

Shura session to end on July 18

As per the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Majlis Ash'shura concludes the first annual session of the 10th term (2023-2027) on July 18. This comes in implementation of Article 41 of the Law of the Council of Oman. The first annual convening saw the completion of 9 agreements and 9 draft laws. Twelve regular sessions were also held, including 4 sessions to discuss ministerial statements of service ministries. Four ministerial statements were delivered to highlight queries and comments regarding the work of these ministries.

SUNRISE - 05:25 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 03:57 AM
DHUHR - 12:16 PM
ASR - 03:34 PM
MAGHRIB - 07:03 PM
ISHA - 08:25 PM



P12

MALEN DOUBLES UP AS DUTCH BEAT ROMANIA TO REACH EURO 2024 QUARTERS



P13

PDO PRODUCED WATER OUTPUT TO HIT RECORD 1.4 MILLION M³/DAY BY 2030



P19

SAMSUNG ADDS SUPPORT FOR MATTER 1.2 TO SMARTTHINGS



MUSCAT

HM CONGRATULATES PANAMA PRESIDENT

Muscat: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to José Raúl Mulino on winning the presidential elections of the Republic of Panama. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and wished him success in achieving further progress and prosperity for the people of Panama. His Majesty also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

HM GREETES BELARUSIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Aleksandr Lukashenko of the Republic of Belarus on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Aleksandr Lukashenko. His Majesty also wished the people of the Republic of Belarus further prosperity.

NO PERMISSION TO RUN PROMOTIONS: MoCIIP

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) announced that commercial establishments in Oman no longer need prior permission from the ministry to run promotions and offers. According to the statement, this decision, made in collaboration with the Consumer Protection Authority, is designed to stimulate commercial activities, enhance market competitiveness and provide products at reasonable prices.

TALE BEHIND OMAN’S TRI-COLOUR TRAIL FLAGS



White, red and yellow stripes on rock faces markers help people to navigate the trails safely and confidently; making the mountains and wadis more accessible. **SEE P20**

Use innovation to face climate change impact

GENEVA: The Sultanate of Oman on Monday called for finding practical, innovative solutions to tackle the impact of climate change. Oman proposed the compilation of a database about areas that are most vulnerable to related damage in the near, medium and long future.

Oman made the plea in a speech during an annual conference about the climate change, held as part of events of the 56th session of the Human Rights Council. The speech was delivered by Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations (UN) and International Organizations in Geneva.

Al Khanjari urged the parties concerned to make an attempt to find collective, comprehensive solutions that take into account local dimensions, anticipate change and comprise measures to ensure smooth transition, sustainability and the protection of the environment against further damage.

Al Khanjari stressed that the desired proactive, fair, sustainable



Oman proposes the compilation of a database about areas that are most vulnerable to climate change

and environment-friendly alternatives would contribute to shifting entire human populations to more suitable places. The solutions should also replace production activities in a manner that ensures the safety of livelihoods, secures justice and equity and respects social, economic and environmental laws worldwide, he said. — **ONA**

Royal Hospital doctors use synthetic protein for Down Syndrome



Dr Alyaa al Mughairy

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team from the Royal Hospital's Department of Paediatric Haematology made history by using Romiplostim drug to treat a patient suffering from a combination of Down Syndrome and bone marrow failure. Dr Alyaa al Mughairy, Consultant of Paediatrics Haematology and Oncology at the Royal Hospital, who headed the medical team that treated the patient's case, said that this first-of-a-kind case showed that the treatment generated rapid response, not only by increasing the number of blood platelets, but also by augmenting red and white blood cells, without causing any side effects. Dr Al Mughairy explained that Romiplostim is a synthetic protein that stimulates the production of platelets in patients suffering from platelet deficiency. The drug is typically used to treat some cases of bleeding in children suffering immune thrombocytopenia. She added that the treatment has been documented in a leading scientific journal specialised in paediatric haematology and oncology (Paediatric Haematology Oncology Journal), run by an international editorial board of experts in the field of paediatrics and oncology. "It is the first case of its kind and its procedure has been reported as "an innovative and effective treatment," said Dr Alyaa. She pointed out that this accomplishment is testimony to the skills and expertise of the paediatric haematology team at the Royal Hospital, as well as the team members' confidence in tackling the most complex cases. The accomplishment highlights Oman's outstanding stature in the field of healthcare and affirms its commitment to the best health services. — **ONA**

80 per cent of Gazans now displaced: UN

UNITED NATIONS: The UN humanitarian coordinator for Gaza said on Tuesday that 1.9 million people — 80 per cent of the territory's population — were now displaced, adding she was "deeply concerned" by reports of new evacuation orders for Khan Yunis. The United Nations has estimated that up to 250,000 people are impacted by the Israeli military order for civilians to leave Al Qarara, Bani Suhaila and other localities near the territory of 2.4 million's second city of Khan Yunis. "Over 1 million people have been displaced once again, desperately seeking shelter and safety (and) 1.9 million people are now displaced across Gaza... I'm deeply concerned about reports of new evacuation orders issued in the area of Khan Yunis," Sigrid Kaag told the UN Security Council. "Palestinian civilians in Gaza have been plunged into an abyss of suffering. Their homes life shattered, their lives upended. The war has not merely created the most profound of humanitarian crises. It has unleashed a maelstrom of human misery," Kaag added. She said that not enough aid was reaching the war-torn strip, and that the opening of new crossings, particularly to southern Gaza, was necessary to avert a humanitarian disaster. Kaag said the Rafah crossing between



A Palestinian boy, who fled the eastern part of Khan Yunis after they were ordered by Israeli army to evacuate their neighbourhoods, rides on a vehicle loaded with belongings, in Khan Yunis on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

Gaza and Egypt should be re-opened, and also pleaded with the international community to do more to fund relief efforts. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,925 people, also mostly civilians,

according to data from the health ministry in the territory. Israel has not specifically said there will be a military operation in southern Gaza, but so far nearly every evacuation order has heralded major battles. **SEE ALSO P6**



‘DotNext Jadeer’ to build capabilities of Omanis



The programme contributes to bridging the gap between degrees and the labour market

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 2

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, presided over the opening of the ‘DotNext Jadeer’ programme’s fourth pioneering technical camp.

The programme aims to build the capabilities of Omani cadres in the field of technical entrepreneurship and qualify graduates of higher education to keep pace with the needs of the labour market by developing work skills in entrepreneurship and self-employment.

An elite group of Omani youth will participate in the camp and will receive specialised training in several fields including artificial intelligence, finance, investment, entrepreneurship, leadership and creative industries.

The programme contributes to bridging the gap between educational outcomes and the labour market and honing the skills of job-seekers. The programme achieved remarkable success during the four years during which it was held, as 40 per cent of the program’s members were employed, in addition to the establishment of 10 companies.

Yousef bin Ahmed al Ibrahim, Director of Entrepreneurship and Innovative Skills at Awj Al Ibtikar Company, said: “Since its launch, the Jadeer Programme has achieved exceptional success, as it has contributed to developing the skills of more than

1,950 members and established more than one pioneering technology idea, some of which have become successful companies today, supplying the Omani market.”

“We place incubating and nurturing national talent at the top of our priorities to contribute to achieving Oman’s Vision 2040 for economic diversification, and through the Jadeer programme, we provide the opportunity for creative Omani youth to showcase their ideas to the world and support them in developing them to enhance the growth and development of the modern technology sectors and bridge the gap between graduates,” he added.

Jassim bin Mohammed al Alawi, a government employee and graduate of business Aaministration affiliated with the Jadeer Programme for the Year, said the programme added to a high ability to deal properly with the work environment, officials, and colleagues through the leadership and entrepreneurship workshop.

Aisha bint Jassim al Ghailaniyah, a lab technician in the central public health laboratories, said, “This is my first participation in the Jadeer programme. “An exceptional experience that enabled me to see the impossible as possible! An experience that taught me how innovation is created by deriving values from ideas and realising them while contributing to granting the Sultanate of Oman global technical sovereignty.”

OMAN AND KIRIBATI ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS



Oman and the Republic of Kiribati signed a joint statement to establish diplomatic relations based on the cooperation and friendship between the two countries in New York, on Tuesday. – ONA

‘Tourism Sector Partners’ meet to enhance summer activities

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 2

The Heritage and Tourism Administration of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate conducted the ‘Tourism Sector Partners’ meeting at Al Shahba Hall in Nizwa on Tuesday.

The meeting was part of the ongoing cooperation between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and hotel and tourism establishments to achieve common goals.

Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, attended the event along with specialists from the tourism sector at the ministry, officials, and operators of hotel and tourism services in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The meeting aimed to



The meeting aimed to enhance the partnership with the private sector, coordinate efforts, achieve common goals, and improve service quality for a unique visitor experience

enhance the partnership with the private sector, coordinate efforts, achieve common goals, and improve service quality for a unique visitor experience. This preparation is for the upcoming summer season in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and complements the activities in Salalah and Dhofar Governorate during the khareef season.

Al Busaidy highlighted the importance of the tourism sector in creating job opportunities, increasing economic activity, and contributing to the tourism field. The meeting aimed to address key areas to enhance the sector’s competitiveness effectively.

Statistics about the tourism sector were presented,

indicating an increase in visitors to Oman in 2023 compared to 2022. Various initiatives to boost the tourism sector were also mentioned.

The meeting included discussions on enhancing the quality of tourism, local content, and an overview of the Tourism Law. The purpose was to increase awareness among establishments regarding service quality and promote the use of local talent.

The meeting concluded with an open discussion session, reflecting efforts to strengthen partnerships with the private sector, achieve common goals, and improve the quality of services for a unique experience for visitors and tourists. The tourism sector is considered one of the most important economic sectors in several aspects.

General Education Diploma exams conclude with mixed feelings

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 2

The General Education Diploma (GED) second semester exams concluded across Oman on Tuesday, as students took their final paper. Students left the exam halls with mixed feelings, a combination of joy and relief on one hand, and anticipation and anxiety on the other, awaiting the announcement of the results that represent the gateway to their entry into universities and colleges.

According to psychological experts, this period is very sensitive for students, and a calm and supportive environment should be provided to them, away from any discussions or expectations that may cause them tension and anxiety that may negatively affect their psychological state.

“During this period, all families and friends should avoid discussing the final exam scores and the cumulative semester percentage in front of the students. The aim is to avoid any psychological pressure



This period is very sensitive for students, and a calm and supportive environment should be provided to them

that may affect their mood and hinder their enjoyment of their great achievement after a strenuous academic year,” said one of the experts.

Specialists stressed the importance of providing a calm and supportive environment for students during this period while avoiding any discussions or pressures related to exam results or university admission opportunities. They advised encouraging students to take advantage of this period to relax and engage in activities that make them happy, away from any atmosphere of tension or anxiety.

In this context, Ahmed al

Raisi, a social worker, said: “Families should realise that this period is one of the most important periods in a student’s life. After a long-year of effort and study, students need their families’ support away from the pressures related to academic results. It is best to focus discussions on the achievements that students have made and encourage them to engage in recreational activities that will make them forget the worries of exams.”

Al Raisi indicated that organising family and social events can have a great positive impact on the students’ psychological state. “Families

can organise short trips or simple family gatherings that enhance the spirit of fun and optimism among students. These activities not only help alleviate stress but also strengthen family ties and give students a sense of support and care,” he said.

Al Raisi explained that it is also important to raise awareness among parents on how to deal with this critical period, pointing to the need to provide a calm and stable home environment. “Parents should avoid talking about exam results and university admission intensively and comparison, but rather focus on encouraging students to relax and pursue their favourite hobbies. Psychological support during this period can make a big difference in students’ ability to deal with future pressures,” he said.

Al Raisi stressed that praising students’ efforts and successes, regardless of the final results, is essential to boost their self-confidence and encourage them to move forward in their educational journey successfully.

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AI TO CREATE 97M NEW JOBS WORLDWIDE

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will create about 97 million new jobs worldwide and almost 85 million jobs that seen today would be obsolete, according to First Regional Workshop of the Islamic World Artificial Intelligence Charter (IWAIC) in the Asia and Middle East regions being held at the W Hotel in Muscat.

Nearly 14 per cent of the market share of global income would be from AI, which is poised to grow at 33 per cent per annum, said Dr Salim al Malik, DG of Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

“Almost 77 per cent of all devices that are currently in use will be powered by AI in the days to come as it is poised to grow by 33 per cent per annum. The line that separates



The two-day workshop aims to explore strategic and methodological framework for the Islamic World Artificial Intelligence Charter and to brainstorm the possibilities of AI in the modern world

the decision-making process and AI will narrow down and there would be no distance between the two in the days to come,” Dr Salim said.

Held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif bin Hamoud al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, the two-day workshop

aims to explore strategic and methodological frameworks for the Islamic World Artificial Intelligence Charter and to brainstorm the possibilities of AI in the modern world.

“One of the most prominent initiatives led by ICESCO is the preparation of the Charter of Ethics for Artificial Intelligence in the



Islamic World, which comes in implementation of the decision of the Executive Council of ICESCO at its forty-third session, held in December 2022 in the Kingdom of Morocco, where member states unanimously assigned the task of drafting the Islamic World Charter for Artificial Intelligence to the administration,” Dr Salim said.

According to the experts from 43 member states who are attending the conference, it has become necessary to harness a comprehensive, forward-looking and proactive approach to everything related to AI and its uses, in order to keep pace with the accelerating technological and qualitative transformations.

It is also pertinent to achieve

the desired aspirations and goals, move forward towards a bright future and promising horizons, and lay solid foundations through which economies will flourish and sustainable development of societies will be achieved.

“Oman is all set to reap the benefits of AI and our students are being empowered in this area besides setting up AI-powered technologies at various spots including the airport. This regional workshop represents a significant advance in the existing consultation process for the Charter, and after an initial calibration session at ICESCO headquarters, this workshop comes in a strategic location to move the initiative forward in partnership with the UTAS and the MoTCIT,” Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences, said.

Task force intensifies health inspection during khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 2

As Khareef Dhofar season advances, Dhofar Governorate is intensifying its health inspection and control measures across commercial establishments, restaurants and mobile vendors. These rigorous efforts are aimed at ensuring that all entities adhere to the highest health safety standards, thereby providing a safe and healthy environment for both visitors and residents.

