

OMAN
DAILY

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P12

CARAPAZ TICKS OFF TOUR WIN AS EVENEPOEL EDGES POGACAR, VINGEGAARD

P13

INVESTMENTS IN AL BURAIMI INDUSTRIAL CITY REACH OVER RO 19M

P20

SUMMER PROGRAMMES ENRICH CHILDREN'S SKILLS AND VALUES

HM gets call from King of the Belgians

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a phone call from King Philippe Léopold Louis Marie of the Belgians, on Wednesday. During the telephone conversation, His Majesty and King Philippe discussed the existing bilateral cooperation between the two countries and ways of fostering them in various fields and exchanged views on the regional developments. The King of the Belgians expressed his country's solidarity with the Sultanate of Oman on the incident which occurred in Muscat Governorate, hailing the procedures taken by the relevant authorities. His Majesty thanked King Philippe for his noble sentiments and kind gesture.

SUNRISE - 05:31 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:06 AM

DHUHR - 12:18 PM

ASR - 03:39 PM

MAGHRIB - 07:01 PM

ISHA - 08:21 PM



UN agencies hail Oman’s maternity leave

MUSCAT: The United Nations organisations in Oman represented by the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) commended the move taken by Oman’s government to launch maternity leave for Omani and non-Omani workers in the public and private sectors.

The newly launched maternity leave scheme, which comes into effect on July 19, provides 98 days of fully paid maternity leave for working mothers including the option to commence leave 14 days prior to the expected delivery date and seven days of paternity leave.

“I applaud the Sultanate of Oman for its strong commitment to the well-being of its workforce and its citizens,” commented Sumaira Chowdhury, Unicef Oman Representative.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sub-regional office for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) emphasised that reproductive health is fundamental to equal economic and social participation. Prioritising reproductive health,



98

DAYS OF PAID MATERNITY LEAVE FOR WORKING MOTHERS



7

DAYS OF PATERNITY LEAVE FOR WORKING FATHERS



19

JULY THE SCHEME COMES INTO EFFECT

BENEFITS OF MATERNITY LEAVE

1

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REGULAR VISITS FOR MONITORING CHILD GROWTH

2

RISE IN GLOBAL IMMUNISATION RATES AND TIMELY VACCINE COVERAGE

3

MOTHERS HAVE SUFFICIENT TIME FOR REST AND NEWBORN CARE

4

MORE TIME FOR BREAST-FEEDING

“

Mother’s presence in the first months of her child’s life is crucial in shaping the child’s future health, emotional, and social well-being

”

DR JEAN JABBOUR

WHO Representative

including maternity and paternity leave, can boost productivity, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the economic empowerment of women and society as a whole.

UNFPA further noted that women comprise approximately 40 per cent of the global workforce, and workplaces that accommodate women’s needs benefit everyone. It added that Oman Vision 2040 prioritises

the development of its citizens through advanced education, a robust health system, the promotion of citizenship, identity, and national culture, and the achievement of well-being and social protection. The vision also emphasises the importance of a competitive, innovation-driven economy with diversified roles, equal opportunities, and private sector leadership, all

contributing to sustainable development goals. Dr Jean Jabbour, World Health Organization Representative to the Sultanate of Oman, emphasised “the importance of the mother’s presence in the first months of her child’s life is crucial in shaping the child’s future health, emotional, and social well-being.”

Paid maternity leave is associated with an increase in the number of regular visits for monitoring child growth and a rise in global immunisation rates and timely vaccine coverage. It also ensures that mothers have sufficient time for rest and newborn care not only that but also it is linked to higher rates of initiation and continuation of exclusive breastfeeding. — ONA



DENNIS FRANCIS

UNGA president commends Oman’s commitment to peace

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Dennis Francis, President of the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), lauded the Sultanate of Oman for its steadfast commitment to peace, dialogue, and the promotion of noble values under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Francis highlighted Oman’s consistent efforts in fostering peace and understanding, emphasising its role as a beacon of stability in the region. He praised Oman’s enduring policy of dialogue and its proactive approach to international relations, noting the Sultanate of Oman’s constructive engagement across various global platforms.

“The international community holds Oman’s contributions in high regard,” said Francis, acknowledging Oman’s positive impact on global diplomacy and its constructive role in advancing international cooperation.

In addition, Francis lauded Oman Vision 2040, describing it as a forward-thinking blueprint aimed at positioning Oman among the ranks of advanced nations. He emphasized Oman’s strategic focus on human development, the promotion of a knowledge-based society, and the consolidation of modern state institutions.

“Oman’s developmental experience serves as a global model,” Francis affirmed, underscoring the nation’s achievements in sustainable development and its commitment to building resilient communities.

Iraq, Jordan condemn Al Wadi Al Kabir shooting

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Fuad Hussein, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq on Wednesday reviewed, in a phone call, the growing relations between the two countries.

They also touched on some developments and underlined the two countries’ consistent visions that back all means of maintaining regional and global security, stability and peace.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Iraq expressed the solidarity of his country with Oman in regard to the shooting incident that took place in the vicinity of a mosque in Al Wadi Al Kabir area in Muscat. He also extended Iraq’s condolences over the demise of some civilians and the martyrdom of a police serviceman.

Meanwhile, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister also received a phone call from Ayman Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan.

The Jordanian official expressed his country’s solidarity with Oman on the shooting incident which took

Gulf Arab states and Egypt have also condemned a deadly shooting in Oman. UAE expressed its strong condemnation of the criminal act

place in Al Wadi Al Kabir. He also extended his country’s condolences to Oman on the demise of some civilians and the martyrdom of a police serviceman.

During the call, the two ministers underscored the distinguished relations between Oman and Jordan. They also underlined the ongoing fruitful cooperation between the two countries in all fields.

Gulf Arab states and Egypt have also condemned the deadly shooting in Oman.

The United Arab Emirates expressed its “strong condemnation of these criminal acts and its permanent rejection of all forms of violence”.

A foreign ministry statement said the attack “undermines security and stability, and endangers” the lives of Omanis.

TURN TO P2



KHAREEF LENDS FULL GLORY TO AIN HAMRAN

SALALAH: Ain Hamran is a spectacular spring surrounded by lush greenery, dense trees and majestic caves. It is located some 17 km away from the Wilayat of Salalah. The spring provides drinking water for livestock as well as irrigation water for nearby orchards.

Varied trees spread over the spring forming a stunning view making it one of the most visited tourist sites in the

Wilayat of Salalah with tourists frequenting the area all around the year but with an increased tourist number in the fall season.

Springs flow forming scenic views and unique beauty making it a suitable place for tourists seeking tranquillity and peace of mind while enjoying the picturesque views and fine weather of Ain Hamran. Around Ain Hamran you can see a lot of trees

including Sidr, fig, and coconut trees. In bygone eras, the spring was used for irrigating farms across the Hamran plain where residents used to grow corn, sugar cane, sweet potatoes and other crops. During the rainy season, there are well-known places at the top of the valley in Ain Hamran from which springs of water flow for several weeks unlike the other springs.

— ONA



State Council discusses financial sustainability of civil society institutions

MUSCAT: The Office of the State Council reviewed a number of studies and proposals submitted by the Council's standing committees. The discussions took place on Wednesday at the Council's 5th meeting during its first convening in the 8th Term.

The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

During the meeting, the office discussed two proposals submitted by the Social and Cultural Committee. The first proposal dealt with the panel's

keenness to explore means of enhancing the financial sustainability of civil society institutions. The second study discussed means of maximising society's gains from cultural edifices and their activities.

Later, the State Council's Office reviewed the State Audit Institution (SAI)'s annual report (2023), the reply of the Council of Ministers about a number of studies submitted recently by the State Council, and reports filed by State Council members about their participation in regional and international forums. —ONA

UNEA calls for speeding up sustainable agenda

NEW YORK: The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) underscored the need to coordinate efforts to speed up the implementation of the sustainable development agenda at the global level.

This was stated by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA) and President of the United Nations Environment Assembly while addressing the seventh session of the UNEA High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development held in New York City.

The chairman of the EA pointed to the environmental challenges facing Planet Earth and the impact of conflicts in the Gaza Strip and many parts of the world.

He touched on the initiatives



Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and President of UNEA

and decisions taken at the sixth session of UNEA related to climate change, fighting pollution and loss of biodiversity. He reviewed goals 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals and the efforts being made by UNEA to achieve these goals.

— ONA

Iraq, Jordan condemn Al Wadi Al Kabir shooting

FROM PAGE 1

Bahrain's foreign ministry called the shooting a "heinous attack that goes against all religious and moral values and aims to destabilise the security and stability of Oman".

The secretary general of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, Jasem al Budaiwi, "affirmed the full support and solidarity of GCC countries" with their fellow member states.

Saudi Arabia praised "the speed and efficiency" with which Omani authorities dealt with the shooting.

Egypt expressed its condemnation of a shooting

attack that took place in Al Wadi Al Kabir. Posting on X account, Spokesman for the Foreign Ministry Ahmed Abu Zeid said Egypt stands by the Sultanate of Oman at this critical time.

The spokesman wished a speedy recovery for the wounded.

The Arab League also condemned the shooting incident. The Arab League affirmed its solidarity with the Sultanate of Oman's actions to maintain its security and stability. It also expressed sincere condolences to the Omani government, people, and the families of the victims and wished the injured a full and speedy recovery. — ONA and AFP

Implementation of maternity leave insurance from July 19

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Social Protection Fund announced that, with effect from July 19, 2024, the maternity leave insurance will be implemented in the Sultanate of Oman.

This was unveiled during a media briefing organised by the Social Protection Fund in Muscat on Wednesday.

The Fund pointed out that the maternity leave insurance mandate was endorsed through elaboration on working papers submitted by a set of institutions concerned, namely the Social Protection Fund, the Unicef, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development.

The maternity leave insurance benefits all Omanis working in the Sultanate of Oman in all sectors. It includes all Omanis working under employment contracts of various types. It also pertains to temporary contracts, training contracts and retired workers, as well as all non-Omani workers employed in units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and



The maternity leave insurance benefits all Omanis working in the Sultanate of Oman in all sectors and as well as all non-Omani workers employed in units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and workers in private sector. — ONA

workers in private sector business establishments that are governed by the provisions of the labour law.

The employer (employment party) is mandated to pay 1 per cent as a subscription towards the "Maternity Leave Insurance". The sum shall be calculated vide the full wage, without a specific ceiling and on a daily basis.

The dues of the "Maternity Leave Insurance" include the maternity leave allowance, the paternity leave allowance, the childcare leave and the maternity leave allowance for past employees/workers whose services have been ended but are still eligible for job security allowance.

Sayyid Shabib al Busaidy, Executive Vice-President for

Social Protection Affairs at the Social Protection Fund highlighted the importance of the new maternity leave insurance branch introduced by the Social Protection Law under Royal Decree No 52/2023. This insurance covers categories of both Omani and non-Omani insured individuals, with the employer responsible for payment calculated from the total wage.

Additionally, the working papers discussed the types of benefits provided by the branch, including a maternity leave allowance for 98 days with full pay for the insured mother, a paternity leave allowance for 7 paid days for the insured father, and child care leave for an additional 98 days without allowance. The period of service during these leaves counts

towards retirement pension entitlement.

Ajwad al Maskari, Communications Program Analyst at UNFPA Gulf Cooperation Council, emphasised the importance of reproductive health in economic and social participation, stating that maternity and paternity leave contribute to productivity, reduce absenteeism, and empower women and society economically.

The new law extends maternity leave from 50 to 98 days for insured women. Insured male employees are also entitled to a 7-day paternity leave allowance. Furthermore, mothers can choose to extend their leave by an additional 98 days of unpaid childcare leave within a year after maternity leave completion.

Dhofar Municipality opens two festival venues for Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI

SALALAH, JULY 17

Dhofar Municipality has inaugurated the 'Attin Square' and 'Return to the Past' sites to welcome visitors as part of the Dhofar Khareef Season 2024. The two sites, one of several planned by the municipality, aim to offer citizens, residents and visitors new and thrilling experiences. Activities lined up at these venues emphasise cultural, artistic, heritage and entertainment aspects suitable for all age groups.

Ammar bin Obaid Ghuass, Director of Events and Awareness at Dhofar Municipality, said that the 'Attin Square' began receiving visitors this week. The venue features entirely new games, distinct from those in previous years, along with a state-of-the-art digital theatre hosting numerous



The two sites, one of several planned by the municipality, aim to offer citizens, residents and visitors new and thrilling experiences

international performances, including spectacular light shows and laser fountain displays.

He noted that the 'Attin Square' events will run until August 31, showcasing global entertainment and tourism activities, such as drone light and laser shows and the Khareef Garden, which displays a variety of flowers.

Regarding the new 'Return to

the Past' location, Ghuass noted that its activities will launch on Thursday, July 18, in the Saadah area of Salalah. This venue, introduced for the first time, recreates traditional life and simulates local environments in the Dhofar Governorate, while also incorporating themes from various Omani governorates.

The event includes traditional

arts, heritage markets and diverse products from craftsmen and craftswomen.

He explained that the 'Return to the Past' venue reflects Oman's rich cultural and civilisational heritage, featuring an arena for diverse arts, heritage events, and markets with live performances embodying Omani culture. He emphasised the importance of the event in highlighting national identity, attracting tourists and promoting Omani culture.

Ghuass also mentioned that the 'Kady Time' activities in Awqad Park, Salalah, dedicated to children, commenced on July 1 and will continue until August 31. He detailed that the event includes global entertainment villages for children, an area for interactive games (VR), illuminated models and various restaurants and cafes.

Walkability vital for future of cities and livability

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

The UITP MENA conference, titled 'Smart Transportation for Sustainable Cities,' came out with critical recommendations to enhance the public transport system in the MENA region. The conference concluded in Salalah on Wednesday.

The event was held at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

An important outcome of the conference was a report on walkability in the MENA region.

The conference witnessed a

large number of national and international participants and evoked an engaging response from not less than 450 survey responses from the public and authorities over 'walkability' across five Mena cities.

The responses offered insights into current strategies and public perceptions regarding walkability. The findings emphasised the need to improve infrastructure, safety, enforcement, collaboration and partnerships to enhance walkability.

The report recognised walkability as vital for the future of cities, directly impacting livability and quality of life.

"It enhances first and last-mile connectivity, thereby boosting public transport ridership," said



the report with an assurance that authorities are actively working to shift mindsets and implement incentives to encourage walking." It called for technological investments in green mobility, which is crucial to advancing public transport.

The region, according to

the experts, is witnessing the development of green mobility and micro-mobility strategies to improve connectivity.

They called for stress from authorities and operators to restrict car ownership and promote public transport.

As a matter of comprehensive

and collaborative approach, the conference recommended community involvement in policies related to infrastructure development.

"Political support is crucial for the successful implementation of these strategies and emphasis needed on high-quality network design, service excellence and ensuring accessibility and frequency of services." The speakers called upon the authorities to optimise bus routes using big data and AI, repurpose fleets creatively and design buses for easy recycling.

"Innovative initiatives include powering buses with biodiesel from date seeds and harvesting energy from roads," they said.

