

HM greets Pakistan President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President Asif Ali Zardari of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Zardari. He also wished the people of Pakistan further progress and welfare.

SUNRISE - 05:42 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:22 AM
DHUHR - 12:17 PM
ASR - 03:43 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:46 PM
ISHA - 08:01 PM



P12

POPYRIN BREAKS AUSSIE DRY SPELL WITH ATP MONTREAL TITLE



P13

NEW INITIATIVE TO BOOST ARTISANAL FISHING IN OMAN



P19

HORSES ARE A LOT SMARTER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT



SALALAH PREPARE MANPOWER FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY

The Ministry of Labour has organised a forum titled 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Future of Work' to discuss the impact of technological developments on the future of work, the challenges and opportunities introduced by new work patterns. The two-day forum, held in Salalah, seeks to prepare manpower for rapid developments taking place in the work environment and augment the readiness of governments to accommodate AI and future skills. The objectives of the forum include increasing productivity and efficiency in the work environment and enhancing human capital in context of future challenges and updates in the digital age. **DETAILS ON P2**

MUSCAT CRUDE PRICE AT \$80.03 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Tuesday reached \$80.03, comprising a rise of \$1.31, compared to the price of Monday, which stood at \$78.72. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$82.50 per barrel, thus \$1.39 per barrel lower than July delivery. Brent crude futures eased 1 per cent to \$81.43 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures slipped 1 per cent to \$79.24 a barrel. Brent had gained more than 3 per cent on Monday, while US crude futures had risen more than 4 per cent.



AUTHENTIC OMANI EXPERIENCE

The current travel trend that involves homestays and heritage experiences is reflective of a broader shift in consumer preferences. In Oman, the rise of initiatives like Fanja Heritage House is indicative of this global trend. Travellers are increasingly seeking accommodations that offer more than just a place to sleep. They want to connect with the local culture, learn about the history of the area, and contribute to the local economy. **DETAILS ON P20**

Work permits for some professions suspended

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

The Minister of Labour has issued decision No 452/2024, temporarily suspending permits for the employment of expatriate workers in specific professions for six months.

The decision calls for the suspension of the issuance of trading permits for the employment of expatriate workers in certain professions based on the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree No 53/2023 and guidelines provided by the Ministry of Labour for trading permits as per the decision No 180/2022.

Article 1 states that the issuance of trading permits for the employment of non-Omani workers in private sector establishments for the professions listed in the attached annexe is suspended for six months.

Article 2 says notwithstanding the provisions of Article 1, permits may be issued for the employment of non-Omani workers in the professions listed in the annexe, provided that the request for renewal or transfer of services is submitted from within the Sultanate of Oman.

Article 3 says that this decision shall come into effect on September 1 and the authorities concerned are responsible for implementing its provisions.

The professions include construction worker/general, cleaning worker/general, buildings, loading and unloading

worker, bricklayer, steel fixer, tailor/women's clothing/general, tailor/men's clothing/general, electrician/general electrical installations, waiter, painter, chef/general, electrician/home installations and barber.

Last month, to provide more jobs for citizens in the private sector, the Ministry of Labour listed 30 new professions where hiring expatriates will be prohibited.

The ministry said all units of the state's administrative apparatus and government companies should not deal with private sector establishments that do not adhere to the Omanisation targets.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has notified all contractors and suppliers who deal with it for various tenders regarding purchases and services to submit an electronic certificate issued by the Ministry of Labour.

The certificates should prove that they are complying with requirements, including the Omanisation percentages approved by the government, provided that the certificate is valid for one month from the date of its issuance.

The certificate should be submitted when competing for government tenders and when requesting government services.

The ministry added that construction and service tenders will be awarded to companies that offer a 100 per cent Omanisation rate in electricity, water, and maintenance services.

Putin tells Abbas of 'great pain' at Palestinian plight

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin told visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday that Moscow was pained by the plight of his people and backed their aspiration to create a fully fledged state. "Everyone is well aware that Russia today, unfortunately, must defend its interests and defend its people with arms in hand. But what is happening in the Middle East, what is happening in Palestine, of course, does not go unnoticed on our part," Putin said, according to a Kremlin transcript.

"And of course, we are



Russian President Vladimir Putin with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas during a meeting outside Moscow, Russia, on Tuesday. – Reuters

watching with great pain and anxiety the humanitarian catastrophe that has unfolded in Palestine," he added.

Putin noted the death toll of almost 40,000 Palestinians in the course of the Gaza war since the October 7 attack.

Russia has longstanding ties to both Israel and the Palestinians. But since the war started, Moscow has upset Israel by hosting Hamas delegations and Putin has emphasised the plight of the Palestinians, saying at one point that the suffering of their children "makes tears come to your eyes".

SEE ALSO P6

Earth registers hottest July on record, says US agency

WASHINGTON: Last month was the hottest July on record, making it the fourteenth straight record-breaking month, a US environmental agency reported.

The monthly report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) also said that 2024 now has a 77 per cent chance of being the warmest year on record.

The July calculation by NOAA contradicted the EU's Copernicus climate monitor, which — using a different dataset — calculated

last month's average temperature as being slightly lower than July 2023.

However, both agencies agree on the alarming trend of record-breaking heat, with the past year seeing month after month of new highs. According to NOAA, whose historical data goes back 175 years, 2024 will definitely be one of the five hottest years on record.

In July, the global temperature was 1.21 degrees Celsius above the 20th century average of 15.8C,



A tourist uses a fountain to cool off amid a heatwave, in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on Tuesday. – Reuters

the US agency said.

The month saw a series of heat waves across Mediterranean and Gulf countries, NOAA said.

Africa, Europe and Asia recorded their hottest July on record, while North America was the second hottest.

Ocean temperatures were their second warmest ever in July, according to NOAA — the same reading as Copernicus.

Scientists at Copernicus noted last week that "air temperatures over the ocean remained

unusually high over many regions" despite a swing from the El Nino weather pattern that helped fuel a spike in global temperatures to its opposite La Nina, which has a cooling effect. Last year was also the warmest year on record.

"The devastating effects of climate change started well before 2023 and will continue until global greenhouse gas emissions reach Net-Zero," said Samantha Burgess, deputy director of Copernicus. — AFP



AI forum recommends readiness of digital economy needs

SALALAH: The Ministry of Labour (MoL) has organised a forum titled “Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Future of Work” to discuss the impact of technological developments on the future of work, the challenges and opportunities introduced by new work patterns.

The two-day forum, held in Salalah, seeks to prepare manpower for rapid developments taking place in the work environment and augment the readiness of governments to accommodate AI and future skills.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and attended by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour.

The objectives of the forum include: Increasing productivity and efficiency in the work environment, enhancing human capital in context of future challenges and updates in the digital age (that require increased competitiveness and improved quality of services),



The two-day forum seeks to prepare manpower for rapid developments taking place in the work environment and augment the readiness of governments to accommodate AI and future skills. — ONA

consolidating employee self-development by learning new technologies and achieving professional growth.

The event, held on the sidelines of the Labour Forum, includes four working sessions. The first session discusses the impact of technological developments on the future of work (the challenges and opportunities of new work patterns); the second session focuses on capacity building; the third looks into the preparation of the workforce for rapid developments in the work environment; while the fourth session elaborates on the role of AI in improving the work environment.

Working papers presented at the forum deal with a variety of related determinants: The importance of mastering “AI engineering”, the advantages of



ongoing education in dealing with changing scenarios in the environment and using AI to improve employee productivity.

The participants also consider better ways of using the AI and data science platform, the significance of AI in achieving sustainable development and the role of government institutions in enhancing future skills and developing skills in a climate of renewable economy. — ONA

OVER 750,000 HOUSEHOLDS COVERED WITH FIBRE OPTIC NETWORK: TRA

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

More than 750,000 (773,589) residential units in the country are now covered with fibre optic networks, according to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) in its latest annual report, which was published recently.

The report added that there are 5,238 stations to provide 5G mobile services in the country.

The percentage of families using fixed broadband services went up to 80 per cent (561,983) in 2023 from 75.5 per cent (536,967) in 2022. The number of mobile phone users went up to 6,984,826 in 2023 from 6,749,535 in 2022.

Total revenues created in the telecommunications sector increased to 878.5 million in 2023 compared to 794.9 million in 2020, 775.6 million in 2021 and 774.3 million in 2022.

TRA also reported that major complaints against telecommunication service



providers included anti-competitive prices and violation of regulatory obligations.

New permits were issued to provide postal services to 15 new companies, bringing the total number of companies licensed in this sector to 63 in 2023, which helped create 1,624 additional job opportunities with permanent contracts. 1,223 vacancies were filled by Omanis.

The Authority launched a public consultation on the framework for licensing postal services to improve services and open investment to emerging postal companies.

Royal Opera House Muscat to announce new season on August 18

MUSCAT: Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) is poised to unveil its highly anticipated new season. The official announcement is scheduled to take place on August 19 at 11:00 am.

Following the announcement, tickets for the upcoming season will be available for purchase on the ROHM website.

Reflecting on the forthcoming season, Director General and Artistic Director of the Royal Opera House Muscat, Umberto Fanni, expressed his anticipation, stating: “I look forward to presenting our new season to our loyal and dedicated audience. From enchanting operas to mesmerising ballets and world-renowned performers, this season promises

to be a true highlight in ROHM's illustrious history.”

The previous season saw ROHM captivate audiences with an array of world-class productions, including the iconic opera The Barber of Seville, the mesmerising Bolshoi Ballet's Raymonda, the family-show Symphony on Ice, a breathtaking co-production of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream performed by Teatro Carlo Felice di Genoa, sold out performances of Swan Lake acrobatic ballet performed by Xi'An Acrobatic Troupe of China and the percussion show Stomp, and the unforgettable Muscat debut of world-renowned soprano Sonya Yoncheva in Homage to Maria Callas, among other remarkable shows.

MoHUP broadens real estate online services

YOUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) is pressing ahead with its electronic transformation strategy through developing its digital platforms Amlak and Tatweer with a slew of housing and real estate services now available on both platforms enabling service seekers to save time and effort.

The ministry is also endeavouring to digitise existing real estate data as part of its plans to complete the comprehensive electronic transformation system.

Malik bin Hamdan al Maliki, Director of the Amlak platform, said that the platform has enhanced automated transactions and the digital transformation into an integrated software system that comprises 59 main services



Over 189,430 transactions have been conducted via the Amlak platform since its launch in January 2022 until the end of July 2024.

including in the sectors of urban planning, real estate development, legal transactions and social housing. Over 189,430 transactions have been conducted via the Amlak platform since its launch in January 2022 until the end of July 2024.

Saud bin Salem al Shuaibi, Director of the Pick Your Land platform, said that the digital transformation has reduced the

number of service seekers and cut waiting time for completion of transactions at multiple service stations to less than 15 minutes per transaction. The Choose Your Land platform enables service seeker to complete their service procedures electronically except for receiving the title deed which will also be integrated into the digital platform in the foreseeable

future as the electronic printing of the title deed was launched by the ministry during the COMEX 2024 exhibition and we hope to initiate the service by the end of this year or the beginning of 2025 at the latest.

The services available through the Pick Your Land platform include Plan Your Land, Obtain Your Land, Replace Your Land as well as the options available at the Sultan Haitham City, the Integrated Residential Quarters Initiative, Future Cities, and the Integrated Plans Initiative. As many as 29,546 transactions have been conducted via the Pick Your Land platform with over 50,000 people availing of the digital services since its inception on February 22, 2022 up to June 31, 2024. The platform sorts out eligible citizens electronically and sends the SMS, Al Shuaibi concluded.

Dates harvest season kicks off at Oman Across Ages Museum

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, AUGUST 13

The Oman Across Ages Museum, in collaboration with Nakheel Oman Development Company, is hosting the second edition of the Dates Harvest Season from August 13 to 17.

The event, held under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of al Dakhiliyah, features various activities related to palm trees and their products, available for viewing from 10 am to 5 pm.

As the summer season is pivotal for Omani farmers, marking the harvest of a range of agricultural products, this event serves as a vital platform to celebrate Oman's rich agricultural heritage. It also fosters communication between the local community and companies keen on supporting cultural and agricultural initiatives.

Mustafa bin Issa al Obaidani, Events Manager at the Oman Across Ages Museum, said,



As the summer season is pivotal for Omani farmers, marking the harvest of a range of agricultural products, this event serves as a vital platform to celebrate Oman's rich agricultural heritage.

“We’ve gathered enthusiasts and specialised institutions to promote the concepts of date harvesting and related industries, showcasing these to our visitors. The exhibition emphasises food security in Oman, particularly focusing on the palm tree, often called the ‘tree of a thousand uses.’ Various products derived from palm trees, such as fronds, are displayed, along with dialogue sessions on the subject. To engage visitors of all ages, a

children's area has been set up with activities like planting seedlings and crafting with Madloun (dates), along with distributing educational brochures on palm trees.” The exhibition features several sections, including a vegetables and fruits corner presented by Anaab Company and Awkiah, highlighting key agricultural crops and harvesting techniques. The handicrafts corner, with contributions from Al Zaidi Pottery



and Omani Women's Associations, displays traditional and modern craft techniques, including pottery and palm frond carpets.

Nakheel Oman Development Company (NODC) showcases the dates and harvest season using advanced technology, blending past traditions with modern innovations. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources also contributes with workshops on agricultural

pest control, emphasising the importance of agriculture for Oman's food security.

A section dedicated to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), represented by Al Sharaa Mills, showcases various harvest products. Meanwhile, the Tree Planting Corner by Muscat Municipality offers workshops on tree planting and seedling care.

The Interactive Corner, in collaboration with Engineering

Village, presents an educational display on palm tree growth, pest control, and the use of modern technology like drones for agricultural purposes. Majid al Busaidy from Engineering Village explained, “Our aim is to integrate technical aspects with agriculture, allowing visitors to learn about innovations like electronic devices that monitor crop health and irrigation, even within their homes.” A palm frond workshop for participants aged 14–16, conducted by Mohammad Bani Arabeih, will run from August 13 to 15 at 10:00 am. Additionally, a dialogue session titled “The Palm Tree in History,” featuring Dr Khaled Douglas from Sultan Qaboos University and Professor Ali al Lawati from the University of Nizwa, will explore the historical and scientific significance of palm trees.

The event aims to offer a comprehensive insight into the palm tree, its myriad uses, and Oman's agricultural treasures.



It’s marriage season in Dhofar

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Marriage season in Salalah is a time of joy, where families, relatives and friends come together to celebrate and support newlyweds as they embark on a new chapter in their lives. In Dhofar, the majority of weddings take place during the khareef season, a time when the weather is cooler, businesses thrive, and many residents remain in Salalah to enjoy the beauty of the season.

The season brings happiness for families on both sides, friends and relatives. But, it is not free from challenges for many.

Ahmed, a retired educator, finds himself in a unique situation during the marriage season. Known for his active social life, Ahmed has a vast network of acquaintances. “A wide circle of contacts means more wedding invitations,” he notes.

“In Dhofar, it’s customary to offer a monetary gift at weddings as part of our participation in the ceremony. This gesture is often reciprocated when there’s a wedding in our family, helping to ease the burden of the rising costs of weddings,” he explains.

Having retired earlier this



year, Ahmed received over 100 wedding invitations from across Salalah, Taqah, Mirbat and Itin. While he wished to attend all the weddings, he had to be selective, given the financial commitment involved.

“So far, I’ve attended 83 weddings this season,” Ahmed shares. “The amount you give depends on how close you are to the family. While there’s no set rule, I typically contribute between RO 10 and 50. You can imagine the challenge,” he laughs.

“But I support this tradition because it’s only during the marriage season, and a wise man like me sets aside some

money each month for the occasions.” Ahmed values the tradition of giving money at social functions, seeing it as a form of mutual support. “It’s about sharing someone’s burden, even though it’s not mandatory. Some people have started giving gifts instead, but I prefer giving money,” he says.

Similarly, Khalid, who recently began his career, feels the pressure to attend social events and uphold these customs.

