

P11

FOUR DAYS OF MAGICAL EXPLORATION OF OMAN'S ENCHANTING WADIS AND CAVES



P10

MOROCCO STUN SOUTH KOREA TO CLAIM FIRST EVER WOMEN'S WORLD CUP VICTORY



P13

OMAN WEIGHING STEPS TO ALLOW PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF BOUNCED CHEQUES



■ A TOP ENTERTAINMENT SPOT IN SALALAH



The Light Park in Salalah Public Park organised by the Dhofar Municipality for this year's khareef season will remain open until August 31, providing visitors an array of enjoyable activities. Ahmed bin Awad al Rawas, from the Department of Events and Awareness at Dhofar Municipality, said that the illuminated park showcases artistically designed models of animals and plants using three-dimensional techniques. "These sculptures are adorned with lights, creating a delightful atmosphere in the area. The illuminated garden stands out with its intricate details, showcasing the beauty of animals and plants, which contributes to creating a unique and enchanting ambience," he said. **DETAILS ON P2**

Four new charitable associations

MUSCAT: Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, issued four ministerial decisions announcing four charitable organisations.

The new charitable organisations include Ishraqa Charity Foundation, Al Yusr Charitable Foundation, Al Roya Al Ejabya (Positive Vision) Association and Omani Design Association.

Ishraqa Charity Foundation aims to provide financial support to needy beneficiaries for the sake of developing Omani society in areas of education, support for children with disabilities and geriatric care.

Al Yusr Charitable Foundation seeks to improve the living conditions of families in need of liveli-

Omani Design Association plans to develop frameworks, concepts and practices related to design as a sustainable industry

sociation envisages imparting knowledge and experience with government departments, private establishments and individuals, with a view to keeping pace with global developments in design thinking and related professional applications. — **ONA**

hood assistance, whereas Al Roya Al Ejabya focuses on implementing public awareness programmes to lend support to segments that are prone to HIV infection or addiction to drugs and psychotropic substances.

Omani Design Association plans to develop frameworks, concepts and practices related to design as a sustainable industry. It considers establishing links with all sectors and operators in the field. The association envisages imparting knowledge and experience with government departments, private establishments and individuals, with a view to keeping pace with global developments in design thinking and related professional applications. — **ONA**

■ MUSCAT

INFLATION INCREASES BY 2.8 PER CENT



The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 2.8 per cent in 2022 as the Consumers Price Index (CPI) registered 109.7 points compared to 106.7 points in 2021, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in 2022 in varying rates. A rise was recorded in the main groups of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 1.1 per cent, transport by 3.9 per cent. **DETAILS ON P13**

■ ISLAMABAD

BLAST IN PAKISTAN KILLS 44

At least 44 people were killed and over 130 injured when an explosion tore through a political rally in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday, police said. The police said there was no confirmation yet about the cause of the blast that took place at a gathering of the Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) party, in the former tribal area of Bajaur. "The JUI-F organised a workers convention in Khar town of Bajaur in which 40 people lost their lives and more than 130 were injured," district police officer Nazir Khan said. He said an emergency had been declared in the hospitals of Bajaur and adjoining areas where most of the injured were taken.

Tenders worth RO 287m approved until July

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, July 30

The overall value of tenders for projects stood at RO 287 million until July this year.

The Tender Board awarded numerous tenders for new development and services projects as well as strategic roads and rehabilitation of existing projects in a number of governorates for this year to support the government's digital transformation strategy. In addition, tenders valued over RO 38 million were awarded for the execution and management of Oman Government Network.

The Sultanate of Oman boosted spending on service projects especially in the healthcare and education sectors. The tenders aimed to supply equipment and materials for laboratories and provide supplies, maintenance and operation services for medical devices at various health institutions of the Ministry of Health. Besides, a tender for additional work has been

RO 38 MILLION
FOR EXECUTION AND MANAGEMENT OF OMAN GOVERNMENT NETWORK

approved to provide engineering consultancy services to convert the Madha Healthcare Centre in Musandam Governorate into Madha Hospital.

DISTANCE EDUCATION
Tenders for the education sector included contracting for distance education platform for the Ministry of Education, licenses renewal for Microsoft programmes, printing works, electronic marking for the general education diploma exams for, nutrition services and associated works for students of Sultan Qaboos University, and additional work for the classroom project of the foundation programme building at the Shinas Vocational College. This is in addition to

maintenance and rehabilitation of the headquarters of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

Among the tenders awarded for development projects were the additional work for provision of consultancy services for the development at the fishing port in the Wilayat of Dibba and the additional work at the southern runway and air corridors at Muscat International Airport.

The Tender Board also awarded a tender for the design and implementation of a single-lane road between Khasab and Dibba and the road to Lima in Musandam Governorate in addition to new asphalt roads in the Wilayat of Maqshin in Dhofar Governorate.

For the better exploitation of additional oil revenues, the government allocated part of these revenues to enhance development spending and improve the citizens' living standard. The previous year saw the value of tenders increase to over RO 500 million from RO 252 million in 2021.



Tender Announcement

Capital Market Authority announces the following tender:

Tender Number	Description	Tender Main Scopes	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
CMA / 2023/002	Risk Based Capital Solvency	Electronic system for calculation of risk based capital solvency for insurance companies licensed in the Sultanate of Oman.	31 July 2023	8 th August 2023 03:00 PM	17 th August 2023 03:00 PM	25 /- OMR Non Refundable

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit the original payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person (business card) to the Services and Public Relations Department ; hence, we shall provide you with Tender document.
- Bidders must attached an electronic copy of the tender bond of not less than %2 of the tender value. The bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- CMA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Name of beneficiary : Capital Market authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank: Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code: BMUSOMRXXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :
E-mail : Admin@cma.gov.om
Telephone Number : 24823299
From 8 am to 3 pm
(Sunday to Thursday).



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Minister of Interior receives GCC assistant secretary general for security affairs

MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior received in his office on Sunday Brigadier Hamad Ajlan Al Amimi, Assistant Secretary General for Security Affairs of the GCC. Al Amimi highlighted several topics related to joint GCC security action. He also addressed some aspects related to enhancing joint cooperation. On his turn, Al Busaidy expressed his thanks to Al Amimi, wishing him success in carrying out his duties. — ONA

Tender Board signs framework contracts for purchasing government vehicles

MUSCAT: Represented by the Directorate General of Government Procurement, the Secretariat General of the Tender Board today signed framework contracts for the purchase of government vehicles. The contracts were inked with a number of vehicle suppliers in Oman. The Tender Board also launched a system of managing orders to provide vehicle purchase services via Amana platform.



An agreement to this effect was signed by Eng. Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, who described the signing of the first contract for the purchase of government vehicles as a major achievement. The added value of the contract is seen through shortening vehicle delivery time by 50 to 60 per cent, he explained. The signing of the contracts underlines the Tender Board's keenness to develop Amana platform as a unified government electronic system

for the management of purchase orders, the automation of such requests and the unification of purchase prices for government departments. The step also helps devise terms and conditions of framework contracts, augment the gains of local content in contracts and link the parties concerned electronically. The Secretariat General of the Tender Board was embarked on training more than 175 employees from the various government units to use Amana platform and manage orders. It also provided technical support to users of the platform through a 100 per cent Omani staff that lends technical assistance whenever needed. Amana platform is distinguished in many ways. It provides a range of price preferences, access to 36 types of vehicles, automation of vehicle purchasing processes, offering 270 training opportunities and more than 20 employment opportunities in the automotive sector. This is in addition to streamlining procedures and cutting down 55 to 60 per cent of purchased vehicle delivery time. — ONA

Dust storm may decrease horizontal visibility on Dhofar, Al Dakhiliyah roads

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The overcast sky was prominent upon landing of flights at the Muscat International Airport on Sunday morning. Passengers felt the heaviness of dust and humidity on their arrival. Oman Met Office had sounded about the possibilities for active downward winds ranging between 15-30 knots over Al Wusta Governorate, which may lead to the rise of dust and a decrease in horizontal visibility on the road connecting the Dhofar and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. Similar conditions are expected on Monday also. The weather condition is significant, especially for road users heading to Dhofar for the Khareef season and those who are returning back. The impact of the active downward winds that caused a decrease in horizontal visibility and the rise of dust and dirt was experienced throughout the Hajar Mountains. An advisory was released with possible thunderstorms for Samayil, Jabal Shams, Ibri, Al Hamra, Bahla, Izki, Nizwa, Hamra Al Duru and Al Mudhaibi. Adam, Fahud, Qarn Alam, Haima, Maqshin, Marmul and Thamrait are in line with the dust storm. On the other hand, early morning satellite images on Sunday showed the continued flow of high and medium clouds over the northern and central governorates. There had been a good condensation of monsoon clouds over the Dhofar Governorate, bringing in sporadic rain in the mountains and deserts.



Today, the weather is expected to be partly cloudy skies along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle and chances of isolated rain over mountain and desert areas. The Oman Met Office also warned of thunderstorms accompanied by active downwind on the Hajar Mountains, including Al Sharqiyah South, Al Sharqiyah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah, as well as adjacent areas, and the extension of cumulus clouds to desert areas further in the day lasting from 1 pm to 10 pm. The rainfall could range between 10 - 25 mm. On Monday, the weather is expected to be partly cloudy skies along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains with intermittent drizzle and chances of isolated rain over mountain and desert areas. The chance of convective cloud development could lead to isolated rain and occasionally thundershowers over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas. Chances of low clouds also continue with late night to early morning low clouds along parts of coastal areas of the Arabian Sea and the Oman Sea. The chance of dust rising over the desert areas is also expected on Monday.

Light Park in Salalah a top entertainment spot

SALALAH: The Light Park in Salalah Public Park organised by the Dhofar Municipality for this year's khareef season will remain open until August 31, providing visitors with an array of enjoyable activities. Ahmed bin Awad al Rawas, from the Department of Events and Awareness at Dhofar Municipality, said that the illuminated park showcases artistically designed models of animals and plants using three-dimensional techniques. "These sculptures are adorned with lights, creating a delightful atmosphere in the area. The illuminated garden stands out with its intricate details, showcasing the beauty of animals and plants, which contributes to creating a unique and enchanting ambiance," he said. To enhance the scene's realism, the garden incorporates sound techniques and simulates animal sounds, adding an extra touch of authenticity to the experience. This year, khareef season is attracting numerous visitors and tourists from both within and outside the Sultanate of Oman, to relish the pleasant weather and breathtaking landscapes across the Dhofar Governorate. — ONA





Property market in Oman on recovery path: CBO

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO), which released the eleventh issue of the Financial Stability Report (FSR) 2023), has said that the 'Omani financial system exhibited remarkable resilience to the heightened volatility and liquidity stress that permeated a large part of the global financial system.

In addition, the FSR 2023 reaffirms that in Oman 'the short-term risks to financial stability remain muted' and that the 'Omani financial system remains strong and well-poised to support the economy.'

The report stated that

unlike developments in many advanced countries, the real estate market in Oman began to pick up in 2022 amid the improvement in economic conditions.

The recent recovery in the population profile from the pandemic eased some segments of the Omani real estate market, reviving the demand for real estate properties. In addition, given the rise in policy rates, so far there are no signs of tightening in lending to the real estate sector as lending rates remained unchanged.

CBO has authorised FLCs to lend for commercial real estate projects besides lending to real estate developers, this additional source of financing will further bolster the real



estate sector in Oman.

The expatriate population, a major user of rental residential properties, rose by eight per cent in 2022 as compared to

the beginning of the pandemic year 2020. The recent rise in the expat population to the prepandemic level along with the resumption of commercial

activities and the increase in the number of Omanis joining the workforce as a result of the recovery in economic activities has rebooted the demand for property.

Resultantly, during 2022, residential property prices inched up on average by 7 per cent with the residential real estate index recovering from its lows in 2021.

Similarly, the property transactions (value of the traded property) that experienced a sharp decline at the onset of the pandemic gradually recovered in the latter part of 2021, and this positive trend persisted throughout 2022.

'Overall, the property market in Oman appears to be recovering amid the

resurgence of economic activity. Hence, we do not foresee any imminent correction in the real estate prices,' the report stated.

Properties issued in the name of GCC citizens increased by 79.3 per cent to 633 in the first six months of 2023, compared to 353 during the same period last year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). 884 properties were issued to GCC residents at the end of 2022.

A total of 117,870 properties were issued during the same period this year, an increase of 1.3 per cent from 116,324 in 2022. It may be noted that the total value of traded property also increased during the same period by 18.9 per cent.

