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MUSCAT STABLES CROWNED YOUTH CHAMPIONS



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CBO GREEN-LIGHTS HSBC OMAN, SOHAR INTERNATIONAL MERGER



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CAPTURING THE STORY OF OMAN WITH PAINT



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO NEW ZEALAND

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Cindy Kiro, Governor General of New Zealand, on the occasion of her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to Cindy Kiro, and the friendly people of New Zealand further progress and prosperity. — ONA

FEEDBACK ON DRAFT MARINE LAW

The State Council has given its feedback, along with the opinion of the Legal Committee, on the draft marine law, which is forwarded by the Council of Ministers. The step comes in preparation for submitting the same to His Majesty the Sultan. The State Council also gave its feedback on a study conducted by the Technology and Innovation Committee on the allocations of a national award for investment in the technological innovations. This was unveiled during the council's fifth session of the fourth annual setting for the 7th term held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. SEE ALSO P2

INSIDE



PAKISTAN'S FORMER RULER MUSHARRAF DIES

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HOW TO TRANSFORM AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

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Big boost for technology and innovation

STEPS TO LINK START-UPS WITH IN-COUNTRY VALUE

MUSCAT: The Supervisory Committee of Omani Promising Start-ups Programme on Sunday held its first meeting for 2023. The meeting was chaired by HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

The programme seeks to activate the system of companies based on technology and innovation in Oman and contribute to spreading the culture of entrepreneurship in educational institutions. It also aims to impart social awareness about the importance of start-ups and upgrade them to operate in the regional and global levels.

Other objectives of the programme include enhancing investments offered to start-ups, linking them with in-country value (ICV) and finding sustainable financing and investment solutions that suit the needs of nascent



companies. The programme figures among the priorities of Oman Vision 2040 in the field of economic diversification and financial sustainability.

The meeting discussed the selection of representatives for start-ups in the Supervisory Committee, implementing a programme of field visits to Omani

start-ups, devising plans for the “Omani Promising Start-ups Programme”, espousing strategic performance indicators (for 2023-2025) and launching a package of

incentives for Omani start-ups. The Omani Promising Start-ups Programme is implemented in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED), the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Economy and the Oman Information Communication Technologies Group (ITHCA). The programme reflects the keenness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to establish a vibrant and prosperous economy by providing proper environment for entrepreneurs and start-ups and supporting their projects and consolidating their presence internationally. — ONA

Trademark for products by disabled launched

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development launched the trademark ‘Azm’ for promoting products made by persons with disabilities at a celebration held by the ministry, on Sunday.

The celebration was organised by the Director-General of Persons with Disabilities Affairs in collaboration with Jusoor Foundation under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the presence of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, at Intercity Hotel Muscat.

‘Azm’ trademark is aimed at promoting products made by the persons with disabilities in order to enable them financially.

By launching the trademark, the ministry seeks to boost consumer trust in the products of

the persons with disabilities which bear the new brand. The move also aims to create a mental image of the for the consumers that these products are reliable and subjected to quality standards.

During the celebration, the chief guest and the attendees watched a visual display containing the importance of the new in serving this significant society segment.

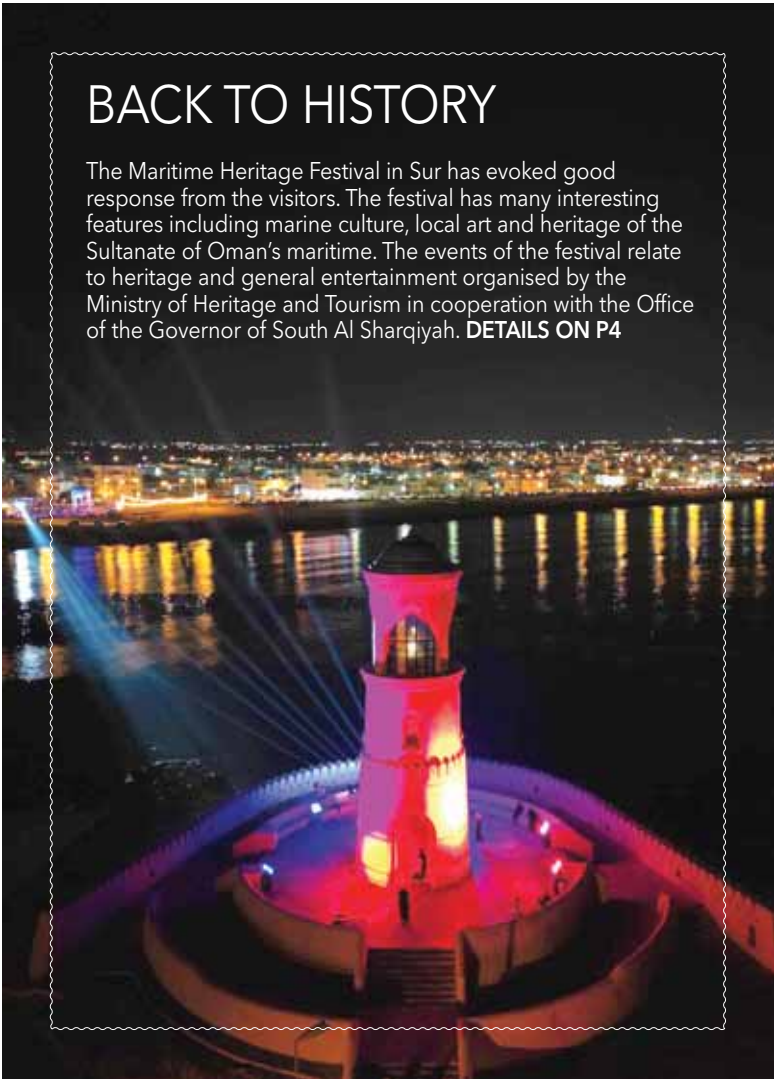
The celebration saw the opening of an exhibition that highlights various products made by persons with disabilities under the trademark ‘Azm’.

In addition the celebration witnessed the signing of three agreements. The first of these was an agreement between the Ministry of Social Development and Jusoor Foundation on the launch of the trademark ‘Azm’.

TURN TO P3

BACK TO HISTORY

The Maritime Heritage Festival in Sur has evoked good response from the visitors. The festival has many interesting features including marine culture, local art and heritage of the Sultanate of Oman's maritime. The events of the festival relate to heritage and general entertainment organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah. DETAILS ON P4



Publish weather forecasts only from CAA

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The Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and chairman of the Board of Directors of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued decision No 116/2023, specifying the executive regulations of the Civil Aviation Law.

Article 46 of the law, forecasts, warnings, and meteorological reports issued by the authority or Oman Meteorology are the only official sources for such, while Article 47 states that all media outlets are prohibited from publishing any information or meteorological data other than those obtained from the authority.

Article 48 says, “It is not permissible to practice any work related to the activities of meteorological services in the Sultanate of Oman, such as installing a meteorological station, providing meteorological services, or carrying out meteorological training activities, except after obtaining the approval of the authority in accordance with the conditions and procedures for which a decision is issued by CAA.”

TURN TO P2

Breathtaking ‘bioluminescence’ waves in Salalah

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A chemical phenomenon called bioluminescence took a section of beachgoers by surprise, as the breathtaking moment of glittering seawater shooting back and forth was no less than magic for those who could grab it.

Bioluminescence is a rare phenomenon in which the ocean can glow and glitter like the stars in the sky thanks to a natural chemical process allowing living



PHOTO BY DR SACHIN SINGH

things to produce light in their bodies. A regular beach visitor and a keen observer of sea activities, Dr Sachin Singh, was pleasantly surprised to see some fast-moving glittering objects inside the sea while walking on a beach in Salalah on Friday. He brushed up his memory and knowledge about the sea and realised that the ‘glittering thing’ doing back and forth like shooting stars was the result of a chemical reaction on the body of some

marine species. He captured the moment in his camera in the form of photos and videos and shared them with the *Observer* “to let people know about the bioluminescence event in the sea.” “In so many years in the Sultanate of Oman, I could see this rare phenomenon for the first time. I only have superficial knowledge about sea activities, but it would be interesting for marine researchers to find more details.”

TURN TO P2



Oman elected to DCO's executive committee



RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman was selected as member to the Executive Committee of the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO). The decision was taken during the participation of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology in DCO's General Assembly's meeting held in Riyadh.

DCO was founded in November 2020 to accelerate economic growth in member states. Oman's delegation was headed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (pictured).

The meeting reviewed DCO's programmes and projects for this year (2023). It endorsed the membership of some countries and reviewed the achievements made by DCO last year. Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, affirmed that Oman's active role in DCO's activities stems from a deep conviction in the significance of international cooperation for the realisation of digital economy's goals.

"Through our membership in this organisation, we seek to advance digital economy in Oman by consulting the expertise and experiences of member states, notably in devising policies and laws," Al Shaithani said.

The ministry is currently joining hands with the DCO in implementing various projects in data governance.

DCO is a global multilateral organisation that brings together the ministries of communications and information technology in 13 countries, namely Oman, Cyprus, Bahrain, Djibouti, Gambia, Ghana, Kuwait, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Jordan, Rwanda and Saudi Arabia. — ONA

■ STATE COUNCIL GIVES FEEDBACK ON DRAFT MARINE LAW



The State Council has given its feedback, along with the opinion of the Legal Committee, on the draft marine law, which is forwarded by the Council of Ministers. The step comes in preparation for submitting the same to His Majesty the Sultan. The State Council also gave its feedback on a study conducted by the Technology and Innovation Committee on the allocations of a national award for investment in the technological innovations. This was unveiled during the council's 5th session of the 4th annual setting for the 7th term, which was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. — ONA

ASMED launches programmes to hone entrepreneurial skills

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The SME sector is poised to have a better outlook in 2023 compared to 2022 as per plan outlay of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development.

The Authority's press briefing covered various points related to enable and ensure the sustainability of SMEs in term of growth, development, financing and investment, as well as prominent performance indicators.

"The annual press conference stems from the principle of transparency and clarity in delivering correct information and indicators to the public from its official sources, and considering the media as an active partner in supporting the advancement of the small and medium enterprises sector in the Sultanate of Oman," Abdulaziz bin Said al Raisi, Vice-President of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development, said.

Al Raisi also rolled out a number of programmes for honing the skills of entrepreneurs, including Entrepreneur Readiness Programme to upgrade the efficiency of owners of SMEs wishing to get financing.

As per indicators, the total number of SMEs registered in the Sultanate of Oman until September 2022 numbered 210,877, while the number of SME registered with the Authority reached 104,141 in December 2022. The number of active enterprises that obtained the entrepreneurship card reached 37,489. During 2022 a total of



Senior officials of Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) at the press conference in Muscat on Sunday. — ONA

28,445 entrepreneurship cards were issued for the first time, while renewal requests for the card amounted to 20,113.

The entrepreneurship card features a document that enables its holder to obtain a package of facilities, incentives, and exemptions in various sectors from the relevant government and private agencies, and their most important objectives are based on supporting SME by providing these concessions. The authority also revealed that it received more than 200 applications for usufruct right in 10 industrial schemes announced by the authority in 2022 of which 35 applications were approved.

Younis bin Mohammed al Nasri, Assistant Vice-President for Finance and Investment of ASMED, mentioned that the number of financing applications submitted electronically reached 203, of which from more than 20 applications were approved, until the end of 2022, with a total value of more than RO 2.3 million.

The authority has also paid

attention to entrepreneurs by organising a number of programmes that enhance the skills of entrepreneurs, the most important of which is the Entrepreneur Readiness Programme, which it implemented in all governorates.

There were 56 groups in various governorates that underwent the programme, and the number of participants reached about 1,179 in four tracks, which are establishment, promotion, advanced, and contracts. The number of passers-by who completed the requirements of the programme reached 1,057 participants.

This is in addition to the in-country value programmes and initiatives for SME with the creation of opportunities and partnerships for owners of enterprises.

The authority revealed that the number of SME and startups incubated in its various business incubators is 56.

In order to activate the regulation of business incubators,

the Authority announced the granting of licenses to six business incubators, in the field of empowering artisans and owners of innovative ideas.

It also reviewed the most important indicators for the financing and investment sector for the year 2022 by facilitating financial procedures for SME, and it was with Muscat Stock Exchange, the Ministry of Finance, the Gulf Travel Company, the Oman Center for Financial and Credit Information "Mala'a", the Omani-Saudi Committee, and the Public Authority for Social Insurance. With nine training workshops aimed at spreading the culture of innovative financing, in which more than 250 entrepreneurs participated.

The financing requests submitted electronically amounted to 203 applications, and more than 20 applications were approved until the end of 2022, with a total amount of more than RO 2,300,000, noting that the start of receiving financing applications took place in June 2022.

Publish weather forecasts only from CAA

FROM PAGE 1

Article 49 states that it is prohibited to use meteorological data or information obtained from the competent authority for purposes other than those authorised, except after obtaining the approval of the competent authority.

Article 50 states that the person licensed for the activities of meteorological services and other persons is prohibited from exchanging information and data with any local, regional or international entity, with the exception of information and data published by the competent authority.

It is also prohibited to publish or broadcast meteorological information, data, alerts or warnings that are deceptive or misleading.

Article 51 states that it is prohibited to touch or tamper with monitoring and remote sensing equipment or devices or to move them, as well as prohibiting attacks on monitoring stations and the like and the prohibitions of meteorological stations.

Earlier, CAA had said that those violating provisions of executive decisions will be punished with an imprisonment period of not less than one and not more than one year. A fine of RO 15,000 and not more than RO 50,000 will be imposed.

Only one company bids for metro consultancy

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The Minister of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology (MoTCIT) has opened the financial bid for the first consultancy study (phase 1 pre-feasibility outline) for the Muscat Metro, which has been in the planning stages for some time now.

As per details available on the Tender Board website, F&M Middle East Engineering Consultancy is the only company that has submitted the bid.

F&M Middle East has been associated with a few projects including Oman Expo pavilion.

The last date for the submission of the bid was February 5.

The opening of the consultancy bid is the first step towards the implementation of the metro rail project in the capital, which will be also the first of its kind in the country.

Explaining the scope of the work, the ministry said, "The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) is seeking to contract a reputable consultant to support the ministry in delivering key decisions pertaining to the Muscat metro Project."

It added, "This project is identified as a key Mass Transit requirement stipulated by various studies, and MoTCIT as the owner of the project, requires this support to be done in a cost-effective, safe, and in full

compliance with the standards, specifications and terms and conditions of the contract."

The upgradation of the public transport system will be key as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning embarks on the ambitious Greater Muscat Development Plan.

The project aims to accommodate the increasing future population, attract investment, develop transportation, raise the quality of services, strengthen infrastructure, and protect the environment.

The Greater Muscat project will focus on making the capital easy to navigate with the provision of an integrated transport network suitable for sports and health activities.

Breathtaking 'bioluminescence' waves

FROM PAGE 1

"If they find the event happening in regularity and during a particular season, it can be added as an attractive thing in the tourism calendar and showcased to a large number of visitors who come to the country during the summer and winter seasons," said Dr Sachin.

The real breathtaking moment, according to Dr Sachin, is also known as 'Sea sparkle' and happens due to a chemical reaction in the body of one of the largest species of dinoflagellates in the marine environment and is



globally distributed.

"Recently bioluminescent, marine plankton (dinoflagellates) as observed on the beaches of Salalah. Such bioluminescence is quite common in the sea, but it is

best seen when the dinoflagellates are disturbed, either by breaking waves or perhaps by passing ships," he said.

Humans can witness this natural phenomenon when there is lots of bioluminescence in the water, usually from an algae bloom of plankton. The bioluminescent sea will glow when it is disturbed by a wave breaking or a splash in the water at night.

Marine creatures like some fish, squid, tiny crustaceans, and algae produce bioluminescence to either confuse predators, attract prey or even lure potential mates.



MINISTER RECEIVES IRAQI AMBASSADOR



Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received Qais Saad Al Amri, Ambassador of the Republic of Iraq to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Sunday. Gen. Sultan welcomed the guest who expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for enhancing means of cooperation to achieve the joint interests between the two countries. Cordial conversations were exchanged and matters of common concern were discussed during the meeting.

Follow safety steps inside vehicles: ROP

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The number of road accidents in Oman had dropped by 60 per cent over five years starting from 2017.

According to the NCSI, the accidents were down from 3,845, which was equivalent to one road accident per three hours by the end of 2017 to 1,539 accidents, equivalent to one per six hours by the end of 2021.

This, however, does still bring about safety issues for the driver and passengers within the vehicles.

In a series of awareness campaigns, the Royal Oman Police traffic has been focusing on safety measures to be practiced inside the automobile. When vehicle owners make slight changes they could result in grave danger as in the case of removing headrests of the car seats especially in the front seats.