Health control teams are operational around the clock in various wilayats of the governorate, divided into morning and evening shifts. This comprehensive initiative highlights the commitment of the relevant authorities to elevate the quality of services offered during this crucial tourist season, which draws thousands of visitors to Dhofar to relish its breathtaking natural landscapes and outstanding tourist amenities.



Health control teams are operational around the clock in various wilayats

Hamed bin Mohammed Bamousa, Director of the Health Affairs Department in Dhofar Municipality, detailed in a Twitter post that the municipality has enacted a decision to form a task force dedicated to the management and regulation of temporary activities. This encompasses the organisation and establishment of markets for productive families in coordination with relevant authorities, and the elimination of

unauthorised and non-compliant activities. The subcommittee will ensure strict adherence to health regulations, with inspection teams from the Health Control Department working tirelessly in shifts across different wilayats.

In addition to these measures, Dhofar Governorate has also launched a public awareness campaign to educate both residents and visitors about the importance of health and safety

practices. This campaign includes informative sessions, distribution of educational materials and active engagement on social media platforms to reach a wider audience. The goal is to foster a culture of health consciousness that will complement the regulatory efforts being implemented.

Moreover, the municipality is collaborating with various stakeholders, including local businesses, community leaders and healthcare providers, to create a unified front in maintaining the highest standards of public health. Regular meetings and workshops are being organised to ensure that all parties are aligned with the health safety objectives and are equipped to handle any challenges that may arise during the busy season.

The establishment of the task force for the management and regulation of temporary activities is a significant step towards streamlining the operations of temporary markets and events.



The step places the museum on the map of global museums and allows it to benefit from international expertise. — ONA

Oman Across Ages Museum joins ICOM

MANAH: Oman Across Ages Museum (OAAM) has joined the International Council of Museums (ICOM), headquartered in Paris. The step places the museum on the map of global museums and allows it to benefit from international expertise.

Eng Al Yaqdhan bin Abdullah al Harthy, Director-General of the Oman Across Ages Museum, said that the OAAM's joining of the ICOM would help the Omani museum's operators to conduct international meetings,

forums, research and studies specialised in the museum field.

He added that the step would also help upgrade the efficiency and efforts of the museum's intendants.

The ICOM is a non-governmental organisation dedicated to museums that sets professional and ethical standards for museum activities. It also makes recommendations on matters related to cultural heritage and raises public cultural awareness. — ONA

Campaign to promote Oman as summer tourism destination

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahalbalushia

To promote, enhance and support the tourism, investment and entertainment aspects, the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing recreational tourism events and forums during summer.

While the tourism sector is an enabling and incubating sector capable of contributing to development with the rest of the concerned sectors, the investment

programmes and entertainment projects within the Sultanate of Oman seek to contribute to reducing the gap between internal and external tourism.

One of the events is the Ajwaa Al Ashkharah Forum, which is unique in seeking to develop the concept of tourism and its integration with the cultural and economic aspects through the diversity and comprehensiveness of events, and working to sustain tourism activities and events by preparing permanent sites to host them.



Various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing recreational tourism events and forums during summer

This is in addition to strengthening the bonds of interdependence between societal groups in the governorate through solidarity participation in the forum.

Statistics issued by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism showed that the number of visitors coming to the Sultanate of Oman during the first quarter of this year amounted to about 956,6000 visitors, including 322,4000 visitors from the Gulf countries.

Statistics indicated that the

occupancy rate of hotels operating in the Sultanate of Oman during the first quarter of this year reached 38 per cent.

In addition, the Khareef Dhofar season witnesses the launch of the 'Sikka' electronic platform, which is a good tool that serves visitors, as it will allow the provision of easy and reliable rental services, which enhances and facilitates the management of residential units with high efficiency and guarantees the rights of landlords and tenants.

Ahmed bin Mohammed al

Ghassani, Director of the Quality Control Department at the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate, mentioned that the 'Sikka' digital platform for renting residential units aims to enhance quality standards and simplify registration and licensing procedures to improve services provided to guests during the Khareef Dhofar season.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism launched a promotional campaign that will continue until the end of August.



DO YOUR SHARE

TO REDUCE TRASH



RUQAYA AL KINDI
@ruqaya.alkindi

RANDOM dumping of waste is a threat to environment and spoils the beauty of public areas like picnic spots, beaches and parks. Azhar al Hinai, Head of the Waste Management Section at the Environment Authority, said, “Undisposed waste is the breeding ground of microbes, insects and rodents which leads to diseases and epidemics.” Some types of waste “can release toxic fumes into soil, water, and food because they contain lead, cadmium, and mercury, thus affecting the health of the community and its members.” The daily practices of individuals have a very important impact in reducing this problem and keep Oman clean and beautiful. “Make sure to get rid of household rubbish responsibly. All you have to do is put the household rubbish in plastic bags and close it tightly before putting it in the rubbish bins so that cockroaches, mice and other insects that spread germs and diseases do not multiply, and it is also easier for workers to clean those bins,” she said.

It is important, as she added, “To ensure that the garbage is placed inside the garbage bins and not next to them, so that cats, goats and mice do not tamper with it and scatter it. If the garbage bins are full, contact Be’ah Company to empty them”.

There are many reasons why your contribution in reducing your personal output from waste whether at home or in factories is an urgent necessity.

Azhar explained, “The increase in the size of garbage bins, is increasing the health and economic cost of disposal. It also leads to an increase in time, effort, and cost in waste sorting and transferring, in addition to increasing pressure on both the labour force and equipment.” You can reduce this cost by adopting sustainable and eco-friendly habits that help in reducing the accumulated garbage that the environment has to deal with. “These sustainable habits include rejecting what you don’t need (such as the conference’s pens and notebooks), reducing purchasing and consumption, reusing things instead of

throwing them away (such as empty glass jars), and repairing tools instead of buying new ones (such as electronic devices),” Azhar said.

Donating and purchasing used products are also environmentally friendly ideas due to their effective contribution in reducing the burden on waste dumps and the environment.

Oman’s population currently stands at more than 5 million people. “Each of them produces about 1.2 kg of waste per day, and thus the potential negative repercussions resulting from the production of these huge quantities of municipal solid waste are increasing very significant with the passage of time,” she said.

Taking care of your daily choices will support the government efforts in reducing municipal waste. “You can, for example, use reusable products for a long time instead of items that end up in the trash after the first use (such as cloth bags instead of single-use plastic bags), and use kitchen utensils that can be washed and reused,” she said.

RECYCLING FACTORIES

Designing products by producers in a way that facilitates their recycling, as she pointed out, “Contributes in reducing waste, which leads to reducing its accumulation and its presence for longer periods, whether in the environment or in sorting.” Recycling is one of the options adopted by local concerned entities to address the large quantities that are received in engineering landfills in Oman. “There are approximately 67 recycling factories in Oman. Of which 18 are involved in plastic, which constitutes majority of the waste. Paper, cardboard, glass, aluminium, and iron waste are the most common in recycling in Oman.” Many projects convert waste into energy, producing organic fertiliser and renewable energy. The Environment Authority is also working to update laws, increase penalties, and intensify oversight of all industrial establishments and commercial stores in coordination with the competent entities to reduce waste.

THERE ARE
67
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MAKE GARBAGE IS
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NOT NEXT TO THEM



REPAIRING
GADGETS INSTEAD
OF BUYING
NEW ONES

STEPS TO PROTECT OUR PLANET



Learning beekeeping using augmented reality technology

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 2

The General Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Governorate of Al Sharqiyah South, represented by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi and the Rural Development Section of the Directorate, organised the "Beekeeper of the Future" initiative using augmented reality technology.

The initiative, targeting 300 students from summer centres, aims to spread awareness of rural development products in



The initiative, targeting 300 students from summer centres, aims to spread awareness of rural development products in a fun and interactive manner

a fun and interactive manner, which promotes understanding and exploring the world of agricultural and rural products in a fun and interactive way.

The initiative included several educational and interactive

corners. Ali al Hashmi, Director of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Wilayat of Al Kamil W'al Wafi, said that the initiative was adopted by the General Directorate of



Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, with the support of the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company.

"This initiative is considered the second at the governorate level and aims to develop

cognitive skills among students and train them on how to raise bees and use tools in beekeeping, production, storage and packaging," he said.

Al Hashmi stressed that the General Directorate of

Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources will continue to establish such initiatives to cover all wilayats of the governorate.

Eng Arwa bint Mohammed al Maamariyah, Head of the Rural Development Department, said, "It is a valuable experience for the emerging generations, and we hope to reach thousands of children."

The idea for this initiative came as a continuation of the efforts made by the ministry to enhance the level of knowledge and awareness of good beekeeping practices in the Sultanate of Oman and to achieve sustainable development goals.

Training workshop focuses on AI practical skills for personal, professional use

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 2

The Taqah Sports Club's Cultural Committee, in collaboration with the Wilayat of Taqah's Omani Women's Association, recently hosted a training course titled "How to Use Artificial Intelligence and ChatGPT."

Held under the auspices of Khalid bin Ahmed bin Ali Tabook, Director of the Social Development Department, the event aimed to empower participants with the knowledge and tools to navigate the emerging world of AI.

Dr Taha Abdel Aal, a distinguished AI expert, led the session, focusing on equipping attendees with practical skills for both personal and professional use. This initiative aligns with the committee's commitment to fostering community development through technical expertise.

Dr Abdel Aal elaborated on the workshop's objectives, which included introducing AI fundamentals, exploring its diverse applications, and



Ahmed al Maashani



Dr Taha Abdel Aal

We designed an engaging and informative environment, explaining complex concepts in a clear manner, while offering participants the chance to experiment with AI tools firsthand

DR TAHA ABDEL AAL
AI expert

providing hands-on training with user-friendly tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney and Google AI Experiments.

Participants gained a foundational understanding of AI's various forms, its impact on healthcare,

transportation, education and business sectors, and the practical capabilities of these accessible AI instruments.

Expressing his enthusiasm for guiding AI novices, Dr Abdel Aal said, "In today's world, AI is a cornerstone technology across numerous fields.

Mastering its skills is crucial to harnessing its potential and shaping its future."

He further highlighted the workshop's approach: "We designed an engaging and informative environment, explaining complex concepts in a clear manner, while offering participants the chance to experiment with AI tools firsthand."

Ahmed al Maashani, Chairman of the Committee, emphasised the event's significance as the first of many such endeavours. "We're a dedicated team that strives to identify initiatives that benefit our region. By expanding educational opportunities through workshops and courses, we aim to cultivate a more informed and culturally enriched society," he said.



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

Tenders Announcement

Tender No.	109/2024/MHT/HQ-19	110/2024/MHT/HQ-20	Tender Name	
			Providing materials supply service for the restoration projects of Rustaq Fort and Bayada Mosque in South Al Batinah Governorate	
			Providing a labor supply service for the restoration projects of Rustaq Fort and Bayada Mosque in South Al Batinah Governorate.	
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	109/2024/MHT/HQ-19	25 O.R	110/2024/MHT/HQ-20	60 O.R
Tender Document Sales End Date	23/07/2024			
Last Date for Bid Submission	14/08/2024			
Grade	Second, Third			
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om			

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- The Tenderers must acknowledge commitment to the bid .
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
For further information	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
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Ministry of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Bidding:

Ref:	Description	Last Date for Collection of Bidding Document	Last Date for Submission of Bidding	Eligibility	Bidding Fee (Non Refundable)
1/2024	RENTING LOCATIONS FOR VENDING MACHINES FOR HOT, COLD DRINKS AND SNACKS IN BURAIMI HOSPITAL	Before 11 AM On 18/07/2024	Before 11 AM On 31/07/2024	Specialized companies	R.O 25 Per set

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the Bidding can purchase the bid from the financial Affairs Department (Revenue Office) at Al Buraimi Hospital Between 8:00 AM until12:00 PM on working days.
- A 1% bank guarantee must be attached to the bidding documents.
- Bids shall be placed in sealed and waxed envelopes in the tender box at the Office of the Head of Financial Affairs Department.
- The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the More bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above Bidding, please contact the following:
- Contact via Telephone: 25650855 Ext. No:1125 &1159.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that a **Bid Commitment Declaration**, and bids received without the required Declaration will not be considered.

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رؤية عمان 2040
Sultanate of Oman
Oman Authority for
Academic Accreditation and
Quality Assurance of Education
Jawda

Announcement

Database of Qualifications in Oman

The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education, represented by the Directorate General of National Qualifications Framework, invites all education and training providers delivering, offering and awarding qualifications in Oman, including academic, technical/vocational, professional, and technological qualifications, to send the titles of these qualifications to aalsaidi@oaaaqa.gov.om.

www.oaaaqa.gov.om @oaaaqa_om



Displaced Palestinians leave an area in east Khan Yunis after the Israeli army issued a new evacuation order. – AFP

DISPLACED GAZANS FLEE AS ISRAEL BOMBS SOUTH

GAZA: Israeli forces bombarded several areas of the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday and thousands of Palestinians fled their homes in what could be part of a final push of Israel's intensive military operations in nine months of war.

Eight Palestinians were killed and dozens wounded, health officials said. Israel's military said that two soldiers had been killed in battle a day earlier.

Israel's leaders have said they were winding down the phase of intense fighting against Palestinian groups and would soon shift into more targeted operations.

Later on Tuesday, 17 Palestinians were killed in Israeli tank shelling of a street in the densely populated Zeitoun neighbourhood in

17 Palestinians were killed in Israeli tank shelling of a street in the densely populated Zeitoun neighbourhood in Gaza City in the north of the Strip

Gaza City in the north of the Strip, medics said. Footage on some Palestinian social media showed the scene at a local market, with bread scattered on a floor stained with blood.

The Israeli army had ordered residents of several towns and villages in eastern Khan Younis to evacuate their homes on Monday, prior to tanks re-entering the area the military had left several weeks ago.

Thousands who had not

heeded the call were forced to flee their homes in the dark overnight, as Israeli tanks and planes bombed Karara, Abassan and other areas that had been named in the evacuation orders, residents and media said.

"Where will we go?" said Tamer, a 55-year-old businessman, who has been displaced six times since October 7. "Every time people go back to their homes and begin to rebuild some of their lives even on the rubble of their houses, the occupation sends the tanks back to destroy what is left," he added.

The offensive launched by Israel in retaliation has killed nearly 38,000 people, according to the Gaza health ministry, and has left the heavily built-up coastal enclave in ruins.