Traffic exhibition in Salalah promotes road safety

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 30

The General Directorate of Traffic, in collaboration with the Dhofar Governorate Police Command, launched an exhibition in Salalah to create traffic awareness among road users.

Themed 'TAMAHL', the five-day event marks the beginning of the 2023 traffic awareness campaign for visitors to Dhofar.

The exhibition features several sections, including a corner of the National Road Safety Committee and one of the traffic safety institutes in the Royal Oman Police. These sections aim to educate and train policemen and road users on essential traffic safety measures.

The exhibition has engaging visual presentations demonstrating effective traffic control measures.

Moreover, visitors have



the opportunity to review comprehensive traffic accident statistics in the Sultanate of Oman from 2012 to 2022. The event also introduces electronic services and showcases the smart traffic patrol initiative.

The 'Wakeness of Traffic Thought' competition, now in its seventh edition, runs parallelly with the exhibition. The competition aims to disseminate vital information and foster a

strong traffic safety culture among road users.

The Traffic Exhibition at the Salalah Garden Mall is happening under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghasaani, the Chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

In conjunction with the broader traffic awareness campaign for visitors to Dhofar, the organisers have arranged traffic competitions and recreational activities for children at the public park in

Salalah. Additionally, informative lectures are being held to raise road safety awareness among the local community.

The Traffic Exhibition is a valuable platform for road users to enhance their understanding of traffic safety and learn preventive measures to avoid accidents.

The commendable efforts of the organisers in raising awareness about this crucial issue deserve recognition.



GCC civil service committee reviews training programmes

SALALAH: The GCC Technical Committee for Civil Service and Human Resources Affairs is currently holding its second meeting of the year.

Being held in Salalah Millilumen Resort, the two-day meeting discusses the decisions of the Financial and Economic Cooperation Committee at its 117th meeting regarding the challenges facing the Gulf

common market.

The meeting also reviews the recommendations of the 26th meeting of the GCC Under-Secretaries of Civil Service and Administrative Development Units, in addition to the initiative of joint training programmes among the GCC countries and unifying the purchase of licenses for human resources systems.

— ONA

Lamer al Mughsail significant for Dhofar tourism

MAHIRA ISHAQ AL BALUSHI
SALALAH, JULY 30

The Lamer al Mughsail project in Dhofar holds great significance due to the location's tourist attraction and demand for facilities during the Khareef season.

The project is important in many ways and, most importantly, due to the handling of it by Omani youths. The primary objective of the Lamer al Mughsail project is to empower and uplift Omani youth by providing them with a platform to showcase their skills and initiatives across various fields.

By supporting small and medium-sized projects led by Omani youth, the initiative fosters an environment of creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. This not only benefits the young individuals involved but also contributes to the overall growth and development of the region's economy.



The project focuses on setting up recreational tourism during the Khareef season. The season is special when the region experiences a unique climate and lush green landscapes, making it

an ideal place to attract tourists and visitors.

By offering a wide range of activities and services, such as beach activities, an artificial waterfall, and entertainment



options for families and children, the project ensures that it caters to people of all age groups, further enhancing its appeal.

In addition to providing various recreational services, the Lamer al

Mughsail project plays a vital role in creating opportunities for local businesses and entrepreneurs.

The provisions for restaurants and cafes not only enhance the visitors' experience but also open

avenues for small businesses to thrive during the tourism season. The availability of boats for picnics at reasonable pricing makes the beach experience accessible to all, encouraging families and friends to spend quality time together.

Al Mughsail beach's allure as one of Dhofar's most popular tourist destinations during the Khareef season adds prestige to the project.

The Lamer al Mughsail project is a well-thought-out initiative that not only contributes to the promotion of tourism in Dhofar but also nurtures the potential of the Omani youth.

By combining recreational offerings with support for local businesses and entrepreneurs, the project sets an example for sustainable and community-centric tourism development. Its impact resonates not only during the Khareef season but also throughout the year, fostering a sense of pride and engagement among the local population.



CAPTURING NATURE’S SPLENDOR

AHMED AL WASHAHI’S JOURNEY THROUGH WETLAND



BADER AL KIYUMI
MUSCAT

ONE DAY, as the sun drew close to sunset, I strolled through the serene Al Ansab Wetland. The harmonious interplay between stillness and motion painted a breathtaking view before me. Amidst this tranquil setting, I spotted a man shouldering his camera, venturing among the vibrant Omani Plants that flourished in this wetland. With a gentle wave, he silently greeted the bustling flocks of birds.

Ahmed al Washahi, a renowned photographer specialising in biodiversity and wildlife, is also a respected water engineer. Though he originally aspired to study biology, an opportunity to delve into oil and gas emerged.

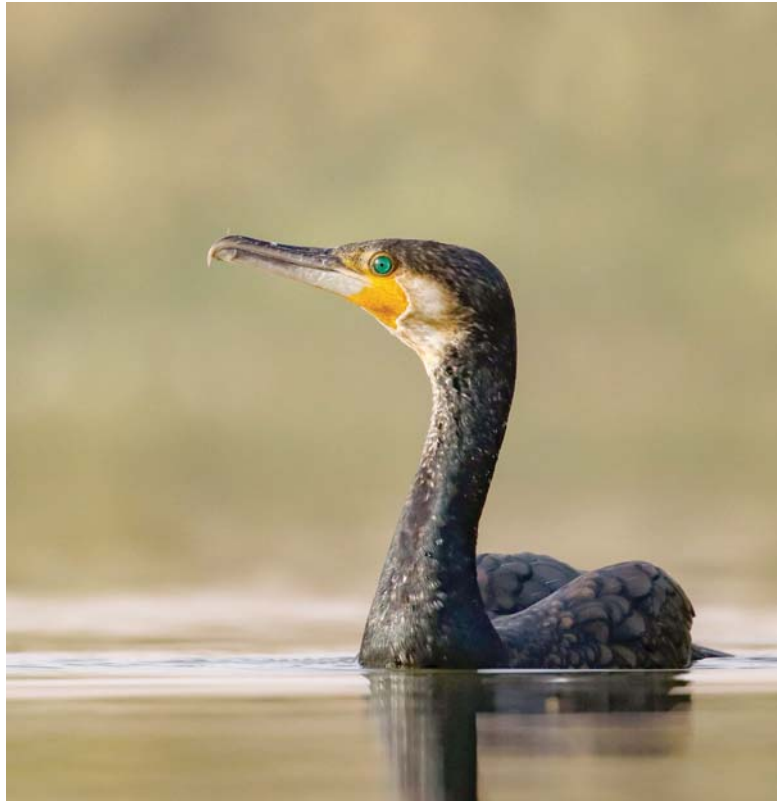
Nonetheless, fate smiled upon him after graduating as he secured a job at Nama Water Services. There, he worked as a process engineer in a wastewater treatment plant near the Al Ansab Wetland. “This environment,” he shared, “provides the perfect opportunity to develop my skills in biodiversity, as my company is deeply committed to preserving the natural world through various initiatives.”

Ahmed has dedicated the past decade to nature photography, showcasing his passion for wildlife through captivating action shots. His photographs and videos have graced the pages of esteemed international publications, including the prestigious National Geographic Magazine. Most notably, Al Washahi documented numerous bird species, particularly those frequenting Al Ansab Wetland. I was informed by a friend that Ahmed fostered a special connection with a family of foxes, regularly paying them visits.

Curiosity led me to ask Ahmed what drew him to Al Ansab Wetland. With a sigh, he gestured around the wetland and replied, “The allure lies in the heart of Muscat, where unique and migratory birds grace us with their presence. The breathtaking landscapes, teeming biodiversity, and the support from my company, which encourages photography and videography, make this place truly exceptional.”

One of Ahmed’s short video clips featuring the Pterocles bird garnered significant attention, reaching an audience of over three million through his digital platform and other channels.

One stands out vividly among the remarkable encounters Ahmed experienced at Al Ansab Wetland. “I used to visit the wetland daily, hoping to capture the



AHMED AL WASHAHI



THE ALLURE LIES IN THE HEART OF MUSCAT, WHERE UNIQUE AND MIGRATORY BIRDS GRACE US WITH THEIR PRESENCE. THE BREATHTAKING LANDSCAPES, TEEMING BIODIVERSITY, AND THE SUPPORT FROM MY COMPANY, WHICH ENCOURAGES PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEOGRAPHY, MAKE THIS PLACE TRULY EXCEPTIONAL

Golden Eagle Bird, which typically resides here from November to January. By sheer chance, I witnessed the eagle preying on an Egret Bird. Though it fled as I approached, knowing the behaviour of predatory birds, I anticipated its return.” Determined, I promptly set up my tent and readied my equipment. After an hour, the eagle indeed returned, allowing me to capture striking photos that garnered appreciation from countless admirers.

Prior to documenting any species, Ahmed emphasised the importance of scientific integrity. A photographer must possess knowledge and references, familiarise themselves with bird species, and be well-versed in various resources. Personally, I meticulously documented three bird species that migrated to Al Ansab Wetland, relying on trusted references and books.

One prominent source I consulted was a book published by Sultan Qaboos University, specialising in ornithology.

When I inquired about dealing with swift bird movements and challenging lighting conditions, Ahmed once again took a deep breath. He shared, “Photographing birds demands patience and a deep understanding of their behaviour. Knowing when they sleep, feed, and other habits is crucial. Furthermore, photographers must approach their subject with the understanding that they may return with remarkable photos or an empty memory card.”

Eager to learn more about his bond with the fox family, I asked Ahmed for the story behind their friendship. He chuckled and replied, “Everyday, after the Al Fajr prayer, I would visit the fox and its adorable offspring. Initially, I approached with caution, minimising any movement or sound. Gradually, I started bringing food for them, and they would emerge, peering at me curiously.

Over time, a sense of familiarity blossomed, allowing me to stand close and capture the enchanting moments through my lens.” Al Ansab Wetland, nestled in the heart of Muscat, stands as one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most biodiverse and captivating regions. Photographers have long been captivated by its splendour, seeking to immortalise its beauty through their lenses.

While opportunities for photography exist year-round, the period from October to April offers a special season for capturing an abundance of immigrant bird species. Additionally, there are numerous distinguished locations to explore, showcasing the rich biodiversity, Omani plants, and other breathtaking scenes.



Ofeer Theatre geared up for ‘Wala wa saret’



MIAAD ALI AL DARBI
MUSCAT, JULY 30

As part of the Khareef Dhofar 2023 activities, the Ofeer Theatre Group is gearing up to unveil an exciting new theatrical production scheduled to run from Tuesday (August 1) to August 6 at the Ubar Theatre in the General Directorate of Heritage and Tourism.

Mohammed al Ajmi, Vice-President of Ofeer Theatre Group, said the play titled “Wala wa saret” will have its grand premiere under the patronage of Khaled al Ghassani, Adviser to the Ministry

of Culture, Sports, and Youth.

The play “Wala wa saret,” written and directed by Ofeer Theatre’s head, Al Moatamad bin Mohammed al Yafei, features a talented cast of the group’s stars, including Mahfouz Baqweer, Tunis Kasboub, Abdul Rahim al Yafei, and others from the play’s staff. Their collaborative efforts, along with the expertise of a skilled technical team, are expected to ensure the success of this performance.

Ofeer Theatre Group is well-known for presenting distinctive works that address social issues



in a humorous and comedic manner, catering to audiences who appreciate continuous laughter and comedy. “Wala wa saret” follows the same approach, delving into

a social issue while delivering a meaningful message.

Oman boasts 56 theatre groups, all under the purview of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and

Youth. These teams compete within the Omani theatre arena, striving to present unique and creative theatrical pieces to captivate their audiences. Additionally,

the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth organises an annual competition for cultural creations. It hosts several local festivals in collaboration with theatre groups.



Meeting discusses joint Arab cooperation in communications, IT

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is hosting the 51st meeting of the Permanent Arab Committee for Communications and Information Technology, which

kicked off on Sunday.

The three-day meeting discusses a spectrum of topics related to joint Arab cooperation in the fields of communications and information technology, such as cybersecurity and the Arab strategy for communications and information technology,

among other topics.

Oman is hosting the committee’s meeting for the first time in a bid to highlight prominent achievements in the communications and information technology field in Oman, as well as attract foreign investments. — ONA

Duqm University College gets nod to start studies

MUSCAT: The Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation issued a Ministerial Resolution 65/2023 to start studies at Duqm University College.

Article 1 of the decision stipulated that studies start at Duqm University College from the year 2024/2025, in the two programmes of Bachelor of Science with honours in Logistics Management, and Bachelor of Science with honours in Construction Environment.

