

Search on to find missing person

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AL NAHDATHUMP
AL ITTIHAD TO
EXTEND LEAD
ON TOP



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OMANI ECONOMY
SET FOR NEW PHASE
OF ENERGETIC
GROWTH



P20

INCLUDE
KUMZAR ON
YOUR SUMMER
BUCKET LIST



MUSCAT

FORUM FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The first forum for people with disabilities will begin on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The Ministry of Social Development is organising the three-day forum themed 'Integration and Empowerment' in strategic partnership with Oman Energy Association and HDCC Centre, Human Development Centre for the Disabled. During the forum, there will be a lab focusing on three main areas -- Education, Health and Society. There will also be a platform for inventors who have disabilities, said Hamoud al Shabibi, Head of the Department for the Welfare of Disabled People at the Ministry of Social Development.

DETAILS ON P3

WORLD VETERINARY DAY CELEBRATED

The Sultanate of Oman joined the rest of the world to mark World Veterinary Day which is celebrated on the last Saturday of April every year in recognition of the veterinarians' roles and efforts to achieve food security and protect public health. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is keen on celebrating the day every year in appreciation of the efforts and achievements the veterinarians make in preserving and developing livestock in Oman by vaccinating animals against diseases. Oman has more than 750 veterinarians working for public and private institutions.

DETAILS ON P5

INSIDE



NORTH KOREA RAMPS UP
THREATS AGAINST US

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WOMEN WORKERS KEY
TO ERADICATING POLIO

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The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, is participating in the 37th session of the Tunis International Book Fair. The book fair which opened on Friday continues until May 7, under the slogan "Fly with the Wings of the Book." Tunisian President Kais Saied, who visited the Omani pavilion, listened to an explanation of the publications at the pavilion. The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion includes a wide range of publications and various titles. **DETAILS ON P3**

Clouds carry drug-resistant bacteria across distances

MONTREAL: For a team of Canadian and French researchers, dark clouds on the horizon are potentially ominous not because they signal an approaching storm – but because they were found in a recent study to carry drug-resistant bacteria over long distances.

"These bacteria usually live on the surface of vegetation like leaves, or in soil," lead author Florent Rossi said in a telephone interview.

"We found that they are carried by the wind into the atmosphere and can travel long distances – around the world – at high altitudes in clouds," he said.

The discovery was published in last month's edition of the journal *Science of The Total Environment*.

The researchers from Laval University in Quebec City and Clermont Auvergne University in central France searched for antibiotic-resistant genes from bacteria found in cloud samples.

The samples were taken from an atmospheric research station perched 1,465 metres above sea level atop the Puy de Dome summit, a dormant volcano in central France between September 2019 and October 2021.

An analysis of the retrieved mist revealed that they

contained between 330 to more than 30,000 bacteria per millilitre of cloud water, for an average of around 8,000 bacteria er millilitre. They also identified 29 subtypes of antibiotic-resistant genes in the bacteria.

Drug resistance occurs when bacteria are exposed to antibiotics and develop an immunity to them over generations.

Health authorities have repeatedly warned these adaptations are becoming what the study described as a "major sanitary concern worldwide," making it harder – in some cases impossible – to treat certain bacterial infections as antibiotics use continues to rise in healthcare and agriculture.

The study offered no conclusions on the potential health effects of the spread in the atmosphere of antibiotic resistant bacteria – estimating that only five per cent to 50 per cent of the organisms could be alive and potentially active. But Rossi suggested the risks are likely low.

"The atmosphere is very stressful for bacteria, and most of those we found were environmental bacteria," which are less likely to be harmful to humans, he explained. "So people shouldn't be afraid to go for a walk in the rain." – **AFP**

Omani exports to Singapore at RO 794.5m

MUSCAT: An Omani delegation headed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, visited the Republic of Singapore during April 25-28 to explore the Singaporean experience in the economic field.

The delegation comprised representatives of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Oman Investment Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Asyad Group and National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher).

Official statistics indicate that the total Omani imports from the Republic of Singapore amounted to RO 186.7 million in 2022, while the value of total Omani exports to the Republic of Singapore amounted to RO 794.5 million during the same period.

The delegation held several meetings with Singaporean officials to introduce the attractive investment environment provided by the Sultanate of Oman to businessmen and investors.

The meetings also reviewed the most important incentives, advantages and investment opportunities available in various sectors.

The delegation visited OQ's commercial office to learn about its activities in the trading and marketing of oil, gas and petrochemical products in the Asian markets. — **ONA**



Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in Singapore.

Air strikes hit Khartoum as UN envoy sees sides more open to talks

KHARTOUM: Air strikes and artillery rocked Khartoum on Saturday as Sudan entered a third week of fighting between rival military forces despite a ceasefire, prompting more civilians to flee and renewed warnings of wider instability if the war is not stopped.

As dark smoke rose over Khartoum, a UN envoy offered a possible flicker of hope, saying the warring sides that have so far shown no sign of compromise were now more open to negotiations — though no date had been set.

POWER STRUGGLE

Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands wounded since April 15 when a long-simmering power struggle between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) erupted into conflict.

The fighting has pitched Sudan towards a civil war, derailing an internationally-backed transition aimed at establishing a democratic government and sending tens of thousands of people fleeing into neighbouring countries.



A girl evacuated from Sudan arrives at Abu Dhabi airport. – **Reuters**

"I'm afraid that one day I'm asleep and I wake up to a bomb falling on my house," said a man named Khalid, speaking from Khartoum where he has stayed because his elderly grandmother and ill sister would suffer on the long and costly trip out.

"That's my deepest fear right now. That's all that I think of. That's why I can't sleep at night."

SEE ALSO P6



Omani economic delegation visits Singapore

An Omani delegation headed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yusef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, visited the Republic of Singapore during April 25-28 to explore the Singaporean experience in the economic field.



Batinah to get heritage guesthouses

STAFF REPORTER
RUSTAQ, APRIL 29

The heritage guesthouses and inns in the South al Batinah Governorate are very popular with tourists as they offer an option for accommodation at affordable prices, apart from being a source of income for citizens.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has been encouraging citizens to invest in heritage and green guesthouses to add value to the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Al Mutasem bin Nasser al Hilali, Director of the Heritage and Tourism Department, in South Al



Batinah Governorate, said that the total number of existing projects in the governorate is 21 distributed across three out of six wilayats in the governorate.

The Wilayat of Barka has 14 heritage guesthouses, Rustaq 5 and Nakhal 2 facilities constituting 32.3 per cent of the total residential facilities in the governorate.

He said eight guesthouses are under construction in South al Batinah — four in Barka, three in Nakhal, and one in Rustaq.

The ministry licenses such guesthouses to encourage Omani investors to set up medium and small projects that serve the tourism

Accommodation for football players to be ready soon

MUSCAT: The Oman Football Association (OFA) has said that 80 per cent of the project involving the construction of an administration building and housing for players at the Seeb Sports Stadium has been completed and will be ready this year.

As stipulated in the agreement, the project will be delivered during the current year in accordance with the quality conditions and specifications.

The project, which is funded by the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA), includes an integrated administration building consisting



of 55 rooms with all facilities, in addition to halls, a gym, and a swimming pool.

Fahad al Saadi, acting director of Administrative and Financial

Affairs, said, “The housing project is one of the most important goals set by the OFA and it will positively reflect on Oman’s football scene in general, and national teams in

particular.

Basma Mohammed, Director of the Purchasing Department at the Federation, who is responsible for following up on the project, said, “When developing the building plan and designs, the needs of the national teams were taken into account, as the project contains rooms for the teams to live in, in addition to providing all their necessities throughout their stay, such as restrooms, halls, a gymnasium, a swimming pool, facilities for management and services, on an area of approximately 4,700 square metres.” — ONA

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Oman at 37th Tunis International Book Fair



TUNIS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, is participating in the 37th session of the Tunis International Book Fair.

The fair which opened on Friday continues until May 7, under the slogan “Fly with the Wings of the Book.”

Tunisian President Kais Said, who visited the Omani pavilion listened to an explanation of the publications contained in the pavilion.

The Sultanate of Oman’s pavilion at the exhibition includes a wide range of publications and

various titles in various fields of knowledge and literature, representing media, cultural and religious aspects.

The participation comes within the framework of consolidating the existing media and cultural relations between the two countries.

The Sultanate of Oman lays importance to the presence of Omani writers at all Arab and international exhibitions and cultural forums. In order to highlight the cultural and historical heritage and to introduce Omani intellectual and culture as well as the tourism potential that characterises the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Search on to find missing person in Dima W’atayeen

AHMED AL MAAMARI
DIMA W’ATAYEEN, APRIL 30

The search and rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CADA) are still searching for a young Omani who was washed away on a wadi two days ago.

The young man and his friends came to Dima W’atayeen from Al Amerat to enjoy the rainy weather and was washed away while swimming on a wadi at the entrance of Wadi Dhaiqah. The people made several attempts to save him but failed.



Since then, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police, has launched a wide search operation to find the missing person.



Forum for people with disabilities begins tomorrow

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

The first forum for people with disabilities is to begin on Monday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The Ministry of Social Development is organising the three-day forum themed ‘Integration and Empowerment in strategic partnership with Oman Energy Association and HDCD Center, Human Development Center for the Disabled.

During the forum, there will be a lab focusing on three main areas -- Education, Health and Society.

The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, said after the workshops, there will be recommendations, and they will be considered to be implemented immediately after the forum.

There will also be a platform for inventors who have disabilities, said Hamoud al Shabibi, Head of the Department for the Welfare of Disabled People at the Ministry of Social Development.

The Oman Exhibition and Convention Centre will be made entirely accessible, and the Mwasalat buses will be available for transportation. There will also be extra wheelchairs provided to make the venue accessible to all.

The forum will focus on the healthcare system and quality of



life of people with disabilities, education and employability of people with disability and the third topic will address society’s role along with the role of government entities and families.

Oman Energy Association’s CEO, AbdulRahman al Yahyai said, “It is going to be an outstanding forum to exchange information and networking because all the stakeholders responsible for providing services to people with disability are going to be under one roof. So it is going to be a great opportunity. I think this forum will be a grand success as it will inspire people with disabilities to achieve their goals and empower

themselves to contribute to the development in line with Oman Vision 2040 as well as greater inclusion of people with disability into society.”

The form will continue every other year with new topics tackling challenges faced by individuals with disabilities.

One of the main challenges has been mobility. The movement of people, the availability of equipment, vehicle with accessibilities as well as the affordability of converting the vehicles are some of the challenges faced by individuals and families. Some individuals are far away from the centres

that provide services, which makes transportation a necessity. Technology has advanced; some of these will be showcased at the conference. Banks and certain government entities will also be showcasing their services.

Ominvest supports the lab, and the ESG and Sustainability manager, Feras al Farsi, said, “The lab will be launched during the forum that will continue for six months with multiple meetings and workshops. Ominvest is interested in sustainable development, and this conference is not just discussions but policies are going to come out of it and changes in governance as well.”

Oman sees surge in international hotel guests

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman witnessed a surge in the number of international hotel guests at the end of March 2023 compared to the same period last year.

While the number of Omani guests in hotels dropped 1.5 per cent to 181,300 guests at the end of March of this year from 184,000 during the same period a year ago, the number of European guests increased 41.8 per cent to 169,300 from 119,400.

The Asian guests surged 53.4 per cent to 64,600 from 42,100, Gulf nationals increased by 30.9 per cent to 33,000 from 25,200, and other Arab guests increased by 38.1 per cent to 21,600 from 15,600 guests.

The number of American guests increased by 6.4 per cent to 17,000 from 16,000, and guests from the African



continent by 43.5 per cent to 2,800 from 2,000.

It may be noted that revenues of three to five-star rated hotels increased 49.9 per cent to RO 73.2 million at the end of last March, compared to the same period last year, which was RO 48.9 million.

According to the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the total number of guests in three to five-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman increased

by 25.6 per cent to 522,700 guests, from 416,200 guests in the same period of the year. The occupancy rate in hotels increased by 17.5 per cent to 56.4 per cent, compared to 48 per cent in the same period in 2022.

A total of 159,424 pipeline rooms are currently under contract in the Gulf at present, of which 100,071 hotel rooms are in Saudi Arabia, Dubai (27,095 rooms), Qatar (17,145), Oman (10,292),

Bahrain (3,452), Kuwait (1,369), according to data released by STR Global.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: “This region is undoubtedly a global hotspot for industry investment right now.”

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) said that 127 new hotel establishments are being established at an investment cost exceeding RO 340 million.

RECALL CAMPAIGN
For ISUZU D-Max & MU-X

Date of Campaign : 30/4/2023

Recall Type : Recall

Recall Segment : Mechanical

Product Description : Isuzu D-Max & MU-X

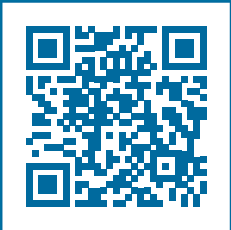
Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2020-2023	ISUZU	D-Max & MU-X	FROM MPAEL3310LT021718 TO MPAER33T3NT010103	258

Description of defect:
Some vehicles may have a lower bolt tightening torque on the lower second steering shaft than the standard value.

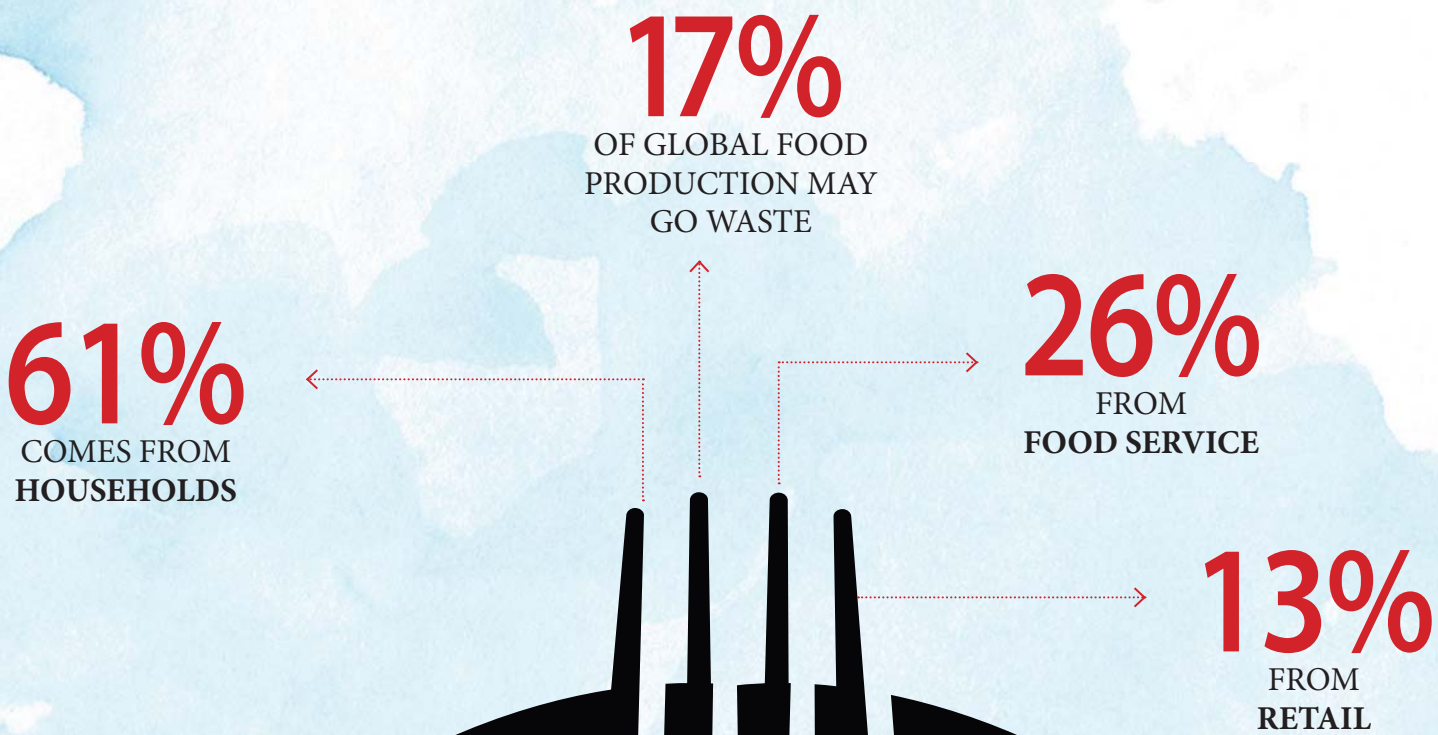
Procedure:
To ensure that the lower second steering shaft bolt is tightened to the standard value before delivering the Vehicle to customer.

