

Oman at Paris peace meeting

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, will participate in the 'International Meeting for Peace 2024' to be held in the French capital, Paris, from September 22-24. This year's theme 'Cultivating a Culture of Peace' draws inspiration from Unesco's foundational belief that "wars begin in the minds of men, so it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

|                    |
|--------------------|
| SUNRISE - 05:56 AM |
| PRAYER TIMINGS     |
| FAJR - 04:40 AM    |
| DHUHR - 12:05 PM   |
| ASR - 03:30 PM     |
| MAGHRIB - 06:09 PM |
| ISHA - 07:19 PM    |



P13

DUQM SEZ RECORDS 55% JUMP IN INVESTMENTS TO REACH RO 6 BILLION

P11

KASATKINA TO FACE HADDAD MAIA IN KOREA OPEN FINAL

P20

WHY OMAN IS THE ULTIMATE DESTINATION FOR WOMEN TRAVELLERS

DHOFAR WELCOMES 'SARB' SEASON

On Saturday Dhofar Governorate welcomed the astronomical spring season, or as it is locally called 'Sarbi', which can be seen in the coastal areas of the governorate from Dhalkout in the west to Mirbat in the east, and continues until December 21. The 'Sarbi' season is one of the most beautiful seasons in Dhofar, as it comes after the khareef with the weather changing from humid to a more moderate climate. **DETAILS ON P3** (PHOTO BY SHAMSA AL HARTHY)

NEW DIMORPHIC MEDICINAL FUNGUS DISCOVERED

MUSCAT: Teachers appreciate HM's congratulations

NEW DIMORPHIC MEDICINAL FUNGUS DISCOVERED

**NIZWA:** The University of Nizwa, represented by the Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre, announced the discovery of a dimorphic medicinal fungus that causes a new fungal infection in humans. The new discovery announced by the University of Nizwa was the outcome of research cooperation with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States of America (USA), Radboud University in the Netherlands, Guizhou Medical University based in Guiyang Province in China, and the German National Reference Centre for Invasive Fungal Infections in the city of Jena, Germany.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hatmi, Assistant Professor at the University of Nizwa and Head of the Microbiology Laboratory at the Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre and one of the scientists who participated in the scientific discovery, said: "This fungal infection was unknown before and the newly-discovered fungus can infect humans." **SEE ALSO P2**

**MUSCAT:** Teachers have appreciated the congratulations of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to his sons and daughters at the outset of the new academic year.

They stressed that His Majesty's commendation of the efforts exerted by teachers in building future generations armed with science and knowledge and adhering to values, principles and good morals is a source of pride and a motivation to move forward to further develop the educational process in the Sultanate of Oman. The Ministry of Education explained that the decision of the Council of Ministers allocating RO 40 million during the current Five-Year Plan to speed up the construction of new schools will help in meeting the increasing student density in some governorates. — ONA

Israeli strike on Beirut suburb kills 37: Official

**BEIRUT/GAZA CITY:** At least 37 people were killed in an Israeli air strike on a Beirut suburb on Friday, including three children and seven women, the Lebanese health ministry said on Saturday.

Hezbollah said overnight that those killed in the deadliest strike in a year of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel included 16 of its members, and that senior leader Ibrahim Aqil and another top commander, Ahmed Wahbi, were among the dead.

Heavy cross-border strikes continued on Saturday, with Israeli warplanes carrying some of its heaviest bombardment in 11 months of fighting across Lebanon's south and Hezbollah claiming rocket attacks on military targets in Israel's north.

Friday's strike sharply escalated the conflict between Israel and the group.

The total death toll in those attacks has risen to 39, and more than 3,000 were injured.

The attacks on communications devices were widely believed to have been carried out by Israel, which has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement. Transport Minister Ali Hamieh told reporters at the scene of Friday's strike that at least 23 people were still missing.

"The Israeli enemy is taking the region to war," he said.

The ministry had dispatched vehicles and equipment to help rescuers dig through the collapsed buildings.

"We've been taking out women and children from under the rubble," he said.

school building in Gaza City, Palestinian authorities said on Saturday.

At least 30 people were injured, including women and children, the health authority in Gaza said. Displaced people are said to have been sheltering inside the building.

According to the Palestinian Civil Defence, volunteers are currently trying to free victims from under the building's rubble. The death toll could therefore rise further, it said.

The Palestinian news agency WAFA had earlier reported of another Israeli attack on a former school building in the same neighbourhood, saying dozens more were injured there.

Fighting also continues in the south of Gaza, according to the Israel Defence Forces (IDF).

— Agencies



Rescuers sift through the rubble at the scene of an Israeli strike that targeted Beirut's southern suburbs a day earlier, as search and rescue operations continue on Saturday. – AFP

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## Electronic platform linking 45 govt entities to be launched

MUSCAT: Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit (IFU) announced it has begun implementing the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik by laying the foundations for launching a dedicated electronic platform to receive complaints and suggestions in government institutions in 2025.

Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Director-General of the Quality and Government Excellence Department at Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, said that the platform aims to improve the services provided by government institutions, enhance beneficiary satisfaction and achieve Vision priorities particularly the governance of the state's administrative apparatus, resources and projects.



He added that the platform keeps pace with the government's digital transformation strategy noting that AI-powered work methodologies and tools have been adopted to implement it, noting that this national platform is linked to 45 government service agencies and is one of the enablers that will help agencies respond to the requirements of beneficiaries according to unified methodologies governed by controls and standards.

— ONA

## Oman takes part in UN forum

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, which chairs the United Nations Environment Assembly, participated in the Youth Forum on the Future of the Environment held at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the forum was headed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority.

The forum is jointly organised by the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary in collaboration with Unicef and the International Labour Organization (ILO) with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Global Opportunities for Sustainable Development



The chairman of the Environment Authority addressed the Youth Forum on the Future of the Environment held in New York.

Goals.

In his speech, the chairman of the Environment Authority and President of the 7th Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly stressed that the forum's activities highlight the youth population being the most informed and connected and they are an essential part of environmental governance

processes due to their crucial role in shaping a sustainable future for the environment and ensuring the health of the planet.

He expressed his hope that the seventh session will play significant roles in realising its goals including enhancing environmental governance through clearer and more binding monitoring and

reporting while enhancing the role of youth networks in comprehensive decision-making processes.

He added that the goals are based on the successful outcomes of the United Nations Environment Day which was celebrated at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly which enhanced cooperation and synergy between the United Nations Environment and its stakeholders.

The forum discussed several topics, most notably: jobs of the future as emerging opportunities, identifying the skills and training required to achieve success in environmentally friendly jobs in line with the goals of the Green Jobs for Youth Pact.

— ONA

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## ROHM marks World Alzheimer's Day

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

On September 21, the Royal Opera House Muscat went purple to mark World Alzheimer's Day. "Time to Act on Dementia, Time to Act on Alzheimer's" is the theme for World Alzheimer's Day 2024.

The Oman Alzheimer's Society has been conducting events to join in with the international campaign to raise dementia awareness and challenge stigma.

The World Alzheimer's Report: Global changes in attitudes to dementia 2024, conducted by Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) commissioning the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), was



released on September 20 ahead of World Alzheimer's Day. Results from the world's largest global survey on attitudes towards dementia reveal stigma around the condition is worsening among the general public and even healthcare professionals.

The awareness continues to be much needed

because globally, according to Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI), 65 per cent of health and care professionals incorrectly believe dementia is a normal part of aging, up from 62 per cent in 2019.

On the other hand, people are also becoming aware of the effects of their lifestyle on the risk of developing the condition, with over 58 per cent of the general public believing dementia is caused by an unhealthy lifestyle. With 45 per cent of dementia cases reported to be impacted by just 14 modifiable risk factors, this is important progress, according to ADI.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Chairman, Oman Alzheimer's Society, said, "The key message is that risk reduction starts

at an early age so healthy habits can be built into one's yearly routine. This is why it is important to understand how psychology interacts with health and how we can adopt new healthy lifestyles and keep it up."

Experts listed two new modifiable risk factors for dementia: Cholesterol and eye health in addition to what was already established by the Lancet Commission in 2020, where it was established that 12 of the risk factors that are linked to 40 per cent of all dementia cases are: alcohol abuse, smoking, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, air pollution, brain injury, physical inactivity, depression, social isolation, hearing loss, and lower levels of education.

## Announcement (8/2024)

Based on Commercial Register Law No. (3/74), the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion announces the delisting of expired commercial registers (companies) due to the failure of their owners to renew them and the cessation of their commercial activities. These procedures are being implemented as part of the effort to organize registered data and information, and to identify active registers that are in compliance with the laws and issued regulations.

Any party wishing to object to this delisting is hereby required to complete the objection form by scanning the QR code provided and submitting their objection within thirty (30) days from the date of this announcement via email.

[soce@tejarah.gov.om](mailto:soce@tejarah.gov.om)

To view the delisted commercial registers, please scan the QR code.

## University of Nizwa discovers new dimorphic medicinal fungus

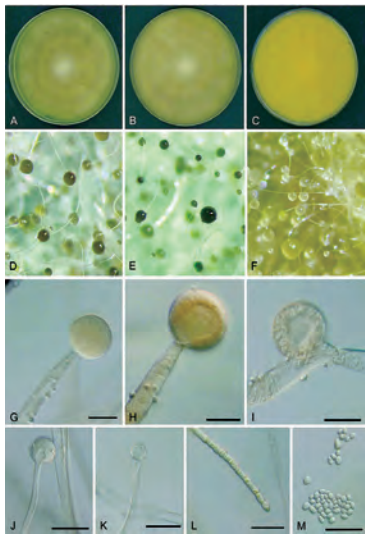
NIZWA: The University of Nizwa, represented by the Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre, announced the discovery of a dimorphic medicinal fungus that causes a new fungal infection in.

The new discovery announced by the University of Nizwa was the outcome of research cooperation with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States of America (USA), Radboud University in the Netherlands, Guizhou Medical University based in Guiyang Province in China and the German National Reference Center for Invasive Fungal Infections in the city of Jena, Germany.

Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Hatmi, Assistant Professor at the University of Nizwa and Head of the Microbiology Laboratory at the Natural and Medical Sciences Research Centre at the University of Nizwa and one of the scientists who participated in the scientific discovery, said: "This fungal infection was unknown before and the newly-discovered fungus can infect humans. It has the ability to survive inside the human body in the form of yeast



DR ABDULLAH BIN MOHAMMED AL HATMI



but it can also live outside the human body in the form of mold and becomes more resistant to drugs when exposed to high temperatures."

Al Hatmi noted that this discovery was recently published in the magazine (mBio) in cooperation with international scientists and physicians. We received an invitation from scientists and fellow researchers to conduct accurate analyses at the University of Nizwa and the university adopted the research project stemming from its keenness in supporting scientific research.

The results of the accurate analyses did not match any type of previously known fungi. The new fungus belongs to a family known to have the ability to infect humans with a serious fungal disease that affects various parts of the human body, Al Hatmi said.

The research was conducted by Dr Abdullah Al Hatmi from the University of Nizwa, Dr Amir Mosmi, from the National Institutes of Health, Professor Sybren de Hoog and Dr Sara Ahmed from Radboud University and Professor Joyce Kang from China.



The Green Mobility Forum featured participation from specialists across Oman and the GCC countries.

# Oman sees 300% surge in EV growth

**SALALAH:** The 2nd Green Mobility Forum in Salalah concluded on Thursday, highlighting the latest innovations and initiatives in sustainable mobility. Organised by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the two-day forum featured participation from specialists across Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, presided over the closing ceremony, attended by dignitaries, officials, and experts in green transportation.

The forum emphasised the role of green mobility in reducing pollution and promoting sustainability while fostering cross-sector partnerships to advance strategies aligned with the Sultanate of Oman's 2050 vision of reduced carbon emissions.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shammakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, outlined key achievements, noting the rapid growth of electric vehicles (EV)

in Oman, which increased from 550 in 2023 to 1,500 in 2024, a 300 per cent surge. The government's progress includes installing over 120 charging points for electric vehicles, with expectations of reaching more than 200 by the end of 2024 and 350 by 2027.

The Ministry also spearheaded initiatives to electrify port equipment, introduce sustainable fuel production for aircraft, and reduce emissions in data centres and communication towers. Highlighting the governorate's innovation, Oman launched the Middle East's first green mobility project, the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road, using electric equipment to cut carbon emissions.

Workshops during the forum focused on promoting electric and hybrid vehicle use, building an integrated charging network, and developing advanced technologies to lower maintenance costs for electric vehicles.

Additionally, a proposal for a joint GCC platform to locate charging stations was discussed, aiming to enhance user experience and operational efficiency. — ONA

## Salalah, Switzerland share an intriguing similarity

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH  
@patkaushal

Salalah in Oman and Switzerland, though geographically distant and culturally distinct, share an intriguing similarity in how their mountain communities interact with the natural environment, particularly during seasonal shifts.

The lush, green landscape that emerges in Salalah during the khareef season often draws comparisons to Switzerland's serene, mountainous terrain.

During khareef, the normally arid mountains of Salalah transform into verdant green spaces, akin to the famous pastures of Switzerland. The mountain dwellers in Salalah, much like Swiss farmers, traditionally migrate to the plains with their livestock — camels in Salalah and cattle in Switzerland — to escape the monsoon.

The damp conditions caused by the rains foster insects and parasites, posing health risks to both humans and animals, while the slippery mountains make it unsafe for livestock to roam



freely.

As in Switzerland, this seasonal migration has long been a cultural tradition in Salalah, where returning to the mountains after the monsoon is marked by celebration.

Historically, both communities adorned their animals, wore new clothes, and engaged in festive processions accompanied by folk songs and dances. In Salalah, camels play a central role, much like cattle do in Switzerland, with decorated camels paraded during these celebratory returns to the mountains.

"My grandfather used to tell me stories of the grand processions, with camels draped in colourful fabrics and women singing folk songs," shares Abdullah al Mahri, a resident of Salalah.

"It was a time of joy after months of rain, when everyone came together to celebrate returning to the mountains," he says.

Another local, Salma al Shihri, reminisces, "I remember as a child, we would eagerly await the day we'd return to our mountain home. The adults would sing as they led the camels, and we children would run ahead, excited to see the green hills and blooming flowers after khareef."

The monsoon season in Salalah brings not just life to the land but also a sense of festivity. The seasonal movement of people and livestock from mountains to plains and back again reflects a deep interconnection between nature, culture and community in both areas.

For the mountain dwellers of Salalah, much like their Swiss counterparts, the return to the mountains after khareef is a joyful occasion, signifying not just the end of the rainy season but a return to a more familiar, drier environment where both the land and the people can thrive again.

Both Salalah and Switzerland, despite their differences, highlight how geography, climate and tradition shape the lives and celebrations of mountain communities across the globe.

## OCCI Businesswomen Forum explores creativity

**SALALAH:** The Second Businesswomen Forum, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Dhofar Governorate, focused on the economic empowerment of women, enhancing their role in entrepreneurship, and fostering creative and sustainable business ideas.

Hosted at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment, the forum included two working papers on key topics.

Dr Fatima bint Ahmed al Rai, Head of the Businesswomen Committee in Dhofar, emphasised the significance of connecting businesswomen across various sectors and highlighted the importance of



OCCI Businesswomen Forum was held under the slogan 'Made in Dhofar'.

small and medium enterprises.

The forum, held under the slogan 'Made in Dhofar,' featured a presentation by Dr Noor bint Abdullah al Shanfryyah on innovation in entrepreneurship and by Dhahab bint Mohammed Habis on the role of training centres in advancing businesswomen's skills.

An exhibition showcased projects by female entrepreneurs from Dhofar, while a dialogue session provided further insight into women's role in entrepreneurship. The event concluded with a recognition ceremony led by Arej bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, honouring participants for their contributions. — ONA

## Dhofar Governorate welcomes 'Sarab' season

**SALALAH:** On Saturday Dhofar Governorate welcomed the astronomical spring season, or as it is locally called 'Sarab', which affects the coastal areas of the governorate from Dhalkout in the west to Mirbat in the east, and continues until December 21.

The 'Sarab' season is one of the most beautiful natural seasons in Dhofar Governorate, as it comes after the khareef with the weather changing from humid to a more moderate climate.

The Sarb season has a positive impact on economic activity in the governorate due to the increased influx of visitors to enjoy the beauty of nature and various activities.

Economic activities flourish among farmers, fishermen, and livestock breeders. This is due to the seasonal agricultural harvest in the mountainous and plain areas that depend on seasonal autumn rains, including corn, local beans, and cucumbers. This is in addition to the increased production of honey and the availability of large quantities of surface and bottom fish with high nutritional value, most notably sharka, kanaad, sardines, safi and shaari.