The ministry issued a ministerial decision in September 2021 to establish Duqm University College, based in Al Wusta Governorate in the Special Economic Zone of Duqm.

The college is subject to the laws, regulations, and decisions regulating private universities and colleges in force in the Sultanate of Oman.

Duqm University College



can accept Omani and non-Omani students who hold a general education diploma or its equivalent in accordance with the conditions determined by the college in accordance with the laws, regulations, and decisions that regulate this decision.

Duqm University College, after the approval of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, can grant the appropriate academic qualifications in accordance with the National Framework for Academic Qualifications.

Good response for blood donation campaign

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousuf

Members of several NGOs turned up responding to the call of Oman Blood Bank and conducted blood donation campaigns to support the need for blood units over the last weekend.

Hope, an organisation which was formed to render blood units to the department of blood services organised a day long blood donation campaign in association with the Bausher Blood Bank over the weekend.

As many as 31 donors were able to donate blood taking part in the campaign led by Said al Maawali, a senior phlebotomist from the blood bank.

‘Hope’ an NGO that was established some 8 years ago with the sole aim of helping people receive blood units as and when required for medical emergencies and for regular blood transfusions, has



besides 22 chapters in India, in all GCC countries except Bahrain which will be soon launched, according to Nassr Mash Ayanchery, one who spearheads the blood donation move across borders.

“We are glad that many donors turned up on a weekend for a noble cause and every single person can bring in smile to someone whom they may or may not know,” he said.

An exclusive group for those who possess rare groups such as Negative groups, a ladies only blood donors group, and a group for platelet donors are currently in action under the ‘Hope’, detailed Oman wing coordinators, Musthafa Kappad and Shameem Atholi.

‘Save Life’, a group of doctors and other key people in the healthcare sector aimed at sending help in times of pressing

needs, an internal newsletter called ‘Blood News’ are other ventures of the group which has been actively involved in assisting blood banks.

A 57-member regional committee headed by Abdul Naser Ayanchery, Jamdhad Pathiyarakkara (General Secretary), and Gireesh Babu Sharadamandiram (Treasurer) looks after the blood donation campaigns.

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

TENDER NOTICE

The Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources
Announces the following Tender: -

Tender No.	Description	Tender Documents Price (R.O)	Class	Last Date for Collection of Documents	Last Date for Submission of Documents
525/2023/MAFWR/HQ-46	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Firewall System for the General Directorates in the Governorates at the Ministry of Agricultural, Fisheries Wealth & Water Resources	25/-	Specialized	Thursday 3/8/2023	Thursday 10/8/2023

- Interested Companies registered with The General Secretariat of the Tender Board (in the above mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- The value of the document will be paid & submitted on line on given website.
- The Tenderer should attach Bid Commitment Declaration (regarding the exemption from submitting a bid bond in tenders).
- All correspondence pertaining to the tender inquiry must be online at e-tendering System.
- All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: +968 24402200 or etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.

TENDERS COMMITTEE
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Wealth and Water Resources

■ DROPPING LAST REMNANTS



Workers dismount a Soviet emblem from the shield of the 'Motherland' monument, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, at a compound of the World War II museum in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Sunday. – Reuters

Ukraine drone attack on Moscow injures one, closes airport

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned on Sunday that “war” was coming to Russia after three Ukrainian drones were downed over Moscow.

“Gradually, the war is returning to the territory of Russia -- to its symbolic centres and military bases, and this is an inevitable, natural and absolutely fair process,” Zelensky said on a visit to the western city of Ivano-Frankivsk.

“Ukraine is getting stronger,” he added, warning however that the country should prepare for new attack on energy infrastructure in winter.

“But we must be aware that, just as last year, Russian terrorists can still attack our energy sector and critical facilities this winter,” Zelensky said, adding that preparations for “all possible scenarios” were discussed in Ivano-Frankivsk.

Zelensky spoke after three Ukrainian drones were downed over Moscow early on Sunday, the Russian defence ministry said. The attack damaged two office towers and briefly shut an international airport.

Two drones were brought down over the Moscow City business district by electronic jamming while another was shot

down over the greater Moscow region by anti-aircraft fire, the Russian Defence Ministry said.

Photos showed severe damage to a building in Moscow City. Broken glass littered the street below. Several ministries are located in the district, while a major skyscraper project is still under development.

Moscow Mayor Sergey Sobyanin spoke of “insignificant damage” to the facades of two office buildings.

The Defence Ministry held the “Kiev regime” responsible.

State-run news agency TASS reported that a security guard had been injured. — **Agencies**

Thousands evacuated after rains lash China

BEIJING: Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from high-risk areas of Beijing and another northern city as much of China was lashed by torrential rain on Sunday.

Deadly storm Doksuri has been sweeping northwards over China since Friday, when it careened into southern Fujian province after battering the Philippines as a typhoon.

The Chinese capital and surrounding region were drenched over the weekend, with officials warning of potentially hazardous conditions including floods, swelling rivers, mudslides and landslides.

More than 27,000 people in high-risk areas of Beijing have been evacuated, and another 20,000 were relocated from parts of neighbouring province Hebei’s capital Shijiazhuang, state media said. Hundreds of millions of people in northern China, including in Beijing, remain under a red alert — the highest level — for heavy rain through at least Monday afternoon.

The alert covers Beijing’s 22 million people and Tianjin’s 14 million, as well as parts of Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong and Henan provinces.

It is the first time since 2011 that such a heavy rainfall warning has been issued, according to local media.

Chinese authorities have been cautious about heavy downpours since severe flooding in 2021 killed more than 300 people in central China, mainly in the city of Zhengzhou.

In Beijing, residents were



People wear raincoats during heavy rain in Beijing on Sunday. – Reuters

urged on Sunday not to go outside unless necessary, advice that appeared widely heeded with the usually buzzing streets empty of many cars or pedestrians.

Companies were also told not to force their employees to come to work unless necessary.

Many popular sites in the capital were temporarily closed, including the Forbidden City, libraries and museums.

The sprawling National Centre for the Performing Arts, located near Tiananmen Square, cancelled opera and musical performances scheduled for Sunday. City officials ordered all school buildings to shut, as some students and teachers were using the facilities for training or extracurricular activities like sports during the summer break.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Water Resources raised its flood warning after some rivers swelled beyond alert levels.

In one mountainous village on the outskirts of Beijing, a local

river was transformed into a gushing torrent, but no casualties were reported as 62 households in the surrounding area were evacuated the previous day, according to the local newspaper.

Doksuri was initially categorised as a super typhoon as it tore across the Pacific Ocean earlier this week, but it lost some intensity as it neared the Philippines, where it killed more than a dozen people.

It still brought colossal waves and howling winds of up to 175 kilometres per hour (110 miles per hour) to China’s southeast on Friday, causing significant damage.

More than 880,000 people in Fujian province were affected by the storm, state media said on Sunday.

The storm is hitting China after a summer of record temperatures, with scientists saying the extreme weather is exacerbated by climate change.

— **AFP**

Africa leaders give Niger junta one week to cede power

ABUJA: African leaders on Sunday gave the junta in Niger one week to cede power or face the possible use of force, and slapped financial sanctions on the putschists, after the latest coup in the terrorist-plagued Sahel region raised alarm on the continent and in the West.

In the third coup in as many years to fell a leader in the Sahel, Niger’s elected president and Western ally, Mohammed Bazoum, has been held by the military since Wednesday.

General Abdourahamane Tiani, the head of the powerful presidential guard, has declared himself leader.

Bazoum is one of a dwindling group of elected presidents and pro-Western leaders in the Sahel, where since 2020 a jihadist insurgency has triggered coups in Mali and Burkina Faso.

Former colonial ruler France and the European Union have suspended security cooperation and financial aid to Niger following the coup, while the United States warned that its aid could also be at stake.

At an emergency summit in Nigeria, the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional bloc demanded Bazoum be reinstated, within a week.



Pro-junta demonstrators break down one of the doors of the French Embassy building before being dispersed by Nigerian security forces in Niamey, the capital city of Niger, on Sunday. – Reuters

Otherwise, the bloc said it would take “all measures” to restore constitutional order.

“Such measures may include the use of force for this effect,” it said in a statement, adding that ECOWAS defence chiefs were to meet on Sunday.

It was not immediately clear how ECOWAS could use force. Last year, the bloc agreed to create a regional security force to intervene against jihadists and prevent military coups, but details on the force and its funding were still unclear.

The bloc also slapped financial sanctions on the junta leaders and on the country, freezing

“all commercial and financial transactions” between member states and Niger, one of the world’s poorest nations, often ranking last on the UN’s Human Development Index. In a statement read out on national television on Saturday evening, Niger junta member Amadou Abdramane said the summit’s aim was to “approve a plan of aggression against Niger, in the form of an imminent military intervention in Niamey”.

The intervention would be “in cooperation with African countries who are not members of the regional body and certain Western nations”, he added.

— **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraq and Kuwait seek to solve border issue

Iraq and Kuwait will work towards reaching a definitive agreement on demarcating their borders, including a contested maritime area of the Gulf, their foreign ministers said on Sunday.

The de facto land and maritime borders between the neighbouring states were established by the United Nations in 1993, three years after Iraq under Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

After meeting his Kuwaiti



counterpart Salem Al Sabah in Baghdad on Sunday, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein said that during their talks “the emphasis was placed on resolving the border issues”.

LONDON

Kanye West’s Twitter account reinstated

Kanye West’s Twitter account has been reinstated after an almost eight-month suspension for violating the platform’s policy against inciting violence.

The US rapper, who has legally changed his name to Ye, posted a series of erratic tweets at the end of last year, one of which appeared to show a symbol combining a swastika and a Jewish star.

He stoked further controversy online with remarks made during an interview with US



conspiracy theorist Alex Jones where he praised Adolf Hitler. Twitter owner Elon Musk, who has recently rebranded the platform to X, confirmed on December 2 that West’s account had been suspended.

JERUSALEM

Israel eyes rail links to Saudi Arabia

Israel will build a \$27-billion rail expansion that will connect its outlying areas to metropolitan Tel Aviv and, in the future, could provide overland links to Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday.

The announcement followed a trip by top US officials to Saudi Arabia last week to advance a possible forging of formal relations between the Muslim powerhouse and Israel.

Opening the weekly cabinet



meeting, Netanyahu appeared to sidestep the constitutional crisis that has roiled the country for seven months, denting its economy and shaking Western allies’ confidence in its democratic health.

How to beat procrastination using soft skills



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

We are all guilty of procrastination – the tendency to postpone chores, usually of the routine or dreaded kind. Assignments, reports, even fixing the slightly leaking tap at home, all are found to be tedious, boring, and definitely not enjoyable chores.

But it is these boring chores of life that keep the clock of routine ticking. Work does have to be done and the sooner it is done, the faster we can move on to other, more enjoyable moments of life. Plus, these moments can be enjoyed more, knowing that the dreaded work has now been done.

This is, of course, easier said than done. Humans tend to procrastinate, mainly because the required job is itself daunting or repetitive. We know procrastinating is not a good habit, and yet, we are all guilty of it.

The New York Times quotes professor of

psychology Dr Fuschia Sirois who says that “people engage in this irrational cycle of chronic procrastination because of an inability to manage negative moods around a task”. Effectively, it’s all about attitude: change how you approach a task and it will not be as daunting as it seemed.

Approaching procrastination like any other chore is the key: it is a situation which needs to be tackled, a problem to be solved. The solution is in our hands.

The magic word surrounding procrastination is focus. We tend to ignore the main task at hand and go on to almost everything. Of course, this is so much easier now with any number of distractions available at the end of our palm, on our phones.

Focusing on one task, one chore that is either of utmost urgency or has been neglected the most is the central way to getting tasks done. Forbes suggests the ‘5-minute miracle’: ask yourself what is the one thing that you have been postponing but can be done in 5 minutes – the answer usually has many

THE MAGIC WORD SURROUNDING PROCRASTINATION IS FOCUS. WE TEND TO IGNORE THE MAIN TASK AT HAND AND GO ON TO ALMOST EVERYTHING

options. Repeating this a few times works wonders – there are any number of 5-minute chores which can done within a half hour span: replying to emails, sorting out a drawer at work or at home, finally putting away all the books lying around.

Once the minutes pass, this can be translated into an hour – a so called ‘power hour’ where all distractions are taken away and there is focus on the chore at hand. Think about it – one hour in 24 hours of the day is utterly doable, and we still think it is too much time to dedicate to tasks at hand.

Reflecting on why we are procrastinating can go a long way in actually curing the habit. Perhaps it is because the tasks are boring, maybe they are too daunting or maybe it is too much of a routine.