For More information:
Customers of affected vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment for further details/booking Appointment etc from Date - 30/4/2023

Contact details
Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.30 PM with effect from Date 30/4/2023



F O O D W A S T A G E



TARGETING FOOD SECURITY

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

THE recent usufruct contracts to build a food infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman is a much-needed step towards establishing self-sufficiency in food items and an exercise for food security. As the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources resolves to achieve in-country reliance on other food products, there is good news about 100 per cent self-sufficiency in some food products, including dates. The country is working on a mechanism to ensure food security amid alarming reports of agricultural shortfall. There have been reports of “impending agricultural shortfall that could fail to produce enough to feed the world’s

anticipated 10 billion population by 2050.” Oman has taken note of the impending issues related to food security as the country’s Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, shared plans to achieve food self-sufficiency ‘the next stage of which is an emphasis on agricultural industrialisation.’ The preparations are timely and in line with the future demand for food items, as a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report published few years ago is relevant for today as it talks about growth, development, population, consumption and other related trends. “These trends mean that market demand for food will continue to grow. Demand for cereals for food and animal feed is projected to reach 3 billion tonnes by 2050. The advent of bio-fuels can

OMAN TAKES
STEPS TOWARDS
FOOD
SELF-SUFFICIENCY,
BUT MUST TACKLE
HIGH FOOD WASTE,
WARNS UN REPORT

change some of the projected trends and cause world demand to be higher, depending mainly on energy prices and government policies. The demand for other food products that are more responsive to higher incomes in the developing countries (such as livestock and dairy products, vegetable oils) will grow much faster than that for cereals,” said the FAO report. The latest usufruct contracts are in the areas of honey, production and marketing of banana crops, soil richness, and date production worth over RO 32 million. Another critical step that the country needs to take is awareness among the masses of food waste. Food waste needs to be understood in a global perspective. Amid the gap in demand and supply, food waste causes further leakage of the available resources. According to the UN Environment

Programme’s (UNEP) Food Waste Index Report 2021, about 17 per cent of global food production may go waste, with 61 per cent of this waste coming from households, 26 per cent from food service and 13 per cent from retail. Reports from Oman and GCC countries are no different. According to the United Nations Food Waste Index Report 2021, the Sultanate of Oman’s estimated household food waste is 95 kg per capita per year or 470,322 tonnes in 2019. Similar is the situation in other GCC countries, as the report suggests the estimated household food waste in UAE, Qatar and Kuwait is 95 kg per capita per year. These reports are wake-up calls for everyone to ensure that there is no food waste. There should be new ways to increase the production of agricultural goods.



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Oman marks World Veterinary Day



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman joined the rest of the world to mark World Veterinary Day which is celebrated on the last Saturday of April every year in recognition of the veterinarians' roles and efforts to achieve food security and protect public health.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is keen on celebrating the veterinarian every year in appreciation of the efforts and achievements they make in preserving and developing livestock in the Sultanate of Oman vaccinating animals against

World Veterinary Day which is celebrated in recognition of the veterinarians' roles and efforts to achieve food security and protect public health

diseases.

The Sultanate of Oman has more than 750 veterinarians working for public and private institutions.

Engineer Khalfan bin Matar al Sharji, Director-General of Livestock Resources at the

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, confirmed that the ministry will continue to pay attention to veterinarians with the aim of developing livestock and their products, adding that the veterinarians will continue their important role in protecting livestock against imported and endemic diseases by vaccinating animals against infectious and epidemic diseases that cause high mortality and large economic losses at the individual and institutional levels as well as the national economy in general.

— ONA

Omani students create organic algae fertiliser to fight soil salinity

MUSCAT: A student company, Azot, affiliated to the University of Technology and Applied Sciences UTAS-Nizwa, has successfully produced a liquid organic fertiliser extracted from algae that grows in fresh water.

The product serves as an alternative to mineral fertilisers and helps combat soil salinity, a significant issue for agricultural lands.

The team aims to market the product and register the intellectual property with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Ali bin Mohammed al Qasabi said that the idea of the product came about due to the salinity of the soil in agricultural lands and finding alternatives to the use of fertilisers that affect the soil, as it works to solve the problem of salinity in a large way at a lower and competitive price.

He mentioned that the salinity of the soil causes a decrease in agricultural production, as this product will contribute to the reclamation of soil and agricultural land and reduce the salinity rate, and had conducted several experiments on the



The idea of the product came about due to the salinity of the soil and finding alternatives to the use of fertilisers that affect the soil

product to prove its efficiency.

He pointed out that the company is currently working on devising an auxiliary device that distributes the product with water to be used in irrigating crops through aflaj for cultivation, with

the addition of organic materials that help trees bear fruit.

He also stressed that the company is conducting more studies and research for the product and working on developing it, adding that there are many challenges and difficulties that the company faced, represented in finding laboratories to help them complete the necessary research and studies for the product.

The team included Ali bin Mohammed al Qasabi, Shahd bint Khalfan al Siyabiyah, Malak bint Mohammed al Bahriyah, Muayyad bin Mohammed al Mufadhil, Ahmed bin Said al Qasabi, Al Zahraa bint Said al Hadramiyah, Abdullah bin Hilal al Shaibani, Al Basil bin Ali al Shukaili, Maria bint Hussain al Tawbiyyah, and Nour bint Sulaiman Ambusaidiyah. — ONA

UTAS-Nizwa, Mashhad Corporation sign MoU

BADRIYA AL BALUSHI
NIZWA, APRIL 29

A memorandum of cooperation was signed recently between the University of Technology and Applied Sciences UTAS-Nizwa and Mashhad Corporation for Artistic Production, at the Corporation's headquarters in Muscat.

The agreement was signed within the framework of

strengthening the relationship in various sectors in developing the educational and training process by creating a strong relationship for the exchange of experiences in areas of common interest.

Dr Sara al Bahlani, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs and Scientific Research from UTAS-Nizwa, and Mohammed al Harthi, CEO of Mashhad Corporation for Artistic Production, signed the



memorandum of cooperation.

The signing event was attended by officials from both the institutions.

The memorandum aims at building abilities, boosting cooperation between the two institutions, exchanging scientific, educational, training and practical experiences and motivating and supporting students' projects and researches and students' abilities.

Dr Khamis Ambusaidi, Faculty member, Department of Mass Communication, UTAS-Nizwa, said: "The memorandum is part of the University's endeavour to create a cooperative environment between the private sector and the academic institution in which it will fuel the spirit of cooperation and the transfer of practical expertise."

سلطنة عُمان
وزارة النقل والاتصالات وتقنية المعلومات
Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

إعلان مزايمة استثمارية

Investment Announcement

Investment Announcement No. 2/2023

Bidding for the Operation of Towing Boats Activity at Sultan Qaboos Port

The internal investment committee at The Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology announces the following request for investment proposals for local and global companies specialized in operating, managing and developing commercial activities in Ports to submit investment offers by the conditions outlined in this announcement and according to the details and attachments mentioned in the bidding document.

NUMBER	NAME OF BIDDING DOCUMENT	DEADLINE FOR PURCHASING BIDDING DOCUMENT	DEADLINE FOR INQUIRES SUBMISSION	CLOSING DATE	DOCUMENT FEES
02/2023	Operation of Towing Boats Activity at Sultan Qaboos Port	28/5/2023	11/06/2023	25/06/2023 12:00PM	100 Omani Rials (non-refundable)

- Document fee should be paid by bank transfer only to the Ministry's account number **0325001361300017** Bank Muscat
- The payment receipt must be sent to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- The bidding document will be shared via email
- The Investment proposals must include all the requirements mentioned in the Bidding document
- The Investment proposal must be valid for at least 12 months and should be signed and stamped
- All investment proposals should be sent as PDF to investment@mtcit.gov.om
- For any other inquiries, you can reach us via the following contact details:

PHONE NUMBER	E-mail
24685094 24685341	investment@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL INVESTMENT COMMITTEE

www.mtcit.gov.om

تقدم بثقة
Moving Forward
with Confidence

رؤية عمان 2040
Oman Vision 2040

Ministry of Social Development

Oman at Dubai ATM expo from May 1

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is participating in the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) exhibition in Dubai, which opens tomorrow, May 1.

The expo will see the participation of 20 institutions, establishments and destinations related to the tourism sector.

This annual participation comes within the framework of the keenness of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the institutions and establishments in the Omani tourism sector.

Oman's pavilion of 250 square metres includes a tourist information centre, hospitality tent and a display of traditional handicrafts, in addition to 20 corners for Omani tourism sector institutions. The exhibition is the largest of its kind in the Middle East, which attracts more than 2,000 exhibiting companies and about 34,000 participants from more than 150 countries.

— ONA

تقدم بثقة
Moving Forward
with Confidence

رؤية عمان 2040
Oman Vision 2040

Ministry of Social Development

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtaining of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
103/2023	Construction of the educational kitchen at Al-Wafa Center for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Ibri	Companies specialized in the field of urban contracting and maintenance and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the second degree	Sunday 14-5-2023 02:00 PM	Sunday 28-5-2023 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Sunday 30/4/2023.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

SUDAN FIGHTING ENTERS THIRD WEEK



People walk among scattered objects in the market of El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, as fighting continues in Sudan. — AFP

FIGHTING BETWEEN THE ARMY AND A RIVAL PARAMILITARY FORCE CONTINUED DESPITE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A 72-HOUR CEASEFIRE EXTENSION ON FRIDAY

512
PEOPLE HAVE BEEN
KILLED AND
CLOSE TO
4,200
WOUNDED



MORE THAN
75,000
PEOPLE WERE
INTERNALLY
DISPLACED WITHIN
SUDAN JUST IN THE
FIRST WEEK OF THE
FIGHTING

ONLY
16%
OF HOSPITALS
WERE OPERATING
AS NORMAL IN THE
CAPITAL

“
They both think they will win, but they are both sort of more open to negotiations, the word ‘negotiations’ or ‘talks’ was not there in their discourse in the first week or so

VOLKER PERTHES
UN special representative
in Sudan



Iranian nationals and other nationalities arrive at Jeddah Sea Port after being evacuated by Saudi Arabia. — Reuters



A ferry transports some 1900 evacuees across the Red Sea from Port Sudan to the Saudi King Faisal Navy Base in Jeddah. — AFP

KHARTOUM: The sounds of air strikes, anti-aircraft weaponry and artillery could be heard in Khartoum early on Saturday and dark smoke rose over parts of the city, as fighting in Sudan entered a third week.

Fighting between the army and a rival paramilitary force continued despite the announcement of a 72-hour ceasefire extension on Friday, when strikes by air, tanks and artillery rocked Khartoum and the adjacent cities of Bahri and Omdurman.

Hundreds have been killed and tens of thousands have fled for their lives in a power struggle between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that erupted into violence on April 15, derailing an internationally-backed transition toward democratic elections.

The fighting has also reawakened a two-decade-old conflict in the western Darfur region where scores have died this week.

The army has been deploying jets or drones on RSF forces in neighbourhoods across the capital. Many residents are pinned down by urban warfare with scant food, fuel, water and power.

At least 512 people have been killed and close to 4,200 wounded, according to the United Nations, which believes the real toll is much higher.

More than 75,000 people were internally displaced within Sudan just in the first week of the fighting, according to the United Nations. Only 16 per cent of hospitals were operating as normal in the capital.

The latest ceasefire, brokered by foreign powers, is supposed to last until Sunday at midnight.

The RSF accused the army of violating it with air strikes on its bases in Omdurman, Khartoum's sister city at the confluence of the Blue and White Nile rivers, and Mount Awliya.

The violence has sent tens of thousands of refugees across



Sudanese refugees who have fled the violence in their country queue to receive food supplements from World Food Programme (WFP) near the border between Sudan and Chad. — Reuters

Sudan's borders and threatens to stir instability across a volatile swathe of Africa between the Sahel and the Red Sea.

Foreign governments have evacuated diplomats and citizens to safety over the past week, including with airlifts. Britain said its evacuations would end on Saturday as demand for spots on planes had declined.

The US said several hundred

Americans had departed Sudan by land, sea or air. A convoy of buses carrying 300 Americans left Khartoum late on Friday on a 525-mile trip to the Red Sea in the first US-organised evacuation effort for citizens, the New York Times reported.

NEGOTIATIONS HORIZON
Warring sides in Sudan are more open to negotiations and

have accepted the conflict that erupted two weeks ago cannot continue a possible flicker of hope even as fighting continued.

Volker Perthes, UN special representative in Sudan, said the sides had nominated representatives for talks which had been suggested for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, or Juba in South Sudan, though he said there was a practical question over whether they could get there to “actually sit together”.

The prospects of negotiations between the leaders of the two sides have so far seemed bleak. On Friday, army leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan said in an interview he would never sit down with the RSF's “rebel” leader, referring to General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who said he would only talk after the army ceased hostilities.

Perthes noted that he had told the Security Council both sides thought they could win the conflict, most recently in a briefing a couple of days ago,

but he also said attitudes were changing.

“They both think they will win, but they are both sort of more open to negotiations, the word ‘negotiations’ or ‘talks’ was not there in their discourse in the first week or so,” he said.

While the sides had made statements that the other side had to “surrender or die,” Perthes said, they were also saying, “ok we accept ... some form of talks”.

“They have both accepted that this war cannot continue,” he added. While the army has conducted daily air strikes and says it has maintained control of vital installations, residents say the RSF has a strong presence on the ground in Khartoum.

Fighting between the forces has damaged electricity, water, and telecommunications infrastructure, and looting has destroyed businesses and homes. Tens of thousands of Sudanese have fled fighting either to other towns or to neighbouring countries. — Reuters



In brief

■ TEXAS



FIVE DEAD IN TEXAS SHOOTING

Five people including an 8-year-old child were killed in a shooting at a home in Cleveland, Texas. The shooting took place late on Friday and the police were still looking for the suspect, news reported.

