

Vietnam flood toll climbs to 127

Tens of thousands of people were forced to flee their homes on Tuesday as massive floods inundated northern Vietnam in the wake of Typhoon Yagi, while the death toll climbed to 127. Yagi struck last Saturday, bringing winds in excess of 149 km per hour and a deluge of rain that has caused flooding not seen in decades, according to locals. More than 59,000 people have been forced to evacuate their homes in Yen Bai province, local authorities said on Tuesday, after the floodwaters engulfed almost 18,000 homes. **SEE P6**

SUNRISE - 05:52 AM

PRAYER TIMINGS

FAJR - 04:36 AM

DHUHR - 12:09 PM

ASR - 03:36 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:20 PM

ISHA - 07:31 PM



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SUSTAINABILITY WITH
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LUXURY
CAMPING IN
THE OMAN
DESERT

MUSCAT

EXPANSION WORKS
AT QURAYAT HOSPITAL

The expansion of the gynaecology and obstetrics clinics at Qurayat Hospital was inaugurated on Tuesday, under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, in the presence of Shaikh Talal bin Saif al Hosni, Wali of Qurayat, and a number of officials. The expansion enhances the hospital's ability to deliver integrated medical services by providing state-of-the-art equipment to meet the needs of patients and offer high-quality health services. Among the most important improvements is the launch of the virtual emergency medicine system, which links Qurayat Hospital to the Royal Hospital. The system enhances the medical team's ability to obtain advanced medical consultations for emergency cases.

DETAILS ON P2

Pact for RO 1.3m centre for health in Sultan Haitham City

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Tuesday signed an agreement with Renardet SA (Consulting Engineers) to design the National Centre for Women and Children's Health at Sultan Haitham City (SHC).

To be built at a cost of RO 1.3 million, the agreement reflects efforts being made to implement the first phase of the SHC project and enhance healthcare services in the modern metropolis.

The agreement was signed by Sulaiman bin Nasser al Hiji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Lorenzo Nicolai, Managing Director of Renardet SA and partners. The ceremony was attended by Dr Hilal bin



The Sultan Haitham City has allocated an area of one million square metres for healthcare.

Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

The agreement aims to improve the quality of health services provided to women and children in a manner that reflects SHC's commitment to offer comprehensive healthcare for all members of society.

The agreement provides for consulting services, studies, surveys and determinants of the project, in addition to the designing of masterplans.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Health have joined hands to provide a healthy environment that supports vitality in the envisaged sprawling eco-city. Towards

this objective, an agreement valued at more than RO 90 million was signed to build a referral hospital (with a capacity of 800 beds), in addition to the National Centre for Women and Children's Health (capacity - 500 beds).

It is worth noting that Sultan Haitham City has allocated an area of one million square metres for healthcare, including the referral hospital, the National Centre for Women and Children's Health, Oman Health College, the Higher Institute for Health Sciences and the Oman Medical Speciality Board. Within the first phase of SHC's implementation, an area of more than 63,000 square metres has been allocated for lands adjoining the health centres. — ONA

SAYYID BILARAB VISITS OMANTEL INNOVATION LABS



HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the 'Programme of Promising Omani Startups', visited Omantel Innovation Labs at the company's headquarters on Tuesday. HH Sayyid Bilarab was briefed about the initiatives and programmes sponsored and adopted by the labs, as well as the achievements made since the labs' inception. **SEE ALSO P2**

Covid-19 pandemic accelerated brain ageing in teens: Study

WASHINGTON: A new study in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated brain ageing in teenagers. The research, led by Dr Patricia K. Kuhl from the University of Washington, found that girls' brains aged an average of 4.2 years faster, while boys' brains aged 1.4 years faster than expected. This study is the first to highlight sex-specific differences in pandemic-related brain ageing.

The study tracked 130 adolescents in Washington State, initially scanned in 2018, with follow-up MRIs delayed by the pandemic. The results show accelerated cortical thinning in 30 brain regions for girls and 2 regions for boys. The research



Worried young schoolgirl studying at home.

supports the "stress acceleration hypothesis," which suggests that high-stress environments may lead to earlier brain maturation as a protective response.

While the study provides valuable insights, it has limitations, including the lack of

a control group and unmeasured variables like socioeconomic status. The study underscores the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the need for continued investment in adolescent mental health and crisis preparedness.

— Agencies

Israeli strike kills 40 in humanitarian zone

POLIO VACCINE PUSH MOVES TO NORTHERN GAZA

AL MAWASI: Gaza's civil defence agency said an Israeli strike on Tuesday on a humanitarian zone in the Palestinian territory killed 40 people.

The strike hit Al Mawasi—in Gaza's southern province of Khan Yunis— which was designated a safe zone by the Israeli military early in the war, with tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians seeking refuge there. Israel's military has carried out occasional operations in and around the area, including a strike in July that it said killed Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif, and which Gaza health authorities said killed more than 90 people.

Egyptian, Qatari, and US efforts to broker an elusive ceasefire have focused on securing the release of captives in exchange for a pause in Israel's offensive.

In Gaza, civil defence official Mohammed al Mughair said 40 dead and 60 wounded were taken to nearby hospitals following the strike on Al Mawasi early on Tuesday. "Our crews are still working to recover 15 missing people as a result of targeting the tents of the displaced in Mawasi, Khan Yunis," Mughair said.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Basal said people sheltering in the camp in the dunes along the Mediterranean coast had not been warned of the strike. The strike left behind "three deep craters," he said, adding: "There are entire families who disappeared under the sand." **SEE ALSO P6**



A boy stands along a hallway balcony at a make-shift camp for people displaced by conflict in Deir Al Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Tuesday. — AFP

Arab League calls for ceasefire

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday participated in the 162nd meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers, held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo. Oman's delegation at the meeting was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs. The meeting reviewed means of ending the continuous Israeli aggression on Gaza and the West Bank. It also highlighted the crimes of genocide committed by the Israeli Occupation Forces against the Palestinian people. The meeting underscored the necessity of a ceasefire as the only solution to the situation in Gaza, where the Israeli Occupation Forces continue violating all international covenants and treaties and repeat their crimes against civilians. **DETAILS ON P2**



Deal inked to design women and children’s health centre at Sultan Haitham City

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday signed an agreement with Renardet SA (Consulting Engineers) to design the National Centre for Women and Children’s Health at Sultan Haitham City (SHC). Inked to the tune of RO 1.3 million, the agreement reflects efforts being made to implement the first phase of the SHC project and enhance healthcare services in the modern metropolis. The agreement was signed by Sulaiman bin Nasser al Hiji, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and Lorenzo Nicolai, Managing Director of Renardet SA and partners. The ceremony was attended by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, and Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. — ONA



Gynaecology, obstetrics clinics at Qurayat Hospital expanded



The expansion enhances the hospital's ability to deliver integrated services by providing state-of-the-art equipment. – Photo by Hussein al Maqbali

ABDULAZIZ AL ABRI
QURAYAT, SEPT 10

The expansion of the gynaecology and obstetrics clinics at Qurayat Hospital opened yesterday, under the auspices of Dr Said bin Harib al Lamki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs in the presence of Shaikh Talal bin Saif al Hosni, Wali of Qurayat and a number of officials. The expansion enhances the hospital's ability to deliver integrated medical services by providing state-of-the-art equipment to meet the needs of patients and provide high-quality health services. Among the most important improvements is the launch of the virtual emergency medicine system which links Qurayat Hospital to the Royal Hospital. The system enhances the medical team's ability to obtain advanced medical consultations for emergency cases thereby expediting emergency response and providing appropriate treatment in the least amount of time possible. The emergency department

was equipped with an ultrasound device to conduct tests more accurately and provide appropriate diagnoses for emergency cases and severe injuries. In addition, a mobile incubator for premature babies has been set up to facilitate the transfer of critical cases to referral hospitals in Muscat. The physiotherapy department has also been expanded and equipped with modern devices to improve the work environment and services provided to patients. The improvements also included expanding the computer technicians' offices and the server room, expanding the dialysis unit waiting room to provide a convenient space for patients while waiting. The maternity ward has witnessed significant development to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for mothers. In addition, essential medicines and medical devices such as assistive breathing devices and an automated defibrillator have been provided to speed up the treatment of emergency cases and provide special facilities for people with disabilities.

SAYYID BILARAB VISITS OMANTEL INNOVATION LABS

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, Honorary President of the “Programme of Promising Omani Startups” (POPS) visited Omantel Innovation Labs at the company's headquarters in Madinat Al Irfan on Tuesday. HH Sayyid Bilarab toured Omantel Innovation Labs. He was briefed about the initiatives and programmes sponsored and adopted by the labs, as well as the achievements that have been made since the labs' inception. Further, HH Sayyid Bilarab also viewed the services offered by the labs to technology startups, including investments and experimental environments. These services aim to support those companies and to boost the entrepreneurial system in the Sultanate of Oman. The visit



HH Sayyid Bilarab was briefed about the initiatives and programmes sponsored and adopted by the labs. — ONA

also included observing eight technology startups from various programmes of the labs. This visit comes as part of HH Sayyid Bilarab's keenness to continue supporting Omani technology startups and to monitor the challenges faced by these companies. — ONA

Oman participates in meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman participated on Tuesday in the 162nd meeting of Arab Foreign Ministers, held at the headquarters of the Arab League in Cairo. Oman's delegation in the meeting was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs. The meeting reviewed means of ending the continuous Israeli aggression on Gaza and the West



Oman's delegation in the meeting was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs. — ONA

Bank. It also highlighted the crimes of genocide committed

by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) against the Palestinian people. These crimes are ongoing for almost a year and have resulted in the martyrdom, injury and disappearance of more than 145,000 Palestinian civilians. Further, the meeting underscored the necessity of ceasefire as the only solution to the situation in Gaza, where the Israeli Occupation Forces continue violating all international covenants and treatise and repeat their crimes against civilians. The meeting underlined that the international community should undertake a more positive stance against what Israel is doing in the Palestinian territories. It also emphasised the need for a two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state with Al Quds Al Sharqiya (East Jerusalem) as its capital on the basis of the 1967 borders. — ONA

Alzheimer’s awareness campaign calls for support to caregivers

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The Oman Alzheimer’s Society has begun their activities marking the World Alzheimer’s Month in September with a Purple Cafe event held at Intercity, Al Khuwair. The event was for the support group for Alzheimer’s patients’ carers, who discussed challenges they face while caring for an Alzheimer’s patient. The important part is that caregivers get to share their experiences but can also benefit from experts. More than 40 members attended the event, supported by the Intercity Hotel. On September 15, a webinar will be held, and the objective is about how to help someone with



Dr Hamed al Sinawi explained that major focus is going to be on how to diagnose Alzheimer’s and how to support a person with Alzheimer’s with the latest and advanced methods when it comes to assessment and diagnosis



Alzheimer’s. “On September 26, we are having the National Alzheimer’s Month Symposium, and it is going to be for the healthcare workers. This year it is being held in Suhar. The major focus is going to be on how to diagnose Alzheimer’s and how to support a person with Alzheimer’s with the latest and advanced methods when it comes to assessment and diagnosis,” explained Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Chairman of the Oman Alzheimer’s Society. This year the theme is time to act on dementia and time to act on Alzheimer’s. “The idea is to encourage people to come for early detection of their condition so they can benefit from available treatment,” he noted. In many cases it has been observed that people do not realise that they have been effected by dementia, and according to Dr Hamed, this is so because they are in denial. “The family might begin to notice the signs first because they see changes in their loved ones, and the individual is confused, might

misplace things, and has difficulty communicating with people. Some people tend to play it down, saying it is part of ageing, and push it aside because he does not have to go to work anymore, so it is okay to be forgetful,” he pointed out. However, with time, the symptoms get worse, as individuals with dementia would soon find it difficult to do basic daily activities such as looking after themselves, washing themselves or even combing their own hair, going shopping, driving a car, and handling money. More often than not, the people most affected by the stigma, misinformation and discrimination are in fact those living with the condition and their families. “So often, those living with dementia tell us they wish they had known more about the condition earlier and that their communities were better equipped to support them. We hear their experiences daily, from accusations of witchcraft, through to abandonment by family and relatives; stigma has real world consequences” Says Paola Barbarian, Chief Executive Officer of Alzheimer’s disease international. The hashtags #TimeToActOnDementia and #TimeToActOnAlzheimers will be used throughout September to rally global attention and encourage proactive steps toward better understanding, timely diagnosis, and comprehensive care for those living with dementia.



SAI PARTICIPATES IN GCC AUDIT MEETING

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), participated in the 25th meeting of under-secretaries of GCC Audit and Accounting Bureaus.

The meeting was launched from Doha, the State of Qatar, via video-conferencing. Oman's delegation was

headed by Ahmed bin Salim al Rujaibi, Deputy Chairman of SAI.

Several topics were reviewed and discussed during the meeting, most notably the applied study on the results and recommendations of the winning researches in the GCC Competition for Research and Studies in the Field of Auditing.



Oman's delegation was headed by Ahmed al Rujaibi, SAI Deputy Chairman. — ONA

Further, the meeting discussed the mechanisms of benefiting from the issued manuals and views on their development in order to achieve efficiency in implementing audit tasks. It also reviewed a number of draft professional manuals prepared by a sub-group of specialists in the member SAIs, namely the updated Financial Audit Manual

(General Manual) and the Manual of Audit of Disaster and Crisis Management.

The meeting also included a review of a plan to enhance cooperation and partnership with the INTOSAI Development Initiative (IDI), in light of SAI's undertaking to implement this initiative within the GCC Training Strategic Plan. — ONA

Forum discusses probation and aftercare of juveniles

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The third forum for social observers commenced on Tuesday at the National Centre for Autism, addressing mechanisms for implementing judicial probation measures and aftercare programmes. The event, organised by the Ministry of Social Development's Department of Juvenile Affairs, was inaugurated by Maani bint Abdullah al Busaidi, Director-General of Family Development, and saw the participation of 60 specialists and social observers in the field of juvenile care.

The two-day forum is designed to foster the exchange of best practices among social observers, enhance collaboration among relevant stakeholders to develop joint working mechanisms and promote skill development. Additionally, it aims to propose innovative solutions to the challenges faced in the implementation of judicial probation measures and aftercare programmes, ensuring their long-term sustainability.

Fahad bin Zaher al Fahdi, Director of Juvenile Affairs at the ministry, emphasised the



The two-day forum is designed to foster the exchange of best practices among social observers, enhance collaboration among relevant stakeholders to develop joint working mechanisms, and promote skill development

forum's significance, stating it provides vital social care services for juveniles, who are among the most vulnerable groups in need of empowerment and societal integration. He further highlighted the department's role in offering comprehensive care through judicial measures aimed at reforming behaviour, along with rehabilitation programmes focusing on vocational, psychological and social training.

Al Fahdi also addressed the growing issue of juvenile delinquency, underscoring its potential to undermine societal security, development plans and family structures. The forum serves as a platform for addressing this concern, while

simultaneously promoting traditional values and national identity through coordinated efforts between governmental and civil society organisations.

One of the key focus areas discussed was the application of alternative non-custodial measures and aftercare programmes, which align with contemporary approaches to juvenile rehabilitation. Such programmes ensure that juveniles are able to reintegrate into their families and communities, maintaining positive behavioural changes and addressing any challenges they may face in adapting to society.

