

HM greets King of Morocco

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco on the Throne Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to King Mohammed VI. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on King Mohammed VI while the people of Morocco realise aspirations of further progress and prosperity.

SUNRISE - 05:36 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:13 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:56 PM
ISHA - 08:14 PM



P11

DJOKOVIC DOWNS NADAL AS DALEY DIVES TO FIFTH OLYMPIC MEDAL



P13

E-COMMERCE IN OMAN VALUED AT \$6.57 BILLION BY 2030



P19

ANCIENT SECRETS UNEARTHED IN VAST TURKISH CAVE CITY



MUSCAT

SCHOLARSHIPS COVER ALL FIELDS OF STUDY

The programmes and specialisations offered through local and international scholarships to holders of the General Education Diploma (GED) and its equivalents during academic year 2024/2025 cover all fields of knowledge, said the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The ministry added that the programmes are envisaged to meet student expectations and respond to the actual needs of the development sectors. The ministry was keen to give students more flexibility and wider scopes for choosing their desired specialisations.

DETAILS ON P5

IGNITING THE MINDS



The Cultural Library in collaboration with Oman Daily Observer newspaper, has launched the second workshop of the 'Summer of Talents' programme.

DETAILS ON P5

AIRPORTS SEE 11.9% RISE IN PASSENGERS

The total number of passengers through the airports of the Sultanate of Oman during the first half of 2024 increased by 11.9 per cent to stand at 7,074,854 (onboard 53,316 flights) compared to 6,322,152 passengers (onboard 49,013 flights) during the first half of 2023, according to preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The number of passengers through Muscat International Airport by the end of June 2024 reached 6,386,267, constituting a rise by 11.8 per cent.

DETAILS ON 13



A MAGNET FOR TOURISTS!

Tucked away in a part of khareef-bound Dhofar Governorate, Wadi Darbat unfolds its beauty just east of the Wilayat of Taqah. This verdant valley winds its way through the landscape, culminating in a meeting with Khor Rori and the Arabian Sea. Wadi Darbat stuns visitors with its breathtaking scenery. A verdant carpet of diverse trees and shrubs unfolds, dominated by towering sidr trees. Freshwater springs bubble up from the earth, feeding sparkling lakes and waterways that weave through the valley.

PHOTO BY SUHAIL BIN MAHAD BIN SAID AL AWAID

Oman combats human trafficking

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joins the world countries to mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, which is observed annually on July 30.

The Sultanate of Oman is making constant efforts to combat human trafficking and is among the first countries to issue national legislations to eliminate human trafficking namely the Law on Combating Trafficking In Persons.

Shaikh Humaid bin Ali al Maani, Head of the Global Affairs Department at the Foreign Ministry, said that the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to promote a culture of human rights and increase awareness of the crimes that affect human dignity is not only an international commitment but rather a religious obligation and a national duty that is deeply-rooted in the Omani values.



Oman's keenness to promote a culture of human rights and increase awareness of the crimes that affect human dignity is a religious obligation and a national duty

SHAIKH HUMAID BIN ALI AL MAANI
Head of Global Affairs Department

He added that the Sultanate of Oman, stemming from its keenness to reinforce human rights, has enacted national laws to combat human trafficking and has ratified several international conventions and covenants on combating the exploitation of persons particularly women and children. The crime of human trafficking is one of the most serious crimes and the biggest illicit trade that threatens human security and requires international cooperation to combat it as well as a clear strategy that takes into account the nature and seriousness of the crime which contradicts human nature and the teachings of Islamic law and various heavenly laws that sanctify the body and prohibit all forms of human rights abuse.

Al Maani touched on the leading role played by the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking in the Sultanate of Oman in order to fight this phenomenon and provide protection and assistance to victims.

The Dar Al Wafa protection centre provides a number of services to victims of human trafficking including psychological counselling and social, health and legal support. The National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking has developed the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking (2024-2026) to enhance national efforts aimed at preventing all forms of human trafficking as well as providing necessary assistance for victims. — ONA

SEE ALSO P2

'Nazdaher' develops RO 828m projects

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The National Investment and Export Development Programme (Nazdaher) revealed its achievements in developing the investment portfolio since its launch in 2021. The Nazdaher programme has successfully achieved several notable accomplishments, including the development of 37 investment projects with a total value of RO 828 million, the activation of specialised teams to support investments in various sectors, the signing of cooperation agreements with local and international companies to enhance exports, and the improvement of the infrastructure for petrochemical and food industries.

The project focuses on achieving several key objectives, including attracting foreign and domestic investments by creating an attractive investment environment in vital sectors such as food industries, petrochemicals, and logistics services. It also aims to develop industrial and commercial sectors by improving the quality of products and services, increasing productivity, and developing Omani exports by supporting local companies to increase their exports through product improvement and providing the necessary facilities to enter global markets.

The project's implementation is divided into several phases.

TURN TO P2

Diplomats rush to contain ME escalation

MAJDAL SHAMS: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday vowed a "severe" response to a deadly strike that killed youths in the annexed Golan Heights, as diplomats raced to contain escalation between Israel and Hezbollah.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib said a flurry of diplomatic activity has sought to contain the anticipated Israeli response.

"Israel will escalate in a limited way and Hezbollah will respond in a limited way... These are the assurances we've received," Bou



A woman checks flight information boards showing cancelled flights, at the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport, in Beirut, on Monday. — Reuters

Habib said in an interview with local broadcaster Al-Jadeed.

The United States, France and others were trying to contain the escalation, he added, while Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said that "talks are ongoing with international, European and Arab sides to protect Lebanon and ward off dangers".

On Monday White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said he was "confident" a broader war can be avoided. Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said he had spoken to Habib. — AFP

Muscat Festival to be back in a new format

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 29

After a year of pause, Muscat will host Oman's biggest cultural and entertainment event, the Muscat Festival, according to Muscat Municipality sources.

The nearly one-month-long festival, currently in its 23rd edition, will take place at three main locations, Qurum Natural Park, Naseem Gardens in Barka, and Al Amerat Public Park.

The Muscat Festival, which is in a new hybrid format, will

feature a diverse array of shows, including breathtaking fireworks, live theatre performances, and drone displays.

Local and international companies are competing for contracts related to this massive event, raising expectations for unforgettable experiences for residents and visitors alike.

Organisers have confirmed that this year's events will be the best yet, providing all the necessary comforts and entertainment to attract the largest possible audience.



Oman intensifies efforts against human trafficking

MAJ THURAYA AL KALBANI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The Sultanate of Oman joins the global community in celebrating the World Day Against Human Trafficking on July 30. This year's theme, 'Leave no child behind', underscores the relentless fight against human trafficking, highlighting achievements and essential measures to curb this crime, which severely impacts human dignity and violates international laws.

Brigadier Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi, Director-General of Investigations and Criminal Investigations, emphasised the Royal Oman Police's (ROP) commitment in combating human trafficking through a system characterised by effectiveness, professionalism and continuous improvement.

The ROP's coordinated efforts focus on eradicating all forms of human trafficking, which thankfully remain at low levels in Oman. To enhance their capabilities, the ROP has implemented numerous training programmes for its personnel, aligning with the latest



Brigadier Jamal bin Habib al Quraishi

international standards. These programmes aim to improve early detection of human trafficking victims by identifying potential indicators, especially among vulnerable groups who may not report due to fear or lack of knowledge about the procedures.

The General Department of Criminal Investigations and Research has monitored various reports and indicators of suspected human trafficking this year. These include false advertisements abroad promising attractive job offers in Oman to lure and coerce individuals into immoral activities, often involving blackmail, freedom restriction and confiscation of official documents.



Oman has prioritised combating human trafficking

Other monitored methods include employers withholding workers' passports or identification documents without consent or bringing in workers on family or tourist visas for employment, violating labour and residency laws.

Some employers even subject workers to debt bondage, forcing them to perform multiple tasks to repay visa and travel expenses. Additionally, social media advertisements promoting domestic worker services at attractive prices often reveal that many of these workers were brought in on tourist visas, violating labour law and exposing them to legal and financial consequences.

Brigadier Al Quraishi highlighted a notable case where the General Department of Investigations and Criminal Investigations thwarted the smuggling of a child from an African country to Europe through Oman. ROP officers' vigilance and suspicion of a kidnapping and smuggling operation led to the arrest of the individuals accompanying the child, who were found to have criminal records. The child received health and psychological care, and procedures for his return to his home country were completed, garnering international praise for this operation.

Al Quraishi emphasised the

ROP's efforts to combat various crimes rely on citizens' awareness and understanding of their responsibilities in maintaining security and stability, encouraging them to report any suspicious activities

importance of clear, officially documented employment contracts to protect both employers and workers. Understanding employment terms helps prevent claims of exploitation and deception. He advised employers to rectify their practices to avoid future allegations of human trafficking, following monitored reports that found no indicators of such crimes.

The coordination between the Royal Oman Police and relevant government agencies is crucial in supporting vulnerable groups at risk of exploitation by criminal gangs. This coordination involves searching for, investigating and assisting these groups to correct

their residency status, facilitate deportation, or recover their rights.

Oman has prioritised combating human trafficking, completing the first phase of the National Referral System for Victims of Human Trafficking. This system aims to identify reports and establish a coordination mechanism between relevant authorities (Royal Oman Police, Ministry of Labour, Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Social Development, and Public Prosecution) to identify victims, provide support and complete legal procedures, including investigation and evidence gathering, to bring perpetrators to justice.

Community partnership plays a vital role in combating human trafficking, with efforts to raise public awareness about the indicators and dangers of such crimes.

The General Department of Criminal Investigations and Research has enhanced community awareness through educational and awareness programmes following the latest standards.

Conference focuses on mitigating risk for enterprises

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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The Enterprise Risk Management Conference commenced at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy. The two-day conference aims to emphasise the significance of risk management in attaining the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Organised by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with Masarat Development Foundation, the two-day event features a distinguished assembly of officials, academics and decision-makers. It targets executive directors and senior leaders in both the public and private sectors, as well as officials and employees specialising in risk management, directors involved in implementing Oman Vision 2040, and professionals from the oil sector and other related fields.

Dr Mohammed bin Khamis al Farsi, Adviser to the Minister



The two-day event features a distinguished assembly of officials, academics and decision-makers

of Labour for Planning and International Relations, inaugurated the conference with a speech highlighting the event's importance. He noted that the conference facilitates the exchange of knowledge and discussions on the latest trends and challenges in risk management. The event aims to enhance skills and capabilities, deepen understanding of risk management and support business sustainability across all institutions.

The conference includes

presentations and discussions by academics and decision-makers, focusing on the role of artificial intelligence and innovative methods in risk management. This engagement underscores the importance of a comprehensive and forward-thinking approach to institutional risk management, vital for both government and private sectors.

Risk management is increasingly recognised as a crucial administrative process that transitions institutions

from emergency solutions to sustainable strategies. It plays a pivotal role in government and private institutions by closely examining and improving risk management policies and procedures.

Enterprise risk management encompasses human, financial, legal, operational and strategic aspects.

It aims to prevent damage or losses and ensure the success of institutions in a highly competitive and rapidly advancing environment.

SQU DEVELOPS ALGORITHMS TO BOOST AI, MACHINE LEARNING

BALQEES ALORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) developed a mathematical equation that aims to enhance the efficiency of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms through the university's Information Systems Department.

It is an advanced step in addressing many of the shortcomings of current equations, as it measures quantitative and qualitative similarities in big data at the same time, which enhances the accuracy and effectiveness of data analysis and knowledge extraction processes.

Dr Jameel bin Darwish al Shaqsi, Head of the Information Systems Department and the project's principal investigator, said: "Artificial intelligence relies heavily on mathematics to solve complex problems, and developing new mathematical equations can lead to more effective and efficient solutions, which enhances the university's ability to provide innovative solutions to society and the industrial sector, which enables Sultan Qaboos University to be at the forefront of academic institutions that lead technological progress in the region and the world." He stressed that Sultan Qaboos University can develop advanced academic programmes based on these equations, which attract talented students and researchers from all over the world and contribute to the development of distinguished



scientific cadres.

"Universities that excel in developing artificial intelligence technologies often attract partnerships with major companies and institutions. These partnerships can provide research funding and training opportunities for students, in addition to providing job opportunities for graduates." He stressed that developing new mathematical equations can contribute to developing practical applications in various fields such as medicine, agriculture and economics.

"These applications can enhance the university's position as a centre for innovation and technology," he said.

Al Shaqsi explained that a series of experiments were conducted on various medical data, such as those related to genes and cancer, and some agricultural and commercial data.

Several studies were conducted on the results of the experiments and compared them with many leading equations and algorithms.

'NAZDAHER' DEVELOPS 37 PROJECTS WORTH RO 828 MILLION

FROM PAGE 1

The first phase (2021-2023) includes activating specialised teams to support and develop investments, developing a suitable infrastructure for manufacturing and petrochemical industries, and strengthening cooperation with government agencies and large companies. The second phase (2024-2026) includes implementing private sector development strategies in cooperation with international organisations, enhancing economic sustainability by empowering the private sector and improving the business

environment, and increasing the competitiveness of Omani exports through trade agreements.

Among other notable achievements is the development of the 'Ladain' plastic industries complex, which aims to enhance the production capacity and competitiveness of the plastic industries in Oman. The complex includes several investment projects aimed at improving product quality and increasing productivity, thus strengthening Oman's position as a regional industrial centre in the field of plastic industries. The value of



the investment agreements signed for the 'Ladain' plastic industries complex until the second quarter of 2024 reached approximately RO 46.5 million.

The Nazdaher team, in cooperation with the Ministry

of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, held a workshop in July 2023 with the participation of 25 parties concerned. The workshop resulted in the development of initiatives in three axes

- exports, imports, and re-exports.

In the field of exports, the initiatives include preparing a comprehensive guide for exporters and investors, training and qualifying exporters,

and enhancing promotional activities for exporters. It also includes establishing the Oman centre to facilitate the utilisation of export markets to global markets. In the field of imports, the initiatives include reviewing import policies to stimulate the commercial centre and supporting investment to stimulate imports. In the field of re-exports, the initiatives include finding solutions and mechanisms to combat harmful practices in international trade, activating air, sea, and land ports in the Sultanate of Oman to support foreign trade, and governing the economic system of foreign trade.



CIVIL DEFENCE BOOSTS EMERGENCY READINESS



QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Oman has published a list of 19 emergency centres with their respective contact numbers established along key land routes leading to Dhofar Governorate where the Khareef holiday season is currently at its peak.

This initiative aims to enhance safety and ensure a swift response to emergencies, providing citizens and residents with quick and efficient access to emergency services.

With the Khareef season now on, attention is drawn to the rigorous preparations undertaken by the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) to safeguard the well-being of citizens and residents. The Khareef season in Dhofar is celebrated for its breathtaking natural beauty, marked by abundant rainfall, which attracts visitors from across Oman and beyond. However, the heightened risk of emergencies requires a high degree of readiness and swift response.