Officials from the San Jacinto County Sheriff's office received a call about harassment from Cleveland at around 11:31 p.m. local time but when they reached the scene they found several victims who had been shot. The Sheriff's office said that the suspect was a Mexican man who was intoxicated, armed and on the run. The shootings all took place in one home, with four victims declared dead at the scene and the fifth declared dead after being taken to the hospital, the report added. — **Reuters**

■ ISTANBUL



ERDOGAN RETURNS FROM THREE-DAY ABSENCE

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Saturday appeared in public for the first time in three days after a stomach infection kept him off the campaign trail before key polls. Smiling and dressed in a red windbreaker, the 69-year-old leader walked out on the stage of an Istanbul aviation festival and tossed out flowers to flag-waving supporters.

He arrived together with his close ally, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and Libyan prime minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah.

Both countries have fought wars using Türkiye's combat drones, which will feature prominently at the weekend aviation event. — **AFP**

■ MOSCOW



FIVE RUSSIAN VILLAGES WITHOUT POWER

Five Russian villages on the border with Ukraine were without power as a result of Ukrainian shelling, the governor of Russia's south-western Belgorod region that borders Ukraine said on Saturday. The region has been hit by attacks throughout Moscow's more than year-long offensive in Ukraine. "The village of Novaya Tavolzhanka came under Ukrainian shelling today," Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said on Telegram. "The power lines are damaged", he said, adding that residents in the village and four others nearby were "without electricity." Gladkov said that "according to preliminary information, there are no victims." — **AFP**

Pope warns against indifference, meets in Orban's Hungary



Pope Francis speaks at the "Protection of the Mother of God" Church during his visit in Budapest. — **Reuters**

BUDAPEST: Pope Francis warned against indifference while thanking Hungary for taking in Ukrainians on Saturday despite the anti-refugee policies of nationalist Prime Minister Viktor Orban.

On his arrival of the three-day visit on Friday, the 86-year-old Argentine in his first speech to Orban and other government officials stressed "the need for openness towards others", warning against "withdrawing into oneself".

Hungary's government has welcomed those fleeing the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

But activists say there is barely a support system in place, while Orban's insistence on maintaining ties with Moscow puts off Ukrainians.

Some 600 refugees and poor people listened to the pope at St. Elizabeth's Church in Budapest on Saturday, while about a thousand more gathered outside.

After listening to some of their stories, including that of Oleg Yakovlev, a father-of-five who fled Ukraine, the pope thanked Hungary "for having welcomed so many refugees from Ukraine."

He further urged the need of "showing compassion toward all".

Olesia Misiats, a mother-of-three from Kiev who fled to Hungary a year ago, said she felt "very happy" to see the pope.

"We feel safe, and many people help us," the 33-year-old said.

"I respect the pope very much because he prays for Ukraine. He wants this war to finish, and my heart is full with thanks for him," she added.

A Ukrainian woman outside the cordoned-off church grounds, who only gave her name as Elena, said that she also hoped to see the pope "who is a strong advocate of peace". "We have no problems here, but obviously when you

are waiting to go back, you don't immerse yourself too deep," the 43-year-old dancer from north of Kyiv said.

During an audience last year at the Vatican, Francis equally thanked Orban for welcoming Ukrainian refugees.

Since Russia attacked its neighbour more than a year ago, more than two million Ukrainians have crossed into Hungary, but just 35,000 have applied for the EU's temporary protection status in the country.

That's far fewer than in other countries just west of Ukraine. — **AFP**

Crimea fuel depot on fire, towns shelled in Ukraine

KYIV: A huge fire erupted in Moscow-annexed Crimea after a suspected drone attack hit an oil depot on Saturday.

A Russian strike on a bloc of flats in the central Ukrainian city of Uman killed 23 people, including a baby boy.

On Saturday, officials in Moscow-controlled Crimea, towns in southern Ukraine and a governor of a border region reported attacks.

Fears of Ukrainian reprisals more than a year into Moscow's offensive have grown in Russia, where a range of cities have cancelled traditional May 9 celebrations.



Smoke rises over a fuel tank following an alleged drone attack in Sevastopol, Crimea. — **Reuters**

In Sevastopol, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, clouds of smoke rose high into the sky as a fuel reserved burned.

The port city has been hit by

a series of drone attacks since Moscow's attack of Ukraine began more than a year ago.

Russian-installed authorities said the fire was caused by a

suspected drone but sought to downplay the incident, amid rising security fears on the peninsula.

The Kremlin said nothing about the attack.

It came less than 24 hours after Russia struck a typical housing bloc in the historic city of Uman, killing more than two dozen of its residents.

Kyiv on Saturday identified five children killed in the attack as an 18-month-old boy, three girls aged eight, 11 and 14, and a 16-year-old boy.

"One woman is considered missing. The search continues," Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said. — **AFP**

Biden to meet 18 Pacific leaders in Papua New Guinea

PORT MORESBY: US President Joe Biden will meet 18 leaders from the South Pacific when he visits Papua New Guinea in May, a top regional diplomat said on Saturday, as the United States and China vie for influence.

Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko told a news conference Biden would attend bilateral talks with his hosts and is "also having a meeting with the 18 Pacific Island leaders".

The 18-member Pacific Island Forum is a regional bloc of mostly small states scattered across the vast swath of ocean.

The prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand will also attend.

Biden is set to become the first sitting US president in at least a century to visit Papua New Guinea when he touches down on May 22.

According to State Department records, which date back to Theodore Roosevelt's administration in 1901, no sitting US president has visited Papua New Guinea.

Biden is also scheduled to attend a G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, and a summit of the Quad — Australia, India, Japan and



Papua New Guinea Foreign Minister Justin Tkatchenko

the United States — in Sydney in May. US special envoy Joseph Yun said this week the United States was playing "catch-up" after years

of relative neglect.

China recently signed a secretive security pact with Solomon Islands, east of Papua New Guinea, that could allow Chinese troops to be deployed or based there.

A state-backed Chinese company won a contract in March to develop the international port in the capital Honiara.

"We need to accelerate our catch-up," Yun told the Hudson Institute. "Any high-level engagement is welcome," he said before Biden's Pacific meeting was confirmed.

"Have we neglected the

Pacific? The answer is yes we have neglected the Pacific and so I do appreciate more attention currently being given. We are trying to correct that quite a bit."

Biden's trip may also put the finishing touches on a US-Papua New Guinea Defence Cooperation Agreement.

Washington is working to establish a joint naval facility at Lombrum on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

Construction started in mid-2020, according to Australia's Department of Defence, which is also taking part in the initiative.

— **AFP**



FILE PHOTO: Kim Yo Jong, sister of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un attends wreath laying ceremony at Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi

North Korea ramps up threats towards US

SEOUL: North Korea has responded to increased US-South Korean military cooperation with fresh nuclear threats and personal insults directed at US President Joe Biden.

The first-strike capability of Pyongyang's nuclear force should be expanded, remarks by Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean strongman Kim Jong Un, suggested.

"We are convinced once again of the fact that the enhancement of the nuclear war deterrent, especially the second mission of the nuclear war deterrent, should be brought to further perfection," Kim was quoted as saying by state media on Saturday. Kim Jong Un's sister is a senior official of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea.

North Korea is subject to rigorous international sanctions because of its nuclear weapons programme - a situation that fuels Pyongyang's frequent invective against foreign governments and leaders.

Kim also lashed out at the so-called Washington Declaration of support announced on April 26 during a state visit to the US by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol.

The declaration reflected the "most hostile and aggressive will of action" and would only result in endangering peace and security in the region and the world, Kim said, according to state media.

In the declaration, the US assured South Korea that it would be more involved in the planning of its "extended deterrence," meaning the full range of military capabilities to defend South Korea - including nuclear. — **dpa**

Doctor please, no more of these



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

I have been working as a psychiatrist for over 28 years and the one question I get on regular bases from my patients is “doctor, would I get addicted to antidepressants?”

And despite saying no and citing the evidence, people still stop their medication even when are just starting to get better which leads them to experience a relapse of their symptoms and we have to restart the process all over again and again.

People from different backgrounds hold this misconception that antidepressants are addictive, you could be talking to a chain smoker or someone addicted to hard drugs like heroin and cocaine but when it comes to prescribed medication they are worried about addiction.

I sometimes try to use the analog of using insulin for someone with

diabetes but despite people agreeing that they will take insulin forever if advised by their doctor but they would not take antidepressants.

When asking the question, why do people stop their antidepressants?

The following can provide an explanation. First is a stigma that is associated with mental illness. People sometimes believe that someone is weak or not religious enough when they say they are experiencing mental health problems so they tend to hide it from their families and hide the fact they are taking medication.

Some family members force the person to stop their medication even when they are helping them remain well.

The second factor is a lack of awareness about how medication work. From a scientific point of

‘PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS HOLD THIS MISCONCEPTION THAT ANTIDEPRESSANTS ARE ADDICTIVE, YOU COULD BE TALKING TO A CHAIN-SMOKER OR SOMEONE ADDICTED TO HARD DRUGS BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE PRESCRIBED MEDICATION THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT ADDICTION’

view, antidepressants need two weeks to twenty days to work fully yet so some patients stop them from the first few days because they did not understand this point when the doctor explained it.

The third reason is that, like other medications, antidepressants can cause side effects that can be troubling to the patient so they stop them without informing their doctor who can recommend an alternative.

The fourth reason that is worth mentioning is cost as some patients have to pay for their medication and can't get it free from government hospitals.

So what can we do to help patients stay on their medication? In my opinion, having a clear conversation with patients about the role of medication and when they work is an essential step.

People have the right to know and would respect a doctor who is clear and honest with them.

Also one should allow the patient to ask questions and encourage them to do that. I personally make

it a point to ask the patient toward the end of our session if he or she has any questions and suggest writing their questions if they have any after they have left the clinic so we can discuss them in the following session.

Some patients prefer to read about the medication before taking them in that case.

I recommend to them scientifically trusted websites to read from and not any angry patients who may have had one unpleasant experience which makes their opinion biased.

Finally, it's important to provide the patient with psychological therapy that is appropriate to his or her condition and explain that for some patients, therapy alone is not enough and a combination of medication with therapy gives them a better chance of recovery.

New Zealand fights to save its flightless national bird

RYLAND JAMES

New Zealand’s treasured kiwi birds are shuffling around Wellington’s verdant hills for the first time in a century, after a drive to eliminate invasive predators from the capital’s surrounds.

Visitors to New Zealand a millennium ago would have encountered a bona fide “birdtopia” — islands teeming with feathered creatures fluttering through life unaware that mammalian predators existed.

The arrival of Polynesian voyagers in the 1200s and Europeans a few hundred years later changed all that.

Rats picked off snipe-rails and petrels, mice chewed through all the seeds and berries they could find, leaving little for native birds to peck on.

Possums — introduced for fur — stripped trees bare. Rabbits bred like, well, rabbits, devouring meadows and paddocks alike.

Heaping disaster upon disaster, stoats were introduced to kill the rabbits but instead killed wrens, thrushes, owls and quails.

The population of native flightless birds like the kakapo and kiwi plummeted.

The Department of Conservation estimates there are only around 70,000 wild kiwi left in New Zealand.

Despite the bird being a beloved national symbol, few New Zealanders have seen one in the wild.

However, numbers are rising again thanks to more than 90 community initiatives working nationwide to protect them.

One such group is The Capital Kiwi Project, a charitable trust backed by millions of dollars from government grants and private donations.

“Ever since people came to New Zealand, we have had a special connection to the kiwi,” founder and project leader Paul Ward said.

“They are central to Maori myth. Our sports teams, our rugby league teams, our defence force and, even when we go overseas, we are known as kiwis.

“They are tough, resilient, adaptable, all values we think of as New Zealanders, but most of us have never seen a kiwi before.”

Ward estimates wild kiwi last roamed the Wellington area more than a century ago.

The bid to save them required a sustained conservation effort.

The project had to first deal with the kiwi’s natural enemies prowling through the undergrowth.

— AFP

A symbol of loss in almost every Ukrainian kitchen



Marc Santora

The writer is the international news editor based in London

“Salt gave us work and salt gave us life,” said Ruslan, a salt miner turned soldier.

Ruslan, 45, was working 1,000 feet below the earth in one of Europe’s largest salt mines when the Russians launched their full-scale attack. Almost a year later, he was fighting near the ruined city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine when the Russians took control of his nearby hometown, and the mine with it.

“I can’t even describe that feeling now,” he said. “Everything dear to me, everything I loved, worked for, and dreamed about was shattered in an instant.”

Soledar — which means gift of salt — fell in January, allowing the Russians to step up their assault on Bakhmut, about 40 miles to the south. The small town, with only 10,000 residents before the attack, also held a special place in Ukraine’s economy and history.

The mine provided more than 90 per cent of the country’s salt, and its operator, the state-owned company Artemsil, exported salt to more than 20 countries. Now Ukraine is relying on imported salt for the first time in its modern history.

But the country’s connection to its salt runs deeper than economics: It is a matter of national pride. Nearly every home had a package of salt from Soledar. Salt was among the first resources that made the eastern Donbas region famous for its mineral wealth.

The remnants of more than a century of mining were spectacular, too — excavations more than 1,000 feet deep, linked by more than 200 miles of tunnels, and caverns with cathedral-like roofs big enough to host orchestral concerts, a soccer match and even a hot-air balloon. The Soledar mine had become a tourist attraction, complete with a sanitarium built around the unproven health benefits of breathing salt-infused air.

Soon after the Russians launched their attack, Soledar came under withering bombardment. Ruslan, whose job was to ensure fresh air in the mines, recalled how they raced to get



A packet of salt mined in Soledar is featured in a new mural in Irpin, Ukraine.

UKRAINE’S CONNECTION TO ITS SALT RUNS DEEPER THAN ECONOMICS: IT IS A MATTER OF NATIONAL PRIDE. NEARLY EVERY HOME HAD A PACKAGE OF SALT FROM SOLEDAR

enough salt from the earth to replenish the national strategic stockpile before shelling forced the company to suspend operations in late April last year.

The salt disappeared from store shelves last summer, but 20 tonnes of stock that the government and the company managed to recover is now being sold within Ukraine to raise money for the war effort. Its packaging is based on a widely shared illustration by designer Artem Gusev that turned Artemsil’s salt-crystal emblem into a Ukrainian trident and replaced the word “salt” (“sil”) with “strength” (“mitts”).

When Artemsil became aware of the illustration, it saw the chance to “add a little bit of strength to every Ukrainian,” said its head of communications, Volodymyr Nizienko. According to the government platform handling the sales, United24, the campaign has raised more than \$1.5 million.

The money cannot replace the more than 2,500 jobs lost, or rebuild what the bombardment destroyed, but it will buy drones for the Ukrainian military to attempt to win the town back.

Ruslan, who now goes by the call sign Miner, learned of the Ukrainian forces’ withdrawal from Soledar from friends as he was fighting in the forest belt north of Bakhmut, near the village of Pidhorodne.

He had a hard time putting into words the brutality of the Russian onslaught there, calling it “a nightmare.”

“Wagner group fighters were attacking us constantly; we didn’t have enough ammunition,” he said, speaking by telephone from a position in a different part of the country. His full name is being withheld for security reasons since he is still on active duty. “Not all of us survived, but we accomplished all the tasks and defended the place.”