Camel owners in the mountains move their camels in groups from the plains to pastures

The 'Sarb' season is characterised by spring grazing (Khateel Al Ibil), which begins in late September. Camel owners in the mountains of Dhofar Governorate are keen to move their camels in groups from the plains or areas behind the mountains (Al Qatn) to the pastures that are closed at the beginning of the autumn season, chanting several traditional songs and poetic verses, accompanied by some inherited social customs.

The Sarb season in Dhofar Governorate has distinctive characteristics such as increased production of meat and honey,

in addition to dairy products and their derivatives, most notably butter (Qatmim) and local ghee (Mishah), because of the abundance of green pastures for livestock in the plains, plateaus, and mountains.

Among the most prominent tourist destinations in the Sarb season are the mountainous areas that receive a great turnout from visitors and tourists due to their picturesque nature, moderate climate, wide, extended plains, and the spread of trees that citizens and residents visit to seek shade and spend beautiful times in the



Due to the seasonal agricultural harvest in the mountainous and plain areas activities flourish among farmers.

embrace of the picturesque nature.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) organised joint sessions between tourism sector partners in the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia as part of the 'Marhaba Dhofar' event, which saw the participation of more than 40 tourism companies and 13 media professionals.

The Ministry also organised the 'Dhofar Path 2024' event, a photography tourism forum that hosted a group of professional photographers from the Sultanate of Oman and the GCC to provide an opportunity to explore the

### KHAREEF SEES 9PC VISITOR SURGE IN 2024

**SALALAH:** The Khareef Dhofar Season welcomed 1,065,635 visitors by the end of August 2024, marking a 9 per cent increase compared to 2023, which saw 924,127 visitors. Preliminary statistics from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed a rise in Omani visitors by 8.7 per cent, reaching 713,105. Visitors from GCC countries also grew to 171,762, up from 156,953 in 2023, while international visitors increased to 121,767 from 111,055 last year. Of the total visitors, 786,107 arrived via land ports, and 220,528 by air, a 5.2 per cent increase in air travel compared to last year. August alone accounted for 59 per cent of the total visitors for the season. — ONA

natural beauty of Dhofar during the Sarb season with its bright colours and stunning scenery.

The Ministry is preparing to launch the third edition of the Frankincense Season events in December to introduce the frankincense sites listed on the Unesco World Heritage List.

Dhofar Municipality is also organising many events during this year's Sarab season that attract visitors and tourists, including the Dhofar Municipality Championship 'Ironman 70.3,' as well as the Dhofar Municipality Championship 'Salalah Half Marathon,' in addition to the 'Dhofar Municipality She Runs' 'Iron Child'.

These sporting events will be held over two weeks in October, with each event featuring its programme that targets different categories and serves the community in multiple ways. The municipality will also organise the Dhofar International Theatre Festival in early October, with the participation of local and international theatre groups in various fields of theatre and arts.

— ONA



# SAFE SEAS, HAPPY SHORES

KNOWING HOW TO SWIM IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. THE OCEAN IS A GREAT WAY TO HAVE FUN BUT IT IS ALSO ESSENTIAL TO UNDERSTAND THE DANGERS OF THE SEA AND TO PROCEED WITH CAUTION AND TAKE THE NECESSARY SAFETY CONCERNS TO HELP KEEP YOU SAFE

NAJAH AL RIYAMI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Sultanate of Oman is blessed with a magnificent coastline extending 3,165 km across the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea, both of which are part of the Indian Ocean. Yet, it is a worry that this vast expanse of ocean is responsible for the highest rates of infant deaths in the Sultanate of Oman, as demonstrated to us time and time again with tragic stories we hear about on the news.

With over a thousand beaches along Oman's coastline to explore, and many activities to enjoy like swimming, snorkeling, kitesurfing, wakeboarding, sailing, and diving.

Knowing how to swim is extremely important. The ocean is a great way to have fun but it is also essential to understand the dangers of the sea and to proceed with caution and take the necessary safety concerns to help keep you safe.

Ask yourself if you are a confident swimmer, as many drowning incidents happen because the person doesn't know how to swim. If you don't know how to swim or feel uneasy in the water, there are many things you can do to become a better swimmer.

Practice in safe places with a confident swimmer who knows how to swim. Take swimming lessons with certified teachers. Learn how to float, move and gain confidence in the water.

Riptides are naturally occurring phenomena, creating a strong current that pulls things out from the shore. It is necessary to understand what a rip tide

## TIPS FOR ENJOYING THE OCEAN



RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF SWIMMING SKILLS



PRACTICE IN SAFE ENVIRONMENTS



TAKE LESSONS WITH CERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS



MANAGE RIPTIDES BY SWIMMING PARALLEL TO THE SHORE



SEEK ASSISTANCE FROM LIFEGUARDS WHEN IN TROUBLE



STAY CALM; USE FLOTATION DEVICES IF STRUGGLING IN THE WATER



IDENTIFY, ALERT OTHERS TO SIGNS OF DISTRESS

current is, how the water in a rip tide current can pull you away from the shore, and to know what to do in this situation. Remember not to worry. It is crucial not to panic, and instead of swimming directly back to the shore — swim sideways, parallel to the beach. Once you're out of the strong water, you can swim back to the shore safely.

If you need help, just raise your hand and call for a lifeguard or an adult nearby. They're there to keep you safe!

If you are struggling in the water, try to stay calm: Take a big breath and don't panic. Float on your back to help you rest and keep your face out of the water. Wave your arms and call out for help if possible, and finally, if you have a floating or a boogie board, hold onto it. It will help you stay afloat while you wait for help.

You can recognise if someone is in trouble in the water in several ways. These relate to signs from quietness to bobbing up and down in the water, with their head back and mouth close to the water. Wide eyes can also be a good tell; try to recognise if the person's eyes look afraid, if their hair is over their face, or if it looks like they might be struggling to breathe.

If you see someone in the water who looks like this, it's really important to get help right away. Don't try to help them yourself unless you've learned how to do it safely. The most important thing is to tell an adult so they can help the person who is in trouble.

With Oman's stunning beaches, we hope everyone takes the necessary precautions to enjoy the coast safely and protect their loved ones.





# Workshop focuses on digital economy initiatives



A workshop focused on the digital economy and its initiatives was held in Al Batinah North Governorate

SIHAM AL SAIDI  
SUHAR, SEPT 21

A comprehensive workshop focused on the digital economy and its critical initiatives was recently held in Al Batinah North Governorate, aiming to raise awareness of Oman's digital transformation programmes. The event sought to educate participants on national efforts to foster digital initiatives and their potential to drive the nation's development.

Organised by the Office of the Governor of Al Batinah North in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the workshop was attended by Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North. It attracted a diverse audience, including members of the public, entrepreneurs and experts in the digital economy. The large turnout reflects the growing awareness and interest in the digital economy and



investment culture in Oman.

The workshop highlighted key pillars of Oman's National Digital Economy Programme, focusing on government digital transformation, e-commerce, financial technologies (FinTech) and enhancing digital infrastructure. These elements form the core of Oman's strategy to build a future-ready economy, promoting innovation and boosting global competitiveness.

Several key organisations participated in the event, including the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and

Investment Promotion, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), and the Central Bank of Oman.

A major topic of discussion was the National E-Commerce Strategy, which seeks to build trust between consumers and entrepreneurs while fostering a modern, reliable business environment. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion emphasised the need for a robust framework to support e-commerce growth. The CBO also highlighted its role in driving financial sector innovation by supporting emerging financial technologies, reinforcing the significance of FinTech in advancing Oman's digital economy.

The TRA's presentation centred on enhancing Oman's digital infrastructure, particularly through the expansion of fiber optic networks and the deployment of 4G and 5G technologies.

# Bee Expo explores innovation, global collaboration for sustainability

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Africa Bee Expo, hosted in Oman, brought together beekeepers, experts and industry leaders from across the Gulf and beyond to explore advancements in the beekeeping sector. The conference, part of a broader Gulf initiative to enhance bee production and achieve self-sufficiency, focused on adopting modern technologies and solutions to help beekeepers increase their yields and revenues.

In his address, Muath Kazim, a representative of the Arab Beekeepers Union, praised Oman for its hospitality and highlighted the country's successful blend of tradition and development.

He emphasised the critical role bees play in global food security, noting that they are responsible for pollinating approximately 70 per cent of agricultural crops, vital for sustaining 90 per cent of global food production. Kazim also underscored the therapeutic value of bees and honey, stressing their contribution to both biodiversity and human health.

Kazim raised concerns about the growing threats to bee populations, including climate change, pesticide overuse and



Ahmed al Ghamdi, President of the Arab Beekeepers Association

habitat destruction, which have collectively led to declining bees health.

He called for collective action to preserve bee populations, emphasising that protecting bees is not just an environmental issue but a moral obligation for future generations. He urged for initiatives to promote sustainable agricultural practices and reduce reliance on harmful chemicals.

The conference also turned attention to the beekeeping crisis in Gaza. Kazim highlighted how the Israeli occupation and ongoing siege have severely impacted Gaza's beekeeping industry, putting local food security at risk.

He called on the international community to support Gaza's beekeepers in revitalising this critical sector.

Ahmed al Ghamdi, President



Muath Kazim, from the Arab Beekeepers Union

of the Arab Beekeepers Association, echoed the importance of the event, noting that the high-level participation of international speakers and experts made the conference a standout occasion in the Gulf.

Al Ghamdi stressed that beekeeping's future looks bright due to modern technologies that have improved productivity and safeguarded bees against climate change.

He highlighted ongoing research in Gulf countries aimed at helping bees adapt to harsh environmental conditions.

The Africa Bee Expo is set to leave a lasting impact, with international cooperation, shared knowledge and innovative strategies paving the way for a sustainable and prosperous future for the beekeeping industry.

## Oman, Kenya boost bilateral ties

NAIROBI: Oman and Kenya took significant steps towards bolstering their bilateral relations with a high-level meeting in Nairobi on Friday. Khalid bin Hashil al Muselhi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, met with Dr Singwe Korir, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Kenya, to discuss opportunities for deeper economic, trade, and investment ties.

Nasra bint Salem al Hashimiyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Kenya, and senior officials from both sides were present, underscoring the importance of ongoing dialogue between the two countries in fostering stronger international relationships.

— ONA



### MUSCAT GOVERNORATE MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (28/2024)

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| 2      | PRE-24-272  | Organizing Events for the Muscat Nights (2024/2025) Organizing and Managing of Equestrian Event at Al Qurum Natural Park      | 25 Rials     | 06/10/2024                           | 07/10/2024                       | 13/10/2024              |
| 3      | PRE-24-273  | Organizing Events for the Muscat Nights (2024/2025) Organizing and Managing a Variety Events and Activities for Muscat Nights | 25 Rials     | 06/10/2024                           | 07/10/2024                       | 13/10/2024              |

**Companies registered with Muscat Municipality and specialized in the above mentioned bidding field are invited to participate according to the following procedures:**

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- Document fee for the requested bid must be paid through bank deposit into the following Muscat Municipality's Bank account:  
**Bank Muscat 0423010702710024**
- To receive the bid's documents, a Copy of bank receipt must be submitted to the Quantity Surveying and Contracts Department at Muscat Municipality (Head office, first floor, Darsait), accompanied with the following details: (name and bid number, representative's name, contact number (mobile & office), bidder official email, commercial registration number).
- 10:00 AM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining bid documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered.
- Bidders offers must be accompanied with a bond as mentioned in the bidding document valid for a period not less than (90) days, issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bids that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted.**
- Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without mention the company identity) and placed in the box located at Quantity Surveying and Contracts Department at Muscat Municipality (Head Office, first floor, Darsait)

**NOTES:**

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the Muscat Municipality's website ([www.mm.gov.om](http://www.mm.gov.om)). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email ([crm@mm.gov.om](mailto:crm@mm.gov.om)).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail ([SO.QS@mm.gov.om](mailto:SO.QS@mm.gov.om)).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

**Website: [www.mm.gov.om](http://www.mm.gov.om)**



### AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Finance is pleased to announce the sale of movables, by online auction ([www.mazadcom.om](http://www.mazadcom.om)), as per the following details:

| Auction                    | Preview Location                                                                                                      | Preview Dates & Times                     | Auction Period                                                            |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Used vehicles              | 1 (40) Vehicles at the MOF warehouse, Ghala Industrial<br>2 (1) Vehicle at the General Directorate of Finance, Dhofar | 23-25 September 2024<br>8:00 am - 2:00 pm | Open:<br>29 September 2024 (10 am)<br>Close:<br>30 September 2024 (10 pm) |
| Used Furniture and Devices | 1 Ministry of Finance's warehouse, Ghala Industrial<br>2 General Directorate of Finance, Dhofar Governorate           |                                           |                                                                           |

Interested persons/companies shall comply with the following:

- A bidder must register and sign up on the website ([www.mzadcom.om](http://www.mzadcom.om)).
- A bidder shall pay a security deposit of RO 1000 for vehicles, and RO 100 for Furniture and Devices (refundable in case of non-purchase).
- A bidder shall pay the total value of the movables via the website within five working days after the end of the auction.
- A 5%-VAT shall be added to the purchase value and 2%-auction fees to each movable value.
- A bidder is required to pick up the movable within five working days after paying the purchase value. In case the movable is not picked up, the Ministry shall not be responsible for any losses or damage that may occur to the movable.
- If a bidder fails to pay the purchase value or transfer the movable within the specified period, the security deposit shall be confiscated.
- The interested bidders can inspect the movables during the period starting from 23 September 2024 to 25 September 2024 at the Ministry of Finance's warehouse in Ghala Industrial from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm.
- The mechanical condition of the vehicle, vehicle safety driving on the road, or the possibility of it being licensed by the Royal Oman Police will not be guaranteed in any way, as well as the Ministry is not obligated to guarantee any defects in the movables being sold, and the buyer must inspect the movables to verify their condition.

**N.B:**

- The movable is sold as is.
- The Ministry of Finance reserves the right to delay or cancel the auction without justifications.

For more details and information, please visit ([www.mazadcom.om](http://www.mazadcom.om)) or telephone number: (94162650 - 77507247 - 93815156).

To inspect the vehicles, please contact (during the working hours)  
Ministry of Finance: (24746112 - 24746129 – 24746131).

oman\_mof | www.mof.gov.om | وزارة المالية - سلطنة عمان | ministry of finance - Oman



An aerial view shows a flooded residential area caused by torrential rain in Wajima, Japan. — Reuters

## Japan orders evacuations as heavy rains trigger floods

TOKYO: Japanese authorities told tens of thousands of people to evacuate the quake-hit region of Ishikawa on Saturday as “unprecedented” rains triggered floods and landslides. One person was killed and at least seven were missing on Saturday, officials said, as “unprecedented” rains triggered floods and landslides in Japan’s quake-hit region of Ishikawa, where authorities told tens of thousands to evacuate.

A dozen rivers in the region, on the west coast of central Japan, had burst their banks by 11:00 am, land ministry official Masaru Kojima said. Many buildings were inundated, with landslides blocking some roadways, the Ishikawa government said in a statement. The cities of Wajima and Suzu, as well as Noto town, ordered about 44,700 residents to evacuate, officials said.

The Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) said it issued its highest-level warning for Ishikawa, cautioning of a “life-threatening situation”.

The areas under the warning were seeing “heavy rain of unprecedented levels”, JMA forecaster Satoshi Sugimoto told reporters, adding “it is a situation in which you have to secure your safety immediately”.

More than 120 millimetres of rainfall per hour was recorded in Wajima in the morning, the heaviest rain since comparative data became available in 1929.

Footage on NHK showed an entire street submerged in Wajima.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida instructed the government “to do its best in disaster management with saving people’s lives as the first priority”, top government spokesman Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters. Self-Defence Forces personnel have been sent to the Ishikawa region to join rescue workers, he said. At least one house was hit by a landslide.

Another 16,700 residents in Niigata and Yamagata prefectures north of Ishikawa were also told to evacuate. Some 6,600 households in the region were without electricity by Saturday afternoon and communication services were cut for some people. Wajima and Suzu, in central Japan’s Noto peninsula, were among the areas hardest hit by a huge New Year’s Day earthquake that killed at least 236 people. The region is still reeling from the magnitude-7.5 quake that toppled buildings, ripped up roads and sparked a major fire. — AFP

# ISRAELI STRIKE ON GAZA SCHOOL SHELTER KILLS 21

GAZA: Gaza’s civil defence agency said an Israeli strike on Saturday on a school-turned-shelter in the Palestinian territory’s largest city killed 21 people, while Israel’s military said it targeted gunmen.