The forum also seeks to enhance the skills of participants

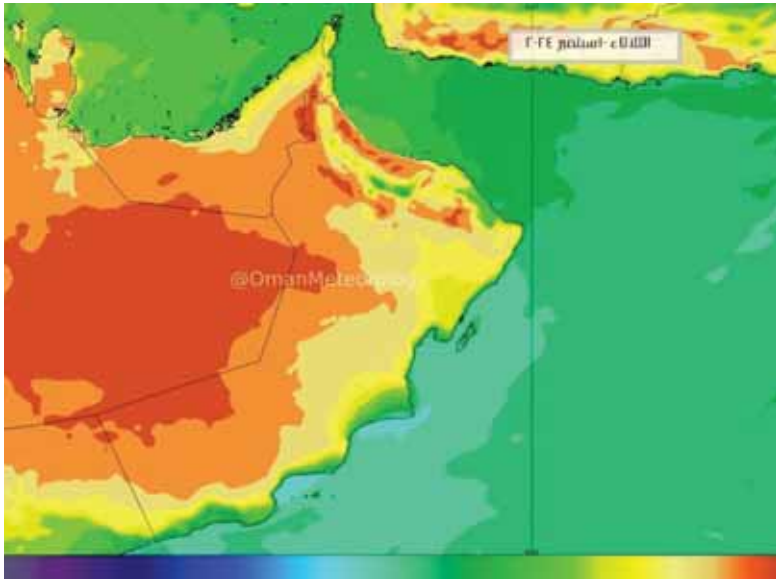
in executing aftercare programmes effectively, while raising awareness of the legal and regulatory frameworks governing judicial probation and aftercare management.

Participants are encouraged to explore innovative tools and methodologies to assess and monitor juveniles' progress within these programmes.

Amina bint Khalfan al Rashidiyah, Supervisor of the Juvenile Guidance Centre at the Juvenile Affairs Department, shared insights from a Swedish case study on juvenile rehabilitation. The presentation covered key legal provisions and aftercare mechanisms in Sweden that promote the sustainable reintegration of juveniles into society, thereby reducing recidivism rates and fostering a supportive environment for young offenders.

On Wednesday, the forum will continue with four panel discussions covering topics such as professional advancements in judicial probation, skills for dealing with juveniles, initial psychological and mental assessments, and developing practical tools for working with juveniles.

Temperatures expected to soar in desert areas



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPTEMBER 10

Temperatures are expected to soar in the coming days to between 38 and 44 degrees Celsius on the coasts of the Sea of Oman.

Desert areas are expected to register temperatures of between 44 and 47 degrees Celsius while the coasts of the Arabian Sea are forecast to experience temperatures between 28 and 38 degrees Celsius.

Oman Met Office forecasts partly cloudy conditions on the coastal strip and mountains adjoining Dhofar Governorate with chances of scattered drizzle over the mountains with low temperatures in areas overlooking the Arabian Sea where the minimum temperature will be around 28 degrees Celsius.

The weather will be generally clear in the rest of the governorates with chances of clouds forming on parts of the Al Hajar Mountains in the afternoon with maximum temperature of 44 degrees Celsius while the minimum temperatures may drop to 37 degrees Celsius.

There is a possibility of low clouds forming late at night

and early in the morning over parts of the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman where temperatures may be in the region of 28 and 38 degrees Celsius.

This year's August is the hottest, with an average surface air temperature of 16.82°C. It is tied with August 2023 as the hottest month of August ever recorded, 0.71°C above the 1991-2020 average, and 1.51°C above the pre-industrial level, according to a new report by Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

To add fuel to the fire, August 2024 was the 13th month in a 14-month period where average temperatures went above 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The report found that the global average temperature for the past 12 months (September 2023 – August 2024) is the highest for any 12 months.

“During the past three months of 2024, the globe has experienced the hottest June and August, the hottest day on record, and the hottest boreal summer on record.

This string of record temperatures is increasing the likelihood of 2024 being the hottest year on record,” the report said.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN ENVIRONMENT AFFAIRS MEET

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, took part in the 26th meeting of GCC ministers of environment affairs, held in Doha, the State of Qatar. The meeting discussed the decision of the GCC Supreme Council in regards to non-customs restrictions related to the environment. It also touched on the strategic plan of environment ministers, among other topics. Oman's delegation in the meeting was headed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority. — ONA



Frankincense: Oman's ambassador to ancient civilisations

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA ALSALMANI

For thousands of years, the Sultanate of Oman has been known for producing the finest frankincense, with trees growing in Dhofar Governorate. Historians attribute the growth of this tree to the availability of the appropriate climate and calcareous soil suitable for its historical, economic and medical importance. Visitors to Dhofar Governorate can explore the sites where these trees are located, often found in areas behind the mountains, along with low slopes and wide valleys (wadis).

Frankincense is harvested

in seasons determined by the profession from March to June, with another stage of harvesting beginning after the khareef season until winter. The quality of frankincense is measured by its pure colour free of impurities, with prices increasing according to its quality levels.

Today, frankincense products occupy a significant space on the shelves of markets, whether traditional markets or modern shopping malls. Among the most important markets that display this product are Souq Al Hafa in Salalah, Souq Muttrah, and Souq Nizwa. Frankincense products are often wrapped in plastic bags and displayed next to



Today, frankincense products occupy a significant space on the shelves of markets, whether traditional markets or modern shopping malls

Al Mijmar, the tool used to place the frankincense so its scent can spread throughout the house or

area, especially during social and religious occasions.

Frankincense prices vary

according to type and quality, ranging from RO 3 to more than RO 50 per kilogramme. One of the most famous and finest types is Al Hojri Frankincense, still in great demand among citizens and residents in Oman.

Frankincense is not only used for social and religious occasions, but some people buy it to treat diseases such as joint inflammation, improve stomach function, treat asthma, and skin allergies.

Therefore, some workers in this field extract various types of frankincense oils according to customers' requests.

Historical sources indicate that the trade in frankincense, horses

and dates played a vital role in deepening relations between Dhofar and regions such as the Levant, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome, India and China for thousands of years.

The frankincense produced by Dhofar was an important economic boom, used in religious and funeral rites in ancient temples and monasteries until recently.

Excavations have found traces of frankincense in the port of Samahram, the Hanoon region, and Andhoor oasis, indicating commercial contact between the inhabitants of southern Arabia and the Mediterranean at that time.



B R E A K F A S T



DON'T SKIP IT

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

Breakfast is often overlooked, particularly by children who face long school days. However, it remains one of the most crucial meals, supplying the energy needed to start the day with vitality and focus. For students, this energy is essential for academic success, as breakfast lays the foundation for a healthy, productive day.

Numerous studies reveal that consuming breakfast can significantly enhance students' academic performance. A balanced breakfast rich in carbohydrates, proteins, and healthy fats improves brain function, increasing focus and attention during classes.

Dr Abdullah al Muqimi, a therapeutic nutrition specialist, highlighted this in a statement to the Observer, noting that "breakfast serves as fuel for the body and mind, helping to regulate blood sugar levels, which in turn boosts learning and memory." Children who consistently eat breakfast display higher levels of activity and engagement in the classroom compared to their peers who skip the meal. This leads to faster information retention and improved classroom participation.

Beyond academic benefits, regular breakfast consumption positively impacts overall health. Children who start their day with a nutritious meal are less prone to obesity and digestive issues. Breakfast helps stimulate metabolism and maintains balanced energy throughout the day.

Paediatric consultant Dr Laila al Dahmashi warns that "skipping breakfast can lead to long-term health complications, such as increased risks of obesity and type 2 diabetes." She also noted that children who skip breakfast are more likely to snack on unhealthy foods later, heightening their risk of nutritional deficiencies.

Experts agree that the ideal breakfast should include complex carbohydrates from whole grains, which provide sustained energy, along with proteins like eggs and dairy to promote satiety and support growth. Adding fruits and vegetables ensures the meal is packed with essential vitamins and minerals. Parents are encouraged to provide a diverse breakfast, such as whole wheat toast with a boiled egg and a piece of fruit like an apple or orange.

Despite its numerous benefits, many children skip breakfast due to time constraints or a lack of understanding of its importance. This is where both families and schools must step in. Parents can model healthy eating habits by having breakfast with their children, while schools can promote the importance of breakfast through awareness programmes and by offering healthy snacks to students. Schools also play a pivotal role in reinforcing these habits by implementing educational programmes on nutrition and offering balanced breakfast options.

Working families may struggle with busy mornings, but solutions exist. Preparing quick and healthy meals, like oatmeal with fruit the night before or simple sandwiches with proteins and vegetables, can save time. Involving children in the preparation process encourages them to eat breakfast and teaches valuable life skills.

Breakfast serves as a key foundation for both students' health and academic performance. By fostering cooperation between families and schools, the habit of eating breakfast can be firmly established, ensuring students begin their day energised and ready to succeed. Breakfast is more than just a meal—it is essential for thriving in school and life.

IMPORTANCE OF BREAKFAST

ENERGY: After spending a solid 6-8 hours sleeping, and therefore fasting, your body wakes up ready to receive recharging fuel that will empower it throughout the entire day.

IMPROVED CONCENTRATION: Eating good-quality foods during breakfast time can significantly improve concentration skills, hence better grades.

HEALTHY WEIGHT: People who skip breakfast tend to have a larger weight than those who do not. In other words, breakfast eaters tend to make smarter and portion-controlled food choices throughout the day, as opposed to those who skip it.



Wadi Dayqah shutters to open on September 15



The move aims to replenish underground reservoirs crucial for irrigation in the nearby villages of Daghamr and Hail Al Ghaf

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) on Tuesday announced plans to release 15 million cubic metres of water from Wadi Dayqah Dam on September 15. The move aims

to replenish underground reservoirs crucial for irrigation in the nearby villages of Daghamr and Hail Al Ghaf. Wadi Dayqah, located 75 km from Muscat in the Wilayat of Qurayat, boasts one of the largest dams in the Arabian Peninsula, with a storage capacity of 100 million cubic metres and standing 75 metres

tall. In its official statement, MoAFWR emphasised the importance of the discharge to support local agriculture by ensuring a sustainable water supply for farmers in the wilayat. The release will help maintain water levels in the aquifers, directly benefiting the area's farming communities.

NCSI survey to assess economic factors influencing Omani families

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) is currently conducting the 43rd Consumer Confidence Survey for the third quarter of 2024.

The survey targets Omani citizens aged 18 and above, including a minimum of 1,500 participants from various governorates across Oman.

Data collection through phone-based interviews will cover both genders, different age groups and educational backgrounds. The Consumer Confidence Index is a key economic indicator that provides valuable insights into the economic conditions of Omani households. The survey seeks to assess multiple factors influencing the Omani economy, including the financial status of households, factors impacting the economy positively or negatively, future economic expectations and the availability of employment opportunities.



Data collection through phone-based interviews will cover both genders, different age groups and educational backgrounds

10 new schools to come up in governorates

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has floated a tender for the design and construction of ten school buildings through five packages in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The last date to get tender documents is September 23, and the bid closing date is October 21. The technical bid opening will be on October 21, and the priced bid opening will be on November 26.

Package 1 covers Al Batinah North and Al Batinah South and includes a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in Al Burshid in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq in Al Batinah North Governorate, a school with 36 classrooms for grades (1-4) in Al Khatim in the Wilayat of Nakhal in Al Batinah South Governorate and a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in the Wilayat of Saham in Al Batinah North Governorate.

Package 2 includes a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in Al Ghushbah in the Wilayat of Suhar in Al Batinah North Governorate, a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in



The last date to get tender documents is September 23, and the bid closing date is October 21

Majaz Al Sughra in the Wilayat of Saham and a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in the Wilayat of Suhar.

Package 3 includes a school with 40 classrooms for boys for grades (9-12) in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna in Dhofar Governorate, and a school with 40 classrooms for grades (1-4) in the Wilayat of Taqah.

Package 4 includes a school with 40 classrooms for boys for grades (9-12) in the Wilayat of Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate.

The fifth package includes a school with 40 classrooms for girls in grades (9-12) in Al Nahda, in the Wilayat of Masirah, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate.

وزارة المالية
Ministry of Finance

11 September 2024

Request for Expression of Interest (EOI)

Development and Management of Government E-services
“Oman Business Platform” Under a Public-Private Partnership Agreement.

As part of the Public Private Partnership agreement to encourage the private sector to invest in infrastructure projects and public services, the Ministry of Finance, in coordination with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion, invites specialized local and international companies to participate in the Oman Business Platform project.

Interested companies can obtain the EOI document by sending an email to: Invest.easy@mof.gov.om

EOI NO.

Last date for obtaining the EOI document

Last date for submitting EOI documents

MOF-PPP-EOI-2024-01

November 5th 2024

November 12th 2024
(2 pm)
Oman Time Zone

For more information, don't hesitate to contact us at:
Invest.easy@mof.gov.om (Sunday to Thursday, 8 am to 2 pm Oman Time Zone).

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tenders:-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
(353/2024)	Implementing an awareness campaign on family issues	Companies specialized in the field of Television, film and radio production services registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first degree, second, third, fourth	Saturday 21-09-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 03-10-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
(354/2024)	Implementation of the second edition of the intensive specialized training program in the field of marital counseling	Companies specialized in the field of Education, training and human resources development registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the excellent, first degree, second, third, fourth	Saturday 21-09-2024 02:00 PM	Thursday 03-10-2024 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On **Wednesday 11/09 /2024**.

❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

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Polio vaccine push moves to northern Gaza

GENEVA: The third phase of a giant polio vaccination drive targeting children in Gaza began on Tuesday in a particularly war-ravaged zone, but the WHO said a support convoy had to abort its mission.

After the first confirmed polio case in 25 years, a massive vaccination effort began last week targeting over 640,000 children under 10, aided by localised “humanitarian pauses” in fighting.

After covering central and southern Gaza, the campaign moved into its final phase in the north from Tuesday until Thursday, said World Health Organization spokesman Tarik Jasarevic.

Maher Shamiya, the deputy health minister in the Gaza Strip, said that 230 teams were working to provide the vaccines and that there had already been “significant turnout of families eager to vaccinate their children”.

Disease has spread with Gaza lying in ruins and the majority of its 2.4 million residents forced to flee their homes due to Israel’s military assault — often taking refuge in cramped and unsanitary conditions.

A fresh campaign to provide a needed second dose is due to begin in about four weeks in Gaza, besieged for over 11



Palestinian medics administer polio vaccines to children at Al Daraj neighbourhood clinic in Gaza City. — AFP

months.

Ahead of the roll-out of the third phase, “vaccines, cold chain equipment and finger markers

were delivered to north Gaza yesterday,” Jasarevic said.

However, “a WHO mission carrying fuel for hospitals and

vehicles for the polio campaign as well as campaign monitoring experts was impeded”, he said.

It had taken three hours for that

mission to get a green light from the Israelis to move, “followed by five hours at the holding point, after which the mission had to be

A massive vaccination effort began last week targeting over 640,000 children under 10, aided by localised “humanitarian pauses” in fighting

aborted”, he explained.

WHO also voiced concern that some areas in the north facing Israeli evacuation orders are part of the areas where humanitarian pauses had been agreed to allow the vaccination to go ahead.