Civil Defence teams operate around the clock to monitor weather conditions and promptly respond to incidents. Preparations include

PHONE NUMBERS OF CIVIL DEFENCE AND AMBULANCE AUTHORITY STATIONS			
(+968)		(+968)	
Mahut	98956754	Mahut	98842683
Rub' Al khali Port	91392307	Al-Jazer	98978317
Hamra Al Drooa	91392306	Hamra Al Drooa	91392294
Qarn Alam	91392308	Qarn Alam	91392293
Al Ghaftain	91392301	Al Ghaftain	91392295
Qitbit	91392310	Qitbit	91392305
Seih Al Khairat	91392303	Seih Al Khairat	91392302
Duqm	91392309	Shahb A' sayb	90913779
Haima	91392304	Al Saada	98518033
Taqah	98069471	Raysut	98937841

outfitting rescue and ambulance teams with the latest tools and technologies and increasing patrols in mountainous and coastal areas that experience a significant influx of visitors.

The Authority has devised a

comprehensive emergency plan encompassing all wilayats of Dhofar Governorate. This plan involves activating emergency centres and deploying field teams in the most vulnerable areas. Specialised teams are

prepared to manage floods, landslides, and traffic accidents, ensuring rapid response and minimising damage.

In addition to field efforts, the Authority places significant emphasis on awareness and guidance. Awareness campaigns have been launched through various media outlets and social media platforms to warn citizens of potential dangers and instruct them on how to act in emergencies. These campaigns include advice on safe driving in rainy conditions and avoiding hazardous areas.

The Authority's efforts rely on close cooperation with various governmental and local entities, including the police, municipalities, and health services.

This collaboration helps coordinate efforts and provide necessary support in emergencies. Engaging local communities is also crucial to enhance awareness and preparedness for emergencies.

The CDAA remains on high alert to ensure the safety of all during the Khareef season in Dhofar. The priority remains to protect lives and property through continuous efforts, ongoing planning, and effective collaboration with all relevant parties.

ROP warns against letting children hang out of car windows

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

As the Dhofar Khareef season brings increased road traffic, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) have issued a warning about dangerous behaviour that puts children's lives at risk.

Allowing children to hang parts of their bodies out of car windows while the vehicle is in motion might seem harmless, but it carries catastrophic consequences.

The seemingly innocent act of letting children lean out of car windows can quickly turn tragic. An unexpected accident or even a slight turn can hurl a child out of the vehicle, resulting in severe injuries or even death.

The ROP emphasises that this behaviour exposes children to significant and often underestimated dangers. A sudden stop or sharp turn can drastically alter the car's path, posing an immediate threat to a child who is not properly restrained.

Additionally, a child's head or other body parts can collide with external objects like tree branches, traffic signs, or even passing vehicles, leading to serious injuries. Even without a collision, the force of the air and contact with hard surfaces can cause severe



injuries, including lacerations and bruises.

In its advisory to motorists visiting Khareef-bound Dhofar, the ROP stressed the need for all passengers, especially children, to be securely fastened with seat belts for the entire journey. Furthermore, windows and the sunroof should be fully closed while driving to prevent any risk of a child leaning out.

"Never leave children unattended in a vehicle, even if it is stationary. Always maintain vigilance to prevent any risky behaviour," the ROP cautioned, adding: "Avoid excessive speeding and strictly follow traffic signals to minimise the risk of accidents."

Underscoring the importance of public awareness, a traffic safety expert noted: "Educating parents about the dangers of allowing children to hang out of car windows should be a key component of national traffic safety campaigns. This behaviour poses a significant threat to children's safety."

"Ensuring the safety of our children is a collective responsibility. We urge all parents to heed these warnings and educate their children about the serious risks involved. Let us work together to make our family trips not only memorable but also safe, free from preventable hazards," the expert added.

OAWA hosts dialogue session titled 'Biography and Journey'

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

The Omani Association of Writers and Authors (OAWA), Dhofar Branch, held a dialogue session on Sunday titled 'Biography and Journey'.

The event took place at the Marine Hall in Millennium Resort Salalah and was attended by several officials, representatives from governmental and private entities, and cultural figures from the governorate.

The association organised the dialogue session to delve into the life and contributions of His Highness Sayyid Namir bin Salim al Said. The event was also part of its ongoing effort to invigorate the cultural and literary movement in the region.

The session drew significant interest from the cultural and literary community, and provided a platform for discussing his experiences and impact on the literary and cultural landscape of the Sultanate of Oman.

The session aimed to highlight the achievements and



The Dhofar Branch of Omani Association of Writers and Authors organised a dialogue session in Salalah

contributions of His Highness, showcasing his efforts in enriching the cultural and literary fabric of Oman. This initiative aligns with the association's broader mission to foster literary culture and encourage meaningful dialogue among writers and intellectuals.

The Omani Association of Writers and Authors is committed to organising diverse events to enhance cultural and literary awareness.

These efforts are aimed at encouraging writers and creators to excel, thereby contributing to the advancement of Omani culture and society.

Combating the invasive Parthenium threat in Dhofar

NIZWA: With the Khareef season on, the Governorate of Dhofar have been transformed into a verdant paradise, stretching from Mirbat and Salalah to Dhalkout and Rakhyout. During this season, native plants flourish, and trees become lush, spanning from plains to mountain tops and plateau areas. However, recent human interventions have begun to disrupt this delicate ecosystem.

One of the major threats to Dhofar's natural harmony is the invasive plant species. In 1998, a plant known as Parthenium was first spotted in the region. Within two decades, this invasive species started spreading across different areas of Dhofar, posing a significant threat to the local flora.

The rapid proliferation of Parthenium has prompted a coordinated response from various

authorities and institutions in Oman.

In 2021, the Environment Authority (EA), Dhofar Municipality, and other institutions, including the Academy, collaborated to form a scientific team dedicated to managing the Parthenium invasion.

This team, comprised of experts from the University of Nizwa's Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre, aims to control and manage the spread of Parthenium through a comprehensive study of its genetic, natural, and phytochemical characteristics.

The University of Nizwa's research team collected plant and seed samples from the wilayats of Mirbat, Salalah, Rakhyout, and Dhalkout during September and



Dr Ali al Lawati, Project Manager

October 2023. They conducted a study on the germination physiology of 16 samples and prepared a preliminary report.

The team extracted and isolated chemicals and growth-inhibiting



The Research Centre team at Nizwa University controlling the spread of Parthenium

compounds from Parthenium and began exploring local herbal extracts that may inhibit its growth.

The next phase of the study involves physical, biochemical, and molecular analyses of the

plants. The researchers plan to conduct transcriptomic analysis of proteins, chemical characterisation, modelling, and computational analysis.

The culmination of this

extensive research will be a final report and scientific publications, which will be presented to the scientific team and Dhofar Municipality, the primary funding organisation for the study.

Dr Ali al Lawati, Project Manager, University of Nizwa, who spoke about the project's significance, said, "These studies will enhance our understanding of the impact of this invasive species on the environment and biodiversity of Dhofar. In addition, it helps us develop sustainable management practices that assist the Municipality of Dhofar and the EA in controlling this invasive species. Management practices from these studies by the University of Nizwa are examples of utilising and converting scientific outputs to outcomes that assist the environment and community."



A GROWING HAZARD ON ROADS?

COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE CALLING FOR DESIGNATED AREAS FOR BIKE ACTIVITIES AND STRICTER REGULATIONS, INCLUDING MANDATORY BIKE REGISTRATION AND TRAINING



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

WHILE two-wheelers are a convenient option for short-distance commuting, especially in smaller towns, they have raised significant concerns regarding safety and traffic disruption. Should parents bear some responsibility?

Last week, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate Police Command arrested 30 motorcycle drivers for violating traffic rules and regulations and for obstructing traffic and disturbing public comfort in the Wilayat of Bahla.

Legal procedures have been completed against them.

Abdullah al Balushi who has reacted to the news, says, “There has been a noticeable increase, and we do not know the exact reasons. For young people, there must be an arena for racing on sand bikes. We may produce talents who may go on to participate in international tournaments, but as for what is happening on the roads, it is necessary to take strict action.”

“Unfortunately, this phenomenon is increasing, and has only ended with setting up laws and rules for the movement of all types of bicycles on public roads,” said Khalid al Yaqoubi.

Biking is much appreciated in Oman and there are numerous bikers clubs and associations.

However, movements of bikers from the associations are organised and done with prior permission.

International biker, Maher al Barwani, who has travelled to many parts of the world from Oman on his bike, is of the view that all bikes must be registered.

“The bike seller must register the bike

he is selling with the plate number. This will help in having control. And they tend to have chips in the bikes that are registered as well,” said Maher.

“I have seen sometimes bikers accompanying the wedding procession or the vehicle of the groom and bride. The group of bikers can range from 60 to 80 and at times even 100. This number of bikes can create many issues on the road and at times disturb the traffic. It can even lead to road accidents,” he pointed out.

Maher also urged the youngsters to wear safety gear.

“They may not have licences but what is important is to be cautious and this is by wearing appropriate shoes, jacket, gloves, and most importantly helmets,” explains Maher.

He noted that punishment might not work at this age because they might not understand the impact of their mistake but they will do so once they attain their licence.

He suggests, “It would be ideal if they can go through a mandatory training course for a week, as they purchase the bike from the dealer. The course could be from the traffic institute and passing the course must be a prerequisite.”

“In Muscat there are limitations but in Al Dakhiliyah, for example, there is potential to ride freely, but can also disrupt main roads.”

He noted that in some countries they have dedicated tracks for motorbikes and that keeps the bikes safe and they have options when they want to be adventurous.

“The young bikers need to remember that they need to be more mature while riding a bike as motorbikes are weapons and if they do not know how to use them correctly it can kill them and if they use it correctly they can be safe. There is no point in punishing parents but they should sit with their children and guide them,” warned the biker.

KEY POINTS

RIISING INCIDENTS OF YOUTH VIOLATING TRAFFIC RULES ON MOTORCYCLES

RECENT ARRESTS BY POLICE IN BAHLA

CALLS FOR DESIGNATED BIKE RACE AREAS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANDATORY BIKE REGISTRATION AND TRAINING

EMPHASIS ON PARENTAL GUIDANCE FOR SAFE BIKING



The programme emphasises social values like cooperation, time management, recycling, and saving.

Cultural Library, Observer ignite young minds at summer camp

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The Cultural Library at the General Directorate of Publications and Artistic Works, in collaboration with the *Observer* newspaper, has launched the second workshop of the “Summer of Talents” programme. This three-day event, featuring twelve children, aims to cultivate various skills and values in young minds. The workshop is conducted by Zainab al Hashimi, Maitha al Mundhiriya, Yaqoob al Balushi, and librarian Warda al Lawati.

The programme’s objectives include promoting library usage, encouraging reading, and enhancing children’s spiritual, behavioural, scientific, and cultural development.

Activities such as digital drawing, story reading, handicrafts, and scientific experiments are designed to instill values of good citizenship, introduce the concept of Palestine, and provide insights into digital television studios.

Beyond educational activities, the programme emphasises social values like cooperation, time management, recycling, and saving.

It aims to discover and nurture children’s talents in areas such as radio presentation and reading, providing guidance in selecting appropriate books. Additionally,



it offers children a chance to understand their parents’ workplaces, broadening their horizons and satisfying their curiosity about their guardians’ professions.

Al Lawati highlighted that the summer educational programme spans three months — June, July, and August — each targeting different age groups. Children will explore television and radio studios, electronic games, and the significance of saving.

The first day of the workshop featured Zainab al Hashimi introducing children to the Ain electronic platform through interactive presentations and audiobooks,

focusing on content for young audiences.

The children engaged in competitions about children’s programmes and learned the basics of simplified graphic design. They participated in a puzzle activity and watched an episode of “Wissam’s Trips,” providing feedback and suggestions for future episodes. Booklets from the Wissam’s Trips series were distributed to the participants as well.

Overall, the “Summer of Talents” programme offers a blend of educational, cultural, and entertaining activities that foster reading habits and develop children’s skills in a fun and engaging manner.

Engraving & embroidery workshop begins

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

To nurture cultural cooperation and civilisational exchange, the Omani Women’s Association in Muscat has teamed up with the Cultural Attaché of the Iranian Embassy to launch a workshop on engraving and handicraft embroidery. This is the first initiative of its kind.

The collaboration aims to enhance cultural and creative exchanges between nations with historical and cultural ties to Oman. By leveraging diplomatic relationships, the partnership seeks to open broader horizons for interaction with diverse cultures.

Maryam bint Mohammed al Zadjiyah, President of the Omani Women’s Association in Muscat, emphasised the



Forty women are taking part in the workshop which runs until Thursday

significance of this cooperation. “Our association aspires to be a leader in social, cultural, and creative domains. The idea for this workshop stemmed from the exceptional creativity of Omani women in handicrafts, which are integral to Omani culture. Our traditional costumes, embodying Omani identity, reflect the

civilisational depth of our people,” she stated.

The workshop, which runs until Thursday, will see the participation of forty trainees. Expert trainers from Iran will conduct sessions on the art of engraving and embroidery, equipping participants with the skills needed to excel in these crafts.

MoHERI: Scholarships cover Bachelor’s courses

MUSCAT: The programmes and specialisations offered through local and international scholarships to holders of the General Education Diploma (GED) and its equivalents during academic year 2024/2025 will cover all fields of knowledge, said the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The ministry added that the programmes are envisaged to meet student expectations and respond to the actual needs of the development sectors.

Hamad bin Khalfan al Harthy, Assistant Director-General for Scholarship Affairs at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, said that the ministry was keen to give students more flexibility and wider scopes for choosing their desired specialisations, educational institutions and countries of study.

Al Harthy pointed out that the scholarships comprise two packages: STEM and ESAM. He explained that STEM scholarships are offered to science stream students and it covers scientific specialisations (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), but not medicine, veterinary medicine or dentistry.

On the other hand, ESAM scholarships are offered to arts stream students and they cover specialisations in education, social sciences, arts and management.

Al Harthy said that neither of the two packages comprises programmes that lead to any degree beyond the Bachelor’s degree. He advised aspirants to consult the HEAC Guide (issued by the Higher Education Admission Centre) for more information.



The ministry was keen to give students more flexibility and wider scopes for choosing their desired specialisations, educational institutions and countries of study

Acting in cooperation with the Medical City for Military and Security Services, the ministry released 14 on-the-job training and employment-linked programmes in the fields of medicine, dentistry, specialised nursing and associated medical specialties, said Al Harthy, noting that successful students will then be sent for further study in the US, the UK, Ireland, New Zealand and Bahrain.

He added that this year, the ministry focused on offering specialisations that are compatible with the accelerated pace of

4IR technologies (Fourth Industrial Revolution), most notably cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (IR), data science, cyber forensics, computer science for smart devices, IR-based business analysis and business analysis.

Al Harthy affirmed that many private higher education institutions provide scholarships towards the Bachelor’s degree, with the volume of such scholarships being equivalent to 10 per cent of seats allocated to the institutions.