He paused. “To be honest, it was hell,” he said. — **New York Times**

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Nature: Poetry in motion...

“We’ve got technology, and social media,” said a student to me this week. “We don’t need nature!” I never had to think much to know what my response would be, but I did need to deliberate somewhat as to whether I should respect their opinion, or whether to ‘hit them out of the ballpark,’ or be compassionate in my response. You be the judge.

“Oh dear,” I responded, after due deliberation. “How lightly you cast aside Mother Nature. Don’t you know she has been around for, 4,600 million years? Meanwhile, we humans have only been around for 6 million years, civilisation for about 6,000 years, industrialisation for 300 years, and technology for a mere one hundred and fifty years, even in its earliest forms, while social media is a true five-minute-wonder that has evolved only since 1970, a touch more than fifty years since.”

“Yeah but...” incidentally my most disliked response at any time, she said with a laugh. “That’s all old history. You’ve got to look forward or you’ll get lost in the rush, Sir.”

“I appreciate your compassion, and care for my well-being.” I smiled, “However, I’m not quite ready for the retirement home yet, and I won’t get lost in any ‘techie’ rush. Your advice may be well meaning, but I actually manage the new technologies fairly capably for an elderly citizen. I cannot code, and I don’t do video games, but I’m pretty good at Word, Excel, and PowerPoint, and can navigate my way around the world-wide-web thank you very much.”

“I’m not saying anything, sir. But you’ve gotta admit that everything’s better since we got Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter and that!”

“Well, what I can tell you is that in my lifetime I’ve had the pleasure of writing to, and getting letters from, pen pals around the world. I’ve also experienced the evolution of telephones from not having one, to sharing a ‘party line’ with six neighbouring homes, to having a ‘private’ phone line, to mobile phones, and now smart phones. I think it’s amazing what they have become



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THE VERY FIRST SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM WAS AN INSTITUTIONAL ONE, ‘PLATO,’ AN ACADEMIC SITE FOR THE FACULTY

today, but I think your generation unfortunately sees things on either social media, or your phones, and think that’s as good as it gets. I genuinely feel you are short-changed, because all you are getting are images, when what are valuable, are experiences.”

In fact, the very first social media platform was an institutional one, ‘PLATO,’ an academic site for the faculty at the University of Illinois. ‘SixDegrees.com’ opened in 1997 and closed just three years later, but ‘AmIHotorNot.com’ fired up that year, and apart from rebranding currently as a dating app, has survived. ‘Friendster’ opened and closed in 2002 and 2003 respectively, while ‘MySpace,’ ‘LinkedIn,’ ‘YouTube,’ and ‘WordPress’ all predated “The Facebook’s arrival in 2004, and its 1 millionth sign-up as ‘Facebook,’ only a year later. ‘Twitter,’ ‘Tumblr,’ and the ‘hashtag,’ all arrived soon after, and social media had arrived to stay.

“What’s a party line?” I chuckled aloud at that, and explained that a ‘party’ line was in fact the terminology for a shared phone line, which really seemed to be mind-blowing to the youthful student, and to be fair, I could understand why.

“Then there’s the matter of energy to run the new technologies,” I continued, “Ultimately, all energy, for now, is drawn from nature, so what are you going to do for energy?”

“Solar power, and wind power, that’s where the future lies, Sir. You must see that?”

“Hmmmm. Both natural, and renewable, and both products of nature. Yes?”

There is no great satisfaction in a points victory over a student, That’s not at all my ‘thing,’ but as much as technologies are enabling progress, it is nature that can perpetuate the continuing evolution. Until that relationship is recognised, it is not a question of the challenges of the tech industry responding to the need to sustain nature, but rather that mankind itself both recognises, and responds, to its appreciation of an ever so forgiving life partner... Mother Nature.

UP IN THE SKY!



Hot air balloons are seen during the 33rd Ballooning International Festival, in Torres, Brazil, on Friday night. The event was conceived by Franco-Brazilian balloonist Bruno Schwartz in 1989, when he discovered that Torres is the only seaside city in the world where the wind runs parallel to the beach hence being the ideal setting for a festival. – AFP

Women health workers hold key to eradicating polio

Anyone who witnesses a polio vaccination campaign in Pakistan will notice something remarkable: in most areas, the majority of health workers moving house to house to vaccinate children against this highly infectious paralytic disease are women.

But despite their outsize role in providing life-saving vaccinations and other essential services to children in every corner of the country, these frontline workers are rarely consulted on matters of health policy. This year, as Pakistan strives to eradicate wild polio once and for all, input and feedback from the women leading these efforts on the ground must be incorporated into the programme’s design. There is no hope of success otherwise.

Today, wild polio — a scourge that once caused irreversible paralysis, or even death, all around the world — remains endemic in just two countries: Afghanistan and Pakistan. Vaccination is the key to stopping this virus once and for all, and in Pakistan, the success of vaccination campaigns largely depends on female health workers. In many communities, women can enter homes where men cannot and, as a result, are able to build lasting trust with families.



Atiya Aabroo

The writer is Deputy Director of Pakistan’s Ministry of National Health Services, is a core member of the National Gender Group within the National Emergency Operations Centre

AFTER YEARS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES TO BATTLE OUTBREAKS AND PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Decades of progress, reflecting the work of thousands, have brought us closer to success than ever before: wild polio cases in Pakistan are at an extreme low, endemic transmission is now geographically restricted to just seven districts, and ten of the 11 strains of virus circulating in 2020 have been wiped out.

A polio-free Pakistan is within our grasp, and the women on the frontlines will help to carry us over the finish line. Recognising this reality, the country’s polio eradication programme launched an unprecedented initiative to listen to underrepresented female health workers and engage them as co-partners in designing solutions to end polio in Pakistan.

The first step was to gather data at scale by surveying a representative sample of more than 2,600 women working in the highest-risk districts. They answered questions about their experiences and challenges in the field, including the barriers to reaching children during campaigns and administering vaccines in homes, as well as their motivations and safety concerns.

Based on the survey results, 14 in-person workshops were

held across the country, bringing together hundreds of female frontline workers in dedicated listening sessions. In addition to swapping stories and experiences, attendees suggested solutions for the biggest hurdles to ending polio in their districts and shared their hopes for future livelihoods beyond polio. The leadership at Pakistan’s National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) — the heart of the country’s polio programme — promised to review and act on the valuable feedback gathered from these structured listening sessions.

I was lucky enough to attend one of the workshops, and the

sense of excitement was palpable. Knowledgeable women, whose extremely valuable work has been underappreciated for too long, finally had the floor and were eager to help design a more effective programme that better reflects the reality they face every day.

The importance of such an exercise was evident from their creative ideas for addressing practical challenges like having to choose between walking for hours or hiring private transport during rush hour in order to get to work on time. They also brainstormed about how to overcome parents’ refusal of the polio vaccine, owing to misconceptions about how

best to protect their children, and disrespect for polio workers in many communities.

This co-design initiative is just one example of the Pakistani government’s revitalised commitment to engage women more deeply in public-health efforts. The NEOC, for example, established its own National Gender Group, tasked with giving a voice to the women who are essential to eradication efforts — starting with initiatives like this one.

Pakistan’s government was the first in the Global Polio Eradication Initiative to launch such a programme, and I am encouraged to see that we are not alone. With similar efforts to listen to and learn from female health workers now under way in Somalia, Nigeria, and other countries, a global movement is taking shape. In many places, it is the first time that women have a seat at the policymaking table.

As the world faces a historic convergence of crises, from climate change to pandemics and persistent conflict, women’s policy input is indispensable — and not just to improving healthcare.

@Project Syndicate, 2022



Wild polio cases in Pakistan are at an extreme low

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AL NAHDA THUMP AL ITTIHAD TO EXTEND LEAD ON TOP

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

Al Nahda maintained their lead in the Omantel League after a well-deserved 3-0 win against Al Ittihad in the postponed match of Round 20th of the Omantel League. The match took place at the Al Buraimi Sports Complex, where Al Nahda widened the points difference from their closest competitors.

The first half of the match saw Al Nahda controlling the game, with several attempts to score from all directions, but it was in the 19th minute, Omar al Maliki managed to score the first goal for Al Nahda from Ahmed al Kaabi's cross. Al Ittihad tried to keep up, but Al Nahda continued to dominate and posed a clear danger to Al Ittihad's goal.

In the second half, Al Nahda continued their attacks and managed to score two more goals. Omar al Maliki scored his second goal in the 58th minute from a cross from Munther al Alawi, and Mohammed al Khasib added the third goal in the 83rd minute from a counterattack.

With this victory, Al Nahda raised their points to 49, while Al Ittihad remained at 16 points.

SEEB SECURE THIRD SPOT
Al Seeb have temporarily secured third place following a 2-0 victory over Sohar in a postponed match at the Seeb Sports Stadium.

In the first half, Al Seeb's

players attempted to advance forward to score an early goal, but the result remained negative without goals until the 45th minute.

At the beginning of the second half, Sohar coach pushed some alternative cards to improve his team's performance, while Al Seeb's coach preserved the basic line-up with which he started the match. Seeb striker Mohsen al Ghassani almost opened the scoring in the match with a beautiful header, but the ball went out near to the post.

However, Al Ghassani compensated for wasting that opportunity by scoring the first goal in the 52nd minute with a powerful ball hit in the difficult corner of Sohar goalkeeper Youssef al Shiyadi's goal. Sohar players organised their ranks well and looked for an equaliser, but Al Seeb goalkeeper Mutasim al Wahaibi saved a number of their easy and dangerous opportunities.

Al Seeb striker Abdulaziz al Muqbali added the second goal in the 82nd minute after dribbling couple of defenders inside the box, revealing the goal in front of him and hitting a strong shot to the right of goalkeeper Youssef al Shiyadi. Al Muqbali's goal ended Sohar's last hope of returning to the match.

With this victory, Al Seeb continued their good comeback and climbed to third place with 41 points while Sohar remained eighth with 30 points.



Oman volleyball team concludes preparatory camp in Suhar

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

Oman volleyball team concluded their first domestic training camp on Saturday at Sohar Sports Complex with attendance of 17 players. The training sessions were performed under watchful eyes of national coach Jamal al Mamari besides assistant coach Khalid al Shizawi.

The four days preparatory camp was part of the team's forthcoming assignment including their attendance in the Arabian Sports Games which will be held in Algeria in July and Arabian Volleyball Championship in Iraq in September besides the Asian Games in China which will begin on September 23. The recently concluded internal camp will be followed by a series of domestic warm-up gathering in May and June until the kick off of the first official participation.

The experienced national coach, Jamal al Mamari, said that he is very pleased to lead the coaching staff of the national volleyball team. "Thanks to Oman Volleyball Association (OVA) and for their confidence and trust in me to lead the technical side of the national team. We will work together with the OVA board of directors to accomplish the desired targets. There are many assignments which are awaiting the team in the coming few months and we will work hard to shape the readiness of the players ahead of the championships," he added.

On the camp, coach Jamal said: "The camp was an opportunity to see a replacement for some faces in the squad. This will not happen in a short term but it will take time until the newly selected players will be adapted with the level of international and regional matches and official events. The latest gathering featured presence

of a mixture of young players including three players who are under 20 years besides seven players who are in their 20s and five players who are above 30 years old. This is a normal squad in volleyball which normally have players with longer age than other sports," he concluded.

The announced squad of Oman national volleyball team comprised 17 players. The majority of the selected players were from Seeb and Sohar clubs besides some members from Oman Club.

OMAN SQUAD: Yousef al Shukaili, Younis al Amri, Abdullah al Muqbali, Ahmed al Toubi, Adam al Jabobi, Khamis al Jabri, Mohammed al Muqbali, Mahmood al Saadi, Saleh al Jabobi, Hilal al Muqbali, Majid al Shibli, Ismail al Hedi, Khalid al Muqbali, Abdullah al Shibli, Osama al Mamari, Saud al Mamari and Falah al Jaradi.





Lucknow Super Giants' Marcus Stoinis plays a shot during the IPL Twenty20 match between Punjab Kings and Lucknow Super Giants. – AFP

Stoinis, Mayers star as Lucknow smash Punjab

MOHALI, INDIA: Marcus Stoinis and Kyle Mayers smashed 11 boundaries apiece to bring Lucknow Super Giants the second-highest team total in Indian Premier League history during Friday's 56-run demolition of Punjab Kings.

Lucknow finished on 257-5 after being sent in to bat with Mayers giving the visitors a racing start, putting on 41 runs from 21 balls with skipper KL Rahul.

Kagiso Rabada sent back the openers, with Mayers caught at mid-on for 54, but Stoinis kept up the charge with a statement knock that delivered 72 from 40.

"This wicket was so much better to bat on than the one at home," said the Australian afterwards. "We were even joking about it in the middle."

Stoinis took 22 runs off the last nine balls he faced to finish in the 19th over with six fours and five sixes.

Wrist spinner Rahul Chahar was the only Punjab bowler who managed to slow down the batting charge, conceding 29 runs in his wicketless four overs.

Punjab rode 23-year-old Atharav Taide's 66 off 36 balls to finish at 201 runs in a brave but improbable chase.

Stoinis put an early dent in the fightback by dismissing returning captain Shikhar Dhawan (1), who was caught in the deep after miscalculating with an uppercut in the first over.

The Australian's night came to a premature end after he was hit on the hand while bowling and retired hurt, grimacing in pain, though he was unfazed after the match.

"My finger is alright. We will get scans done," he said.

Taide was out in the 13th over becoming leg spinner Ravi Bishnoi's first wicket of the evening. He also trapped Liam Livingstone lbw for 23 effectively ending Punjab's already scant hopes.

Sikander Raza was the only other Punjab batsman to cross the 30-run mark with the hosts all out on the second-last ball.

Lucknow's score was six shy of the tournament record by Royal Challengers Bangalore, who scored 263-5 in a 2013 match against the now-defunct Pune Warriors.

The game also recorded the second-highest boundary count — 45 fours and 22 sixes — in IPL history, second only to the 69 between Chennai and Rajasthan Royals in 2010. — AFP

UAE edge Oman by two runs in DLS method

MUSCAT: It was heartbreak for Oman as they narrowly lost to the UAE by two runs on DLS method in the rain-curtailed semifinal match of the ACC Men's Premier Cup at Mulpani Ground in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Saturday.

In a closely fought match, where fortunes swung like a pendulum, rain stopped play with Oman needing 47 runs off 42 balls and four wickets in hand.

Oman were at 190/6 in 43 overs when downpour started, falling short of the DLS target of 193 in 43 overs.

UAE will take on hosts Nepal in the final on May 1 after the hosts semifinal match against Kuwait was abandoned. Nepal put up a total of 281/9 in 42 overs after rain forced the match to be reduced to 42-over-a-side game.

Kuwait were 37/6 in 8.3 overs when rain stopped play with Nepal pacer Karan KC picking up five wickets for just 10 runs in 4.3 overs.

Nepal booked the spot in the final as they had more points than Kuwait at the conclusion of the group stage.

On Saturday, Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood won the toss and put UAE to bat, a decision that was vindicated by the Oman bowlers, who came up with a disciplined performance to restrict UAE to 236 in 49.2 overs.

Spinner Maqsood was exceptional as he picked four for 32 while pacer Bilal Khan continued his fiery form to claim four for 44, including two in one over, to sent back Asif Khan and experienced Rohan Mustafa.