“We appeal to all parties to continue ensuring these humanitarian pause zones are respected during the campaign,” Jasarevic said.

He said a separate WHO mission to reach Gaza’s largest hospital, Al Shifa, in the north was also “impeded” on Monday.

That marked the fourth time in as many days that WHO was unable to reach the hospital.

“We call for safe and sustained access to the north and for a functional de-confliction system, which still remains a challenge 11 months into the war,” Jasarevic said.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive in the Gaza Strip has so far killed at least 41,020 people, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. — **AFP**

Senior China, US military officials hold ‘in-depth’ talks

BEIJING: Senior military officials from China and the United States held “in-depth” talks on Tuesday, Beijing’s defence ministry said.

On Tuesday, Beijing’s defence ministry said Wu Yanan, head of the Chinese army’s Southern Theater Command had held “an in-depth exchange of views” with Samuel Paparo, Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command.

The two officials discussed “issues of common concern”, it added, in the first-ever talks of their kind.

The Southern Theatre Command is responsible for the Beijing military’s activities in the South China Sea, where Chinese vessels have engaged in a series of high-profile confrontations in recent months.

Tuesday’s high-level military dialogue between the geopolitical countries comes on the heels of the first visit to China by a US national security adviser since 2016. Top White House aide Jake Sullivan visited Beijing last month, where he held talks with senior army official Zhang Youxia.



US and Chinese flags are set up at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. — Reuters

Sullivan’s meeting with Zhang saw the officials agree to hold a call between the two sides’ theatre commanders in the near future, the White House said.

Meanwhile, Russian and Chinese warships began joint drills in the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, part of a major naval exercise that will see Moscow sail through waters spanning the Northern Hemisphere and Pacific.

Moscow and Beijing have deepened military and economic cooperation in recent years, as both countries seek to counterbalance what they see as a United States-led global order. — **AFP**

Floods inundate north Vietnam

HANOI: Severe floods are expected to inundate parts of Vietnam’s north, including the capital Hanoi, government officials said, as the aftermath of typhoon Yagi, the most powerful storm to hit Asia so far this year, continues to extract a deadly toll.

Typhoon Yagi, the landslides and floods it triggered have killed at least 127 people, and 54 others are missing in northern Vietnam, the disaster management agency said on Tuesday. Most of the victims were killed in landslides and flash floods, the agency said in a report. Nearly 764 people have been injured, it added.

Other northern areas, including the industrial hubs of Bac Giang and Thai Nguyen which host factories of several export-oriented multinationals including Samsung Electronics and Apple supplier Foxconn, are also facing severe flooding, state media reported. It was not immediately clear if the companies were affected.

The typhoon made landfall on Vietnam’s northeastern coast, devastating a large swath of



A man standing on Long Bien Bridge looks down at houses partially submerged in floodwaters in Hanoi. — AFP

Typhoon Yagi, the landslides and floods it triggered have killed at least 127 people, and 54 others are missing in northern Vietnam

industrial and residential areas and bringing heavy rains that caused floods and landslides. It had previously hit the Philippines

and the southern Chinese island of Hainan.

Several rivers in northern Vietnam have risen to alarming levels, leaving villages and residential areas inundated, according to the disaster agency and state media.

A 30-year-old bridge over the Red River in the northern province of Phu Tho collapsed on Monday, leaving eight missing, according to a statement from the provincial

People’s Committee.

Authorities have subsequently banned or limited traffic on other bridges across the river, including Chuong Duong Bridge, one of the largest in Hanoi, according to state media reports.

“Water levels on the Red River are rising rapidly,” the government said on Tuesday in a post on its Facebook account.

Using public loudspeakers commonly used to broadcast Communist propaganda in the past, officials warned residents of the capital’s riverside Long Bien district to be on alert for possible flooding, and to be ready to evacuate the area.

Flood waters have already inundated villages on the outskirts of Hanoi, state broadcaster VTV reported, and authorities were already evacuating residents from there.

Evacuations were also taking place from flood-prone areas in Bac Giang province, the government said. More than 4,600 soldiers have been deployed in the province to support the evacuation and support flood victims. — **Reuters**

Senegal intercepts more than 400 illegal migrants

Senegal’s navy says it intercepted two large canoes carrying more than 420 illegal migrants a day after a boat sank off the coast of the West African country killing at least nine people.

Twenty children were among the 421 people picked up by a naval offshore patrol vessel.

The navy did not say where it stopped the two large motorised open canoes known as pirogues, or what nationality the people onboard were.

On Sunday, a pirogue “in-



involved in irregular emigration” capsized off the coast of the western town of Mbour.

In recent toll, at least nine people died and others were missing. — **AFP**

Rains trigger flooding Myanmar border town

Days of rain have lashed the Myanmar town of Tachileik and triggered flooding that has knocked out power and telephone lines.

Images from the town bordering with Thailand showed people riding motorcycles through streets under red-brown waters and residents trying to bail out flooded shops and houses.

“Many people are stuck and my friends are stuck at their offices and cannot leave,” Tachileik resident Phoo Phoo said.



Telephone and electricity lines in the town, home to at least 60,000 people, were down. Thailand’s weather office said more heavy to very heavy rains were likely in the north on Wednesday. — **AFP**

Djibouti offers port-sharing deal to Ethiopia

Djibouti said it has offered a port-sharing deal with Addis Ababa, a move aimed at easing tensions between Horn of Africa rivals Ethiopia and Somalia. The memorandum of understanding (MoU) gives Ethiopia access to the sea.

Djibouti Foreign Minister Mahamoud Ali Youssouf said his government was offering to operate its port of Tadjoura jointly with Ethiopia.

“What we have proposed to the Ethiopians is not to sell the



port of Tadjoura. There has never been any question of ceding or selling the port,” he said. “It is a national heritage that will never be sold off to anyone,” he added. — **AFP**



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In brief

ATHENS



SUICIDE THREAT PROVOKES GREEK MINISTRY EVACUATION

A ministry in Greece's capital, Athens, was evacuated on Tuesday after a refugee threatened to blow himself up in a nearby building. Journalists said the bare-chested man, clutching a knife, was pacing a sixth-floor balcony near the agriculture ministry and balancing over the edge.

Greek media had earlier reported that he had threatened to blow up a gas canister and throw himself off the balcony. Police cordoned off traffic in the area and evacuated the ministry as a precaution. Firefighters positioned a rescue air cushion under the balcony. After about four hours, elite police broke into the apartment and arrested him.

— AFP

FLORIDA



SPACEX LAUNCHES FIRST CIVILIAN CREW FOR SPACEWALK

SpaceX launched its daring Polaris Dawn mission on Tuesday, a multiday orbital expedition carrying a four-member civilian crew for the first spacewalk by non-professional astronauts. The crew, led by Shift4 Payments CEO Jared Isaacman, is also aiming to fly deeper into space than any other manned mission in more than half a century, reaching a peak altitude of 1,400 kilometres.

The highlight of the mission will be the first spacewalk composed entirely of non-professionals, who are wearing sleek, newly developed SpaceX extravehicular activity (EVA) suits outfitted with heads-up displays, helmet cameras, and an advanced joint mobility system.

— AFP

LYON



4 ITALIAN, KOREAN CLIMBERS FOUND DEAD ON MONT BLANC

Four climbers from Italy and South Korea were found dead on the Alps' highest peak of Mont Blanc on Tuesday after they had been missing for three days in bad weather. The mountaineers had "died of exhaustion," the Haute-Savoie prefecture said, adding that rescuers who finally reached the site found the two Koreans first, close by the two Italians.

A helicopter from the PGHM mountain police based in Annecy was able to land and found the bodies between 100 and 200 metres from the summit. "The bodies have been brought down" from the mountain and "the families informed," it said

— AFP

Ukraine targets Moscow in massive attack

MOSCOW: Ukraine targeted the Russian capital on Tuesday in its biggest drone attack so far, killing at least one and wrecking dozens of homes in the Moscow region and forcing around 50 flights to be diverted from airports around Moscow.

Russia said it had destroyed at least 20 Ukrainian attack drones as they swarmed over the Moscow region, which has a population of more than 21 million, and 124 more over eight other regions.

At least one person was killed near Moscow, Russian authorities said. Three of Moscow's four airports were closed for more than six hours and almost 50 flights were diverted.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that the drone attack was another reminder of the real nature of Ukraine's political leadership, which he said was made up of Russia's enemies.

"There is no way that night time strikes on residential neighbourhoods can be associated with military action," said Peskov.

"The Kyiv regime continues to demonstrate its nature. They are our enemies and we must continue the special military operation to protect ourselves from such actions," he said, using the expression Moscow uses to



A view shows a damaged multi-storey residential building, in Ramenskoye in Moscow. – Reuters

describe its war in Ukraine.

Kyiv said Russia, which sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine in February 2022, had attacked it overnight with 46 drones, of which 38 were

destroyed.

The drone attacks on Russia damaged at high-rise apartment buildings in the Ramenskoye district of the Moscow region, setting flats on fire, residents said.

A 46-year-old woman was killed and three people were wounded in Ramenskoye, Moscow regional governor Andrei Vorobyov said.

The Ramenskoye district, some

Russia said it had destroyed at least 20 Ukrainian attack drones as they swarmed over the Moscow region and 124 more over eight other regions

50 km southeast of the Kremlin, has a population of around a quarter of a million people. More than 70 drones were also downed over Russia's Bryansk region and tens more over other regions, Russia's defence ministry said.

As Russia advances in eastern Ukraine, Kyiv has taken the war to Russia with a cross-border attack into Russia's western Kursk region that began on Aug. 6 and by carrying out increasingly large drone attacks deep into Russian territory.

The war has largely been a grinding artillery and drone war along the 1,000 km heavily fortified front line in southern and eastern Ukraine involving hundreds of thousands of soldiers.

Moscow and Kyiv have both sought to buy and develop new drones, deploy them in innovative ways, and seek new ways to destroy them - from using shotguns to advanced electronic jamming systems.

— Reuters

Spanish court shelves Franco-era torture case

MADRID: A court in Spain has shelved the first case and only probe into alleged torture under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, according to a ruling made public on Tuesday.

Julio Pacheco Yepes, 68, was questioned by a judge in September 2023 — the first time someone who says they were detained and tortured during the Franco era testified at a Spanish court. He was 19 when he was arrested in Madrid in August 1975 for belonging to a left-wing underground movement that opposed the regime.

His detention happened just three months before the death of Franco, who ruled until the end of Spain's 1936-39 civil war.

The former printer said he was tortured for several days at the Madrid police headquarters before being jailed for "terrorism".

Pacheco Yepes filed a lawsuit against his four alleged torturers in February 2023, a year after Spain's left-wing government passed a democratic memory

law to tackle the legacy of the civil war and the ensuing dictatorship, and to honour victims of violence and persecution under Franco.

A Madrid court in May 2023 accepted the case, saying there was possible evidence of "crimes against humanity and torture".

But it closed the case on July 31 on the grounds that the time limit for filing criminal charges had passed, and because the alleged crimes fell under an amnesty law passed in 1977 during the transition to democracy — arguments used by courts in the past to routinely reject lawsuits filed by victims of the regime.

"Jurisprudence has not changed after the enactment of the democratic memory law," the court wrote in its ruling.

Pacheco Yepes said he had appealed the decision and was prepared to "keep fighting it" all the way to the Constitutional Court and European courts. "It's devastating," he said, adding he felt "anger".

— AFP



Franco's victim Julio Pacheco (2L), and his wife Rosa Maria Garcia Alcon (2R), hold a banner depicting photographs of other victims outside the courthouse in Madrid. – AFP

Starmer vows 'partnership' with unions



British Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference in Brighton, Britain. – Reuters

BRIGHTON: Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Tuesday pledged to reset industrial relations strained by widespread strike action, as he became the first UK leader to address the annual meeting of Britain's trade unions in 15 years.

The speech came amid early tensions between the young government and major unions over plans to cut energy benefits for millions of pensioners.

Starmer's Labour Party billed the speech as a powerful symbol that the centre-left party is back in government after nearly a decade and a half of Conservative rule.

"Partnership is a more difficult way of doing politics," Starmer said, seeking to draw a line under years of strike action and tensions between unions and the previous administration.

Labour has historically been allied with trade union organisations, which contribute a substantial amount to the party's income. The Trade Union Congress

It's time to turn the page -- business and unions, the private and public sector united by common cause, to rebuild our public services

KEIR STARMER
UK prime minister

(TUC), the umbrella body of 48 member unions comprising more than 5.5 million working people, helped found Labour in the early 20th century.

Gordon Brown was the last premier to deliver a speech to its conference in 2009.

"It's time to turn the page – business and unions, the private and public sector united by common cause, to rebuild our public services and grow our economy in a new way," Starmer, 62, told TUC delegates in the seaside resort

of Brighton.

He warned, however, that decisions on pay would be shaped by "tough decisions" needed to protect the public finances – repeating his mantra that the Conservatives left Labour with a dire economic inheritance when they vacated office following a landslide election defeat in early July.

"No one in this room wants to hear such a gloomy forecast, I get that," said Starmer, adding though that he would not "risk" Labour's "mandate for economic stability, under any circumstances".

Labour has also laid out proposals to legally ban practices such as "fire and rehire" and to ban zero-hours contracts, which leave workers without a minimum number of hours to be worked. That has prompted concern among business leaders, while Starmer said his government would also scrap legislation introduced by the Conservatives that set higher thresholds for strike action.

— AFP

Trump-Harris clash could reshape 2024 race



Joseph Ax

The writer is National Affairs Reporter at Reuters

Republican US presidential candidate Donald Trump and Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris will meet in their first and perhaps only debate on Tuesday, a clash that could prove pivotal in their pitched battle for the White House.

The ABC News-hosted debate at 9 pm ET (01:00 GMT on Wednesday) takes place just eight weeks before the November 5 election, with both candidates locked in a tight race that could still easily swing in either direction. Early voting will start in some states just days after the debate.

The encounter is particularly important for Harris, with opinion polls showing that more than a quarter of likely voters feel they do not yet know enough about her, in contrast to the well-known Trump. The nationally televised debate also offers Harris, a former prosecutor, a chance to make her case against Trump, whose felony convictions, outspoken backing for supporters convicted of the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol and frequent falsehoods all offer plenty of fertile ground.

It will be the first time the two candidates have met and follows weeks of personal attacks on Harris

by Trump and his allies that have included racist and sexist insults.

A similar outburst on stage could turn off undecided voters, according to John Geer, a professor at Vanderbilt University and an expert on presidential politics.

Trump’s advisers and fellow Republicans have urged him to focus on Tuesday on illegal immigration and high prices, issues that play well with voters, and portraying Harris as too liberal for the country.

“There’s no floor for him in terms of how low he will go, and we should be prepared for that,” Harris said in a radio interview that aired on Monday.

Presidential debates do not always move the needle, but they can transform the dynamics of a race. President Joe Biden’s faltering performance against Trump in June was so damaging that it eventually led him to abandon his campaign. In a contest that could again come down to tens of thousands of votes in a handful of states, even a small shift in public opinion could alter the outcome. The two candidates are effectively tied in the seven battleground states likely to decide the

THE ENCOUNTER IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR KAMALA HARRIS, WITH OPINION POLLS SHOWING THAT MORE THAN A QUARTER OF LIKELY VOTERS FEEL THEY DO NOT YET KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT HER

election, according to polling averages compiled by the New York Times.