“Do not drive your vehicle with the headrests removed as passengers may be seriously injured in the event of an accident,” stated ROP Traffic in their campaign.

In fact, headrests help prevent serious neck injuries when they are properly adjusted. Children must not put their heads and hands out of the window or the sunroof. This expression of joy is actually a traffic violation.

When the seats’ backrests are not upright and if the seatbelt does not provide the intended protection, a road mishap can turn out to be fatal.

“Never drive the vehicle with the seat backrest position down. Avoid seating positions that affect the efficiency of the seatbelt, and adjust the seat’s backrest as vertical



as possible,” noted Royal Oman Police traffic.

The headrest is of most importance and the experts point out that, “The headrest does not need to be in contact with the head while driving, but the distance between them should be at most four centimetres in order for the headrest to function in emergency situations.”

Safety experts have warned that when passengers lean against the car doors or extend arms out of windows while seated can be dangerous during a road accident because airbags can come up in less than a blink of an eye in an accident and can result in serious injury.

The Royal Oman Police asked motorists to make sure the car engine is off, the automatic transmission is in “P” mode or the first gear, as well as apply the handbrake when there is a requirement to load or unload the goods from the vehicle. “Failure to follow these steps may allow the vehicle to move causing damage to the vehicle or causing serious injuries to others,” it said

Oman’s East African legacy to be unveiled in Kenya on Friday

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) will open a permanent museum-cum-exhibition for records and antiques pertaining to Oman’s historical presence in East Africa on Friday . The exhibits also highlight the common history shared by Oman and Kenya in the province of Lamu.

Once restoration tasks are completed and final improvements made, the archival exhibition will be inaugurated in coordination with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya and the Kenyan Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage.

The project constitutes one of the archaeological and architectural landmarks hoped to play a variety of cultural roles.

Besides affirming Omani presence in the province of Lamu and the depth of the two countries’ historical relations, the exhibition consolidates noble Omani values and reflects Oman’s keenness to preserve various aspects of its heritage, culture and civilisation.

The permanent exhibition is established within the framework of cooperation



The 51-year-old museum’s renovation was funded by the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya.

between the NRAA and the Kenyan Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage, following a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed earlier by the two countries in the same context.

Through this project, the

NRAA seeks to spread awareness about Oman’s history and civilisation in East Africa, notably among the local community and visitors to Lamu Island.

In 2017, the NRAA restored some parts of Mombasa Fort in the Republic of Kenya so

that the monument could house a permanent museum-cum-exhibition. The facilities are named as follows: “Omani House”, “Al Mazrouei Hall” and “Fort Museum”. They all serve as testimony to Omani presence in Mombasa. — ONA

Trademark for products by disabled launched



FROM PAGE 1

The second agreement was signed between the Ministry of Social Development and the Arab Open University whereby the university should open a marketing outlet at its new campus for the products of persons with disabilities affiliated with the

Vocational Rehabilitation and Evaluation Centre of the Ministry of Social Development.

The third agreement was signed between the Jusoor Foundation and Zubair Enterprises Development Centre (Zubair EDC) for the preparation and implementation of Azm initiative. The initiative involves

promoting the culture of entrepreneurship among persons with disabilities and the supervisors who undertake their training rehabilitation, providing the necessary commercial and marketing guidance and advice, improving the quality of their products and enhancing consumer confidence in the

products registered under the umbrella of ‘Azm’. The aim is to enable larger-scale marking and promotion of products made by persons with disabilities through cooperation and partnership between the Ministry of Social Development and the Jusoor Foundation and other partners. — ONA



ROHM to feature Mozart’s Le Figaro on Feb 16 and 19

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat will present Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s wonderful opera Le Nozze di Figaro on February 16 and 19. It is performed by the Accademia Teatro alla Scala conducted by Sestro Quatrini.

The opera features incredible young talented artists from the academy associated with one of the most famous opera companies in the world, Teatro alla Scala.

Le Nozze di Figarotells is the story of Figaro, a servant to the Count who is marrying Susanna, another member of the household. The opera is a comedy, following the

twists and turns of a plot which sees the Count trying to woo Susanna himself, the Countess trying to win back the Count, a manservant who would woo anyone but in this case must don a disguise as a woman to confuse the Count, and a maid who thinks Figaro must repay a debt with marriage but turns out to be his mother.

Figaro is by turns tumbled by events and the chief puppet master of the story. Audiences love this opera.

Don’t miss this classical production, dressed with glorious period costume and staged by the acclaimed director Giorgio



Strehler with revival director Marina Bianchi. Le Nozze di

Figaro Will take place at the Royal Opera House Muscat on February

16 (Thursday) and February 19 (Sunday) at 7pm. A pre-performance talk will take place one hour ahead of the show.

The Marriage of Figaro is considered one of Mozart’s most prominent works, which he wrote in 1786, based on a play by Pierre Augustin Caro de Beaumarchais with the same title. When it was shown for the first time in Vienna, it achieved tremendous success.

The reason for its success is due to its exciting musical opening, its melodies that reveal the truth about its characters, and its collective scenes full of life that captured the hearts of its audience,

in addition to its touch with social reality.

The opera came as a sequel to a story ‘The Barber of Seville’ written by French polymath Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. The Barber of Seville, which takes place in Seville in the eighteenth century, carries deep implications related to love and forgiveness, and discusses community issues in a hidden way.

The highlights of the opera are the amazing direction of Giorgio Strehler, elegant costumes designed by Franca Squarciapino and breathtaking artwork by Ezio Frigerio. — ONA



Back to history with Maritime Heritage Festival



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The Maritime Heritage Festival in Sur has evoked good response from the visitors. The festival has many interesting features that highlights marine culture, local art and heritage of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Maritime Heritage Festival opened on February 3 under the auspices of Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah. It will continue till February 19.

The festival has several events related to heritage and general entertainment organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah and a number of entities in order to raise awareness about the heritage of the Wilayat of Sur.

It has a heritage village, sea voyage simulation and accompanying activities including skateboarding and paragliding, in addition to popular games and sports competitions.

“This festival reflects the great diversity that characterises South Al Sharqiyah Governorate in general and Sur city in particular in addition to the maritime history and the harmony it represents in the relationship between the sea and man,” Dr Yahya al Maawali said.

“Over the course of the 14 days of the festival, we will find a variety of activities of a marine nature, and it is expected that the festival will witness a great turnout, which would stimulate the economic and commercial movement.”

A historical journey experienced by visitors to the festival between the sails of Omani ships, folklore songs of sailors, and

traditional crafts handed down through generations. The festival aims to highlight the historical role of the city, past and present, as a commercial and historical centre. Also, as a site of memory and technical knowledge of the ship industry over centuries, in addition to promoting and introducing the maritime heritage and tourism potentials in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah and stimulating the tourism movement of the governorate.

Haitham bin Muhammad al Ghassani, General Director of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, confirmed that the festival is part of the strategic programmes to enhance cultural heritage as an added value, and one of the tourism possibilities for the advancement of this vital and reliable sector in opening outlets and economic benefits.

Among the activities included traditional sea voyage that embodies the historical journey of Omani ships to and from the Omani ports, in which the mechanism of transporting and loading goods in the past is simulated along with traditional arts. Even the ancient routes of ships and goods are explained.

Another attraction is the Omani Food Carnival, which allows visitors to explore Omani and international dishes. One can enjoy fresh seafood from local sources that reflect the richness of marine wealth. It also helps small and medium enterprises and productive families to improve their income.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism seeks to hold many festivals in other wilayats to attract more tourists, create community mobility, and raise the rates of hotel occupancy.



ARTIFICIAL ISLAND, BOAT RACES HIGHLIGHT OF NORTH AL BATINAH FEST

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 5

The sea is part and parcel of Omanis. Traditionally it has been the companion of travellers and merchants. Many tales are documented about the people and their association with the sea. A festival that revisits all those tales and shows the deep connection of Omanis with the sea will take place at al Manial Park in Suhar.

The activities of the maritime festival in the Governorate of North al Batinah, titled Tides, will continue for one month from February 28 to March 25.

The opening ceremony will have a marine operetta telling the story about the city of Suhar and its maritime history. It mentions the ports in China, India, and other countries of the world.

Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North al Batinah, said, “The governorate of Suhar has a rich maritime history. A simple overview of that history and what the governorate is famous for in terms of marine arts and traditional industry will be presented. The visitors will have many new things to present during the festival. The public will have many things to satiate their taste buds, whereas the festival has special programmes and events for children, families and youth. There are many opportunities for the participation of small and medium entrepreneurs to display their products without any fees in designated areas.”

The idea of the festival is in line



with imparting education to the children about the Sultanate of Oman's maritime history and the life their fathers and grandfathers lived.

The event will be held at two locations. Al Manial Park will have several small and medium enterprises on display. In addition, a group of craftsmen and local families will display various products made by them.

Al Manial Park will be the wild side of the festival. It will contain a marine village, a museum of marine collectables and manuscripts, and a group of storytellers, adventurers, and cruise sailors.

Folklore groups will participate daily and present performances. It would have many other artistic events.

For theatre lovers, there will be performances showcasing marine characters and their popular heritage and culture.

The new generation would know the life of its ancestors at the

maritime festival.

The second venue will be the artificial island close to Al Manial Park. Spread over 300 square metres, the venue's attraction will be boats and small ships. Several events and activities are lined up for the venue ranging from an astronomical observatory to kiosks to keep the visitors engaged in some educational stuff related to the universe and the planet Earth.

Dr Abdul Rahman bin Salem al Qasimi, Director of North Al Batinah Maritime Festival, explained that the festival will feature 52 daily main events. Al Qasimi said the organising committee of the festival has been keen to help small and medium enterprises and productive families benefit from this festival. Twenty four small and medium enterprises and 94 productive families participate in the festival.

He said there will be a number of races and marine sports will be held throughout the festival.



Total refinery output till December up by 4 per cent

MUSCAT: The total refinery products in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 4 per cent until the end of December 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Oman's production of petrol (M-95) rose by 12.6 per cent to stand at 14,838,700 barrels compared to the same period in 2021. Sales of M-95 fuel dropped by 0.3 per cent to reach 12,574,900 barrels, while exports reached 3,111,600 barrels, comprising a surge by 118.8 per cent till the end of December 2022.

The production of standard grade petrol (M-91) rose by 0.5 per cent till the end of December 2022 to stand at 13,816,900 barrels compared to the same period in 2021. Sales of M-91 fuel reached 13,171,800 barrels, comprising a rise by 44.7 per cent, while exports declined by 59.6 per cent to reach 1,605,600 barrels. Gas oil (diesel) output fell by 5 per cent compared to the same period in 2021, to reach 32,569,300 barrels.

Sales of diesel increased by 12.2 per cent to reach 14,975,100 barrels, while exports decreased by 17.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2021 to stand at 17,288,000 barrels. As far as petrochemicals are concerned, the exports and production of polypropylene went up by 22.4 per cent and



Sales of M-95 fuel dropped by 0.3 per cent to reach 12,574,900 barrels, while exports reached 3,111,600 barrels, comprising a surge by 118.8 per cent till the end of December 2022.

43.3 per cent, respectively. Sales of polypropylene dropped by 48.2 per cent at the end of December 2022 compared to the corresponding period in 2021. Meanwhile, the exports and production of benzene declined by 59.7 per cent and 63 per cent respectively. The production and exports of paraxylene went down by 66.1 per cent and 66.6 per cent, receptively, till the end of September 2022. — ONA

SalamAir adds Kuala Lumpur as its 36th destination



MUSCAT: To establish direct air connectivity with one of the world's popular destinations, Oman's value-for-money airline SalamAir has announced the introduction of a direct flight between Muscat and Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, with two flights per week beginning on July 3.

Flights from Muscat to Kuala Lumpur are scheduled for Monday and Friday. The route serves both sides' high demand for leisure and business tourism.

Kuala Lumpur, SalamAir's first destination in Malaysia, marks the airline's further expansion into Southeast

Asia. For people living in Oman and those wanting to take connecting flights, it's a convenient non-stop flight to Southeast Asian country for leisure, shopping, or business purposes.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir, said, "The new service marks another milestone in our network expansion strategy. We are delighted to launch flights between Muscat and Kuala Lumpur, providing our customers with a perfect value-for-money product that allows them to be flexible, save on airfare with our competitive pricing, and add services they prefer."

SQU to host global conference on earth sciences and energy

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The Sultanate of Oman will host as many as 162 people representing 26 countries for he First International Conference on Earth Sciences and Energy Transition to be held at the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Monday.

The Conference is convened in the backdrop of the ever-increasing global demand for energy across many countries as the population increases. According to the United Nation report, the world population is expected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050, and energy demand is increasing from 11.4 billion tonnes of oil equivalent to 17.7 billion. The increase in global energy demand and consumption has significant implications for climate change.

Organised by the Earth Sciences Research Centre at the SQU in cooperation with the Unesco Chair in Ophiolite Studies, and with the support of Occidental, PDO, Daleel Petroleum, Petrogas, and CGG, the 5-day conference will see brainstorming sessions moderated by eminent persona from across the world in order to highlight the role of earth sciences and their importance in the transition to clean energy.

"The high-level conference is an attempt to know the findings of studies in the transition to clean energy and to enhance the fight against carbon dioxide emissions. The conference will also make efforts to understand the various types of alternative energy," a note from the organising committee said.

Besides seven keynote speakers from the Sultanate of Oman, experts in clean energy from Australia, Britain and Pakistan will deliver their speeches in the two sessions of the conference.

The topics covered are as wide and diverse as hydrogen energy, thermal energy, solar energy, wind energy, in addition to water energy, and tidal energy, besides energy storage, energy wastage, the environment, economics, policies and management. Energy, as well as the absorption, exploitation and storage of carbon dioxide and non-renewable energy sources will also be in the focus of the conference on different days.

The Organising Committee was established with Mohamed El Ghali as Chairman, Arshad Ali as Co-Chairman, and Osman Abdullah, Talal al Hosni, Mohammed al Kindi, Maria bint Khalfan al Kharousi of SQQ, and Abdulmunim al Zakwani of the Geological Society of Oman as members.

Book on Dr Rafay to be launched on February 15

MAGGIE JEANS

The long-anticipated book 'Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay — A Life of Selfless Service in the Sultanate of Oman' will be launched on February 15.

It tells the remarkable story of Dr Rafay, who came to the Sultanate of Oman from Patna in India and dedicated his life to providing medical services to the country. Fortunately, he kept a set of diaries that served as an inexhaustible record. His son, Dr Akbar Rafay, has skilfully woven into a chronicle of his father's incredible journey.

This began in 1958 when he established the first medical clinic in Samayil and culminated in his appointment as personal physician to the late Sultan Qaboos in 1970, entrusted with the care of Sultan's mother, A sayyida Al Jalila Maizoon.

"Medicine in the Sultanate of Oman in the 1950s was practised with a limited medical budget resulting in limited medical supplies at a time when typhoid, hepatitis, glaucoma, cataract, entropion, trachoma and malaria were rampant.

"Aby assisted by his wife, Saida bint Abdul Haleem, Dr Rafay performed surgeries in his garden, where bed sheets were tied to date palms, converting the area into a makeshift operating theatre," says Dr Akbar Rafay.

For him, this 266-page coffee-table sized is like a giant scrapbook filled with fascinating facsimiles of letters and historical documents.

There are good detailed descriptions of life in the Sultanate of Oman in the 70s, such as a description of saving a patient's leg, which a swordfish had penetrated.

"The book is an attempt to bring history alive with letters to and from Dr Rafay, my father. Many of them are tributes from well-known individuals



Dr Syed Mohammed Rafay

on the international stage as well as grandchildren, family and friends. It is packed with many rare previously unpublished photographs of people and places in the Sultanate of Oman as well as the UK and other countries," adds Dr Rafay.

In 1974, Dr Rafay was granted Omani citizenship, and in recognition of his commitment, dedication, loyalty and honesty, the Order of Oman was conferred on him in 1992. He died in September 2014 after ten uncomplaining years of total blindness due to retinitis pigmentosa. He had given 56 years of service to Oman.

The life of Dr Rafay should serve as an inspiration to us all, including medical professionals, on how resourcefulness and innovation can convert challenges into opportunities. He also drew great solace from helping those in need, and successful outcomes, in particular, gave him immeasurable joy and happiness.

The book will be launched on February 15, and copies will be available following this event.



جمعية المهندسين العمالية
Oman Society of Engineers

By virtue of articles 21 and 22 of the Statute and Article VIII, \ A of the Bylaws of the Oman Society of Engineers has decided to hold General Assembly Meeting and hold elections and nominations open according to the following dates:

Subject	Date
Nominations open	6/2/2023
Nominations close	20/2/2023
General Assembly & Election	12/3/2023

The current Board of Directors urges Omani engineers who wish to nominate themselves to the Board of Directors to contact the OSE office to get the nomination applications.
Note: that a member of the Assembly is a member of the outstanding fees, including an annual subscription for 2023.