In this context, Al Harthy said that Petroleum Development Oman provided BA scholarships for students who belong to concession areas in many specialisations. In the meantime, OMIFCO also offered scholarships for children who belong to the Social Security Scheme and those who belong to limited income families from Al Sharqiyah North and South Governorates. — ONA



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education



TENDER

Tender Number	Tender Title	Company Grade:	Tender Fee	Distribution Till	Last Day to receive Clarifications	Bid Submission Date
2/2024	Development of AI Simulation & Media Center (Smart Solutions in Managing Training Workshops)	First/ Second	25 OMR	13 August 2024	20 August 2024	17 September 2024

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation & Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) is hereby inviting all local, specialized bidders to participate in this TENDER as per the following instructions, in addition to all terms of TENDER enclosed in the TENDER documents. For project brief, please visit the below link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

- **Purchase of Tender Documents**
The Bidders may obtain the TENDER document by registering the company at eTendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Submission
All Proposals should be SUBMITTED ONLINE AT e-TENDERING System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Proposals to be accepted for evaluation which will be submitted through the eTendering System ONLY.
- **Correspondence Tender Inquiry:**
All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online through the eTendering System ONLY.
- **Tendering System Inquiry:**
All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: **etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200**
All correspondence pertaining to the OAAAQA tender must be directed to the following email address and phone number: **tenders@oaaaqa.gov.om and +968 24121706**

OAAAQA Business Hours



Lufthansa, Air France halt Beirut flights as tensions rise

BEIRUT: Air France and the German airline group Lufthansa said on Monday they were suspending flights to Beirut after Israel threatened reprisals for a deadly rocket strike launched from Lebanon.

Lufthansa services would be halted up to and including August 5 due to “current developments in the Middle East”, a group spokesman said.

Air France and its low-cost subsidiary Transavia France meanwhile said that flights between French airports and Beirut would be suspended on Monday and Tuesday because of the “security situation” in Lebanon.

Israel has said it would retaliate after rocket fire launched from neighbouring Lebanon killed 12 young people in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights on Saturday.

Israel blamed Lebanon's Hizbullah movement, which said it had “no connection” to the strike.

The incident heightened fears that the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza could spread north to Lebanon.

The country's only airport in Beirut was packed with travellers on Monday, including families anxiously awaiting delayed flights in the suffocating heat, a photographer said.

Syrian-German traveller Nisreen al Hussein said she found out her flight to Dusseldorf had been cancelled upon arriving at Beirut airport.

“I’m trying to look for another flight but they’re all either packed or cancelled,” said Hussein, who was travelling with children.



People sit near their luggages at the Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut. — Reuters

Many Syrians have been taking flights from Beirut since civil war erupted in their country in 2011.

Ahmad Arafat, from the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, said he had been waiting with his family for a delayed Paris flight for two hours.

“I don’t know what I’ll do if the flight is cancelled,” he said. “It’s going to be difficult waiting long hours in the heat, with young children and little available seating.”

Other airlines have also cancelled or rescheduled flights in the wake of the attack.

A Greek airport source said that an Aegean flight to Beirut had been cancelled on Sunday night.

Lebanon's Middle East

Airlines said in a statement that it had rescheduled a number of flights on Sunday and Monday, citing “technical reasons related to the distribution of (aircraft) insurance risks”.

The Lufthansa group, which includes SWISS and Austrian Airlines, has repeatedly paused travel to the region since the Gaza began in early October.

Israeli forces and Hizbullah have traded cross-border fire following the October 7 attack on Israel which triggered the war in Gaza.

The cross-border violence has so far killed at least 529 people in Lebanon, according to a tally, most of them fighters but also including 104 civilians.

Meanwhile, Israel's government is preparing for

a retaliatory strike against Hizbullah in Lebanon following the devastating rocket attack on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, where at least 12 children were killed on Saturday.

After more than four hours of consultations, the security cabinet authorised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant “to decide on the manner and timing of action against Hizbullah,” Netanyahu's office said on Sunday. Earlier, he had threatened saying they would pay a “high price.” As tensions rise — and Western leaders warn against an expansion of the Middle East conflict — Hizbullah said it is preparing for a possibly severe Israeli attack. — AFP/dpa

Quad finance ministers discuss maritime and cyber defences

TOKYO: Foreign ministers from Australia, India, Japan and the United States — a grouping known as the ‘Quad’ — discussed initiatives to bolster maritime security and build up cyber defences in talks in Tokyo on Monday.

The talks attended by Australia's Penny Wong, India's Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Japan's Yoko Kamikawa and Antony Blinken from the US, follow security discussions between Tokyo and Washington on Sunday where the allies labelled China the “greatest strategic challenge” facing the region.

“We are charting a course for a more secure and open Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean region by bolstering maritime security and domain awareness,” Blinken said in remarks to the press after the meeting.

“It means strengthening the capacity of partners across the region to know what's happening in their own waters,” he added.

He said the US would continue to work with its allies to ensure freedom of navigation and the unimpeded flow of lawful maritime commerce.

The US announced plans on Sunday for a major revamp of its military command in Japan to deepen coordination with its ally's forces.

It was among several measures taken to address what the US and Japan said was an “evolving security environment”, noting various threats from China including its increasingly muscular maritime activities in the East and South China Seas.

“Uncertainty surrounding the international order as well as the international situation has been increasing with Russia continuing its aggression in Ukraine, attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the East China Sea and South China Sea, and the launch of ballistic missiles by North Korea,” Japan's Kamikawa said after the talks.

She highlighted the need to build up cybersecurity capability and provide training opportunities in maritime security to protect and develop prosperity in Indo-Pacific.

After leaving Tokyo, Blinken and Austin will hold security talks with another Asian ally, the Philippines. — Reuters



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida with US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Japan's Defence Minister Minoru Kihara as they meet in Tokyo. — Reuters

Displaced Gazans struggle with disease and lack of shelter

CAIRO/DEIR AL BALAH: Thousands of Palestinians fled a community in the central Gaza Strip on Monday in the face of new Israeli evacuation orders, worsening the humanitarian plight in an area already inundated with displaced people fleeing an assault in the south.

Israeli forces, which have now captured nearly the entire Gaza Strip in nearly 10 months of war, have spent the last several weeks launching major operations in areas where they had previously claimed to have uprooted Hamas

fighters.

Hundreds of thousands of people have converged on Deir Al Balah, a small city in the centre of the enclave that is the only major area yet to be stormed, many forced there by fighting in the ruins of Khan Yunis further south since last week.

In its latest assault, Israel ordered residents on Sunday to flee Al Bureij, just northeast of Deir.

“What is left? Deir? Deir is full of people. Everyone is in Deir. All of Gaza. Where should people



Palestinian children look out of a bus window as they wait to be evacuated for treatment abroad in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters

go?” Aya Mansour said in Deir after fleeing from Bureij.

The Israeli military said fighter jets hit 35 targets across the Gaza Strip over the past day as troops battled fighters in Khan Yunis and Rafah, close to the border with Egypt. The armed wings of Hamas and the IJ said fierce gun battles have been ongoing in those two areas as well as in the suburb of Tel Al Hawa in Gaza City further north.

Palestinian medical officials said at least eight Palestinians were killed in an Israeli air strike

earlier in Khan Yunis.

Some families used donkey carts and rickshaws to carry whatever belongings remained. Many walked for several km on foot to reach Deir or Al Zawayda town to the west.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of UNRWA, the United Nations relief agency for Palestinians, said only 14 per cent of the Gaza Strip had not been placed under evacuation orders by the Israeli military. People have been forced to evacuate repeatedly, often with only a few hours notice. — Reuters

COLOMBO

Ranil fails to get backing of largest Lanka party

Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe failed to secure the backing of the biggest political party in parliament for his re-election bid, broadcaster Ada Derana said on Monday, posing a major challenge to his prospects in the September 21 presidential election.

Sri Lanka's first presidential elections since an unprecedented economic crisis spurred widespread unrest was announced to be held in September, the election commission said last week.



The election will be the first test of the public mood since the height of the 2022 downturn, which caused months of food, fuel and medicine shortages across the island nation. — AFP

SEOUL

North Korea mobilises military for flood rescue

North Korea deployed military helicopters to bring thousands of people stranded in a flood-hit zone to safety, state media reported. The official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) reported leader Kim Jong Un last week ‘personally guided’ a military rescue — including 10 helicopters and navy lifeboats — shaking the hands of the pilots ‘one by one’.

Kim reprimanded officials for their failure to prepare and respond to the recent torrential



rains.

Last week, North Korea conducted a crisis response meeting to discuss strategies to mitigate the impact of natural disasters on agriculture. — AFP

TANZA

Philippine oil spill reaches fishing town

An oil spill from a marine tanker that capsized off the coast of Manila Bay in the Philippines has reached the shores of a nearby fishing village, threatening the health and livelihood of fishermen, as efforts began to mop up the fuel.

MT Terra Nova was carrying 1.5 million litres of industrial fuel when it sank in rough seas off the coast of Limay in the province of Bataan, west of the Philippine capital, on Thursday. One member of the 17-strong crew was



killed. Fishermen in the town of Tanza in Cavite province, south of Manila, were in distraught after the oil slick landed on the town's shores and they reported smelling a foul odour. — Reuters



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



2 DEAD, 140 HURT AFTER RUSSIAN TRAIN AND TRUCK COLLIDE

At least two people were killed and up to 140 people injured when a passenger train carrying 800 people collided with a Kamaz truck, derailling eight carriages. Some of the carriages lay twisted and battered beside the railway track, they said.

The train had been travelling from Kazan in Tatarstan to Adler on the Black Sea when it derailed in the southern Volgograd region near the Kotelnikovo station about 1,200 km south of Moscow, the emergencies ministry said. "Paramedics are on the scene," the ministry said, adding that 324 emergency workers were involved in the operation.

— Reuters

■ ATHENS



VIRAL INFECTED 'GOAT PLAGUE' SPREADS IN GREECE

Greece has banned moving sheep and goats from their farms to try to contain a viral infection known as "goat plague" after new cases were detected over the weekend, the agriculture ministry said. The virus, also known as Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR), does not affect humans but is highly contagious among goats and sheep and can kill up to 70% of those infected.

About 8,000 animals have been culled and more than 200,000 tested, mainly in the central Thessaly region where authorities first detected the outbreak on July 11, Georgios Stratakis, a senior agriculture ministry official, said. — Reuters

■ LUXEMBOURG



COURT SLAPS DOWN SPANISH REGION'S PLAN TO HUNT WOLVES

Permission may not be given to hunt wolves regionally when the species' conservation status at national level is unfavourable, the top EU court found. "That is true even in cases where the wolf does not enjoy strict protection in the region concerned," a press release from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) said.

The ECJ said hunting and other species control measures "must be designed to maintain or restore species at a favourable conservation status." The court was ruling on a case in Spain that concerned the government of Castile and Leon's declaration that the Iberian wolf could be hunted. — dpa

France hit by new infrastructure attack



SNCF railway workers and law enforcement officers work at the site where vandals targeted France's high-speed train network with a series of coordinated actions that brought major disruption in Croisilles, northern France. — Reuters

PARIS: Vandals targeted France's telecoms networks overnight, piling pressure on French security services trying to secure the Olympics after authorities said they suspected left-wing groups of attacking rail lines ahead of the opening ceremony in Paris.

Police have yet to arrest anyone for Friday's attacks on the high-speed rail lines with explosive devices, but Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said on Monday authorities suspected members of far-left militant groups due to the nature of the sabotage. "We have identified the profiles of several people," Darmanin told France 2 TV.

A police source said it was "too soon to tell" if there was any link between the telecoms and rail attacks.

French telecoms regulator



French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin

Arcep said the sabotage of telecom networks affected 11,000 people, mainly customers of the SFR and Free services.

A spokesman for SFR said vandals had made cuts to its long-distance network in five different parts of France in the early hours of Monday. The impact on clients was minimal because the network was designed to reroute traffic, he said.

Free said some of its services

Leftists suspected in rail attacks as telecoms networks hit as clients of SFR and Free mainly impacted and comes just days after rail sabotage

had been affected by "a multi-operator network incident" in six different departments across France.

"Since 2.15 am our national network is experiencing significant slowdown," Free said on X. "All our services are provided, sometimes with a degradation in quality of service."

Marina Ferrari, the junior minister for digital matters, said the vandalism was "cowardly and irresponsible." She said work was

under way to get services back up and running.

In recent years, France has mainly been targeted in attacks by fighters, but security services have been increasingly concerned about far-left or anarchist groups, which typically oppose the state and capitalism.

The then-head of France's domestic intelligence agency, Nicolas Lerner, told *Le Monde* newspaper last year President Emmanuel Macron's divisive 2023 pension shake-up had helped lure recruits to far-left groups, which have increasingly added environmental issues to their ideologies.

"In recent years, the far-left movements have been known for particularly violent clandestine actions, including arson campaigns ... ransacking and destruction of property," Lerner,

who now leads the foreign spy agency, said in the interview.

In a 2023 report on terrorism trends, European police agency Europol said left-wing and anarchist groups typically attacked "critical infrastructure, such as repeaters and antennas, government institutions and private companies" with their 'most common modus operandi' being arson and explosive devices.

Train services in France were back up and running by early Monday after teams worked around the clock at the weekend to fix the damage, Transport Minister Patrice Vergriete told RTL radio. He said 800,000 people had faced travel disruptions and said the cost to the state-owned rail operator SNCF would be considerable.

— Reuters

Opposition rejects Maduro's 3rd term win

RIO DE JANEIRO: Venezuela's Electoral Council (CNE) announced on Monday that the country's authoritarian president, Nicolás Maduro, has won a third term in office, but the opposition rejected those results saying it had won.

Maduro won about 51 per cent of the vote, beating opposition candidate Edmundo González, who secured about 44 per cent, the CNE said. But opposition leader María Corina Machado, who was banned from holding public office for 15 years due to alleged irregularities from her time as a member of parliament, claimed the opposition had secured 70 per cent of the vote.

"We won and the whole world knows that," she told journalists. She referred to post-election polls and four independent projections as well as the actual counting results. "This is the largest margin of victory in history," she said.

The 56-year-old industrial engineer was seen as the driving force behind González's candidacy. The 74-year-old diplomat was previously largely unknown in the country.

"Venezuelans and the whole world know what happened on election day today," he said.



Venezuelan President and presidential candidate Nicolás Maduro reacts following the presidential election results in Caracas. — AFP

Ahead of the vote, few observers inside or outside Venezuela expected a free and fair election.

In the run-up to election day, numerous members of the opposition were detained and candidates critical of the government were not allowed to run.

The European Union was not represented with observers at the vote as Venezuela's electoral authority had revoked an invitation due to existing personal sanctions against CNE representatives.

According to the Panamanian authorities, four Latin American ex-presidents were prevented



Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado talks to the media in Caracas. — AFP

from travelling to observe the election on Friday.

Although the United Nations has sent some election experts, their roles are limited as the body does not make public statements to assess the electoral process.

US has 'serious concerns' about results

Hours after the CNE announcement proclaiming Maduro the winner, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, on a visit to Japan, questioned the results.

"We have serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people," Blinken said, according to US media reports from Monday.

He called on the electoral

commission to publish the full results and "to immediately share information with the opposition and independent observers."

He added: "The international community is watching this very closely and will respond accordingly." He did not elaborate on what those actions might be.

Some Latin American leaders have doubts.

"The Maduro regime must realise that the results it publishes are hard to believe," Chilean President Gabriel Boric wrote on the X platform. "Chile will not recognise any result that is not verifiable."

His Guatemalan counterpart Bernardo Arévalo wrote: "We have received the results announced by the CNE with great doubt."

Both those in the left-wing, anti-Western camp congratulated Maduro, including the heads of state of Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Honduras. China did too.

"China and Venezuela are good friends and partners who support each other," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said in Beijing.

