

Shinas Port-Abbas Port link opens

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced the launch of a new maritime route connecting Shinas Port with the Port of Bandar Abbas in Iran. The move comes in line with the ministry's efforts to activate and boost revenues of Omani ports. The strategic partnership aims to enhance tourism movement and trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran. **DETAILS ON P15**

SUNRISE - 05:37 AM
PRAYER TIMINGS
FAJR - 04:14 AM
DHUHR - 12:18 PM
ASR - 03:42 PM
MAGHRIB - 06:55 PM
ISHA - 08:12 PM



P10

ALPINE F1 TEAM APPOINT OAKES AS FIFTH BOSS IN FOUR YEARS



P13

OMAN'S GROWTH PROJECTED TO SURGE WITH ROBUST ECONOMIC STRATEGY



P20

TURNING WASTE COOKING OIL INTO LIQUID GOLD



MUSCAT

HM SENDS CABLES OF GREETINGS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Viola Amherd of the Swiss Confederation on her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Amherd and the people of the Swiss Confederation. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Patrice Talon of the Republic of Benin on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Patrice Talon and the people of his country.

WARNING AGAINST TRAVEL TO LEBANON

In view of the events taking place in the region, especially in the Lebanese Republic, the the Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Ministry has urged against travel to Lebanon and urged all Omani citizens present in Lebanon to return immediately to their homeland. Meanwhile, Air France and low-cost carrier Transavia France said on Wednesday their flights between Paris and Beirut would remain suspended till the weekend due to the "security situation" in Lebanon. The two airlines had planned to resume flights on Wednesday, but said they will now remain grounded until Saturday. "The resumption of operations will be subject to a new assessment of the local situation," an Air France statement said. Both carriers stopped servicing the route on Monday, a day after Israel vowed to retaliate following rocket fire it blamed on Hezbollah that killed 12 people in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights.

Oman condemns Haniyeh's assassination

BLATANT VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL AND HUMANITARIAN LAW

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has expressed its strong condemnation and denunciation of the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, Head of Hamas Movement's Political Bureau.

Oman considered the assassination, which took place in the Iranian capital city of Tehran, as a blatant violation of international and humanitarian law and a clear undermining of efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on Wednesday, Oman reiterated its firm stance in rejecting all forms of terrorism, regardless of its motives and causes, as well as rejecting the violation of the sovereignty of states.

Oman called on the international community to intervene urgently to punish the perpetrators of these crimes and political assassinations, besides taking immediate action to stop the Israeli aggression and the ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

It also called for stopping the Israeli policy of killing, extremism and abuse practiced against the defenceless Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem.

Oman expressed its heartfelt



File photo of Hamas Chief Ismail Haniyeh

condolences to the family of Ismail Haniyeh and his companion, praying to the Almighty Allah to grant the Palestinian people and leadership patience.

Meanwhile, Qatar and Egypt, which have acted as mediators in ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas, suggested on Wednesday that the killing of Haniyeh could jeopardise efforts

to secure a truce in Gaza.

"Political assassinations and continued targeting of civilians in Gaza while talks continue leads us to ask, how can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on the other side?" Qatari Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani wrote on X. "Peace needs serious partners and a global stance against the

disregard for human life."

Shaikh Mohammed, who is also foreign minister, later spoke with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken over the phone and discussed continuing work towards a ceasefire.

Egypt's foreign ministry said in a statement that a "dangerous Israeli escalation policy" over the past two days had undermined efforts to broker an end to the

fighting in Gaza.

"The coincidence of this regional escalation with the lack of progress in the ceasefire negotiations in Gaza increases the complexity of the situation and indicates the absence of Israeli political will to calm it down," the statement said.

"It undercuts the strenuous efforts made by Egypt and its partners to stop the war in the Gaza Strip and put an end to the human suffering of the Palestinian people," it added.

Qatar, Egypt and the United States have repeatedly tried to clinch a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, where Israeli forces have killed more than 39,000 Palestinians since October.

NO SIGN OF PROGRESS

A final deal to halt more than nine months of war has been complicated by changes sought by Israel, sources have said, and there was no sign of progress at the latest round of talks in Rome on Sunday.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant stressed the importance of continuing to work towards reaching a deal to release the remaining 115 Israeli and foreign captives in a phone call with his US counterpart Lloyd Austin on Wednesday. — **Agencies**

Landslides in India's Kerala kill 188

CHOOALMALA: Hopes of finding survivors began to fade as hundreds of rescuers worked through slush and rocks and pulled out bodies from debris in the hills of India's Kerala state on Wednesday, a day after 188 people were killed in monsoon landslides.

Steady rain that intensified as the day progressed and the rising water level in a local river hampered the rescue, with a temporary bridge built to connect the worst affected area of Mundakkai being washed away.

The weather department has forecast more heavy rain over the next 24 hours, Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said and urged people to be on "high alert".

Heavy rain in Kerala, one of India's most popular tourist destinations, led to the landslides in its Wayanad district early on Tuesday, sending torrents of mud, water and tumbling boulders downhill and burying or sweeping people to their deaths as they slept.



Survivors of the landslide console each other as they rest at a relief camp in Wayanad on Wednesday. — **AFP**

It was the worst disaster in the state since deadly floods in 2018. Experts said the area had received heavy rain in the last two weeks that softened the soil. Extremely heavy rainfall on Monday then triggered the landslides.

Nearly 1,600 people have been rescued from the hillside villages and tea and cardamom estates, authorities said on Wednesday.

They said at least 167 people died, while the local Asianet news TV channel put the death toll at 230. More than 8,000 people were being sheltered in camps across the district, authorities said.

Wayanad's district administrator said people had been asked on Wednesday to shift to camps "as soon as possible as there is a danger".

SEE ALSO P7

HM sends condolences to Indian President

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Droupadi Murmu of the Republic of India, on the victims of floods and landslides in India's southern state of Kerala. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies to President Droupadi Murmu, families of the victims and the people of India. — **ONA**

ON WORLD'S GREATEST PLACES LIST

Time magazine has included Bab Al Salam Mosque in Muscat to its annual World's Greatest Places list. *Time* magazine has unveiled its annual World's Greatest Places list, highlighting 100 extraordinary hotels, cruises, restaurants, attractions, museums and parks. The list — compiled in part through the nominations of global correspondents and contributors — features eco-conscious glamping sites, billion-dollar hotels, villages in Egypt and museums in Tokyo, all conveniently categorised into 'places to stay' and 'places to visit'. **DETAILS ON P2**





MUSCAT’S BAB AL SALAM MOSQUE ON WORLD’S GREATEST PLACES LIST

MUSCAT: *Time* magazine has included Bab Al Salam Mosque in Muscat Governorate in its annual World’s Greatest Places list.

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Time magazine described the mosque as a minimalist wonder bathed in natural light. - ONA

stay’ and ‘places to visit’.

The magazine said: “For years, the Middle East’s cutting-edge skyscrapers have stood side by side with opulent mosques rooted in centuries of classical Islamic architecture. But lately, a wave of more contemporary houses of worship have emerged on the skylines of Gulf cities, often paying tribute to age-old design in fresh and unexpected ways.” Last year, Omani design firm Altqadum unveiled Bab Al Salam Mosque in Muscat Governorate, with a tranquil complex of blush-coloured circular structures. An arc

of water hugs the central building, while a delicate crescent is etched into the freestanding conical minaret; inside, a dome of over 1,600 crystal bulbs forms a chandelier over the main prayer hall, and in place of a mihrab, a niche that traditionally directs congregants toward Mecca, the magazine said.

Time magazine described the mosque as a minimalist wonder bathed in natural light, with a more restrained aesthetic than some of the region’s lavishly appointed religious spaces, leaving visitors to turn their thoughts inward. — ONA

Haj: Priority for those who didn’t get chance this year



92 per cent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the entire Haj experience

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Priority to perform Haj rituals next year will be given to those who couldn’t make it this year, according to the Omani Haj Mission under the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

However, the ministry stated that the priority for those who couldn’t make it this year does not guarantee their chance next year as high priority shall be given to those who are chronically ill.

Last year, 41,000 pilgrims, including Omanis and expatriates, registered with Awqaf, but only 14,000, the allowed quota for Oman, were able to participate in the Haj rituals.

Sultan bin Said al Hinai, Head of the Oman Haj Mission, told the *Observer* that in a survey conducted post-Haj, 92 per cent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the entire Haj experience.



Sultan bin Said al Hinai

“We had a successful Haj season this year and were able to complete the procedures for the Sultanate of Oman pilgrims to travel to the holy sites and back,” he said.

This year, 14,000 people, including 13,500 Omanis, 250 Arab residents, and 250 non-Arab residents attended the Haj rituals for the year 1445 AH.

“We are truly thankful to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, represented by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, and the various bodies supporting the Omani Haj Mission and Haj

Most Omani pilgrims were from the youth category between the ages of 18-60 years, at a rate of 83.2 per cent compared to 16.8 per cent from the category over 60 years old

and Umrah companies in their work. The sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has announced the success of the Haj season of 1445 AH, and the mission is pleased to review a number of indicators and statistics related to the Haj season of 1445 AH,” he said at the press briefing.

It was revealed in the review that the number of women who participated in the Haj represented 49.9 per cent of the total compared to 50.1 per cent for men.

The percentage of pilgrims who performed the obligatory

Haj stood at 89.2 per cent, pilgrims executing wills were 1.7 per cent, and voluntary pilgrims were 9.1 per cent.

While private Haj companies employed 700 employees for the season, the Omani Haj mission had 350 members. The total number of the Haj delegation from the Sultanate of Oman reached 15,050 pilgrims, including mission employees.

Most Omani pilgrims were from the youth category between the ages of 18-60 years, at a rate of 83.2 per cent compared to 16.8 per cent from the category over 60 years old. Regarding the paths taken by pilgrims to the Holy Lands, the percentage of air travel reached 60.4 per cent compared to 39.6 per cent by land.

The average cost of Haj by air was RO 2,137 compared to RO 2,054 in 1444, and the average cost of Haj by land was RO 1,319 compared to RO 1,367 in the 1444 season.

Eidaad aims to bridge gap between academia and industry



The ‘Eidaad’ programme targets students in their penultimate year at both public and private higher education institutions.

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in partnership with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), has launched the fifth phase of the National Programme for Training University Students, ‘Eidaad’. Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation

(MoHERI) inaugurated the event in Muscat.

The ‘Eidaad’ programme targets students in their penultimate year at both public and private higher education institutions. Over the course of a year, the programme aims to equip these students with essential skills by immersing them in real work environments.

This initiative is a strategic effort to enhance collaboration between the industrial and academic sectors, thereby bridging the gap between them. By providing participants with the necessary technical expertise, knowledge, and skills, the programme aligns the educational outputs with the demands of the labour market.

The launch event also saw the introduction of the ‘Specialisations Harmonisation Initiative’ and

the signing of cooperation protocols between industrial and academic sectors. These measures aim to systematically link the two sectors, creating structured training opportunities for university students. Hamad bin Saif al Hadhrami, Director of the ‘Eidaad’ Programme and Director of External Training and Development at PDO, emphasised the programme’s evolution since its inception in the academic year 2020/2021.

Initially, the programme included a limited number of students and institutions-five universities and six industrial and private sector entities.

Al Hadhrami outlined ambitious plans for the future, including collaboration with the Oman Oil Development Company to incorporate scholarship students into the programme. He highlighted the programme’s goal to expose students to key projects and challenges in various fields, enhancing their problem-solving skills, fostering cooperation, and boosting their confidence to thrive in any work environment.

Dr Yasser al Harthy, an expert in studies and research at the ministry, stated the Eidaad Programme focuses on preparing higher education students for the labour market.

‘Change the Atmosphere’ campaign showcases culture

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JULY 31

As the peak tourism season approaches, it is crucial to enhance efforts to promote domestic tourism in the Sultanate of Oman. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has launched a campaign to promote heritage and tourism components during the summer season under the slogan ‘Change the Atmosphere’. This campaign, in cooperation with the National Travel Operator and Omran Group, will continue until the end of August.

The campaign includes promoting tourist sites, presenting offers from tourism companies for trips, adventure tours, accommodation offers, entertainment centre offers, and more.

In conjunction with the “Change the Atmosphere” promotional campaign, the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate organised the Majan Expo for Tourist Facilities 2024. This expo will run until August 3rd at the Nizwa Grand Mall and was held under the auspices of

Saleh bin Dhiyab al Rubaie, Wali of Nizwa.

Haitham bin Saleh bin Salim al Hashemi, owner of Majan Expo for organising exhibitions and festivals, stated, “A number of institutions concerned with the tourism sector from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate participated in the exhibition.

Participants include tourist facilities such as hotels, hotel apartments, heritage inns, travel agencies, and resorts from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.” The main objective of the expo is to introduce the public to the



“Change the Atmosphere” campaign, showcase the Ministry’s role in facilitating offers and services from tourist facilities, and foster collaboration among participating establishments to promote their services. Visitors will have the opportunity to explore various services, take advantage of exclusive offers, and gain valuable insights and experience in event organisation.

Ali bin Said al Adawi, Director of the Department of Heritage and Tourism in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, mentioned that the exhibition is organised in

conjunction with the tourism movement witnessed by the governorate during this period. The aim is to introduce visitors to the governorate with hotel facilities and tourism services, as well as to enrich the tourism aspect and promote these facilities to attract visitors, especially in conjunction with the tourism movement in Dhofar Governorate.

Among the participants of the exhibition are Nizwa tourism cars, classic electronic cars that take visitors on a trip to the past in just 30 minutes.



Temperatures dip due to low-pressure system

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The low-pressure system over the Arabian Sea, originating from India, covered most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman with clouds, but only brought rain to Al Dhahirah. “Cloudy weather was observed over most of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman with scattered rain, and there are continued chances of rain in the coming hours,” said the Oman Met Office on Wednesday night. Despite it being the end of July, still summer, some parts of Oman saw temperatures as low as 28 degrees Celsius. A weather forecaster at the Oman Met Office mentioned, “The situation on Thursday will be different, as we might see more moderate rains than isolated ones. The cloud activity could result in heavy rains over the Al Hajar Mountains.” The low pressure system also affected Dhofar’s monsoon season.

The Met Office has been monitoring the wind, with southern/southeast winds over the desert areas of Al Dhahirah, Al Wusta, and Dhofar governorates. Some meteorological stations recorded wind speeds of up to 24 knots at the Thamrait station and 21 knots at the Al Buraimi and Al Sinainah stations. The weather for Thursday is forecasted to be partly cloudy to cloudy along the coast of the Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains, with intermittent drizzle and a chance of isolated rain, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms. It will be cloudy to partly cloudy over the rest of the governorates with chances of isolated rain, occasionally accompanied by thunderstorms over the Al Hajar Mountains and parts of Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta governorates. There is a chance of dust rising over desert and open areas with a chance of low-level cloud patches along parts of the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea.

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In a concerning development, scamsters are employing increasingly sophisticated methods to deceive individuals through social media and SMS platforms. These fraudulent messages often masquerade as official communications from reputable agencies such as banks, police, tax authorities, or central banks, preying on the recipients’ fears and urgency to protect their personal and financial information. One prevalent scam involves fake messages purportedly from ‘Oman Post,’ claiming that a consignment is awaiting collection at the post office. The message, written in Arabic, is designed to sound legitimate and urgent. It reads: “Oman Post: Your package has arrived at our warehouse. We tried delivery twice but failed due to incomplete address information. Please update your detailed address information within 24 hours; otherwise, your package will be returned. Please update your address link...” The message



The increasing frequency and sophistication of these scams underscore the need for heightened

further instructs recipients to reply with “Y,” exit the message, reopen it to activate a link, or copy the link to open it in Safari, promising that the package will be reshipped within 12 hours upon updating the address. After receiving such an SMS, this correspondent contacted Oman Post for clarification. An employee immediately dismissed the message as a scam and advised deleting and reporting it as phishing. This would enable

telecom service providers to take action against the fraudsters. The peculiar aspect of these SMSs is their apparent authenticity, as they often use official-looking logos and language to deceive recipients. These fraudulent messages create a sense of urgency, pressuring individuals to act quickly to avoid supposed consequences, such as the return of a parcel or the misuse of their ID cards. To safeguard against these

scams, experts recommend certain precautions. They ask to verify the source. “Always double-check the sender’s information. Official agencies usually contact individuals through verified numbers or email addresses.” They strictly tell not to click on links in unsolicited messages. “Instead, visit the official website of the organisation in question to verify the information.” It is advisable to report suspicious messages and “Inform your telecom service provider about any suspicious messages to help prevent further scams.” It is important to educate self and others, stay informed about common scams and share this knowledge with friends and family to increase awareness. The increasing frequency and sophistication of these scams underscore the need for heightened vigilance and proactive measures to protect personal and financial information from fraudsters. By staying informed and cautious, individuals can help mitigate the risks posed by these malicious schemes.