“There is more for Kamala Harris to gain and more for her to lose,” said Mitchell McKinney, a former adviser to the US Commission on Presidential Debates, since she remains somewhat of an unknown for many voters.

Viewers will be looking for where she stands on various issues. But just as important, they will be looking to see how she handles herself against Trump.

Trump, by contrast, is already well defined. “You’re either for him or against him” at this point, McKinney said.

The 90-minute debate will take place at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. As agreed by the campaigns, there will be no live audience and microphones will be muted when it is not a candidate’s turn to speak.

Harris has been preparing in Pittsburgh since last Thursday, holding mock sessions on a stage with lights to recreate the debate environment. Philippe Reines, a former Hillary Clinton aide, is playing Trump.

Ban on plastic bags in US state reduces beach pollution

ISSAM AHMED

Statewide bans on plastic bags in the United States have led to significant reductions in the number of bags found on beaches and waterways, according to a scientific analysis.

The number of grocery bags collected by volunteers for Ocean Conservancy’s International Coastal Cleanup (ICC) doubled during the Covid-19 pandemic, a period marked by a surge in plastic bag use and the temporary suspension of bans.

But since 2020, as the percentage of the US population covered by statewide bans has risen from 12 to 25 per cent, there has been a 29 per cent reduction in the number of bags collected per volunteer from 2022-23 compared to pre-pandemic levels (2013-2019).

California was the first of eleven states to pass a plastic bag ban, effective since 2015.

“Plastic bags are well-known to be one of the most deadly types of plastic pollution in our oceans,” Anja Brandon, Ocean Conservancy’s director of plastics policy, said.

“We were really excited to see that with the increase in percentage of Americans who are covered by a strong plastic bag ban, we see less plastic bag pollution within our ICC dataset,” added Brandon, an environmental engineer who has helped draft state and national legislation on plastic pollution.

The data was drawn from the ICC, an annual international cleanup effort that has run since 1986, as well as other voluntary cleanup efforts recorded in the Clean Swell app or data sheets that contribute to Ocean Conservancy’s marine litter database.

Ocean Conservancy applies statistical methods to weigh the citizen-science data, accounting for variations in the volume of information gathered across different locations.

As the largest database of its kind, the ICC data informs scientists, conservationists and policymakers. It has played a key role in shaping two California laws on plastic pollution and Florida’s balloon release ban, which passed earlier this year. Turtles and birds mistake plastic bags as jellyfish and ingest them.

“Once they’re ingested, they can bunch up and coil inside the stomach or intestines on an animal,” explained Brandon. This can cause blockages and leave them unable to feed, leading to starvation. It can also impact turtles’ buoyancy, preventing them from swimming down.

The analysis comes ahead of the next round of UN plastic treaty talks, set to take place in Busan, South Korea, in November. — AFP

Unseen fight against racism...



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As the world resumes full activity each September, one issue remains as heated and relevant as ever: the global fight against racism and racial discrimination. The United Nations defines racial discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.” Over centuries, this has evolved into an institutional force, deeply rooted in humanity’s historic pursuit of power, land, social status, and wealth.

In the Sultanate of Oman, as in many nations, significant steps have been taken to address racial discrimination. Oman is actively engaged in global efforts through initiatives like the Supreme Judicial Council’s participation in the UN’s International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. At a societal level, public discussions on platforms like Oman Radio’s English FM programmes encourage reflection and dialogue. Recently, a discussion led by Asma and Shaikh Hatim al Abdusalam delved on the roots and remedies for racism. These conversations are critical, as racism affects every society. I have personally witnessed its lasting impact in various communities, both abroad and at home.

Islamic teachings trace the origins of discrimination to arrogance. In the creation story, God asks Satan, “What prevented you from bowing to Adam?” Satan replies, “I am better than him. You created me from fire, but you created him from clay.” (Holy Quran, Surat Al A’raf). This sense of superiority based on one’s origin is the root cause of discrimination. Arrogance leads individuals to justify harmful actions against others they deem inferior.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought to counter these destructive tendencies by setting strong legal precedents. A notable example was his decision to uphold the rule of law even against his own uncle, Al Abbas, showing there would be no favouritism. The Prophet also emphasised that the law would apply equally to his own daughter, Fatima. Moreover, key figures pivotal in the establishment of Islam, such as Bilal the Abyssinian, Salman the Persian, and Suhaib the Roman,

came from diverse backgrounds. These figures exemplify the Islamic emphasis on belonging to a community united by faith, not by race. While these early efforts eradicated overt forms of racial discrimination, such as enslavement, subtler forms of discrimination have persisted. In fact, fighting for self-awareness and reflection over the origins of these internal, subtler forms of discrimination is known as the little Jihad.

Enslavement stands as the most heinous form of racial discrimination, a historical injustice that has scarred nearly every race. However, Black people and those with darker skin tones have borne the brunt of this atrocity, with tens of millions perishing across oceans, fields, and deserts. This legacy has left generations with diminished

access to basic human rights, from jobs to housing, to opportunities in marriage and representation, creating a vicious cycle of trauma and socio-economic immobility.

Even today, expatriate workers and immigrants often face discrimination as they seek better opportunities for their families. Their vulnerability makes them easy targets for racial prejudice, and globally, many marginalised groups continue to experience exclusion, whether through economic disparity, social marginalisation, or outright violence.

THE IMPACT

The consequences of racial discrimination run deep and are often immeasurable. Fear and silence often accompany these experiences, stripping victims of the motivation and opportunity to improve their lives.

While many nations have embraced Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEI&B) policies, these efforts have not fully succeeded in addressing the deeper, more insidious effects of racism.

Recent events serve as stark reminders. In the United States, racial violence, such as lynchings of Black individuals, has persisted even in the 21st century. In 2024, emerging technologies like AI-assisted systems like Lavender and killer drones are increasingly being used to target and intimidate marginalised communities, particularly those from the Global South who oppose genocide and war crimes. These acts result not only in loss of life and property but also in the erosion of dignity across generations.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Achieving a post-racist world requires more than external policies; it calls for deep internal reflection. At some point, each of us has felt a sense of superiority, believing we are “children of fire” while others are “children of clay.” Recognising this internal bias is difficult, but it is crucial. The fight against racism must evolve beyond policies and public discourse. The real challenge lies in confronting and overcoming the arrogance that fuels discrimination.

To truly combat racism, a multi-faceted approach is required. Nations must continue to strengthen legal frameworks, including reparations to address the historical and systemic harms inflicted upon marginalised groups. These frameworks must enforce anti-discrimination laws and foster continuous public dialogue on race. However, these efforts must be complemented by individual self-awareness. Regular reflection on our biases, coupled with education that emphasises empathy and inclusion from an early age, can dismantle the subtler forms of racial superiority that still linger today.

By addressing both the internal and external facets of racism, we can move closer to a society where all people are treated with equal dignity and respect. Only through this collective effort — grounded in humility, justice, and empathy — can we hope to create a post-racist world where the division between “fire” and “clay” is rendered obsolete.

A city of natural beauty and culture

For any visitor, the appeal of a city is based on its vibrant art and architecture, geographical setting, unique cultural identity, etc. While plenty of urban destinations are scenic during the day, many of them really shine differently at night!

We know most cities are characterised by landmarks that make them more beautiful and charming for the eyes and take on a new persona at night under the stars, the soft glow of the moon, and electric illuminations.

Those historic buildings evoke emotions in their spectators and make them able to see the smallest architectural details that glow under lights. This sight probably has fascinated writers, musicians, poets, storytellers, philosophers, scientists and dreamers in their real or fictional narratives.

But for cities to get ranked as the most scenic nighttime destinations in the world, low light and noise pollution levels and the safety of walking alone at night are factors that make them to the top positions.

Travelbag ranked Muscat as the third most scenic city in the world at night, after Dubai and Tokyo, leaving Singapore, Hiroshima, Kyoto, New York City, Sydney, Abu Dhabi and Taipei behind.

This ranking makes us happy, enriches its position in our hearts, and brings it to the top of the global tourism and cultural map.

“Oman’s capital city is becoming one of the prettiest cities at night. And we’re not surprised, as exploring this incredibly picturesque city after sunset is something everyone should add to their bucket list,” said Travelbag, a company specialising in multi-destination trips, while declaring the ranking in its report.

Travelbag experts assessed 136 of the world’s most popular cities to identify the top 10 cities to explore after dark.

Factors such as Instagram hashtags, levels of light and noise



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

RANKING OF MUSCAT AS SCENIC CITY IN THE WORLD AT NIGHT MAKES US HAPPY, AND ENRICHES ITS POSITION IN OUR HEARTS AND BRINGS IT ON THE TOP OF GLOBAL TOURISM AND CULTURAL MAP

pollution, and nighttime safety were analysed to compile the rankings.

“The low light pollution in Muscat, at 29.9, means you can easily see stars at night, even in the city’s centre”, said Travelbag, the long-haul travel specialist, in the report.

No doubt, Muscat is one of the oldest and most charming and beautiful cities in the Middle East. Between its Sea Road areas and its modern neighbourhoods, lie those Portuguese-style forts, blue-domed mosques, royal palaces, old markets and other landmarks all bearing the character and atmosphere of ancient Arab life.

In this regard, the Travelbag report highlights the elegant Royal Opera House Muscat, shopping for textiles and antiques at Muttrah Souq, and the beauty of the commanding silhouettes of historic forts and palaces.

Reflecting contemporary Omani architecture, the stunning Royal Opera House Muscat is a world-class musical venue and showcases beautifully designed marble, inlaid wood and arabesque design.

ANCIENT PAST

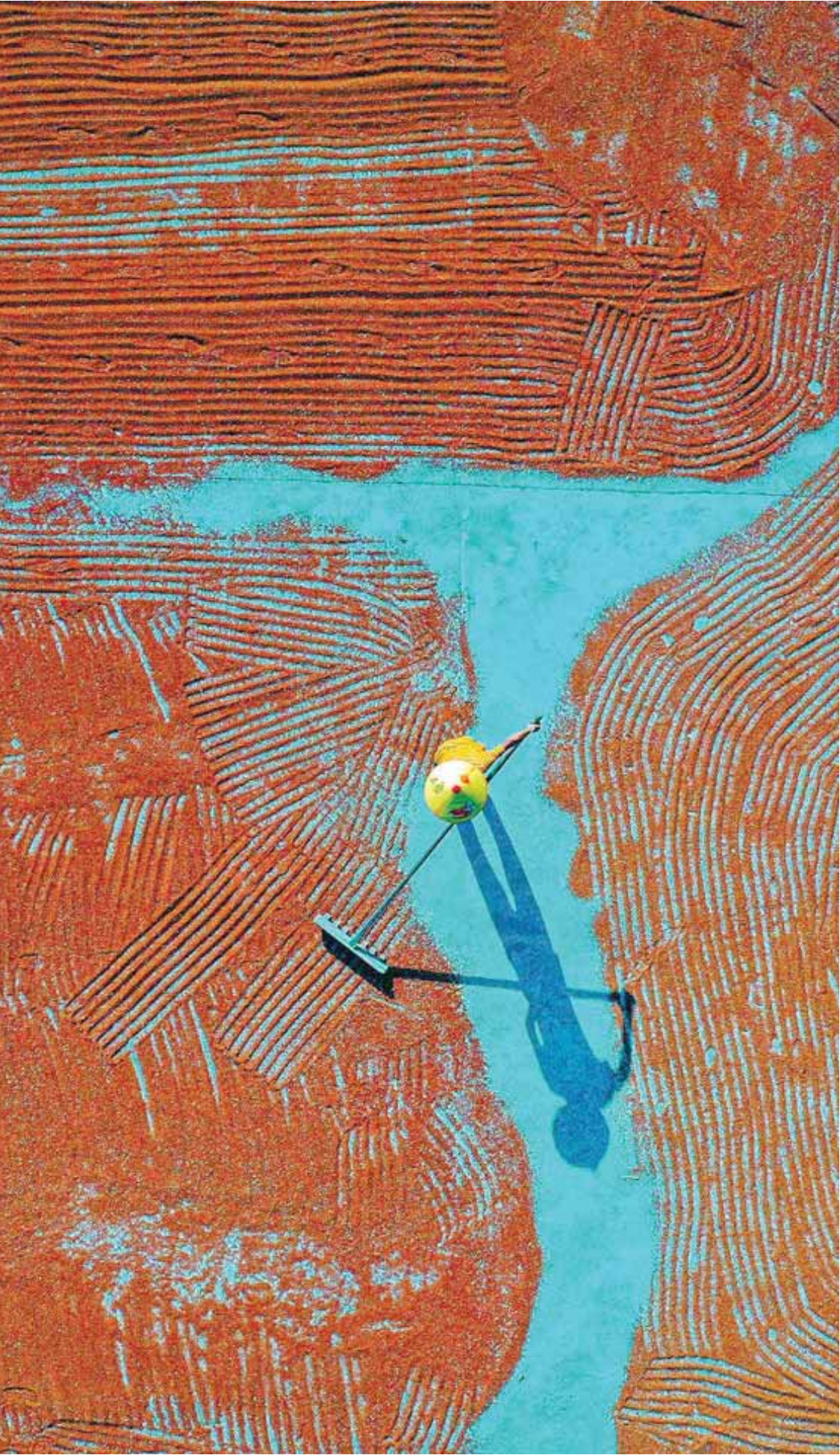
Muttrah Souq is a destination for visitors from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman to enjoy the fragrance of the ancient past, reflected in its old handicrafts and a number of different goods.

It is a typical old market with shops selling traditional Arab perfumes, handicrafts, traditional clothes, antique furniture, gold and silverware, and Omani artefacts, some of which are quite fascinating.

The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque is the biggest mosque in the country and can accommodate up to 20,000 worshippers. The design of the mosque reflects both Omani and Islamic architectural styles.

Oman has hundreds of forts, castles and towers scattered along the length and breadth of this picturesque country. They are a major attraction to international and domestic tourists.

DRYING SORGHUM



The photo taken on Tuesday shows a villager drying sorghum at a village in southwestern China’s Chongqing municipality. – AFP

Protesting ethically...

Climate protesters have disrupted the tennis at Wimbledon, thrown tomato soup at the glass protecting famous paintings, sprayed orange powder on Stonehenge and blocked traffic. In response, European governments have been cracking down on environmental protesters with detentions and fines, and, in one case, with a five-year prison sentence for advocating civil disobedience in a Zoom call.

Whether a protest is ethical is distinct from whether it is legal. As Martin Luther King, Jr, argued in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” protesters who engage in civil disobedience show their respect for the law when they behave nonviolently and accept the penalty that the law imposes.

We agree that nonviolence is a crucial element in an ethical protest, and that protesters who live in a democracy with safeguards against excessive penalties for nonviolent political actions should be willing to accept the penalty that the law imposes. But what counts as an excessive penalty depends on how much inconvenience protesters can ethically inflict on the public.

We suggest adapting the internationally recognised principle of proportionality in war. That principle prohibits military actions when the harm to civilians is disproportionate to the military advantage gained. To target a single enemy commander, while foreseeing that the method used will kill hundreds of innocent civilians, is wrong.