There was general agreement for electrification and financial support, as the electrification of public transport involves complex interactions between multiple stakeholders.

"Financial institutions play a critical role in supporting sustainable public transport projects and assisting governments in their transition to Net-Zero." The conference underscored the importance of a unified effort among all entities, with clearly defined roles for stakeholders.

The recommendations set forth a road-map aimed at reclaiming public spaces, enhancing the quality of life and transitioning towards sustainable, efficient urban mobility in the Mena region.



CPA shuts down travel agency



The establishment was closed for failing to fulfil its obligations and provide the agreed-upon services

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has taken action against a commercial establishment in the travel and tourism offices sector in Muscat following multiple complaints from consumers who reported that the establishment failed to fulfil its obligations and provide the agreed-upon services, resulting in harm to the consumers.

The complaints received by the CPA stated that after booking tickets and making advance payments, the establishment did not deliver the tickets as promised. The establishment also neglected to update customers about their reservations and failed to respond to repeated consumer inquiries.

Furthermore, the establishment did not provide refunds after being unable to deliver the agreed services.

To address these complaints, the CPA conducted a thorough investigation, including searches and evidence collection, to verify the claims against the

establishment.

The investigation confirmed that the establishment had violated Article 23 of the Consumer Protection Law. According to this article, “The provider shall provide the service to the consumer in an optimal manner and in accordance with the purpose for which the service was procured and shall guarantee the service provided for a time internal that is appropriate for the nature of the service, failing this, the provider shall refund the value of such service or an amount compensating for any shortfall therein or in the perform the service again in the optimal manner as contemplated under the regulations.”

Based on the findings, the CPA took legal action and contacted the Public Prosecution. Subsequently, a judicial decision was issued to close the establishment and suspend its activities until a final decision is made regarding the case filed against it. Additional legal measures are also being pursued.

GED results out today as students wait anxiously

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The results of the General Education Diploma (GED) exams, attended by more than 50,000 Omani and expatriate students, will be announced at 4 pm today (Thursday).

Students can view their results through the short text message service (SMS) via Omantel, Ooredoo and Vodafone, or by sending an SMS containing the seat number to (90200).

They will also be available later on the Educational Portal, allowing students and parents to easily and conveniently follow the results as soon as they are issued.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, earlier approved the general indicators for the results of the GED exams for the first round of the academic year 2023/2024. She congratulated the students on their success and extended her congratulations to their parents, appreciating their efforts in helping their children achieve their ambitions.

Before the announcement of the results, many schools had organised psychological counselling sessions to help



A number of students have expressed their feelings of anxiety and anticipation, hoping that their results would live up to their expectations

students deal with pre-result stress and tension that were attended by many students.

The Ministry of Education affirmed its commitment to providing all necessary resources to ensure the process of announcing the results goes smoothly and transparently, while emphasising the speed and accuracy of the correction process.

Jassim al Fakhri, a student of GED of Al Alaa School, spoke about his experience preparing for exams, saying: “I relied on strategies such as

time management and periodic review of curricula to overcome them. However, I faced great psychological pressures, but the support of my family and friends played a major role in alleviating those pressures.”

Sarah Ahmed, another student, pointed out the benefits she gained from the counselling sessions organised by the school.

“These counselling sessions helped me a lot in dealing with stress and provided me with useful tips for studying. My expectation of the results is a mixture of anxiety

and hope, but I am ready to deal with any outcome and I plan to continue my university education in engineering,” she said. A number of students expressed their feelings of anxiety and anticipation, hoping that their results would live up to their expectations and the hopes of their families.

Meanwhile, educational experts called on parents to support their children regardless of the results and direct them towards taking advantage of all available educational opportunities.

TENDERS NOTICE



Mazoon Mining LLC, a subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman (MDO), is developing the Yanqul Copper Project in Al Dhahirah Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman. The project comprises five open-pit mines that will feed copper ore to a new processing plant to produce copper concentrate.

Mazoon Mining would like to invite qualified and experienced local and international Companies to participate in the following tenders:

Tender No.	5185-0304
Tender Title	Fire Protection System Design
Closing Date of Selling	July 28, 2024
Eligibility (Mandatory)	Bidders must be registered with Oman Civil Defense and have proven experience in providing Fire Protection System Design services on major process plants or similar major infrastructure projects. Bidders must demonstrate a minimum contract value of more than,OMR 100,000 on two (2) similar projects. At least one (1) of the projects must have been undertaken on a major industrial process plant.
Tender Fee	OMR 25/- Twenty-Five Omani Riyals Only (Non-Refundable)

Tender No.	5185-0102
Tender Title	Third Party Inspection Services
Closing Date of Selling	July 28, 2024
Eligibility (Mandatory)	Bidders must have proven experience in providing third party inspection services especially on an international basis on major process plants or similar major infrastructure projects. Bidders must demonstrate a minimum contract value of more than, OMR 60k on two (2) projects. At least one (1) of the projects must have been undertaken on a major industrial process plant.
Tender Fee	OMR 25/- Twenty-Five Omani Riyals Only (Non-Refundable)

Tender No.	5185-1000
Tender Title	Permanent Camp Construction (EPC)
Closing Date of Selling	July 28, 2024
Eligibility (Mandatory)	Bidders must have proven experience in providing EPC services for permanent camps construction on major process plants or similar major infrastructure projects. Bidders must demonstrate a minimum contract value/accommodation capacity of more than, OMR 2.3 m on two (2) projects / 500-person accommodation.
Tender Fee	OMR 100/- A hundred Omani Riyals Only (Non-Refundable)

Tender No.	Lot 1: 5185-1002, Lot 2: 5185-003, Lot 3: 5185-0301
Tender Title	Lot 1: Site Geotechnical Services Lot 2: Tailings Storage Facility (TSF), Wadi Diversion, Site Wide Surface Water (Quality) Management Design Services Lot 3: Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and Waste Rock Dump Design
Closing Date of Selling	July 28, 2024
Eligibility (Mandatory)	Bidders must have the following: Lot 1: Proven experience in providing site geotechnical services on major mineral process plants or similar industrial processing plants. Must demonstrate a minimum contract value more than, OMR 250,000 on two (2) projects undertaken on a major industrial processing plant. Lot 2: Proven experience in providing dry stack tailing design services on similar major mineral process plants projects. Must demonstrate a minimum project volume of more than, 20M tons on two (2) dry stacking projects. And have proven experience in water management for large mine and mineral and processing plant. Lot 3: Proven experience in providing Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and waste rock dumps design services on similar base metal mining projects. Must demonstrate a minimum number of the project more than, Five (5) similar Base Metal Mining Projects and Five (5) Experience in Waste Rock Dump Design.
Tender Fee	OMR 25/- Twenty-Five Omani Riyals Only Per Lot (Bidders can bid on one or more lots)

- SMEs with Riyada card are exempted from payment of tenders fees.
- Tenders fees shall only be accepted through bank deposit in the following bank account:

Account Name : Mazoon Mining LLC.
Bank Name : Sohar International Bank SAOG
Branch : Qurum Branch
Account : 005020042486
IBAN : OM720300000005020042486

- A copy of the original bank deposit receipt confirming deposit and identifying the bidders' name and the Tenders number must be forwarded via email, to tenders@mazoonmining.om to request the release of the tender documents. Payments received after the submission date will not be refunded. MMC retains the right to correspond solely with companies satisfying the mandatory tender requirements before the release of the tender documents Responses received that do not comply with the eligibility (mandatory) requirements will be removed from evaluation and will not be eligible for shortlisting.
- For any inquiries, clarifications, or submissions, please email: tenders@mazoonmining.om



RISE IN CASES OF WAREHOUSE FIRES A CONCERN



WE MUST EXERCISE
EXTRA CAUTION AND
IMPLEMENT BETTER FIRE
PRECAUTIONS IN LIGHT
OF THESE STATISTICS AND
A RECENT INCIDENT IN
ANOTHER GCC COUNTRY
WHERE 49 PEOPLE
LOST THEIR LIVES IN A
MIDNIGHT FIRE AT THEIR
ACCOMMODATION

**MOHAMMED AL
KHADOURI**

*An expert in health,
safety, and security*

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

A significant number of warehouses in the Sultanate of Oman, where companies store their goods, many of which are flammable, are presenting a serious fire threat despite warnings issued by the Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDAA). This threat is particularly heightened during the hot summer months.

A visit to several warehouses, primarily situated in industrial and residential areas, revealed that goods are often stacked beyond capacity, disregarding safety norms against fire hazards.

Although a devastating fire destroyed an upholstery store and warehouse in Wadi Kabir a few years back, and a shop selling computer accessories failed to serve as a wake-up call, CDAA still had to evacuate around 80 individuals from a building in the Ghala Industrial Area in the Wilayat of Al Seeb after a fire broke out recently.

Experts warn that warehouses storing combustible materials are at a heightened risk of fires. Improper handling or storage of these flammable substances can lead to them becoming potential ignition sources. The close proximity of these materials to potential heat sources increases the likelihood of accidental fires, damaging both the premises and surrounding properties.

“We must exercise extra caution and implement better fire precautions in light of these statistics and a recent incident in another GCC country where 49 people lost their lives in a midnight fire at their accommodation,” said Mohammed al Khadouri, an expert in health, safety, and security, and a lecturer at a college specialising in fire hazards and precautions.

The Sultanate of Oman, which has experienced rapid industrial growth, reported 41 fire accidents in industrial facilities. “Industrial fires can be prevented by conducting routine checks on fire protection strategies, maintaining and replacing outdated electrical parts, and raising awareness among employees within the organisation,” Al Khadouri said.

The statistics also revealed that fires in industrial and residential areas are primarily due to people’s careless attitudes, exacerbated by rising temperatures in summer, and a reluctance to adhere to safety and precautionary measures mandated by the CDAA.

In 2023, there were 1,539 reported residential fire incidents, a 14.4 per cent increase from 1,345 in 2022. Commercial fires at companies and warehouses totalled 302 (7.2 per cent), with no fire incidents reported at oil installations. Additionally, 8 fire incidents occurred at places of worship last year. The number of fire incidents involving electrical equipment, overhead power lines, and utility poles amounted to 234 (5.6 per cent), while 50 fires occurred in government facilities. In 2022, there were 4,186 fire incidents, compared to 4,057 incidents in 2021 and 3,409 incidents in 2020. The statistics indicated that 32.1 per cent of fire incidents (1,345 incidents) occurred in residential facilities. Home-based fires are common due to the presence of electrical appliances and cooking gas.



THE SULTANATE
OF OMAN,
WHICH HAS
EXPERIENCED
RAPID
INDUSTRIAL
GROWTH,
REPORTED

41

FIRE ACCIDENTS
IN INDUSTRIAL
FACILITIES



MOHERI, OCI COLLABORATE TO UNVEIL SHE STEMS 3.0

MUSCAT: Building on the success of previous editions, Oman Cables Industry (OCI)'s 2024 SHE STEMS initiative announced the launch of its third edition 'SHE STEMS 3.0' to reinforce its commitment to advancing gender diversity in the manufacturing and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sectors as part of achieving its social ambition.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) was signed to further solidify this collaboration. This partnership aligns with Oman Vision 2040 that focuses on developing a progressive, inclusive and diversified economy.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, stated: "The partnership with Oman Cables Industry for the launch of the third edition of the SHE STEMS programme is a significant boost towards creating a future where innovation knows no boundaries. Our combined efforts provide Omani women with the tools required to excel in STEM fields and perfectly align with Oman Vision 2040. The SHE STEMS programme highlights our ongoing commitment to creating a diverse and resilient economy, driving technological advancement, innovation and equal opportunities." Participants are required to undergo rigorous pre-selection assessments in English and mathematics, ensuring they are well-suited for the challenges that await them. Successful candidates receive a monthly allowance from OCI and benefit



The partnership aligns with Oman Vision 2040 that focuses on developing a progressive, inclusive and diversified economy.

from training and coaching provided by the Modern Gulf Institute (MGI), a leader in leadership and management development.

The programme is open to unemployed Omani women, aged 24-30, who hold a bachelor's degree in engineering and are willing to undergo pre-selection assessments in English and mathematics. OCI continues its partnership with a headhunter consulting company to assist graduates in job placement and soft skills development, ensuring a seamless transition into the workforce.

Erkan Aydogdu, CEO of Oman Cables Industry said: "We are proud to launch the third edition of the SHE STEMS programme, demonstrating our commitment to empowering Omani

women in key industrial sectors. With over 2000 candidates already applied, the eagerness of Omani women to join the manufacturing industry is clear. In the 2024 programme, we are introducing a special module on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to develop foundational knowledge and leverage its capabilities to reach new professional goals." "This edition will provide participants with a cutting-edge understanding of AI technologies, allowing them to explore this rapidly advancing field. This reflects our dedication to preparing graduates for both traditional industries and cutting-edge technology. The programme underscores our social ambitions and our profound belief that Omani women and the next generations will play a vital role in shaping the nation's future," he added.

ROP launches training on handling land border checkpoints

MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences on Wednesday launched a training programme that is implemented by the Royal Oman Police for citizens enrolled in divisions tasked with managing handling operations at land border checkpoints.

The programme, being carried out in partnership with the private sector, seeks to familiarise the participants with relevant regulations, laws and security systems in force and to empower them with the skills needed for performing their duties.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed

al Yousef, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the presence of Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs.

The programme's initiative includes assigning handling tasks (in land border checkpoints) to private sector companies. The operational units will be connected via the Bayan system.

The programme will help accelerate customs clearance using the latest equipment, programmes and technologies. It will also streamline procedures, apply innovation standards and improve institutional performance. — ONA



The ceremony was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the presence of Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs. – ONA

Al Nahdha Hospital performs 53 corneal transplants

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health announced that Al Nahdha Hospital has achieved a significant milestone by successfully performing 53 corneal transplants by the end of June 2024.

This accomplishment marks a major

step forward for the recently reinstated National Organ Transplant Programme.

The National Organ Transplant Programme aims to create a local eye bank to collect and preserve corneas from donors across the Sultanate of Oman,

achieve self-sufficiency in corneal tissue and make this vital service available in all governorates.

This is in addition to reducing reliance on overseas treatment by expanding local transplant capabilities.

9 crew members of oil tanker rescued

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Maritime Security Centre of Oman said 9 crew members of Comoros-flagged capsized oil tanker were rescued and one crew member dead. Search and rescue operations are still ongoing for other missing personnel, 25 nautical miles southeast of Ras Madrakah, Duqm. The Prestige Falcon, a 117-metre-long oil products tanker, was en route to the Yemeni port of Aden when it capsized on the evening of Monday. The vessel had a total crew of 16 members, comprising 13 Indians and 3 Sri Lankans. The Environment Authority (EA) said the vessel remains intact with no reports of any substance leaks.

The preliminary assessment suggests that a leak is unlikely due to natural factors, and it is anticipated that any dispersed materials would have already reached the Omani coast by now.

EA emphasised its preparedness for all possible scenarios, affirming its capability to manage the situation. A marine agent has been appointed, and a specialised company has been tasked with handling potential oil spills in anticipation of any emergency.

