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HOW JABAL AKHDAR'S HYDROPONICS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LOCAL FOODS

SUNRISE - 05:39 AM

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ASR - 03:42 PM

MAGHRIB - 06:52 PM

ISHA - 08:09 PM



**MUSCAT**

**RARE SURGERY AT ROYAL HOSPITAL**

A specialised medical team at the Royal Hospital successfully performed the first laparoscopic cholecystectomy (of its kind in Oman) for a patient who was infected with a liver fluke Fasciola hepatica. The diagnosis of such rare cases requires exceptional skills and treatment. Dr Al Warith bin Ahmed al Hashemi, Consultant of Liver and Pancreas Transplants and Surgery at the Royal Hospital, said that diagnosing Fasciola hepatica is a real medical challenge due to the similarity of its symptoms to many other digestive system diseases. Such diagnosis requires extensive experience and the use of advanced techniques.

**DETAILS ON P5**

**8.6% SURGE IN HOTEL REVENUES**

The Sultanate of Oman witnessed a notable increase in hotel revenues for establishments classified as 3 to 5 stars during the first half of 2024. Revenues surged by 8.6 per cent, reaching RO 119.493 million, compared to RO 110.68 million in the same period of 2023, as per data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information. This revenue boost is largely attributed to a 10.7 per cent rise in the total number of hotel guests, totalling approximately 1,045,226 by the end of June 2024, up from 944,268 guests by the end of June 2023. Additionally, the occupancy rate experienced a growth of 2.7 per cent.

**DETAILS ON P5**

**DHAKA**

**73 DIE AS CLASHES ROCK BANGLADESH**

At least 73 people were killed and hundreds injured in clashes in Bangladesh on Sunday, as police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse tens of thousands of protesters calling for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign. The government declared an indefinite nationwide curfew starting at 6 pm on Sunday, the first time it has taken such a step during the current protests that began last month. It also announced a three-day general holiday starting from Monday. The unrest, which has prompted the government to shut down internet services, is Hasina's biggest test in her 20-year regime after she won a fourth straight term in elections that were boycotted by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

**SEE ALSO P6**

# OMAN WARNS OF DISRUPTION IN VALUE CONCEPTS

**MECCA:** The Sultanate of Oman on Sunday cautioned against the challenges facing the world, including the disruption of value concepts, imbalance of morality, disputes and wars. These, it affirmed, led to humanitarian and environmental disasters and economic crises, undermined development efforts and threatened social ties.

This was stated by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, who delivered Oman's speech at the '9th Conference of Ministers of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in the Islamic World: The two-day conference, which began on Sunday in Mecca, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, deals with the role of the ministers concerned in consolidating the values of moderation.

"Our societies are not far from such challenges and their impacts because the Islamic world is an integral part of the fabric of the global community," said Dr Al Maamari.



Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari

He added that Islamic societies have repeatedly found themselves facing polarisation policies and hate speech that portrayed our societies as if they were a burden on civilisation and modernity.

Dr Al Maamari said that such targeting of the Islamic world "quotes a misleading narrative of history". He warned that these negative claims focus on families, the first and fundamental building blocks in society. He noted that the action of targeting misuses the ongoing and expanding technological openness.

The minister highlighted the "Message of Oman" which, he said, laid emphasis on promoting a culture of peace and harmony and consolidating the principles of common human values.

In his speech, the minister touched on Oman's efforts in spreading tolerance, coexistence and understanding, confronting stereotypes about Islam and Muslims and contributing to the reduction of hate speech and Islamophobia. — ONA

# Israel hits Gaza schools killing 25 Palestinians

FOREIGN NATIONALS TOLD TO LEAVE LEBANON AS WAR FEARS RISE

**CAIRO:** An Israeli air strike hit two schools in Gaza City on Sunday, killing at least 25 people, the Palestinian official news agency said, while the Israeli military said it struck a military compound embedded in the schools.

An Israeli air strike hit a tent camp inside a hospital in central Gaza earlier in the day. Gaza health officials said at least 44 Palestinians were killed on Sunday, the day after a round of talks in Cairo ended without result.

Footage circulated on Palestinian media showed bodies scattered inside the yard of one of two blast-wrecked schools as residents rushed to carry casualties, including children, and loaded them into ambulance vehicles that took them to at least two nearby hospitals.

The Palestinian official news agency WAFA and Hamas media said dozens were wounded in addition to the 25 fatalities in the schools of Hassan Salama and Al Nasser, which housed Palestinian displaced families. They said the strike destroyed several structures inside the facilities.



A Palestinian girl cries following Israeli bombardment which hit a school complex, including the Hamama and Al Huda schools, in the Sheikh Radwan neighbourhood in the north of Gaza City on Sunday. — AFP

Earlier in the day, an Israeli strike inside the Al Aqsa Hospital compound started a fire, and wounded at least 18 people as well as killed five, medical authorities said. The hospital compound is in Deir Al Balah, an area crowded with thousands of people displaced by fighting in other parts of the enclave.

Residents in areas southeast of the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis and to the north of Rafah, reported receiving evacuation orders from the Israeli military.

Meanwhile, urgent calls for foreign nationals to leave Lebanon grew on Sunday with France warning of "a highly volatile" situation. **SEE ALSO P6**

# UK PM STARMER TELLS RIOTERS YOU WILL 'REGRET'



Prime Minister Keir Starmer

**LONDON:** UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Sunday said that he could "guarantee" that far-right rioters would "regret" participating in violent disturbances that have spread across England in recent days.

"We will do whatever it takes to bring these thugs to justice," Starmer said as he addressed the nation on the fifth day of skirmishes between protesters and police.

Authorities faced growing pressure on Sunday to put an end to England's worst rioting in 13 years after disturbances linked to child murders and involving far-riot agitators flared across the country.

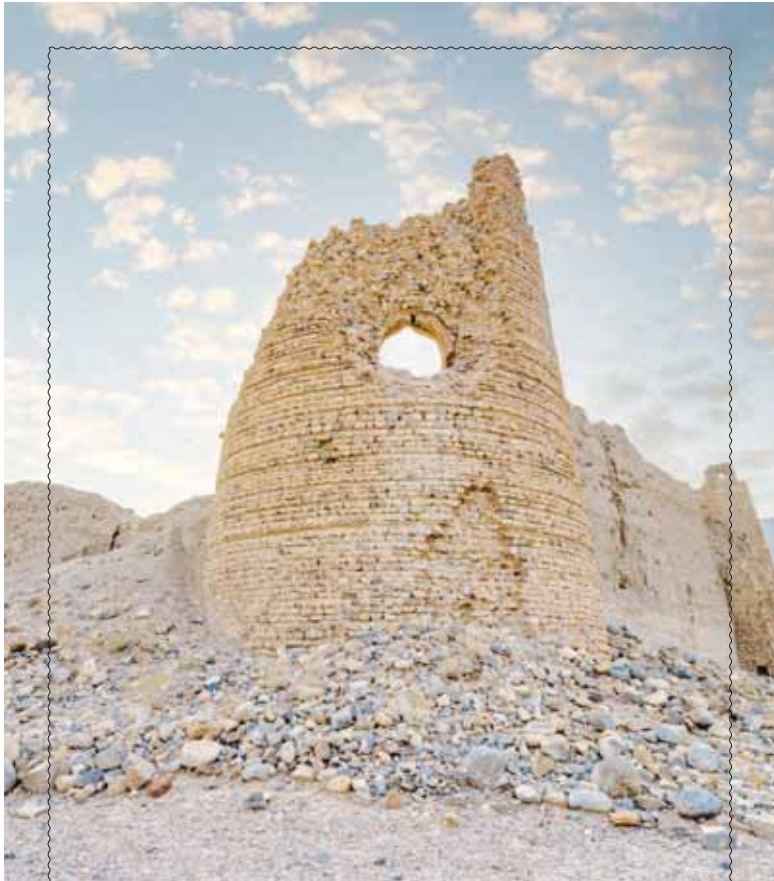
Unrest related to misinformation about a mass stabbing that killed three young girls earlier this week

has spread to multiple towns and cities, with anti-immigration demonstrators clashing with police.

The violence is posing a major test for Starmer, who was elected only a month ago after leading Labour to a landslide win over the Conservatives.

In the latest incident, trouble flared in Rotherham, South Yorkshire, on Sunday when masked anti-immigration demonstrators smashed several windows at a hotel that has been used to house asylum seekers.

More than 90 people were arrested on Saturday after skirmishes broke out at far-right rallies in numerous places, including Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Blackpool and Hull, as well as Belfast in Northern Ireland. **DETAILS ON P7**



# A RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF OMAN

The Wilayat of Izki in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is one of the oldest inhabited areas in Oman, renowned for its ancient ruins, traditional architecture and rich cultural heritage. Archaeological findings indicate that Izki has been inhabited for thousands of years, offering a fascinating glimpse into the lives of its early residents. Izki is divided into two primary sections, Al Yaman and Al Nizar, each with its own unique historical significance and beauty. **DETAILS ON P4**

# Oman sees drop in marriages and divorces

**VINOD NAIR**  
[@vinot\\_nair](#)

The number of people getting married in the Sultanate of Oman has been on the decline over the last couple of years, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCISI).

The country saw a fall in the number of registered marriages, which dropped to 14,716 in 2023 from 15,400 in 2022 and 19,294 in



2021. In Muscat Governorate, the number of registered marriages stood at 3,565, compared to 3,162 in 2022 and 3,980 in 2021. In other governorates, Dhofar recorded

1,622 marriages, Al Dakhiliyah 1,725, Al Batinah North 2,542, Al Batinah South 1,790, Al Sharqiyah South 1,077 and Al Sharqiyah North 1,009, among

others. Divorces at the same time registered a drop in 2023. The number of divorce cases was down at 3,828 in 2023 from 4,160 in 2022 and 3,837 in 2021. At the same time, the number of divorces in Muscat increased to 1,008 in 2023, compared to 977 in 2022 and 853 in 2021. In other governorates, 633 divorce cases were recorded in Dhofar, 360 in Al Dakhiliyah, 665 in Al Batinah North, and 325 in Al Batinah South.



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# Omani-Arab forum reviews mutually beneficial cooperation

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, AUGUST 4

The Omani Arab Investment Forum was inaugurated at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment on Sunday under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar.

The two-day forum, organised by a number of government and private sector agencies, discusses the prospects of enhancing investment and economic cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the Arab countries.

It will also review investment opportunities available to Arab investors and business owners, as well as the legislation, laws and facilities granted to investors in Oman.

The forum also highlights the investment environment in Oman and the promising sectors targeted according to Oman Vision 2040, including manufacturing industries, agricultural and fisheries, logistics, education, scientific research and innovation, in order to achieve effective partnerships between Omani and Arab business owners.

Eng Awadh bin Saeed Khawar al Katheeri, Chairman of the Organising Committee, delivered a speech in which he referred to the efforts of Oman to promote and encourage investment and economic diversification with the aim of stimulating investment and increasing its contribution to the economic cycle, stressing the importance of the forum in



The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. – ONA



OCCI Board Member Dr Siham al Harthy speaking at the Omani-Arab Investment Forum on Sunday in the presence of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. – ONA

building investment and economic cooperation links between Omani businessmen and their Arab counterparts.

Taking part in a panel discussion, Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, highlighted the various investment opportunities in the governorate. He also shared details about the growth in the number of visitors and spending levels during the khareef season of Dhofar for the period from 2021 to 2023, the investment incentives and the available facilities, and opportunities in the sectors of food

security, mining, renewable energy and tourism.

A second panel discussion featured presentations on investment opportunities by Dr Siham bint Ahmed al Harthy, OCCI Board Member, and Eng Ammar bin Sulaiman al Kharousi, CEO of the Invest Oman.

An accompanying exhibition was held on the sidelines of the forum to introduce the most important real estate, commercial, banking and industrial fields and the services provided by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion,

Municipality of Dhofar, Salalah Free Zone and the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

In exclusive remarks to the Observer, Dr Siham al Harthy, OCCI Board Member, said her presentation discussed efforts made to address issues related to procedures, study laws, regulations, and legislation pertinent to investors, and explore opportunities that can be presented either to delegations or individually.

“Returning to the chamber for insights on the best investments in Oman, I also discussed the work of the 18 committees aimed at enhancing investment and expanding horizons for investors, whether from Oman or abroad. These committees facilitate the networking of companies, both local and international.

For instance, last year in Dhofar, there was a business forum with Yemeni businessmen and other similar events,” she said.

The sectoral committees of the Chamber also significantly contribute to enhancing the business environment in Oman by representing the interests of various economic sectors, providing policy-making recommendations, and participating in the implementation of strategic projects. “These committees cover 18 economic sectors and have organised 486 diverse activities to promote cooperation among companies operating in the Sultanate Oman,” Al Harthy stated.



The book reveals important new information on the settlement history and societal development of this culturally influential part of Oman

## Archaeological study on Jaalan looks at cultural developments

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has announced the release of its latest publication, ‘The Archaeological Landscape of the Western Part of Jaalan Region, Sultanate of Oman’ by Sultan Qaboos University’s Unesco World Heritage expert Professor Nasser al Jahwari.

The result of extensive research as well as on-the-ground archaeological surveys and excavation by the author and his team, this authoritative book reveals important new information on the settlement history and societal development of this culturally influential part of Oman.

Noting the immense contribution the volume makes to our understanding of the daily life and rituals of prehistoric communities settled in the Jaalan area and their influence on the region, Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, remarked, “Archaeological discoveries of the kind presented by Professor Al Jahwari in this, his latest work, are rare and its importance cannot be overstated. Thanks to his considerable efforts and expertise, we now have a more complete picture of the lives of our ancient forefathers – their social practices and economic activities – as well as a better comprehension of the heritage of our nation.

The ministry is certainly proud to add this outstanding book to our publication



Professor Nasser bin Said al Jahwari

catalogue and urges academics, students, history enthusiasts and anyone interested in archaeology and anthropology to delve into its pages. Rich in insights and information, I am sure it will be of great interest to a broad readership.”

‘The Archaeological Landscape of the Western Part of Jaalan Region, Sultanate of Oman’ documents the archaeological surveys and excavations conducted by Professor Al Jahwari in the Western Part of Jaalan Region at Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, focused principally around Jabal Qahwan and Wadi Al Batha between Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Al Kamil W’al Wafi.

Its chapters cover the fundamental role played by the area in the cultural developments of the region since prehistoric times, starting with the Stone Age and continuing through the Bronze and Iron Ages and pre-Islamic periods as well as the Islamic periods.

## Recruitment formalities start at SAF, ROP

MUSCAT: The General Staff of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, announced on Sunday the start of recruitment procedures for a number of job-seekers to recruit applicants who meet the conditions.

Applicants will undergo acceptance and evaluation stages in various units of the armed forces.

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), in coordination with



the Ministry of Labour, began recruitment procedures for pilot and air officer candidates for which a number of citizens have applied to join Rafo.

Meanwhile, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) began recruitment procedures for a new cohort of citizens holding a general education diploma with the evaluation stages finalised at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences. — ONA

# ‘Media and telecoms main targets of cyberattacks in 2024’

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabyousef

Mass media outlets and telecommunication service providers are the top targets for cyberattacks in the first half of 2024, along with construction development companies, according to a report.

The report, published by Kaspersky, a global cybersecurity and digital privacy company, states that telecoms faced the highest number of cyberattacks on databases and confidentiality. This is mostly due to attackers’ interest in sensitive data and

exploiting trusted relationships. Mass media has also been traditionally targeted, while construction development firms may be attractive to threat actors due to their extensive use of subcontractors.

In Oman, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) effectively managed over 460 cybersecurity incidents in 2023. This swift action is a result of the sultanate of Oman’s efforts to protect digital infrastructure from attacks and maintain cyber resilience. Oman reported 140 cases of cybercrime



Mass media organisations are increasingly targeted, especially during international conflicts where they play a crucial role in information warfare

in 2023, up from 126 in 2022, with cases related to online content increasing to 2,686 in 2023 from 2,519 in 2022.

According to Kaspersky Managed Detection and Response (MDR) statistics for January-June 2024, there were

284 cybersecurity incidents per 10,000 systems in the telecommunications sector. Mass media companies experienced 180 attacks per 10,000 systems, while the construction development, food, and industrial sectors followed with 179, 122, and 121 incidents, respectively.

“If a cyberattack is successfully launched on a telecom company, millions of customers’ records could be exposed, including contact details, social security numbers, and credit card information,” said Sergey Soldatov, head of Kaspersky Managed Detection and Response. These

attacks can also lead to further exploitation of clients’ trusted relationships, making the sector attractive to cybercriminals.

Soldatov also noted that mass media organisations are increasingly targeted, especially during international conflicts where they play a crucial role in information warfare. Construction development firms are targeted due to their significant cash flows and reliance on subcontractors, which makes them vulnerable to attacks through trusted partners’ infrastructures and spear phishing, the report added.



The CDAA demonstrated its comprehensive range of services at the Dhofar International Exhibition

# CDAA’s latest tech innovations highlighted at Dhofar expo

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, AUGUST 4

The second edition of the Dhofar International Exhibition has provided an impressive platform for the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) to demonstrate its comprehensive range of services and cutting-edge equipment.