Peter Singer

The writer is Founder of the nonprofit organisation The Life You Can Save, is Emeritus Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University



Martin Skladany

The writer is Professor of Law at Penn State

Applying this approach to nonviolent protests in liberal democracies has four aspects. First, a “protest proportionality principle” should attempt to balance the annoyance to others against the number of citizens protesting. If a million people join a protest march, it is inevitable that they will fill the street, stopping traffic.

Princeton University professor Zeynep Tufekci is correct that contemporary mass protests have lost gravitas because social media has made them so much easier to organise. Instead of investing years building bonds between like-minded individuals and then leveraging such grassroots efforts to culminate in a national protest, organisers can simply send a tweet with a time and place to meet.

Yet such ease of communication does not invalidate the difference between five protesters and 500,000. People still have to be willing to give up their time and make the effort to turn out. Vast numbers of protesters tell a democracy that something may be fundamentally wrong (although it is also possible that the protesters are wrong).

The second component of the protest proportionality principle is the importance of the issue relative to the inconvenience caused. Just because protesters are few in number does not necessarily make their actions wrong. The

art-targeting climate activists are trying to spur us to action against a slow-motion crisis that has already harmed millions, and without drastic action, will alter our planet’s climate in ways that harm billions. Even a small chance of waking people up to the need for change outweighs the disappointment of many tourists who are temporarily unable to see the Mona Lisa.

Of course, protesters tend to believe that their cause is crucial. If they are wrong, the protest may be unethical, even if it causes only minor inconvenience.

The third consideration is whether activists intend to inflict significant inconvenience or seek to minimise disruption. Protesters feel they are trapped in

an activist’s dilemma: the easiest way to gain publicity is to protest in a disruptive way that might turn public opinion against their cause. To break through the media fog, they believe they must cause mass inconvenience.

It can be hard to think of creative ways to let others know about injustice without disturbing their lives, but it can be done. Instead of disrupting a Christmas tree lighting for kids, protesters could hold a rogue tree-planting event in a public park. The originality of such a protest could go viral, while also ensuring that any response by bureaucrats, such as removing the newly planted trees, would only add to the media coverage.

Intentionally inflicting

inconvenience is not necessarily unethical; it must be weighed in relation to the other protest proportionality factors, including who is being inconvenienced. This is the fourth factor. A dozen climate protesters blocking thousands of people from driving their kids to school or going to work is more ethically worrisome than disrupting the routine of those with the power to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. It is more ethical to inconvenience politicians and bureaucrats in their official capacity than the public. For democracies to function, public officials must know the views of citizens. Yet protesters need to consider the importance of the services to be disrupted. Interrupting a politicians’ meeting with corporate lobbyists is easier to justify than blocking the provision of public services.

Whether we are assessing international conflicts or nonviolent protests, the principle of proportionality will not yield precise answers. Yet ethical considerations remain vital. Unethical activism, even when nonviolent, can easily spur counter-protests that spiral into violence. The principle of proportionality can serve as a useful guide to the factors that protesters should consider, enabling us to defend the right to protest while also specifying protesters’ ethical responsibilities.

@Project Syndicate, 2024



Nonviolence is a crucial element in an ethical protest.

sport

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South Korea's forward and captain #07 Son Heung-min celebrates with his striker #11 Hwang Hee-chan after the latter scored a goal during the 2026 Fifa World Cup Asian qualification match between Oman and South Korea in Muscat. – AFP

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

South Korean superstar Son Heung-Min turned on the style with great involvement in the match, scoring one goal and providing assists for two others as they beat hosts Oman 3-1 in an entertaining World Cup 2026 Asian qualifier Group B match in Muscat on Tuesday.

This was Oman's second straight loss in Group B after their opening 1-0 loss to Iraq in Baghdad. Oman are at the bottom of the group with no points.

South Korea boosted their position to second in the group with four points, behind leaders Jordan on the same points after they beat Palestine 3-1.

At the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, Hwang Hee-Chan put the Koreans in the lead in the 10th minute. Oman equalised in injury time of the first half through an own goal by the South Korean defender.

Captain Son put South Korea in the lead in the 82nd minute while Joo Min-Kyu netted the third goal for them in the 11th minute of added time.

Oman were cheered by home fans as the stadium attendance was 27,144 for the match.

The qualifier started with South Korea pressing ahead with continuous attacks. In the fourth minute, Lee Kang-In's dangerous shot was acrobatically saved by Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini.

Their early push yielded results as Hwang Hee-Chan scored in the 10th minute to give a 1-0 lead to South Korea. Son provided a nice assist from the left flank, and Hee-Chan's right-footed shot



Oman and South Korea players fight for the ball at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. – Faisal al Balushi

from outside the box entered the bottom left corner of Oman's goal.

In the 20th minute, Lee Myung-Jae's left-footed shot from outside the box was brilliantly saved by Oman keeper Al Mukhaini, preventing any addition to the South Korean score.

Next, Oman's Abdulah Fawaz cleared a Korean attack with a sliding tackle.

In the 23rd minute, South Korea came up with another attempt, which the Oman defence cleared for a corner. Hwang

In-Beom's left-footed shot from outside the box missed to the right after a header assist by Hwang Hee-Chan following a corner.

In the 25th minute, Hwang In-Beom passed to Jung Seung-Hyun, whose shot to the bottom right corner was saved by the Oman goalkeeper.

Oman then slowly started to organise attacks, and Ali al Busaidy's left-footed shot from outside the box was too high after a pass from Abdullah Fawaz in the 31st minute.

EQUALISER

In the 37th minute, Jameel al Yahmadi's right-footed shot from the right side of the box after a header pass from Amjad al Harthy went close but missed to the right.

As it seemed the Koreans would go to the break with a 1-0 lead, Oman struck the equaliser.

In additional time of the first half, Mohammed al Musallami won a free kick for Oman on the left wing after a foul by Seol Young-Woo, who received a yellow card.

The free kick, taken by Harib

al Saadi, was headed narrowly by Abdulrahman al Mushaifri but was deflected by South Korean defender Jung Seung-Hyun into his own net to make it one-all at half-time. In the second half, Oman survived a penalty appeal on VAR in the 52nd minute.

Looking for a winner, Oman head coach Jaroslav Silhavy replaced Nasser al Rawahi with Omar al Malki in the 65th minute. In the next minute, Oman was forced to make an injury substitution when Khalid al Braiki replaced Ahmed al

Khamisi.

In the 68th minute, South Korean manager Myong-Bo Hong opted for a double substitution. Lee Jae-Sung and Hwang Mun-Ki came in for Oh Se-Hun and Seol Young-Woo respectively.

In the 69th minute, Oman missed a great opportunity when Muhsen al Ghassani failed to pass effectively to his on-rushing teammate at the Korean box with only goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-Woo to beat.

In the 79th minute, Oman replaced defender Mohammed al Musallami with Ghanim al Habashi and midfielder Abdulrahman al Mushaifri with striker Issam al Subhi.

SON ACT

In the 82nd minute, Son made an impact again as his left-footed shot from outside the box beat Ibrahim al Mukhaini to the bottom left corner for a 2-1 lead for South Korea. Lee Kang-In provided the key assist.

In the 85th minute, Korea Republic brought in Jung Woo-Young in place of Park Yong-Woo. In the 88th minute, Ali al Busaidy's shot missed the target narrowly for a corner after a pass from Zahir al Aghbari. In the next minute, Al Busaidy's brilliant cross came dangerously close to the goal.

Referee added 16 minutes of stoppage time due to injuries and humid conditions during the match.

In the 11th minute of added time, Son provided another vital assist as Joo Min-Kyu made no mistake with his right-footed shot from outside the box to the bottom left corner of the Omani goal.

Marwan, Bamakhalif re-elected to top posts

MOOSA AL BALUSHI TO LEAD HANDBALL ASSOCIATION

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

The Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) re-elected Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhalif as Chairman of OTTA for the 2024-2028 term. Sajad Mohammed Baqer earned the confidence of the general assembly members to be elected as vice-chairman. Sameer bin Shneen al Shukaili is the new face in the board after getting elected for the mandatory women's seat.

Three members were also selected for the Board of Directors including a new face in Majid bin Marhoon al Alawi while Mohammed al Jassasi and Masoud al Shaqsi, who is representing the athletes' committee will continue as board members. One member seat in the board is still vacant and will be occupied in the upcoming meeting of the General Assembly in coming March.

Seven clubs out of 10 attended the meeting including Seeb, Ibri, Ahli Sidab, Saham, Salalah, Qurayat, Yanqul and Masirah.

Abdullah Bamakhalif began his speech with thanking note to all members of the current board for their dedicated efforts despite the challenges faced. He also extended the clubs for their active role in supporting the association's programmes and competitions, and to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their continuous support, as well as to the Oman Olympic Committee for their ongoing cooperation.

"The OTTA had managed to



host 10 international tournaments over the past term as well as the major achievement of organising the World Table Tennis Veterans Championship in January 2023 with the participation of 1,600 players from 69 countries across the world. There were establishment of 10 youth centres across various sports complexes and clubs in Oman," he pointed out.

HOCKEY OMAN
Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, was re-elected as chairman of Oman Hockey Association (OHA) for another four-year term (2024-2028). This was announced during the Extraordinary General Assembly meeting of OHA on Monday in presence of all assembly general members and representatives of Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Said bin Khalfan al Maamari, who was a board member in the previous term, was elected as vice-chairman in the new term. Rodaina bint Amer al Hajriyah managed to earn the confidence of the assembly general members after she received nine votes while her competitor Hanan al Harrasi got two votes only. Additionally, three members were appointed to the Board of Directors including



Dr Marwan al Juma

Ahmed bin Nasser al Darmaki, Hamad bin Mohammed al Batrani and Abdulrahman bin Mohammed al Balushi. Thani bin Saheem al Wahaibi was elected as the athletes committee representative on the board.

Dr Marwan al Juma, Chairman of OHA, affirmed that the previous term of the board has been filled with hard work and dedication. "I extend my thanks to the previous board for their tremendous efforts in enhancing the association's work. We focused on several pillars including the development of youth teams and the establishment of a women's national team to build a foundation for this important sector.

Furthermore, OHA worked on improving the overall structure of the sport by developing referees, coaches and players. We hope to see more clubs participating in the General Assembly and in the various competitions organised by the association. We will certainly continue our journey to build a robust structure for Omani

hockey in the coming period."

"We managed to organise several regional and international tournaments including the top global profile event represented by the opening edition of FIH Hockey5s World Cup Muscat 2024. This event was appreciated highly by the International Hockey Federation (FIH) and the participating countries. Our national teams also achieved several other accomplishments, alongside specialised programmes for all categories. This success was not by chance but rather the result of the hard work of the board members, association staff and various committees, as well as the support from the media," he signed off.

HANDBALL ASSOCIATION
Moosa al Balushi earned the trust and confidence of general assembly members of Oman Handball Associations (OHA) after he was elected as the chairman of OHA for the new term. Moosa was the Secretary-General of the previous board and he beat his competitor Mohammed al Musharafi in the election for chairman's post. Newcomer Yaqoob al Wahaibi was elected as vice-chairman while Abeer al Zadjali will continue in her role as board member for the women's mandatory seat.

The new board members were Iyad al Shanfari, Salim al Saadi and Mohammed al Dhoeri while Nasr al Hasani was elected as board member from the athletes committee.

Saudi Arabia's 10 men fight back to beat China



Saudi Arabia's Hassan Kadish (C) celebrates after a goal during the 2026 Fifa World Cup qualifier against China in Dalian, China. — AFP

DALIAN, CHINA: China face a struggle to qualify for the 2026 World Cup as they followed their 7-0 drubbing in Japan last week with a 2-1 defeat against 10-man Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

China went ahead in the 14th minute in Dalian through an Ali Lajami own goal but failed to take advantage of Saudi midfielder Mohamed Kanno being red-carded a few minutes later.

Hassan Kadish equalised with a header from a corner before half-time and repeated the feat in the last minute of the 90 to spark wild celebrations from the visitors.

China, who had registered just one shot in their match with Japan, struggled to carve out chances despite their numerical advantage.

They paid the price when the Saudis, managed by former Manchester City and Italy coach Roberto Mancini, equalised through Kadish before half-time.

As the rain poured down after the break, China began to exert pressure on a tiring Saudi

defence. Wang Shangyuan thought he had put China back ahead after bundling the ball home from a corner, only for the goal to be disallowed for offside.

At the other end, winger Salem al Dawsari went through on goal but his shot cannoned off the crossbar.

Both sides went in search of a winner, but it was Kadish who popped up unmarked again from a corner to power a header past China's goalkeeper Wang Dalei.

Boos rang around the stadium at the final whistle with Croatian manager Branko Ivankovic the target of many fans' anger.

"There are three very strong teams in our group, Japan, Australia, and Saudi Arabia," said Ivankovic. "There are still eight games left. This game was a little better than the previous one. We still have hope in the upcoming matches."

Hashtags "Chinese football. No hope" and "Ivankovic step down" began trending on social media platform Weibo minutes after the final whistle. — AFP

Oman Open concludes second round

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

The second round of the Oman Hockey5s 2024 Championship concluded at the Oman Hockey Field in Al Amerat, with 77 goals scored across 12 matches.

In Group A, the Royal Army team secured a well-deserved 3-1 victory over the Royal Guard, dominating the game. The Badr Al Samaa team also triumphed over FAP with a thrilling 4-3 win in a match that remained intense until the final moments. The Army team continued their strong performance with another win, defeating Badr Al Samaa 3-0, while the Royal Guard secured a big win over FAP with a 9-1 scoreline. The Royal Guard also beat Badr Al Samaa 5-3, and the match between the Army and FAP ended in an exciting 3-3 draw.

In Group B, the Royal Navy team defeated Jindal Shadeed 3-1, while the Al Fayha team earned a hard-fought 2-1 win over Safety and Security.

Al Fayha continued their winning streak with a 4-2 victory against Jindal Shadeed, while Safety and Security delivered a major upset by beating the Royal Navy 6-2. The group stage ended with Al Fayha winning 5-1 against the Royal Navy, and Jindal Shadeed overcoming Safety and Security with a 5-3 victory.

The final rounds are scheduled for Wednesday. In the first match, FAP will face the Royal Navy, followed by

Badr Al Samaa taking on Jindal Shadeed in the second match. In the third match, the Royal Army will play against Safety and Security, while Al Fayha will compete against the Royal Guard in the fourth.

The championship will conclude with a third-place playoff between the losers of the third and fourth matches, and the winners will face off in the final to compete for the title.

Ahmed al Hasani, an accredited referee in the Oman Hockey Association, praised the significance of holding this tournament after a six-year hiatus, emphasising that despite the long break, the championship witnessed a high level of performance.

Al Hasani pointed out that the participation of veteran players helped elevate the matches, saying, "Despite the absence of tournaments for years, the experienced players demonstrated their competence and ability to deliver a competitive performance."

Al Hasani also highlighted the importance of continuing such tournaments to improve the skills of both players and referees, noting that organising such events provides opportunities to hone abilities and gain experience.

He commended the efforts of the Oman Hockey Association in successfully organising the tournament and expressed hope that it would be a step toward achieving more accomplishments both locally and internationally.





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Divestments garner RO 1 billion in revenues over 2022-23: OIA

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

HAVING GENERATED over RO 1 billion over the 2022-2023 timeframe through divestments in its subsidiaries and affiliated companies, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has pledged to press ahead with its divestment strategy over the next five years.