Russian President Vladimir Putin also congratulated Maduro. In a letter published by the Kremlin, Putin conveyed his "warmest congratulations." — dpa

Proper transport can preserve Dhofar’s beauty



The khareef season in Dhofar, particularly in Salalah, is a time of vibrant activity and tourism, expected to attract nearly one million.

This annual monsoon period transforms the landscape into a lush paradise, making it an ideal destination for both local and international tourists.

However, as the influx of visitors continues to grow, so does the pressing need for a robust and efficient public transport system to facilitate their movement.

A well-structured public transport network is essential for any thriving tourist destination. It not only enhances accessibility, but also contributes significantly to the overall visitor experience.

In Salalah, where attractions are spread across various locations, efficient transport options are crucial.

Developing and expanding the road network should be a top priority, in addition to improving accommodation and transport facilities.

Long-term investment in infrastructure will ensure a comfortable and smooth tourist experience, enhancing Dhofar’s capacity to host larger numbers of visitors.

Investing in public transport is not merely about improving logistics but also has profound economic implications.

A reliable transport system can boost local businesses by increasing foot traffic in commercial areas and enhancing access to attractions that might otherwise be overlooked due to transportation challenges.

Moreover, with the khareef season drawing more visitors each year, the demand for accessible transport will only rise. By providing affordable and efficient travel options, Salalah can position itself as a premier tourist destination while simultaneously empowering local entrepreneurs.

However, as Dhofar continues to develop its tourism sector during khareef, environmental sustainability must remain a priority.

A well-planned public transport system can help reduce carbon footprints by minimising individual car usage. Buses that run on cleaner

A WELL-STRUCTURED PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK IS ESSENTIAL FOR ANY THRIVING TOURIST DESTINATION

energy sources could further enhance this aspect of sustainability while promoting eco-friendly tourism practices.

High-quality and reasonably priced public transport services should be offered, with parking facilities provided at tourist sites to encourage visitors to use mass transit. This shift will ease pressure on the roads, reduce traffic congestion and promote the sustainability of the tourism sector.

The call for a proper transport system in Dhofar during khareef is not just about convenience but rather creating an integrated approach that benefits tourists, residents and local businesses alike.

Stakeholders that include government entities, tourism operators and community members must collaborate to ensure that this vision becomes a reality.

As we look forward to another successful khareef season in Salalah, let us advocate for improved public transport solutions that will enhance our collective experience while preserving the natural beauty and cultural richness of this unique governorate.

AI start-ups jump into Big Tech’s deep pockets

ALEX PIGMAN

It’s the case of the vanishing start-up: some of Silicon Valley’s most promising names in the fast-developing generative AI space are being gobbled up by or tied to the hip of US tech giants.

Short on funds, in the past few months promising companies like Inflection AI or Adept have seen founders and key executives quietly exit the stage to join the world’s dominant tech companies through discrete transactions.

Critics believe these deals are acquisitions in all but name and have been especially designed by Microsoft or Amazon to avoid the attention of competition regulators, which the companies strenuously deny. Meanwhile, firms like Character AI are reported to be struggling to raise the cash needed to remain independent, and some, like French start-up Mistral, are thought to be especially vulnerable to being bought out by a tech giant. Even ChatGPT’s creator OpenAI is locked in a relationship with Microsoft, the world’s biggest company by market capitalisation.

Microsoft helps guarantee OpenAI’s future with \$13 billion in investment in return for exclusive access to the start-up’s industry-leading models.

Amazon has its own deal with Anthropic, which makes its own high-performing models.

Joining the revolution brought by the era-defining release of ChatGPT requires a supply of cash that only tech behemoths like Microsoft, Amazon or Google can afford.

“The ones with the big money define the rules and design the outcomes that play in their favour,” said Sriram Sundararajan, a tech investor and adjunct faculty member at the Leavey School of Business at Santa Clara University.

Breaking from typical Silicon Valley legend, generative AI won’t be developed out of some founder’s garage.

That type of artificial intelligence, which creates human-like content in just seconds, is a special breed of technology that requires colossal levels of computing from specialised servers.

“Start-ups have been founded by former research leaders at big tech companies, and they require the resources that only large cloud providers can make available,” said Brendan Burke, AI analyst at Pitchbook, which tracks the venture capital world. “They’re not following the traditional entrepreneurial journey of doing more with less, they’re really looking to recreate the conditions that they experienced working in a highly funded research lab.” Many of these founders, including those at Inflection or Adept, came from Google or OpenAI. — AFP

Salalah’s 11-star experience



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi

What can you get for 300 baisas, equivalent to around \$1, in Salalah, in Dhofar in the Sultanate of Oman? From experience, you will get the warmest welcome by the vendors of one of the many food and coconut kiosks between the lush farms of Salalah.

You will receive fast service and a fresh, organic coconut drink and meat, not to mention the opportunity to capture this iconic and refreshing moment with family and friends over social media.

This experience reminds us of the strategic concept of an “11-star experience,” discussed in a conversation on the Masters of Scale Podcast between its host, Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, and his guest, Brian Chesky, co-founder and CEO of Airbnb*, the world’s largest online accommodation application, worth around \$90 billion.

Just as in the case of Salalah’s coconut experience, this insightful conversation makes the case for serving customers one by one after designing an experience that exceeds their expectations.

When you buy a service or a product, you would rate it as 1 if it is unsatisfactory, or 5 if it is excellent with a smile. When the service is so good that you want to share it with all your loved ones, you have truly come across an 11-star experience.

The significance of an 11-star experience is that it can be embraced by the economy of one attractive city like Salalah and then scaled up towards achieving socioeconomic progress for the whole economy. The question is, how can this be achieved?

Salalah, with its unique blend of natural beauty, cultural heritage and hospitable community, has the potential to become a pioneer in adopting the 11-star experience approach.

By focusing on creating extraordinary customer experiences, Salalah can set a new standard for tourism and service industries, driving significant economic growth and societal benefits.

The concept of an 11-star experience goes beyond conventional customer

experience. It involves anticipating and exceeding customer expectations at every touch point.

For Salalah, this means leveraging its unique strengths — such as its stunning landscapes, rich history and local traditions — to create memorable and shareable experiences for visitors and residents alike. Imagine tourists arriving in Salalah not just for its famed monsoon season, khareef, but for an array of meticulously curated experiences that celebrate the natural and cultural riches.

To implement this approach, Salalah can start by considering every citizen and resident an 11-star experience ambassador. This means warm hospitality becomes part of our identity as opposed to only the job of tourism and travel staff.

The implementation also calls for building the capacity of all service providers across various sectors, from hospitality and retail to transport and public services, to deliver exceptional and personalised service. This training should emphasise the importance of understanding and anticipating customer needs, delivering consistent quality, and adding unexpected touches that delight and surprise.

For example, local hotels and other accommodation providers can offer personalised welcome packages featuring products from Salalah’s farms such as frankincense, tropical fruits and coconut-based items.

Tour operators can design bespoke tours that offer deeper insights into the governorate’s history, culture and natural wonders, perhaps guided by citizen or resident historians or environmentalists.

Restaurants can focus on providing not just meals, but culinary experiences that tell the story of Oman and Dhofar’s rich gastronomic heritage.

The benefits of adopting the 11-star experience approach in Salalah are manifold. Firstly, it can significantly boost tourism, attracting more than the current 1 million visitors annually who seek unique and high-quality experiences.

This increase in tourism can lead to job creation, higher incomes and improved infrastructure, benefitting the local economy. Secondly, by setting high standards for customer service,

Salalah can enhance its reputation on the global stage, attracting investment and fostering partnerships with international businesses and organisations.

Moreover, the ripple effects of this approach can extend beyond the tourism sector. Improved service standards can elevate the overall quality of life for all residents, fostering a culture of excellence and pride in local heritage. Businesses across sectors can adopt similar principles, driving innovation and competitiveness in the broader economy.

Scaling the 11-star experience approach from Salalah to the entire Oman involves a strategic and phased implementation.

The government can play a crucial role by creating policies and incentives that encourage businesses to prioritise exceptional customer experiences. This can include funding for training programmes, tax incentives for businesses that achieve high customer satisfaction ratings, and initiatives to promote Omani culture and products internationally.

By embracing the 11-star experience concept, Oman can transform its economy into a model of excellence in customer service and hospitality. This transformation can attract global attention, positioning Oman as a top destination for tourists and investors.

Ultimately, the 11-star experience approach can drive sustainable socioeconomic progress, enhancing the quality of life for all Omanis and creating a legacy of pride and prosperity for future generations.

Our journey towards socioeconomic progress through the 11-star experience begins with Salalah. By harnessing its unique strengths and focusing on creating exceptional customer experiences, Salalah can set the stage for a nationwide transformation, unlocking the full potential of Oman’s economy and society.

**Airbnb violates the recent rulings of the UN’s International Court of Justice’s recent rulings by operating in the unlawfully Occupied Palestinian Territories, therefore the esteemed readers are encouraged to reconsider any dealings that violates the ICJ’s rulings.*

Never be lost in translation

Translation is not just about translating from one language to another, in a way, it is also about interpreting professional terms used in the same language.

When you look at English language too, one can see the use of business language, medical term and legal language. If caught in these professional languages one can easily be lost so then you can imagine when you are interviewing these professionals.

Now we all are aware of the terms acute and chronic. Acute is an infection that has caught on suddenly but is severe; while chronic is an enduring long-term illness. What is interesting is most of the medical terms originate from Latin and Greek words. So we know we need to get familiar with these two languages and these ancient languages are very much alive because of this relevance even today.

We also have special respect for the medical professionals because of all the terminologies and years of education invested in and the fact that they have to keep up with the latest advancements, in addition to the admiration for their medical practice consisting of the right diagnosis and treatment skills.

But even doctors have to communicate to their patients and the challenge is to impart their diagnoses in common man's language — this requires patience.

The world of legal terms are something we come across too. The legal language is also known as Legalese. That gives an idea on how distinct it is. The terms we are familiar with and use might mean something else in legal language.

For instance, 'In Writing' in legal language means something that is written by hand or electronically for the record. 'Written law' are the laws that are written and enacted by a legislative body. Then there is plain language legal writing which refers to a language that is understandable to the client, in other words technical language is not used.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

WHEN YOU LOOK AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE TOO, ONE CAN SEE THE USE OF BUSINESS LANGUAGE, MEDICAL TERM AND LEGAL LANGUAGE

When we move away from legal English to Business English the subject varies because legal writing is used to define legal rules, legal analyses, legal concepts, legal points and legal arguments, but business English has an emphasis on vocabulary that is used in conversation to terms of the industry.

Business English has distinct terms used in different sectors such as banking, finance, human resources, IT, logistics, travel, import and export, publishing, advertising, travel etc. it is also style of writing. Business English has functional words and they are regularly used in the sectors for business letters, memos, presentations, contracts etc. the words could range from 'clause' in a contract to 'invoice' to describe the performed service, 'trademark' that represents the company which is a registered design or logo.

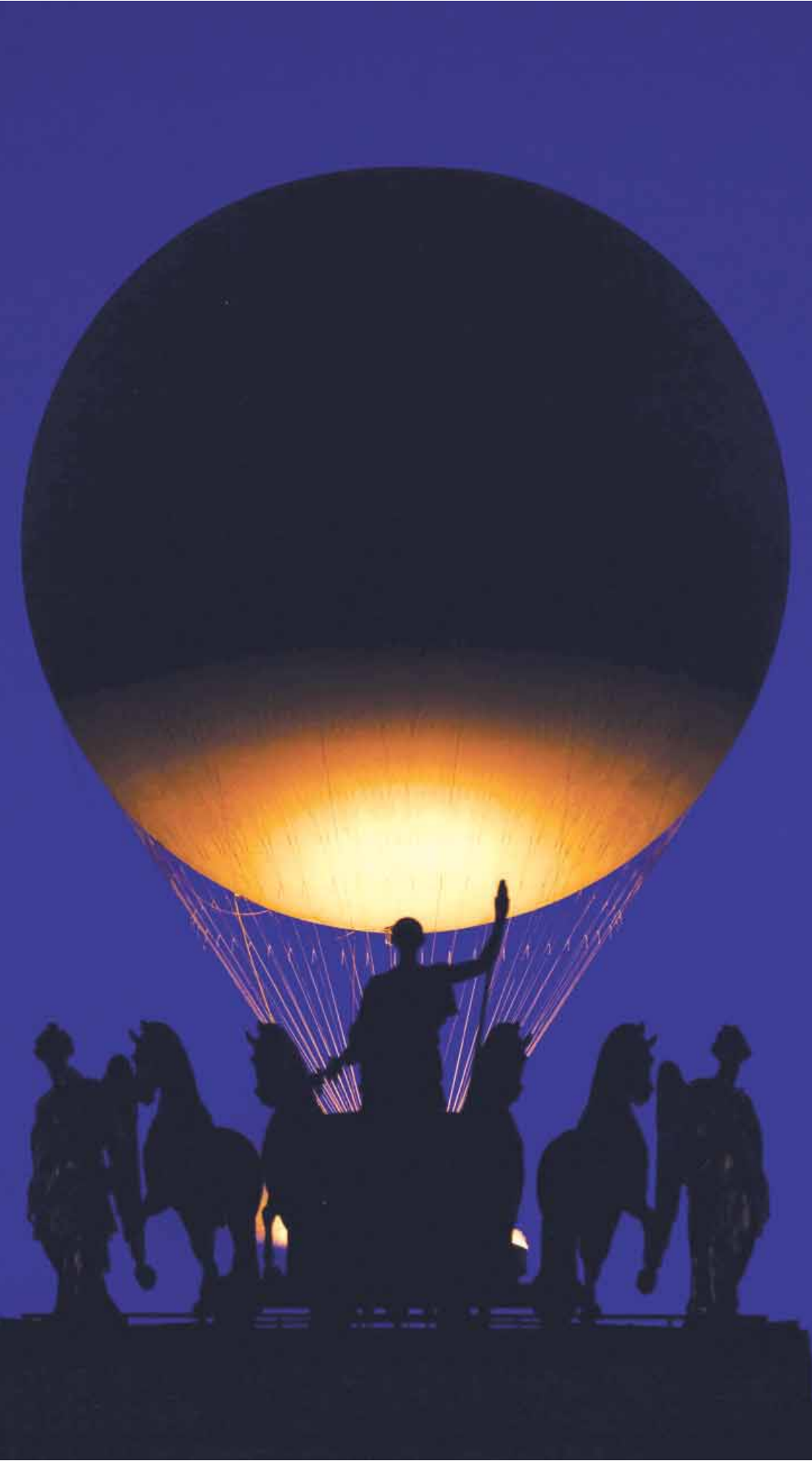
A lot of times the technical terminologies used in various sectors can often be referred to as 'jargons'. In the media sector, journalists are taught to avoid jargons so that the story is understandable for all readers.

Words are to communicate and while they convey the message some words that we use commonly might have specific interpretations in business language such as the words 'calling' and 'employment' as in the case of profession and employment in a company.

No matter whether the words originate from a different language or has a different usage, or are from different professions, what is required to communicate clearly is the right attitude with empathy and compassion especially when it comes to the medical field. That is because people who approach healthcare are vulnerable. When it comes to legal affairs it is extremely important to know what paper you are signing. However when it comes to business sector it is a competitive field that requires confidence. To gain confidence the best tool is to master the terminologies and their usages.