Whatever the reason, the ultimate strategy is to have fun in every situation – making every chore as enjoyable as possible (there is always a positive side to work) will ensure that a task becomes a finished chore rather than a dreaded one awaiting each day.

Shadowy army veteran who seized power in Niger

BOUREIMA HAMA

General Abdourahamane Tiani, the chief of Niger’s powerful presidential guard who took power after a military coup, is an army veteran who has foiled similar uprisings in the restive West African nation.

Tiani, 59, has shunned the limelight despite a stellar military career which saw him lead the elite 700-member unit from 2011 up until now.

“He is not well known outside military circles. He is a man in the background, powerful,” said Ibrahim Yahaya Ibrahim, a researcher with the International Crisis Group think tank.

On Friday, Tiani declared himself leader after staging a takeover that began on Wednesday when his presidential guards seized President Mohamed Bazoum and sequestered him in the presidential palace.

Niger is an extremely poor nation but with vast uranium deposits. It has suffered four coups since independence from France in 1960 and several other failed putsch attempts and is currently in the throes of jihadist violence like its neighbours.

Bazoum -- a key ally of the West in fighting militancy in sub-Saharan Africa -- was the first elected leader to succeed another since independence.

Tiani is a staunch ally of former president Mahamadou Issoufou, Bazoum’s predecessor, who appointed him head of the presidential guards in 2011.

Bazoum kept him in the job after taking over from Issoufou, who served two terms, but relations between them deteriorated in the past months, according to sources close to Bazoum.

They said that Bazoum had been considering replacing Tiani as the head of the presidential guard.

Tiani meanwhile began shunning “official ceremonies and activities” of the president and sent his deputy Colonel Ibroh Amadou Bacharou, also a member of the new junta, to represent him, a source close to Bazoum said.

- ‘Brave’ and ‘popular’ - Another source close to the deposed leader said Tiani’s replacement was due to be decided at a cabinet meeting this month.

Tiani is originally from Filingue, an arid zone about 200 kilometres (125 miles) northwest of the capital Niamey.

He has served in missions by the United Nations and West African regional bloc ECOWAS in Ivory Coast as well as in Sudan.

Filingue lies in the volatile Tillaberi region which has been repeatedly attacked for nearly eight years by insurgents linked to Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State group as well as jihadists from neighbouring Nigeria.

The vast area, roughly the size of South Korea, has around 150,000 internally displaced people, according to the United Nations. — AFP

‘Oppenheimer’ fans are rediscovering a 40-year-old documentary

MARC TRACY

One morning in the 1950s, Jon Else’s father pointed toward Nevada from their home in Sacramento, California.

“There was this orange glow that suddenly rose up in the sky, and then shrank back down,” Else recalled.

It was, hundreds of miles away, an atomic weapon test: a symbol of the world that was created when a team of Americans led by physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer exploded the first nuclear bomb a decade earlier on July 16, 1945.

Growing up in the nuclear age left an impression on Else, now 78.

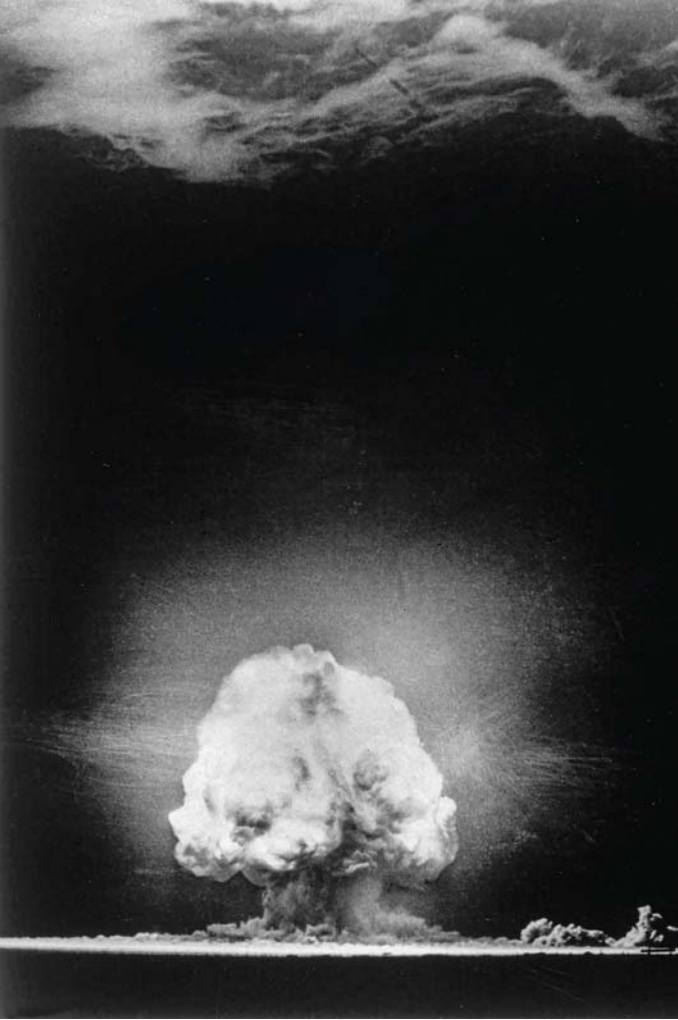
He was later a series producer of the award-winning “Eyes on the Prize,” a program on the civil rights movement, and directed documentaries about the Great Depression and Richard Wagner’s “Ring” cycle. But before all that, in 1981, he made a documentary about Oppenheimer, the scientist whose bony visage graced the covers of mid-century magazines, and the bomb. It was called “The Day After Trinity,” a reference to that inaugural detonation.

Decades later, viewers are flocking to Else’s film, a nominee for the Academy Award for best documentary feature, as a companion to Christopher Nolan’s biopic “Oppenheimer,” which grossed more than \$100 million domestically in its opening week this month.

After the Criterion Channel made “The Day After Trinity” available without a subscription until August, it shot to the top of the streaming service’s most-watched films this month, alongside movies directed by Martin Scorsese, Paul Verhoeven, Michael Mann and other typically Letterboxcore filmmakers.

“We have seen a huge increase in views,” Criterion said in a statement, “and we’re very happy with the success of the strategy as a way to make sure this film found its rightful place in the conversation around ‘Oppenheimer.’”

In a phone interview from California last week, Else, a professor emeritus at the University of California, Berkeley, praised Nolan’s film, which he saw last weekend in San Francisco. (A spokesperson for Nolan said he was not available to comment.)



A photo shows the mushroom cloud caused by the Trinity nuclear test, on July 16, 1945.

DECADES LATER, VIEWERS ARE FLOCKING TO THE DAY AFTER TRINITY AS A COMPANION TO CHRISTOPHER NOLAN’S BIOPIC, WHICH GROSSED MORE THAN \$100 MILLION DOMESTICALLY IN ITS OPENING WEEK THIS MONTH

“These stories have to be retold every generation,” Else said, “and they have to be told by new storytellers.”

Nolan’s three-hour opus, a Universal release shot on IMAX film with a lavish cast of brand-name Hollywood actors, shares much with “The Day After Trinity,” an 88-minute documentary financed by the public television station in San Jose, California, and various grants.

The Oppenheimer of “Oppenheimer” (based on Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin’s Pulitzer Prize-winning biography “American Prometheus”) and the Oppenheimer of “The Day After Trinity” are the same brilliant, sensitive, haunted soul. “This man who was apparently a completely nonviolent fellow was the architect of

the most savage weapon in history,” Else said.

The movies feature some of the same characters from the life of Oppenheimer, who died in 1967, including his brother, Frank (played in “Oppenheimer” by Dylan Arnold); his friend Haakon Chevalier (Jefferson Hall); and physicist Isidor Isaac Rabi (David Krumholtz). Both films build to Trinity and then document the conflict between some of its inventors’ hope that the bomb would never be used in war and its deployment in Japan, the invention of the more devastating hydrogen bomb and the nuclear arms race of the Cold War.

A central plot point in each movie is a closed hearing in 1954 at which Oppenheimer was stripped of his government security clearance, partly because of past left-wing associations. David Webb Peoples, a co-editor and co-writer of “The Day After Trinity” — whose later screenwriting credits include “Blade Runner,” “Unforgiven” and “12 Monkeys” — even proposed structuring the film around the hearing, as Nolan did with “Oppenheimer.”

— The New York Times

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Armrest your in-house troops

A good leader would always know how important training is to retain employees and attract talents. In fact, training is necessity in employee’s career journey and shall be a never-ending process. Further, it enhances one’s thought process and contributes in delivering better results at workplace.

Training, in general, is a teaching by itself! It is, basically, defined as developing any skill or knowledge related to specific competencies in oneself or others. It always intends to achieve certain goals of improving people’s capabilities and productivity as well as reviving their motivation. For that reason, training is a must-to-maintain practice as it upgrades the skills and energy of employees throughout their work span.

People in any profession need a certain type of training, which is relevant to the work they do as a professional development to hone their skills and abilities. Even if they are talented and competent, employees’ expertise should be updated every now and then. Through training, they could sharpen their competencies; they enrich their experiences and know-how.

As is well-known that training builds morals and experience; it is the right of every employee to have. Usually on-job training empowers people to realise their new competencies and hone their current capabilities. People are the most valuable assets for their employers, thus it is a must to get them trained, so they give back quality performance and outcomes to the business of their organisations.

No matter what the profession is, employees need some kind of essential training. It refreshes their minds, thoughts and spirits. Undoubtedly, they will look forward for their turn to get trained and further qualified. Such opportunities will be highly appreciated by employees even if it happens once in a year. Training pushes employees to give back more to the organisation. It shoots up their loyalty levels, so they double their efforts, and boosts their devotion to do their best.

Accordingly, as long as a nation



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

NO MATTER WHAT THE PROFESSION IS, EMPLOYEES NEED SOME KIND OF ESSENTIAL TRAINING

is generally investing in honing, developing, qualifying, training, enhancing the skills and diversifying the expertise of its human resources, success is guaranteed in building a modern state with growth in all aspects of life.

Thus, many establishments are very concerned about training and developing its human resources. They accord sufficient attention in their annual fiscal plans and budgets for employees’ development. In fact, they get the training plans and strategies prepared, approved and ready to be put into action since the beginning of the year.

It is a good planning indeed to get a certain budget spent to serve the professional needs of employees. If plans and budgets are well worked out; this will be encouraging and rewarding for employees. They will recognise the meaning of them being the valuable assets of their organisations.

However, in some organisations all these plans and strategies will be just put on the shelves; not to be approached and functioned for a reason or another. Either it’s for the sake of cost cutting policies, or due to the carelessness of the people in charge of training. Accordingly, employees are deprived of their rights to get a training opportunity which is in need of course.

As a matter of fact, development of human resources is an investment and not an expense; it is as strategic as all other planned changes. Strategic thinkers don’t put the training budget on the list of the discretionary spending. When organisational strategy is discussed, smart thinkers give training director a seat at the table.

To all employers, just remember that investing in your people proves that they have a future with the organisation. If planning to build a team of loyal, fully engaged and high achievers, hire the right people then invest in their development regularly. At all times, training marks a high significance to people as they need maintenance and upgrade even more than machines. Training stands as an upgrade while retraining is maintenance.

SHOW OF SKILLS



Marines show off their skills during the Navy Day celebrations in the port city of Novorossiysk, Russia, on Sunday. – AFP

Defaulting to plant-based foods

The catastrophic effects of climate change are here: blistering and deadly heat waves are scorching Europe, and the poles are melting, with sea-ice growth in Antarctica reaching unprecedented lows. Is there anything individuals can do about it?

The answer is a resounding yes. What we eat, in particular, matters a great deal. The claim that “cows are the new coal” may seem hyperbolic, but it is essentially accurate. Roughly a third of all demand-side greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions are from food systems, and beef alone accounts for a quarter of emissions produced by raising and growing food.

Moreover, the real price of animal-based meals does not reflect their carbon footprint and the resulting cost of mitigation efforts. Research shows that a shift towards plant-based diets, or to less environmentally harmful meats such as fish and chicken, would be better for people and the planet.

Recently, a global consortium of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization, Unicef, and others concluded that to achieve sustainable and healthy dietary patterns, food systems will need to be transformed – and fast. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has also shown that decarbonising food systems can play a significant role in combating global warming.