The Gaza health officials say most of the dead are civilians. Israel says 320 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza and that at least a third of the Palestinian dead are fighters.

Israel says that its operation in Rafah, in southern Gaza near the border with Egypt, that was meant to stamp out Hamas in its final redoubt will soon be concluded.

After the intense phase of the war is over, its forces will focus on smaller-scale operations meant to stop Palestinian groups from regrouping, officials say.

Efforts to secure a ceasefire and the release of hostages in Gaza have stalled. Hamas says any deal must end the war and bring a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. — **Reuters**

Lebanon says Israeli GPS jamming confounding ground, air traffic

BEIRUT: Uber driver Hussein Khalil was battling traffic in Beirut when he found himself in the Gaza Strip — according to his online map, anyway — as location jamming blamed on Israel disrupts life in Lebanon.

"We've been dealing with this problem a lot for around five months," said Khalil, 36. "Sometimes we can't work at all," the disgruntled driver said on Beirut's chaotic, car-choked streets. "Of course, we are losing money."

For months, whacky location data on apps have caused confusion in Lebanon, where the Israel and Lebanese group Hezbollah have been engaged in cross-border clashes.

The near-daily exchanges started after Palestinians launched an unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7.

In March, Beirut lodged a complaint with the United Nations about "attacks by Israel on Lebanese sovereignty in the form of jamming the airspace around" the Beirut airport.

Khalil showed screenshots of apps displaying his locations not only in the Gazan city of Rafah — around 300 kilometres away — but also in east Lebanon near the Syrian border, when he was actually in Beirut.

Numerous residents have reported their online map location as appearing at Beirut airport while they were actually elsewhere in the capital.

Israel has taken measures to disrupt Global Positioning System (GPS) functionality for the group and other opponents.

The cross-border exchanges have killed more than 490 people in Lebanon, mostly fighters, with 26 people killed in northern Israel. Fears have grown of all-out conflict between the foes that last went to war in 2006.

Lebanon's civil aviation chief Fadi El Hassan said that since March, the body has asked pilots flying in or out of Beirut to "rely on ground navigation equipment and not on GPS signals due to the ongoing interference in the region". Ground navigation equipment is typically used as a back-up system.

Hassan expressed frustration that "in this technological age, a pilot who wants to land at our airport cannot use GPS due to Israeli enemy interference".

Lebanon is ensuring "the maintenance of ground navigation equipment at all times in order to provide the necessary signals for pilots to land safely," he said. — **AFP**



A motorbike drives past buildings destroyed during previous Israeli fire on the southern Lebanese village of Aita al Shaab. – AFP

UN says 250,000 Palestinians hit by new evacuation order

GENEVA: The UN agency supporting Palestinian refugees estimated on Tuesday that a quarter of a million people had been impacted since Israel's army issued a new evacuation order for parts of southern Gaza a day earlier.

"We've seen people moving, families moving, people starting to pack up their belongings and try to leave this area," UNRWA spokeswoman Louise Wateridge told reporters in Geneva via video-link from Gaza.

The agency "estimates that around 250,000 people have been impacted by these orders", she said, adding: "We expect these numbers to grow".

Her comments came after the Israeli army on Monday issued a new evacuation order for parts of Khan Younis and Rafah in southern Gaza. The 250,000 number was UNRWA's estimate for the people in the area of new evacuation orders in eastern Khan Younis, Wateridge said.

"We expect that almost all of these people will move from this area," she said, adding that the

It's another devastating blow for the people and the families on the ground. It seems that they are forcibly being displaced again, and again

LOUISE WATERIDGE
UNRWA spokeswoman

agency hoped to get a better idea later on Tuesday of the numbers who have physically left.

Monday's evacuation order followed mass displacement from large parts of Rafah that began with a similar order nearly two months ago, which signalled the start of a long-feared Israeli ground offensive. The fighting since then has again uprooted many Palestinians and led to the closure of a key aid crossing.

"This is another devastating blow to the humanitarian response here," Wateridge said.



Palestinians flee the evacuation area in east Khan Younis. – AFP

"It's another devastating blow for the people and the families on the ground. It seems that they are forcibly being displaced again, and again."

She pointed out that following the start of the Rafah incursion in May, people had flooded back into the largely destroyed Khan Younis area.

"And now already, because of the orders last night, the same families are having to move again," she said.

"There is absolutely no safe place in the Gaza Strip."

Gaza's deadliest war began with October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, according to a tally based on Israeli figures.

The Palestinian groups seized 251 captives, 116 of whom remain in Gaza including 42 the army says are dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive aimed at eradicating the Palestinians groups in Gaza has killed at least 37,925 people, mostly civilians, according to data from the health ministry in the territory. — **AFP**



In brief

■ BRIDGETOWN



HURRICANE BERYL PUMMELS CARIBBEAN, HURTLES TO JAMAICA

Hurricane Beryl was on Tuesday hurtling towards Jamaica as it strengthened into a record top-level Category 5 storm after sweeping across several islands in the southeastern Caribbean.

Dumping heavy rain and unleashing devastating winds, Beryl was described as a “potentially catastrophic” storm by the US National Hurricane Center (NHC).

Beryl is the earliest Category 5 storm in the Atlantic on record.

“The centre of Beryl will move quickly across the Caribbean Sea today and is forecast to pass near Jamaica on Wednesday and the Cayman Islands on Thursday.” — **AFP**

■ NEW YORK



TRUMP SEEKS OVERTURN CONVICTION AFTER IMMUNITY RULING

Donald Trump’s lawyers plan to ask that his May conviction on criminal charges stemming from hush money paid to a film star be set aside due to the US Supreme Court’s ruling on presidential immunity, *The New York Times* reported.

Citing a person with knowledge of the matter, it said a letter seeking permission to file the motion would be made public on Tuesday at the earliest and before sentencing scheduled for July 11 in New York state in Manhattan court.

Trump’s lawyers are likely to point to some evidence used in the case that dated from Trump’s presidency time in the White House. — **Reuters**

■ MOSCOW



RUSSIA DESTROYS 5 UKRAINIAN JETS IN STRIKE ON AIR BASE

Russia said on Tuesday it had destroyed or damaged five Ukrainian military jets in a strike on an air base, as Kyiv prepares for the arrival of long-awaited F-16 fighters. Russia’s defence ministry said it fired Iskander-M missiles at an air base near the Ukrainian city of Myrgorod.

“As a result of the Russian army strike, five operational SU-27 multirole fighters were destroyed, and two that were under repair were damaged,” it said in a statement. The ministry published footage, showing smoke billowing at the airfield, where parked planes were visible and charred earth. — **AFP**

Hungarian Orban calls for Ukraine ceasefire

KYIV: Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban urged Kyiv on Tuesday to work towards a “quick ceasefire” in Ukraine that could pave the way for negotiations with Russia to end more than two years of war.

Orban issued the appeal standing next to President Volodymyr Zelensky during a surprise visit to Ukraine, the first by the vocal critic of Western support for Kyiv.

“I asked the president to consider whether... a quick ceasefire could speed up the peace talks,” the Hungarian leader told reporters.

Unlike many other European leaders, Orban had not visited Kyiv since Russia attacked in February 2022 and has publicly hit out at Europe’s financial and military aid, temporarily blocking a 50-billion-euro aid package for weeks.

The nationalist leader has also blasted the EU’s move to open formal membership talks with Kyiv and has been accused of maintaining warm relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Orban, in power since 2010, met with Putin in October 2023 at a regional summit in Beijing, becoming the first EU leader to do so since the start of the war.

Hungary openly opposes sanctions on Russia, though has so far only sought to hold up the EU’s measures, not outright block them.

The Kremlin said earlier on

Tuesday it expected little to come of the visit but described Orban as a “tough” politician who keenly defended his country’s interests.

The visit to Ukraine comes the day after Hungary took over the EU’s rotating presidency for the next six months, a position which gives the central European state sway over the bloc’s agenda and priorities for the rest of the year.

Orban said he would report on his talks with Zelensky to EU prime ministers “so that the necessary European decisions can be taken.”

Zelensky said the timing of the visit, after Hungary took over EU presidency, was symbolic.

“This is a clear indication of our common European priorities, of how important it is to bring a just peace to Ukraine,” he said, urging European countries to maintain military support.

Orban’s visit came as Russian forces killed one person and wounded seven more in the southern Kherson region, which is partially occupied. Moscow has claimed the capture of a string of villages in eastern Ukraine in recent weeks.

Relations have been frosty between Orban and Zelensky since the start of the war. After winning re-election in April 2022, Orban said the Ukrainian leader was an “opponent” that he had managed to defeat in the campaign. — **AFP**



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky (C-R) and Hungary’s PM Viktor Orban (C-L) attend a joined media briefing after their talks in Kyiv. — **AFP**

Poland’s Tusk issues rallying cry to pro-European forces



WARSAW: Pro-European politicians must act decisively in tackling issues of concern to ordinary voters like illegal migration to counter rising nationalism, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said on Tuesday, after far-right gains in French and EU elections.

Tusk was speaking alongside Chancellor Olaf Scholz after intergovernmental consultations between the Polish and German cabinets as they look to deepen ties.

France, the third member of the ‘Weimar Triangle’ grouping, is reeling from the far-right’s victory in Sunday’s first round of its parliamentary election.

“The French election is not the only quite critical moment, in many places we can see the growth of forces that do not hide their eurosceptic attitude,” Tusk told a joint news conference with Scholz in Warsaw. “That is why it is so important that moderate, reasonable, pro-European forces... find convincing answers to what has become important for ordinary people — the effective fight against illegal migration, security, greater economic sustainability, increased industrial coordination.”



The French election is not the only quite critical moment, in many places we can see the growth of forces that do not hide their eurosceptic attitude

DONALD TUSK

Polish Prime Minister

Scholz said he was sure that relations between Paris, Berlin and Warsaw would remain strong despite Marine Le Pen’s far-right National Rally (RN) party making historic gains in France, which will hold a second round of voting next Sunday.

“We are of course two very pro-European nations and two very

pro-European governments,” Scholz said of Poland and Germany. “We know that our future can only succeed together with Europe and that is also the basis for why, in my view, we have reached very concrete agreements on what we will do next.”

Following Tuesday’s intergovernmental talks, the first since 2018, Germany and Poland presented a joint action plan in which they agreed to discuss boosting defence cooperation, including a stronger Nato presence on the alliance’s eastern border, and the coordination of Ukraine aid. However, differences on defence were also visible.

Tusk has been a vocal proponent of common EU financing of defence projects, but Scholz has said the bloc should not be involved in financing arms purchases or national defence budgets. Tusk said he would continue to stress to EU partners including Germany the importance of coordination in defence purchases.

“Poland spends huge amounts of money on armaments,” Tusk said. “I would like our efforts to be well coordinated with the efforts of other countries.” — **Reuters**

French candidates bow out in bid to block far-right

PARIS: Opponents of France’s National Rally (RN) stepped up their bid to block the far-right party from power on Tuesday as more candidates agreed to pull out of this weekend’s run-off election to avoid splitting the anti-RN vote.

More than 200 candidates have confirmed they will not stand in Sunday’s second-round for France’s 577-seat national parliament, according to local media estimates.

Marine Le Pen’s RN came out well ahead in Sunday’s first-round vote after President Emmanuel Macron’s challenge on a snap election backfired, leaving his centrist camp in a lowly third place behind the RN and a hastily formed left-wing alliance.

But even before the manoeuvring of the last 24 hours to create a “republican front” to block the anti-immigrant, eurosceptic party, it was far from clear the RN could win the 289 seats needed for a majority.

Pollsters calculated the first round put the RN on track for

anything between 250-300 seats. But that was before the tactical withdrawals and cross-party calls for voters to back whichever candidate was best placed to defeat the local RN rival.

“The match is not over. We must mobilise all our forces,” the Socialist mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, told France 2, insisting the rise of the far right should not spoil the festive mood in the French capital as it hosts the summer Olympics.

The RN is hostile to further European Union integration and would cut funding to the EU. Human rights groups have raised concerns about how its “national preference” and anti-migrant policies would apply to ethnic minorities, while economists question whether its hefty spending plans are fully funded.

There was initial confusion over whether Macron’s allies would stand down in local contests in favour of better-placed rival candidates if they came from the radical left-wing France Unbowed (LFI) party of Jean-Luc Melenchon. — **Reuters**



A woman looks at election posters of French far-right Rassemblement National (RN), in Libourne, France. — **AFP**

Sustainable adaptation can tackle climate change in GCC



Rumaitha al Busaidi

As I trekked through the Alps, I was enveloped by the breathtaking beauty and cool mountain air, a stark contrast to the sweltering heat that many of us are enduring back home in the Gulf. This difference reminded me of my relatives' difficult experiences during their haj pilgrimage this year. What should have been a spiritually enriching journey turned into a test of endurance, with temperatures soaring to dangerous levels, leaving many pilgrims, including my family members, battling heat exhaustion and dehydration.

This personal connection to the climate crisis underscores the urgency of addressing the severe heat conditions that are becoming increasingly common in the Gulf. The Gulf States are on the front lines of climate change, facing challenges that threaten both their ambitious development plans and the well-being of their populations.

In Oman and across the Gulf, the summer heat is becoming increasingly unbearable, pushing temperatures beyond what is safe for human activity. Projections suggest that future heat waves could be nearing the 60 degrees Celsius mark, which has

profound implications for public health, economic stability, and environmental sustainability. Already, we see the strain on infrastructure, as evidenced by recent power outages in Kuwait during a heatwave that saw temperatures climb to 52 degrees Celsius. While crucial, our region's reliance on desalinated water highlights another significant challenge. In addressing the challenges posed by climate change, the Gulf States must focus on several key areas.

First, investing in renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power can reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. The abundant sunshine and strong winds in our region make these energy sources particularly viable. Improving insulation in buildings and adopting energy-saving technologies can significantly reduce power consumption and lower carbon footprints.

Water conservation is another critical area. Improved irrigation practices and promoting public awareness about the importance of water conservation can help manage the limited water resources more sustainably. Furthermore, developing more efficient desalination technologies that use less energy and produce less environmental

OUR RESILIENCE WILL DEPEND ON OUR ABILITY TO ADAPT AND INNOVATE AS WE PREPARE TO FACE INCREASINGLY HARSH SUMMERS

impact is essential. Public health measures are also necessary to cope with extreme heat. Establishing cooling centres, improving healthcare infrastructure to handle heat-related illnesses, and raising public awareness about the dangers of extreme heat can help protect the most vulnerable populations.