“Weddings are mostly held on weekends for everyone’s convenience. Out of the 22 invitations I received, I attended five weddings last

week — two in Saada, two in Taqah and one in Mirbat, contributing RO 10 for each,” he recalls.

Last year, Khalid was able to offer more generous contributions of RO 10, 20, or 50 at weddings. However, after moving into a new home this year, his budget has tightened, and he’s decided to standardise his contributions to RO 10 per wedding.

To ensure he can attend these events without financial strain, Khalid has started saving a little each month for weddings, allowing him to participate with joy while supporting the tradition he holds dear.

GULF SCOUT CAMP CONCLUDES IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The Gulf Summer Scout Camp for the Advanced Scouts concluded on Tuesday in Jabal Ashur Plain in Dhofar Governorate. The camp was organised by the General Directorate of Scouts and Guides under the slogan “Scouting: Innovation, Sustainability, Construction”. Khamis bin Surour al Balushi, Head of the Summer Scout Camp for Advanced Scouts, spoke about the objectives of the camp, which focused on enhancing capabilities in sustainable development, instilling scouting values and citizenship.

A visual presentation showcased the various activities held during the camp. The camp programme also included workshops on producing films using mobile phones and artificial intelligence programmes, identifying electronic blackmail, communication and media, as well as first aid and civil defence. Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, the event sponsor, honoured the supporting institutions, cooperating organisations and the delegations participating in the camp. – **ONA**

Recall

Subaru WRX STI

Recall Date: 14th August 2024

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production	Number of Affected Commodities
Subaru WRX STI	2018 - 2021	24

Recall consequence

Description of defect: For certain 2018MY-2021MY WRX STI vehicles for GCC countries, if the original temporary spare tire is used on the front wheels, the load capacity of the temporary spare tire is insufficient for the load capacity specified by the regulation due to inappropriate setting of the temporary spare tire specification, resulting in non-compliance with the regulation. The cause of the inappropriate setting of the temporary spare tire specification was that the relevant GCC regulations were misunderstood to be identical to the UN Regulation 64, and the original temporary spare tire specifications were mistakenly set based on UN-R64.

Recall Action

Procedure: Change of the temporary spare tire with correct specifications to comply with the GCC regulations

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov.om>

Toll free No 80050004 on all working days between 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM & 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM

هيئة حماية المستهلك
Consumer Protection Authority
www.pacp.gov.om

رقب المستهلك
Consumer Line
80079009
80077997

OTE GROUP
Oman Gulf enterprises LLC

Task force to intensify drive against ‘aarnot’ seasonal fly in Dhofar

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, AUGUST 13

The Steering Committee overseeing the control of the ‘aarnot’ — a pesky biting midge that thrives during the khareef season — has reported significance success in the trial of new control measures piloted for the first time during the 2023 khareef.

The measures, centring on the use of insecticides and carbon traps, were implemented in four different locations — Wadi Darbat, Ain Arzat, Ain Sahlnoot and Ain Jarziz — in Dhofar Governorate. The results indicated that the campaign was effective in reducing the number of midges in the targeted areas, as a noticeable decrease in the presence of the ‘aarnot’ was observed. This partial success provided the team with clear directives to improve the programme for this year and mitigate any treatments that might have an environmental impact.

This year, the committee continues its tasks in combating the ‘aarnot’ seasonal fly (scientific name: Forcipomyia), focusing on using fumigant insecticides (smoke) to target adult insects. The smoke quickly dissipates in the air and targets the insects at their peak, achieving the goal of reducing the insect population while minimising negative environmental impacts. Several tourist sites such as Wadi Darbat, Ain Arzat, Ain Sahlnoot and Ain Jarziz, among other tourist locations in the plains, will be targeted. Carbon traps will be deployed in various locations to study the effectiveness of the spraying. The results will be compared between sprayed and



Carbon Trap installed in Salalah as a measure against the ‘aarnot’ seasonal fly

unsprayed areas, and based on daily reports, the team will take appropriate measures.

The committee clarified that this campaign will focus solely on certain tourist sites to reduce the presence of this insect and will not be randomly directed in forested areas but within a limited scope, similar to mosquito control that may occur in residential and tourist areas. It is known that the ‘aarnot’ is a seasonal insect that appears only in the khareef after the soil is saturated with rain, with the larvae remaining dormant throughout the year until the next khareef season begins.

The ‘aarnot’ Control Steering Committee is collaborating with relevant authorities to select one of the proposals for a detailed study on the midge’s life cycle, its environmental impact, and ways to mitigate its effects while maintaining the sustainability of ecosystems. Such a study will provide a broad perspective on the ‘aarnot’ and other insects present in the khareef.

The control team is keen to use organic pesticides that are less harmful to the environment and that dissipate over time without long-term environmental effects. Although all activities in tourist sites have a negative impact on the environment, restoring and enhancing these ecosystems, contributing effectively to the planting of wild trees, scattering local herb seeds and raising environmental awareness help compensate for the negative impact of human activities on the environment.

Dhofar Municipality, in cooperation with relevant authorities, is currently implementing extensive campaigns to scatter more than 40 billion grass seeds, over 68 million local tree seeds and more than 2 million seed balls.

Over 70 per cent of this campaign has been completed so far. Additionally, several projects have been announced, and others will be announced soon, aimed primarily at protecting ecosystems and supporting the spread of local plants.

طاقة
taqa

وزارة الطاقة والمعادن
Ministry of Energy and Minerals

Public Auction of Mining General Sites for Gypsum

To enhance local industries, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals is pleased to announce the public auction of 4 mining sites for gypsum - **for domestic use only** - within the general site in the Wilayat of Thummrit No. (GS-0000004). This opportunity is open to Omani companies with experience in mineral sector projects.

The general site extends over an area estimated at approximately 27 square kilometers and is 14 kilometers south of the state of Thumrait and 55 kilometers north of the state of Salalah. The Ministry has conducted the preliminary studies for this general site.

The opportunities - shown in the table below - will be open for competition to Omani companies via the Taqa platform <https://taqa.mem.gov.om/eminig> starting from the date of this announcement.

	The mining Site numbers
The general site number (GS-0000004)	(GS-0000004)-A
	(GS-0000004)-C
	(GS-0000004)-D
	(GS-0000004)-I

For more details, please contact the number **24640654/24640561** or email: **concessions.dept@mem.gov.om**



Emotional readiness prerequisite for new school year



adapting to the changes ahead.

Teachers also face challenges as they prepare for the new school year. They need to be ready to meet the needs of their students, create a positive learning environment, and take care of their well-being.

“Each year brings a unique group of students with different needs. It’s important to be prepared mentally and physically,” says Mohammed, an elementary school teacher. “Creating a safe and supportive environment for students is crucial.”

Teachers prepare by gathering resources, setting up classrooms, and planning lessons. However, their emotional readiness is just as important, as they need to stay positive and energetic throughout the year.

Some parents and teachers focus on personalised school supplies. Faisal Mubarak, a teacher and father, says, “I spent a month finding the right supplies for my children and myself. I like personalised items like pencil cases and notebooks with their photos and positive quotes. It makes me feel ready and happy, and my kids are excited to show off their unique supplies to their friends.”

Parents play a key role in preparing their children for the school year, both physically and emotionally. They make sure their kids have what they need for school and also help them prepare mentally for the challenges ahead.

“My main concern is making sure my son feels confident and ready for the new school year,” says Alia, a mother of two. “We talk about his feelings a lot, making sure he’s not just prepared with supplies but also mentally ready for what’s coming.”

Ali, a father of three, adds, “I focus on getting my kids mentally ready for school, especially after they’ve had unlimited screen time all summer. A break from screens before school starts is essential.”

Parents also need to be emotionally prepared to support their children throughout the school year. This includes managing their stress, creating a positive home environment that encourages learning, and wisely using their time and their children’s time.

As the school year approaches, it’s clear that back-to-school preparations involve more than just buying supplies and making schedules. Students, teachers, and parents all have their challenges, and being emotionally and mentally prepared is just as important as being physically ready.

By addressing these different perspectives, the transition into the new school year can be smoother and more successful for everyone involved.

SIHAM AL SAIDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

As the summer break is soon coming to an end, teachers, students, and parents are getting ready for the new school year. Each group has its own expectations and challenges, highlighting the importance of being both academically and emotionally prepared for the year ahead.

For many students, going back to school brings a mix of excitement and anxiety. They are excited to see friends and learn new things, but they also worry about academic pressures, new teachers, unfamiliar surroundings, and transitioning from the freedom of summer to a structured school routine.

“I can’t wait to see my friends, but I’m nervous about the new classes and teachers,” shares Fatima, a high school student. “It’s hard to get back into a routine after such a long break. I used to stay up late. How will I wake up early again after three months?” she adds with concern.

While students focus on getting new uniforms and school supplies, their emotional well-being is equally important. Many students need help managing stress and

GETTING READY

- 1 CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR STUDENTS IS CRUCIAL
- 2 MAKING SURE CHILDREN FEEL CONFIDENT AND READY FOR THE NEW SCHOOL YEAR
- 3 A BREAK FROM SCREENS BEFORE SCHOOL STARTS IS ESSENTIAL
- 4 FINDING THE RIGHT SUPPLIES FOR MY CHILDREN



RECALL DATE: 14/08/2024

Recall

TOYOTA

Brand of Commodity	Year of Production*	#Number of Affected Commodities
Avalon GSX50	May 20,2020 - November 12,2021	449

*Not all vehicles in this production period, are affected.
#Subject to revision, based on the information received from the manufacturer, from time to time.

Recall consequence

The subject vehicles are equipped with a front passenger seat that contains an Occupant Classification System (OCS) sensors which provides input to the Supplemental Restraint System (SRS) to determine the deployment strategy of the front passenger airbag, depending on the occupant load. There is a possibility that, during the production process during a specific period at a certain supplier, the OCS sensor Printed Circuit Board (PCB) became deformed, causing a crack to form in a capacitor, which could lead to moisture entering the capacitor over time and result in a short circuit. If this occurs, the SRS warning lamp will illuminate, the "Passenger Airbag OFF" lamp will illuminate, a Multi Information Display (MID) message will display, and the front passenger airbag may not deploy in certain crashes as designed, increasing the risk of injury to an occupant in the seat in the event of a crash.

Recall Action

To inspect and replace the OCS sensors

To check the serial Numbers of the affected commodities, please visit the website for Recalls & Warnings: <http://recall.pacp.gov>



Contact details: Toll free - 80073000
Working days: Sunday - Thursday
Working Time: 8:00 - 17:00 hrs.





Oman participates in ‘Army-2024’ military forum

MOSCOW: Oman participated in the opening of the 10th International Military-Technical Forum (Army-2024) in Russia. The forum is being held from August 12 to 18, at



Patriot Expo, Kubinka Air Base, and Alabino military training grounds. Oman was represented at the opening by Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College.

The Omani delegation toured the exhibition and listened to briefings about defence and strategic industries, artificial intelligence technologies and a broad range of military equipment on show.

Theft in Ruwi jewellery shop, 8 arrested

MUSCAT: The police in Muscat arrested eight people of Arab and Asian nationalities for stealing large quantities of gold jewellery from a gold shop in the Ruwi area.

In a statement, ROP said

legal procedures are being completed against them.

‘The owners of shops and private institutions are advised to implement safety and security standards in their establishments to reduce theft crimes,’ ROP stated.

International Youth Day — NCSI highlights role of young Omanis

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

On the occasion of International Youth Day, which is celebrated on August 12 every year, the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) issued a report that highlights some important statistics related to Omani youth.

This data highlights the role of youth as a driving force in the economic and social development of the Sultanate of Oman, as well as emphasising the importance of empowering and supporting them to achieve their goals.

According to the report, the number of Omani youth aged between 18 and 29 years by the end of June 2024 amounted to about 535,041 young people. This age group represents a large percentage of the population and is considered the backbone of the future of the Sultanate of Oman. This figure shows the importance of youth in Omani society, as they contribute to various sectors and constitute a large part of the workforce.

In the field of entrepreneurship, the report revealed that the number of Omani youth who own businesses reached 7,134 young people. This figure expresses a significant increase in the number of young people who have chosen the path of entrepreneurship. This trend reflects the growing ambition of Omani youth to establish their own projects, which contributes to diversifying the national economy and creating new job opportunities. This result is a positive indicator of economic growth and the trend towards innovation and leadership among young people.

In another context, the report



The number of Omani youth aged between 18 and 29 years by the end of June 2024 amounted to about 535,041



indicated that the number of Omani youth who own housing units reached 13,437 young people. This number reflects the success of young people in achieving economic independence and their ability to invest in long-term assets. The ownership of housing units by young people is an indicator of

their ability to plan for the future and provide stability for their families.

These statistics show the great importance of young people in Omani society and their pivotal role in building the future of the country. This report emphasises the need to enhance policies and programs that enhance the

empowerment of young people and provide them with the necessary opportunities to achieve their ambitions and contribute to the renaissance of the country. On International Youth Day, these numbers are a reminder of the importance of investing in the next generation to ensure Oman’s sustainable and prosperous future.

Awareness campaign highlights effects of social media on children

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

In alignment with the national campaign ‘Our Children, Our Responsibility’, the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), in collaboration with the Muscat Unicef office, organised a special event aimed at promoting awareness of the increasing risks posed by social media to children.

The event represents a significant effort by the Ministry, in partnership with the National Committee for Family Affairs and Unicef, and with the support of the Ministries of Education, Health, and Information, alongside the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Held in Dhofar Governorate, the event drew attention to the harmful effects of children’s growing engagement with social media platforms. With many children spending substantial hours each day on these platforms, the risks are mounting, including potential health issues, psychological challenges, and social problems.

Specific dangers include exposure to inappropriate content, experiences of online bullying, and the threats posed by cybercrime, such as demands for personal data and online

blackmail.

A key feature of the event was a short theatrical performance by children, dramatising the potential health and social dangers of social media use. The event also incorporated interactive sessions to involve the children and audience in discussions aimed at raising awareness of these issues.

Meanwhile, the NCSI shared insights from a survey conducted between February and April 2024, examining children’s use of social media in Oman. The findings revealed a significant rise in social media usage among children since 2019, with 78 per cent now using these platforms, 58 per cent of them daily. Parents generally agree that 16 years is an appropriate age for children to begin using social media.

However, 22 per cent of children were reported to avoid these platforms due to concerns about information security, lack of essential skills, and worries about health and social impacts.

The survey highlighted YouTube as the most popular platform among children, with an 82 per cent usage rate, followed by WhatsApp at 47 per cent, and Instagram at 31 per cent, with other platforms being less commonly used.



The event drew attention to the harmful effects of children’s growing engagement with social media platforms

AN ARTIST’S JOURNEY THROUGH THE THEATRE

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

Abdulmalik bin Yasser al Busaidy, a passionate student of Arabic language and literature at Sultan Qaboos University’s College of Arts and Social Sciences, has found his calling in the university’s theatre group, where he currently serves as president.

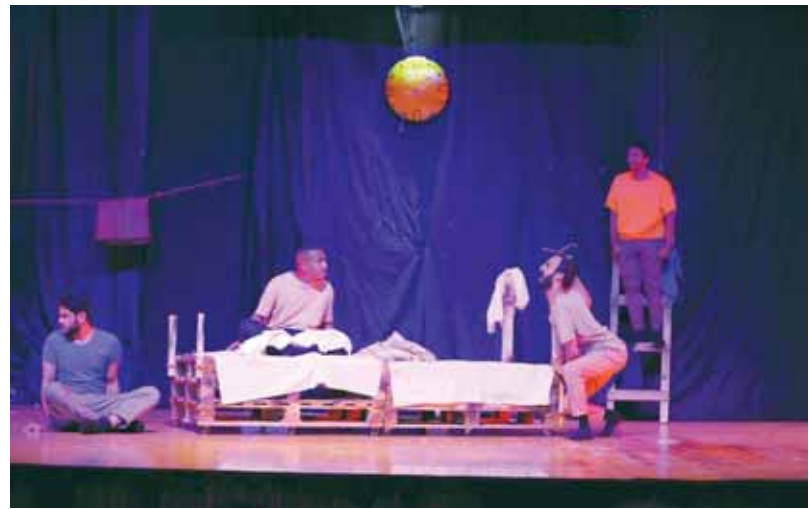
Abdulmalik’s journey into theatre began unexpectedly, initially focusing solely on academics, but his curiosity led him to join the theatre group. What started as a casual involvement quickly turned into a deep passion, propelling him from a participant to the head of the decor committee, and eventually, to the group’s leadership.