For more information, please contact:
Tel: 00968-24210099/92319975
Email: office@ose.org.om



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Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Return Date
PRE-23-26	Prequalification of Maintenance of Roads in Muscat Governorate 2023	21/02/2023
PRE-23-29	Prequalification of Development of one way road system in Al Khuwair	21/02/2023

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
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Coast guard members searching for missing people after a fishing boat capsized in waters off the coast of Sinan county. – AFP

South Korea searches for missing crew after fishing boat capsizes

SEOUL: Nine people were missing on Sunday after a fishing boat capsized off the southwest coast of South Korea, authorities said, with the country's president urging stepped-up search and rescue efforts.

The fishing boat overturned just before midnight on Saturday, with three crew members picked up by rescuers, the coast guard said.

Video released by the coast guard showed a rescue boat approaching the overturned fishing vessel, with the three crew members in the water near the red hull.

Coast guard ships were scouring the area for nine others,

and President Yoon Suk-yeol ordered other naval and civil resources to help, his office said in a statement.

In late January, at least eight people were reported dead after a cargo ship sank between South Korea and Japan, Chinese officials said.

Meanwhile, rescue workers were searching by sea and air for nine people missing after a fishing boat capsized in waters off South Korea's southwestern coast, authorities said on Sunday.

The 24-tonne vessel overturned in waters off the coast of Sinan county late on Saturday night, according to the interior ministry.

Three crew members were

rescued by a nearby boat, but nine others — including two foreigners — remained missing, the ministry added in a statement.

More than a dozen vessels and three aircraft from the coastguard and the navy had been deployed to search for the missing people, it said. Most of the crew are believed to have left the capsized boat, Yonhap news agency reported, citing Interior Minister Lee Sang-min.

President Yoon Suk-yeol urged maximum efforts for the rescue operation, ordering the mobilisation of "all available resources" to widen the search area, his office said.

— Reuters/AFP

Pope ends South Sudan trip, urges end to 'blind fury' of violence

JUBA: Pope Francis urged the people of South Sudan on Sunday to resist the "venom of hatred" so they could achieve the peace and prosperity that have eluded them through years of bloody ethnic conflicts.

In his last public engagement before flying home, Francis presided at an open-air Mass on the grounds of a mausoleum for South Sudan's liberation hero John Garang, who died in 2005. The Vatican said 100,000 people attended the Mass.

The 86-year-old pope wove his homily around the themes that have dominated his trip to the world's newest nation -- reconciliation and mutual forgiveness for past wrongs. He begged the worshippers to shun the "blind fury of violence".

Many in the crowd sang, drummed and ululated as Francis entered the dusty area, and his homily was repeatedly interrupted by loud cheers and more ululations.

At the end of the service, in a farewell address shortly before heading to the airport, the pope thanked the people of South Sudan for the affection they showed him.

"Dear brothers and sisters, I return to Rome with you even closer to my heart," he told them. "Never lose hope. And lose no opportunity to build peace. May hope and peace dwell among you. May hope and peace dwell in South Sudan!"

The pope has had a longstanding interest in South Sudan. In one of the most remarkable gestures of his papacy, he knelt to kiss the feet of the country's previously warring leaders during a meeting at the



Pope Francis with South Sudan's President Salva Kiir Mayardit during a farewell ceremony before his departure in Juba. – Reuters

Vatican in 2019.

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, leader of the global Anglican Communion, and Iain Greenshields, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, accompanied the pope during his visit to South Sudan.

The "pilgrimage of peace" was the first time in Christian history that leaders of the Catholic, Anglican and Reformed traditions conducted a joint foreign visit.

The three left the South Sudanese capital Juba on the same flight and landed in Rome at around 5:15 pm.

Earlier on his Africa trip, the pope visited Democratic Republic of Congo, home to the continent's largest Roman Catholic community, where he celebrated Mass for a million people and heard harrowing stories from people harmed by war in the eastern part of the country. Among the worshippers

at Sunday's Mass in Juba was Ferida Modon, 72, who lost three of her children to conflict.

"I want peace to come to South Sudan. Yes, I believe that his visit will change the situation. We are now tired of conflict," she said. "We want God to listen to our prayers."

Jesilen Gaba, 42, a widow with four children, said: "The fact that the three Churches united for the sake of South Sudan, this is the turning point for peace. I want the visit to be a blessing to us. We have been at war, we have lost many people."

Francis made another appeal for an end to the tribalism, financial wrongdoing and political cronyism at the root of many of the country's problems.

He urged the people to build "good human relationships as a way of curbing the corruption of evil, the disease of division, the filth of fraudulent business dealings and the plague of injustice". — Reuters

Pakistan's former military ruler Musharraf dies after long illness

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exiled former military ruler Pervez Musharraf, who became a key US ally during the "war on terror", died in a Dubai hospital on Sunday aged 79 after a long illness.

Musharraf seized power in a 1999 coup and was acting simultaneously as Pakistan's army chief, chief executive, and president when the 9/11 attacks on the United States took place.

The general twice suspended the constitution and was accused of rigging a referendum shoring up his power, as well as rampant rights abuses including rounding up opponents.

Nonetheless, he became Washington's chief regional ally during their invasion of neighbouring Afghanistan.

The decision — made after the US issued a "for us or against us" ultimatum — put him in the crosshairs of militants, who made several attempts on his life.

But it also earned Pakistan a huge influx of foreign aid which bolstered the economy.

In Pakistan, where the military remains supremely powerful and enjoys significant support, Musharraf is a divisive figure.

"There was good in him," 69-year-old Naeem Ul Haq Satti



Pakistan's former president Pervez Musharraf

said in an Islamabad marketplace.

"But his one act, which will be remembered throughout history, was he violated the constitution," the retired civil servant added. "The most important thing a country has is its constitution."

Musharraf had been suffering from a rare disease known as Amyloidosis and last summer his family said he had no prospect of recovery.

Senior military chiefs "express heartfelt condolences on sad demise of General Pervez Musharraf", a brief statement released by the military's media wing said on Saturday.

The four-star general died

in hospital in Dubai on Sunday morning, according to media reports and a senior security official who spoke.

"I can confirm that the late general breathed his last in Dubai this morning ... He is no more," the official, who asked not to be named, said.

A Pakistan air force source said that Musharraf's body would be flown back to Pakistan on Monday, aboard a civilian liner or UAE air force jet.

Musharraf ruled Pakistan for nearly nine years, starting when then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attempted to remove him as army chief. — AFP

CAIRO

Egypt's former prime minister, 67, dies

Former Egyptian prime minister Sherif Ismail, who served during President Abdel Fattah al Sisi's first term in office, died on Saturday at the age of 67.

"I mourn with deep sorrow a virtuous man among Egypt's best, a man in whom the nation's conscience was embodied, the former prime minister, the honourable Dr Sherif Ismail," the president wrote on Facebook.

Ismail was sworn in as prime minister in 2015 before resigning in 2018 as Sisi began his second



presidential term, after a landslide victory.

According to Sisi, Ismail "assumed responsibility in the most difficult of circumstances and the hardest of times". — AFP

BEIJING

Sixteen killed in China highway pile-up

A highway pile-up in central China has killed 16 people and injured dozens, authorities said with footage aired on local media showing burning trucks and smashed cars.

Nearly 50 vehicles were involved in multiple collisions along a highway in Hunan province within the span of 10 minutes on Saturday evening, "with some vehicles catching on fire", local traffic police said in a statement. Footage republished online by the state-owned



People's Daily showed multiple burning trucks bearing the logos of delivery companies, crushed and overturned cars, and a dark cloud of smoke rising from the crashes. — AFP

KABUL

Qatar sends envoy to Kabul to meet with Taliban

An envoy for Qatar's foreign affairs minister visited the Afghan capital and met with the Taliban administration's acting foreign minister, according to a Afghan foreign ministry.

The visit comes after the Taliban administration placed restrictions on women's education and NGO work, which Qatar labelled "deeply concerning" amid widespread international criticism.

Mutlaq bin Majed al Qahtani, the special envoy of Qatar's



foreign minister, took part in meetings with acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Kabul, according to Afghan foreign affairs spokesperson Abdul Qahar Balkhi. — Reuters



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In brief

■ RIO DE JANEIRO



AT LEAST 22 DEAD AS FOREST FIRES RAGE IN CHILE

At least 22 people have died as a result of devastating forest fires currently raging in Chile, officials said. At least 10 further people are missing in the Santa Juana municipality in the region of Bío Bío, some 500 kilometres south of Santiago, Interior Minister Carolina Tohá said. A total of 554 people have been injured, 16 of them seriously, the minister said. A large number of houses were damaged or destroyed by the fires, with a total of 1,429 people currently housed in emergency shelters. “In the past week of this crisis, the same area has burned down as in an entire normal year,” Tohá said.

■ VIENNA



8 DEAD IN WEEKEND AVALANCHES IN AUSTRIA

Austrian police said on Sunday that five people had been killed in avalanches in the west of the country, after three deaths were reported despite pleas for caution on ski slopes. The eight deaths came as resorts are filled during the February school holidays in Vienna, with the avalanche alert level at four on a scale of five after several days of intense snowfall and wind. On Sunday, the body of a 59-year-old man buried while helping the snow removal effort in his tractor was recovered, police in Austria's western Tyrol region said. Two skiers aged 29 and 33, including a guide, who were carried off-piste on Saturday morning were found dead in Sankt Anton am Arlberg.

■ SARAJEVO



SNOW, WINTER STORMS DISRUPT TRAFFIC ACROSS THE BALKANS

Gale-force winds and snow storms closed roads and left more than 25,000 households in Serbia without power on Sunday, while fallen trees disrupted traffic in neighbouring Croatia and Montenegro. In Croatia, a red alert was issued for the regions along the Adriatic coast due to north winds estimated to reach 130 km per hour.

Authorities in Montenegro's coastal town of Budva warned citizens to stay indoor after strong wind on Saturday destroyed a school roof, brought down trees and lamp posts, sank a tourist boat and disrupted traffic along the coast.

US fighter jet shoots down suspected spy balloon



Printed balloons with Chinese flag are placed on a US flag in this illustration. — Reuters

SURFSIDE BEACH: China has slammed the US for shooting down a Chinese aircraft that officials suspected was a surveillance Balloon above US territorial waters, labelling the move as an “obvious overreaction.”

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on Saturday confirmed that the US military had shot down a “high altitude surveillance Balloon launched by and belonging to the People's Republic of China” in US airspace off the coast of South Carolina.

On Sunday, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson in Beijing expressed China's “strong dissatisfaction” over the “use of force” in bringing down the Balloon.

President Joe Biden said he had issued an order on Wednesday to take down the balloon, but the Pentagon had recommended waiting until it could be done over open water to safeguard civilians from debris crashing to Earth from thousands of feet above commercial air traffic.

“They successfully took it

CHINA SLAMS US FOR SHOOTING DOWN A CHINESE AIRCRAFT LABELLING THE MOVE AS AN ‘OBVIOUS OVERREACTION’

down, and I want to compliment our aviators who did it,” Biden said. Multiple fighter and refueling aircraft were involved in the mission, but only one -- an F-22 fighter jet from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia -- took the shot at 2:39 pm, using a single AIM-9X supersonic, heat-seeking, air-to-air missile, a senior US military official said.

China strongly condemned the military strike on an airship that it says was used for meteorological and other scientific purposes, and which it said had strayed into US airspace “completely accidentally” -- claims flatly dismissed by US officials.

“China had clearly asked the US to handle this properly in a calm, professional and restrained manner,” China's foreign ministry said in a statement. “The US had



Stephanie Stadler of Surfside Beach, photographs a suspected Chinese spy balloon as it floats off the coast in Surfside Beach, South Carolina. — Reuters

on Saturday afternoon.

While Saturday's shootdown concludes the military dimension to the spying saga, Biden is likely to continue to face intense political scrutiny from Republican opponents in Congress who argue he failed to act quickly enough.

A senior administration official said after shooting down the balloon, the US government spoke directly with China about the action. The State Department also briefed allies and partners around the world, the official said.

Questions remain about how much information China may have gathered during the balloon's trek across the United States.

The balloon entered US airspace in Alaska on January 28 before moving into Canadian airspace on January 30. It then re-entered US airspace over northern Idaho on Jan. 31, a US defence official said. Once it crossed over US land, it did not return to open waters, making a shootdown difficult. — Reuters

Battles rage in Bakhmut as Ukraine calls for planes

BAKHMUT: Heavy fighting was underway on Sunday in the northern parts of the frontline hotspot Bakhmut, while Russian missile strikes on Ukraine's second-largest city Kharkiv wounded five people.

Despite the flow of Western weapons to Ukraine, Russia has in recent days claimed gains around war-ravaged Bakhmut in the eastern region of Donetsk.

However, the head of Russia's mercenary group Wagner said on Sunday that the Ukrainian army was not retreating and that fighting raged on in northern parts of Bakhmut.

“In the northern quarters of Artemovsk, fierce battles are going on for every street, every house, every stairwell,” Yevgeny Prigozhin said in a statement, referring to Bakhmut by its old name.

“The Ukrainian armed forces are fighting to the last,” he said.

Russian forces have been trying to seize control of Bakhmut in the eastern region of Donetsk for months in what has become the longest and bloodiest battle since Russia invaded Ukraine last February.

The fight for Bakhmut has turned the town with a pre-war population of roughly 75,000 into a ghost town dotted with hedgehog anti-tank defences and burnt-out cars. The town has no water, gas or



The wreckage of a car is seen following a Russian missile strike in Kharkiv amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

electricity.

About 20 people, including two soldiers, attended a Sunday mass in the basement of the golden-domed All Saints' church in the deserted town.

Three women sang hymns, punctuated by sounds of mortar shells in the background. The room was lit by two dozen candles and a portable light used by the two priests to read from the sacred book.

“Today I prayed that everything will be better for me after I die,” said 20-year-old Serafim Chernyshov standing outside the church, with loud sounds of a steady exchange of small arms fire and the pounding of mortar shells to and from Russian positions echoing in the background.

“Last night, a missile flew into my garden and a bullet flew inside my house, it could have hit me,” he added. “I might die now or in 30

years. If I'm killed, it will be God's will.” “I came to pray for peace,” added Lyubov Avramenko, 84.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday that Kyiv's troops would fight for Bakhmut “as long as we can.”

He urged the West to supply Kyiv with sophisticated weapons to help his forces retain control of Bakhmut and speed up deliveries of heavy tanks.

High turnout as Cypriots vote for new president

NICOSIA: Cypriots voted in large numbers on Sunday in a close presidential election between three front runners, with the focus on corruption and the economy amid deadlock over the island's long-standing division. A record 14 candidates -- but only two women -- are standing, with the winner needing 50 per cent plus one vote to succeed two-term President Nicos Anastasiades.

There was a strong turnout, with 312,008 votes cast by 3 pm, chief returning officer Costas Constantinou said.

That figure constitutes 55.6 per cent of the electorate -- a 4.7 per cent increase on the same time during the last presidential election in 2018.

Opinion polls predict a run-off on February 12, with no contender expected to secure an immediate outright majority. “I expect the next president to do something about corruption and to settle the Cyprus question,” said civil servant Andreas Georgiadis, 29, after voting in the capital Nicosia. — AFP



Cypriot presidential candidate Andreas Mavroyiannis casts his vote at the third elementary school of Aglanzia polling station in Nicosia. — AFP

The fight for Bakhmut has turned the town with a pre-war population of roughly 75,000 into a ghost town

In his evening address on Saturday, Zelensky acknowledged that the situation was getting tougher. Russia, he said, was “throwing more and more of its forces at breaking down our defence”.

“It is very difficult now in Bakhmut, Vugledar, Lyman and other areas,” he added, referring to the frontline towns in the east of the country.

The British defence ministry said on Sunday that over the past week, Russia had made “small advances” in its attempt to encircle Bakhmut. The two main roads into the city for Ukrainian troops “are likely now both threatened by direct fire, following the Russian advances,” the British defence ministry said.