Taqah takes centre stage as the host of Khareef cultural programme



Taqah’s cultural programme will be held at multiple locations in the wilayat

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 31

The Wilayat of Taqah is set to host a vibrant cultural programme starting today (Thursday) in celebration of the Khareef holiday season in Dhofar Governorate. Taqah is known for its diverse natural landscapes, including beaches, creeks, mountains, deserts, valleys, caves, and springs. This rich environment has helped the local community adapt to changing weather conditions. The two-week cultural programme, running until August 15, aims to engage various segments of the community. Events will take place at prominent locations such as the Main Al-Fardah Theatre, Al-Midan Square, and Tilly Match Village by the coast. The programme offers a wide range of activities encompassing culture, arts, environmental initiatives, entertainment, and heritage. Highlights include opening ceremonies, artistic performances, operettas, and environmental events focused on marine and terrestrial conservation. Attendees can also participate in beach games, electric entertainment, and a heritage exhibition showcasing Omani traditions. Key attractions of the programme include cultural competitions for all ages, art workshops, local family product exhibitions, a consumer fair, and captivating artistic evenings. The events aim to celebrate the autumn season, promote cultural heritage, boost domestic tourism, and provide family-friendly entertainment. Taqah lies just south of the Tropic of



Cancer and north of the Equator, serving as a gateway to Dhofar’s eastern provinces. It connects Mirbat to the east, Salalah to the west, and Thamrait to the north, with the Arabian Sea to the south. The wilayah’s natural environment includes coastal areas like Taqah city, mountainous regions in Al-Haqq, and desert landscapes in Jabjat. During the Khareef season, the mountains transform into lush landscapes shrouded in mist, while waterfalls like Darbat and Athum, and scenic beaches such as Khor Solei, Taqah, and Rori enhance the region’s beauty. The Taqah Plain, spanning 9 kilometres by 2 kilometres, showcases the blend of urban and rural landscapes, with mountains bridging the gap between desert and city.

Taqah’s environmental diversity supports a variety of bird and animal species and provides fertile soil for plants used in personal, medicinal, and commercial applications. Historical sites in Taqah include the ancient city of Samharam, Qasbar ruins, Darbat ruins, Taqah Fort, and Taqah Tower. The Sheikh Al-Afeef Mosque and the surrounding district also hold historical significance. The Al-Askar Tower, situated on a rocky summit overlooking Taqah, combines heritage with modernity. Renovated in 2008 and opened as a tourist attraction in 2022, the tower features three observation towers offering panoramic views of the Arabian Sea. It also showcases traditional Omani attire, heritage items, and a permanent exhibition on the tower’s history. The project, a collaboration with various government bodies, includes facilities such as a restaurant and café, making it an appealing year-round tourist destination. Khor Rori, known as Samharam, is a World Heritage Site renowned for its historical significance as a frankincense trade port. Protected for its ecological balance, the site is home to diverse species and connects to the Dhofar water drainage system. In addition, the Generations Link Museum in Taqah, established by the late Tufoul bint Ramadan Awad Bamakhlaif, stands as Dhofar Governorate’s first private museum. It aims to preserve Omani cultural identity through exhibits on Bedouin life, urban heritage, rural traditions, and historical currency, fostering appreciation for Omani heritage across generations.

‘Breastfeeding support for all’

KABEER YOUSUF
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Breastfeeding has proven benefits for infants and mothers in the short and long term, but many women do not breastfeed for as long as they would like due to a lack of supportive environment, according to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO). In Oman, the Ministry of Health (MoH) statistics show that in 2015, 93.4 per cent and in 2018, 90.8 per cent of mothers exclusively breastfed at birth. However, only 11.8 per cent of mothers in 2015 and 8.7 per cent in 2018 were still exclusively breastfeeding at 6 months. There has been a noticeable decline in the number of mothers breastfeeding their babies for the first 6 months. This year, the ‘World Breastfeeding Week’ campaign from August 1 to 7 focuses on ‘Closing the gap: Breastfeeding support for all,’ aiming to raise awareness about the importance of breastfeeding exclusively for the first 6 months. Globally, less than half of infants under 6 months are exclusively breastfed. WHO recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed until 6 months of age, as it is a shared responsibility and mothers are encouraged to follow the national breastfeeding policy. The WHO report states that breastfeeding is one of the best ways to ensure a child’s health and survival. Dr Salima al Mamary, Director of the Nutrition Department at the MoH, emphasised the benefits of breastfeeding, stating that it protects infants against many diseases and provides all the necessary energy and nutrients for their first 6 months of life. Dr Salima advocates for



Breastfeeding protects infants against many diseases and provides all the necessary energy and nutrients for their first 6 months of life

DR SALIMA AL MAMARY

Director of the Nutrition Department at the MoH

compulsory breastfeeding to help combat the increasing trend of obesity and overweight among children under five years of age. She believes that getting children accustomed to natural mother’s milk can lead to healthier children. Breast milk is considered the ideal food for infants, as it is safe, clean, and contains antibodies that protect against common childhood illnesses. Breast milk meets all the energy and nutrient needs of infants in their first months of life and continues to provide a significant portion of their nutritional needs in the second year. Studies have shown that breastfed children perform better on intelligence tests, are less likely to be overweight or obese, and have a reduced risk of diabetes later in life. Women who breastfeed also reduce their risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

Job Vacancy

Job Title: Sales Engineers

A leading Company in Oil & Gas Sector having Manufacturing, Supplies and Services is seeking a dynamic and result oriented Sales Engineers to join our growing team.

Qualification:

- ◆ Bachelor's Degree in Science or Engineering
- ◆ Minimum 2 – 3 Year Experience in Oman
- ◆ Having Valid Oman Driving License

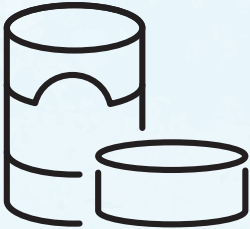
Interested candidates please submit your resume to **soghr24@yahoo.com**



BASIC ITEMS IN **EMERGENCY KIT**



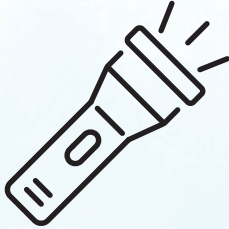
A THREE-DAY
SUPPLY OF
WATER
(ONE GALLON
PER PERSON
PER DAY)



NON-PERISHABLE
FOOD ITEMS SUCH
AS CANNED
GOODS, DRIED
PROTEINS, AND
NUTS



FIRST AID KIT
CONTAINING
BANDAGES,
DISINFECTANTS,
PAINKILLERS



BASIC
EQUIPMENT LIKE
FLASHLIGHT
WITH EXTRA
BATTERIES



EMERGENCY
TOOLS LIKE A
WRENCH OR
PLIERS FOR
TURNING OFF GAS
OR WATER LINES



PERSONAL HYGIENE
ITEMS LIKE WET
WIPE, GARBAGE
BAGS, HAND
SANITISERS, AND
BASIC TOILETRIES



EMERGENCY KITS
VITAL IN EVERY HOME

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Oman's vulnerability to heavy rains and cyclones during specific months of the year highlights the importance of disaster preparedness. An emergency kit is a crucial element of this preparedness, serving as a lifeline in unforeseen circumstances.

By taking proactive measures, risks can be significantly reduced especially as climate change events become more frequent and severe.

From June to November, Oman faces threats from tropical cyclones. These weather conditions can result in floods, landslides, and disruptions in essential services like electricity and water.

Such extreme weather highlights the need for every household to have basic supplies to navigate these challenging times.

An emergency kit is essential in every home to ensure safety during crises. It should include a three-day supply of water, approximately

one gallon per person per day. Non-perishable food items such as canned goods, dried proteins, and nuts are also crucial. A first aid kit containing bandages, disinfectants, painkillers, and necessary medications, including those for chronic conditions, should also be included.

Basic equipment like a flashlight with extra batteries, a battery-powered or hand-cranked radio, and a whistle for signalling help are vital. The kit should also contain emergency tools like a wrench or pliers for turning off gas or water lines, strong duct tape, clear plastic, and cutting tools for securing protection. Personal hygiene items like wet wipes, garbage bags, hand sanitisers, and basic toiletries should be included.

Warm clothing and blankets are essential, along with copies of important documents like national ID, passports, and medical records stored in a waterproof bag. Cash should also be included

ALL FAMILY MEMBERS SHOULD BE FAMILIAR WITH THE KIT'S CONTENTS AND THEIR LOCATION TO ENSURE READINESS IN EMERGENCIES. A WELL-PREPARED EMERGENCY KIT CAN MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE DURING CRISES, ENSURING THE FAMILY'S SAFETY AND STABILITY

for use in case banking services are unavailable. A dust mask for protection from polluted air and sewing supplies for repairing clothes and equipment are recommended.

Regularly reviewing and updating the contents of the kit to ensure the freshness of food, medications, and batteries is crucial. All family members should be familiar with the kit's contents and their location to ensure readiness in emergencies. A well-prepared emergency kit can make a significant difference during crises, ensuring the family's safety and stability.

In addition to the physical kit, psychological preparedness and awareness of the importance of disaster readiness are essential. Families should conduct regular drills on their emergency plans, including how to use the kit's equipment and identify safe evacuation routes. All family members, including children, should learn to remain calm and composed during crises.

Communities and authorities play a crucial role in promoting awareness about the importance of emergency kits. Authorities can organise awareness campaigns and workshops to train citizens on preparing emergency kits and their significance. Communities can establish support groups to share information and resources during crises. Such initiatives help build a cohesive community capable of collectively facing challenges.

Having an emergency kit in the home can mean the difference between safety and danger during the natural disasters that Oman may face. Proactive planning and preparation are essential for ensuring the safety of family members and minimising potential damage. Ultimately, an emergency kit is a simple yet effective tool for protecting lives and property during times of crisis. Every family should take this vital step seriously to ensure safety and stability in the face of anticipated natural disasters.



EA issues regulations for keeping wild animals

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 31

The Environment Authority announced the issuance of Decision No. (150/2024) regarding the regulation of keeping domesticated wild animals. This decision aims to regulate the possession of domesticated wild animals, whether local or imported.

The decision includes details of the requirements and stages needed to obtain a licence, as well as the basic rules related to keeping these animals, and the associated violations and fines.

According to the decision, domesticated wild animals are defined as animals that are bred in farms or reserves owned by individuals, whether they are local or imported, such as the Arabian gazelle, reem gazelle, Nubian ibex, Arabian oryx, and Arabian sand gazelle.

To obtain a licence to keep domesticated wild animals, applicants must meet several basic conditions. First, the applicant must be an Omani citizen to ensure compliance with local laws.

Second, the applicant must provide a suitable place to breed the animals, in compliance with the prescribed environmental and health conditions. Third, it is required to pay the fees required to obtain the licence, which enhances compliance with official procedures and ensures the seriousness of the application.

The process of obtaining a licence to keep domesticated wild animals goes through several stages. This process begins with submitting a formal application containing the documents required by the Environment Authority.

The Authority studies this application within a period not exceeding 30 working days. After approving the application, the applicant is notified of the need



Domesticated wild animals are defined as animals that are bred in farms or reserves owned by individuals, whether they are local or imported, such as the Arabian gazelle, reem gazelle, Nubian ibex and Arabian oryx.

to pay an amount of 200 Omani rials for each animal. After paying the fees and fulfilling all the conditions, the licence is issued to the breeder.

The decision includes several basic rules to ensure the proper care of domesticated wild animals. The licence is granted for a period of two years and is renewable based on compliance with the rules. Mixing domesticated wild animals with other animals for mating is prohibited except after obtaining the approval of the Authority to ensure the preservation of breeds. The release of domesticated wild animals into the wild is prohibited to protect them and ensure their safety. The breeder must notify the Authority of any changes in the condition of the animals.

VIOLATIONS AND FINES

The decision includes a set of violations and fines to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations related to keeping domesticated wild animals. Keeping domesticated wild animals without a licence exposes the owner to a fine ranging from RO100 to RO500, and the same fine is imposed on transferring possession without a licence.

Disposing of domesticated wild animals without the approval of the Authority exposes the violator to a fine ranging from RO300 to RO500 for each animal. Releasing

domesticated wild animals into the wild without approval results in a fine ranging from RO500 to RO1,000 for each animal.

Mixing domesticated wild animals with other animals for mating without the approval of the Authority results in a fine ranging from RO500 to RO1,000. Failure to notify the authorities of deaths among domesticated wild animals results in a fine ranging from RO300 to RO1,000 for each lost animal. Failure to install a microchip or numbered ear tags on wild animals produced by the first and second generations imposes a fine ranging from RO50 to RO200 for each animal.

In addition, failure to provide a suitable place to breed animals results in a fine ranging from RO50 to RO300 Omani rials, and failure to bear the costs of transporting animals imposes a fine similar to the first violation.

Not allowing the authority's specialists to enter the breeding places exposes the violator to a fine ranging from RO400 to RO1,000, while the death of any of the wild animals as a result of negligence results in a fine ranging from RO400 to RO1,000 for each animal.

The decision set the fees for licenses to keep domesticated wild animals at RO10 for renewing the licence for two years. The fees for transferring ownership of domesticated wild animals is RO2.

Muscat students set to compete at World Hip Hop Competition

MUSCAT: A talented group of students from The Kings United Muscat dance academy is set to compete at the prestigious World Hip Hop International (HHI) competition, taking place from August 4 to 9 in Phoenix, Arizona.

This event, often dubbed the "Olympics of Hip Hop Dance," attracts top hip-hop dance teams from around the world, making it a highly anticipated competition.

The six-member team, consisting of Tejaswini Shakhile, Shihan Shetty, Shubhra Buranpur, Jhanvi Prakash, Shaurya Sonavale, and Veer Gupta, hails from various schools across Muscat. They have been rigorously preparing for this moment, perfecting their routines and pushing their physical limits to compete with the best on the global stage.

Kings United Muscat was founded in 2018 by a passionate group of dancers with a shared dream of showcasing their talents internationally. Since their inception, the team has gained recognition for their skill and dedication, participating in numerous regional competitions and earning their spot at the global event through consistent performances. Their first appearance in HHI world dance championships occurred in 2022 when a group of young performers, residents of Oman, participated in a highly competitive arena.



The six-member team, consisting of Tejaswini Shakhile, Shihan Shetty, Shubhra Buranpur, Jhanvi Prakash, Shaurya Sonavale, and Veer Gupta, hails from various schools across Muscat

"The team's journey to HHI has been filled with rigorous training sessions, choreographic innovation, and mental fortitude. Under the guidance of their experienced coach, Prashant Shinde, Kings United Muscat has developed a unique style that blends traditional cultural elements with modern hip hop, creating a fusion that sets them apart from their competitors," said Tejas Gupta, director of Kings United Dance

Academy Muscat. The World Hip Hop International competition is renowned for its high standards and fierce competition, drawing teams from over 60 countries. Participants compete in various categories, including MegaCrew, Varsity, Junior, and Adult divisions. Kings United Muscat will compete in the Junior division, where they will face off against some of the world's most elite dance crews.

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees In Omani Riyals	Last Date For Tender Submission
2024/11	Supply, Installation, Testing, Commissioning, migration to DMZ, Support, and Maintenance of New Servers	LO: 25 SME: 10 RE: 25	9/9/ 2024

First

- All specialized and interested companies that are registered with the Tender tender from the following website: www.etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
- The bidders must submit their offers electronically via the website.

Second

- Tenders that does not meet the above conditions shall not be considered. The ministry shall have the right to reject any tender, and shall not be obliged to award the tender for the lowest bid without giving reasons.

For inquiries regarding tenders, please contact through the website of the electronic tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries regarding the technical support of the electronic tendering system, please contact via e-mail and phone :

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om

+ 96824402200

Oman Air flight diverted due to fog conditions

MUSCAT: The national airline Oman Air's flight WY3911 to Salalah was diverted on Tuesday due to unforeseen dense fog conditions.

Normal operations have resumed, the airline said in a statement.

"The safety and wellbeing of our guests remain our top priority at all times. We apologise for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding and patience," the airline said. Oman meteorology has predicted partly cloudy to cloudy along the coast of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains, with intermittent drizzle and a chance of isolated rain occasionally thundershowers.

There are chances of low-level cloud patches along parts of the coastal areas of the Arabian Sea.

Ministry of Interior

Advertisement of e-auction for the Sale of Vehicles in Muscat

The Ministry of Interior announces the holding of an electronic auction for the sale of vehicles through Mazad Oman Platform www.mazad.om according to the following statement:

Type of the auction

Heavy and light vehicles' auction

Number

196 Vehicles

Location of the auction

Storage of the Interior Ministry in Al Maabailah (Industrial Area)

Date of the auction

Sunday-Thursdays
11-15 August 2024

Date & time of the inspection

Sunday- Thursdays
4 to 8 of August 2024,
from 8 am to 1 pm

For those who desire to participate shall abide by the following requirements:

- Registration shall be made through the website mentioned above.
- A subscriber shall pay an insurance fee online amounted to RO 1000 One thousand Omani Rials.
- Buyers shall pay fees totaling 3 per cent of the total prices of the purchased goods as a brokerage percentage, in addition to pay VAT on the brokerage fees amounted to 5 %.
- The Ministry of Interior and mazad Oman shall have no commitment towards any vehicles whose picture and description are not matched, as well the validity of the auctioned vehicle or guarantee its technical status. The buyers shall personally make the visual inspection during the period mentioned above.
- The buyer shall pay the price of the purchased vehicle electronically through banking transfer within three working days from completing the purchase process.
- The buyer shall shift the purchased vehicle no later than 5 working days from the date of concluding the purchase process. If they are not moved during the determined period, the Ministry is not responsible for its lose or damage.
- The purchased vehicle shall not be returned or its price is reduced and no petition shall be made in this regard.
- The insurance payment shall be confiscated in case the terms and conditions are breached.

To acquaint with the electronic auction:

www.mazad.om

For further information, please contact us through the email

info@mazad.om and the contact centre on +968 96568396



Palestinians protest after the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Hebron on Wednesday. — Reuters

Hamas chief’s killing fuels fears of retaliation and wider war

US BEARS RESPONSIBILITY BECAUSE OF ITS SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL: IRAN

CAIRO/DUBAI: Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated on Wednesday morning in Iran, the Palestinian militant group and Tehran said, drawing threats of revenge on Israel in a region already shaken by the war in Gaza and a deepening conflict in Lebanon. Iran’s Revolutionary Guards confirmed the death of Haniyeh, hours after he attended a swearing in ceremony for the country’s new president, and said it was investigating.