Behavioural research has identified



Lucia Reisch

The writer is Director of the El-Erian Institute of Behavioural Economics and Policy at the University of Cambridge’s Judge Business School

ONE WAY TO ACCELERATE THE DIETARY SHIFT IS TO IMPLEMENT DEFAULT POLICIES IN RESTAURANTS AND CAFES THAT HARNESS THE POWER OF SUGGESTION

ways to influence decision-makers of all types – including farmers deliberating what to grow, retailers seeking to sell more climate-friendly foods, and consumers ordering in a restaurant. In the United States, the latter has significant potential, considering that Americans eat, on average, six meals outside of the home per week.

Presenting sustainable meals as easy and attractive, including changing the order and scale of plant-based options in buffets, has been shown to influence food choices. This approach is also relatively palatable, whereas bans and rules are typically viewed as overly paternalistic, and taxes on specific products like meat or sugar negatively affect the poor.

Given this, default policies in restaurants, cafes, and canteens could be a game changer. As powerful yet freedom-preserving “nudges,” they change the context of choice while still allowing individuals to decide. Defaults should not act as a standalone policy; rather, they should be part of a large-scale curation of those parts of the food system to which consumers are exposed, with industry and retail playing a large role. Wherever people decide, behaviourally informed policy tools could be applied.

Politicians may prefer supporting climate pledges,

implementing food-waste laws, or calling for corporate sustainability practices, with some insisting that “people should make their own decisions around the food they eat.” But they can nudge food retailers to enlist their sophisticated marketing arsenal to make sustainable and healthy options (or in today’s lingo, a “planetary health diet”) more attractive, affordable, available, and socially acceptable. This would go a long way towards reducing GHG emissions worldwide.

Obviously, policymakers should never manipulate their constituents, no matter how important the goal. But powerful behavioural tools also work when made fully transparent. Built on insights derived from economics, consumer research, and decision

science, such policies put people’s emotions, habits, biases and heuristics, social norms, and preferences centre stage, and can be designed to mitigate climate change.

Most criticism of nudges – particularly that they are ineffective and crowd out more useful policy tools – does not hold water. Policymakers strive for “good governance of nudging,” and cities like New York and Copenhagen and regions worldwide are employing choice architecture to help transform food systems. By harnessing the power of suggestion, people’s inertia, and their quest for convenience, defaults are one of the most important tools to change people’s behaviour.

When the plant-based option is the default, and the non-

vegetarian option becomes the “other” choice, meat consumption declines. A systematic review of 15 independent intervention studies published between 2012 and 2020, conducted in different settings in six European countries and the United States, concluded that vegetarian default interventions did substantially decrease consumers’ choice of meat dishes, with 53-87 per cent fewer meat options selected.

A study conducted in Denmark showed over 84 per cent of 300 participants approved of changing the default lunch option to a vegetarian buffet. Further evidence strongly suggests that such defaults are a promising tool to test in different food choice settings. Supported by earlier studies, the University of Cambridge’s El-Erian Institute of Behavioural Economics and Policy (of which I am director) is currently running a similar field experiment in collaboration with 13 college cafeterias at the university.

Given these outcomes, it is possible to imagine “default vegetarianism” in restaurants, grocery stores, schools, and offices. As for how to introduce such defaults, the non-profit Better Food Foundation offers a wide range of resources and suggestions.

@Project Syndicate, 2023



Presenting sustainable meals as easy and attractive.

sport

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Nizwa Club wins basketball championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 30

The Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in collaboration with the Oman Basketball Association (OBA), successfully concluded the championship for sports development centres of basketball players as part of the 'Exploration to Achievement' project. The event took place over two days, featuring thrilling competitions among six teams.

The award ceremony was under the auspices of Jaber bin Mohammed al Shabibi, Director of National Teams Affairs and the Project Director of Sports Preparation System, to honour the exceptional players.

Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi, OBA Chairman; Dr Ali bin Salam al Yaarubi, Vice-President;

and Mohammed bin Nasser al Hassani, General Secretary, were also present at the ceremony, demonstrating their support for sports development in Oman.

The highlight of the championship was the outstanding performance of Nizwa Club, which clinched the title of the first championship in all categories. The Nizwa team demonstrated remarkable skills and determination throughout the final matches, earning well-deserved gold medals for their accomplishments. Sohar Club secured the runner-up position in both categories, earning the silver medals.

Individual players from Nizwa Club bagged two awards. Adam al Hinai from Nizwa Club received the top scorer award in the 2009 category, scoring an impressive



49 points. His teammate, Mutaz al Rashidi, was the top scorer in the 2010 category, with an outstanding 72 points.

The final match of the 2010 category was a closely contested battle between Nizwa and Sohar teams. Eventually, Nizwa emerged victorious, defeating Sohar 27-

20. The match witnessed both teams exchanging control at different periods, providing an exciting display of basketball skills. Similarly, in the 2009 category, Nizwa's dominance was evident as they secured a decisive victory against Sohar 46-28.

Speaking at the award ceremony,

Al Shabibi emphasised the significance of the championship in revitalising sports preparation centres across Oman. He expressed his appreciation for the collaboration between the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth and the sports associations, which made the championship possible. Al Shabibi praised the efforts of the OBA in monitoring the centers technically and guiding the coaches to enhance training programs and performance levels.

The 'Exploration to Achievement' project, initiated by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in Oman in 2022, aims to discover and nurture talented athletes, elevating Oman's ranking in various sports and achieving positive results in upcoming championships. This championship serves as a crucial

platform to assess the performance of sports preparation centres and foster healthy competition among players.

Al Naabi, applauded the ministry's support for athletes' preparation centres, providing them with necessary resources and technical assistance under the guidance of highly qualified coaches. He highlighted the tournament's role in evaluating the performance of players and centers, as well as identifying and developing promising talents.

The championship showcased the commitment and dedication of coaches in nurturing young players, and Al Naabi expressed his hope for continued support from clubs to bolster sports preparation centres and enhance their performance in future tournaments.

Al Balushi wins 100 km endurance race

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 30

Khalid bin Said al Balushi riding on Marquis Royle won the 100 km endurance race at Khor Al Dahariz beach in the Wilayat of Salalah.

The race was organised by the Oman Equestrian Federation, as part of the Khareef Dhofar activities for 2023 in association with the Dhofar Equestrian Committee, the Dhofar Governor's Office, and the Dhofar Municipality and sponsored by Hala FM.

Twenty six horses from the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman took part in the race comprising three stages; the first red-colour stage was 38 km long, the second red-colour stage 38 km and the third green-colour stage 24 km.

Marquess Royle is owned by Khalil bin Mohammed al Dhaheri and trained by Mohammed bin Dawood al Balushi.

The runners-up was Al Muntasir bin Hassan al Balushi, on the horse HM Luntaco, which is owned by Al Bahja Stables and trained by by Mohammed bin Hassan al Balushi.

Nibras bin Said al Balushi claimed the third prize on King,



which is owned by Ahmed bin Ali al Ansari and trained by Abed bin Abdullah al Balushi.

HH Sayyid Saud bin Harib bin Thuwaini al Said gave prizes to the winners in the presence of Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, Secretary-General of the Oman Equestrian Federation.

Al Abri said; "The day before the race, we started the veterinary examination for the endurance race. The competition started with ponies and prizes were sponsored by Oman LNG Company. The field and tracks were prepared early for the race, and a traditional village model was set up in Al Dahariz beach. The 100-km race witnessed strong competition where all horses passed the finishing line."

Oman Equestrian Federation will hold another endurance race in Dhofar on August 19.

Olympic team wraps up training with a draw against Al Nahdha

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 30

Oman Olympic football team recently ended their domestic camp with a 1-1 draw against Al Nahdha on Friday. The camp was scheduled as part of the team's preparatory plan for the AFC U23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Qualifiers which will take place in Jordan during September 4 to 12. The head coach of Oman Olympic football team, Akram Habreesh, evaluated the player's readiness technically and physically during this warm up gathering. The national coach did several substitutions during the match against the champions of the HM Cup and Omantel league. Oman's goal was scored by Ahmed al Mushkehi while Al Nahdha's goal was netted by Essam al Subhi.

The team will soon return to the series of internal and external preparatory camps. It is expected that the team will play in a few international friendly matches and the schedule will be announced soon by the OFA.



In the AFC U23, Oman will play in Group A against Jordan, Syria, and Brunei. The qualifiers format will be in a single round-robin at a centralised venue with the 11 group winners and four best second-placed teams. The finals will be played between April 15 and May 3, 2024.

IMPRESSIVE SHOW
The team had delivered an impressive show despite their early exit in the Arabian Sports



Games in Algeria earlier this month. Akram's men ended their campaign at the group stage as they were placed in third place with four points. Oman boys had defeated Lebanon 1-0 and held the hosts to a goalless draw in the opener. The loss against Sudan 2-0 in the concluding match ended Oman's dream to enter the semis.

Oman probabilities: Maitham al Ajmi, Salim al Dawodi, Mazin al Harrasi, Al Faraj al Kiyoumi, Ayman al Nabhani, Basil al Jabri,

Ali al Balushi, Nasser al Rawahi, Mohammed al Hatmi, Osama al Haddabi, Abdullah al Fulaiti, Salim al Abdulsalam, Khalid al Ghatrifi, Mulham al Sunaidi, Abdulhafidh al Mukhaini, Omar al Salti, Yousef al Ghailani, Said al Salami, Nibras al Maashari, Abdulmajeed al Balushi, Mohammed Abdulhakeem, Mohammed al Hinai, Ahed al Mushaikh, Hudhaifa al Maamari, Omran al Numani and Maamoon al Araimi.

Morocco stun South Korea to claim first ever Women’s World Cup victory

ADELAIDE: Debutantes Morocco claimed their first ever victory at the Women’s World Cup with a 1-0 win over South Korea in their second Group H encounter on Sunday, all but confirming the Asian side’s exit.

Morocco are 55 rungs below South Korea in the women’s rankings, but the African side made an early breakthrough with their first ever World Cup goal in the sixth minute from striker Ibtissam Jraidi.

Hanane Ait El Haj whipped in a cross from the right and Jraidi dived forward to make contact with a deft glancing header that went in at the far post.

Park Eun-sun nearly levelled with a diving header of her own at the other end but the forward saw her effort go agonisingly wide of the post, much to the relief of Khadija Er-Rmichi in Morocco’s goal.

Er-Rmichi saw Germany find the net six times in their group opener, but she was hardly tested by the South Koreans, who failed to have a shot on target and struggled to make inroads into the final third as the Moroccan defence stood firm.

Morocco defender Nouhaila Benzina, who became the first player to wear a headscarf at the Women’s World Cup, made crucial interventions, while she almost scored from a set-piece when she volleyed a snapshot over the bar.

She even took one for the team when she deliberately clipped Ji So-yun, who was racing through on goal on a counterattack with support, accepting a yellow card without protest.

But South Korea could not capitalise from the free kick, which hit the wall as coach Collin Bell stood on the touchline shaking his head in frustration.

South Korea’s Casey Phair nearly equalised late in the game, but the 16-year-old, who became the youngest player to take the field in Women’s World Cup history in their opener, fired wide to leave them bottom of the group.

“I can’t believe it, to be honest. We saved the worst two performances in my tenure for the World Cup. I didn’t recognise my own team,” said



Morocco's Ibtissam Jraidi celebrates scoring their first goal. – Reuters

Bell, who took over in 2019 and guided the team to the final of the Asian Cup last year.

“The reality is we were not good enough in both games. Why that

was, we have to analyse in detail. I’m not going to let my emotions take over now, and obviously we’re all very disappointed.

“The players are much better

than they’ve shown in both matches and it really is almost unbelievable that we’ve performed like we have.”

Morocco are level with Germany and Colombia with

three points ahead of their game later on Sunday. South Korea have zero points and will be eliminated if Germany avoid defeat.

— Reuters

Dennis becomes Britain’s first Formula E champion

LONDON: Jake Dennis became the first British driver to win the all-electric Formula E world championship when he finished second for Avalanche Andretti on Saturday in the first of two season-ending home races in London.

The 28-year-old took his 10th podium of season nine and an unbeatable lead over New Zealanders Nick Cassidy and race-winner Mitch Evans for Envision Racing and Jaguar respectively.

Dennis now has 213 points to Evans’s 176 and Cassidy on 174.

“To become world champion is mind-blowing,” said Dennis, who was third at the finish but moved up to second when Porsche’s Antonio Felix da Costa was penalised.

“I really didn’t think it could happen coming into this year.”

Cassidy started on pole

position as Dennis’s closest rival, 24 points behind with Evans a further 20 adrift, but retired after contact with team mate Sebastien Buemi in a race that was twice red-flagged.

The title was U.S. team Andretti’s first in Formula E.

“It was insane, I think that basically explains what Formula E is all about,” said owner



Michael Andretti. “You just never know all the way until the last lap. Even those last two laps we were just holding our breath.