For months Moscow has systematically targeted Ukraine's civilian infrastructure, including the energy grid, leaving millions in the dark and cold in the middle of winter. — AFP

Instagram has made poetry more popular today



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

Famous British poet William Wordsworth defined poetry as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity’. Nothing can be more spontaneous than social media today, so it is only apt that reading poetry has become even more popular now than a few years ago. Consider some facts: 25-year old Canadian Rupinder Kaur sold more copies of her collection of poetry ‘Milk and Honey’ in 2 years than the legendary works of Homer. She became more popular once she posted her poetry on Tumblr, and then on Instagram. There is also Drake, who started sharing his poetry on Instagram in 2013 by posting snippets of his poetry accompanied by pictures. He now has 1.8 million followers

across social media. Atticus, hiding behind a mask, is an internet phenomenon who not only sells millions of copies of poetry but also has tours across North America and Europe. Instagram poetry is probably not for the literary purists. The pithy one-liners are catchy for a text driven generation: “I am like the moon, but all my phases/ Are about my love for you,” by Marie Jo Schwarz is followed by the little nudge to ‘tag someone you love’. There are some motivational ones too: “The healing will come, only if you let it in” by someone with the handle ‘the typewriter daily’. But the charm of poetry is that it develops and evolves. One of the reasons why poetry is still

INSTAGRAM POETRY MAY BE A PASSING FANCY, OR ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT CHAPTER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF POETRY. IT HAS CLEARLY BROUGHT OUT THIS FORM OF LITERATURE TO THE FORE, POPULARISED IT AGAIN JUST WHEN READING OF ANY KIND WAS SEEN TO BE ENDING

so popular today is because, as a form, it can take on modern and changing feelings and reflect our society. Rupinder Kaur, for example, speaks for countless women with the

powerful lines “Our backs/tell stories/no books have the spine/to carry,” accompanied by the doodle of a woman’s back. Not all Instagram poems are about love or the need to stay motivated. Austen Kleon writes about exile in a blog but references it in a pictorial poem set in wavy black: “The winds/have begun blowing/ me/back home”. Instagram poets are an entire industry today. They have stage shows, book signings, and even merchandise. They lend their words to advertising, making it possible for brands to re-invent themselves using current issues of women’s empowerment and sustainability as pillars. Cleo Wade, for instance, recently

worked with Gucci to help it re-brand its image with the phrase ‘Chime for Change’. Of course, there are critics of this kind of poetry, labelling it as commercial and just a passing fad. It doesn’t help that almost everybody can be posting a few lines, so the quality is not always great. Instagram poetry may be a passing fancy, or another significant chapter in the development of poetry. But if we can make any conclusions, it is that art will stay popular as long as it reflects the choices of its ‘consumers’, be it readers, buyers or viewers. Instagram poetry has clearly brought out this form of literature to the fore, popularised it again just when reading of any kind was seen to be ending.

Long-delayed ExoMars mission still dreams of 2028 launch

JULIETTE COLLEN

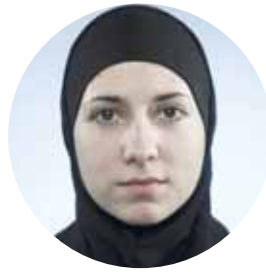
War, budget cuts, a pandemic and a crash: For all its trials, Europe’s ExoMars mission might be more deserving of the name Perseverance than Nasa’s Martian rover. But the European Space Agency still hopes the mission can launch in 2028 on its long-delayed quest to search for extraterrestrial life on the Red Planet. This time last year, the ESA’s Rosalind Franklin rover was all ready for a September launch from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, planning to catch a ride on a Russian rocket and descend to the Martian surface on a Russian lander. Then Moscow invaded Ukraine in March, and sanctions imposed by the ESA’s 22 member states led to Russia pulling out and the mission being suspended. It was just the latest blow for the hundreds of scientists who have been working on the project for more than two decades. First conceived in 2001, the ambitious programme quickly proved too expensive for Europe, which has still to land a rover on Mars. The United States’ space agency Nasa stepped in to fill the funding gap in 2009. But three years later, budget cuts led to Nasa pulling out. Help then came from an unexpected source: Russia’s space agency Roscosmos. Together, the ESA and Roscosmos launched the Schiaparelli EDM module in 2016 as a test run for ExoMars. But when Schiaparelli arrived at Mars, a computer glitch caused it to crash into the surface and fall silent. That failure pushed back the launch of the joint Russian-European ExoMars mission to July 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic pushed that date back to 2022, when it was again delayed by the invasion of Ukraine. Late last year, the ESA’s ministerial council agreed to keep the mission alive with an injection of €500 million (\$540 million) over the next three years. David Parker, the ESA’s director of human and robotic exploration, said last week that one of the arguments they put forward for continuing the mission was “that this is a unique piece of European science. “It’s like James Webb,” he said referring to the space telescope that has been sending back astonishing images of distant galaxies since 2022. “But it’s for Mars — it’s that scale of ambition. “This is the only mission that is foreseen that can actually find evidence of past life.” — AFP

In West Bank, settlers sense their moment after far right’s rise



Patrick Kingsley

The writer is a British journalist and is the Jerusalem bureau chief of NYT



Raja Abdulrahim

The writer is a correspondent in Jerusalem for NYT

The remains of Or Haim, an illegal settlement outpost, lie strewn across a windswept hilltop in the north of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Two dozen Israeli settlers erected a few flimsy huts there one night last month, and by morning, the Israeli army had demolished them. But the settlers plan to try again. The most right-wing government in Israel’s history, which includes settler leaders among its key ministers, entered office late last year, and the settler movement has been emboldened, sensing a window of opportunity to expand its enterprise faster than ever before. “Now I expect things to go differently,” said Naveh Schindler, 19, a settler activist leading the effort to build the Or Haim outpost. “If I persevere enough,” Schindler said, “hopefully the government will build it themselves.” Settlers such as Schindler hope to build more Israeli settlements across the West Bank, which is illegal under international law, on land that Palestinians hoped would be the core of a future Palestinian state. Palestinians, meanwhile, are watching with fear and anxiety as settlements expand, and as the number of attacks on Palestinians increase as more settlers come. While previous Israeli governments and generals have built and protected hundreds of settlements, they have often opposed unauthorised outpost construction by settler activists. Now, open advocacy for settlements by government ministers and the growing ambitions of the settler movement, coupled with a recent surge of violence, are raising fears that it could help incite an explosion in the West Bank. An unusually intense wave of settler violence against Palestinians and their property swept through parts of the territory last weekend. It followed a month of near daily Israeli military raids into Palestinian cities and towns that left at least 26 Palestinians dead. Palestinian violence against Israelis also continued to rise sharply, compounding the sense of a region on



The Palestinian village of Al Sawiya on Road 60, which also leads to the Yitzhar settlement in the West Bank.

PALESTINIANS ARE WATCHING WITH FEAR AND ANXIETY AS SETTLEMENTS EXPAND, AND AS THE NUMBER OF ATTACKS ON PALESTINIANS INCREASE AS MORE SETTLERS COME

the brink. United Nations officials documented at least 22 settler-led attacks and vandalism from January 26 to January 30, while Palestinian officials said the real number was roughly seven times higher. More than 70 settler attacks occurred throughout January, UN officials said — a rate that, if maintained throughout the year, would be the highest in at least a half-decade. That capped a January in which the Israeli army reported at least 59 Palestinian attacks in the West Bank, nearly twice as high as two months ago, causing several injuries but

killing none. At least 35 Palestinians were killed during the same period, sometimes during those attacks. At least two were killed by civilian settlers, in circumstances that Israeli officials described as self-defence, but that Palestinians said was unclear. Violence from both Israelis and Palestinians has long been routine in the territory, which was occupied by Israel during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, in which Israel defeated several Arab states that were mobilising against it. Hundreds of Israeli settlements have since been built there, impeding Palestinian hopes of sovereignty, and contributing to the creation of a two-tier legal system that tries settlers in civilian courts and Palestinians in military ones. But now there are expectations of an even greater surge. Young settler activists, who believe the land in the West Bank has been promised to them by God, have been galvanised by the presence of their allies in the new government. New groups of young Palestinian fighters have meanwhile emerged in response to the entrenchment of Israel’s occupation and the perceived corruption of their own leadership. A surge of violence last month highlighted how ripe the situation was for further escalation. — New York Times

Impacts of social media on campaigns

Undoubtedly using social media stands as one of the most influential factors to change public attitudes, especially when hiring celebrities, public figures or bloggers as influencers or ambassadors for certain public campaigns. On the local front, it could work as a very effective tool for communication campaigns, change public attitudes and communicate direct messages.

This is verified by a report released by the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI) in 2019, stating that 94 per cent of Omanis own or use social media accounts where they spend up to six hours daily. This indicates a possible commendable impact of using social media in the campaign.

A recent example at the local front, reflecting the influential role of social media influencers is during Shaheen Cyclone that hit some parts of Oman in October 2021. The influencers made remarkable efforts to urge public to join hands in organising clean-up campaigns in the affected areas, support the affected families clean and renovate their homes.

Further, they organised public fund-raising campaigns calling corporates, NGOs and individuals to contribute funds and household appliances for these families and individuals. Their campaigns on social media have been conducted for weeks and months.

The different initiatives of social media influencers backed the government's efforts to bring back normalcy in the affected areas and support the needy families. Another example is "Oman vs Covid-19" media campaign that was introduced by the Government Communication Centre during Coronavirus pandemic (2020-2021).

Various social media platforms and traditional media jointly implemented campaigns for two years. These platforms were dedicated to promote awareness about Covid-19 virus, update public on the progress of the efforts made by international and local authorities to combat the virus, publicise health advices, directions and precautionary measures.



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A REPORT BY THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR STATISTICS AND INFORMATION, STATES THAT 94 PER CENT OF OMANIS OWN OR USE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS WHERE THEY SPEND UP TO SIX HOURS A DAY

These campaigns served as reliable official sources of information and means of communication with the public. On the local front, similar national media and communication campaigns have been conducted and proved successful to change public attitude in the Sultanate of Oman. One of these campaigns is the "No Plastic Bags", which was conducted by the Environment Authority.

This year-long awareness campaign was kicked off in December 2020 based on the decision to ban single-use plastic shopping bags in the country with effect from January 1, 2021. The key objectives behind this campaign is to change the public attitude towards using environment-friendly shopping bags.

Besides, the primary objective is to save and protect the environment from plastic bags. Therefore, the public, traders and shopping centres were obliged to comply with this decision and shoppers were urged to use their own reusable shopping bags.

Accordingly, whoever is violating the ban will be fined a minimum of RO 100 (\$259) and maximum of RO 2,000 (\$5,180) fine, which will be doubled if the violation is repeated.

The campaign's promotions and communication messages were found in almost all traditional and new media channels in addition to public awareness roadshows held at different venues around the country.

Over a year, different awareness sessions and activities like distribution of environment-friendly bags on various occasions and events, media campaigns, radio and TV talks were conducted to promote awareness about the impacts of single-use plastic bags on environment and health.

As a result of this campaign, a decision was issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to ban the imports of bags with effect from January 2023.

This decision comes in line with the ministry's plan to regulate the market activities related to the import of harmful products to the environment. Therefore, anyone importing plastic bags, will be imposed a fine of RO 1,000 (\$2,597), which is doubled if the violation is repeated.

A WALK IN THE SNOW



A boy walks in snow at a camp for internally displaced Syrians in the Khirbet al Joz area, in the west of the northwestern Idlib province near the border with Turkey, on Sunday. – AFP

How to transform African agriculture

SAFIA BOLY AND OMID KASSIRI

The Covid-19 pandemic, compounded by supply-chain disruptions and surging inflation, has highlighted the fragilities of Africa's food systems, leading to a 60 per cent increase in hunger across the continent in 2020 alone. And climate change, which is expected to degrade freshwater ecosystems and arable lands, rendering vast areas of Africa uninhabitable, will only make things worse.

While the pandemic and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated global food insecurity, throwing millions into extreme poverty and reversing decades of progress, the situation is even more dire in lower-income African countries. The continent's population has reached 1.4 billion and could double by 2050, while agricultural productivity, despite improvement, remains significantly below global benchmarks. This has forced governments to rely more on food imports, pushing up prices.

But there are some bright spots. Ethiopia, Morocco, and Rwanda, for example, have managed to boost agricultural productivity by defining a vision for their domestic industries, bringing together public and private stakeholders, building the necessary

WITH SOARING FOOD PRICES, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND RAPID POPULATION GROWTH UNDERMINING FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA, THE CONTINENT IS IN DIRE NEED OF AN AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION



The continent's population has reached 1.4 billion and could double by 2050.

infrastructure, and engaging in continuous learning and adaptation. As a result, these countries have increased agricultural output, improved food security, raised farmers' incomes, and strengthened local food systems' resilience to external shocks. Consider Ethiopia, where domestic yields have increased by 76 per cent, and total food production has risen by 50 per cent, since the establishment of its Agricultural Transformation Agency in 2010. According to

ATA estimates, agricultural reforms have saved 150,000 people from starving to death, reduced the number of undernourished Ethiopians by 11.5 million, and lifted roughly 286,000 people out of poverty.

Similarly, Morocco's Plan Maroc Vert (Green Morocco Plan), launched in 2008 to modernise domestic farming and to promote sustainable economic growth, has revitalised the agriculture sector. The Agricultural Development Agency, set up to support the

plan's implementation, estimates that agricultural GDP grew 5.25 per cent a year from 2008-18, faster than the economy as a whole (3.8 per cent). This resulted in a 117 per cent rise in agricultural exports and 342,000 new jobs. Watershed management has also improved, with drip-irrigation systems quadrupling to 542,000 hectares. Since 2004, Rwanda has been developing and implementing its Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA). The International Food Policy Research Institute estimates that every dollar that the government spends on agriculture corresponds to a \$2.05 gain in GDP, implying that the programme delivered \$730 million in economic gains between 2018 and 2021, helping to lift 1.1 million people out of poverty. Rwanda's Strategic Plan has also improved watershed management and soil conservation.

What these three countries have in common is a deep understanding of the challenges ahead, a clear vision for meeting them, and a strong commitment to developing the effective governance mechanisms needed

to implement solutions.

Building on these examples, we have identified four key principles that could help other African countries successfully transform their own agriculture sectors.

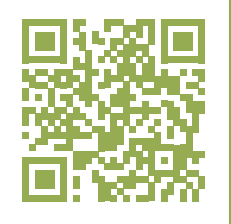
For starters, consistent planning is critical. Governments must establish clear mandates, spell out their priorities, align policies, and mobilise resources.

In Rwanda, the PSTA's mandate was to use market-led growth to overhaul the country's largely subsistence-based agriculture. In preparing the latest version of its plan, known as PSTA 4, the government worked with development partners to devise a forward-looking strategy that aligned with Rwanda's commitments under the African Union's Malabo Declaration and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. PSTA 4 focuses on encouraging private-sector investment and shifting to higher-value agricultural commodities to increase profits and capture productivity gains, in line with the vision that the Rwandan government set out nearly 20 years ago.

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Muscat Stables crowned youth champions

Z A M Z A M S N A T C H E S W O M E N ' S T I T L E



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 5

Ahmed bin Said al Saeedi was crowned the endurance race champion for the junior and youth category for the 2022-23 while Zamzam bint Hamad al Hasaniyah snatched women's title for endurance race for a distance of 100 km at Al Mahamid Village for Endurance race in the Wilayat of Barka.

With participation of 44 horses, including 29 in the junior and youth race and 15 horses in the women's race, the competition also included 40 km and 80 km qualifying races.

The race witnessed exciting competition for 100 km, divided into four stages, where 12 horses were able to pass the four stages.

The first stage was given a white colour for a distance of 30 km, the second and third stages were given green for a distance of 25 km, and the fourth stage was given a yellow colour for a distance of 20 km.

In the junior and youth race for 100 km, eight horses were able to reach the finish line out of 29.



Ahmed al Saeedi on 'Ankara' of Muscat Stables claimed the title, coached by Hamad al Saeedi. In second place was 'Chandra', ridden by Khaled al Balushi, owned by Ahmed al Balushi and coached by Mohammed al Balushi. 'Muscat' owned by Muscat Stables, ridden by Mohammed al Saeedi and trained by Hamad al Saeedi finished third. 'Bahgaht Muscat' claimed fourth led by Mohammed al Saeedi.

In the women's section, high competition was witnessed in the 100 km race with three horses reaching the finish line out of 15 horses.

'A3AH' won the title, led by Zamzam bint Hamad al Hasaniyah, owned and coached by

Mohammed bin Saleh al Balushi. In second place was Elaf bint Qabeel al Zadjali on 'Al Qadah', owned by Ahmed bin Abdullah al Mayoub, and coached by Hamad bin Ali al Balushi. 'Asater Muscat', led by Ghadir bint Ahmed al Balushi owned by Muscat Stables, under the coaching of Hamad bin Saeed al Saeedi finished third.

The federation had set general conditions for participating in the 100 km race.

The age of the horse was set above six years with the horse registered with the Omani Equestrian Federation. The heartbeat was 64 beats per minute and the minimum speed was 14 km per hour.