In a post, the integrated sovereign wealth fund said the divestment plan over the 2024 - 2028 timeframe envisions Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) in businesses

linked to the energy, services and logistics sectors.

At the same time, strategic investments will be invited to make private placements in businesses related to agriculture, aquaculture and mining.

The new divestment strategy comes on the heels of Monday's announcement by OIA-owned OQ Group that its exploration and production unit OQEP will divest 25 per cent of its stake via an IPO and eventual listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). The IPO is anticipated to raise an estimated \$2 billion, say experts.

"The divestment plan of OIA continues to achieve its national targets," the Authority noted in its post on Monday.

"In 2022 and 2023, it successfully generated revenues exceeding RO 1 billion after divesting from 12 investments, while continuing to establish an institutional approach by updating the plan and creating steering committees to ensure its effective management."

OIA's divestment plan, launched in 2022, has the following national strategic goals: Attracting foreign investment, Deepening and expanding

the Muscat Stock Exchange, Restructuring capital for greater efficiency, Repaying debts and deleveraging, Localising new technologies, Fostering deeper partnerships with the private sector and international investors, and Reinvesting revenues from divested mature assets.

These efforts are not only reshaping Oman's economy but also positioning the nation as a regional leader in financial innovation and strategic growth.

The 12 divestments undertaken thus far include high-profile IPOs involving The Pearl REIF, Abraj Energy Services,

and OQ Gas Networks. A further nine private placements were undertaken as well.

Private placements with strategic investors, coupled with reinvesting revenue from divested mature assets, are vital components of this strategy.

A distinctive feature of Oman's Divestment Plan is its institutionalised divestment process. Steering committees have been set up in companies targeted for divestment to ensure adherence to timelines and strategies for divestment. OIA is also updating its divestment plan to cover the 2025 - 2029 period.

CBO embraces sustainability with Islamic finance initiatives

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) is stepping up its efforts to integrate sustainability into the country's financial landscape, with a particular focus on Islamic finance. Speaking at the IFN Oman Forum 2024, Tahir bin Salim Al Amri, Executive President of the CBO, outlined several key initiatives aimed at aligning Islamic banking with sustainable development goals and green finance principles.

In his address, Al Amri revealed that the CBO is in the final stages of drafting a regulatory framework for climate risk management.

This new circular will provide detailed guidelines for banks in Oman, including governance strategies for addressing climate-related risks. "We are taking decisive steps to integrate sustainability and green finance principles into the banking sector, in alignment with Oman's national vision and strategic plans," Al Amri said.

The CBO has conducted extensive consultations with the banking industry to ensure that the regulatory requirements meet both industry needs and global best practices.

The circular will serve as a foundational framework for banks to manage environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks, although the CBO is encouraging institutions to voluntarily adopt broader sustainability approaches.

Banks will have the flexibility to align their sustainability disclosures with international standards, which will further improve transparency and investor



The CBO has conducted consultations with the banking industry to ensure that the regulatory requirements meet industry needs.

confidence in Oman's financial system. Al Amri emphasised that sustainability is no longer just an option but a crucial element in maintaining competitiveness and ensuring long-term resilience. "By embracing sustainability, banks and financial institutions can not only contribute to a more resilient and sustainable economy but also enhance their reputation and long-term competitiveness," he added.

Beyond sustainability, the CBO is also focused on expanding the range of Sharia-compliant financial products to drive growth in the Islamic banking sector. A new licensing framework is being prepared to enable finance and leasing companies to offer Sharia-compliant products.

This move is expected to open up new avenues for Islamic finance in the country and attract more investors. In addition, the Central Bank is working on a regulatory framework to guide the voluntary conversion of conventional banks and branches into Islamic bank-

ing institutions. Al Amri noted that this follows the model seen in many other countries where conventional banks operate alongside Islamic ones.

Oman's Islamic banking sector has already made significant contributions to the economy, despite its smaller market share. Since 2013, Islamic banks have contributed RO 6.4 billion in new Sharia-compliant financing, amounting to nearly half of the additional deposits generated in the last decade.

To support these developments, the CBO has also been investing in the infrastructure needed to provide liquidity to Islamic banks. A treasury platform is being developed to launch additional Sharia-compliant liquidity instruments, such as lender-of-last-resort facilities and Islamic treasury bills.

"The CBO has already offered one liquidity instrument, and we are targeting the launch of further Sharia-compliant tools by the end of the year," Al Amri announced.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C invites interested companies to participate in the following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
NESC/ 2024/007	Development of 5-years IT Division, Digitalization, and Emerging Technologies Strategy	18/09/2024	01/10/2024	Specialist	26.250
The table below shows the instructions for participation: -					
Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply) - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please visit www.supply.nama.om , under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender				
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to procurement@supply.nama.om , using the inquiry form found in the tender document (05) Five working days before bid submission date. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.				
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER and supplier guidelines available at NESC Website www.supply.nama.om , under NESC VENDOR / E-Tender.				
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF PROCUREMENT COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The hard copy of the bid bond should be deposited in the Tender Box at the Nama Electricity Supply Company Main Office at Wilayat Al Seeb, before 10:00 AM on the day specified for bid submission or any extended deadline. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.				
Terms and Conditions	- Any tender shall be valid for a period of (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - A certificate confirming 60% Omanization, inclusive of subcontracting, must be provided. Alternatively, a commitment letter must be submitted, confirming the implementation of the required Omanization % within a timeframe specified by NESC during the contract's validity period. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.				

BUSINESS

QUICK TAKES



SEZAD OFFICIALS
CONFER WITH AIIB
DELEGATION

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUQM, SEPT 10

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) received on Monday, September 9, 2024, a delegation from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The delegation met with Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), and Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, along with several officials from the Authority.

During the meeting, the efforts of the Authority to implement several infrastructure projects in SEZAD were reviewed. These projects aim to facilitate local and foreign investment in the region, which has directly contributed to attracting numerous local and international projects and increasing interest in investment in Duqm.

Dr Al Sunaidy also discussed enhancing cooperation with the AIIB to leverage the Bank's mechanisms for financing new projects in SEZAD. This includes projects related to renewable energy, green industries, logistics and supply chains, and those aimed at improving the quality of life, including tourism and service projects.

The AIIB delegation praised the growth observed in Duqm over the past years since their last visit to the region in 2019, expressing their interest in strengthening cooperation with the Authority and the Bank's intention to expand its operations in Duqm.

During their visit to SEZAD, the delegation reviewed several projects in the region, including the commercial quay at Port of Duqm, which the Bank helped finance, as well as the fishing port, the seafood and food processing zone. The Sultanate of Oman is one of the contributing countries to the AIIB.

OMAN OIL PRICE
DROPS \$ 0.48/BARREL

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil yesterday for delivery in November reached \$71.84 per barrel. The price of Oman oil yesterday witnessed a decrease of 48 cents compared to Monday's price, which was \$72.32. The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery in September reached \$83.85 per barrel, up by \$1.35 compared to the price for delivery in August.

Brent crude futures were down 48 cents, or 0.67%, at \$71.15 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate crude lost 42 cents, or 0.6%, to \$67.97. — Agencies

Oman’s aquaculture
output tops 5,000 tonnes

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, SEPT 10

AQUACULTURE projects in the Sultanate of Oman, owned and operated predominantly by subsidiaries of the Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) – part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) – generated over 5,000 tonnes of farmed fisheries and seafood products during 2023, according to a key FDO executive.

Sultana al Jardani, Business Intelligence Lead at FDO, said in an interview featured in Enjaz & Eajaz, the quarterly newsletter of Oman Investment Authority, that the aquaculture sector – a key component of Oman's food security strategy – is poised for strong growth going forward.

“Oman's turn toward aquaculture reflects a long-term strategic view that aims to achieve environmental sustainability, provide food security, and diversify the economy,” Al Jardani stated.

“Capitalising on technological innovations and continuing improvements will allow Oman to become the region's aquaculture pioneer.

It will ensure a prosperous and sustainable future for marine resources by adopting a sustainable approach based on transferring technologies and building capabilities.”



Oman's aquaculture sector has benefitted from strong investment inflows from FDO, as well as private firms securing licenses from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

According to the 2023 Annual Report of OIA, farmed shrimp harvests by FDO subsidiaries more than doubled to

2,673 tonnes in 2023, up from 1,076 tonnes a year earlier

According to the executive, investments in the sector amounted to around RO 33 million in 2023. “Several active ongoing projects in partnership with the private sector are expected to be a fantastic addition to governance efforts in the aquaculture field,” she added.

FDO, the fisheries investment and development arm of OIA, is the single biggest investor in Oman's aquaculture sector. Two of its subsidiaries, National Shrimp Aquaculture Co and Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture Co, currently

operate shrimp farms in key locations around the country. According to the 2023 Annual Report of OIA, farmed shrimp harvests by FDO subsidiaries more than doubled to 2,673 tonnes in 2023, up from 1,076 tonnes a year earlier. European sea bream fish production dipped to 1,867 tonnes, down from 2,101 tonnes a year earlier.

Significantly, shrimp production is poised to grow exponentially as operations at a number of aquaculture projects pick up pace.

Last year, FDO owned Oriental Shrimp Aquaculture brought its modern shrimp farm project into operation at Khuwaimah in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali. Spread over an area of 200 hectares, the facility has a production capacity of 3,500 tonnes of shrimp per year.

Earlier, National Shrimp Aquaculture launched FDO's first shrimp farm at Qurun in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan. Set on an area of 500 hectares, it has a capacity of 4,600 tonnes per year.

Also in 2023, National Shrimp launched a hatchery in Barka in Al Batinah South Governorate, to serve as an incubator for shrimp seed cultivation as well as a test-bed for future shrimp farm projects.

Additionally, FDO is finalising the design of its flagship shrimp farming project, planned at Al Jazir in the Al Wusta Governorate. It will boast a world-scale capacity of 20,000 tonnes of shrimp per annum.

OIB LAUNCHES GCC WEEKLY MONITOR RESOURCE

MUSCAT: Following its establishment in Q1 2024 as the Sultanate of Oman's first dedicated corporate investment bank, Oman Investment Bank is marking another milestone with the launch of its GCC Weekly Monitor.

This new resource is accessible through [www.oib.om](#).

The website will serve as a key information platform for clients, reflecting OIB's continued development into a full-service investment bank and its role as an internationally aligned partner in Oman's dynamic and competitive economy.

This comprehensive resource offers professional investors and corporate cli-



ents a detailed snapshot of market movements, valuation data, and news across Oman, the GCC, and key emerging markets, covering equities, fixed income, and commodities.

Commenting on the launch, Akin Tuzun, Head of Research at OIB, noted: “This, our first product, reflects our commitment to providing high-quality, independent research and analysis tools.

We hope it will positively contribute to our clients' investment processes and investment outcomes. We look forward to introducing our company research, macroeconomic analysis, and strategic insights over time.”

A synopsis of the GCC Weekly Monitor is available at <https://oib.om/research-insights/>, providing approximately 20% of the full content.

For complete access, professional investors and corporate clients are encouraged to subscribe to Oman Investment Bank's research distribution list by completing and submitting the ‘Research and Insight’ form available on the website.

Kia named among Time Magazine’s world’s most sustainable companies

MUSCAT: Time Magazine collected a roster of over 5,000 of the world's largest and most influential companies, and then partnered with data firm Statista to develop a methodology to assess sustainability.

Companies were measured on external sustainability ratings. Key criteria included adherence to the UN Global Compact, alignment with the Science Based Targets initiative, inclusion in the S&P Global Sustainability Yearbook, participation in the UNFCCC Race to Zero, and MSCI ESG & SRI evaluations.

The final step involved researching various environmental and social Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the companies' Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports.

“Kia is honoured to be recognised in Time's ‘World's Most Sustainable Companies of 2024’ list,” said Steven Center, COO & EVP, Kia America. “This accolade reflects Kia's commitment to electrified vehicles. Kia is driving towards a future where mobility is sustainable, efficient, and accessible to everyone. This distinction from Timr motivates us to further

Kia's sustainable mobility initiatives are guided by its comprehensive “Plan S” strategy. “Plan S” represents a bold shift for Kia, heavily focusing on electrification. Kia expects to build an EV lineup of 15 models globally by 2027, including the recently revealed EV3



accelerate our efforts in creating a sustainable future for all.”

Kia's sustainable mobility initiatives are guided by its comprehensive “Plan S” strategy. “Plan S” represents a bold shift for Kia, heavily focusing on electrification. Kia expects to build an EV lineup of 15 models globally by 2027, including the recently revealed EV3. Kia's sustainable range in Oman includes the all-electric sedan EV6 and the EV9 in the SUV category. For those looking for diverse automobile options, The EV6 is a powerhouse of innovation, with spacious interiors featured with user-centric intuitive

technologies that make journeys smooth.

Based on Kia's new E-GMP platform the vehicle covers a longer range of up to 500 km on a single charge, has ultra-fast charging capabilities and emits zero-carbon pollution with noiseless acceleration.

Experience the prowess of an SUV with the Kia EV9. Enjoy the enhanced driving experience with its futuristic looks, sophisticated appeal and remarkable speed, all in the absence of an engine. The EV9 features an electric rechargeable battery with an impressive driving range of up to 500 km on a

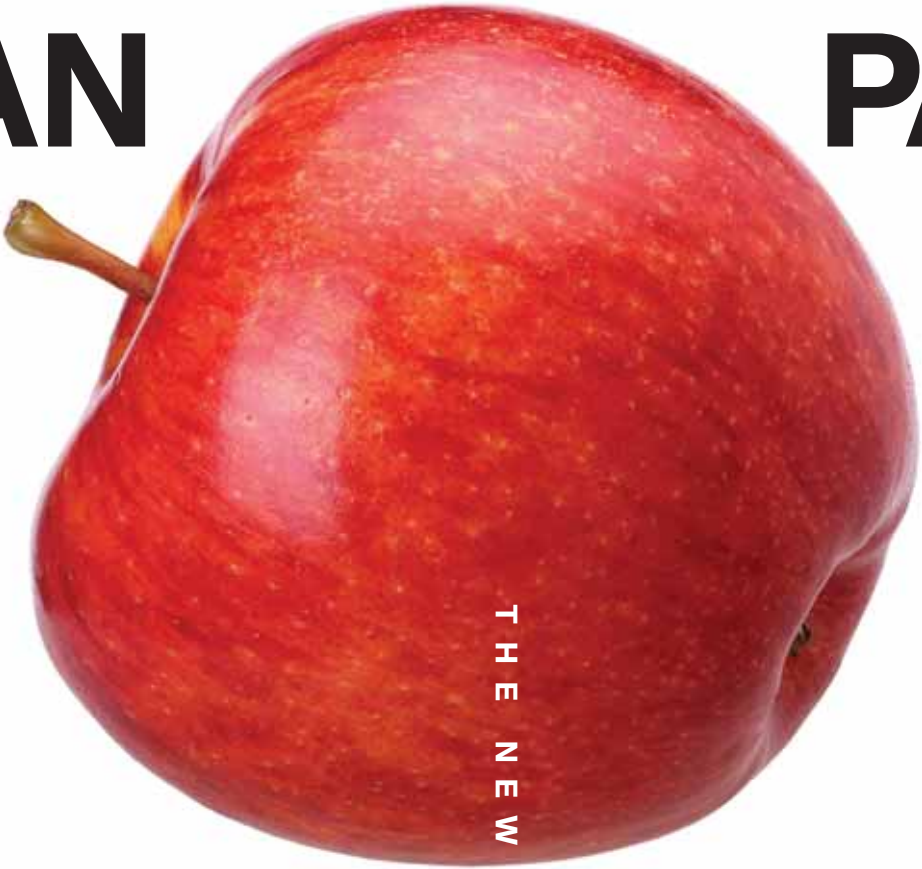
full charge. Whereas, a quick 20-minute charge goes a long way from 10 to 80 per cent embracing both short and extended journeys. Depending on usage, the EV9 is an ideal city car.