Finally, collaboration and knowledge sharing among Gulf States can also enhance our collective ability to address climate change. By working together, sharing best practices, and supporting regional initiatives, we can build a more resilient and sustainable future for the entire Gulf region.

The Gulf States are at a critical juncture. The relentless impacts of climate change are already upon us, demanding immediate and decisive action.

Our region's resilience and future depend on our collective will to embrace innovation and sustainability. We have the resources, the knowledge, and the capability to lead by example. By harnessing renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, conserving water, and protecting public health, we can transform our economies and societies for the better.

How an algorithm tweak cost livelihoods

JOSEPH BOYLE

Google made major changes to its search algorithm and spam filters earlier this year to get rid of low-quality content — but the effects have proved devastating to some smaller websites.

Online businesses have been left considering layoffs and even site closures after Google's massive upgrade in March and April caused catastrophic drops in traffic.

Gisele Navarro is one of the unlucky ones whose website got caught up in Google's dragnet.

The 37-year-old Argentine runs the HouseFresh website with her husband, and they had been building a healthy niche in product reviews for air purifiers since 2020.

There were no ads, no product placements and no soft-peddalling — if a product was bad, the site's reviewers would say so. They earned commissions from click-throughs to Amazon. But Google's update changed all of that. "We found that we went from ranking number one — because we were one of the only people who had actually done a review — to not even showing up," she said. HouseFresh used to get around 4,000 referrals from Google search a day, but this has since collapsed to around 200.

The drop-off in business has been so bad that Navarro said she had been advised to shutter the site and start over with a new domain name.

Underpinning the frustration for Navarro and many other sites is the lack of clarity over how Google ranks results.

The US firm is notoriously secretive about its algorithms — so much so that an entire industry known as "search engine optimisation" has grown up trying to game the algorithm to get more clicks. The latest update sent SEO experts into a tailspin, desperately trying to unpack why some sites were boosted and others getting downranked.

Google said its update was designed specifically to give users "fewer results that feel made for search engines". Yet Navarro showed in a widely shared blog post in May that people searching for product reviews were increasingly being fed ads and content that appeared to be AI-generated or SEO-maximised. Other material boosted by Google's update included user-generated content from websites like Reddit and Quora.

All the businesses AFP talked to said they were now urgently seeking ways to avoid relying on Google search — whether by writing newsletters, making podcasts or finding other ways to attract audiences. The boss of a fintech news outlet said their competitors all employed SEO firms "to buy traffic".

— AFP

Remote work raises productivity



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Tobi

The author is an academic and researcher

Most of us are accustomed to traffic congestion during rush hours as we head to work. This raises numerous questions about the causes of this congestion, its negative impact, possible solutions to reduce traffic, and the ability of employees to perform their duties efficiently and provide services to clients and stakeholders.

We wonder about the necessity of physical presence for all these jobs and the feasibility of remote jobs. These policies do not require specific attendance times but instead focus on task completion. However, it is essential to note that not all jobs can be fully converted to remote work such as those in healthcare, police and military.

Oman Vision 2040, which began in 2021 coincided with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, forced many government and private institutions to adopt remote work policies to maintain operations. This vision emphasises digital transformation projects aimed at digitising services in both government and private sectors to enhance service efficiency, reduce costs and speed up work. Achieving digital transformation projects make it easier for institutions to implement remote work policies, which can significantly contribute to creating new job opportunities, reducing unemployment rates, and increasing work flexibility, thereby boosting the digital economy in Oman.

Returning to our initial topic of traffic congestion, one solution to reduce this congestion is by transitioning many jobs to remote work in parallel with digital transformation. Studies have shown that remote work can improve employee productivity. For instance, a 2020 Stanford University study found that remote workers were 5 per cent more productive than those working on-site. By 2022, remote worker productivity increased to 9 per cent as institutions became more adept at remote work practices due to investments in technology and training (as published in *Forbes* in 2023). Financially, institutions implementing remote work policies can reduce operational costs such as rents and utility bills, enhancing the effectiveness



of resource management.

From another perspective, remote work can provide employees with greater flexibility in managing their time, contributing to improved job satisfaction and personal lives. This work-life balance can lead to better mental health, reduced stress levels, and increased job commitment and efficiency.

OMAN VISION 2040 EMPHASISES DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS AIMED AT DIGITISING SERVICES IN BOTH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTORS TO ENHANCE SERVICE EFFICIENCY, REDUCE COSTS AND SPEED UP WORK

According to a 2023 report by Buffer, 98 per cent of remote workers expressed a desire to continue working remotely due to the benefits it offers.

Despite the advantages, remote work also presents challenges. One such challenge is the difficulty in effective communication between employees and their managers, which can negatively impact coordination and workflow.

A 2023 Flexjobs survey highlighted some challenges remote workers face: 28 per cent reported overworking or working longer hours, 19 per cent struggled with working across different time zones, 18 per cent faced technical issues, 17 per cent experienced numerous non-work-related distractions, and 16 per cent felt invisible to their superiors. Another significant challenge is related to data security and the risk of cyber attacks.

A Cisco survey of various institutions revealed a 25 per cent increase in cyber attacks since the onset of the pandemic, coinciding with the shift to remote work. This underscores the need to secure networks and train employees on cybersecurity tools and awareness of digital systems' potential vulnerabilities and protection methods.

To address these challenges, government and private sector institutions must invest in improving digital infrastructure by expanding high-speed Internet access to all areas, including remote regions, and enhancing cybersecurity for networks and data. This effort is supported and implemented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology in Oman in collaboration with relevant institutions, emphasising that improving communication infrastructure is crucial for achieving digital transformation.

Institutions capable of wider-scale digital transformation should expand remote work policies, even on a trial basis, to identify challenges and benefits, and track productivity rates. However, this implementation should be preceded by training to enhance employees' capabilities. It is evident that productivity will increase with investment in developing employees' skills in modern digital technologies, whether on-site or remote.

Based on the justifications supporting the expansion of remote work and proposed solutions for associated challenges, such measures will strengthen digital transformation projects and their practical applications, contributing to the goals of Oman Vision 2040 in supporting the national economy, achieving governmental agility and enhancing productivity levels.

How life becomes faster, easier

Whether it's paying for a meal at a restaurant, ordering a takeout from a home delivery service, or filling fuel at a gasoline station, the exchange of cash is not the only option for payment.

Similarly, we can carry out many of the basics of our lives, including daily commercial transactions, healthcare needs, education, and other essential social or family interactions with just a few taps or clicks on a gadget!

As human life evolves and its needs and wants change and grow over time, advanced and modern technology comes to the rescue to fulfil these needs. It has touched every aspect and need in our lives. Like magic, it does things that most people never knew were possible. We can do things that would have traditionally taken days or even weeks. The world is moving fast; hence, catching up with speed is more essential. So by applying new technology, the set goal can be achieved more clearly and with quality. Thanks to digital transformation, life and work have become faster, easier and cheaper than they were before!

It's no longer a question of whether we should digitise, but the faster we do, the better. The worst nightmare in our life, perhaps, will be the thought of a world where there is no technology. Today, the world of information is in the palm of your hand. In our homes, we find that children often become more adept with modern technology than their parents, who, on the other hand, believe that familiarity with technology will allow their children to be more creative, learn new skills and access a world of possibilities.

So they try to introduce their kids to technology early on, realising that it goes beyond mere screen time. With the help of technology, children have more access to many educational resources and tools that can enhance their learning experience. As countries are heading towards digital



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AFTER ALL, AN EFFICIENT DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE BACKBONE OF A DIGITALLY INCLUSIVE SOCIETY. IF DEVELOPMENT OF A COUNTRY MOVES AT A SLUGGISH PACE, IT MEANS THAT TECHNOLOGY OF THAT COUNTRY IS QUITE BACKWARD

societies, technology can bring more opportunities that can bring about development across all sectors. Digital tools and systems help governments manage their daily operations, deliver services and engage with stakeholders, including individuals, businesses and civil society. After all, an efficient digital infrastructure is the backbone of a digitally inclusive society. If the rate of development of any country is slow, it means that the technology of that country is quite backward.

Look at countries in the Gulf region that were heavily reliant on oil and gas production and exports; they're now investing heavily in digital technologies across the government and private sectors. Reports are there to show that the region has the additional benefit of the young tech-savvy working population, and high internet and mobile device penetration rates.

These factors are boosting the region's information technology market. Analysts estimate it will be worth \$95 billion by 2025, compared to \$84.23 billion in 2020.

Oman is one such country that has been on a transformative journey to modernise its economy and society through the strategic implementation of digital technologies. It has recorded qualitative leaps in its digital transformation under the National Programme for Digital Transformation during 2021-2023.

According to the digital transformation report issued by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Oman's government entities achieved an average performance of 72 per cent in achieving digital transformation goals in 2023.

The reason for this remarkable digital transformation is attributed to good governance, the development of national policies and guidelines, and community participation.

This means digital transformation in government bodies is better for citizens, residents, employees and business overall.

FUMING AGAINST TAX



A protestor throws a tear gas canister back police amid clashes during nationwide deadly protests over tax hikes and a controversial now-withdrawn tax bill in Nairobi, on Tuesday. – AFP

Reassess ideologies to avoid violence

The year 1979 was pivotal in the region's history, marked by the Grand Mosque seizure in Saudi Arabia led by Juhayman al Otaibi, the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the onset of the Iran-Iraq War, which lasted eight years.

Al Otaibi's religious ideology was influenced by Muhammad Nasser Al Din al Albani. His controversial views, particularly among students of the Islamic University in Medina, led to his expulsion from the Kingdom. His followers adopted various jurisprudential opinions, including praying with shoes on and rejecting the phrase "Prayer is better than sleep" during the second call to prayer. They also superficially interpreted signs of the Hour and considered Muhammad bin Abdullah Al Qahtani as Mahdi who would bring about Judgement Day.

Some researchers see them as an extension of the Buraydah Brotherhood. During King Abdulaziz al Saud's reign, when Islamic groups with modernising tendencies like the Muslim Brotherhood became prominent, a marriage of Salafist and reformist movements occurred, leading to the emergence of the Sahwa (awakening), Surur and Qutb movements.

Juhayman advocated the idea of (enjoining good and forbidding evil), operating under the banner of Ihtisaba rather than the state. He founded the Muhtisaba Salafist Group, supported by Abdulaziz Ibn Baz, eventually leading the state to absorb the institution of



Badr al Abri

The writer focuses on reconciliation and understanding and is the author of The Jurisprudence of Extremism

A POLITICAL AND SECURE SYSTEM THAT ALLOWS BROAD FREEDOMS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND CRITICAL INTERACTION IS NEEDED, FREE FROM SELF-INTERESTED RELIGIOUS, SECTARIAN, OR POLITICAL GOALS

enjoining good and forbidding evil, which clashed with modernisation efforts.

Ayatollah Khomeini advanced the theory of Naini to address the political vacuum left by the Shiite theory post-Great Occultation, forming a theocratic Islamic government as an alternative to liberal and leftist ideologies.

Researchers link the Islamic awakening to 1979, with the Iranian revolution injecting an Islamic fervour initially used by Gulf policies to counter leftist tendencies. Modernisation efforts were minimal, focusing on material aspects without expanding legal and political demands, leading to the containment of religious movements under official control.

During this period, Gulf political trends faced three challenges: eliminating the extremist ideology of Al Otaibi, confronting the Soviet Union's communism and fearing the spread of the Iranian revolution's ideology. The Brotherhood, known for their strong rhetoric and openness to other movements, were seen as suitable allies to counter Iran's revolution and manage sectarian divisions.

In this environment, Salafism blended with the Brotherhood, leading to the emergence of Sahwa also known as Sururism or Qutbism. Many Islamic writers, however, reject linking the

awakening to these events.

Hashim Abdul Razzaq al Ta'i argues that the awakening and reform movements are reactions to colonialism, while Al Qaradawi views it as an extension of historical Islamic movements and thinkers, including the ideology of Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, Muhammad bin Ali al Senussi, Muhammad bin Ahmed al Mahdi, Jamal Al Din al Afghani, Abdul-Rahman al Kawakibi, Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Rashid Reda,

Saeed al Nursi, Hassan al Banna, Abu al Ala al Mawdudi, Abdul Hamid ibn Badis, Mustafa al Sibai, and Sayyid Qutb.

Religious discourse during this time was used to oppose other trends, particularly leftists, and extended to sectarian minorities such as Ibadiya and Zaidiya, and even non-religious groups. There was also a rise in Orthodox Christian awakening in Egypt under Pope Shenouda III.

From the mid-eighties to the

early 2000s, the state of awakening was not a merely Shiite or Sunni, but a broadly Islamic state, integrating ideas from Ibadi and Zaidi sects, each with significant political influence. Abdul Halim Mahmoud noted that the Kharijites' views on imamate align with modern trends, advocating for free elections contrary to Sunni and Shiite Akhbari tendencies that either supported the ruler or withdrawal after the Great Occultation.

Exposure to Western theories of state and governance, and the fall of the caliphate, led to diverse political experiences and a blockage in historical and heritage continuity, fostering dynamic Islamic tendencies that clashed with the modern state system.

This period requires a deconstructive and critical reassessment, avoiding violence that perpetuates further violence, as seen during Gamal Abdel Nasser's era. Recent decades have seen many critical analyses, but today, a political and secure system that allows broad freedoms and financial support for research and critical interaction is needed, free from self-interested religious, sectarian, or political goals.



The Brotherhood, known for their strong rhetoric and openness to other movements, were seen as suitable allies to counter Iran's revolution and manage sectarian divisions.

Translated by Badr al Dhafari
The original version of the article appeared in Arabic in Oman newspaper's print version on July 2.

sport

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Pogacar wins stage four to reclaim Tour de France lead

VALLOIRE, France: Tadej Pogacar made an early statement in the Tour de France as he dropped defending champion Jonas Vingegaard to claim victory in the first mountain stage and take the overall leader's yellow jersey on Tuesday.

The Slovenian attacked 800 metres from the top of the Col du Galibier, when the slope was at its steepest, and only Vingegaard followed but the Dane had to watch his rival fade in the distance 300 metres further ahead.