The Maritime Security Centre reported that the capsized oil tanker, flying the Comoros flag, has prompted a coordinated search and rescue operation involving relevant authorities.



The preliminary assessment suggests that a leak is unlikely due to natural factors.

Sultanate of Oman

Ministry of Defence

ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
11/2024	HVAC System Works- MAM	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	01/08/2024	02/09/2024	90/- R.O
13/2024	HVAC System Works- MAM	First and above - specialized in HVAC system	01/08/2024	02/09/2024	77/- R.O
15/2024	Building Works - MAM	Excellent	01/08/2024	09/09/2024	395/- R.O
17/2024	Replacement of Water Distribution Network - Izki	First & above - specialized in water distribution network	01/08/2024	02/09/2024	175/- R.O
18/2024	Building Works - MAM	First & above	01/08/2024	09/09/2024	380/- R.O
20/2024	Building Works - MAM	First & above	01/08/2024	02/09/2024	275/- R.O
21/2024	Building Works - BAF	Excellent	01/08/2024	09/09/2024	1500/- R.O
22/2024	Building Works - BAF	First & above	01/08/2024	09/09/2024	369/- R.O
23/2024	Building works - Bidbid	Excellent	01/08/2024	09/09/2024	1282/- R.O
24/2024	Electromechanical Work - (STP) DABA	First & above - specialized in Electromechanical work - STP	01/08/2024	02/09/2024	68/- R.O

*For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)

Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.

The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).

The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.

Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.

We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).

You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.

1. Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).

Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.

Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:

A. Financial (**bill 1&2 separated file from bill3**)

B. Technical files.

4. Confirmation of site visit.

5. All addendums and circulars.

6. List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.

7. List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.

8. Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.

9. Financial Statement for the last Three years.



Israeli settlement threatens Palestinian UNESCO village

BATTIR: On a hillside near Palestinian landowner Olayan Olayan's olive groves, young Israeli settlers are hammering out a new, illegal outpost in a UNESCO-protected zone.

Olayan and his neighbours have long battled attempts to settle the land in Battir, a heritage site in the Israeli-occupied West Bank famed for its ancient stone terraces.

Israeli construction in the West Bank has boomed since the war began in the Gaza Strip, even though all settlements in the territory are considered illegal under international law.

The new outpost on a Battir hilltop, also not approved by Israel, was served an eviction notice that Olayan's cousin Ghassan Olayan said has not been enforced because of the Gaza war.

The outpost already has a flagpole, living quarters and a barn for sheep that roam a rocky hill covered by olive trees belonging to Palestinian farmers.

"I ploughed the land and planted it until it bore fruit trees," said Olayan, who at 83 is older than the state of Israel itself. "Some trees were 50 years old, or even more, and suddenly the settlers came and wanted to devour the land and take it from us," he added, his voice shaky. Even more concerning to the Olayans than

the encroaching outpost is the adjacent, future settlement of Heletz. Yonatan Mizrahi of settlement watchdog Peace Now said Heletz was among five settlements "deep in Palestinian territory" approved by the Israeli government on June 27.

Heletz and the outpost sit inside the UNESCO protection zone for Battir, one of four listed heritage sites in the West Bank. The UNESCO classification means the village can get technical, legal, and monetary assistance to preserve sites deemed in danger.

In Battir, children splash in the Roman-era fountain that waters the terraces where tomatoes, corn, aubergines and olive trees grow.

The 2,000-year-old dry stone walls supporting the landscape earned the village its cultural inscription in 2014. But the classification has done little to prevent seizures of the surrounding farmland. Battir's inhabitants have beaten in court at least three previous Israeli settlement outpost attempts.

A UNESCO spokesperson said the UN cultural agency's world heritage committee had been told about "reports of illegal constructions" and that Battir would be discussed at a session in late July. — AFP



A Palestinian woman checks damage in Nour Shams camp after an Israeli raid, in Tulkarm. — Reuters file photo



Men stand before the collapsed minaret of a mosque following Israeli bombardment in Nuseirat in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

DEADLY STRIKES POUND PALESTINIAN ENCLAVE

GAZA: Israel kept up its air strikes on Gaza on Wednesday after PM Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to ramp up the pressure on Palestinian group Hamas as hopes faded for a US-announced ceasefire plan. Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh accused Israel of deliberately undermining negotiations for a truce and captives release deal because it did not want to end the war.

The Israeli military said it had carried out 25 strikes in 24 hours, targeting "military structures, infrastructure, cells and rigged structures". It said its troops were also "continuing precise, intelligence-based operational activity" around the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said 52 people, most of them women and children,

The health ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza said 52 people, most of them women and children, had been killed in Israeli strikes over the previous 24 hours

had been killed in Israeli strikes over the previous 24 hours.

The UN humanitarian office OCHA said multiple strikes across Gaza on Tuesday killed and wounded dozens. The territory's civil defence agency said 30 people had been killed in three strikes in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, one on a UN-run school, another on a house and a third on a mosque.

In southern Gaza, two people were killed in Israeli bombardment of the Shakush

area, northwest of Rafah, a medical source at Nasser Hospital said.

At least 90 per cent of Gazans have been forced from their homes, many of them seeking refuge in UN-run schools. Seven of them have been hit by Israeli strikes since July 6.

Nearly 70 per cent of UN-run schools across Gaza have been hit during more than nine months of fighting, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) said on Tuesday.

"Why do they target us when we are innocent people?" asked Umm Mohammed al Hasanat, sheltering with her family at a UN-run school in Nuseirat, which was among those hit.

"We do not carry weapons but are just sitting and trying to find safety for ourselves and our children."

Washington has been pushing for a truce deal between Israel and Hamas since President Joe Biden released details of what he said was an Israeli ceasefire roadmap on May 31.

In a telephone call with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan late on Tuesday, the Hamas leader blamed Israel for the deadlock.

"We dealt positively with the proposals put to us by the mediators but the occupation is avoiding the required outcome and does not want to reach an agreement under which it ends its war," Haniyeh said.

His comments came after a senior Hamas official said on Sunday that the group was withdrawing from the current talks following Israel's deadly strikes but was ready to return if its attitude changes. — AFP

■ RESCUED OUT OF DEBRIS



Palestinians carry an injured man from a building in Nuseirat, as Israel kept up its air strikes in the central Gaza Strip. — AFP

Hezbollah vows to hit Israeli targets if civilians killed

BEIRUT: Lebanese group Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned on Wednesday that his group would hit new targets in Israel if more civilians are killed in Israeli strikes on Lebanon.

The Lebanese movement has exchanged almost daily fire with Israeli troops in support of its ally Hamas since the Palestinian group's October 7 attack on Israel triggered war in the Gaza Strip.

"If the enemy continues to target civilians as it has done in recent days, then this will push us to target localities that we have not targeted until now," Nasrallah said. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said Israeli strikes in the south killed five people, including three Syrian children, on Tuesday.

In response, Hezbollah said it launched rounds of Katyusha rockets at northern Israel.

The United Nations children's agency, UNICEF, described



Smoke billows following an Israeli strike near the village of Kfar Kila in southern Lebanon. — AFP

as "horrific" the killing of the children, who were reportedly playing in front of their home at the time of the strike.

Nasrallah warned Israel of the consequences of any invasion of Lebanon, saying Israel would be left without any tanks if a full-blown conflict erupted.

The Israeli military said last month that "operational plans for an offensive in Lebanon were

approved and validated".

Nasrallah, speaking during Ashura commemorations, also pledged to assist thousands of Lebanese whose homes have been destroyed by cross-border fire.

"We assure residents whose homes have been completely or partially demolished that we will work with you, hand in hand... we will rebuild our homes," he said.

— AFP



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THURSDAY | JULY 18 | 2024

7

In brief

■ JOHANNESBURG



SEARCH UNDERWAY AFTER FRENCH SHIP LOSES 44 CONTAINERS

Authorities were scouring the ocean off South Africa's east coast on Wednesday for 44 containers missing after breaking loose from a French-owned ship in heavy seas last week, the maritime body said.

The container ship heading to Le Havre from Asia encountered bad weather in the Indian Ocean near the city of Durban on July 9, the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) said. Aerial surveys of the area were being carried out to trace the containers, SAMSA spokesman Tebogo Ramatjhe said. "Some of them spotted containers in the area but aerial survey have not found any yet," he said. — AFP

■ PORT-AU-PRINCE



HAITI CHURCH TAKES IN HUNDREDS FLEEING GANG VIOLENCE

Some 800 people now reside in a makeshift camp in the church's courtyard, surrounded by personal belongings hanging on walls or clotheslines.

Gangs had been steadily gaining ground in crisis-ravaged Haiti — with some estimates putting their control as high as 80 per cent of Port-au-Prince — but the violence spiked in late February.

Armed gangs struck sites around the capital and called for the resignation of Haiti's PM, Ariel Henry. The violence has taken a major toll, with the UN's migration agency saying almost 600,000 people in Haiti have been displaced, a 60 per cent increase since March. — AFP

■ ROME



ITALY PROBES ARMANI, DIOR OVER SUPPLIER LABOUR ISSUES

Italy's competition watchdog said on Wednesday that it was investigating the luxury fashion groups Armani and Dior over allegations they used supplies from firms that underpaid and overworked their staff.

As part of the probe, the AGCM watchdog and the Guardia di Finanza financial police carried out inspections at the headquarters of Giorgio Armani SpA and G.A. Operations SpA as well as Christian Dior Italia Srl.

"In some cases the companies may have used supplies from workshops employing workers who would receive inadequate wages," it said. — AFP

Russia and Ukraine each free 95 POWs

KYIV: Russia and Ukraine have released a total of 190 captured soldiers in the latest prisoner exchange between the two countries, officials in Moscow and Kyiv announced on Wednesday.

Thousands of POWs have been freed in more than 50 individual exchanges throughout the war — an area where the two sides have been able to strike rare agreements since Russia attacked in February 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russia's defence ministry on Wednesday each said that 95 of their soldiers had been freed.

"We continue to bring our people home. Another 95 defenders have been released from Russian captivity," Zelensky said in a post on Telegram. He said the exchange was mediated by the United Arab Emirates.

"As a result of a negotiation process, 95 Russian servicemen... have been returned," Russia's defence ministry said on Telegram.

The ministry shared video images of the freed Russian soldiers smiling and chanting "Glory to Russia" as they were transported by bus to an undisclosed location.

Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatyana Moskalkova shared a video in



Ukrainian prisoners of war (POWs) are seen after a swap, at an unknown location in Ukraine. — Reuters

Thousands of POWs have been freed in more than 50 individual exchanges throughout the war, an area where the two sides have been able to strike rare agreements

which the soldiers, interviewed by Russian officials, said they felt well and did not complain of any health problems.

In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that 1,348

Russian soldiers were being held in Ukrainian captivity, and that Russia had detained 6,465 Ukrainian POWs.

Exchanges have taken place sporadically throughout the conflict.

In a rare instance of direct talks between officials from Moscow and Kyiv, Moskalkova said her office met with a counterpart from Ukraine at the exchange.

The first such meeting took place at an exchange in June, Ukraine's human rights commissioner Dmytro Lubinets said at the time.

The officials discussed "joint humanitarian actions, including those related to the reunification of families", Moskalkova said.

Kyiv accuses Russia of having forcibly deported thousands of Ukrainian children from territory that came under Moscow's control, and is working to secure their return.

Moscow says children were moved for their own protection. Several have been returned, including through deals brokered by Qatar.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin on Wednesday denied a major

ground offensive on Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region had failed, after Russian officials said they would seal off border villages to protect civilians from Ukrainian shelling.

Russia in May launched a surprise assault into the Kharkiv region, which sits across the border from Russia's Belgorod region.

But on Tuesday, Belgorod's regional governor announced that civilian access to 14 Russian border villages would be restricted given the ongoing intensity of Ukrainian cross-border attacks. — AFP

UK's Labour govt programme laid out in King's address



King Charles III looks up as he reads the King's Speech, with Queen Camilla sitting beside him during the State Opening of Parliament in the House of Lords, London. — Reuters

LONDON: King Charles III outlined Labour's first programme for government in 15 years on Wednesday, with promises of economic stability and tougher action on irregular immigration to improving relations with Europe soured by Brexit.

"We will unlock growth and take the brakes off Britain," Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in introductory remarks to the King's Speech, a centuries-old tradition full of pomp and ceremony that details the laws the government proposes to make over the next 12 months.

Despite its name, the address, which marks the official start of the new parliamentary session, is not written by the monarch as head of state but by the government. It was centre-left Labour's first such speech since it was last in power in 2010.

Wearing the diamond-studded Imperial State Crown, his Admiral of the Fleet uniform and the crimson Robe of State, Charles delivered Labour's proposals from a golden

The speech included more than 35 bills, including measures to enforce public spending rules and an independent assessment of future budgets

throne in the House of Lords upper chamber after a carriage procession from Buckingham Palace.

The speech included more than 35 bills, including measures to enforce public spending rules and an independent assessment of future budgets to prevent a repeat of former prime minister Liz Truss's disastrous 2022 mini-budget that tanked the economy.

The legislation fleshed out several announcements already made, such as the launching of a wealth fund to draw investment into the UK to spur growth and of a publicly owned body tasked with boosting clean energy by 2030. Labour also announced an acceleration of house-building

and plans to take Britain's much-maligned rail services back into public hands.

There was also detail of a new border security command with beefed-up "counter-terror powers" to curb "immigration crime" — Starmer's pledge to "smash the gangs" behind migrant crossings of the Channel from northern France.

Labour returned to government following a landslide win against the Rishi Sunak's Conservatives earlier this month, in which the hard-right Reform UK party led by the eurosceptic Nigel Farage secured five seats.

"The snake oil charm of populism may sound seductive, but it drives us into the dead end of further division and greater disappointment," Starmer said on Wednesday, pledging to lead a government of "service".

The King's Speech included a bill to strengthen workers' rights and plans to reform the unelected House of Lords by scrapping the right of those with hereditary titles to sit there. — AFP

EU and Serbia to sign deal on 'critical raw materials'

BERLIN: The EU and Serbia are set to sign a deal over the supply of battery materials, the German government said on Wednesday, a day after Belgrade allowed work to resume at a disputed lithium mining project.

Lithium is a strategically valuable metal crucial for making electric vehicle batteries and is key to helping Germany's flagship automotive sector transition to greener production.

On Friday, Serbia and the EU will sign a memorandum of understanding on "a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials, battery supply chains and electric cars", German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit told reporters in Berlin.

The agreement is planned at a "critical raw materials summit" in Serbia which will be attended by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic, Hebestreit said. He added that the deal came against the "backdrop of a sustainable lithium extraction project" in Serbia, which has been a political fault line in the Balkan country in recent years.

On Tuesday the government in Belgrade said operations could restart at a site near the western Serbian city of Loznica where vast mineral deposits discovered in 2004 are to be mined by Rio Tinto. The deposits were discovered in 2004, but the Serbian government moved against the mining project in 2022 after weeks of protests sparked by fears over the environment and public health.

President Aleksandar Vucic has hinted that Serbia could begin mining lithium as early as



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has taken seat to lead the weekly meeting of the German cabinet at the Chancellery in Berlin. — AFP

2028, following new guarantees from Rio Tinto.