The university theatre, as

Abdulmalik describes, is much more than a stage; it’s a cradle of artistic expression where many have honed their talents over the years. Although the theatre’s exact founding year is unclear, its legacy is evident through the numerous successful directors, actors, and writers it has produced.

A key influence on Abdulmalik’s journey has been Dr Rahima al Jabri, whose teachings transcended the basics of acting, emphasising the importance of emotion, narrative, and genuine expression.

Under Abdulmalik’s leadership, the theatre group has thrived, driven by a clear vision: To enhance the reputation of Sultan Qaboos University, showcasing not only academic excellence but also a vibrant cultural life. Despite



Picture for illustrative purpose only

facing challenges such as logistical hurdles and creative differences, Abdulmalik emphasises the importance of consultation and collaboration, particularly with the

group’s experienced supervisor.

The theatre group has enjoyed significant success, staging impactful productions like ‘Strangers Don’t Drink Coffee,’

directed by Abdullah bin Zaher al Maskary, which addressed the Palestinian Islamic cause. Other notable performances include the Traffic Week sketch ‘Driving Without a Phone,’ in collaboration with the Royal Oman Police, and the comedy ‘The Arguth Comedy,’ directed by Abdulmalik himself, at the Eastern University Festival.

Abdulmalik firmly believes in the power of theatre to shape perspectives and foster cultural awareness, often quoting, ‘Give me a theatre, and I’ll give you a cultured nation.’ This philosophy drives the group to create performances that educate and inspire. Collaboration, both within the university and with external partners like government institutions, has been crucial to their success.

For Abdulmalik, leading the theatre group has been a transformative experience, teaching him patience, resilience, and the true essence of leadership. Looking ahead, he envisions a future where the theatre group continues to grow, becoming better with each passing day. With plans for new shows, festivals, and a variety of activities, the future of the university theatre is indeed promising.

In his parting message, Abdulmalik emphasises the importance of the arts, declaring, ‘There is no life for those who have no art.’ To him and the members of the university theatre group, art is not merely a hobby but a vital part of life, shaping identities and world views.



Hamas fires at Tel Aviv after 19 killed in Gaza

GAZA: Palestinian Hamas fired two rockets at Israel's commercial hub Tel Aviv on Tuesday for the first time in months and Israeli air strikes killed at least 19 Palestinians in Gaza, as mediators aimed to resume ceasefire talks later in the week.

There were no reports of casualties in Israel. Two rockets had been fired from Gaza, the Israeli military said, one of which fell in the sea and the other had not reached Israeli territory.

Hamas' military wing said in a statement: "We have bombed the city of Tel Aviv and its suburbs with two 'M90' missiles in response to the Zionist massacres against civilians and the deliberate displacement of our people."

Israeli air strikes killed 19 Palestinians in the central and southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday, medics said. Hamas last claimed firing rockets at Tel Aviv in May.

One strike killed six people in Deir Al Balah, including a mother and her twin four-day-old babies, while seven other Palestinians were killed in a strike on a house in the nearby Al Bureij camp.

Four people were killed in two separate strikes on the Al Maghazi camp in the central Gaza Strip and Rafah in the south, and two were killed in a strike on a house in the Sheikh Radwan



Palestinian children pose for a picture near their tent set on a road's median at a makeshift displacement camp set up along a road in Deir Al Balah. — AFP

neighbourhood of Gaza City in the north, medics said. The Israeli military said it had killed Palestinian gunmen and

dismantled military structures in Khan Yunis, located weapons and explosives in Rafah, and struck rocket launchers and sniper posts

in central Gaza. The US said on Monday that it expected Gaza ceasefire talks slated for Thursday to go ahead as planned, and that an agreement was still possible. Axios reported that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken planned

Israeli air strikes killed 19 Palestinians in the central and southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. Hamas last claimed firing rockets at Tel Aviv in May

to set off on Tuesday for discussions in Qatar, Egypt and Israel.

But Hamas is demanding a workable plan to implement the proposal, presented by US President Joe Biden in May - rather than more talks.

A Hamas official said that a CNN report saying the group planned to attend on Thursday was wrong. "Our statement the other day was clear: what is needed is the implementation, not more negotiation," said the official.

Almost 40,000 Palestinians have since been killed in the Israeli offensive in Gaza, with much of the enclave laid to waste and most the population displaced. A ceasefire deal would aim to end fighting in Gaza and ensure the release of Israeli captives held in the enclave in return for Palestinians jailed in Israel. — Reuters

Bangladesh opens probe against Hasina

DHAKA: A court in Bangladesh opened a murder investigation into ousted ex-premier Sheikh Hasina and six top figures in her administration on Tuesday over the police killing of a man during civil unrest last month.

Hasina, 76, fled by helicopter to neighbouring India a week ago, where she remains, as protesters flooded Dhaka's streets in a dramatic end to her tenure. More than 450 people were killed during the weeks of unrest leading up to her toppling.

"A case has been filed against Sheikh Hasina and six more," said Mamun Mia, a lawyer who brought the case on behalf of a private citizen.

He added that the Dhaka Metropolitan Court had ordered police to accept "the murder case against the accused persons", the first step in a criminal investigation under Bangladeshi law.

Mia's filing with the court also named Hasina's former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Obaidul Quader, the general secretary of Hasina's Awami League party.



Activists of the Anti-Discriminatory Student Movement gather at the University of Dhaka's Teacher Student Center (TSC), in Dhaka. — Reuters

It also names four top police officers appointed by Hasina's government who have since vacated their posts.

The case accuses the seven of responsibility for the death of a grocery store owner who was shot dead on July 19 by police violently suppressing protests.

The Daily Star newspaper reported that the case was brought on behalf of Amir Hamza Shatil, a resident of the neighbourhood where the

shooting happened and a "well-wisher" of the victim.

Hasina's government was accused of widespread human rights abuses, including the extrajudicial killing of thousands of her political opponents.

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus returned from Europe three days after Hasina's ouster to head a temporary administration facing the monumental challenge of steering democratic reforms.

The 84-year-old won the

The court had ordered police to accept the murder case against the accused persons, the first step in a criminal investigation under Bangladeshi law

Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his pioneering work in microfinance, and is credited with helping millions of Bangladeshi out of grinding poverty.

He took office as "chief adviser" to a caretaker administration and has said he wants to hold elections "within a few months".

Hossain said that the government had no intention of banning Hasina's Awami League, which played a pivotal role in the country's independence movement.

"The party has made many contributions to Bangladesh — we don't deny this," he told reporters. "When the election comes, (they should) contest the elections." — AFP

DEATH TOLL MOUNTS FROM SOUTH ASIA'S MONSOON



Students and villagers stand near a partially collapsed school following severe soil erosion during monsoon season in Kokrajhar district, India. — AFP file photo

NEW DELHI: Torrential storms lashing South Asia have killed hundreds of people since June, official data showed on Tuesday, with flooding and landslides causing widespread devastation during the treacherous monsoon season.

Weather-related disasters are common during the monsoon season from June to September, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency and severity.

The deaths include at least 250 in India, 171 in Nepal and 178 in Pakistan, according to official data in each country.

In India, just months after the country baked in its longest-ever heatwave, according to

government weather experts, ferocious rainstorms have triggered widespread flooding and landslides.

The crushing heatwave in May and June saw temperatures in New Delhi match the capital's previous record high: 49.2C clocked in 2022. Now the heat has been replaced by rains. India's weather department this week warned of "heavy rainfall" over much of the south and northeastern states.

On Tuesday, rescue teams searched for two missing people after nine drowned when a surge of water smashed through the Una district of Himachal Pradesh state. Witnesses saw a car being swept away like a toy by the swollen muddy river. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

KAMPALA

Court finds Uganda LRA commander guilty

A Ugandan court on Tuesday found a former commander in the feared Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) guilty of multiple counts of crimes against humanity after the first such war crimes trial in the East African country.

Thomas Kwoyelo, who was charged for crimes committed during a bloody two-decade LRA rebellion in northern Uganda, had been waiting for years behind bars for a verdict in the landmark case. "He is



found guilty of the 44 offences and hereby convicted," lead judge Michael Elubu said at the International Crimes Division (ICD) of the high court in the northern city of Gulu. — AFP

TOKYO

Thousands cancel trips in Japan after quake alert

Japan's unprecedented mega-quake advisory has prompted thousands of hotel cancellations in areas flagged as high-risk, dealing businesses a heavy blow in what would have been one of the busiest seasons, hoteliers said.

The weather agency said last week a huge earthquake was more likely in the aftermath of a magnitude 7.1 jolt in the south, which left at least 15 people injured. The advisory, the first of its kind, doesn't mean a colos-



sal tremor is imminent. Subject to the warning is the so-called "Nankai Trough" 800-kilometre undersea zone that runs from Shizuoka to the southern tip of Kyushu island. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkiye says progress in Somalia, Ethiopia talks

Turkiye said Horn of Africa rivals Somalia and Ethiopia made "notable progress" on the second round of talks in Ankara on Tuesday aiming to overcome their differences.

Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan mediated talks between his counterparts.

"I am pleased to announce that the number and extent of issues we discussed, has increased significantly, compared to the first round," Fidan said in English, speaking to the press



alongside his two counterparts. "There are important convergences on some major principles and specific modalities. This constitutes notable progress," Fidan added. — AFP



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In brief

■ MADRID



SPANISH CHARITY RESCUES 54 MIGRANTS IN MEDITERRANEAN

Volunteer lifeguards from Spanish charity Proactiva Open Arms rescued 54 migrants stranded on a rubber dinghy in the Mediterranean Sea off the Italian island of Lampedusa on Tuesday. They were later taken to Lampedusa by the Italian Coast Guard.

The central Mediterranean is one of the most dangerous routes for refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Last year, more than 3,100 people died or went missing while attempting to cross the sea to Europe, according to data from the United Nations refugee agency. Open Arms said it had rescued a total of 383 people in the past four days. — AFP

■ SANTIAGO



WORKERS STRIKE AT WORLD'S LARGEST COPPER MINE

Workers at BHP's Escondida mine in Chile began a strike on Tuesday morning after pay negotiations fell apart, setting the stage for a potential hit to production at the world's biggest copper mine.

The workers' union said a strike was set to start at 8 am after little progress was made during five days of government mediated talks.

"We made every responsible effort to reach an agreement, but that wasn't possible," said the union, which represents about 2,400 people.

BHP said it had not anticipated a new set of demands from the union on the final day of talks. — AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMAN BORDER CONTROLS SET TO BE EXTENDED

Border controls introduced by Germany could be extended beyond Dec. 15 if necessary as they have proved very successful in fighting smugglers and irregular migration, the German interior minister said. "For me, the border controls will remain as long as necessary," Nancy Faeser said in the city of Goerlitz on the Polish border.

The European Union agreed in December on new rules to handle irregular arrivals of asylum seekers and migrants, a deal hailed as a breakthrough after almost a decade of bitter feuds. It could take until the end of 2025 for the pact to take full effect. — Reuters

Russia strikes back in Kursk

MOSCOW: Russian forces on Tuesday struck back at Ukrainian troops with missiles, drones and air strikes in actions that one senior commander said had halted Ukraine's advance after the biggest attack on sovereign Russian territory since the war began.

Thousands of Ukrainian soldiers smashed through the Russian border a week ago in a surprise attack that Russian President Vladimir Putin said was aimed at improving Kyiv's negotiating position ahead of possible talks and slowing the advance of Russian forces along the front.

The Ukrainian forces carved out a slice of Russian territory, prompting Moscow to evacuate almost 200,000 people while it rushed in reserves.

Russian war bloggers reported intense battles across the Kursk front as the Ukrainians tried to expand their control, though they said Russia was bringing in soldiers and heavy weaponry and had repelled many Ukrainian attacks.

Russia's defence ministry published images of Sukhoi Su-34 bombers striking at what it said were Ukrainian troops in the Kursk border region and said it had repelled attacks at villages about 26-28 km from the border.

Russian forces had destroyed a total of 35 Ukrainian tanks, 31 armoured personnel carriers, 18 infantry fighting vehicles, and 179 other armoured vehicles during the week-long battle, it said.

"The uncontrolled ride of



Ukrainian servicemen operate an armoured military vehicle in the Sumy region, near the border with Russia. — AFP

Russian forces had destroyed a total of 35 Ukrainian tanks, 31 armoured personnel carriers, 18 infantry fighting vehicles and 179 other armoured vehicles

the enemy has already been halted," said Major General Apti Alaudinov, the commander of the Chechen Akhmat special forces unit. "The enemy is already aware that the blitzkrieg that it planned did not work out."

It was not clear which side was in control of the Russian town of Sudzha, through which Russia delivers gas from Western Siberia through Ukraine and on to Slovakia and other European Union countries.

Gazprom said on Tuesday it was still pumping gas to Ukraine through Sudzha.

Kursk's acting governor, Alexei Smirnov, said on Monday that Ukraine controlled 28 settlements in the region, and the incursion was about 12 km deep and 40 km wide. Ukraine claimed it controlled 1,000 square km of Russia.

Putin told officials that Russia

would force out the Ukrainian troops, saying Russian forces were speeding up their advance along other parts of the front.

President Volodymyr Zelensky told Ukrainians in his nightly address that the operation in Russia was a matter of Ukrainian security and the Kursk region had been used by Russia to launch many strikes against Ukraine.

But by dedicating forces to Kursk, Ukraine may leave other parts of the front exposed just as Russia has been advancing. Russia which has a far larger army, could try to encircle Ukrainian forces. — AFP

UN says concerned by 'climate of fear' in Venezuela

GENEVA: The United Nations voiced deep concern on Tuesday over what it said was a climate of fear in Venezuela following the country's disputed presidential election results.

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said he was troubled by the high number of arbitrary detentions and the disproportionate use of force.

"It is especially troubling that so many people are being detained, accused or charged either with incitement to hatred or under counterterrorism legislation," Turk said in a statement.



Members of the Venezuelan community march during a protest against the results of Venezuela's presidential elections, in Mexico City. — AFP file photo

"Criminal law must never be used to limit unduly the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association."

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro called on Monday for the state to use an "iron fist" after deadly protests in response to his re-election, dismissed at home and abroad as a sham.

As the official protest death toll rose to 25, Maduro urged "severe justice" for violence he blames on the opposition, which insists its candidate Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia won a July 28 vote by a landslide. The UN human rights office said that according to official

statements, more than 2,400 people have been arrested since July 29.

The figure includes the arbitrary detention of protesters, human rights defenders, adolescents, people with disabilities, members of the opposition or those perceived to be connected to them, as well as people who served as electoral observers accredited by opposition parties in polling stations, Turk's office said.

Turk's spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani told a press briefing that the UN rights office wanted to see the right to political representation and freedom of expression upheld. — AFP



Former US president Donald Trump speaks during an interview with billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk, Florida. — Reuters

■ GREECE BATTLES WILDFIRES



Volunteers and firefighters try to extinguish a fire in a building as a wildfire burns in Vrilissia near Athens, Greece. Stoked by gale-force winds and despite the efforts of hundreds of firefighters, aircraft and trucks, the blaze moved quickly into the suburbs, torching homes and stirring panic in neighbourhoods. Hundreds took to the streets, their faces covered by bandanas or t-shirts as smoke and ash descended. — Reuters

Salalah holds potential to be a ‘Silicon Valley’



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

How will you measure the success of your city? In his book “How Will You Measure Your Life?” the late father of Disruptive Innovation, Professor Clayton Christensen, emphasised the importance of applying structured models to measure our lives, advocating that the most rewarding approach is building up people, rather than merely building infrastructure and materials.