The Mulpani ground was assisting the slower bowlers in a big way and Oman's off-spinner Jay Odedra kept a tight leash on the run-rate in the middle of the innings as he produced a miserly spell of 0/19 in eight overs while Ayaan Khan took two crucial wickets.

Muhammad Waseem was the top run-getter for the UAE with 48 off just 31 balls while there were notable contributions from Rameez Shahzad (46), Asif Khan



(34) and Basil Hameed (34).

With cloudy and overcast conditions persisting throughout the day, prospects of rain interrupting play was high.

Chasing 237 to win, Oman openers – Jatinder Singh and Kashyap Prajapati – began on a positive note and scored briskly. Both looked in good knick and kept the scoreboard moving with boundaries at regular intervals. However, the introduction of leg-spinner Karthik Meiyappan swung the game in UAE's favour as he sent back the top-three Oman batters. Prajapati was Meiyappan's first of three victims in the 16th over, adjudged leg-before wicket for a 43-ball 49 that included nine boundaries.

Meiyappan spun a magical web that then had Jatinder stuck in it as the star Oman batter was bowled for 65-ball 42. Oman were 98/2 in the 20th over and were soon three down in the 24th over. Shoaib Khan became the third scalp of Meiyappan to leave Oman in a spot of bother at 119/3.

Captain Maqsood then dropped anchor and along with Mohammad Nadeem (24 not out) rebuild the chase with a 62-run partnership before Zahoor Khan

got the crucial breakthrough when he castled Maqsood for a 70-ball 40 in the 42nd over.

At that stage of play, Oman were at 181/4 in 41.3 overs, slightly ahead on DLS method. With rains threatening play, a sense of panic ran down the new batters – Ayaan Khan and Sandeep Goud – who opted to go for quick runs and in the process departed in one over.

UAE spinner Basil Hameed was the tormentor as he sent back Ayaan and Goud in the 43rd over. The two wickets in a space of three balls turned the tables on Oman in the DLS calculation with Goud caught behind by Vriitya Aravind off the last ball of the over before rain stopped play.

Hameed had earlier got Ayaan caught off the third ball and Goud's dismissal sealed the fate of Oman. Oman next play Kuwait in the third-place play-off on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES: UAE 236 in 49.2 overs (Muhammad Waseem 48, Rameez Shahzad 46, Basil Hameed 34, Asif Khan 34; Zeeshan Maqsood 4/32, Bilal Khan 4/44, Ayaan Khan 2/54) beat Oman 190/6 in 43 overs (DLS target 193 in 43 overs) (Kashyap Prajapati 49, Jatinder Singh 42, Zeeshan Maqsood 40, Mohammad Nadeem 24 n.o.; Karthik Meiyappan 3/42, Basil Hameed 2/20).



Shankar, Miller power Gujarat to top of IPL table

KOLKATA: A smashing partnership between Vijay Shankar and David Miller steered holders Gujarat Titans to the top of the IPL table with a seven-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders on Saturday.

Chasing 180 for victory, Gujarat were in trouble at 93-3 when Shankar (51) and the left-handed Miller (32) combined to achieve victory with 13 balls to spare at Kolkata's Eden Gardens.

Bowlers Mohammed Shami, Josh Little and Noor Ahmad set up victory after they kept down Kolkata to 179-7 despite a sparkling 81 by Rahmanullah Gurbaz in a match which started 45 minutes late due to rain and wet outfield.

In the chase, skipper Hardik Pandya fell for 26 and Shubman Gill departed on 49 when Miller, who survived a dropped catch on 26, took on the bowlers with a couple of sixes.

Shankar, an Indian all-rounder, soon took over from his South African partner in their unbeaten stand of 87 with a six-hitting blitz as he reached his fifty in 24 balls.

Gujarat, who had a fairytale debut season when they clinched the Indian Premier League title last year, moved top of the 10-team table with six wins in eight matches.

Two-time champions Kolkata, led by Nitish Rana, stay seventh with six losses in nine matches.

Regular wickets hurt Kolkata's chances of getting to a bigger total as they fell to 88-4, but Gurbaz, who made the team in place of injured England batsman Jason Roy, held firm.

Afghanistan's Gurbaz smashed seven sixes in his attacking knock and put on 47 for the fifth wicket with Rinku Singh before he fell to Ahmad's wily left-arm wrist spin. – AFP

Dhoni's mind vs Punjab's aggression, Rajasthanani domination



The heart-broken Oman fans would be hating this game of cricket after what they would have believed to be a series of tactical errors that cost Oman an all-important berth in the finals. From not picking a front-line spinner on a turning track, to not sending a specialist technically correct batter at a time when wickets were crucial and instead going for the option of aggression. Obviously, at the end of the day, cricket is just a game, yet national representatives have to get used to receiving the appreciations when they are doing well and hearing the complaints when they go wrong.

Coming to IPL, in both these matches, the teams are clashing for the first time in this season and on a day of double-header, all these attacking sides on batting-friendly tracks should be able to provide a perfect entertainment.

Chennai, which were leading the table before their previous game, have slipped down to the fourth position, such is the intensity of this year's IPL. Four teams are on 10 points, two teams are on 8 points and another 2 teams are on 6 points.

CSK VS PBKS AT CHENNAI

TEAM INFO – Chennai has had a brilliant season

so; they have only lost 3 games out of 8. They are going to be playing Punjab only once this season and they would be aware of how dangerous are Punjab. Punjab are on the sixth position with 8 points and majority of their matches have been high scoring. Last game, Lucknow stunned Punjab by posting a total of 257 against them. When both teams are coming with a losing momentum, expect firecrackers.

Head-to-Head - Played - 27; Won by CSK - 15; Won by PBKS - 12

CSK possible 12 – R Gaikwad, D Conway, A Rahane, S Dube, A Rayudu, M Ali, R Jadeja, MS Dhoni, M Pathirana, T Deshpande, M Theekshana, A Singh

PBKS possible 12 – S Dhawan, Atharva Taide, S Raza, L Livingstone, S Curran, J Sharma, S Khan, K Rabada, R Chahar, G Brar, A Singh, P Singh.

Pitch & Weather Report - The pitch at MA Chidambaram Stadium is spin-friendly. The spinners will play a key role while bowling here as the ball tends to grip off the surface. Run-scoring isn't easy and the batters will have to be on their toes while batting here. Clear skies will greet both sides on Friday, with the temperature in Chennai expected to hover between 28 to 36 degrees Celsius.

Match Prediction - Chennai are on a roll this year and their balanced and in-form line up has been consistently performing well. Dhoni's captaincy and man management is a point that doesn't need any further mention. Punjab are a dangerously unpredictable side, but don't really think that they have what it takes to beat CSK at their fortress.



MI VS RR AT MUMBAI

TEAM INFO - This is the only time these two are going to be clashing against each other in the league stage. Rajasthan have been the team of the year and they are topping the points table currently. While MI have only won 3 out of 7 and are on the eighth position. MI are coming from a losing streak, after being beaten by Punjab and Gujarat and would love to get to winning ways. RR had lost their way momentarily, by losing two back-to-back games, but they found their

winning way back at home, against Chennai.

Head-to-Head - Played - 27; Won by MI - 14; Won by RR - 12; No Result - 1

MI possible 12 – R Sharma, I Kishan, C Green, S Yadav, T David, Wadhwa, K Karthikeya, A Tendulkar, R Meridith, P Chawla, J Behrendorff

RR possible 12 – y Jaiswal, J Buttler, D Padikkal, S Samson, S Hetmyer, DJurel, R Ashwin, J holder, A Zampa, S Sharma, Y Chahal, K Yadav

Pitch & Weather Report - The pitch at Wankhede Stadium is a wonderful track to bat on. The batters can hit through the line right from the start of their innings. Short boundaries on either side help the batters and fans can expect a high-scoring affair on Saturday. The temperature in Mumbai is expected to hover between 27 to 32 degrees Celsius. It will stay humid throughout the day.

Match Prediction - Expect a run-fest at Mumbai. The small ground of Wankhede with a good batting track will mean that the bowlers are going to be paying a hefty price for their smallest mistakes. Mumbai don't have the biggest names of Indian cricket's batting, but they aren't in the kind of form that is required to go the distance. Bowling is another big concern which puts a lot of pressure on Mumbai. Considering Rajasthan's firepower and form, it should be difficult for Mumbai and this should be an easy one for Rajasthan Royals.

FAN COMMENTS

"Obviously, it's disappointing to see the team that you have served for almost a decade, on the losing side. Although, I would like to call them

unfortunate and unlucky to have fallen short due to unforeseen circumstances. This could have happened with anyone and I just hope that the team recovers from this loss quickly and focuses on further projects. Coming to IPL, CSK & RR are a team to beat this year." – Ajay Lalcheta, 39, ex-captain of Oman, Manager Shipping, Clearing and Forwarding Dept, Al Tasnim Enterprises, Indian.

"I really hope that the Oman Cricket management looks at picking and training the local Omani youngsters at the international level. I hope that they realise that this is not fair with the locals, if they are ignored. My cousin's team just finished as second in top division competition and they have many young talented kids. We also want to see Omani boys in IPL like the Afghanis." – Faisal al Balushi, 49, Lawyer, Omani.

"Omani cricket is just like old Kenya cricket. Little success, then no back up, so it will come down. I love IPL and Rajasthan Royals. Starting they supported the youngsters and now every gully in Rajasthan have too much talent. This year they will win trophy easily, everyone in form." – Shakil Ahmed, 49, Machine Operator, Electrician/ Mutrah Insofoam, Indian.

"My husband is a big fan of cricket and since Oman's loss yesterday, he has been in a terrible mood. But today it's Chennai's game and watching Dhoni play will just get him in the perfect mood. The only issue is with amount of consumption of fritters from health perspective. I am not sure whether I love or hate cricket, but it's a fantastic game for sure." – Kajal Umesh Shah, 52, Housewife, Indian.

Sensational maiden FIA WEC pole for Al Harthy

Ahmad becomes first Omani to set FIA WEC pole

Oman Racing star proud to have delivered grid-topping performance

Sights set on major challenge for honours in 6hrs of Spa-Francorchamps



SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS, Belgium: Oman Racing with TF Sport's Ahmad al Harthy stormed to a dominant GTE Am class pole position at Spa-Francorchamps on Friday – a landmark first qualifying topping performance from the Omani in his maiden season in the FIA World Endurance Championship.

Delivering a faultless showing throughout the 15-minute session, which was red flagged halfway through and then re-started, the Aston Martin Vantage driver shot to the top of the times with his first true flying lap, a time of 2m18.127 seconds.

No sooner had Al Harthy put Oman Racing at the summit of the timesheets than the session had to be halted due

to a car off track, and so the runners all returned to pitlane. When qualifying resumed, Al Harthy got down to business straight away and posted an improved time of 2m17.474 seconds.

Extending his advantage markedly, there was still time to better it further with his final lap of the session and he duly delivered with a session best of 2m17.216 seconds. Sparking huge celebrations within the Oman Racing squad, Al Harthy's first WEC pole – the first ever in the World Championship by an Omani entrant – was achieved by a gap of almost two seconds.

The result comes as a welcome boost to Al Harthy and team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood after a

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM DRIVER STANDINGS:

14th Ahmad al Harthy / Michael Dinan / Charlie Eastwood, 7 pts

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP GTE AM TEAM STANDINGS:

11th Oman Racing with TF Sport, 7 pts

challenging start to the 2023 campaign, and hopes are now justifiably high ahead of today's TotalEnergies 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps race in Belgium.

The build-up to the third contest of

the season has been strong from the get-go for Oman Racing, with the squad finishing third fastest in the opening free practice session on Thursday, 27th April, before then working hard on the set-up for qualifying and race trim.

As a track where Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS backed Al Harthy has excelled throughout his distinguished motorsport career, Oman's number one racing driver is very much looking forward to round three of the FIA WEC campaign.

AHMAD AL HARTHY: "I'm absolutely delighted, our first FIA WEC pole position and we are the first

Omani entry to ever do that in the World Championship. It's a dream come true! I'm delighted with how we managed to prepare ourselves for qualifying, everything over the last two days which we have been practicing worked and it was all about maximising the tyres at the right time in qualifying."

"We knew some competitors were able to be in the low two minute 17 seconds bracket in practice, and for us to do that in qualifying and the others not to replicate that was a huge boost. I think we can have a good race, it's always a long six hours of racing around Spa, but we did what we had to do in qualifying. I'm so proud to have achieved this for Oman, hopefully it's the start of more to come."



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Oman economy set for new phase of energetic growth

Fiscal Sustainability: New impetus for economic diversification strategy: Official

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

The Omani economy is poised for a recovery, buoyed by massive projects, diversification of income sources, and optimal utilisation of financial resources, according to Dr Khalid bin Said al Amri (pictured), Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Economic Society.

Speaking at a lecture organised by the British-Omani Society in London, Dr Al Amri praised the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the government's financial plans and programmes, which he believes will help Oman recover in the coming period.

Dr Al Amri also discussed the laws and regulations that will support economic aspects, such as the expected Labour Law, Social Protection Law, and Public Debt Law in 2023.

He predicts that Oman's credit rating will continue to improve in the coming years with the implementation of financial measures and policies aimed at achieving financial sustainability and regulating public finances.

Despite going through a tough period due to the Covid-19 crisis and the collapse of oil prices, the

Omani economy has recovered thanks to the government's economic reforms, initiatives, and programmes.

Oman is expected to continue working on improving the business environment, providing financing sources with competitive interest rates for various projects, and attracting foreign investment.

The country will also focus on economic diversification plans and developing governorates by granting them more authority, developing economic leadership, activating the role of civil society institutions and regulatory authorities, as well as utilising the

surplus in the budget to create export-oriented economic projects that generate jobs, and focusing on education and its quality.

Green hydrogen

Oman will also be an important global centre for the production and export of green hydrogen, with five giant projects expected in the sector.

These include the 'Duqm Hyperscale Green Hydrogen Project', the Oman Hydrogen Project, the JEA Green Energy Project, the H2Oman Project, and the Salalah H2 Project.

The Chairman of the Oman Economic Society highlighted

the most important financial and economic developments in Oman from February 2020 to March 2023, which included the launch of the National Financial Sustainability Programme and Financial Sector Development to enable the growth of the economy and increase investments, ensuring sustainability and financial stability.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the economist noted, has extended job security benefits for former employees working for Omani citizens until the end of June 2023 to maintain social and economic stability.

His Majesty has also directed an

THE COUNTRY WILL ALSO FOCUS ON ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION PLANS AND DEVELOPING GOVERNORATES BY GRANTING THEM MORE AUTHORITY, DEVELOPING ECONOMIC LEADERSHIP, ACTIVATING THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS AND REGULATORY AUTHORITIES, AS WELL AS UTILISING THE SURPLUS IN THE BUDGET TO CREATE EXPORT-ORIENTED ECONOMIC PROJECTS THAT GENERATE JOBS, AND FOCUSING ON EDUCATION AND ITS QUALITY

government schools, completion of compensations related to the coastal interior road, establishment of a new airport in Khasab, execution of the Dibba-Lima-Khasab road and connecting it to Khamis Mushayt in the Governorate of Musandam, among others.