“I can’t thank the team enough, hanging in there all these years to finally get on top of a podium for the championship.”

Formula E’s first season was in 2014-15 and Dennis is the eighth driver to take the title with France’s Jean-Eric Vergne the only double champion.

Brazil has had two champions while the others up to now have come from Switzerland, France, Portugal, the Netherlands and Belgium.

The teams’ championship will go down to Sunday’s finale at the ExCeL Centre with Envision Racing and powertrain provider Jaguar level on points. Porsche also still have a mathematical chance. — Reuters

West Indies level ODI series with six-wicket win over India

BRIDGETOWN: West Indies beat India by six wickets in the second one-day international at Barbados on Saturday, claiming their first victory over the Asian side in nearly four years to level the series at 1-1 and force a decider.

In the absence of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, India were put into bat after the hosts won the toss and it was initially smooth sailing as Ishan Kishan (55) and Shubman Gill (34) stitched together an opening partnership of 90.

But the top order suffered a collapse and India soon found themselves at 113-5 before Suryakumar Yadav (24) attempted to rescue the innings.

However, a second collapse in the lower order saw India bowled out for 181, with Gudakesh Motie and all-rounder Romario Shepherd picking up three wickets each on a track that aided the bowlers.

In response, Shardul Thakur cleaned up the top order with three wickets after Kyle Mayers gave them a quick start with 36 off 28 deliveries, which included two sixes.

But West Indies skipper Shai Hope (63 not out) and Keacy Carty (48 not out) played patient knocks to chase down the target, wrapping up the match in the 37th over.

“When things are difficult, you’ve got to find ways to score quickly on that wicket, especially against a quality bowling attack like India,” said Hope, who was named player of the match.

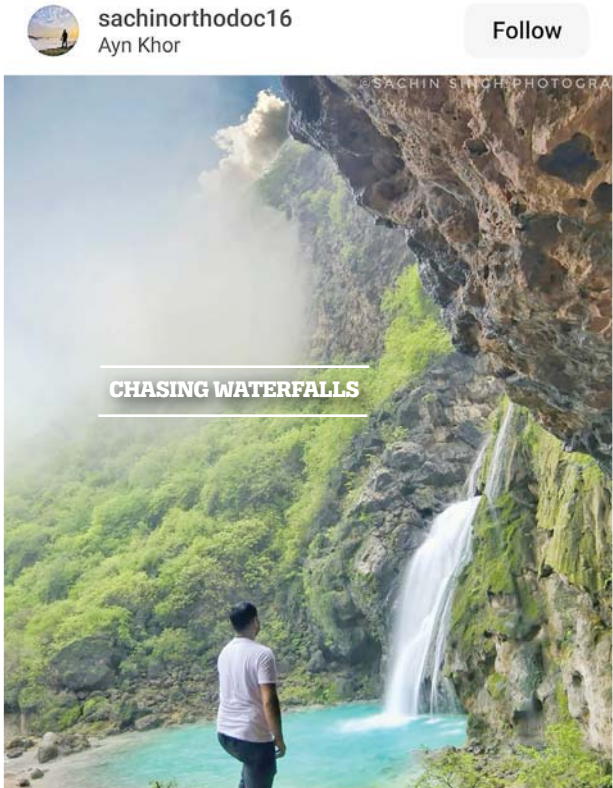
“Very satisfied, the aim was to get back into the series. We’ve got to win one more and need to come back strongly.” The final ODI will be played on Tuesday before a five-match Twenty20 series. — Reuters



Alzarri Joseph (L) of West Indies celebrates the dismissal of Shardul Thakur (R) of India during the 2nd ODI match. – AFP



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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This Fossil Is a Freeze-Frame of a Mammal Fighting a Dinosaur

THE WORK OF A paleontologist is often like solving a puzzle with no picture on the box and most of the pieces missing. From scattered bones and teeth, scientists studying fossils extrapolate entire long-dead creatures, and even relationships between different species. But every so often, researchers get a lucky break in the form of nearly complete skeletons, their bodies preserved in a way that offers a glimpse into their behaviour in life.

This could be the case with a newly described fossil of a badger-like mammal and a Labrador retriever-size dinosaur, locked in what appears to be an eternal brawl. A mixed team of Canadian and Chinese researchers published their findings in the journal *Scientific Reports*, along with a section of the study devoted to addressing concerns that the fossil is a fake.

The prehistoric skirmish took place around 125 million years ago, in what's now north-eastern China, and appears to be something like a man-bites-dog story of the dinosaur era. Usually in that period, conventional wisdom holds, mammals were meek, eking out a tenuous existence as terrible reptiles shook the ground around them. But the unlikely fossil depicts combat between a mammal called *Repenomamus robustus* and a bipedal, plant-eating relative of triceratops called *Psittacosaurus lujiatunensis*.

Size-wise, the dinosaur had an advantage, but *R. robustus*, preserved with its teeth clamped into the *psittacosaur's* rib cage, appears to have punched above its weight. The dinosaur's bones don't show evidence of being gnawed on by scavengers, indicating that the *R. robustus* encounter

happened when the *psittacosaur* was still alive.

"There are examples today of small carnivorous mammals taking down much, much larger prey," said Jordan Mallon, a paleontologist at the Canadian Museum of Nature and a co-author of the study. He pointed to wolverines taking down caribou. He added, "We think *repenomamus* was probably similarly a small, feisty predator that was willing to take down prey that was

much larger than itself if it had to."

The animals' preservation mid-melee required a great deal of luck (or unluckiness, from the animals' point of view). It started with a volcanic eruption, unleashing ash. That ash could have been converted into a mudslide by seasonal flooding or heavy rains. Then, while this *repenomamus* and *psittacosaur* were fighting, "this mud flow sort of caught them off guard and preserved

them for 125 million years," Mallon said.

The fossil was unearthed in 2012 by farmers in the Chinese province of Liaoning and acquired by Gang Han of the Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, a co-author of the study. The find was incredible, and there are numerous cases when such discoveries have turned out too good to be true. Fossil forgeries, including separate specimens being put together

to complete a skeleton or a scene, are "a big problem," Mallon said. "This was a concern that we had, and so we had to do our homework to at least convince ourselves" that it was legitimate.

Mallon said the researchers dug into the rock surrounding the fossils and found that the mammal's left lower jaw "was indeed plunging into the rock and was indeed biting the ribs of the dinosaur," rather than simply being placed together

by a fossil forger. The researchers also analysed the rock in the fossil and rock from the fossil beds where it was purportedly found; they matched. Based on these independent lines of evidence, "we feel fairly satisfied that this is a genuine fossil and it is not a fake," Mallon said.

Or if it's a fake, he said, it's "the best I've ever seen."

David Grossnickle, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Washington who was not involved with the study, said that while in the "worst-case scenario" parts of the fossil specimen might have been forged, the mammal skull biting into the dinosaur bone appears to be real, and that piece alone is "still an incredible fossil."

If no convincing challenge to its authenticity is presented, the fossil offers tantalising evidence of how mammals and dinosaurs interacted.

"We rely on spectacular fossils like this to really fill in the gaps of how these ancient ecosystems work, because we can't always rely on just the bones alone to tell us these stories," Mallon said.

Michael Pittman, a paleontologist at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who was also not involved with the study, said the immortalised bite didn't necessarily mean *R. robustus* was hunting down dinosaurs for food and that the animals might have been engaged in less of a predatory takedown and more of a "scuffle."

But the study may contribute to the "growing evidence that Mesozoic mammals were more ecologically diverse than we classically thought," Grossnickle said, "and getting a little bit of revenge, I guess, on those big mean dinosaurs." — NYT



LIFESTYLE

Yemen speciality coffee 'wave' sweeps capital

TUCKED AMID SHELL-POCKED buildings and roadside tributes to fallen fighters, a less obvious byproduct of wartime is spreading across Yemen's capital: speciality coffee houses serving steaming cups of top-rated pour-over.

The Arabian Peninsula's most impoverished country, locked in an eight-year conflict between Iran-backed Ansar Allah rebels and forces supporting the internationally recognised government, has deep ties to coffee. Legend has it that Sufi mystics on



Yemen's western coast were the first people to brew coffee beans back in the 15th century.

Yet Yemeni entrepreneurs have until recently focused on exporting their best product to wealthy overseas markets.

The most famous among them is Mokhtar Alkhanshali, whose death-defying bid to ship a container full of speciality beans during the war's early stages was chronicled in Dave Eggers' 2018 best-selling book "The Monk of Mokha".

For other Yemenis, however, blocked

ports and related restrictions imposed during the war have inspired them to turn inward, giving rise to a cafe scene that today brings flashes of Brooklyn and Paris to Sanaa's war-scarred streets.

"People started to feel like Yemeni coffee was costing a lot and they lost interest in buying it," said Rashed Ahmed Shagea of Durar Coffee, recalling how the export market soured as fighting broke out in 2015.

In response, he opened a cozy shop in central Sanaa where customers can sample beans from all over the country,



surrounded by Yemeni art and Yemeni-made wood furniture.

"We had to think of another way to support our farmers," Shagea said.

"Everybody said it's impossible to work in Yemen, that people had no purchasing power... But we insisted."

'A MAGICAL DRINK'

In southern Sanaa's Hadda neighbourhood, Hussein Ahmed made a similar gamble in 2018, opening his Mocha Hunters cafe on a street dotted with million-dollar villas.

It was the culmination of a long per-

sonal journey with coffee that began when he and his Japanese wife founded a cafe in Tokyo more than a decade ago. After the marriage ended, Ahmed also turned his attention to exporting, but wartime hurdles and a travel ban against Yemenis introduced by former US president Donald Trump spurred him to consider opportunities in his home country.

In the cafe's early days, Ahmed could sometimes count on one hand the number of customers who dropped by.

Now the patio is full most afternoons, with Yemenis and foreigners drawn to the simple menu: 750 Yemeni rials (around \$1.50) for pour-over drip and qishr, a traditional drink made from coffee husks, and 1,000 Yemeni rials (around \$2) for cold brew.

"It's like a wave," Ahmed said, adding this was only natural for a country of coffee "pioneers" who transformed it "from seeds to a magical drink".

The speciality offerings are a far cry from the commercial-grade coffee, often loaded with milk and sugar, that many Yemenis are used to consuming, Ahmed said.

"This movement, it reintroduces what is good taste," he said, with a touch of the haughtiness required of any self-respecting trendsetter.

"We tell customers, 'Your taste or preference doesn't matter for us. We drink what we think is good.'"

'ANGELS SINGING' IN A CUP

Both Durar and Mocha Hunters still depend heavily on their export business, which became easier after a truce was announced in April last year.

Yemeni coffee is world-renowned: James Freeman, founder of Blue Bottle Coffee, once said of Alkhanshali's Port of Mokha product that "this is what angels singing tastes like".

Sales abroad have been boosted further by Yemeni diaspora communities wracked with nostalgia for their homeland but reluctant to return because of the fighting, Ahmed said.

"I think our expats, our people who live abroad, because of the hardness of travel, they become more emotional about their land. So they buy local products," he said.

"It's a global movement, speciality coffee, but in Yemen it's more emotional." Back home, meanwhile, entrepreneurs are bullish on local consumption, especially if a durable ceasefire were to take hold and improve the economy.

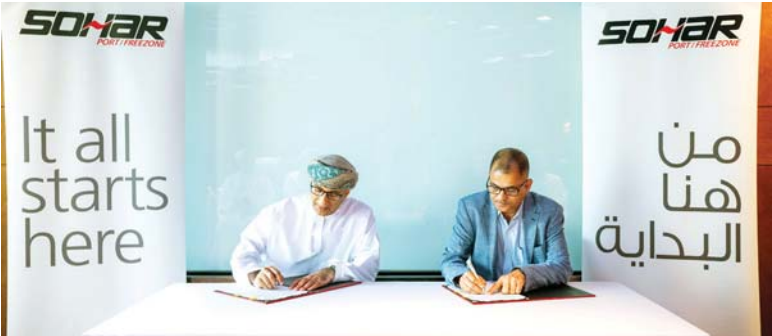
More than two-thirds of the population currently depend on aid to survive.

"This place will grow in the future to become the largest coffee centre in the Middle East," predicted Ghaleb Yahya Alharazi, manager of Haraz, a coffee house that opened last year and can accommodate 1,000 people.

