

HM greets Sri Lanka President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ranil Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the President wishing him good health and happiness and the friendly Sri Lankan people more progress and prosperity. – ONA



P11

AL MOUJ GOLF PREPARES TO WELCOME WORLD'S TOP PRO GOLFERS



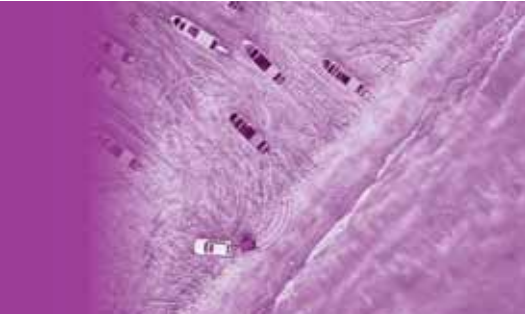
P13

EXPATRIATE REMITTANCES FALL TO 10-YEAR LOW IN 2021



P20

AN ESCAPE TO MASIRAH INSPIRED A NEW ODYSSEY OF SCENTS



MUSCAT

OVER 3 MILLION USE MWASALAT BUSES

More than three million passengers used Mwasalat public transport buses in 2022, while 221,000 passengers used the ferries. According to Mwasalat, around 1.6 million more passengers travelled in Mwasalat buses compared to 2021, while the number of ferry passengers came down from 245,000 in 2021. Mwasalat buses reported a punctuality of 97 per cent in 2022 as they transported nearly 8,400 passengers daily.

DETAILS ON P2

INDUSTRIAL CITIES ATTRACT RO 7 BILLION

The industrial cities of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) continue to benefit from strong local and international investor interest across all manufacturing-related sectors. According to Hamad bin Hamoud al Qasabi, Acting CEO, Madayn, total investments in Madayn's industrial cities have surpassed RO 7 billion as of end-2022, providing employment to more than 19,000 Omanis. In 2022 alone, more than 300 projects with investments totalling over RO 300 million were finalised for developments in these parks, he said.

DETAILS ON P13

OMAN OBSERVER

FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH NEWS APP IN OMAN



SEPOV CLAIMS IRONMAN HONOURS

Multiple Ironman champion Ilya Sepov clinched the Ironman 70.3 Oman Muscat 2023 honours at Shatti Al Qurum on Saturday. The Russian triathlete claimed the men's overall title in Muscat by finishing in four hours four minutes and seven seconds in the total race distance of 113 km which included 1.9 km swim, 90 km road bike and 21.1 km run. Sepov clocked a timing of 26min 26 secs in swim, 02:15:33 in biking and 01:17:32 in run.

DETAILS ON P10

NOVEL EVENTS BOOST TOURISM SECTOR

MUSCAT: A number of tourism events and festivals are currently taking place in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman in conjunction with the winter tourism season. These events are aimed at stirring tourist activities and highlighting the tourist potentials of Oman.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that in order to develop winter tourism season, which lasts from October to April, the ministry has announced a number of events and festivals which would take place during the first half of the year in different governorates some of which went under way at the outset of the year such as the Empty Quarter Festival, the Desert Adventure Festival and the Ironman World Championship.

In comments to ONA, Al Ghassani added that the upcoming period will see more events in the rest of the governorates including in the governorates of Musandam and Al Buraimi. He added that these activities are aimed at stimulating tourist activities.

He emphasised that the



Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is striving to increase cruise ships calls at the country's ports as cruise ship tourism is one of the most important activities that contribute in attracting tourists from all countries, he added.

Khalid bin Mohammed al Azri, Director of the Department of Tourism Patterns at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the Sultanate of Oman managed to attract many cruise ships to the Port of Salalah, Port Sultan Qaboos and Port of Khasab. He added that the cruise ship sector carries great significance in promoting Oman as one of the

key tourist destinations in the region and the whole world.

Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group, said that the tourism sector is set to become the largest generator of job opportunities in the upcoming period at both the local and global levels, noting that the tourism sector witnessed a steady growth over the past few years.

He affirmed that Khimji's House of Travel seeks to contribute to the growth of the tourism sector in Oman by attracting tourists and offering various packages especially for tourists coming via cruise ships. — ONA

INSIDE



IRAN SLAMS UN NUCLEAR WATCHDOG CHIEF

P6

Muscat Nights comes to a colourful end

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

Muscat Nights, the Sultanate of Oman's rebranded version of the Muscat Festival, came to an end with the concert of Omar al Abdalla and Khaled Abdel Rahman on Saturday.

An annual celebration of culture, tradition, entertainment and global gastronomic delicacies was a hub of activities from January 19. Eighteen nights of fun, frolic, laser and drone shows, international cuisines,

amusement and a complete entertainment festival for the whole family opened under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, at the Qurum Natural Park, on January 19.

Organised under the slogan "Enlightened by Your Presence", the activities of Muscat Nights concluded with the 'Enlightened by Your Presence' with a huge turnout of people from different walks of life who visited the sites of the events.

The 'Muscat Nights' was

organised in association with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and offered the visitors a variety of cultural, artistic and traditional events and activities.

It was held at four venues — Oman Convention and Exhibition Center (OCEC), Al Naseem Park, Oman Automobile Association and Qurum Natural Park where the largest heritage village where one could see and get to know traditional Omani life.



JOINT OMANI-BRITISH MILITARY DRILL KICKS OFF

The joint Omani-British military Exercise Khanjar Oman 2023 kicked off at the military training zone in Al Wusta Governorate, on Saturday. The military drill is carried out by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) represented by the Coast Security Force along with units from the British army.

SEE ALSO P5



JAPAN'S PURSUIT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

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Northeast US and Canada gripped by Arctic blast

NEW YORK: A "generational" Arctic blast brought dangerously cold temperatures to swaths of the northeastern United States and Canada on Saturday, with forecasters warning that frostbite can occur in just five minutes.

Atop Mount Washington in New Hampshire state, the wind-chill factor reached minus 78 degrees Celsius overnight, the National Weather Service (NWS) said. That broke the previous low recorded there of minus 74 C, the Weather Channel said.

At almost 6,300 feet, Mount Washington is the highest peak in northeast America and is known for having some of the world's worst weather.

Temperatures of minus 43 C and wind gusts of over 177 kmph combined for the historic low. The NWS office in Caribou, Maine, said a wind chill of minus 51 C was recorded in the small town of Frenchville, just south of the border with Canada.

"This is an epic, generational arctic outbreak," the office had



A pedestrian covers their face against the wind and cold as an 'Arctic Front' brings cold temperatures in Chelsea, Massachusetts, US. – Reuters

warned in an advisory ahead of the front. It said the chills would be "something northern and eastern Maine has not seen since similar outbreaks in 1982 and 1988."

"Most stations are forecast to see their lowest wind chills in decades or, in some cases, the lowest ever recorded," the service added.

"The dangers of being caught unprepared without shelter from the elements and without proper winter survival gear cannot be stressed enough," the service wrote. — AFP



PUBLIC TRANSPORT SEES PASSENGER INCREASE

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

More than three million passengers used Mwasalat public transport buses in 2022, while 221,000 passengers used the ferry. According to Mwasalat, there was a 1.6 million increase in bus passengers compared to 2021, while ferry passengers decreased from 245,000 in 2021.

Mwasalat's buses had a 97% punctuality rate and transported nearly 8,400 passengers daily, while the ferry had a 98% punctuality rate and carried 600 passengers daily.

Mwasalat's statement also noted that only 9.4% of bus passengers were women.

Recently, during the event to mark its 50th anniversary, Mwasalat announced the launch of electronic transportation tickets linked to the smart transportation system.

Mwasalat recently entered into a strategic partnership with Sultan Qaboos University to test



biofuel applications in its vehicles and promote renewable energy initiatives.

The upgradation of the public transport system will be key as the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning embarks on

the ambitious Greater Muscat Development Plan. The project aims to accommodate the increasing future population, attract investment, develop transportation, raise the quality of services, strengthen infrastructure,

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

Cooperation 3: Joint Omani-Emirati drill



MUSCAT: A force from Muscat Regiment at the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) along with support units, aircrafts and naval ships, on Saturday headed to the brotherly United Arab Emirates

(UAE) to take part in the joint Omani-Emirati military drill (Cooperation 3) which will be conducted in Al Hamra Military Training Centre in the emirate capital Abu Dhabi from February 6 to 16.



The participation comes within the framework of the annual training programmes conducted by the corps of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) represented by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) with the armies of brotherly and

friendly countries. The aim of the drill is to exchange military expertise, activate training plans to sustain high levels of training performance and combat competence of SAF personnel. — ONA

MoE takes part in G77 plus China education meet

HAVANA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, participated via video conferencing in the meeting of the Meeting of Education Ministers of the Group of 77 (G77) and China held under the theme 'Meeting for the Unity of Educators' in the Cuban capital Havana.

The Sultanate of Oman was represented by Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hamami, Permanent Representative to UNESCO, who delivered a speech confirming that the Sultanate of Oman appreciates all the technological initiatives that were applied in the educational field amidst the pandemic.

He added, on the national front, the Sultanate of Oman has upgraded its policies and embraced innovative methods such as online learning through digital platforms, distance learning, and blended education to ensure education sustainability. As part of the government's efforts towards the digital transformation, an online education committee has been formed with a mission to create a national framework in the education sector to achieve effective learning through training and empowerment of educators.



Al Hamami pointed to the efforts being made by the Ministry of Education to train the teachers in the essential skills for online learning and distance education. He underscored the need for radical change in the professional development of teachers through pre-employment training and establishing an attractive and conducive work environment.

Al Hamami affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman believes in the role of science and innovation in education. Hence, the Ministry of Education, represented by the Specialised Centre for the Professional Training of Teachers, carries various training programmes for teachers. The Centre organises national initiatives such as the Oman Science Festival, biennial event that aims to make science available through engaging society members, including teachers, students, researchers, the private sector, and youth.

424 students participate in Winter Programme for gifted students

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning's Gifted Care Department, recently organised a winter programme for gifted students via Teams platform. The programme was attended by 424 gifted students who were identified through the Tharwa programme and have passed the Arab Gifted Scale.

The programme consisted of training seminars in various fields such as self-development, practical skills, literature and art. The first period of the programme focused on self-development with sessions on emotional intelligence by Zuwaina al Ghawi and self-confidence building by Abdullah al Ghafri. The second period of the programme featured specialised skill circles, including

workshops on smart applications in science and technology by Imtenan al Ghassani, arts and literature by Shaikha al Kalbani, digital art by Adhari al Shaibani, and story writing by Dr Fawzia al Fahdi.

Dr Tariq al Kharousi, Director of the Diagnostics and Gifted Care Department, emphasised the importance of the programme in maximising the students' spare time and developing their talents and potentials.

The programme also aimed to engage the community by involving local experts in the fields being covered and providing vocational guidance to the gifted students. Zuwaina al Ghawi also noted that the programme was a valuable opportunity for students to enhance their self-confidence and develop their personalities beyond the classroom.

Workshop on Antimicrobial Stewardship held

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The Antimicrobial Stewardship Committee at Khoula Hospital organised the first national workshop on Antimicrobial (AMR) Stewardship with the theme 'Together Save Life Save Future' on January 30.

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is endangering human life, and as per the World Health Organisation's (WHO) prediction, the one to cause the next pandemic will be AMR. It is predicted that by 2050, AMR will result in 10 million deaths per year and cost about \$100 trillion worldwide.

Dr Mazin al Khaburi, DG of Khoula Hospital, inaugurated the workshop and, in his inaugural speech, emphasised the importance of education and awareness about the appropriate use of antimicrobials in animals and humans.

"Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria,



viruses, and parasites will not respond to commonly used antimicrobials medicine," said Dr Manoj Malviya, Senior Consultant at Khoula Hospital.

He further said that what is more concerning is that AMR is interfering with the achievements of modern healthcare medical and surgical practices. AMR increases morbidities like healthcare-

associated infections, surgical site infections, and hospital stays. It is a burden on people's health and economy.

"It seems that our time for antimicrobials is getting over; antimicrobials are progressively becoming less effective."

Evidence suggests that overuse and misuse of antimicrobials in humans and animals are the main

drivers of AMR. The antimicrobial stewardship programme (ASP) has emerged as a successful strategy to combat the danger posed by AMR. ASP teaches evidence-based, responsible use of antimicrobials in the community and hospital settings.

The workshop aimed at educating and imparting the skills and knowledge to healthcare

providers required to implement an AS programme. Eighty-four delegates, 47 from the Muscat region and 37 from regional hospitals (Ibra, Nizwa, Sohar, Sur, and others), participated in the workshop, which was a face-face, one-day programme with interactive lectures, practical sessions, and case studies.