Monetary and economic indicators show that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is expected to reach RO 44.1 billion by the end of 2022, a 30 per cent increase from the previous year.

Foreign currency reserves of the Central Bank of Oman rose to \$16.6 billion by the end of June 2022.

Traditional commercial banks' total deposits increased to RO 26.3 billion, a 5.5 per cent increase, and the total credit balance provided by local banks increased by 3.9 per cent to RO 28.8 billion by the end of September 2022, Dr Al Amri stated.

The Financial Balance Plan aims to reduce public debt as a percentage of GDP from 69.7 per cent in 2020 to 46.5 per cent in 2022 by reducing external borrowing, repurchasing sovereign bonds, paying off high-cost loans, and issuing local bonds for trading on the Muscat Stock Exchange at a relatively low cost.

The plan was developed due to the sharp and sudden drop in oil prices, which remained low for an extended period, and the public spending's inability to adapt to the situation, he added.

Consultants sought to oversee delivery of \$800m solar PV projects in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

Ahead of the commencement of construction work on Oman's biggest solar PV development at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) — the sole buyer of electricity and water output — has invited qualified consultancy firms to bid for its contract to supervise the delivery of this new renewable energy landmark.

Made up of two distinct but similar-sized PV schemes — each of 500 megawatt-peak (MWp) capacity — the Manah venture will make a significant contribution to Oman's goal to secure at least 39 per cent of its electricity requirements from renewable sources by 2040.

Total investments in the pair of side-by-side solar Independent Power Projects (IPPs) — dubbed Manah I Solar IPP and Manah II Solar IPP — is about \$800 million.

Last month, a consortium led by

THE MANAH VENTURE WILL MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO OMAN'S GOAL TO SECURE AT LEAST 39 PER CENT OF ITS ELECTRICITY REQUIREMENTS FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES BY 2040

EDF Renewables Middle East, the regional arm of leading international energy giant EDF Renewables, and Korea Western Power Co Ltd (KOWEPO), a key player in South Korea's power sector, was named the winner of Manah I Solar IPP.

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MSX-listed banks net profits in Q1 2023 reach RO 118.5 million

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

The net profits of banks listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) increased by 26.2 per cent during Q1 2023 to reach RO 118.5 million compared to RO 93.8 million during the same period last year. The preliminary financial results of the banks listed on the MSX indicated an increase in profits.

Bank Muscat recorded the highest profit with RO 51.3 million, registering an increase of 6.4 per cent compared to RO 48.2 million last year.

The National Bank of Oman (NBO) was able to raise its net profits to RO 14.3 million, compared to RO 10.2 million in Q1 2022. Sohar International ranked third, recording net profits of RO 13.3 million for Q1 2023, compared to RO 8.5 million during

the same period last year. HSBC Bank Oman also recorded a growth of 126 per cent after its net profits increased from RO 5.4 million to RO 12.2 million.

Oman Arab Bank net profits increased from RO 3.5 million to RO 5.5 million. Bank Nizwa,

on the other hand, recorded 5.7 per cent increase in net profits with RO 3.5 million compared to RO 3.3 million in the same period last year.

Banks witnessed growth in most of their financial indicators and preliminary data

indicated that the total assets of the eight banks listed on the stock exchange increased by the end of last March to RO 37.6 billion, compared to RO 36.1 billion at the end of March of 2022, recording an increase of 4 per cent.

Bank Muscat has the highest volume of assets at RO 13.79 billion, while Sohar International Bank came in second place with RO 4.632 billion, then Bank Dhofar with assets amounting to RO 4.621 billion, National Bank of Oman ranked fourth with RO 4.4 billion and Oman Arab Bank came in fifth place with RO 3.8 billion.

Meanwhile, the aggregate earnings for the banking sector in Q4 2022 reached RO 76.54 million (\$198.8 million). In 2022, the banking sector witnessed net profits growth of 20.7 per cent to reach RO 423.522 million (\$1.1 billion).

Bank Muscat to participate in forum for persons with disabilities on May 1-3

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its participation in the Forum for Persons with Disabilities, to be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on May 1-3, 2023.

The forum, which is being held under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Development, will see the strong participation of several leading government and private sector organisations.

Also present will be a number of local and regional organisations working for the welfare of persons with different types of disabilities, technical institutions and manufacturers of various assistive devices. During the forum, Bank Muscat will highlight its pioneering role in empowering persons with disabilities through various services and initiatives for this important segment of society.

The event aims to enhance the status and role of persons with disabilities by providing them with opportunities to showcase their abilities and talents.

In particular, the forum will highlight the importance of modern technologies, which can assist persons with disabilities to lead as normal a life as possible.

It will also bring to the fore the role of the family in supporting persons with disabilities through early intervention and the need



for promoting accessibility by a society that cares and empowers the disabled socially and economically.

A number of presentations and works by persons with disabilities will also be displayed at the forum for the benefit of the large numbers of visitors. Visitors to the exhibition will have an opportunity to learn more about the different facilities provided by Bank Muscat to persons with disabilities through its dedicated stall.

In particular, visitors can learn about the job opportunities available to persons with disabilities as well as specially designed inclusive features and services. It may be noted that Bank Muscat has a number of achievements to its credit in this regard including the launching of the first ATM in Oman for persons with visual disabilities at the premises of the Al Noor Association for the Blind.

The bank's participation at the forum comes as part of its keenness to enhance financial inclusion

as part of its overall strategy to support Oman's renaissance.

Bank Muscat has also been taking great effort to ensure that staff trained in sign language are available at different branches to provide banking services to serve customers with hearing and speech impairments.

The bank also continues to partner with the Omani Association for the Hearing Impaired by providing assistive devices to those in need.

The bank has also previously

provided wheelchairs and electrically operated beds to the disabled and Braille Sense devices and special laptops to students with visual disabilities at Sohar University.

It has also supported the Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre and the Al Wafa Centre for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities. These efforts are a part of the bank's initiatives in the field of social responsibility projected to improve the facilities provided to the persons with disabilities and help them to integrate into society and contribute to the development of the country.

The bank is comprehensively upgrading 11 conventional banking branches and 9 Meethaq Islamic branches across the Sultanate of Oman so as to provide enhanced banking services to persons with disabilities.

Also, the m-Banking app has been updated to allow screen reading in Android and iOS to assist persons with visual disabilities. Bank Muscat is also implementing best practices on social media, promotional campaigns and emailers including describing images and videos with alternative text. Hence people with disabilities can easily identify the published multimedia. This reflects the bank's keen efforts to create a convenient and accessible environment for the disabled.

Omani catering firm inks deal with Mazoon Dairy



MUSCAT: 'Helping Hands,' an Omani catering firm focused on redefining the catering industry, has been chosen as Mazoon Dairy's new catering partner. Under the agreement signed by Ashish D Sampat, Manager, from 'Helping Hands,' and Rashid bin Khalfan al Maqbali, Administration and Facilities Manager from Mazoon Dairy, 'Helping Hands' will provide three meals per day at Mazoon Dairy's premises in Al Sunaynah.

Meals will be prepared at 'Helping Hands' dedicated kitchen on site and dispatched to Mazoon Dairy in temperature-controlled cabinets and trucks. The meals will be planned and prepared in a manner that they cater to the dietary and nutritional requirements of the different nationalities working at Mazoon Dairy.

Ashish D Sampat, 'Helping Hands' said: "The food services market within the corporate world is growing in the Sultanate of Oman, as more and more companies look to balance taste and quality with affordable and diverse menu options. We are honoured to have been selected as Mazoon Dairy's catering partner, and look forward to a mutually beneficial partnership experience."

Rashid al Maqbali, Mazoon Dairy stated: "We have significant requirements for high-quality food catering services that meet the needs of our large and diverse workforce.

As part of our In-Country Value programme, we are pleased to have signed this agreement with 'Helping Hands' and reinforce our commitment to support local businesses and the growth and diversity of the Sultanate of Oman's food industry by encouraging procurement of locally made food through domestic suppliers."

Oman Arab Bank wins best online platform in Oman

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has been recognised for its suite of innovative online banking services, winning the Best Online Banking Platform – Oman category at the prestigious 2022 MEA Business Awards.

After an in-depth research and judging process, OAB emerged victorious for its forward-thinking online services, anchored by its complete range of financial products and services available via the OAB Online App.

In addition to the standard banking services available, the bank has provided its customers with greater convenience, flexibility, and control over their



finances by enabling them to open their accounts digitally, apply for a new personal loan or top up

their existing loans instantly, and update their personal banking information anywhere, anytime

without visiting the branch.

This year the app allowed customers to subscribe digitally to the initial public offering of Abraj Energy Services Company.

Sulaiman al Harthi, CEO at OAB, said: "OAB has dedicated itself to enhancing our customers' experience across all touch-points and Omni channel banking experience, with a range of digital services available conveniently on the OAB Online App. This victory will serve as inspiration to our bank and its staff to continue to provide our customers with industry-leading services – especially as we celebrate our 50th anniversary."

Laura O'Carroll, Awards

Coordinator, said: "It has been an absolute pleasure to host the MEA Business Awards 2022, and I want to wish all of our winners a deeply successful future as they continue to raise the bar for their industries, and the global corporate landscape. Congratulations to all of them."

The annual awards programme, run by MEA Markets Magazine, is in its sixth year and showcases the best companies in the region that are having an impact on their surrounding areas – and beyond – as they continue to reach new heights, with the level of professionalism and strength of the winning businesses ensuring adaptability, growth and success.

Bank Nizwa, SIPTT sign memorandum of agreement

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa — the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman — recently inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT).

This reflects the bank's intention to develop the educational infrastructure in the Sultanate of Oman and improve its efficiency to meet current demands.

The agreement was signed by Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa on behalf of Bank Nizwa and Intisar Ambosaidi, GM of the Institute represented SIPTT during a signing ceremony held at the head office of Bank Nizwa in the presence of several officials on both sides.

Under the MoU, Bank Nizwa will sponsor the honouring

ceremony for the "Enrichment and Upgrade" initiative, through which outstanding teachers, educational districts, and technical schools will be recognised.

In addition, the bank will conduct a workshop on Islamic banking so that trainees at the institute can gain a more thorough understanding of this sector.

After the signing ceremony, Khalid al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa commented, "We support social responsibility activities that contribute to change for the betterment of individuals by providing a positive and sustainable impact, guided by Islamic Sharia when giving back to Omani society.

Throughout its history, the bank has devoted efforts to developing national competencies in tandem with the education



sector objectives of Oman Vision 2040. As part of our commitment to support such meaningful initiatives, we are pleased to cooperate with the Specialised Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT).

This partnership enables Bank Nizwa to advance sustainable development in the country by building qualified competencies that drive change and create a stable knowledge-based economy." Intisar Ambosaidi, GM of the

Institute commented, "We are pleased to partner with Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman with a long history of providing innovative and advanced services.

The bank has been working tirelessly to support the education system and improve its efficiency in the country. The partnership represents the desire of both parties to leverage their capabilities to support the Sultanate of Oman in improving the quality of education. Our goals should align with the country's future vision for the education sector and the country as a whole."

SIPTT prepares and qualifies educators for the teaching profession whilst encouraging them to be self-motivated and confident.

Further, it ensures that teachers deliver the right messages and information to both children and adults.

In addition, the institution aims to highlight the critical role educators play in society's development. By forming partnerships with a variety of institutions and coordinating with all segments of society, Bank Nizwa adheres to its social responsibility.

Additionally, the bank recognises that such targeted projects contribute to the country's comprehensive development by strengthening the educational sector. Moreover, Bank Nizwa strives to instil a culture of responsibility and social giving among its employees to produce positive and sustainable results for the community.

5 tips to start online presence from scratch



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association

An Omani fresh-graduate contacted me on LinkedIn to ask for advice on how to start his online business. I provide here 5 ideas to make the process more fun:

Step 1: Build in public — The first step to rebuilding from scratch is to build in public. This means being open and transparent about your process of rebuilding.

Share your ideas, progress and challenges with others. This will help you get feedback, build a community and attract potential customers.

To build in public, you can start a blog, a YouTube channel, or a social media account. Share your story, your vision and your journey. Be authentic and honest. Show people how you're overcoming obstacles and learning from mistakes. This will make you more relatable and trustworthy.

Step 2: Provide value first — The second step is to provide value first. This means giving something of value to your audience before asking for anything in return.

This can be in the form of free content, advice, or tools. By providing value first, you're building trust and credibility with your audience. They'll be more likely to support you in the future.

To provide value first, you can create free content like blog posts, podcasts, or videos. You can also offer free consultations, webinars, or workshops.

Make sure your content or offer is relevant and useful to your target audience. This will help you attract the right people to your brand.

Step 3: Target a specific market — The third step is to

target a specific market. This means identifying a niche or a specific group of people who have a common problem or need that you can solve.

By targeting a specific market, you'll be able to focus your efforts and resources on the right people.

To target a specific market, you can research your audience's demographics, psychographics and behaviours. This will help you understand their needs, wants and pain points.

You can also use tools like Google Trends, social media analytics and keyword research to find out what people are searching for online.

Step 4: Create a product or service — The fourth step is to create a product or service that solves your audience's problem or need. This can be a physical or digital product, a service, or a combination of both. Your product or service should be unique, valuable and easy to use.

To create a product or service, you can use tools like product development frameworks, customer feedback and user testing. Make sure you're creating something that your audience actually wants and needs. You can also use crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter or Indiegogo to validate your idea and raise funds.

Step 5: Market your product or service — The fifth step is to market your product or service. This means promoting it to your target audience using different marketing channels and tactics.

You can use social media, e-mail marketing, influencer marketing, content marketing and paid advertising to reach your audience.

To market your product or service, you can create a marketing plan that includes your goals, target audience, messaging and tactics. You can also use analytics tools to track your performance and optimise your campaigns. Make sure you're using the right channels and tactics that resonate with your audience.

Building a business takes time, effort and resilience. Good luck!

Consultants sought to oversee delivery of \$800m solar PV projects in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

Just earlier, the partnership of Singapore energy firm Sembcorp Utilities and Chinese clean energy supplier Jinko Power Technology received an award from OPWP for the implementation of Manah II Solar IPP.

Under either award, the winning consortium obtained a mandate to build, own and operate their respective 500 MW IPPs to be operational by 2025 and backed by a 20-year power purchase agreement with Oman

Power and Water Procurement Company.

To help oversee the implementation of the two projects, OPWP — member of Nama Group — plans to appoint a consultant to provide project management and supervisory services during the construction, commissioning and testing phases of Manah I and Manah II Solar IPPs.

Interested consultants have until June 11, 2023 to submit their proposals in this regard.

Towards a sustainable future: Tejarah Talks tackles Net Zero



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, APRIL 29

Ahead of the May 17 Tejarah Talks session 'Oman's Journey to Net Zero: An Environment for Enterprise', we sat down with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Director, Maymuna al Adawi (**pictured**) and organiser of the popular discussion series to consider 2050 Net Zero targets and why making efforts to be more sustainable is a necessity if Omani businesses want to remain competitive.

Tejarah Talks is organised by Oman Business Forum in association with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. It is generously supported by Jindal Shadeed, Sustainable City – Yiti and Nortal.