“Civil Defence crews recovered 21 people, including 13 children and six women”, one of whom was pregnant, said agency spokesman Mahmud Bassal. There were “around 30 injured, including nine children needing limb amputations, as a result of an Israeli bombing on Al-Zaytoun School C” in Gaza City, he said. Thousands of displaced people had sought shelter at the school, Bassal said.

Israel’s military said in a statement the air force had “conducted a precise strike on gunmen who were operating inside a Hamas command and control centre in Gaza City”. It said the target was “embedded inside” the Al Falah School, adjacent to the Al Zaytoun School buildings. Reporters at the scene confirmed that



Displaced Palestinians inspect the damage at the site of an Israeli strike on a school housing displaced Palestinians in Gaza. — AFP

Al-Zaytoun School C had been hit.

Witnesses said that before the strike, orphans had gathered there because they were due to receive sponsorship from a local NGO for humanitarian assistance.

Israel’s military did not provide a death toll

Witnesses said that before the strike, orphans had gathered there because they were due to receive sponsorship from a local NGO for humanitarian assistance

but said “numerous steps were taken to mitigate the risk of harming civilians, including the use of precise munitions, aerial surveillance and additional intelligence”.

It was the latest in a series of Israeli strikes on school buildings housing displaced people in Gaza.

A strike on the United Nations-run Al-Jawni School in central Gaza on September 11 drew international outcry after the UN agency for Palestinian refugees said six of its staffers were among the 18 reported fatalities.

The Israeli military accuses Hamas of hiding in school buildings where many thousands of Gazans have sought shelter — a charge denied by the Palestinian group. Hamas on Saturday condemned the strike on Al-Zaytoun School C, describing it in a statement as “a war crime under American cover”, a reference to Washington being Israel’s most important military backer.

The war has badly battered Gaza’s health sector, and the World Health Organization said earlier this month that only 17 of its 36 hospitals were partially functional. Gaza’s health ministry said on Saturday that in a separate incident, an Israeli air strike hit a warehouse in a “densely populated” area of southern Gaza, killing “three ministry of health personnel and a passer-by” and injuring six others. “The warehouse was directly targeted with several missiles while doctors and staff were performing their duties, preparing to transport the medicines stored there to hospitals under the ministry of health that are facing severe shortages of medicines and supplies,” a statement said. — AFP

## Kyiv says struck ammo depots in Russia

KYIV: Ukraine said on Saturday it had successfully struck two Russian weapons depots in the southern Krasnodar and western Tver regions, with Moscow announcing more than 1,000 evacuations. Kyiv regularly hits Russian infrastructure with drones as Moscow’s offensive drags on for more than two and a half years.

The Ukrainian army said it had hit a depot near the city of Tikhoretsk in Krasnodar, calling it one of Moscow’s “three largest ammunition storage bases” important to the Russian army’s logistics for its Ukraine war.

It also said it struck an arsenal in Tver region’s Oktyabrsky village, resulting in a “fire and detonation”.

The governor of the Krasnodar region, Veniamin Kondratyev, announced the evacuation of 1,200 people after a drone attack had



A man reacts when his wife and daughter departure aboard of an evacuation bus in the city of Pokrovsk, Donetsk region. — AFP

caused a fire that “spread to explosive objects” near Tikhoretsk.

Videos on social media showed a massive explosion in the dark resembling fireworks at first before blowing up loudly, with online reports that an ammunition depot

was struck. Kondratyev called it a “terrorist attack by the Kyiv regime” and said an unnamed village near the fire had been evacuated, with most people staying with relatives but others placed in temporary accommodation in Tikhoretsk.

Videos on social media later showed sirens ringing around the city of some 50,000 people in the daylight, with smoke rising into the air in the distance. Krasnodar is separated from occupied Ukraine by the Azov Sea and had been relatively spared from the type of attacks on Russian border or other southern regions.

Authorities in the western Tver region also announced a night-time drone attack near the city of Toropets, which lies in the western part of the region.

Its governor Igor Rudenya said the “consequences of falling debris” from the attack were being “cleared”. He said there was no evacuation in Toropets but announced a temporary closure of the federal M-9 highway, promising it will reopen soon.

— AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### WARDEN

##### S Africa snowfall closes roads, strands motorists

Unusually heavy snowfall caused major disruption on South Africa’s roads on Saturday with people still stranded at midday after spending the night stuck in their vehicles.

The key N3 highway linking Johannesburg and the east coast city of Durban was one of the worst affected and several portions were closed, with even detours impassible, officials said.

Emergency services were working to reach people in their vehicles but it was still not clear



how many were affected and in what condition they were, N3 Toll Concession operations manager Thania Dhoogra said. Blankets and meals had been delivered to some stranded motorists. — AFP

#### COLOMBO

##### Polls close in Sri Lanka presidential election

Sri Lanka voted for its next president on Saturday in an effective referendum on an unpopular International Monetary Fund austerity plan enacted after the island nation’s unprecedented financial crisis. Turnout was at nearly 70 per cent an hour before polling stations closed at 4:00 pm, an election commission official said, citing provisional figures.

Counting began on Saturday evening and the result is expected on Sunday, but an official outcome could be delayed if the contest



is close. Schools were closed on Friday to be converted into polling stations, which were staffed by more than 200,000 public servants deployed to conduct the vote.

— AFP

#### BUDAPEST

##### Hungary Danube waters reach decade high

The Danube peaked at a 10-year high in a heavily fortified Budapest on Saturday with the water reaching the steps of parliament, after deadly Storm Boris lashed Europe. As the swollen Danube waters have moved south, Hungarian emergency workers have lugged sandbags to fortify settlements, including Budapest, where the river has flooded the embankment up to the steps of parliament. Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has cancelled all his international travels this week and



went to inspect Budapest’s flood protection work on Saturday, said the focus was “on controlling the flood” with some “hard days” ahead to make sure dykes hold.

— AFP

# Communication failures plagued Trump rally



Eileen Sullivan

The writer is a New York Times reporter, covering breaking news



Kate Kelly

The writer is a New York Times reporter, covering money, policy and influence

The Secret Service failed to give clear and crucial directions to its local law enforcement partners at a July campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, allowing a would-be assassin to climb onto a warehouse and shoot at former president Donald Trump, an agency internal investigation has found.

The lapse was one of several significant findings in the summary of an internal investigation report the Secret Service released on Friday in response to the shooting on July 13 at a Trump campaign rally, where the former president was grazed by an assailant’s bullet. Three attendees at the event were wounded, one fatally.

During a news briefing in conjunction with the release of the summary, Ronald L. Rowe Jr., the acting director of the Secret Service, ticked off several other failures, including complacency by some advance team members charged with securing the site and technological breakdowns that, if better managed, could have thwarted the gunman.

Rowe said that while he could not discuss individual personnel matters, there would be consequences for agents responsible for deficiencies in the security plan and its implementation.

“These employees will be held accountable, and this agency has among the most robust stable of penalties in the entirety of the federal government,” he said.

The close call on Trump’s life shocked the country and raised profound questions about whether the Secret Service was up to the task of protecting American leaders in the current, unusually high, threat environment.

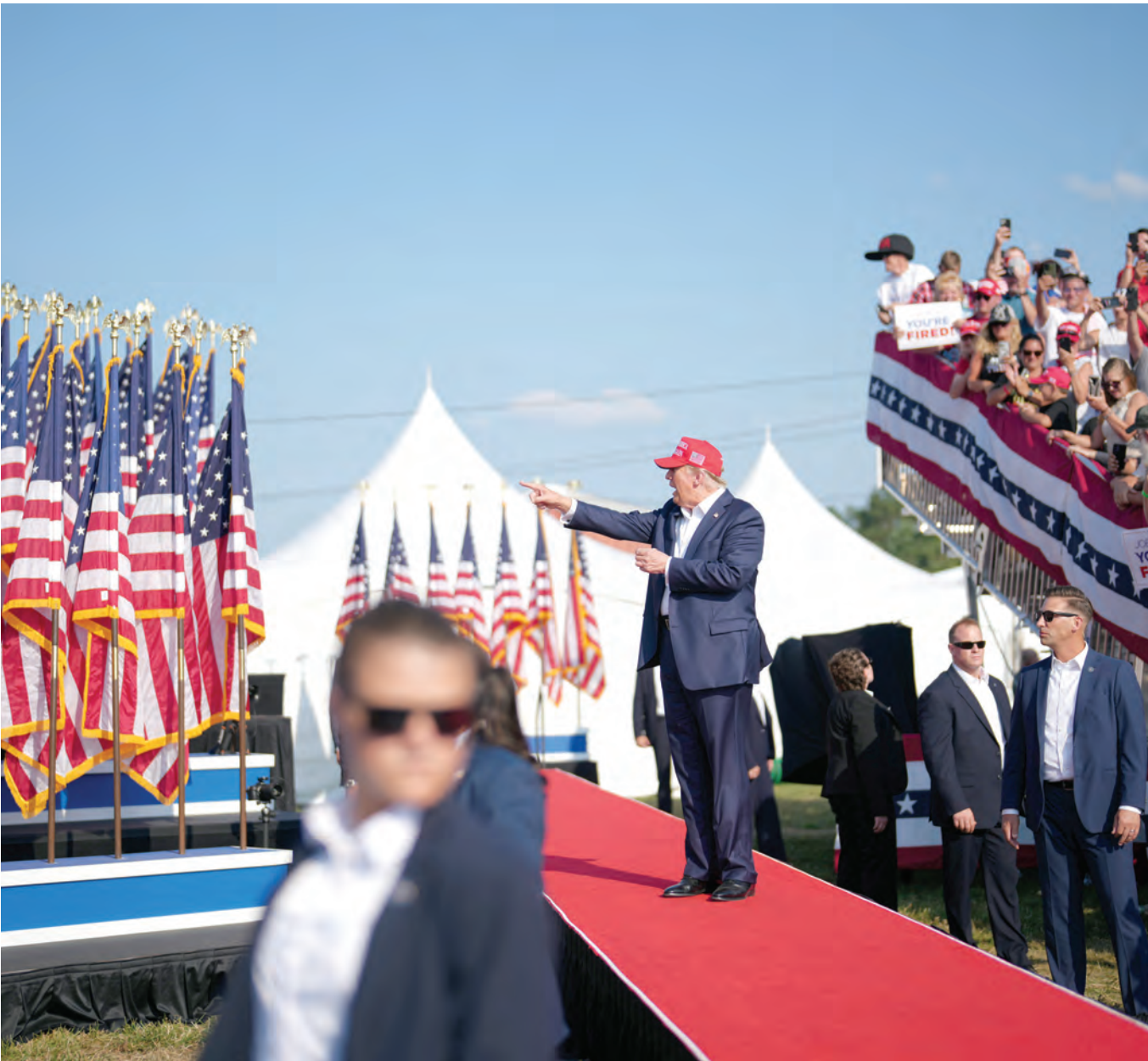
Those concerns were underscored on Sunday when the Secret Service spotted a man with a firearm hiding in the wooded area of a golf course in Florida where Trump was playing a round. That episode, which ended with a Secret Service agent firing at the gunman, who sped off in a vehicle and was arrested 45 minutes later, appeared to be a second assassination attempt on Trump.

Rowe promised that the agency was already learning from the mistakes at the rally and making changes. The Secret Service’s summary findings were released after a monthslong inquiry. The complete report is not yet finished.

The review pointed to an array of shortcomings in the preparation and security of the July 13 event, including gaps in communication and a failure to follow through and address concerns about the unguarded warehouses that ultimately became a critical point of vulnerability. Those findings hewed closely to security lapses that were identified in a New York Times investigation.

The most glaring of the agency’s lapses that day centres on how Crooks was able to climb onto a roof of one warehouse, owned by AGR International, giving him a clear line of sight to Trump.

“Multiple law enforcement entities involved in securing the rally questioned” the location of a local team of snipers that had positioned itself in the warehouse area, but without a clear view of the rooftops, the report said. “Yet there was no follow-up discussion about modifying



Former president Donald Trump, the Republican nominee for president, campaigns at a rally in Butler. – NYT

their position.” Local law enforcement officials have said in interviews with the Times that Secret Service agents in charge of planning for the rally never specified where local officers should be, leaving them to make their own decisions.

Secret Service countersnipers deployed to the event based on heightened threats against Trump were assigned to assess the landscape and position themselves in strategic places to detect a would-be sniper at high points with a clear shot of Trump. But no one was posted on the rooftop from which Crooks eventually lay prone with his rifle. “The Secret Service did not give clear guidance or direction to our local law enforcement partners,” Rowe said. He added that the fact that the warehouses were left exposed was a topic of repeated conversation during the planning phase leading up to July 13. Rowe said that even as late as the day of the event, some agents were concerned about the risk posed by the unguarded warehouse roofs. But the agents never escalated their worries to supervisors who could have helped solve the problem in time to secure

Trump’s safety. “While some members of the advance team were very diligent, there was complacency on the part of others that led to a breach of security protocols,” Rowe said.

The summary findings also addressed the fact that two command posts were permitted to be set up, without key personnel being concentrated in the one where the Secret Service was posted. The findings also faulted an overreliance on mobile phones, rather than the use of a common radio frequency, for communications.

Rowe said agents surrounding Trump never received notice that a man was on the roof of the AGR building because the information was not shared over Secret Service radios.

Instead, a Secret Service agent called the agency’s countersniper to inform him. Had that information been shared over the Secret Service’s radio, the agents surrounding Trump would probably have had enough time to remove Trump from the podium before Crooks fired.

The lapse was one of several damning findings in the summary of an internal investigation report the Secret Service released on Friday in response to the shooting on July 13

# Parts of Canada’s Boreal forest are burning faster



Manuela Andreoni

The author is a climate and environmental reporter at The New York Times

The dead black spruce looked like a collection of giant burned matchsticks standing tall above the grey landscape as far as Jennifer Baltzer could see. But here, at the edge of one of the largest areas of scorched forest that scientists have ever documented in Canada, what caught Baltzer’s attention was closer to the ground.

Baltzer, a professor of forest ecology, was a few hundred miles below the Arctic Circle, where for over a decade she has studied the health of the black spruce and the Boreal forests. It was a scorching late spring morning, and she and three of her students from Canada’s Wilfrid Laurier University were in the Northwest Territories to document what could grow from the ashes of the record-breaking fire season that had ravaged the forest almost a year earlier. “Wow, it’s kind of crazy in here,” Baltzer said as she inspected the blackened landscape. She had never seen trees burn this soon after a previous fire.

The Boreal forests are the largest forests in the world, and in Western Canada, they evolved to burn once every century or so. But this patch of forest had just burned for the second time in a decade. As a result, many trees would struggle here, she explained. The slow-growing black spruce didn’t stand a chance.

More frequent, bigger wildfires, fuelled by climate change, are a formidable challenge to

the black spruce, a species that has dominated these landscapes for thousands of years. Their gradual decline, now accelerated by last year’s fire season, is one of the strongest pieces of evidence that the new age of wildfires isn’t just overwhelming people with the smoke and destructive blazes now raging across North America — the fires are overwhelming nature, too.

The dwindling number of black spruce trees, scientists say, is deeply transforming an ecosystem that is one of Earth’s biggest storage systems for planet-warming carbon dioxide, a crucial tool to keeping the atmosphere from warming even more than it already has. Last year’s fires engulfed a stretch of forest the size of the Netherlands for at least the second time in 50 years, according to an analysis by Natural Resources Canada, a federal government department.

Black spruce forests didn’t just evolve alongside fire, they depend on it. The tree is a natural bonfire of sorts. Its branches are covered with flammable resin that fuels the flames of forest fires right up to the tree’s crown. Fires help melt the waxy coating of black spruce cones until the trees release seeds onto the soil where seedlings can grow.

But if they burn too often, there aren’t enough viable seeds to reproduce. Burn too hot, and the seeds are killed. Burn too deeply, and the organic layer of soil where black



Jennifer Baltzer, a professor of forest ecology, examines a black spruce stand, in the Northwest Territories of Canada. – NYT

More frequent, bigger wildfires are a formidable challenge to the black spruce, a species that has dominated these landscapes for thousands of years

spruce trees thrive, and which takes decades to accumulate, is gone.

In recent years, the black spruce failed to regenerate after fire in a fifth of the hundreds of sites Baltzer and other researchers monitored in North America’s Boreal forests. And that was before the fire season of 2023.