The project triggered mass protests and a long-legal battle but last week Serbia's constitutional court issued a ruling paving the way for work to resume.

Rio Tinto says the area holds one of Europe's largest reserves of lithium and could produce 58,000 tonnes annually, enough for 1.1 million electric vehicles.

However, opponents have expressed worries over the mine's impact on the environment and public health.

Rio Tinto has insisted that the project "will be subject to stringent environmental requirements in compliance with Serbia and EU regulations" and Hebestreit said the planned deal with Serbia would also include an "obligation to meet high environmental and sustainability standards". Vucic has hinted that Serbia could begin mining lithium as early as 2028. — AFP

The Cook of Castamar a cocktail of history and cookery



Rasha al Raisi

The writer is the author of The World According to Bahja. rashabooks@yahoo.com

If you're looking for a historical series that's set in a country other than England, then I invite you to watch Netflix's The Cook of Castamar (2021). Set in Madrid in 1720 during the reign of King Philip V, the series tells the story of the family of Duke Diego of Castamar (Roberto Enriquez), a widower who can't get over the loss of his beloved wife Alba, who died two years back in a horse-riding accident. He stays with his mother Doña Mercedes and his adopted brother Gabriel in the palace of Castamar and works in the Royal Court. The King insists on the Duke – his confidante- to throw a party in his Castamar palace that he'd attend personally with the Queen to mark the end of the Duke's long mourning period. Invitations are sent to the aristocrats of Madrid and that's when other key characters of the series appear such as Amelia Castro (María Hervás) — the orphan of a bankrupted aristocrat who's regarded as the perfect match for the Duke — and Marquis Enrique de Arcona, a close friend of Doña Mercedes and a scandalmonger who uses his knowledge of the aristocrat's affairs for his own benefit.

The party is a huge event for the Castamar residence and hence the viewers are invited to leave the aristocrats and join the staff that are preparing for it — mainly the kitchen staff where the heroine of the story Clara Belmonte (Michelle Jenner) works as a newly hired cook. Clara had lost her father in the war and since that time she's been suffering from Agoraphobia that makes her confined to the kitchen. Her path crosses with the humble duke's and a romance starts between the two. However, social status and circumstances keep separating and joining them throughout the ten episodes. Will the duke sacrifice everything for the sake of Clara? What I enjoyed most about the series was the attention to details that could be seen from the set to the costume designs. Moreover, to match the title given to the series, each episode demonstrates a dish or a recipe that comes from that period and what people recovering from different ailments ate or drank. The characters — especially the servants of Castamar — are likable and easy to relate to. You'd even feel sympathy at times for the aristocrats — despite their continuous intrigue and scandalous love affairs — when their backstories are

THE NETFLIX SERIES IS ENTERTAINING AND EVERY EPISODE ENDS WITH A CLIFFHANGER THAT MAKES YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

revealed throughout the episodes. The characters of King Philip V and his wife Queen Isabel de Farnesio were the most interesting in the series. King Philip suffered from deep melancholia that deemed him manic and neurotic most of the time, which made Queen Isabel the de facto ruler of Spain who managed state affairs with her husband's approval. The Cook of Castamar is based on a novel by the same name written by Fernando J. Muñoz. The outdoor shots of the palace of Castamar is the Palacio del Infante Don Luis — the youngest son of King Philip V — that was built in the west of Madrid between the years 1763 and 1765 (which is more than 40 years after the series' events). The series was nominated in a few Spanish television award ceremonies in the category of miniseries and won Best Leading Actor (Roberto Enriquez) and Best Supporting Actress (María Hervás). The Cook of Castamar is entertaining and every episode ends with a cliffhanger that makes you want to know what happens next. Recommended for history lovers and cooking shows enthusiasts.

Climate change risk stirs oil market

EMELINE BURCKEL

From forest fires to hurricanes and other natural disasters: climate change risk is increasingly influencing oil prices, just as the world is struggling to shift away from high-polluting fossil fuels. Hurricane Beryl became the latest weather phenomenon to jangle market nerves, boosting crude prices as it passed through Texas earlier this month. Texas accounts for some 42 per cent of total US crude oil production, according to Energy Information Administration data. It also possesses the largest number of crude oil refineries among US states. "Almost half of the total US petroleum refining capacity is located along the Gulf, with Texas accounting for one-third of total US refining capacity," Exinity analyst Han Tan said. The World Meteorological Organization has warned that Beryl's early formation and swift intensification could foreshadow similarly severe storms in the future. Earlier this year meanwhile, oil market sentiment was jarred in May as forest fires broke out in Canada. Traders took flight as out-of-control wildfires threatened to spread to the crude-producing hub of Fort McMurray, the nation's largest oil sands mining facility. Traders, more used to pricing in geopolitical turmoil, are now also weighing up the risks arising from the climate crisis. "Climate change and its effect is a major source of risk in the oil markets, and I expect that risk will only increase in the coming years as the effects of climate change become more visible and extreme," Rystad Energy analyst Jorge Leon said. At the same time, climate disruption is also having an increasingly visible impact on the operations of oil and gas companies, which are frequently slammed by environmentalists over their role in global warming. "Climate change has been and will be affecting production," summarised Tamas Varga, analyst at PVM Oil Associates. At the COP28 UN climate conference in Dubai last December, almost 200 countries agreed to a call for a transition away from fossil fuels and a tripling of renewable energy capacity this decade. However, the text crucially stopped short of a direct call for phasing out fossil fuels, while there were major concessions to the oil and gas industry and producer countries. Analysts argue that the oil market participants are simply focused on generating profit rather than saving the environment. That throws the onus onto the world's politicians and regulators, they add.

— AFP

Ejada in the age of intelligence and empathy



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In today's era of digital transformation, AI and evolving workplace dynamics, performance management systems like Ejada, which means excellence in Arabic language, play a significant role in guiding institutions toward sustained progress and excellence. Ejada, the Performance Management System for employees in government units in the Sultanate of Oman, is implemented across various ministries and authorities under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour. For leaders, bringing back empathy, adopting the right mindset is pivotal in leveraging such systems to their fullest potential. They can choose between an abundance mindset, which fosters growth and collaboration, or a scarcity mindset, which often leads to unfair competition and institutional weakness.

Abundance mindset
An abundance mindset is characterised by a belief in the potential for growth and improvement for everyone involved. Leaders who embrace this philosophy are typically more open to innovation, collaboration, and empowering their teams. For instance, Chinese leaders transformed the nation's culture by shifting from a fixed mindset to a growth-oriented one. They encouraged the Chinese market to learn, grow, and collaborate, which significantly boosted Chinese innovation and market performance. Similarly, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has shown how empathetic leadership and a focus on collective well-being can drive national progress. By prioritising the mental health and well-being of citizens, Ardern has fostered a more inclusive and progressive society. In the context of Ejada, an abundance mindset among leaders of institutions in Oman can lead to more effective utilisation of the system. It can encourage a culture where employees feel valued, supported, and motivated to improve their performance. This, in turn, can drive better outcomes for government units, fostering a more efficient and innovative public sector. By viewing Ejada as a tool



The Sultanate of Oman, by deploying Ejada, has taken significant strides towards embracing leadership best practices.

for growth rather than merely a mechanism for evaluation, leaders can inspire their teams to strive for excellence and continuous improvement.

BY ADOPTING AN ABUNDANCE MINDSET, LEADERS CAN LEVERAGE THESE SYSTEMS TO CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF GROWTH, COLLABORATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Scarcity mindset
On the other hand, a scarcity mindset is often rooted in fear and competition. Leaders with this mindset tend to view resources as limited and success as a zero-sum game. This perspective can lead to unhealthy competition, siloed thinking, and a reluctance to share information or collaborate. One notable example of a scarcity mindset is seen in the leadership style of some organisations that emphasise short-term gains over long-term sustainability. For example, under certain periods of leadership, companies like Wells Fargo experienced scandals due to a cutthroat culture that prioritised profits over ethical practices and employee well-being. Such an environment stifles innovation and can lead to significant

reputational damage. In the case of Ejada, a scarcity mindset can hinder the system's effectiveness. Leaders who focus solely on rankings and punitive measures may create an environment of fear and mistrust. Employees might become more concerned with avoiding mistakes than with innovating and improving. This not only stifles creativity but also undermines the potential benefits of Ejada. Instead of fostering a culture of growth and continuous improvement, a scarcity mindset can lead to stagnation and a decline in overall performance.

A global role model
The Sultanate of Oman, by deploying Ejada, has taken significant strides towards embracing leadership best practices. This system reflects a commitment to fostering a culture of accountability, growth and continuous improvement within government units. The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said serves as a global role model in this regard. His leadership was characterised by a vision of growth, inclusiveness and a deep commitment to the well-being of the Omani people. Sultan Qaboos's legacy underscores the importance of an abundance mindset in leadership. His emphasis on education, healthcare and infrastructure development has laid the foundation for Oman's progress and prosperity. Performance management systems like Ejada are vital tools for modern leaders aiming to drive institutional progress. By adopting an abundance mindset, leaders can leverage these systems to cultivate a culture of growth, collaboration and continuous improvement. The Sultanate of Oman's implementation of Ejada signifies a commitment to such progressive leadership principles. As leaders worldwide look for models of effective leadership, analysing the style and legacy of The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos can provide invaluable insights. His approach to governance, rooted in empathy and a vision for collective growth, remains a shining example for leaders striving to make a positive impact on their institutions and societies.

Between reality and fantasy

The journey of science is laden with a multitude of achievements and surprises, each emerging only after rigorous scientific endeavours. These milestones are the culmination of complex ideas that ignite the mind, which meticulously scrutinises and transforms these ideas into logical hypotheses. These hypotheses eventually evolve into theories through methodical scientific proof, employing both mathematical and experimental methodologies. Conversely, nothing can be deduced except in the realm of a writer's imagination or science fiction. This genre, far from being mere fantasy, significantly contributes to the reservoir of ideas that have inspired scientists and researchers.

Many of the concepts first envisioned by writers and philosophers were initially considered flights of fancy. Historical intellectual conflicts between science, imagination, and myth have often centred around visions. These visions, experiences perceived during sleep, transport individuals across the temporal spectrum, where they encounter future events before they materialise in reality. Such experiences have historically divided scientific opinion, predominantly negating the possibility of temporal breakthroughs and attributing these visions to illusions or coincidences. However, the recurrence of such experiences, especially among scientists, politicians, and philosophers, challenges these dismissals. These testimonies, some of which are documented in my Arabic book 'Between Science and Faith' suggests a need for a deeper scientific exploration beyond traditional dismissals as mere fantasy.

Modern science continues to explore these phenomena through various hypotheses, including those informed by quantum physics, which remains a source of fascination in understanding atomic and subatomic behaviours. Additionally, concepts like "Timeless Awareness" and theories such as the "Block Universe Theory" propose that all times — past, present, and future — exist simultaneously, aligned with Albert Einstein's theory of relativity which views time as a relative



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Tobi

The writer is an academic and researcher

IT IS THE PROPENSITY FOR IMAGINATION THAT PROPELS THE MIND TOWARDS SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION AND INNOVATION, ENSURING THAT IDEAS, ONCE DEEMED FANTASTICAL, ARE REEVALUATED AND POTENTIALLY INTEGRATED INTO SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE

dimension. Despite these theories, the scientific community lacks a definitive explanation for the nature of dreams, and remains unable to conclusively prove or disprove their existence using established scientific methods.

Further complicating the scientific landscape are issues like the nature of consciousness. The debate over consciousness has extended beyond the human mind to include digital entities in the realm of advanced artificial intelligence. Some philosophers and scientists posit that digital systems could potentially exhibit a form of consciousness, despite the prevailing belief that such systems merely simulate human intelligence. Another profound human inquiry relates to immortality, a concept long pursued through historical narratives and scientific endeavours. While modern science has made significant strides in enhancing health and prolonging life through technologies like genetic modification, the fundamental biological principles continue to underscore the inevitability of death, rendering true immortality unattainable.

These ongoing scientific and philosophical debates underscore the vast and complex nature of scientific inquiry. They reflect the enduring human struggle to comprehend and navigate the mysteries of life and existence, a journey not limited by current understanding or technological capability. Prior to modern advancements like electricity, humans could scarcely conceive of realities beyond their immediate experience and historical context.

In conclusion, the foundations of human thought oscillate between scepticism and belief, where knowledge is perpetually bounded by the limits of current understanding. However, it is the propensity for imagination that propels the mind towards scientific exploration and innovation, ensuring that ideas, once deemed fantastical, are reevaluated and potentially integrated into scientific knowledge.

The interplay between doubt and certainty, myth and fact, remains a central theme in the ongoing pursuit of understanding the vast and intricate tapestry of existence.

PROOF IN THE PLUNGE



Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo swims in the Seine, in Paris on Wednesday to demonstrate that the river is clean enough to host the outdoor swimming events at the Paris Olympics later this month. Despite an investment of 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to prevent sewage leaks into the waterway, the Seine has been causing suspense in the run-up to the opening of the Paris Games on July 26 after repeatedly failing water quality tests. But since the beginning of July, with heavy rains finally giving way to sunnier weather, samples have shown the river to be ready for the open-water swimming and triathlon – and for 65-year-old Hidalgo. – AFP

Preparing for extreme heat waves

People across Asia have eagerly awaited the end of heat-wave season, which now appears to be drawing to a close. In my home country, the Philippines, the first typhoon of the year arrived in late May, lowering temperatures that had climbed to nearly 50° Celsius. Over the previous few months, the record-breaking heat led to school closures, a spike in emergency-room visits, reduced productivity, and a return to remote work.

While the public-health effects and economic impact of extreme heat waves can be difficult to measure, the speed at which they are forgotten is alarming. This mirrors the cycle of panic and neglect that often follows pandemics: societies forget the lessons of past health crises and are caught unprepared when the next one arrives. Just as we must improve pandemic preparedness, we must mitigate the health risks posed by life-threatening temperatures. As climate change accelerates, heat waves are expected to become increasingly frequent and intense, especially in Asia. To survive this “new normal,” we cannot rely on inadequate public-health guidelines like drinking more water and staying in air-conditioned spaces, as if the vast majority of the world's population has access to air conditioning or even clean water.

Instead, governments must adopt



Renzo R. Guinto

The writer is with the Duke-NUS Medical School in Singapore

HEAT- PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMMES MUST FOCUS ON HIGHLY VULNERABLE GROUPS, SUCH AS FARMERS AND FISHERFOLK, CONSTRUCTION AND FACTORY WORKERS, THE ELDERLY, AND PEOPLE WITH COMORBIDITIES

a more proactive approach and accelerate efforts to build heat resilience. By the time the next historic heat wave hits, all countries should have a national plan to address it, along with adaptation measures for local communities. In fact, every aspect of policymaking should be viewed through the lens of resilience. Beyond the health sector, the top priorities should be housing, transportation, and water — which are all targets under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Housing should come first. Many of Asia's most vulnerable people live in poorly ventilated public housing or densely populated slums. Globally, an estimated 1.6 billion people suffer from inadequate living conditions. Given that such surveys do not usually account for ventilation, this could well be an underestimate.