One of the clearest global best practices in building up people to achieve progress has been applied for the past century in San Francisco, California, in the United States of America. Silicon Valley is not only a hub for global technology companies; it also exemplifies the power of leveraging government support to attract investment in new market innovations. Salalah, located in the Governorate of Dhofar in the Sultanate of Oman, holds the potential to contribute significantly to global socio-economic progress by becoming a sustainable new market innovations hub.

Professor Christensen’s theories on innovation provide a valuable framework for understanding how cities can position themselves as leaders in the global economy. He identified three primary innovation markets: low-end mass market innovation, sustained innovation, and new market innovation. Each of these offers a unique path to success, as demonstrated by various cities around the world.

Shenzhen, China, is a prime example of how low-end mass market innovation can drive economic growth. In the late 20th century, Shenzhen transformed from a small fishing village into a sprawling metropolis by focusing on mass

production and price competitiveness. The city became a global manufacturing hub, particularly for electronics, leveraging its cost advantages to attract businesses from around the world. By producing affordable goods at scale, Shenzhen not only boosted its local economy but also made advanced technology accessible to billions of people worldwide. This focus on mass market innovation has positioned Shenzhen as a critical player in the global economy, demonstrating the potential of cities that prioritise efficiency, cost competitiveness, and large-scale production.

Zurich, Switzerland, offers a contrasting example of sustained innovation. Known for its high-quality products and services, Zurich has carved out a niche in the global economy by focusing on sustained innovation. The city is a centre for finance, pharmaceuticals, and precision engineering, industries that require continuous improvement and cutting-edge research. Zurich’s commitment to excellence and its ability to maintain a competitive edge in these elite markets have made it a global leader in innovation. The city’s sustained innovation strategy has attracted top talent and investment, proving that even smaller cities can dominate niche markets through relentless focus on quality and incremental improvements.

Bengaluru (Bangalore), India, is a textbook case of new market innovation. Often referred to as the ‘Silicon Valley of India,’ Bengaluru filled a gap in the global technology market by becoming a hub for software development and IT services. Unlike traditional tech hubs that focused on hardware or established software markets, Bengaluru capitalised on the growing demand for outsourcing and software services, creating a new market that was

SALALAH, WITH ITS STRATEGIC LOCATION, RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND GROWING INFRASTRUCTURE, IS WELL-POSITIONED TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF NEW MARKET INNOVATION

previously underserved. This strategic focus on new market innovation allowed Bengaluru to emerge as a global technology centre, attracting investment, talent, and multinational corporations. Bengaluru’s success illustrates how cities can achieve rapid growth by identifying and serving new markets, even in the face of established competitors.

Salalah, with its strategic location, rich cultural heritage, and growing infrastructure, is well-positioned to follow the path of new market innovation. The city can carve out a unique niche by focusing on sustainable technologies and practices that are increasingly in demand globally. As the world shifts towards sustainability, there is a significant opportunity for Salalah to become a leader in clean technologies, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture. By adopting a blue ocean strategy, where competition is minimal, Salalah can attract national, regional, and international investments, foster innovation, and create new markets that address the pressing environmental challenges of our time.

The success of cities like Shenzhen, Zurich, and Bengaluru demonstrates that there is no single path to becoming a global innovation hub. However, they all share a common trait: the ability to build up their people and create an environment that fosters innovation. Salalah, by focusing on sustainable new market innovations, can contribute to global progress while also securing its place in the global economy. With the right vision, investment, and commitment to building up its people, Salalah has the potential to become the next hub for sustainable innovation, making a lasting impact on both the region and the world.

Extreme heat a new challenge for Gaza aid agencies

NAZIH OSSEIRAN AND MENNA FAROUK

In Gaza, the sky is full of menace. As well as the missiles that rain down on schools and shelters, the brutal rays of the sun have made the summer unbearable for those struggling to survive in a ravaged landscape of ruins and rubble.

Samaher al Daour sometimes wishes she had been killed in the early days of the war rather than have to watch her son, who lost a leg during the conflict, endure the unbearable heat.

“The situation is horrible,” said Daour, 42, as she sat beside her 20-year-old son Haitham in their sweltering tent in the southern city of Khan Younis in June. “During the day, it is incredibly hot inside and outside the tent,” she said in a telephone interview. “We go to the sea but it is still very difficult.” Haitham lost his leg in February during an Israeli airstrike on a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNWRA) in the Maghazi refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip.

Now the stifling heat is denying him the rest he needs to recover his strength. He sweats all the time and this is irritating his leg and making it swell. “He is suffering because of this,” said Daour.

After 10 months of war, almost all of Gaza’s 2.3 million people are displaced. They live in tents or overcrowded shelters, and there is almost no electricity and little clean water.

Hungry and weak, they cannot shower and struggle to sleep in their boiling shelters. In the heat, food is rotting, drawing insects and flies to crowded camps where people, who have been forced to flee again and again, now risk heatstroke and other heat-related diseases.

Since April, Gaza has experienced several periods of extreme heat, with temperatures reaching around 40 degrees Celsius during that month. Temperatures throughout August reached an average high of 34 C, according to US private forecaster AccuWeather.

In late June, the World Health Organization said scorching heat could exacerbate health problems for the millions of displaced, warning that a public health crisis was looming due to the lack of clean water, food and medical supplies.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



RUMAITHA AL BUSAIDI

The writer is an Omani climate change activist, women’s rights activist, radio presenter, marine scientist, entrepreneur and footballer

THE REAL CHALLENGE LIES NOT JUST IN SURVIVING THE SUMMER HEAT, BUT IN GRAPPLING WITH ITS LASTING EFFECTS ON OUR MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

How ocean warming is reshaping our region’s marine life

As the intense heat of summer in the Sultanate of Oman begins to wane, a sense of relief mingles with a lingering anxiety — an anxiety born not just from the scorching sun we’ve endured, but from the warming waters beneath us that remain a persistent threat. Having spent years working in the oceans space, I’ve come to recognise that the real challenge lies not just in surviving the summer heat but in grappling with its lasting effects on our marine ecosystems.

Oman, with its rich maritime heritage, has long-prided itself on its thriving fisheries and growing aquaculture sector. These industries are more than economic assets; they are integral to our nation’s identity, providing sustenance and livelihoods for countless families. From the fishermen who have navigated these waters for generations to the modern aquaculture farms pushing the boundaries of sustainable food production, the sea is our lifeblood.

But now, these very waters are changing in ways that threaten our traditions and our future. The once predictable patterns of the ocean are being upended by climate change. The relentless rise in ocean temperatures is not just a distant worry - it’s an immediate reality with profound consequences.

In aquaculture, we’ve seen how the summer heat can strain our operations. The fear isn’t just about surviving the peak temperatures but also about managing the long-term impacts that follow. Recent research conducted by scientists from NYU Abu Dhabi and the Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology, has revealed that fish in these waters



are shrinking, with some species up to 40 per cent smaller than their counterparts in cooler waters. This isn’t just a scientific curiosity; it’s a stark indicator that the balance of life in our seas is being disrupted.

The study underscores the need for resilience in our marine species. However, the ability to adapt to warmer temperatures is likely limited to a fraction of species, making it imperative that we take proactive measures to protect our marine ecosystems. The researchers recommend several strategies that could be pivotal in mitigating the impacts of ocean warming.

For Oman, a country deeply invested in its fisheries and aquaculture, this trend is alarming. Smaller fish mean less productive fisheries, which could lead to reduced catches and economic challenges for those who rely on the sea. The implications for our food security and economic diversification efforts are significant. As someone who has worked closely with the industry, I understand the gravity of the situation. But I also believe that we must not be

passive in the face of these changes. We must innovate, find new ways to counter what nature, unfortunately, has affected. We need to invest in research that helps us understand how our marine species are adapting - or struggling to adapt - to these changing conditions. We must develop and implement strategies to protect our marine resources, ensuring their sustainability for future generations.

We have a long history of resilience and innovation in this country. In fact, our ancestors adapted to life in one of the world’s most challenging environments, and we must now harness that same spirit to safeguard our marine heritage. Whether it’s through breeding heat-resistant fish strains, expanding marine protected areas, or pioneering new aquaculture techniques, we have the tools and the determination to make a difference.

The worst of the summer may have passed, but the work to protect our marine environments has only just begun. By taking decisive action now, we can ensure that Oman’s seas remain a source of life and prosperity for generations to come.

Cities for a viable future...

As population is witnessing an exponential growth, countries in the world are facing a demographic shift. This means more people are living in cities, posing more challenges for countries in providing basic services.

According to the UN Population Fund, over half of the world's population today lives in cities. As the trend expected to continue, the urban population, from its current size of 4.4 billion inhabitants, will more than double by 2050.

This urban surge gave birth to the concept of “smart cities” as they adopt smart and innovative technologies to ensure improvement in people's quality of life and also care for future generations.

In other words, smart cities help maintain better relations between the governments and citizens that will ensure improvements in operational efficiency in key basic services.

In this context, I love what's happening in the Sultanate of Oman, which had been my favourite country and my home for two and a half decades. It gives pleasure to see that Oman is becoming one of the forerunners in creating smart city hubs.

When we look at Oman's growth path, we find that urbanisation has made a significant stride during the last decades. Indeed, it surged from a mere 31.3 per cent in 1971 to a mammoth 86.3 per cent in 2020. Data shows that in 1950, less than 2.5 per cent of Omanis lived in urban areas.

According to data provider Statista, in 2023, the share of urban population in Oman represented the peak at around 88.4 per cent.

Now look at the way the number of smart cities coming up in Oman; a number of smart areas have been identified, including smart economy, smart mobility, smart environment, smart citizen, smart living and smart government.

Significantly, Oman is among the countries that signed a commitment



The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

OMAN IS AMONG THE COUNTRIES COMMITTED TO APPLY ITS PRINCIPLES IN ALL NATIONAL PLANS AND STRATEGIES THAT CALL FOR ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO KEY FACILITIES AND SERVICES FOR ALL

to apply its principles in all national plans and strategies that call for ensuring universal access to safe and affordable basic housing and services, sustainable transport systems, and green and public spaces for all.

In this direction, Oman has already unveiled its National Spatial Strategy, an enabler to achieve the ambitious Oman Vision 2040, to accelerate Oman's smart city journey of urbanisation and to capitalise on the potential for social, economic and environmental development.

The Omani authorities recently announced their plans to construct Sultan Haitham City, a new smart city located outside of Muscat, as part of Oman Vision 2040.

According to the plan drawn up by the American architectural firm Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, the new city will be accessible through a mass transit system connected to Muscat, and feature smart infrastructure designed to monitor environmental factors such as air quality and water management.

The city will have a wide array of residential units that will house 100,000 people in 20,000 homes spread over 19 neighbourhoods and 14.8 square kilometres.

The project will also include a traffic management system that utilises real-time data from cameras and speed sensors to reroute vehicles and control traffic flow.

The city's design aims to minimise its ecological impact with the use of solar energy facilities, wastewater recycling, electric vehicle infrastructure and waste-to-energy plants.

More than a city, this iconic hub will consist of an ecosystem, and a unified society built on the notion that real generosity towards the future lies in giving all to the present.

With meticulous attention to architectural excellence and design, the city aspires to become a true landmark and a cherished gift from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to all segments of society, especially the youth.

PRICELESS COLLECTION!



Two brooches part of the recovered jewellery are on display during a press event in the historic Green Vault in Dresden, eastern Germany, on Tuesday. Priceless 18th-century jewels had been snatched from the state museum in Dresden in a spectacular heist on November 25, 2019. A court had convicted five members of a criminal gang for the theft and handed down sentences of up to six years in prison in May 2023. – AFP

The rise of techno-colonialism

In 1853, under orders from president Millard Fillmore, US Navy Commodore Matthew Perry led four warships on a mission to persuade Japan to end its 200-year-old isolationist policy. When he arrived at what is now Tokyo Bay, Perry delivered an ultimatum to the Tokugawa shogunate: open up to trade with the United States or face the consequences.

The arrival of these “black ships” (so named for the dark smoke emitted by their coal-fuelled steam engines) was a pivotal moment. Confronted with this impressive display of technological prowess — which exemplified the industrial power that had already enabled the British Empire to dominate much of the world — the shogunate reluctantly agreed to Perry's demands, leading to the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854. One year later, the shogunate received its first steam-engine-powered warship from the Dutch as a token of appreciation.

While technology can pose a threat, it also powers critical infrastructure like schools and hospitals. Over the past century, in particular, the sovereign individual has become inextricably linked to a vast array of technologies, including interconnected systems like energy grids, the Internet, mobile phones and now artificial-intelligence chatbots.

As the Perry expedition showed, technology is also the backbone of state military sovereignty. Thanks to its technological dominance, the US has become the world's leading military



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power, with more than 750 bases in 80 countries — three times as many as all other countries combined.

But this picture of state sovereignty is rapidly changing. While America's financial sovereignty, underpinned by the dollar's status as a global reserve currency, remains intact, its economic sovereignty is increasingly challenged by a rising China. In purchasing-power-parity terms, China surpassed the US to become the world's largest economy in 2014. With manufacturing output roughly equal to the US and the European Union combined, China is the top trading partner of more than 120 countries.

Both superpowers are currently competing to control the design, development and production of critical technologies such as semiconductors, AI, synthetic biology, quantum computing and blockchain. A 2023 study commissioned by the US State Department, which tracks research contributions across 64 emerging technologies, showed that China is leading the US in more than 80 per cent of these areas, with the US a close second.

As the US-China rivalry escalates in the technological arena, countries around the world will be forced to pick a side and adopt their chosen ally's distinct technologies,

standards, values and supply chains. This could usher in a new era of technological colonialism, undermining global stability.

Curiously, however, neither the US nor China have been able to dominate the semiconductor industry. To change this, both superpowers are constructing what we call “technology sovereignty circles” — spheres of influence that other countries must join to access these critical technologies.

Unlike the colonialism of old, techno-colonialism is not about seizing territory but about controlling the technologies that underpin the world economy and our daily lives. To achieve this, the US and China are increasingly onshoring the most innovative and complex segments of global supply chains, thereby creating strategic chokepoints.

China, for example, has gained control of supply chains for

critical raw materials, enabling it to become the world's leading producer of electric vehicles. Meanwhile, the US leads in chip-design software thanks to companies like Cadence Design Systems and Synopsys.

Europe, too, is keen to establish itself as a key player in this rapidly evolving sector. Beyond hosting the Dutch company ASML, which produces extreme ultraviolet lithography systems crucial for advanced-chip manufacturing, the European Union is a net importer of AI research talent. It is also home to more STEM students and computer scientists and creates more start-ups than the US.

When onshoring proves impossible, technology sovereignty circles act as another, subtler form of coercion. By cultivating deeply entrenched asymmetric dependencies, they effectively push countries into

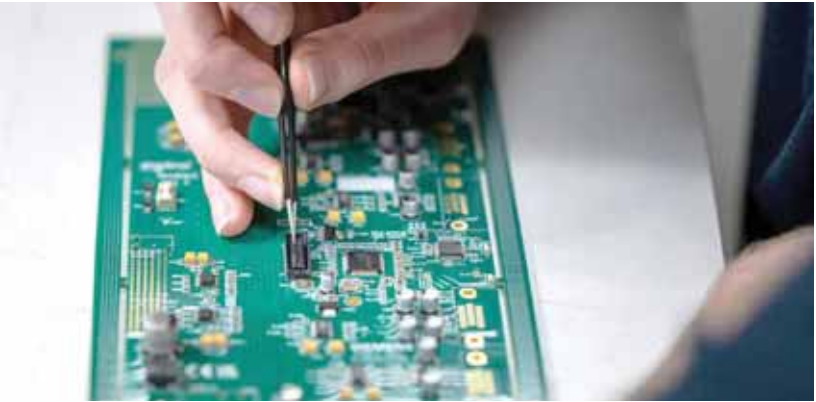
techno-economic servitude.

The United Kingdom is a prime example. In 2020, the US forced the UK to exclude Chinese technology firm Huawei from its 5G network, threatening to cut off access to America's intelligence apparatus and chip-design software. Similarly, the Netherlands was pressured to stop supplying China with ASML machinery in early January. In response, China has tightened its grip on critical materials by restricting exports of gallium and germanium, key inputs for microchips and solar panels.