I'm other words no matter what the profession, what sets a person apart is the character — a human quality.

BEHIND THE STATUES



This photograph shows the Paris 2024 Olympic Games cauldron attached in the Jardin des Tuileries to a balloon and seen behind statues in Paris on Sunday night. – AFP

Will Trump get his wish for a weaker dollar?

If former US President Donald Trump returns to the White House in 2025 — and most betting markets still have the odds at 60 per cent or better — will he achieve the weak dollar that both he and his running mate, Senator JD Vance, so desperately want? Their view, of course, is that something must be done to restore America's manufacturing sector to its former glory, and they believe that the best way to achieve this goal is by imposing high tariffs and devaluing the greenback.

Vance, in his journey from Never Trumper to Forever Trumper, has repeatedly argued that today's strong dollar undermines the competitiveness of American labour. This argument is catnip for the press, as it sounds more like sports talk than boring economics, and the commentariat's response has largely focused on just how little sway the US president has over global exchange-rate markets. To be sure, there is a long history of presidents and Treasury secretaries trying, and failing, to talk the dollar up or down. Moreover, many have predicted that the spectre of Trumpian tax cuts and tariffs would, in fact, push up interest rates and strengthen the dollar.

But in the rush to point out the flaws in Trump's thinking — the starting point in the mainstream press for any proposed MAGA policy — one detail has not received sufficient attention: as gleeful American tourists romping through Europe and Asia this summer



Kenneth Rogoff

The writer is Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics, was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003

DONALD TRUMP BELIEVES THAT DEVALUING THE DOLLAR WILL RESTORE AMERICA'S MANUFACTURING SECTOR TO ITS FORMER GLORY

know well, the dollar is indeed very strong right now. This is especially the case if one looks at dollar metrics that account for different currencies' purchasing power. Any broad measure of the "real dollar exchange rate" adjusted for relative inflation in America's major trading partners shows that the greenback is far above normal historical levels. Only the 1985 and 2002 peaks look remotely comparable, and on both occasions, the dollar fell sharply in the following years.

Exchange rates are famously difficult to explain, much less predict, but one empirical regularity across a wide range of currency pairs and historical circumstances is that there tends to be some convergence back to mean whenever the real exchange rate is far out of line. The pace is not necessarily rapid, typically taking around three years for a real-exchange-rate overvaluation to reduce by half, but it is nevertheless quite discernable in the data. And the real adjustment does not necessarily have to take place through the exchange rate itself — it could be due to higher inflation in US trading partners, although this is not usually the case.

This means that there is some truth to the assertion that the dollar is too strong. Moreover, it implies that Trump would more likely than not get lucky with the dollar, even if

he does nothing. The same would be true if Kamala Harris wins the presidency.

The case of Japan — still the world's fourth largest economy — is a good, albeit extreme, example of this dynamic. Over the past three years, the yen has lost roughly one-third of its value against the dollar, even though cumulative inflation in the United States has been far higher.

Japan has struggled to sustain even 2 per cent inflation, while US inflation over the course of Joe Biden's presidency has been close to 20 per cent. Previously one

of the most expensive advanced economies in the world to visit, Japan is now one of the cheapest. The Chinese renminbi has also been falling.

Which forces will push currencies like the yen and renminbi back up? For one thing, the US is at a different point in its interest-rate cycle. Long-term US interest rates are likely to remain far above pre-pandemic levels, but short-term rates are expected to come down while Japanese rates are likely to climb.

Additionally, although the weak yen is putting upward pressure on

prices in Japan, which must import most commodities (including oil priced in dollars), the flood of low-cost imports helps contain US inflation. Indeed, Asian countries are so desperate to export goods to the US ahead of a potential Trump presidency that the cost of securing container ships in East Asia is skyrocketing.

Predicting the exact timing of any decline in the real value of the dollar is a fool's game. The dollar could very well rise further before it starts falling, no matter what Trump might say on his Truth Social website.

Unfortunately, even if the dollar does weaken sooner rather than later, it is unlikely to discourage a second Trump administration from forging ahead with its tariff policy, which both Trump and Vance see as a politically expedient and effective solution.

One would hope that a Trump administration would not try to interfere with foreign-exchange markets beyond instituting tariffs (which are bad enough) — for example, by using heavy-handed capital controls to keep the dollar artificially weak, or by installing a feckless Federal Reserve chair. Trump and Vance may be right about the costs of a high dollar, but most of the cures they are proposing are worse than the disease. © Project Syndicate, 2024



Something must be done to restore the manufacturing sector to its former glory.

sport

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Second place in the Gold Cup category for Al Manar racing

NÜRBURGRING (GERMANY): Oman's Al Faisal bin Khalid al Zubair, Austrian Dominik Baumann and Canadian Mikaël Grenier delivered another impressive performance to finish second in the Gold Cup category at the third round of the 2024 Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup at Germany's Nurburgring circuit on Sunday evening.

The three-hour race developed into a predictable duel between

the Saintéloc Racing trio of Paul Evrard, Gilles Magnus and Jim Pla and the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed crew in their Mercedes-AMG GT3 Evo.

Grenier drove the last stint of the three-hour race and finished just 4.974 seconds behind Magnus in the Saintéloc Racing Audi, as the two teams pulled clear of their rivals in the title race after the German race weekend.

The Haupt Racing Mercedes crew finished third and the CSA

Racing Tresor Attempto Racing Audis rounded off the Gold Cup leader board after a demanding race on the notorious German circuit.

Al Faisal said: "It was a good race today and very tight between the Gold Cup contenders. I feel with the package that we had coming into the weekend that a win was definitely possible. But we were just short of that. Second place here at the Nürburgring and second in the championship, just

nine points behind the leaders, I believe. Anything can happen at the final two rounds.

"The fight for the championship is still on. We have been quite consistent now with a second, first and a second, so I am quite happy with that. We struggled with the car a bit and that got us short of the win but the Audi seemed a bit too quick here this weekend. Hopefully we will be back on the top step in Monza."

Gold Cup rivals Saintéloc

Racing topped the times in Saturday morning's free practice session with a best lap of 1min 56.043sec. Haupt Racing carded the second quickest Gold Cup run of 1min 57.458sec with Al Manar Racing by Getspeed down in fourth with a fastest tour of 1min 58.541sec.

Al Zubair took part in the opening qualifying session on Sunday morning and carded a best lap of 1min 56.695sec on his fourth tour of the circuit to slot into third

behind Saintéloc Racing's Jim Pla and Tresor Attempto Racing's Lorenzo Patrese. Baumann then topped the times in his Q2 stint with a best lap of 1min 54.543sec and Grenier ran third in his Q3 stint behind the Haupt Racing Team's Arjun Maini and Saintéloc Racing's Gilles Magnus.

With the times combined, the Al Manar Racing by Getspeed Mercedes would line up for the race in second place behind the Saintéloc Racing Audi.

Hard-fought seventh place for Al Harthy

NURBURGRING: OQ by Oman Racing posted a seventh place finish in the Bronze class during round three of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup at Germany's Nurburgring on Sunday, 28th July, to record its second points-scoring result of the 2024 campaign.

Ahmad al Harthy and teammates Sam De Haan and Jens Klingmann combined to make strong progress from 13th on the Bronze grid during the three-hour encounter, with British racer De Haan shining during the opening stint as he charged through the order.

At one stage challenging for the podium in the OQ, Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman supported No.30 BMW M4 GT3, in the end the trio had to settle for seventh position and depart Germany 15th in the Bronze class driver standings.

Sunday afternoon's race began



GTWCE ENDURANCE CUP NURBURGRING RESULT

1st	Dennis Marschall / Dustin Blattner / Loek Hartog(Rutronik Racing, Porsche 911)	Darren Leung (Century Motorsport, BMW M4)
2nd	Patrick Kolb / Michael Verhagen / Bastian Buus (Lionspeed GP, Porsche 911)	Jonathan Hui / Eddie Cheever / Chris Froggatt (SKY Tempesta Racing, Ferrari 296)
3rd	Antoine Doquin / Till Bechtolsheimer / Sandy Mitchell(Barwell, Lamborghini Huracan)	Miguel Ramos / Louis Prette / Adam Smalley (Garage 59, McLaren 720S)
4th	Jake Dennis / Toby Sowery /	Ahmad Al Harthy / Sam De Haan / Jens Klingmann(OQ by Oman Racing, BMW M4)

behind the Safety Car when the original green flag formation lap was impacted by a couple of cars making contact. The allotted three-hour duration already began to be counted down by the time racing proper got underway a lap later, and De Haan produced a superb performance to slice through a dramatic and scrappy first tour to climb into seventh in Bronze.

Continuing to make excellent early progress, inside a couple more laps he was into the top five and by the end of the first half hour he was fourth in class. Soon passing the No.78 Lamborghini for third in Bronze, the OQ by Oman Racing driver latterly moved into second as the first round of pit-stops began with around 50 minutes of action elapsed.

After remaining on track until just before the end of hour one, De Haan then pitted to hand the BMW over to Al Harthy for the middle stint.

SAUDI ARABIA PLANS 92,000-CAPACITY STADIUM IN RIYADH



RIYADH: Saudi Arabia said on Sunday it plans to build a 92,000-capacity stadium in Riyadh that can host major international events, with the kingdom looking set to win the right to host the 2034 World Cup.

The Saudi sports ministry unveiled the approved design for the stadium, which is scheduled to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2029, according to the state news agency SPA.

The stadium is set to serve as the main base of the Saudi national team and will be part of a sports complex featuring an

indoor sports hall, an Olympic-sized pool and other facilities. It will be named after Saudi King Salman.

"This design was chosen from several submissions by six international companies, ensuring it meets Fifa requirements and standards of sustainability and architectural excellence," SPA said.

In March, Saudi Arabia launched its campaign to host the 2034 World Cup. The bid is all but certain to succeed due to the absence of any other expressions of interest before Fifa's deadline late last year. – Reuters

Djokovic downs Nadal as Daley dives to fifth Olympic medal

Djokovic during his match
against Nadal. – Reuters

PARIS: Novak Djokovic overcame a gritty Rafael Nadal comeback on Monday in probably the last chapter of their epic tennis rivalry at the Paris Olympics, where British diver Tom Daley grabbed his fifth medal in five Games.

In the pool, Canada's Summer McIntosh launched her bid for 400m medley gold in the morning session, with Australian Ariarne Titmus hotly tipped to win her second swimming gold later in the day.

With fans basking under glorious blue Paris skies, a happy contrast to the soggy opening ceremony only three days ago, golds are up for grabs in 11 sports.

As forecasters issued a heat warning for Paris and surrounding areas, the hottest ticket in town was at Roland Garros, where Djokovic and Nadal clashed for a 60th time.

Coming into the match, Djokovic held a razor-thin 30-29 edge in their rivalry but the Spaniard had always ruled the roost on the clay in the French capital down the years.

Age and injuries have caught up with the Spanish great however and he had warned before the match he would struggle to be competitive with Djokovic.

That proved painfully prescient in the first set as the ruthless Serb dispatched the former king of clay 6-1.

But Nadal rolled back the years in the second set, roared on by a packed Roland Garros crowd, fighting back from 4-0 down to 4-4 with two breaks of serve.

Djokovic found an extra gear at the end to claim a 6-1, 6-4 victory, the two tennis legends embracing at the net and Nadal waving to the Roland Garros faithful.

- 'GOOFY TASSIE GIRL' -

Another electric night of swimming action is expected, with Titmus bidding to add the 200m freestyle crown to her dominant 400m triumph on Saturday, when she blew away rivals McIntosh and Katie Ledecky to retain her title.

The 23-year-old Titmus is favourite at 200m — she is reigning champion and world record-holder.

Her biggest threat is fellow Australian Mollie O'Callaghan, who boasted the fastest time ever until Titmus smashed it in June.

Monday's other swimming finals are women's 400m individual medley, men's 200m freestyle, men's 100m backstroke and women's 100m breaststroke.

In diving, Daley took an emotional silver medal with partner Noah Williams in the men's synchronised 10m platform behind China's Lian Junjie and Yang Hao. Williams choked back tears as he recalled his former coach Dave Jenkins, who died in 2021 after the last Olympics in Tokyo.

BBC: "I've never seen Noah cry in my whole life, I know how much today mean to him. "It's very sad Dave is not here, but I know Dave and my dad would both be so proud to see us here today."

- SEINE EVENTS SCRAPPED -

Another fascinating battle pits China and Japan against each other for gold in the men's team final of the gymnastics.

Gold medals are also up for grabs in archery, canoeing, mountain biking, equestrian, fencing, judo, shooting and skateboarding.

Yuto Horigome defends his men's skateboarding street title after the event was postponed on Saturday because of rain.

Daley, whose father Rob died of cancer in 2011, told the

Said scores 70 points in men's Trap qualifier



Issa eyes strong start in 100-metre freestyle

ADIL AL BALUSHI
PARIS, JULY 29

Oman's shooter Said al Khatri ended in the 26th position with a score of 70 points in the opening day of the preliminary qualifications for the Men's Trap Shooting event at Paris 2024 Olympic Games. Al Khatri delivered an impressive performance at the main range of the Châteauroux Shooting Center on Monday as he managed to earn 23 out of 25 points in the first round and then 25 out of 25 in the following round. The concluding round of the first day finished with 22 out of 25 with a total of 70 points.

The Oman's shooter will aim for positive scores on the second day of the preliminary qualifiers to advance to the next stage. Swedish shooter Levin Andreas led the tally with 74 points while Australian shooter James Willett finished second with 74 points

and Croatian shooter Giovanni Cernogoraz ended in third place with the same points.

The second day of the qualifying rounds will begin on Tuesday at 12:00 pm (Oman time). Shooters will target 50 points divided into two rounds of 25 targets each. The top six shooters with the highest scores will advance to the finals where the gold, silver and bronze medallists will be determined.

Swimmer Issa in good shape
Oman swimmer Issa al Adawi will compete in the 100-metre freestyle event at Paris La defense Arena on Tuesday. The 22-year-old will compete in the second heats of the preliminary rounds against top swimmers including Libya's Youssef Abubakr, Estonia's Nixon Hernandez and Tanzania's Kolios Salibuko. There are ten heats in total with 16 swimmers. The toppers will progress to the semifinals which will take place on the same day during the evening

session while the finals will take place on Thursday.

Al Adawi will hope to register better presence in this Olympics in comparison to his previous Olympic appearance at Tokyo 2020 where he finished sixth in 51.81 seconds in the preliminary rounds of Group 3.

Coach Amer said Issa will aim to achieve advance and positive timing in this second Olympic participation. "He is now in better physical and technical shape in comparison to his previous Olympics participation. This indicates that he has improved significantly since the last Olympics. This preparation aims to enable him to achieve new personal and record breaking times," Tunisian coach said.

ATHLETICS TEAM GEAR UP

Oman's athletics team are taking part in the daily warm-up sessions under watchful eyes

of coach Fahad al Mashaykhi. Mazoon al Alawi will compete in the preliminary rounds of the 100-metre event on Friday while sprinter Ali al Balushi will participate in the same category on Saturday. Both athletes aim for podium finish and set new personal and record timing.