There are more viable options for adaptation than advising poor people to live in air-conditioned buildings. In addition to being costly, air conditioners consume vast amounts of electricity, with researchers estimating that they are responsible for 3.9 per cent of global greenhouse-gas emissions. Instead of burning more fossil fuels to meet this increased energy demand, policymakers must reimagine urban development

to protect both the planet and public health. For example, some countries in Asia, including Indonesia and Singapore, have begun using low-cost “cool roof” paint to lower indoor temperatures without air conditioners.

Transport is another heat-sensitive sector. Whether riding in overcrowded buses or waiting for extended periods on sweltering train platforms, commuters in low- and middle-income countries are often exposed to extreme temperatures. Investing in sustainable transportation systems that also provide comfort during heat waves is crucial to achieving vital climate and public-health goals.

To build heat resilience,

governments must also address the global water crisis. Although hydration is crucial for protection against extreme heat, nearly one-third of the world's population does not have access to safe drinking water. Single-use plastic water bottles are not the answer; like air conditioning, they are costly, carbon-intensive, and polluting.

Heat-preparedness programmes must focus on highly vulnerable groups, such as farmers and fisherfolk, construction and factory workers, the elderly, and people with comorbidities. This effort must also be extended to prisoners, detained migrants, and psychiatric patients, all of whom are often confined to extremely hot, cramped spaces.

Like storm and pandemic-response protocols, heat preparedness must be embedded in health policies. To this end, Asian countries' disease-surveillance systems should be updated to account for heat-related illnesses before the region endures another historic heat wave. Maintaining adequate supplies of medical equipment, from basic items like intravenous fluids to cooling vests, is also crucial.

Moreover, the potential effects of extreme heat must be integrated into the education and training of emergency doctors, community-health workers, and primary-care providers, who are often the first point of contact for underprivileged patients. Regrettably, the clinical management of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke was mentioned only in passing when I was a medical student.

With global temperatures rising at an alarming rate, we have no choice but to adapt to a warmer world. At the same time, accelerating decarbonisation could enable us to reduce the frequency and intensity of extreme heat waves. By pressuring governments and corporations to stop burning fossil fuels, we can build true heat resilience and improve planetary health. © Project Syndicate, 2024.



A person plays with water in a fountain during the heat wave in Bucharest. – Reuters



Red Warriors to take on Real Murcia CF in friendly

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The Oman national football team will take on Real Murcia CF on Thursday in the opening friendly matches during its camp in Asturias region, Spain. This warm-up game is the initial match while two more friendlies take place in the coming days of the camp as the Red Warriors will meet Real Oviedo FC on Sunday. Then, the last warm-up encounter will be against CD Leganés FC on Wednesday in July.

The ongoing camp in Spain is scheduled for the team's preparations for the upcoming assignment like the Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26 starting in September and the Arabian Gulf Cup in Kuwait in December.

The head coach of the national team, Joroslav Shilhavy, is very keen to ensure the technical and physical development of the players during the match. Also, he will evaluate the performance of the players including the new faces who joined the Red Warriors squad. Furthermore, the coaching staff implement some technical tactics to boost attacking and improve the defending and the areas which require more focus to improve.

The opponent team in today's match is Real Murcia Club which is one of the domestic Spanish



football clubs. They are currently playing in Primera Federation — Group 2. The club has a commendable record, having won eight Segunda División titles and one Spanish Royal

Federation Cup. Oman's coaching staff will watch from all the above three warm-up games against different tier Spanish clubs to implement and test various technical and

tactical plans. Also, it is part of the strategic move for the team's comprehensive preparation for the Asian Qualifiers — Road to 26. The friendly matches will assist the coaching staff

to evaluate individual player progress and the effectiveness of the training regimes. Based on the players technical performances during these games, the head coach and his assisting team

will finalise the squad for the September Asian qualifier matches as Oman will face Iraq in Basra on September 5 and then South Korea in a home match in Muscat on September 10.

Messi to miss next two Miami MLS matches with ankle injury

MIAMI: Lionel Messi was in tears after injury prevented him from finishing what is likely to be his last match for Argentina at a major tournament but his team-mates came through for their captain by delivering the Copa America title on Sunday. The eight-times Ballon d'Or winner hurt his ankle in the 36th minute of the final against Colombia but soldiered on until the 66th minute when he limped off the field in tears, before strapping an ice pack to his swollen ankle on the bench. With the game finely poised

at 0-0 when the 37-year-old departed, Argentina raised their game and Lautaro Martinez struck in extra time to secure a 1-0 victory and a record 16th Copa title. Skipper Messi went on to lift the trophy alongside longtime team-mates Angel di Maria and Nicholas Otamendi, both 36. "Leo is the greatest player in history. He never wants to leave the pitch. He has a swollen ankle and he wants to keep on playing," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni told reporters. "I prefer those players and



Lionel Messi will miss Inter Miami's next two Major League. — AFP

his team-mates see that, that he is 30-something-years-old and he's there and he wants to contribute. He wants to play not because he is egotistical or selfish. "He wants to continue playing because he doesn't want to leave his team-mates. He doesn't want to leave them on the pitch even when he's in that condition... He doesn't feel well when he has to leave and he was born to be on the pitch." Messi has hinted at retirement on several occasions in recent months, saying this

week that he and his fellow Argentine veterans were fighting their "last battles" at the Copa America. "I know Leo (Messi), I know how he thinks. He always wants to be there, but the fact that he's part of this team is the best thing for us," midfielder Rodrigo De Paul told TyC Sports. "With Fideo (Di Maria), I'm sad to see him go, but I'm also happy because he's one of the few that can say goodbye in this way as a World Cup and Copa champion." — Reuters



Oman bag global ICC Development Award

MUSCAT: Oman was one of the six nations to have been crowned global winners of the prestigious ICC Development Awards on Tuesday. Besides Oman, the other nations awarded by the International Cricket Council (ICC) were Mexico, the Netherlands, the UAE, Nepal and Scotland.

The awards acknowledge the world-leading programmes delivered by ICC Members to grow the game and Oman won the 100% Cricket Female Cricket Initiative of the Year Award.

The six global winners were selected by an esteemed panel, from a shortlist of regional awardees, which spanned 21 emerging nations. The ICC acknowledged Oman Cricket's groundbreaking initiatives and outstanding performances during the last calendar year.

Launched in 2002, the ICC Development Awards casts light on the world-leading work being carried out in ICC Associate Member countries to grow the game globally, whether through innovative development programmes or through inspiring efforts on the

field of play.

Oman Cricket (OC) women's cricket initiative came through their Cricket4Her programme, which provides unique participation opportunities for women and girls and a valuable pathway through to competitive cricket.

Oman's Cricket4Her project aims to redefine the landscape of women's cricket in the country by cultivating an environment that encourages talent development, skill enhancement, and the empowerment of women cricketers.

The programme has already had a significant impact in the country through regular school sessions and both softball and hardball cricket tournaments, where 16 teams participated in softball tournaments and 9 teams have transitioned to playing competitive hardball cricket league, providing not only a unique platform for participation, but also a valuable pathway for young women and girls through to competitive cricket.

This year's winners were identified from a long list of

regional awardees announced back in May, and were determined by an esteemed panel comprising ICC Full Member executives, former international cricketers, and ICC global partners.

Speaking after the ICC announcement, Oman Cricket Chairman Pankaj Khimji said: "We are elated by this achievement. We would like to thank the ICC for this recognition. It will put us on a pedestal from which we can take women's cricket to greater heights. "It goes without saying that if the coaches and the team behind the initiative did not have the passion and commitment to make it happen, we would not have been able to attract these female cricketers, let alone making them stay, embrace the game and go on to play tournaments."

"We hope that we are able to take this to the next level, adding more schools, colleges and girls from local communities. Harnessing the family factor into cricket is going to be the major success factor for cricket in Oman," he ended

SOUTHGATE STANDS DOWN, WHO'S NEXT FOR THE HOT SEAT?

LONDON: The search for the next England manager kicked off on Tuesday with plenty of names and no shortage of speculation about who might replace Gareth Southgate in one of the hottest seats in soccer.

Southgate, in charge since 2016, announced his departure less than 48 hours after England's second successive European Championship final defeat, this time a shattering 2-1 loss to Spain in Berlin on Sunday.

The news came as no great surprise and turned the spotlight immediately to the future, and whether England should look for another homegrown replacement or seek a standout successor from further afield.

"The process for appointing Gareth's successor is now under way and we aim to have our new manager confirmed as soon as possible," said Football Association Chief Executive Mark Bullingham in a statement.

"Our UEFA Nations League campaign starts in September, and we have an interim solution in place if it is needed.

"We know there will be inevitable speculation, but we won't be commenting further on our process until we appoint."

The next manager will need broad shoulders to carry the burden of expectation and weight of history with England still seeking a first major title since winning the 1966 World Cup on home soil.

Premier League experience will likely be required, as will the man-management skills of being able to develop and maintain a team spirit and culture while withstanding intense personal criticism.

If as expected the FA go for another Englishman, then Newcastle United manager Eddie Howe, former Chelsea boss Graham Potter and current England under-21 coach Lee Carsley look like the immediate frontrunners.

Newcastle chief executive



England manager Gareth Southgate. — Reuters

Darren Eales made clear the club expected Howe to stay and would fight to keep him, with significant compensation likely.

"For us, he is exactly the right man for the project we are on at Newcastle United and that is why we are committed to a long-term deal with him," he told British media.

Southgate was also under-21 coach and started out as an interim solution before being getting the job full time, and Carsley could fit into that scenario. Potter would be available immediately, without a club since being sacked by Chelsea last year.

"Over the years we've had every different type of manager; the fashionable, international managers, the best English managers, we've had Gareth who's been through the ranks with younger teams," former England defender Gary Neville told Sky Sports television.

"Where England go next I don't know. There's some obvious contenders, I think Graham Potter will get mentioned and Eddie Howe will get mentioned.

"I think it will definitely be an English manager... to actually

appoint an international manager would be wrong. We need to develop an English coach."

Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard, stellar England players with less successful managerial careers, look well down the list of prospects.

Bookmakers added some international glitter, and a touch of fantasy, with odds on former Southampton, Tottenham Hotspur, PSG and Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino, Thomas Tuchel (also ex-Chelsea and Bayern Munich) and recently-departed Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp.

Other names floating around included former Chelsea, Manchester United and Tottenham manager Jose Mourinho and Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola, whose club contract runs out next year.

William Hill were even offering odds on 74-year-old Arsene Wenger (100-1), Juergen Klinsmann (150-1) and Sam Allardyce (200-1) while England's Dutch women's manager Sarina Wiegman was a comparatively competitive 50-1.

— Reuters

Training to select talented junior TT players ends today



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Twelve junior players are taking part in table tennis training camp, organised by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) at the training hall in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex, which runs till Thursday.

The camp is held under supervision of Iranian coach Faeti Keivani, who trains the national girls' team. The participants were selected based

on the results of the physical and technical tests conducted during the Under-12 Table Tennis Festival.

The programme included intensive training on the basic skills of the game such as introductory skills as well as on hand and foot movements and the correct grip of the racket and ball. At the end of the camp, the participants will undergo a practical test to select the best of them to be in the next preparation camps.

Maryam al Alawi, a member of the board of directors of OTTA, said, "The main goal of these camps is to select the boys and girls to represent Oman in local and international competitions." "Next week, 16 girls will undergo training under Keivani. OTTA pays special attention to develop women's table tennis in Oman, and to form women's teams in various age groups in local and international competitions," she said.



National team coach Faeti during training



CARAPAZ TICKS OFF TOUR WIN AS EVENEPOEL EDGES POGACAR, VINGEGAARD

THE FINAL THREE STAGES ARE ALL POTENTIAL GAME CHANGERS, WITH FRIDAY’S RUN TAKING THE PELOTON TO 2,800M ALTITUDE BEFORE A HUGE DESCENT

SUPERDÉVOLUY, FRANCE: Ecuador’s Richard Carapaz won stage 17 of the Tour de France after the remnants of a breakaway finished ahead of the main pretenders in the High Alps on Wednesday.

EF rider Carapaz dropped Simon Yates and soloed the final 10 km to win his first ever Tour de France stage after finishing third overall in 2021.

The former Giro d’Italia champion, who won the Tokyo Olympics road race, also wore the overall leader’s yellow jersey after his efforts in the second stage to Bologna.

“That was a big day for me,” Carapaz said. “I suffered but I put a cross on an objective.”

“How special it feels, I owe so much to my team,” he said of the American Education First team who will be delighted with their two million euros a year new signing.

Overall leader Tadej Pogacar, defending champion Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel kept their powder dry until late in the medium mountain run.

The trio then produced an entertaining scrap with third-placed Evenepoel finishing 12 seconds ahead of Pogacar, with Vingegaard losing two seconds to the leader.

The relentless Slovenian said his attack was off the cuff.

“I enjoyed it, I don’t know what to say, I tested my legs and theirs. I thought I might be able to get away, so I had a go,” said the 25-year-old Pogacar. Pogacar had been the first to try his luck and Vingegaard was

unable to follow. Evenepoel however closed the gap while Denmark’s Vingegaard then caught them both on a daredevil descent after picking up the wheel of a teammate who had been in the early attack. Belgian Evenepoel then broke again, and finished strongly to consolidate his third place overall. A group of over 30 riders broke away early on a balmy day in the south as they climbed to the ski resort of Superdevoluy.

GIRMAY STAYS IN GREEN Nursing knee and elbow injuries, Biniam Girmay retained the green jersey for best sprinter with 387 points to Jasper Philipsen’s 354.

“It’s never easy a day after a fall, but I felt okay today,” said the Eritrean who will race at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

Girmay spoke excitedly about the reaction back home where he said “from two in the afternoon until the end of the race everyone goes out onto the streets to watch the race or listen to it together”.

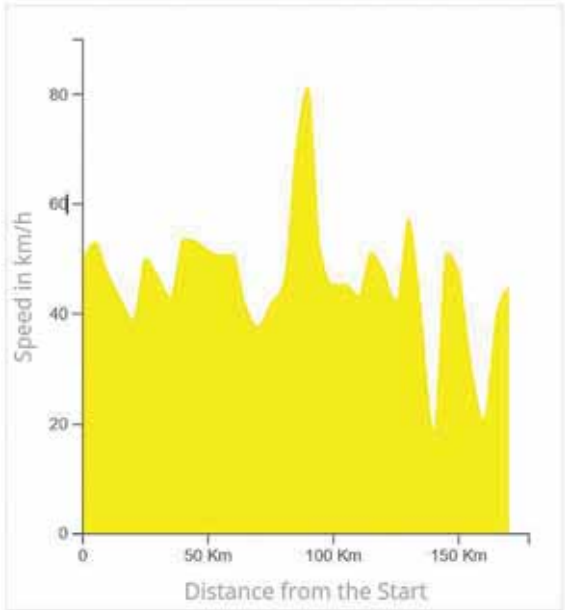
Stage 18 on Thursday is billed as one of the prettiest, with lakes and mountains in Haute Provence and an opportunity for the one-day specialists during a 179 km ride from Gap to Barcelonnette.