Pogacar pushed harder on the pedals, briefly looking back, before hitting the descent to Valloire at breakneck speed and gradually increase his lead over Vingegaard, who was then caught by other top contenders, including three-times Vuelta champion Primož Roglič and Belgian prodigy Remco Evenepoel.

Capping off an impressive show of strength by his UAE Emirates team, Pogacar finished the 139.6 km fourth stage 35 seconds ahead of Evenepoel and Spain's Juan Ayuso.

"It was the plan, and it paid off," his team mate Pavel Sivakov of France said.

Overall, Pogacar leads Evenepoel by 45 seconds. Vingegaard, who easily responded to Pogacar's first move in the second stage, was just a notch down on Tuesday and finished the day gasping with his head down.

The Visma-Lease a Bike rider, however, can still take comfort from the fact that he had not raced in almost three months after suffering a collapsed lung in the Tour of the Basque Country in April.

He will have the opportunity to make his own statement in Friday's 25.3 km time trial, a year after he humiliated Pogacar in the solo effort against the clock on the Tour, beating him by 98 seconds over 22.4 km.

This year's race was billed as a duel between the winners of the last four editions and it is already turning out to be the expected two-man battle, although Slovenian Primož Roglič and Evenepoel are still in the mix.

They were glued on the road when Pogacar attacked, but limited their losses while former Giro d'Italia champion Richard Carapaz cracked and saw his yellow jersey vanish in the rarefied air of the Col du Galibier, which is 2,642 metres above sea level, losing more than four minutes on the line.

A breakaway group of 17 took shape in the climb to Sestriere (39.9 km at 3.7%), the first ascent of the day, but Pogacar's UAE Emirates team and Carapaz's EF Education-Easy Post set the pace at the front of the peloton, keeping the fugitives on a tight leash.

Pogacar's men forced a devilish speed from the Col du Lautaret, the stepping stone of the climb to the Galibier, whose flanks were covered in snow.

Vingegaard was without a team mate when Matteo Jorgenson cracked 4.5 km from the top while Pogacar still had Adam Yates, Ayuso and Joao Almeida by his side.

Shortly before the summit, Pogacar burst away and Vingegaard followed before gasping for air and letting the 2020 and 2021 champion ride away. — Reuters



Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar cycles to the finish line. – AFP

Oman Under-17 football team back to warm up session

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 2

The Oman Under-17 football team reported back to the domestic training sessions after an absence of more than a month since their last presence in the abroad camp in Uzbekistan last May. The national team boys, coached by the experienced national coach Anwar al Habsi, began their internal warm up sessions on Monday evening at the Royal Court Affairs in Al Khoudh to hone their skills and foster team cohesion.

The six-day domestic gathering will feature a comprehensive schedule of sessions dedicated to enhancing the team's physical, technical, and tactical abilities.



The players will be engaged in rigorous physical conditioning to boost their stamina, strength, and overall fitness level beside

implementing some development of strategic gameplay.

The current warm up gathering is part of team's preparations for



the next assignment which is taking part in the 2025 AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers. Oman team grouped with Tajikistan, Guam

and the hosts Singapore in Group J for the 2025 AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers. The qualifiers will be played from October 19 to 27. The ten group winners and five best second placed teams will advance to the finals accompanied by the hosts Saudi Arabia during April 3-20, 2025.

Oman will commence their campaign in the Asian qualifiers with a match against the hosts Singapore on October 23 before meeting Guam in a key match on October 25. Then, the national team boys will conclude their group matches with an essential game against Tajikistan who is ranked as the top seed team in the group. Oman team will aim to secure the Asian ticket and attend the Asian meet for the 11th time

in history.

In a previous comment to Oman Observer, Coach Anwar al Habsi, said that the national team was handed in an equal group. "The group featured teams with different varying technical levels including Tajikistan team which considered as the top team in the group order. It is one of the top developed Asian teams. The national team is moving on a proper preparatory plan ahead of the Asian qualification challenge. The warm-up plan will feature two domestic camps in July and then an abroad camp. Later, the team will take part in the West Asian Championship in August and it will be followed by Arab Football Championship in September," he said

US crash out in group phase as Uruguay, Panama advance



Mathias Olivera (16) celebrates with team-mates after scoring a goal. – USA TODAY Sports

KANSAS CITY: The United States crashed out of the Copa America on Monday after a 1-0 defeat to Uruguay, as Panama sealed their place in the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Bolivia.

The tournament hosts suffered an upset 2-1 defeat to Panama last week and went into Monday's final Group C game at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City needing to match or better Panama's result against Bolivia to advance.

But US coach Gregg Berhalter's side never looked like doing enough to seriously threaten a well-drilled Uruguay who advance to the last eight as group winners.

"Just looking at the faces of the staff and the players, we're bitterly disappointed with the results," Berhalter said.

"We know that we're capable of more and in this tournament we didn't show it. It's really as simple as that. We should have done better.

"We'll do a review and figure out what went wrong, why it went wrong, but it's an empty feeling right now for sure."

USA captain Christian Pulisic blamed a lack of attacking quality.

"We had a good start and brought a lot of energy, but just didn't have enough quality,"

he said. "We just couldn't find a solution."

Hopes of a great escape for Berhalter's men faded inside the first 30 minutes as news filtered through that Panama had taken a 1-0 lead against Bolivia in Orlando.

US hopes were revived early in the second half after Bolivia equalised, leaving the hosts on course for qualification, provided they continued to hold Uruguay.

Yet the US optimism was punctured just moments later when Uruguay took the lead in controversial circumstances through Mathias Olivera on 66 minutes.

PRETTY CRAZY

Ronald Araujo's powerful header from Nicolas de la Cruz's free-kick was parried away by US goalkeeper Matt Turner, but only into the path of Olivera, who tucked away the rebound.

Replays appeared to show that Olivera was offside when Araujo first made contact with the ball, but despite a

lengthy VAR review, Peruvian referee Kevin Ortega ruled that the goal should stand.

"It's pretty crazy," Berhalter said. "I don't understand it, I feel like I know the offside rule pretty well.

"It's disappointing. It really is. But you know that happens in football, and we have to live with it."

The mathematics of qualification looked even more bleak for the US after news that Panama had scored again through Eduardo Guerrero to regain the lead at 2-1, and the final nail in the coffin came when Cesar Yanis added a third for Panama in stoppage time.

The USA's first-round exit raises fresh questions about the future of Berhalter, who remains deeply unpopular amongst swathes of American fans.

Berhalter was only reappointed to the US job in June last year following a hiatus after leading the team to the 2022 World Cup.

The nature of Monday's early exit is certain to reignite debate about whether he is the best man to lead the United States into the 2026 World Cup on home soil.

Failure to defeat Uruguay, 14th in the latest Fifa rankings, extends Berhalter's poor record against top 20 teams. — AFP



DJOKOVIC, MURRAY LAUNCH WIMBLEDON CAMPAIGNS

Mechanical problem ends strong bid from Al Harthy in 24hrs of Spa

BELGIUM: Spa-Francorchamps in Belgium was, for once, a less-than-happy hunting ground for Oman's Ahmad al Harthy over the weekend, June 29-30, when a mechanical problem with the No 30 BMW M4 GT3 — with just eight hours to run — ended involvement in this year's CrowdStrike 24 Hours of Spa.

From the outset in the Centenary staging of the Fanatec GT World Challenge Europe powered by AWS Endurance Cup's blue riband event, Al Harthy's OQ by Oman Racing team didn't put a wheel wrong in terms of driving or the pit-stops as a top result in the Bronze class became a distinct reality.

Unfortunately, though, the as-yet unidentified mechanical issue on Sunday morning brought an immediate end to the challenge of Al Harthy and team-mates Sam De Haan, Jens Klingmann and Calan Williams.

Beginning the championship's blue riband race at 16.30 local time on Saturday from 11th in the Bronze class, but with hopes of a major push for a very strong result with a competitive race set-up, everything started well with Klingmann taking the first stint.

Al Harthy took over after the opening pit-stop in the first hour and held fifth in

the Bronze class, but after picking up some debris he had to pit again around 75 minutes into the encounter and dropped to 18th in class as a result.

Facing a tough challenge, and running out of sequence with the competition, Al Harthy made terrific progress through the order and as the race approached the end of hour two, the Omani had climbed into eighth in Bronze. Continuing to make gains, he was back up into the class top five before the second scheduled pit visit.

Through the various driver cycles over the coming hours, with De Haan and Williams making their first appearances of the race, the strong run continued apace as evening became night and the OQ, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel and BMW Oman supported entry ran strongly.

Heavy rain and thunderstorms over the Ardennes made the night portion of the race particularly challenging and treacherous, but Al Harthy and his team-mates kept their bid on track with some very impressive, committed and yet sensible driving.

With two-thirds of the race complete on Sunday morning, Klingmann was eighth in Bronze before handing the car over to Williams.



LONDON: Wimbledon greets Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray launch their campaigns at the All England Club on Tuesday after both went under the knife in the build-up to the Grand Slam.

Djokovic, who had a knee operation after pulling out before his French Open quarterfinal, is chasing a record-equalling eighth men's Wimbledon title and opens against Czech qualifier Vit Koprieva.

Britain's Murray, a two-time champion, takes on another Czech, Tomas Machac, just over a week after having surgery to remove a cyst from his spine, in his farewell appearance at the tournament.

Also in action on the second day of the Championships is women's world number one and five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek, eager to progress beyond the quarterfinals for the first time.

AFP Sport looks at three

matches to watch on Tuesday: Novak Djokovic v Vit Koprieva World number two Novak Djokovic has declared himself "pain-free" after initial fears he would miss Wimbledon following surgery to repair a torn meniscus.

The Serbian has not played since he was forced to withdraw from the French Open before his last-eight tie against Casper Ruud.

Now 37, he knows time is not on his side as he bids to equal Roger Federer's Wimbledon record and become the first player — man or woman — to win 25 Grand Slam singles titles.

Djokovic, who practised with a knee support on Sunday, said he had an "incredible desire" to play.

He arrives in London without a title to his name this season, losing his Australian Open crown and the number one ranking to 22-year-old Jannik Sinner. — AFP



UEFA
EURO2024
GERMANY



Netherlands' Donyell Malen celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

MUNICH, Germany: The Netherlands swept into their first European Championship quarter-final since 2008 as Donyell Malen scored twice in a 3-0 win over Romania in the last 16 on Tuesday.

Cody Gakpo gave the Dutch an early lead but they were unable to convert pressure into a crucial second goal until the Liverpool forward set up Malen with seven minutes remaining in Munich.

Romania were gritty but out-classed, lacking the quality to punish their opponents' profligacy before Malen added his second on the counter in stoppage-time.

The victory put the Oranje on course for a quarter-final clash with Turkey or Austria, who beat the Netherlands in 3-2 in the group stage.

Ronald Koeman's side will need to improve their effectiveness in front of goal should they wish to emulate their manager, who was a player for the Dutch when they won the 1988 Euros on German soil.

Prior to the game, Netherlands' captain Virgil van

MALEN

doubles up as Dutch beat Romania to reach Euro 2024 quarters

Dijk said his side lacked energy and the "will to win" in the loss to Austria.

But the Dutch were still strangely flat in the early stages despite Van Dijk's rallying cry.

Group E winners Romania, whose 3-0 victory over Ukraine in their opening game, was just their second ever win in the Euros, pinned the Dutch back early.

Romania went close when Dennis Man latched onto a superb diagonal ball from Nicolae Stanciu, but the Parma

winger blasted over.

The Dutch broke Romania's momentum shortly after when Gakpo got on the end of a sweeping move to open the scoring on 20 minutes.

Jerdy Schouten sliced a perfect, long pass through the midfield to Xavi Simons, who found Gakpo on the left flank.

Gakpo eluded Andrei Ratiu and seemed to catch goalkeeper Florin Nita off-guard, blasting in at the near post.

The goal ignited a period of Dutch dominance, Stefan de

Vrij heading inches wide five minutes later.

The Netherlands wasted a perfect chance to double their lead with half-time approaching when Denzel Dumfries picked Bogdan Racovitan's pocket and found Simons, who got tangled up and failed to get a decent shot away.

Koeman's team squandered an array of opportunities early in the second-half.

Memphis Depay and van Dijk went agonisingly close before Gakpo's second was ruled out by VAR for offside.

With every missed chance, the nerves in the Dutch camp seemed to grow, but Romania lacked the quality to truly punish them.

Gakpo, the most impressive man in orange, took matters into his own hands with seven minutes remaining, dribbling through a crowded penalty area and finding Malen who tapped home. With Romania launching a final attack, Malen broke through on the counter and slid the ball into the goal in the fourth minute of stoppage-time to seal the victory. — AFP

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PDO produced water output to hit 1.4 million m³/d

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 2

Faced with a daily deluge of produced water — highly saline oil-contaminated water that comes to the surface along with oil — Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has revamped its water management strategy to unlock value from this prodigious resource.

Besides harnessing this resource for Enhanced Oil Recovery (EOR) operations, potential applications for desert agriculture, notably in the cultivation of oil-bearing plants for biofuel production, are being explored as well.

Majority state-owned PDO, the country's largest energy company, currently generates around 948,600 m³/day (cubic metres/day) of produced water — volumes enough to fill an estimated 380 Olympic-sized swimming pools daily.

This is projected to soar to 1.4 million m³/day (equivalent to 560 Olympic-sized swimming pools) in 2030. Until about a decade ago, much of this output was pumped back into deep aquifers — an energy-intensive process that is progressively being scaled down.

“We have established a comprehensive Water Management Strategy in collaboration with relevant government ministries. This prioritises a three-pronged approach: Reduce, Reuse and Relocate (3Rs) for produced water. In 2023, this strategy was refreshed to enable better value creation,” said PDO in its 2023 Sustainability Report.

As part of its revised strategy, PDO plans to maximise the reuse of produced water for EOR operations, notably through water-flooding and steam injection. Around 70 per cent of produced water is presently utilised towards



Rima Water Treatment Plant.

such EOR initiatives. But going forward, PDO plans to explore alternative, energy-efficient and beneficial applications as well.

Significantly, water disposal into deep aquifers — currently accounting for 13 per cent of total produced water — is proposed to be eliminated by 2030.

As for the remaining 17 per cent of the produced water, it is being

channelled towards sustainable surface water management initiatives, such as the Nimr Reed Beds and Rima Water Treatment projects.