Hamas’ armed wing said in a statement Haniyeh’s killing would “take the battle to new dimensions and have major repercussions”. Vowing to retaliate, Iran declared three days of national mourning and said the US bears responsibility because of its support for Israel. Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said Israel had provided the grounds for “harsh punishment for itself” and it was Tehran’s duty to avenge the

Hamas leader’s death as it had occurred in the Iranian capital. Iranian forces had already made strikes directly on Israel earlier in the Gaza war.

There was no comment nor claim of responsibility from Israel. The Israeli military said it was assessing the situation but had not issued any new security guidelines for civilians.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, at an event in Singapore, sidestepped a question on Haniyeh’s killing, saying a ceasefire deal in Gaza was key to avoiding wider regional escalation.

“I’m not going to speculate on what impact any one event might have on that, I’ve learned over many years.”

He told Channel News Asia that the US had neither been aware of nor involved in the killing. The assassination, which took place less than 24 hours after Israel claimed to have killed

the Hezbollah commander it said was behind a deadly strike in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, appears to set back chances of any imminent ceasefire agreement in the 10-month-old war Gaza.

Qatar, which has been brokering talks aimed at halting the fighting in Gaza along with Egypt, condemned Haniyeh’s killing as a dangerous escalation of the conflict. “Political assassinations and continued targeting of civilians in Gaza while talks continue leads us to ask, how can mediation succeed when one party assassinates the negotiator on other side?” Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Thani wrote on X.

Egypt said it showed a lack of political will on Israel’s part to calm tensions. China, Russia, Türkiye and Iraq also condemned it. Iran’s top security body met to decide strategy in reaction to the

death of Haniyeh, a source with knowledge of the situation said.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned the killing and Palestinian factions in the Israeli-occupied West Bank called for a strike and mass demonstrations. In Israel, the mood was buoyant as Israelis welcomed what they saw as a major achievement in the war against Hamas, though residents in besieged Gaza feared Haniyeh’s death would prolong the fighting that has devastated the enclave.

“What a loss. We lost one of our very own,” said Gaza resident Fatima Al Saati who was sleeping when news of Haniyeh’s death broke. Another neighbour, Hachem Al-Saati, said: “This news is scary. We feel that he was like a father to us.”

There is no sign of an end to Israel’s campaign in Gaza, as ceasefire talks appear to have faltered.

‘Hamas and Iran don’t want regional war, but a crime should be punished’

DUBAI/CAIRO: Hamas and Iran don’t want a regional war, but there is a crime that should be punished, Hamas deputy chief in Gaza Khalil Al Hayya said in a press conference in Tehran after the killing of the Palestinian militant group’s chief Ismail Haniyeh.

The assassination strips the Palestinian group of one of its sharpest political minds but will have no bearing on the leadership of the military wing that Israel is trying to destroy in Gaza. Hamas has several possible candidates to replace Haniyeh, notably Khaled Meshaal, the group’s former leader who survived an Israeli assassination attempt in Jordan in 1997 and resides today in Qatar. Whoever emerges, experts say it won’t impact the way Hamas runs its war against Israel in the Gaza Strip, where leaders including Yahya Sinwar have been directing operations with a significant degree of autonomy during the conflict.

For Hamas leaders based outside the Palestinian territories, the assassination in Tehran indicates heightened risks. Haniyeh was the second Hamas leader killed in a Middle East capital this year, following a drone strike that took out the group’s deputy leader — Saleh al Arouri — in Beirut in January.

Israel has achieved mixed results in trying to kill the Gaza-

based commanders responsible for planning and executing the cross-border October 7 attack.

In March, Israel said it had killed Marwan Issa, the deputy military commander of the Hamas armed wing known as Al Qassam Brigades. The United States confirmed Issa’s death in an Israeli operation. Hamas has neither confirmed nor denied his death. In July, an Israeli attempt in Gaza to kill Mohammed Deif — head of the Qassam Brigades and believed to be one of the masterminds of October 7 — resulted in scores of Palestinian dead but no confirmation he was among them. Israel has said there are increasing signs that Deif was killed in the strike but has yet to confirm whether he is dead. It has accused Hamas of hiding the truth about his fate.

The other mastermind of the October 7 attack, Sinwar, is still believed to be directing military operations, possibly from bunkers beneath Gaza, while playing a leading role in indirect negotiations with Israel for a prisoner swap deal.

“Assassinations don’t impact Hamas,” a source said, declining to be identified due to the sensitivity of the subject. “Fighters on the ground have their own orders, they are bound to fight until Sinwar and the leadership tell them there is a deal in place.” — AFP



Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei meets with Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran on Tuesday the day before he was killed. — AFP

AL JAZEERA SAYS ISRAELI STRIKE KILLS TWO OF ITS JOURNALISTS



Palestinians inspect a vehicle where Al Jazeera TV said its reporter Ismail al-Ghoul and cameraman Ramy El Rify were killed in an Israeli strike, in Gaza City on Wednesday. — Reuters

DOHA: Two Al Jazeera journalists were killed in an Israeli strike on Gaza, the Qatar-based channel reported on Wednesday as war rages between Israel and Hamas.

“Al Jazeera Arabic journalist Ismail al-Ghoul and his cameraman Rami al-Refai have been killed in an Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip,” the network reported adding the strike “targeted a car near the Aidia area, west of Gaza City”. Anas Al Sharif, a colleague of the two dead journalists, told Al Jazeera that Ghoul and Rifi were on mission to film near the house of Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas chief killed in Iran earlier on Wednesday in an attack the movement blamed on Israel. “Ismail was conveying the suffering of the displaced Palestinians and the suffering of the wounded and the massacres

committed by the [Israeli] occupation against the innocent people in Gaza,” he said.

The Hamas-run Gaza government media office said the new deaths raised to 165 the number of Palestinian journalists who were killed by Israeli fire since October 7.

Mohamed Moawad, Al Jazeera Arabic managing editor, said the Qatar-based network’s journalists were killed as they were “courageously covering the events in northern Gaza”.

Ismail was renowned for his professionalism and dedication, bringing the world’s attention to the suffering and atrocities committed in Gaza, especially at al-Shifa Hospital and the northern neighbourhoods of the besieged enclave. — Agencies

Hundreds mourn children killed in Israeli strike on south Beirut

BEIRUT: Hundreds of mourners on Wednesday chanted “death to Israel” and “America is the Great Satan” at the funeral of two children killed in an Israeli strike on Hezbollah’s stronghold in southern Beirut the day before.

The Israeli military said the strike had “eliminated” Fuad Shukr, a top Hezbollah commander it blamed for carrying out a weekend rocket attack on the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights that killed 12 children.

The raid on the Beirut suburb, an overcrowded residential area that is also a Hezbollah bastion, killed siblings Amira and Hassan Fadlallah as well as two women and injured dozens of civilians, according to Lebanon’s health ministry.

“I feel very angry because the... lives of our children are becoming very cheap,” said Aya Ahmed, 38, a friend of the two



Lebanese security forces check the area in the aftermath of an Israeli military strike on a building in Beirut’s southern suburb on Wednesday. — AFP

killed children’s mother.

The Iran-backed group said Shukr was in the targeted building but that his fate remained unknown.

An AFP photographer at the scene on Tuesday night saw an eight-storey building that had partially collapsed in the strike, while ambulances struggled through crowds and

rescue workers combed through the rubble of the building for survivors.

“Every mother now is thinking: I could lose my children at any moment because the Israelis have a license to kill,” said Ahmed.

At the procession in southern Beirut, Hezbollah-affiliated scouts carried the two children’s

coffins, draped in the youth group’s white flag.

Other mourners carried photographs of the two dead siblings while some held up Hezbollah’s flag.

“I feel sorry for the children, but... even if the jets are above our heads and striking we will be fighting,” Walida Othman, 45, said defiantly.

Lebanon’s Hezbollah group has been exchanging near-daily fire with Israel since its Palestinian ally Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, sparking war in Gaza.

On the Lebanese side, the violence has killed at least 535 people, most of them fighters but also including 109 civilians, according to an AFP tally.

At least 22 soldiers and 25 civilians have been killed on the Israeli side, including in the Golan Heights, according to army figures. — AFP



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In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



IMRAN KHAN OFFERS CONDITIONAL TALKS WITH THE MILITARY

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan has offered to hold "conditional negotiations" with the powerful military as he serves a year into a jail term that he said he was given on trumped up charges designed to keep him out of power.

Khan did not specify what he wanted to discuss with the military, but in a post on his X account on Wednesday said that one of the conditions for negotiations was that "clean and transparent" elections be held and that "bogus" cases against his supporters be dropped. He said he had appointed Mahmood Khan Achakzai, a close political ally, to represent him in any talks. — AFP

■ DUBAI



SUDAN'S ARMY CHIEF DEFIANT AFTER DRONE STRIKES ARMY BASE

Sudan's army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan struck a defiant tone on Wednesday after a drone hit an army base he was visiting in eastern Sudan, casting doubt on recent efforts to bring an end to a 15-month civil war.

The army said the attack took place at a graduation ceremony at the Gibeit army base, about 100 km from the army's de facto capital Port Sudan in Sudan's Red Sea state, and that five people were killed. Witnesses confirmed that Burhan was at the base when the drone struck on Wednesday. He remained in the area and returned to the base to speak to troops, contradicting earlier reports that he had left for Port Sudan. — Reuters

■ PARIS



UNESCO HAILS UK'S STONEHENGE TUNNEL CANCELLATION

The United Nations' cultural organisation on Wednesday welcomed Britain's decision to cancel a controversial tunnel project near Stonehenge, a world heritage site.

The UK's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves on Monday announced a number of "difficult" budget decisions, telling parliament that a few "unfunded" projects launched by the previous government would not go ahead under the Labour administration of Prime Minister Keir Starmer, including plans for a road tunnel close to Stonehenge, a renowned prehistoric site in England.

— AFP

Hopes of finding landslide survivors fade

AT LEAST 188 PEOPLE DIED IN KERALA'S WAYANAD; MORE THAN 8,000 PEOPLE IN CAMPS



A damaged vehicle lies amid mud after landslides in Wayanad on Wednesday.



— AFP

CHOOALMALA: Hopes of finding survivors began to fade as hundreds of rescuers worked through slush and rocks and pulled out bodies from debris in the hills of India's Kerala state on Wednesday, a day after 188 people were killed in monsoon landslides.

Steady rain that intensified as the day progressed and the rising water level in a local river hampered the rescue, with a temporary bridge built to connect the worst affected area of Mundakkai being washed away.

The weather department has forecast more heavy rain over the next 24 hours, Kerala's Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said and urged people to be on "high alert".

Heavy rain in Kerala, one of India's most popular tourist destinations, led to the landslides in its Wayanad district early on Tuesday, sending torrents of mud, water and tumbling boulders downhill and

burying or sweeping people to their deaths as they slept.

It was the worst disaster in the state since deadly floods in 2018. Experts said the area had received heavy rain in the last two weeks that softened the soil. Extremely heavy rainfall on Monday then triggered the landslides.

Nearly 1,600 people have been rescued from the hillside villages and tea and cardamom estates, authorities said on Wednesday.

They said at least 188 people died, while the local Asianet news TV channel put the death toll at 230. More than 8,000 people were being sheltered in camps across the district, authorities said.

Wayanad's district administrator said people had been asked on Wednesday to shift to camps "as soon as possible as there is a danger".

Rescuers had found 24 bodies and six

body parts on Wednesday and were not hopeful of finding any survivors more than 36 hours after the tragedy, one official in Chooralmala town said.

The landslides were mostly on the upper slopes of hills which then cascaded to the valley below, M R Ajith Kumar, a top state police officer, told Reuters.

Nearly 350 of the 400 registered houses in the affected region have been damaged, Asianet reported, citing district officials.

The Indian Navy said its disaster relief team had reached the area on Tuesday night and search and rescue helicopters were deployed early on Wednesday but adverse weather conditions due to "incessant rains" posed challenges.

India has witnessed extreme weather conditions in recent years, from torrential rain and floods to droughts and cyclones, blamed by some experts on climate change.

"Climate change has led to significant

alterations in our environment. We need to take proactive steps to address and adapt to these changes," Chief Minister Vijayan said. "Effective measures should be taken to prevent impending disasters."

The region hit by the landslide was forecast to get 204 millimetres (8 inches) of rainfall but ended up getting 572 millimetres (22.5 inches) over a period of 48 hours, Vijayan said on Tuesday.

"The Arabian Sea is warming at a higher rate compared to other regions and sending more evaporation into the atmosphere, making the region a hotspot for deep convective clouds," said S Abhilash, head of the Advanced Centre for Atmospheric Radar Research at Kerala's Cochin University of Science and Technology.

"Deep developed clouds in the southeast Arabian Sea region were carried by winds towards land and produced this havoc," he said. — Reuters and dpa

AUSTRALIA LAUNCHES PEANUT ALLERGY TREATMENT FOR BABIES

SYDNEY: Australian children with potentially deadly peanut allergies will be offered life-saving treatment in a nationwide programme touted as a world first. Eligible babies will receive daily doses of peanut powder for two years to build up their tolerance, said officials announcing the initiative on Wednesday.

Over time, the infants will be given increasing doses in the hope of reducing their sensitivity to peanuts, under the supervision of doctors at 10 paediatric hospitals around the country.

It is the first national peanut allergy treatment programme offered in hospitals outside of a clinical trial setting, said Kirsten Perrett, head of oral immunotherapy at the National Allergy Centre of Excellence.

At the end of the two years, a food allergy test will determine if the treatment has led to a remission.

"Ultimately we want to change the trajectory of allergic disease in Australia so that more children can go to school without the risk of a life-threatening peanut reaction," Perrett said.

Previously, families have been told to ensure their children strictly avoid foods with peanuts.

Australian children have some of the highest rates of food allergies in the world.

Peanut allergies affect three percent of Australian children by the time they are 12 months old, government data shows.

Of those, only 20 per cent will

Eligible babies will receive daily doses of peanut powder for two years to build up their tolerance, touted as a world first

outgrow their allergy by the time they are teenagers.

Nine-month-old Hunter Chatwin, who is among those in the free treatment programme, started developing hives after eating peanut butter.

"We are taking part in the programme to try and improve his chance of being able to safely eat peanut in the future," Hunter's mother Kirsten said.

"Many families are desperate to protect their children from allergic reactions and anaphylaxis," she said.

"To have this programme available and free at public hospitals is a game-changer."

If successful, the programme will be rolled out more broadly, including in regional and remote areas.

Deaths from peanut allergies are rare in Australia, but almost 20 per cent of the population has an allergic disease, data from Australia's leading allergy institute found.

This figure is estimated to grow by 70 per cent by 2050, impacting 7.7 million Australians. — AFP

39 UK cops hurt in clashes after 3 girls stabbed to death

SOUTHPORT: Dozens of British police officers suffered injuries in violent clashes in an English seaside town late on Tuesday after three young girls were killed a day earlier in a violent stabbing attack at a Taylor Swift-themed dance event.

Police vans were set on fire in Southport and protesters hurled bricks at both officers and at cars parked at a mosque, following speculation and unverified posts on social media that the suspect behind the attack was a Muslim and a migrant. As well as killing three girls aged six to nine, Monday's horrific incident in the normally quiet town in northwest England saw eight other children stabbed. Five remain in a critical condition in hospital along with two adults who tried to protect them.

Police, who have arrested an unnamed 17-year-old male on suspicion of murder and attempted murder, have said the incident was not terrorism-related and sought to quash speculation on the suspect's origins, saying



Smoke billows from a fire started by protesters as riot police stand guard after disturbances near the Southport Islamic Society Mosque in Southport, northwest England, on Wednesday. — AFP

he was born in Britain. That did not prevent protesters, from what Merseyside police believed were tied to the right-wing anti-Islam group, the English Defence League, from targeting a mosque in the town and attacking police who tried to stop them.

Politicians and police said most of those taking part in the violence were not from the area, and said the clashes detracted from a large vigil attended by thousands to pay tribute to the young victims.

A total of 39 officers were treated for injuries, including 27 who were taken to hospital, North West Ambulance Service said on Wednesday. Police said eight had suffered serious injuries including fractures, and three police dogs were also hurt.

"Offenders have destroyed garden walls so they could use the bricks to attack our officers and have set cars belonging to the public on fire, and damaged cars parked in the Mosque car park," a senior police official said. — AFP

Haniyeh gave his life for the people of Palestine



Malak Al Busaidi,

The writer is with Al Zahra College for Women

Today, the world woke up in shock to the assassination of Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh in Iran. The news came like a “thunderbolt” to war-weary Gazans. The Hamas political chief died defending “his land, his people and its sanctities,” one Palestinian said.

The whole incident can be seen from two perspectives: a meek triumph and a courageous death fighting for a genuine cause.

For Israel and its allies, the operation that led to the killing of Haniyeh is legitimate and based on pre-set plans and intentions. It exhibits that the Israeli acts are carried out with premeditation and deliberation. The assassination has been carried out with consideration and planning. It seems that Israel intends to eradicate and uproot the whole original population of occupied Palestine. The whole international community is silent and unwilling to

hear or listen to Palestinians’ protest and outcry.

The whole world has become devoid of consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, and impropriety. There is no international law nor is there an obligation or willingness on the part of Israel to accept responsibility or to account for its murderous actions. The blood of Palestinians, men and women, young and elderly, is in the hands of Israel. As per Israeli practices and laws, children as young as 8 years can be put in prison. Israel shows no respect for the rights of women by assaulting their dignity in jails.