Captain Youssef al Mashaikhi, an officer of the Awqad station in Salalah, shed light on the Authority's multifaceted participation in this significant event.

The exhibition is organised into several distinct sections, each highlighting a specific area of the Authority's operations.

The first section is dedicated to the land rescue team, showcasing an array of devices and equipment used for emergency rescue operations and vehicle fire control. This display underscores the team's readiness and capability to handle various emergency scenarios efficiently.

Managed by the Civil Protection Department, the second section

focuses on enforcing safety regulations in commercial and industrial settings.

Featured in this section are various detectors, early warning systems, fire-resistant doors, and external devices, all crucial for preventing and mitigating potential hazards. The third section highlights the first responders of the rescue team, who handle all types of emergency calls, including thermal and rural incidents.

These rural calls often involve hiking accidents or camel falls, while urban incidents cover a broad range of disasters. The team's versatility and preparedness in managing diverse emergencies are clearly illustrated.

The fourth section is dedicated to the Hazardous Materials Team, which responds to hazardous material incidents across the governorate. This section showcases specialised devices, respiratory equipment, and detection instruments necessary for addressing radiological, chemical, and toxicological hazards. The equipment on display reflects the team's ability to manage complex and dangerous situations with precision.

Another crucial component of the exhibition is the ambulance section, which presents various medical devices and home ambulance services.

This section highlights the Authority's commitment to providing prompt and effective medical assistance, featuring a fleet of advanced vehicles designed to respond swiftly to emergencies involving injured individuals.

The water rescue team's section is particularly noteworthy. This team is responsible for responding to drowning incidents in water bodies, wells, or beaches. The display includes a collection of suits, cameras and devices used during rescue operations, demonstrating the team's preparedness and resourcefulness.

Additionally, this section features specialised vehicles and equipment, such as an industrial foam truck with a capacity of 7,000 litres of foam, 5,000 litres of water, 250 kilogrammes of dry powder, and a hose length of approximately 20 metres, essential for effectively tackling water-related emergencies.

# Dhofari incense: A blend of tradition and innovation

**SALALAH:** The craft of incense making is a cherished Omani heritage that sees interest and demand from visitors and tourists during the khareef season in Dhofar Governorate.

Amal bint Ali Saleh, an entrepreneur has entered the world of Dhofari incense with innovative ideas. Amal has not only preserved the traditional methods but has also added her creative touch. With a passion for perfumes and incense, Amal turned her interest into a profession, launching her incense manufacturing business in 2013 after completing several specialised training courses in the field.

Amal explains that incense making 'requires experience, creativity and extensive knowledge of oud, aromatic materials and authentic ingredients,' due to the presence of counterfeit products in the market.

She highlights the different types of incense, including dakkha, mabthooth, musham, oud mutar, oud musqa and other varieties that are widely known in the market. Each manufacturer, she notes, brings their unique flair to the craft.

Amal shares that oud is filtered with original Omani or Taif roses and heavy perfumes, allowing it to absorb for a period of not less than six months before it is ready for sale.

The scent of each type of oud varies depending on its quality. For the production of diffused incense, a substance called sahalah - ground oud sticks, medium between fines and coarse - is used. Purchased in large quantities from trusted shops, the sahalah is then infused with concentrated perfumes, and mixed with ground cardamom, musk, hafur and other special ingredients until it becomes a cohesive mixture.

This mixture is stored in glass containers in a cool, dark place for a minimum of three months before being offered for sale. During the autumn season, incense prices range from RO 10 to 150, depending on the type and preferences. Amal says sourcing authentic materials from reliable suppliers is one of the primary challenges, as maintaining



Amal bint Ali Saleh, an entrepreneur, has entered the world of Dhofari incense with innovative ideas

Amal has introduced new ideas, diversified her incense offerings and maintains traditional methods of blending aromatic materials

the integrity of the craft is crucial to avoid potential health risks from adulterated products. Through diligent research, Amal has established connections with reputable raw material producers both within Oman and internationally.

Competition in this field has intensified in recent years, especially in Salalah, where shops with little experience or knowledge attempt to replicate products seen on the Internet and YouTube. This, Amal warns, can tarnish the reputation of this ancient industry.

However, she remains resilient by continually introducing new ideas, diversifying her incense offerings, and maintaining the traditional methods of blending aromatic materials. She also focuses on raising customer awareness, particularly among those from outside Dhofar who seek high-quality products based on their experiences and trust in reputable shops. Amal aims to expand her reach beyond Oman, aspiring to establish a prestigious global brand in the perfume and incense industry. — ONA

# Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

| Tender Number        | Tender Name                                                                                              | Last date of Buying | Date of Submission | Type of Work        | Register Degree     | Fee (R.O) |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 14/2024/ PEIE/ HQ-14 | Consultancy Services for the Master Plan Development at Sur Industrial City, Sharqiyah South Governorate | 18-08-2024          | 12-09-2024         | Consultancy Offices | Excellent and First | 100       |

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

**1. Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

**2. eTendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: [etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) and +968 24402200

**Note: Bid Submission will be online only.**

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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in



Youth Empowerment Scout Forum launched in Salalah

# Scout Forum to empower youth launched

**SALALAH:** The activities of the Youth Empowerment Scout Forum began on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah under the slogan 'Increase... and Empowerment.'

The forum is organised by the Arab Scout Organisation and the Directorate General of Scouts and Guides at the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth represented by the Directorate-General of Culture, Sports and Youth in Dhofar Governorate. The forum will continue until August 8 with the participation of 67 participants from 13 Arab countries.

The forum includes several programmes, diverse dialogue sessions, and visits to the most prominent tourist sites in Dhofar Governorate.

The first day of the forum included three sessions, the first entitled: 'Modern Project Management', the second entitled: 'Youth Participation Policy', and the third entitled: 'Modern Project Management: Project Planning and Implementation.'

The forum aims to enhance the skills of young people in the areas of leadership and decision-making, deepen the bonds of friendship between scouts in the Arab world, and enhance their role in the areas of entrepreneurship. — ONA

Sultanate Of Oman  
University Medical City  
**Sultan Qaboos University Hospital**

## BIDDING NOTICE

The Procurement Department at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital at the University Medical City would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

| S. No | Type of Business                              | Location                                                                      | Date of site visit  | Bid Number#     | The last date to collect the Document | The last date to submit the quotations |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1     | Rental and operation of a restaurant / coffee | Omani National Centre for Hematology Diseases and Bone Marrow Transplantation | 14/08/2024 10:00 am | UMC. BMT.1/2024 | 12/08/2024                            | 03/09/2024 before 11:00 am             |

- The priority will be for Small and Medium Establishments (SMEs) that fulfill the quality requirements. All classes of companies can also apply for these bids.
- Bidders who wish to participate in this Bid may collect the Bid Documents from the Procurement Department t, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, during working hours, the Bid document for an amount of OMR.25 for (non-refundable). The last date for collecting the Document is on Monday 12/08/2024
- The Site Visit for the selected shop is mandatory. It will be on the above-mentioned date and the assembly point will be at the Procurement Department, SQUH.
- The last date for submission of the quotations is on Tuesday: 03 /09/2024. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Procurement Department, located on the first floor of the Hospital Administration building at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, and deposited in the Bid Box kept in the Department, before 11:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Bid being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Bidder.
- The Bidder should prepare the Site per the health requirements of Muscat Municipality and the requirements of civil defense in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- University Medical City reserves the right to reject any quotation not comply the requirements and does not obliged to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.

**Procurement Department at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital  
University Medical City  
P.O BOX 38, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN  
Tel: 24144084  
Email: [hospitalprocure@squ.edu.om](mailto:hospitalprocure@squ.edu.om)**

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# Izki

## IZKI STORES RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE OF OMAN

IZKI IS DIVIDED INTO TWO PRIMARY SECTIONS, **AL YAMAN** AND **AL NIZAR**, EACH WITH ITS OWN UNIQUE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE AND BEAUTY

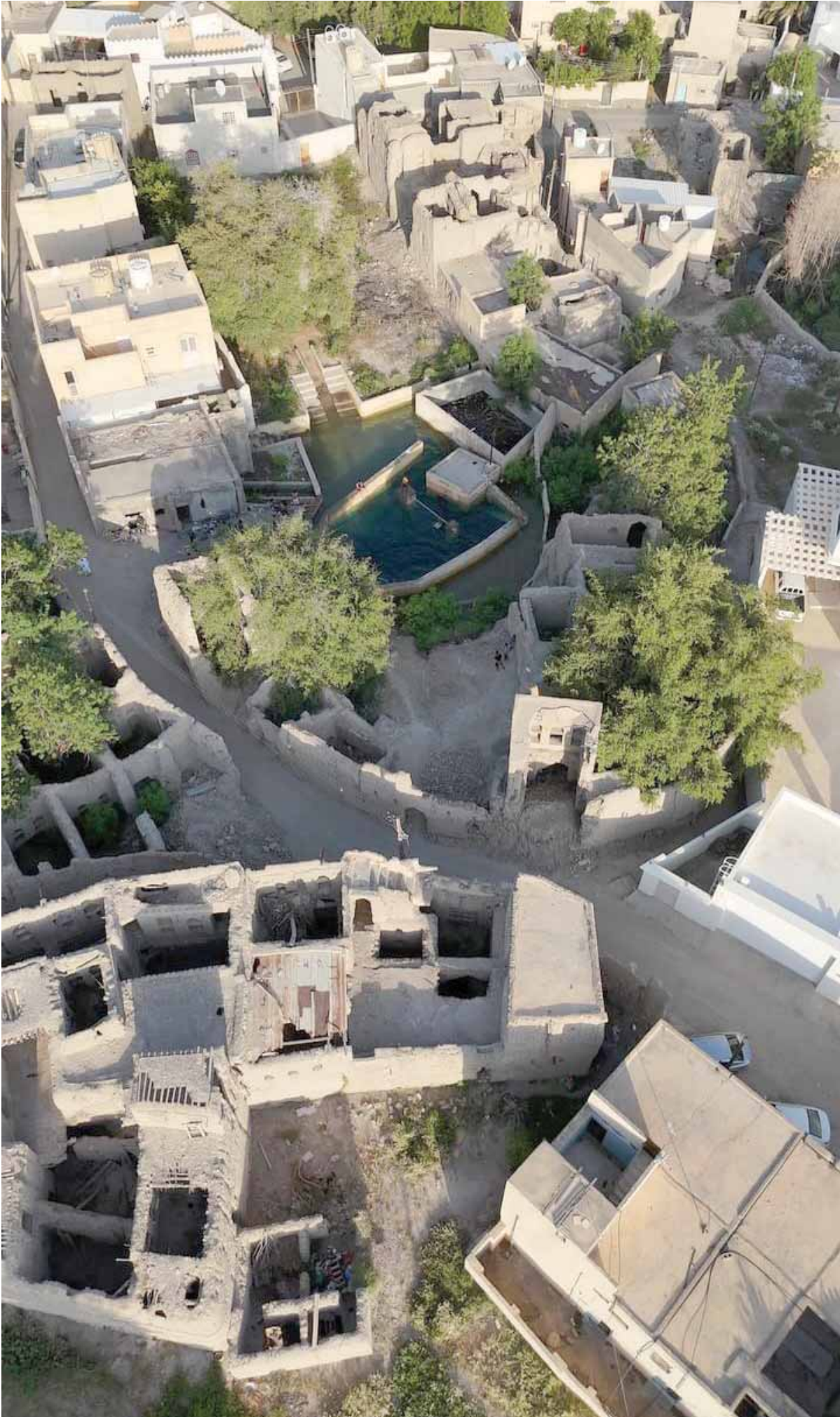


PHOTO BY NIZAR AMBUSADI



### HARAT AL NIZAR

IS A TREASURE TROVE OF HISTORY. THE NAME IS DERIVED FROM THE NIZARI TRIBES OF THE ADNANITE ARABS. THE VILLAGE BOASTS FIVE GATES, ONCE DEFENSIVE FORTS, WITH IMPRESSIVE INSCRIPTIONS DETAILING THEIR HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE. NOTABLY, THE RAHBA GATE, BUILT OVER **1,000** YEARS AGO, STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO THE VILLAGE'S ENDURING LEGACY

ZUWAINA AL SULAIMANI  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

The Wilayat of Izki in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate is one of the oldest inhabited areas in Oman, renowned for its ancient ruins, traditional architecture and rich cultural heritage. Archeological findings indicate that Izki has been inhabited for thousands of years, offering a fascinating glimpse into the lives of its early residents.

Izki is divided into two primary sections, Al Yaman and Al Nizar, each with its own unique historical significance and beauty.

Al Yaman is famous for its ancient 'aflaj' irrigation systems, traditional mud brick homes and lush oases, which have earned a spot on the UNESCO World Heritage List. These 'aflaj', some of which date back to pre-Islamic times, showcase the early inhabitants' expertise in water resource management in a harsh, arid environment.

Al Nizar, also known as Harat Al Nizar, is an old Omani neighbourhood dating back over 1,500 years. It is a must-visit for those interested in Omani history and culture, as it retains much of its ancient identity. Harat Al Nizar is distinguished by its remarkable architectural heritage, including the ruins of old houses, mosques, and forts adorned with intricate inscriptions and carvings.

### IZKI IS HOME TO NUMEROUS NATURAL AND HISTORICAL ATTRACTIONS:

- JARNAN CAVE** is located at the foot of Wadi Halfyan, beneath the ruins of Al Nizar village.
- FALAJ AL MALKI** is one of the five largest 'aflaj' in Oman, with a history spanning over two millennia.

**SAYMA AL ALAYA** features several historical sites such as Falaj Aali, old house ruins and Wadi Sayma.

- ZUKAIT TOMBS**, the beehive-shaped tombs are a testament to the area's ancient past.

Harat Al Nizar is a treasure trove of history. The name is derived from the Nizari tribes of the Adnanite Arabs. The village boasts five gates, once defensive forts, with impressive inscriptions detailing their historical importance. Notably, the Rahba gate, built over 1,000 years ago, stands as a testament to the village's enduring legacy.

The village also has a rich spiritual and educational heritage, evident in its numerous old mosques. Among these, Al Hawari Mosque, named after the esteemed Izki scholar Shaikh Abu Mohammed Al Fadhl bin al Hawari al Azkawi, holds a significant importance.

A unique landmark in Harat Al Nizar is the Well of Al Maghaba, a deep well veiled in mystery and local legend.

It has served as a vital water source and a place where villagers learned to swim and dive. The well, believed to be up to sixteen kilometres deep, is a cultural treasure symbolising strength and life.

As Oman modernises, preserving the historical and cultural landmarks like Harat Al Nizar becomes increasingly important. These sites are not just historical markers, but living legacies of Omani perseverance and cultural diversity. Documenting, restoring and promoting these sites is essential to ensure that future generations can appreciate and benefit from them.

The Wilayat of Izki, with its ancient roots and vibrant history, offers a unique glimpse into Oman's past. Harat Al Nizar stands as a tribute to the resilient character of the Omanis, showcasing their architectural heritage and historical significance through landmarks like the Well of Al Maghaba.



# OMAN HOTEL REVENUES SURGE TO OVER RO 119 MILLION

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman witnessed a notable increase in hotel revenues for establishments classified as 3 to 5 stars during the first half of 2024. Revenues surged by 8.6 per cent, reaching RO 119.493 million, compared to RO 110.68 million in the same period of 2023, as per data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

This revenue boost is largely attributed to a 10.7-per cent

rise in the total number of hotel guests, totalling approximately 1,045,226 by the end of June 2024, up from 944,268 guests by the end of June 2023. Additionally, the occupancy rate experienced a growth of 2.7 per cent.

The statistics highlighted an increase in Omani guests by 7.4 per cent, reaching 363,240. Gulf guests rose by 3 per cent, totalling 75,066. Other Arab guests saw an



This revenue boost is largely attributed to a 10.7-per cent rise in the total number of hotel guests.

11 per cent increase, amounting to 49,040.

European guests recorded a significant rise of 19.2 per cent, reaching 298,247. Guests from the Americas numbered 32,090, while those from Africa saw a slight increase of 0.8 per cent, totalling 5,528. Asian guests increased by 12.6 per cent, reaching 159,187, and guests from Oceania amounted to 15,619.

— ONA

# Naql platform records several violations in passenger transportation

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has recorded several violations on its online platform 'Naql' since its launch in 2020.

A total of 11,664 violations were related to passenger transport activities, while 8,030 violations were related to the transportation of goods.



11,664 violations were related to passenger transport activities

These violations included, mainly, the practice of transporting expatriate passengers and the transportation of goods by expatriates.

At the same time, through this platform, seven licenses were issued for taxi service applications, two applications for transporting passengers by bus, five applications for transporting goods, and four

licenses were issued for land transport shelters with the aim of providing safe and suitable facilities.

The 'Naql' platform has recorded a noticeable increase in the means of transportation registered on the platform, which exceeded 490,000 means of land transportation (passengers and goods), while

the number of passengers transported via registered means of transportation exceeded 12 million passengers.