Both ground-breaking initiatives, the Nimr Reed Beds project can process 175,000 m³/d of produced water, resulting in

energy savings of around 40 MW and emission reductions of 113,000 tonnes of CO2 per annum.

Likewise, the Rima Water Treatment Plant features innovative biological processes that eliminate the need for the deep aquifer disposal of around 40,000 m³/day of produced water.

“These projects have garnered recognition for their contributions to environmental sustainability efforts, including the greening desert lands, pioneering water solutions and reducing GHG discharges,” according to PDO.

Further, in a bid to create value from this resource, initiatives aimed at extracting salt and minerals are being pursued.

Notable examples included the Fahud Salt Making project, the Qarn Alam Steam Hypersaline project and the use of surface

water for plantation projects.

As reported by the *Observer*, a number of Omani start-ups, among other international players, are exploring opportunities for the production of bio-fuel and potentially even Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) through the cultivation of select crops using treated produced water.

Additionally, by piping produced water to oilfield areas with inadequate supplies for EOR operations, PDO is helping to reduce its reliance on energy-intensive aquifer abstraction.

The construction of a pipeline from Yibal to Lekhwaier presently enables the transfer of produced water for water injection at Lekhwaier, thereby slashing aquifer abstraction from 36,000 m³/day in 2020 to 28,000 m³/day in 2023 — a move that contributes to the monetisation of produced water.





Majan University College

كلية مجان الجامعية

BOARD REPORT FOR THE THIRD QUARTER ENDED 31 MAY 2024

Respected Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Majan College SAOG (Majan University College), I am pleased to present this report on Majan's financial performance and the accompanying un-audited interim condensed financial statements for the Nine-month period ended 31 May 2024.

Financial Performance

In comparison to the same period in previous financial year, total income has increased by 7% to be OMR 3.42 million mainly from increase in new and returning undergraduate students and increase in investment income. Total expenses have decreased by 5% to be OMR 2.76 million mainly decrease in staff cost and decrease in depreciation expense. Therefore, net profit before tax and taxation increased by 130%. Consequently, overall net profit after tax has increased by 130% to be OMR 0.56 million. Earnings per share has increased from 2 Baiza per share to 6 Baiza per share.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to his Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his unlimited support and guidance to higher education. Our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for its support to the private higher education sector. This resulted in tremendous growth in the sector. It is our intention that Majan College SAOG (Majan University College) continues to support to achieve the vision of his Majesty by continuously improving and enriching the standards of its academic programmes and its resources.

Dr. Mansour AlSaid
On behalf of Majan College Board of Directors

Note: The complete accounts are available on Muscat Stock Exchange (www.msx.om)

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS

	01/03/2024-31/05/2024	01/03/2023-31/05/2023	01/09/2023-31/05/2024	01/09/2022-31/05/2023
PROFIT OR LOSS CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE PROFIT OR LOSS				
Revenue	1,002,431	898,306	2,967,411	2,810,566
Other income	45,084	51,343	126,767	145,669
Service expenses	74,278	69,761	227,162	228,950
Employee benefits expense	608,634	624,679	1,801,127	1,883,280
Depreciation, depletion and amortisation	67,771	88,091	203,090	260,073
Other operating expenses	186,189	186,121	496,249	515,897
Profit (loss) from operating activities	110,643	-19,003	366,550	68,055
Investment income	120,630	112,121	339,396	246,579
Finance costs	0	0	0	2,034
Impairment loss (reversal) of non-financial assets	12,221	-131	45,097	24,991
Profit (loss) before income tax	219,052	93,249	660,849	287,609
Income tax expense, continuing operations	32,812	14,091	99,142	43,382
Profit (loss) from continuing operations	186,240	79,158	561,707	244,227
Profit (loss) for period	186,240	79,158	561,707	244,227
PROFIT (LOSS), ATTRIBUTABLE TO BASIC AND DILUTED EARNINGS PER SHARE BASIC EARNINGS PER SHARE				
Basic earnings (loss) per share from continuing operations	0.002	0.001	0.006	0.003
Total basic earnings (loss) per share	0.002	0.001	0.006	0.003

UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	31/05/2024	31/05/2023	31/08/2023
ASSETS			
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	3,081,036	3,284,052	3,229,768
Deferred tax asset	287,312	279,532	275,285
Total non-current assets	3,368,348	3,563,584	3,505,053
CURRENT ASSETS			
Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss, Current	1,259,437	1,250,508	1,275,722
Financial assets carried at amortized cost, current	7,370,730	6,979,279	7,370,730
Trade and other current receivables	2,493,536	1,323,694	789,350
Cash and bank balances	914,065	1,358,016	1,065,295
Total current assets other than non-current assets or disposal groups classified as held for sale or as held for distribution to owners	12,037,768	10,911,497	10,501,097
Total current assets	12,037,768	10,911,497	10,501,097
Total assets	15,406,116	14,475,081	14,006,150
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
EQUITY			
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000
Statutory reserve	1,677,328	1,595,521	1,621,157
Retained earnings (Accumulated losses)	2,298,621	1,562,359	893,087
Other equity interest	0	0	900,000
Total equity	12,975,949	12,157,880	12,414,244
LIABILITIES			
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
NON-CURRENT PROVISIONS			
Non-current provisions for employee benefits	659,330	609,908	650,614
Other non-current provisions	260,655	246,555	236,755
Total non-current provisions	919,985	856,463	887,369
Total non-current liabilities	919,985	856,463	887,369
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
CURRENT PROVISIONS			
Trade and other current payables	1,399,013	1,395,062	580,613
Current tax liabilities, current	111,169	65,676	123,924
Total current liabilities other than liabilities included in disposal groups classified as held for sale	1,510,182	1,460,738	704,537
Total current liabilities	1,510,182	1,460,738	704,537
Total liabilities	2,430,167	2,317,201	1,591,906
Total equity and liabilities	15,406,116	14,475,081	14,006,150
Number of outstanding shares	90000000	90000000	90000000
Net assets per share	0.144	0.135	0.138

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Tender Price (OMR)
RFP No. 18/ Nama Supply/ 2024	Provision and Maintenance of Coffee Machines and Supply of Ingredients	11/07/2024	18/07/2024	Specialist	Free Cost

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - To obtain the tender document, please contact us by email procurement@supply.nama.om - Requesting the tender document will be in working hours between 08:00 AM till 02:00 PM.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent using the inquiry form found in the tender document to procurement@supply.nama.om five (5) days before the date of submission of the tender. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of not less than Ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization. - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.
Incentives and exemptions	- Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from registration fees on business opportunities platform and supplier registration with Nama Group.



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BankDhofar wins Euromoney best bank for corporates award

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, a leading bank in the Sultanate of Oman, has been recognised as the “Best Bank for Corporates in Oman” by Euromoney, a world-renowned financial publication. This award underscores BankDhofar’s dedication to providing comprehensive and innovative financial solutions to Omani Corporates that empower businesses to thrive.

BankDhofar has a comprehensive suite of products to meet the growing needs of Omani Corporates including Lending and Working Capital, Trade Finance products including import and export financing, Transaction Banking products ensuring faster collection and automated reconciliation services.

Euromoney’s Awards for Excellence are highly respected within the global banking sector. Winning this distinction solidifies BankDhofar’s position as a leader in corporate banking within the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank has been recognised for its commitment



to delivering a comprehensive suite of corporate banking products and services, providing tailored financial solutions to meet the unique needs of each client and offering exceptional customer service and support to corporate clients.

BankDhofar’s dedication to corporate banking is reflected in its various initiatives, including developing industry-specific solutions for different sectors, providing cash management solutions to optimise business finances and offering trade finance solutions to facilitate international trade.

By prioritising exceptional corporate banking services, BankDhofar empowers businesses in Oman to achieve their financial goals.

Hongqi’s HS5 and Ousado models revolutionise driving experience

MUSCAT: Hongqi, a prestigious name in the automotive industry, proudly showcases its range, including the Hongqi HS5 and Hongqi Ousado, designed to redefine the driving experience with a blend of luxury, performance, and technology.

These models stand as a testament to Hongqi’s commitment to delivering unparalleled luxury and performance to the discerning drivers of Oman.

Hongqi Ousado: Luxury and modernity redefined

The Hongqi Ousado is a remarkable blend of luxury and modernity, making a bold statement on Oman’s roads. Its prominent exterior embodies a sophisticated design that seamlessly integrates contemporary aesthetics with luxurious details.

Inside, the Ousado offers an exquisite interior that harmoniously balances comfort, nobility, and luxury, creating an environment of pure indulgence.

Underneath its stylish exterior, the Ousado is powered by a high-performance aluminium 2.0 turbo-charged engine, paired with an 8-speed transmission.

This powerful combination allows the Ousado to accelerate



from 0 to 100 km/h in just 7.8 seconds, providing a thrilling and dynamic driving experience.

Key features of the Hongqi Ousado include:

- Dynaudio Surround Sound System: Delivers an immersive audio experience.
- Large Panorama Glass Sunroof: Enhances the sense of space and openness.
- 12.6-inch Central Control Screen: Equipped with automatic CarPlay for seamless connectivity.
- Parking Assistance: Facilitates effortless and safe parking.
- Wireless Charging: Ensures you stay connected on the go.

of Delicacy and Power

The Hongqi HS5 brings a unique blend of aesthetic brilliance, safety, and comfort, making it a standout on the roads of Oman.

The HS5’s exterior features extremely delicate aesthetic elements, ensuring it shines in the limelight. Its unique “Wing of Hongqi” welcome light resembles an eagle spreading its wings, offering an honourable experience every time you approach your vehicle.

Key features of the Hongqi HS5 include:

- Extremely Delicate Design: The vehicle’s aesthetic elements make it shine in the limelight, with a unique “Wing of

Hongqi” welcome light design.

- Extremely Safe: Over 60% of high-strength steel sheet and 1,500MPa high-strength thermos steel sheet create a safe cage-type body structure.

- Extremely Comfortable: Nappa and Alcantara seat trim, aviation-grade side foldable headrest, heated and ventilated seats offer extreme driving and riding enjoyment.

- Five Driving Modes: Economy, comfort, sports, off-road, and snow modes coordinate with the intelligent damper control suspension system to provide a pleasant driving experience.

- Available in Five Stunning Colors: Allowing personalisation to match individual style.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO MHD ACERE, remarked that, “Our goal at Hongqi Oman is to provide our customers with a driving experience that transcends the ordinary.

The Hongqi HS5 and Ousado models embody our commitment to innovation, luxury, and performance. We are proud to offer vehicles that not only meet the highest standards of quality but also provide a unique blend of elegance and technology.”

Be one of the winners this summer with Bank Muscat credit cards



MUSCAT: In line with its pioneering role in providing exceptional offers to customers during summer travel season, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced

an exclusive travel offer for credit card holders.

During the offer period, customers will get the chance to enter a draw to win RO 50 cashback when they spend a minimum of RO 50 using their Bank Muscat Credit Cards internationally on POS (Point of Sale) machines. For every additional RO 50 spent, customers will get another chance to win in the draw.

There will be 2024 winners by the end of the campaign. The offer continues until August 31, 2024.

For those looking to participate in the offer, Bank Muscat offers a variety of credit cards carefully curated to fit the needs of its

customers offering a plethora of benefits such as free travel insurance, rewards on spends and discounted offers across a wide range of categories including, lifestyle, health and beauty, entertainment, travel and hotel stays.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager – Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “We are pleased to continue our summer offerings for our valued customers, enabling them to enjoy the best value proposition for Bank Muscat’s products and enhance their banking experience.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite customers

to take advantage of this special offer as they enjoy their summer holidays. Going forward, we will continue to elevate our services and offerings to provide a memorable experience for all customers.”

He added that this special offer comes as part of Bank Muscat’s strategy to provide special offers to customers and users of Bank Muscat’s Credit Cards. Such offers will help to enhancing the concept of electronic payment and completing various transactions, especially at times that require reducing the use of cash, such as travel, as credit cards offer more convenience and security with their multiple features.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds introduces NUWA diamond collection

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, sixth largest jewellery retailer globally with a strong retail network of over 350+ outlets spread across 13 countries, unveiled its latest diamond jewellery collection named ‘NUWA’ at a grand event in the UAE. Renowned Indian actress Kareena Kapoor Khan unveiled the collection.

Kareena, known for her timeless elegance embodies the very essence of the NUWA collection, making her the perfect ambassador for this launch.

The NUWA collection is a celebration of nature’s intricate designs, waves, forms, folds and textures, masterfully crafted into luxurious pieces of diamond jewellery.

Drawing inspiration from the elegance and resilience found in the natural world, each piece in the collection has been meticulously crafted, refined over time, and perfected to emerge as a glorious, intricate work of art.



Renowned Indian actress Kareena Kapoor Khan unveiled the collection.

Just like women, who navigate the ups and downs, standing tall and resolute in the dreams they hold.

Each piece is a testament to the

elegance, strength, and grace that women embody. MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group, said, “We are incredibly proud to introduce the NUWA collection,

which celebrates both nature and the indomitable spirit of women. Each piece in this collection has been crafted with immense care and precision, reflecting the intricate beauty of nature and the resilience of women.

We are honoured to have Kareena Kapoor Khan launch this collection, as she perfectly represents the grace and awe that NUWA stands for.”

The NUWA collection by Malabar Gold & Diamonds stands as a testament to the women of today, their commitment to excellence, celebrating the intricate beauty of nature and the empowering essence of womanhood.

Like all diamond jewellery at Malabar Gold & Diamonds, NUWA also comes with the assurance of Malabar Promises like responsibly sourced natural diamonds, tested and certified diamonds, 100% exchange value, 100% transparency, guaranteed buyback, etc.

ahlibank successfully completes RO 40 million AT1 bonds issue

MUSCAT: ahlibank has announced the successful completion of its Additional Tier 1 Capital Instruments (AT1 Bonds) issue aggregating RO 40 million, through private placement. This includes a base issue of RO 20 million and a Green Shoe Option of RO 20 million. The AT1 Bonds issuance is set to strengthen the overall capital adequacy of the Bank.

The subscription period for the issuance opened on June 13, 2024, and closed on June 25, 2024.

The issue received strong response from investors and was oversubscribed by more than two times, leading to the Bank exercising the green shoe option in full.

Earlier in June 2024 the Bank had exercised its first call option on AT1 Bonds of RO 20 million, issued by the Bank in June 2019.