The topics addressed during the

workshop included the burden and drivers of AMR, how to establish and implement antimicrobial stewardship, and various antibiotics limiting strategies in the hospital setting.

There was an exhibition with the stall on 'Infection prevention and control bundles', 'A microbiological display of resistant microorganisms /diagnostic stewardship', and 'How to start antibiotics stewardship as a quality improvement project.'

"Khoula hospital can play a crucial role in knowledge dissemination," said Dr Mazin Khaboori, adding that "controlling antimicrobial resistance is a national priority and is everyone's responsibility."

Khoula ASC members conducted the workshop consisting of Dr Manoj Malviya, Chair and members Dr Nawal al Kindi, Zainab al Hashimi, Dr Adil al Kharusi, Dr Amal al Jabri, Huda al Abri, Nabala al Mout, Dr Said al Busaidy, Amira al Battashi, Dr Simi Rizvi and Sohail Rasheed.



Muscat Nights leaves behind beautiful memories



MUSCAT: The three-week long Muscat Nights festival has officially come to an end, leaving behind a trail of beautiful memories for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who attended.

With an estimated 500,000 attendees, the festival was a resounding success, showcasing a range of exciting activities and events across four venues.

Naseem Park emerged as the standout venue, drawing in crowds with its Heritage Village, shopping pavilion, and stage shows. Qurum Natural Park also attracted a large number of visitors, despite limited activities, due to its prime location in the heart of the city and affordable entry fees.

Meanwhile, the motor shows and e-games at Oman Automobile Association proved popular with the youth demographic, who were drawn to the events specifically curated with their interests in mind.



Young writers invited to submit original stories set in Oman

MUSCAT: The Let's Read Team has announced the launch of its 17th annual Children's Writing Competition. This year, children aged 8 to 18 from schools across Oman are invited to write an original story set in the country or to retell a traditional Omani tale in their own words. The stories must be accompanied by illustrations depicting the Omani landscape and characters.

Participants can submit their entries in either English or Arabic. The entries should be no longer than 500 words and must include the name, age, and contact information of the student, as well as the name and contact information of their school. The deadline for submissions is April 8, 2023.

"We hope that children from schools across the country will participate in the writing competition," said Jane Jaffer, Chairperson of the Let's Read Program. "We are grateful for the support of our sponsors, Renaissance Services, The London Speaker Bureau, and KPMG."

Stephen R Thomas, CEO of Renaissance Services, expressed his excitement about the initiative, saying, "Renaissance is proud to be a part of this initiative, which will provide children with valuable skills that will only grow with time." Tom Kenyon-Slaney, Chairman of the London Speaker Bureau, added that participating

Children aged 8 to 18 from schools across Oman are invited to write an original story set in the country or to retell a traditional Omani tale in their own words

in a writing competition is one of the most comprehensive and helpful extra-curricular activities for prospective school or university applicants.

Maythaa al Mandhary, CEO of the Let's Read Team and a judge of the Arabic entries, expressed her excitement about the competition, saying, "We are looking forward to receiving some exciting stories from the students this year."

The entries can be submitted by hand at the Let's Read Charity Bookshop on the 3rd floor of Oman Avenues Mall, or by email to letsreadoman@gmail.com for English entries and maythaa.1988@gmail.com for Arabic entries.

The entries will be divided into three age groups and evaluated by a panel of judges based on descriptive setting, vivid characters, an exciting story, and colourful illustrations. With sufficient sponsorship, the winning stories will be published in a book entitled "Stories from Oman."

Big boost to domestic tourism



VINOD NAIR
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Tourism in South and North Al Sharqiyah governorates got a boost with an increasing number of events organised this year. According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the number of events organised this year includes the Empty Quarter Festival, the Desert Adventures Festival in North Al Sharqiyah.

The Omani Maritime Heritage

Festival, which will continue until February 19, reflects the rich maritime history of the governorate in particular and at the same time explores the relationship between man and the sea.

The Maritime Festival highlights the historical journey of Omani ships which used to transport Omani products and a food carnival that presents Omani and international dishes prepared with locally sourced

seafood.

Other activities include events such as windsurfing, sailing, sea fishing, and traditional boat racing.

The ministry seeks to hold many festivals to stimulate tourism and economic movement, and to highlight the tourism potential in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. These festivals will also help improve hotel occupancy rates.

The government has recently launched the commercial hot air balloon service for the first time in the country.

Royal Balloons Project will be operated in partnership between Omani and Turkish companies, and each balloon ride is for between 40 and 60 minutes. It can reach a height of 600 metres above sea level.

The companies will operate balloons between October and April tourist season.



Bridal

elegance lights up the night

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

[@lakshmioman](#)

The Oman Bride Show made a comeback at Muscat Nights and left a lasting impression on visitors. The event, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, showcased the best of the wedding industry in the Sultanate of Oman. With over 100 exhibitors, it provided a unique platform for couples to gather information, inspiration, and ideas for their special day.

“Why not bring your whole wedding party along to help plan and gather information and inspiration for your wedding day?” said the event organisers. This year’s edition aimed to bring the entire wedding industry under one roof and promote new luxury trends, fashionable products, and services to brides-to-be.

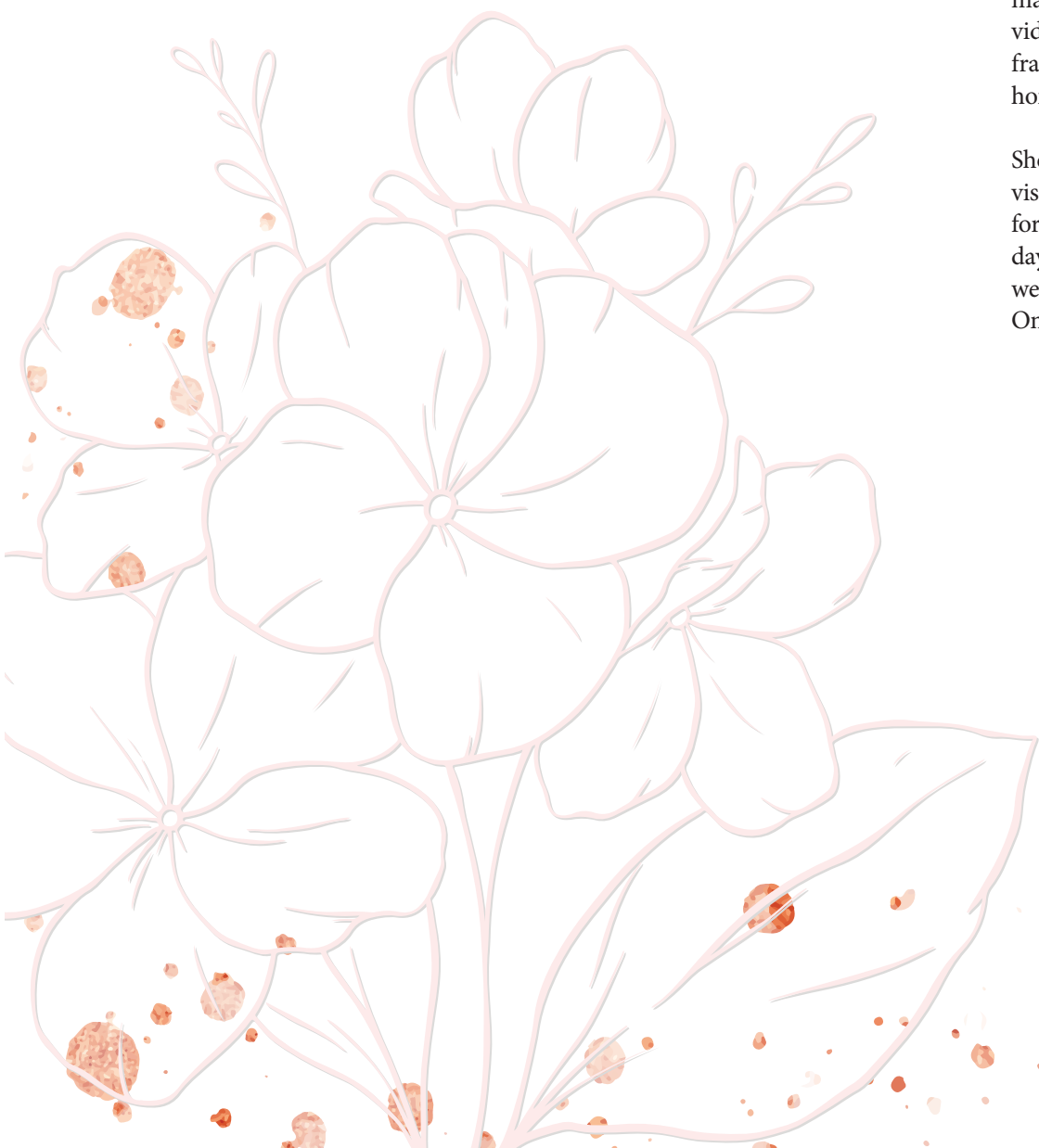
Designers and fashion houses such as Alghaithi Fashion, Amal Raad, Amira, My Bride, Wajaha, Yousuf al Jasmi, Alaa Seyabi, Catwalk, Diana Caramali, KASH5AFUL, Kinza Zubair, Rishi Mehra, Fouad Sarkis, and Hadeel Beauty were all in attendance. The all-encompassing bridal exhibition, now in its fourth edition, has become a significant platform for the wedding sector, recognised as the biggest and most important event for the industry.

In addition to local fashion designers, the event also featured international fashion designers showcasing the latest fashion trends.

Oman Bride Show provides a platform for local fashion designers to showcase the latest Omani traditional attire for men and women and promote it to the world.

The event allowed couples to meet with a wide range of suppliers, including hotels and venues, photographers, florists, wedding planners, bridal attire and accessories, grooms fashion, rentals, hair and make-up, wedding invitations, videographers, catering, perfume, frankincense, abayas, and even honeymoon packages.

In conclusion, the Oman Bride Show left a lasting impression on visitors, providing a unique platform for couples to plan their special day and showcasing the best of the wedding industry in the Sultanate of Oman.





Traditional horse show held in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali

JAALAN BANI BU ALI: A traditional horse show was held in Asilah, Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali on Saturday in partnership with the Al Asayel Equestrian Club. The aim of the event was to promote and protect the cultural heritage of the region. Riders from the Al Asayel Club participated in the show, showcasing their artistic equestrian skills and traditional horse shows, which drew admiration and engagement from



the spectators. Mohammed bin Rashid al Ghailani, the General Supervisor of Al Ardah activities, stated, “The horse exhibition is a significant cultural heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation in Omani society and is a part of the community’s culture. These events serve as a platform to preserve traditions and a social meeting point for community and the horse sports enthusiasts.” — ONA

Desert festival in Al Sharqiya Sands ends



BIDIYA:The Desert Adventures Festival in Al Sharqiya Sands came to a close on Friday in the “Tal Al Rakah” area, with Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, serving as the chief guest. The 6-day festival, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in partnership with the Office of the Governor of North Al Sharqiyah and several government and private entities, saw a large turnout of visitors and tourists and participation from both public and private institutions.

Governor of North Al Sharqiyah, Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, said the festival was a “quantum leap” for the region’s tourism and winter events and created a “distinguished community movement” through the high attendance, which underscores the importance of such entertainment and tourism activities. The Desert Adventure Festival in Al Sharqiya Sands featured over 20 activities, including the Oman International Motor Championship, artistic and singing events, paragliding, and an exhibition of camping, tourism, and adventure gear.



MoL takes action against several violations

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The Ministry of Labour has cracked down on several expatriates for visa violations, arresting 26 individuals who were found to be working on tourist visas. In a separate incident, the ministry also arrested 22 workers for violating provisions of the country’s Labour Law. The ministry has also referred a private sector establishment to the judicial authorities for failing to pay its workers for multiple months and for violating Articles 51 and 53 of the Labour Law. According to

the law, workers who are paid on a monthly basis must receive their wages at least once a month, while those paid on a daily basis must receive weekly payments for work completed, with the remainder of their wage paid in full the following week after completion. The law also requires that if an employment relationship ends, the worker must be paid all outstanding amounts immediately, unless they leave the job voluntarily. In such cases, the employer must pay the worker’s wages and all their dues within seven days of their departure.

Joint Omani-British military drill kicks off



MUSCAT: The joint Omani-British military Exercise Khanjar Oman 2023 kicked off at the military training zone in Al Wusta Governorate on Saturday. The military drill is carried out by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) represented by the Coast Security Force along with units from the British army.