The platform facilitates the creation of Vehicle Operating Cards (VOCs), permits, and licenses for all individuals and institutions operating within the Sultanate of

Oman in land transport activities in accordance with the Land Transport Law of the Sultanate of Oman.

It has been linked to the systems of both the Royal Oman Police and Invest Easy in the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to track and regulate the land transport details, drivers and activities authorised for the companies.

The Naql platform was developed to integrate a database of all road transport users in the Sultanate of Oman, including private buses, trucks and taxi drivers, to ensure compliance with transport laws.

The model enabled the private sector to provide services through operational contracts. It will also implement projects that support the integration and organisation of the transport sector as a whole.



The ten-day programme is organised by Al Sharqiyah North Governor's Office in partnership with the Arab Private Schools Federation. — ONA

# ‘100 Arab Innovators’ programme kicks off

BIDIYAH: The activities of an international training programme themed '100 Arab Innovators' kicked off on Sunday in the Wilayat of Bidiyah, the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah North. The ten-day programme is organised by Al Sharqiyah North Governor's Office in partnership with the Arab Private Schools Federation.

Commenting on the occasion, Badr bin Ahmed al Habsi, Director of Activities

and Awareness in the governor's office said that the programme targets 100 innovators from Oman and a number of Arab countries.

It aims to enhance digitisation and innovation by training the candidates on the latest artificial intelligence technologies and apps in the oil and gas sector.

The programme was launched under the auspices of Shaikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Abri, Wali of Ibra. — ONA



# LAPAROSCOPIC CHOLECYSTECTOMY RIDS PATIENT OF FASCIOLA HEPATICA

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team at the Royal Hospital successfully performed the first laparoscopic cholecystectomy (of its kind in Oman) for a patient who was infected with a liver fluke Fasciola hepatica. The diagnosis of such rare cases requires exceptional skills and treatment.

Dr Al Warith bin Ahmed al Hashemi, Consultant of Liver



The diagnosis of such rare cases requires exceptional skills and treatment. — ONA

and Pancreas Transplants and Surgery at the Royal Hospital, said that diagnosing Fasciola hepatica is a real medical challenge due to the similarity of its symptoms to many other digestive system diseases. Such diagnosis requires extensive experience and the use of advanced techniques, he added.

Dr Al Warith pointed out that this operation was performed using laparoscopic technology,

which, he said, "reduced the usual complications of traditional surgery and shortened the recovery period, allowing the patient to return to his normal life more quickly and with less pain". The use of laparoscopy in such delicate operations reflects the extent to which the medical team at the Royal Hospital masters high skills in using this technology, said Dr Al Warith. — ONA



## Ministry of Health

### ANNOUCEMENT

The Ministry of Health, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, announces its need to occupy the position of the Director of Litigations Department at the Directorate General of Legal Affairs (through hiring). Those who are confident and desire to occupy this job and meet the its requirements stated down are requested to submit application to the Directorate of Human Resources, the Directorate General of Human Resources, Ministry of Health, within 15 working days as of the date of the publication of this advertisement.

| JOB                     | GRADE | WORKING PLACE                        | REQUIREMENTS FOR THE JOB'S OCCUPATION                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Director of Litigations | 8th   | Directorate General of Legal Affairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>PHD degree + 3 years of post-experience.</li><li>Master degree + 6 years of post-experience.</li><li>Bachelor degree + 9 years of post-experience.</li><li>Specialization of the degree (a legal specialization)</li></ul> |

**General requirements:**

- Should be an Omani national and meet the requirements for occupying the job at the time of its advertisement. No application not meeting the requirements should be considered.
- The applicant should pass the personal interview convened for this purpose.
- Requirement submitted after the announcement has expired should not be considered.
- Scientific qualifications, practical experience and CV are enclosed with the attached forum after having it being filled in.
- The applicant should not be a pensioner.

## TENDER NOTICE



Sultanate of Oman  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries  
Wealth and Water Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources Announces the following Tender:-

| Tender No.           | Tender Title                                                   | Tender Document Sales Start Date | Tender Document Sales End Date | Bid Submission Closing | Companies that are Eligible to Participate                                              | Tender Document Fee (R.O)                                               |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 529/2024/MAFWR/HQ-41 | Supply of Attractive Materials for the Red Palm Weevil Control | Thursday 1/8/2024                | Tuesday 20/8/2024              | Monday 9/9/2024        | Specialized companies registered with excellent, first, second, third and fourth grades | (25/-) Omani riyals for local companies<br>(10/-) Omani riyals for SMEs |

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration for local companies, and for International company that not have headquarters in the Sultanate of Oman should attach Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman (as required in the tender) and addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources.
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or [etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om).

TENDERS COMMITTEE  
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources



# Foreigners told to leave Lebanon as war fears surge

**BEIRUT:** Urgent calls for foreign nationals to leave Lebanon grew on Sunday with France warning of “a highly volatile” situation as Iran and its allies ready their response to high-profile killings blamed on Israel.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement, which has traded near-daily fire with Israeli forces since the Gaza war broke out in October, announced its fighters had fired a barrage of rockets at Israel’s north overnight.

The Israeli military said 30 projectiles were launched from Lebanon, with most of them intercepted.

With Israel on high alert anticipating major military action from groups including Hezbollah and Hamas, medics and police said two people were killed on Sunday in a stabbing attack in a Tel Aviv suburb.

The assailant, a Palestinian from the occupied West Bank, was “neutralised” by police and taken to hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Israeli forces meanwhile kept bombarding the Gaza Strip, witnesses and officials in the besieged territory said, with no end in sight to the nearly 10-month war.

France, Canada and Jordan were among the latest



Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli strike on a tent camp for displaced people, in Deir Al Balah. — Reuters

governments to call for their citizens to leave Lebanon.

“In a highly volatile security context”, French nationals were “urgently asked” to avoid travelling to Lebanon, and those already in the country “to make

their arrangements now to leave... as soon as possible”, the foreign ministry in Paris said. The United States and Britain have issued similar warnings.

On Sunday, the Saudi Embassy in Beirut said in a

statement posted on social media platform X that it was “following closely the developments in south Lebanon”, near the border with Israel, and “reiterating its call for Saudi nationals to leave Lebanon’s

territory immediately”.

Several Western airlines have suspended flights to Lebanon and other airports in the region.

On Sunday, Qatar Airways said the Doha-Beirut route would “operate exclusively

Lebanon’s Hezbollah movement announced its fighters had fired a barrage of rockets at Israel’s north overnight.

The Israeli military said 30 projectiles were launched from Lebanon

during daylight hours” at least until Monday.

The killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, hours after the Israeli assassination of Hezbollah’s military chief in Beirut, has triggered vows of vengeance from Iran.

On the ground in Gaza, fighting continued on Sunday, with strikes, shelling and gunfire reported in and around Gaza City and in the territory’s south.

The Palestinian Red Crescent said eight bodies had been recovered from a residential building in north Gaza’s Jabalia refugee camp after an Israeli air strike.

Medics at central Gaza’s Al Aqsa Martyrs hospital said at least five people were killed and 16 wounded in an Israeli drone strike on tents housing displaced Palestinians at the medical complex. — AFP

## Clashes rock Bangladesh, curfew imposed

**DHAKA:** At least 43 people were killed and hundreds injured in clashes in Bangladesh on Sunday, as police fired tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse tens of thousands of protesters calling for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to resign.

The government declared an indefinite nationwide curfew starting at 6 pm on Sunday, the first time it has taken such a step during the current protests that began last month. It also announced a three-day general holiday starting from today.

The unrest, which has prompted the government to shut down Internet services, is Hasina’s biggest test since January when deadly protests erupted after she won a fourth straight term in elections that were boycotted by the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Demonstrators blocked major highways on Sunday as student protesters launched a non-cooperation programme to press for the government’s resignation, and violence spread nationwide.

“Those who are protesting



Protesters block the Shahbagh intersection during a protest in Dhaka. — AFP

on the streets right now are not students, but terrorists who are out to destabilise the nation,” Hasina said after a national security panel meeting, attended by the chiefs of the army, navy, air force, police and other agencies. “I appeal to our countrymen to suppress these terrorists with a strong hand.”

Police stations and ruling party offices were targeted as violence rocked the country of 170 million people.

At least five people were killed and dozens injured amid fierce clashes in several places in the capital, Dhaka, police and witnesses said.

Two construction workers were killed on their way to work and 30 injured in the central district of Munsiganj, during a three-way clash of protesters, police and ruling party activists, witnesses said.

Police said they had not fired any bullets and said injuries were

caused by improvised explosives that were detonated as the area turned into a battleground.

In the northeastern district of Pabna, at least three people were killed and 50 injured during a clash between protesters and activists of Hasina’s ruling Awami League, witnesses said.

Three people were killed in violence in the northern district of Bogura, and 30 were killed in 12 other districts, hospital officials said. — Reuters

## NIGERIAN PRESIDENT CALLS FOR END TO ‘BLOODSHED’

**ABUJA:** Nigeria’s President Bola Ahmed Tinubu called for the suspension of nationwide protests and an end to “bloodshed” on Sunday after security forces cracked down on rallies over economic hardship. Thousands of people began taking to the streets last week to protest government policies and the high cost of living.

Rights group Amnesty International has accused security forces of killing at least 13 demonstrators in the first day of protests on Thursday, while police say seven people have died and deny responsibility.

In a televised address, Tinubu urged the demonstrators “to suspend any further protest and

create room for dialogue,” his first public comments since the rallies started.

“I have heard you loud and clear. I understand the pain and the frustration that drive these protests, and I want to assure you that our government is committed to listening and addressing the concerns of our citizens,” he said. “But we must not let violence and destruction tear our nation apart,” he warned. “We must stop further bloodshed.”

Tinubu blamed organisers for failing to prevent disorder, and used the speech to defend his record and outline measures he said would benefit Nigerians and the economy. — AFP



A general view of Nigerian security forces taking position during the protest in Abuja. — AFP file photo

### SHORT TAKES

#### CAIRO

##### Yemenis claim first attack on shipping lanes

Yemenis said on Sunday that they targeted the *MV Groton* vessel in the Gulf of Aden, claiming its first attack on shipping lanes since Israel carried out a retaliatory air strike in Hodeidah port on July 20.

The Yemeni military spokesperson Yahya Saree said in a televised statement that the ship was attacked by ballistic missiles.

British maritime agency UK-MTO and British security firm Ambrey said on Saturday that the vessel was targeted by a missile



125 nautical miles east of Yemen’s port of Aden.

Both parties said the ship did not sustain damage and that no water entry or oil leaks were observed. — Reuters

#### BEIJING

##### China landslide death toll rises to 8, 19 missing

A landslide that hit a village in southwestern China and caused a highway bridge to collapse killed at least eight people and left 19 missing. The disaster occurred early on Saturday morning near Kangding, in Garze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southwestern Sichuan province.

A flash flood and mudslide caused the collapse of a highway bridge that linked two tunnels, with four cars carrying 11 people plummeting off it, state broadcaster CCTV said on Sunday.



China is experiencing a summer of extreme weather events, including torrential rains, flooding, landslides and record-high temperatures, made more frequent by climate change. — AFP

#### ALGIERS

##### Jordan Foreign Minister holds talks in Iran

Jordan’s Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi held talks on Sunday with officials in Iran, as fears of an escalation between Tehran and Israel grow. ISNA news agency said Safadi “met and held consultations with” acting foreign minister Ali Bagheri after landing in Tehran for a rare visit.

Earlier, the official news agency IRNA said that Safadi would “exchange views with Iranian officials on regional and international issues” during his visit to Tehran, meeting Bagheri.



The Jordanian foreign ministry said Safadi would deliver a message from King Abdullah II to the Iranian president on “the situation in the region and bilateral relations”. — AFP



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## In brief

■ VATICAN CITY



### POPE CALLS FOR 'TRUTH' IN VENEZUELA, WARNS OF VIOLENCE

Pope Francis on Sunday called for Venezuela to "seek the truth" after the disputed re-election of President Nicolas Maduro, warning parties to avoid violence.

The pope, saying Venezuela was undergoing "a critical situation", sent "a heartfelt appeal to all parties to seek the truth and exercise moderation to avoid any type of violence."

Speaking to the crowd gathered at St. Peter's Square, Francis called "to settle disputes through dialogue and have the true interests of the population and not the interests of parties." Protests following the election have killed at least 11 civilians, based on rights groups. — AFP

■ TORONTO



### CANADIAN FIREFIGHTER DIES BATTLING FOREST BLAZE IN ALBERTA

A 24-year-old firefighter was killed by a falling tree while battling a forest blaze northeast of Jasper in the Western Canadian province of Alberta, the police said in a statement. The deceased was a resident of Calgary and based out of the Rocky Mountain House Fire Base, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police said.

The RCMP said it was notified of a serious injury sustained on Saturday by an Alberta Wildland fire employee who was extracted from the scene. "Heartbroken by the news that a firefighter has lost his life while battling the wildfires in Jasper," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said. — Reuters

■ FLORIDA



### DEADLY TROPICAL STORM DEBBY TAKES AIM AT FLORIDA

Tropical Storm Debby is expected to gather strength and become a hurricane, the US National Hurricane Center (NHC) said. Governor Ron DeSantis called up 3,000 National Guard and placed most of Florida's cities and counties under emergency orders, while evacuations were ordered in parts of the Gulf Coast counties.

"It's become clearer and clearer that Debby will become a hurricane before it makes landfall," said Jamie Rhome, deputy director of the National Hurricane Center. The centre will move across the Gulf of Mexico and reach the Florida Big Bend coast. — Reuters

# Ukraine orders evacuation from several eastern towns



Ukrainian emergency workers cool off after extinguishing fires following a Russian strike in Pokrovsk. — Reuters

**KYIV:** Ukraine on Sunday announced the mandatory evacuation of children and their guardians from areas in the Donetsk region, where Russia has been claiming advances.

Just hours earlier, Russia said its forces had seized a nearby village, after claiming a string of villages in recent weeks -- many just consisting of a few streets.

"The enemy is bombing the towns and villages of these communities every day, so it was decided to evacuate children with their parents or other legal representatives," Donetsk governor Vadym Filashkin said, listing the towns and villages to be evacuated. Filashkin cited the town of Novogrodovka, which is about 20 kilometres from the village of Novoselivka Persha that Russia claimed to have captured on Sunday.

The Donetsk governor said 744 children and their families had to be relocated to four regions of Ukraine.

"I have instructed that only armoured vehicles be involved in the process of evacuating children, as the enemy is actively using first person view drones in these communities," Filashkin

**I have instructed that only armoured vehicles be involved in the process of evacuating children, as the enemy is actively using first person view drones**

**VADYM FILASHKIN**  
Donetsk governor

said. "We must make every effort to protect our children," he added.

Filashkin has been urging civilians to flee the region over recent weeks because of an increase in deadly Russian bombardments.

Now grinding through a third year of fighting, neither Kyiv nor Moscow has managed to swing the conflict decisively in their favour, even though Moscow's forces have gained ground in recent months. Russia claimed to have annexed the Donetsk region — along with three others in eastern and southern Ukraine — in 2022, despite not fully

controlling any of them.

Now grinding through a third year of fighting, neither Kyiv nor Moscow has managed to swing the conflict decisively in their favour, even though Moscow's forces have gained ground in recent months.

Russia's defence ministry said forces had "liberated the settlement of Novoselivka Persha" that lies in the Donetsk region around 20 kilometres northwest of Avdiivka, which Russia seized in February.

On Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky praised his forces for hitting military targets inside Russia, after his army reported several strikes including on an airfield and an oil depot.

"I would like to thank each of our soldiers and all those who work in our defence industry for striking Russian airfields, oil refineries and logistics," he said in his daily statement.

Kyiv has stepped up aerial attacks on Russian territory, saying it carries out the strikes in retaliation for the bombardments Ukraine has faced since Russia attacked more than two years ago. — AFP

# Dozens arrested after UK protests turn violent

**LONDON:** Police arrested dozens of people after protests across parts of England and Northern Ireland turned violent, as the government pledged tough action against those it said were exploiting the murder of three girls to stir up disorder.

Violent protests involving hundreds of anti-immigration groups have erupted in towns and cities across Britain after three girls were killed in a knife attack at a children's dance class in Southport in north-west England last week.

The murders were seized on by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim groups as misinformation spread that the suspect was a migrant. Police have said the suspect was born in Britain.

On Saturday, violent disorder broke out in cities around the country, including Liverpool, Bristol, Hull and Stoke-on-Trent, as well as the town of Blackpool, with local police saying they had arrested at least 87 people. There was also unrest in Manchester and Belfast.

Shops and businesses were vandalised and looted, a library in Liverpool was set on fire and several police were injured, police statements said.

"Criminal violence and thuggery on our streets will not be tolerated," interior minister Yvette Cooper said late on Saturday.

"Police forces have my full support in ensuring that those who engage in criminal disorder face the strongest possible penalties."

Saturday's protests were the most widespread after several days of disorder following the murders. Prime Minister Keir Starmer has said they are the result of deliberate actions by the far-right, co-ordinated by a "group of individuals who are absolutely bent on violence," rather than legitimate protest.