We sing praises and boast about international law and conventions. But Israel cares least about these norms. There should be an international prize to be granted to Israel for its constant and continued violation of international law in the killing fields of the holy land of Palestine. So, today Israel celebrates the victory over its international arch enemy.

THE WHOLE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS SILENT AND UNWILLING TO HEAR OR LISTEN TO PALESTINIANS’ PROTEST AND OUTCRY.

The slain leader also has the right to celebrate his martyrdom. He was killed in defence of a genuine cause. He knew beforehand that death was inevitable and could not be avoided or evaded. It was a matter of time only for him and for the rest of the Palestinians.

All Palestinians know that one way or another they will get killed and are in an intermediate state where their righteous souls await resurrection and the final judgment.

There is another place of bliss, felicity, and delight in heaven awaiting them. The justice of Allah is above all human laws. When people on the day of judgement stand before Allah, the international law becomes nil and void. There is no more United Nations nor is there a Security Council. Under Chapter 9, Israel will be held accountable for all its atrocities on the day of judgement. Therefore, Muslims and Palestinians should not worry.

Indonesia’s new capital has long way to go

JACK MOORE

It was supposed to be the jewel in the crown of the 10-year presidency of Joko Widodo, but Indonesia’s capital-to-be, carved out of dense jungle in Borneo, is a vast building site just weeks before being due to open.

Bar the centrepiece presidential palace — winged like the national emblem, the mythical Garuda bird — Nusantara is a series of unfinished buildings and bumpy access tracks, shrouded by clouds of dust kicked up by trucks and excavators.

The new capital was expected to be inaugurated on August 17, Indonesia’s Independence Day, but building delays, funding woes — and even the unwillingness of those expected to relocate there — have cast doubt on its opening.

“Everything is still in progress,” Widodo conceded during a visit to the site this week.

“This is a job of 10, 15 or 20 years. Not just one, two or three years.” The city-in-progress will still figure large in independence celebrations, but an official decree moving the capital from Jakarta could be delayed until long after Widodo’s successor, Prabowo Subianto, takes charge on October 20.

AFP was given rare access to phase one by project officials, but found claims that it was 80 per cent complete hard to accept.

“We are on track. There is no crisis, as you can see,” Danis Sumadilaga, Nusantara’s head of infrastructure, said.

Instead of a shiny new urban centre, a legion of workers toiled around hollow tower blocks, protecting their faces from the dust while being pushed to meet the August 17 deadline.

“For Independence Day, we are indeed pressured to finish the target,” said concrete plant manager Jamaluddin, 47, who goes by one name.

On top of delays, Nusantara has failed to attract crucial foreign investment.

Jakarta will fund 20 per cent of Nusantara and wants \$6.13 billion in private investment by the end of 2024.

But as of June, it had received only 51.3 trillion — all from domestic backers.

Experts say foreign firms are likely hesitant to commit to a city in one of the world’s largest stretches of rainforest, home to orangutans and long-nosed monkeys.

“They don’t want to invest in something at the cost of biodiversity,” said Aida Greenbury, an Indonesian expert on sustainability.

“They say it will truly become a city in 2045. But we have to move there in 2024. What will our lives be like?” Even the offer of special allowances and moving costs is doing little to change minds.

“I am still very reluctant to move,” a 32-year-old civil servant said.

But the government is banking on the loyalty and sacrifices of its workforce.

“Whoever comes in will be the pioneers,” said Sofian Sibarani, the city’s designer. — **AFP**



Karim Easterbrook
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The author is Former School Principal from Cambridge

The increasing divide between British Asian Muslims and indigenous Britons

I place the blame for the growing divide between the British Asian Muslim community and the rest of British society above all on successive British governments who pander to the small minority of extremist elements of the male British Asian Muslim community and engage only with them as though they represent the majority of all Muslims in the UK.

I have intentionally used the word “male” since it is the men who are foremost in promoting extremist views. Successive British governments have pandered to these extremist groups and consequently have tarred the majority of British Muslim Asians with the same brush. The majority of British Asians want to live peacefully and in harmony with their British compatriots. Most British Asian Muslims don’t seek favourable treatment from the British authorities. They want equal rights, not different rights.

Here are two of many examples of how the British authorities have promoted the view that British Muslims seek to dominate and change the traditional values of the British indigenous citizens. In 2003 British authorities banned an advertisement for a Christmas Carol Service for fear it might cause tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. In a survey of British Asian Muslims 75 per cent disagreed with this ban. In 2005 64 per cent of British Asian Muslims surveyed thought it was wrong for another British Local Council to ban all images of pigs in their government offices, on calendars, cards and on toys etc. on the grounds that it would offend Muslim sensibilities. Only 6 per cent of Muslims surveyed named the British Council of Muslims as representing their views. This Council states in its promotional literature that it is “the largest and most diverse representative body for the British Muslim community in the UK.” This may or may not be true but on the basis of the survey they don’t represent 94 per cent of British Muslims, only themselves. And yet the British media and the British government regularly quote its statements as though they represent the views of all British Muslims.

Large Mosques, often much larger than Christian churches, are built in cities like Oxford, my hometown.



British Muslims are used to create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety by the western media.

The indigenous Britons are tolerant of every religious practice but often perceive unnecessarily large mosques as a statement of Muslim power. And who gives planning permission to allow these Mosques to be built? Of course that is the British government. Such actions often offend the majority of people including many British Asian

BRITISH GOVERNMENTS PANDER TO THE SMALL MINORITY OF EXTREMIST ELEMENTS OF THE MALE BRITISH ASIAN MUSLIM COMMUNITY AND ENGAGE ONLY WITH THEM AS THOUGH THEY REPRESENT THE MAJORITY OF ALL MUSLIMS IN THE UK

Muslims. British Muslims know this can further isolate them from the society and the country which is their home and give ammunition to those racists who hate anyone of a different colour or religion.

I am not a conspiracy theorist but when there is evidence of my governments taking actions which self-evidently are aimed at widening the gap between the Muslim and non-Muslim British communities one

has to consider the possibility that they have a political agenda. What might that agenda be? One possible agenda is to paint all British Muslims as terrorists or extremists or foreign invaders wishing to take over. This would allow successive governments to receive support for wars against Muslim countries that fail to toe the Western line. Another agenda might be to create an atmosphere of fear. Here I quote from The Prince, a treatise written by Niccolo Machiavelli in the 16th Century. When giving advice on whether a government should use fear or love to rule its people he writes “it is much safer to be feared than loved because...love is broken at every opportunity (by the people) for their advantage; but fear preserves you (the government) by a dread of punishment (by Muslims?) which never fails.” I am not suggesting in any way that my own government is fascist but past fascist governments have used this method to effectively control their people. British Muslims are used to create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety by the western media.

A current example of using fear is taking place in the State of Palestine. The Zionists justify their genocidal actions by saying Israelis and Jews are in danger of their lives. They weren’t but they are now owing to Netanyahu’s and the IDF’s atrocities. Jews are not Zionists but the fear of Jews and consequent prejudice against them are growing owing to the actions of the extremist Zionist government.

Hot button issues in society

The world we know is becoming weirder. The clock is ticking faster, as are the rates of bizarre behaviours, decisions, regulations, and societal norms. Many strange facts are happening practically simultaneously.

To begin, the Paris Olympic opening ceremony has been marred by controversy, except for Celine Dion's unforgettable and beautiful performance after enduring difficult years since being diagnosed with stiff-person syndrome; everything else was odd.

The representation of the 'Last Supper' raises issues about the nature of the Olympics, its history, and its relationship with mythology. Christians from around the world have joined the French Bishops' Conference in denouncing the Olympic opening ceremony's depiction of the 'Last Supper'. The unconventional choreography has received condemnation, explanation, and admiration from people all around the world. Was it art, creativity, or an insult? People are coming out of their closets and showing their true colours.

The attempted assassination of the former president of the United States, Donald Trump, could have had far-reaching consequences for global politics. The FBI confirmed that a full bullet, or fragmented into smaller pieces, struck the former president's ear.

Then there was the sight of US lawmakers giving Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a standing ovation despite the war crimes committed in Gaza. His speech in the US Congress was very clear: a thank you to the American people and politicians for their support. He justified the war and outlined a post-war vision of total victory and possibly total territorial control. In such a context, killing innocent people and destroying infrastructure, schools, and hospitals was seen as moral and acceptable.

Furthermore, immigration is becoming a more divisive and contentious issue than ever before, with patriotism on the rise. Europe and the United States are facing thorny challenges, as are other countries!



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THE CLOCK IS TICKING FASTER, AS ARE THE RATES OF BIZARRE BEHAVIOURS, DECISIONS, REGULATIONS, AND SOCIETAL NORMS

The situation in Ukraine and Russia, which is gradually sliding down to becoming a footnote, is weighing down the global economy and undermining a larger European and Indo-Pacific security order. There is a lot at stake in this area.

It has recently been clear that military weaponry can be replaced by Internet shutdowns, power outages, and cultural and religious aggressions, not forgetting the Covid pandemic, which affected everyone's lives all over the world. It was a shared vulnerability.

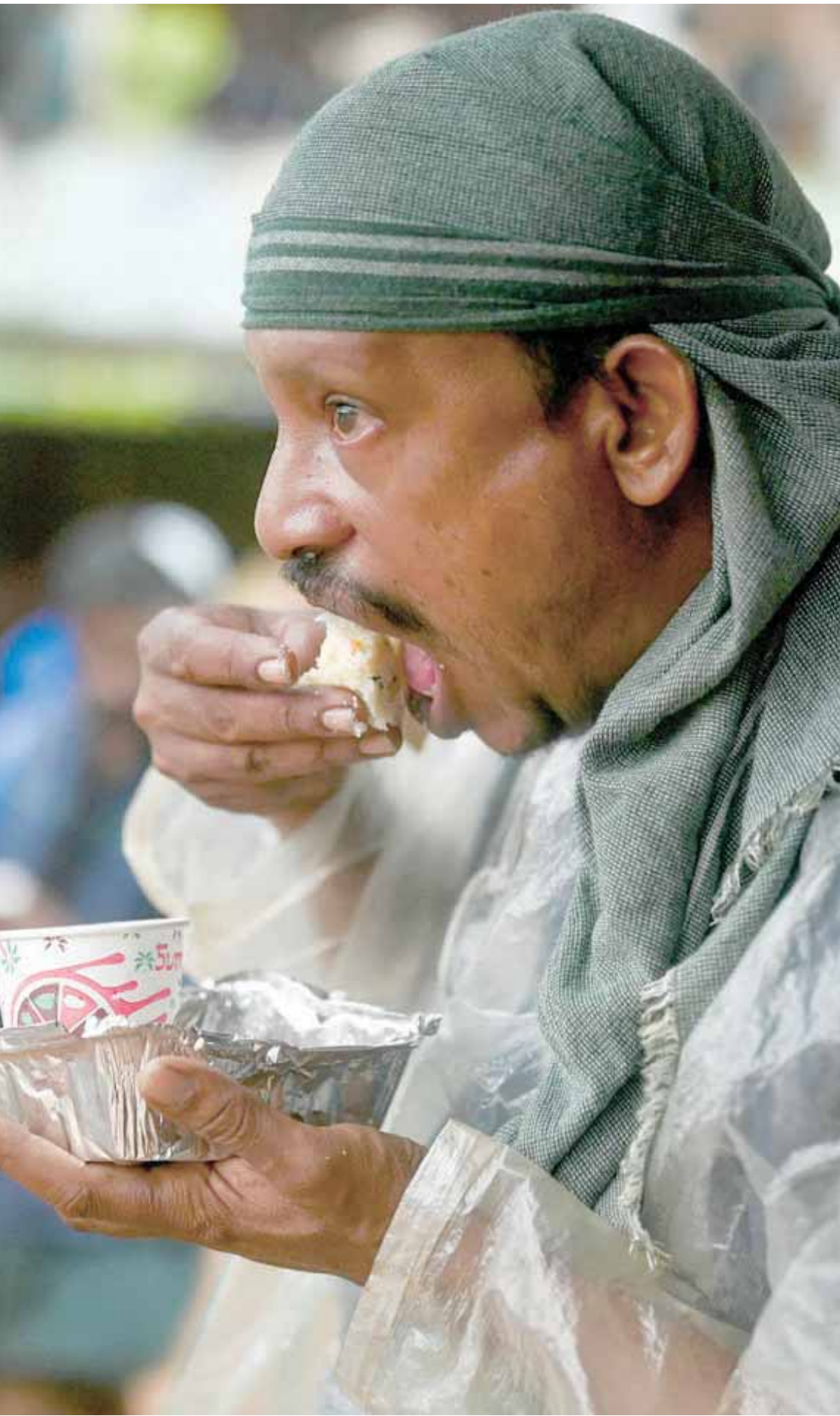
It is appropriate to consider the Covid-19 pandemic in this current context given that people were pulled on all sides, locked down, and shackled. People throughout the world did as they were told. We now know that those who were deciding on types and doses of the vaccines had direct commercial interests. There is more to vaccine contract transparency than meets the eye. Hypocrisy and corruption are common characteristics of politics.

A software upgrade crashed approximately 8.5 million computers around the world just a few days ago, sparking the greatest digital crisis in history. Airlines, businesses, hospitals, and banking services were among the hardest hit. Large corporations are capturing both the economy and people's lives. As with Covid, we are all vulnerable.

In a time of traditional and nontraditional threats, countries consider their economic interests first. Lips are tight, especially when it is not politically or economically appropriate to voice opinions. Behind the scenes and away from the spotlights, we can see manoeuvres by countries inserting themselves as part of solutions to the unravelling of conventional geopolitics. Several countries that have historically been Western allies are increasingly seeking friendly relations with growing powers, such as China and Russia.

The world has become a vast theatre, with many actors pursuing their interests. Geopolitical morality shows a complex set of tradeoffs; we are reaching a point of a series of difficult choices.

TAKING A BREAK



A relief worker breaks for a meal during a search and rescue operation after landslides in Wayanad, Kerala, on Wednesday. Relentless downpours and howling winds hampered search for survivors of landslides that struck Indian tea plantations and killed at least 150 people, most believed to be labourers and their families. – AFP

Artificial intelligence and national security

Humans are a tool-making species, but can we control the tools we make? When Robert Oppenheimer and other physicists developed the first nuclear fission weapon in the 1940s, they worried that their invention might destroy humanity. Thus far, it has not, but controlling nuclear weapons has been a persistent challenge ever since.

Now, many scientists see artificial intelligence — algorithms and software that enable machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence — as an equally transformational tool. Like previous general-purpose technologies, AI has enormous potential for good and evil. In cancer research, it can sort through and summarise more studies in a few minutes than a human team can do over the course of months. Likewise, it can reliably predict patterns of protein folds that would take human researchers many years to uncover.

But AI also lowers the costs and the barriers to entry for misfits, terrorists, and other bad actors who might wish to cause harm. As a recent RAND study warned, "the marginal cost to resurrect a dangerous virus similar to smallpox can be as little as \$100,000, while developing a complex vaccine can be over \$1 billion."

Moreover, some experts worry that advanced AI will be so much smarter than humans that it will control us, rather than the other way around. Estimates of how long it will take to



Joseph S Nye, Jr

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IT IS A TRUISM THAT TECHNOLOGY MOVES FASTER THAN POLICY OR DIPLOMACY, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT IS DRIVEN BY INTENSE MARKET COMPETITION IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

develop such superintelligent machines — known as artificial general intelligence — vary from a few years to a few decades. But whatever the case, the growing risks from today's narrow AI already demand greater attention.

For 40 years, the Aspen Strategy Group (consisting of former government officials, academics, businesspeople, and journalists) has met each summer to focus on a major national-security problem. Past sessions have dealt with subjects such as nuclear weapons, cyber-attacks, and the rise of China. This year, we focused on AI's implications for national security, examining the benefits as well as the risks.

Among the benefits are a greater ability to sort through enormous amounts of intelligence data, strengthen early-warning systems, improve complicated logistical systems, and inspect computer code to improve cybersecurity. But there are also big risks, such as advances in autonomous weapons, accidental errors in programming algorithms, and adversarial AIs that can weaken cybersecurity.

China has been making massive investments in the broader AI arms race, and it also boasts some structural advantages. The three key resources for AI are data to train the models; smart engineers to develop algorithms;

and computing power to run them. China has few legal or privacy limits on access to data (though ideology constrains some datasets), and it is well supplied with bright young engineers. The area where it is most behind the United States is in the advanced microchips that produce the computing power for AI.

American export controls limit China's access to these frontier chips, as well as to the costly Dutch lithography machines that make them. The consensus among the experts in Aspen was that China is a year or two behind the US; but the situation remains volatile. Although Presidents Joe Biden and Xi Jinping agreed to hold bilateral discussions on AI when they met last fall, there was little optimism



AI lowers the costs and the barriers to entry for misfits.

in Aspen about the prospects for AI arms control.

Autonomous weapons pose a particularly serious threat. After more than a decade of diplomacy at the United Nations, countries have failed to agree on a ban of autonomous lethal weapons. International humanitarian law requires that militaries discriminate between armed combatants and civilians, and the Pentagon has long required that a human be in the decision-making loop before a weapon is fired. But in some contexts, such as defending against incoming missiles, there is no time for human intervention.

Since the context matters, humans must tightly define (in the code) what weapons can

and cannot do. In other words, there should be a human "on the loop" rather than "in the loop." This is not just some speculative question. In the Ukraine war, the Russians jam Ukrainian forces' signals, compelling the Ukrainians to programme their devices for autonomous final decision-making about when to fire.