The drill will include a number military activities and joint field training and will run until February 13. By conducting the drill, the RAO targets to sustain the combat level of its personnel within the framework of exchanging expertise with the armies of the sisterly and friendly countries. — ONA



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Directorate General of Health Services

AL DHAHIRA GOVERNORATE



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Bidding :-

Bidding Ref.	Description	Eligibility	Last Date for Collection Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1/2023	Renting and operating Cafe Truck for several health centers in Al Dhahirah Governorate.	Specialized Companies	Monday 20/Feb/2023	Before 10 am on Wednesday 01/March/2023	R.O 25/= Per set
2/2023	Provide Beverages and Snacks machines for several health centers in Al Dhahirah Governorate.	Specialized Companies	Monday 20/Feb/2023	Before 10 am on Wednesday 01/March/2023	R.O 25/= Per set

- The Companies should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the bidding value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to the Tender Committee in the DGHS before one day of date submission.
- Tender Documents can be purchased from the Directorate General of Health Service in AL Dhahira Governorate – Purchase & Tender Section, offers enclosed in the sealed envelope.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the highest bid or any other bid.



Ukraine allies pledge new precision weapons

KYIV: Western allies pledged precision rockets and missile systems to Ukraine on Friday, after President Volodymyr Zelensky called for sophisticated weapons to help retain control of the embattled eastern city of Bakhmut.

The European Union agreed to introduce price caps on Russian petroleum products to try to further limit Russian President Vladimir Putin's war chest by targeting his key exports.

The announcements came shortly after Zelensky told a summit with EU leaders in Kyiv: "No one will surrender Bakhmut. We will fight as long as we can."

"If weapon (deliveries) are accelerated — namely long-range weapons — we will not only not withdraw from Bakhmut, we will begin to de-occupy Donbas," he said of the eastern region of Ukraine.

The United States on Friday announced a new \$2.2-billion package of arms and munitions, which the Pentagon said included a new rocket-propelled precision bomb that could nearly double Kyiv's strike range against Russian forces.

The ground-launched small-diameter bombs (GLSDB), which can fly up to 150 kilometres, could threaten

key Russian supply lines, arms depots and air bases far behind the front lines.

They potentially give Kyiv's forces the ability to strike anywhere in the Russian-occupied Donbas, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, as well as the northern part of occupied Crimea.

However, "the delivery of the GLSDB likely won't be for several months due to contracting, production, and delivery timelines", said Pentagon spokesman Lt Col Garron Garn, declining to say how many would be delivered.

France and Italy will deliver mobile surface-to-air missile systems, the French defence ministry said, in response to an urgent request from Kyiv to help protect "civilian populations and infrastructure from Russian air attacks".

The systems, called MAMBA or SAMP, are a vehicle-mounted battery of medium-range missiles designed to offer protection from airborne threats such as missiles and manned or unmanned aircraft.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov, who had requested the weapons, tweeted his gratitude, saying the systems would "help us save thousands of lives" from Russian attacks. — AFP

Chinese balloon advanced, hard to shoot down: US expert

WASHINGTON: The first Chinese surveillance balloon that the Pentagon found flying over sensitive US ballistic missile sites may be guided by advanced artificial intelligence technology, a US expert said on Friday.

A second Chinese surveillance balloon was later spotted over Latin America, the Pentagon said, without specifying its exact location.

William Kim, a specialist in surveillance balloons at the Marathon Initiative think-tank in Washington, said that balloons are a valuable means of observation that are difficult to shoot down.

Kim said the first Chinese balloon looked like a normal weather balloon but with distinct characteristics.

It has a quite large, visible "payload" — the electronics for guidance and collecting information, powered by large solar panels.

And it appears to have advanced steering technologies that the US military hasn't yet put in the air.

Artificial intelligence has made it possible for a balloon, just by reading the changes in the air around it, to adjust its altitude to guide it where it wants to go, Kim said.

"Before you either had to have a tether... or you just send it up and it just goes wherever the wind takes it," he said.

The first Chinese balloon looked like a normal weather balloon but with distinct characteristics. It has a quite large, visible "payload" — the electronics for guidance and collecting information, powered by large solar panels

WILLIAM KIM
Specialist in surveillance balloons

"What's happened very recently with advances in AI is that you can have a balloon that... doesn't need its own motion system. Merely by adjusting the altitude it can control its direction."

That could also involve radio communications from its home base, he said.

But "if the point of it is to monitor (intercontinental ballistic missile) silos, which is one of the theories... you wouldn't necessarily need to tell it to adjust its location," he added.

Kim said that as satellites become more vulnerable to being attacked from the Earth and space, balloons have distinct advantages.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken speaks in the State Department in Washington, DC after he scrapped a rare Beijing trip aimed at easing escalating tensions between the two global powers. — AFP

Firstly, they don't easily show up on radars.

"These are materials that don't reflect, they're not metal. So even though these balloons expand to quite large, detecting... the balloon itself is going to be a problem," he said.

And the payload, if small enough, can be overlooked.

Balloons also have the advantage of holding relatively stationary positions over a surveillance target, compared to constantly orbiting satellites used by spy agencies to take photographs.

"These things can stay overhead, they can stay over one spot months at a time, compared to the low-Earth-orbit satellites," Kim said. — AFP

Iran slams IAEA chief after centrifuge report

TEHRAN: Iran slammed UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi after the agency raised concerns over covert changes to equipment at its Fordo uranium enrichment plant, state media said Saturday.

The criticism of Grossi comes after the International Atomic Energy Agency director-general said he plans to visit Tehran in February for talks on getting it to increase cooperation over its activities, amid stalled negotiations to revive a landmark deal over Iran's nuclear programme.

The IAEA said in a confidential report seen on Wednesday that Iran had substantially modified an interconnection between two centrifuge clusters enriching uranium to up to 60 per cent at Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), without giving prior notice.

Iran said later an inspector had "inadvertently" reported the changes, and that Grossi had

issued the report despite the matter being resolved — a response that the United States and its allies criticised as "inadequate".

"We gave a letter to the agency that an inspector... made a mistake and gave an incorrect report," Mohamad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

"But yet again the director-general of the agency released this issue to the media," he said, labelling it "unprofessional and unacceptable" behaviour.

"We hope that this practice will not be continued... because this is not acceptable for his reputation and the agency."

The IAEA had said that during an unannounced Fordo inspection on January 21 it found "two IR-6 centrifuge cascades... were interconnected in a way that was substantially different from the mode of operation declared by Iran to the agency".



Since late last year, the two cascades had been used to produce uranium enriched to up to 60 per cent, the report to member states

added.

In the report, Grossi expressed concern that Iran had "implemented a substantial change

in the design information of FFEP in relation to the production of high enriched uranium without informing the agency in advance".

In a statement on Friday, the United States, Britain, France and Germany said Iran's response to the report was "inadequate".

"Iran claims that this action was carried out in error are inadequate," they said.

"We judge Iran's actions based on the impartial and objective reports of the IAEA, not Iran's purported intent."

Grossi told the European Parliament on January 24 that he plans to visit Tehran this month "for a much-needed political dialogue, or reestablishment thereof, with Iran".

The IAEA chief noted the "big, big impasse" on the Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

The deal with world powers collapsed after the United States withdrew from it in 2018 under former president Donald Trump.

Negotiations that started in April 2021 to revive the agreement have since stalled. — AFP

BANDA ACEH

Sumatran tiger captured in Indonesia

A Sumatran tiger believed to have attacked and injured farmers in Indonesia's westernmost province of Aceh was captured after a days-long hunt. It comes after two separate tiger attacks in the same Sumatran town over the past week left at least four people seriously injured. The animal entered a trap set by conservationists inside a forest reserve early Saturday in the town of Kluet Tengah in southern Aceh. It was found to have several wounds on its body.

"One of the victims said he



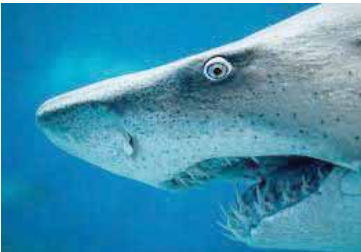
injured the animal when he was being attacked and was defending himself. There are several wounds on the tiger's body including on its face, neck and leg," Agus Rianto, the head of Aceh's conservation agency, said. — AFP

SYDNEY

Shark kills teenage girl in Western Australia

A 16-year-old girl died on Saturday after being mauled by a shark as she swam in a river in Western Australia, officials said. The girl was bitten by an unknown species of shark in the Swan River in the Perth suburb of North Fremantle, a state government statement said.

She was pulled from the water but pronounced dead at the scene after efforts to revive her failed, said Paul Robinson, police acting inspector for the Fremantle district. "It's very early on, what



we're being advised is that she was with friends on the river," he told a news conference. "They were on jet skis. Possible a pod of dolphins were being seen nearby and the young female jumped in to swim nearby the dolphins." — AFP

BRASILIA

Brazil sinks rusting old aircraft carrier

Brazil sank a decommissioned aircraft carrier in the Atlantic Ocean off its northeast coast, the Brazilian Navy said, despite warnings from environmentalists that the rusting 1960s French-built ship would pollute the sea and the marine food chain. The 32,000-tonne carrier had been floating offshore for three months since Turkey refused it entry to be scrapped there because it was an environmental hazard and the ship was towed back to Brazil. The carrier was scuttled



in a "planned and controlled sinking" late on Friday, the Navy said in a statement, that would "avoid logistical, operational, environmental and economic losses to the Brazilian state," it said. — Reuters

How ChatGPT kicked off an AI arms race



KEVIN ROOSE

The writer is a technology columnist based in the Bay Area

One day in mid-November, workers at OpenAI got an unexpected assignment: Release a chatbot, fast. The chatbot, an executive announced, would be known as “Chat with GPT-3.5,” and it would be made available free to the public. In two weeks.

The announcement confused some OpenAI employees. All year, the San Francisco artificial intelligence company had been working towards the release of GPT-4, a new AI model that was stunningly good at writing essays, solving complex coding problems and more. After months of testing and fine-tuning, GPT-4 was nearly ready. The plan was to release the model in early 2023, along with a few chatbots that would allow users to try it for themselves, according to three people with knowledge of the inner workings of OpenAI.

But OpenAI’s top executives had changed their minds. Some were worried that rival companies might upstage them by releasing their own AI chatbots before GPT-4, according to the people with knowledge of OpenAI. And putting something out quickly using an old model, they reasoned, could help them collect feedback to improve the new one.

So they decided to dust off and update an unreleased chatbot that used a souped-up version of GPT-3, the company’s previous language model, which came out in 2020.

Thirteen days later, ChatGPT was born. In the months since its debut, ChatGPT (the name was, mercifully, shortened) has become a global phenomenon. Millions of people have used it to write poetry, build apps and conduct makeshift therapy sessions. It has been embraced (with mixed results) by news publishers, marketing firms and business leaders. And it has set off a feeding frenzy of investors trying to get in on the next wave of the AI boom.

It has also caused controversy. Users have complained that ChatGPT is prone to giving biased or incorrect answers. Some AI researchers have accused OpenAI of recklessness. And school districts around the country, including New York City’s, have banned ChatGPT to try to prevent a flood of AI-generated homework.

Yet little has been said about ChatGPT’s origins, or the strategy behind it. Inside the company, ChatGPT has been an earthshaking surprise — an overnight sensation whose success has created both opportunities and headaches, according to several current and former OpenAI employees, who requested anonymity because they were not authorised to speak publicly.

An OpenAI spokesperson, Niko Felix, declined to comment for this column, and the company also declined to make any employees available for interviews.

Before ChatGPT’s launch, some OpenAI employees were skeptical that the project would succeed. An AI chatbot that Meta had released months earlier, BlenderBot, had flopped, and another Meta AI project, Galactica, was pulled down after just three days. Some employees, desensitised by daily exposure to state-of-the-art AI systems, thought that a chatbot built on a 2-year-old AI model might seem boring.

But two months after its debut, ChatGPT has more than



An image created by OpenAIs DALL-E 2 image-generating software.

30 million users and gets roughly 5 million visits a day, two people with knowledge of the figures said. That makes it one of the fastest-growing software products in memory. (Instagram, by contrast, took nearly a year to get its first 10 million users.)

The growth has brought challenges. ChatGPT has had frequent outages as it runs out of processing power, and users have found ways around some of the bot’s safety features. The hype surrounding ChatGPT has also annoyed some rivals at bigger tech firms, who have pointed out that its underlying technology isn’t, strictly speaking, all that new.