"We have a goal, which is a journey back to the glory, culture and authenticity of Yemeni coffee." — AFP



New steel fabrication unit to come up in Sohar Freezone



MUSCAT: SOHAR Port and Freezone has signed a land lease agreement with SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC, which is establishing a steel fabrication unit within SOHAR Freezone. This agreement is geared towards fostering seamless integration in the mining sector’s business ecosystem and providing comprehensive industrial services like project development to operational support and mechanical maintenance of FAP, effectively reducing construction costs.

With a total investment of \$1.3 million and total area of 5,000 sqm, the investment from SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC highlights the attractiveness of SOHAR Freezone for foreign investors, setting the stage for future foreign direct investment in the region.

Barjesh Kumar Singh, Authorised Manager of SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC said, “We are excited about this partnership with SOHAR Freezone and the promising

opportunities it offers to investors. By leveraging the strategic advantages provided by SOHAR Freezone and its continued growth.

Our comprehensive service platform will offer businesses a streamlined approach to accessing essential services, ultimately enabling them to focus on their core operations and maximise productivity.”

“This signing with SCME Projects Pvt Ltd (FZC) LLC signifies our unwavering commitment to driving economic development and fostering a self-sustaining industrial ecosystem,” said Haitham al Omairi, Business Development Manager of SOHAR Port and Freezone.

“This agreement will significantly enhance our value proposition in establishing a dynamic ecosystem, facilitating the provision of specialised technical services to both current and prospective clients, thereby optimising operational cost-effectiveness and maximising mutual growth opportunities.”

Strict new measures and penalties to combat hidden trade

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 30

To combat the hidden trade phenomenon, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued Ministerial decision 412/2023 setting out measures to fight the practice in collaboration with a number of government agencies.

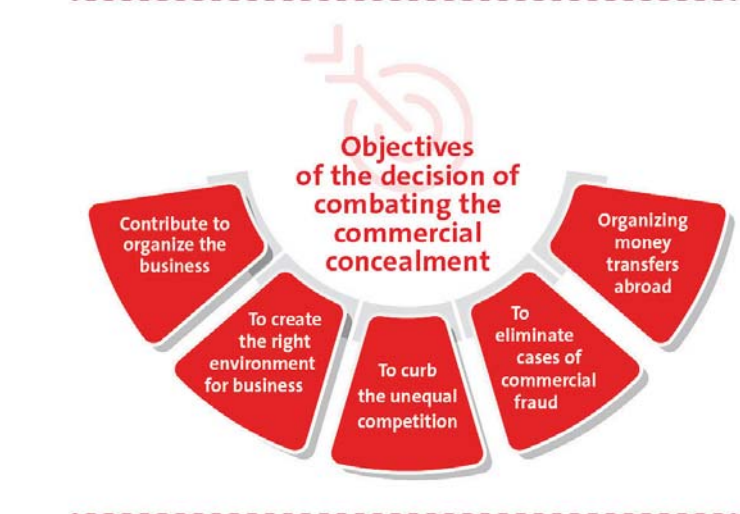
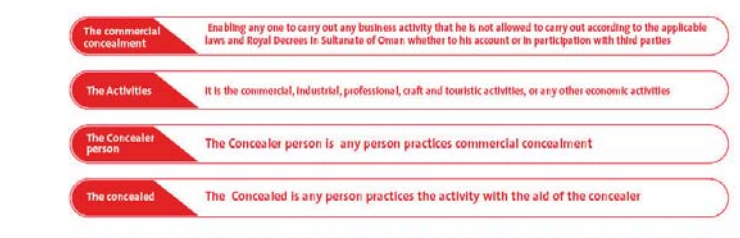
The decision comes into effect 90 days from its publication in the Official Gazette.

Hidden trade, also known as the shadow economy, adversely impacts local markets and the national economy, because it contributes to commercial fraud, distorts labour markets, disadvantages entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, enables tax evasion, and circumvents legally established commerce.

The decision defines hidden trade as the practice of any business activity by an individual or business lacking authorisation to do so under applicable laws and Royal Decrees in Sultanate of Oman, whether individually or in partnership with third parties.

Activities covered by the decision can be commercial, industrial, professional, craft and touristic related, or any other economic activities involving individuals without lacking the requisite approvals to do so.

The decision encourages citizens and residents to curb



hidden trade activities by reporting them to the Ministry.

It noted:“ No one may carry out any commercial, industrial, professional, craft, tourism or

other economic activities that are not authorised under the laws and Royal Decrees in force in the Sultanate of Oman allowing him to practice it, whether directly or

Oman weighing steps to allow partial fulfilment of bounced cheques

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 30

The long-standing practice of banks to bounce cheques due to insufficient funds in the drawer’s account – the principal reason behind the vast proportion of cheques returned in the Sultanate of Oman – is slated for a major overhaul.

According to the Central Bank of Oman (CBO), Oman’s authorities are weighing measures to enable the partial fulfilment of cheques where funds may be deficient in the drawer’s account, in line with international practice.

“Oman is (..) working on modalities to introduce partial fulfilment of cheques. This would provide mechanisms to ensure the maximum possible cheque value is collected in the fastest and simplest way possible,” the Central Bank noted in its Financial Stability Report 2023 issued here last week.

Dishonoured cheques, which had been on the uptrend in previous decades, are trending downwards as transactions are becoming increasingly electronic in Oman.

Against 4.7 million cheques issued for payment in 2018, the tally slumped to 3.8 million cheques in 2022, in trend with



DISHONOURD CHEQUES, WHICH HAD BEEN ON THE UPTREND IN PREVIOUS DECADES, ARE TRENDING DOWNWARDS AS TRANSACTIONS ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY ELECTRONIC IN OMAN

the transition from paper-based payments to digital payments.

Returned cheques over this period dipped to 387K in 2022, down from 399K in 2018, according to CBO figures. In percentage terms, dishonoured cheques presented into the banking system accounted for

10.6 per cent of total cheque submissions in 2021. This figure declined to 10.3 per cent a year later in 2022.

Significantly, 309,728 cheques – representing 80.1 per cent of the total number of bounced cheques in 2021 — were returned due to insufficient funds in the drawers’ account.

A further 39,457 cheques (10.1 per cent) were rejected because the accounts were either ‘Closed’, ‘Frozen’ or ‘Transferred’. Regardless of the reasons cited, bounced cheques can invite legal penalties in the form of fines and imprisonment under Omani laws.

According to the CBO, some countries have begun authorising partial fulfilment of cheques where it is possible to cash a cheque for an amount less than the full amount written on the cheque.

“While typically a cheque would bounce if the full amount to honour it was not available in the drawer’s account, after the amendments introduced in some countries, banks are required to fulfil partial amounts of the cheque equal to the amount available in the drawer’s account, unless the cheque bearer rejects the option for partial payment,” the apex bank explained in the report.



2022 inflation rate in Oman increases by 2.8%

MUSCAT: The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 2.8% in 2022 as the Consumers Price Index (CPI) registered 109.7 points compared to 106.7 points in 2021, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in 2022 in varying rates. A rise was recorded in the main groups of housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 1.1%, transport by 3.9%, food and non-alcoholic beverages by 5.2%, clothing and footwear by 1.3%, restaurants and hotels by 2.1%, furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 1.3%, recreation and culture by 1.6%, education by 3.8%, miscellaneous goods and services by 2.1%, health by 3.1% and tobacco by 0.6%.

Meanwhile, prices of the communications group stabilised without change.

As far as products are

concerned, oils and fats recorded the highest contribution rate to the rise in the CPI by 16%, followed by fuels and oils for personal transport equipment by 9.2%, kindergarten by 6.4% and spending on hotels by 5.5%.

The Governorate of Al Buraimi recorded the highest inflation rate by 3.6%, while the Governorate of Muscat recorded the lowest rate of 2.4%. Producers Price Index (PPI) in Oman recorded an increase by 36.4% during 2022, registering 167.8 points compared to 123 points in 2021.

Prices of oil and gas products lead the rise by registering a growth by 44.1%. Non-oil products recorded an increase by 3.8%. Moreover, prices of crude oil and natural gas went up by 47% and the prices of refined oil increased by 28.2%.

A rise was also recorded in the prices of products of mining, electricity and water by 1.3% and converting industries by 4.5%.

— ONA

Shell Oman partners with MoSD to drive sustainable social impact

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to powering lives, Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) is reinforcing its dedication to social development in the Sultanate of Oman through a partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). The objective of this partnership is to provide vigorous support to several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) registered under the Ministry. The signing ceremony was held at the Ministry's office in

the presence of key officials from the ministry and Shell Oman's management. As part of its collaboration, Shell Oman will provide support in the form of fuel cards and laptop devices to NGOs, enabling them to carry out their day-to-day activities efficiently and effectively. The fuel support will benefit a number of non-governmental organisations and charity groups including Dar Al Atta, Al Noor Association — Muscat, Ihsan Association — Muscat,



Ihsan Association — Batinah, alleviating their commuting and transportation costs, Shell

Oman aims to ensure that these organisations can reach and assist a broader spectrum of beneficiaries across Oman. Furthermore, Shell Oman's dedication to making a positive impact extends to children as well. Specifically, laptops will be provided to the Child Care Centre in Al Khoudh and Al Wafa Rehabilitation Centre in Nizwa. These devices will serve as catalysts in boosting the digital literacy of young individuals, exposing them to a diverse

array of tools and programmes that are vital to their academic performance and personal development. By ensuring access to technology, Shell Oman is committed to equipping these children with the essential skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital era. In alignment with its dedication to In-Country Value (ICV), Shell Oman has thoughtfully chosen to procure the laptops and electronic tablets from the Omani SME 'Onsor'.

How AI, Blockchain technologies are shaping financial markets in the GCC



MUSCAT: It didn't take long for Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Blockchain technologies to impact companies, as their rise is gradually shaping new business models, optimising performance and boosting efficiency across the entire economic spectrum. Among the many sectors affected by this digital transformation, are financial markets in the GCC and beyond. On one hand, the integration of AI helps to improve data analysis and enables the swift processing of vast financial data, leading to better decision-making and risk assessment. Automated trading algorithms execute trades rapidly based on market trends and patterns, while AI assists in risk management by identifying and mitigating potential risks through data analysis. On the other hand, Blockchain technology enhances security in financial markets, guaranteeing safe and transparent transactions, which helps reduce fraud and enhances trust in regional financial markets. It also streamlines financial processes, such as settlements and record-keeping, driving efficiency and lowering costs. In Saudi Arabia, for example, Blockchain technology is being used to create a new and simple way to finance small and medium enterprises. As for Dubai, the city has been at the forefront of Blockchain adoption, with ambitious plans to become the Blockchain capital of the world, as the Emirati leadership strives to fully digitise the government by utilising Blockchain for all government documents, which demonstrates a firm commitment to embracing this technology for various sectors. According to Ritu Singh, Regional Director of Stone X Group Inc., the combination of AI and Blockchain technologies is expected to have a profound impact on financial markets in the Middle East.

Singh says: "While the specific investment capital dedicated to AI and Blockchain in this part of the world is not clear yet, their projected impact and the region's advancements indicate a growing interest and investment in such transformative technologies, which contributes to reshaping the financial landscape." A recent PwC report has highlighted the potential for AI to disrupt markets and foster the creation of innovative services and business models in the Middle East. The report projects that the region will gain 2% of the total global benefits of AI by 2030, with the UAE experiencing the largest impact, amounting to approximately 14% of its 2030 GDP. The report further estimates that the potential impact of AI in the Middle East could reach \$320 billion, with Saudi Arabia anticipated to be one of the economies that will benefit the most from AI advancements. According to the International Data Corporation, it is estimated that the Middle East will be spending \$3 billion on AI in 2023 with that amount more than doubling to \$6.4 billion by 2026. The region is expected to see annual growth in spending of almost 30% in this technology over the next three years, which is the fastest growth rate worldwide over the coming years. Furthermore, more than 80% of CEOs in the Middle East believe that AI is critical to the future of their businesses, and over 70% of them are investing in such technologies. For FOREX.com, a leading trading company which has its office in Dubai and part of StoneX Group Inc., investing in AI technologies has already started. The company offers customers an AI-based Performance Analytics tool, in addition to giving them access to advanced Risk Management Performance Analytics solutions.