The final three stages are all potential game changers, with Friday’s run taking the peloton to 2,800m altitude before a huge descent.

Saturday is also mountainous and features another downhill finale.

— Reuters

LEADING GR. AVERAGE SPEED



GENERAL RANKING

1.	T. Pogacar		UAD	70h 21' 27"
2.	J. Vingegaard		TVL	+03' 11"
3.	R. Evenepoel		SOQ	+05' 09"
4.	J. Almeida		UAD	+12' 57"
5.	M. Landa		SOQ	+13' 24"

STAGE RANKING

1.	R. Carapaz		EFE	04h 06' 13"
2.	S. Yates		JAY	+00' 37"
3.	E. Mas		MOV	+00' 57"
4.	L. De Plus		IGD	+01' 44"
5.	O. Onley		DFP	+01' 44"



Tadej Pogacar celebrates the best climber’s polka dot (dotted) jersey. – AFP



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OFM opens registration for procurement of local wheat crop

Around 10,000 metric tonnes of local Omani wheat were procured by OFM during the last crop season.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Oman Flour Mills Company (OFM), in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, announced the opening of registration for interested farmers to sell their local wheat crops to the company for the next season 2024/2025.

The registration process, covering farmers across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, will remain open until October 31, 2024.

The link to register is available on the website: www.omanibur.com. This initiative comes within the framework of OFM's plans to strengthen the food security system and encourage farmers to grow wheat in Oman.

OFM Company annually purchases Omani wheat crop from the local farmers to contribute to developing Omani wheat and introducing it to the local and regional markets as an Omani product.

OFM urged farmers to adhere to the quality standards in producing and harvesting the crop.

The company supports farmers by purchasing different varieties of Omani wheat through the wheat purchase subsidy programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in order to expand cultivation of the crop locally, as well as contribute to develop Omani wheat products (Omani Bur). The average procurement the Omani local wheat crop by OFM in 2024 reached 10,000 metric tonnes, recording a growth by 100 per cent, compared to 2023. Around 95 farmers sold their crop to OFM in 2024, up from 65 in 2023, representing an increase of 45 per cent.

The increase in the quantity of local wheat sold to OFM in this season reflects the level of demand for Omani wheat, which is highly accepted by the consumers in the local and regional markets due to its high quality as an Omani national product.

Investments in Al Buraimi Industrial City reach over RO 19m

MUSCAT: Al Buraimi Industrial City has witnessed substantial growth, with investments reaching over RO 19 million by the end of the first half of this year.

The total investment volume in the city has soared to RO 277 million, employing 1,674 workers, including 365 Omanis and 1,309 expatriates, achieving an Omanisation rate of 22 per cent.

Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director-General of Al Buraimi Industrial City, reported an increase in the number of projects, investments and leased spaces.

By mid-2024, the city hosted 362 investments and 115 third-party projects (subcontracts), totalling 477 projects. The leased areas in the city spanned 1,879,101 square metres.

During the first half of 2024, 15 new projects were established, covering a combined area of 87,000 square metres. These projects span industrial, commercial and service sectors, with an occupancy rate of 39 per cent.

Al Balushi highlighted the incentives for new contracts signed in 2024, including a

By mid-2024, the city hosted 362 investments and 115 third-party projects (subcontracts), totalling 477 projects.

THE TOTAL INVESTMENT VOLUME IN THE CITY HAS SOARED TO RO 277 MILLION, EMPLOYING 1,674 WORKERS, INCLUDING 365 OMANIS AND 1,309 EXPATRIATES, ACHIEVING AN OMANISATION RATE OF 22 PER CENT.

100-per cent exemption from rental value for 24 months and a 50-per cent exemption for the following 36 months.

These incentives aim to attract more investments and foster economic growth. Al Buraimi Industrial City significantly supports the national economy by creating job opportunities for

citizens and boosting the local product, thereby contributing to the gross domestic product. Additionally, the ‘Masar’ Centre plays a crucial role in Al Buraimi Industrial City by providing comprehensive services to investors under one roof, thereby attracting more investors and businesspeople to the city.

Rahab Farm in Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands enhance food security in Oman

MUSCAT: The Rahab Farm in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands, part of the Dhofar Governorate and operated by Nakheel Oman Development Company, stands as a pioneering project in Oman.

This initiative significantly bolsters food security, economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability.

The farm aims to revolutionise the palm sector by integrating cutting-edge technologies and scientific advancements in agriculture.

The farm aims to revolutionise the palm sector by integrating cutting-edge technologies and scientific advancements in agriculture.

This approach enhances the productivity and competitive edge of Omani dates in international markets.

Eng Shabib bin Ali al Mahrouqi (pictured), a Senior Specialist in Agricultural Support Services at Nakheel Oman Development Company, informed that the farm hosts 40,000 date palm trees of the ‘Al Fard’ and ‘Khalas’ varieties. Spanning a total area of 6 square kilometres, it is located 25 kilometres from Marmul Airport, with a cultivated area covering 256 hectares.

Highlighting the carbon neutrality initiative, Al Mahrouqi emphasised the importance of planting 30,000 lemon trees over

96 hectares at Rahab Farm.

This project, carried out in 2023 in collaboration with Petroleum Development Oman Company and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, aims to boost Oman's lemon productivity by 38 per cent.

The farm employs modern irrigation techniques, utilising groundwater as the primary water source. These techniques are linked to sensors that ensure

optimal water usage, enhancing productivity and efficiency.

Oman is dedicated to nurturing its palm trees by establishing modern farms dedicated to date cultivation across various governorates. This effort aims to enhance agricultural, economic, environmental and food security, while also capitalising on promising investment opportunities in this vital sector.

— ONA

Oil prices steady amid falling US inventories

MUSCAT: The official price of Omani oil for next September delivery reached \$83.62. The price of Omani oil witnessed a decrease yesterday of \$0.19 compared to the price on Tuesday, which amounted to \$83.81.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery this July amounted to \$83.89 per barrel, down \$5.41 compared to the price for delivery last June.

Meanwhile, international oil prices rose on Wednesday, a day after benchmark Brent hit a one-month low, as a decline in US oil stockpiles and a weaker dollar overshadowed signs of weakening demand in China.

Brent crude oil futures were up 55 cents, or 0.7 per cent, at \$83.98 a barrel by 1242 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up 75 cents, or 0.9 per cent, at \$81.16.

In the United States, the world's largest oil producer and consumer, crude oil inventories fell by 4.4 million barrels in the week ended on July 12, market sources said, citing data from the American Petroleum Institute.

Analysts estimated crude stocks would fall by 33,000 barrels. The US Energy

Information Administration will release its official storage report at 1430 GMT.

“The government data this afternoon is where the real story is, but the precursor of US oil stocks in the API data does not exactly show much of an effect of Hurricane Beryl and the shutting down of some the infrastructure that stood in its path,” PVM Oil analyst John Evans said.

A weaker US dollar also boosted oil prices. A softer US dollar can boost demand for oil by making greenback-denominated commodities like oil cheaper for holders of other currencies.

Also supporting crude prices was rising geopolitical risk, said George Khoury, global head of education and research at CFI, adding that tensions in the Middle East and Europe could continue to fuel risks.

— Agencies

BMW Group posts strong growth in H1 2024

MUSCAT: With 179,557 fully electric vehicles delivered, the BMW brand achieved a +34.1 per cent increase in BEV sales in the first half of 2024 compared to the previous year. Overall, the BMW brand grew by +2.3 per cent compared to the previous year's period with 1,096,486 units sold in the first half of the year.

The brand thereby outperformed its traditional competitors and managed to significantly gain market share in Europe. In total, the BMW Group delivered 1,213,359 vehicles of the BMW and MINI brands in the first half of the year.

“In the first six months of the year, we saw double-digit growth of our fully electric vehicles and models from the upper premium segment,” said Jochen Goller, member of the Board of Management of BMW AG responsible for Customer, Brands



and Sales. “Despite a challenging market environment, we increased sales for the BMW brand in the

first half of the year, thanks to our attractive product portfolio. The strong commitment of our BMW

Group employees and our robust global re-tail network have made a significant contribution in this

regard,” said Jochen Goller.

For the BMW brand, models from the upper premium segment are becoming increasingly popular with customers, in addition to fully electric models. The BMW 7 Series achieved a sales growth of +22 per cent in the first half of the year compared to the same period last year.

Also, the BMW X1 and the BMW 3 Series saw strong growth compared to the previous year.

BMW M GmbH also performed well, generating a great deal of interest when it unveiled the first M5 high-performance sedan with an electrified drive train in June.

With a total of 99,517 vehicles sold, BMW M recorded a sales growth of +5.1 per cent.

With the continuing model changeover of its complete product portfolio, the MINI brand delivered 114,054 vehicles

in the first half-year. This includes the first MINI Cooper cars from the New MINI Family, which received a very good response from customers.

The further ramp-up of the MINI Cooper and MINI Countryman, as well as the market launch of the MINI Aceman, will provide positive momentum in the second half of the year. A highlight for the BMW Motorrad brand was that it handed over 113,072 motorcycles and scooters to customers worldwide during the same period.

The BMW Group is looking forward to the second half of 2024 with confidence. This is underpinned by the full availability of the BMW 5 Series models – including the new BMW 5 Series Touring* and the first BMW i5 Touring*, as well as the ongoing market launch of the New MINI Family.

Al Maha Petroleum announces ‘Khareef 54 winners’ promotion

MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has launched its promotional campaign of the Khareef Season offering customers the chance to win amazing prizes, including Changan CS85 SUV, Changan Alsvin sedan, Salalah holiday packages for 8 families, iPhone 15s, and Apple iPads.

This promotion runs from July 10, 2024, to September 10, 2024, at all Al Maha fuel stations across the Sultanate of Oman.

To enter, customers need to download the Al Maha PLUS app from the Apple Store, Play Store, or Huawei Store. After registering through the app, they must redeem the promotion coupon within the app to be eligible. Each 50 points enables one redemption, and a chance to enter the promotion.

Customers can collect points in several ways. When refuelling for RO 5, they will receive 50 points. For cash transactions, customers should provide their mobile



number to the station staff and register this number in the Al Maha PLUS app to view and redeem points.

New e-Rial card users will receive points automatically, while those using old e-Rial cards are encouraged to switch to the new generation card or use the Al Maha PLUS app. National Subsidy Scheme (NSS) card users will also automatically receive their points for redemption. The promotion is not applicable to Al Maha corporate fuel card users.

Ahmed al Shanfari, the Division head of Marketing and Business development said, “We are thrilled to launch the Khareef Promotion, a unique opportunity for our customers to win fantastic prizes while enjoying the superior services of Al Maha Petroleum. This promotion is our commitment to rewarding our loyal and regular customers. We encourage everyone to download the Al Maha PLUS app, participate, and stand a chance to win big this Khareef season.”

The first lucky draw for the Salalah holiday packages for 8 families will be held on July 25, 2024.

Vodafone announces network readiness for Khareef 2024

MUSCAT: Ensuring its customers enjoy a seamless, uninterrupted and fast mobile experience this Khareef, Vodafone Oman has reinforced its 5G network coverage, adding and expanding tower capacities across the Dhofar Governorate.

Addressing network challenges in high-footfall areas, the company's network readiness efforts extended to also include the installation of new sites within the season's hotspots such as Dhareez Beach, Wadi Darbat and Ittin Square.

Recognising the importance of connectivity for the residents and visitors of Dhofar Governorate during the season, the digital operator fast-tracked its network expansion plans for Oman's southernmost governorate, investing its resources and technological advancements to provide robust and reliable service throughout the season.

As a result of Vodafone's steadfast commitment to providing an even greater experience, all customers in the governorate can now enjoy cutting-edge technologies with unprecedented speed and agility.

“Our goal is to ensure that



every resident and visitor in Dhofar Governorate has a great experience this Khareef season with Vodafone. We've listened to our customers and worked hard to reinforce our network where it matters most. With our expanded coverage and advanced technology, we're ready to provide reliable, high-speed connectivity that meets everyone's needs,” said Stelios Savvides, Director of Technology at Vodafone Oman.

At the heart of Vodafone Oman's market-leading experience is its pioneering 5G Next Level network.

This cutting-edge

technology redefines the user experience by delivering exceptional speeds, reduced latency and efficient data usage.

Unlike legacy operators, Vodafone Oman's network operates without speed caps, ensuring seamless and uninterrupted connectivity for both business and leisure activities. In addition to its remarkable 5G capabilities, Vodafone Oman offers crystal-clear VoLTE calling over its fast and reliable 4G network.

This service exemplifies the company's dedication to providing superior quality telecommunication at every turn.

Must-have essentials from Ooredoo to make travel super easy this summer

MUSCAT: Looking to save money when travelling abroad this summer? Want to make calls, share selfies and download stuff without worrying about a holiday phone bill?

As always, Ooredoo has thought about you, and with its special summer promotion, we've got you covered on your travels!

This summer, Passport World and Passport GCC bundles are offering more data for all prepaid and postpaid customers using their mobile in selected countries across the globe.

Ooredoo offers two main travel bundles; Passport GCC and Passport World plans are available as daily, weekly and monthly bundles to support Ooredoo



customers in staying connected and making the most of their travels. Both bundles are available starting from RO 4, with a variety of plans to suit their needs. Travel with confidence, enjoy

our Ooredoo Passport bundles and roam as if you are at home in Oman.

The Ooredoo summer promotion runs until October 15, 2024 and can be activated through the Ooredoo App or in-person at any Ooredoo store across Oman.

Ooredoo Passport GCC applies to all six countries in the region. For Passport World, customers can see the 96 popular destinations Ooredoo has covered across Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania by visiting: <https://www.ooredoo.om/passport>.

Customers can check that their destination is included in Ooredoo Passport before buying their top picks for the heatwave!

Dhofar Islamic empowers the young with new youth account

MUSCAT: Dhofar Islamic, the Islamic Banking window of BankDhofar, is pleased to introduce its latest offering, the Youth Account, designed to cater to the unique financial needs and aspirations of Oman's young generation.

Dhofar Islamic encourages young Omanis to embrace Youth Account as a stepping stone to financial literacy and financial independence. With this account, Dhofar Islamic aims to inspire a generation of confident and responsible financial leaders.

The Youth Account is a Shari'a compliant savings account (based on Mudarabah principles)

specially crafted to cater to the unique needs of youth aged between 18 and 23 years.

It comes with no minimum balance requirement and allows free fund transfers through mobile payment service ensuring that young account holders can enjoy their banking experience without any extra fees.

This innovative youth-centric account is a testament to Dhofar Islamic's commitment to empowering the youth with convenient and flexible banking solutions that enable financial independence from an early age.

Commenting on the launch of the Youth Account, Amor bin



Said al Amri, DGM and Head of Retail Banking - Dhofar Islamic said, “Our Youth Account is designed to empower the young generation to learn essential money management skills, take control of their finances and build a strong financial foundation for their future.

We are committed to providing them with the tools they need to start their career and achieve their financial goals.”

Dhofar Islamic is one of the leading Islamic windows in Oman setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman by adopting best

international banking practices.