ChatGPT is also, for now, a money pit. There are no ads, and the average conversation costs the company “single-digit cents” in processing power, according to a post on Twitter by Sam Altman, OpenAI’s CEO, likely amounting to millions of dollars a week. To offset the costs, the company announced this week that it would begin selling a \$20 monthly subscription, known as ChatGPT Plus.

Despite its limitations, ChatGPT’s success has vaulted OpenAI into the ranks of Silicon Valley power players. The company recently reached a \$10 billion deal with Microsoft, which plans to incorporate the startup’s technology into its Bing search engine and other products. Google declared a “code red” in response to ChatGPT, fast-tracking many of its own AI products in an attempt to catch up.

OpenAI is an unusual company, by Silicon Valley standards. Started in 2015 as a nonprofit research lab by a

group of tech leaders including Altman, Peter Thiel, Reid Hoffman and Elon Musk, it created a for-profit subsidiary in 2019 and struck a \$1 billion deal with Microsoft. It has since grown to around 375 employees, according to Altman — not counting the contractors it pays to train and test its AI models in regions such as Eastern Europe and Latin America.

From the start, OpenAI has billed itself as a mission-driven organisation that wants to ensure that advanced AI will be safe and aligned with human values. But in recent years, the company has embraced a more competitive spirit — one that some critics say has come at the expense of its original aims.

Those concerns grew last summer when OpenAI released its DALL-E 2 image-generating software, which turns text prompts into works of digital art. The app was a hit with consumers, but it raised thorny questions about how such powerful tools could be used to cause harm. If creating hyper-realistic images was as simple as typing in a few words, critics asked, wouldn’t pornographers and propagandists have a field day with the technology?

To allay these fears, OpenAI outfitted DALL-E 2 with numerous safeguards and blocked certain words and phrases, such as those related to graphic violence or nudity. It also taught the bot to neutralise certain biases in its training data — such as making sure that when a user asked for a photo of a CEO, the results included images of women.

How to stay safe in extreme cold weather



KAREN ZRAICK

As an Arctic blast bombards the northeastern United States, temperatures have plunged, and people are bracing for extreme wind chill. Those who will be affected by the cold should stay inside as much as possible.

If you have to go out, protect yourself from the risks associated with icy conditions, including falls and car accidents. The unanimous advice from experts: Exercise extreme caution. You’ll also want to bundle up and cover any exposed skin to avoid frostbite and hypothermia. Here’s how to spot the signs of those conditions — and what to do if you think someone has developed them.

Frostbite

In extreme cold, exposed skin can develop frostbite in as little as five minutes, said George T Chiampas, an emergency medicine doctor and a professor at Northwestern Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

The body’s first reaction to extreme cold is to restrict blood and oxygen flow from its extremities, in order to preserve major organs, he said. And the first signs of frostbite including tingling or pain in the affected areas.

If you think you have frostbite, you should immediately go inside and check yourself for any discoloration or other clear signs of the condition.

Fingers, toes and the face are most often affected. People with frostbite sometimes don’t realize what is happening, because their fingers or other parts of their bodies go numb as it sets in. And if they are also experiencing hypothermia, which can be deadly, their judgment could be impaired.

Watch for signs of frostbite, including skin that has blistered or become discolored or that feels unusually firm or waxy. The condition can result in permanent damage and amputation and can be more dangerous the longer it goes without treatment.

If you think you have frostbite, avoid using a heating pad or hot water, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns: If the affected area is numb, you could get burned.

Until you can see a doctor, immerse the area in warm water, change into dry warm clothes and use blankets and body heat, such as tucking fingers into armpits.

The CDC warns against walking on frostbitten feet or toes or massaging affected areas, which can increase damage.

Hypothermia

When the body is exposed to the cold for prolonged



Residents of the Williamsburg neighbourhood of Brooklyn, brave the noreaster snow.

When the body is exposed to the cold for prolonged periods, it begins to lose heat faster than it can produce it. Wet conditions are especially dangerous, even in relatively warmer temperatures

periods, it begins to lose heat faster than it can produce it, according to the CDC. Wet conditions are especially dangerous, even in relatively warmer temperatures.

A low body temperature renders major organs incapable of functioning properly and can be deadly. Older adults and others with poor circulation are particularly vulnerable.

In the early stages of hypothermia, people often become disoriented or drowsy. Their judgment may be compromised. Fumbling and slurred speech are telltale signs.

This makes hypothermia especially dangerous, according to the CDC, “because a person may not know that it’s happening and won’t be able to do anything about it.”

The agency advises taking the person’s temperature if you notice any of those symptoms. A temperature below 95 indicates an emergency, requiring immediate medical attention.

Until you can get medical assistance, get the person inside, remove wet clothing and gently warm the body, the agency says. You can give the person warm beverages, but avoid alcohol, as it causes the body to lose heat more rapidly.

In cases of severe hypothermia, the victim may be unconscious — and may seem not even to have a pulse, or to be breathing. But some hypothermia victims who appear dead can be resuscitated, the CDC says. Call 911 and administer CPR if possible.

More than willpower



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

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

It is now February and few of us are sticking to their new year resolutions, thinking about the gym membership, the special diet to help you lose weight. When such plans don't come through most people blame it on willpower or rather the lack of it. According to psychologists we need three components to achieve our objectives. Firstly, we need to establish the motivation for change and set a clear goal. Secondly, we need to monitor our behaviour towards that goal. The last component is willpower which is a critical step in achieving our goals. Willpower is defined as the ability to resist short-term temptations to meet long-term goals. That's what makes you attend school and study hard in

order to pass your exams with good grades, or skip that tempting cheesecake in order to remain in a healthy body shape. According to research, self-discipline which is linked to willpower is more important than IQ in predicting academic success and this is not a surprise as we could think of people, we know who despite their high intelligence did not achieve good grades because they lack self-discipline. Willpower can also be defined as the ability to overcome unwanted thoughts, feelings, that put you down and discourage you from working towards your goals when you experience a setback, or the ability to restrain yourself from reacting emotionally and impulsively, which makes you overreact to certain situations

SELF-DISCIPLINE IS LINKED TO WILLPOWER AND IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN IQ IN PREDICTING ACADEMIC SUCCESS

without thinking clearly. So, the question that comes to mind, how can one boost his willpower? According to Dr Frank Ryan, a clinical psychologist and author of 'Willpower for Dummies,' there are few tips that can improve your self-control and boost your willpower. This includes believing in yourself and having self confidence that you can complete

the task ahead, imagining yourself in graduation gown smiling to the camera as you receive your award would keep you motivated to study. Clarifying your goals and planning ahead can help you focus, as well as monitoring your progress. Developing a routine will also help you stay organised, set up a fixed time for physical exercise, sleep early so you can have enough time in the morning to prepare your healthy meal and carry it with you instead of eating fast food at work. Avoid temptation as it could be very hard to resist. If you are planning to lose weight avoid going to the area of the supermarket where cheesecakes are on display. If you are quitting smoking, don't go out with friends

who smoke. Such situations can lead to setbacks which makes you go back to the behaviour you were trying to change in the first place. Get support from friends and family, explain to them that you are starting a healthy diet so they don't invite you to restaurants that serve junk food. Having a companion to the gym or a jogging buddy can motivate you and help you form a routine of regular exercise. Remember the quote "Rome was not built in a day", so be patient and keep going slow and steady, use technology to monitor your progress, be it a smart phone app that counts the number of steps or an excel progress sheet so you can monitor your progress and modify your efforts as you reach your goals at the end.

No lights, no water: S Africans fume at cascading crisis

ZAMA LUTHULI AND DINKY MKHIZE

Already struggling without electricity for hours a day, many South Africans are now having to do also without water, as power outages batter the supply system. A power failure at a pump station feeding reservoirs and water towers caused taps to run dry in parts of Johannesburg and Pretoria, provincial utility Rand Water said this week. This further aggravated residents who for months have had to plan mundane activities such as cooking and do laundry based on a daily blackout schedule. Thomas Mabasa, a rail worker, said he had taken to showering at work — a luxury not afforded to his children. "(They) have to go to school without bathing," the 43-year-old said. He was among frustrated locals who took to the streets in Soshanguve, a township north of the capital, this week to protest the situation. Demonstrators disrupted traffic, blocking roads with stones and waste. "Sometimes we wait to see if the water will come back in the middle of the night to wake the kids up so they can shower before it runs out again," Mabasa said, as tyres burned on the street behind him. Africa's most industrialised economy has been crippled by record power cuts in the past year, as troubles at debt-laden state energy firm Eskom worsened. The utility provides about 90 per cent of the country's electricity. But for years it has failed to keep pace with demand as it struggles to maintain its ageing coal-powered infrastructure. Water and sanitation ministry spokeswoman, Wisane Mavasa said the government was working with water utilities "to improve the situation". "(The) energy crisis is impacting the water infrastructure," she said. One problem is that machinery is constantly being restarted because of power cuts, and this accelerates breakdowns, the government said. Pump stations and water-treatment, which need a steady flow of power to work properly, have been badly impacted, it said. Criminality has also contributed to the crisis, with Johannesburg's municipality saying hundreds of water tanks were stolen or vandalised in 2022. Hospitals and schools have not been spared. Kalafong hospital in Pretoria, endured two days of no water at the weekend. Journalism student Ethel Malatji, 21, said her and colleagues at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria were unable to cook, clean or bathe. "We don't even have water to drink," she said. Her studies have also been disrupted by protesters burning tyres on a road she crosses to access part of the campus, she said. — AFP

The world's newest country is broken and forgotten. Enter Pope Francis



Declan Walsh

The writer is the chief Africa correspondent for The NYT



Jason Horowitz

The writer is the Rome bureau chief of The Times

It is just over a decade since the steamy capital of South Sudan exploded in joy, with revelers singing and dancing through the night to mark the birth of their nation as it split from its old enemy, Sudan. The new country was cheered on in 2011 by the US diplomats who had midwived its delivery and the Hollywood celebrities who championed its cause. Billions of dollars poured into an ambitious state-building project that offered a fresh start to a people weary after decades of war. "Freedom!" they cried. Now that feels like a very long time ago. Engulfed by civil war, famine and, most recently, floods, the world's newest country has been plagued by schisms and thwarted by leaders who pocketed its considerable oil wealth. No Western leader has ever made a public visit, leaving many South Sudanese feeling forgotten. But not by Pope Francis. He arrived in the capital, Juba, on Friday after visiting the Congo — an African tour intended to shine a light on some of the continent's most troubled yet ignored countries. Francis immediately issued an urgent appeal to the country's leaders whose violent squabbling plunged South Sudan into civil war in 2013 and continues to sow chaos despite a shaky peace deal. "No more bloodshed, no more conflicts, no more violence and mutual recriminations about who is responsible for it," Francis said in the gardens of the Presidential Palace, sitting alongside South Sudan's president, Salva Kiir, and other authorities. "Leave the time of war behind and let a time of peace dawn!" Excitement has been building for weeks in Juba, where colourful murals of Francis appeared on the ramshackle streets, and authorities laid the route to the papal nunciature with a new tarmac road, still a rarity in South Sudan. At Juba International Airport, Francis was welcomed by Kiir, a former rebel who has led South Sudan since 2011, much of it locked in a vicious feud with archrival Riek Machar. The last time the pope met both



Men deliver food aid, transported overnight in canoes over the floodwater, in Bentiu, South Sudan.

"NO MORE BLOODSHED, NO MORE CONFLICTS, NO MORE VIOLENCE AND MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS ABOUT WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR IT. LEAVE THE TIME OF WAR BEHIND AND LET A TIME OF PEACE DAWN!," SAYS POPE FRANCIS

men was at the Vatican in 2019 when, in a dramatic gesture, he prostrated himself and kissed their shoes — a calculated show of humility intended to pressure them into resolving the rivalry that sparked the civil war and led to an estimated 400,000 deaths. The two men also represent South Sudan's biggest fault line: Kiir is a member of the Dinka ethnic group, which dominates the government and security forces, while Machar belongs to the Nuer, the Dinka's bitter rivals. If those leaders expected that Francis would be an entirely sympathetic visitor, they received a rude shock on Friday when he lashed out at the notorious, grand-scale corruption that has seen billions of dollars in oil revenue vanish into thin air — much of it the fault of the leaders gathered around him. "Future generations will either venerate your names or cancel their memory, based on what you now do," he said. "The inequitable distribution of

funds, secret schemes to get rich, patronage deals, lack of transparency — all these pollute the riverbed of human society. They divert resources from the very things most needed." Francis came with unusually prominent companions: the archbishop of Canterbury and the symbolic head of the global Anglican Communion, Justin Welby, and the leader of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields. In the colonial era, Christian missionaries in Sudan were divided by the Nile River, with Catholics allowed to preach on one side and Anglicans on the other. Now the "three wise men," as some have dubbed them, are uniting for a joint pilgrimage — the first of its kind, church leaders say — in an effort to bring the plight of suffering South Sudanese to global attention. Sudan is a predominantly Christian country of 11 million people, of which the Catholic Church claims 6 million, including Kiir. Even so, the papal kiss of 2019 had only modest impact on the country's deadly divide. Although Kiir and Machar formed a unity government in 2020, local conflicts continue to rage, often manipulated by national leaders, especially Kiir, as a means of undercutting rivals or consolidating power, analysts and diplomats say. A plan to integrate duelling armed groups into the national army is incomplete. — The New York Times

Of Munster’s and mobiles, not mice nor men

Living in today’s world, and looking back over our shoulders, I wonder how many of us yearn for the quieter life of yesterday? Just think about it... has every technological advance, every ‘must have,’ life-enhancing development been for the good of mankind, or have some simply created complexities that were never meant to be?