The black spruce’s struggles are a gradual break to an ancient natural cycle, one that releases planet-warming carbon into the atmosphere as old trees burn, and then gradually returns that carbon to the land, in the form of new trees and new soil. Any imbalance in this tug of war between life and death can threaten the Boreal forests’ ability to store heat-trapping carbon.

Last summer, temperatures in Canada were more than 2.2 degrees Celsius, or 4 degrees Fahrenheit, above the historical average of the past few decades. Around the Northwest Territories, it was even hotter. The heat is largely why fires as severe as last year’s happened many years before scientists anticipated. Most climate projections didn’t expect these kinds of fires until later in the century, a new preprint study found.

Forest fires are burning more than twice as much tree cover as they did 20 years ago. They have also become more intense and frequent, especially in the Boreal forests, according to a recent study. Increasing temperatures, fuelled by the burning of oil, gas and coal, are the biggest culprit.

# The dark psychology of financial fraud



Dr Hamed al Sinawi  
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

THE American movie ‘The Beekeeper’ starts with the story of an old woman who gets scammed by a corporate cyber-scam that hacked her email and wiped out her savings and a significant trust she was responsible for.

The devastating impact of the scam leads her to take her own life. The scammers are depicted as heartless, celebrating their actions and plotting further scams, which adds to the film’s tension and the drive for justice.

Much like the elderly woman in the film, I have encountered people in my own life who have been similarly targeted by financial fraud which left them feeling depressed and facing jail imprisonment.

I remember a young man who lost his job during Covid and was tempted to invest his savings by a scammer who contacted him through a social media programme and convinced him to wire the money in the promise of huge profit in a short time. But to his surprise, the scammer withdrew the savings and stopped answering his calls or replying to his email.

This made me curious to know the psychological

tactics used by the scammers and what made some people more vulnerable to fall for such scams.

My search led me to a podcast titled (Fraud) that investigates the complex world of organised financial fraud.

In the podcast, the journalist interviews victims and goes undercover as a potential customer to expose the fraud firsthand.

The podcast highlighted how scammers use fraudulent investment advertisements that appear legitimate, promising quick and guaranteed profits — sometimes claiming daily returns of up to \$2,000.

The scammers use powerful psychological tactics such as building personal connections with their victims, using their first name, and asking them a few personal questions like their jobs and the name of their eldest son or daughter.

They also used religious phrases to support their claims and build a trusting relationship with the victims while some faked a local accent when speaking to appear more genuine and trustworthy.

One of the interesting observations was that victims were generally reluctant to report the scam

‘I WAS CURIOUS TO KNOW THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TACTICS USED BY THE SCAMMERS AND WHAT MADE SOME PEOPLE MORE VULNERABLE TO FALLING FOR SUCH SCAMS’

to the authorities probably because they feel shame and blame themselves for falling into the trap.

Those who tried to recover their money experienced more emotional difficulties as they ended up being scammed by others posing as lawyers who demanded payment to start the legal process to retrieve the money. Poor victims fall for this in the hope that they can recover their losses.

Another interesting observation is that most victims are of the older generation who are not very familiar with the importance of being vigilant and not sharing banking information with strangers.

Some scammers started using artificial intelligence to record the voices of their loved ones and use them to make calls when they appear to be in distress claiming they have lost their wallet or credit card and asking you for an urgent transfer of money.

With more advancements in technology, scammers are more likely to adopt new and sophisticated techniques to lure their victims. It is important for all of us to stay vigilant. Whether it’s an email from a stranger or a panicked phone call from a ‘loved one,’ always verify before you trust.

## Melting glaciers worry Central Asia

BRUNO KALOUAZ

NEar a wooden hut high up in the Kyrgyz mountains, scientist Gulbara Omorova walked to a pile of grey rocks, reminiscing how the same spot was a glacier just a few years ago. At an altitude of 4,000 metres, the 35-year-old researcher is surrounded by the giant peaks of the towering Tian Shan range that also stretches into China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The area is home to thousands of glaciers that are melting at an alarming rate in Central Asia, already hard-hit by climate change.

A glaciologist, Omarova is recording that process — worried about the future.

She hiked six hours to get to the modest triangular-shaped hut that serves as a science station — almost up in the clouds.

“Eight to 10 years ago you could see the glacier with snow,” Omorova said. “But in the last three to four years, it has disappeared completely. There is no snow, no glacier,” she said.

The effects of a warming planet have been particularly visible in Central Asia, which has seen a wave of extreme weather disasters.

The melting of thousands of glaciers is a major threat to people in the landlocked region that already suffers from a shortage of water.

Acting as water towers, glaciers are crucial to the region’s food security and vital freshwater reserves are now dwindling fast.

Equipped with a measuring device, Omorova kneeled over a torrent of melted water, standing on grey-covered ice shimmering in strong sunshine. “We are measuring everything,” she said. “The glaciers cannot regenerate because of rising temperatures.”

A little further on, she points to the shrinking Adygene glacier, saying it has retreated by “around 16 centimetres” every year.

“That’s more than 900 metres since the 1960s,” she said.

The once majestic glacier is only one of thousands in the area that are slowly disappearing.

Between 14 and 30 per cent of glaciers in the Tian-Shan and Pamir — the two main mountain ranges in Central Asia — have melted over the last 60 years, according to a report by the Eurasian Development Bank.

Omorova warned that things are only becoming worse. “The melting is much more intense than in previous years,” she said.

With scientists warning that 2024 is likely to be the hottest year on record, professions like hers have hugely grown in importance. — AFP



Dr Musallam Al Maani

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women

## Embracing AI in higher education: Navigating resistance and enablement

IN over less than a decade, the landscape of higher education has witnessed incredible changes.

This relates to the advancement in artificial intelligence (AI). Higher education institutions (HEIs) and those working in academia have no choice but to acknowledge the invasion of AI, accepting it as a de facto state even though it was improbable to believe in the past.

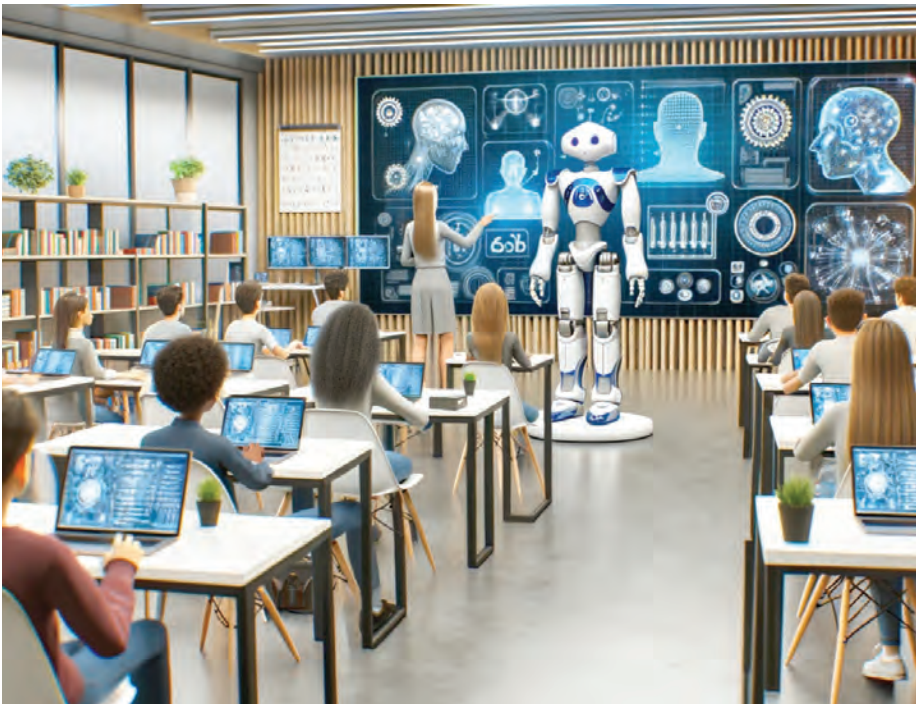
It was beyond our imagination, especially the generation of HEI students of the 1980s and 1990s, that a machine could do what AI does now. To write one paragraph in the 1990s was something produced by exertion and trying, and used to take time to execute. I always bring this example to my students and colleagues.

One of the English Language instructors, Victor Hill, was teaching us a writing course back in 1991 at the University of Salford, UK. We had to go to the library to look into and over references carefully and thoroughly to find and access the information we desperately needed. Then, we had to put down the main idea, and the topic sentence.

And finally, we had to write the concluding sentence. The whole process of writing a paragraph used to take at least a month. Any mistake in writing meant that we had to rewrite everything again and again of course in a new paper.

Crossing out was not acceptable. Then we had to start writing the developers, by strictly adhering to the same procedure. When computers were introduced a year later, Hill mentioned that the students would be spoiled if they did not handwrite their ideas.

Now, we rarely accept handwritten assignments, but we do encourage students to check spelling, and grammatical constructions, and use computers in the maximum possible ways. Having witnessed the changes in the use of computers in education, this story brings to attention two important aspects, namely resistance and enablement.



As humans, we tend to exert force in opposition to new things and occupy an opposing and often antagonistic position towards whatever is new. AI in our case, has come into existence. Instead of looking at the good and helpful results and favourable effects, AI produces to promote our well-being, we should rather search for the points that make achievement through

AI PROVIDES STUDENTS THE MEANS AND OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THEIR JOURNEY IN HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICAL AND EASY

the use of AI difficult.

It is a human inclination to emphasise adverse aspects, conditions, and possibilities or to expect the worst possible outcome, rather than sitting down, feeling, or showing hope for the future, while anticipating the best possible outcome. AI is inevitable. It is not possible to avoid or evade the use of AI in education, nor is it possible to restrain nowadays generations from benefiting from AI.

Although all possible endeavours are nowadays taken to limit, restrict or keep the use of AI under control, younger generations can bypass such restrictions. Soon, such restrictions will pass out of existence. Educational policies need to be revised to address the urgent needs and to allow higher education students to gain the utmost benefits from AI tools. What used to take months to uncover, find, or know, students can get it in the blink of an eye.

AI, without a doubt, provides students with the means and opportunity to make their journey in higher education possible, practical, and easy.

The role of government bodies in charge of HEIs and HEIs themselves is to give legal power, capacity, and sanction to the use of AI. What really matters is to make students focus not only on gaining knowledge as access to knowledge is easier than ever, but on considering the merits and demerits of any piece of information they come across and judge it accordingly.

The students must also exercise as well as be involved in careful judgment and judicious evaluation of information presented to them. This is the real challenge which must be addressed.

Is thinking over-rated?

Thinking is over-rated! Well, that's what I tell many of my English Language and English Literature students. It's not as bad as it sounds though, as the otherwise blasé statement has a caveat. It is always as a consequence of seeing a student, having been given an assignment to write, even with extensive guidance and support... yet will still be found sitting at their desk, a blank page in front of them, fiddling with their pen or sucking on the end of it, staring into the distance, doodling, or just immobile, immovable.

I so frequently offer, "How can I help?" This in preference to a command to "Get writing," or to question their lack of progress. I do want to know and understand why they are not progressing, but I feel the oblique approach, rather than a direct approach, is much less confrontational in that first instance, and therefore will be seen in a much more positive vein.

In any event, the response is almost always identical... "I'm just thinking!" And my rejoinder almost always the aforesaid, "Thinking is over-rated... what you need to be doing is writing." I will go on to explain how doing, writing, activates the genuine writing process. I like to require the students to first write down the task, or the question they are responding to, and then to paraphrase the task as their introduction to their assignment... and they will be, to use a time-worn phrase... off and laughing.

There is a bit of an analogy in rolling a hula-hoop, or getting a cart, or bike going, in that those first couple of turns, are the hardest, and once it gets rolling, there's no stopping it. It's exactly the same with your imagination, and in fact, students who have embraced the method tell me the hardest part is their writing keeping pace with their imagination, which is a great 'problem' to have.

The old way of thinking was to have a basic five steps to quality writing, consisting of brainstorming, drafting, revising, editing and submission, but today, that process has more failings than an ashtray on a Vespa, and is counter-intuitive to contemporary understanding of youth and student



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THINKING IS NOT OVER-RATED, BUT THINKING FOR EFFECT IS RARELY TAUGHT, AND EVEN LESS RARELY TRUSTED

societies, motivations and needs. So, let's look at why the traditional writing may not be effective in meeting classroom assignments and exam question answering requirements. For a start, the process is too unwieldy and time consuming. Test and examination constraints don't genuinely allow sufficient time to effectively implement a five-step process for effective answers. Most test papers don't, physically, offer sufficient space. But most telling is the student and learner feedback that they can't, and probably won't, write or produce, four versions of the same thing. They don't see the point, and having to do something pointless is just another frustration.

Andrew Fowler wrote last year of 600,000 UK students every year being forced into a cognitive pressure-cooker, and questioned the demands and difficulty of exam questions themselves drawn up by examiners making inferences about what is being learned prior to the exams, rather than checking the students' learning. Student feedback to Fowler's study revealed issues with recall, reasoning, and the application of knowledge, and found "compelling reasons, in terms of teaching and learning, improving question design, validity and public confidence in the examination system, to listen to students' views."

We would be better, as a profession, to develop their imaginations, to stretch the way they see questions, and to have faith in their ability to respond to the question from their own perspectives, and write what they think... not what they think a marker wants to see. Writing from that distanced position will only confuse them, in every sense, from spelling and punctuation, to grammar, to tense, to vocabulary, when what is important is how they see the answer in their own words and way.

Thinking is not over-rated, but thinking for effect is rarely taught, and even less rarely trusted... and we do need to empower our kids to trust themselves and their abilities, and then we must trust them, that what they think, they will write. We don't need sycophancy, but we do need vision, enthusiasm and diversity of thought.

STOP CROISIERES!



This photograph shows cruise ship AIDAstella as it is blocked by activists (unseen) from the NGOs 'Stop Croisieres' and 'Extinction Rebellion France' at the northern entrance of Marseille's harbour by riding kayaks in Marseille, southern France, on Saturday, to protest against cruise ships and their environmental impacts and pollution. Around twenty members of the 'Stop Croisieres' and 'Extinction Rebellion France' used a dozen canoes to block the entrance to the cruise terminal in the port of Marseille, to protest against the pollution generated by these ships. – AFP

Only a sustainable bioeconomy can save us

The world economy continues to over-exploit nature, despite being fully dependent on it. It is easy to see why this is unsustainable, especially in light of dangerously escalating climate change. With the biodiversity financing gap estimated to be about \$700-900 billion per year, calls are growing ahead of October's United Nations Biodiversity Conference in Cali, Colombia (COP16) to "invest in nature."

But these well-meaning efforts miss the bigger picture. Investing in nature will not save it so long as the global economy consumes more natural resources than the planet can sustain. It is like trying to shift to a low-carbon economy by using expensive carbon-storage schemes, while simultaneously allowing fossil fuel-intensive industries to emit ever more greenhouse gases. Instead, what is needed is a regenerative global economy that preserves and restores nature and, in so doing, helps the world achieve crucial climate goals. In short, we must work towards a sustainable and equitable bioeconomy.

The bioeconomy comprises a wide range of sectors and business activities. Most obvious are regenerative forms of agriculture, fishing, forestry and aquaculture. There are also many ways that technology is combined with land- and sea-based production, from bio-based plastics to bioenergy



Simon Zadek  
The writer is Co-CEO of NatureFinance

THE KEY TO PRESERVING THE PLANET IS A SUSTAINABLE, EQUITABLE BIOECONOMY THAT PROMOTES SOCIAL INCLUSION, PROVIDES SUSTAINABLE JOBS AND ACCELERATES PROGRESS TOWARDS CLIMATE AND NATURE GOALS

and biopharmaceuticals. Lastly, there are many opportunities to financialise nature's value through high-integrity and equitable nature-based carbon and biodiversity credits.

The potential is enormous. The World Bioeconomy Forum estimates the current value of the global bioeconomy at \$4 trillion, with some projections showing that this could rise to \$30 trillion or more by 2050. But the bioeconomy is not automatically sustainable or equitable. It can destroy nature, such as through overfishing and deforestation. Similarly, it can deepen inequalities: land grabs by foreign investors have already been reported, leaving nature-rich countries and local communities in the Global South worse off.

For example, one major question on the biodiversity agenda is how to ensure fair sharing of the profits earned from the digital sequencing of genetic resources. DNA sequence data — called "digital sequence information" (DSI) in policy circles — have revolutionised the life sciences and are fuelling innovation in sectors such as food security, medicine, green energy and biodiversity conservation. Open access to the Sars-CoV-2 viral sequences was

partly responsible for the rapid development of diagnostic kits and vaccines.