One of the most frightening dangers of AI is its application to biological warfare or terrorism. When countries agreed to ban biological weapons in 1972, the common belief was that such devices were not useful, owing to the risk of "blowback" on one's own side. But with synthetic biology, it may be possible to develop a weapon that destroys one group but not another. Or a terrorist with access to a laboratory may simply want to kill as many people as possible, as the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult did in Japan in 1995. (While they used sarin, which is non-transmissible, their modern equivalent could use AI to develop a contagious virus.)

In the case of nuclear technology, countries agreed, in 1968, on a non-proliferation treaty that now has 191 members. The International Atomic Energy Agency regularly inspects domestic energy programmes to confirm that they are being used solely for peaceful purposes.

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Everton sign Irish defender O'Brien from Lyon

LIVERPOOL: Everton have signed Ireland centre back Jake O'Brien from Ligue 1 side Olympique Lyonnais on a four-year contract, the Premier League club announced on Tuesday.

The Merseyside club did not disclose the financial details, but British media reported that the deal is worth around 17 million pounds (\$21.82 million).

The 23-year-old started his career at his hometown club, Cork City, before moving to Crystal Palace in 2021. Having had loan spells at League Two club Swindon Town and Belgian side RWD Molenbeek, he made 32 appearances for Lyon across all competitions since joining them last year.

"Jake further strengthens our talented core of centre backs and adds competition to our squad which can help us continue to progress," Everton manager Sean Dyche said in a statement.

"He is still young but has earned valuable experience both abroad and at international level, and has many impressive attributes to become a top-quality player for Everton in the Premier League."

Everton begin their Premier League campaign against Brighton & Hove Albion at Goodison Park on Aug. 17.

— Reuters

Alpine F1 team appoint Oakes as fifth boss in four years



LONDON: Oliver Oakes was appointed principal of Renault-owned Alpine on Wednesday and will start after the August break as the under-performing Formula One team's fifth boss in four years.

The 36-year-old Briton, a former racer and karting champion who founded Hitech Grand Prix competing in various junior series, will be the second youngest team boss in the championship's modern era.

Red Bull's Christian Horner, now the longest-serving principal, started with the current champions in January 2005 at the age of 31.

"It is a pleasure to welcome Oli to the team and for him to become one of the youngest team principals that this sport has ever seen," said Renault Group Chief Executive Luca de



Meo in a statement.

"This team is being built for future success and this is highlighted by Oli's appointment in a senior role. We look forward to harnessing his enthusiasm, energy and passion for racing and realising that mindset across the entire team."

Oakes will replace Bruno Famin, who has lasted a year in the job. The Frenchman took over from Otmar Szafnauer, who replaced Laurent Rossi at the helm in February 2022. Rossi was appointed in January 2021 after the departure of Cyril Abiteboul.

Alpine, who won titles as Benetton and Renault in the 1990s and 2000s, have struggled this season with only 11 points from 14 races.

They are eighth overall after finishing sixth in 2023 and

fourth in 2022.

"Oli is highly talented with a great record of leadership and success in racing," said former boss Flavio Briatore, now an adviser to De Meo.

"His move into this role is a great example of the strength and belief we have in our team and by young, upcoming people, and I'm excited to work closely with him with a joint focus on moving up the grid and winning races."

Oakes said the team had talented people and excellent resources and was confident "that we can accomplish a great deal together during the remainder of this season and the longer term. I look forward to getting started after the summer break." — Reuters

Chelsea sign goalkeeper Jorgensen from Villarreal

CHELSEA: Chelsea have completed the signing of Denmark under-21 goalkeeper Filip Jorgensen from LaLiga side Villarreal, the Premier League club said on Tuesday.

The 22-year-old, who last season became Villarreal's number one keeper, has signed a seven-year deal, Chelsea said.

The clubs did not disclose the transfer fee but British media reported the deal was worth around 20 million pounds (\$25.67 million).

"This move is a dream come true," Jorgensen told the club website.

"I am very excited to have signed for Chelsea, one of the biggest clubs in the world. I can't wait to get to know everyone and to start playing with all my new teammates."

Born in Sweden to a Danish father and Swedish mother, Jorgensen represented Sweden at youth levels before making a switch to Denmark in May 2021. — Reuters



SeaOman gain PADI certifications as Tripadvisor Award

MUSCAT: Instructors from SeaOman, Oman's number one marine leisure provider and the commercial department of Oman Sail, have received qualifications from the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) to recognise the excellence of scuba and snorkelling experiences offered to customers. This commitment to providing excellence was also recently recognised by Tripadvisor, the world's largest travel guidance platform, which named SeaOman as a winner of Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards for 2024.

Senior Dive Instructor Azzan al Sinani was awarded the Professional Member Recognition for 25 years as a PADI certified dive instructor, Abdulnaser al Sinani earned his



Azzan al Sinani



Khamis al Anbouri



Emergency First Response (EFR) Elite Instructor Award and a Certificate of Excellence from PADI, and Faisal al Jahdhami also received a Certificate of Excellence from PADI.

Khamis bin Mohammed

al Anbouri, Oman Sail's Commercial Director, said, "SeaOman is committed to offering visitors from within Oman and internationally a unique experience and sharing the natural beauty of Oman.

Our instructors' new PADI certifications are recognition of their expertise, dedication, and a symbol of the quality SeaOman can offer, which sets the company apart within Oman."

The Tripadvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards honours businesses that consistently earn great reviews, placing the company among the top 10 per cent of listings around the world on Tripadvisor.

"SeaOman would like to thank all the visitors and reviewers who have kindly left us reviews this year, and of course our wonderful staff team who have helped make this a possibility. We are honoured to be included among travelers' favourites this year," Khamis al Anbouri added.

"Congratulations to SeaOman on its recognition in Tripadvisor's

Travelers' Choice Awards for 2024," said John Boris, Chief Growth Officer at Tripadvisor.

"Travelers' Choice honours businesses that consistently demonstrate a commitment to hospitality excellence. We hope this recognition continues to drive business to you in 2024 and beyond," he added.

Alongside PADI scuba diving and snorkelling tours SeaOman also offers yacht trips (including sunset cruises, day trips and overnight stays), sailing and windsurfing lessons, children's holiday camps, wakeboarding and waterskiing, powerboat driving licences, team building activities and First Aid Courses. SeaOman remains committed to enhancing its offerings and maintaining the highest standards in diving instruction and customer service.



NADAL AND ALCARAZ TURN UP THE HEAT, GAUFF KNOCKED OUT

PARIS: Spain's raging bulls Rafa Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz blazed into the quarter-finals of the Olympics men's doubles but a host of women's singles medal contenders were knocked out as the heat was turned up at Roland Garros on Tuesday.

Once again the dynamic duo received top billing on the schedule and they did not disappoint a fevered crowd as they fought off Netherlands' Tallon Griekspoor and Wesley Koolhof to claim a 6-4 6-7(2) 10-2 victory.

Earlier, as the mercury soared into the mid-30s Celsius (90s Fahrenheit) leaving spectators and players wilting, the women's singles was blown apart as second seed Coco Gauff, fourth seed Jasmine Paolini and seventh seed Maria Sakkari all perished.

Women's top seed Iga Swiatek of Poland stayed on course for gold though with a 6-3 6-4 win against injury-hampered Chinese player Wang Xiyu to reach the quarter-finals.

Defending men's singles champion Alexander Zverev of Germany stayed cool in the oven-like heat as the third seed kept on track for a repeat of his Tokyo title with a 6-3 7-5 defeat of Czech player Tomas Machac to reach the third round.

There was only one place to be on a tropical evening alongside the Bois de Boulogne though — the claustrophobic Court Suzanne Lenglen for the latest 'Nadalcaraz' show.

Up against a former doubles world number one in Koolhof, the Spaniards found themselves involved in a red-dirt dogfight as the Dutch showed scant regard for reputations and threatened to spoil the party by deservedly

levelling the match.

But the 38-year-old Nadal and Alcaraz, 21, have 26 Grand Slam singles titles between them for a reason, and they caught fire again in the deciding tiebreak, with some electrifying tennis moving them within three wins of a dream gold medal.

"Our goal to try to get a medal is closer. So I'm really, really happy about it and let's see tomorrow," said Alcaraz.

The Spaniard plays a third-round singles against Roman Safiullin on Wednesday before joining Nadal to take on Americans Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram in the doubles.

"I'm trying to enjoy every single second out there."

SHOCK EXIT

Gauff, like Alcaraz an Olympic debutant, still has medal hopes but not in the singles after her shock exit to Croatia's 13th seed Donna Vekic.

The American was in tears in the second set when an over-



Carlos Alcaraz (L) and Rafael Nadal celebrate after the winning. — Reuters

ruled line call saw her slip 4-2 behind and became embroiled in an argument with umpire Jaume Campistol and the tournament supervisor in which she was heard to say "I'm being cheated".

Gauff had grounds for complaint as a call of "OUT" on a Vekic shot was quickly overruled but the American insisted it put her off. Vekic remained focussed to seal a superb victory and become the first Croatian woman to reach the Olympic singles quarter-finals since 1996.

"Afterwards they apologise, but 'Sorry' doesn't help you once the match is over," Gauff said.

Italian Paolini, runner-up at the French Open and Wimbledon in the build-up to the Olympics, lost 7-5 3-6 7-5 to Slovakian Anna Karolina Schmiedlova while Sakkari lost a lengthy battle against Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk.

Zverev reached the French Open final this year and looked

perfectly at home on the Parisian clay as he maintained a strong start to his bid to repeat his Tokyo gold.

He was pushed hard by Machac but turned on the afterburners at 5-5 in the second set with two searing forehands earning a break of serve before he ended the contest a game later.

Germany's Angelique Kerber, a singles silver-medallist in Rio, will retire after the Olympics but stayed on course for a golden farewell by beating Canada's Leylah Fernandez 6-4 6-3 to reach the last eight where China's Zheng Qinwen awaits.

The lineup for the women's quarter-finals is complete with Kostyuk to face Vekic, Schmiedlova up against Czech Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejcikova and Swiatek playing American Danielle Collins.

In the men's singles, two Americans reached the third round with Taylor Fritz beating Britain's Jack Draper 6-7(3) 6-3 6-2 and Tommy Paul overcoming Czech Jakub Mensik 6-3 6-1.

Fritz will face Italy's 11th seed Lorenzo Musetti, who beat Argentina's Mariano Navone. Felix Auger-Aliassime also reached round three by thrashing Germany's Maximilian Marterer 6-0 6-1 but Swiss three-times Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka lost to Australia's Alexei Popyrin.

Britain's Andy Murray kept his career going for one more match at least as he and Dan Evans saved match points for the second contest in a row — beating Belgians Sander Gille and Joran Vliegen in a cliffhanger to reach the quarter-finals. — Reuters



Sprinters Mazoon, Ali chase new records

ALI IN PERFECT SHAPE FOR OUTSTANDING SHOW: COACH FAHAD

ADIL AL BALUSHI
PARIS, JULY 31

Mazoon al Alawi will chase up for a different show in her third Olympic presence as she will compete in the preliminary heats of the Women's 100m at Stade de France on Friday. The fastest Omani women previously took part in Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 Olympics. In her last Olympics, she finished sixth with a timing of 12.35 seconds in the preliminary heats of Group 3 in 100m while she had delivered much better at Rio 2016 Olympics after she had clocked 12.43 seconds.

Ali al Balushi will commence his Olympic debut on Saturday in the Men's 100m at the same venue which has hosted athletic events since its construction in 1998. Al Balushi will look to show a promising performance and

achieve advanced times despite the tough competition.

Both athletes are training daily on the main track to adapt to the competition environment ahead of the Olympic challenge in coming days. National head coach Fahad al Mashaykhi said training of Al Balushi started in August 2023. "The goal was to develop the required speed for such races starting with indoor races over shorter distances. We started 60m indoor race during a training camp in Turkiye last January breaking Omani record with a timing of 6.58 seconds," he said.

"Ali took part in several overseas camps and external competitions and events including the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in Iran where he won first place clocking a time of 6.50 seconds to set both Omani and Gulf records."



From March to April, the training took place at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat.

In the following month, Ali participated in international athletics meets including the Grand Prix in Dubai and a few camps in Europe including two camps in Greece, one in the Czech Republic and another in Germany — achieving his best time of 10.17 seconds.

"The sprinter had participated at the West Asian Championships in Iraq last May and was followed by camps in France, Italy and Turkiye in July.

"Then, he had competed at Arab Youth Championships in Egypt where he managed to win two gold medals with timing of 10.00 seconds in the 100m event and 20.68 seconds in 200m," he said.



Djokovic beats heat to reach quarter-finals

PARIS: Novak Djokovic beat the punishing heat and Germany's Dominik Koepfer on Wednesday to set up a mouthwatering Olympic quarter-final against Stefanos Tsitsipas as he hunts an elusive gold medal.

The Serbian top seed, who crushed Rafael Nadal in the previous round, came through 7-5, 6-3 in sweltering conditions in the first match on Court Philippe Chatrier.

"I'm soaking wet, honestly," he said moments after his win. "It's a very, very humid day as it was yesterday. I just hope it rains so it cools down the temperature a bit and the air.

"But it is what it is. You have to kind of accept and embrace the conditions and it's the same for you and your opponents so you have to try to make the best out of it."

The 24-time Grand Slam champion broke Koepfer early but the German world number 70 returned the favour in the next game to get back on serve.

Djokovic, a three-time French Open champion on the clay courts at Roland Garros, took the first set 7-5

when Koepfer went long to concede another break.

As the sun beat down on Court Philippe Chatrier, Djokovic found his groove, surging into a 3-0 lead to take a grip on the second set, sealing the win with a minimum of fuss.

Thursday's quarter-final against Greece's Tsitsipas will be a repeat of the 2021 French Open final, which Djokovic won in five gruelling sets.

Tsitsipas, the world number 11, eased past Argentina's Sebastian Baez 7-5, 6-1 in his third-round tie.

Djokovic is yet to drop a set in three rounds of tennis in Paris.

The 37-year-old, searching for his first trophy in 2024, is still wearing strapping on his right knee after undergoing an operation in June.

He was a bronze medallist on his Olympic debut in 2008 but is targeting gold in Paris to complete his staggering collection of trophies.

The world number two said representing Serbia at the Olympic Games was the "greatest honour". — AFP

France, US, Argentina reach quarters; Paraguay, Morocco, Egypt also through

PARIS: Hosts France secured a place in the quarter-finals of the men's Olympic football tournament with a 3-0 win over New Zealand that put them top of Group A, while the United States edged Guinea 3-0 to progress on the final day of the group stage on Tuesday.

Argentina, Paraguay, Morocco and Egypt also joined already-qualified Spain and Japan in the last eight.

France, coming off two wins, only needed a draw to go through, but goals by skipper Jean-Philippe Mateta, Desire Doue and Arnaud Kalimuendo made it a perfect first round.

The US advanced in second place after a strike from Djordje Mihailovic and a Kevin Paredes double earned them victory in St Etienne.

The 27-year-old Mateta grabbed the lead for France, taking advantage of New Zealand's poor defending in the 19th minute.

Doue added another in the 71st after a neat passing move, before Kalimuendo's low shot sealed the win three minutes later.

Thierry Henry's side next face Argentina in Lyon on Friday.

At an almost empty Geoffroy-Guichard stadium, US midfielder Mihailovic opened the scoring in the 14th minute by sending a brilliant free-kick into the top left corner.

Paredes made it 2-0 off Paxten Aaronson's great through ball in the 31st and got his second 15 minutes from time.

The US will meet Morocco at Parc des Princes in Paris.

FINE EFFORT

Argentina, who progressed second in Group B, beat Ukraine 2-0 thanks to Thiago Almada's

fine effort just after halftime and Claudio Echeverri's stoppage-time goal at Lyon Stadium.

Almada scored two minutes after the break from long range, while Echeverri got on the scoresheet off a rebound from Ukraine goalkeeper Kiril Fesiu a minute into added time.

Morocco reached the quarter-finals as Group B leaders on goal difference with a crushing 3-0 win over Iraq in Nice with all the goals in the first 36 minutes.

They went ahead in the 19th when Amir Richardson headed in a superb Achraf Hakimi cross before Soufiane Rahimi doubled the advantage in the 28th for his fourth goal in the tournament.

Former Barcelona forward Abde Ezzalzouli wrapped up the win when his brilliant strike from the edge of the box sailed into the far corner.

Egypt also made the quarters as they claimed top spot in Group C ahead of already-qualified Spain who fielded a much-changed side and lost 2-1 to finish second.

Ibrahim Adel capitalised on poor Spanish defending to score in the 40th and 62nd minutes to give the Egyptians an unexpected win. Spain did pull a goal back in the final seconds with Samu Omorodion's header but it was too little too late.

Also in Group C, the Dominican Republic were eliminated from their first Olympics after a 1-1 draw with Uzbekistan who arrived at Parc des Princes already out of contention.

A sensational Marcelo Fernandez volley after five minutes gave Paraguay a 1-0 win over Mali also in Paris to send them to the last eight. The South Americans will meet Egypt in Lyon. — Reuters





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Integrated cold chain cluster planned at Duqm SEZ

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 31

Authorities at the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) have begun preparing the groundwork for the establishment of an Integrated Cold Chain Cluster at the SEZ — part of a strategic bid to underpin the growth of a food sector industrial ecosystem at Duqm.

It follows a decision adopted by the Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), during its third meeting of the year in June, approving the appointment of a task force to oversee the development of an Integrated Cold Chain Cluster at Duqm.