For instance, I am incredibly thankful for my desktop personal computer, with its word processor allowing me to make, erase, or correct a million mistakes. Without going to my library, or my dictionary, I can check with just a couple of clicks and a few keystrokes, any reference, resource, fact, or text, and proceed with my thoughts barely hindered. Previously, I would write, or type, with a myriad of sheets of paper around me, all with words, sentences, quotations, facts, statistics, or ‘doodlings,’ in my writing. It was hard work by comparison with today, chaotic, and often ‘character building,’ and when you are a two-fingered typist like me, incredibly frustrating.

On the other hand, I feel that I could easily do without my mobile phone.

What about you? Could you live without, or could you imagine living without, your mobile phone? I’m not fussed to be honest. I don’t get on the ‘upgrade train,’ and have to have the latest model, in fact the last time I changed my phone was so I could get one with larger text buttons, because my sausage-fingers made texting more demanding than it should have been. That said, I am now forced to keep my mobile phone close at hand, as every-man-and-his-dog are now utilising two factor verifications. What started a couple of years ago as a banking industry practice, has now become compulsory, it seems, for energy suppliers, emails, online shopping, and sign-ups for governmental and health agencies.

So now, my Android (I never fell



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

for the Apple), goes everywhere I go. It sits like an inconvenient lump in my pocket, larger and heavier than any wallet I have ever had, mis-shaping whatever refinement and sartorial elegance I ever had, or thought I had. Oh, I could just carry it in my hand, but then when I do that I so often forget to pick it up, and spend half the day looking for it. And really, I just don’t like it!

I know. Somebody might want, or need, to ‘get-a-hold-of-me,’ urgently. Honestly... if there is an urgent need to contact me, it’s probably bad news and I don’t want to hear it, or would rather hear it later. What did you say, I need it to check my emails? No, that’s why I have an office and a study, so I can read my emails, triage them, and respond effectively. But what about photos? I rarely take them... and selfies... goodness me. It’s bad enough having to have my photo taken sometimes. Me taking a photo of me, aaaaaaargh! That has never been one of my life priorities. What else? Paying for stuff? Um, money, maybe, or cards? Oh, I dunno.

Certainly, among the youth of today, there is significant reliance upon their phones. We have rules in school to prevent distractions, and to ensure class tasks are ‘genuinely’ completed, which is a whole ‘nother debate, with the disciplinary consequences being loss of phone for the hour or the day under the school’s stated guidelines. Oh, what drama ensues when the beloved mobiles are taken away. I’m not kidding. It’s dramatic, it’s life-changing, and not in a good way! It strains teacher/student relationships like nothing else. So, what have we come to? We have created a monster, a Frankenstein. Or maybe just a Munster, a benign monstrosity we can laugh with? Nah... didn’t really think so.

But guess what? My phone has had the last laugh... I have bought a new car, it’s perfect for me, but I must plug my phone into the touchscreen to access my maps, so I can find my way around... so I DO need it. Aaaaaaargh!

HAS EVERY TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE, EVERY ‘MUST HAVE,’ LIFE-ENHANCING DEVELOPMENT BEEN FOR THE GOOD OF MANKIND

CELEBRATION TIME



Sri Lankan Army parachute troopers take part in the country's 75th Independence Day celebrations in Colombo on Saturday. – AFP

Japan’s pursuit of economic security

In the last few months, particularly after the release of Japan’s new National Security Strategy document in December last year, the phrase “economic security” has acquired inordinate attention in Japan.

Safeguarding the economic interests is an integral part of any country’s security policies, Japan is perhaps among the select-few countries that are very seriously working on the adoption of the concept of economic security. In fact, in Japan’s NSS document, the authors have tried to strike a balance between the strategic security and economic security. Intense focus on the economic security by the Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s regime is quite palpable in its every action. Interestingly, unlike the main chapter of the NSS, which explicitly declares China as the “disruptive force for regional and global stability.

In many ways, Japan’s economic security policies, which embody the concept of shoring up national interests from an economic perspective, are different from other countries. Envisioned in 2019 by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP as a part of formal recommendation, Japan’s “economic security strategy” was officially released by the party in the last quarter of 2020. The last two years have seen consistent work by the LDP leadership to lay down a comprehensive implementation plan



Dr Imran Khalid

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ENVISIONED IN 2019 BY THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY AS A PART OF FORMAL RECOMMENDATION, JAPAN’ S ‘ECONOMIC SECURITY STRATEGY’ WAS OFFICIALLY RELEASED BY THE PARTY IN THE LAST QUARTER OF 2020

— which includes supply chain resiliency, nurturing of critical industries of the future as well as induction of the corporate sector in the whole process.

An entire section has been dedicated to “Promoting Economic Security Policies to Achieve Autonomous Economic Prosperity in the country’s new 26-page National Security Strategy document. The most striking part of the economic security in Japan is the plan to redesign the entire government structure and functions on the basis of this central theme. Interestingly, in a bid to dilute attention from his continuously waning public approval ratings, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has intensified the internal branding of the phrase “economic security”. He has been quite successful in this gimmick.

Courtesy Kishida’s personal obsession, “economic security” has become a new mantra in Japan, and it is being routinely used in the prime time talk shows in electronic media and in the government strategy documents. Not surprisingly, the scope and definition of economic security in Japan is not well demarcated, it includes a diverse plethora of multiple — and often overlapping — initiatives.

A new ministry of economic

security has been created at the cabinet level and it is assigned an economic division within the National Security Secretariat, which is planning and coordinating economic security policies with other ministries such as foreign affairs, defense, intelligence and financial services. Exactly like any strategic security policy, Japan’s economic security is focused on both “protection and growth” aspects: three divisions are assigned to oversee the defense mechanisms such as tech controls, visa screening and cybersecurity, besides devising industrial policies to support the critical new industries.

The Economic Security Promotion Act (ESPA), which was approved by the parliament in May 2022, reflects the span



Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during the first day of an ordinary session at the lower house of parliament in Tokyo, Japan. – Reuters file photo

and depth of economic security thinking in Japan. Four key areas are focused by the ESPA: securing supply chains of critical material, nondisclosure of patents, patronising the development of advanced technologies and safeguarding the infrastructure.

In fact, economic security is not just about “security”, it is the integral part of the Kishida regime’s long-term plan for the resurgence of Japan’s economy, which is suffering from the “lost decades” due to stagnant growth rates. So, growth is the dominant feature of Kishida’s economic security policies. Unlike the United States, where economic security is limited to trade war and technology competition with Beijing, Japan’s economic security concept is much wider and

holistic in approach — with focus on fostering domestic economy on broader terms and to devise the programme to make it more competitive and relevant.

Interestingly, while a big section is allocated in the NSS on China’s growing belligerent attitude — in the context of its military preparedness — but there is no explicit mention of China in the section pertaining to economic security. Nonetheless the context is predominately China-centric.

“Japan will curb excessive dependence on specific countries... promote capital reinforcement of private enterprises with critical goods and technologies, and strengthen the function of policy-based finance, in pursuit of protecting and nurturing critical goods,” says the NSS.

Unquestionably, the economic security package is quite comprehensive in its outlook and approach, but it is too early to predict the quantum and complexion of the metamorphosis in the corporate behavior, particularly with reference to China, which incidentally happens to be Japan’s largest trading partner. The implementation of the ESPA is still in the nascent stage and its subsidies are yet to be fully tested.

sport

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Sepov claims Ironman honours

FINLAND’S KRISTA TAKES WOMEN’S CROWN IN MUSCAT

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Multiple Ironman champion Ilya Sepov clinched the Ironman 70.3 Oman Muscat 2023 honours at Shatti Al Qurum here on Saturday. The Russian triathlete claimed the men’s overall title in Muscat by finishing in four hours four minutes and seven seconds in the total race distance of 113 km which included 1.9 km swim, 90 km road bike and 21.1 km run. Sepov clocked a timing of 26min 26 secs in swim, 02:15:33 in biking and 01:17:32 in run. Bryan van Rutten of the Netherlands claimed the overall second position by finishing in 04:06:27. Portugal’s Raphael Domingos took the third spot in 04:07:30 among the 339 finishers in the race. Irish triathlete Niall McCarthy of Sliante Endurance team (04:14:02) was fourth and Flaurian Kaufmann of Switzerland (04:14:16) finished fifth. Oman Triathlon’s David Hynes (04:14:30) came in sixth position. KRISTA ON TOP In the women’s section, Finland’s Krista Kuusijarvi bagged the top honours by finishing in 04:45:25 (00:35:17, 02:32:38 and 01:31:39 in three stages). Belgium’s Liesbeth Leysen (05:00:02) claimed the second spot while Ireland’s Michelle Nagle (05:01:44) of Sliante Endurance team finished third among the 73 finishers in the section. South Africa’s Jacqueline Engelbrecht (05:03:56) took the fourth position and Switzerland’s Ines Kneubuhler (05:07:44) of CNN Tri Nyon finished fifth. His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said was the chief guest for the concluding award ceremony in presence of Azzan bin Qasim bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, and chief organiser



PHOTOS BY FAISAL AL BALUSHI

Mohammed al Obaidani, CEO of Triathlon Middle East (TRI.ME).

ABU DHABI POLICE CHAMPIONS
In the team relay, Team Abu Dhabi Police won the top place with a timing of 03:51:08. Great Britain’s Team Cyclekom (04:01:28) was second while Oman’s Team Mas claimed the third spot with a timing of 04:47:12. Team Happy Crampers (05:02:51) took the fourth spot and Team Kaspi.kz (05:04:11) finished fifth out of 16 teams. Young Omani triathletes Salim al Nabhani (04:53:19) and Omar al Rashdy (05:18:05) of Oman Triathlon team impressed by finishing fourth and sixth respectively in the men’s 18-24 category.

SPECTACULAR COURSE
The 2023 Ironman 70.3 Oman route included a swim in the Sea of Oman waters off Shatti Al Qurum, followed by a bike and run route that took the athletes through Muscat’s magnificent urban settings and historic Old Quarter, as well as through the spectacular mountain and desert terrain surrounding the capital. The route also tracked its way past many of the capital’s tourism highlights — including the Muttrah Corniche and Souq, Al Alam Royal Palace, Royal Opera House Muscat, and the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. The race’s start, transition zone and finish line all were situated at the same location at Shatti Al Qurum as the triathletes, their support crews, and the large number of spectators enjoyed an action-packed race atmosphere in one central ‘stadium’ style location. The event also included an Ironkids Muscat Run on February 3 for boys and girls aged three to thirteen years. The Ironman Race Village operated from February 2 to 4, providing an action-packed hub of entertainment for competitors and endurance sport fans in Oman.





PSM Women's claim championship

MUSCAT: Pakistan School Muscat Women's team beat Indian Social Club Women's convincingly by 6 wickets in the final of the Oman Cricket Women's League Season 2022-23 powered by TM Done.

In the lead to the final, PSM Women's registered 3 victories in 4 games while ISC Women's also registered 3 victories in 4 games, their only defeat was against PSM Women's in the league stage of the tournament.

PSM Women's won the crucial toss and put ISC to bat first. ISC's Suhaani Dadhwal (30 of 51; 2x4) and Geetha Jagdish (27 of 48; 3x4) stitched a steady 69 run partnership for the 2nd wicket stand. ISC were cruising to put up a formidable total but PSM Women's did well to restrict them. Sani E Zehra, Sameera Khan and Hina Javed picked up a wicket each to end ISC Women's team on 108/4 in 20 overs. In response, Hina Javed (25 of 33; 2x4) and skipper Sameera Khan (32 of 28; 3x4) gritty and determined batting created a base for them to get the target with ease. Hira Javed (17 of 23; 1x4) contributed to the chase to take them over the line in 17.1 overs losing 4 wickets. Trupti Pawde, Flavia Dsouza and Sushma Shetty bagged a wicket each. PSM Women stormed in and hurdled to celebrate their victory.