Every country could soon face its own black-ship moment. Those without the protection provided by ownership of critical technologies risk becoming techno-colonies, serving the needs of their technological sovereigns by manufacturing simple electronics, refining rare metals, labelling data sets, or hosting cloud services — from physical mines to data mines. Countries that fail to align with either the US or China will find themselves relegated to the status of impoverished technological backwaters.

Amid heightened geopolitical tensions, emerging technologies such as quantum computing, AI, blockchain and synthetic biology promise to push the boundaries of human discovery.

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Curiously, however, neither the US nor China have been able to dominate the semiconductor industry.

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Top bodybuilders to vie for West Asian honours

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

More than 135 bodybuilders representing 12 countries will take part in the fifth edition of the West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship which will begin on Thursday and will run for three days at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC). The Oman Bodybuilding Committee (OBC) unveiled the details of the tournament in a press meeting on Tuesday at the main hall at SQSC in the presence of Dr Salim al Bahri, Chairman of OBC, Manar Haikel, Chairman of West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Association and Syrian Bodybuilding and Fitness Association.

“After the successful organisation of Oman Bodybuilding Championship in March, we announced and

signed the agreement to host the West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship. Today, we are thrilled to announce our full readiness to host this major event in Muscat. Thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their support to organise this event in Oman. We are very pleased that all the countries in the West Asian Association confirmed their attendance.

All the technical and logistics arrangements are completed and the arrival of the delegations began on Monday. The rest will arrive in these two days,” Dr Salim al Bahri said.

The bodybuilders will represent teams of Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, UAE, Iran, Bahrain and hosts the Sultanate of Oman. Oman team will take part at the event with 100 bodybuilders who will



compete in different categories of the event.

“Thanks to the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Oman Bodybuilding Committee for their top efforts towards hosting this major event. I had a visit to the stage and it is well prepared and ready for the event. The West Asian activities were halted for the past four years and only resumed last year. The last edition

of the West Asian championship was in Bahrain. We are expecting more players to take part in this edition,” Manar Haikel, Chairman of West Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Association, said.

Responding to an inquiry on the selection, Dr Salim said: “The national team bodybuilders were selected based on their performances at the Oman Bodybuilding and Fitness

Championship in March. This is the main domestic event. The toppers in this event will represent the country in the world, Arab, Gulf and West Asian tournaments.”

Moahmmmed al Siyabi, head coach of the Oman bodybuilding and fitness team, affirmed that the players are in good shape for the event. “The players were under comprehensive camp with daily two training sessions. Our aim is to take the first place in the tournament and we are entering this event with maximum number of players. Our stars in bodybuilding have managed to impress in the international and regional events. Our hopes are very high to achieve the top medals and secure the first place.”

INVESTMENT DESTINATION

Al Bahri said that hosting the West Asian Bodybuilding and

Fitness Championship aligns with Oman Vision 2040. “This event is emphasising the importance of youth and attracting regional and international championships. The aim is to place bodybuilding on the global sports map and to promote Oman as a known investment destination by showcasing its strategic location and capabilities.”

Commenting on the refereeing part: “Umpiring is a very crucial element for the success of the championship. Each participating country will bring their referees and the organising committee has formed a technical committee to select the best referees to manage the competitions.

Additionally, several referees from the Gulf and Arab regions known for their expertise in such championships will be invited to ensure transparency and fairness in judging,” he concluded.

Semifinals of School Beach Games Championship today

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

The semifinals of the Beach Games School Championship, organised by the Oman School Sports Association, will kick off on Wednesday at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural and Entertainment Complex in Dhofar Governorate. School teams will compete in handball and volleyball, with each team seeking to secure a place in the final match to be held on Thursday morning.

In handball, the Muscat Education team, the title holder, will face the Al Dakhiliyah Education team in a match expected to be full of excitement and competition. While the group leader, the Al Batinah North Education team, will meet the Al Dhahirah Education team, in a match that will decide the qualification card to the final.

As for beach volleyball, there will be two strong confrontations, as the Al Batinah North Education team will meet the Al Batinah South Education team, while the Al Sharqiyah South Education team will face the Dhofar Education team.

GROUP STAGE RESULTS

The final round of the group stage in beach volleyball witnessed 8 matches, where the Al Batinah South

Education team outperformed the Al Dhahirah Education team with a score of 2-0, and the Al Sharqiyah South Education team achieved a victory with the same score over the Al Sharqiyah North Education team. The Al Batinah North Education team also outperformed Dhofar Education 2-0, and the Muscat Education team defeated Al Buraimi Education with the same score. In other matches, the South Al Batinah Education team defeated Al Wusta Education, and the Al Sharqiyah South Education team achieved a second victory over Al Dhahirah Education. The Al Batinah North Education team also defeated Al Dakhiliyah Education, and the Dhofar Education team ended its matches with a victory over Al Buraimi Education.

As for the beach handball competitions, the last round witnessed four exciting matches. The Al Batinah North Education team defeated Muscat Education on penalties with a score of 2-1 in a thrilling match. In the remaining matches, the Al Sharqiyah South Education team outperformed South Al Batinah Education 2-0, the Al Dakhiliyah Education team defeated Dhofar Education with the same score, and the Al Dhahirah Education team defeated Al Sharqiyah North Education 2-0.



Coe hails ‘extraordinary’ group of athletes

PARIS: Track and field chief Sebastian Coe has hailed the emergence of an “extraordinary” group of athletes at the Paris Olympics who have gone some way to filling the void left by Jamaican legend Usain Bolt.

Bolt was a transformational figure in athletics, winning eight Olympic and nine world gold medals as he dominated the sprints during his stellar career.

Talk since his retirement after the 2017 world championships in London has always been about who might step into his shoes as the leading pin-up for the sport.

But Coe insisted the narrative wasn’t just about one athlete alone to fill the void.

“We are no longer a sport about one person,” he told reporters in Paris on Sunday, all the while praising Bolt. “That one person was Herculean, that one person transformed the popularity of our sport for a very clear period of time, and he consistently did that.”

Coe likened Bolt’s legacy to that of Muhammad Ali in boxing.

“You don’t replace Muhammad Ali, you don’t replace Usain Bolt. But I did say, ‘Mark my words, other athletes will come through.’

“I cannot remember a generation of more talented athletes. The way they’ve come through has been extraordinary. We’ve now got a greater bandwidth of talent across a broader range of disciplines than we’ve ever had in the sport.”

‘WOBBLING GLOBE’

More than one million tickets



Sifan Hassan of Netherlands celebrates as she crosses the finish line at Invalides to win gold as World Athletics President Sebastian Coe looks on. — Reuters

were sold for the Olympic athletics programme at the Stade de France that saw athletes from 75 different countries bag top-eight finishes. Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis,

American 400m hurdler Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone and the US mixed 4x400m relay team all set world records.

There were also 13 new Olympic records and the World



US rapper Snoop Dogg, World Athletics President Sebastian Coe and Simone Biles of United States with grandparents Evarista Cayetano and Ronald Biles and freestyle skier Eileen Gu in the stands. — Reuters



Athletics seating area for guests featured a daily selection of celebrities keen to watch the action.

“I did slightly feel the globe wobbling the other night when I had Snoop Dogg one side of me and Simone Biles the other side and trying to explain the finer points of the 1500m,” Coe said.

“And I’m still smiling at the response from Simone, who looked up the track and said, ‘I have no idea people ran that quickly.’

“I said, ‘How do you think we feel when we’re sitting at the side of the gymnastics auditorium? How on earth do you do what

you do?’”

Coe said the “sport became cool”. “It’s the first time my kids have actually thought anything I’ve done on the planet has been cool.”

Coe also underlined the reach of track and field, dubbing it the “definitive definition of a global sport”, with one eye already on the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

“We had our 105th country in the history of the Olympic Movement winning a medal in Paris and that has been sensational,” he said.

Saint Lucia’s Julien Alfred (women’s 100m), Pakistan’s Arshad Nadeem (men’s javelin)

and Dominica’s Thea LaFond (women’s triple jump) all won their countries’ first gold medals.

“Tell me any other sport on the opening day of a competition is celebrating a medal for Ecuador, so that for me tells me the sport is moving in the right direction,” Coe said. “It is really important we do not take our foot off the accelerator.”

“I said after (last year’s world championships in) Budapest that the red carpet is out in front of us. We continue down that carpet right the way through to LA, which will be a huge and important moment for the sport.” — AFP

Thorpe killed by train: Inquest

LONDON: Former England batsman Graham Thorpe died after being struck by a train at a railway station, an inquest into his death heard on Tuesday.

The 55-year-old took his own life, his wife Amanda revealed on Monday in an interview with *The Times*.

Thorpe died on the morning of August 4 having suffered “traumatic injuries” during the incident at Esher railway station, southwest of London, Surrey Coroner’s Court in Woking was told.

The area coroner for Surrey, Simon Wickens, recorded Thorpe’s cause of death as one of multiple injuries during the short hearing.

The coroner offered his “sincere condolences” not just to Thorpe’s family, but to “all those touched by his life and career”.

A date for the full inquest will be fixed at a later time.

Thorpe’s death plunged the cricket world into mourning for the popular star.

He enjoyed an impressive England career as an elegant batsman from 1993 to 2005, before spending 12 years in various coaching roles.

But Thorpe was hospitalised in May 2022 and declared “seriously ill”.

Amanda Thorpe told *The Times* that the former Surrey batsman attempted suicide two years ago before taking his own



life. “Despite having a wife and two daughters whom he loved and who loved him, he did not get better. He was so unwell in recent times and he really did believe that we would be better off without him and we are devastated that he acted on that and took his own life,” she said.

Amanda Thorpe added: “Graham was renowned as someone who was very mentally strong on the field and he was in good physical health.

“But mental illness is a real disease and can affect anyone.

Thorpe’s daughter Kitty, 22, said the family “are not ashamed” of talking about his death, adding: “There is nothing to hide and it is not a stigma.”

The left-hander featured in 100 Test matches and 82 one-day internationals for England, scoring over 9,000 runs for his country, including 16 Test hundreds. — AFP

Coe to give IOC presidency tilt ‘serious thought’

PARIS: World Athletics president Sebastian Coe said on Sunday he would give “serious thought” about throwing his hat into the ring to succeed Thomas Bach as head of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

Bach, who has led the Olympic movement since 2013, told a session of IOC members on Saturday that he will not seek to remain in charge for a third term. “New times are calling for new leaders,” the 70-year-old German lawyer said.

Coe, whose third and final term as athletics chief ends in 2027, has long been suggested as a successor to Bach.

“I’ve always made it clear that if the opportunity arose, I will obviously give it serious thought,” Coe told reporters.

“The opportunity has arisen and clearly I need to think about that. Of course I’m going to consider this.”

While not immediately committing to a tilt, two-time Olympic 1500m gold medallist Coe, chairman of the 2012 London Games bid, then listed attributes that would make him a



International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach and World Athletics President Sebastian Coe during the medal ceremony at Paris Olympics 2024. — Reuters

suitable candidate.

“I have been involved in the Olympic movement for the larger part of my life,” he said.

“I’ve chaired an Olympic Games from bid through delivery, two years of legacy. After that, I’ve been privileged to compete in two Olympic Games.

“I chaired the National Olympic Committee and I now have the best job in the world, as president of the number one Olympic sport.

“These are experiences that, if you put together with other aspects of my life, I think would be beneficial to the role.”

Coe is also a proven innovator, having taken over a World Athletics in dire straits after predecessor Lamine Diack was embroiled in a cover-up of Russian doping cases.

Coe has earned credit for taking a hardline stance in banning Russian and Belarusian athletes in response to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Equally he attracted flak

from some fellow federation presidents for taking the revolutionary step of paying Olympic track and field gold medallists \$50,000 each in prize money.

INNOVATE AND CHANGE

Coe, who was a British Conservative Party lawmaker from 1992-97, added that there were many other potential candidates within the Olympic movement “who have good qualifications for that role”.

“We’re a diverse group of global people, international candidates who would fit that bill,” he said.

Ever the politician, Coe added: “I would encourage others to consider that within the movement because choice is important. I take that very seriously, and I think the membership needs to have a good range of quality qualified people to look at.”

Asked about what his vision for the IOC might be, Coe

stressed that the incoming president would require a “laser-like focus on the need to innovate and to change”.

“We know that the Olympic Games is fundamentally about sport. I’ve sensed in recent times that sport... in a way, has slipped down the agenda.

“I’ve heard a lot in the last year or so about solidarity, empowerment and sustainability, they’re health checks, and every good organisation should have those at the heart, we do in World Athletics, and we’re not the only organisation.

“They are absolutely the essentials of a good organisation, but that’s not how we should be defining ourselves.

“No. This is a sporting organisation.

“My view here, and not just in Paris, but in the last few years, is that sport is going to have to make sure that it is really punching its weight in this space, because at the moment, we have some challenges.” — AFP

POPYRIN BREAKS AUSSIE DRY SPELL WITH ATP MONTREAL TITLE



Alexei Popyrin (AUS) holds his trophy at the IGA Stadium. – USA Today Sports



Alexei Popyrin (AUS) reacts after beating Andrey Rublev in the ATP Montreal Masters final at IGA Stadium. – USA Today Sports

MONTREAL: Alexei Popyrin profited from the mental fragility of Andrey Rublev on Monday as the Australian won the biggest title of his career at the ATP Montreal Masters.

World number 62 Popyrin beat sixth-ranked Rublev 6-2, 6-4 in 90 minutes in the US Open tune-up, denying the Russian a second Masters crown this season after winning at Madrid.

“One of the best matches I’ve played in my life,” Popyrin said of the victory. “It’s not the way I played in that final that makes me most proud. It’s more the way I played all week.”

Popyrin is the first Australian to win a Masters 1000 title since Lleyton Hewitt in 2003 at Indian Wells.

The only other Aussie to reach a Canadian final was Patrick Rafter in 2001, who lost to Romanian Andrei Pavel.

Popyrin, who turned 25 last week, is the fourth from his nation to win at this level, following Rafter (1998 Toronto, 1998 Cincinnati), Mark Philippoussis (1999 Indian Wells) and Hewitt (2002-2003 Indian Wells).

“This means so much, it means the world,” an emotional Popyrin said. “All the hard work we’ve put in over the last couple of years has paid off.”

Popyrin, who beat five top-20 opponents during his run to Canadian glory, said he never

felt much pressure. “I felt pretty calm. I love to play matches like this. There is no point in being nervous or afraid of the opportunity,” he said.

“I wanted to impose myself in the first game and I think I managed to do that. It disturbed him a little bit, which was part of the game plan. I kept going in that way.”

Rublev, who has boiled over several times this season on court and confessed to dealing with mental stress, got off to a poor start and took out his frustrations early through screaming, kicking a towel container and generally breaking down in tight moments.

His form in knocking out world number one Jannik Sinner in the quarter-finals was barely visible as he ran into an inspired Popyrin.

But Rublev said that from a month ago his head is “clear” and his mental attitude is improving.

“A month ago I was (mis) behaving much more. I showed emotions today but compared to other matches I did a better job,” said Rublev, who was disqualified from Dubai in February for angrily confronting a linesman.

“I would call this a very positive and very good week. It was a big step forward. I’m proud I was able to play really good mentally all week.” — AFP

Pegula beats Anisimova for second WTA Canada title in a row

TORONTO: Jessica Pegula defeated Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 in an all-American final on Monday to win the WTA Toronto Masters, becoming the event’s first back-to-back champion since 2000.

Sixth-ranked Pegula captured her sixth career WTA title and second of the year after Berlin in June to become the first consecutive winner in Canada since Martina Hingis in 1999-2000. “Crazy. I can’t believe it. I wanted it so bad,” a tearful Pegula said. “Getting emotional thinking about it. I’m so happy to take the title here. It’s awesome. I’m just flooded with emotions.

“It has been an up-and-down year but these are happy tears. I’m so happy.”