DSI also has many commercial applications and offers new opportunities for economic development. It is promising that negotiators recently agreed on a draft recommendation for operationalising the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from DSI, including the creation of a global fund, to be considered at COP16.

Brazil, in its current role as G20 president, has taken the lead in advancing an equitable, sustainable bioeconomy. This includes establishing the G20 Initiative on Bioeconomy, which recently defined ten voluntary high-level principles that will help policymakers cultivate a bioeconomy that promotes social

inclusion, provides sustainable jobs and accelerates progress towards climate and nature goals. There are high hopes that Brazil will continue this work during its presidency of the UN Climate Change Conference in 2025, and that South Africa will advance a similar agenda when it assumes the G20 presidency at the end of the year.

Several steps can be taken now to facilitate investment in the bioeconomy. Creating common measurement standards and natural capital accounting could help agencies like UN Trade and Development and the World Trade Organization improve bio-trade arrangements and address subsidy problems. Nature pricing could help drive investment by increasing the economic value of a sustainable bioeconomy.

Devising trade and investment rules, addressing data shortfalls and ensuring systematic analysis are vital for developing a robust bioeconomy. Regional groups such as the European Union and the African Union are well-positioned to begin implementing these changes.

Developing a successful bioeconomy requires an integrated approach, and that starts with enabling policies. Regenerative agriculture, like bioplastics and bioenergy, struggles to compete with carbon-intensive alternatives that often receive significant subsidies. "Bio-businesses" that rely heavily on technology need a supportive ecosystem of business partnerships, research and innovation, regulation, and public financing that is often lacking in low- and middle-income countries.

Such challenges make it harder for Global South countries to advance value-adding sectors that sustainably use their natural assets. Moreover, while several governments are increasingly developing bioeconomy strategies, sovereign-debt crises, and the resulting fiscal pressures, are often a barrier to unlocking domestic public finance or crowding in private investment.

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The current value of the global bioeconomy is estimated at \$4 trillion.

# sport

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## Malaysia edge Oman in the opener of AFC U20 Asian Cup Qualifiers

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Oman suffered a 2-0 defeat against Malaysia in the opening match of Group E at the AFC U20 Asian Cup 2025 Qualifiers. The victory meant three-time runners-up Malaysia managed to secure three crucial winning points in the opener while junior Red Warriors missed the opportunity to commence with a strong start.

At the Republican Central Stadium in Dushanbe, Malaysian defender Moses Raj put his team in the lead in the 31st minute. Oman's players worked hard to score the equaliser in the remaining minutes of the first half but it ended with Malaysian leading by 1-0. Malaysia's junior star Mohammed Haikel doubled the lead from

a penalty shootout in the 66th minute to make it 2-0 before Majid al Farsi reduced the gap to one goal as he netted the first goal from penalty shootout to end the match at 2-1 for Malaysia.

The game started with both teams seeking a win but it was the Malaysian side that created continuous attacks in the first half. Half an hour after several attacks, Malaysian players managed to break the deadlock as Moses Raj received a perfect crossball from Mohammed Haikel and he benefited from the defending mistake to score the opening goal in the 31st minute. Oman's attackers worked hard to return to the game and to score the equaliser. Faisal was very close to scoring as he entered the box but his ball was saved by Malaysian



goalie Mohammed Ameen in the dying minutes of the first half.

In the second half, Oman head coach Ahmed al Alawi entered with a different style as Oman's players pressed very hard towards the Malaysian side. Faisal al Hadidi was the active man in the front side but his attempts were blocked and prevented by the strong Malaysian defending line beside the top performance of the Malaysian goalkeeper Ameen. In the 65th minute, the referee Venkatesh Ramachandran decided for a penalty after Haikel fell after a tough interaction with Abdullah al Mamari and Adnan al Mushaifri. Mohammed Haikel

converted the penalty into a goal in the 66th minute to extend the lead to 2-0. The response of Omani players was more after the goal as they tried to reduce the scoring gap.

The referee of the match Ramachandran announced another penalty spot for Oman and it was converted to a goal by Mahid al Farsi in the 88th minute. The referee announced seven minutes as additional time but it was not enough to score the equaliser as the game ended for Malaysia by 2-1.

Oman will meet Sri Lanka on Wednesday while Malaysia will take on North Korea on Monday.

## Seeb defeat Nizwa in Credit Oman Cup

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Seeb Club defeated Nizwa Club with a score of 70-57 in the Credit Oman Basketball Cup 2024. The match, held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, saw Seeb win the three quarters, while Nizwa managed to win the final quarter.

Seeb started the match well, taking the lead with a three-pointer from player Rashid al Zuhaihi. Nizwa responded with a free throw point from Saif al Toubi. After several attacks, Seeb added two points through Abdulrahman al Shaibi, extending the lead to 5-1. Nizwa managed to narrow the gap with a three-pointer, and both teams continued to exchange attacks. Seeb scored 12 more points while Nizwa added 6, ending the first quarter with Seeb leading 17-10.

In the second quarter, the gameplay pattern remained unchanged as Seeb continued to dominate. Marwan al Hadidi scored a basket, making the score 19-10. Nizwa's Saif al Toubi responded with a two-pointer. Seeb then doubled the gap to 30-16, before Nizwa's Mohammed al Wahaibi reduced the score. The first half ended with Seeb leading 32-18.

The third quarter witnessed an exchange of points between the two teams, as Mohammed al Wahaibi managed to score two points for Nizwa, and



Marwan al Hadidi responded for Seeb. Despite a three-pointer from Musab al Wahaibi, Seeb maintained their advantage, taking a 36-23 lead. Both teams continued exchanging attacks, and the third quarter concluded with Seeb ahead 52-30.

In the fourth quarter, Nizwa attempted to close the gap, scoring 5 points, while Seeb responded with 2, keeping their lead at 54-35. Seeb's Rashid al Wahaibi extended the lead with a three-pointer, but Nizwa's Akram al Rashidi answered back with 4 points, followed by 2 points from Mohammed al Wahaibi, reducing the gap to 41-57.

Abdulrahman al Shaibi of Seeb then responded with 5 points, pushing the score to 62-41. Nizwa countered with 4 points, narrowing the gap. The match ended with both teams exchanging points, sealing Seeb's victory over Nizwa with a final score of 70-57.

## Ibri and Al Rustaq share points; Seeb outclass Al Khabourah

AHMED AL KAABI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

A thrilling match between Ibri and Al Rustaq ended in a 1-1 draw on Friday at Al Rustaq Sports Complex Stadium. The match was part of the fifth round of Oman's Football League. The draw raised both teams' points to four in the league standings. Al Rustaq are in eighth place on goal difference, while Ibri is in ninth place.

The game started strong with Ibri launching aggressive attacks. In the 4th minute, Augustine threatened Al Rustaq's goal with a shot but the goalkeeper managed to save it. Ibri continued their offensive efforts until Abdulaziz al Mandhari opened the scoring in the 18th minute after a well-coordinated play left him in front of the goal. Al Rustaq tried to make a comeback and had several chances the most notable being a header from Douglas in the 20th minute which narrowly missed the target. Just before the end of the first half, the referee disallowed a goal for Al Rustaq due to a foul on one of their players, leaving Ibri leading 1-0 at halftime.

In the second half, Al Rustaq imposed its control in search of equalising the score, while Ibri tried to maintain its lead. In the 62nd minute, Al Rustaq managed to score the equaliser through its player Musab al Shaqsi after a series of successive attacks. Despite the many opportunities that were available to both teams, neither team succeeded in achieving victory.

**SEEB DOMINATE AL KHABOURAH**

Seeb claimed a resounding 4-0 victory over Al Khabourah in a match played at Seeb Sports Stadium. With this victory, Seeb raised its score to 15 points to return to the top of



the standings, while Al Khabourah's score froze at 6 points in sixth place. Muscat-based team dominated the first half and opened the scoring in the 22nd minute through Abdulaziz al Muqballi after a perfect pass from Ahmed al Khamisi. Seeb continued its offensive pressure until it obtained a penalty kick in the 25th minute after Zaher al Aghbari was obstructed, but Omar al Malki missed the opportunity after Al Khabourah's goalkeeper saved the kick. Despite Al Khabourah's timid attempts, Seeb maintained its lead to end the first half with a clean goal.

In the second half, Al Khabourah's performance improved, and had some opportunities without being able to score. As time passed, Seeb regained control and added the second goal in the 78th minute through

Jameel al Yahmadi, after a low shot that hit one of the defenders and settled in the net. In the 87th minute, Ali al Busaidi scored the third goal after exploiting a mistake by Al Khabourah's goalkeeper. With the start of stoppage time, Abdulrahman al Mushaifri managed to score the fourth goal with a distinctive header after a cross from Ali al Busaidi.

**SAHAM DEFEAT AL NASR**

Saham achieved an important victory over Al Nasr with a score of 2-1, in the match that was held at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium. With this victory, Saham raised its score to 7 points, equal to Al Nasr, which maintains fourth place on goal difference, while Saham occupied fifth place.

# Walkathon to support cancer patients on Oct 29

MUSCAT: The Oman Cancer Association (OCA) revealed the details of its 20th Annual Walkathon which will take place on October 29. The details of the Walkathon event which aimed to support cancer patients during a press conference held at the headquarters of the Oman Cancer Association in the presence of the association's board of directors and a number of media professionals, members and interested parties. The OCA organises the annual walkathon, which is an inspiring and impactful event where thousands of participants from all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman gather to participate in this charitable event, with the aim of spreading awareness and supporting cancer patients.

Dr Wahid al Kharusi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Cancer



Association, welcomed the attendees, stating that the annual walkathon in support of cancer patients is an important event in strengthening social bonds and raising awareness on the importance of early detection of cancer and appropriate

treatment. Thousands of people of different ages and backgrounds come together to participate in a group walk to raise awareness and funds to support research and development of treatments. The walkathon is usually organised



in large cities and include events such as competitions, children's entertainment, food, shopping and other activities that bring families and friends together in an atmosphere of fun and solidarity. He stressed that the walkathon is an opportunity

for patients and their families to connect with the community and share their experiences and success stories in facing this disease. These events also enhance the positive spirit and optimism among the participants. Al Kharusi revealed the new location of the event, this time it will be held at the Oman Automobile Association instead of Al Qurum Natural Park, where the Walkathon has been known to be held.

The Walkathon is set on a specific path that the participants walk down together, carrying symbols of hope and courage. Participation in this march is an opportunity for individuals to stand together and be a part of an awareness campaign that urges support for cancer patients. He also pointed out that the unisex t-shirt designed for the event will feature the walkathon logo

prominently displayed.

Then, Sameh al Dahshan, media adviser to the Oman Cancer Association, explained the slogan, which is (No one fights alone), as this event is an opportunity for everyone to participate in a noble endeavour to combat cancer and raise awareness of the importance of early detection and proper treatment. By participating in this walk, the spirit of solidarity and cooperation is enhanced, and individuals are motivated to take positive steps to maintain their health and prevent this deadly disease. OCA's Annual Walkathon reflects the spirit of resistance, challenge and hope. Seeing thousands of individuals walking side by side, expressing their solidarity and support for cancer patients, inspires us and reminds us of the importance of spiritual strength in facing challenges.



England's Harry Brook with teammates. — Reuters

## England bowl as heavyweight trio return for Australia in 2nd ODI

LEEDS: England captain Harry Brook won the toss and elected to field in the second one-day international against Australia at his Headingley home ground on Saturday.

England, looking to level this five-match series at 1-1 after a thumping seven-wicket loss at Trent Bridge on Thursday, made one change with fast bowler Olly Stone replacing rested express quick Jofra Archer.

World champions Australia, who made it 13 ODI wins in a row in Nottingham despite fielding a weakened team due to illness, recalled three senior players in fast bowlers Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc, as well as star all-rounder Glenn Maxwell, with pacemen Sean Abbott and Ben Dwarshuis, alongside Cameron Green, making way.

"It's always nice to try and put pressure on with the ball and try to chase them," said Yorkshire batsman Brook at the toss.

England were criticised for the slap-dash way they lost wickets to Australia's spinners on Thursday but Brook insisted there would be no deviating from their aggressive approach to batting, saying:

"Exactly the same, keep coming, potentially come harder, put pressure on their bowling unit and carry the momentum from the first part of the last game's innings into today (Saturday)." — AFP

## India hold upper hand despite Bangladesh chase in first Test



CHENNAI: Centuries from Shubman Gill and Rishabh Pant helped India close in on victory in the first Test despite a spirited start to Bangladesh's chase for their target of 515 in Chennai on Saturday.

Bangladesh started briskly but lost wickets to reach 158-4 when bad light stopped play on day three, with the visitors still needing 357 for a win.

India earlier declared their second innings on 287-4.

Pant, who made 109, and Gill, unbeaten on 119, put on 167 runs for the fourth wicket

to ram home India's advantage in the second session after they bundled out Bangladesh for 149 on day two.

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was unbeaten on 51 at the close of play, with Shakib Al Hasan on five.

India were hitting Bangladesh with some "quality bowling", Bangladesh batting coach David Hemp told reporters.

"Very confident side, especially at home, so you are going to be challenged," he said.

"So it's a case of how do we

match that. You have to look to score and that's what we just reinforce... to the batting group, to trust their strengths."

India spinner Ravichandran Ashwin took three wickets to add to his 113 with the bat in his team's first innings total of 376. Bangladesh openers Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam began briskly with 62 runs for the first wicket before Jasprit Bumrah ended their defiant stand to send back Zakir for 33.

Ashwin dismissed Shadman for 35.

The veteran off-spinner kept

up the charge when he bowled left-handed Mominul Haque for 13 with a flighted delivery that also turned. He then had Mushfiquur Rahim caught out, also for 13.

Najmul stood firm to reach his fifty and, with fellow left-hander Shakib for company, the two saw off the day in fading light.

**CONQUERING SPIN**

The left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman Pant earlier smashed the Bangladesh bowlers to all parts of the ground before a

double off Shakib gave him his sixth Test century.

The 26-year-old, who survived a near-fatal car crash in December 2022, took off his helmet and raised his bat to acknowledge a standing ovation from the crowd.

Pant fell caught and bowled by spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz after his 128-ball knock that included 13 fours and four sixes. Gill kept up the charge and raised his fifth Test ton before skipper Rohit Sharma called him and KL Rahul, on 22, back. — AFP



## Kasatkina to face Haddad Maia in Korea Open final

SEOUL: Russia's top seed Daria Kasatkina will face Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia in Sunday's Korea Open final after both came through their semi-finals in straight sets.

Kasatkina beat compatriot Diana Shnaider 6-3, 6-4 on a busy Saturday in Seoul that saw all the quarter-finals and semi-finals played because rain had washed out the previous day's entire schedule.

Number three seed Haddad Maia beat Russia's Veronika Kudermetova 6-4, 6-4 to reach her second final in three tournaments.

Kasatkina came through her quarter-final when Britain's Emma Raducanu retired with an injured foot after losing the opening set.

Shnaider also needed medical attention during the semi-final, but Kasatkina kept her cool to



Russia's Daria Kasatkina. — AFP

win a semi-final that saw 11 breaks of serve overall.

"To reach the final at a tournament is always a great feeling -- it means that you have done good through all the



Brazil's Beatriz Haddad Maia. — AFP

week," said Kasatkina, the world number 13.

"I'm really happy to be in the final again. I'm taking as much time as I can here in Seoul."

Haddad Maia made her

experience count in a 6-2, 6-1 quarter-final win over Polina Kudermetova that earned her a semi-final against her beaten opponent's older sister.

Haddad Maia again came out

on top despite another day of challenging weather conditions in the South Korean capital.

"During the last four days we had different type of conditions," said world number 17 Haddad Maia. "Today was very windy and the wind was changing direction so it wasn't easy. A lot of days were hot, also humidity."

Kasatkina and Haddad Maia have faced each other three times previously, with the Brazilian winning two of those encounters.

Kasatkina won their most recent meeting, in the semi-finals in Abu Dhabi in February.

"I'm happy that I could find myself in this match," Haddad Maia said after beating Kudermetova.

"I improved a little bit my game from the first match I had today so I'm happy. Tomorrow I have another opportunity to do it better." — AFP



# JACKSON DOUBLE FIRES CHELSEA TO VICTORY AT WOEFUL WEST HAM

**LONDON:** Nicolas Jackson fired Chelsea to a 3-0 win against West Ham as the Senegal striker repaid his manager's faith with a decisive double at the London Stadium on Saturday.

Jackson struck twice in the first half before Cole Palmer wrapped up Chelsea's third win in five Premier League games under new boss Enzo Maresca.