In the post match presentation ceremony, Mr. Paul Sheridan – Vice Chairman, Oman Cricket, Ms. Vaishali Jesrani — Women's Co-Ordinator and Board Adviser and Mr. Duleep Mendis — Chief

Development Officer, Oman Cricket were present.

Vaishali Jesrani addressed the opening note, said, "I would firstly thank Oman Cricket and its board to back and help develop cricket among women in Oman. I would also like to thank the participating teams, their management and the participants for putting up great cutting-edge competitiveness in every game. I would congratulate PSM Women and ISM Women for their podium finish. We envision having 8 teams in the Women's Domestic League in the coming years and we expect each and everyone to contribute to be able to play ICC tournaments in the near future. We are also looking to play more cricket through the calendar year and look forward to your participation."

The player of the match for the final was handed by Mr. Duleep Mendis to Sameera Khan. The league accolades comprising of Best Batting was handed by Mr. Duleep Mendis to Nikitha Jagdish (ISM Women's) and Best Bowling was handed by Mr. Duleep Mendis to Sameera Khan (PSM Women's). The player of the tournament was bagged by Hina Javed (PSM Women's) for her all-round performance during the league. Mr. Paul Sheridan handed the Runners Up trophy to ISC Women's skipper, Trupti Pawde and handed the Champions Trophy to PSM Women's skipper, Sameera Khan to conclude the Season 2022-23 of the Women's Domestic Cricket League in Grand Style.



Al Mouj Golf Prepares to Welcome World's Top Pro Golfers

MUSCAT: Oman's championship golf course Al Mouj Golf is gearing up to host some of the world's best professional golfers including Sergio Garcia, Louis Oouisthazen and Joaquin Niemann at The International Series, the elevated series of tournaments on the Asian Tour.

Taking place at the oceanfront course over four days between 9th and 12th February, the Al Mouj Golf event is the first leg of ten events in 2023. Garcia, Oouisthazen and Niemann are part of an impressive line-up of 132 players entered which includes two winners of major tournaments, a Ryder Cup/President Cup player, and 14 golfers ranked in the World's top 300 all competing for their share in a total prize fund of \$2 million.

Spain's Garcia has won 36 international tournaments as a professional, most notably the 2017 Masters Tournament whilst South Africa's Oouisthazen's titles include the 2010 Open Championship. He has also finished runner-up in the four major championships of the Masters, the US Open, the 2015 Open Championship, and the PGA Championship.

Other big names include



Brooks Koepka of the USA who in October 2018 became world number one in the Official World Golf Ranking for 47 weeks after winning the 2018 CJ Cup. Fellow American Sihwan Kim plays on the European Tour and the Asian Tour, where he has won two titles.

One of the most prominent players is Joaquin Niemann of Chile who has won twice on the PGA Tour and was the number one ranked amateur golfer from May 2017 to April 2018. Joaquin has reached a career-high 15th in world rankings in April 2022, and has been a top 50 player for more than two years.

Two other players that are ones to watch based on past achievements and current form are Graeme McDowell of Northern Ireland and Scott Vincent of Zimbabwe. Vincent

has won three times on the Japan Golf Tour and in 2022 he won the International Series England and eventually went on the clinch the victory of being The International Series' inaugural winner.

McDowell has a record of 11 tournament victories on the European Tour, and four on the PGA Tour, including one major championship, the 2010 US Open at Pebble Beach.

CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani says: "Bringing world-class players to experience Oman for the first time through the international series promises to promote the country across continents, elevating the competitive experience for players on the Asian Tour. Al Mouj Golf, a world-renowned top 100 course, continues to make a significant impact in supporting and driving

the country's sports-tourism sector."

"With so many incredible players about to arrive in Muscat, excitement is building particularly for golf fans who will have the chance to watch these professionals up close. We invite spectators of all ages to come and experience the competition over the four-day period. Our club will be open to the public during this time and to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all, we will provide dedicated transportation to the golf course"

Al Mouj Golf has now received 23 International Awards and welcomes 16,000 golfers and 35,000 guests annually, many more are expected as part of this latest competition. The course is a key asset of Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate's leading leisure and lifestyle destination, and a joint venture between Majid Al Futtaim Properties, OMNAN, and Tanmia. As Oman's first Integrated Tourism Complex Al Mouj Muscat has delivered significant socio-economic impact on job creation, development, foreign direct investment, growth in the number of SMEs as well as across the tourism sector.

Oman Golf Association Tee Up Partnership with Sohar Aluminium

MUSCAT: In an official signing ceremony held at Ghala Golf Club, Sohar Aluminium continued their support of golf in Oman by renewing as a partner of the Oman Golf Association (OGA) for 2023. The partnership agreement was signed by Mundhir al Barwani, Chairman of the OGA and Eng. Said al Masoudi, Chief Executive Office of Sohar Aluminium.

Established in 2009 by the Ministry of Sports Affairs, the Oman Golf Committee was formed to grow and govern the sport of golf in the Sultanate of Oman, their efforts and progress were formally recognised in 2020 when the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth announced the formation of the Oman Golf Association. The aims of the Oman Golf Association are to increase participation and awareness in an inclusive way, to develop elite Omani talent, and to use the sport of golf to promote tourism and investment.

Mundhir al Barwani, Chairman of the OGA is quoted as saying, "We are delighted that Sohar Aluminium will continue as a partner of the OGA. Their signing comes on the eve of the first

ever International Series Oman tournament which is part of the Asian Tour, the field of players who will be competing in the Sultanate of Oman are extremely high profile and this is sure to raise the interest levels in Oman from overseas, but also will inspire many within the Sultanate of Oman to get involved in golf. Through the support of Sohar Aluminium the OGA will be able to continue to grow and develop the game, giving people the opportunity to try the game for the first time, as well as developing our more established players to prepare them to compete at the highest level. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and to His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said for their unlimited support and guidance."

At the signing ceremony, Eng. Said al Masoudi, commented: "We are pleased to continue our long-term partnership with Oman Golf Association which further cements our commitment towards the growth and sustainability of golf in Oman. We hope that this will have a clear and direct impact



and contribute to achieving the objectives of the OGA to increase awareness and participation of golf in the domestic and international markets and ensure that this sport is used to promote the general interests of the Sultanate of Oman, both locally and globally."

Some of the OGA's activities that will be supported through the partnership with Sohar Aluminium include GOLadies, which is an introductory programme targeted at Omani women and girls, GOjuniors which provides a series of competitions

for youngsters to develop their skills and build friendships, and the further development of the Oman National Teams who represent the Sultanate of Oman in tournaments at home and abroad in men's, ladies and under 13, 15 and 18 categories.

The Oman Golf Association's mission, with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth is to raise awareness and participation levels for golf in Oman to give golfers of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to play the sport. The Association aims to create an environment that allows beginners to learn and serious golfers to strive to the top, in an inclusive and sustainable way.

The Oman Golf Association (OGA) was established by the Ministry of Sports Affairs on the 14th of January 2009, and is responsible for managing all technical, management, financial and organisational aspects of golf as a sport and its implementation in the Sultanate of Oman or abroad after coordination with the ministry.

Sohar Aluminium LLC was formed in September 2004 to undertake a landmark Greenfield aluminium smelter project in the Sultanate of Oman and has an annual production capacity of more than 390,000 tonnes of high-quality primary aluminium. It is jointly owned by OQ S.A.O.C, TAQA, and Rio Tinto.

SCORCHERS BEAT HEAT TO WIN FIFTH BIG BASH LEAGUE TITLE



PERTH, Australia: Teenager Cooper Connolly's big hitting at the death and skipper Ashton Turner's heroic 53 saw Perth Scorchers beat Brisbane Heat to win an unprecedented fifth Twenty20 Big Bash League title on Saturday.

Their fireworks propelled them to 178-5 and a nail-biting five-wicket win with four balls left in front of a record 53,886 parochial fans at Perth Stadium after Brisbane put on 175-7.

It was a successful title defence by a side who beat the Sydney Sixers in last season's decider, with Saturday's win securing a fifth trophy in only the competition's 12th year.

"It's a surreal feeling. I've played a lot of games of cricket but you never know how it will pan out," said man-of-the-match Turner

after his 32-ball knock.

"We are in rarified air at the moment, we have a lot of guys in form and that's not always the case. A lot of guys have contributed to wins throughout the season."

A victory looked highly unlikely when Turner was run out after a horror mix-up with Nick Hobson, leaving them needing 39 needed off 19 balls.

But young gun Connolly smashed 25 off 11 balls to turn the game on its head.

He crunched 18 of those from a James Bazley over to leave them needing 20 off the final 12 balls.

Hobson then smashed a huge six followed by a no-ball five in the last over to secure the victory.

"At 19 (years old) to have this crowd cheer for me, couldn't have asked for anything better. It's a dream come true," said left-hander



Connolly. "I had full confidence in myself."

The clash culminated a season marked by thrilling finishes, controversial moments, outstanding individual performances, and more than one million fans through the turnstiles.

Perth earned home-ground advantage after finishing on top of the regular season table, then knocking off the Sixers in a qualifying match last weekend.

The Heat only finished fifth and had to come through three knockout games, all away from home, to reach the final.

Both teams were depleted with the Heat's Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Matt Renshaw and Mitchell Swepson all departing earlier this week for Australia's tour of India.

The Scorchers were without

fast bowler Lance Morris and team-mate Ashton Agar who are also preparing for the four-Test Border-Gavaskar series starting on Thursday in Nagpur.

Heat skipper Jimmy Peirson won the toss and batted first with Josh Brown coming out with all guns blazing, smacking 25 off the opening 11 balls.

But his luck soon ran out and after the opening barrage, the Scorchers restricted Brisbane to 86-1 by the halfway mark.

Jason Behrendorff removed Sam Heazlett for 34, snapping a dangerous 79-run stand with Nathan McSweeney, then Peirson for three in the same over.

McSweeney fell for 41 before Max Bryant smashed an aggressive 31 from 14 balls to ensure a handy total.

— AFP

Zverev storms to Davis Cup win after being cleared of abuse

PARIS: Alexander Zverev defeated three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka in the Davis Cup on Friday as the German star returned to the courts for the first time since being cleared of domestic abuse.

The 25-year-old Zverev swept past Wawrinka 6-4, 6-1 in Trier to bring Germany level with Switzerland after the opening day of their qualifier.

On Tuesday, Zverev was told by the ATP that there was "insufficient evidence" to substantiate allegations against him of abusing a former girlfriend.

Former world number two

Zverev always denied the claims, describing them as "baseless".

On Friday, Wawrinka, who helped his country win the 2014 Davis Cup, was returning to the team competition for the first time in eight years.

Now ranked 135 in the world, he was comfortably beaten for the fifth time in five meetings by Zverev.

"I think it's important to go into tomorrow's ties with a 1-1 scoreline," said Zverev after recording just a second match win in eight months.

He missed the last six months

of the 2022 season having suffered ankle ligament damage in June during a French Open semi-final defeat to Rafael Nadal.

"That was the best match since my injury. It's going in a positive way and I hope to continue progressing."

Marc-Andrea Huesler had given Switzerland the lead with a 2-6, 6-2, 6-4 win over Oscar Otte.

The tie continues on Saturday with a doubles and two singles rubbers as the Swiss look to beat Germany for the first time having lost all nine meetings since their maiden clash in 1939.

Mackenzie McDonald and Tommy Paul gave the United States a 2-0 lead in their qualifier against Uzbekistan.

- 'Bring out the broomsticks!' - McDonald, who knocked Nadal out of the Australian Open last month, eased past Sergey Fomin 6-4, 6-1 in Tashkent before Tommy Paul, a semifinalist at the season-opening Grand Slam in Melbourne, defeated Khumoyun Sultanov 6-1, 7-6 (8/6).

Despite his lowly ranking of 480, Sultanov opened up a 4-0 lead in the second set over top-20 player Paul before the American's

greater experience paid off.

"He picked up his level a ton," admitted Paul. "I felt like I wasn't prepared for it."

Of Saturday's rubbers, he added: "A sweep would be nice — bring out the broomsticks!"

France, the 10-time champions, were 1-1 against Hungary in Tatabanya.