It continues to demonstrate its strong commitment towards community development and contribution to the growth of the national economy by offering innovative Shari'a compliant financial solutions that cater to the needs of its retail and corporate customers.

The Youth Account is available now at all Dhofar Islamic branches.

For more information about the Youth Account and how to open an account, please visit any of the branches around the Sultanate of Oman, or call our call centre 24/7 on 24775777 for inquiries.

‘E-commerce can create jobs and attract investments in Oman’

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 17

The digital transformation journey is one that never stops evolving, and with it comes the trends of how we buy and sell online. E-commerce, a dynamic and ever-evolving sector, has seen significant growth globally, and Oman is no exception.

To delve deeper into this subject, Oman FM, hosted by Ahmed al Busaidy, spoke with Moawiya al Rawas, the CEO and founding partner of iON LLC.

“E-commerce is any transaction between two parties where goods are exchanged over the internet, including information,” Al Rawas explained. The evolution of e-commerce began with the banking industry going online, setting the stage for secure and regulated transactions. This digital shift involved numerous industries such as shipping and technology, contributing to the robust ecosystem we see today.

Oman’s e-commerce story is intricately linked to its cultural and technological landscape. Since the 1970s, Omanis have embraced technology rapidly.

Interestingly, many skipped the laptop phase and moved directly from PCs to mobile phones, significantly influencing the e-commerce landscape.

“This shift made social media a primary driver of e-commerce, often referred to as social commerce,” Al Rawas noted. The prevalence of mobile phones facilitated transactions through social platforms, which is unique to Oman.

The government has laid a strong infrastructure foundation, investing in central banking, commerce, transportation, and technology. These investments are gradually paying off by creating an environment conducive to thriving markets.

“E-commerce can



SMEs, which constitute a major part of Oman’s economy, can transition to e-commerce, offering substantial employment opportunities.



Moawiya al Rawas, CEO & founding partner of iON LLC

significantly contribute to job creation and attract foreign direct investments,” Al Rawas emphasised.

SMEs, which constitute a major part of Oman’s economy, can transition to e-commerce, offering substantial employment opportunities.

If 20% of the over 100,000 registered SMEs adopt e-commerce, we could see around 150,000 to 200,000 jobs created, encompassing roles like graphic designers, photographers, accountants, and marketers.

Despite the opportunities, challenges remain.

Many businesses thrive on social media but aren’t officially recorded as e-commerce. Social platforms simplify communication and transactions,

but scaling up requires formal structures like registration, accounting, and logistics.

“Users in Oman spend significantly online, but much of it goes to international platforms like Apple, Netflix, and Amazon,” Al Rawas pointed out. The goal at iON is to equip Omani entrepreneurs with the capabilities to compete on these levels.

iON operates as a software service provider focusing on e-commerce. Al Rawas’ background in banking and e-payments, combined with his co-founder Marcin’s experience in infrastructure, led them to address the e-commerce needs in Oman.

ON offers a comprehensive solution for SMEs, including

website creation, inventory management, CRM, accounting, and social media integration.

They also partner with Seat Express for delivery, ensuring products can reach any part of the world efficiently. Their packages start at 11 riyals, with new offerings to be announced at the upcoming Oman job fair.

“The idea was born out of a synergy between myself and my partners, each bringing unique skills to the table,” Al Rawas explained.

They aimed to create a business that could thrive in Oman while leveraging their expertise in e-commerce and payments. The need to foster a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem in Oman further motivated them to develop iON.

The future of e-commerce in Oman is promising. With ongoing investments in infrastructure and a young, tech-savvy population, the potential for growth is immense. Empowering entrepreneurs and providing them with the tools to succeed in the digital marketplace is crucial.

As the country moves forward, e-commerce is expected to play a crucial role in diversifying the economy and creating sustainable job opportunities.

GCC-Mexico trade exchange surges by 25%

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Trade exchange between countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Mexico surged 25 per cent from \$3.3 billion in 2021 to reach \$4.4 billion in 2022. According to data published by the Council, trade was weighted in Mexico’s favour, with \$3.4 billion worth of goods imported from that country.

Key imports included vehicles and vehicle parts valued at \$0.9 billion, representing 26.5 per cent of imports, followed by miscellaneous items valued at \$0.8 billion (23.6 per cent).

Electrical machinery and equipment, along with machinery and mechanical appliances accounted for 17.6 per cent of total imports and worth \$0.6 billion.

Medical, optical, and photographic apparatus represented 11.8 per cent of imports, valued at \$0.4 billion, while iron and steel articles represented 2.9 per cent valued at \$0.1 billion.

Exports from the GCC to Mexico amounted to around



\$1 billion in 2022, representing a two-fold surge from 2021’s figure of \$0.5 billion. In 2022, aluminium and aluminium articles made up around 60 per cent of exports with a value of \$0.64 billion.

This was followed by plastics valued at \$0.09 billion, fertilisers valued at \$0.08 billion, and machinery and mechanical appliances valued at \$0.06 billion.

Miscellaneous items represented 7 per cent of total imports valued at \$0.07 billion, while iron and steel represented 3 per cent valued at \$0.03 billion.

In 2019, trade between Oman and Mexico amounted to \$44 million, according to data from the Mexican Government. Main imports from Mexico to Oman included transport vehicles, while main exports to Mexico consisted of minerals and chemicals.

Tax Authority holds workshop on tax procedures, laws for SMEs

MUSCAT: In order to enhance the tax awareness and support SMEs, the Tax Authority in cooperation with the SMEs General Authority, organised a workshop entitled “Procedures and Laws for SMEs”, which was held at the Al/Hosn Hall in the headquarters of the Tax Authority.

There were several topics discussed in the workshop such as: the methods of dealing with accounting matters for VAT, excise tax and income tax, including the method of preparing the tax returns,

registration obligations, and financial reports.

In the end of the workshop, an interactive session was conducted to answer all the questions and inquiries of the attendees regarding the tax procedures and laws.

Also, practical solutions to the challenges faced by SMEs in the field of taxation were provided. The importance of this workshop comes in enabling entrepreneurs to understand their tax duties, by making tax procedures as a key pillar for achieving sustainable economic development.

Oman to host first EV-centric summit next year

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 17

Capitalising on the government-led thrust towards e-mobility in the Sultanate of Oman, a first-ever expo spotlighting the entire ecosystem around electric vehicles (EV) will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC), Muscat during October 15 – 18, 2025.

Organised by Muscat Expo in partnership with White Paper Summits, the 4-day forum, dubbed ‘Oman Electric Vehicle Show’, is billed as the first EV-centric conference and exhibition to be held in the country.

“The EV Show is a gateway to the lucrative EV market in the Sultanate of Oman, driven by government initiatives and the growing demand for sustainable transportation options,” said the organisers in an overview on the event.

“The comprehensive expo will showcase next-gen

electrification technology, innovative sustainable solutions, most advanced electric vehicles, electric charging infrastructure, battery systems, energy storage solutions, latest mobility solutions and trends making it a one stop destination for everything EV.

The Show will also feature the latest advancements in autonomous driving, eVTOLs, electric boats, hydrogen, and alternative fuels.”

The forum is set to take place against the backdrop of energetic efforts, led by the Omani government, to accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles and sustainable transportation solutions to support the country’s Net-Zero goals.

Participating in these efforts are the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion,



An EV-friendly car parking slot with charging infrastructure.

Oman Investment Authority, Oman 2040 Vision, Invest Oman, Asyad Group, and others.

Earlier this year, the Ministry of Transport vowed to phase out fossil-fuel powered vehicles in tandem with a phase-in of EV and other sustainable mobility options.

Around 79% of vehicles are targeted to be electric or hydrogen powered by 2035. At the same time, EV charging stations, currently numbering around 100 nationwide, will be trebled within two years.

Further in a bid to popularise electric and other zero-carbon

“THE COMPREHENSIVE EXPO WILL SHOWCASE NEXT-GEN ELECTRIFICATION TECHNOLOGY, INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS, MOST ADVANCED ELECTRIC VEHICLES, ELECTRIC CHARGING INFRASTRUCTURE, BATTERY SYSTEMS, ENERGY STORAGE SOLUTIONS, LATEST MOBILITY SOLUTIONS AND TRENDS MAKING IT A ONE STOP DESTINATION FOR EVERYTHING EV

vehicle options, the Ministry has made it mandatory for fuel marketing companies to install charging stations at all forecourts.

Last July, Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO), a subsidiary of OQ Group, announced a collaboration with Synergy Investments LLC to establish ‘Electric Vehicles One’ (EVO), a new entity focused on developing Oman’s electric

vehicle infrastructure.

Shell Oman joined hands with Amlaak Energy LLC for the supply and installation of EV chargers at its filling stations.

Separately, Shell Oman also partnered with HTC (Hussam Technology Company) to develop a fully integrated charging point operator (CPOs) capabilities for the first time in Oman.

Significantly, private sector players are also positioning themselves to capitalise on opportunities in this promising space.

In May, Egoles, a well-known Omani integrated logistics services provider, signed a distribution agreement with UAE-based EV startup ONE MOTO for the supply of affordable EV vehicles to the Omani market.

The agreement commits over 10% (2,300 vehicles) to be supplied by ONE MOTO in the first 24 months, including motorcycles and light commercial vans.

Can personal income tax hurt Oman's competitive business environment?



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

The debate is ongoing regarding the potential imposition of income tax on individuals in the Sultanate of Oman. However, no specific timeframe for this introduction has been announced yet. The media, along with local radio and television programmes, are animatedly discussing this issue and its implications.

Many voices still urge patience, especially as many Omanis are still searching for suitable job opportunities. Meanwhile, the state is making strenuous efforts to attract foreign investment,

provide job opportunities for citizens, and enhance development projects to engage Omanis in the country's economy.

For businesses, the final decision to impose income tax must primarily serve the Omani economy and social goals.

It is well-known that the Sultanate of Oman has recently made progress in raising its competitiveness and investment attractiveness, according to international institutions' statements.

Imposing an income tax could delay efforts to employ citizens, increase layoffs in existing institutions and companies, and potentially delay attracting new investments to the country. This decision is unprecedented in the region and aims to strengthen the financial budget.

The state's annual tax must distribute the benefits to other social groups.

Local efforts aim to balance the economic and social dimensions, requiring the adoption of flexible economic policies to encourage the private sector and stimulate investments.

Economic plans should focus on employing more Omanis and keeping them engaged in

the economic arena. There is a great need to stimulate various sectors, especially manufacturing, technology, renewable energy, tourism, agriculture and fisheries.

Any hasty decision could have negative consequences, especially since the authorities are working to enhance competitiveness by providing flexibility, incentives, benefits, and protective legislation for investment and trade.

Oman should avoid imposing more taxes to exploit its natural resources and logistical capabilities, given its strategic geographical location. Enhancing the commercial and industrial fields is crucial. Naturally, the private sector's contribution to the gross domestic product will increase, boosting foreign trade.

Over the past four years, Oman has improved its financial position by paying external debts and reducing debt service expenses, leading to better ratings from international credit agencies.

This progress will help achieve economic diversification, attract more investors, expand the private sector's role in sustainable development, accelerate the growth of non-oil activities, and improve the overall business environment.

China's gold buying break seen as fleeting given its long-term needs



POLINA DEVITT

The author is Reuters metals correspondent in London



KEVIN YAO

The author holds the position of Senior Correspondent, Greater China, at Thomson Reuters

China still has plenty of appetite for official gold purchases despite pausing in May and June, as its bullion holdings remain low as a share of reserves and geopolitical tensions persist, according to a policy insider, industry experts and data.

Beijing's gold buying, which helped the spot price rally in April and May, is no longer perceived to be immune to price sensitivity, but ongoing geopolitical risks are expected to keep its longer-term programme to diversify exposure from US dollar-denominated assets active.

China's gold reserves need to rise in absolute and relative terms because they do not match the status of the world's second-largest economy and gold's share of its reserves is the lowest of any major economy, said a Chinese policy insider involved in internal discussions who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

"But we need to look at prices - it's impossible for the central bank to maintain a constant amount of purchases each month," the insider said, adding that geopolitical factors spurred by the Russia-Ukraine war and the Middle East conflict were among drivers of China's gold demand in recent years.

Officials at the central bank, the People's Bank of China (PBOC), have never publicly commented on what prompted a resumption of gold buying in November 2022 after a more-than three-year pause.

Eight months after Western sanctions froze \$300 billion of Russia's official reserves, about half of Moscow's total, the PBOC started reporting gold purchases and kept doing so for 18 months, forming a pillar for global gold prices to hit record highs in 2024.

The PBOC was the world's largest single buyer of gold in 2023, with its net purchases of 7.23 million ounces the most by China for at least 46 years, according to the World Gold Council.

But when it made no purchases in May and June this year, spot prices came under pressure, leaving the market

CHINA'S GOLD RESERVES NEED TO RISE IN ABSOLUTE AND RELATIVE TERMS BECAUSE THEY DO NOT MATCH THE STATUS OF THE WORLD'S SECOND-LARGEST ECONOMY AND GOLD'S SHARE OF ITS RESERVES IS THE LOWEST OF ANY MAJOR ECONOMY, SAID A CHINESE POLICY INSIDER INVOLVED IN INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS WHO DECLINED TO BE NAMED DUE TO THE SENSITIVITY OF THE MATTER.



Headquarters of the People's Bank of China (PBOC), the central bank, is pictured in Beijing, China. – Reuters

guessing about China's future appetite. The policy insider attributed the pause in buying to "high prices".

The spot price, which regained ground after a dip in June, hit a record high during trading on Wednesday on improved US rate cut hopes.

The PBOC and foreign exchange regulator State Administration of Foreign Exchange did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

China has the world's largest foreign currency reserves, at \$3.22 trillion in June.

But gold's share of China's overall reserves, which include its reserve position and special drawing rights (SDRs) at the International Monetary Fund, while at a record high of 4.9 per cent is low compared to the global average of 16 per cent.

Developing and emerging market countries typically have a much lower share of gold in reserves than advanced economies, which have smaller currency reserves.

"Given that base and very large scale of FX reserves we believe the PBOC will be buying gold at higher volumes for decades," said Nitesh Shah, commodity strategist at WisdomTree.

Demand from investors in China is also set to stay strong, he said, amid a prolonged property crisis and as central bank purchases give confidence in gold as a store of value.

"The official sector buying is a free advertisement for gold in China," said Shaokai Fan, global head of the central banks sector at the World Gold Council. "In the sense that if the central bank is buying gold, maybe I, as a retail investor, shall buy some too."

RUSSIAN PRECEDENT AND SECRECY

Putting more reserves in gold is a matter of security because

bullion can be stored onshore - safe from seizure.

Officially, Russia's gold is 30 per cent of its \$597 billion reserves, but in terms of accessible assets the share is much bigger as half of Russia's reserves were frozen by Western countries in reaction to Moscow's attack of Ukraine in 2022.

That precedent, in which Russia's central bank kept access only to investments in yuan-denominated assets and gold, has served as a cautionary tale for China, which has an estimated 60 per cent of its reserves in US dollar-denominated assets, according to analysts.