The last time violent protests erupted across Britain was in 2011 when thousands of people took to the streets after police shot dead a Black man in London.

There are more demonstrations planned, based on messages circulating on social media.

On Friday night hundred of anti-immigration demonstrators in Sunderland threw stones at police in riot gear near a mosque, before overturning vehicles, setting a car alight and starting a fire near a police station. Four injured police officers were taken to hospital and 12 people were arrested, Mark Hall, chief police superintendent of the Sunderland area, told reporters on Saturday. "This was not a protest. This was unforgivable violence and disorder," Hall said. — Reuters



A protester holding a piece of concrete walks towards riot police as clashes erupt in Bristol. — AFP

# Philippines, Germany to sign defence pact

**MANILA:** The Philippines and Germany on Sunday committed to signing a defence cooperation arrangement this year, vowing to uphold international rules-based order in the region as tensions flare over disputed areas.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and his Philippine counterpart Gilberto Teodoro committed to establishing long-term relations between their armed forces to expand training and bilateral exchanges, explore opportunities to expand bilateral armaments cooperation and engage in joint projects.

The meeting in Manila was the first such visit by a German defence minister, as their countries mark 70 years of diplomatic relations.

"This ruling remains valid, without any exceptions," said Pistorius. "It is our obligation to strengthen the maritime border and we are living up to it."

Teodoro said the Philippines, seeking to modernise its military to boost external defence, will be "looking to engage Germany



Philippine Defence Minister Gilberto Teodoro speaks during a joint press conference with German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, Manila. — Reuters

as a possible supplier of these capabilities".

"These are in the command and control, anti-access aerial denial, maritime domain, aerial domain and in higher technologically capable equipment," Teodoro told a press conference with Pistorius.

Previously, China has expressed concern about the growing ties between Nato

members and Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, as Washington and its partners expand alliances and partnerships, including those that span the globe.

Germany on Friday joined the US-led United Nations Command in South Korea, becoming the 18th nation in a group that helps police the heavily fortified border with

North Korea and has committed to defend the South in the event of a war.

Pistorius said that move was evidence of Berlin's strong belief that European security is closely linked to security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Germany's commitments and engagements in the region "are not directed against anybody," Pistorius said in Manila. "Instead,

**The two countries' defence ministers committed to establishing long-term relations between their armed forces to expand training and bilateral exchanges**

we are focussing on maintaining rules-based order, securing freedom of navigation and protecting trade routes."

The South China Sea is a vital trade route with more than \$3 trillion in ship-borne trade passing through it every year.

Teodoro said the Philippines was not provoking China and did not seek war.

Manila reached a provisional arrangement with China for its resupply missions in the South China Sea last month in an attempt to ease tensions and manage differences. The details of the deal have not been made public. — Reuters

# Academic excellence is not the only criteria of success



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English and Translation, Sultan Qaboos University

As students now confront the results of their final exams and prepare for the next steps in their academic career, many are left crestfallen as they may not have got into the institution or course of their choice.

Often, this is because they have not performed well in the entry level exams or interviews.

Low academic performance can lead to depression, low self-esteem and poor mental health.

However, it is important to realise that academic excellence is no longer the only criteria of success. As our world changes and youngsters opt for a diverse variety of careers, that one final mark or grade is not the only determinant.

Educational institutions can, at best, provide book knowledge, with a sprinkle of practical experience if a student is lucky enough to go through a school that provides experiential education.

Internships are the first time when students confront the real world.

As has often been pointed out, the template for

the Internet was not written in a book but was a product of constant trial and error, just like the succeeding innovations of social media. Education teaches existing knowledge — it takes creativity and innovation to build something new.

In spite of the number of challenges facing today's world, it is also one of infinite possibilities. There is virtually no hobby than cannot be turned into a career or a business. From designing to creating digital applications, there is room for every passion and every hobby. There are also intersecting areas between academics and passion such as sports management which combines the love for sports with the discipline of marketing and management.

There is no denying the intense competition for coveted colleges and select jobs. What is important is to realise that being left out of any of this does not equal failure. There are endless opportunities for the taking. Of course, there is no short cut to success. Whatever passion guides a person, it has to be combined with dedication, hard work and relentless effort. It is never enough to be just interested.

WHATEVER  
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AND RELENTLESS  
EFFORT

But in an environment where both worlds, the one with traditional careers and the other with unexplored possibilities exist together, it is important for parents and teachers to inform and encourage youngsters to understand the number of possibilities that exist around them.

It is often said, 'do what you love, or you will be forced to love what you do.' The latter is surely not the preferred option for anyone.

In fact, most people do not even love what they do, introducing an endless circle of misery and frustration.

At the end of the day, success is gauged, not by society, but by oneself. Following a chosen path, sticking to it in spite of challenges that are sure to come, and defining success in one's own terms will all lead to a more fulfilling life.

Academic success is merely a number, a letter grade, or a short report. It does not have significance beyond the first days of university. The real world awaits to be explored and it is one of infinite possibilities.

## Missed warnings, over-tourism worsened landslides

MUNSIF VENGATTIL, KRISHN KAUSHIK & CHRIS THOMAS

With a steeply pitched tiled roof piercing misty green hills in southern India and a stream gushing through rocks nearby, the Stone House Bungalow was one of the most popular resorts in the Wayanad area of Kerala state.

It was empty when two landslides washed away the 30-year-old stone building: staff and tourists had left after rain flooded its kitchen a few days earlier. But neighbouring dwellings in Mundakkai village were occupied and 205 people, almost all locals, were killed and scores are missing. Tourists had been warned to leave the day earlier because of the rain.

Local authorities are now counting the cost of the disaster and questioning whether the rapid development of a tourism industry was to blame for the tragedy. Weather-related disasters are not unusual in India, but the landslides in Kerala state were the worst since about 400 people were killed in floods there in 2018.

Mundakkai, the area worst affected by the landslides, was home to some 500 local families. It and neighbouring villages housed nearly 700 resorts, homestays and zip-lining stations attracting trekkers, honeymooners and tourists looking to be close to nature, a local official said. Cardamom and tea estates dotted the hills.

Experts said they had seen disaster coming for years and several government reports in the past 13 years had warned that over-development in the ecologically sensitive areas would increase the risk of landslides and other environmental disasters such as floods by blocking natural water flows. The warnings were largely ignored or lost in bureaucratic wrangling.

Just weeks before the latest disaster, Kerala Tourism Minister P A Mohammed Riyas said in the local legislature in answer to a question that Wayanad was "dealing with an influx of more people than it can handle, a classic example of a place facing the problem of over-tourism".

The area is just six hours by road from Bengaluru, India's tech hub, and is a favoured weekend destination for the city's wealthy IT professionals.

However, officials were unable to share any documentary evidence of resorts and tourist facilities flouting building regulations, although they said some had done so.

Noorudheen, part of Stone House's managing staff, said no government or village authority had warned the management against building or operating a resort there. — Reuters

## Joining the Omani Society for Writers and Literati: A literary journey unfolds



Mohammed Anwar Al Balushi

The writer is an academic lecturer and adviser, Oman College of Management and Technology

Reading and writing have always been my sanctuary. In the pages of books, I discover new worlds and words, and through my writing, I create them. These hobbies bring me immense satisfaction, allowing me to explore the vast landscapes of imagination and knowledge.

A friend of mine suggested I join the Omani Society for Writers and Literati. While I appreciated the idea, I initially hesitated, wanting to carve my path in the literary field. However, the thought lingered.

After a productive meeting, I decided to visit their office. The welcoming atmosphere and a stimulating discussion with Said al Saqlawi, the president of the Omani Society for Writers and Literati, about Arabic literature convinced me to join.

Completing the formalities was straightforward, and soon, I became a member. This decision opened up a new chapter in my literary journey. I immersed myself in world literature and translation, staying updated on the colourful activities of Omani poets, writers and authors.

To my pleasant surprise, the Omani literary scene was far from empty. The association plays a significant role in the country, organising poetry nights, and encouraging students in the field of literature.

Omani authors and translators are actively engaged, contributing to the cultural richness of our society.

Despite its commendable efforts, the Omani Society for Writers and Literati faces challenges, particularly with its limited budget, which restricts the scope of large-scale literary events.

This is where the support of profit organisations through sponsorship, as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), becomes crucial.

The role of writers and literature in shaping societies cannot be overstated. Literature reflects societal values, norms and issues, acting as both a mirror and a catalyst for change.

Through their creative expressions, writers have the power to influence public opinion, inspire movements and

foster a deeper understanding of the human condition.

As Eagleton (2008) posits, literature is a social institution inseparable from its historical context, capturing the spirit of the times and offering future generations a window into the past.

Literature is the spirit of society, with the economy as its body, and a positive bridge between the two is essential. Writers often use their expertise to advocate for social change.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' is a classic example, credited with influencing public opinion on slavery in the United States and contributing to the abolitionist movement.

OMAN HAS TALENTED WRITERS, TRANSLATORS, AUTHORS AND NOVELISTS WHO DESERVE SUPPORT AND MOTIVATION TO SHINE GLOBALLY

Academic research supports the notion that literature can inspire social change. A study by Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading literary fiction improves empathy, a critical component of social change.

By stepping into the lives of diverse characters, readers develop a deeper understanding and compassion for

others, which can translate into real-world actions.

According to McAdams (2006), narratives help individuals make sense of their lives and experiences. Through stories, people can explore different aspects of their identity.

Books like J K Rowling's 'Harry Potter' series and Angie Thomas' 'The Hate U Give' offer young readers characters and situations they can relate to, helping them navigate their own identities and the complexities of growing up. Bourdieu (1993) notes that writers possess cultural capital, allowing them to influence societal norms and values.

Economists and entrepreneurs should acknowledge that literature serves as a reflection of society, a tool for social change, a source of knowledge and a means of identity formation. Writers, through their creative expressions, have the power to influence and inspire.

In Oman, we have talented writers, translators, authors and novelists who deserve support and motivation to shine globally. By nurturing and promoting our literary talents, we not only preserve our cultural heritage, but also contribute to the global literary landscape.

Joining the Omani Society for Writers and Literati has been a transformative experience. It has connected me with a community of like-minded individuals, all passionate about the power of words. Together, we can continue to enrich our society and make a lasting impact through the timeless art of literature.



الجمعية العُمانية للكتاب والأدباء  
THE OMANI SOCIETY FOR WRITERS & LITERATI

# Promoting personal, national interests

Undoubtedly, many of us have been tourists exploring different destinations and cultures around the world. Though, defining what tourism actually can be difficult at some point. However, tourism could simply signify the activities of people travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for different reasons. Having leisure, business or other purposes are just to name a few motives for them to travel.

In other words, tourism might stand as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon, involving people moving from a country to another or to a place within their home country. As tourism is travelling for either a pleasure or business, it also involves the practice of touring, business of attracting, accommodating and entertaining tourists, as well as the business of operating tours.

Likewise, tourism reflects the natural resources, local attractions, facilities and a variety of services that generate unique experiences for each visitor. Tourism's significance is marked as being one of the most important economic activities for countries for it feeds and boosts other types of local industries. In many countries worldwide, tourism is regarded one of the main generators of economic earnings.

According to data collected by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), one among every 11 employees works in any of tourism-related sectors. In addition, tourism influences growth in infrastructure, with the opening of hotels, restaurants, shops and backing public transport and individuals' businesses. Tourism also raises the profile of visited places in general, which translates into improvement in infrastructure, roads, health and education for people living in those destinations.

Moreover, good travel experiences help people become interested in knowing and experiencing what a country can offer them.

Therefore, the support of locals is very essential as well to promote interesting places and share positive impressions and deliver memorable experiences. On the other hand, travelling is a great source of personal growth, learning and having fun.

Accordingly, visiting different



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

TOURISM IS A DYNAMIC AND COMPETITIVE INDUSTRY THAT REQUIRES THE ABILITY TO ADAPT CONSTANTLY TO CUSTOMERS AND TOURISTS' CHANGING NEEDS AND DESIRES

destinations and understanding other nations' cultures, traditions and people changes one's perception to have a broader vision of what other parts of the world are distinguished with. Travelling also inspires people to admire every nation they visit and possibly urges others to explore them. This is the case with those travelling overseas.

On the other hand, many prefer to boost domestic tourism by visiting in-country tourist destinations and enjoying local attractions. On the local front, many locals prefer to spend their time, especially during summer break, within the country. They enjoy their holiday visiting various tourist landmarks and places in different parts of Oman. Their interest serves promoting and investing more in internal tourism rather than travelling abroad. As well, this offers them an opportunity to discover new tourist destinations and thrive the national economy.

Consequently, in a bid to promote domestic tourism, local and foreign tourists alike look for remarkable and competitive attractions in the country. Introducing diverse offerings will certainly serve the national and personal interests when travelling and touring around a destination. For instance, experiencing the local food tops the interests of many tourists. Locally, you rarely find authentic Omani cuisine served in either public places, malls or tourist destinations. Other cultural and social aspects are not effeminately promoted to tourists.

This approach urges countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, to invest more in boosting the internal tourism. As well, it brings different lessons for the government and private sectors to increase their investments in tourist benchmarks, facilities, sightseeing and services. Moreover, this marks a call on all authorities and parties concerned with tourism sector to re-explore the investment opportunities in tourism sector.

Tourism is a dynamic and competitive industry that requires the ability to adapt constantly to customers' and tourists' changing needs and desires. The customer's satisfaction and enjoyment are particularly the major focus of tourism businesses. Thus, it is time now to revisit the plans and strategy of tourism sector in Oman and bring unique tourism experiences.

## A 'VIBRANT' WALK



Indonesian performers dressed in costumes parade during the Jember Fashion Carnival, in eastern Java island on Sunday. The annual parade brings designers creating elaborate and vibrant costumes with motifs of wayang, versailles, fairy, rio carnival, chess, Jember, beta fish, zodiac, climate change, and media attended by some 900 participants in a 3.6 km parade route around the city. – AFP

# Disaster response and the climate crisis...

Earlier this month, Hurricane Beryl swept through the Caribbean, flattening entire islands and causing "Armageddon-like" destruction. As the earliest Category 5 Atlantic storm to form in the Atlantic Ocean, it marks the beginning of what is forecasted to be the most active hurricane season on record.

This is undoubtedly a climate disaster. The torrential rainfall and 150-mile-per-hour winds that flattened the islands of Carriacou, Petit Martinique, and the Grenadines archipelago, along with the storm surge that hammered the coasts of Barbados and Jamaica, were up to 10-30 per cent more intense due to human-driven climate change.

Hurricane Beryl's aftermath should concern financial institutions as much as it does climate scientists because it reveals how our patchwork development-finance system – designed when extreme weather events were far less catastrophic – is falling short in the face of increasingly frequent and intense storms, floods, and wildfires.

Studies have shown that no matter how rapidly we reduce greenhouse-gas emissions, disasters like Beryl will recur. But small island developing states (SIDS), which are among the world's most climate-vulnerable countries,



Pepukaye Bardouille

The writer is a Special Adviser on Climate Resilience to the Prime Minister of Barbados and is Director of the Bridgetown Initiative

THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANE BERYL EXPOSES HOW OUR FINANCIAL SYSTEM IS FALLING SHORT IN THE FACE OF INCREASINGLY FREQUENT AND INTENSE STORMS, FLOODS, AND WILDFIRES

currently have access to less than 2 per cent of the climate financing pledged to developing countries.

To protect Caribbean countries and other vulnerable regions from the existential risks posed by climate change, the international community must help them build resilience. This requires a more comprehensive approach to delivering financial support before, during, and after extreme weather events.

The most important priority is emergency liquidity in the aftermath of a crisis, so that governments can meet their populations' most urgent needs and begin disaster-response work. Examples include the World Bank's loans with a Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option (Cat DDO), similar to the Inter-American Development Bank's (IDB) Contingent Loan for Natural Disaster Emergencies. Because such credit lines are approved in advance, countries can access funds quickly once certain predefined conditions are met.

The Cat DDO fund was vital to St Vincent and the Grenadines' response to the 2021 volcanic eruption, providing the country with \$20 million in immediate

liquidity to support its recovery. Regrettably, this fund expired last year, leaving St. Vincent and the Grenadines without similar financing in the wake of Hurricane Beryl, which destroyed 90 per cent of homes on one of its islands.

More broadly, accessibility is a major obstacle to protecting SIDS. Most Eastern Caribbean countries are not members of the IDB and therefore cannot access its loans, underscoring the need for a universal contingent liquidity fund that every climate-vulnerable country can access immediately.

This fund could be capped at a relatively modest amount to ensure that all countries can respond to their most pressing emergencies.



Hurricane Beryl's aftermath should concern financial institutions as much as it does climate scientists.

Importantly, the contingent loan would be triggered by a national or sub-national government's declaration of emergency.

Additional "top-up" options like the Cat DDO, or even higher-level coverage through a combination of public support and private solutions – such as debt-payment deferrals, contracts with reinsurers, or parametric risk-transfer solutions– would still be available. But with a universal "base-level" facility, no country would be unable to access emergency liquidity and reconstruction funds. This is why SIDS has unanimously called for the creation of the appropriate financial instruments.