It was a well-timed brace from Jackson, who was Chelsea's first choice striker by Maresca on Friday, despite Christopher Nkunku's match-winning impact against Bournemouth last weekend.

Although Jackson signed a contract extension earlier in September that will keep the Senegal star at Stamford Bridge until 2033, there were calls for Nkunku to start after the French forward came off the bench to net in the 1-0 win at Bournemouth.

Jackson scored 17 goals in an inconsistent debut season with the Blues and was guilty of missing a number of big chances. But the 23-year-old has been in fine form at the start of this season and already has four goals in six games in all competitions.

Chelsea have won all three away league games this season, losing only once, against champions Manchester City, in their five top-flight matches.

Despite a reported power struggle between Chelsea co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali behind the scenes, former Leicester boss Maresca, who replaced Mauricio Pochettino in the close-season, has made a strong first impression.

After disappointing sixth and 12th place finishes in the last two seasons, there are encouraging signs that the Italian could be the manager to turn Chelsea's expensively assembled squad of underachievers into top four contenders.

The Hammers' dismal start to the season has already put new boss Julen Lopetegui under pressure, with the former Spain and Real Madrid boss jeered by the few frustrated fans who hadn't fled the ground well before the final whistle.

West Ham have won just one

of their five Premier League games this term, losing three in a row at home to start a league campaign for the first time.

## RAMPANT CHELSEA

Chelsea made a flying start after just four minutes when West Ham switched off at a free-kick, allowed Jackson to take Jadon Sancho's pass and surge down the right flank.

Jackson cut into the penalty area and beat Alphonse Areola's weak attempted save with ease.

It was Chelsea's earliest goal in a Premier League London derby since Daniel Sturridge netted against QPR in 2012.

Jackson was proving impossible for West Ham to subdue and he teed up Cole Palmer for a low strike that flashed just wide.

Chelsea's pressure was relentless and there was a sense of inevitability about their second goal in the 18th minute.

At the climax of a free-flowing move, Moises Caicedo produced a deft pass that pierced the West Ham defence, allowing Jackson to guide a composed finished past Areola.

Jarrod Bowen summed up West Ham's sluggish start with a woeful shot that ballooned over from a good position.

Making his first league start for West Ham after his close-season move from Leeds, Crysencio Summerville demanded a penalty after Wesley Fofana's tug sent him sprawling, but VAR rejected the forward's appeals.

Lopetegui was furious with West Ham's lethargy and responded by hauling off Argentina midfielder Guido Rodríguez before half-time.

But Rodriguez's replacement Thomas Soucek hardly improved Lopetegui's mood when he wastefully fired straight at Chelsea keeper Robert Sanchez.

Sancho looked revitalised following his loan from Manchester United, causing problems with his nimble dribbling in his first Premier League start since May 2023.

Palmer killed off West Ham in the 47th minute as the England forward took Jackson's pass and slotted past Areola from a tight angle. — AFP



Chelsea's Nicolas Jackson in action with West Ham United's Lucas Paqueta and Jarrod Bowen. – REUTERS

# BUSINESS

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## Duqm SEZ records 55% jump in investments to reach RO 6 billion

**BUSINESS REPORTER**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

**THE** TOTAL cumulative investment in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) rose by the end of June to RO 6 billion, compared to RO 3.865 billion in June of the previous year, reflecting a 55 per cent year-on-year growth. This growth coincides with the start of operations of the Duqm Refinery and several other economic projects in the zone.

Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, CEO of SEZAD, stated that this increase demonstrates the significant interest from both local and international companies as the zone intensifies its efforts to attract more investments.

He noted that several new agreements were signed across various economic sectors during the first half of this year.

In an interview, Eng Akaak highlighted several major strategic investments in the green industries sector, with some projects entering the construction phase or nearing final design. These include the



Duqm Refinery

*These strategic investments include the Vulcan Green Steel, the HYPOR Duqm project, the Green Hydrogen project (ACME), and the joint venture between Japan's Kobe Steel and Mitsui & Co., Ltd. to establish a direct reduced iron (DRI) plant*

Vulcan Green Steel, the HYPOR Duqm project, the Green Hydrogen project (ACME), and the joint venture between Japan's Kobe Steel and Mitsui & Co., Ltd. to establish a direct reduced iron (DRI) plant.

Eng Akaak explained that these projects will reinforce Duqm's position as a leader in green industries and contribute to Oman's goal of achieving carbon neutrality

by 2050. He also mentioned that the SEZAD continues to receive investment requests from global companies, with each proposal being reviewed in coordination with relevant authorities to assess the potential added value.

Regarding the SEZAD's efforts to improve services for investors in collaboration with other government entities, Eng Akaak stated that the SEZAD implemented the Cabinet's decision during the first half of this year to oversee and manage municipal services and public utilities in areas designated for public use within the master plan of the SEZAD.

This initiative aims to boost development and activate various economic sectors within the zone.

He further explained that the SEZAD has completed preparations to assume responsibility for licensing and technical affairs services, with the training of employees on delivering these services. The total area of the plots designated for public use within the SEZAD's master plan amounts to 33 square kilometres, distributed across nine different plots, including Saay neighbourhood.

These areas are allocated for various commercial, industrial, and residential purposes, in addition to investment zones in commercial, industrial, tourism, logistics, real estate development and renewable energy sectors.

The SEZAD began providing the necessary services to these areas during the second half of the year.

Eng Akaak also expressed satisfaction with the progress of the ongoing projects within the SEZAD.

He emphasised that the first half of this year witnessed the official inauguration of several significant economic projects, most notably the Duqm Refinery, which was inaugurated under the patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. The refinery, one of the Zone's largest projects, is expected to transform Duqm into a leading energy hub in the region.

With a production capacity of 230,000 barrels per day, the refinery will increase Oman's refining capacity to approximately 500,000 barrels per day.

## Oman's green hydrogen sector to spur local industrialisation: IRENA

**CONRAD PRABHU**  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The potential for Oman's mega-scale green hydrogen sector to ignite the growth of adjacent industries has been highlighted by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) in a new report.

Titled 'Shaping Sustainable International Hydrogen Value Chains', the report sheds light on, among other things, the potential socio-economic benefits for countries embarking on energy transitions powered by green hydrogen.

Citing Oman's green hydrogen strategy, as outlined by Hydrom – the orchestrator and master-planner of the sector – IRENA stated: "In the latest strategy, Oman foresees green hydrogen as a catalyst for significant local industrialisation, as well as substantial local production of various raw materials and components.

Furthermore, the transition will spur new industries, including local manufacturing of solar panels, wind turbines and electrolyzers, supporting green steel and e-fuel production." Importantly, this industrial



Oman plans to develop an integrated green hydrogen ecosystem (Picture courtesy: Hydrom)

expansion will not only drive the development of green hydrogen but also stimulate adjacent industries - from mining to green steel production - resulting in "positive feedback loops," according to the Abu Dhabi based body.

"For example the growth of the mining sector, powered by renewable energy is seen to support the renewable energy value chain. In agriculture, excess electricity and water trickling from green hydrogen production is seen to boost output, enabling increased crop and cattle production.

These developments are set to enhance Oman's business ecosystem, driving economic diversification

and sustainability," it added.

An updated version of Oman's Green Hydrogen Strategy, published in May this year, affirms a commitment to In Country Value (ICV) and domestic industry developments as key national goals.

It stresses, in particular, the potential for spurring localisation of key industries and forward connected industries in existing and new industrial zones.

For example, massive quantities of hydrogen assets – an estimated 300 million solar panels, over 10,000 wind turbines and 5,200 electrolyzers - are envisaged for installation as part of the upstream components of the green hydrogen projects set to come up in Oman over the next 25 years through to 2050.

This mammoth requirement opens up short-term opportunities for the localisation of, for example, wind turbine manufacturing of components (tower segments and blades), iron ore pellet and hot-briquetted iron production, solar PV assembly, electrolyser assembly and logistic solutions, services and infrastructure.



### TENDER

Manah Power Plant, operating by Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company (GPDC), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

| Tender Number | Tender Name                      | Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents | Last Date for Proposal Submission | Tender Fee (OMR)                     |
|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| GPDC/2024/02  | Gas Turbines Capital Spares Sets | 26 September 2024                            | 14 October 2024                   | 100/- Plus VAT Total amount: 105 OMR |

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee" and the envelope shall be marked with the tender name & number. No indication or reference about the bidder is permitted on the envelope.
- Three separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these three envelopes must be marked with the tenderer name and number as per the below:
  - Commercial Proposal
  - Technical Proposal
  - Bid Bond
- The original hard copy of bid bonds should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception before 02.00 pm, time of the Sultanate of Oman, on Monday 14 October 2024.
- Each bid should be accompanied by bid bond, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of GPDC. Bids that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- Interested party must deposit the tender fee (Non-Refundable) to the following account:  
Bank Name: Bank Muscat - Account Name: Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company - Account No: 0423011069510017
- Ensure to mention the bidder's name and tender number. Tender Documents will be received via email upon receipt of the fee.
- The deposit on the last day of purchasing of the tender documents should be before 02.00 pm.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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BUSINESS

OMAN CHARTS PATH FOR ENERGY TRANSFORMATION

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, in collaboration with various government and private entities, is spearheading the development of a comprehensive energy transformation strategy for Oman. This initiative aims to support the country's economic growth objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040 and achieve

net-zero carbon neutrality by 2050.

The strategy is anchored on several key pillars: enhancing energy efficiency, expanding renewable energy, developing a hydrogen economy, and advancing carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS).

The plan is guided by five core principles: ensuring energy



supply security, facilitating an organised transition to decarbonisation, building local capabilities for energy transformation, establishing a low-carbon economy, and maintaining Oman's competitive edge in the global energy market.

Maryam bint Mohammed al Hashimiyah, Director of Electricity and Energy Efficiency

Policies and Strategies, emphasised that the strategy's primary goal is to provide the energy necessary for growth across various economic sectors while supporting the nation's economic diversification efforts, reducing carbon emissions, creating jobs and building a skilled national workforce.

— ONA

TENDER FLOATED FOR SPACE ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME



The Space Accelerator Programme will support entrepreneurs and space sector SMEs.

HIBBA AL KINDI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has unveiled a tender for the development of a space accelerator programme. Overseen by the National Centre for Space, Advanced Technology and AI, the tender is open to local and international companies specialising in accelerators within the space industry. Through the programme, the Ministry aims to enhance economic growth in the space sector and increase its contribution to the national GDP. This is in addition to supporting entrepreneurs and local startups in the sector by providing resources, funding, and guidance to startups and small and medium-sized enterprises, to help them expand and bring innovative products to the local and global markets.

According to the Ministry, the programme will focus on various activities in the space sector including communications, earth observation, geospatial analytics, drones, artificial intelligence and machine learning, big data processing, data storage and preservation, space sustainability, and spacecraft simulation. The programme is part of the country's wider plan of boosting the space sector. In 2023, the Ministry unveiled the National Executive Programme detailing a 10 year plan aimed at growing the sector. Speaking to the Observer earlier this year, Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology unveiled that investments in the sector amounted to RO 20 million since the programme's launch.

Tender documents are available for collection until September 22, 2024, while the deadline for submitting bids is October 20, 2024.

Oman-Malaysia symposium drives healthcare innovation

JOMAR MENDOZA  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

**THE** Malaysia-Oman Medical Symposium 2024 was held yesterday, September 21, at the W Hotel, uniting healthcare professionals from Oman and Malaysia in a collaborative effort to enhance healthcare services in both nations. With a focus on knowledge sharing, the symposium aims to address pressing healthcare challenges and explore innovative solutions that can benefit Omani patients.

The event, attended by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary for Planning and Health Organisation at the Ministry of Health of Oman, and Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia to Oman, underscores the growing relationship between the two countries in the healthcare sector.

The symposium is set to become a cornerstone for future partnerships in clinical practice and medical research.

The symposium's opening session featured remarks by Dr Mohamed Ali Abu Bakar, CEO of the Malaysian Healthcare Travel Council, who highlighted the shared commitment of both nations to improving healthcare standards. "This symposium is more than an event; it is a bridge connecting Malaysia's healthcare expertise with Oman's growing medical landscape," said Dr Mohamed Ali.

He praised Oman's efforts to enhance its healthcare infrastructure and expressed Malaysia's eagerness to support this vision through strategic collaborations. Malaysia's healthcare system, known for its international recognition and affordability, offers a unique model that Oman can learn from to improve patient care and expand its medical services.



The event, attended by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary for Planning and Health Organisation at the Ministry of Health of Oman, and Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia to Oman, underscores the growing relationship between the two countries in the healthcare sector.

The symposium covered a range of medical specialties, including oncology, fertility, nuclear medicine, and robotic surgery, with dedicated panel discussions on primary healthcare and women & children's health. Experts from both countries shared insights on the latest medical advancements and discussed ways to integrate these innovations into the Omani healthcare system.

Dr Qasim al Salmi, Director-General of Planning at the Ministry of Health of Oman, noted that such exchanges are vital for enhancing local medical practices. "Learning from Malaysia's successes in healthcare not only broadens our perspectives but also inspires us to adopt best practices that can improve healthcare delivery in Oman," he said.

The Malaysia-Oman Medical Symposium 2024 is a testament to Oman's commitment to advancing its healthcare sector. By bringing together top experts from Malaysia, the event provides Omani healthcare professionals with valuable exposure to new techniques and medical innovations. This knowledge transfer is crucial for empowering Oman's healthcare workers and elevating the quality of care provided to patients.

Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia, reiterated the importance of these collaborative efforts. "Our shared goal is to create sustainable partnerships that address the healthcare needs of both nations. The symposium sets the stage for ongoing dialogue and cooperation that will benefit our healthcare systems for years to come," he said.

FDO's presence at Russian expo strengthens Oman's position as fisheries hub

HIBBA AL KINDI  
MUSCAT, SEPT 21

Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) – the Omani government's fisheries investment arm – says its participation in the Fishery Forum & Seafood Expo in Russia last week has helped solidify Oman's potential as a key fisheries and aquaculture investment hub.

In a statement, Investments Director at FDO, Salim al Maamari, commented, "Our participation this year was a resounding success. We had the opportunity to engage with numerous potential partners and investors, further elevating Oman's reputation as a major fish producer and exporter.

The event reinforced our commitment to sustainability and highlighted our innovative investments in aquaculture and fishing technologies, setting the stage for future growth.

The event reinforced our commitment to sustainability and highlighted our innovative investments in aquaculture and fishing technologies, setting the stage for future growth.



FDO team at the 7th Fishery Forum & Seafood Expo in St Petersburg, Russia.

ting the stage for future growth." Business Intelligence Lead at FDO, Sultana al Jardani added, "The level of interest in Oman's fisheries sector was overwhelming. This platform allowed us to present Oman's diverse marine resources and showcase the tremendous potential for international partnerships.

The response from global

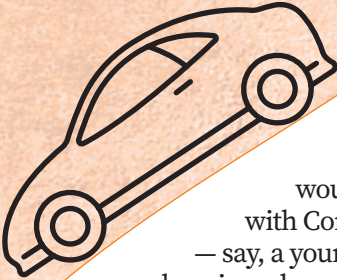
stakeholders was incredibly positive, and we anticipate fruitful collaborations that will drive sustainable growth in the sector."

**SHOWCASING**

The Expo, held in St Petersburg, Russia, from September 17 to 19 attracted over 30,000 visitors from over 70 countries, in addition to various industry leaders, traders and global investors.

Showcasing their products and services at the expo were five FDO subsidiaries, including SIMAK, the largest tuna and sardine canning factory in the MENA region with an annual capacity of 100 million cans per year, demonstrating its products and eco-friendly practices. According to FDO officials, the company attracted interest from European buyers seeking sustainably sourced products and white labelling opportunities.

# IS IT BETTER TO BUY OR LEASE A CAR



**MOST PEOPLE** have two options when they want a new car: buy it with a traditional loan or lease it. Either can make sense, depending on your personal situation. If you're looking for the lowest overall cost over the longer term, buying a car with a loan, and then driving it for a while debt free after you finish making payments, is usually the best option. But if low monthly payments and a smaller down payment are a priority, a lease may be worth considering. And if you're willing to try an electric vehicle or a plug-in hybrid, tax breaks available for leased models may make deals more affordable. Almost half of new EVs were acquired with leases in the second quarter of this year, up from around a fourth a year earlier, according to data from Experian. The Federal Reserve's decision on Wednesday to cut its benchmark rate by half a point indirectly affects rates on car loans, which are also influenced by factors like the borrower's credit score and the level of loan delinquencies. The average interest rate for a new-car loan in August was 7.1%, and 11.3% for a used-car loan, according to the automotive site Edmunds.