A diverse demographic of investors, including foreign investors, corporate entities, government bodies, sovereign institutions, and high-net-worth individuals, participated in the subscription, underscoring the widespread popularity of ahlibank’s

financial instruments.

Besides attracting a significant number of new marquee investors, another notable aspect of the subscription was the continued support from a large proportion of investors who had previously subscribed to the 2019 AT1 Bonds.

Commenting on the success of the issue, Said al Hatmi, Chief Executive Officer, ahlibank, said, “With the successful completion of our AT1 Bonds issuance, ahlibank has achieved yet another milestone.

This strong demand for our AT1 Bonds is a testament to the resilience of our business model and the effectiveness of our strategic initiatives. We are indeed grateful for the continued support from our existing investors and delighted to welcome new participants to our growing community of stakeholders.

We would also like to thank the Central Bank of Oman, Financial Services Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange, and Muscat Clearing and Depository who have played a quintessential role in facilitating the entire process.”



Marsh McLennan
names Omani CEO



MUSCAT: Marsh McLennan (NYSE: MMC), the world's leading professional services firm in the areas of risk, strategy and people, has announced the appointment of Mohammed al Hinai as the new Chief Executive Officer of its operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

In this role, Al Hinai will be responsible for leading Marsh McLennan's continued growth and innovation, supporting the evolving needs of clients in Oman, as well as Marsh McLennan's ongoing investment in local talent.

Marsh McLennan's presence in Oman spans four decades, with its Marsh business serving as Oman's leading insurance broker and risk adviser.

El Hout, CEO of Marsh McLennan's, UAE, Qatar, Oman and Egypt region, said: "Mohammed brings more than 19 years of extensive experience in senior management positions.

Through his leadership he will ensure that Marsh McLennan continues to contribute to the Oman Vision 2040 goals of creating a productive and diversified economy based on innovation, integration and sustainability."

Al Hinai commented: "I'm excited to take on this new role and lead efforts in further strengthening Marsh McLennan's position as a trusted partner as organisations in Oman raise their global profile and enhance their contribution to international trade.

"Marsh McLennan stands ready to enable them to pursue new opportunities to navigate the fast-changing and dynamic economic environment, making decisions with confidence."

Silal prepares for grand opening,
set to transform Oman's food sector

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 2

The Khazaen Central Market for Vegetables and Fruits, better known as Silal, is buzzing with excitement as it gears up for its grand opening. After a successful trial run on June 29, Silal is ready to launch full-scale commercial operations, marking a pivotal moment for Oman's food supply chain.

Situated in Khazaen Economic City, Silal is more than just a market; it is the heart of the Food City in Khazaen.

Spanning a significant 500 square metres and designed with future expansion in mind, this cutting-edge facility aims to revolutionise the marketing, distribution, storage, import, and re-export of vegetables and fruits both locally and internationally.

Construction of Silal kicked off in May 2022, and now, with over 98 per cent of the project completed, it stands as a shining example of strategic planning and effective execution.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources highlighted that one of Silal's key goals is to address the high spoilage rate of vegetables and fruits, currently estimated at 30-35 per cent.

By offering advanced storage and distribution facilities, Silal aims to drastically cut down on this loss, thereby boosting food security and sustainability in Oman.

The facility also presents numerous investment



The facility also presents numerous investment opportunities, especially for SMEs, including spaces for ground handling, business centres and sales kiosks.

opportunities, especially for SMEs, including spaces for ground handling, business centres and sales kiosks.

However, Silal's vision goes beyond merely reducing waste. It seeks to transform the agricultural marketing landscape for local products, providing a strong platform for Omani farmers and local agricultural companies.

The market supports a variety of logistics services tailored for the food sector, such as central refrigeration, wholesale market areas, dry storage, and specialised workshops for sorting vegetables and fruits.

Silal also features a comprehensive range of facilities, including customs inspection

THE MARKET SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF LOGISTICS SERVICES TAILORED FOR THE FOOD SECTOR, SUCH AS CENTRAL REFRIGERATION, WHOLESALE MARKET AREAS, DRY STORAGE, AND SPECIALISED WORKSHOPS FOR SORTING VEGETABLES AND FRUITS.

agricultural quarantine zones, a food safety laboratory, and designated areas for selling and marketing local products.

Administrative offices for wholesalers are part of the infrastructure, ensuring smooth and efficient operations. Silal's objectives are closely aligned with the National Food

Security Strategy and Oman Vision 2040.

By attracting both local and international investments, Silal aims to elevate the fruit and vegetable sector's performance and quality in Oman. It promises integrated logistical solutions for central cold and dry storage, minimising waste and enhancing the efficiency of cooling and supply chains.

Additionally, Silal is set to create direct marketing opportunities for local products, nurturing a more vibrant and sustainable agricultural sector.

This initiative not only supports Omani farmers, but also provides a robust platform for local companies to flourish in the agricultural production industry.



Oman oil
price reaches
\$86.79/barrel

MUSCAT: The official price of Omani oil yesterday, July 2, for next September delivery reached \$86.79 per barrel. It witnessed an increase of \$1.23 compared to Monday with \$85.56 per barrel.

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

Meanwhile, international oil prices climbed nearly 1 per cent on Tuesday, extending gains to two-month highs on Tuesday on expectations of rising demand during the summer driving season and possible supply disruptions from Hurricane Beryl.

Brent crude futures rose 75 cents, or 0.87 per cent, to \$87.29 a barrel by 1314 GMT, their highest since April 30. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude was up 84 cents, or 1.01 per cent, at \$84.10 after touching its highest since April 26. Both benchmarks gained about 2 per cent in the previous session.

US gasoline demand is expected to ramp up as the summer travel season picks up with the Independence Day holiday this week.

The American Automobile Association has forecast that travel during the holiday period will be 5.2 per cent higher than in 2023, with car travel up 4.8 per cent. — ONA/Reuters

Sandcastle economics: Navigating fragile growth

As economic growth remains robust, driven by sectors like defence, AI, and obesity drug manufacturing, Saxo Bank's strategy team warns of the fragility of this "sandcastle economy" in their quarterly outlook for Q3.

Although their perspective for the short term is neutral, this outlook explores the underlying threats of unsustainable US fiscal spending, geopolitical risks, and demographic trends that could destabilise the current economic momentum in the longer term.

In his macro note, "Sandcastle economics," Peter Garnry, Saxo's chief investment strategist, emphasises the precarious nature of our current economic growth.

He states, "Economic growth will remain stable, but down the road, several factors can destroy our sandcastle economy."

Garnry explores the concept of a "two-lane economy," where thriving sectors contrast struggling ones.

This disparity complicates monetary policy, as aiding weaker sectors could prolong inflation, increasing economic costs. Inflation remains persistently high, prompting cautiousness from the Fed and delaying rate cuts until a significant economic



Damian Hitchen
CEO of Saxo Bank MENA

slowdown is observed.

"The Q3 outlook reveals a complex financial landscape with significant implications for the Middle East.

"The region, heavily influenced by global economic trends, must navigate the dual challenges of persistent inflation and geopolitical uncertainties," said Damian Hitchen, CEO of Saxo Bank MENA.

Robust demand in key sectors such as energy and agriculture presents opportunities, but the underlying fragility of the global economy necessitates a cautious approach.

The Middle East needs to stay attuned to these dynamics to mitigate risks and leverage growth prospects effectively.

Commodities: Energy and grains in focus as metals pause

Robust demand and production challenges are expected to continue supporting commodities. While the metal sector, including gold and



copper, takes a breather after reaching record highs, energy and grains are poised for growth.

Additionally, Ole Hansen, Saxo's head of commodity strategy, states that crude oil is "supported by OPEC's line in the sand" price and strong summer demand towards mobility and cooling."

Despite a second-quarter setback in energy due to a deflated geopolitical risk premium, metals remain strong.

However, Ole Hansen notes that "industrial metals require a recovery in Chinese demand to justify higher prices at this stage."

The energy sector anticipates robust demand in the third quarter from increased mobility and cooling needs amid seasonal heatwaves.

In summary, while metals

markets, we remain overweight European equities. We "believe European equities will be repriced higher relative to other markets on the ECB rate cut in June and a growth rebound in the third quarter."

While the US market may appear stretched, European equities and sectors tied to electrification are interesting areas to watch.

Fixed income: What to do until inflation stabilises

As US and European sovereign bond yields are expected to remain range-bound during the third quarter, the uncertain inflation outlook persists despite less aggressive monetary policies.

Saxo's head of fixed income strategy, Althea Spinozzi, highlights this in her outlook: "US Treasury yields are expected to remain elevated until inflation trends decisively return towards the 2 -per cent target."

Spinozzi notes that the divergence between US and European rates "will keep bond volatility elevated, prompting us to overweight high-quality credit and short-term duration."

Investment-grade corporate bonds are "likely to remain well-bid as direction on inflation remains uncertain."

High-yield bonds, acting as a hedge against inflation, are also expected to stay supported

despite tight spreads.

In this environment, it makes sense to maintain a cautious stance and limit duration exposure. Focus on quality and maturity up to five years while being cautious with longer durations. Long-term rates remain vulnerable to inflation trends and potential rebounds in the term premium.

FX: Risk-on currencies to surge against havens

A bearish USD trend could extend into Q3 if US economic weakness broadens, although valuation and safe-haven appeal limit the downside.

High-beta currencies like AUD and NZD are well-positioned to outperform due to lagging central bank easing cycles and a stabilising Chinese economy.

However, Charu Chanana, head of FX strategy, mentions that "low-yielding currencies such as JPY and CHF are likely to underperform in a dollar-bear world due to negative carry."

Emerging market (EM) carry trades could remain popular, but tighter risk management is necessary as yield gaps narrow.

While the USD may face downside risks, selective high-beta currencies and tactical EM carry trades present potential opportunities in the evolving FX landscape.

Meta facing heavy fines over ‘breach’ of EU rules

The European Union’s (EU) crackdown on the practices of Big Tech stepped up a gear this week after social media giant Meta braced for as much as £10 billion in fines for an alleged violation of competition rules.

The facebook and Instagram owner is to be told that its new “pay or consent” model, under which users must pay a fee if they refuse to have their data harvested on the platform, was in breach of the EU’s new Digital Markets Act (DMA) with which tech firms were expected to comply from the beginning of the month of March.

The EU is set to complain that the pay or consent policy risks presenting a “false alternative”



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to users of the social media platforms, according to a report and that the cost of rejecting personal data collection could force some users to give their consent.

The decision is the latest in a string of attacks on the market behaviour of tech giants by the European Commission.

Last week, iPhone maker Apple was accused of unfairly restricting App Store developers’ ability to “freely steer their customers” by offering promotions elsewhere.

The EU’s Digital Markets Act, which came into force in November 2022, was aimed at restricting the powers of so called “gatekeepers” — the largest tech companies globally — in a bid to “empower citizens to navigate

the digital landscape with more choice and flexibility”.

It includes giving the consumers more controls over how their data is used and blocking tech firms from treating third-party products and services less favourably than their own.

Both Meta and Apple face a fine of as much as 10 per cent of global revenues if they are found to have broken the rules.

That amounts to a penalty of as much as \$14 billion for Meta and \$38 billion for Apple, based on the pair’s most recent annual financial results.

The fines can be doubled in the event that the EU identifies repeat infringements.

Apple said it was “confident” it had complied with the rules. In a statement a Meta spokesperson

said: “Subscriptions as an alternative to advertising are a well-established business model across many industries, and we designed Subscription for No Ads to address several overlapping regulatory obligations, including the DMA. We will continue to engage constructively with the commission.”

EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe Vestager said last week: “I find it surprising that some of the most valuable, respected big companies on this planet do not take compliance as a badge of honour,” adding that it was “plain vanilla to ask for a fair, open and contestable marketplace.”

She added that she had “a number of Apple issues; I find them very serious.” The EU has

also said it could open a probe into Microsoft’s partnership with ChatGPT maker OpenAI and Google’s AI deal with Samsung.

Policy director at tech policy group Startup Coalition, Camilla de Coverly Veale, said: “There are two ways of thinking about competition policy for tech – making it easier to compete with Big Tech or regulate Big Tech like monopolies. The first allows startups to compete and the latter preserves the status quo — this decision seems more of the latter.”

She added: “The DMA is quite heavy handed, it’s quite broad-brush. The EU is sending our notifications left right and centre in a bid to try and win this space.

Whether all these moves turn out to be sensible remains to be seen.”

Green gold rush: How Oman’s renewable energy policies attract foreign investments

Recently, the world has witnessed a remarkable phenomenon known as the “Green Gold Rush,” a surge in investments focused on clean technology. This extraordinary movement unites sustainability and profitability, signalling a sea change in the goals of the global economy. Once considered a niche industry, green technologies have quickly become a mainstay of investment plans as more people realise how well they can address urgent environmental issues while generating large profits.

This paradigm shift in investment is in response to the pressing need to combat climate change and the growing demand from a variety of businesses for environmentally friendly, sustainable solutions.

Furthermore, this trend offers investors a rare chance to profit from the growing market for green solutions while also making a beneficial impact on the planet’s future in a time when environmental responsibility is of the utmost importance.

Dubbed the “Green Gold Rush,” Oman’s renewable energy policies have been instrumental in transforming the nation into a beacon for global investors seeking opportunities in the burgeoning green energy sector.

The Sultanate of Oman, long-recognised for its oil wealth, has realised in recent years how critical it is to diversify its economy and lessen its reliance on fossil resources. As a result, the country is launching massive renewable energy projects to usher in a new era of economic diversification.

Furthermore, this recognition has led to the creation of a robust legislative framework that aims to foster the growth of renewable energy projects.

This strategy shift aims to draw significant international investments in addition to guaranteeing sustainable development.

One of the main focuses of Oman Vision 2040, a comprehensive plan for economic diversification and sustainability, is renewable energy.

Oman wants to produce



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The country is launching massive renewable energy projects to usher in a new era of economic diversification. Image for illustration only.

30% more electricity from renewable sources by 2030, which is a significant increase from the present percentage. Several high-profile renewable energy initiatives underscore Oman’s commitment to green transformation, each significantly contributing to the country’s renewable energy landscape. One standout project is the Ibri II Solar Project, a massive 500 MW solar power plant representing an investment of \$400 million.

This project exemplifies growing investor confidence in Oman’s renewable energy sector. Once operational, Ibri II is expected to power approximately 33,000 households and reduce carbon emissions by an impressive 340,000 tonnes annually. Another pivotal initiative is the Duqm Wind Power Project, designed with a planned capacity of 200 MW to harness Oman’s abundant wind resources.