World number 182 Zsombor Piros stunned 45th-ranked Benjamin Bonzi 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 before Ugo Humbert levelled the qualifier by seeing off Marton Fucsovics 6-3, 6-2.

"It was my first match in the

Davis Cup and I was very excited," said 24-year-old Humbert, the world number 86.

In Stockholm, Sweden opened up a 2-0 lead over Bosnia thanks to straight-sets wins by brothers Mikael and Elias Ymer.

Norway, without world number four Casper Ruud, slipped 2-0 down at home to Serbia, playing without recently-crowned Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic.

Andreja Petrovic, selected instead of French and US Open runner-up Ruud, is ranked a lowly 1,205 in the world. — AFP

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Oman Exports Platform to take local products global

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Oman Exports Platform, an online one-stop shop for export facilitation and development, has announced a major ramp-up of its capabilities with the goal of taking the ‘Made in Oman’ brand to global markets.

The platform, launched two years ago as an initiative of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), connects Omani companies with a network of professionals, service providers, and organisations in Oman and abroad to help Omani companies grow internationally and increase their in-country value (ICV) by fostering the creation of local supply chains.

Besides offering matchmaking services, the platform offers Omani manufacturers free export and trade assistance, counseling, funding, and financing support. Local businesses can also find leads on prospective international partners, and services to support market entry/expansion and development of new trade resources and opportunities for

training support.

Two years on, Oman Exports Platform has now evolved into an interactive portal that is now fully plugged into the global trading ecosystem in what Thamir al Marhoon, CEO, has described as a world-first.

“Oman Exports Platform has been created to support Omani exports and help companies connect with potential importers and enable them to reach new global markets,” said Al Marhoon. “The platform has several features, including virtual customs clearance services, logistics and legal services, and so on, all offered against competitive prices.”

Speaking to the Observer, the CEO revealed that the platform is presently linked to a global ecosystem of over 200 platforms serving more than 150 countries from around the world.

“These 200 platforms offer access to a database of around 25,000 international experts specializing in all aspects of global trade.

Omani businesses registering on Oman Exports Platform can take advantage of the information and services provided by this global



THE PLATFORM, LAUNCHED TWO YEARS AGO AS AN INITIATIVE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY, AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION (MOCIIP), CONNECTS OMANI COMPANIES WITH A NETWORK OF PROFESSIONALS, SERVICE PROVIDERS, AND ORGANISATIONS IN OMAN AND ABROAD TO HELP OMANI COMPANIES GROW INTERNATIONALLY AND INCREASE THEIR IN-COUNTRY VALUE (ICV) BY FOSTERING THE CREATION OF LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS

network, encompassing topics such as in-country value creation, localisation of products and services, creating job opportunities for Omani youth, and so on.”

Importantly, this platform also links Omani exporters with international organisations, including the likes of the World Trading Organisation which, during its meeting in Geneva in October, discussed efforts to promote trade in general, support

exporting companies and nurture the development of SMEs.

Further, in line with its goal to enable Omani manufacturers to access global markets, the platform encourages prospective exporters to sign up for its ‘Export Readiness’ programme. “Exporters can evaluate their readiness and then go through a programme that help them prepare for international markets in a more organised way,” Al Marhoon explained.

A key focus of the platform is on non-oil exports, including manufactured goods, food products, minerals, and so on, according to the CEO.

But smaller players, notably SMEs and artisans working in the handicrafts sector, are supported as well, he said. The platform’s capabilities were showcased during the Saudi-Oman Investment, which was held in Riyadh last week.

Participating companies from Oman took advantage of the platform to feature profiles on their businesses and highlight their products and services as well, in a bid to tap markets and business opportunities in Saudi Arabia.

Madayn industrial cities pull in over RO 7 billion in investments



MUSCAT: The industrial cities of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) continue to benefit from strong local and international investor interest across all manufacturing-related sectors.

According to Hamad bin Hamoud al Qasabi (pictured), Acting CEO — Madayn, total investments in Madayn’s industrial cities have surpassed RO 7 billion as of end-2022, providing employment to more than 19,000 Omanis. In 2022 alone, more than 300 projects with investments totaling over RO 300 million were finalised for developments in these parks, he said.

Madayn is now working to improve the services it provides to investors, having opened ‘Masar’ centers in all industrial cities. It is now working on developing the digital transformation system and automating its service, he stated.

Additionally, Madayn is working on development projects in all of its industrial cities, for which more than RO 120 million has been allocated for the development of infrastructure and utilities.

Some of these projects are nearing completion and others are in the implementation stages, including the Ibri

Industrial City project and the Mahas Industrial City (Khasab Wilayat).

These industrial cities will contribute to socioeconomic growth in the governorates of Al Dhahirah and Musandam respectively.

Two more industrial cities are under initial development in the governorates of North Al Sharqiyah and Dhofar, he said.

Madayn is also developing the infrastructure of its existing industrial cities, with expansions under way at Sur, Nizwa and Al Buraimi, while a fourth phase has been completed at Raysut Industrial City. — ONA



“
Madayn is now working to improve the services it provides to investors, having opened ‘Masar’ centres in all industrial cities. It is now working on developing the digital transformation system and automating its service

HAMAD BIN
HAMOUD AL
QASABI
Acting CEO, Madayn

Expat remittances fall to 10-year-low in 2021

Beneficial impact: Gross national savings rise 78.7% in 2021, buoyed by increase in gross domestic savings and lower current transfers abroad: CBO



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Expatriate remittances declined 7.5 per cent to around RO 3.120 billion in 2021, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) revealed in its newly released Annual Report for the year.

The slump, coming on top of a 4.0 per cent drop in remittance outflows during the previous year, was attributed to a sharp fall in the size of the expatriate workforce that year, fuelled by the global economic downturn and compounded further by widespread disruptions unleashed by the pandemic.

“Leakage of savings in the form of current transfers (mainly workers’ remittances abroad) declined by 7.5 per cent during 2021, reflecting the decline in expatriate workers,” the apex bank noted in its report. Significantly, remittances have been on a downward trend since 2015, when outflows hit a peak of RO 4.226 billion.

The decline, of late, has mirrored a significant uptick in expatriate departures in the wake of the pandemic-induced economic downturn.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of expatriates working in the Sultanate of Oman plummeted to around 1.443 million in 2020 at the end of the first full year of the pandemic, down from 1.712 million in 2019. Their numbers further sank to 1.409 million in 2021, but have since rebounded to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 following a strong revival of the Omani economy.

On the flipside, gross domestic savings surged 30.5 per cent in 2021, coming on the back of a 34.6 per cent contraction during the previous year amid widespread business and economic impacts, as well as job losses, caused by the pandemic.

“The increase in gross domestic savings and lower current transfers abroad led to a significant growth of 78.7 per cent in gross national savings in 2021, against a decline of 55.4 per cent in 2020. Gross domestic savings to GDP ratio improved to 33.5 per cent in 2021 from 29.9 per cent a year ago, while gross national savings to GDP ratio increased to 17.5 per cent from 11.4 per cent in 2020,” the Central Bank stated.

Alpen Capital announces formation of advisory board



MUSCAT: Alpen Capital announces the formation of its Advisory Board consisting of highly experienced professionals with diversified business experience. The advisory board comprising of Yahya al Jabri, Wim Wienk and Eric Sarasin, intends to provide support and guidance on business development and expansion into new markets.

“We are very pleased to have such industry stalwarts on our advisory board. Over the past few years Alpen Capital has expanded its footprint beyond the GCC and is currently active in several markets in South Asia, Africa and Levant. The rich background of our advisory board members and insights provided by them will only help Alpen Capital further expand and strengthen its foothold in regional as well as international markets,” said Rohit Walia,

Executive Chairman and CEO of Alpen Capital.

Having vast experience of global corporate and investment banking, Yahya al Jabri began his career at Oman International Bank and has held senior and board positions in several leading businesses and financial institutions in Oman.

He was the Chairman of the Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm from 2011–2020 and Executive President of the Capital Market Authority from 1999 – 2011. Yahya al Jabri is currently the Chairman of Alizz Islamic Bank in Oman.

Wim Wienk is an accomplished senior banker with over 44 years of experience

Eric Sarasin has a 30-year track record in Banking at Morgan Stanley, Pictet & Cie, Citibank, and most recently Bank Sarasin (today Bank J. Safra Sarasin).

Ford 2-door Bronco WildTrak SUV with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Adventure seekers can now make the most of their wishes with the powerful and dependable 2-door Ford Bronco WildTrak SUV. The Bronco is now available with exclusive benefits. They include service 3 years/60,000 kms and Registration 1 Year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.) the offer is valid until March 1, 2023.

Besides sporting a tough and attractive design, the Bronco WildTrak takes on any terrain to offer some of the finest experiences on every journey.

The 2-door Bronco WildTrak delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence. Offering fantastic off-road experiences for drivers is the Bronco’s off-road mapping and drive technologies.

Bronco’s advanced four-wheel-drive technology is at the core of its off-road capabilities, and at the heart of it all is Bronco’s exclusive Terrain Management System with G.O.A.T.

Modes that is designed to help drivers better navigate any type of terrain. Up to seven driver-selectable modes are offered including Normal, Eco, Sport, Slippery and Sand, with Baja and Mud/Ruts.



The base system utilises a two-speed electronic shift-on-the-fly transfer case, while the optional advanced system features a two-speed electromechanical transfer case that adds an auto mode for on-demand engagement to select between 2H and 4H.

Available segment-first Trail Toolbox gives Bronco owners a suite of exclusive technologies to elevate their off-road experience. This includes Trail Control —

cruise control for low-speed trail driving, while Trail Turn Assist tightens off-road turning radiuses through torque vectoring, and the innovative Trail One-Pedal Drive acceleration/braking control makes for more precise and confident slow-mode rock crawling.

Segment-leading levels of off-road capability are possible thanks to Bronco’s available best-in-class 11.6-inch ground clearance,

maximum 29-degree break over angle and 37.2-degree departure angle, plus best-in-class water fording capability of up to 33.5 inches.

Thanks to Bronco’s legendary Baja racing DNA, each model brings forth a thrilling off-road experience and delivers it with modern, heritage-inspired style.

To deliver thrilling high-speed off-roading and overall driving performance, every Bronco comes with an independent front suspension for improved control, confidence and comfort.

Race-bred EcoBoost engines and a 10-speed automatic transmissions give the all-new Bronco the optimal combination of power, torque and gear ranges to perform in a wide variety of terrains and uses.

Those interested in experiencing the 2-door Ford Bronco can visit their nearest Ford showroom. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC.

Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.

Renaissance appoints chief communication officer

MUSCAT: Renaissance Services has appointed Mohana Prabhakar (pictured) as Chief Communication and Marketing Officer. Mohana took up the role in December 2022, bringing to Renaissance her comprehensive and strategic skills in media, content creation and delivery, publishing, marketing communication and brand



building.

In the over three decades of her career, 21 years of which have been in Oman, Mohana has held several roles - as equity researcher, business analyst, editor, columnist and events planner.

Her underlying commitment across these domains has been to differentiate, maintain quality and focus and always look for a fresh

approach.

Renaissance CEO, Stephen Thomas, said, “Mohana has made a transformational difference to the company’s communications from a consultancy perspective over recent years. We are now delighted to have her join us in the C-suite leadership team, where her transformative skills may be applied beyond communications.”

Ourshopee launches new centre in Ruwi



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 4

Well-known online shopping platform Ourshopee.com has announced a revamp of its operations in the Sultanate of Oman with the launch of new facilities in the CBD Area of Ruwi.

The new facilities were inaugurated by HH Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said with the attendance of Dr Shanith Mangalath, the founder and CEO of Ourshopee.

Ourshopee is a leading e-commerce platform in the GCC region, known for its wide range of products and exceptional customer service.

With a commitment to delivering on time and providing the best deals, Ourshopee has become a top choice for online shoppers in the region. The platform offers a diverse selection of products, from electronics and fashion to home goods and beauty.

Ourshopee has been serving the people of Oman since 2016 and has been

continuously growing and expanding its reach.

With the new modifications, the company aims to reach a wider audience and meet the market trends.

The new facilities include enhancements that will provide a seamless shopping experience for customers. The company is committed to providing high-quality products and services to its customers and the revamp is a testament to that commitment.

“We are thrilled to launch our new facilities in Oman,” said Dr Shanith Mangalath, CEO of Ourshopee. “We are dedicated to providing our customers with the best possible shopping experience, and this launch is a significant step towards achieving that goal.”

Ourshopee is confident that the new facilities and enhancements will help the company to continue to grow and establish itself as the leading online marketplace in Oman.