But preparedness can go only

so far, and emergency liquidity is ultimately a very small piece of the puzzle. To reduce storm damage and prevent hard-won socioeconomic gains made over decades from being reversed overnight, climate-vulnerable countries must build resilience. For example, Barbados's recently completed investment plan for prosperity and resilience identifies a need to allocate \$11.6 billion to health care, education, housing, and infrastructure – including significant coastal protection – over the coming decade, of which about \$5 billion will need to be funded through the public sector. Achieving this goal requires cheaper, long-term financing options. A much larger share of concessional resources from the multilateral development banks and bilateral donors must be directed toward adaptation, as every dollar spent on making infrastructure more resilient saves \$4 in disaster reconstruction. When combined with pre-approved liquidity instruments, like the contingency facility, such investments improve the capacity plan, rather than improvise, humanitarian responses after a storm. © Project Syndicate, 2024

# sport

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## Al Amerat clinches 3rd in Moscow Beach Soccer Cup



intense pressure, and in one of the attacks, they got a free kick which Yoff's goalkeeper saved brilliantly. Before the end of the half, Al Amerat's player Yahya al Mariki received a red card, forcing the team to play with a reduced player for a while. However, they managed to maintain the score, ending the second half with Yoff still leading 2-1.

The third half began with a kickoff by Al Amerat, executed skillfully by Abdullah al Sooti, who played a high ball over the opponents that reached Salem al Araiimi. He scored a spectacular bicycle kick goal in the opening seconds. Al Amerat players charged with great enthusiasm, and in the following minute, Ahmed al Owisi scored the leading goal through a quick counterattack after a midfield pass.

Yoff Club tried to level the score with several attacks, but Al Amerat's defence was at its best, blocking all attempts. In the fourth minute, a beautiful pass from goalkeeper Yosuke Kawai found Abdullah al Sooti, who scored Al Amerat's fourth goal with a fantastic volley. Yoff continued their desperate attempts to close the gap, but Al Amerat's solid defence and the players' experience prevented that, ending the match with Al Amerat winning 4-2.

Al Amerat advanced to the third-place match after a narrow 5-1 loss to the defending champions, Lokomotiv Moscow, in the group stage.

Coach Ishaq al Mas thanked the players for their efforts and the club president Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani for the opportunity to participate in international competitions. He commented saying: "It was a tough game, but we managed to come back from a two-goal deficit. This gives us the motivation to perform better in future editions, and our ambition is to win the upcoming championships."

Al Amerat Club presented a distinguished performance in the tournament, winning three matches out of four, scoring 32 goals and conceding only 12 goals.

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

Al Amerat Club achieved a remarkable feat by securing third place in the Moscow Beach Soccer Cup after defeating Yoff Club from Senegal with a score of 4-2.

The match began with extreme caution from both teams as they exchanged the ball carefully, trying to find weaknesses in each other's defence. In the second minute, Yoff Club got a free kick which their player successfully converted into the first goal with a powerful shot into the net.

After the goal, Al Amerat players pushed forward, trying to score an

equaliser through several shots and organised attacks, but luck wasn't on their side. In the tenth minute, Yoff Club was awarded a penalty kick after a foul in the penalty area, which they converted for their second goal. Al Amerat tried to respond quickly, but the first half ended with Yoff leading 2-0.

The second half started with a kickoff by Yoff Club, but Al Amerat quickly regained possession and pressed the opponent's defence intensively. In the fourth minute, a clever pass from Takumi Yusa found Sami al Balushi, who scored a stunning bicycle kick goal, reducing the deficit to one goal.

Al Amerat continued their

## West Ham sign Dutch winger Summerville from Leeds



UPTON PARK: West Ham United have signed Dutch winger Crysenicio Summerville from Leeds United on a five-year deal with an option to extend for another year, the Premier League club said on Saturday.

The 22-year-old, who joined Leeds in 2020, was named the English Championship's player of the season in 2023-24 after scoring 19 goals and providing nine assists.

The transfer fee was not disclosed, though media reports put the deal in excess of £25 million (\$32 million).

"It's the perfect next step for my career. West Ham United is a huge club, with lots of ambition and great players," Summerville said in a statement.

West Ham begin their Premier League campaign at home against Aston Villa on August 17. — Reuters

MADRID: Atletico Madrid have signed striker Alexander Sorloth from fellow LaLiga side Villarreal on a four-year contract, both clubs said on Saturday.

The 28-year-old Norway international scored 26 goals for Villarreal in all competitions last season, with 23 coming in LaLiga.

That placed him second in the league's scoring charts, just behind Girona's Artem Dovbyk who recently moved to AS Roma.

The transfer fee was not officially revealed, but Spanish media reported it was around 32 million euros (\$34.9 million).

Atletico manager Diego Simeone had been on the lookout for a central striker since captain Alvaro Morata's move to AC Milan last month. — Reuters

## Atletico Madrid sign Norwegian striker Sorloth





(L-R) Carlos Alcaraz, Novak Djokovic and Lorenzo Musetti pose with their medals. – AFP

**PARIS:** Novak Djokovic completed his career Golden Slam as the 37-year-old Serb fought off Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in a magnificent Olympic men's singles final battle at Roland Garros on Sunday.

After heartbreak in Beijing, London, Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo, Djokovic simply would not be denied the one title that had eluded him for so long, winning 7-6(3) 7-6(2) in front of an enthralled crowd on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Top seed Djokovic delivered one of the finest performances of his career to deny Alcaraz and become only the fifth player to win all four singles Grand Slams and the Olympic title.

Neither player took a backward step in a ferocious contest in which the first set alone lasted one hour and 33 minutes as they wrestled for control in a series of spellbinding games.

Alcaraz cracked first in the tiebreak and when another tiebreak was required to decide the second set, Djokovic again found another gear, sealing victory with a stunning forehand winner down the line.

Djokovic roared to the sky and after consoling Alcaraz at the net he then fell to his knees and sobbed in the centre of the court before climbing into the crowd to be swamped by his family, friends and team.

While Djokovic, the oldest player to win the Olympic singles title since the sport returned to the Games in 1988, cried tears of joy, the 21-year-old Alcaraz was inconsolable after falling short of adding the gold medal to this year's French Open and Wimbledon crowns

While Djokovic, the oldest player to win the Olympic singles title since the sport returned to the Games in 1988, cried tears of joy, the 21-year-old Alcaraz was inconsolable after falling short of adding the gold medal to this year's French Open and Wimbledon crowns.

Djokovic, had lost three times in Olympic singles semi-finals and knew arriving in Paris this was his last realistic chance to fill the last remaining space in a trophy cabinet that contains a men's record 24 Grand Slam titles.

And how he earned it — overturning his crushing loss to Alcaraz in last month's Wimbledon final to become the first man to win the Olympic singles without dropping a set.

"It was an incredible fight and I had to play my best tennis," an emotional Djokovic told Eurosport before the medals ceremony as Serbian fans celebrated in the stands.

"It was fair that the two sets finished in tiebreaks. I put my heart, my soul, everything to win gold.

"I did it for my country first, for Serbia."

Djokovic joins an elite club of Andre Agassi, Rafa Nadal, Serena Williams and Steffi Graf in winning all four Grand Slams and the Olympic title in their careers.

— Reuters

# GOLDEN WIN FOR DJOKOVIC

# Greece's Tentoglou set fair for rare long jump double



**PARIS:** To say Miltiadis Tentoglou is in good form is something of an understatement and Greece's defending Olympic champion threw down the gauntlet in men's long jump qualifying with a leap of 8.32 metres on Sunday, the only effort he needed.

Already this season Tentoglou has retained his world indoor

and European outdoor titles and won all but one of the 11 competitions he has contested. He also improved his personal best to 8.65 metres, the finest by anyone for five years.

That came at the European Championships, where he achieved it twice in a remarkably consistent performance that included five jumps over 8.40 —

the latter being a mark only two others have matched this year.

"I'm in very good shape, it was nothing for me and I feel very good so we'll see now if anyone can challenge me," Tentoglou, 26, said on Sunday.

Switzerland's Simon Ehammer (8.41) and Jamaican Wayne Pinnock (8.40) are the men in his slipstream on the season's world

leading chart but Tentoglou's focus is on a rather better known name in the sport — Carl Lewis.

The American who won four successive Olympic titles from 1984 to 1996 is the only man to have successfully defended it.

Tentoglou, who is also the world champion, aims to change that in Paris and on Sunday's showing, with nobody else in the

field looking even close to him, he is in with a great chance.

"It would be amazing," he said of the prospect. "It would make me one of the best of all time. Maybe not the very best, but in terms of achievements. That is my extra motivation."

China's Wang Jianan, who snatched the 2022 world gold from Tentoglou in the last round,

has a season's best of 8.12, while Czech Radek Juska produced a season's best of 8.15 — the only other man to hit the automatic qualification distance. The long jump is another event historically dominated by the United States, with 22 gold and 47 medals in all, but they have won only two of the last six golds and had a terrible day. — **Reuters**

# Fan seals table tennis gold to maintain dominance

**PARIS:** Fan Zhendong clinched Olympic gold in the men's singles table tennis on Sunday, maintaining the Chinese stranglehold on the sport and ending a fairytale run for shock finalist Truls Moregard.

Roared on by a partisan crowd waving Chinese flags, world champion Fan outclassed the lower-ranked Swede 4-1 in a pulsating Paris final featuring some sensational rallies.

Moregard, world-ranked 26, was seeking to become the first man outside Asia to win Olympic gold since his compatriot Jan-Ove Waldner, who struck gold in Barcelona in 1992.

The 19th seed had already produced the shock of the tournament, beating Chinese top seed Wang Chuqin in the last 32, a day after a photographer broke Wang's bat during celebrations for China's mixed doubles gold.

Moregard started brilliantly against Fan, taking the first game 11-7, counter-attacking effectively on his backhand and seemingly causing the Chinese ace difficulty with his heavy top-spin.

But Fan, the second seed, hit back in the second game, levelling up the match with a fierce backhand top-spin drive up the line to take the game 11-9.

The third game also went the way of the Chinese player 11-9, Fan seizing game point with a forehand smash that brought the whole stadium to its feet.

Fan now seized control, taking the fourth game 11-8 to bring him within one game of gold.



Truls Moregard (L), Fan Zhendong (C) and Felix Lebrun. — **Reuters**

The Chinese superstar dominated the fifth game, despite a last-ditch fight-back from Moregard, taking it 11-8.

He turned to his coach, who threw him in the air in triumph, the pair then grabbing a Chinese flag and acknowledging the crowd.

The gold brought redemption for Fan, who agonisingly lost out in the final of the Tokyo singles final, taking home silver.

With 3.3m followers on the Twitter-like Weibo, Fan is a major celebrity at home and once had to ask his fans to restrain themselves after someone broke into his hotel room and stole his underwear.

In the bronze medal match, home hope Felix Lebrun comfortably beat Brazil's Hugo Calderano 4-0.

China is the undisputed powerhouse of the sport and has again dominated in Paris. Chen Meng took gold in the women's singles in an all-China affair against Sun Yingsha. — **AFP**



Fan Zhendong of China celebrates after winning. — **Reuters**

  
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IGC launches inaugural natural gas spot sale in Oman



This partnership underscores IGC’s commitment to bolstering Oman’s economic diversification.

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

Integrated Gas Company SAOC (IGC) is thrilled to announce the launch of its first spot sale of

natural gas in Oman, marking a significant milestone in the country’s energy sector.

Under this pioneering agreement, IGC will supply 15,000 SM3/d of natural gas to Octal SAOC FZC, a leading global PET packaging company with operations in Oman.

Dr Muslam Qatan, Chairman of the Board of Directors at IGC, expressed his enthusiasm for

the partnership: “This strategic partnership underscores IGC’s commitment to bolstering Oman’s economic diversification and aligns seamlessly with Oman Vision 2040.”

By enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s prominence in the global energy markets, this deal boosts IGC’s revenue streams through positive price realisation. It also signifies mutually beneficial partnerships with industries, supporting overall economic growth and sustainability.

This inaugural agreement solidifies IGC’s bold presence and role in the sector, setting a strong foundation to deliver on its mandates.

“We are proud to launch our first-ever spot sale of natural gas in Oman,” said Abdulrahman al Yahyaee, CEO of IGC.

“This agreement with Octal is a testament to IGC’s ability to meet short-term demands for natural gas and contributes to sustainable economic development. It reflects our dedication to advancing the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by fostering a diversified and robust economy.”

IGC is committed to its mission of expanding its energy market presence, driving economic diversification, and promoting long-term prosperity for Oman.

The company’s strategic initiatives, supported by the IGC Board of Directors, are designed to significantly enhance the country’s revenue streams while pursuing national objectives related to industrialisation and contributing to a sustainable future.

البنك الوطني العماني  
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي  
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

ملادوقا

### National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

**Investment Manager Report**  
For the quarter ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024

After three consecutive months of decline, GCC index monthly performance witnessed gain during June-2024 amid mixed market performance in the region. A similar trend was seen in key global benchmarks mainly reflecting mixed messaging coming on the global inflation front. During June 2024, S&P GCC composite TR recorded an increase of 2.63% mainly led by strong gains in Qatar and Abu Dhabi benchmarks and further supported by low-single-digit gains in Saudi and Dubai benchmarks.

On the sectoral front, the Insurance index showed double-digit monthly gain of 10.6% during June-2024 followed by Healthcare and F&B indices with gains of 8.0% and 5.9%, respectively. Large-cap sectors like Banks and Telecom showed relatively smaller gains of 4.6% and 3.3%, respectively. On the decliner’s side, the Utilities index topped with a decline of 4.8% followed by Materials and Consumer Durables indices with declines of 1.8% and 0.7%, respectively. The Energy index also showed marginal decline of 0.6%.

In terms of Q2-2024 performance, S&P GCC composite (TR) index was down 3.9%. Saudi Market dropped the most by 5.82% in Q2-2024 after posting sizable gains in Q1-2024. Kuwait and Dubai market followed with drop of 5.33% and 5.09% respectively during Q2-2024. Qatar and Oman were the only positive market during Q2-2024 and were up by 1.22% and 1.11%, respectively.

The NBO GCC Fund gained 4.29% YTD by end of Q2 2024 and outperformed the Benchmark S&P GCC Composite (PR) Index by 6.00%. The outperformance was largely due to better stock selection and proper allocation. Our strategic position in US markets and better stock picking in KSA and UAE aided the overall performance of the fund.

Overall, we believe that our portfolio is well positioned to benefit from the regional and US market and is likely to deliver positive results to the unit holders.

| FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2024                         |                 |                 |                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION                                                |                 |                 |                     |
|                                                                                | 30 June 2024 RO | 30 June 2023 RO | 31 December 2023 RO |
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                                                  |                 |                 |                     |
| Investments at fair value through profit or loss                               | 10,599,254      | 10,925,138      | 11,620,258          |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                                      | 1,286,039       | 649,805         | 410,400             |
| Dividends receivable                                                           | 5,098           | 2,054           | --                  |
| Total assets                                                                   | 11,890,391      | 11,576,997      | 12,030,658          |
| <b>LIABILITIES</b>                                                             |                 |                 |                     |
| <b>Current liabilities</b>                                                     |                 |                 |                     |
| Accruals and other payables                                                    | 50,248          | 103,346         | 149,411             |
| Total liabilities                                                              | 50,248          | 103,346         | 149,411             |
| Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders                               | 11,840,143      | 11,473,651      | 11,881,247          |
| Net asset value per unit                                                       | 1.045           | 1.012           | 1.050               |
| <b>STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME</b>                                       |                 |                 |                     |
|                                                                                | 30 June 2024 RO | 30 June 2023 RO | 31 December 2023 RO |
|                                                                                | (6 months)      | (6 months)      | (12 months)         |
| <b>INCOME</b>                                                                  |                 |                 |                     |
| Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss         | 565,661         | 1,291,616       | 1,324,731           |
| Dividend income                                                                | 221,127         | 276,019         | 378,093             |
| Net realised (loss) / gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss | (118,740)       | 107,980         | 611,429             |
| Interest income                                                                | 271             | 705             | 1,190               |
| Foreign exchange gain                                                          | --              | 3,595           | 581                 |
| Other income                                                                   | --              | 11              | 11                  |
|                                                                                | 668,320         | 1,679,926       | 2,316,035           |
| <b>EXPENSE</b>                                                                 |                 |                 |                     |
| Management fees                                                                | 70,129          | 62,139          | 128,509             |
| Fund Management Body fees                                                      | 26,849          | 28,000          | 35,000              |
| Brokerage expenses                                                             | 21,729          | 26,952          | 86,289              |
| General and administration                                                     | 11,401          | 10,250          | 24,416              |
| Administrator fees                                                             | 9,563           | 8,474           | 17,524              |
| Foreign exchange loss                                                          | 6,792           | --              | --                  |
| Custodian fees                                                                 | 5,588           | 4,918           | 10,442              |
| Performance fees                                                               | --              | 55,118          | 104,974             |
|                                                                                | 152,051         | 195,851         | 407,154             |
| Net profit and total comprehensive income for the period / year                | 516,269         | 1,484,075       | 1,908,881           |
| Net profit per unit                                                            | 0.046           | 0.128           | 0.167               |

Investment Manager & Administrator

البنك الوطني العماني  
**NBO**

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

## ABRAJ ENERGY SERVICES SAOG

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



**Dear Shareholders,**

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services SAOG, I am pleased to present the condensed interim financial statements for the Second quarter of 2024.