With His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said moderating proceedings, Tejarah Talks welcomes three experts on green issues and sustainability to lead discussions, they are: KPMG partner and ESG Services Lead, Fadi al Shihabi; Talabat Director, Sustainability, Dimitra Theodoropoulos; and Hilal al Ghaithi, Director, Energy, Authority for Public Services Regulation.

Q: What role can local SMEs play in helping Oman achieve its 2050 Net Zero target?

A: Headlines are usually dominated by the contributions of big companies to reducing carbon emissions and so forth. However, like a large iceberg, what goes on beneath the surface can be more important.

According to the World Bank small businesses more than pull their weight in the global economy — responsible for 50 per cent of employment worldwide as well as up to 40 per cent of GDP in emerging markets — and their environmental efforts, though perhaps less visible, are hugely important.

So Omani SMEs, like their counterparts around the world, have a crucial role to play in the collective corporate effort to address the climate crisis and achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050.

Something we are going to look at in this edition of Tejarah Talks is not just the role and responsibilities of SMEs but the opportunities and benefits they can gain from taking meaningful climate action sooner



rather than later.

Q: How do you see green legislation impacting Omani businesses?

A: This is going to be a consideration not just for our exporters, but also for those who are part of value chains for goods sold overseas. For example, proposed US regulations would require companies to disclose information about their direct greenhouse gas emissions (Scope 1) and indirect emissions from purchased electricity or other forms of energy (Scope 2).

In addition, companies would be required to disclose greenhouse gas emissions from upstream and downstream activities in their value chain (Scope 3).

If an Omani company large or small is selling their goods in US markets, or is part of a supply chain, they will need to provide information about any GHG emissions back up the chain. So local businesses capitalising on the Oman-US free trade agreement should be taking time to get prepared for these changes.

Similarly, Omani enterprises doing business in the EU should prepare themselves as its Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) will make it mandatory for companies already subject to the non-financial reporting directive to disclose green information in their sustainability reports from January 1, 2024.

There is two years' breathing room until 2026 to comply with CSRD requirements, with the first reports due in 2027. But the message is loud and clear, we should be gearing up for these changes now.

Q: Net Zero targets give opportunities for building new green businesses but aren't these limited?

A: In fact, the opportunities it presents are wide-ranging and lucrative. This is not a small niche corner of the market, focused on the decarbonisation of polluting industries.

Today the green economy is the fifth largest industrial sector by market capitalisation, larger than

the oil and gas industry. When looking at future growth estimates, it could grow to be the first or second largest industry worldwide.

In fact, a report from Arup and Oxford Economics estimates that new green industries could be worth \$10.3 trillion to the global economy by 2050, equivalent to 5.2 per cent of global GDP that year.

So yes, the opportunities are vast but what we really must keep at the forefront of our minds is that if we fail to tackle climate change the results will be devastating.

This is what matters most. Higher concentrations of CO2 will push average temperatures up across the world, causing rising sea levels and extreme weather events that will in turn bring significant human suffering.

Putting that in perspective, uncontrolled climate change could cost the global economy \$178 trillion over the next 50 years, or a 7.6-per cent cut to global GDP in the year 2070 alone.

If global warming reaches around 3°C towards the century's end, the toll on human lives could be significant, leading to loss of productivity and employment, food and water scarcity, worsening health and well-being, ushering in a lower standard of living globally.

The time for debate is over. We need swift, bold and widespread action now across all sectors and that is something Oman is proudly doing.

Q: Do you think consumers are more likely to buy from environmentally focused businesses?

A: As Omani consumers become more eco-conscious, any company seen as being green will be at an advantage. Research by the Pennsylvania-based Natural Marketing Institute already shows that consumers are 58 per cent more likely to buy a company's products or services when they know the business pays attention to its impact on society and the environment.

While an Accenture study revealed products that can be reused or recycled can demand higher price-tags, with half of consumers saying they would pay a premium for such items.

However, in order to benefit from this competitive advantage, Omani manufacturers and service providers need to ensure they are making customers here at home and overseas aware of their green credentials.

Highlighting sustainability initiatives on social media

or adding details to product packaging and having a dedicated sustainability section on the website can all help raise awareness of green efforts being made.

Q: Green credentials attract customers it seems but is it a consideration when people are looking for employment?

A: Much like consumers, employees, particularly millennials and Gen Z are increasingly attracted to companies with green credentials.

Studies indicates that 60 per cent of job hunters research a potential employer's sustainability commitments before accepting a position, while 18 per cent of workers overall and 34 per cent of millennials would not work for a company they felt was harming the environment.

It is the same here in Oman as anywhere else on that front. So if Omani employers want to attract and keep the best talent and avoid the costs associated with high employee turnover, they should be taking clear steps to go green.

Q: Isn't going green too expensive for small companies and start-ups?

A: While making sustainability improvements can require upfront investment, it can without doubt lead to savings in the long-term.

For instance, improving energy efficiency with LED lighting can significantly reduce energy bills.

Also, renewable energy technologies, such as solar panels, can pay for themselves in just a few years.

Simply having a more sustainable mind-set can also generate cost savings. Take going paperless, it saves on ink and paper, which could add up to substantial savings across the entire business.

Similarly, taking time to plan the most efficient routes for deliveries or business travel will reduce carbon emissions and fuel costs. Every small change, every small step, makes a difference.

Q: What would your final word of advice be?

A: Sadly, there is still a misperception that green issues are just for big companies. But as we have discussed being environmentally conscious can help strengthen the bottom line, attract talent, establish a competitive advantage and enhance brand reputation. By considering green matters today, Omani enterprises, organisations and institutions can set themselves up for long-term success and a more sustainable future.

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Include Kumzar on your summer bucket list

Kumzar is very isolated and is only accessible by boat or by treacherous mountain roads. It continues to lure tourists because the village offers a glimpse into a way of life that has largely remained unchanged for centuries... **P20**



'Hammer to Fall': Freddie Mercury belongings headed for auction

FROM A MOUSTACHE COMB to dazzling stage costumes, personal items belonging to late Queen front man Freddie Mercury will go under the hammer in September allowing fans to purchase memorabilia once owned by one of the world's most famous rock stars.

Some 1,500 items, including handwritten lyrics, art and collectibles from Mercury's London home, Garden Lodge, have been looked after by his close friend Mary Austin since his death from AIDS-related

pneumonia in 1991.

They will go on public display for the first time in a month-long summer exhibition at Sotheby's in London before they are sold in six separate auctions, each dedicated to a different aspect of the singer's life.

"For many years now, I have had the joy and privilege of living surrounded by all the wonderful things that Freddie sought out and so loved. But the years have passed, and the time has come for me to take the difficult decision to close this very special chapter in my life,"



Austin said in a statement.

"It was important to me to do this in a way that I felt Freddie would have loved, and there was nothing he loved more than an auction."

Among the items for sale are Mercury's crown and regal cloak, worn for the "God Save The Queen"

finale during the singer's last tour with Queen in 1986, with an auction estimate of 60,000 - 80,000 pounds (\$74,838-\$99,784).

Handwritten manuscript working lyrics for "We Are The Champions" have an estimate of 200,000-300,000 pounds, while those for "Killer Queen"



have a price tag of 50,000-70,000 pounds.

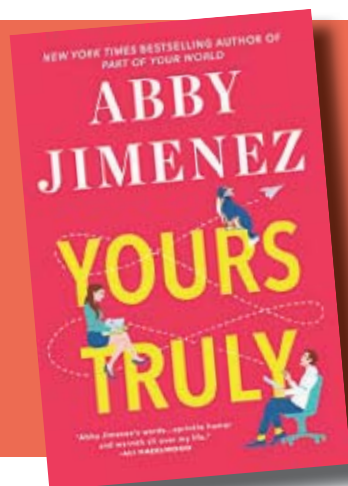
There is also a Tiffany & Co. silver moustache comb (400 - 600 pounds), pink star-shaped glasses (2,000-4,000 pounds), as well as notebooks of Mercury's drawings, including one depicting objects at Garden Lodge (2,000- 3,000 pounds).

Sale highlights will go on tour in New York, Los Angeles and Hong Kong before the main London exhibition begins on August 4. — **Reuters**

READ

YOURS TRULY BY ABBY JIMENEZ

The quietly sexy new doctor in Dr. Briana Ortiz's life offers to donate her brother a kidney and asks for a favour she can't refuse.



FASHION

Model walk the runway wearing a creation by Mexican designer Paulina Luna during the Spring-Summer collection show at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Guadalajara, Mexico. — **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

An attendee dressed up in a cosplay outfit posing for a photo as people attend the 10th Anime Japan, the Japanese animation industry's biggest event, at Tokyo Big Sight in Tokyo. Getting hit by a truck doesn't sound like anyone's favourite fantasy, but it's an idea central to a Japanese anime genre exploding in popularity. — **AFP**





Netflix director of series starring a Black Cleopatra fires back

THE DIRECTOR OF "Queen Cleopatra," a series about the pharaonic ruler, has defended her choice of actor to play the starring role after some accused the drama-documentary of historical revisionism.

Los Angeles (tca/dpa) — Was Egypt's Queen Cleopatra Black?

That's the hotly debated question surrounding Netflix's "Queen Cleopatra," a drama-documentary series about the pharaonic ruler narrated and executive produced by Jada Pinkett Smith. And the series' director had a few choice words on Friday about the racist and colourist backlash she received for casting a Black actor as the titular queen, a decision she made following decades of academic discourse about Cleopatra's enigmatic roots.

"After 300 years, surely, we can safely say Cleopatra was Egyptian. She was no more Greek or Macedonian than Rita Wilson or Jennifer Aniston. Both are one generation from Greece," film-maker Tina Gharavi wrote in an essay for *Variety*. "Doing the research, I realised what apolitical act it would be to see Cleopatra portrayed by a Black actress. For me, the idea that people had gotten it so incredibly wrong before — historically, from Theda Bara to Monica Bellucci, and recently, with Angelina Jolie and Gal Gadot in the running to play her — meant we had to get it even more right."

The series, which mixes dramatic reenactments with expert interviews, depicts the queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt as Black by starring British, mixed-race actor Adele James. The casting was "a nod to the centuries-long conversation about the ruler's race," according to Netflix's companion website, Tudum, and the series is the second installment of the streamer's look at the lives of prominent and iconic African queens. (Season 1 focused on 7th century warrior Queen Njinga, who ruled over areas located in what's known today as Angola.)

But since the casting announcement in February and this month's trailer drop ahead of the series' May 10 premiere, the production has faced major criticism and allegations of "blackwashing" and "stealing" from Egypt's ancient history, with prominent Egyptians accusing the series of historical revisionism.

Dr Zahi Hawass, a top Egyptologist and the country's former minister of state for antiquities affairs, told the *Al-Masry Al-Youm* newspaper that the idea that Cleopatra was Black is "completely fake."

"Cleopatra was Greek, meaning that she was light-skinned, not Black," he said, pushing back against Black Americans who have claimed that the Egyptian civilisation is of Black origin.

He said that the only Egyptian rulers known to have been Black are the

Kushite kings of the 25th dynasty (747-656 BC), and he accused Netflix of "trying to provoke confusion by spreading false and deceptive facts that the origin of the Egyptian civilisation is Black."

Egyptian lawyer Mahmoud al-Semary also filed a complaint with Egypt's public prosecutor to request that Netflix be blocked in the North African nation due to the promotion of "Afrocentric thinking" including "slogans and writings aimed at distorting and erasing the Egyptian identity."

"Most of what Netflix platform



displays do not conform to Islamic and societal values and principles, especially Egyptian ones," he said in the complaint, according to Egypt Independent.

The trailer reportedly got so many dislikes on YouTube that Netflix had to disable commenting on the video and series star James took to Twitter last week to take a stand against some of the hateful messages she received: "If you don't like the casting don't watch this how," she wrote.

All that appeared to prompt Gharavi, a Sundance and BAFTA-nominated filmmaker, to enter the discourse on Friday.

"Why shouldn't Cleopatra be a melanated sister? And why do some people need Cleopatra to be white? Her proximity to whiteness seems to give her value, and for some Egyptians it seems to really matter," the Persian director wrote in the essay.

Gharavi defended James' casting by saying that historians can confirm that "it is more likely that Cleopatra looked like Adele than Elizabeth Taylor ever did." Taylor notably portrayed the queen stateside in the Oscar-winning 1963 epic directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Gharavi argued that "we need to have

a conversation with ourselves about our colourism, and the internalised white supremacy that Hollywood has indoctrinated us with."

Cleopatra, the last queen of a Greek-speaking dynasty founded by Alexander the Great's Macedonian general Ptolemy, was born in the Egyptian port city of Alexandria in 69 BC. Egyptologists have confirmed that she was Macedonian-Greek on her father, Ptolemy XII's, side, but her maternal heritage is less clear because little is known about her birth mother's ethnic origin. Historians have

this."

Representatives for Netflix declined to comment further when reached on Friday by *The Times*.

The series debuts on the platform mere days after the "Bridgerton" prequel "Queen Charlotte" begins streaming on the platform. That project, albeit a fictional Regency drama, is also about a ruler who is believed to have Black roots and is portrayed by a Black performer.

In an April 12 statement, Pinkett Smith said that she wanted to find stories that would inspire her daughter,

Willow.

"We don't often get to see or hear stories about Black queens, and that was really important for me, as well as for my daughter, and just for my community to be able to know those stories because there are tons of them," Pinkett Smith told Tudum. "The sad part is that we don't have ready access to these historical women who were so powerful and were the backbones of African nations."

The producers worked with Cleopatra scholar Dr. Sally-Ann Ashton on the project to "explore Cleopatra's story as a queen, strategist [and] ruler of formidable intellect."

"Her ethnicity is not the focus of Queen Cleopatra, but we did intentionally decide to depict her of mixed ethnicity to reflect theories about Cleopatra's possible Egyptian ancestry and the multicultural nature of ancient Egypt," they said.

"Given that Cleopatra represents herself as an Egyptian, it seems strange to insist on depicting her as wholly European," said Ashton, who was interviewed for the series. — AFP

LIFE AT THE ACADEME



Dr Zainab Al Ajmi

Social Learning Theory (SLT), Why does it matter?

IT IS QUITE NORMAL that learning is not limited to acquiring knowledge yet works to improve the social interaction and attitudes of students, where they learn from each other. In the simplest term, social learning is the medium through which learning occurs, especially among young pupils. In the 1960s, an approach to social learning was introduced by the Canadian-born US psychologist Albert Bandura in his book "Social Foundation of Thoughts and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory (1986) as a successor to social learning theory (Colman, 2006).

Social learning theory (SLT) is a psychological theory that explains how people acquire new behaviours, attitudes, and skills through observation and imitation of others in their social environment.

Referring to the view of (Nabavi, 2012), "learning can occur without a change in behaviour. In other words, behaviourists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behaviour; while in contrast social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance".

Bandura proposed that this type of learning involved four stages which include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. The first stage is attention, whereby learners be obliged at- tend to the behaviour. They need to see the behaviour that they want to reproduce. Secondly, they need to internalise and retain what they have seen.

This involves cognitive processes in which a learner mentally rehearses the behavior or actions to be reproduced. Thirdly they need an opportunity to produce the behaviour by converting the information obtained from attention and retention processes into action. Finally, learners need to be motivated to enact or imitate the behaviour they have observed.