Oman beach soccer team gears up for AFC Asian Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 5

With less than 40 days for AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2023, Oman beach soccer team is gearing up for a good show in the forthcoming Asian assignment which will take place in Pattaya, Thailand from March 16 to 26.

The national team players are busy in the ongoing abroad camp in Saudi Arabia which started on Sunday and will run until Saturday. The one week external gathering in Jizan city will feature three international friendly matches against Saudi Arabia.

Oman are pitted in Group D besides Palestine, Kuwait and Kyrgyz Republic. Hosts Thailand will vie for the title as they face 2006 champions Bahrain, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia in Group A.

Two-time winners Islamic Republic of Iran will play against Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan placed in Group B. Defending champions Japan will defend their title as they will play



against Lebanon, China PR and Indonesia teams in Group C.

The top three sides in the Asian event will join hosts United Arab Emirates at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2023.

Coach Talib Hilal's men played two crucial preparatory matches against Iran, the head coach as part of the team's preparations

schedule for the Asian assignment. In the first friendly match, Iran managed to end the game on a winning note by 3-2 in penalties while Oman players registered a 4-3 win over Iran in the following game.

After the preparatory matches against Iran, the head coach of the national beach soccer

team said the team earned the maximum technical output from both warm-up games. "The two friendly matches against Iran were very tough and the technical performance was very strong. I am satisfied with the show in both games and looking for a better show in the Asian finals," Talib said.

Responding to the team's show in the second match, he responded that the performance was much better. "Iran team is a very strong team in Asia and ranked as first team in Asia and third in the world level. We managed to implement the right tactics in the game and players showed a solid show. This game will encourage the team to

do much better in the Asian finals," he said.

The experienced national coach appreciated the efforts by the new faces during the camp. "I am happy with the new selections and they made their presence in the team. I am sure they will deliver their best in the near future," he concluded.



Triple Dutch at women’s world cyclo-cross

HOOGERHEIDE, Netherlands: Fem van Empel led a Dutch one-two-three in winning the women’s title at the cyclo-cross world championships on Saturday.

With compatriot and defending champion Marianne Vos out injured, Van Empel took full advantage to lead home Puck Pieterse and Lucinda Brand.

On a memorable day for the Dutch, the home side had seven riders in the first eight places — only Italy’s Silvia Persico in fourth broke the stranglehold.

The turning point of the race came on the fourth of seven laps when Pieterse crashed, losing control of her front wheel on a fast corner.

Van Empel then accelerated away to defeat fellow 20-year-old Pieterse.

“I put the gas on when I realised that Puck had slipped,” said European champion Van Empel whose road power trumped the technicality of mountain bike specialist Pieterse.

Jumbo-Visma team leader Van Empel has now won 14 of 22 cyclo-cross races this winter. Pieterse finished all her 19 races on the



Dutch Fem van Empel reacts as she crosses the finish line of the 2023 UCI Women Elite Cyclo-Cross World Championships during the World Championships in Hoogerheide, on February, 4 2023. — AFP

podium.

On Sunday, the sport’s biggest stars Mathieu van der Poel and

Wout Van Aert will clash for the men’s title.

Van der Poel, the four-time

cyclo-cross world champion and the winner of three road classics, is on home mud in Hoogerheide in

the Netherlands.

Belgian van Aert, who won the green points jersey in last year’s

Tour de France, has won the world title three times.

The reigning champion, Tom Pidcock of Britain is skipping the event to attend a training camp in Spain, preparing for the road-racing season.

Van Aert and Van der Poel have met 10 times on the mud already this season. All the races have been close, but the Belgian has come out on top six times.

“It will probably be 50/50. It will all depend on the form on the day. Until then, I’m going to rest well so that I have my best legs of the season in a week,” Van der Poel said last Sunday, after he won the World Cup race in Besancon, France, where Van Aert did not compete.

Barring mechanical problems, so frequent in the sport, it is hard to see who could disrupt the fight between Van der Poel and Van Aert.

Their strongest rivals are a trio of Belgians, Laurens Sweeck, Eli Iserbyt and Michael Vanthourenhout, who between them won the first six races as the big two both skipped the start of the World Cup season. — AFP

YALLA SHABAB TROUNCE MAJEES CC

MUSCAT: Yalla Shabab beat Majees CC by 108 runs in the Premier Division powered by Muscat Pharmacy of the Oman Cricket Domestic League 2022-23.

Putting Yalla Shabab to bat first , Majees started off well picking 2 wickets in the powerplay. Hannan Rizwan (43 of 45; 7x4) set a base for the Shabab batsmen to put up a formidable total. Wasim Ali (101 of 94; 6x4,4x6) and Khalid Kail (101 of 107; 11x4,1x6) stitched a well knitted and composed 207 run partnership, both remaining not out taking Yalla Shabab to 285



Khalid Kail , Mohd Zahid and Wasim Ali – Yalla Shabab

in 50 overs. Sahil Shaik bagged 2/29 for Majees CC. In response, Majees CC was in a puddle as none of their batsmen could stand ground against the Yalla Shabab bowlers other than stalwart Zeeshan Maqsood (83 of 108; 2x4,5x6) who single-handedly drive Majees to fight for the chase. Majees CC bundled down for 177 in 42.5 overs courtesy Muhammed Zahid (3/35) , Wasim Ali (2/29) and Zikria Islam (2/30). Yalla Shabab register their 4th win out of 5 games while Majees CC are yet to register a win in the league.

Hazlewood to miss first India test, McDonald hopeful of Green return



AUSTRALIA: The Australian cricket team’s injury concerns continue to mount before their first test against India with seasoned fast bowler Josh Hazlewood ruled out of next week’s opener in Nagpur, which begins on Thursday.

Hazlewood, 32, has been struggling with an Achilles problem sustained during Australia’s test against South Africa in Sydney last month and said on Sunday he will miss at least the first test of the four-match series. Left-arm quick Mitchell Starc has already been ruled out of the opener while all-rounder Cameron Smith is doubtful, with both picking up finger injuries.

Hazlewood, who did not bowl during Australia’s training camp on the outskirts of Bengaluru, is now racing to be fit for the second test in Delhi, which starts on February 17.

“It’s still lingering from the (Sydney) Test match,” said Hazlewood, who has featured in only four tests in the last two years due to a string of injuries. “Not sure about the first test. It’s still a few days away but it’s sneaking up pretty quickly.

“Second one is obviously straight after as well. So, we’ll play it by ear over the next week and next few days... It’s been frustrating playing one Test at a time. It always feels the hardest Test to play. “They sort of get easier as they go and you get to the other side, the end of the series, it gets hard again. Hopefully I can string a couple together on this tour”

Australia coach Andrew McDonald remains hopeful Green can feature in the first test against India, saying he still had progress to make before he could be considered for the series opener.

Green damaged his right index finger during the Boxing Day test win over South Africa in Melbourne and was only given clearance to return to training by his doctor on Monday following surgery.

The 23-year-old bowled with soft balls for 30 minutes in the nets at the Australian camp before doing an hour’s batting practice.

“He’s made some significant steps forward in the last couple of days, probably to my surprise. There’s still an outside chance that, everything going well, he might be on the team sheet,” McDonald told reporters.

With Green unlikely to be able to bowl in the first test, captain Pat Cummins acknowledged the make-up of Australia’s bowling line-up remained unclear.

“I wouldn’t say (picking two spinners) is a given,” he said. “It’s very conditions dependent, particularly this first test, so once we get to Nagpur, we’ll see.

“I think sometimes, talking about a couple of spinners, you forget how good a lot of our fast bowlers have been in all conditions.

“We’ll obviously pick the bowlers that we think can take 20 wickets — how are we going to split that up I’m not 100 per cent sure yet.” — Reuters

Malnati leads as high winds halt play at Pebble Beach

SAN FRANCISCO: American Peter Malnati was atop the leaderboard when gusting winds halted play at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am on Saturday, with US PGA Tour officials now expecting the tournament to finish on Monday.

Only a couple of players had completed the third round when gusting winds forced organisers to suspend play because balls wouldn’t hold on at least one green.

A planned resumption never materialised as the winds sweeping in from the Pacific Ocean continued blow.

Malnati admitted he had mixed feelings when play was halted.

He had six birdies through 12 holes on the par-72 Pebble Beach Golf Links, one of three courses in use over the first three rounds along with par-72 Spyglass Hill and par-71 Monterey Peninsula.

“I got to play eight holes before the weather got bad, so that was nice,” said Malnati, who teed off on 10 and birdied the 11th, 12th and 13th.

“Then made the turn and made three birdies into the wind on one,



David Lingmerth (left) and Gareth Bale (right) react to Jerry Yang’s (not pictured) putt on the fifth hole during the third round of the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am golf tournament at Pebble Beach Golf Links. — USA Today Sports

two and three.

“Honestly, like where I was, I was on the fourth green, I was getting ready to go play five, six, seven into the teeth of that wind, so who knows.

“I wish we were still out there playing for the sake of the tournament, but for me maybe it was a good break getting out of

there at the time that I did.”

Malnati was 12-under when play was halted, two strokes clear of Joseph Bramlett and Keith Mitchell. Bramlett was through 13 holes and Mitchell through 10.

Officials said the amateur competition, which attracts such celebrity golfers as Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron

Rodgers and former Wales captain Gareth Bale, would be shortened to 54 holes.

PGA Tour pros will complete the third round on Sunday and after the cut — made after three rounds rather than two because of the three courses in use — would begin the final round. — AFP

STAN’S THE MAN AS VETERAN CLAIMS DAVIS CUP VICTORY FOR SWITZERLAND

PARIS: Stan Wawrinka took Switzerland to the Davis Cup Finals group stage on Saturday, winning a rollercoaster deciding clash against Germany, just weeks shy of his 38th birthday.

Three-time Grand Slam title winner Wawrinka, who helped the Swiss to the Davis Cup title alongside Roger Federer in 2014, defeated Daniel Altmaier 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 as his country triumphed 3-2 in their qualifying tie.

Former world number three Wawrinka, now down at 135 after a long spell rebuilding his career following two foot surgeries, was playing in the tournament for the first time in eight years having made his debut in 2004.

By contrast Altmaier, 13 years younger, was making his Davis Cup debut in Trier.

Wawrinka, who turns 38 next month, had lost his singles opener on Friday in straight sets to Alexander Zverev.

He was on the losing side again earlier on Saturday when he and Dominic Stricker were beaten in the doubles 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-4 by Tim Puetz and Andreas Mies.

However, Marc-Andrea Huesler then stunned world number 14 Zverev 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) to bring Switzerland level at 2-2, setting the stage for Wawrinka’s moment in the spotlight.

“I’m happy that I won one point and the last one was the most important,” said Wawrinka.

“We have a great team. They’ve been building this team for the last few years. I was happy to come back if they needed me.”

The United States, who have won the 123-year-old tournament on a record 32 occasions, also booked their place in September’s group stage by seeing off Uzbekistan in Tashkent.

Experienced doubles pair Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram cantered to a 6-2, 6-4 win over Sanjar Fayziev and Sergey Fomini in just 52 minutes.

“I was so excited to see Raj and Austin play today,” said US captain David Nainkin whose team were 2-0 up overnight.

FREIGHT TRAINS

“They came out really sharp and got the early break in the first set. After that it was like two freight trains, there was no stopping them.”

Serbia shrugged off the absence



of Novak Djokovic to comfortably defeat a Norway team missing world number four Casper Ruud.

Ahead 2-0 after Friday’s opening singles in Oslo, Nikola Cacic and Filip Krajinovic saw off Viktor Durasovic and Herman Hoeyeraal 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 for the key point.

France, the 10-time champions, made the next round with a win over Hungary.

Ugo Humbert, making his tournament debut this weekend, sealed the tie with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Fabian Marozsan in Tatabanya in the deciding singles.

France were given a scare when Hungary surprisingly claimed the doubles rubber as Marozsan and Mate Valkusz defeated Nicolas Mahut and Arthur Rinderknech 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) before Adrian Mannarino levelled at 2-2 with a straight sets win over Marton Fucsovics.

“I am so proud of this team,” said Humbert.

Sweden also made it through to the September group stage with a 3-1 win over Bosnia.

The Swedes led 2-0 overnight in Stockholm before Bosnia cut the deficit when Mirza Basic and Tomislav Brkic downed Andre Goransson and Elias Ymer in straight sets.

World number 60 Mikael Ymer sealed the tie with a 6-1, 1-6, 6-3 win over Damir Dzumhur.

Britain defeated Colombia 3-1 when Cameron Norrie edged Nicolas Mejia 6-4, 6-4 for his second singles win of the weekend.

Croatia, the champions in 2005 and 2018, are 2-0 up on Austria in Rijeka after the first day with Borna Coric seeing off Dennis Novak 6-3, 7-5 and Borna Gojo getting the better of Dominic Thiem 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

Chile are 1-1 at home to Kazakhstan, Belgium lead South Korea 2-0, the Netherlands have a 2-0 advantage over Slovakia, Finland and Argentina are 1-1 while the Czech Republic are 2-0 up on Portugal.

There are 12 ties this weekend with the winners securing places in the group stage in September alongside defending champions Canada, 2022 runners-up Australia and wild cards Italy and Spain.

The eight best teams then go through to the finals stage in Malaga in November. — AFP

Bol clocks fastest ever indoor 500m at Boston GP

NEW YORK: Olympic and world 400m hurdles medallist Femke Bol opened her season with a bang on Saturday, clocking the fastest women’s indoor 500m ever with a time of 1min 05.63sec at the Boston Indoor Grand Prix.

The Dutch runner became the first woman to break 1:06 at the distance, breaking the previous world best of 1:06.31 set by Russian Olesya Krasnomovets-Forsheva on January 7, 2006.

In other results at the World Athletics Indoor Tour Gold event, world record-holder Grant Holloway won the 60m

hurdles in a world-leading 7.38sec -- stretching his win streak to 52 straight races.

There were world-leading performances for American Heather MacLean (4:23.42) and Britain’s Neil Gourley (3:52.84) in the women’s and men’s miles.

And Noah Lyles, the 200m outdoor world champion, clocked a personal best of 6.51sec to win the 60m, edging compatriot Trayvon Bromell who was credited with the same time. Ghana’s Benjamin Azamati was third in 6.62sec.

“I’ve been waiting on this for a long

time,” said Lyles, who said improvement in the 60m is a stepping stone as he targets both the 200m and 100m this season.

“This is my journey to the 100 -- I’ve got to be in it,” he said. “We’re not just coming for the 200 world record. We’re coming for all the world records.”

Bol admitted that in the first race of the season, at an unfamiliar distance, she wasn’t sure if she was on pace for a world best.

“Indoors, it’s the first race, you have no idea at the end,” said the 22-year-old, who is coming off a stellar 2022 season that saw her win European titles in the 400m

hurdles, 400m flat and 4x400m relay.

She also won 400m hurdles silver at the World Championships and bronze at the Olympic Games in Tokyo.

“You train hard but you know when you start competing. I’m happy to go like this. I think it’s even faster than we expected.”

Jamaica’s Leah Anderson was a distant second in 1:08.34.

Bol said she’d been contemplating testing herself over 500m for some time.

“I think it’s never a bad thing to run a bit longer because I hope the 400 will feel a bit easier then,” she said. -- AFP





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CBO green-lights HSBC Oman, Sohar International merger

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 5

HSBC Bank Oman and Sohar International announced on Sunday that they have received the approval of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) for their merger proposal.

The merger is expected to be completed in the second half of 2023 when approvals are expected from regulators and shareholders in the two banks.

In previous disclosures, the two banks disclosed the details of their merger plan and the obligations to which the two banks are committed to shareholders and customers as well.

The two banks said in separate



regulatory announcements that all assets and liabilities of HSBC Oman will be transferred to Bank Sohar International.

HSBC Oman will be dissolved as a legal entity upon completion of the merger and its shares will be cancelled.

HSBC Bank Oman had further

stated in its filing: “HSBC Oman shareholders will be offered to consider rating HSBC Oman with a 1.0x book value, with this consideration consisting of Sohar International shares with an option for HSBC Oman shareholders to choose to receive the fee in cash, provided that it does not exceed

the maximum cash payment you pay.

“The book value of each bank is calculated later (which is currently expected at the end of the first quarter of 2023) before banks invite their shareholders to vote on the merger at the Extraordinary General Assembly Meeting.”

Oman, Saudi Arabia ink pact to cooperate in ICT infra sector

RIYADH: Oman and Saudi Arabia signed on Saturday an executive programme for cooperation in the field of communications and information technology infrastructure. It builds on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the two sides last November.

The signing of the programme came against the backdrop of Oman’s participation in the international technical conference “LEAP”, which is set to open in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, on Monday.