Pegula said she was happy to have won the Canadian crown

in both of the event’s alternating home cities, Montreal and Toronto, which is near her own hometown of Buffalo, New York.

Her grandparents, one from Toronto and the other from Montreal, were in the audience.

“One in each city so that’s one for each of you,” Pegula said.

Pegula improved to 3-0 in her career rivalry with Anisimova, taking her second victory of the year after April at Charleston.

Pegula broke Anisimova to begin the match and again to claim the first set after 27 minutes when Anisimova double faulted.

In the second set, Anisimova smacked a forehand winner to break Pegula for a 2-1 lead and Pegula double faulted away a break to give Anisimova a 5-2 edge on the way to a third set.



Jessica Pegula (USA) kisses the NBO championship trophy after defeating Amanda Anisimova at Sobey's Stadium. – USA Today Sports

‘JUST SUPER EXCITED’

After dropping her first set of the week, Pegula broke for a 2-0 lead on an Anisimova double fault and took a 4-0 edge when Anisimova netted a forehand to surrender another break.

Anisimova, who won only three points in the first four games of the final set, sent a forehand long to drop the match on Pegula’s serve after 87 minutes. “I know everyone’s talking about my record and all this stuff, but it’s nice to be able to get through the week and to back it up,” Pegula said. “Just super excited, I mean, an honour, really.”

At 132nd in the world, Anisimova became the lowest-ranked finalist at the Canadian tournament in 40 years.

Anisimova dispatched four

top-20 rivals this week to reach her fourth career WTA final, but could not claim a third title after Bogota in 2019 and Melbourne in 2022.

Anisimova took a nine-month mental health break from tennis last year and fell to 373rd in the world rankings at the start of the year, but ensured a return to the top 50 with her runner-up finish.

“I put the work in, I kept my head down and I tried to come back to the sport with more of a relaxed feeling,” Anisimova said on Monday.

“Trying to enjoy each day as it comes and not being so serious about everything, because I think that takes away the joy from a lot of things. I think with that kind of approach to my everyday life, I think that’s helped me a lot,” Anisimova added. — AFP



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OQGN to expand Oman’s gas network with launch of Saib project

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

OQ Gas Networks SAOG (OQGN), the exclusive operator of Oman's natural gas transmission network, is set to inaugurate the Saib project — a new 208 km gas pipeline in Dhofar Governorate on August 26.

This strategic growth project aims to increase the gas network's capacity in Dhofar Governorate, addressing the growing demand for natural gas to keep pace with the population increase, urban development and economic growth. As a result, the gas network's capacity will increase by 60 per cent from 10 to 16 million cubic metres per day.

The inauguration ceremony will be held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, along with government officials, community leaders, OQGN Board of Directors, key stakeholders, and contractors.

The project consists of two loops: Loop 1 – 32 km at Hubara in the Wilayat of Haima and Loop 2 – 176 km from Harweel to Raysut station in Salalah, with a total of 208 km of 32-inch pipeline alongside the existing 24-inch pipeline.

The scope of work includes the extension of 6 shut-off valve stations and 3 new launching and receiving stations.

In a media conference held yesterday, Eng Haitham bin Zaher al Shraihi, VP Project Delivery, stated, “This strategic project comes within the framework of the company’s plans to increase the capacity of the gas transmission network in Dhofar Governorate and in response to the increasing



Eng Haitham al Shraihi, VP Project Delivery; Faisal al Maamari, VP People, Technology and Culture and Ahmed al Hadhrami, Head of Corporate Identity and Culture, speak to the media during the press conference.



OQGN manages 4,045 kms of gas pipelines, along with three compressor stations and 29 gas supply stations.

demand for gas to keep pace with population increase, urban development and economic growth.”

Currently, OQGN manages 4,045 kms of gas pipelines, along with three compressor stations and 29 gas supply stations, ensuring energy delivery to 130 major consumers, including power plants, desalination facilities and various industrial complexes.

By 2024, OQGN plans to increase the pipeline length to 4,222

kms, further extending it to 4,287 kms in 2025, 4,344 kms in 2026 and 4,472 kms by 2027.

Network capacity is expected to rise from 69.3 billion standard cubic metre (SCM) in 2023 to 71.1 billion SCM in 2024, 77.1 billion SCM in 2025 and 2026, and 79.7 billion SCM by 2027.

Correspondingly, the volume of gas transported is projected to increase from 40.5 billion SCM in 2023 to 41.7 billion SCM in 2024, 43 billion SCM in 2025, 44.3 billion SCM in 2026, and 45.6 billion SCM by 2027.

Faisal bin Ali al Maamari, VP People, Technology and Culture, explained that the company's future plans include many projects and initiatives that are currently under study in coordination with the relevant government agencies, aiming to increase the gas capacity for all parties in the Sultanate of Oman.

“There is a second project that will be announced soon that will increase the capacity of gas networks in the Sultanate of Oman,” he said.

He also emphasised that

financing these projects will not impact the distribution of profits that OQ Gas Networks has committed to shareholders during the years 2024 and 2025.

Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Hadhrami, Head of Corporate Identity and Culture, noted, “The total gas transfer to all 160 consumers amounted to 120 million cubic metres per day, with the gas availability rate reaching 99.99 per cent through the presence of 25 gas supply stations and 3 compression stations.”

He highlighted the company's workforce, stating, “The number of employees in the company reached 469, of whom 94 per cent are Omanis in general and 100 per cent in senior positions. The company seeks to attract specialised competencies in the field of zero neutrality during the coming period.”

OQGN's robust expansion plans include developing new pipeline segments and compressor stations to enhance gas transportation efficiency, ensuring the network's growth and meeting the nation's energy demands.

New initiative to boost artisanal fishing in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13



The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, represented by the Directorate General of Fisheries Resource Development, unveiled a programme to enhance artisanal fishing in Oman.

According to the Ministry, the programme, which is part of a broader five-year plan to develop the fishing industry, aims to empower artisanal fishermen by boosting their production and marketing capacities. In addition to enhancing their skills, increasing fish production and local supply, and boosting the income of artisanal fishermen.

The programme will equip fishermen with modern fishing equipment, devices and technologies, such as new fishing boats, fish detection devices, GPS devices, electric winches, boat engines and ice boxes for fish preservation.

The programme will also include training to enable the fishermen to use the new devices and technologies.

Artisanal fishing accounted for 88 per cent of total landings as of March 2024, according to preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Furthermore, the amount of landed fish through artisanal methods reached 193,054 tonnes, representing an 11-per cent increase from the previous period in 2023.

As of March 2024, the total value of landed fish in Oman through various methods amounted to RO 147.308 million. The fisheries and aquaculture sector have been identified as a key component of achieving economic diversification in Oman, according to Oman Vision 2040.

In 2021, the fishing industry was valued at RO 292 million, according to data from Oxford Business Group, and is expected to generate 8500 direct jobs and attract RO 450 million worth of investment by 2025. Furthermore, the sector plays a crucial role in enhancing food security in Oman, which is another pillar of Oman Vision 2040.

In 2023, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, signed over RO 60 million worth of agreements for food security projects within the fisheries industry. Including a project for fish development, a shrimp farming project in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and a fish farming initiative in Musandam Governorate.

Additionally, the Ministry revealed that the number of fish factories in the Sultanate of Oman reached 114 by the end of 2023.

Artisanal fishing accounted for 88 per cent of total landings as of March 2024.

Over 2,400 cases of electricity metre tampering unearthed

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 13

Nama Electricity Distribution Company (NEDC), Oman's sole electricity distribution company outside of Dhofar Governorate, has revealed that its ongoing drive to install smart metres in place of conventional analog devices that require onsite visits by metre readers, has uncovered around 2,400 instances of metre tampering and other forms of illegal metering activity during 2023.

An estimated 671,000 smart metres have been installed across the Sultanate of Oman as part of the National Automated Meter Reading (AMR) project since the start of the initiative in 2021

till the end of 2023. They include around 219,000 metres installed in 2023 alone, up from 196,000 a year earlier. As of 2023-end, the programme had covered around 47 per cent of NEDC's customer base.

Nevertheless, the rollout continues to deliver significant benefits in the form of, among other things, power loss reductions, highly accurate automated metre readings, and timely and correct billing. At the same time, it has unearthed instances of illegal metre tinkering as well.

“Intensive inspections were conducted on connections and metres to detect tampering, wrong connections, or faulty and defective metres. These efforts



Around 671,000 smart metres have been installed as of 2023-end.

led the detection of over 2,400 tampering and illegal cases along with more than 7,700 defective metres directly contributing to the reduction in losses,” NEDC stated in its 2023 Annual Report.

Importantly, system losses in the wake of the AMR project implementation dipped 0.45 per cent to 8.22 per cent in 2023, down from 8.67 per cent a year earlier.

“This improvement can be attributed to various procedures and operations implemented by the company to improve the distribution losses, including: Switching to AMR metres contributed to enhancing the quality of metre reading and enabling remote monitoring of metre performance; and Improved supervision and follow-up on manual metre reading operations, including a dedicated team to validate readings and ensure their accuracy,” the state-owned utility noted.

The performance of metre readings also soared to 97.06 per cent, according to NEDC, a member of Nama Group.

It attributed the improvement

to the advanced metering technologies underpinning the project.

“By replacing outdated metres with modern, more accurate counterparts, NEDC significantly improved the reliability and precision of its readings,” the company said.

“AMR systems aimed to optimise costs, reduce operational losses, and facilitate a modernised infrastructure as NEDC intends to improve metering operations by collecting automated, real-time data, which will increase efficiency.

Our goals include maintaining accurate readings, providing customers with real-time information, and lowering operating expenses,” it added.

BYD impresses with advancements in intelligence

MUSCAT: BYD, the world's leading manufacturer of new energy vehicles, has recently unveiled an ambitious strategy for Integrated Vehicle Intelligence, accompanied by the launch of its ground-breaking Xuanji Architecture.

This innovative move sets a new course in the evolution of intelligent new energy vehicles, highlighting BYD's commitment to revolutionising the industry.

The Xuanji Architecture, a state-of-the-art vehicular intelligence system, functions as both the brain and neural network of the vehicle.

It seamlessly integrates electrification and intelligence, allowing the vehicle to perceive and respond to changes in its environment in real-time.

By consolidating information at the millisecond level and feeding it back to the central "brain" for rapid decision-making, the system significantly enhances driving safety and comfort.

BYD also introduced the Xuanji AI Large Model, a pioneering multimodal vehicular

artificial intelligence system.

As the first AI technology applied across all vehicular domains, it boasts the largest data foundation in the industry, covering over 300 vehicular scenarios.

This extensive data and high computational power enable the Integrated Vehicle Intelligence system to continuously adapt and evolve.

In the realm of intelligent driving, BYD leads the charge in China with over 4,000 dedicated engineers.

The company is at the forefront of L2-level intelligent driving deployment and holds the distinction of being the first automotive brand to receive the L3-level test license.

Looking ahead, BYD aims to lower the barriers to Intelligent Driving, making advanced technologies more accessible and accelerating their adoption in the global market.

In a notable partnership with DJI, BYD has created the world's first vehicle-integrated UAS (Unmanned Aerial System).

This pioneering innovation



features an integrated automotive-grade drone bay, complete with intelligent storage, automatic battery swapping, and charging management.

With the ability to take off and land with a single click, and support for high-definition, high frame rate, and low-latency

image transmission, this system promises to enhance travel experiences with stunning aerial views.

Additionally, BYD announced plans to construct professional all-terrain test drive sites in China, signalling a new era for Chinese automotive

culture within the new energy landscape. As the world's leading manufacturer of new energy vehicles, BYD is committed to leveraging "technological innovations for a better life."

With its Integrated Vehicle Intelligence strategy, BYD continues to spearhead the

evolution of new energy vehicles, aspiring to transform the global automotive industry and provide users with a more comfortable and efficient mobility experience.

In Oman, the BYD range of electrifying vehicles will soon be distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

BankDhofar to invest and capitalise on the power of AI systems

MUSCAT: BankDhofar the leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman — invested in modern technologies to keep pace with the technological transformations that appear in the world from time to time, especially in the banking sector, in addition to supporting the goals of Oman Vision 2040 of building a sustainable knowledge society and developing the information technology industry in Sultanate of Oman.

BankDhofar seeks to adopt artificial intelligence systems and integrate financial technologies into its services to provide an enriching and cost-efficient customer experience to ensure that it remains at the forefront of the banking services sector.



Dr Tariq Saleh Taha, Chief Information Officer at BankDhofar, said: "Technology

has brought about a major change in the framework of the banking sector and in various

financial institutions, and has even contributed to increasing the intensity of competition between them to provide the best reliable products and services to customers."

Pointing out that artificial intelligence systems are among the most widespread systems that can contribute to bringing about many fundamental transformations in the banking sector.

He explained that these systems allow bank officials to communicate with customers through "chat bots" that will be linked to popular social messaging platforms such as Facebook Messenger, and WhatsApp, which in turn contributes to solving customers' problems and

complaints efficiently, as well as responding to their inquiries related to detailed information about Products, ATMs, foreign exchange rates, branch hours, etc.

Artificial intelligence systems contribute to reducing the bank's operational costs, reducing errors, increasing revenues, and improving the efficiency and productivity of employees.

These systems also help bank employees make safe loan and credit decisions, which ensures achieving more profits, as well as making investment decisions, supporting research in this aspect, writing reports based on financial data, and combating money laundering and fraud.

Artificial intelligence is a very effective and powerful tool to reduce such types of crimes.

ahlibank continues reinforcing relationship with Al Nukhba premium clients

MUSCAT: In its ongoing commitment to providing a top-notch banking experience, ahlibank continues hosting a number of gatherings for its Al Nukhba clients across the Sultanate.

These exclusive events, held across various governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, aim to strengthen relationships with ahlibank's premium clientele and express gratitude for their continued trust.

The gatherings also serve as a venue to introduce the latest tailored products and offerings exclusively designed for this esteemed segment.

Al Nukhba gathering kicked off with great enthusiasm in a few governorates of the Sultanate and is to be continued across ahlibank branches in all governorates.

This strategic initiative reflects ahlibank's unwavering



commitment to fostering strong connections with its premium clients and delivering unparalleled banking experiences.

Muneer al Balushi, Assistant General Manager — Head of Retail Distribution at ahlibank, emphasised the bank's commitment to its exclusive clients, stating, "We believe in exceeding traditional banking services by recognising the

unique requirements of our premium clients. As partners, we provide distinctive and innovative solutions that surpass their expectations.

Moreover, we are attuned to the evolving preferences and premium lifestyles of our clients, striving to deliver innovative solutions that align with their needs.

By actively collecting market insights and client feedback, we

continuously solidify our position as one of the most preferred banks in Oman."

Al Balushi further added, "Our efforts exemplify our dedication to understanding the individual needs of our clients and enhancing our product and service offerings accordingly.

Through the Al Nukhba banking account, premium clients enjoy an array of exclusive benefits that elevate their banking

experience."

Each Al Nukhba account holder is assigned a dedicated Relationship Manager, ensuring personalised attention and assistance.

In addition, Al Nukhba lounges offer a private and comfortable setting for conducting banking transactions. Complimentary debit and Signature credit cards provide convenient access to funds and a host of additional benefits.

With preferential pricing on deposits and loans, Al Nukhba clients can seize competitive rates and maximise their financial opportunities.

Furthermore, special discounted tariffs on bank charges translate into savings on transaction fees. Exclusive discounts and offers from selected premium merchants grant Al Nukhba clients unique privileges and savings.

Meethaq Islamic Banking to organise back to school initiative

MUSCAT: Embracing the joy of new beginnings, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is excited to host a special Back to School initiative for children on August 15 and 16, 2024 from 6-10 pm at Muscat City Centre. This initiative aims to celebrate the new school year with children through a variety of entertaining activities, competitions and games.

During the two-day event, all families can visit Meethaq's stall at Muscat City Centre, where they and their children can participate in numerous fun activities. The initiative will include stage activities, fun games, a dedicated kids' area, math and science games and exciting gifts. Visitors will also have an opportunity to know more about Meethaq's wide range of products and services, including various accounts, cards, financing products and more.