This project has attracted investments from international energy giants and is set to play a crucial role in Oman’s renewable energy infrastructure.

Diversifying the energy mix through projects like Duqm opens new avenues for economic development in the region, in addition to strengthening energy security. The strategic

crafting of Oman’s renewable energy policies not only fosters sustainable development but also attracts significant foreign investments. These policies include a range of incentives, including tax breaks, long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs), and favourable regulatory frameworks.

The implementation of these regulations has demonstrated significant efficacy in attracting global investors to Oman’s renewable energy sector, leading to a noteworthy surge in foreign direct investments (FDI) in sustainable energy projects such as wind, solar, and other green energy projects.

Compared to other countries in the region, Oman’s proactive approach has positioned it as a frontrunner in attracting foreign capital to the renewable energy sector. Statistical evidence underscores the significance of these policies. According to the Oman Investment Authority, foreign direct investment (FDI) into Oman’s renewable energy sector increased by 25% in 2021 alone, totalling \$2.5 billion.

This cash inflow has expedited the Sultanate of Oman’s infrastructure for renewable energy development, solidifying Oman’s position as a regional leader in the shift to sustainable

energy.

Oman’s renewable energy efforts have other advantages besides luring international capital. The growth of renewable energy initiatives has an impact on the entire economy.

By 2030, the renewable energy sector has the potential to generate up to 15,000 jobs, spanning from construction and engineering to operations and maintenance. This job creation is essential for a nation whose population is young and expanding.

The transition to renewable energy will significantly reduce Oman’s carbon footprint in terms of the environment.

The combined output of the Ibri II and Duqm projects alone will cut carbon emissions by over 500,000 tonnes annually.

This reduction is critical to mitigating climate change impacts and aligning Oman with global sustainability goals.

Several proposals might be taken into consideration to enhance Oman’s renewable energy investment environment. Regulatory structures must be strengthened to give investors stability and clarity.

To overcome infrastructural issues and assist the expansion of the renewable energy sector, investments in energy storage

systems and grid upgrades are crucial. To speed the shift to greener energy sources, government agencies, private investors, and technology companies should work together to promote public-private partnerships, which can also spur innovation and sustainable development in the renewable energy sector.

Looking ahead, Oman’s renewable energy industry seems promising. The government’s proactive stance and the growing global demand for sustainable energy solutions create a positive perspective. Projects such as the Al Mazyouna Solar Plant and other wind farms in the Dhofar region demonstrate a robust pipeline of developments that will further support the industry.

In summary, Oman is reaping major economic and environmental benefits from its strategic transition to renewable energy. By fostering an environment that is welcoming to international investors, the Sultanate of Oman is taking advantage of the “Green Gold Rush” and positioning itself as a leader in the global renewable energy industry. This innovative approach not only ensures Oman’s sustainability but also serves as a potent model for other countries in the region.

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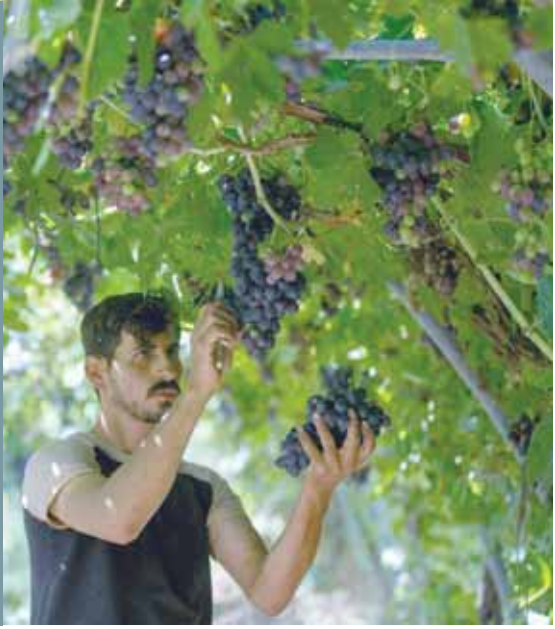
WEATHER
Two women use fans to cool off during a hot day in Hanoi. — AFP

AUTHOR
Scottish Author Alexander McCall Smith poses with his medal after being appointed a Knight following an investiture ceremony at the Palace Of Holyroodhouse in Edinburgh. — AFP



TRAVEL
A Mongolian herder and a child stand near their home in Erdene, in central Tuv province, Mongolia. —AFP

FRUITS
A farmer picks bunches of grapes at a vineyard in the Al-Ishaqi district of Salah al-Din, north of Baghdad, during harvest season in one of Iraq's main grape production areas. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
A boy rides a horse during horse race ahead of Naadam festival in Hantay bag, in the Bulgan province of Mongolia. — AFP

art & life

WEDNESDAY | JULY 3, 2024 | DHUL HILLAH 26, 1445 AH

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Tale behind Oman's tri-colour trail flags

White, red and yellow stripes on rock faces markers help people to navigate the trails safely and confidently; making the mountains and wadis more accessible...p20

Barbie that went to space to go on display in London

A Barbie that spent six months orbiting the Earth on the International Space Station will go on public display for the first time this week at the Design Museum in London. It will be part of a new exhibition marking the 65th anniversary of the Barbie brand, set to open on Friday in partnership with the doll's creator Mattel. The Barbie was made to resemble Samantha Cristoforetti, the first female commander of the ISS. On the mission in which she was accompanied by her lookalike Barbie, Cristoforetti became the first European woman to complete a spacewalk. There will be videos on display of Cristoforetti answering questions from space to encourage young girls to become scientists and astronauts -- all while floating in zero gravity alongside the Barbie. "We're so excited that the first time anyone can see Samantha's doll since it returned from the International Space Station is at the Design Museum this summer," said curator Danielle Thom. "Its remarkable journey on Samantha's history-making



Barbie that went to space to go on display in London

mission 400 kilometres above the Earth was one of the most dramatic moments in Barbie's evolving story." Cristoforetti said she was "thrilled" her Barbie would play a "starring role" in the exhibition. Highlighting other connections between Barbie and the cosmos, there will be a rare edition of the first space-themed Barbie on display. The silver "Miss Astronaut" was Barbie's first depiction as an astronaut released in 1965, four years before Neil Armstrong reached the moon. Another Barbie in a metallic pink spacesuit on display was released in 1985 after Sally Ride became the first American woman in space. Other rare dolls will include a prototype of the first Talking Barbie launched in 1968 and one of the earliest first edition Barbie dolls. Visitors can also expect some more iconic figurines on display, including the Sunset Malibu Barbie and Day to Night Barbie. Charting the changing design of Barbie through time, the exhibition will also include friends of Barbie including Midge, and a while section dedicated to Ken, Barbie's male companion. — AFP



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Slow art: the master illuminator of Tehran



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri
at his workshop in Tehran.



Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri works on one of his pieces depicting Al Fatiha, the first chapter of the Holy Quran, at his workshop in Tehran. — AFP

Iranian artist Mohammad Hossein Aghamiri sometimes labours for six months on a single design, very carefully — he knows a single crooked line could ruin his entire artwork.

In the age of AI-assisted graphic design on computer screens, the centuries-old tradition of Persian illumination offers an antidote to rushing the creative process.

Aghamiri's fine brush moves natural pigments onto the paper with deliberate precision as he creates intricate floral patterns, religious motifs and elegantly flowing calligraphy.

phy. The exquisite artwork has for centuries embellished literary manuscripts, religious texts and royal edicts as well as many business contracts and marriage certificates.

Aghamiri, 51, is one of Iran's dozen or so remaining masters of the ancient illumination art of Tazhib, which was inscribed last year on UNESCO's list of intangible heritage.

"It is a very unique job that requires a lot of patience and precision," Aghamiri, a veteran of the craft with over 30 years' experience, said.

"It's not accessible to everyone."

IN THE AGE OF AI-ASSISTED GRAPHIC DESIGN ON COMPUTER SCREENS, THE CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION OF PERSIAN ILLUMINATION OFFERS AN ANTIDOTE TO RUSHING THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Tazhib's non-figurative and geometric flourishes have traditionally adorned the margins of holy books and epic poems. The artform dates back to

the Sassanid era in pre-Islamic Iran but flourished after the seventh century advent of Islam, which banned human depictions.

Aghamiri says it often takes him months to finish one design and that a single misplaced stroke that disrupts its symmetrical harmony can force him to start over.

He said he started the piece over four months ago and aimed to finish it within six weeks, using natural pigments such as lapis lazuli, saffron, gouache and pure gold, from China.

"Gold has a very strong visual appeal," said Aghamiri. "It's

expensive and it enhances the perceived value of the work." Aghamiri hails from a family of artists and artisans with a rich history in Iranian craft traditions including calligraphy, miniature painting and carpet design.

His work has been showcased in museums in Iran and in nearby Arab countries of the Gulf region where interest in Oriental and Islamic art continues to grow.

In recent years, Aghamiri garnered interest abroad and even began teaching the ancient art online to students from across the world, notably the United States.

Soon, he also hopes to hold workshops in Britain for his craft, which he says is fundamentally different from European illumination art, which flourished in the Middle Ages.

European designs, he said, are more figurative and can depict human faces, animals and landscapes, and often illustrate biblical scenes.

UNESCO labelled the Persian art of illumination as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2023, at the request of Iran as well as Turkiye, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan.

— AFP

ART

Pompidou museum's New York branch suspended

FRANCE'S POMPIDOU CENTRE, one of the world's leading modern art museums, confirmed on Tuesday that its plan to open a satellite branch in New York had been suspended.

The Paris-based museum, known for its colourful and tubular building, was due to open a branch in Jersey City in the suburbs of New York in 2027.

But it has been "suspended until further notice," the Pompidou said, confirming a report in US media.

Local authorities considered the cost — which involved some \$18 million in public redevelopment funds — too high, according to a letter they published in the New Jersey Monitor.

It comes as a blow for the



Pompidou, which is preparing to shut down for expensive renovations.

The French state is funding a 262-million-euro (\$281 million), five-year refurbishment from September 2025 for asbestos removal and renovation.

But the centre is also planning a 186-million-euro redevelopment of its art spaces that will rely on other funding sources.

State auditors offered a harsh verdict on the museum's finances in

April, saying its economic model was "difficult to sustain", with a renovation project that was "insufficiently guided and whose financing was not assured".

The Pompidou Centre did not respond to questions from AFP about the financial implications of the New York project falling through.

It said "discussions with the mayor of Jersey City will continue in order to decide together on the follow-up to the project." — AFP

DIGITAL

Samsung adds support for Matter 1.2 to SmartThings

SMARTTHINGS, SAMSUNG's global connected living platform, announced a suite of updates and exciting announcements. Among the new features are shareable routines, enhanced hub functionality, new device control, and SmartThings Energy enhancements, in addition to the announcement of Matter 1.2 support that will enhance smart home ecosystems.

These platform updates have been designed to make it even easier for users to manage their smart devices and routines. Shareable Routines is a new feature within the SmartThings platform that allows users to share their daily routines with others. This means users can



easily pass on their automated sequences of tasks or actions to guests or friends, enhancing the overall usability and accessibility of these routines.

With Shareable Routines, you can easily share this routine with your friends or family who would like to set up the same routine at their house. They can activate the shared routine by simply scanning the QR code of the routine, and SmartThings will take care of

the rest. Full Matter 1.2 support in the SmartThings mobile app will come later this summer. Through the new Device Control feature, Galaxy users can experience easier access, navigation and control of their smart home devices without interrupting their lives. Device cards are bigger to show you more controls for home devices, and users can select devices to create their own home control page.



ADVENTURE

Tale behind Oman's tri-colour trail flags

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

Ever wondered about the painted flags of white, red and yellow on rock faces you see while hiking majestic mountains and stunning wadis of Oman. These simple but highly effective way markers help people to navigate the trails safely and confidently; making the mountains and wadis more accessible to people who want to explore the beautiful natural environment. You will find these flags guiding you on many of your chosen adventures. They will lead you as you scramble to the peak of Oman's highest point, Jabal Shams. They will guide you safely whilst you explore the beauty of Wadi Shab. Who is behind these trails and creating a safer adventure environment? Nizwa local, Ahmed al Abri, one of the original teams to create this marking system, explains how the little painted flags of white, red, and yellow which mark the trails are not just random splashes of colour, but a symbol of a collaborative effort to guide hikers through the beauty of Oman's natural wonders.

Ahmed began exploring the Al Hajar Mountains many years ago. With his love of adventures and nature he started to develop the skills and techniques required in the outdoors from seasoned adventure companions. As he gained experience, he obtained his adventure license from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and now regularly guides people on trails, in wadis and in the desert. With his knowledge of the mountains, he joined the trail marking initiative known as Legna Al Wataniya.

THE CHOICE OF WHITE, RED AND GOLD WERE DELIBERATELY SELECTED FOR THEIR VISIBILITY IN OMAN'S MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPES, TO ENSURE THAT ADVENTURERS COULD EASILY FIND THEIR WAY.

This project was spearheaded by Ahmed al Rahbi, and it emerged as a beacon of cooperation between the government and local communities. Al Rahbi, also a seasoned coach in adventurous pursuits, brought his expertise to the endeavour, ensuring that every twist and turn of Oman's trails were marked for exploration.

The extensive project was originally funded by a modest sum of approximately RO 250 per trail, along with paint supplies. The focus being to ensure hikers' safety and enhance their experience amidst the rugged terrain. The choice of white, red and gold were deliberately selected for their visibility in Oman's mountainous landscapes, to ensure that adventurers could easily find their way. To make these trails as safe as possible in each governorate, a team of local experts were tasked with marking these trails based on their extensive experience in these areas. They have since meticulously painted the paths of many trails across the governorates.

From the ancient trails of Nizwa to the captivating routes of Samayil, these flags have become an integral part of Oman's hiking experience; guiding adventurers on journeys to discover more of Oman's incredible landscapes. For those looking to go on their own adventures across the Sultanate of Oman, these maps can be found in PDF format through the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, as well as the Wikiloc Hiking App which offers a digital guide to Oman's most renowned routes.

As hikers continue to traverse the painted trails, they not only immerse themselves in the splendour of Oman's landscapes but also become part of this story of collaboration, adventure, as a testament to the enduring bond between nature and community.