"The main motivation of the PBOC is to be less dependent on the US dollar and - in an extreme case - to be less susceptible to US sanctions," said Carsten Menke, an analyst at Julius Baer.

He expects China's desire to diversify reserves to persist as "the geopolitical tensions between China and the United States are unlikely to disappear anytime soon, independent of the outcome of the US presidential elections."

It took China nine years to raise the share of gold in its total reserves to 4.9 per cent from 1.8 per cent in 2015.

China holds 72.8 million ounces of gold worth about \$170 billion. If it eventually lifted the share of gold in its reserves even to 10 per cent at current reserve levels and prices, the purchases would total another \$170 billion.

For comparison, Russia's central bank stopped active buying of the precious metal in 2020 when gold reached 20 per cent of its total reserves. Gold's share has since grown due in part to its rising price.

The PBOC has sometimes reported past gold purchases well after they occurred, according to the World Gold Council, leading analysts to caution the latest statistics may not provide the full picture. — Reuters

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CONDUCTOR

Palestinian conductor Lamar Elias leads the Palestine Youth Orchestra (PYO) of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music during a concert focused on Gaza at the Amman Academy Theatre in Amman. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Heili Sirvio competes at the Finnish championship in Tampere, Finland. Travelling to skateboard competitions around the world, 13-year-old Heili Sirvio, Finland's youngest Olympic athlete ever — lives a life unlike the average Finnish teen. — AFP



ART

A man walks past flowers installation at a shopping mall in Beijing. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

An Afghan woman rides a donkey along a hill road in Argo district of Badakhshan province. — AFP



SINGER

British singer-songwriter and actress Rita Ora attends the world premiere of Disney's "Descendants: The Rise of Red" at the Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California. — AFP

art & life

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Summer programmes enrich children's skills and values

As summer vacation begins, many parents seek enriching programmes to engage their children, providing a blend of education, entertainment and personal growth. Summer programmes play a crucial role in developing children's skills and values, offering an environment where learning, fun and personal development intersect... **P20**

Sharpening kids' problem solving skills

LJLU CHERIAN

Global educators Dr Meredith Harbord and Sara Riaz Khan began their long-term collaboration in the Middle School Design lab of ABA Oman International School in Muscat, focusing on sustainability, ethical design and global-mindedness. They utilise ethical dilemmas and thinking tools to enrich and transform learning, developing resources based on real-world issues to engage and challenge students. Their new book, '21 Visual Thinking Tools for the Classroom: Developing Real World Problem-Solvers in Grades 5-10,' has contributions to the book from ABA Oman International School, where students used the Detective Tool, Design for the Need Tool and the Myself Tool to explore real-world ethical dilemmas, identity and creativity. The Observer spoke to them about the book and their work. Excerpts from the interview:

HOW DID YOUR EXPERIENCES AT ABA OMAN INFLUENCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CONSULTANCY?
We worked together as Design teachers for many years at ABA and were given a lot of freedom to develop a Middle Years Programme that would support the vision of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme. Curriculum development was an area that inspired both of us so when we left school, we wanted to continue our collaboration. One of the main 'drivers' of our collaboration was curiosity together with the ability to embrace new ideas which engage and inspire our students. Our common interest in ethical approaches such as ethical dilemmas and the idea of responsible design, as well as the scheduling of classes in our design lab allowed us to collaborate and develop a professional and personal relationship of respect and trust. It became apparent that students were more

interested and engaged in using an ethical lens to explore the real-world design dilemmas and issues in our units.

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY, ETHICAL DESIGN AND GLOBAL-MINDEDNESS IN EDUCATION?
The IB philosophy and MYP Design Guide support the development of global-minded students, who focus on being open-minded, caring and inquiring. For us, students needed to have opportunities to explore real-world issues and sustainable design for their personal development. Young people are very disturbed by the many crises impacting our world, particularly the effects of the climate crisis. They want a voice and need to discuss these issues in a safe and secure setting that the classroom provides.

COULD YOU EXPLAIN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF USING ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND THINKING TOOLS?
Our classroom experience showed that students paid more attention to units of work involving ethical dilemmas and values. For example, Grade 6 students had strong feelings when exploring Robotics.

IS IT FAIR TO USE ROBOTIC ANIMALS TO ENTRAP WILDLIFE POACHERS AND SAVE WILDLIFE?
Grade 10 students were challenged to examine how the manufacture of mobile phones and how child miners handled poisonous minerals and dreadful factory conditions in the production of these. Many stu-



dents were affected and felt empathy so decided to take action and write e-mails to the companies involved to complain.

WHAT ARE SOME REAL-WORLD ISSUES THAT YOUR RESOURCES ADDRESS, AND HOW DO THEY ENGAGE STUDENTS?
The first two curriculum books explored a range of real-world issues including sustainable ways of growing food, designing shelters for displaced families, developing space settlements and stereotypes relating to packaging. These issues are relevant to our world today and can be viewed through different lenses and ethical values such as wisdom, kindness and honour. They engage students through student choice and emotion and also require them to reflect on their beliefs, values and biases.

CAN YOU PROVIDE MORE DETAILS ABOUT '21 VISUAL THINKING



TOOLS FOR THE CLASSROOM: DEVELOPING REAL WORLD PROBLEM-SOLVERS...?
Every chapter introduces a different visual thinking tool and a step-by-step approach for a range of topics from challenging bias and promoting self-awareness to reflecting on social interactions. Stories from the classroom and world, a range of ethical issues, and student and educator examples illustrate how the tools can be used. Some of our tools have been translated into different languages and we are looking for collaborators to translate them into Arabic as well. The book was launched on July 9 by Routledge and is available in paperback and Kindle.

HOW CAN THESE THINKING TOOLS BE USED FOR PROBLEM-SOLVING?
The thinking tools give a structure to explore and resolve problems that may occur in the organisation. The use of a visual mecha-

nism takes the pressure off the individual or team of people and allows them to 'step away' and explore ideas with greater agency. For example, a school principal used the Thinking Generator Tool to help her faculty identify/pinpoint underlying issues relating to time management.

HOW CAN PARENTS USE THESE TOOLS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN?
As educators, we know the value and insights gained through respectful conversations. Parents often have difficulty in broaching sensitive issues with the constant distractions from digital technologies that influence so many facets of our home life today. In one example, parents were able to have a more in-depth conversation with their child regarding playing video games. In another situation, a parent facilitated their child in identifying their real feelings. We also had a student who came home after using the Myself Tool in school and told their parents that they were being bullied.



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THURSDAY | JULY 18 | 2024

19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



michaelclicks_birds_wildlife
Masai Mara, Kenya



sachinorthodoc16 and vibes_of_oman
Ayn Khor



jojo_paulose
Salalah, Dhofar, Sultanate of Oman



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Nature's pharmacy: Herbal riches of Bhutan

Blooms of vibrant purples and blues called our attention as we made our way through forests and hills carpeted with a rich mixture of greens, greys, and earth tones. Despite the cautionary advice to not touch or smell any flowers or plants to avoid any allergies or contact toxicity, we could not help but closely admire the seemingly ordinary plants and herbs. But this was no normal botanical display — we were surrounded by a wealth of highly prized medicinal plants and herbs as we walked through Jigme Dorji National Park (JDNP) in north-western Bhutan.

"This place is a living pharmacy" exclaimed Izabella Koziell, ICIMOD's Deputy Director-General, "we should be collecting herbs along the way". This sent a wave of laughter through the team, as we continued our journey through Bhutan's second-largest national park, where, according to the park's team, more than 200 species of medicinal herbs have been recorded, boasting myriad health benefits.

JDNP is a testament to Bhutan's rich biodiversity, proudly preserving several of the nation's iconic symbols. Within its borders, you will find the majestic cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*) — the revered national tree, the takin (*Budorcas taxicolour*), best described as 'having the body of a cow and the face of a goat' — the national animal, the blue poppy (*Meconopsis grandis*) — an emblematic national flower, and the raven (*Corvus corax*) — the national bird.

At the heart of mountain livelihoods within JDNP lies a pivotal practice — the collection of medicinal plants,



Simran Silpakar

herbs, and other species. Throughout our journey in the national park, we encountered yak herders collecting herbs, whose highland livelihoods are closely tied to both yak products and medicinal herbs.

A yak herder we met at Shodu (4,000 metres above sea level) proudly shared with us that he had gathered a plentiful harvest of yartsa gunbu during the last collection season and had earned a good income from the sales. Further north, at Tshering Yangu, three women herders described their routine, which involves tending to yaks while simultaneously collecting medicinal species.

The gathering of medicinal herbs leverages the unique biodiversity of the JDNP, capitalising on the abundance of natural resources in the remote highlands. The collection of high-value herbs has diversified the income sources for highland communities, helping them to build their resilience to better cope with uncertainties from climate change, such as extreme weather events, and changes in pasture conditions that affect yak herding.



The heavy dependence on herb collection for livelihoods comes with its threats and challenges, many of which are just emerging. Among these is the encroachment of invasive species and shrubs on rangelands, such as *Rumex obtusifolius* and *rhododendron* shrubberies, which have significantly threatened the growth and harvesting of medicinal herbs. The changing climate may also be affecting the proliferation and upslope movement of these shrubs and invasive species.

The collection of medicinal herbs is at risk of declining, likely due to the changing climate. Changes in weather patterns have resulted in reduced harvests. Unpredictable and irregular rainfall has exacerbated soil erosion and landslides, further impacting areas where medicinal herbs are harvested.

According to Menjong Sorig, a state-owned enterprise of the Royal Government of Bhutan, that follows Sowa Rigpa, an ancient traditional medicinal system influenced by



Buddhist philosophy, there are also issues with collection practices. With medicinal herbs high in demand, the number of collectors has increased in the highlands. Unfortunately, these collectors often fail to follow sustainable collection practices, resulting in over-harvesting and damage to plants and sites, which may have contributed to the decline in the availability of medicinal herbs.

Thinley Norbu of Menjong Sorig also stresses that the future of herb collection and its contribution to mountain livelihoods depends on the stability of the natural habitats of herbs and the

maintenance of sustainable populations in the collection areas through appropriate collection techniques. This includes gathering only plants that are found in abundance, avoiding unnecessary damage to plants, harvesting conservatively by taking no more than 30-50% using the 'thinning method', and covering the hole after digging or uprooting to protect against infection and invasion by pests.

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Photo credits Thinley Norbu and Jitendra Bajracharya

DANISH INSECT FARM SETS SIGHTS ON FEEDING EUROPE'S LIVESTOCK

Flemming: At the end of a small country road in Denmark is the "Enorm" factory, an insect farm set up by a Danish woman who wants to revolutionise livestock feed.

Jane Lind Sam and her father, Carsten Lind Pedersen, swapped pigs for soldier flies and created a 22,000-square-metre factory where they intend to produce more than 10,000 tonnes of insect meal and oil a year.

The factory, which opened in December 2023, is the largest of its kind in northern Europe, and its products will initially be used by farmers for animal feed and, perhaps in the future, for human consumption.

The two entrepreneurs are making products that will be "substituting other, maybe less climate friendly products", Lind Sam, co-owner and chief operations officer, said.

They hope to contribute to the evolution of agriculture in a country where the sector's climate impact is under

scrutiny.

In 2020, a report by the University of Copenhagen showed that importing soy products for livestock feed emitted seven million tonnes of planet-heating carbon dioxide, accounting for 60 per cent of the total CO2 emissions from Danish agriculture.

However, Enorm -- which has started production with the help of public and private investment -- still has a modest order book.

"It's still a virgin industry, the volume in the market is still very limited," admitted Lind Sam, whose factory has strived to use automation as much as possible.

But according to the International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed, the industry is growing and insect meal production could reach one million tonnes by 2030.

Under turquoise fluorescent lights, millions of black flies buzzed inside some 500 plastic cages, where they lay hundreds of thousands of eggs every day.

Inside the facility, it was impossible to escape the roar of insects who incessantly lay eggs throughout their 10-day lifespan.

Niels Thomas Eriksen, a biologist at Aalborg University, told AFP that "insects can eat materials that other animals probably won't so we can make better use" of agricultural byproducts and food waste.

Minimising waste is one of Enorm's key aims and the manufacturer stressed that the rearing of insects facilitates "the recycling of nutrients".

It takes between 40 and 50 days to produce the finished product, which is mainly flour with a protein content of 55 per cent.

It is then distributed across Europe -- although Enorm remains discreet about the identity of its customers -- used for feed for pig, poultry, fish and pet farms.

The company noted that the larvae also hold "the potential for future integration into human nutrition". — AFP



SUMMER PROGRAMMES ENRICH CHILDREN'S SKILLS AND VALUES



AMAL AL RIYAMI

As summer vacation begins, many parents seek enriching programmes to engage their children, providing a blend of education, entertainment and personal growth. Summer programmes play a crucial role in developing children's skills and values, offering an environment where learning, fun and personal development intersect.

These programmes offer children the chance to interact with peers in a relaxed setting, enhancing essential communication and teamwork skills. Through various activities, children learn cooperation, problem-solving and the ability to build lasting friendships. They are empowered

to build confidence through sports, artistic and scientific activities, allowing them to discover and highlight their talents.

Summer programmes introduce children to alternative educational methods, different from traditional school settings. Workshops in science, arts, sports and technology make learning enjoyable and inspiring. Many programmes also focus on instilling moral and patriotic values, emphasising citizenship, social responsibility and respect for others through engaging activities.

'MY SUMMER IS DETERMINATION AND VALUES'

In Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, the 'My summer is determination and values' programme involves 200 children participating in diverse training workshops across

various centres, including the Fatima bint Al Khattab Summer Centre in Al Hamra and the Safiah Umm Al Mu'minin Summer Centre in Adam. Activities range from recycling art to photography and design using Canva, showcasing the programme's creativity and variety. This initiative aligns with the Ministry of Education's mission to extend educational efforts beyond regular school hours.

'NUTTY SCIENTISTS' NIZWA

An Omani company specialising in educational and entertainment services, Nutty Scientists Nizwa offers workshops that often fill up quickly due to limited seats, ensuring focused attention on each child. Director Fatima al Wardi highlighted the high turnout, with over 170 children participating in monthly

activities at the centre and even more in external events. The centre's approach shifts from traditional memorisation to hands-on scientific experimentation, enhancing children's understanding of natural phenomena.

SPORTS TRAINING CENTRES IN AL DAKHLIYAH GOVERNORATE

The Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate organised various sports activities as part of the Summer Sports Programme 2024. Eman bint Said al Daihani from the programme's media committee reported participation statistics: 124 boys and 40 girls in swimming, 27 in equestrian training, and multiple football training centres with participants ranging from 14 to 20 children. Additionally, the

girls' physical fitness training centre at Al Hamra Club saw 50 participants.

Summer programmes are vital in nurturing children's development and preparing them for future challenges. Support and diversification of activities are essential for the success of these programmes, ensuring they cater to various interests at reasonable prices. Collaboration between different parties is necessary to maintain high-quality programmes.

By reinforcing essential skills and values, summer programmes significantly contribute to a promising future for children. Parents and institutions must actively support and encourage these initiatives to secure a bright and successful path for the next generation.