"It will take a number of additional rate cuts before the cumulative effect becomes material for car buyers," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate. Paying cash for your car is, of course, interest free. But while car prices have eased somewhat, they remain high. The average transaction price in July was around \$48,000 for a new car, and about \$25,000 for a used car, according to Kelly Blue Book, part of Cox Automotive. Most people who buy a new automobile and many who buy one used get some kind of financing. With a traditional loan, you make a down payment and then pay off the debt with fixed monthly payments over time. (The average new-car loan term is about six years.) When the loan is repaid, you can keep the car and drive it payment free or trade it in and get credit for its value toward your next car purchase.

With a lease, you're essentially paying for the car's depreciation — the difference between the car's value at the beginning and end of the lease. Down payments and monthly payments on a lease are usually lower, but when the lease ends after two or three years, you haven't built up any equity to help you acquire your next car.

Ivan Drury, senior manager of insights at Edmunds.com, ran an analysis for The New York Times that illustrates the difference between traditional financing and leasing for a popular car model.

Consider a 2025 Toyota Camry SE sedan, purchased for about \$40,910 (including taxes, fees and any add-ons, like extended warranties), with a down payment of \$3,365 and a loan through the dealership of \$37,545, paid over 72 months at 7.4% interest. The final cost to the buyer after paying off the loan, Drury's calculation shows, would be about \$50,161. The car's estimated value after six years would be \$14,623.

Lease terms are typically shorter than traditional loans. So to arrive at a rough comparison over six years, Drury ran the lease calculation as if the shopper had taken out two consecutive 36-month leases on the same terms, with a down payment of \$1,729 and \$33,390 (roughly the amount the car is expected to depreciate in value plus taxes, fees and any add-ons) financed at 7.4%. The final cost in this scenario, which leaves the driver with no equity in the car after six years, would be \$5,908 higher than traditional loan financing when factoring in equity earned with the loan option. But monthly payments for the lease would be \$528, compared with \$650 for the loan. Ben Preston, an automotive writer with Consumer Reports, said that can make a difference to shoppers on a strict budget — say, a young couple needing a bigger car to accommodate a growing family. But if you're choosing a lease just to get a fancy car that you couldn't otherwise afford, he said, you may want to reconsider. "Think about what you need versus what you want," he said.

Buying a used Camry is the overall cheapest option, Drury's analysis shows. The interest rate on a loan for a 2021 Camry is higher but the amount financed is lower and you build equity in the car, so the total cost is under \$32,000. The downside? You'll have potentially higher maintenance and repair costs as the car ages, and you won't have the most up-to-date safety features. And that's something to think about, particularly if a teenager new to driving will be behind the wheel.

Also, leases have requirements that can add to your costs if you're not careful, said Charlie Chesbrough, a senior economist at Cox Automotive. A lease may not be ideal if you drive long distances, for instance, because they have mileage caps — say, 15,000 miles per year. If you exceed the limit, you may owe fees of 15 to 30 cents for each extra mile. You could also be charged fees for excess "wear and tear," he said, so you must be careful about how you use the vehicle, particularly if it's a pickup truck. A couple of minor dings probably won't cost you. "But if it looks like you've been throwing cinder blocks into the back, that's a different story," Chesbrough said.

If you're considering leasing an electric vehicle or a plug-in hybrid, you could make lower payments because of a quirk in the "clean vehicle" tax breaks created by the Inflation Reduction Act. The law created a tax credit of up to \$7,500 for the purchase of a new EV, but it can be hard to qualify because of income limits and other complex criteria, including where the car was manufactured and the source of components used in the car's battery. Leases, however, are considered "commercial" transactions, so most of those restrictions don't apply, Chesbrough said.

— The New York Times

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OPINION

AI’s potential to transform and disrupt - or damage - the economy



STEFANO VIRGILLI  
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

IT’S been a whirlwind 660 days since ChatGPT was first unveiled to the public. The initial release captivated the world with its ability to generate human-like text, but that was just the beginning.

Subsequent releases have introduced groundbreaking features such as code interpretation and execution, plugin support, and a vastly expanded context window allowing for deeper, more nuanced interactions.

The hype surrounding AI has translated into substantial investment. Global AI funding is projected to reach staggering heights, with venture capitalists, tech giants and governments pouring billions into the sector. The United States and China lead the charge, while companies like OpenAI, DeepMind and Anthropic have emerged as major recipients of this funding wave.

As AI continues its relentless advance, concerns persist about its impact on the job market. While AI has the potential to automate many tasks, it’s important to remember that it also creates new opportunities. Jobs requiring creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence are likely to remain in high demand, while those involving repetitive, predictable tasks may be most susceptible to automation.

Tiff Macklem, the head of the Bank of Canada, recently expressed his concerns about the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on Canada’s economy. While acknowledging AI’s potential to transform industries and boost productivity, Macklem cautioned that the technology could also lead to significant job losses and economic disruption.

He emphasised the need for a proactive approach to address the challenges associ-

Highlights

As AI continues its relentless advance, concerns persist about its impact on the job market.

ated with AI’s rapid advancement and he noted that these benefits might take time to materialise. Macklem expressed concerns about the potential inflationary impact of AI-related investments.

He suggested that the surge in AI stocks could lead to increased spending and contribute to inflation: “Investment in AI could fuel inflation as investors profit from a surge in AI stocks and spend that money on other stuff.”

Elon Musk, a vocal advocate for responsible AI development, has warned of the potential dangers of unchecked AI progress, stating, “AI is far more dangerous than nukes.”

His words serve as a reminder that as we embrace AI’s transformative power, we must also prioritise safety and ethical considerations to ensure a future that benefits all of humanity.

EUROPE’S CO2 FINES UNDERMINE CARMAKERS’ PROGRESS

EUROPE’S carmakers are asking for help on the bloc’s carbon emissions rules, which imply steep fines starting next year. Governments can help the industry swerve the crunch relatively easily, but the bigger question is whether politicians are willing to do what’s necessary to help hit ambitious long-term electric-vehicle goals.

The European Automobile Manufacturers’ Association (ACEA) on Thursday called for “relief” on 2025 carbon targets, which it fears could result in “multi-billion euro” fines. At first glance, it sounds like special pleading, not least because the carmakers were well-warned.

The rules require a 15-per cent cut, relative to 2021 levels, in the average amount of carbon emitted per car per kilometre. It’s been obvious for years that auto groups with fossil fuel-intensive fleets would face fines.

Yet the blame doesn’t lie exclusively with the companies. One problem is that electric-vehicle sales are going into reverse across the bloc. The share of battery-powered rides in August fell to 14.4 per cent of overall sales from 21 per cent a year earlier, the ACEA said, making it hard to meet the targets. It’s partly down to high costs, arguably worsened by limited state subsidies, and the scant options for car-charging stations.

Nor have carmakers shirked when it comes to investing and electrifying their fleet: capital expenditures have surged in recent years.

Luca de Meo, who heads the lobby group and is also the CEO of France’s Renault, has suggested that penalties could reach 15 billion euros overall. A fine of that magnitude

would amount to nearly 20 per cent of Volkswagen, Stellantis, BMW, Mercedes-Benz and Renault’s pre-tax profit next year, according to LSEG data.

That’s a painful hit at a time when the groups are contending with a sluggish economy and the emergence of Chinese competition. Perversely, the fines could set them back on the path to electrification.

Luckily, the EU could in theory help the industry with some relatively simple delays to the 2025 targets. That would buy time. Carmakers are cranking out new electric models, which should help EV sales next year. Volkswagen, probably the most steeply affected by 2025 targets of the large European carmakers, is planning to launch 30 new cars over the next year, half of which are electric. The proliferation of cheaper battery rides, like the 25,000-euro Renault 5, will help.

The tougher issue is what happens next, with a 55-per cent cut to emissions required by 2030 and a total phaseout by 2035. Getting there requires a dramatic increase in electric-vehicle demand. ACEA estimates that some 1.4 million charging points need to be installed per year through 2030, nearly 10 times the 2023 level.

And auto groups require a steady and reliable source of batteries, at a time when geopolitical risks are rising and European champions like Northvolt are struggling. To hit those longer-term targets, governments will need to put their own hands in their pockets. — Reuters



QASIM AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of Oman Observer’s Business section



Oman’s ambition to transition to renewable energy is driven by both necessity and opportunity.

DHOFAR, Oman’s southernmost governorate, is rapidly emerging as a key player in the country’s drive towards renewable energy. With its natural advantages and strategic location, Dhofar is poised to become a centre for green energy production, playing a critical role in Oman’s broader energy transition. At the heart of this vision lies green hydrogen, a technology that promises to reshape the global energy landscape and position Oman as a leader in the clean energy revolution.

Oman’s ambition to transition to renewable energy is driven by both necessity and opportunity. As the world moves towards reducing carbon emissions and limiting reliance on fossil fuels, Oman’s vast solar and wind resources offer the perfect foundation for a sustainable energy future.

Dhofar, in particular, is uniquely positioned to capitalise on these resources. The governorate’s geography, with its high solar radiation and consistent wind patterns, provides an ideal setting for large-scale renewable energy projects.

The green hydrogen sector is set to be a cornerstone of Oman’s renewable energy strategy, and Dhofar is at the forefront of this transformation. Recent land block auctions have paved the way for the establishment of three major green hydrogen projects in Dhofar, spanning 1,087 square kilometres.

These projects aim to produce 553,000 tonnes of green hydrogen, leveraging the governorate’s renewable energy capacity, which stands at an impressive 14.1 GW of combined solar and wind power. This development is a significant step towards realising Oman’s vision of becoming a global hub for green hydrogen production.

Green hydrogen, produced by using renewable energy to split water into hydrogen and oxygen, is a clean and versatile fuel that can be used in various industries, from transportation to heavy manufacturing. Its potential to decarbonise sectors that have been difficult to shift away from fossil fuels

makes it a critical component in the global fight against climate change.

To fully harness the potential of green hydrogen, Oman is investing in technological innovation and research. The focus is not just on production but also on improving storage, transport and distribution technologies to make green hydrogen commercially viable.

Initiatives such as partnerships with international research institutions and universities are expected to play a crucial role in advancing Oman’s capabilities in this space.

Dhofar, with its renewable energy resources, can serve as a living laboratory for testing new technologies, which will further enhance the country’s green hydrogen production efficiency.

Oman’s green hydrogen projects in Dhofar are attracting attention from international investors and global energy companies. Partnerships with countries like Germany and South Korea, which are actively pursuing hydrogen as a clean energy source, present Oman with opportunities for technology transfer and shared expertise.

These collaborations not only enhance Oman’s technical know-how, but also provide a market for green hydrogen exports. With its strategic location near major global markets in Asia and Europe, Oman is well-placed to become a key supplier of green hydrogen, ensuring its place in the evolving energy landscape.

The environmental benefits of developing green hydrogen in Dhofar are profound. By focusing on clean energy sources, Oman is aligning itself with global climate goals, such as the Paris Agreement. The shift towards green hydrogen will significantly reduce the country’s carbon emissions, helping mitigate the effects of climate change.

Additionally, the vast scale of Dhofar’s renewable energy projects will contribute to preserving Oman’s natural landscapes by minimising the environmental footprint of traditional fossil fuel energy sources.

Oman Vision 2040 outlines the country’s

long-term goals for economic diversification, and green hydrogen plays a crucial role in achieving these objectives.

By developing the renewable energy sector, Oman can reduce its reliance on oil and gas, which currently dominate the economy. Dhofar’s green hydrogen projects are set to create thousands of jobs, both in the construction and operation phases.

This growth will stimulate the local economy, offering new career paths in clean energy technology, engineering and project management. Furthermore, the skills developed through these projects will help Oman build a workforce capable of leading the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Developing a robust green hydrogen sector also enhances Oman’s energy security by reducing its dependence on fossil fuels. As global energy markets become increasingly competitive and volatile, Oman’s ability to produce its own clean energy through green hydrogen offers a buffer against external shocks.

This shift not only strengthens Oman’s energy resilience, but also enhances its geopolitical influence, as countries seek reliable suppliers of green hydrogen. Dhofar’s role as a major producer gives Oman leverage in international energy diplomacy and trade.

Dhofar’s renewable energy projects are set to transform the local communities. In addition to providing new employment opportunities, these projects will stimulate the governorate’s infrastructure development, improving transport, utilities and communication networks.

Educational initiatives aimed at equipping the local workforce with skills in renewable energy technology will ensure that the benefits of these projects are distributed across all levels of society.

The government’s focus on localisation ensures that Dhofar’s green hydrogen developments will enhance the quality of life for residents while also contributing to Oman’s national economic goals.

Despite the promising potential of green hydrogen, challenges remain. The high costs of production and the need for extensive infrastructure development are significant hurdles. In conclusion, Dhofar is not only central to Oman’s green energy future, but also to the country’s economic diversification and sustainability goals. The governorate’s natural resources, combined with strategic international partnerships and cutting-edge technology, are driving Oman’s green hydrogen ambitions.

As Oman continues to invest in renewable energy, Dhofar will play a leading role in shaping the country’s energy landscape, ensuring a sustainable and prosperous future for generations to come. The green hydrogen projects in Dhofar are more than just energy initiatives — they are a testament to Oman’s commitment to a future powered by innovation, sustainability and global collaboration.

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28 years Experience in Oman in sales, marketing and management, Indian with DL and release. Looking for a good job change. Contact: 78501743.

Indian male 6 years of experience in accounts / automobile / admin. Seeking for suitable opening in any field, currently in Oman. Contact: 78988055 / 92850930, email: ullasmon8@gmail.com

Indian male, 10 years experience in Oman as Coordinator have diploma, valid D/L with NOC ready to join. Contact: 95645241.

A Sudanese resident in Salalah, Bsc of administrative sciences with 21 years of experience in the fields of (sales/ management/ logistics and fleet). Contact: +968 98510880.

Indian male Mechanical Engineer have overall 3 years experience in Oil and Gas Piping Field as QA/ QC and welding inspection. Seeking for suitable in any filed, currently in Oman. Contact: 78805060. Email: princeroyaranmula@gmail.com

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### INFASHION

#### Fendi sees Roaring 20s at Milan Fashion Week in challenging times



Milan transformed once again into the world's fashion capital on Tuesday, with Fendi launching Spring-Summer 2025 women's shows with a flowing 1920s-inspired collection — just enough to make one temporarily forget industry headwinds. In an elegant and understated start to Fashion Week, Fendi Artistic Director Kim Jones presented a collection to celebrate 100 years of the Italian luxury brand focused on “movement, lightness, excellence and ease”.

Rife with dropped waists, elongated shapes, transparent organzas and shimmering beading, the looks were inspired by the seminal decade of the 1920s, with the show notes citing the 1925 Paris Art Deco exhibition and the publication of F Scott Fitzgerald's “The Great Gatsby.”

Bands of black or grey were slung low on the waist of transparent skirts, while long, while elaborate bead-work marked V-neck dresses in silk and organza — all in never-boring neutrals of cream, black, pearl grey and rich beige.

The Roaring Twenties may have been top of mind at Fendi, but the luxury industry is more at a whimper during the 2020s a century later, facing a challenging environment, fuelled by inflation, low consumer confidence and weakness in the key market of China.

Still, that won't stop the glamour of Fashion Week, which runs through Sunday and benefits this season from the addition of one more day — the better to squeeze in 57 live catwalk shows attended by buyers, reporters and other industry professionals.

Highlights of the week include Italy's best-known luxury fashion labels, from Prada and Gucci to Bottega Veneta, Versace and Dolce & Gabbana.

Fashion Week stalwart Giorgio Armani, however, will not be showing his namesake line this season, having chosen New York for his women's collection on October 17, timed to coincide with the inauguration of a new building on Madison Avenue.