In a post on Wednesday, July 31,

2024, SEZAD said the task force attended “a two-day workshop on the project as the first step towards preparing the execution plan within the expected timeline”.

The task force evaluated the need for investment necessary to support the development of cold chain infrastructure, encompassing cold storage, transportation and logistics.

The team reviewed areas suitable for the establishment of this infrastructure based on available synergies suitable for exploitation in this regard.

Plans by OPAZ to explore the potential for cold chain infrastructure investment across its expansive portfolio of industrial, manufacturing and economic assets were first discussed at a workshop held a



Cold chain infrastructure is a key enabling of investment in manufacturing, food processing and food logistics.

PLANS BY OPAZ TO EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL FOR COLD CHAIN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT ACROSS ITS EXPANSIVE PORTFOLIO OF INDUSTRIAL, MANUFACTURING AND ECONOMIC ASSETS WERE FIRST DISCUSSED AT A WORKSHOP HELD A YEAR AGO.

Duqm SEZ was singled as particularly promising for investment in cold chain infrastructure, partly because of the presence of a Fisheries Industrial Port within its precincts, as well as its strategic appeal as a regional storage and distribution hub for all kinds of agro foods.

The presence of an airport with well-established freight and cargo facilities was a distinct advantage as well, they noted.

Oman’s growth projected to surge with robust economic strategy



Oman is less impacted by OPEC+ oil production cuts thanks to its burgeoning natural gas output.

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 31

In a remarkable turn of events, Standard Chartered’s latest Global Focus report for Q3 2024 highlights promising developments for Oman, the sole Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economy to witness a significant reduction in its fiscal breakeven oil price, now at \$65 per barrel, down from \$80 in 2021.

In remarks to *Oman Observer*, Hussain al Yafai, CEO of Standard Chartered Oman, said, “Oman’s economic strategy is yielding impressive results, particularly in its non-oil sectors.”

This substantial decrease has been pivotal in the Sultanate of Oman’s consecutive rating upgrades, moving from B+ in 2021 to BB+.

Standard Chartered anticipates that continued efforts in debt reduction, improved fiscal performance and a steadfast commitment to medium-term reforms could soon restore Oman’s investment-grade rating.

Public debt is projected to decline to 34 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of 2024, bolstered by



The projected growth to 3.0 per cent in 2024 for these sectors demonstrates the success of Oman’s diversification efforts. The country’s expanding natural gas output provides a unique advantage, offering greater economic stability

HUSSAIN AL YAFAI
CEO, Standard Chartered Oman

sustained twin surpluses.

This financial stability could lead to opportunities for refinancing, thereby invigorating

the domestic economy and enhancing the Central Bank of Oman’s foreign exchange reserves.

Economic activity in Oman is on the rise, driven by investment initiatives from Future Fund Oman. Unlike its GCC counterparts, Oman is less impacted by OPEC+ oil production cuts thanks to its burgeoning natural gas output.

The non-oil sector, which makes up about 70 per cent of real GDP, is expected to grow from 2.4 per cent in 2023 to 3.0 per cent in 2024, with significant contributions from tourism, manufacturing and trade.

Hussain al Yafai added, “The projected growth to 3.0 per cent in 2024 for these sectors demonstrates the success of Oman’s diversification efforts.

“The country’s expanding natural gas output provides a unique advantage, offering greater economic stability.

“With the Future Fund driving investment initiatives, the Sultanate of Oman is well-positioned for sustained economic growth and increased attractiveness to international investors.”

Arabia Falcon Insurance

التأمين العربية

فالكون

CONDENSED UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE SECOND QUARTER 2024

DIRECTORS’ REPORT FOR THE SECOND QUARTER 2024

Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Arabia Falcon Insurance SAOG, I have the pleasure to present to you the financial results of the company for the second quarter ending June 30, 2024.

Business overview
There are some noticeable improvements in the macroeconomic outlook due to the stable oil prices and improvement in government finances and Oman economy outlook, accordingly; the insurance sector is expected to show improvement in 2024, aside from the weather event that took place in April 2024 and affected some companies in the market. The impact on Arabia Falcon operation and profitability was very limited due to the robust insurance arrangements company have.

The insurance sector is expected to show 6% average growth in the coming few years. On the sales side the improvement started to show in the market from last year. However, the growth in claims was much higher than the growth in premiums, which caused technical losses for most companies operating in the market. The second quarter results show a change in high claim trend that started post covid toward healthy and controlled claims.

During the first half, the insurance industry observed a decline in premiums compared to the same period last year. The total premium underwritten by the insurance companies was down by 11%, RO 295 million in H1 2024 against RO 333 million of last year same period (source: Financial Services Authority portal).

Income and Technical Results
The international financial reporting standard IFRS17 replaced the old IFRS4 for reporting insurance contracts for all comparative results starting third quarter 2023. The Q2, 2023 financial statements were restated to reflect the implementation of IFRS17 on Q2, 2023 results.

a. Gross written Premium increased by 11% from RO 14.6 million in H1-2023 to RO 16.2 million in H1-2024.

b. Net insurance service results inclusive of net insurance finance expense Increased by 165% from RO 320k loss in H1-2023 to 209k profit in H1-2024.

c. Investment income increased by 5% from RO 1.01 million in H1-2023 to RO 1.06 million in H1-2024 due to the improvement in interest rates on bank deposits.

d. The net profit for the year was RO 814K compared with RO 363K in the previous year, an increase of 124% due to the improvement in technical results and lower claims recorded in H1 2024 compared with same quarter last year.

e. The shareholder’s Equity was RO 20.980 million on June 30, 2024, compared with RO 19.967 million on June 30, 2023.

Outlook for the second half 2024
This year is expected to be challenging in terms of the increase in reported claims, Management took necessary measurements to tackle the increase in claims.

The Management is committed to growing the insurance portfolio profitably and keeping control of the expenses with the main objective of delivering better technical profit at year-end.

The company will continue implanting the strategy of digital transformation and heavy investment is planned to be the leader in the market in terms of digitalization and service quality. Meanwhile, AFIC will remain focused on increasing its shareholders’ equity while maintaining compliance with all regulatory requirements.

Acknowledgements
I take this opportunity to wish all the success to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq bin Taimur towards further development and prosperity of the Sultanate. We would like to thank the Capital Market Authority and all Regulatory bodies for their continuous guidance and support.

We highly value our clients and business partners.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would also like to thank the management team and all the employees of the company.

We would like to convey our sincere thanks to the shareholders of the company for the confidence they have put in the Company and in its Board and for the support over the years.

For & on behalf of the Board of Directors of Arabia Falcon Insurance SAOG
H.H Sayyida Meyyan bint Shihab bin Tariq Al Said
Chairperson of the Board

	Unaudited 30 June 2024 RO	Unaudited 30 June 2023 RO	Audited 31 Dec 2023 RO
ASSETS			
Property and equipment	143,466	199,599	175,183
Right-to-use asset	-	58,806	19,602
Goodwill	555,883	555,883	555,883
Intangible assets	206,502	258,053	251,409
Investments fair value through other comprehensive income	11,282,500	9,273,216	7,706,473
Investments fair value through profit or loss	1,686,029	1,954,913	2,530,150
Deferred tax asset	210,585	177,272	210,585
Reinsurance contract assets	11,821,244	11,928,683	11,519,473
Term deposits	4,584,067	-	-
Other receivables	1,512,037	1,257,601	730,207
Investment fair value reserve	24,900,357	23,916,486	25,444,383
Cash and bank balances	1,453,320	2,803,314	6,097,825
Total Assets	58,355,990	52,383,826	55,241,173
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	10,330,166	10,330,166	10,330,166
Share premium	1,749,442	1,749,442	1,749,442
Legal reserve	1,492,405	1,373,158	1,410,978
Contingency reserve	6,456,634	6,172,245	6,305,987
Investment fair value reserve	394,817	211,895	387,439
Investment finance reserve	(72,407)	-	(264,501)
Retained earnings	629,554	(159,282)	47,356
Total shareholders’ equity	20,980,611	19,677,624	19,966,867
LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	5,892	68,453	26,328
Insurance contract liabilities	35,014,546	31,664,958	31,925,426
Reinsurance contract liabilities	841,534	146,222	2,275,627
End of service benefits	189,953	150,401	186,723
Other payables	973,960	560,363	643,876
Provision for taxation	349,494	115,805	216,326
Total liabilities	37,375,379	32,706,202	35,274,306
Total Equity and liabilities	58,355,990	52,383,826	55,241,173
Net Assets per share	0.203	0.184	0.193

	30 June 2024 RO	30 June 2023 RO
Insurance revenue	10,830,673	9,986,889
Insurance service expenses	(7,513,663)	(5,988,729)
Insurance service result before reinsurance contracts held	3,317,010	3,998,160
Net income or expense from reinsurance contracts held	(2,879,972)	(4,192,550)
Insurance service result	437,038	(194,390)
Finance expenses from insurance contract held	(389,853)	(359,906)
Finance income from reinsurance contract held	162,283	234,487
Net Insurance finance expenses	(227,570)	(125,419)
Investment income	1,061,613	1,009,995
Other income	206,858	182,366
Net investment and other income	1,268,471	1,192,361
Non attributable general and administrative expenses	(529,402)	(470,369)
Net profit before tax	948,537	402,183
Income tax	(134,265)	(38,790)
Net profit after tax for the period	814,272	363,393
Net Finance expense from insurance and reinsurance contracts	192,094	-
Changes in fair value of investments through other comprehensive income	7,378	86,417
Total comprehensive income for the period	1,013,744	449,812
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.008	0.003

Ominvest and Outward Bound Oman to nurture leadership potential of young Omanis

MUSCAT: Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG (Ominvest) has unveiled 'Ominvest Young Shapers' Programme, in partnership with Outward Bound Oman.

This initiative will engage 100 young individuals from various backgrounds, including school, university and college students, as well as job-seekers and entrepreneurs.

The programme reflects Ominvest's commitment to investing in national talent and fostering leadership skills and self-responsibility among Omani youth.

Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Balushi, the Group CEO of Ominvest, stated that one of

the Group's key objectives is to empower Omani youth, helping them develop their independent personalities and prepare them to become future leaders.

This goal aligns with Oman Vision 2040, which emphasises cultivating economic leadership and developing Omani talent. He added: "We encourage the youth to make the most of the training programme and take full advantage of the workshops and panel discussions led by experts in the field."

Ominvest Young Shapers programme is designed in collaboration with Global Shaper Muscat Hub to nurture a new generation of Omani leaders to tackle global challenges with the right knowledge and essential



soft skills, and to emphasise their expected role in addressing and

reducing its negative impacts. Kicking off next August and

spanning over months, the programme includes discussion sessions designed to deepen understanding of an individual's role as a global citizen.

Additionally, it seeks to motivate young people to engage in existing volunteer initiatives within the Sultanate of Oman, fostering a greater awareness of how civil society can address global challenges.

Various discussion panels will take place in natural settings to boost young people's skills in exploration and experiential learning.

These sessions will focus on personal development, building fundamental skills, raising awareness of global issues and identifying potential solutions.

The programme will also address various environmental and sustainability concerns, the use of natural resources, and social issues impacting young people.

Richard Lewis, the Executive Director of Outward Bound Oman, stated, "Through our unique experiential learning courses in the natural environment, we were able to shape a positive change in the lives of more than 25,000 participants.

"Our programmes are aligned with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and Ominvest Young Shapers programme will allow us to increase awareness of global issues within youth and help them identify possible solutions that will impact their contribution as future leaders in Oman."

Jetour X70: Where style and comfort meets technology

MUSCAT: MHD Automobile LLC is excited to announce that the stylish and comfortable Jetour X70 SUV, known for its multi-functional features, is now available at an unbeatable starting price of RO 6,999

The Jetour X70 boasts a timeless design complemented by multi-functional features, making it an ideal vehicle for families who love travelling and camping.

Equipped with a 6-speed DCT automatic gearbox, it offers intelligent gear switching and smooth shifting for stable driving control.

This 7-seater SUV features an adjustable backrest in the second row and foldable and removable rear seats in the third row, providing a versatile multi-level storage space.

Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani said, "The Jetour X70 represents a perfect blend of style, comfort and advanced technology. It's customised for the unique needs of Omani families, offering ample



space, intelligent features and robust safety measures."

He also remarked that, "We are excited to bring this remarkable vehicle to our customers, providing them with a driving experience that is both enjoyable and reliable."

The Jetour X70's outstanding appearance includes a sporty bumper, dual exhaust pipes with electroplating, a central grille, and 20-inch aluminium alloy wheels. The new body colour wheel eyebrows, automatic

anti-dazzle interior rear-view mirror, rearview mirror with flowing-water turn signal, and intelligent LED matrix daytime running lights further enhance its aesthetic appeal.

MHD Automobile LLC invites everyone to visit their showrooms at Al Athaiba or call 80080222. This vehicle is a testament to the commitment of MHD Automobile LLC to bring innovative, high-quality automobiles to the Omani market.

LUXURY PREMIUM HOSPITAL BADR AL SAMAA ROYAL HOSPITAL INAUGURATED IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The private healthcare sector of the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a milestone when Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals inaugurated its flagship hospital in the premium luxury segment Badr Al Samaa Royal Hospital (BRH) on Monday.

This state-of-the-art hospital is delivering world-class medical care in a luxurious environment designed for exceptional patient experience. The hospital is situated at Al Ghubra, Muscat.

This premium hospital, BRH, was inaugurated by Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, who was also the chief guest of the event in presence of the guest of honour, Faissal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Musalhi, Director-General of Private Health Institutions, MoH, Managing Directors of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed, Executive Directors, Moiden Bilal and Firasath Hassan, eminent dignitaries from private and government sector, top management of corporates and insurance companies, senior management of



Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals, media personnel and many more. After the ribbon cutting and inauguration, all the eminent dignitaries were taken for a walk-thru of the hospital; where they experienced luxury meeting the highest standards of the healthcare.

All dignitaries were flabbergasted by seeing meticulously designed OPDs, spacious and serene waiting areas, luxury comfortable IPD rooms which cater to every need of the patient while providing the highest level of medical attention, operating theatres equipped with cutting-edge technology and designed for optimal precision, the advanced diagnostic

sections of radiology and pathology, state-of-the-art endoscopy suite, and much more.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Mandhari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Planning and Health Organisation, congratulated Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospital's managing directors Abdul Latheef and Dr P A Mohammed for setting up such a wonderful hospital in premium luxury segment. He praised Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals for its uniqueness.

He also acknowledged the contribution and support of Badr Al Samaa Group of Hospitals in the healthcare industry of Oman.

FULLY ELECTRIC VOLVO EX30 NAMED 2024 WORLD URBAN CAR



MUSCAT: The all-new fully electric Volvo EX30 – launched in Oman last month as the centrepiece of OMASCO Volvo's distinctive Volvo Car line-up – has landed a big accolade at the prestigious World Car Awards.

Beating out a competitive field of nominees, the EX30 was awarded the title of 2024 World Urban Car in a presentation held at the New York International Auto Show. Volvo's compact SUV was also named as one of the top three cars in the world out of a list of 38 nominees.

"Winning this award with the EX30 is incredibly gratifying and a firm validation of our ambitious electrification strategy," says Jim Rowan, CEO at Volvo Cars.

"Customer response to the EX30 has exceeded our expectations, and it has proven to be a perfect car for today's marketplace as a growing number of car buyers switch to fully electric cars. I'm convinced the EX30 will strongly contribute to our growth this year and beyond."

The EX30 was revealed globally last summer to almost universal acclaim and has already won several major awards, including The Sun Car

of the Year, the Small SUV/Crossover of the Year award from the Sunday Times, and the Eco Warrior of the Year award from Top Gear magazine.

The EX30 is a strong addition to Volvo Cars' product portfolio, which also contains several very attractive plug-in and mild hybrid models in multiple segments. Those cars are an important bridge towards on the way to Volvo Cars' ambition to only sell electric cars by 2030.

"The Volvo EX30 is a big part of our commitment to encourage more people in Oman to adopt greener mobility, as well as empower them to play a role in climate change action," commented David Swain, Managing Director, OMASCO.

"This latest addition from Volvo aligns perfectly with Oman's vision towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 while delivering everything our customers in Oman want in a Volvo, in a compact and more powerful package with a mighty green impact.

"While safety, premium quality and high-performance are the common factors in any Volvo, the Volvo EX30 takes everything up a notch higher."

BYD ranks among top 10 in 2024 Kantar BrandZ global automotive brands

MUSCAT: According to the latest Kantar BrandZ Most Valuable Global Brands 2024 report, BYD has successfully retained its position within the Top 10 global automotive brands for the second consecutive year, with a brand value exceeding \$10 billion.

As a global company operating across four major industries — automotive, rail transit, new energy and electronics — BYD has established a strategic presence across six continents. In 2023, BYD's car sales surpassed 3.02 million units, with exports increasing by 334 per cent year-on-year.

To date, BYD has sold over 7.6 million new energy vehicles (NEVs). With a steadfast belief in long-term development, BYD continues to build a respected global brand.

This year, BYD became an official partner of UEFA EURO 2024 and a regional partner for CONMEBOL Copa América 2024 in Latin America. Additionally,



BYD launched its fifth-generation Dual Mode technology, boasting world-leading performance.

BYD believes that all these efforts leads to international success, as evidenced by its nearly two-decade-long commitment to new energy technology, its support for dragon boating as an Olympic sport and its nurturing of young Chinese football talents for the global stage.

In the passenger car segment, BYD's internationalisation strides have been both firm and steady. As of May this year, BYD's new energy passenger cars have entered 77 countries and regions, including Brazil, Germany, Japan

and Thailand, gaining worldwide consumer favour.