The programme aims to take advantage of the geographical location of the two brotherly countries and the submarine cables that pass through them. It also seeks to create a common work environment to enhance cooperation in the field of infrastructure for communications



and information technology services, and high-speed digital connectivity for data exchange.

The executive programme provides for conducting a detailed study of the options for implementing digital connectivity,

the expected economic effects and the investment cost of the connectivity options through investment entities and licensed companies between the two parties, and determining the procedures in negotiating with

investors and service providers of data centers, hosting and global cloud services that target the regional presence to maximise the benefit of this digital connectivity.

The executive programme was signed by Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Omani Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology; Eng Bassam bin Abdullah al Bassam, Under-Secretary of the Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Infrastructure, in the presence of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Oman’s Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and his Saudi counterpart Eng Abdullah bin Amer al Sawaha. — ONA

New fiscal tool to monitor Oman’s financial stability

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has begun publishing for the first time the International Investment Position (IIP) of the Sultanate of Oman – a new fiscal metric that serves as a balance sheet of a country’s external assets and liabilities.

Oman’s maiden IIP was featured in the 2021 Annual Report of the Central Bank, which was released last week. Commenting on the significance of this new financial indicator, the apex bank noted: “The IIP of Oman is being published for the first time, marking a major milestone in transparency and data dissemination.”

Experts say the IIP can be used to measure the degree of financial openness of a country and to provide indications on the sustainability of its external debt, encompassing both government and private debt. As such, it is also a helpful tool for monitoring financial stability.

According to the Central Bank, foreign liabilities have grown in recent years relative to foreign assets held by residents, resulting in an increase in net liabilities during the 2017-2021 timeframe.

“The difference has increased over the last five years to reach RO 12.800 billion in 2021,” the apex bank stated. “Growth in the stock of liabilities can be explained by financial account developments, specifically the issuance of debt securities by the government to finance its current and capital expenditures. Apart from this, inward FDI has also seen a steady flow during this period, which



BALANCE SHEET: ‘Publication of Oman’s International Investment Position (IIP) in line with commitment to financial openness’ – CBO

attest to the sustained trust of foreign investors in Oman’s economy.”

Significantly, the overall stock of foreign assets increased by 7.8 per cent to reach RO 36.575 billion by the end of 2021, up from RO 33.936 million a year earlier.

Contributing to the uptick was an increase in the growth of the overseas investment portfolio of residents, it said.

On the other hand, the stock of foreign liabilities increased 9.7 per cent to reach RO 49.375 billion at the end of 2021, up from RO 45.021 billion a year earlier. This increase was attributable to FDI inflows and debt securities, which grew by 9.6 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively.

“As a result of these developments, the net borrowing IIP position continued to widen, reaching RO 12.8 billion by the end of 2021, up from RO 11.058 billion, albeit lower as a percentage of GDP,” the Central Bank added.

Indian regulator reassures investors after Adani rout

MUMBAI: India’s securities regulator said on Saturday that markets were stable and protected from further volatility, following a phenomenal share rout that hit the business empire of tycoon Gautam Adani.

The combined market cap of Adani Group’s listed companies has collapsed by around \$120 billion — about half of the conglomerate’s value — since US short-seller Hindenburg Research released an explosive report in late January.

It accused Adani of accounting fraud and artificially boosting its share prices, calling it a “brazen

stock manipulation and accounting fraud scheme” and “the largest con in corporate history”.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) said in a statement that India’s financial market had “demonstrated ongoing stability and is continuing to function in a transparent, fair and efficient manner”.

It added that it had “put in place a set of well defined, publicly available surveillance measures” for addressing excessive volatility in specific stocks, without naming the Adani conglomerate.

Adani dismissed the allegations in the Hindenburg report as



Adani logo and decreasing stock graph is seen in this illustration. — Reuters

a “maliciously mischievous” reputational attack and issued a 413-page statement asserting its claims were “nothing but a lie”.

Hindenburg said in response Adani had failed to answer most of the questions raised in its report.

The group’s founder has seen his fortune plummet sharply, dumping him from third to 17th on the real-time Forbes rich list.

His operations have expanded at breakneck speed, with Adani Enterprises shares soaring more than 1,000 per cent over the past five years.

Finance Minister Nirmala

Sitharaman on Friday insisted Indian markets were well regulated and that the controversy would not affect investor confidence.

Earlier this week Adani cancelled a \$2.5 billion stock sale meant to help reduce debt levels — long a concern — restore confidence and broaden its shareholder base.

Big banks including Credit Suisse and Citigroup have stopped accepting Adani bonds as collateral for loans to private clients, according to Bloomberg News, fuelling worries about how the conglomerate will raise fresh funds. — AFP

Bank Muscat Premier banking holds customer networking event



MUSCAT: Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking from Bank Muscat recently hosted a special networking event in Sur, in line with the bank's customer-centric vision and commitment to further strengthen its partnership and communication channels with its customers.

The events, which were attended by Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager — Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, and other bank officials, saw excellent participation from a large number of Premier Banking customers.

They follow recent customer meets in Duqm, Nizwa and Suhar, which were organised by the bank to strengthen its partnership with customers and get their feedback regarding new services, products and offers.

On the occasion, Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, thanked Asalah and Al Jawhar customers for their whole-hearted support and confidence in Bank Muscat's various high-tech services and products, which are backed by its customer-centric vision. He said that promptly responding to customer feedback and keeping pace with global banking trends were key to Bank Muscat's continued leadership in the financial services sector in Oman.

He added that the bank would further work towards realising customer aspirations and expectations in line so as to continue providing a world-class banking experience.

Customers having a monthly salary of RO 5,000 or those who maintain a savings deposit of RO 30,000 are eligible for Asalah Priority Banking and enjoy a range of unrivalled benefits including access to a team of dedicated Relationship Managers, 39 Asalah Centres across Oman and a dedicated 24/7 Asalah Call Centre. Asalah customers also enjoy access to an

integrated wealth management platform that allows them to invest in global asset classes through a single touchpoint. They also get the latest updates and reports on local and international investment opportunities.

Other exclusive lifestyle benefits include the Asalah Entertainer App, which has more than 3,500 'Buy 1, Get 1 Free' offers in Oman and at international destinations as well as rewards of indulgence and merchant discounts across fine dining, entertainment, leisure, and the beauty and wellness segments. The Asalah Debit Card offers access to 50 lounges worldwide and has a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO 1,000.

Meanwhile, Asalah Visa Signature credit cardholders can enjoy airport lounge access at more than 1,000 lounges worldwide, and a 24/7 global concierge service. The Credit Card also offers 1 per cent cashback on purchases as well as free multi-trip travel insurance for customers and their direct family members.

Customers of Al Jawhar Privilege Banking are eligible for exclusive 2-for-1 deals on food; entertainment and shopping that are available through the 'xperience with the Entertainer' app on their smartphones. They also have access to a higher ATM withdrawal limit of RO 800. Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Cardholders offers access to 25 premium lounges around the world in addition to the lounges at Muscat airport. Al Jawhar Visa Platinum Credit Cardholders can enjoy the "best in class" complimentary travel insurance and 1% cash back on all local and international spends.

For more details about Al Jawhar Privilege Banking, please visit <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/premier-banking/Pages/al-jawhar-privilege-banking.aspx>.

Sidrah leadership programme marks completion of inaugural edition

MUSCAT: Sidrah, a youth leadership programme for young women ages 18 to 25, has marked the completion of its inaugural edition with its concluding celebration. Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, graced the occasion which showcased the journey so far of Sidrah and the enriching learning experience of the girls spread over six months.

Co-designed and co-run by Lahunna Oman and Outward Bound Oman, Sidrah was launched in Oman in June 2022 to serve the unique needs of young Omani women across the Sultanate of Oman, creating a balance between theoretical concepts and pragmatic exercises. Its mission is to prepare the next generation in creative problem solving, leading change, character development, service learning, and civic engagement by reinforcing our Omani values, social responsibility and citizenship.

Shatha bint Salim al Maskiriyah, Lahunna's Founder, said: "As a natural extension of Lahunna's objectives, the first edition of Sidrah helped more than 40 young women build a stronger sense of self and purpose by developing their abilities to critically think, collaborate and solve problems, as well as harnessing their emotional intelligence to network and communicate effectively."

She added, "The Sidrah women had access to mentors in various



fields which not only provided the young women a pathway towards expanded options for their careers and lives, but also personally gave me hope that the next generation can create a better future by being agents of change. Our participants learnt that they do not require championing nor empowering — they have all it takes to excel. I can't wait to see how much more they will achieve from here with the boost of confidence they have now."

Mark Evans, OBO's Executive Director, said, "We have been privileged to continue our decade-plus journey of making an impact on youth in Oman. One aim of our courses is to generate and develop the next generation of future leaders for the nation, our partner Lahunna Oman complimented this programme in Phase II by catering to the intellectual needs



of the young women to cultivate their leadership skills and create an expansive network of connections to expand their professional horizons. The development they have shown throughout the programme has been fantastic to witness — and a tribute to the careful planning, in-depth and

continuous observation that went into the programme by Lahunna Oman."

Sidrah employed a two-phased approach. Phase I focused on experiential learning, held over four days in June 2022 at Outward Bound Oman's Jabal Akhdar Training Centre. Phase II was an intensive six months of coaching and mentoring represented by NYAA in Singapore, Protiviti and Identity. The programme was further complemented with guest speakers who were CEOs, Parliamentarians, academics, industry experts and entrepreneurs.

Gratitude was also extended to Oman Shell, Sohar Freezone & Port, VISA, OMRAN, and Sabco Media (Al Wisal, Merge 104.8 and Virgin Radio Oman) for their generous support and sponsorship.

OAB CUSTOMERS CAN UPDATE PERSONAL INFO ON OAB BANKING APP

MUSCAT: As part of OAB's commitment to improve its customers' banking experience, Oman Arab Bank is pleased to announce that all OAB customers will now be able to update their personal information directly from their OAB mobile banking app.

The process is simple as customers can now log in to their mobile app, click on 'Update Customer Information' and complete all the required fields to update their personal banking information. The new functionality comes as the bank continues to increase the number of services available online for its customers.

OAB created this new functionality with customers' needs in mind, ensuring that updating their personal banking information is as seamless as possible. Thanks to this new feature, OAB customers are no longer required to visit their nearest OAB branch to update their personal banking information.

Rashad al Shaikh, Head of Retail Banking at OAB commented on the new functionality: "With a laser sharp focus on delivering a consistently superior customer experience, we are committed



to launching new features and services that make our customers lives easier. This latest release enables most of our customers to update their personal information on-the-go via the OAB Online Banking app without visiting the branch." This new functionality is an integral part of

Bank's digital transformation journey with an increasing number of services available online or on the OAB mobile banking app.

The bank has been leading in the provision of online services, keeping up with digital trends in the banking sector to offer its customers the best possible banking experience. From opening bank accounts to applying for new loans and topping up their existing personal loans and now updating their personal information on-the-go, OAB customers have access to a wide range of services directly from their mobile app, enhancing their banking experience with OAB.

OAB has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the Sultanate of Oman. Today, OAB operates a nationwide network of 47 conventional branches and 131 conventional ATMs locations across the Sultanate of Oman.

OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App. Customers can now digitally benefit from several other services, directly from the convenience of their mobile phones.

NBO marks 50th anniversary with sustainable growth, progress

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently marked its 50th anniversary with a series of initiatives and events bringing together clients, team members and other stakeholders.

Ever since its inception in 1973 as the first local bank in Oman that introduced banking services, the customer-centric NBO has been at the forefront of creating value, smart solutions and ushering socio-economic development.

The bank highlighted its contributions and the opportunities it has unlocked, benefitting not only its customers but also the entire nation during three dedicated events.

With the presence of the bank's Board of Directors, the first event witnessed the recognition of

65 of the longest-serving team members with 30-plus years of contributions. The second event was dedicated to celebrate with the bank's partners. As for the third, close to 20 small and medium enterprises were invited, and over 1,000 team members and their families participated to mark this milestone. During these celebrations, participants enjoyed a virtual showcase of NBO's 50-year journey and future plans, which was produced as the biggest digital show of its kind in Oman.

Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer of National Bank of Oman, said, "Ever since our establishment five decades ago, we have always been driving sustainable growth and progress by making our customer experiences



an absolute priority. Being a customer-centric bank has enabled us to continuously address the rapidly and ever-changing needs of our clients, while we have been expanding our array of services and integrating digital technologies

into our operations. With the renewed renaissance under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, we renew our promise to our customers to continue nurturing our partnership and ensure it soars to new heights."

Putting its customers at the core of its operations, NBO entered a partnership with the telecom provider Vodafone, to further facilitate the bank's services and digital solutions, while both entities will also cooperate in other initiatives benefitting customers and team members alike. In addition, the bank also signed an agreement with Abraj Energy Services, an integrated energy company in Oman. The bank also partnered with Ottu, a Kuwait-based company offering Computer Integrated Solutions, to further streamline online payment processes for the bank's customers.

Creating value that feeds into the overall progress of Oman, NBO also announced other initiatives. One of the initiatives was with the

Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), in which NBO donated to the non-governmental organisation to support national social welfare projects and programmes benefitting children, orphans and disabled people.

Over the past 50 years, NBO has focused on its role as a primary contributor to growth in Oman's banking and finance industry, while positioning itself as a people-focused workplace that has created numerous opportunities. Through its comprehensive CSR strategy, the bank has also been supporting projects that create value for the society. Meanwhile, NBO has continuously been improving its resilience, while staying ahead of the curve in regards to technological advancements.

Oman embraces Gulf Standard specs for electric vehicles

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 6

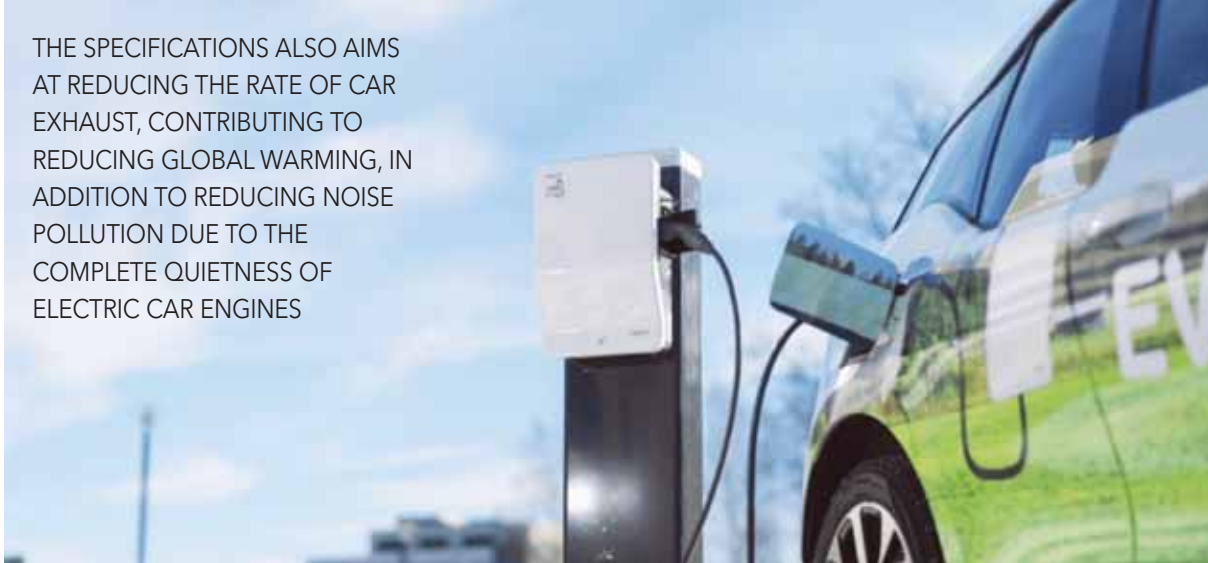
The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued Ministerial Decision 45/2023 deeming the Gulf Standard Specification GSO2698:22, which related to technical requirements for electric vehicles as a binding Omani standard,

In accordance with this decision whoever violates its provisions, shall be punished with the penalties stipulated in Royal Decree 1/78. The decision shall come into force after three months from the date of its publishing in the Official Gazette.

The Gulf Standard specification aims to specify the technical safety requirements for electric vehicles in terms of the safety of the driver and passengers through avoiding accidents and electric shocks and to ensure driving a high-performance car at a lower cost than conventional combustion vehicles.

It also aims at reducing the rate of car exhaust, contributing to reducing global warming, in addition to reducing noise

THE SPECIFICATIONS ALSO AIMS AT REDUCING THE RATE OF CAR EXHAUST, CONTRIBUTING TO REDUCING GLOBAL WARMING, IN ADDITION TO REDUCING NOISE POLLUTION DUE TO THE COMPLETE QUIETNESS OF ELECTRIC CAR ENGINES



pollution due to the complete quietness of electric car engines.