Moncler has also shunned Milan this season, opting for Shanghai for its show on October 19, with MSGM, Blumarine and Tom Ford also absent from the calendar. Tom Ford announced two weeks ago that Haider Ackermann would be its new artistic director — with his first collection for Fall 2025 in Paris — while David Koma is to take the helm at Blumarine, following the sudden exit of Walter Chiapponi after just one season. — AFP

### INDUSTRY HIGHLIGHTS



#### LIFESTYLE

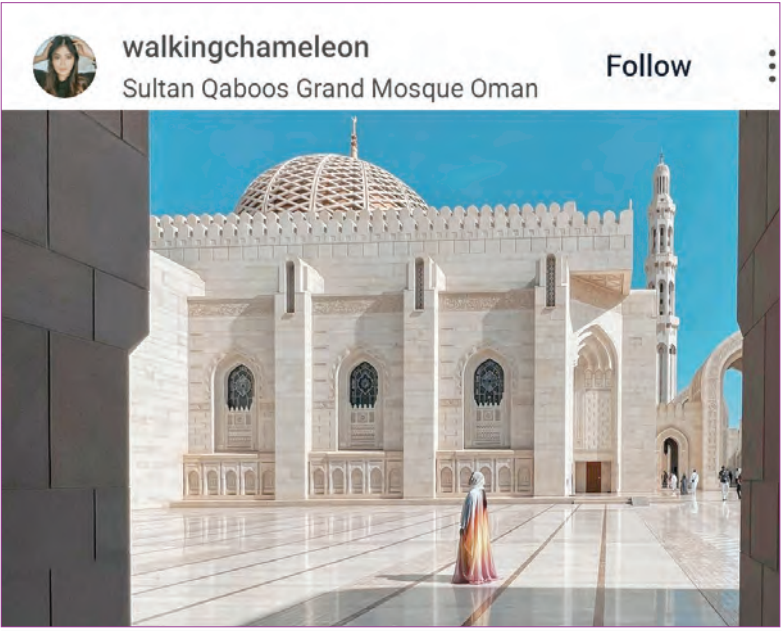
A villager walks over burning charcoal to perform a traditional fire-walking ritual called “Lianhuo” at Shuangfeng village in Jinhua, in eastern China's Zhejiang province. —AFP



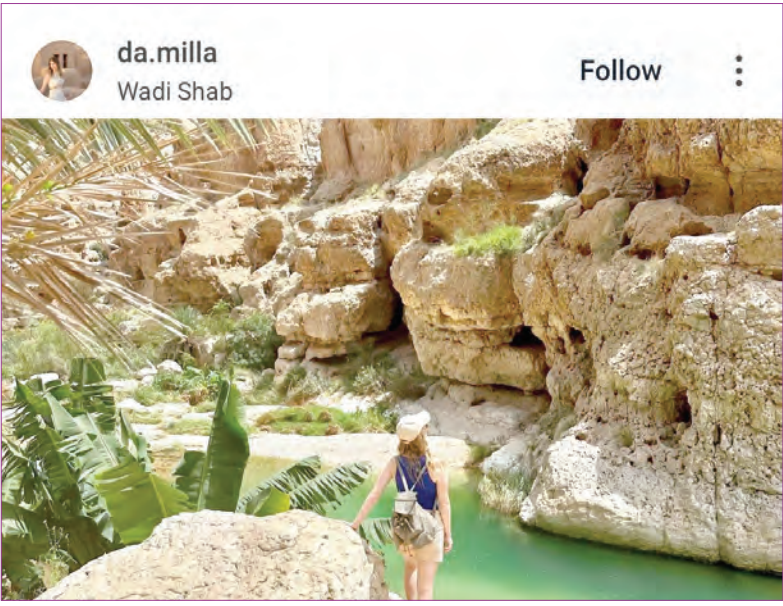
#### CULTURE

Alex Lucitante, member of the indigenous Cofan ethnic group, paints his face with Achiot (Bixa orellana shrub) during a Yage (Ayahuasca) ceremony at Avie village, in Lago Agrio, Sucumbos Province, Amazon region, Ecuador. This small community is famous for having driven mining companies out of their Amazonian territory in northern Ecuador. —AFP

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



A Sacred Place



Out in the Wadi

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Van Gogh ‘Sunflowers’ brought together in London show

**A HUNDRED YEARS** after acquiring one of Vincent van Gogh’s “Sunflowers”, Britain’s National Gallery in London will bring his vision to life by showcasing three works side-by-side for the first time. The triptych, which features two from of his sunflower series, forms part of a major exhibition dedicated to the Dutch painter and titled “Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers”. The exhibit focuses on the post-impressionist’s output during the two years that he spent in the south of France, in Arles and Saint-Remy de Provence, between February 1888 and May 1890. “His art takes on a new amplitude, a new inventiveness, everything emerges from it,” exhibition co-curator Christopher Riopelle

said of the period in Van Gogh’s life. “He becomes ever braver and bolder in how he paints, new freedom, new rhythms that enter in,” Riopelle added. The exhibition brings together some fifty paintings and drawings, which testify to Van Gogh’s talent for raising emotions thanks to his subtle and intense use of colours. Many are already well-known masterpieces, such as “Starry Night,” but some had never left their original private collections or museums. In a room with yellow walls, three paintings are notably exhibited: two “Sunflowers”, one belonging to the National Gallery since 1924, and the other specially loaned by the Washington museum. They surround “The Lullaby”, a painting representing a woman, seated on an armchair. This is the first time that the works have been exhibited together in this way. Predictably, nature and the landscapes of the south of France are at the heart of the works arouse feelings in the viewer. —AFP

Study shows how a woman’s brain reorganises during pregnancy



The study, the first-of-its-kind, was based on a single subject: University of California, Irvine cognitive neuroscientist and study co-author

ELIZABETH CHRASTIL,

a first-time mother who gave birth to a healthy boy, now 4 ½ years old. Chrastil was 38 during the study, and 43 now.

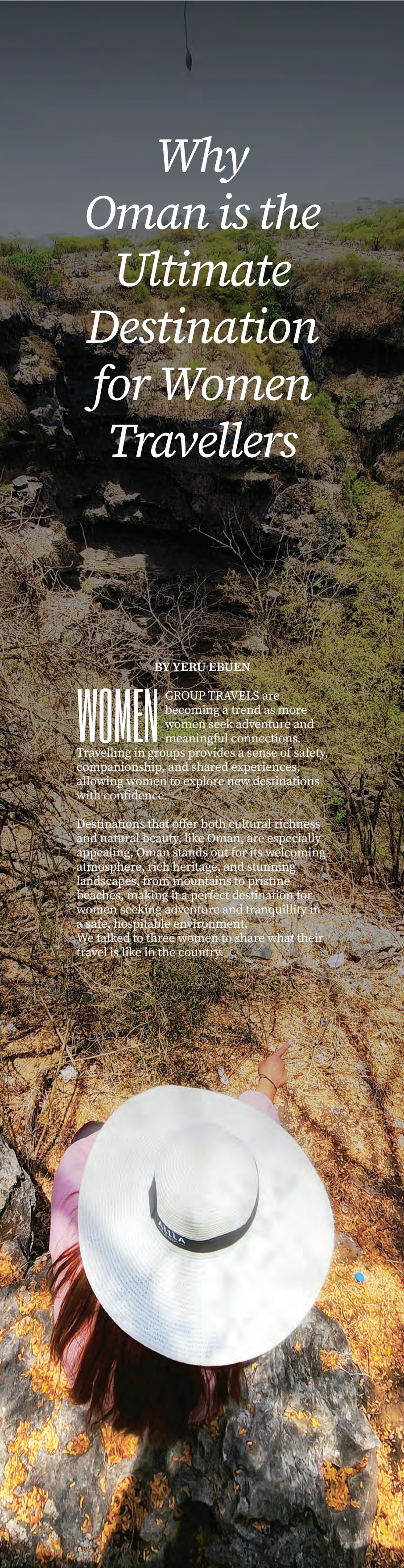
**PREGNANCY** triggers vast changes in a woman’s body — hormonal, cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal, urinary and more. And, as a new study reveals, the brain undergoes major changes too, some fleeting and others more enduring. Researchers said on Monday they have for the first time mapped the changes that unfold as a woman’s brain reorganises in response to pregnancy, based on scans carried out 26 times starting three weeks before conception, through nine months of pregnancy and then two years postpartum.

The study documented a widespread decrease in the volume of cortical gray matter, the wrinkled area that comprises the brain’s outermost layer, as well as an increase in the microstructural integrity of white matter located deeper in the brain. Both changes coincided with rising levels of the hormones estradiol and progesterone. Gray matter is comprised of the cell bodies of the brain nerve cells. White matter is made up of the bundles of axons — long, thin fibres — of the nerve cells that transmit signals in long-distance connections across the brain. The study, the first of its kind, was based on a single subject: University of California, Irvine cognitive neuroscientist and study co-author Elizabeth Chrastil, a

first-time mother who gave birth to a healthy boy, now 4-1/2 years old. Chrastil was 38 during the study, and 43 now. The scientists said that since the study’s completion they have observed the same pattern in several other pregnant women who have undergone brain scans in an ongoing research initiative called the Maternal Brain Project. They aim to expand the number into the hundreds. “It’s pretty shocking that in 2024 we have hardly any information about what happens in the brain during pregnancy. This (research) paper opens up more questions than it answers, and we are just scratching the surface of these questions,” Chrastil added. The scans showed a reduction averaging about 4% in gray matter in roughly 80% of the brain regions studied. A small rebound postpartum did not return the volume to pre-pregnancy levels. The scans also showed an increase of about 10% in white matter microstructural integrity, a measure of the health and quality of the connections between brain regions, peaking late in the second trimester and early in the third trimester, then returning to pre-pregnancy status postpartum. “The maternal brain undergoes a choreographed change across gestation, and we are finally able to observe the process in real time,” said University of California, Santa Barbara neuroscientist Emily Jacobs, senior author of the study published

in the journal **Nature Neuroscience**. “Previous studies had taken snapshots of the brain before and after pregnancy. But we’ve never witnessed the brain in the midst of this metamorphosis,” Jacobs added. The researchers said it is not clear that the loss of gray matter is a bad thing. “This change could indicate a fine-tuning of brain circuits, not unlike what happens to all young adults as they transition through puberty and their brain becomes more specialised. Some changes we observed could also be a response to the high physiological demands of pregnancy itself, showcasing just how adaptive the brain can be,” University of Pennsylvania postdoctoral scholar and study lead author Laura Pritschet said. The researchers hope in the future to examine how variation in these changes could help predict phenomena such as postpartum depression and how pre-eclampsia, a serious blood pressure condition that may develop during pregnancy, could affect the brain. Chrastil said she was not aware during the study of the data showing her brain changes and did not feel any different. “And so, you know, now there’s some distance to be able to say, ‘OK, well, that was a wild ride,’” Chrastil said. “Some people talk about ‘Mommy Brain’ and things like that,” Chrastil added, referring to the mental foggy some pregnant women experience. “And I didn’t really experience any of that.” —Reuters

TRAVEL



Why  
Oman is the  
Ultimate  
Destination  
for Women  
Travellers

BY YERU EBUEEN

WOMEN

GROUP TRAVELS are becoming a trend as more women seek adventure and meaningful connections. Travelling in groups provides a sense of safety, companionship, and shared experiences, allowing women to explore new destinations with confidence.

Destinations that offer both cultural richness and natural beauty, like Oman, are especially appealing. Oman stands out for its welcoming atmosphere, rich heritage, and stunning landscapes, from mountains to pristine beaches, making it a perfect destination for women seeking adventure and tranquillity in a safe, hospitable environment. We talked to three women to share what their travel is like in the country.

Magical  
villages and  
dreamy  
destinations  
by Naura  
Zoubir

My career has been as a trekking guide, travel agent, and eco-tourism consultant. In early December 2009, the French trekking agency for which I used to work in Jordan proposed training in the Sultanate of Oman. I did not know the country but the travel agency urgently needed to train French-speaking guides for the tours during Christmas and New Year. I had one week to find out information about Oman before the training started. There was very little literature in French, so I looked for books written in English. I also dug into travel forums on the Web to gather some information.



What a surprise when I arrived in Muscat. I was greeted by a police officer elegantly wearing a beautiful mussar and the traditional dishdasha! Since then, a new and bigger airport has been built to welcome a larger flow of international visitors, and nowadays the policemen wear elegant uniforms and are always very welcoming. The training was intensive. We covered the whole country over two weeks with the local team. It was love at first sight: splendid landscapes of long pristine beaches, refreshing wadis (canyons), gorgeous mountains and deserts of legends. Every village offered amazing hospitality, and local people were keen to share their fascinating

customs and traditions. For those new to the country and who want to have a deep dive into Omani culture, you can visit the villages of Misfat Al Abriyeen, Bilad Sayt, and Birkat Al Mouz. These three villages are an amazing encapsulation of traditional living but developments would allow you to enjoy your time there as there are designated aesthetic coffee shops and plenty of nature activities or those that you can engage with locals. Whenever in Oman, I am always grateful for the peace and serenity that I feel at all times. Fifteen years later, I am still amazed by this country, where I also had the opportunity to create strong friendships with Omanis and expats. For women visiting Oman, it's also a must to include visiting khareef. In the southern Dhofar Governorate, Salalah offers a lush, tropical escape, especially during the khareef season when monsoon rains transform the landscape into a green paradise. I feel so safe in Oman that I sometimes go alone to camp in the wild. I am so grateful to live in this legendary country of the 1001 Nights. I am very attached to Oman which has become my residency. Whenever I do my trekking tours in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Socotra, I also look forward to coming back.

Pristine  
beaches and  
exhilarating  
water  
adventures by  
Rose Ebuena

I came to Oman expecting only to stay for two years. Back in 2015, I thought working in the country would be challenging, especially for women. Fast forward to eight years later, working as a marketing and communications specialist and managing a digital travel page, I've come to learn that Oman is a total gem that is still quite unknown to a lot of people. Because of my work, I'd been to nearly 60 per cent of the country. It helped a lot to have adventure-loving Omani friends who could also show some of the country's best-kept secrets. As for safety, we've gotten lost a lot. We entered someone else's property, but as always, we got invited for a cup of kawa



(coffee) and dates instead of being chased out. This has become one of the reasons why Oman is a second home to me. It's very safe. For those coming to the country for the first time, Oman is more than just a desert country. You go to Al Khaluf and you will be welcomed by some of the whitest dunes that seemingly flow towards the bluest or greenest of water. If you're a little more adventurous, head out to Ras Al Rowais which is very remote but allows you to witness where the desert meets

the sea. You can't also miss Barr Al Hikman and Ras Madrakah, the first, the Maldives of Oman so pristine you would want to stay a bit longer and the latter, perfect for winter camping. One of the most memorable trips I joined was when we did a coastal cave hop, starting from Muscat to Dhofar. There are plenty of hidden gems that only reveal themselves to those willing to take the off-beaten route. If there's a secret to exploring Oman, the best one is finding a friend among the many hospitable locals. Once you make an Omani friend, you usually have a friend for life. For women travellers, this is what you have to remember. With over 3,000 kilometres of coastline, Oman's waters are a paradise for marine enthusiasts. The Daymaniyat Islands, a protected marine reserve, are known for their vibrant coral reefs and diverse marine life, offering some of the best diving and snorkelling experiences in the region. Here, divers can encounter whale sharks, turtles, and schools of colourful fish, while the islands themselves provide a pristine environment for camping and nature observation.

A safe  
destination  
seamlessly  
blending old  
and new by  
Rachel Chew

I'm a British expat who has been living in Oman since September 2019. I present a show on Hi FM Radio on weekdays from 4-7 pm. When I'm not in the studio, you will either find me reading a book or hiking. I truly love Oman; the community spirit is so welcoming and contagious; and I generally think I am a nicer person after mixing with Omanis and fellow expats who have been so kind to me during my time here. I feel very safe here, and I am proud to call it my home. When my Mum came to visit, she was so shocked and confused that we were just leaving our bags unattended at Wadi Shab and that no one stole anything, sadly, that wouldn't be the



case in my home country. Anyone who has truly experienced the nature of Oman will fall in love with it. In my time here, I've been on plenty of trips, and this appreciation for nature will happen whether you are checking out the views on the balcony walk in Jabal Shams or if you're swimming up the quiet, glistening, beautiful pools at Wadi Al Houqain. Farther down south, the magical

greenery of Salalah is so unique that the khareef season has become a full-blown attraction. If you're coming here between June to September, you can't miss what it has to offer including the beautiful Ayn Athum and other waterfalls that pepper the landscape. For those new to the country, if you're looking for a remote location off the beaten track and you fancy a swim in Wadi, there is a smaller, quieter wadi, very close to the famous Sa'al steps, not far from Muscat. I don't even know its name, as it's not written on a map, but I have been multiple times and thoroughly enjoyed it. There are little fish who can give you a little foot spa as they nibble on your feet, a rope that you can attempt to climb, and some goats to cheer you on as you plunge into the water. Many of the expats who came to Oman for work may have originally planned to stay here for a short time. Oman has a way of creeping up on you and tugging into your heart-strings that, just like me, five years later, is still here. What sets Oman apart is its balance between preserving its ancient traditions and embracing modern adventure tourism.