In response to international market demand, BYD is continuously enhancing its eco-friendly and intelligent international logistics system.

The maiden voyage of its first roll-on/roll-off (ro-ro) vehicle carrier "EXPLORER NO.1" in January this year exemplifies BYD's commitment to green, sustainable development and supports the brand's global expansion.

Kantar BrandZ is the world's largest consumer-centric brand valuation system. It offers authoritative rankings and analysis for global brands, leveraging

comprehensive consumer insights and a unique brand valuation approach.

This year, BYD's repeat presence in the Top 10 of the BrandZ global automotive brands underscores the global consumer recognition and trust it has garnered.

Upholding a development philosophy that prioritises technology and innovation, BYD remains committed to introducing more high-quality, high-performance NEV products to deliver a greener and smarter mobility experience. In Oman, BYD range of electrifying vehicles will soon be distributed by Saud Bahwan Group.

New shipping line launched linking Oman to Iran’s Bandar Abbas Port



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has announced the launch of a new shipping line linking Shinas Port to Bandar Abbas Port in Iran, as part of the efforts of the ministry and its partners, the operators of Omani ports, to activate and maximise revenues from ports, and to complement the efforts made to develop Shinas Port.

The launch of the new shipping line comes based on the partnership agreement signed between QSS Maritime (the operator and developer of Shinas Port) and World Modern Lights Company, which includes launching the shipping line and rehabilitating and operating a new passenger lounge to provide a comfortable and smooth experience for travellers through Shinas Port, while providing modern facilities and services.

The strategic partnership aims to enhance and activate tourism and trade exchange between Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and reflects the commitment of the Shinas Port operator to develop, rehabilitate and activate the port’s infrastructure.

Dhofar witnesses investment surge in agriculture, fisheries and livestock sectors

SALALAH: Dhofar Governorate is experiencing a surge in investment in its agricultural, fisheries and livestock sectors, buoyed by government support and the region’s inherent potential for success.

The khareef season, marked by heavy tourist influx, significantly boosts the demand for local produce, thereby benefiting these sectors.

Eng Rashid bin Said al Ghafri, Director-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar, highlighted the positive economic impact of thekhareef season across all sectors.

He noted that the season presents an excellent opportunity to market agricultural, animal and fishery products, thanks to the high demand from both domestic and international tourists.

Al Ghafri emphasised the strong demand for agricultural, fisheries and animal products, which are essential for both tourists and residents.

The Directorate collaborates with various authorities, including Consumer Protection, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Dhofar Municipality, to ensure the availability, quality and safety of food commodities through import outlets.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is actively encouraging investment in these sectors. Significant investments are being made in



Significant investments are being made in the Najd agricultural region, with ample land available for food security projects.

THE SEASON PRESENTS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO MARKET AGRICULTURAL, ANIMAL, AND FISHERY PRODUCTS, THANKS TO THE HIGH DEMAND FROM BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS.

the Najd agricultural region, with ample land available for food security projects. The ministry is also coordinating infrastructure development to support these investments.

Currently, over 35 investment opportunities are in the pipeline, spanning agriculture, livestock, fisheries and water sectors across Dhofar Governorate.

Al Ghafri pointed out that Dhofar’s diverse geography and

environment make it ideal for a wide range of agricultural crops.

The governorate has seen successful cultivation of tropical fruits and various field crops, such as corn and beans.

Notably, the turmeric localisation project has benefited over 76 families, producing more than 40 tonnes last year. Preparations are underway for ginger cultivation this autumn.

Coconuts are a significant tourist attraction in Dhofar, with coconut juice (mashli) becoming a favourite among visitors.

The governorate boasts more than 170,000 coconut trees, and a new farm, Salalah Gardens Company, is being established to add 50,000 more trees, along with other crops like papaya.

To meet the increased demand

during the autumn season, the ministry has facilitated the import of coconuts. Measures have been taken to temporarily halt the export of coconuts and restrict their transportation outside the governorate until August 23, in coordination with Consumer Protection and the Royal Oman Police.

Fish production in Dhofar stands at over 103,000 tonnes annually, valued at approximately RO 52.5 million. This not only meets the food needs of tourists and residents, but also supports exports to local and international markets.

The governorate has a robust fishing industry, with 12,687 fishermen operating 5,094 boats, 83 artisanal fishing vessels, and 82 coastal fishing vessels.



Eng Rashid bin Said al Ghafri
Director-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

Investment opportunities in the fisheries sector include establishing wholesale markets in the Raysut fishing port and a fish collection project in Al Shuwaimiyah. Fish farming projects, such as abalone and shrimp farming, are also underway. New fish landing facilities are being constructed, including ports in Hadbin and Hasik, with significant investments.

In the livestock sector, which constitutes 60 per cent of the camel and cow population in Oman, several development projects are in progress.

These include a national immunisation project, enhanced veterinary services, and the introduction of modern technologies like automatic milking machines.

The Al Murooj milk collection project, with three existing centres in Salalah, is expanding with plans for additional centres in Mirbat, Taqah and Thamrait.

— ONA

Workshop explores Dhofar’s economic and investment potential

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 31

A key workshop on the economic and investment potential of Dhofar Governorate was held at the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Dhofar Branch, on Wednesday, July 31, 2024.

This pivotal event, attended by representatives from state administrative units at the chamber’s Salalah branch, underscored the collaborative efforts between the chamber and Sultan Qaboos University to map out the governorate’s economic prospects.

Key discussions were held with the Governor of Dhofar and the Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, focusing on identifying projects and addressing challenges that could yield substantial returns for both the governorate and Oman.

Dr Ashraf Musharraf, Chairman of the OCCI Chair for Economic Studies at Sultan Qaboos University, emphasised the chamber’s crucial role in the governorate’s development initiatives.

The workshop outlined eight primary objectives aimed at fostering economic development in Dhofar Governorate, each contributing to a comprehensive blueprint for progress.

The initial goal is to provide



Delegates taking part in a workshop seeking to unlock Dhofar’s economic potential.

an in-depth overview of Dhofar, showcasing its unique attributes.

These include its rich cultural heritage, breathtaking landscapes, abundant natural resources and strategic geographic position, all of which distinguish Dhofar from other governorates in Oman.

An analysis of the governorate’s current status of development encompassed present conditions, spanning human (population, education, health), economic (business activities, investments), and natural (resources, environment) dimensions.

Existing development plans for Dhofar were scrutinised, assessing their effectiveness and proposing necessary adjustments to align with sustainable development goals. A sectoral economic analysis

aimed to identify key economic sectors that significantly contribute to Dhofar’s economy, alongside those with high growth potential, such as tourism, industry and agriculture.

The workshop also highlighted the importance of developing a robust strategy to manage risks associated with investment projects in Dhofar, ensuring the protection and sustainability of investments.

Crafting an effective marketing strategy to attract investors and tourists to Dhofar was also crucial, experts stressed. This involves highlighting the governorate’s unique tourism and investment advantages to a broader audience, they noted.

To attract investors to promising sectors, the workshop

proposed various incentives, including tax exemptions, streamlined procedures and the provision of industrial land.

The ultimate objective is to ensure balanced development across all wilayats of Dhofar by identifying and promoting investment opportunities in each area, fostering equitable growth. The workshop marks a significant step towards realising sustainable development in Dhofar Governorate through the concerted efforts of various stakeholders.

By identifying and enhancing investment opportunities, this initiative aims to drive economic growth, improve the standard of living for residents and ensure the sustainable advancement of the governorate.

Royal Oman Police and Bank Muscat raise awareness against digital trading platform scams

MUSCAT: In an ongoing effort to increase public awareness of various methods of digital fraud, Royal Oman Police and Bank Muscat recently emphasised the serious consequences of digital trading platform scams as part of their joint anti-fraud initiative.

Fake investment scams are on the rise and it is crucial to recognise them in order to protect oneself.

To avoid falling victim to fraudulent scams, there are a number of precautionary steps that need to be taken: avoid responding to messages with doubtful investment offers; be wary of attractive returns in digital currency and other investments; avoid sharing details such as your password, OTP including PIN and CVV, and digital wallet information; research the investment company and the offer thoroughly; and most importantly, block and report the sender if found suspicious.

The awareness initiative will continue throughout the year across various media channels including TV,



radio, print, online media and social media; aiming to help the public recognise fraud and avoid falling prey to misleading messages on WhatsApp, requests to share bank details with others, etc.

It is essential to never share personal details with anyone, including those claiming to be employees or officials in certain institutions as this is a vital first step to defend oneself against criminal activities.

Being wary and vigilance against fraud methods will help reduce the financial and psychological consequences that they cause.

The public can easily contact the Royal Oman Police hotline at 80077444 to report fraud or for any fraud-related queries.



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for CBO and OCCI

An international freight rail line for containers was recently launched between China and Iran, becoming a new channel for enhancing trade between the two countries.

It was conceived within the ambit of China’s “One Belt - One Road” project. China has signed many agreements with several countries around the world to support this project with the wider goal of strengthening commercial, cultural, and humanitarian relations.

In contrast, during the same period, a number of Asian countries, notably India, besides the United States and some Gulf and Arab countries have been strengthening their alliance with

the American axis states besides Israel, the Zionist state, with the aim of proposed initiatives to counter the Chinese “Belt and Road” project.

One such initiative aims to transfer goods from India via some GCC countries, then onward to Jordan and from there to Israel before traversing Palestinian Gaza, en route by sea to European countries.

There is no doubt that the restart of the international freight rail line between Iran and China, passing through Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, will re-establish the eastern corridor to European countries to transport Chinese goods via container trains to countries that have trade relations among them.

This network will help to ease

their dependence on the ‘US dollar’ as the principal currency for trade between these countries.

These trains will pass through other countries, such as Türkiye, and will be included in the project in the future.

They will help local economies by directing goods to European countries and strengthening cooperation among them to include commercial, industrial and cultural cooperation as well.

Officials in China believe that the launch of the double container train between Iran and China complements the One Belt – One Road project.

They recall the history of the Silk Road linking the two countries some 2,000 years ago. Economic and trade exchanges between Beijing and Tehran have since

witnessed significant growth in recent years.

Both China and Iran are working successfully to strengthen the policy of cooperation among themselves and with other countries to continue the achievements.

These trade ties will boost the exchange of local goods and services, but also serve to offset the effects of the economic boycott imposed on both countries in different sectors.

The ceremony that was held on the inauguration of the first phase of the railway line between the two countries towards Europe was witnessed by several officials in the two countries along with officials from their neighbouring Asian countries.

They believe that the success of

this project is due to the diplomatic efforts made in over the past years in the field of railway transport and has become today a fast and safe gateway for transporting goods from China to Iran and from there to neighbouring countries on the European continent.

The first phase of the railway project will significantly shorten the period of transporting goods compared to maritime transport and will provide distinct security and safety for businessmen and cargo owners, especially in the countries through which the line passes.

This is at a time when the two countries are looking to increase the number of trains from one trip per week to daily trips in order to increase the volume of trade exchanges in the future.

Commodity flows at risk should Trump spark tit-for-tat trade war

CLYDE RUSSELL

Much of the debate surrounding the implications of a possible second US presidential term for Republican Donald Trump has focused on what may happen to the US and global economies.

Trump’s plan to impose tariffs of 10% on virtually all imports into the United States, and as much as 50% on those from top trading partner China, has raised the spectre of higher inflation and interest rates and a less competitive market.

But for commodities, the bigger risk of a Trump return to the White House is the response the rest of the world is likely to have to the imposition of US trade tariffs.

Political leaders across the globe will be unable to sit idly by if Trump places barriers on their exports to the United States.

Any unilateral action by Trump is thus likely to be met by retaliation from US trading partners, even if they are erstwhile political allies, such as countries in Europe and some in Asia, such as Japan, South Korea and even India.

If it’s inevitable that US trading partners respond to Trump’s proposed actions by putting tariffs on imports from the United States, the main question is then what form will they take?

While major US exporting companies such as aeroplane maker Boeing will have cause for concern, a far easier target for retaliation is likely to be US commodity exports.

The United States is the world’s biggest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and ranks fourth globally for exports of crude oil and all grades of coal.

A major buyer of US commodities is China. If Trump were to impose tariffs of 50% on its exports, Beijing could effectively ban all commodity imports from the United States, either formally or informally.

US exports of crude oil to China were 10 million barrels in July, according to commodity

analysts Kpler, and that figure is expected to rise to 16.58 million barrels in August, which would be the most since April 2023.

For the first eight months of this year, US crude exports to China are tracking at about 309,000 barrels per day (bpd), which represents only about 3% of China’s total imports, but accounts for about 7.5% of total US shipments.

In other words, it would likely be fairly easy for China to stop buying US crude and find alternative suppliers, such as Angola and Brazil.

But how easy would it be for US oil producers to replace the loss of Chinese buyers? Much will depend on whether other countries place tariffs on US commodity exports.

Imagine if the European Union, Japan and South Korea all put a 10% tariff on US crude in retaliation for Trump putting a similar impost on their exports to the United States.

By putting tariffs on US crude, LNG and coal, the rest of the world could keep US energy exports in the market, but force US companies to either offer discounts to keep their prices competitive or lower output.

Overall, the picture that emerges is one of significant vulnerability for US energy exporters if we do see another trade war, given how countries could respond to the tariffs currently being proposed by the former president’s camp.

Of course, Trump still has to overcome likely Democratic candidate and current vice president, Kamala Harris, in the November election, and then actually follow through on what is likely to be a widely-criticised trade policy.

But the risk remains meaningful. In 2022, Russia’s attack of Ukraine showed us what can happen when a political event roils energy markets.

If Trump is elected and does embark on a trade war, the disruption may not be quite on that scale.

But commodity flows — and thus a large part of the global economy— could be impacted if the market has to adapt to an unpredictable political dynamic once again. — Reuters

How to reduce Chinese overcapacity



YU YONGDING

The author, a former president of the China Society of World Economics and director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, served on the Monetary Policy Committee of the People’s Bank of China from 2004 to 2006.



Cars for export are seen at a port in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, China. — Reuters

In recent months, Chinese overcapacity has been a major topic of discussion – and a source of controversy – among economists and policymakers around the world. While these concerns are not entirely off base, they are excessive and resolvable.

Over the past four decades, as China has shifted from a planned economy characterised by shortages to a market economy oscillating between insufficient aggregate demand and overheating, its government has often sought to eliminate overcapacity whenever it arose.

In 2003, for example, a crackdown on overcapacity in the steel industry led to the shutdown of many steel mills.

Following the 2008 global financial crisis, China’s exports plummeted, leading to a significant economic slowdown. In the first quarter of 2009, Chinese GDP grew by just 6.1%, the lowest rate in more than a decade.

To counteract this shock, China’s government introduced a CN¥4 trillion (\$560 billion) stimulus plan. Fuelled by massive investments – fixed-asset investment grew by 30.1% in 2009 and 23.8% in 2010 (year on year) – China’s economy rebounded sharply, achieving 10.6% growth in 2010.

Although aggregate demand also rose quickly, aggregate supply failed to keep pace, as it takes time for new investment to translate into increased production capacity. (The duration of the lag depends on the type of investment.)

This mismatch contributed to an uptick in inflation, with the

consumer price index rising by 3% in 2010.

By the time CPI growth peaked at 5.4% in March 2011, the Chinese government had announced that its top policy priority for the year would be to clamp down on inflation.

OVER THE PAST FOUR DECADES, AS CHINA HAS SHIFTED FROM A PLANNED ECONOMY CHARACTERISED BY SHORTAGES TO A MARKET ECONOMY OSCILLATING BETWEEN INSUFFICIENT AGGREGATE DEMAND AND OVERHEATING, ITS GOVERNMENT HAS OFTEN SOUGHT TO ELIMINATE OVERCAPACITY WHENEVER IT AROSE.

And clamp down it did: from 2009 to 2011, China’s budget-deficit-to-GDP ratio fell from 2.8% to 1.1%, and new credit declined from CN¥9.6 trillion to CN¥7.5 trillion.

However, the production capacity associated with past investments was already forming, if not becoming operational. Consequently, as fiscal and monetary tightening reduced aggregate demand, a new mismatch emerged, and overcapacity surged in many

industries, including steel, automobiles, cement, electrolytic aluminium, pesticides, photovoltaics, and glass.

By this point, CPI growth had fallen below 3%, and the producer price index was in negative territory.

Under these circumstances, the typical response to surging overcapacity would have been to return to fiscal and monetary expansion in order to stimulate the economy.

Instead, China’s government decided to continue tightening. As a result, GDP growth fell to 7.7% in 2012 and has declined continuously ever since.

With hindsight, it seems entirely possible that inflationary pressures would have subsided later even if the government had not pursued fiscal and monetary tightening in 2011, owing to the gradual formation of new production capacities.

If policymakers had pursued moderate fiscal and monetary expansion while encouraging the market to play a decisive role in eliminating sectoral overcapacity in 2012, China may well have achieved higher GDP growth rates in the ensuing years.

We cannot change the past, but we can heed its lessons to achieve a better future.

In China’s case, this means implementing a more expansionary fiscal and monetary policy today.

This would help reduce

“overcapacity” at the macroeconomic level, which is equivalent to “lack of effective demand,” while creating more space to eliminate overcapacity at the sectoral level – a process in which China’s government should be allowing the market to play a decisive role.

All this would go a long way toward improving China’s trade balance.

Though there is no justification for countries to introduce protectionist trade policies in the name of “national security” – as the United States, for example, has been doing – China must ensure that it adheres to all World Trade Organization rules.

On this front, the Third Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, held earlier this month, was encouraging.