BUSINESS REPORTER MUSCAT, JULY 30

Outstanding Omani students started their educational journey recently at the Oxford International Study Centre in the United Kingdom, one of the oldest British training institutes. The students had the opportunity to participate in the fourth edition of Duqm Refinery's Leadership Programme for Outstanding Students, which is fully funded by Duqm Refinery and Petrochemical Industries and implemented by Takatuf Oman. To enhance its partnership with the community, Duqm Refinery has launched various initiatives as part of its social investment programme that gives utmost priority to the development of youth. The company recognises the importance of investing in young people and has committed financial and moral support to various initiatives aimed at building their capabilities. The programme this year builds on the great success of the previous three years. The programme, designed to enhance the English language and leadership skills of selected students, seeks also to develop the social and educational skills of students by exposing them to a new environment where they can interact with students from different cultures around the world. This exposure helps the students to develop their social and educational skills significantly. The programme also includes



entertainment programmes such as visits to historical and cultural sites to introduce students to new cultures. Jasim bin Hassan al Ajmi, Head of Corporate Identity and Culture at Duqm Refinery, reiterated OQ8's commitment to preparing future leaders which is an integral part of the company's social investment programme. He noted that this initiative, funded entirely by Duqm Refinery in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Takaful Oman, is part of these efforts. "Duqm Refinery has been keen to offer this opportunity to students from all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. He also pointed out that the selection

process used several criteria including academic excellence. During their 40-day long stay at Oxford International Study Centre for 40 days, the twenty students will be accompanied by mentors throughout their studies outside the Sultanate of Oman during the summer", he concluded. Dr Qasim al Maamari, Supervisor of Scholarships at Takatuf Oman, expressed his pride in partnering with Duqm Refinery to implement this Programme, which he believes will contribute to building the capabilities of Omani youth and preparing them for the university stage. The students were selected based on specific evaluation criteria developed by Takaful

Oman in coordination with Duqm Refinery, including academic performance. He added that the programme provides unmatched opportunities for good students to develop their English language skills through learning outside the school environment and to develop other life skills such as leadership, communication, and independence. Student exchange programmes during their school years help enhance their confidence and broaden their cultural experiences through exploring new cultures and engaging in experiences they are not used to during their school learning period," Al Maamari added.

Bank Nizwa hosts exclusive event in Salalah

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank organised a special event dedicated to its customers in Salalah. This exclusive gathering brought together clients, industry experts, and renowned financial advisors, and provided a holistic experience for attendees by offering networking and communications opportunities. Moreover, it proved to be a unique platform that promoted the exchange of valuable insights and contributed to further strengthening relationships with the local community in Dhofar Governorate. The event commenced with a welcome address by Shaikh Khalid al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa. Expressing his gratitude to the bank's clientele for



their unwavering trust and loyalty, he said, "This exclusive event not only reaffirms our steadfast commitment to providing exceptional services but also exemplifies our strategic focus on cultivating enduring relationships with our customers. It serves as a platform for the exchange of ideas and insights amongst thought leaders in the community,

furthering collaboration and propelling industry growth. We are proud to have facilitated such valuable interactions that will undoubtedly contribute to the continued success of our customers and the industry as a whole." He added saying, "At Bank Nizwa, we are committed to the financial success of our clients.

We remain dedicated to helping them navigate their financial journeys and achieve long-term goals by investing in Sharia-compliant products and services that are ethical, sustainable, and have the potential to contribute to the creation of a more resilient economy." Bank Nizwa offers a range of effective Islamic financial solutions that cater to the varying demands of its clients, both individual and corporate. With a comprehensive range of tailor-made products and services, customers benefit from a personalised banking experience that includes round-the-clock access to dedicated personal bankers, Mudaraba investment options, and an array of value-added advantages.

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Disruptive technologies and their impact on startups



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

As-Salaam-Alaikum, Have you ever come across the term ‘disruptive technology’? Is

it just a buzzword in the tech landscape, or does it hold a significant meaning for startups? What impact can disruptive technologies have on new businesses?

This article will answer these questions and more.

Disruptive technology, as coined by Harvard Business School professor Clayton M Christensen, refers to an innovation that significantly alters the way that industries operate, often displacing established systems and markets.

Examples include the Internet, smartphones, artificial intelligence, and blockchain technology, to name just a few.

Startups often serve as

the launchpad for disruptive technologies.

They challenge the status quo, bringing forward innovative ideas and transforming them into tangible products or services. But these technologies also affect startups themselves, opening up new opportunities, yet at the same time, introducing new challenges.

Disruptive technologies can expand a startup’s potential market, enabling them to reach customers who were previously inaccessible. They can help startups offer better products or services, operate more efficiently, and even establish new business models.

However, the disruptive nature of these technologies also presents

risks.

They can render existing products obsolete, alter customer expectations, and intensify competition. Startups must navigate these challenges, continually innovating to stay relevant and competitive.

But how can startups navigate this wave of disruption?

Here are three key strategies:

Stay informed: Keeping abreast of the latest technological developments is crucial. Engage with tech news, attend industry conferences, and build relationships with tech experts.

Embrace experimentation: A willingness to experiment with new technologies can give startups a competitive edge. By fostering a

culture of innovation, startups can be at the forefront of exploiting disruptive technologies.

Adapt and evolve: Being flexible and open to change is vital. Startups should be ready to alter their business model to align with technological advancement.

These strategies aren’t guaranteed, but they can help startups stay competitive and seize the opportunities arising from disruptive technologies.

As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer, but there is good in everyone.” Strength, in this context, can be viewed as a startup’s ability to adapt and thrive

amidst the disruptions brought about by new technologies.

So as we see, disruptive technologies bring a sea of change that can either sink existing ships or carry new ones to successful, unexplored territories. But what happens once your startup is ready to set sail?

The next step is convincing others to join your journey and support your voyage.

And this brings us to our next article’s topic, “Mastering the Art of Pitching to Investors.”

How can you, as entrepreneurs, effectively convey your vision and secure crucial backing to turn your dreams into reality? Stay tuned to find out! Ma’s salama!

End of Nigerian fuel subsidy set to squeeze Europe’s refiners

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One of Europe’s main markets for gasoline has shrunk, threatening to squeeze European refiners, after Nigeria removed fuel subsidies, which destroyed much of the country’s domestic demand and a regional market for smuggled fuel.

North America and West Africa (WAF), with Nigeria at the helm, historically have been the top two destinations for petrol exports from Europe, which produces more gasoline than it uses, meaning its refiners rely on exports to support profit margins.

A steady decline in European refining margins in recent years, as competition from the Middle East, the United States and Asia grew, was reversed when fears of fuel supply shortages boosted profits after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

So far, benchmark profit margins for gasoline in northwestern Europe have held firm at around \$27 a barrel, data shows.

They have been supported by demand from North America, a shortage of high quality blending materials, disruption caused by low water levels inland and local refinery outages.

But analysts say the reduction of flows following the upheaval in Nigeria will increase pressure on European refiners, and any winners are likely to be newer Middle Eastern refineries.

At the end of May, Nigeria’s President Bola Tinubu scrapped a popular but expensive subsidy on the fuel, which cost the cash-strapped government \$10 billion last year. Petrol demand in response fell by 28%, official data showed.

Symptomatic of the fall in demand, onshore gasoline stocks in Nigeria have climbed to 960,000 tonnes from an average 613,000 tonnes between January and June, said Jeremy Parker

at the CITAC consultancy which focuses on Africa’s downstream energy market.

Meanwhile, the black market for smuggled subsidised Nigerian fuel in Togo and neighbouring Benin and Cameroon has collapsed, further reducing demand for shipments via Nigeria.

There is no reliable data on how much fuel was smuggled out of Nigeria under the subsidy regime, but a comparison of estimates from official and independent sources indicate more than a third of petrol could have left state oil firm NNPC’s depots every day to be sold illegally abroad.

Without the subsidy, the financial incentive for smuggling disappears.

Average monthly West African (WAF) gasoline imports fell by 56% in the second quarter compared with the first, according to Refinitiv Eikon data. “The key point is demand from West Africa is drying up,” said Refinitiv Lead Oil Analyst Raj Rajendran.

Seasonally, June loadings from the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp (ARA) hub to West Africa fell to 629,000 tonnes this year from 895,000 tonnes last year and 1.2 million tonnes in 2021, Refinitiv data showed.

Loadings dropped to 627,000 tonnes in July so far this year from 1.5 million tonnes last year and 1.4 million tonnes at the same time in 2021.

By contrast ARA exports to the United States rose to reach 695,000 tonnes so far this year in July, compared with 449,000 tonnes last year, although they were down from 791,000 tonnes in 2021.

Gasoline stockpiles in the ARA hub are higher seasonally than they have been at least since 2003, as US exports from the region did not fully compensate for the lower WAF exports.

Nigeria, Africa’s largest crude oil producer, relies heavily on imports because of its inadequate domestic refining capacity. — Reuters

The irresistible rise of the Rest



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Will the United States be number three in the new world order? In his forthcoming book, former journalist Hugh Peyman argues that it will: China’s economy has already surpassed that of the US by some measures, and India’s will do the same by mid-century.

He also argues that “the Rest” more broadly will pose a growing challenge to the West, which in turn continues to underestimate the challengers.

Peyman is hardly the first to predict the rise of countries that are not included in the geopolitical West (a group that includes Japan).

The British economist Angus Maddison knew back in 2007 that China’s GDP would soon overtake that of the US (in purchasing-power-parity terms at constant 1990 US dollar prices), with India at number three.

And the OECD estimates that India will overtake the US in GDP by 2050, and that, by 2060, the combined GDP of China, India, and Indonesia will equal \$116.7 trillion — 49% of GDP — making it three times larger than the US economy.

This should not be particularly surprising, not least because non-



Western countries are home to far more people.

As Peyman points out, China and India each have populations four times larger than the US, so their combined GDP would be twice that of the US, even with one-quarter America’s per-capita income. As he puts it, “Population numbers dictate that the West is only 10%, the Rest 90%.”

To be sure, when it comes to GDP, the West has often punched well above its demographic weight. In 1950, the West (including Japan) accounted for just 22.4% of the world’s population, but 59.9% of global GDP.

Meanwhile, Asia (excluding Japan) accounted for just 15.4% of world GDP, despite being home to 51.4% of the world’s people.

The Industrial Revolution, which afforded the West major economic advantages, together with colonial exploitation, help explain this discrepancy. In 1820, the shares were far more balanced: Asia (excluding Japan) had accounted for 65.2% of the world’s population and 56.4% of global GDP.

By the middle of this century, however, the Rest’s population will be 3.8 times larger than that of the West (including Japan), and its GDP will be 1.7 times larger. As Peyman notes, rising investment in the Rest, not least in education, has played an important role in boosting productivity and rebalancing global output and income.

These investments will continue to pay off. The McKinsey Global Institute predicted last year that in the new multipolar world order, “technology may move to the forefront of geopolitical competition.”

Given that human capital, together with governance, is essential to translate technological progress into productivity growth, Asia has an edge: by 2030, the region will be producing more than 70% of the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) graduates in the G20, with China alone accounting for 35%, and India for 27%.

Moreover, while the Rest may lag in terms of cutting-edge research, they have proved adept at applying Western innovations to consumer products and services.

Drawing on his experiences living in Chinese cities and studying Chinese companies, Peyman describes China’s transition to modernity, which is being emulated, to varying extents, elsewhere among the Rest.

For every warning that China will collapse under the weight of a rapidly aging population, overbearing authoritarianism, a massive debt overhang, and slowing growth, there is an example in Peyman’s book of China successfully leveraging scale, entrepreneurship, and innovation to advance its goals and interests.

Unfortunately, Peyman laments, the US remains “blinded by pre-eminence,” making it “slow to see its power ebb.” In fact, it appears that most Westerners take for granted that the Rest are such a diverse lot that they would not be able to pose a coherent, sustained challenge to countries that have long dominated the world order.

But countries like China, India, Indonesia, Singapore, and South Korea have proven that given the chance, the Rest are

at least as competent as many of their Western counterparts in manufacturing, exports, infrastructure investment, and governance.

Indian executives are running some of the top companies in the West. Meanwhile, many Western countries are failing to achieve “social harmony, broad prosperity, and public health at home.”

Even if the West does recognise its weakening position, Peyman notes, adjusting to it will not be easy. With the vast majority of the world’s population living outside the West, the Rest will no longer accept “exclusion from global decision-making.”

The Rest are not seeking to exclude the West in kind, but they do want to play a leading role in reshaping the global rules of the game — formulated by the West — for the twenty-first century.

Peyman concludes by urging US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping — the leaders of the West and the Rest, respectively — to reach a grand bargain, much like the one Richard Nixon struck with Mao Zedong in the early 1970s.

Such a bargain would support greater cooperation on the major challenges of our time — beginning with climate change — while reducing the likelihood of devastating conflict.

But a bargain must also be struck between the state, whose power is growing, and market forces, which are becoming increasingly weak.

Sudden, unilateral policy changes, such as the imposition or tightening of sanctions, are disrupting private companies’ operations and undermining their profitability.

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