This motivation occurs via reinforcement, of which Bandura proposes three different types include direct reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, and self-reinforcement (Horsburgh & Ippolito, 2018). On the other hand, Lesilolo's research suggests (2019), Albert Bandura's social learning theory can be implemented by teachers as follow: a. Associate lessons with learner experiences b. Using tools that can focus the attention of learners. c. Connecting the learning message with the material that has been learned. d. Using music e. Creating a carefree atmosphere. f. Material presentation techniques vary. g. Eliminate irrelevant materials and materials (Feri & Husna, 2022).

In conclusion, (SLT) is an approach to education that emphasises the importance of social interactions and their role in effective learning. Thus, educators can use Social Learning Theory to better reach students by incorporating aspects of modelling, reinforcement, and communication into their teaching strategies. Overall, (SLT), can affect the behaviour of learners, socially, and cognitively. it's a framework for us to consider how students learn via observational learning and modeling.

Dr Zainab al Ajmi is very passionate about the growth of the education system in Oman and wants the country to produce globally competitive workforce. Her column tackles movements and developments within the education sector.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT zeinbf@moe.om



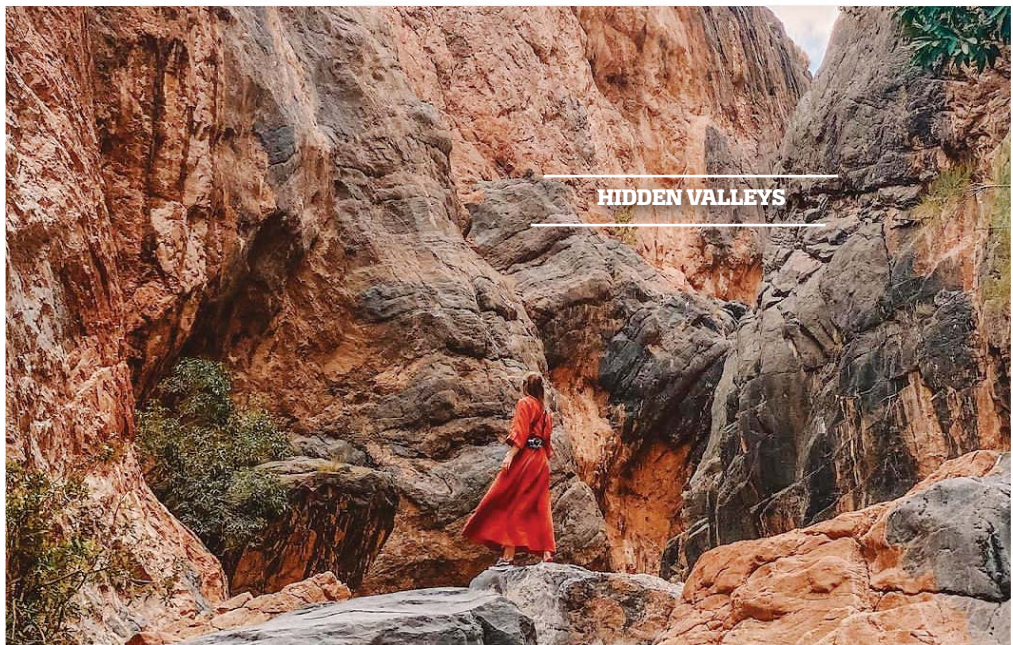
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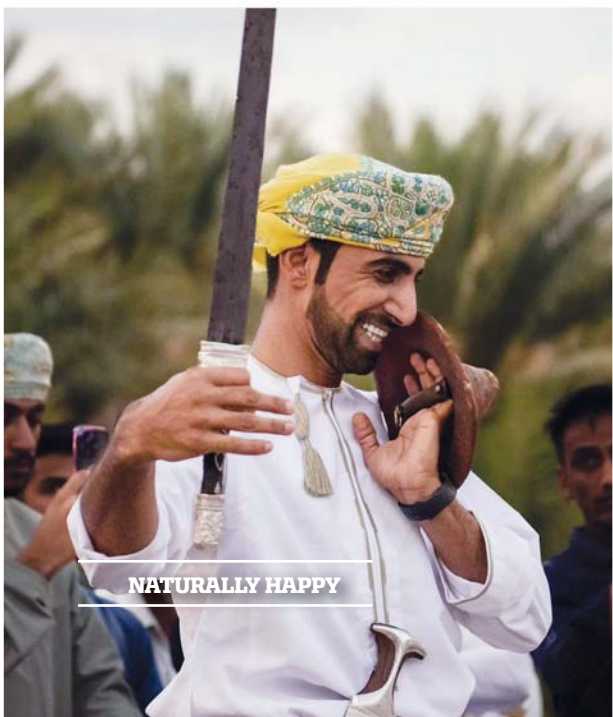


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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Meryl Streep wins top Spanish arts prize



THREE-TIME OSCAR winner Meryl Streep on Wednesday won Spain's top arts prize, the Princess of Asturias award, for her "unforgettable performances" in a career spanning over five decades.

The prize jury praised the 73-year-old for "successive performances in which she brings life to richly complex female characters."

"The honesty and responsibility she brings to her choice of roles, at the service of inspiring and exemplary narratives, reach out beyond the screen," it added in a statement.

Streep has performed in more than 60 movies, acquiring iconic status for roles from a Nazi concentration camp survivor to an ABBA-singing mother.



She won her most recent Oscar in 2012 for her role as Margaret Thatcher in "The Iron Lady".

Before that, she won in 1980 for "Kramer v. Kramer" and in 1983 for "Sophie's Choice".

The 50,000-euro (\$55,000) award is one of eight prizes covering the arts, science and other areas that are handed out annually by the foundation named for Spanish Crown Princess Leonor.

Past winners of the arts prize include US directors Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke and American architect Frank Gehry.

The awards will be handed out at a ceremony hosted by Spain's King Felipe VI and broadcast live on Spanish television in October. — **AFP**

LIFESTYLE

Tiffany reopens flagship New York store under French management



NEW YORKERS AND tourists will once again stroll between the rings and diamonds of jeweller Tiffany & Co. on Fifth Avenue, which officially reopened for business on Wednesday after extensive renovations under new owners, French luxury giant LVMH.

The iconic Manhattan jewellery store — immortalized by the 1961 film "Breakfast at Tiffany's" — reopened its doors following the remodelling, which the luxury jeweller hopes will help fuel the brand's momentum under its new ownership.

It took "a bit longer than what we had in mind," Tiffany CEO Anthony Ledru said during the ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday, two days before the store reopens to the public.

But the result "goes well beyond our wildest dreams," he said.

The renovation of the Manhattan landmark began under previous management in 2019, and continued after Tiffany's takeover by LVMH.

The goal of the makeover, Ledru said by email ahead of the reopening, is to offer "a unique client experience," with a blend of "art, craftsmanship, heritage and lifestyle."

Tiffany is looking to stay true to its origins while remaining culturally "relevant," and the company wants to make the brand "approachable to all generations," he said.

BEYONCE AND NIKE

Tiffany was founded in New York in 1837, and has become best known for its diamonds, silver jewellery and engagement rings sold in the brand's iconic robin's egg blue boxes.

The company, which employs 14,000 people and operates some 300 retail outlets worldwide, was acquired by LVMH in early 2021 for just under \$16 billion.

At LVMH's annual earnings presentation in January, CEO Bernard Arnault noted Tiffany was on track to "exceed \$1 billion in cur-

rent operating income" this year.

"We were barely halfway there when we acquired this business," he said.

With help from Arnault's son, Alexandre, Ledru has embarked on a refresh of the brand, calling on America's hottest show business couple Jay-Z and Beyonce to promote its products, and launching a campaign around the provocative slogan, "Not your mother's Tiffany."

The brand has also forged a partnership with US footwear giant Nike to go along with the revamp.

"Tiffany was a sleeping beauty," says Erwan Rambourg, a specialist in the luxury sector at HSBC.

The company long relied on a "very strong reputation," but was also "very conservative in its choices, very slow and quite obsessed with the short term" to satisfy shareholders, he said.

The new management, spurred on by "the spirit of conquest specific to Bernard Arnault," repositioned the image of the brand by putting less emphasis on products related to marriage and silver jewellery and by raising some prices.

"When it was managed by American executives, there was a huge emphasis in communication on entry price, which is not a good approach" to take in luxury, according to Luca Solca of Bernstein, saying it is more prudent for such brands to focus on high-end products.

The current management's marketing and communication strategy are "more modern," which is necessary "to recruit younger consumers," he said.

RECOGNIZABLE JEWELLERY

The jeweller has also launched a range of new products such as the "T by Tiffany" ring and, more recently, its "Lock" line of bracelets.

"It is quite difficult to put a big logo on a ring, a bracelet or a pendant, but the shape of some so-called iconic products can, at 20 meters in a restaurant or a bar, identify that it is a Tiffany, Cartier or Van Cleef jewel," Rambourg said.

The group has also developed a new approach for its stores, opting for a "more feminine, warm and welcoming" concept, he added.

The renovation of the New York store began under previous management in 2019, and continued after Tiffany's takeover by LVMH.

It represents the largest investment ever made in the luxury world for an operation of this nature, according to a person close to Arnault.

In addition to the refresh of the sales counters, the Manhattan store's 10 floors will include several exhibition spaces, a cafe run by French chef Daniel Boulud and a VIP area.

Before the renovation — during which customers could visit a temporary location next door — the store accounted for around 10 per cent of Tiffany's sales.

Ledru would not commit to a specific sales target post-renovation, but said the group has "set the bar high for business expectations," and that it anticipates "millions of visitors from all over the world" would set foot in the new Tiffany store each year. — **AFP**

CONSERVATION

Thai zoo breeds endangered vultures hoping to see them soar again



FOUR TIMES A DAY, Thai conservationist Watchradol Phangpanya puts on a black, long-sleeved shirt, red gloves, and a red balaclava, hoping to imitate an endangered red-headed vulture feeding its baby.

The pinkish chick, covered in white fuzz that will turn into black feathers as it grows, is the first red-headed, or Asian king vulture, to be bred in Asia and only the second in the world.

Watchradol and his colleagues at the Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo in northeast Thailand want to ensure any hatchling bred in captivity does not imprint on humans so they will be better prepared for eventual release into the wild.

"It's necessary ... to disguise ourselves as a bird, thereby leading them to see us as closest to what their parents would look like," Watchradol said, adding that



it's the best chance to develop the bird's natural instincts.

He feeds it rabbit, deer, chicken and rat meat to simulate its diet in the wild. After feeding, the chick warms up in the sun for the vitamin D it needs for its physical and behavioural development, Watchradol said.

"Is there enough nutrition in its food? Or is it receiving too much? At every moment, worries will persist," he said.

As a scavenger, the red-headed vulture used to play a crucial role in the ecosystem by consuming animal carcasses. However, hunting and changes to its habitat mean the species is extinct in the wild in Thailand and is significantly diminished globally.

After nearly two decades of trying to increase the red-headed vulture population, the zoo is starting to see results, with another egg being incubated by its parents in conservation. The conservation team hopes it can create a large enough population for eventual release.

"The most crucial aspect of our success would be to enhance the ecosystem of the Unesco heritage site, Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary," said zoo director Thanachon Kensing, adding that the park in the west of Thailand was once home to the largest community of Asian king vultures.

"We would like to see the Asian king vulture soar once again through the skies of Thailand," he said. — **Reuters**



art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | APRIL 30 | 2023

Include Kumzar on your summer bucket list

By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

As a tiny fishing village tucked away in the rugged mountains of Musandam, the island of Kumzar has become an intriguing destination for a lot of travellers and one that should definitely be added to your list of destinations this summer.

With an estimated population of around 500 people, Kumzar is very isolated and is only accessible by boat or by treacherous mountain roads. It continues to lure tourists because the village offers a glimpse into a way of life that has largely remained unchanged for centuries.

According to the oral history and folklore of the village, the locals believe that their village was founded more than 1,000 years ago by a group of Arabs trying to flee the Umayyad caliphate. It is said that they found refuge in the rugged mountains of Musandam, where they built a settlement and established trade with nearby countries.

With limited land to build a refuge, Kumzar is presently a maze of narrow alleys and stone houses, with occasional mosques or schools. The tall mountains usually shield it from wind and rain, but the village does get flooded during heavy rainfall. In the summer, some of the villagers are reported to move to the nearby Khasab to rent a few farms where they grow dates and harvest the produce from these farms to feed their families for the rest of the year.

With limited resources, the Kumzaris had been relying on the abundant waters of the Arabian Gulf to sustain themselves. While there has been a major improvement in the way they fish today, the villagers used to rely on small wooden boats and use nets and traditional fishing techniques to catch a variety of fish, including tuna, mackerel, and barracuda, among others.

The fishing industry remains at the heart of Kumzar. Whatever they harvest from the sea is then dried in the sun, a process that can take several days before being sold in the nearby markets or shipped to other parts of Oman. This labour-intensive process has been essential to the survival of the village.

UNIQUE LANGUAGE

The language spoken by the villagers of Kumzar is a unique dialect of the Shihhi Arabic language, which is spoken in the Musandam Peninsula of Oman. This dialect is often referred to as Kumzari, and it is distinct from other Arabic dialects in the region.

The origin of Kumzari is not entirely clear, but some linguists believe that it may be related to an ancient Arabic

dialect known as Himyaritic, which was spoken in southern Arabia more than a thousand years ago. Others speculate that Kumzari has been heavily influenced by the languages of neighbouring tribes and cultures, such as Baluchi and Persian.

Despite its unique characteristics, Kumzari has remained largely unchanged over the centuries. This is partly due to the isolated location of Kumzar, which has allowed the language to develop independently of outside influences. The villagers have also made a conscious effort to preserve their language and culture, passing down their traditions and stories through oral history.

In recent years, there has been some concern about the future of Kumzari, as younger generations have started to learn Arabic and English in school, and are becoming less fluent in their native language. However, there have also been efforts to preserve and promote Kumzari, such as the establishment of a Kumzari language and culture centre in the nearby city of Khasab.

For visitors to Kumzar, the Kumzari language can be an intriguing aspect of the village's culture. While most villagers can speak Arabic and some may also speak English, Kumzari remains the language of daily life in Kumzar. Visitors can listen to the villagers conversing in Kumzari and observe the unique intonations and pronunciation of the dialect.

ONE FOR THE BUCKET LIST

Today, Kumzar is a peaceful oasis in the midst of the Arabian Gulf, a place where time seems to stand still. Visitors can explore the village on foot, admiring the rugged beauty of the mountains and the azure waters of the Gulf. They can also take a boat tour to see the fishing boats in action or try their hand at catching their own dinner.

But perhaps the greatest attraction of Kumzar is its people. The villagers are friendly and welcoming, happy to share their culture and way of life with visitors. They take pride in their traditions and are eager to preserve them for future generations.

To reach Kumzar from Muscat, visitors will need to travel to the Musandam Peninsula, which is located in the northernmost part of Oman.

There are different ways to get to Kumzar. The easiest option and one that is not complicated by border issues is to fly direct from Muscat to Khasab, which takes approximately an hour. The other option is to take the ferry, which usually takes five hours from Oman and goes directly to Khasab port.

For those seeking a beautiful adventure this summer, Kumzar is an ideal destination for those seeking a peaceful and authentic experience of life in the Arabian Gulf.