The provisions of this standard are applicable to all-electric vehicles with a speed exceeding 25 km/h, while electric motor vehicles are considered to be those being operated by using alternative fuels instead of the most common methods of the internal combustion engine.

The standard includes safety and electrical protection requirements in order to reduce accidents, deaths and electric shocks that can be caused by leakage of electricity from batteries

and leakage of battery components in the passenger cabin.

The specification also includes requirements to absorb crashes, in order to reduce injuries to the chest, neck or head.

The specification also stipulates requirements for charging systems and providing electric vehicles with electric energy, so that the electric connection of the vehicle must comply with the instructions and requirements of the specification.

The Gulf Standard Specification (GSO 2698:22) which is related to the technical requirements for

electric vehicles stipulated the conditions for testing the vehicle, as the tyres must be supplied with air to the pressure recommended by the vehicle manufacturer at ambient temperature.

The lights, signals and auxiliary devices of the vehicle should be turned off except those required for testing and operating the vehicle during the day.

All energy storage systems available for traction purposes (electro-hydraulic, pneumatic, etc) must be charged to the maximum level specified by the manufacturer.

Omani law firm AMJ expands partnership

MUSCAT: Leading Omani law firm Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co (AMJ) has appointed Ravinder Singh (pictured) as a new partner in its Projects and Commercial Department.

Ravinder has a broad range of experience in corporate and commercial matters and advises his clients across a wide-ranging spectrum of sectors. His key industry experience includes conventional and renewable energy, infrastructure, and

natural resources including green hydrogen projects, mining, real estate, construction, and telecommunications.

"We are delighted to welcome Ravinder into our partnership," said Mansoor Jamal Malik, managing partner.

"His appointment to the partnership is a testament to the success we have had in the Project and Commercial department and demonstrates our commitment to support fast-paced economic



Ravinder Singh

growth and development in Oman. It boosts our capability to respond

to the business community's need for quality legal services at a time of increasing complexity and sophistication of transactions, products and the developing regulatory framework."

AMJ, established in Oman in the 1970s, is the largest law firm in Oman with 8 partners and 7 teams of lawyers delivering high-quality legal advice across a broad spectrum of company/commercial/projects/banking and litigation/arbitration matters.

Nama Group, al jabr join hands to introduce new customer solution

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Nama Group has partnered with al jabr, an Omani boutique consultancy firm, to facilitate electricity services for residential customers in Oman. This initiative is part of Nama Group's commitment to enhance electricity services across the Sultanate of Oman.

Through this cooperation, Nama and al jabr aim to identify and apply best practices to facilitate booking processes for licensed electricians and make it easier for customers to find and hire electricians, whenever needed.

Ghada bint Mohammed al Yousef, Executive Manager of Communication and Sustainability, Nama Group, said: "Nama Group is constantly working on utilising latest technologies and best practices in its sustainable projects and services. The growing demand for certified electricians has prompted the need for efficient and convenient solutions. Through this partnership, Nama Group strives to study the best innovative and effective solutions to enhance services provided to customers."

Fatma Sultan Bahwan, COO at al jabr, said: "Through this partnership with Nama Group, we seek to leverage technologies to



Fatma Sultan Bahwan



Ghada Mohammed al Yousef

provide new solutions that can benefit home services in the Sultanate of Oman. We at al jabr are proud to work with Nama Group as a prominent institution that is always looking to improve the efficiency of services provided to its customers."

This partnership will continue to drive the impact of 'Naqla' programme, launched in 2017 to achieve economic objectives of Nama Group's Sustainability Policy, by supporting Omani technicians. The programme will further hone their skills and capabilities through training and granting its graduates electrical licences.

India's budget 2023 points towards growth and stability



BY A V MANOHAR

India's Budget 2023 was presented by Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister, against the backdrop of India's soaring international credentials, further underscored by its recent assumption of the G20 Presidency.

It sets out the government's vision to build on its fundamental framework encompassing affordable housing, clean drinking water and sanitation, access to education, health, nutrition, road, telecom and sustainable livelihood and employment opportunities.

1. GDP Growth: The essential trigger of the economy comes from improving the 'In-Country Production Value' i.e. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 6 to 6.8% in 2023-24. To achieve this, the Government has

increased the Capital Investment outlay by about 33.4% to Rs 10 Lakh Crore, which is about 3.3% of the GDP.

This allocation will ensure setting up of new projects, production units and infrastructure facilities such as ports, roads and railways. All these will have a multiplier effect in terms of rise in growth, improved supplies, new employment generation, increased business opportunities for ancillary units, flow of higher credit, improved cash flow and softening of inflation. It is expected that the private sector will play a bigger role in this capacity building process.

2. Fiscal Deficit & Inflation Control: Reduction of Fiscal Deficit (spending in excess of receipts) is another focus area. From a level of 9.2% of GDP in 2020-21, it has been brought to 6.4% in 2022-23, aiming to reduce further to 5.9% in 2023-24 and 4.5% in 2025-26. To bridge Fiscal Deficit, the government proposes to source external borrowings and internal savings aggregating to Rs 15.4 Lakh Crore. Needless to mention that three shocks namely COVID-19,



Russian-Ukraine conflict and the increase in FED rates in US have led the appreciation of the US Dollar and widening of Current Account Deficit (CAD), buoying inflation to 6.8% in 2022-23. Improved GDP, higher capital outlay, increased production and supplies shall yield higher tax collections and contribute towards reduction in fiscal deficit and inflation.

3. Currency Depreciation: India's high Private Consumption (Ex: 58% of GDP in Q2 of 2022-23) has been helpful in overcoming the shrinkage of exports, caused by the currency challenges being faced by importing countries. India has sufficient Forex to finance the CAD and intervene appropriately to manage volatility in the Indian Rupee, which is still

better performing than many other currencies.

4. Broad Frame: The financial agenda is widespread with special focus on harnessing the aspirations of youth, empowerment of women, encouragement of artisans, promotion of tourism, emphasis on green energy, special emphasis on power sector, changes in Personal and Corporate Income Tax, Excise and Customs Duties, all intended towards rejuvenating the economy.

5. Agriculture Focus: Agriculture occupies a sizable percentage of GDP and with the high percentage of agriculture exports, the government is providing Digital Support (electronic access to crop planning, health, inputs, credit, insurance and market intelligence

and linking up all Primary Agricultural Credit Societies), Financial Support (Setting up an Accelerator fund for start-ups in farming and providing higher Credit), Storage Support (Building more common Storage Facilities) and Collaboration Support (Creation of Public Private Partnerships). Higher revenue, attractive prices, productivity and profitability, upgrading of skills, access to new markets and creation of jobs are some of the positive outcomes for the farmers.

6. Medical & Knowledge Building: In the medical field, coinciding with the recent creation of medical colleges, the government proposes to establish new nursing colleges, encourage medical and pharmaceutical research and create multi-disciplinary courses for medical devices. Besides, general training of teachers and creation of digital libraries shall be undertaken as a knowledge building initiative.

7. Supportive Measures: Expansion of Public Digital Platforms, National Logistics Policy and Production Linked Incentive Scheme shall be supportive towards achieving various objectives.

8. Changes in Tax, Customs and Excise: Increase in Personal tax exemption limit from Rs 5 lakhs to Rs 7 lakhs, Changing the tax rates under various slabs, Extension of Standard Deduction for certain Taxpayers, Concessions relating to Corporate Tax, Selective Increase in Customs Duty (except some) and Selective Hike in Excise, (except Cigarettes) are welcome measures. Government is foregoing receipts by Rs 35,000 Crores by these changes. No specific relief has been extended to NRIs.

9. Subsidies untouched: The much-needed bold reforms on reduction of subsidies in agriculture, food, fuel and fertilisers and limiting the beneficiaries are missed this time and hence non-genuine beneficiaries shall continue to take away a big slice of the Budget.

Overall, the Budget 2023 has incorporated many bright spots towards growth and stability and with the long-standing steps planned, it should pave the way for making India a better India.

[The author is the CEO of Wisdom Business and Training Services, Muscat: Email: avm@wisdomoman.com]

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Capturing the story of Oman with paint

Aiming to become a globally renowned artist one day, Abdulwahab al Shukaili felt that there was a story to tell in painting about Oman. With a series of experimentations, he is closer to his dreams with one painting at a time... **P20**

Paco Rabanne, who brought the space age to the catwalk, dies aged 88

PACO RABANNE, THE Spanish-born designer best known for his metallic ensembles and space age designs of the 1960s, has died at the age of 88.

The eponymous label he exited more than two decades ago hailed him as "among the most seminal fashion figures of the 20th century".

Rabanne dressed some of the most prominent stars of the 1960s, including French singer Francoise Hardy, whose outfits from the designer included a

minidress made from gold plates and a metal link jumpsuit, as well as Jane Birkin and Serge Gainsbourg, who were pictured in matching silver outfits.

Among his most famous looks were the fitted, skin-baring ensembles worn by Jane Fonda in Roger Vadim's cult science fiction film "Barbarella".

The death of Francisco Rabaneda y Cuervo, Paco Rabanne's birth name, was confirmed by a spokesperson for Spanish group Puig, which now controls

the fashion house.

"A major personality in fashion, his was a daring, revolutionary and provocative vision, conveyed through a unique aesthetic," said Marc Puig, chairman and CEO of Puig.

Born in a village in the Spanish Basque region in 1934, his mother was a head seamstress at Balenciaga. He died in Portsall in Brittany.

Rabanne grew up in France, where the family moved after Spanish troops shot dead his father, who had been a Republican commander during the civil war.

He studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. He started his career sketching handbags for a supplier to prestigious fashion houses including Givenchy and Chanel, as well as shoes for Charles Jourdan.

He then branched into fashion, designing garments and jewellery with unconventional materials such as metal and plastic.

INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

His first collection, which he described as "unwearable dresses made of contemporary materials" were pieces made of strips of plastic linked with metal rings, worn by barefoot models at a presentation at the upscale Paris hotel George V.



The Paris cabaret Crazy Horse Saloon was his next venue, where models paraded his skimpy dresses and bathing suits while wearing hardhats.

While his innovation and futuristic designs won plaudits, his fascination with the supernatural prompted public derision at times. He was known for recounting past reincarnations, and in 1999, he predicted the space station Mir would crash into

France, coinciding with a solar eclipse.

Surrealist Salvador Dali famously approved of his compatriot, calling him "Spain's second genius".

The designer teamed up with Spain's Puig family in the late 1960s, launching perfumes that served as a springboard for the company's international expansion.

"Paco Rabanne made transgression magnetic. Who else could induce fashionable Parisian women (to) clamour for dresses made of plastic and metal," said Jose Manuel Albesa, president of Puig's beauty and fashion division.

The label has seen a resurgence in popularity in recent years, under the creative direction of Julien Dossena, who has updated the house's signature chainmail designs.

"We are grateful to Monsieur Rabanne for establishing our avant-garde heritage and defining a future of limitless possibilities," the fashion house said in a statement.

The designer's work with metallic plastic gave a "sharp edge" to women's clothes, an effect that was "so much more than a New Look", fashion historian Suzy Menkes said on Instagram on Friday.

"It was rather a revolutionary attitude for women who wanted both to protect and assert themselves." — **Reuters**

READ

DEMON COPPERHEAD

BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

A reimagining of Charles Dickens's "David Copperfield" set in the mountains of southern Appalachia.



ENTERTAINMENT

Musicians perform on a boat during a light show during a ceremony marking the two-day inauguration of the 2023 European Capital of Culture in the industrial town of Elefsina (Eleusis) west of Athens. Dance, concerts, street art, films and exhibitions will draw on ancient sacred city's fabled history and its long experience with unemployment, immigration and environmental degradation thorough the year.



CULTURE

A youth performs 'Gatka', an ancient form of Sikh martial arts during a religious procession to celebrate the birth anniversary of the Sikh warrior Shaheed Baba Deep Singh, in Amritsar. — **AFP**





HM. Sultan Jamshid addressing the Internal self-Government, 1963.



Deputy Police Commissioner, Sulaiman Al Kharusi



HM. Sultan Jamshid, Independence Day, 10.12.1963



Stamps that were issued in the occasion of the Independence

Remembering A Dawn That Changed Fate Of Zanzibar (Part 4)

By Nasser bin Abdullah al Riyami
Translated by Dr Ali bin Rashid al Abri

DEPUTY POLICE COMMISSIONER, Sulaiman al Kharousi, mentioned that: when he was at Mwera Police Station he had been in touch with Malindi Police Station by telephone, and he learned that there were some brave loyal men from the police force and members of the public fighting and resisting the rebels. He mentioned the following names: Salim bin Humoud al Kharousi, Mohammed bin Said al Riyami and Salim bin Ahmed al Busaidy. These patriotic men fought with courage and valour.

The Prime Minister, a number of Ministers and the Commissioner of Police were also barricaded in this Police Station. Shaikh Ali bin Mohsin al Barwani also confirms this, adding to the list of civilian resistance fighters the names of Mohammed bin Musallam al Rawahi, Ahmed bin Saif al Kharousi, Said bin Bader al Barwani, Hilal bin Mohammed al Barwani, and Lieutenant Salim bin Hakim al Khusaibi.

In this context Shaikh Ali bin Mohsin affirms that he sent a distress signal to the Government loyalists and supporters, in Stone Town, to come with their guns to Malindi Police Station. However, those who responded to the signal were only a handful whereas hundreds had been expected to turn up. They preferred to stay at home under the pretext of protecting women and children.

Mention has to be made here of the widespread possibility that many of those who preferred to not leave their homes could ever imagine that what was happening at the time was a step towards toppling their legitimate government.

Their expectations could not exceed a mere disturbance similar to what had happened in June 1961.

It is unfortunate to relate that national resistance was extremely fragile as it consisted of around 20 men. This small contingent centred on Malindi Police Station and offered support to a police force of around 70 men armed with the usual Police rifles. Owing to its strategic location this police station was responsible for protecting vital installations such as the Sultan's Palace, the Harbour and Stone Town. The force fought relentlessly to the last breath.

Sulaiman al Kharousi tried desperately hard to come up with a solution to tackle the matter, and he thought of the Omanis who always have fire arms in their homes mainly shotguns - which would be ideal for crowd dispersal. He was hoping to convince them under his command and the command of Lieutenant Mohammed bin Ali al Kharousi, to take to the streets in town and to confront the rebels. A grocery owner known as Said bin Abdullah al Kiyumi, was sent to the Mudir of Mwera (Equivalent to District officer), Shaikh Humoud bin Ali al Ghaithi, to ask him to exhort the Arabs to take up their arms in order to save the State. Similar to the outcome of Barwani's appeal, no one showed up; they preferred to stay in their homes to protect their families despite attempts to convince them to take their families to the Office of the Mudir where they would be safeguarded, thus enabling the men to carry arms under the command of Sulaiman al Kharousi. Alas, all such attempts were in vain. The Malindi Police Station remained steadfast in its resistance until 5.30 pm, when that last stronghold finally also fell to the hands of the rebels. In Mwera,

Sulaiman felt that at this juncture the situation was critical and that any attempt to show further resistance was suicidal; surrendering to Allah's will was now not an option, it was inevitable. He drew the weapons from the personnel with much sadness and remorse and released them to go home stating that he would call them back if the situation called for remobilisation. He took the weapons to the "Mudiriyyat" and told the Mudir that he would bury them in an agreed location so they could be used again if necessary. Al Kharousi picked up his family from where he had left them and headed to a house belonging to Al Barwani family in Mwera where they spent the night listening to the news on the radio and the inflammatory statements of John Okello.

At dawn he went to the Police Station to check on the situation there, only to find that the rebels had taken over the Station. He immediately surrendered and was led to Raha Leo, the headquarters of the opposition, ASP. On arrival at the Headquarters he was taken to the putative Leader of the invasion, John Okello, who spoke to him in broken Kiswahili: "I have been told that you showed stiff resistance against my men at Mwera and I in turn will break your head and will empty it out." Karume, Head of the ASP, was standing next to Okello at the time. As a matter of fact, prior to the Invasion, Karume was taken to Dar es Salaam on the African mainland in order to prevent his arrest should the Invasion fail. As soon as the government and constitutional regime had been toppled, he returned to Zanzibar on a boat belonging to "Ocean Products".

To be continued...



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

‘Stonehenge of north’ opens to public in England



ENGLAND ON FRIDAY opened public access to a little-known neolithic complex of huge circular earthworks seen as rivalling Stonehenge in importance, after the site's owners gave it to the nation.

Thornborough Henges in Yorkshire, northern England, were not previously accessible to the public and featured on a list of heritage sites at risk.

English Heritage, a charity that cares for state-owned historic sites and monuments, called the site the “Stonehenge of the North” as it opened free public access.