The Company is focused on providing services around Oil and Gas Wells, during and post wells construction. From building a wider service portfolio, Abraj now focuses on strategic top-tier services coupled with strong operational efficiency to realize maximum financial returns and sustainable growth. Abraj continues to benefit from the strength of long-term contracts in generating sufficient cash flow for growth.

**HSE:**

Abraj HSE performance in Q2 2024 was excellent as there was no Loss Time Incident (LTI), no recordable incident or any other major incident in Q2 2024. All Units have achieved Unit KPI target score in Q2 2024 as per defined criteria. In Q2 2024, a dedicated HSE engagement session conducted with drivers and journey managers to enhance awareness about road safety requirements.

**Company Financial Performance**

**Key Financials of your company: -**

- During the six months ending on June 30, 2024, revenue increased by 11.9% compared to the same in 2023, increasing from OMR 69.6 million to OMR 77.9 million.
- During the six months ending on June 30, 2024, the total expenses increased by 6.1% compared to the same period in 2023, rising from OMR 63.5 million to OMR 67.4 million. This increase can be mainly attributed to the increase in Rig Move cost as an additional revenue stream and increase in manpower cost.
- In the period ending on June 30, 2024, the profit after tax increased by 64.6% to OMR 10.7 million from OMR 6.5 million for the same period in 2023.

**Segment Performances – Q2 -2024:**

**Drilling and Workover**

Abraj is seeking to increase its regional operations post penetrating the Kuwaiti drilling market with the award of 3 drilling rigs with KGOC which started its operations during the first quarter in 2024. Abraj fleet remained at 25 Drilling rigs with 97% utilization for our drilling rigs and 100% utilization for workover rigs. Our national market share remains at 29% for drilling rigs and becoming the leader and national champion of Oman in the drilling rig market.

**Well Services and Others**

The company maintains its operations in Well services having 20% market share for the core services and progressively expanding this market share by outperforming service quality and New Technology differentiation being a trusted technical provider for all our customers.

**Acknowledgements:**

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I take this opportunity to express their sincere and deep gratitude to the vision and wise leadership of the country's leader His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tank for maintaining the sustainable growth and prosperity of the Omani Economy. Abraj Board also appreciates the valuable support and guidance from the various stakeholders such as Government agencies, Shareholders, Clients, Management, Employees, Bankers, and Suppliers.

**Ayad Al Balushi**  
Chairman of the Board

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

### CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

|                                              | 30 June 2024 (Unaudited) RO'000 | 31 Dec 2023 (Audited) RO'000 |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                |                                 |                              |
| <b>Non-current assets</b>                    |                                 |                              |
| Property and equipment                       | 203,745                         | 191,405                      |
| Right-of-use assets                          | 4,079                           | 5,502                        |
| Intangible assets                            | 189                             | 231                          |
| Deferred tax assets                          | 461                             | 426                          |
| Deferred expenses – non-current              | 81                              | 94                           |
| Capex advances                               | 15,625                          | 4,546                        |
| <b>Total non-current assets</b>              | <b>224,180</b>                  | <b>202,204</b>               |
| <b>Current assets</b>                        |                                 |                              |
| Trade receivables                            | 38,717                          | 39,448                       |
| Advances, prepayments, and other receivables | 2,396                           | 2,937                        |
| Deferred expenses – current                  | 25                              | 25                           |
| Inventories                                  | 27,724                          | 23,786                       |
| Cash and cash equivalents                    | 4,236                           | 8,071                        |
| <b>Total current assets</b>                  | <b>73,098</b>                   | <b>74,267</b>                |
| <b>Total assets</b>                          | <b>297,278</b>                  | <b>276,471</b>               |
| <b>EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>                |                                 |                              |
| <b>Capital and reserves</b>                  |                                 |                              |
| Share capital                                | 77,020                          | 77,020                       |
| Legal reserve                                | 11,785                          | 10,718                       |
| Retained earnings                            | 51,315                          | 58,040                       |
| <b>Total equity</b>                          | <b>140,120</b>                  | <b>145,778</b>               |
| <b>Non-current liabilities</b>               |                                 |                              |
| Term loans – non-current portion             | 65,444                          | 72,060                       |
| Deferred income - non-current portion        | 1,080                           | 1,094                        |
| Deferred tax liabilities                     | 4,190                           | 4,407                        |
| Employees' end of services benefits          | 2,440                           | 2,218                        |
| Lease liabilities - non-current portion      | 2,117                           | 3,565                        |
| <b>Total non-current liabilities</b>         | <b>75,271</b>                   | <b>83,344</b>                |
| <b>Current liabilities</b>                   |                                 |                              |
| Term loans - current portion                 | 14,270                          | 13,232                       |
| Lease liabilities – current                  | 2,234                           | 2,212                        |
| Short term loan                              | 17,000                          | -                            |
| Trade payables                               | 32,294                          | 16,401                       |
| Other payables                               | 13,207                          | 12,068                       |
| Deferred income - current portion            | 728                             | 762                          |
| Income tax payable                           | 2,154                           | 2,674                        |
| <b>Total current liabilities</b>             | <b>81,887</b>                   | <b>47,349</b>                |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>                     | <b>157,158</b>                  | <b>130,693</b>               |
| <b>Total equity and liabilities</b>          | <b>297,278</b>                  | <b>276,471</b>               |

### CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE SIX MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE (UNAUDITED)

|                                                    | (Unaudited)                            |                                      | (Unaudited)                            |                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|                                                    | Three months ended 30 June 2024 RO'000 | Six months ended 30 June 2023 RO'000 | Three months ended 30 June 2024 RO'000 | Six months ended 30 June 2023 RO'000 |
| Revenue from contracts with customers              | 38,682                                 | 36,308                               | 77,921                                 | 69,647                               |
| Cost of sales                                      | (28,633)                               | (27,981)                             | (57,887)                               | (55,111)                             |
| <b>Gross profit</b>                                | <b>9,849</b>                           | <b>8,327</b>                         | <b>20,034</b>                          | <b>14,536</b>                        |
| General and administrative expenses                | (2,333)                                | (1,813)                              | (4,149)                                | (3,232)                              |
| Other expenses                                     | (330)                                  | (443)                                | (357)                                  | (541)                                |
| Other income                                       | -                                      | -                                    | -                                      | 14                                   |
| Expected credit loss reversal on trade receivables | -                                      | -                                    | -                                      | 204                                  |
| <b>Operating profit</b>                            | <b>7,186</b>                           | <b>6,071</b>                         | <b>15,528</b>                          | <b>10,981</b>                        |
| Finance costs                                      | (1,573)                                | (1,422)                              | (2,983)                                | (3,286)                              |
| Finance income                                     | 38                                     | 57                                   | 111                                    | 101                                  |
| <b>Net Finance costs</b>                           | <b>(1,535)</b>                         | <b>(1,365)</b>                       | <b>(2,872)</b>                         | <b>(3,185)</b>                       |
| <b>Profit before tax</b>                           | <b>5,651</b>                           | <b>4,706</b>                         | <b>12,656</b>                          | <b>7,796</b>                         |
| Taxation                                           | (931)                                  | (829)                                | (1,966)                                | (1,313)                              |
| <b>Profit for the period</b>                       | <b>4,720</b>                           | <b>3,877</b>                         | <b>10,670</b>                          | <b>6,483</b>                         |
| <b>Other comprehensive income for the period</b>   | <b>-</b>                               | <b>-</b>                             | <b>-</b>                               | <b>-</b>                             |
| <b>Total comprehensive income for the period</b>   | <b>4,720</b>                           | <b>3,877</b>                         | <b>10,670</b>                          | <b>6,483</b>                         |
| <b>Earnings per share</b>                          |                                        |                                      |                                        |                                      |
| <b>Basic and diluted earnings per share-Baiza</b>  | <b>6.1</b>                             | <b>5.0</b>                           | <b>13.9</b>                            | <b>8.4</b>                           |

# Amouage opens ephemeral boutique at The Grove LA

MUSCAT: The ephemeral Amouage boutique at The Grove stands as an eternal ode to the rich heritage and landscapes of Oman, seamlessly blending tradition and modernity. Adhering to Amouage’s core identity and contemporary spirit that epitomises Omani craft and culture, this temporary space harmoniously integrates into The Grove in the great city of Los Angeles.

**Inspired by the desert**  
The exterior of the temporary space at The Grove is composed of rough stone and desert sand-inspired rammed earth architecture, depicting a Martian-like crimson desert landscape at sunset.

Both the interior and exterior draw inspiration from bespoke architectural pieces found across Oman, including handmade earthy pottery jars and the Mashrabiya, the traditional oriel window with perforated geographic patterns that, for centuries, has regulated light, heat, and privacy and shaped the emergence of generations.

This results in illuminated cut-hole patterned walls that playfully interact with LA’s famous sunlight.

**From Oman to the world**  
Over the past three years, Amouage’s retail presence has grown organically, focusing on



creating unparalleled perfume experiences. Each destination tells a story anchored in Oman, tailored to the specifics of its location, earning industry recognition for our architecturally distinctive boutiques.

The instantly recognisable Amouage style blends structured, brutalist elements with an organic backdrop. The result is minimalist yet warm spaces, contemporary but not cold, combining drama and intimacy with meticulous attention to detail.

“Our latest space in Los Angeles epitomises this ethos, designed to transport clients from the city’s vibrant pace to the

tranquil experience of Amouage’s high perfumery.

“Central to the design is a surreal piece of Omani landscape: a monolithic reflective table with crimson red sand, set against rammed earth walls and natural clay ceilings, creating a powerful and rooted dynamic,” said Renaud Salmon, Chief Creative Officer of Amouage.

“Meanwhile, the opening of our temporary boutique at this prime location in Los Angeles is expected to keep our growth momentum going as we continue to invest in our retail network development.”

**A journey of light and texture**

With an entrance featuring arched doorways that add to its allure, the Amouage Boutique features a mirror shield emblem and a carpet that has been completely customised with the patterns of Guidance Eau de Parfum designed by Louise Mertens.

In the background, ombre panels host a totemic sun, with its warm embrace radiating through the natural surfaces — creating an interplay of light and texture, as explored in Amouage’s recent landscapes in Guidance Eau de Parfum and Guidance 46 Exceptional Extrait.

# ahlibank announces H1 2024 results; affirms steady growth

MUSCAT: ahlibank announced the unaudited financial results for the six months ending on June 30, 2024, wherein the bank achieved a net profit of RO 20.20 million, compared to the net profit of RO 19.91 million for the same period in the year 2023, marking an increase by 1.5 per cent.

ahlibank’s total assets recorded an 8.1 per cent growth, reaching RO 3.4 billion as of June 30, 2024, compared to June 30, 2023. Customer deposits increased by 8.3 per cent, reaching RO 2.6 billion, while net loans and financing grew by 5.3 per cent, reaching RO 2.8 billion compared to the same period in 2023.

The bank’s operating income rose by 3.2 per cent, reaching RO 50.63 million as of the end of June 2024.

Commenting on the first half results, Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, stated, “The financial results ahlibank achieved in the first half of 2024 reflect its forward-thinking approach alongside its ambitious digital transformation strategy.

“It also highlights the bank’s diligent efforts, wealth of experience and excellence in the banking sector, all of which is supported by its comprehensive portfolio of exceptional banking products and services.”

“ahlibank’s financial results in the first half of the year attest to its embarking on a continuous growth journey, reaffirming its leading position in the Sultanate of Oman’s banking sector.

“The financial indicators also showcase the bank’s eagerness to fulfil its obligations towards its shareholders, as ahlibank strives to increase added value, and operate with utmost integrity in order to ensure customer satisfaction.

“Due to this strategic approach, we were able to establish a resilient ethos and set new standards for excellence and continued success.

“In this regard, ahlibank has received many prestigious awards in recognition of its work ethic and efficiency as a



Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi  
CEO of ahlibank

distinguished leading banking institution in Oman, one that plays a prominent role as the preferred Partner in Excellence,” Al Hatmi added.

Al Hatmi further stated, “ahlibank received recognition for its exceptional performance and innovative approach, attaining the Corporate Bank of the Year Award at the MENA Banking Excellence Awards 2024.

“The bank also won three distinguished awards at the ninth edition of the New Age Banking Summit 2024 — the ‘Excellence in Private Banking’ award, ‘Excellence in Corporate Banking’ award, and ‘Excellence in Digital Transformation’ award.”

Al Hatmi also stated that the first half of the year witnessed the successful completion of ahlibank’s Additional Tier 1 Capital Instruments (AT1 Bonds) issue aggregating RO 40 million, through private placement.

The subscription received wide acceptance and great demand from local and foreign investors and government bodies underscoring the widespread popularity of ahlibank’s financial instruments.

Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, CEO of ahlibank, concluded his statement by emphasising that the bank is steadfast in pursuing a promising path that will ensure it remains at the forefront of the banking sector, thereby contributing to the furthering of the Sultanate of Oman’s socio-economic growth.

# BANKDHOFAR LAUNCHES EXCLUSIVE CREDIT CARD FOR LADIES BANKING

MUSCAT: BankDhofar is proud to be one of the few banks in Oman offering a credit card exclusively for women, reinforcing the bank’s commitment to provide personalised solutions for customers. This card not only offers the standard benefits of a Visa card, but also includes a range of exclusive perks tailored to meet the needs of the bank’s women customers.

As a special welcome offer, new cardholders will receive a RO 5 voucher from Talabat App upon joining. Additionally, members



will enjoy a complimentary subscription to the BankDhofar Entertainer app, providing buy-

one-get-one-free offers and discounts at over 450 outlets across the Gulf.

To activate the BankDhofar Entertainer App benefits, BankDhofar customers simply need to download the BankDhofar’s Entertainer app and register using their credit card.

They will then have instant access to a multitude of exciting offers, making every day an opportunity to save and discover something new.

BankDhofar’s Entertainer Mobile App includes various

offers such as; food and beverage, attraction and leisure, beauty and fitness, fashion and retail and everyday services in Oman and GCC. It’s one of many features that continue to make its customers’ lives easier and more rewarding.

The Entertainer offers are available for the ladies credit card holders on the BankDhofar’s Entertainer Mobile App.

The Visa Ladies Credit Card comes with no annual fee for the first year. Cardholders can also benefit from the exclusive rewards.

# Infiniti and Al Hashar Automotive return modern Japanese luxury to Oman’s roads

MUSCAT: Infiniti Middle East, a subsidiary of Nissan Middle East, has appointed Al Hashar Automotive, part of Al Hashar Group, as its official authorised distributor in Oman.

Recently designated as the official authorised Nissan distributor, Al Hashar Automotive’s selection for Infiniti underscores their natural fit for expanding the brand’s operations in the Middle East. This partnership aims to deliver world-class service to Infiniti customers throughout the Sultanate of Oman, upholding the brand’s values of excellence.

It aligns with Infiniti’s commitment to providing modern Japanese luxury experiences for individuals who seek distinction in

their lives, styles, and vehicles.

Thierry Sabbagh, Divisional Vice-President, President Middle East, KSA - Nissan, Infiniti, expressed enthusiasm about the collaboration: “We are thrilled to welcome Al Hashar Automotive to the Infiniti family as an authorised distributor in Oman.

“With their support, we are poised to elevate the Infiniti brand to new heights, setting the standard for Japanese luxury in Oman.”

Albert Khreiche, Managing Director, Infiniti Middle East, said: “At Infiniti, we pride ourselves on customer-centricity and a seamless service offering. With Al Hashar Automotive as a partner in Oman, we can trust that this legacy will be well-executed to our valued



customers in the market.”  
Shaikh Al Muhannad al Hashar,

Chairman of Al Hashar Group, shared his enthusiasm about the

partnership, stating: “We are honoured to be selected as the

authorised distributor for Infiniti in Oman.

“Our customer-centric approach will drive our vision for Infiniti in this market, supporting our long-term goal of becoming the leading automotive business in Oman.”

This collaboration ensures that customers in Oman are provided with continuity in their access to exceptional standards of luxury and a best-in-class customer journey. The partnership signifies a promising future for the luxury car segment in Oman, with both entities dedicated to providing customers in the Sultanate of Oman with the best in Japanese luxury and a seamless ownership experience.



## Agricultural pilot leverages AI and space data to achieve 90 per cent success

HIBBA AL KINDI  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

A pilot project combining the use of space data and artificial intelligence to enhance the efficiency of the agricultural sector, has achieved a success rate of 90 per cent, according to an official of the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology.

Speaking to the *Observer* last week, Dr Salim al Shuaili, Director of Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies Projects Unit, explained that the project is one of many initiatives that the Ministry is working on that utilises space data and AI.

It entails the collection of agricultural statistics using satellite imagery and then analysing them using artificial intelligence.

"Agricultural statistics usually require hiring people to manually count trees, which is time-consuming and costly. The pilot project used satellite images analysed by AI to count palm trees, lemon trees, and mango trees in specific areas. Drones were also used to take images for comparison."