The technical meeting for athletics competitions will take place on Tuesday. Al Mashaykhi will attend the meeting. The groups for the Omani athletes and the competition schedules will be determined during the meeting.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al Araimi, Oman's Ambassador to France, expressed his great pleasure over Oman's remarkable presence in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. "The Summer Olympic Games is one of the most prominent international sports events which is characterised by the extensive participation of professional athletes from various

countries across the world. These athletes are very keen to be part of this global event which is taking place every four years.

"This year's edition of the Olympics in Paris is featuring a record participation of more than 10,500 athletes representing different parts of the world competing in 47 Olympic sports for 329 Olympic medals. Omani athletes' presence is a unique opportunity to compete with top ranking athletes, helping them to gain essential technical skills and experience to advance their performance to higher levels of sports competition.

"The French government made significant efforts and proper planning in organising this edition of the Olympic Games. The opening ceremony which took place at the Seine River and featured athletes entering by boats deviated from the traditional style and was exceptional. The

Omani delegation stood out during the ceremony by wearing Oman's official dress reflecting the authentic identity on this grand global stage."

The ambassador wished all the best to the four Omani athletes participating in the Paris 2024 Olympics. "I am hoping that the number of athletes will double in future Olympic Games. I appreciate the significant efforts made by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, led by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, and the Oman Olympic Committee chaired by Shaikh Khalid bin Mohammed al Zubair, for their keen interest in this important international participation. The Oman's Embassy in Paris will continue to provide various roles and services to Oman's delegation to facilitate and support our nation's participation in the Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games."

Jung wins eventing, Australian steals show

VERSAILLES, France: German eventing rider Michael Jung won his fourth Olympic gold medal on Monday after beating his main challengers Christopher Burton from Australia and Briton Laura Collett in the final showjumping contest.

Jung, riding on his bay Hannover gelding Chipmunk, won the three-day competition combining dressage, cross-country and showjumping with a final score of 21.8 penalty points, ahead of Burton with 22.4 and Collett with 23.1.

Securing his third individual Olympics win after London 2012 and Rio 2016, Jung managed to follow up on an outstanding dressage score on Saturday with a flawless and perfectly timed cross-country ride and two solid jumping performances the two following days.

The Versailles medal was the first Jung has won with Chipmunk, a horse the Bavarian took over in 2019 from fellow German Olympian Julia Krajewski with the help of his financial backers.

Jung had said he would "coddle and pamper" his partner ahead of the jumping final with a good portion of carrots.

While Jung was seen as one of the main favourites for the title, Australian underdog Burton, ranked 151 internationally, shocked the crowd beating most of the sport's heavyweights on Shadow Man, a horse with no notable track record.

The silver medal was his first individual Olympic medal, after winning team bronze in Rio 2016.

Briton Collett on Saturday had set a new Olympic eventing dressage record with London 52 who she said was the horse of her lifetime, but failed to defend the top spot throughout the competition. — Reuters



Michael Jung riding Chipmunk FRH in action. — Reuters

Pidcock wins mountain bike title

ELANCOURT, France: Britain's Tom Pidcock roared back after suffering a puncture to retain his Olympic men's mountain bike title after a thrilling battle with France's Victor Koretzky on Monday. World champion Pidcock, who won gold in Tokyo, found himself 35 seconds adrift after a front wheel puncture on the fourth of eight laps on the 4.4 km circuit carved in to Elancourt Hill.

Surging with adrenaline, Pidcock sliced into the deficit and hit the front on lap seven and looked set to power ahead.

But Koretzky and South Africa's Alan Hatherly stayed with him to set up a blockbuster final lap. Koretzky was the first to attack and looked to be set to emulate his compatriot Pauline Ferrand-Prevot who won the women's race on Sunday.

But a mistake allowed Pidcock back in again and then the two riders almost came together on the final rocky descent. — Reuters





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E-commerce in Oman valued at \$6.57 billion by 2030

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 29

E-commerce is projected to play a crucial role in reshaping Oman's employment and business landscape. Moawiya al Rawas, the CEO and co-founder of iON LLC, shared his vision for unlocking employment potential through e-commerce at the Oman Jobs Fair held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

By highlighting key statistics and projections, Al Rawas showcased the significant opportunities for job creation and economic growth in Oman's e-commerce sector. Al Rawas began by outlining the current employment landscape in Oman.

He pointed out that the private sector employs 69.5% of the entire workforce in Oman, compared to 16.2% in the public sector and 14.3% in other sectors.

He also noted that 84% of the public sector workforce consists of Omani employees, amounting to 346,460 individuals, while 14% of Omanis are employed in



Moawiya al Rawas
CEO and co-founder of iON LLC

the private sector, with 218,000 employees. This distribution highlights the need for more Omanis to engage in private sector opportunities, particularly in emerging fields like e-commerce.

According to him, the e-commerce market in Oman is estimated to reach \$2.64 billion by 2025 and \$6.57 billion by 2030, based on regional growth trends and local government reports.

This dramatic growth not only presents a substantial opportunity for economic development but also for job creation, with an estimated 200,000 potential



E-commerce in Oman is projected to create 200,000 jobs by 2028.

jobs in the sector by 2028. Al Rawas emphasised the importance of acquiring e-commerce skills to succeed in this rapidly evolving market.

He outlined ten essential job roles for e-commerce businesses,

including E-commerce Manager, Digital Marketing Specialist, and Customer Service Representative.

These skills are crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to thrive in the competitive e-commerce

landscape and maximise their employment potential.

To illustrate the financial viability of e-commerce, Al Rawas discussed the optimal yearly financials for an e-commerce SME.

He provided insights into the average transaction value, annual revenue, and expected profit margins based on different levels of transactions.

For instance, an e-commerce business with 25,000 annual transactions, averaging 2,083 transactions per month, and an average value of RO 30 per transaction, could yield an annual profit of RO 300,000.

This example showcases the significant revenue potential in the sector.

Al Rawas also highlighted the total market employment opportunity in the e-commerce

sector. With 135,064 SMEs registered by the end of 2023, and 31% of these categorised as Retail, approximately 42,000 businesses have the potential to transition online.

By projecting that 50% of these retail SMEs could become successful online within the next five years, Al Rawas estimated a total employment opportunity of 200,000 jobs in the e-commerce sector.

By leveraging e-commerce technology, platforms, and social commerce solutions, businesses in Oman have the potential to drive employment growth and economic prosperity.

Al Rawas's vision for a thriving e-commerce ecosystem in Oman aligns with the country's goals of diversifying its economy and creating sustainable job opportunities for its citizens.

Oman airports witness 11.9% surge in passengers in H1 2024



By the end of June 2024, Muscat International Airport handled approximately 6,386,267 passengers.

MUSCAT: Oman's airports have experienced a remarkable surge in passenger traffic during the first half (H1) of 2024, with the number of passengers rising by 11.9% compared to the same period in 2023.

The total passenger count reached 7,074,854 across 53,316 flights, up from 6,322,152 passengers on 49,013 flights in the first half of the previous year.

According to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information, Muscat International Airport saw an impressive increase in passenger numbers. By the end of June 2024, the airport had handled approximately 6,386,267 passengers, reflecting an 11.8% rise. The number of flights also increased by 8.7%, totalling 48,052.

Salalah Airport reported a 10.9% growth in passenger traffic, reaching 628,951 passengers by the end of June 2024. This was facilitated by 4,688 flights, marking a 7.3% increase in flight operations. Notably, international flights at

Salalah Airport accounted for 2,475 flights with 306,989 passengers, while domestic flights comprised 2,213 flights with 321,962 passengers.

Sohar Airport managed to serve 29,751 passengers on 268 flights, and Duqm Airport handled 29,885 passengers on 308 flights during the same period.

Highlighting the diverse international travel through Muscat International Airport, Indian nationals topped the list of passengers with a total of 185,389 individuals (73,762 arrivals and 111,627 departures). Omani nationals followed with 131,108 passengers (57,585 arrivals and 73,523 departures), and Pakistani nationals were next with a total of 52,925 passengers (26,152 arrivals and 26,773 departures).

This significant growth in passenger traffic underscores the increasing connectivity and strategic importance of Oman's airports in the region, reflecting robust economic and tourism activities. — **ONA**



Board of Directors' Report for the period ended 30 June 2024



Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, I am pleased to present the un-audited financial statements for the period ended 30 June 2024.

Performance Summary

The Company booked total Revenue of RO 15.524 million for the first half of FY2024, up by 14.9% as compared to RO 13.513 million for the same period last year. Interest expense for the period stood at RO 6.7 million which is 17.9% higher than the expense of RO 5.683 million for the corresponding period last year. Operating

expenses for the period were RO 3.217 million as against RO 3.132 million for the same period last year, up by 2.7%.

The Company reported Profit of RO 5.607 million before Expected Credit Losses (ECL) charge and taxation for the period which was 19.3% higher than same period last year (June 2023: RO 4.698 million). ECL of RO 3.098 million was recorded during the reported period, an increase of 8.3% from the ECL of RO 2.860 million for the corresponding period. Net Profit for the half year ended June 30, 2024, was RO 2.133 million as against net profit of RO 1.562 million for the half year ended June 30, 2023, an increase of 36.6%.

The Company's gross loan book increased by 10.7% to RO 388.765 million as on June 30, 2024, as compared to RO 351.159 million as on June 30, 2023. Total borrowings, inclusive of corporate deposits and unsecured non-convertible bonds, stood at RO 200.698 million (June 30, 2023: RO 185.569 million), representing an increase of 8.2%.

The Company continued to build the provision for expected credit losses which accumulated to RO 34.865 million on June 30, 2024, an increase of 23.5% (June 30, 2023: RO 28.237 million).

Market Outlook

The overall improvement in Oman's macro-financial conditions have improved the confidence in the financial sector. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), increase in oil prices and accelerated reforms under Oman Vision 2040 are expected to boost the Country's economy. The non-oil growth is projected at 2.6% for 2024 and 3.2% for 2025.

As the Government is continued to focus on the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME), it will benefit the Finance and Leasing sector which provides concerted financial support to this sector. The Company continues to play its role in the development of MSME sector for overall economic growth of the Country.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to express sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik bin Taimour for his vision and wise leadership.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement for the guidance and support from the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market. We are also grateful to our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Finally, the Board would like to appreciate and thank the management and the staff for all their hard work and efforts.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors

Khalil Ahmed Al Harthy
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests them in Arabic or English as requested, within 7 days of receipt of the request.

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AT 30 JUNE 2024

	Jun-2024 RO'000	Jun-2023 RO'000	Dec-2023 RO'000
ASSETS			
Cash and bank balances	17,186	18,087	12,023
Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	236,366	217,952	228,603
Other receivables and prepayments	809	613	586
Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets	855	740	937
Intangible assets	50	-	48
Deferred tax asset – net	79	79	79
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	255,595	237,721	242,526
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors, accruals and other liabilities	3,394	4,371	3,041
Short-term loans	58,211	58,434	52,071
Tax payable	384	291	866
Provision for employees' end of service benefits	336	255	309
Unsecured non-convertible bonds	29,800	28,098	29,800
Corporate and security deposits	42,608	24,680	32,472
Long-term loans	70,079	74,357	73,470
Total liabilities	204,812	190,486	192,029
EQUITY			
Share capital	27,109	26,384	26,384
Legal reserve	6,215	5,733	6,215
Impairment reserve	2,222	2,222	2,222
Fair value reserve	(441)	(441)	(441)
General reserve	478	152	478
Retained earnings	15,200	13,185	15,639
Total equity	50,783	47,235	50,497
Total equity and liabilities	255,595	237,721	242,526
Net assets per share (baizas)	187	179	191

UN-AUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2024

	Jun-2024 RO'000	Jun-2023 RO'000
Income		
Finance income	14,361	12,226
Interest expense	(6,700)	(5,683)
Net finance income	7,661	6,543
Other operating income	1,163	1,287
	8,824	7,830
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(3,036)	(2,918)
Depreciation and amortization	(181)	(214)
Impairment on net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	(3,098)	(2,860)
	(6,315)	(5,992)
Profit before taxation	2,509	1,838
Taxation	(376)	(276)
Profit for the year	2,133	1,562

Lulu celebrates Oman-India trade collaboration with exclusive Basmati rice, meat and poultry promotion

MUSCAT: Lulu, the leading hypermarket chain in Oman, is excited to announce a new promotion celebrating the finest flavours of India. In collaboration with the Indian Embassy and APEDA, Lulu will be offering a wide selection of premium Indian Basmati rice, meat and poultry products at exceptional value on a wide range.

This event was inaugurated by Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman, in the presence of senior delegates from APEDA, and Lulu Oman management at Lulu Bausher on July 23, 2024.

Speaking at the inauguration, the ambassador emphasised on the importance of the historic and robust trade collaboration between Oman and India and hoped that initiatives like these will further the cause. India is



acknowledged as an agricultural powerhouse with exports to over 200 countries.

We are delighted on being a facilitator with APEDA, the apex body for export of agriculture,

meat and poultry products from India to have aggregated more than 30 exhibitors for this event.

He even appreciated Lulu, the leading retailer with an unmatched presence in Oman, and expressed confidence that this event will help propagate the strength of the Indian produce to customers in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Ananth A V – Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman and India, said, “We are very happy to associate with the Indian Embassy on this unique initiative and are quite confident that this will provide a fillip to the agriculture and poultry sectors back in India.

“This event is a wonderful example of how food can connect people across borders and will also offer Lulu customers a window to experience the quality of these products from India.”

Basmati rice, known as the ‘King of Rice’, is a long-grain variety prized for its delicate

aroma, exquisite taste and fluffy texture. Grown in the fertile areas of India, Basmati rice is cultivated using traditional methods that have been perfected for generations.

Lulu will present a diverse selection of popular Indian Basmati rice brands during the event and customers can discover the perfect Basmati rice to elevate their everyday meals or create an unforgettable Indian feast.

This promotion also features a delightful selection of Indian poultry products. Renowned for their freshness and flavour, Indian meat and poultry offerings are a healthy and versatile protein source.

During the event, Lulu will showcase a variety of products, perfect for creating classic Indian curries, biryanis, or tandoori favourites.

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL’S SUMMER CREDIT CARD OFFER SEES REMARKABLE SUCCESS

MUSCAT: Sohar International, Oman’s best bank, continues to see success with its Summer Credit Card Offer, thanks to the enthusiastic participation of its credit card customers. The exclusive offer, featuring a total reward of RO 10,000, is designed to bring excitement to the summer season. This limited-time promotion provides customers with the opportunity to win substantial cash prizes while enjoying the convenience and benefits of using their Sohar International credit cards.

Until August 31, every RO 10 spent using a Sohar International credit card will earn the customers one entry ticket into a special raffle draw. The more the customers spend, the greater their chances of winning. This exciting offer is part of Sohar International’s ongoing commitment to reward and engage with its valued customers. At the end of the promotion, a total of ten lucky winners will be selected, each receiving a cash prize of RO 1,000. The raffle draw will take place shortly after the offer period ends, and the winners will be announced through Sohar International’s official channels.

“We are delighted to see the great response to our summer offer for our credit cardholders,” said Abdul Qadir al Sumali, Chief Retail and Premier Banking Officer at Sohar International. “Our customers are at the heart of everything we do, and this promotion is a testament to our commitment to providing exceptional value and rewarding their loyalty. We encourage all our credit cardholders to take advantage of this opportunity and increase their chances of winning by using their Sohar International credit cards for all their summer purchases.”