As the meeting’s communiqué noted, China plans to “enhance [its] capacity for opening up” its own economy to the outside world; foster “new drivers of foreign trade”; and develop, through expanded cooperation with other countries, “new institutions” to support an open global economy. As long as all parties are committed to mutually beneficial – and mutually respectful – engagement, no trade dispute is unresolvable.

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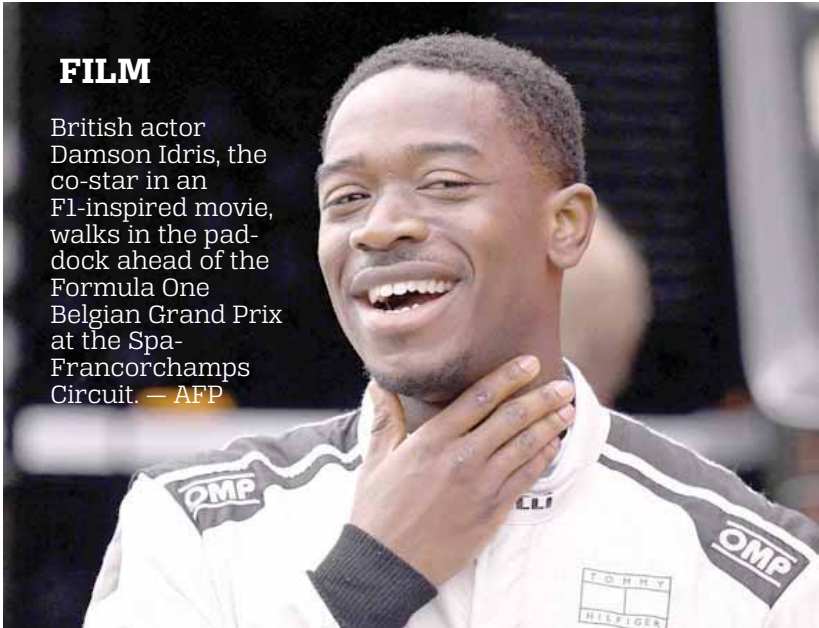
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TRAVEL

People watch the sunset along Beirut's seafront corniche. Airlines suspended flights to Lebanon on July 29, as diplomatic efforts were underway to contain soaring tensions between Hezbollah and Israel. — AFP



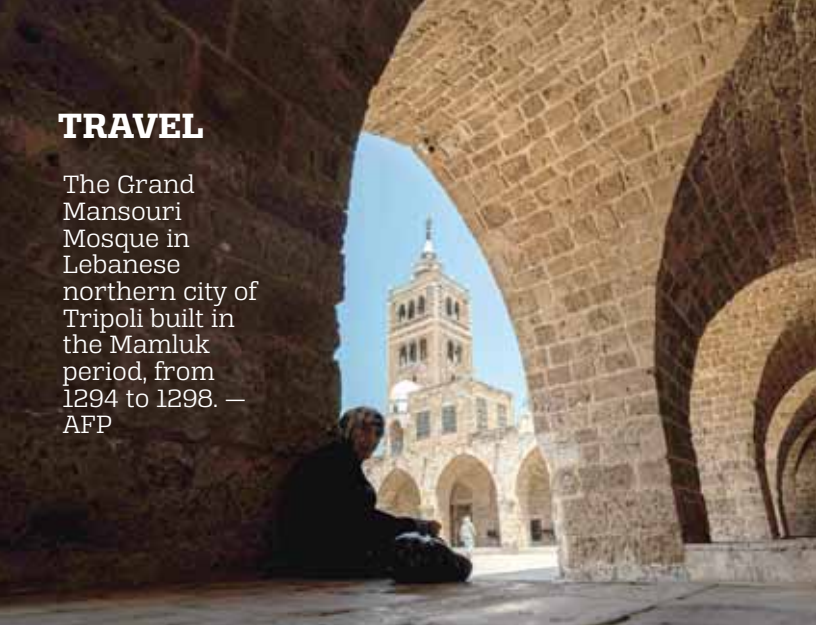
FILM

British actor Damson Idris, the co-star in an F1-inspired movie, walks in the paddock ahead of the Formula One Belgian Grand Prix at the Spa-Francorchamps Circuit. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by Colegiatura Fashion Design School at Colombiamoda during Medellin Fashion Week in Medellin, Colombia. — AFP



TRAVEL

The Grand Mansouri Mosque in Lebanese northern city of Tripoli built in the Mamluk period, from 1294 to 1298. — AFP



CULTURE

Traditional Oaxacan dancers perform during the Guelaguetza 2024 festival in Villa de Zaachila, Oaxaca state. — AFP

art & life

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TURNING WASTE COOKING OIL INTO LIQUID GOLD

Oman's biodiesel industry is set to grow due to entrepreneurial initiatives and government support. The country is curtailing waste exports, boosting local recycling. Wakud, a pioneer in this field, faces challenges but plans to increase production and involve more SMEs... **P20**

CHANGING WORLD



Shaddad al Musalmy

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT shadadm75@gmail.com

Oman: A melting pot for all cultures

TODAY, I WANT TO take my readers on a ride around Oman and its position as a melting pot for all cultures. Oman is a remarkable example of cultural convergence, where diverse traditions and influences intertwine to create a unique societal tapestry. This melting pot is particularly evident in Muscat, which showcases a harmonious blend of ancient heritage and modernity. Historically, Oman has been a crossroads for trade and cultural exchange due to its strategic location. This geographical advantage facilitated interactions with various civilisations over centuries, including those from Africa, Persia, India, and beyond. This is the case in our newsroom too. I have colleagues from Africa,

India, Pakistan and the Philippines, and obviously, Omanis from different corners of the country, with whom we share not only professional advice, but also jokes, laughter and other kinds of food. I am saying this to prove the point that Oman is a welcoming country for all without caring about their backgrounds. The legacy of these interactions can also be seen in Oman's architecture, cuisine, language and customs. Muscat's architectural landscape is a testament to this cultural amalgamation. The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque exemplifies this fusion with its intricate designs that draw inspiration from Western, Eastern and Central Asian styles. The mosque not only serves as a

religious site, but also as an architectural gem that reflects the Omani identity. Omani cuisine also embodies this melting pot concept. Traditional dishes often incorporate spices and ingredients from various cultures due to historical trade routes. The use of frankincense, which is a key element in Omani culture, adds another layer of uniqueness to its culinary offerings. The Muttrah Souq serves as a microcosm of Omani society, where people from different backgrounds converge. It is not just a marketplace; it is a social hub where old meets young, locals mingle with tourists, and conversations flow over cups of coffee amidst the fragrant air filled with spices and incense. Institutions like the Royal Opera

House Muscat play a pivotal role in promoting cultural exchange by hosting performances that span genres, from opera to Arabic music, thereby fostering appreciation for diverse artistic expressions. This venue acts as a bridge connecting Oman's rich traditions with contemporary global culture. To sum it all up, I would say that Oman's identity as a melting pot for all cultures is deeply rooted in its history as a trading hub and its ongoing commitment to preserving traditions while embracing modern influences. This dynamic interplay creates an enriching environment that celebrates diversity through architecture, art, cuisine, social interactions and cultural institutions. Till next time, enjoy what Oman has to offer.

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YOU CAN LEAVE YOUR THINGS ANYWHERE KINDA 'SAFE'

I'm a British expat who has been living in Oman since September 2019. I present a show on Hi FM Radio on weekdays from 4-7 pm. When I'm not in the studio, you will either find me reading a book or hiking.

I truly love Oman; the community spirit is so welcoming and contagious; and I generally think I am a nicer person after mixing with Omanis and fellow expats who have been so kind to me during my time here. I feel very safe here, and I am proud to call it my home. When my Mum came to visit, she was so shocked and confused that we were just leaving our bags unattended at Wadi Shab and that no one stole anything, sadly, that wouldn't be the case in my home country.

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

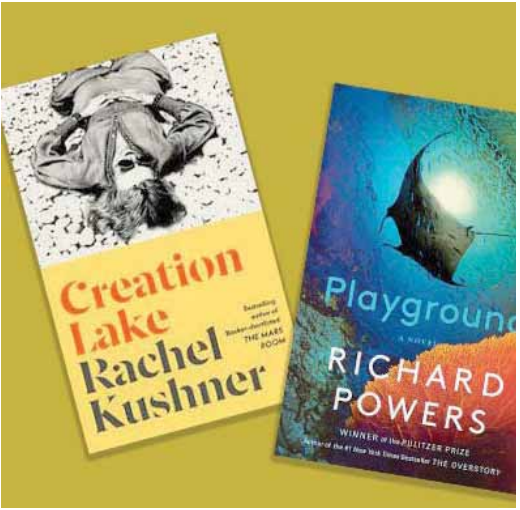
Farther down south, the magical greenery of Salalah is so unique that the khareef season has become a full-blown attraction. If you're coming here between June to September you can't miss what it has to offer including the beautiful Ayn Athum and other waterfalls that pepper the landscape.

For those new to the country, if you're looking for a remote location off the beaten track and you fancy a swim in Wadi, there is a smaller, quieter wadi, very close to the famous Sa'al steps, not far from Muscat. I don't even know its name, as it's not written on a map, but I have been multiple times and thoroughly enjoyed it. There are little fish who can give you a little foot spa as they nibble on your feet, a rope that you can attempt to climb, and some goats to cheer you on as you plunge into the water.

Many of the expats who came to Oman for work may have originally planned to stay here for a short time. Oman has a way of creeping up on you and tugging into your heartstrings that just like me, five years later, is still here.

This feature is included in the newest edition of The Correspondent. For more stories like this, you can download the free copy of the digital magazine on www.omanobserver.om or use the QR code to be directed to the download site.

LITERATURE



Books by Rachel Kushner and Richard Powers Are Among Booker Prize Nominees

SIX NOVELS BY US authors, including Percival Everett, Rachel Kushner and Richard Powers, are among the 13 titles nominated for this year's Booker Prize, the award's organisers announced on Tuesday.

Everett's book "James" is a retelling of Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn" from the perspective of an enslaved runaway; Kushner's "Creation Lake," is a forthcoming novel about a spy who infiltrates an environmental activist group; and Powers' "Playground," another forthcoming title, imagines a plan to send floating cities into the Pacific Ocean.

The Booker Prize is one of the most coveted literary awards, given each year to a novel written in English and published in Britain or Ireland. Recent winners include Margaret Atwood's "The Testaments" and Douglas Stuart's "Shuggie Bain." Last year's winner was "Prophet Song," a novel by Paul Lynch set in a near-future Ireland torn apart by civil war.

Founded in 1969, the Booker Prize was for most of its life only open to books by writers from Britain, Ireland, the Commonwealth and Zimbabwe, but in 2014, organisers expanded its eligibility criteria to any work written in English. Ever since, British literary figures have regularly complained about the prize's dominance by American authors.

Tuesday's announcement could reignite those concerns, especially because only two novels by British authors have been nominated: Samantha Harvey's "Orbital," a day-in-the-life story of six astronauts circling Earth on a space station; and Sarah Perry's "Enlightenment," about unrequited love in an English town.

As well as the books by Everett, Kushner and Powers, the three other American novels nominated are Rita Bullwinkel's "Headshot," set in a women's boxing tournament; Claire Messud's "This Strange Eventful History," a family saga that explores France's colonial history; and "Wandering Stars," by Tommy Orange, which is about the impact of colonisation on a Native American family. Orange is the Booker Prize's first ever Native American nominee.

The nominated titles vary wildly in subject matter and tone — but Edmund de Waal, chair of this year's judges, said in a news release that the 13 books all had a similar emotional impact. "These are not books 'about issues,'" he said. "They are works of fiction that inhabit ideas by making us care deeply about people and their predicaments."

"The precarity of lives runs through our long list like quicksilver," de Waal added.

The judges will now cut the list down to a six-book shortlist, scheduled to be announced on September 16. The winning title will be revealed during a ceremony in London on November 12. — NYT

TURNING WASTE COOKING OIL INTO LIQUID GOLD



BY CONRAD PRABHU

Biodiesel production from Used Cooking Oil (UCO) and other biowaste streams has the potential to grow exponentially in the Sultanate of Oman thanks to two key drivers: Firstly, burgeoning entrepreneurship among young Omanis exploring opportunities in the expanding circular economy, and secondly, new initiatives by government authorities to facilitate the collection, aggregation and processing of recyclable wastes at processing sites.

Such waste streams – spanning UCO, aluminium cans, cardboard cartons, scrap iron and other metals and electronic wastes – have long been siphoned away to lucrative recycling markets in Oman's neighbourhood, depriving small Omani businesses of the opportunity to utilise these resources locally.

But with Omani authorities, chiefly the Environment Authority, ROP Customs and Oman Environment Holding Company (be'ah), plugging loopholes in existing regulations while rolling out supportive legislation, this outflow of commercially valuable waste streams is being dramatically curtailed.

Credit for prodding Omani agencies into action goes to one of Oman's best-known circular economy advocates. Maher bin Mohammed al Habsi is highly regarded as a pioneer in waste oil recycling and reuse. He co-founded Wakud, which operates a state-of-the-art UCO recycling plant at Khazaen Economic City. The biorefinery – the only one of its kind in Oman – produces biodiesel from waste oils, some volumes of which are being lifted by local energy companies and public sector organisations to demonstrate their support for environmental initiatives.



But getting to where Wakud is today was an uphill struggle. Launching operations in 2018, a persistent hassle for the young start-up was the challenge of securing enough UCO volumes to operate the biorefinery at its target capacity of 20,000 tonnes per annum. Although this figure represents just a fraction of the estimated UCO volumes generated annually in the capital city alone, the plant often operated below capacity for want of adequate feedstock. That was primarily because of a small handful of shady players who, by offering a premium to the waste generators such as hotels, restaurants and industrial caterers, managed to capture the lion's share of collected UCO. These volumes would inevitably find their way out of Oman to markets in the regional neighbourhood and the Indian subcontinent, where UCO commands better prices than in Oman.

In recent months, this route used by the irregular collectors to channel UCO out of the country, often by misdeclaring the goods, has been shuttered by authorities as part of a government-led effort to support the growth of indigenous recycling industries. With better awareness, growing numbers of UCO generators are earmarking their waste streams for biodiesel production at Wakud's Khazaen facility.

SPAWNING AN ECOSYSTEM

But beyond the underlying objective of transforming a waste commodity into a commercially valuable and low-carbon fuel resource, Wakud is also catalysing the growth of a wider ecosystem rooted in the circular economy. In one such beneficial spinoff from the initiative, small Omani-owned SMEs are being signed up to support the collection of waste cooking oil from the facilities of generators. As the collection system expands beyond Muscat

to other major towns and cities around Oman, Maher sees potentially scores of SMEs getting gainfully involved in this process.

Boding well for the growth prospects of domestic recyclers like Wakud is a proposal by be'ah to roll out an online platform designed to regulate all trades involving recyclable commodities. Once operational, generators, collectors, transporters and recyclers of all types of recyclable wastes will have to transact their business via this portal. Consequently, all

Wakud's biodiesel as a low-carbon alternative for their transportation requirements. The list includes Oman Oil Marketing Company, ARA Petroleum, BP, Alshawamikh Petroleum, OARC Sohar, Sohar Port, Nakheel Oman, Schlumberger, Oman Airports, Masirah International Marine and 44.01. State-owned public transport company Mwasalat has also operated a few routes using a blend of biodiesel. Renaissance Services and Al Mouj have also agreed to channel all waste oil generated at their facilities to Wakud's biorefinery.

Wakud's longer-term goal is to produce enough biodiesel to sustain the operation of a network of fuel stations dispensing a blend of green fuel and conventional diesel. Wakud aims to start with a B5 blend (5 per cent biodiesel blended with 95 per cent diesel) given the challenges of producing adequate quantities of biodiesel to supply the market.

LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Wakud is also banking on the government to level the playing field for biodiesel producers who find themselves competing with state-subsidised diesel. Discussions with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology have begun to pay off. Following the successful trial operation of a handful of buses on a B20 blend of biodiesel, the ministry has announced that the

uptake of locally produced biodiesel by state-owned buses will be ramped up over the next seven years through 2030. Other government ministries, including the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the Environment Authority, are expected to announce measures advocating the use of greener fuels as part of their energy transition strategies.

Galvanised by these positive developments, Wakud is embarking on plans to expand the biodiesel production capacity of its Khazaen plant to 70-100 m3/day of B100. In conjunction with this expansion, Wakud also aims to deploy cutting-edge FFA (Free Fatty Acid) technology to enhance the production efficiency of the plant.

At the same time, the company is diversifying its feedstock sources by developing agricultural programmes for oil crop cultivation. These crops will provide a sustainable supplement to its UCO supply, ensuring long-term feedstock security. The expanded facility is slated to come on stream during Q1 2025.



of the respective participants in the supply chain, starting from the generators to the recyclers, will be required to register on the platform.

The ultimate goal, says be'ah, is to maximise value creation by commercialising the waste sector – an initiative that also has the potential to ignite the growth of SMEs and entrepreneurship in the resulting circular economy.

One key segment that is expected to benefit from the bidding platform is the fledgling biodiesel sector. Based on figures shared by be'ah, roughly half of the estimated 94,000 tonnes of cooking oil currently imported into Oman should ideally be captured after use for processing into biodiesel or other sustainable products. But the collection is barely around 4,000 tonnes per annum, mainly from industrial caterers, major hotels and food industry operators. In comparison, the collection potential of UCO can be as high as 11,000 tonnes per annum, says be'ah.

Lately, growing numbers of public and private sector organisations have announced pledges to offtake some of