“We are thrilled to have acquired this highly significant site for the nation, ensuring that these magnificent monuments are safe and will be preserved for generations to come,” said Duncan Wilson, chief executive of Historic England, the public body responsible for historic monuments.

The site is made up of three henges, or giant circular earthworks more than 200 metres (655 feet) in diameter.



Standing on moorland, they are believed to have been built for ceremonies and rituals in the period between 3500 and 2500 BC.

This potentially makes the site older than Stonehenge, dating from around 2500 BC, which also features henges. Both were built before Britons had metal tools.

The earthworks at Thornborough may originally have been covered with a mineral called gypsum and glowed white, English Heritage said.

Still visible today are circular banks up to four metres high and encircling ditches.

Two of the henges were given to the nation by Tarmac group, a road-building company that owned the land.

The third henge is still in private ownership and under woodland.

The henges were added to Historic England's at-risk register in 2009 due to erosion from farm animals and rabbits grazing. They are now due to be removed from the register. Stonehenge standing stone circle in southwestern England is one of the UK's best known tourist attractions, with over 330,000 visitors in 2021. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Shah Rukh Khan: Indian heartthrob and King of Bollywood

SHAH RUKH KHAN is Bollywood's most popular star and at 57 still its biggest sex symbol, whose silver-screen repertoire of dance, romance and shoot-em-up heroics made him the cinematic avatar of a changing India.

“King Khan” — whose moniker reflects decades of box office dominance — is a rare unifying figure across India's multiple geographic, linguistic and religious faultlines.

His latest film “Pathaan” was an event akin to a national celebration, shrugging off boycott calls by Hindu hardliners and packing out theatres with boisterous crowds.

Fans regularly make the pilgrimage to the gates of his Mumbai mansion and wait through the day to catch a brief glimpse of a man who basks in his status as a public icon.

“I am very happy being a star. I can never be tired of it,” Khan told AFP in a 2013 interview.

“I love the amount of people that love me, the crowds that collect, the controversies, the responsibilities I have, the success and even the failure. It's an exciting life.”

Khan was born to a Muslim family in New Delhi and did not hail from an established acting dynasty.

His early 1980s TV roles showcased his natural charisma but it took him several years to break onto the big screen, and he risked being typecast as a villain after his riveting performance as an obsessed stalker in “Darr” (Fear).

But the biggest Indian blockbuster of 1995 catapulted him to international stardom and resonated with the profound social changes under way in his country.

“Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge” (The Big-Hearted will Take the Bride) saw Khan play a Londoner who falls in love with another diaspora Indian while sightseeing in Europe.

They decide to wed — against the wishes of her father, who has promised her in marriage to another man back in India.

It was released in a decade when the country's economy and its urban middle class were liberalising, with young men and women enjoying a lifestyle more affluent than their parents while chafing against their rules.

The film remains one of the most popular in the Bollywood canon, and it has screened at one Mumbai cinema every day — except for a Covid interruption — for the 27 years since its release.

‘FEELGOOD INDIA’

Film critic Namrata Joshi wrote that Khan spearheaded a new kind of “roman-

tic family hero” in Indian cinema, displacing the angry young man archetypes that matched the angst-ridden national mood of earlier decades.

“Many see SRK embodying... the spirit of post-liberalisation, feelgood, ambitious, assertive India,” she said.

Along the way, Khan's self-deprecating humour and striking good looks cemented his place as India's chief heart-throb.

The book “Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh”, published in 2021, discusses the intimate desires of modern Indian women through their shared fandom for Khan and the sensitive masculinity he represented.

No film in his extensive repertoire has done more to burnish this persona than 1998's “Dil Se.” (From the Heart), in which Khan pursues a mysterious woman across India's most spectacular natural landscapes.

Today it is fondly remembered for its dazzling choreography — elaborate even by Bollywood standards — including Khan's serenade to dozens of dancers atop a moving steam train.

‘SO MUCH LOVE’

Khan's visage on movie posters became a virtual licence to print money and a string of hits over the next two decades made him fabulously wealthy.

His assets include the Kolkata Knight Riders cricket team in the Indian Premier League, and a film production company.

Recent years have seen a string of personal and professional setbacks, including the 2021 arrest of his son in a drug related case that was later dropped.

Khan, like other acting stars from India's Muslim minority, has also increasingly been targeted for criticism by Hindu nationalists.

“Pathaan”, Khan's secret agent action thriller comeback after a five-year absence from the silver screen, was the latest of several highly anticipated Bollywood films subject to a boycott campaign. Ultimately Khan's star power triumphed over his critics, and ticket sales for “Pathaan” smashed India's opening day box office record.

Khan afterwards was lavish in his praise for fans who made the film a success.

“There is so much love from all sides,” he said, “and we can never show enough gratefulness”. — AFP

HERITAGE

Lebanon hopes UNESCO danger listing could save crumbling modernist fairground



ITS ARCH IS cracking and its vast pavilions lie empty, but the crumbling Rachid Karami International Fair in Lebanon's port city Tripoli now has hope of revival, having been added to the United Nations' list of world heritage sites in danger.

Designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer in 1962, the collection of structures on the 70-hectare plot is considered one of the key works of 20th century modernism in the Middle East.

But the fair park has slowly decayed due to repeated rounds of fighting over the last 60 years, poor maintenance and most recently Lebanon's crippling, three-year-old financial crisis.

“It was placed on the World Heritage List exceptionally, quickly and urgently — and on the list of heritage in danger because it's in a critical situation,” said Joseph Kreidi, UNESCO's national programme officer for culture in Beirut.

Its elegant arch is missing concrete in some parts, exposing the rebar underneath. Rainwater has pooled at the locked entrances. One section is sealed off by a sign that reads, “Unsafe building entry.”

“Placing it on the World Heritage Danger List is an appeal to all countries of the world, as if to say: this site needs some care,” said Kreidi.

He said it was up to the Lebanese authorities to draw together a plan for the site's protection and rehabilitation but that UNESCO, the United Nations' cultural agency, could help search for funding and provide technical expertise.

Lebanon has five other sites on UNESCO's World Heritage list, most of them citadels and ancient temples.

Niemeyer is recognised as one of the fathers of modern architecture and the site in Tripoli was an early foray into the Middle East.

Construction of the fairground began in the 1960s but was delayed when civil war erupted in Lebanon in 1975. Fighters used the site to stage operations and stored weapons underneath its concrete dome.

Mira Minkara, a freelance tour guide from Tripoli and a member of the Oscar Niemeyer Foundation's Tripoli chapter, has fond — but rare — memories of the fairground as a child.

For the most part, it was off-limits to Tripoli's residents given safety concerns. But Minkara remembered her first visit during a festival of pan-African culture and crafts.

She hopes that UNESCO's recognition could bring new festivals, exhibitions and economic benefits to Tripoli — already one of the poorest cities on the Mediterranean before Lebanon's financial meltdown began.

Lebanon's cultural heritage has been hit hard in recent years. The 2020 Beirut port blast tore through 19th-century homes in historic neighbourhoods and power outages caused by the financial crisis have cut supplies to the national museum.

“We hope things change a little,” Minkara said. “It's high time for this fairground to emerge from this long sleep, this almost-death.” — Reuters

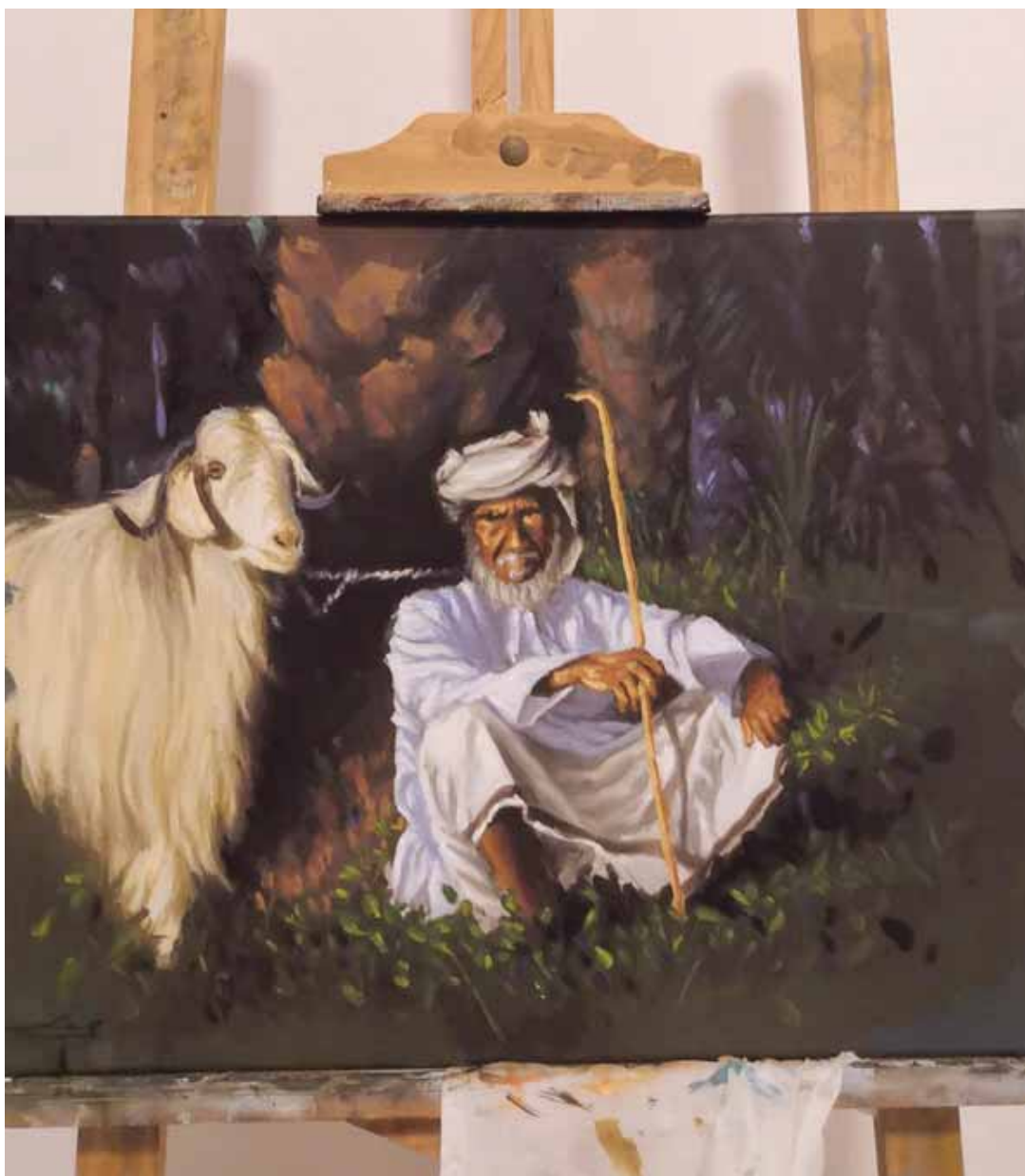
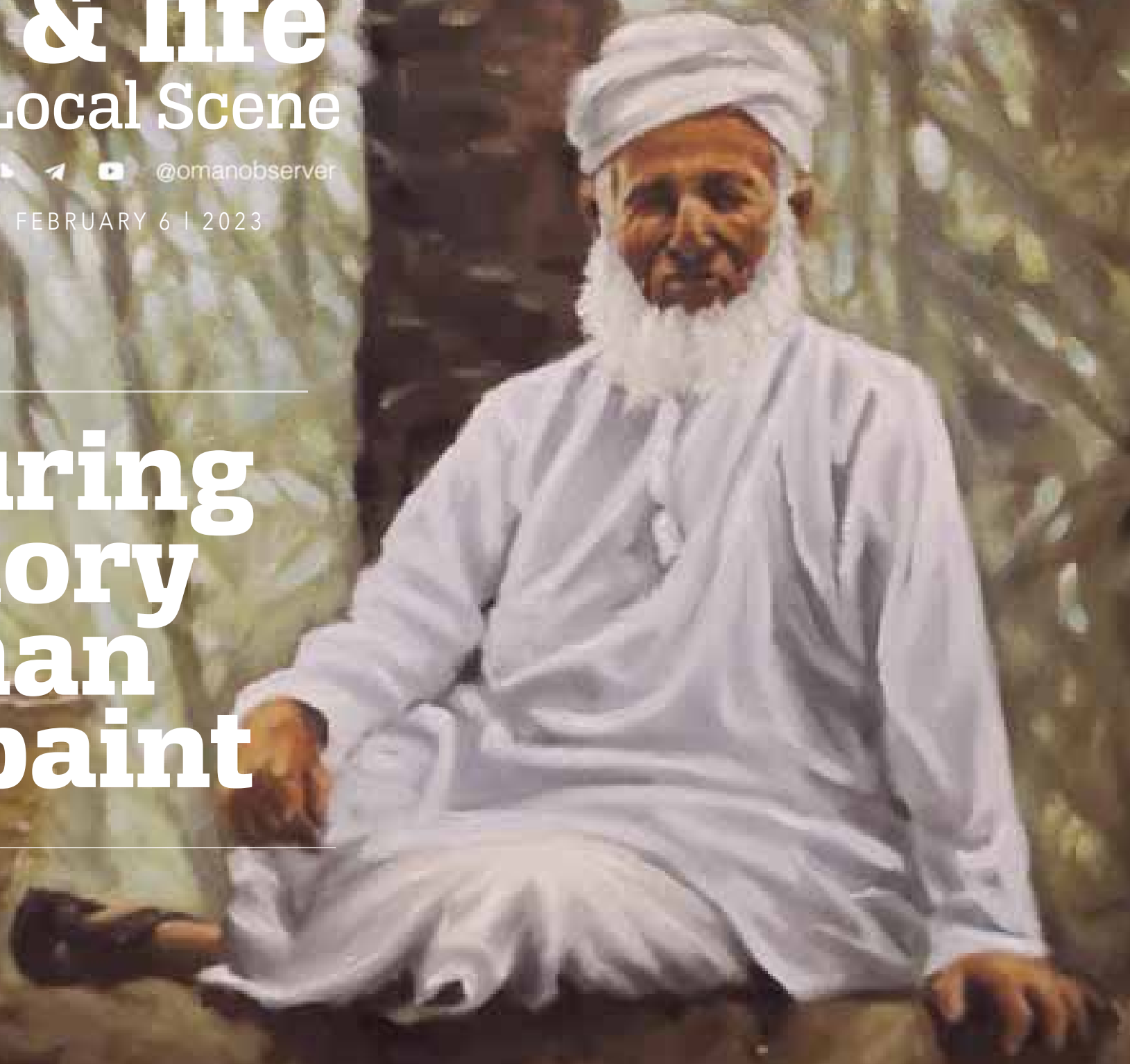
art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | FEBRUARY 6 | 2023

Capturing the story of Oman with paint



By Bayan Al Hadhrami

His paintings have graced some of the most prominent exhibitions in the country, the latest included the 52nd National Day celebration held at the Royal Opera House Muscat.

At 27 years old, Abdulwahab al Shukaili felt like he has a long way to go and as an art teacher, he experimented with a variety of techniques, including series painting, in which he would return to the same subject multiple times to capture its appearance at different times of day and in different weather conditions.

His style is characterised by his use of light, colour, and loose brushwork to capture the fleeting effects of sunlight and atmosphere.

Al Shukaili's recent project focused on the natural landscapes and elements of Oman. He has used Wadi Shab multiple times as his muse having

painted this beautiful destination twice and coming from different angles. The two paintings, predominantly golden brown with streaks of blue sky and green plantations, are distinguished by a form of realism present in Al Shukaili's focus on detail and evident in his layering of colour and the thin yet accurate green strokes of palm leaves. In another work, Al Shukaili paints a group of children swimming in a pool surrounded by palm trees and lush green plantations. This particular work is inspired by the natural landscape of Misfat Al Abriyeen.

Al Shukaili shared that much of his work is experimental and that he has much room for growth and development. While most of his artwork is created with the use of oil paint he attempted to experiment with acrylic paint and attempted to venture into other forms of art such as portraits. In his experimental works,

Al Shukaili practised different art techniques and attempted to express his inner feelings and thoughts through his artwork. He also states that not pre-planning his work allows him to endeavour into a process of self-understanding and realisation as it helps him better understand himself as an artist and helps him find his strong points and gradually discover his own unique art style.

Al Shukaili's art journey began at a young age as he drew mostly with the use of pencils. He received much encouragement and guidance from his teachers in school and ultimately decided to pursue a career in the art field. Al Shukaili began working with colours and paint as a student in the Scientific College of Design as his professors encouraged him to expand his use of art mediums. Al Shukaili hopes to contribute with his artwork in more events and contests and aims to become a globally renowned artist.