The project performed commendably as well, he said. "The project achieved a success rate exceeding 90 per cent, which is considered highly successful for a pilot."

According to the official, the Ministry is currently experimenting with various other pilot projects with the



A drone in operation is pictured in this illustration photo.

goal of enhancing the efficiency of various sectors, such as urban planning.

"Satellite images can also be used for urban planning, providing accurate data to aid decision-making regarding the placement of parks and mosques."

He added that the Ministry also hopes to launch these pilots into fully developed projects, "Although these projects were pilots, they were successful, and we hope to turn them into comprehensive, real-world projects."

The National Programme for Digital Economy, which aims to boost the sector's contribution to the local GDP from 2 per cent to 10 per cent by 2040, currently includes two separate national strategies to enhance both the Space Industry and Artificial Intelligence in Oman.

Earlier this year, officials shared that the Ministry is in the process of designing an Omani artificial intelligence model, which will be trained using different aspects of Omani culture.

CONRAD PRABHU  
MUSCAT, AUGUST 4

Seeking to jumpstart the growth of domestic semiconductor industry, Invest Oman – the premier investment facilitation arm of the government – has invited international investors specialising in Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Testing (OSAT) to consider setting up operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Supporting Invest Oman in this initiative is the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), which has been spearheading the development of a full-fledged semiconductor industry in support of its Digital Economy goals.

OSAT refers to companies offering third-party integrated chip (IC) packaging and testing services for silicon devices produced by foundries before they are placed on the market for sale. The global OSAT market is projected to surge to \$44.047 billion in value by 2027, up from \$30.679 billion in 2021, said Invest Oman, citing IDC statistics.

Significantly, investment in an OSAT facility in Oman is estimated to range between \$130 – 140 million, including around \$110 million towards capex costs.



Investments in an OSAT facility in Oman are envisioned at roughly \$140 million.

For its part, the Omani government has pledged to pitch in with allocations of land of up to 100,000 m2 via a Public Private Partnership arrangement.

Furthermore, in addition to a commitment towards sharing of investments, the government is also offering incentives in the form of tax exemptions, subsidised electricity, water and other utilities, salary subsidies for local employees for the first two years, training subsidies and other government support.

Also boding well for the success of OSAT investments in Oman are a number of geostrategic, regulatory and economic factors, says Invest Oman.

Given Oman's strategic location midway between the East and

and hardware devices, while outsourcing their fabrication (or fab) to a specialised manufacturer called a semiconductor foundry.)

Already, some of the building blocks of a future semiconductor industry are being set in place by various public and private sector organisations.

ITHCA Group, the ICT investment arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), has acquired a strategic stake in US-based semiconductor design and service company, GSME, which has set up an advanced chips-design and development lab in Muscat.

Last October, the government hosted a high-level delegation from South Korea's SK Hynix Inc, the world's second largest semiconductor company, as part of a move to attract major players from the global semiconductor industry to explore opportunities in Oman.

Adding to Oman's investment appeal is the development of a 100,000-tonnes per annum capacity polysilicon project at Sohar Freezone at a cost of \$1.35 billion.

Promoted by Oman-based United Solar Holding Inc, the project is expected to provide critical raw material for, among other industries, semiconductor manufacturing in Oman.

## European firm launches campers to bolster adventure tourism in Oman

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, AUGUST 4

Adventure tourists and nature lovers now have the opportunity to purchase, rent or lease a new generation of recreational vans (RV) and campers to explore the rich and diverse countryside of the Sultanate of Oman, thanks to a European company that has commenced operations locally.

RVGA Caravans, co-owned by partners from the Czech Republic, has a deep appreciation for the Middle East and its camping culture. This enthusiasm led them to introduce their innovative camping products to the region.

At the Dhofar International Expo 2024, Gabriela Ben Ahmed, Managing Director of RVGA Caravans Renting LLC, outlined her company's ambitious plans for expansion in the Middle East.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Ben Ahmed emphasised their search for local dealers and the establishment of networks for peer-to-peer business opportunities.

"We're seeking to make connections and are keen on forming a network," Ben Ahmed said. "We are also looking to engage in peer-to-peer business collaborations."

"We discovered an excellent product in Germany, known as Gladiators, which are campers designed for pick-up trucks," Ben Ahmed explained.

"We believe this product will be very popular in the Middle East because 13 per cent of the fleet cars here are pick-ups. Our



Gabriela Ben Ahmed, Managing Director of RVGA Caravans Renting LLC, engages with Omani dignitaries and visitors.



These luxurious campers, a hallmark of German engineering, are made from a single piece of antibacterial material, ensuring durability and hygiene.

campers come in four different sizes, ensuring compatibility with almost every pick-up model."

RVGA Caravans has secured a contract to represent their products across the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

These luxurious campers, a hallmark of German engineering, are made from a single piece of antibacterial material, ensuring durability and hygiene.

"Our campers are monocoque, meaning they are constructed from a single piece.

This ensures they won't break easily and are antibacterial. Our products were tested during the Covid-19 pandemic and feature patented, thermostable technology," Ben Ahmed elaborated.

They come equipped with air conditioning and heating, making them suitable for the varied climates of the region. Additionally, our unique solar energy system charges everything while driving."

Ben Ahmed highlighted the eco-friendly nature of their campers. "We use low-decibel generators that are very eco-friendly. Our products cater to families, adventurers, and everyone in between.

The starting price for our smallest model is \$20,000, which includes a toilet, shower, and other amenities. Even for clients in the UAE who live in skyscrapers and cannot park their campers, we offer a special service to park and prepare their campers."

RVGA Caravans' entry into the Middle Eastern market signifies a new era of luxury and convenience in the camping industry, promising a blend of advanced technology and ecological sustainability.

## TAX AUTHORITY LAUNCHES MONTH-LONG 'TAX CULTURE' INITIATIVE IN DHOFAR

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
SALALAH, AUGUST 4

In a significant move to bolster tax awareness and compliance, the Tax Authority, in collaboration with governmental and private entities, has launched a comprehensive month-long 'Tax Culture' initiative in Dhofar Governorate. The programme, inaugurated at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry's Dhofar branch on August 4, 2024, targets auditing firms and Sanad offices.

Representatives from the Tax Authority outlined recent advancements in the tax regime, shedding light on the methodologies employed in tax calculation and their application across various industries.

The presentation emphasised the crucial role of corporations in adhering to tax regulations and maximising available tax incentives, underscoring the importance of compliance.

Additionally, the workshop highlighted entities eligible for tax exemptions and featured practical case studies to demonstrate tax implications in different scenarios.

The session concluded with a detailed explanation of the

appeals process against tax rulings.

Shaikh Nayef Fadhil, Chairman of OCCI - Dhofar branch, praised the Tax Authority's educational initiative. He noted that this effort marks a significant step towards enhancing tax awareness among the business community and the general public, reinforcing the concept of tax citizenship, and fostering a sustainable national economy.

"The initiative addresses a critical need for greater transparency and fairness within the tax system," said Shaikh Fadhil.

"This will improve the business environment, attract investments, and bolster public revenues, essential for supporting Oman's comprehensive development. Collaboration between the private sector and the Tax Authority is vital for promoting a culture of tax compliance, building mutual trust, and serving the greater national interest." Parallel to the Dhofar branch programme, similar workshops were held at the Sultan Qaboos Cultural Complex, targeting government sector institutions, and at the Salalah Free Zone, focusing on economic and special zones as well as free zones.



Local Sanad offices and audit firms took part in the opening event on Sunday.

# Energy sector pioneering new hydrogen technologies to deliver clean energy

**BADAR CHAUDHRY**

The writer is head of Energy Sector, Mashreq

By staying at the forefront of technological progress, the energy sector seeks to play a proactive role in shaping solutions for the energy trilemma — balancing energy security, environmental sustainability, and economic development.

This proactive stance underscores their commitment to driving progress that benefits both societal and environmental needs, positioning themselves as key contributors to a sustainable future. The energy sector across all streams recognises the imperative to be a solution to climate change rather than a contributor to the problem.

Years of proactive research and ambitious roadmaps, particularly in hydrogen technology, initiated well before the widespread focus on decarbonisation, highlight

this commitment. This proactive approach has established the energy industry as a leading driver of global climate technology innovation.

These efforts were prominently featured last year at COP28, the world's largest annual climate gathering. Leaders like Dr Sultan Ahmed al Jaber, President of COP28, Chairman of Masdar, and Managing Director and Group CEO of ADNOC, emphasised the industry's dedication with the mantra "Maximum energy, minimum emissions."

Many argue that an inclusive energy mix is not possible without incorporating sustainable strategies within existing business models.

Declining renewable electricity costs and digital technologies are driving a more widespread adoption of renewable sources for power generation, but they still only account for a quarter of global power generation — far short of the estimated 85 per cent share required by 2050 to comply with climate objectives.

Hydrogen is one of the solutions being put forward. More than 30 countries worldwide have unveiled hydrogen roadmaps, with 228 large-scale hydrogen projects announced across the value chain. Of those, 85 per cent are in Europe, Asia and Australia. If all the projects come to fruition,



The energy sector across all streams recognises the imperative to be a solution to climate change rather than a contributor to the problem.

total investments will exceed \$300 billion in spending through 2030. The Middle East, home to some of the world's biggest oil and gas companies, is on an ambitious hydrogen track.

The UAE's Mubadala, ADNOC, and ADQ created the Abu Dhabi Hydrogen Alliance in 2021, aimed at establishing the country as a leader in low-carbon green and blue hydrogen in emerging and international markets.

Saudi Aramco has signed an MoU with Japan's ENEOS to develop a new hydrogen and ammonia supply chain, and Oman's Green H Project at Duqm will supply Germany's Uniper with ammonia. Many other such agreements and alliances continue to be built by producers in the region. The energy transition to renewables still requires massive investment in infrastructure to

make grids suitable for enabling offshore wind and solar power to reach demand centres.

This investment is crucial to ensure that renewable energy sources can be efficiently integrated into existing energy systems, supporting a more sustainable and diversified energy mix. Last year, the COP28 Presidency and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched the landmark Oil and Gas Decarbonisation Charter (OGDC), a pioneering initiative dedicated to accelerating climate action across the global oil and gas sectors.

The OGDC garnered significant industry support, with 50 companies signing on, representing more than 40 per cent of global oil production. Notably, National Oil Companies (NOCs) accounted for over 60 per cent of the signatories, marking the largest-ever commitment from NOCs

to a decarbonisation initiative. This underscores the industry's dedication to embracing new energy technologies and driving progress toward a sustainable future.

The Charter highlighted crucial steps, including the adoption of net-zero 2050 targets by many national oil companies for the first time.

There was an emphasis on stronger ambitions to limit global warming to 1.5°C. Key commitments under the OGDC included achieving net-zero operations by 2050, ending routine flaring by 2030, and reducing upstream methane emissions to near-zero levels.

Signatories committed to investing in renewable energy, low-carbon fuels and negative emissions technologies, such as hydrogen, while enhancing transparency through improved measurement, monitoring and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions.

They aimed to align with industry best practices to accelerate emission reductions, aspiring to implement these practices collectively by 2030. The OGDC underscored climate change as a collective challenge requiring decisive action from both energy producers and consumers. Beyond decarbonisation, the initiative emphasised engagement with customers, investment in future energy systems, including

hydrogen, and increased transparency. It formed a pivotal part of the Global Decarbonisation Accelerator (GDA), a comprehensive framework launched at the World Climate Action Summit, guided by input from international organisations, governments, NGOs and industry leaders across sectors.

This comprehensive approach highlights the industry's dedication to adopting and investing in new energy technologies, such as hydrogen, to support global energy needs and drive progress towards a sustainable future.

That said, cost should not deter investment. For instance, when the UAE embarked on its renewables journey in 2006, high development costs, an uncertain supply chain, and intermittency issues made it economically unfeasible to implement independent power producer projects with solar PV.

The country began with a few pilot projects to gather insights, and once technological advancements reduced costs, it moved on to larger-scale initiatives.

Today, renewables are not only competitive but are often undercutting conventional energy prices. This evolution underscores that with persistent innovation and strategic investment, transformative progress is achievable in the energy sector.

## Is India on the winning track?

**A V MANOHAR**

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The author is the CEO of Wisdom Business and Training Services LLC

The recently announced Indian Budget 2024-2025 is woven with well-crafted measures towards improving the micro and macro indicators of the economy and paving the way for the much-required acceleration in all spheres.

Global tensions over the past two years, preceded by post-Covid challenges, have disrupted the fundamentals of many economies and altered global performance rankings.

Although India faced unprecedented stress, its inherent strengths, developed over time, coupled with a revised oil remittance mechanism with Russia, have stabilised the country and improved its economic rankings, drawing widespread appreciation.

As a prelude to the Budget 2024-2025, the Economic Survey 2023-2024 shed light on the state of affairs of the Indian economy, commending various economic achievements while expressing caution on the way forward in other areas of the economy.

"The Indian economy is on a strong wicket and stable footing,

demonstrating resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges.

The Indian economy has consolidated its post-Covid recovery with policymakers — fiscal and monetary — ensuring economic and financial stability.

Nonetheless, change is the only constant for a country with high growth aspirations.

For the recovery to be sustained, there has to be heavy lifting on the domestic front because the environment has become extraordinarily difficult to reach agreements on key global issues such as trade, investment and climate," the survey noted, sounding more caution that voicing appreciation.

### VISION FOR 2024 -2025:

The preparation of the Budget 2024-2025 was not an easy task. The yardstick of assessment of the policymakers on the economic front has remained the same.

The Budget 2024-2025 outlines the vision of the government and it indicates positive economic indicators such as growth in GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of 6.5 per cent to 7 per cent, reduction of fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP to 4.9 per cent, increased

Capital Spending on production and services to INR 15,01,889 crores, controlling the Revenue & Primary deficits to 1.8 per cent and 1.4 per cent GDP respectively, comfortable Forex Trade position equivalent to 11 months of projected imports, control of inflation through fiscal and monetary policies, buoyancy in tax and other collections, etc.

A combination of the overall structure together with other criteria gives a great level of confidence for the future.

**Tasks and allocations towards increasing GDP**



A man displays 2,000 Indian rupee banknotes after withdrawing them from State Bank of India in Agartala, India. — Reuters

Under the overall framework on the agenda for continuing the growth trajectory, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has set nine priorities covering different facets of the economy, such as Agriculture, Employment & Skilling, All Inclusive Human Resource Development, Manufacturing, Urban Development, Energy, Infrastructure, Research and Development and next generation reforms.

Practically speaking, all the sectors of the economy will get an equitable allocation by this approach and by this an all-inclusive, unified and integrated economic platform will be laid out throughout India.

Combined with the accelerated private sector investments in capital projects, supportive approach of banks, inflow of FDI, well developed infrastructure

facilities and highly skillful and productive human resources, these programmes, upon implementation will ensure pushing up the overall GDP of the country to newer heights.

The government is also determined to keep on reducing the overall debt levels which will augur well for reducing the deficits situation.

Besides, a Financial Sector Vision Document which is on the anvil will set the agenda for the next five years and guide the work of the government, regulators, financial institutions and market participants in close coordination with each other.

### Changes to indirect taxes

The implementation of unified tax system through Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a success of great magnitude. It has decreased tax incidence on the common man, reduced compliance

burden and logistics cost for trade and industry and enhanced revenues of the central and state governments.

Further simplification, rationalisation and expansion is in the pipeline.

The Budget 2024 - 2025 has made changes in the customs duties with a view to support domestic manufacturing, deepen local value addition, promote export competitiveness and simplify taxation, while keeping the interest of the general public and consumers in high esteem.

Reduction of import duty is proposed for medicines and medical equipment, precious metals such as gold and platinum, besides a host of other items.

### Changes to direct taxes

A major overhaul of the Direct Taxes Act 1961 will be completed in six months so as to make the Act concise, lucid and

comprehensible and this exercise will reduce the disputes and litigation, bringing real relief and certainty to the taxpayers.

Under Personal Taxation, the significant changes are 1. Raising the Standard Deduction from INR 50,000 to INR 75,000 2. Deduction on Family Pension has increased from INR 15,000 to INR 25,000, 3. Changes in Tax Structure, resulting in a tax saving of INR 17,500.

The stock markets in India have seen the all-time high recently and obviously many investors might have made a fortune by the uptick in prices.

Recognising this bonanza, combined with the favourable GDP percolating into corporate earnings and share prices in future, the Budget 2024-2025 has hiked up the tax on Short Term Capital Gains with the Sale of Listed Investments from 15 per cent to 20 per cent and on Long Term Capital Gains from 10 per cent to 12.5 per cent.

Listed financial assets sold after 12 months of holding will be treated as Long Term. Simultaneously, an increase in the exemption limit has been made from INR 100,000 to INR 125,000 per annum as a matter of relief.

To attract foreign capital for our development needs, the corporate tax rate on foreign companies gets reduced from 40 to 35 per cent.

Overall, Budget 2024-2025 is a well-crafted blueprint of action, intending to take up different facets of the economy to the next level of excellence and also balancing between the challenges on hand, both internally and externally and the objectives set for achievement in future.