As the leading Islamic financial institution, Meethaq is committed to engaging with the community through events like Back to School, reinforcing its dedication to social responsibilities.

Sami Bait Rashid, Assistant General Manager - Meethaq Personal Banking, said: "Meethaq is delighted to carry out this initiative; enhancing communication with community and introducing them to our comprehensive suite of services and products designed to meet their needs and aspirations.

Meethaq is committed to continuously developing its products and engaging with the community through diverse events and activities.

I invite all visitors to stop by Meethaq's stall at Muscat City Centre and enjoy the various fun activities with their families. We extend our sincere appreciation to our valued customers for their continuous trust in Meethaq's products and services."



In brief

■ LONDON



IEA TRIMS OIL DEMAND OUTLOOK AS CHINA OFFSETS GLOBAL GAINS

The International Energy Agency (IEA) kept its 2024 global oil demand growth forecast unchanged on Tuesday but trimmed its 2025 estimate, citing the impact of a weakened Chinese economy on consumption.

The report from the IEA, which advises industrialised countries, is the second this week to flag that a sluggish economy is likely to curb demand in China, the world's biggest oil importer and second biggest oil consumer.

"Weak growth in China, following the post-Covid surge of 2023, now significantly drags on global gains," the Paris-based watchdog said. — **Reuters**

■ WASHINGTON



US PRODUCER PRICES RISE LESS THAN EXPECTED IN JULY

US producer prices increased less than expected in July as a rise in the cost of goods was tempered by cheaper services, indicating that inflation continued to moderate. The producer price index for final demand gained 0.1 per cent last month after rising by an unrevised 0.2 per cent in June, the Labour Department's Bureau of Labour Statistics said on Tuesday. In the 12 months through July, the PPI increased 2.2 per cent after climbing 2.7 per cent in June. Slowing inflation and a cooling labour market have led financial markets to anticipate that the Federal Reserve will start its easing cycle in September.

— **Reuters**

■ LONDON



GLOBAL EV SALES UP 21% IN JULY AS CHINA RECORDS BIGGEST JUMP

Global sales of fully electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles rose by a yearly 21 per cent in July, thanks to China's strongest growth this year and despite dropping demand in Europe, market research firm Rho Motion said on Monday.

In the European Union, MG Motor, owned by China's SAIC Motor Corp, expects to be hit hardest by provisional tariffs imposed on EVs imported from China, Rho Motion data manager Charles Lester said.

The impact of the tariffs should be smaller on Tesla which can produce in its Berlin factory, and Chinese EV giant BYD whose presence in Europe remains small, Lester said.

— **Reuters**

Oman imports RO 110.34 million worth of vegetables and fruits

MUSCAT: By the end of May 2024, the Sultanate of Oman had imported vegetables and fruits worth RO 110.34 million, with a total weight of approximately 320.569 million kilogrammes.

This marks an increase from RO 98.893 million and 306.581 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2023, reflecting a growth of 11.6 per cent in value, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The value of vegetable imports by the end of May 2024 stood at RO 42.653 million for a total weight of about 146.149 million kilogrammes. This is a significant rise from RO 29.438 million for 139.661 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2023, showing a 44.9-per cent increase in value.

Fruit imports amounted to RO 67.687 million for a total weight of about 174.420 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2024, compared to RO 69.455 million for 166.920 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2023, a decrease of 2.5 per cent in value.

The key import sources for vegetables included the United Arab Emirates at RO 10.973 million, Yemen at RO 10.860 million and India at RO 4.659 million.



The key import sources for vegetables included the UAE, Yemen and India.

For fruits, the main sources were the United Arab Emirates at RO 18.845 million, Egypt at RO 9.492 million and India at RO 9.275 million.

Oman's exports of vegetables and fruits totalled RO 13.592 million for a weight of 59.568 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2024, compared to RO 11.923 million and 49.416 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2023.

Specifically, vegetable exports were valued at RO 8.941 million for 37.813 million kilogrammes by May 2024, up from RO 8.604 million for 40.553 million kilogrammes by May 2023, an

increase of 3.9 per cent in value.

Fruit exports were valued at RO 4.651 million for 21.755 million kilogrammes by May 2024, up from RO 3.320 million for 8.863 million kilogrammes by May 2023, an increase of 40.1 per cent in value.

The key export destinations for vegetables included the United Arab Emirates at RO 3.961 million, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at RO 1.660 million and Kuwait at RO 0.817 million. For fruits, the main destinations were Qatar at RO 1.473 million, the United Arab Emirates at RO 1.095 million and Bahrain at RO 0.784 million.

The total value of re-exports from Oman of vegetables and fruits by the end of May 2024 was RO 2.441 million for a weight of 6.789 million kilogrammes, up from RO 2.133 million and 7.829 million kilogrammes by the end of May 2023.

Vegetable re-exports were valued at RO 0.460 million for 1.613 million kilogrammes by May 2024, down from RO 0.570 million for 2.963 million kilogrammes by May 2023, a decrease of 19.2 per cent in value.

Fruit re-exports were valued at RO 1.981 million for 5.177 million kilogrammes by May 2024, up from RO 1.563 million for 4.867 million kilogrammes by May 2023, an increase of 26.7 per cent in value.

The key re-export destinations for vegetables were Somalia at RO 0.076 million and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at RO 0.070 million, while the main destinations for fruits were the United Arab Emirates at RO 0.397 million, Kuwait at RO 0.297 million and Vietnam at RO 0.267 million.

As of May 2024, there were about 654 establishments operating in the retail activity of specialised stores for fresh fruits, vegetables and dates in Oman.

— **ONA**

Oman oil price rises by \$1.31 per barrel



MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil on Tuesday for October delivery reached \$80.03. The price of Oman oil on Tuesday witnessed an increase of \$1.31 compared to the price on Monday, which was \$78.72.

The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for August delivery reached \$82.50 per barrel, down by \$1.39 compared to the price for July delivery.

Meanwhile, international oil prices dipped on Tuesday after five straight sessions of gains as Opec's move to cut its forecast for demand growth in 2024 tempered fears of supply risks posed by widening conflict in the Middle East.

Benchmark Brent crude futures were down 98 cents, or 1.2 per cent, at \$82.07 a barrel as of 1323 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude was also down 1.2 per cent, dropping 93 cents to \$79.87.

Brent on Monday gained more than 3 per cent, closing at \$82.30 a barrel after hitting a seven-month low of \$76.30 a week earlier.

"Crude oil traders are facing a geopolitical curve-ball courtesy of yet another face-off between Israel and Iran. But unless oil and gas facilities are hit, any upside for oil prices will not be sustained in the face of uncertain demand. Even Opec revised its projections lower on Monday on concerns over China's imports," Gaurav Sharma, an independent analyst, said.

— **Agencies**

Gold falls on profit-taking, US inflation data awaited

NEW YORK: Gold prices fell on Tuesday on profit-taking after the metal hit its highest level in more than a week, while market participants await key US inflation data that may provide further indications on the path of interest rates.

Spot gold fell 0.4 per cent to \$2,462.19 per ounce, after

hitting its highest level since August 2 earlier in the session.

Prices rose more than one per cent in the previous session. Meanwhile, US gold futures were little changed, settling at \$2,502.40.

Traders are awaiting US producer price index data for July, which is due later on



Tuesday, followed by consumer price index data on Wednesday,

which is expected to show inflation and core inflation rising 0.2 per cent on a monthly basis.

As for other metals, silver fell in spot transactions by 1.2 per cent to \$27.67 per ounce, platinum fell by 0.3 per cent to \$933.96, while palladium lost 0.6 per cent to \$914.25. — **ONA**

OQEP celebrates launch of new brand identity



The company's visual identity will solidify OQEP's position as an industry leader both domestically and on the global stage.

energy, enthusiasm and creativity and paying tribute to OQEP's legacy as part of OQ, and blue, representing trust, reliability and professionalism — values that lie at the heart of OQEP's operations.

Ahmed al Azkawi, Chief Executive of OQEP, commented, "Today marks an important milestone in OQEP's journey as we underline our strategic vision

for driving investment, growth and value creation to Oman. Through our track record of delivering affordable energy and reputation as a trusted partner for international energy companies, OQEP is helping to position Oman as an attractive investment destination on a global scale — this new branding more dutifully embodies the ambition and

commitment that define our business and are enabling us to deliver on this goal."

Said al Hashmi, Chief Executive of People, Technology and Culture of OQEP, added, "Launching the new brand identity for OQEP is part of an important strategic evolution designed to accelerate our growth and progress towards

sustainability goals and reinforce the commitment to advancing Oman's national agenda.

"The branding honours both the legacy and the commitment to operational excellence and energy innovation. It has been developed in a way to ensure it embodies the vision and aspirations of all our stakeholders."

As its dedicated upstream company exclusively focused on the exploration, drilling and extraction of oil and gas, OQEP plays a central role in the energy ecosystem of OQ, the largest integrated energy company in Oman.

Leveraging its excellent financial fundamentals, experienced and entrepreneurial management team, and expansive global network of leading international oil company (IOC) partners, OQEP is committed to maximising the use of Oman's energy resources in a sustainable way to bridge the energy transition and drive economic growth to all corners of the Sultanate of Oman for the benefit of its local communities.

Visa review for skilled workers to control migration



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The author is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Visa requirements for skilled workers in IT, telecommunications and engineering to come to the UK could be tightened up, Home Minister Yvette Cooper has signalled. Changes could include raising the minimum salary threshold for overseas workers in these sectors to obtain a visa to take up a UK job. They could also see restrictions based on regions of Britain, where salary levels and labour force shortages vary. The Cabinet minister has written to the Government's migration advisors to ask for a series of reviews on different groups of overseas workers coming to the UK to fill shortages in the labour market. She wants the migration advisory committee (MAC) to "look at key occupations to

understand the reasons behind their reliance on international recruitment." In her letter to its chairman, Professor Brian Bell, Ms Cooper said: "Based in a preliminary look at indicators to inform assessments of reliance on international recruitment, as well as occupational groups which are the largest users of work visas, we have identified the following for this review: information technology and telecommunications professionals, engineering professionals. "These sectors feature in the top 10 of those sectors which have been reliant on international recruitment and the Government would like the MAC to set out the reasons behind this and potential future demand on these sectors. We envisage this being the first of such reviews by the MAC as we seek to further understand the

reliance on international workers in key sectors." **The migration advisers were urged to consider several areas including:** (1) What types of roles are in shortage. (2) What are the different drivers of these shortages including training, pay and conditions. (3) How have the sectors sought to adapt to these shortages, beyond seeking to recruit from overseas. (4) Where relevant, what, if any, impact has been on the shortage occupation list on these sectors/occupations." They were also urged to examine what policy levers within the immigration system could be used more effectively to encourage sectors to focus on recruiting from the domestic workforce, including whether the minimum salary

threshold for skilled workers in these sectors should be increased. Cooper added: "It is open to the MAC to consider a wide range of different options, including the merits or otherwise of a differentiated approach, based on region, occupation and/or other factors. These must be balanced against the risks of undercutting the wages of British workers and of over-complicating the system." The minister asked for this first review to report within the next nine months and stressed the Government's aim was to bring down "high levels of migration". She added: "We recognise and remain very grateful for the contribution that people from all over the world make to our economy and our public services but the system needs to be managed and controlled. The current approach is not

sustainable." Immigration and racism are often linked although that should never be the case. A spate of recent riots in the UK have again highlighted this. Furthermore, a record high of almost 2,000 antisemitic incidents took place in the UK in the first half of this year, a charity has said. The Community Security Trust (CST) said the 1,978 incidents from January to June this year are double the number for the same period last year (964) and the highest total reported in the first six months of any year. Home minister Yvette Cooper branded the levels of hate "truly appalling". She said: "There is no place in Britain for this vile hatred and we are absolutely clear that those who push this poison — on the streets or online — must always face the full force of the law."

Opec's cut to 2024 oil demand doesn't reflect weak China

CLYDE RUSSELL

Opec's modest cut to its global crude oil demand forecast for 2024 still leaves the producer group with an estimate that will require an extraordinarily strong fourth quarter. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) lowered its forecast for demand growth this year to 2.11 million barrels per day (bpd) in its monthly market report released on Monday. This was down 140,000 bpd from its previous estimate, and Opec referred to "softening expectations for China's oil demand growth in 2024." But the detail of Opec's latest forecast still shows that it expects China's demand growth to be far stronger for the whole of 2024 than it has been so far this year. Opec expects China's oil demand will rise by 700,000 bpd in 2024, which means that the world's largest crude importer will account for one-third of the global increase. The August forecast for China's demand growth is just 60,000 bpd below Opec's previous estimate. This is a relatively small adjustment and means that if Opec is to be proved correct, China's demand will have to rise sharply in coming months. This is because China's imports of crude oil have been weaker over the first seven months of the year. Official data released last week showed crude oil imports dropped to 9.97 million bpd in July, the lowest on a daily basis since September 2022, and down from June's 11.3 million bpd. For the first seven months of the year crude imports were 10.90 million bpd,

down 2.9 per cent from the 11.22 million bpd over the same period in 2023. This means that China's oil imports are about 320,000 bpd lower in the first seven months of 2024 compared with the same period last year. It's hard to reconcile the drop in oil imports with Opec's still relatively bullish forecast for China's 2024 oil demand growth. Of course, imports aren't the only factor in total demand, the others including domestic oil production, movements in inventories and net exports of refined fuels. But imports form the major part of China's total demand and it will be their performance that determines whether Opec's forecast can be met. China doesn't disclose movements in crude oil and product inventories, but an estimate can be made by subtracting the volume of crude processed from the total oil available to refineries from imports and domestic output.

On this basis China has added about 900,000 bpd to inventories in the first half of this year, which means it isn't drawing on them to meet demand growth. Domestic oil production was 4.39 million bpd in the first six months of 2024, up 1.9 per cent or about 150,000 bpd from the same period last year. However, the increase in domestic oil output will exacerbate the supply-demand imbalance stemming from the softness in China's crude sector. The question is whether a recovery for the remainder of the year is likely. China's economy is still not firing on all cylinders, with the key construction sector struggling, manufacturing indexes showing contraction and retail sales growth easing. — Reuters

Building a greener future: The rise of eco-architecture in Oman



NAJAH AL RIYAMI
The author is a Media and Communication Master's graduate skilled in diverse writing formats, specialising in storytelling, branding, and in-depth journalism.

As we move toward increasingly sustainable practices, ecological architecture and 'green' buildings are becoming popular; from harnessing renewable solar energy or designing sunlight-reflecting cool roofs — the architectural landscape is evolving with our changing values. Today, we have reached a new approach to modern design, one that seeks sustainable materials and practices, energy-efficient smart appliances, and eco-friendly construction methods with mindful choices aligned with Oman's Vision 2040 goals in our decarbonisation efforts. Architects now look to integrate sustainable options into their designs by creating buildings that contribute to a greener future. We see this trend in Oman in many of its buildings from Alila Jabal Akhdar resort's incorporation of sustainable design principles including locally sourced materials, water and energy conservation systems and eco-friendly room amenities, to Six Senses numerous sustainable practices which include plastic free, zero waste, energy conservation and organic farming. Mall of Oman, for example, implemented sustainability features such as vehicle



As we move forward, our demand for green buildings will continue to grow, and so will our choices in the different ways we can implement sustainability into our structures.

charging areas, car parks with photovoltaic panels with a central cooling plant and utilises a LEED Dynamic Plaque that measures your building's performance in energy, water, waste, transportation and human experience to report sustainability efforts in real time. One significant challenge in architecture is our reliance on concrete- responsible for 4-8 per cent of global carbon emissions. Today, we strive to implement alternatives that include utilising ferrock, a carbon-negative alternative to concrete, or of rammed earth made by compacting dampened subsoil; and timbercrete a mixture of waste sawdust and cement, and more. Not only do these materials reduce the environmental impact during construction but they also minimise the carbon footprint throughout the building's life cycle from design to demolition. Internationally, projects like the Floating School in Nigeria highlight the potential of this sustainable architecture. Floating on 256 plastic drums, the structure is made

TODAY, WE HAVE REACHED A NEW APPROACH TO MODERN DESIGN, ONE THAT SEEKS SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS AND PRACTICES, ENERGY-EFFICIENT SMART APPLIANCES, AND ECO-FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION METHODS WITH MINDFUL CHOICES ALIGNED WITH OMAN'S VISION 2040 GOALS IN OUR DECARBONISATION EFFORTS

from locally sourced wood, powered by renewable energy from solar panels and utilises rainwater to operate its toilets; showcasing how green architecture can thrive even in challenging environments. Singapore's Gardens by the Bay is another memorable example of the successful integration of green architecture into urban spaces with two conservatories, a forest of eight

'supertrees' equipped with photovoltaic panels and cooling channels demonstrating how carbon-absorbing trees and plants can transform urban spaces into green havens. This push for sustainability also extends into our homes with energy-saving appliances and smart technologies becoming standard features that help create zero-energy homes and commercial spaces. Innovations such as smart glass that can change the amount of light reflected to reduce heating and cooling costs are leading the way — not only conserving energy but also significantly reducing long-term living expenses. As we move forward, our demand for green buildings will continue to grow, and so will our choices in the different ways we can implement sustainability into our structures. By choosing eco-friendly materials, adopting smart technologies, and other sustainable aspects into our designs we can all play our part in constructing a greener future for Oman — one building at a time.