Charge Kia EVs at home with the EV charging device provided and installed by Kia's team. Kia's EV range is a modern automotive solution supporting its goal of a net-zero future and reducing burden on the depleting natural resources.

Embrace the change, contribute towards a greener planet and become a part of the global shift. Kia's other range of vehicles in Oman includes the Sportage, Sorento, Seltos, Cerato, Carnival, Telluride, and Sonet in the SUV category. The all new K5, K3, Rio, Picanto and Pegas.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), Kia's distributor in Oman, ensures a rewarding ownership experience with excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities. Recognised globally, RIA has received prestigious accolades, including the ‘Good Partnership’ award, the ‘Family Like Care’ Service Award, and the ‘Kia Distributor of Distinction’ award.

CANPASS



THE NEW IPHONES REPRESENT A BIG MOMENT FOR GENERATIVE AI

SHORTLY BEFORE STEVE JOBS' death in 2011, Apple filled a cramped auditorium in Cupertino, California, for the unveiling of its fifth iPhone. The device's biggest selling point was a new software feature called Siri, which helped cause a jump in iPhone sales.

On Monday, Apple is planning to run that play again.

For the first time in more than a decade, the tech giant will unveil a suite of iPhones whose signature feature won't be an improved camera or an updated design, but new software capabilities. The system, called Apple Intelligence, will sort messages, offer writing suggestions and create a more capable Siri powered by generative artificial intelligence.

The new iPhones represent a big moment for generative AI, which can answer questions, create images and write software code. As a latecomer to the AI party, Apple is in a position to take the technology mainstream — or sow fresh doubt about its viability if it doesn't live up to expectations.

Early enthusiasm for AI has been tempered by questions about its utility. This spring, Microsoft postponed features in an AI computer because of security vulnerabilities around the technology's recording of every second of activity. Humane, a start-up that raised \$240 million for a device called the Ai Pin, was panned by tech reviewers because its system was slow to fulfil requests and sometimes fielded them inaccurately.

In the wake of those problems, Wall Street is looking to Apple for reassurance that customers want AI. The tech giant spent two years watching as Microsoft, Meta, Google and Samsung added AI to products. Apple has shown over the years that it can enter a market late and redefine it, as it did with digital music players, smartphones and smartwatches.

Apple is hoping that AI can rejuvenate the iPhone. It considers the opportunity in AI so important that it cancelled one of its big bets — a \$10-billion project to develop a self-driving car — and reassigned hundreds of engineers to work on the technology.

People are holding on to their iPhones longer as compelling new features have dwindled. The time between replacing an iPhone has expanded to nearly five years, up from three years in 2018, according to TD Securities, an investment bank. The slowdown in buying new phones has weighed on Apple's business, which relies on the iPhone for more than half of total sales.

In addition to Apple Intelligence, which will

be available on the iPhone Pro and Pro Max, analysts say, the new iPhones will feature a new button for taking photos, a slightly larger screen and faster processors.

Wall Street analysts predict the features could help Apple sell a record 240 million iPhones next year, a 12-per cent increase from this year.

Similarly optimistic forecasts tied to AI have backfired for other technology companies. In recent months, shares of Nvidia, Microsoft and Google have been dragged down by weaker-than-expected sales of AI products. The declines weighed on the rest of the stock market because artificial intelligence has become a major focus of investors.

For Apple, which introduced its first iPhone 17 years ago, it's unclear whether new features even matter. Nearly three-quarters of users say they buy a new iPhone because their current phone has become obsolete or been lost or damaged, according to a survey by Consumer Intelligence Research Partners, a technology research firm. Only a fifth say they buy a new phone to get the latest features.

"Pushing out really cool new features used to drive a huge amount of replacements, but that isn't doing it any more," said Josh Lowitz, a partner at Consumer Intelligence Research Partners. "It's become like replacing your clothes dryer or your running shoes. You replace them when they're worn out."

Apple has tried to distinguish its AI offering by emphasising its ability to handle personal requests more privately. When it unveiled the technology in June, it said most requests would be fielded on the iPhone itself, where there's a lower risk that personal information could be compromised. Other requests would be routed to a cloud computing network with Apple semiconductors that the company said wouldn't store any information.

If a user asks Siri when her mother's flight is arriving, Apple says, its AI system can provide a real-time estimate by pulling the flight information from an e-mail and checking it against current flight tracking data. The company will complement those AI services with answers from ChatGPT. It struck a deal with OpenAI, the maker of ChatGPT, to fulfil impersonal user requests, like what to cook with select ingredients.

Apple hasn't said when its array of AI features will be available for the new iPhones. It also hasn't explained how it will launch the technology overseas, particularly in China, its second-most important market. It is expected to address both on Monday. — **The New York Times**

AI
TEST ?

OPINION

Dealmakers await rebound after election hits M&A



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

THE DEALS advisers in the financial district of London (known as the ‘City’) are gearing up for a rebound in activity in the closing months of the year after election uncertainty pushed mergers and acquisitions (M&A) to a four-year low in June, according to fresh figures last week.

The value of total deals involving UK firms as either targets or buyers, slumped to £11.8 billion in the second quarter between April and June down from £13.5 billion between January and March, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics.

Just 385 transactions were completed across the three months, with June’s total marking the lowest number of takeovers since the depths of the pandemic in 2020.

The fall in dealmaking comes after two years of lacklustre appetite as rising interest rates have ramped up the cost of financing deals and inflation has affected valuations.

Private equity firms particularly have been plumped into a quiet period as a slide in valuation forces them to hold onto assets. While there have been signs of life this year, advisers said the election had weighed on appetite over the summer.

“The levels of UK mergers and acquisitions activity during the second quarter of

2024 are disappointing but not a surprise given the political uncertainty in the UK caused by the general election,” said Caroline Rae, a corporate partner at law firm Herbert Smith Freehills.

“However, we are cautiously optimistic that activity will pick up towards the end of the year as uncertainty over the economic outlook eases.”

Other analysts were also bullish on the outlook for dealmaking in the coming months as firms look to complete on transactions ahead of the chancellor, Rachel Reeves’ budget in October.

“The focus now for business owners is the upcoming Autumn Budget and the looming threat of an increase in capital gains tax as sellers rush to get deals over the line,” said James Wild, head of M&A at consulting firm RSM UK.

“As a result, we expect the real increase in deal activity to be in the second half of the year.” Global head of deals at PwC UK, Lucy Stapleton, said she was expecting “confidence to continue growing in the market with UK elections now concluded.”

Pound surges: The pound is set to be one of the world’s top-performing major currencies this year amid expectations of “above trend growth” in the UK economy

Highlights

The value of total deals involving UK firms as either targets or buyers, slumped to

£11.8BN in the second quarter between April and June down from £13.5bn between January and March

and slower interest rate cuts, according to Bank of America.

The Wall Street titan said the pound is poised to hit \$1.41 by the end of 2025, after hitting a 29-month high of \$1.323 recently.

Stirling has jumped 3.2 per cent against the dollar so far this year as money markets bet on more gradual interest rate cuts from the Bank of England compared to the US Fed.

Traders are betting that the Fed and European Central Bank will lower borrowing costs later this month. Growth has slowed in the world’s largest economy while the latest job figures also showed a rise in unemployment.

In contrast, the Bank of England is widely expected to hold its base rate at five per cent at it’s next meeting on 19 September after cutting rates for the first time since 2020 last month.

Bank of America estimated sterling would touch \$1.35 by the end of this year as a possible tightening of the UK labour market gives policymakers reason to ease monetary policy more slowly.

Markets are betting on at least three Fed and two European Central Bank rate cuts before the end of this year, and just one for the Bank of England.

DRAGHI’S EUROPE PLAN COLLIDES WITH NATIONAL CRISES

As befits Italy’s soccer tradition, Mario Draghi is finding it harder to attack than to defend. The former European Central Bank chief rescued the euro zone during its debt crisis and, as prime minister, marshalled his country’s response to the pandemic. Tackling the European Union’s huge investment gap with the United States and China will be a different ball game.

Draghi’s 69-page main report on the future of European competitiveness is a chilling read. The EU is growing 30% slower than the United States. China is a rising threat, directly competing with euro zone firms in nearly 40% of sectors, up from 25% in 2002. And mounting geopolitical tensions are slowing down growth in trade, which accounts for nearly 45% of Europe’s GDP.

As its population ages and the imperatives of greening and digitalising the economy become more pressing, the EU will have to invest up to 800 billion euros extra a year just to keep up with global rivals, Draghi concludes.

At around 4.7% of GDP, that’s more than double the scale of the post-war Marshall Plan, relative to the size of the economy. The report calls for an EU-wide industrial strategy powered by private and public capital and a more responsive and business-friendly Brussels bureaucracy.

The latter aim is the most achievable. Draghi’s proposal to encourage mergers among the EU’s 34 mobile phone operators by looking at bloc-wide, rather than national, marketshares, is sensible.

As is his plan for common procurement standards so that national defence budgets go to European companies rather than foreign ones. It will be much harder, however, to mobilise private and public capital.

Business accounts for four-fifths of EU investments but fragmentation of the bloc’s capital markets and over-reliance on bank financing are holding it back.

The public sector will have to do more, but it is hampered by economic and political factors. Eleven member states, including heavyweights like France and Italy, recorded 2023 budget deficits above the EU limit of 3% of GDP.

And even in countries where the fiscal position is more benign, like Germany and the Netherlands, politicians are reluctant to sanction more “Brussels spending”.

More even, the bloc’s two most important capitals — Berlin and Paris — are enduring political upheavals. A repeat of the 800 billion euro pandemic recovery fund would help, and Draghi is a fan. But that programme was funded by EU-issued bonds — a one-off departure from member states’ long-standing opposition to common debt instruments. — Reuters

Highlights

As its population ages and the imperatives of greening and digitalising the economy become more pressing, the EU will have to invest up to

800 billion euros extra a year just to keep up with global rivals

Metaverse revolutionising the tourism industry

IN RECENT YEARS, the “Metaverse”—a virtual environment where users interact, engage in social experiences, and even conduct business utilising virtual reality (VR) headsets, augmented reality (AR) applications, and other digital tools has become an emerging technology. Terminologies like immersive and interactive experiences, virtual environments, and digital immersion, are instantly associated with the concept of “Metaverse”.

Its integration into the different sectors of the tourism industry significantly impacts the tourism industry where both stakeholders and visitors are aware of the potential of this technology.

People who have first-hand metaverse experience feel they have control and can manipulate situations based on what they want to achieve; a creative way of making things possible for them. This also enhances their socialisation, communication, and analytical thinking skills in addition to having a venue for relaxation and entertainment through immersive experiences enabled by such technologies.

However, despite several presented advantages of its implementation, some stakeholders are still unsure of its efficient application and integration into their work process as it is still new and full of uncertainties. Hence, there should be complete awareness and understanding of how this immersive technology works for stakeholders’ acceptance and confidence in its adoption.

OMAN’S INITIATIVES TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION

Oman has been aggressively integrating metaverse applications into its tourism sector. Emerging technologies such as 5G, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are utilised to enhance visitors’ experience in various sectors of the tourism industry.

This initiative aligns with Oman Vision 2040 focusing on digital transformation, innovation, and economic diversification.

The tourism sector is exploring the metaverse to offer virtual cultural heritage experiences, the creation of virtual replicas of heritage sites allow-



DR ANNA SHEILA CRISOSTOMO

The writer is an assistant professor at Oman Tourism College

The tourism sector is exploring the metaverse to offer virtual cultural heritage experiences, the creation of virtual replicas of heritage sites allowing visitors interactive and immersive experiences where they can engage with Omani culture and history.



People who have first-hand metaverse experience feel they have control and can manipulate situations based on what they want to achieve. — Reuters

ingvisitorsinteractiveandimmersive experiences where they can engage with Omani culture and history. Muscat Municipality has also recently presented the Muttrah Tourist Trail Path Project through virtual reality (VR) technology. This will certainly offer Muscat visitors great experiential opportunities and add to the wide range of existing touristic experiences.

A WAY TO EXPLORE THE WORLD – MORE THAN JUST VIRTUAL TOUR

The integration of the metaverse in the travel industry offers exciting possibilities for enhancing visitors’ experiences, creating more business opportunities and improving operational efficiency for travel agencies.

The metaverse is changing the way we perceive travelling and offers exciting ways to explore different destinations.

For most people, travel is a way to discover new destinations (famous or remote) and learn about different cultures apart from enjoying the attractions, facilities and amenities that come with the place virtually.

Metaverse is more than just a virtual tour, this is designed to engage all senses, a vivid experience as you are physically present. It has been used as simulated versions of real-world destinations, a venue to interact with other travellers and experience things that would be out of reach through different metaverse technologies i.e., virtual reality headsets, augmented real-

ity, etc. This immersive experience motivates individuals to visit the destinations in person especially those who are unable to travel due to budget constraints and physical limitations - an alternative way to explore the world.

Additionally, the metaverse can create new opportunities for businesses in the tourism industry such as virtual tours, digital souvenirs, and even virtual events.

Furthermore, metaverse integration into hotel operations enhances guest experiences and opens new avenues for the potential transformation of the hospitality industry through technological innovation. Hotel bookings, tours, events, training and developments are becoming more engaging, interactive, and immersive.

ADOPTION CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Like other emerging technologies, despite having benefits, the metaverse poses environmental, economic, cultural, and technological challenges. Security and privacy concerns are among the challenges that need to be addressed apart from accessibility and sustainability issues on its adoption.

There must be established and consistent privacy and security policies, strict regulations, users’ education on privacy and security in addition to privacy-enhancing technologies for data protection and user privacy enhancement.