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FILMS

Egyptian-US actor Omar Moustafa Ghonim attends the premiere of Apple Original Films' "The Instigators" at Lincoln Center in New York City. — AFP



MUSIC

Iraqi singer Kadim al Sahir performs during the 58th session of the International Festival of Carthage (FIC) at the Carthage Roman Theatre on the outskirts of Tunis. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

Several auction items from sport stars stand on display at Sotheby's auction house in New York City, US. — AFP



CULTURE

The face of the "Screaming Woman" mummy, discovered in 1935 at Deir El Bahari near Luxor and dating to about 1500 BC during ancient Egypt's New Kingdom period, is seen at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Egypt. — Reuters



CULTURE

A traditional Oaxacan dancer performs during the Guelaguetza 2024 festival in Villa de Zaachila, Oaxaca state, Mexico. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | AUGUST 5, 2024 | MUHARRAM 30, 1446 AH | OMAN OBSERVER | www.omanobserver.om | features@omanobserver.om



HOW JABAL AKHDHAR'S HYDROPONICS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LOCAL FOODS

Launched in July 2024, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's innovative use of hydroponics to grow heirloom tomatoes and other high-end vegetables in mountainous terrain aims to boost local food security, inspire sustainable practices and offer luxury dining experiences with fresh, locally grown produce. P20

ENTERTAINMENT

Britney biopic in works as Universal buys memoir rights

A BRITNEY SPEARS BIOPIC is in development after Universal Pictures bought movie rights to the pop star's best-selling memoir, the Hollywood studio

announced on Thursday. "Crazy Rich Asians" director Jon Chu is attached to develop and direct the film, based on Spears's recent autobiographical book "The Woman In Me," the company said in a statement to AFP. Universal won a "highly competitive auction" for the film adaptation rights, with "La La Land" producer Marc Platt due to oversee the project, it said. "Excited to share with my fans that I've been working on a secret project with #MarcPlatt. He's always made my favourite movies," Spears herself posted on social media on Thursday. "Stay tuned," she told fans. "The Woman In Me" laid bare the troubled singer's journey from child star to global pop phenomenon, as well as her subsequent high-profile public breakdown and legal battles with her father. Full of criticism of her controlling family and an industry that mercilessly devours its talent, the book sold over 2.5 million copies in the United States alone following its publication last October.



Spears's phenomenal early music success with late 1990s hits like "...Baby One More Time" coincided with an aggressive paparazzi culture that delighted in capturing her partying

alongside hell-raisers like Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan. In the book, Spears revealed that Justin Timberlake urged her to have an abortion after she became pregnant.

And she shared details of her brief but intense affair with Irish actor and Oscar nominee Colin Farrell, which she called "a two-week brawl." Following Spears's public breakdown, she was placed under the conservatorship of her father Jamie Spears, who controlled her money and her personal life, even as she continued to perform high-profile concerts. The conservatorship was dissolved by a Los Angeles court in 2021, after a groundswell of public support to "Free Britney." Her father has always insisted that he had the best interests of his daughter at heart and was seeking to protect her from exploitation. No release date has been set for the Britney film. Universal has previously released musical biopics about hip-hop group N.W.A ("Straight Outta Compton") and rapper Eminem ("8 Mile.") Chu is also directing Universal's big-budget, two-part movie adaptation of the musical "Wicked," with the first film out in November. — AFP

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SOUTH AFRICA MAKES OPERA ITS OWN AT HOME AS ITS STARS SHINE ABROAD



**SOUTH AFRICAN OPERA** has developed its own uniquely local style — both in the make-up of its casts and its dramatic themes — in the three decades since the end of apartheid, experts argue.

With South African stars shining on the international stage, opera has boomed since racial barriers were scrapped in 1994, drawing in talent from the country's great choral traditions to carve out an important place in a hugely diverse cultural landscape.

Much of the change has been driven by the 25-year-old Cape Town Opera that is considered Africa's most successful company.

The grandfather of it all is Italian-born Angelo Gobbato, a former singer who co-founded the company five years after apartheid ended and was honoured in March with a lifetime achievement award for his contribution to South African opera.

When the company was starting out, Gobbato staged Donizetti's dramatic "Lucia di Lammermoor" with lead singers brought in from abroad.

The cast of a just-ended 25th birthday run of the same opera was entirely South African and featured only one white singer — an illustration of the changes, he said.

After white-minority rule was scrapped, "we suddenly got a lot of interest from black students who wanted to be trained in opera," Gobbato, 81, said.

"This was very unusual because at the Cape Town opera school we had so-called coloured students — non-white students — but no black students."

**- BIG-NAME SINGERS -**  
His students, who include the

internationally acclaimed Pretty Yende and Levy Sekgapane, often came from community choirs trained in the Western signing fashion. "They responded very naturally to opera and they wanted to sing it," said Gobbato, who has now retired.

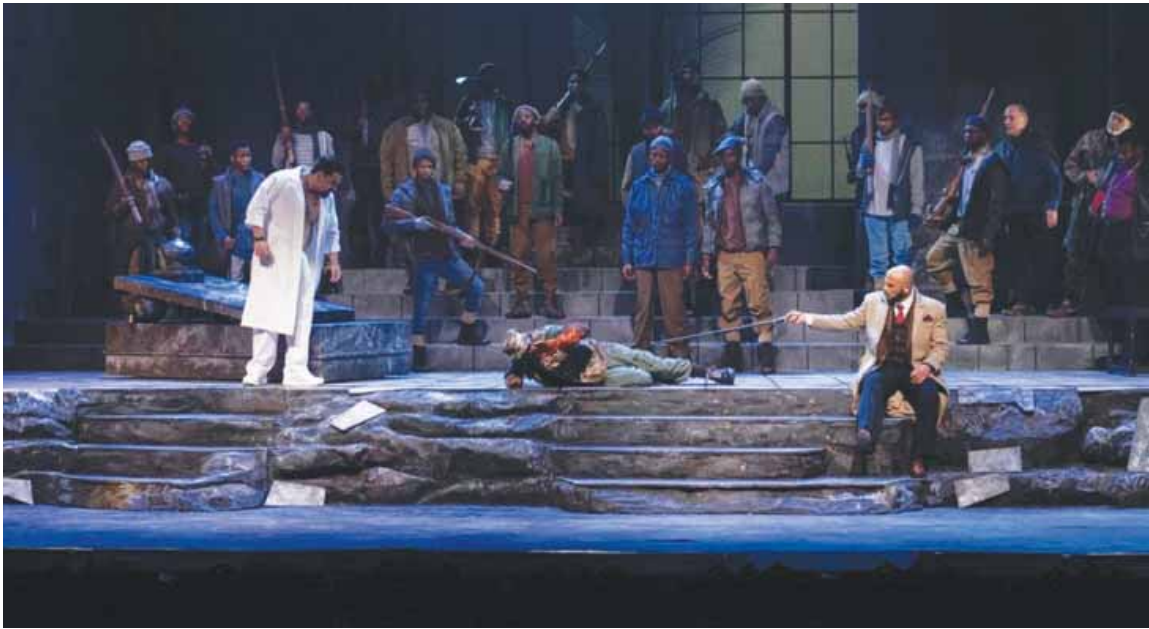
And, as the casts have become more representative

ing it more accessible to everyone and that makes us relevant," the 29-year-old said while prepping for a rehearsal at the Nelson Mandela Theatre.

Smith highlighted the company's outreach programme that sends performers to schools and townships to show youngsters what it is all

music, with settings that are recognisable to local audiences, argued critic and author Wayne Muller.

A "La Boheme" was set in Cape Town's District Six area that was bulldozed by the apartheid authorities, Macbeth was played as a Central African militant leader, and Porgy and Bess con-



of South Africa's racial make-up, so too have the audiences.

"I feel like a grandfather," Gobbato said. "I haven't got physical children or grandchildren, but seeing students I am desperately proud of them and convinced that I have done something for the good of the country."

Opera in South Africa was once a niche performing art with mainly white audiences, said soprano Brittany Smith, the tragic heroine in this year's run of "Lucia di Lammermoor".

Now, "Cape Town Opera is standing on the forefront of reintroducing opera and mak-

about.

The dramatic themes of opera are relevant to today's South Africa, said her co-star Conroy Scott, a deep baritone who developed his voice in church choirs.

**'A SOUTH AFRICAN GENRE'**

"It deals with real issues, with human emotion. It deals with issues that haven't really gone away — politics, violence, child abuse, death," the 43-year-old added.

Stagings of European opera classics post-apartheid have moulded a form that is distinctly South African in the portrayal of characters and

fessed their love in the shacks of Soweto, he wrote in his 2023 book "Opera in Cape Town: The Critic's Voice".

"This process of transforming the arts and opera in South Africa has not ended by any means," Muller said.

"Nonetheless, there is an ease with opera as being African and the possibilities that even the standard Western European repertoire brings to make opera relevant here," the critic added.

"Opera, as scholars and artists have expressed, has become a South African genre — an art form that is also from here." — AFP

HEALTH & WELLNESS



Beyond Sunscreen: The Unexpected Ways Summer Affects Your Baby's Delicate Skin



BY DR NAHED SABRY

**AS THE SUMMER** heat truly kicks in, parents in Oman will be searching for ways to keep their babies cool and protected.

Summer is rolling in, bringing with it along long, hot days and plenty of sunshine in Oman. This can be a wonderful time to spend bonding with your little one, but it's also important to be mindful of your baby's delicate skin in this warm and sunny climate.

Typical summer skin concerns we see in the region for babies include sunburn, dehydration, heat rash and eczema flare-ups.

**Sunburn:** A major concern. Unlike adult skin, a newborns skin is much thinner; Approximately 20-30 per cent thinner, making them more susceptible to sunburn. A sunburn can be painful for your baby and increase the risk of skin cancer later in life.

**Dehydration:** Hot weather can cause babies to lose fluids quickly, leading to dehydration. This can worsen skin problems and make your baby cranky and fussy. Signs of dehydration in babies include infrequent urination, dry mouth and listlessness.

**Heat Rash:** Also known as prickly heat, heat rash is a common skin irritation that appears as tiny red bumps, often in areas where clothing covers folds of skin like the neck, groin and diaper area. Heat rash is usually uncomfortable but harmless, and it goes away on its own once your baby cools down.

**Eczema:** Summer heat can worsen eczema symptoms in babies, making the itchiness and irritation more intense. If your baby has eczema, talk to your paediatrician about ways to manage their symptoms during the summer months.

Healthy skin acts as a shield, protecting babies from harmful environmental factors like irritants, germs and bacteria. It also plays a vital role in regulating their body temperature and

allows them to explore their world through touch.

**CARING FOR YOUR BABY'S SKIN THIS SUMMER:** With a deeper understanding of newborn skin, parents need to make informed, educated decisions about their baby's care routine.

**Gentle Cleansing:** Harsh cleansers can harm the delicate balance of a baby's skin. Choose mild, gentle cleansers specifically formulated for babies that are free of sulfates, parabens, and phthalates. These ingredients can irritate your baby's delicate skin.

**Moisturising is Key:** Regularly applying a gentle moisturiser helps prevent dryness and maintain healthy skin hydration. Look for mild, paediatrician-recommended moisturisers. These products help replenish natural oils and create a protective barrier to lock in moisture. Expert Tip: Apply moisturiser after bath time while your baby's skin is still slightly damp to lock in moisture.

**Sun Protection:** A newborns skin is highly sensitive to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays, especially in the strong sunlight of the region. Unlike adults, babies don't have enough melanin, the pigment that protects skin from sun damage. Keep babies out of direct sunlight, particularly during peak hours between 10 am and 4 pm. When outdoors, use protective clothing with a wide-brimmed hat and consider a stroller shade. Sunscreen can be used for babies over 6 months old, following paediatrician guidance and choosing a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher sunscreen formulated for sensitive skin.

**The Power of Touch:** Gentle touch during bath time, diaper changes, and other routines not only strengthens the parent-child bond, but also plays a role in healthy development. Proper care for a baby's delicate skin goes beyond just hygiene. It lays the foundation for lifelong healthy skin and overall well-being. By understanding the unique properties of baby skin and implementing a gentle care routine, parents can ensure their little ones thrive in their new world.

# HOW JABAL AKHDAR'S HYDROPONICS ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF LOCAL FOODS



BY YERU EBUEN

Black heirloom tomatoes are now growing in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. This is almost impossible a few years back as mountainous areas can be challenging due to cooler temperatures and a shorter growing season.

Due to an introduction of a new initiative, black heirloom tomatoes and other heirloom varieties including leafy greens and commercially expensive vegetables like zucchini, high-end variety of cucumber and different berries used usually for fine dining experiences (and mostly imported from other countries) are starting to proliferate in a few years, these locally grown produce may actually find their way to local supermarkets.

and colours desirable in gourmet dishes. Cucumbers grow quickly and can be used in salads, garnishes and cocktails, while both sweet and hot peppers provide a variety of flavours and colours.

Nearly all of these are already grown with the additions of a few more varieties when the second phase is opened sometime late this year.

Unlike traditional farming method, hydroponics uses up to 90 per cent less water due to water recirculation, ideal for areas with scarce water resources. The space-efficient design allows for vertical or tightly spaced planting, maximising limited arable land. Since no soil is used, it eliminates soil erosion risks, which are common in areas with heavy rains. Hydroponics allows for year-round

tion.

For children, tours can ignite interest in science, technology and environmental careers, inspiring them to explore these fields further.

Singh also said that they despite their current setup, they are already producing more than enough supply for their kitchen, looking into making some of the harvest available in the local supermarkets.

"The most logical thing to do is to make the excess harvest available for purchase by other hotels, restaurants and supermarkets," Singh said.

**PART OF A LUXURY EXPERIENCE**  
The hydroponics farm opened a new opportunity for luxurious experience for the guests staying



Officially launched in early July of 2024 through the support of Omran group, Phase 1 covered a 646-sqm area inside the beautiful landscape of Alila Jabal Akhdar in an effort that hotel General Manager Puneet Singh shared addresses food security and independence while also promoting self-sustainability.

"The goal is to encourage everyone within the industry to pursue their own version of food sufficiency and sustainability and through this, the community is able to see what's possible even in a desert or mountain location," he said.

## HYDROPONICS IN THE MOUNTAIN

Hydroponics is a method of growing plants without soil, using nutrient-rich water solutions to deliver essential minerals directly to the plant roots. This system allows for precise control over the growing environment, including nutrient levels, pH and temperature, which can lead to faster growth and higher yields compared to traditional soil-based agriculture.

To successfully grow heirloom tomatoes, certain conditions are ideal. They require full sun exposure with at least 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight per day. The soil should be well-draining, fertile and rich in organic matter, with a slightly acidic to neutral pH of 6.0 to 7.0.

"When you do hydroponics, you are maximising the utilisation of space. You can do it in a desert or in the mountains because the plants are not dependent on soil," Singh said.

Common vegetable ingredients suitable for hydroponic growing include lettuce and leafy greens like romaine, butterhead and kale, which are popular due to their fast growth and high demand in culinary dishes. Herbs such as basil, mint, cilantro, parsley and thyme thrive in hydroponic systems and are frequently used in fine dining for garnishes and flavouring. Tomatoes, especially heirloom and cherry varieties, are ideal for hydroponics, offering rich flavours



cultivation in controlled environments, leading to faster growth and higher yields with reduced pesticide use. This sustainable approach enhances food security in regions unsuitable for conventional farming.

## EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

According to Singh, what the property has been doing is something that can already be seen in other parts of the world. In fact, the clear intention of the initiative is to create a domino effect where other properties and the community in general will be inspired to look into hydroponics.

"We hope for the community to pay attention and take inspiration from this and encourage farmers and other property operators to take sustainability seriously and work towards food security," Singh said.

Singh said in time, they hope to open the hydroponics farm for visit especially among school children so they can appreciate new technology and learn new means of growing food.

Providing community access to hydroponics through tours and educational programmes raises awareness about sustainable practices and fosters engagement in discussions about food production and environmental impact.

It also offers practical experiences and skills needed to set up personal hydroponic systems, promoting self-sufficiency and innova-

in Alila. Singh said that by allowing guests to harvest the ingredients that will be used in their customised dining experience, they give true meaning to farm-to-table experience.

The "farm-to-table" experience has become a popular catchphrase in luxury hotels due to its emphasis on authenticity, quality and sustainability.

"By focusing on the direct connection between the source of food and its preparation, luxury hotels are able to offer guests high-quality, fresh and seasonal ingredients that are often locally sourced.

This approach enhances the flavour and nutritional value of dishes while aligning with the growing consumer demand for transparency and authenticity in food sourcing," Singh said.

For Chef Pankaj Walia, Executive Chef at Alila Jabal Akhdar, "this initiative speaks to our commitment to sustainability. By reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-distance food transportation, we are championing environmental stewardship."

"Visitors to Oman can not only enjoy these fresh produce but when they visit the mountains particularly Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, they have different seasons they can experience — from the freshness of the rose and pomegranate harvest season, to our now Honey Harvest season, the hydroponics farm opens up doors for culinary innovation," Chef Walia said.