Nissan appoints Al Hashar Automotive as the only authorised official distributor in Oman

MUSCAT: Nissan has announced Al Hashar Automotive, part of Al Hashar Group, as its only authorised official distributor in the Sultanate of Oman, a market that holds considerable significance for the brand as part of its strategy to expand in the Middle East.

Nissan’s new partner in Oman will deliver the brand’s innovative customer experience to diverse audiences through a network of state-of-the-art 3S (Sales, Service and Spare Parts) facilities across the country. Al Hashar Automotive is expected to begin operations in early September.

The partnership agreement was inaugurated with an official signing ceremony that was held earlier in the year at Nissan’s Middle East headquarters in Dubai and attended by key executives from both companies, including Thierry Sabbagh, Divisional Vice-President,



President Middle East, KSA - Nissan, INFINITI, and Shaikh Al Muhannad al Hashar, Chairman of Al Hashar Group.

With a shared vision built on mutual trust and values, Nissan and Al Hashar Automotive are marking the beginning of a new chapter in Oman to deliver advanced mobility solutions to customers in the country.

Thierry Sabbagh, Divisional

Vice-President, President Middle East, KSA - Nissan, INFINITI, said, “Joining our network of valued partners across the Middle East, Al Hashar Automotive will play a pivotal role in catering to customer needs in Oman by ensuring ease of access to a broad range of Nissan’s innovative products and services.

“Combining our global expertise with Al Hashar

Automotive’s in-depth market knowledge, this partnership will enhance customer experiences with seamless purchase and ownership journeys across online and offline channels.”

Shaikh Al Muhannad al Hashar, Chairman of Al Hashar Group, expressed his great appreciation for the partnership, stating, “We are honoured to be appointed as Nissan’s only authorised distributor in Oman.

“Al Hashar Group has been involved in almost every area of the Sultanate of Oman’s economic activities, and our automotive division, which was established in the early 1970s, is backed by a deep understanding of the market. We look forward to a fruitful partnership that welcomes customers to our state-of-the-art facilities and offers them an extensive product line-up and world-class aftersales services suited to their varying needs.”

SOHAR begins ‘Maseer’ 2024 to enrich minds of young innovators

MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone’s pioneering summer programme “Maseer” 2024 has commenced, welcoming more than 350 students from the wilayats of Liwa and Suhar.

This year’s three week-long initiative, conducted in partnership with Kidcity, aims to provide students in grades 5 to 11 with advanced technical knowledge tailored to meet the demands of tomorrow’s burgeoning industries.

As the second edition of this programme, Maseer is set to foster development in innovative thinking, adaptability and confidence, nurturing young minds to think outside the box and develop innovative solutions. It will arm the youth of the nation with the tools and skills needed to navigate an ever-evolving technical landscape and enable students to excel both individually and as part of a team.

Building on the success of 2023’s inaugural programme, which featured a diverse array of workshops covering essential topics such



as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence (AI), cloud data, smart cities development, web development, Arduino programming, 3D computer-aided design (CAD), photography and photo editing, and renewable energy solutions, this year’s Maseer programme has been enhanced with even more specialised training workshops, led by renowned experts in their respective fields.

Students will have the unique opportunity to apply their newfound knowledge by creating innovative projects and presentations,

further honing their skills and pushing the boundaries of their creativity.

“Youth are agents of change and progress. Investing in their future is not only a responsibility but a privilege,” expressed Mohammed bin Ali al Shezawi, Vice-President of People and Support Services at SOHAR Port and Freezone.

“Through the Maseer programme, we aim to nurture the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers and leaders who will shape the future of Oman. By equipping these talented students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive job market and ever-evolving digital world, we are empowering Oman’s youth to become the driving force behind our nation’s success and prosperity.”

SOHAR Port and Freezone’s Maseer programme is part and parcel of its commitment to advancing social welfare and socio-economic community development centred on cultivating a culture of innovation and knowledge-sharing.

NBO MUZN ISLAMIC BANKING LAUNCHES NEW PREMIUM BANKING SEGMENTS

MUSCAT: In its ongoing commitment to delivering a unique banking experience to its customers, National Bank of Oman Muzn Islamic Banking announces the launch of its two new premium banking segments: Privilege Banking and Priority Banking.

These bespoke financial solutions for high-end clients offer personalised services to different income groups. Privilege Banking and Priority Banking underscore Muzn’s commitment to delivering high-quality Sharia-compliant financial products designed to provide its elite customers with a range of unique and value-added benefits.

Salima al Marzooqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking, said: “By realigning our service offerings and introducing tailored solutions, Muzn Islamic Banking reaffirms its commitment to providing financial solutions that not only meet but exceed the expectations of our valued customers.



“Our focus customer-centric benefits is designed to enhance the banking experience across all segments.

“Through these new segments, we aim to deliver premium services that enhance the premium lifestyle experience of our loyal customers. As part of our commitment to sustainable and responsible banking, both Privilege and Priority Banking customers will also have access to our eco-friendly, debit cards, credit cards and personalised cheque books. These cards not only offer a host of exclusive perks, but also exceptional value and convenience.”

OCCI Dhofar branch explores economic alliance with Thailand



Omani business figures from Dhofar Governorate meeting with members of a Thai delegation in Salalah on Monday.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 29

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dhofar Governorate Branch, convened an assembly of Omani entrepreneurs for a strategic dialogue with the Chargé d'Affairs of the Royal Thai Embassy to the Sultanate of Oman.

BOTH PARTIES UNDERScored THE POTENTIAL OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY, LEVERAGING THAILAND'S AGRICULTURAL PROWESS TO ENHANCE OMAN'S FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN.

The gathering served as a platform to explore promising avenues for bilateral investment and exchange expertise across diverse economic domains. A focal point of the discussions was the identification of sectors ripe for collaborative growth. Both parties underscored the potential of agriculture and food security, leveraging Thailand's agricultural prowess to enhance Oman's food supply chain.

Industrial cooperation, particularly in manufacturing and small and medium enterprises, was also deemed a fertile ground for strategic partnerships.

The tourism sector emerged as another area of mutual interest, with Thailand's experience in eco-tourism and cultural heritage offering valuable insights. The exchange extended to the realm of technology, encompassing information and communications technology, renewable energy, and innovation.

Participants deliberated on strategies to surmount investment hurdles and cultivate an investor-friendly climate in both nations. Streamlining bureaucratic procedures and providing essential infrastructure were highlighted as critical enablers for fostering investment flows.

A keen interest in knowledge sharing was expressed by attendees, with a focus on business administration, marketing, and finance. Joint workshops and seminars were proposed to elevate the competencies of national talent.

Salem bin Ali al Amri, a local Omani businessman, expressed optimism about the meeting's outcomes, emphasising the immense potential of Oman-Thailand economic cooperation for driving sustainable growth.

He characterised the event as the dawn of a new era in bilateral economic relations and reaffirmed Oman's commitment to strengthening this partnership.

UK's SNF plans polymer plant to support Oman's chemical EOR sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 29

Underscoring Oman's increasing reliance on Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) to sustain oil and gas production, SNF — the world's leading provider of integrated solutions for chemical-EOR — says it has plans to set up a polymer production plant in the Sultanate of Oman to cater to the requirements of a growing portfolio of oilfield customers and water utilities in the wider region.

UK-based SNF is a major manufacturer of polyacrylamide, a key polymer used in Chemical EOR operations in Oman, among other sectors.

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the country's biggest oil and gas producer, is a leading user of the polymer for its chemical EOR operations. So are a host of energy companies and service providers operating within and outside the Oil & Gas sector, according to a key SNF executive.

"As part of our strategic investment, we plan to establish a local production plant in Oman," said Jimmy Nesbitt, General Manager of SNF, Oman.

"This initiative aims to boost In-Country Value (ICV), reduce transportation costs, and ensure an uninterrupted supply chain.

This investment is closely tied to the promising development of Chemical EOR in Oman, further solidifying our commitment to the region's industrial growth."

In remarks to the *Observer*, Nesbitt said the company is preparing to shortly launch its regional technical hub in Oman. Styled as the Regional SNF Technical Center Oman (RSTC Oman), the facility — newly established at



PDO is a key user of polymer for its chemical EOR operations. Picture for illustration only.

Ghala in Muscat — will serve as SNF's R&D hub for the entire Gulf region.

"We are thrilled to announce that the RSTC Oman will officially commence operations from September onwards. The grand opening ceremony is slated for September or October, marking a significant milestone in our journey to promote Chemical EOR knowledge and enhance technological capabilities in the region," SNF Oman's General Manager said.

At the heart of RSTC Oman is a high-tech lab centre focused on polymer developments, according to the executive.

"The RSTC Oman is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and cutting-edge technology. It will conduct comprehensive QAQC

operations and pioneering R&D for Chemical Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) development in new fields.

The centre's capabilities include Polymer Rheology, Filter Ratio, Thermal Stability, Shear Stability, Core Floods (injectivity, adsorption, in-situ rheology, oil recovery), positioning it at the forefront of technological advancement."

As safe, clean chemicals, polymers can contribute significantly to CO2 reduction, according to the official. "Modern polymer EOR projects can cut oil production CO2 emissions by 50%.

Additionally, polymers are crucial for water treatment, enabling us to treat water for over 1 billion people globally and helping thousands of industrial sites clean and recycle water."

While SNF's biggest client is majority state-owned PDO, other partners include Petrogas, CCED, STS, and MEDCO, besides a number of non-hydrocarbon players as well, he said.

In addition to creating employment opportunities for a number of Omani professionals, the new R&D centre will also seek to foster collaborations with local and Gulf universities, oil and gas companies, and water treatment firms, further expanding employment and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

"Our investment in the RSTC Oman is not just a commitment to innovation but also a testament to our dedication to sustainable growth and local empowerment," Nesbitt added.

Women entrepreneurs attend seminar on tax awareness

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 29

The Department of Taxes in Al Batinah South Governorate, in cooperation with the Omani Women's Association in Al-Musannah, organised a workshop entitled "VAT and Income Tax".

The workshop sought to enhance awareness of taxation among female entrepreneurs with the goal of making their businesses



economically sustainable, while also contributing to economic

development in the governorate.

Attendees were given an overview of the VAT and Income Tax laws, guidelines for registering under both systems, procedures for filing of returns, and the rights and duties of taxpayers.

Taxation challenges faced by women entrepreneurs were also discussed.

They include difficulties in understanding tax laws and regulations, administrative

obligations related to tax, and failure to find an appropriate accounting system.

At the end of the workshop, the best practices of enhancing the tax compliance were discussed, including procedures for obtaining a tax number, keeping tax records updated, submitting correct tax returns on time, paying taxes, and communicating with the Department of Taxes in the governorate for any queries.

Government injects over RO 60m into Oman Air in 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 29

Funding support extended by the Omani government to the tune of RO 60 million helped ease Oman Air's troubled financials in 2023, the national carrier revealed in its 2023 Annual Report. It underlined the importance of the company's 4-year transformation plan that aims to return it to financial health.

Despite acquiring loans amounting to RO 532 million over the last five years, the airline's financial situation still remained unstable as of December 2023, it said.

Long-term financial



Oman Air's current financial state highlights the critical need to transition from reliance on government aid to self-sufficiency as a fully commercial enterprise.

obligations, including debts and aircraft lease agreements, ballooned to RO 9.1 billion between 2018 and 2019. Current

projections indicate that the company's future operations will not generate sufficient cash flow to cover operational and investment

costs without further government intervention.

The company's equity value has plummeted by nearly half since 2019, primarily due to a significant decline in asset value.

In response to these financial challenges, Oman Air has embarked on a rigorous transformation strategy aimed at achieving financial sustainability.

The company's current financial state highlights the critical need to transition from reliance on government aid to self-sufficiency as a fully commercial enterprise.

In September 2023, Oman Air's management unveiled a comprehensive four-year transformation plan focusing on

four main pillars: environmental sustainability, human capital, corporate governance, and institutional governance.

This plan includes several initiatives to improve performance and operational efficiency.

A key aspect of this transformation involves restructuring flight routes and schedules to major destinations in Asia and Europe, among other locations. This strategic realignment is intended to optimise operational efficiency and better meet market demand.

Additionally, Oman Air plans to reduce its excess aircraft fleet, a measure designed to cut costs and increase stable capital liquidity,

facilitating future growth.

In an industry undergoing rapid changes, Oman Air's journey towards self-sufficiency will require careful planning and execution. The airline's efforts to minimise reliance on government support and improve its financial health are commendable.

However, the path forward is fraught with challenges, requiring steadfast commitment and strategic flexibility.

The success of Oman Air's transformation plan will not only influence its financial health but also exemplify the resilience and adaptability of the aviation sector amid unprecedented economic pressures.

India wants to be China's gateway to the West



SHRITAMA BOSE

The author, India columnist, joined Breakingviews in November 2022. She covers the financial sector and related topics from Mumbai.

India is warming up to its northern neighbour. The South Asian country's annual economic report recommends courting investment from China rather than integrating into the country's supply chains.

That lays out a way for companies from Shein to BYD to keep selling in Western markets despite rising suspicion towards the People's Republic.

Much depends on how the Sino-American trade war plays out.

In the survey for the year released on Monday, India's Chief

Economic Adviser V Anantha Nageswaran laid out the two options for the country to benefit from companies shifting supply chains out of China.

He argues that it is more effective to encourage manufacturers from the People's Republic to set up factories in India and export to Western markets than to import China-made parts for assembly and re-export.

Betting on investments rather than low-value imports would help cut New Delhi's \$85 billion annual trade deficit with its neighbour. It would also shield India against any future moves

by Beijing to restrict exports of critical material.

Ideas floated in the survey do not necessarily translate into policy action.

But the push for Chinese direct investment found an advocate in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, the first member of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cabinet to back the idea.

That statement is significant, coming four years after India stepped up scrutiny of investment from its neighbours following a skirmish with Chinese troops.

Signs of a thaw are visible

elsewhere, too.

Fast-fashion giant Shein, which is gearing up for an initial public offering in London, is partnering with \$242 billion Reliance Industries to source merchandise from the world's fifth-largest economy.

China's SAIC Motor formed a joint venture with JSW Group in March to build and sell electric cars in India.

Those are still exceptions, though. As of March 2023, 54 foreign direct investment proposals from entities based in China and Hong Kong were awaiting official approval.

It's a reminder that parts of the Indian establishment are uncomfortable with opening the floodgates to Chinese capital.

Beijing's level of comfort with companies investing in India, especially in strategic industries with potential for technology transfer, is unclear too.

More importantly, the US-China trade war is still in flux, and the upcoming presidential election in November adds to the uncertainty.

At the very least, India's economic ambitions might offer a handy blueprint for the road ahead. — Reuters

Japan's auto rally betrays global electric vehicle anxiety

KATRINA HAMLIN

Japan's latest stock rally underscores the global anxiety over automakers' transition to smarter, cleaner cars.

Investors on Monday were quick to react to the news that Mitsubishi Motor will join an alliance between Honda Motor and Nissan Motor, which the Nikkei had reported a day earlier, citing sources.

The \$4 billion carmaker's shares rose some 5% following the report, while its larger peers each gained more than 2%, adding nearly \$2 billion to their combined market valuation.

Details about how exactly the trio would work together are scant.