LIFESTYLE

A passenger looks out of a train at the Kamalapur railway station after train services resumed in Dhaka. — AFP



ANIMAL PLANET

A beetle (Dynastes neptunus) walks on a wood at Tierra Viva farm in Tunja. Beetle larvae feed on the organic waste of thousands of inhabitants of Boyaca. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Uruguayan film-maker Fede Alvarez attends the "Alien: Romulus" film premiere at the TCL Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP



TRAVEL

The Parthenon temple atop the Acropolis hill in a smoke cloud from a wildfire. On August 12, 2024, Greece's civil protection authorities ordered the evacuation of several towns in the north-eastern suburbs of Athens, threatened by a violent fire. — AFP



CHANGING WORLD

A student paints a wall with revolutionary slogans to cover old murals related to the regime of Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League party in the streets of Dhaka. — AFP



art & life

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FANJA HERITAGE HOUSE IMMERSSES GUESTS IN AUTHENTIC OMAN EXPERIENCE

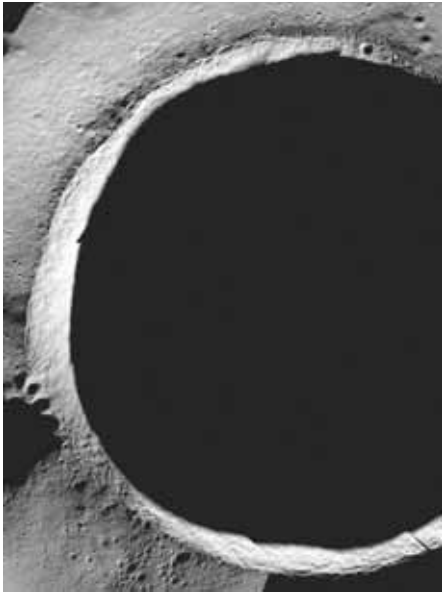
For travellers seeking authentic cultural experiences near to Muscat, Saif al Rawahi's passion project, the Fanja Heritage House, offers a unique, immersive experience that connects visitors with Omani traditions, history and local culture... **P20**

DISCOVERY

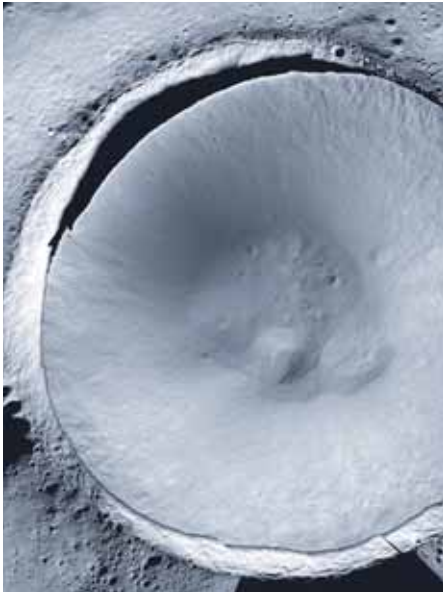
The moon's most shadowy places can't hide from NASA's new camera

WHEN A NASA spacecraft passes over Shackleton Crater on the moon and peers in, it sees a sea of blackness. The sun never rises high above the horizon, and the rim of Shackleton blocks the sun's rays from ever shining directly onto the crater floor.

There are more than 300 such craters on the moon, and the darkness hides an intriguing mystery: oases of frozen water, which could provide a key resource for astronauts living there in the future. Scientists have now figured out how to, in essence, flip on the light switch. How is it possible to take a picture of a place where the sun never shines? The new views are the fruits of ShadowCam, an instrument that Nasa provided for Danuri, a South Korean orbiter that arrived at the moon in December. Since 2009, almost all of the moon's surface has been photographed in detail by Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, a Nasa spacecraft. But its camera is not sensitive enough to see anything in the permanently shadowed craters. Those shadows, however, are not pitch-black. Sometimes sunlight bounces off the ground into the crater, and then ricochets upward to Danuri as it passes overhead. Other images are illuminated by earthlight — sunlight that has bounced off earth towards the moon. That is enough to brighten the shadowed craters a little. While the optics of ShadowCam are almost identical to those in the Lunar



Reconnaissance Orbiter's camera, the new instrument takes superlong exposures, increasing sensitivity by a factor of about 200. The invisible darkness becomes visible. Prasun Mahanti, deputy principal



investigator for ShadowCam, said that when the scientists saw the first images, their reaction was relief that the instrument worked as designed. "Then excitement kicked in immediately," he said.

In certain places at certain times, the shadows are not even that dark. At a conference in March, scientists working on ShadowCam reported that the indirect light was comparable to "comfortable indoor lighting levels." Astronauts visiting those regions may not need to carry flashlights to see where they are going, although glare and long shadows could still pose problems. ShadowCam can also shed light on the mystery of water on the moon. A Nasa mission in 2009 identified water in a cloud of debris excavated from Cabeus Crater, one of the permanently shadowed regions. But where is the water? Even though ShadowCam images show white spots, so far none seem to be ice. Most of the bright spots appear to be boulders, exposed bedrock or fresh craters. That could mean that the water is covered by dust or trapped in minerals in the rocks. Mahanti said more findings on this question are in the scientific pipeline. ShadowCam is an example of greater international collaboration by Nasa these days. South Korea gets to add to its space expertise while Nasa saves the expense of building and operating its own spacecraft. — NYT

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

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HORSES ARE MUCH smarter than previously thought, scientists have said, after a study showed the animals performed better than expected in a complex reward-based game.

Researchers found that when denied treats for not following the rules of the game, the horses were able to instantly switch strategies to get more rewards.

It shows the animals have the ability to think and plan ahead -something previously considered to be beyond their capacity,scientists from Nottingham Trent University (NTU) said.

Knowing how horses learn can help carers train them more humanely and improve their welfare, the team added.

Carrie Ijichi, a senior lecturer in equine science at NTU, said:"Horses are not natural geni-uses, they are thought of as mediocre,but this study shows they're not average and are, in fact, more cognitively advanced than we give them credit for."

To understand more, the researchers set 20 horses a task consisting of three stages.

In the first stage, the animals touched a piece of card with their nose in order to get a treat.

But things became more complicated when a light was introduced and horses were only allowed a snack if they touched the card while the light

was switched off.

The team found that the horses kept blindly touching the card,regardless of whether the light was on or off, and were rewarded for correct responses.

In the final stage of the game, a penalty was put in place where touching the card when the "stop" light was on resulted in a 10-second time-out.

But instead of indiscriminately touching the card, the team found that the horses were engaging with the rules – only making a move at the right time in order to receive their treat.

The researchers said this suggests that rather than failing to grasp the rules of the game, the horses had understood it the whole time but had found a way to play in the second stage that did not require much attention.

Louise Evans, a PhD candidate based in NTU's School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences, said: "We were expecting horses' performance to improve when we introduced the time-out, but were surprised by how immediate and significant the improvement was.

"Animals usually need several repetitions of a task to gradually acquire new knowledge, whereas our horses immediately improved when we

introduced a cost for errors.

"This suggests that the horses knew all along what the rules of the game were."

The researchers said the findings, published in the journal *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, suggests horses have the ability to form an internal model of the world around them to make decisions and predictions, a technique known as model-based learning.

It was previously thought that model-based learning was too complex for horses because they have an underdeveloped pre-frontal cortex, apart of the brain associated with strategic thinking.

Ijichi said this suggests that the hoses "must be using another area of the brain to achieve a similar result".

She said: "This teaches us that we shouldn't make assumptions about animal intelligence or sentience based on whether they are 'built' just like us." — PA Media/dpa



HORSES ARE A LOT SMARTER THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT, RESEARCHERS BELIEVE

ART



Banksy unveils ninth artwork at London Zoo

A NEW PIECE OF artwork at London Zoo has been confirmed as belonging to Banksy, marking his ninth artwork in the capital in nine days.

The new piece, located on a shutter at the zoo's entrance, shows a gorilla lifting it up allowing a number of birds to escape, while the eyes of other animals can be seen lurking in the darkness.

The work, which the artist has posted on his official Instagram account, appears to tie in to previous pieces, with animals scattered around London outside of their natural habitat. It comes after his last piece, a rhino mounting a silver Nissan Micra with a traffic cone on its bonnet, was defaced by a man wearing a black balaclava just hours after it went up. Located in Charlton's Westmoor Street, the rhino piece was revealed on Monday and a video obtained by BBC News shows a man walking up to the artwork and spray painting it, leaving a white tag on it.

The crowd gathered at the piece could be heard saying "don't do that"and as the person walks away, a voice from the crowd asks: "Why did you do that? Why did you do it?"

Banksy has been posting art-work to his Instagram around 1pm every day since August 5.

The rhino follows Sunday's piece, piranhas on a police sen-try box,which has now been removed from near London's Old Bailey court to preserve it.

The anonymous artist appeared to have used translucent spray paint to turn the box into a giant fish tank for the piece which appeared on Ludgate Hill before being taped off by the local council.

The glass-paned box will be kept temporarily by the City of London corporation's offices, a walk of less than 15 minutes from the previous location.

A spokesman for the authori-ty said: "We have moved the art-work to Guildhall Yard to ensure it is properly protected and open for the public to view safely.

"A permanent home for the piece will be decided in due course."

Banksy's first piece was a goat perched on top of a wall and has been followed by silhouettes of elephants, monkeys, a wolf, pelicans, and a cat, all of which have popped up in various locations across London.

The sixth piece, a stretching cat on an empty, distressed advertising hoarding, was removed from its location in north-west London hours after it was unveiled on Saturday.

Crowds booed as the piece in Cricklewood was dismantled by three men who said they were "hired" by a "contracting com-pany" to take down the billboard for safety reasons.

The cat design was the second piece to be removed last week after a howling wolf on a satellite dish was taken off the roof of a building in Peckham, south London, less than an hour after it was unveiled.

A spokesperson for Banksy told the PA news agency that the artist was neither connect-ed to nor endorsed the theft of the wolf artwork and that they had "no knowledge as to the dish's current whereabouts".

The fifth piece to be unveiled was on Bonners Fish Bar in Walthamstow, east London, and shows a pelican stooping to scoop up a fish on the take away's sign, while another is tossing one in the air.

The fish and chip shop had announced in July that it would close from August 1 until September 5, and a message on its Instagram page expressed their gratitude at the artwork. It said: "The last few days have been a whirlwind, thank you to all who have sent such kind words, comments and messag-es.

"We're so sorry if we haven't replied, as you can imagine it's been extremely overwhelming!

"We're over the moon that Banksy decided to choose our little fish and chip shop in won-derful Walthamstow and love the design. "Contrary to some beliefs, we didn't ask him to do this, but are very grateful he did!" — PA Media/dpa

BY YERU EBUEN

The current travel trend that involves homestays and heritage experiences is reflective of a broader shift in consumer preferences. Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable move away from conventional hotel stays towards more personalised and immersive accommodation options.

reflects Saif al Rawahi's passion for Omani heritage and his commitment to sharing it with the world.

"I've noticed that in Fanja, travellers and tourists have no place to go where they can experience the authentic Omani experience. Unlike other places, we also don't have a museum that showcases or preserves our important artefacts. This passion project came out hoping to provide a hub that creates meaningful experiences for the people," he said.

Funding the whole complex out of his own pocket, Saif shared that the Fanja Heritage House, which comes with almost a dozen rooms overlooking the gardens and the popular wadi, a cafe, a mini-zoo and a heritage museum, took years to make and, up to this point, is still undergoing enhancements.

Al Rawahi's establishment is a living testament to the rich history and traditions of Oman, providing visitors with an authentic experience that connects them to the country's roots. The restaurant serves traditional Omani cuisine, the museum houses a private collection of artefacts and the inn offers a stay experience that immerses guests in the local culture. By doing so, Fanja Heritage House helps preserve not only tangible heritage, but also intangible aspects like customs, practices and stories passed down through generations.

Al Rawahi shared that Fanja Heritage House provides a unique and personalised experience that appeals to travellers seeking authenticity. This aligns with the growing global trend towards experiential travel, where tourists are increasingly looking for meaningful and immersive experiences

factors, including the desire for authentic experiences, the influence of social media and the increasing importance of sustainability in travel decisions. Homestays and heritage accommodations offer authenticity that is often missing from standard hotels. They provide travellers with an opportunity to live like locals, experience daily life in a community and gain a deeper understanding of the culture they are visiting. This particularly appeals to millennials and younger travellers, who are more likely to prioritise experiences over material possessions.

In Onan, the rise of initiatives like Fanja Heritage House is indicative of this global trend. Travellers are increasingly seeking accommodations that offer more than just a place to sleep. They want to connect with the local culture, learn about the history of the area, and contribute to the local economy. Homestays and heritage inns meet these needs

rather than just visiting popular landmarks. By offering a deep dive into Omani culture, Al Rawahi's venture caters to this segment of travellers, thereby attracting a niche market that is often willing to spend more for a richer experience. This not only boosts the local economy, but also helps promote Oman as a destination for cultural tourism on the global map.

Comparing experiences like Fanja Heritage House with travel experiences outside of Oman reveals the uniqueness of Al Rawahi's initiative. In many parts of the world, especially in Europe and Asia, cultural tourism has become highly commercialised. While there are many heritage sites and cultural experiences on offer, they are often packaged in a way that caters to mass tourism, which can dilute the authenticity of the experience. In contrast,

panja Heritage House, by being a small, individually-run initiative, retains its authenticity and offers a more intimate experience. Visitors are not just spectators but participants in the cultural narrative of Oman. This is a stark contrast to the often impersonal and commodified experiences found in many other tourist destinations.

"I love sharing stories with people and learning about where they come from. The cafe serves as the

best spot to get to know them and where they've been in Oman, offering them some tips to fully enjoy their time there. Offering local Omani cuisine also allows me to showcase to guests Oman's love for food," Al Rawahi said.

"The inn offers them a great place to stay that allows them to also explore the nearby wadi. There is a path from the inn that leads to the garden and into the wadi. That is one of the unique features that guests also enjoy," he added.

"Beyond that, the museum, I hope, will collect some important artefacts that tell the story of Fanja. We have several private collections shown in the museum. It's air-conditioned too so even in summer, it can be enjoyed. From a series of photographs showcasing the beauty of Fanja to some historical household items, among other things, it educates the people a little bit more about how people are living in the past," he added.

"As for the zoo, it includes a few colourful birds and a couple of ostriches. We also have some other animals. We just wanted the place to be family-friendly," he explained.

Saif said that, as a passion project, the main reason for the Fanja Heritage House is to showcase the best of what Fanja has to offer.

"It can be visited throughout the week, with the cafe accessible for any guests wanting to enjoy refreshments and some Omani favourites," he invited.