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ENTERTAINMENT

US actor/musician Steven Van Zandt attends the world premiere of "Road Diary: Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band" at the Roy Thomson theatre during the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. — AFP



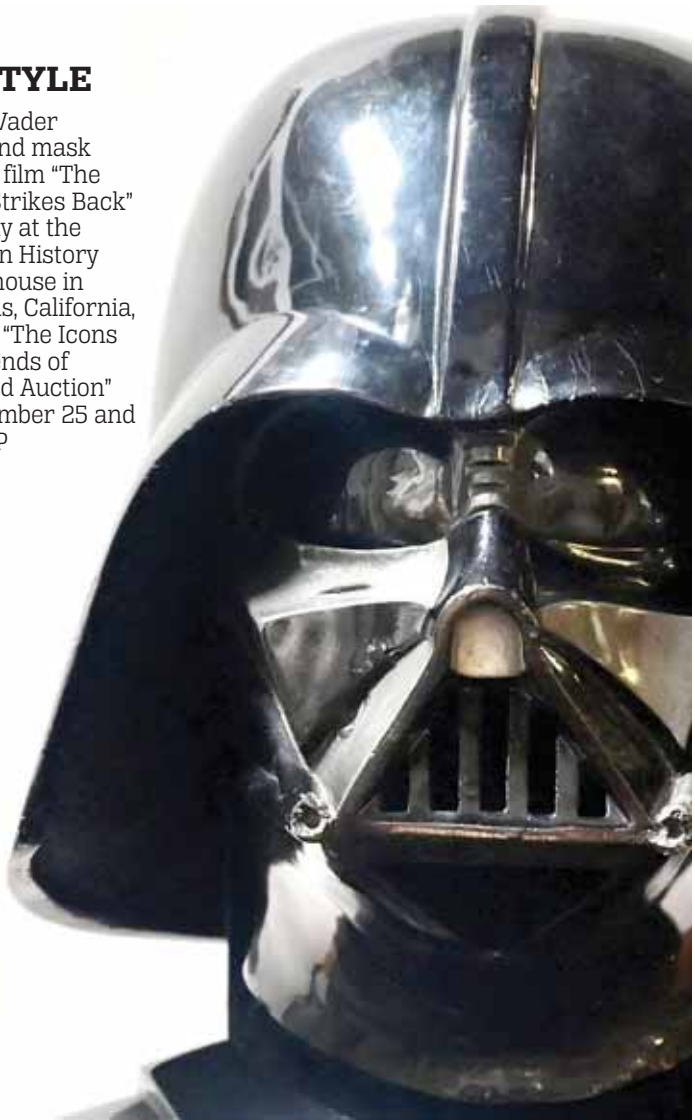
TRAVEL

Visitors watch the Hukou waterfall on the Yellow River in Linfen, in northern China's Shanxi province. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A Darth Vader helmet and mask from the film "The Empire Strikes Back" on display at the Profiles in History auction house in Calabasas, California, ahead of "The Icons and Legends of Hollywood Auction" on September 25 and 26. — AFP



FASHION

A model prepares backstage for the Tory Burch runway show during New York Fashion Week in the Brooklyn borough of New York. — AFP



CULTURE

Traditional Russian wooden nesting dolls, Matryoshka dolls, are seen on Red Square in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in central Moscow. — AFP



art & life

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LUXURY CAMPING IN THE OMAN DESERT

For a lot of guests visiting Oman, the contrast between modern conveniences and the stark beauty of the remote desert can be very surprising. In this anecdote, the author recalls his time in the country where he experienced desert driving, Bedouin hospitality and peaceful solitude amidst Oman's wild desert landscape... **P20**



TRAVEL

Rome's ancient Arch of Constantine damaged by lightning

ROME'S ANCIENT ARCH of Constantine was hit by lightning during a heavy storm, causing some fragments to fall off, an official said on Wednesday last week.

"All the fragments were recovered and made safe" following the strike on Tuesday afternoon that same week, a spokeswoman for the Colosseum archaeological park said.

"Damage assessments have already begun and analyses are continuing this morning with a works site already operational," she added.

The arch, built in 315 to celebrate the victory of Emperor Constantine in the battle of Ponte Milvio, was already undergoing maintenance work, which had begun on Monday.

Standing about 25 metres high, it is the largest of the three triumphal arches still preserved in Rome. It is located along the route followed by triumphal processions, near the Colosseum.

After a hot, dry summer, the centre of Rome was hit on Tuesday afternoon by a sudden storm, bringing heavy rain, high winds, thunder and lightning.

More than 80 millimetres (3.1 inches) of rain per square metre fell on the historic centre — about the same amount that falls on average in a month in autumn, the municipality said.

The "downburst" caused floods and winds of up to 90 kilometres per hour (56mph) that brought down trees, it said.

Experts say climate change is shifting weather patterns and increasing the number of extreme weather events.

"It is increasingly evident that the issue of climate change and its impact on our lives is now unavoidable for everyone," said Rome mayor Roberto Gualtieri. — **AFP**

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

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UNDER A FROZEN ARMY BASE, HE FOUND INCREDIBLE FOSSILS

SOMEWHERE DEEP INSIDE a glacier in Greenland are the remains of Camp Century, a short-lived experiment in making the Cold War literal. In 1959, the U.S. Army began building a network of tunnels, carved inside the ice, that it hoped might become a launch site for nuclear missiles.

By 1967, the military had abandoned the idea and the base. But the samples of ice and frozen sediment that scientists extracted from deep underneath Camp Century are still providing new insights into the planet's history.

When Paul Bierman, a geologist at the University of Vermont, began studying some of these samples, he made a surprising discovery. Scientists had once believed that Greenland's ice sheet had been largely stable for the last 2.6 million years. But what Bierman and his colleagues saw under the micro-

scope provided clear evidence that parts of the ice sheet had temporarily melted away far more recently. Roughly 400,000 years ago, the site had been free of ice.

Bierman spoke to The New York Times about this discovery, which he chronicles in his new book, "When the Ice Is Gone." (This conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.)

Q: WE WOULDN'T HAVE THESE SAMPLES IF NOT FOR CAMP CENTURY. WHAT WAS THE ARMY DOING IN GREENLAND?

A: That started in World War II. Greenland is upwind of the European theatre, so in order to do the weather forecasting, they needed boots on the ground in Greenland. It was also the shortest path to bring airplanes from the US to the Allies.

The US got its foothold in Greenland, and what they realised is they didn't know very much about cold-region science. The men who were stationed there didn't have the right sleds, couldn't move across the ice safely, didn't understand how ice and snow behaved.

So the US military started putting a lot of money into ice. They built several camps under the ice and then started drilling this deep ice core at Camp Century. When they got to the bottom of the ice sheet, they kept going and brought back almost 12 feet of what we call sub-ice material — think of it as frozen soil and water. That was a first.

Within a couple of years of bringing that core up, looking at just the clear ice part, they figured out more than 100,000 years of climate history. But they ignored the sediment at the bottom. In 2019, we were given samples of that bottom material. And that's when things really got fun.

Q: IN YOUR BOOK, YOU SAY THAT THESE SAMPLES LED TO THE ONLY REAL EUREKA MOMENT OF YOUR SCIENTIFIC CAREER. WALK ME THROUGH THAT.

A: The samples showed up on this really steamy July afternoon in a DHL box with a lot of freezer packs. We got this incredible whiff of diesel fuel, because in the 1960s they used a mix of diesel fuel and trichloroethylene — that's dry-cleaning fluid — to keep the hole in the ice open while they were drilling.

We were sieving these samples, which involved trying to sort them by the size of the grain. So we take out the cobbles and the sand and the silt. Everybody involved was hot and tired, and I was just absent-mindedly staring down at this bin of water with the sandy fraction. All of a sudden I see little black flecks floating at the top, and I sort of did a double take. I looked over at the two people with me and said, "I think we have fossil plants in here."

I took a pipette, and I squeezed up these little black flecks. Drew Christ, who was a postdoctoral fellow with me, popped them under the microscope. And there were about 10 seconds of dead silence before he popped his head up with a string of happy expletives.

We were staring at plants that grew where the ice sheet is today. It didn't take long, when the three of us stopped babbling at each other, to realise that this was probably the biggest discovery any of us had made in our in our scientific lives.

From then on, we kept finding fossils: fungus, insect parts, small pieces of wood, leaves, mosses, a poppy seed. It's stunning.

Q: WHAT WAS SO STUNNING?

A: It grabs your gut to see a poppy seed where today there's miles of ice. It is the kind of evidence that everybody understands: Today it's ice, and yesterday it was plants.

It didn't take us long that day to have one of those moments of, "Wow, this is cool, and wow, this is frightening." Because it all happened before we started changing the climate. So, now we know Greenland can melt on its own — and what are we doing? We're giving it a huge kick in the behind to melt even faster.

But humans were ingenious enough to figure out, in the 1950s, how the ice sheet worked, how to live in it and how to drill an ice core. I don't think saving the Greenland ice sheet is impossible. I think it's going to take that same kind of determination. — NYT

MUSIC

Beyonce's 'Cowboy Carter' snubbed by Country Music awards

BEYONCE DID NOT receive a Country Music Association awards nomination when the nods for the 58th edition were announced Monday, even though her "Cowboy Carter" album proved a cultural phenomenon upon release this year.

The absence of "Cowboy Carter" among the slate of nominees was conspicuous: "Texas Hold 'Em," her sprawling album's first single, soared to the top of the charts, including the country list, and the album was widely considered a smash.

Beyonce's "Cowboy Carter" is a full-throated ode to her southern US roots, a rollicking revue that also deals a vital history lesson on the Black lineage of country music.

Nashville's gatekeepers have long tried to promote a rigid view of country music that's overwhelmingly white and male — "Cowboy Carter" skewered that notion.

She leads listeners through country's evolution from African American spirituals and fiddle tunes to its pioneering women.

The awards ceremony will be held on November 20. Morgan Wallen, the controversial country-pop singer who has found enormous streaming success, received the most nominations with seven, including for the coveted "Entertainer of the Year" title.

Chris Stapleton and Cody Johnson received five nominations each.

Lainey Wilson notched four, as did Post Malone, who segued into country this year from his warbling rock-rap. His single "I Had Some Help" features Wallen, and its nominations ushered that artist to the front of the pack.

Beyonce is no stranger to CMA controversy: she notably received racist comments after performing what was then her most country song to date, "Daddy Lessons," at the 2016 CMA awards.

A Texan raised by a mother from Louisiana and a father from Alabama, Beyonce tackled the perceived "controversy" over her country turn this year on the track "American Requiem."

"They used to say I spoke, 'Too country' / Then the rejection came, said I wasn't, 'Country enough' / Said I wouldn't saddle up, but if that ain't country, tell me, what is?" Beyonce sings on the track, whose musical allusions include Buffalo Springfield's classic "For What It's Worth."

"Cowboy Carter" was far more than country: it included technical mastery of a blend of styles including various country subsets. — AFP

LUXURY CAMPING IN THE OMAN DESERT

BY JOSHUA HAMMER

The paved road abruptly ended just past the town of Al Mudairab, at the edge of the Empty Quarter in eastern Oman. Stepping out of my Nissan 4-by-4 at the point where a sand track began, I stared at a vista of coffee-coloured dunes and flyblown Bedouin encampments that stretched towards the horizon.

I was bound for the 1000 Nights Camp, a Bedouin-style resort 24 miles into the desert. I had deflated my tyres to the requisite 18 pounds per square inch for driving on sand and had printed out a map from the company's website that purported to show me how to get there. But the track seemed to vanish a hundred yards from where I stood.

Moments later, Suleiman arrived. Suleiman, an imposing-looking Omani clad in white turban and dish-dasha (a traditional Arab robe), was about to lead a convoy of 40 vehicles packed with his relatives and friends into the desert for a long weekend. "You'd better not do this without a guide," he told me, and moments later he invited me to follow him with eve-

ryone present.

Suleiman got into his Jeep and hurtled down the track. I struggled to keep up with him, fishtailing at 40 miles an hour, hugging narrow paths through the dunes. Several times Suleiman disappeared behind a veil of dust, only to emerge out of the cloud just a few feet ahead of me.

After an hour, we came to a small sign (easy to miss) that pointed left, and we climbed hundreds of feet up a giant ocher sand mound that offered panoramic views of the desert floor. A few miles farther lay the turn-off to the 1000 Nights. Suleiman honked his horn to make sure I didn't miss it. Then he raced off, followed by his convoy.

The Rimal Al Sharqiya of the Empty Quarter, is one of the world's most desolate and starkly beautiful regions: 4,800 square miles of rippled, undulating dunes that rise as high as 300 feet above the desert floor.

It was nearing sunset when I arrived at 1000 Nights Camp. Thirty Bedouin-style tents made of richly patterned lambs' wool were scattered about an oasis of native ghaf trees. The owner, Abdullah al Harthy, who opened 1000 Nights Camp in 2006, welcomed me with pomegranate juice



AFTER AN HOUR, WE CAME TO A SMALL SIGN (EASY TO MISS) THAT POINTED LEFT, AND WE CLIMBED HUNDREDS OF FEET UP A GIANT OCHER SAND MOUND THAT OFFERED PANORAMIC VIEWS OF THE DESERT FLOOR.

down, the 30 guests (most of them French, German and British couples and families) had gathered in the open-air pavilion for a buffet dinner.

Over lentil soup and mutton stew, I met Ian

and urged me to head into the dunes immediately to catch the last rays of the sun.

Using a fixed rope to propel myself through the satiny smooth sand, leaving perfect footprints with every step, I climbed 100 feet above the camp and sat on a rise in silence, watching the landscape darken and the vanishing sun burnish the sky indigo, pink and crimson.

By the time I came back

to read, dip in the pool and take occasional hikes in the dunes. "Getting here is a thrilling experience," he said. "Then I arrive and do absolutely nothing."

My tent was a cosy sanctuary, simply yet tastefully furnished with a queen-size bed, a writing table, a coffee table, and two easy chairs in the centre of the room. Light trickled in through the doorway and a single window cut into the wool. A half-dozen pine tent poles supported the sagging top, and the uniform pattern on the woollen floor, roof and walls gave the place a warm atmosphere.

I had left my tent flap half open during the night and awoke at 7 am to a stream of soft desert light. A buffet breakfast — fresh fruit and omelettes, as well as traditional Arabic cuisine like a fowl, a bean stew — was being served in the open-air restaurant.

An hour later, with a chill in the air, I met Carol Duncan at the stables, and we set out without a guide for a horseback ride. We followed a trail past tufts of green grass and spiny shrubbery and the barbed-wire remnants of a Bedouin encampment. Then the last sign of civilisation disappeared, and we found ourselves in a sea of sand.

The dunes on either side presented a palette of tan, butterscotch, pink, and russet, and were etched with delicate fingerprint-like whorls and ridges. With a flick of my switch, my 3-year-old



Duncan. Duncan and his wife, Carol, had been in Oman for 18 months and had just signed on for another two years.

The Duncans were making their fourth trip to 1000 Nights Camp, this time accompanied by Duncan's brother and wife, visiting from England.

"It's the most remote and the best desert camp, and the most natural," Duncan told me.

When I asked the owner about the Sand Houses, which cost RO 150 a night, he replied that they were hugely popular. "The windows are floor-to-ceiling, and your bed is one metre from the sand," he said. "It is a fantasy."

Even so, Al Harthy has tried to maintain a sense of harmony with the environment, banning dune buggies, because "our guests want to experience the silence." The resort keeps horses, and local Bedouins provide camels for those who want to venture deeper into the desert. Duncan prefers

mare, Reem, broke into a canter, and we ascended gradually towards the top of a ridge. The landscape fell away, revealing a seemingly infinite vista of rippled sand mounds, rising and falling like the folds in a quilt.

It was too early for lunch when we returned to the 1000 Nights Camp, so Duncan and I, along with Ian and the Duncans' British visitors, headed for the pool. We baked in the desert heat, then plunged into the icy water, and repeated the invigorating routine a half-dozen times. I was headed from there to the Wilayat of Nizwa, about three hours away, and was eager to get started. Just after noon, I got back into my 4-by-4 and headed off alone, more confident of the way through the desert this time.

"To the town," read a marker in the trackless sand, and all too soon, the asphalt road reappeared. — NYT