Though Nissan and Honda announced they were looking into a strategic partnership back in March, little is known about the content of their talks, except that they were wide-ranging, covering automotive software platforms, core components related to electric cars, and the even vaguer category "complementary products".

Even so, there is reason to be excited. Combined sales of the three manufacturers totalled nearly 8 million units last year.

That indicates scope for significant economies of scale in the research, development and sourcing of key technology, which could be especially lucrative for costly components like batteries.

By comparison, the world's largest group by sales, compatriot Toyota Motor, delivered just over 11 million vehicles in the 12 months to

the end of March.

Operating margins at the \$250 billion giant hit 11% in its most recent financial year, per LSEG, trouncing roughly 7% at Honda and Mitsubishi and 4.5% at Nissan.

For Mitsubishi, Takao Kato has the most to gain from linking up with larger rivals.

The company, which sold fewer than 1 million cars in the last fiscal year, is part of another three-way tie-up with Nissan and Renault.

Yet in the quarter ending in June, earnings slumped 38% year-on-year to 29.5 billion yen, about \$200 million, on the back of falling volumes, rising sales expenses and other costs.

And although the manufacturer claims to have launched the world's first ever mass-market electric vehicle when it introduced the i-MiEV in 2009, it has since fallen behind.

Last year's strategy reset revealed EVs and hybrids made up just 7% of its sales in 2021, a number it wants to boost to 50% by 2030

Their overall cost remains moderate compared to previous howlers.

Mitsubishi's woes are not unique. Earlier this month, global brands spanning Nissan, Stellantis and Hyundai Motor flagged concerns over rising marketing costs and sluggish demand, which are squeezing the bottom line just as they look to pour more capital into developing smarter, cleaner cars.

Investors' eagerness to seize on any opportunity for companies to cut costs, however fuzzy and premature, betrays the industry's profit angst. — Reuters



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Albert Einstein says, "Compound interest is the eighth wonder of the world. He who understands it, earns it; he who doesn't it pays it."

It is a fact that many did not realise how powerful compounding is. Hence it is very important to understand the "power of compounding".

The concept of "compound interest" is an important aspect of financial planning.

It refers to the capacity of an investment to generate earnings both on the principal amount and also on the accrued interest resulting in exponential growth over a period of time. Let us understand the secrets, benefits and real-life examples.

The snowball effect

Snowball effect explains how small actions can lead to big gains over time. Just like a snowball rolling downhill picks up more snow and becomes a gigantic one when it reaches the bottom of the hill, regular and consistent investment can bring substantial wealth.

For example, a Systematic Investment (SIP) of \$1,000 monthly in a consistently performing Mutual fund for a term of 20 years can bring a wealth of say \$1,036,553 at the end of the term at a CAGR of 12% p.a. The reason behind this magic is that the returns generated are re-invested allowing the investment to grow multi-fold.

Understanding compounding

The key factors that impact the concept is the amount of investment, rate of interest, time and the frequency of compounding viz daily, monthly, quarterly, half yearly or yearly.

The more frequent the compounding cycle, the faster the growth of the investment.

Unlock the magic of compounding for wealth creation



COMPOUND INTEREST REFERS TO THE CAPACITY OF AN INVESTMENT TO GENERATE EARNINGS BOTH ON THE PRINCIPAL AMOUNT AND ALSO ON THE ACCRUED INTEREST RESULTING IN EXPONENTIAL GROWTH OVER A PERIOD OF TIME.

For example, the maturity value of a lumpsum of investment of \$100,000 for a period of 20 years at an interest of 10% p.a. will be \$672,749 if compounded on an annual basis whereas the maturity value will be \$732,807 if compounded on a monthly basis.

The maturity value will be just \$300,000 if invested on simple interest basis. Long term investments unlock the full potential of compounding leading to an exponential growth.

A monthly investment of \$5,000 for a period of 20 years at an interest rate of 8% p.a. will give you a maturity amount of \$3,057,337 if compounded on monthly rests, \$29,05,133 on semi-annual basis and \$2,745,718 on annual basis against a total investment of \$1,200,000 (all taxes ignored).

Strategies

The power of compounding plays an important role in financial planning. The following strategies will help to achieve a decent wealth creation, if followed meticulously:

Invest early

The earlier the better is the thump rule. The general tendency is to defer the process of starting an investment with no valid reason. This is a mistake often people commit, particularly youngsters.

To leverage the magic of compounding one has to start

investment at the early ages. Warren Buffet, one of the richest person in the world, started his investment at the age of 11, but most of his fortune was built after the age of 50. Now at the age of 93, his net worth is \$135 billion.

The story would have been different, had he started his aggressive investing 10 years before or delayed it by 10 years or quit investing at the age of 60.

Let us assume the primary goal of Mr 'A' & 'B' is to build a corpus which they need 20 years from now. Both wanted to invest \$10,000 per month.

'A' started the investment today. 'A' will get a whopping sum of \$5,988,206 at the end of the term (July 2044) at 8% p.a. compounded quarterly. 'B' delayed the investment and started 5 years later.

'B' will get a maturity amount of \$3,494,468 at the end of the term (July 2044) at 8% p.a. compounded quarterly. So the notional loss of 'B' is \$2,493,738 (taxes ignored).

Invest regularly

Rainfall may be little in shape and size. But their continuous fall makes a river overflow. Do consistent contributions to your portfolio at regular intervals irrespective of the market conditions. Increasing the investment at regular intervals can make a spectacular difference in the long-term horizon. Often, this vital aspect is not being given due attention by the investors.

Stay invested for long-term

Compounding works wonders over a longer period. Irrespective of your investment in debt or equity, the focus should be on the long-term accumulation of wealth through disciplined and systematic investments. The examples furnished above clearly

shows the need to stay invested for a long term for exponential growth of your wealth.

Do not withdraw

To achieve the primary goal of financial planning and to unlock the magic of compounding, stay invested and do not resort to periodical withdrawals to meet contingencies or other expenses. Build a diversified portfolio that includes short-term instruments to meet unforeseen expenses.

Allow the core investment to grow. Similarly re-invest the profit realised/dividend received in respect of your investments without using it for consumption purposes.

Be patient

The secret of the power of compounding is time. Therefore, it is important to have a long-term approach towards investing. This is more applicable in respect of investments in equity market or equity-oriented mutual funds.

The investments in the stock market are subject to volatility and market risks. There may be temporary adverse movements in the market and you may see an erosion of wealth which is only notional. Do not expect overnight miracles.

Conclusion

No doubt, the power of compounding is an important tool of long-term wealth creation. But there is a flip side of this when it comes to long-term borrowing like housing loans, vehicle loans and also credit cards dues when carried over.

The awareness of financial products and services play an important role in managing personal finance. While one has to recognise the extraordinary power of compounding, remember there is no magic in the true sense of the word, but it is pure mathematics.



A Toyota EV car is seen at the Bangkok International Motor Show in Bangkok, Thailand. — Reuters

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LEADING LAB CHEMICAL/CONSUMABLE/EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION COMPANY IN OMAN
URGENT HIRING
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- Degree of bachelor of Mechanical Engineering
- Driving license in Oman preferred.

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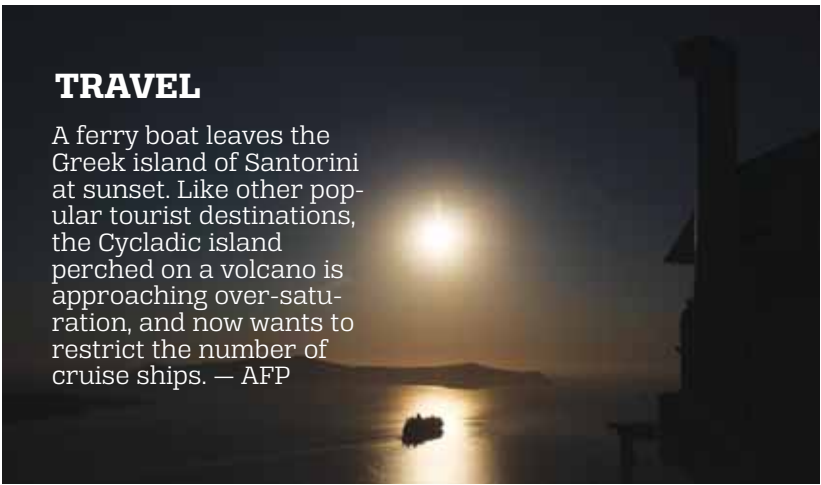
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TRAVEL

A ferry boat leaves the Greek island of Santorini at sunset. Like other popular tourist destinations, the Cycladic island perched on a volcano is approaching over-saturation, and now wants to restrict the number of cruise ships. — AFP



ART

Reproductions of artworks from the Louvre Museum are installed on the Seine during the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games Paris 2024. — Reuters



FESTIVAL

People watch a fire breather perform during a procession to mark Bonalu festival at Akkanna Madanna temple in Hyderabad on Monday. — AFP



MUSIC

The Wailers reggae band and its front-man Mitchell Brunings perform during the 58th session of the International Festival of Carthage (FIC) at the Carthage Roman Theatre on the outskirts of Tunis. — AFP



CULTURE

A woman wearing a wreath of flowers walks in the field during the Archstoyanie 2024 festival in the village of Nikola-Lenivets, Kaluga region. — Reuters

art & life

TUESDAY | JULY 30, 2024 | MUHARRAM 24, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om

THIS YOUNG OMANI WANTS YOU TO TRY ORGANIC FARMING
In her early twenties, Hiba al Hussaini faced health challenges due to college stress and societal pressures. This led her to explore organic farming where she discovered the joy of growing food and eventually becoming an advocate in promoting sustainable agriculture... P20

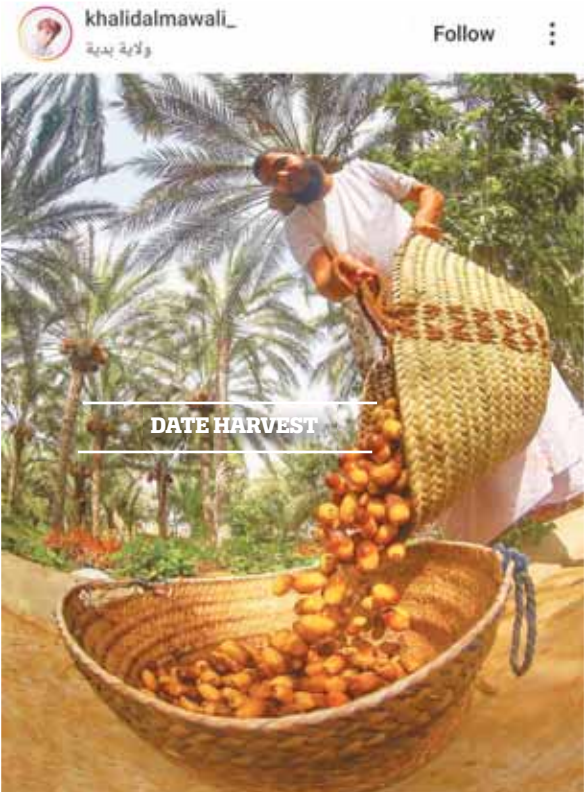
Brancusi's Romanian outdoor sculptures added to UNESCO World Heritage list

UNESCO ADDED A SERIES of outdoor sculptures by Romanian modernist master Constantin Brancusi to its list of world heritage sites on Saturday, celebrating their place as one of the most notable examples of 20th-century public art. Brancusi created the open-air collection that includes the "Endless Column" and the "Gate of the Kiss" in the small south-western Romanian town of Targu Jiu in 1937-1938 as a tribute to fallen World War I soldiers. The five sculptural installations aligned on a 1.5-km-long axis along Targu Jiu's central Avenue of Heroes are one of the few Brancusi works located in Romania. "The granted recognition forces us to protect the monumental ensemble, to keep it intact for future generations and for humanity's cultural memory," Romanian Culture Minister



Raluca Turcan said. Brancusi was born in the small village of Hobita near the Carpathian Mountains, but lived in Paris for most of his life. He arrived in Paris in 1904 after an 18-month walk and eventually worked under Auguste Rodin. He left Rodin's studio in 1907 saying "nothing grows under big trees" and became one of the most influential artists of the 20th century. He bequeathed his studio and some of his art to the French state after his death in 1957. He had wanted to leave his art to Romania, but the then communist government declined the offer. In 2023, the western Romanian city of Timisoara staged the first retrospective exhibit of Brancusi works to be held in his home country in more than 50 years. A separate comprehensive Brancusi exhibit ended this month at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. — Reuters

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



THIS YOUNG OMANI WANTS YOU TO TRY ORGANIC FARMING

BY KHETAM AL BUSAIDI

Oman's diverse climate, with coastal regions and mountainous terrain, offers ideal conditions for a variety of crops. Its abundant sunlight and minimal pollution can also support sustainable organic farming. With the country presenting ample opportunities for individuals passionate about organic farming to thrive, Hiba al Hussaini has become one of those who embarked on a journey to promote organic farming and environmental sustainability motivated by her personal experiences with health issues and the stresses of modern life, leading her to discover the benefits of gardening and growing her food.

Hiba's journey towards becoming an organic farmer began when she was in college and was struggling with both her health and college life challenges. She realised that the unhealthy and stressful lifestyle was taking a toll on her physical and mental health.

Hiba realised that she needed to make a change in her life and decided to take up gardening. She started small, growing her vegetables and herbs in her backyard. She quickly discovered that growing her food not only improved her health, but also helped her gain more knowledge about diet habits and nutrition.

Today, at 26, Hiba became passionate about organic farming and she's aimed to spread the culture of organic farming and encourage more young people to take up farming. She believes that if more people start growing their food, they will not only improve their health, but also reduce their carbon footprint and contribute towards a more sustainable future.

Hiba's approach to farming is different from others in her generation. She expressed feeling bored due to the technological competition, as it does not provide the same level of escape or relaxation that she desires to live a good life.

"One of the reasons I've become a farmer is that everything has become rather boring with all the technology. We're always on the phone, waiting for people to update us and watching out for new trends. At the same time, competition for technology and restaurants is heating up," she said.

"Whenever I engage in planting, touching the soil, or harvesting, I experience a sense of disconnect from the world around me. The most profound impact for me is the feeling of rejuvenation that comes after planting or harvesting as if my health has been restored. Whenever I faced stress or tension from work, I would always seek solace in agriculture."

Hiba mentioned that in her old days, she was not open to trying out different types of vegetables and only stuck to a few specific ones. However, once she began farming, she began to appreciate the value of the food and crops that she grew and started to fully utilise them without wasting any.

"I developed a keen interest in consuming the food I produced, properly preserving it, and ensuring it is stored correctly to maintain its quality. As a result, my health has significantly improved, and I feel more at peace mentally as I am now more connected to nature," Hiba emphasised.

Hiba's farm has become a community hub, with people coming from all over to learn about organic farming and to purchase fresh produce. She has also started a blog to share her knowledge and experiences with gardening with others who are interested in organic farming.

"Currently, the youth are more focused on securing a well-respected, well-paying job rather than searching for a suitable job that offers a decent income potential based on their interests in the surrounding environment. There is a common trend among many individuals, and I aim to break away from this idealistic mindset and embrace a simpler lifestyle that brings me more strength and happiness than I could find elsewhere," Hiba said.