AVOD’s non-hydrogenated products fortify Oman’s health and wellbeing

MUSCAT: Areej Vegetable Oils and Derivatives SAOC (AVOD)’s transformation strategy has always put health and customers’ wellbeing at the forefront, and this has gained it the distinction of being Oman’s Most Trusted Brand year after year.

The brand’s Unique Selling Proposition (USP) is its consistent delivery of products, which offer the ideal balance of nutrition, health and wellness and taste, and encourage consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families.

‘Eat Right, Live Well’ philosophy is the epicentre of the company’s product development process and has made AVOD a trustworthy specialist in refining, processing, packaging and distribution of high-quality Trans Fat Free Cooking oils, Non-Hydrogenated Margarines, Vegetable Ghee, Fats and Mayonnaise.

The company’s continuous transformation takes a multi-pronged approach to create health-focused products. The state-of-the-art modern factory is constantly upgraded to meet



stringent quality controls. Packing materials such as tins, cans, plastic bottles, etc are manufactured in-house and filled immediately using automatic packing machines to ensure highest standards of hygiene.

The company’s commitment to safeguarding health and safety has earned it the ISO 9001 certificate for Quality Management System, ISO 14001 certificate for Environmental Management System and ISO 22000 certificates for Food Safety Management.”

Eng Salem Bortmany, CEO — AVOD, says, “Every product that comes out of the AVOD stable is a testament to its commitment to offer consumers the best of health and value.

After thorough research on the health risks that hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils pose to the physical well-being, which is trans-fats is converted into saturated fat.

AVOD decided to invest in technology to ensure that all its products are non-hydrogenated and free from harmful trans-fats. All products go through a heart-friendly process which is recognised and recommended by WHO.

AVOD is the first company in Oman to fortify and enrich its top-quality cooking oils with vitamins A & D, making them healthier choices in this category while Khafeef is the lightest frying oil, the first of its kind in the Sultanate

of Oman.”

He adds, “Our own transformation journey has mirrored that of our valued consumers. We are committed to building healthier and happier communities to ensure that our nation-building process is fortified further.

With more than three decades of successful operations in the Sultanate of Oman, AVOD has built a product portfolio that prides itself on being both high on quality and taste. The Company’s leading brands Minara, Sohar, Khafeef, Jabal Akhdar and Muscat Margarine are on every Omani kitchen.

A heritage brand and a market leader in delivering high quality and innovative products, AVOD is amongst the 20 largest public limited companies in the country and enjoys a substantial market share in Oman and its current exports are more than 75 per cent of its total business.

All the products are marketed in the GCC as well as other 30 export countries through experienced dedicated distribution chains.



Top 5 jobs that should fear artificial intelligence

STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of International Press Association.

The advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) and automation are transforming the way we work and have the potential to significantly disrupt many traditional jobs.

While these technologies can bring many benefits, such as increased efficiency and reduced costs, they also present challenges for workers who may find their jobs at risk of being automated. In this article, we'll take a look at the five most vulnerable jobs that are at risk of being disrupted by AI.

Data Entry Clerk: Data entry is a repetitive and time-consuming task that is often performed by humans. However, with the increasing accuracy and speed of AI, many data entry jobs are now at risk of being automated.

Companies are finding that investing in AI to perform these tasks not only saves time and money, but also reduces human error.

This shift towards automation is likely to have a significant impact on data entry clerks, who may need to re-skill and find new job opportunities in areas such as data analysis or process optimisation.

Telemarketers: AI-powered virtual assistants are becoming increasingly sophisticated, making them ideal for handling customer service and sales calls. These virtual assistants can process large amounts of information, respond quickly to customer inquiries, and even make recommendations, all while maintaining a high level of accuracy and efficiency. As a result, telemarketers may need to consider re-skilling and finding new opportunities in areas such as customer service management or sales strategy.

Bookkeepers and

Accountants: The routine accounting tasks of data entry, reconciliation, and tax preparation can now be performed by AI and machine learning algorithms. These algorithms are capable of analysing vast amounts of data and making predictions and recommendations, freeing up accountants to focus on higher-level tasks that require human judgment and decision-making.

While this shift towards automation may initially result in job losses for bookkeepers and accountants, it also presents new opportunities in areas such as financial analysis, strategic planning, and risk management.

Manufacturing and Assembly Line Workers: Automation and robots are becoming increasingly common in the manufacturing industry, as companies seek to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

From assembly line workers to machine operators, many jobs in the manufacturing industry are at risk of being automated in the coming years. Workers in the manufacturing industry may need to re-skill and consider new opportunities in areas such as industrial automation or robotics engineering.

Copywriters and Copy-Editors: With AI programs like ChatGPT it is now easier than ever to generate original content in a fly. However, not all that glitters is gold. Editors would still need to invest time to review what the AI engine outputs as it is occasionally factually incorrect. While AI and automation are transforming the way we work, they also present challenges for traditional jobs.

However, it's important to note that these changes can also create new opportunities, as new jobs are created in areas such as robotics, AI programming, and data analysis. As the job market continues to evolve, it's important to be proactive in developing new skills and adapting to the changing landscape.

This means keeping up to date with the latest technologies and trends, and being open to learning new skills and pursuing new job opportunities. Moreover, developing personal business relationships can help to strengthen one's professional position.

'Creating memorable experiences and building lasting connections'

LIJU CHERIAN

@lijuchermanoman

In the second part of this exclusive Observer interview, Haitham Mohammed Mattar (inset), Managing Director, India, Middle East & Africa (IMEA), IHG Hotels & Resorts, sheds light on the distinctive value proposition that IHG brings to the hospitality sector in the Sultanate of Oman, as well as the wider Middle East region.

The first part, published on January 27, 2023, outlines the growth of IHG's portfolio in Oman and its commitment to providing world-class hospitality experiences to visitors from different geographies and cultural backgrounds.

What stands out from among IHG competitors in the global market?

We have made major strides in recent years that are fueling growth for today and tomorrow. Whether that be enhancing the quality of our existing estate through new designs, F&B concepts, renovations and removals.

Or diversifying our brand portfolio by expanding our mainstream offer, transforming our Luxury & Lifestyle capabilities, providing a greater choice of resort locations and all-inclusive stays, and strengthening our ability to seal conversion deals.

For our guests, love and trust starts with consistently meeting



their expectations around product, service, cleanliness, availability and affordability.

Leading design, great F&B, an attractive loyalty offer, and cutting-edge technology also matter a great deal, and how our people bring it all together is what is creating the memorable experiences and building lasting connections.

How do you see the consumer landscape and their evolving needs in the next decade?

In a global study commissioned by IHG, we found that 83 per cent of consumers would choose a hotel brand that operates responsibly, with guests willing to spend on average 31 per cent more on accommodation that meets this need.

In response to this growing appetite for more eco-friendly stays, search engines and OTAs are now highlighting a hotel's credentials.

For example, Google now labels hotels meeting its sustainability criteria as Eco-certified and even Booking.com applies its Travel Sustainable badge to hotels.

This attention to how a hotel operates is shared across corporate and leisure guests, with an increasing number deciding whether to book a stay based upon a property's carbon footprint, sustainable practices and how it supports its local communities.

It's a trend that will continue to accelerate, with 90 per cent of IHG's top global customers having already made net-zero or carbon-neutral commitments in recent years. We have also seen some customers taking efforts to prioritise or flag sustainable hotels within their internal booking

channels.

What newer aspects do you plan to keep the guests tied to the hospitality sector?

We are bringing new brands to the region and diversifying our offering to keep guests with varied requirements engaged with IHG. In the last few years, we have launched voco, Hotel Indigo and Vignette in the Middle East as well as introduced our existing brands in the region to new markets.

As our guests embark on a new era of travel, we have transformed loyalty with IHG One Rewards — a new and improved offer that gives members more tailored experiences and many more options to earn and redeem points across our brands.

Through IHG One Rewards, we will continue to bring more enhancements to the guest experience which will include strategic partnerships to help our brands reach new audiences.

Oman International Hospital launches Med Academy

MUSCAT: The Oman International Hospital (OIH) launches the Med Academy on February 1, a 10-years project powered by Siemens Healthineers. The overall goal of Med Academy is promoting technical and clinical know-how of OIH employees aiming to increase skills leading to the provision of the best health care, in line with the highest quality standards worldwide.

The project includes onsite and online training sessions, e-education platforms, preceptorships, and symposiums. And it will be used as the foundation for the process of Accreditation of the hospital.

Oman International Hospital



was founded in 2021, in collaboration with an experienced European hospital management group (IGHs) and composed of three diverse shareholders: Oman

Brunei Investment Company, Suhail Bahwan Group, and Idealmed Global Healthcare Services (IGHS).

Marcelo Pereira CEO of OIH

also added that "With the assistance of a network of highly devoted and skilled medical professionals, renowned international doctors, sophisticated medical equipment, and cutting-edge technology in streamlining, OIH is committed to providing world-class treatment to the citizens of Oman as well as to the expatriate populace of the country."

Siemens Healthineers is a German leading medical technology company, with +66,000 highly dedicated employees pushing the boundaries of what's possible in healthcare to help improve people's lives around the world pioneer breakthroughs in healthcare.

MSX declines for 3rd week as investors await more disclosures

MUSCAT: The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) declined last week by 0.67% and closed at 4,719 points, declining for the third week in a row after losing about 31.8 points from last previous week. All sectoral indices recorded a raise except for the Financial sector index, which drop 70.4 points.

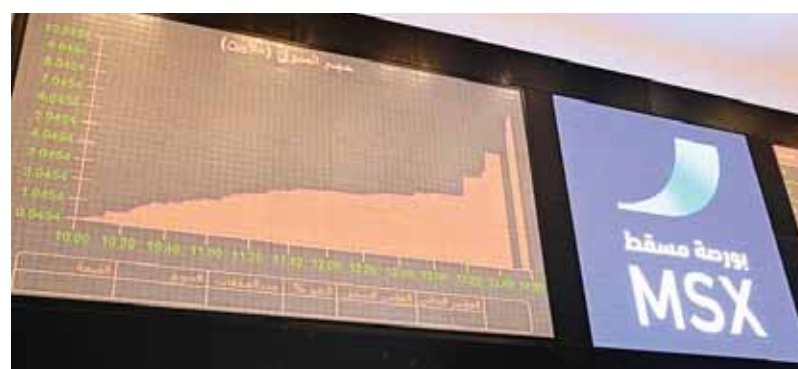
While the industrial sector index recorded the highest increase at 75.8 points, the Service sector index increased by about 11.6 points, and the Shariah index gained about five points.

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has joined the 'Tabadul' platform, the region's first digital exchange hub, established on the mutual market access model that provides a trading network between stock

exchanges regionally.

As a result, MSX's listed securities, along with those of ADX and BHB, are now available for digital trading, further enhancing liquidity and facilitating trading mechanisms for investors. The announcement came during a bell ringing ceremony, organised by the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange at its headquarters, to officially welcome MSX to Tabadul.

The total number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the Sultanate of Oman which is funded by the Inma Fund in 2022 stood at 144 projects in various economic sectors, with a total value of RO 20 million. At the forefront of those sectors is industry (20 %), followed by services (19 %), transport and logistics (16 %), infrastructure (15



%), trade (10 %), tourism (9 %) and the oil and gas sector (8 %).

The projects funded by Inma Fund in Oman's various governorates managed to boost their production lines and provided a number of products and services to the local market, which contributed to revitalising the economic movement and

increasing cash flow. The industry sector, which received the largest share of funding from the Inma Fund in 2022, is considered one of the vital sectors in Oman that contribute to boosting the GDP.

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rate at current prices of the Sultanate of Oman increased by 30.4 % to reach RO 32 billion

until the end of September 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

This came in the first edition of the 'Quarterly National Accounts Indicators' report issued by NCSI. It reviews the most important indicators at current and constant prices, the growth rates of economic activities, and the most important indicators supporting an increase in gross domestic product until the end of September 2022.

The report attributed this rise to the high growth rate of oil activities until the end of September 2022 at current prices, by 72.5 % compared to the same period in 2021, which is the highest among economic activities, in addition to the high growth rate in manufacturing

activities, achieving 65.6 % during the same period. The report stated that the value GDP at constant prices of the Sultanate of Oman until the end of September 2022 recorded an increase of 4.5 % to reach RO 26 billion, compared to the same period in 2021.

This increase is mainly attributed to the growth of oil activities until the end of September 2022 by 12 % at constant prices, which is considered the highest among economic activities, in addition to the increase in the growth rate of service activities by 5 %.

Meanwhile, the growth rate of construction activity decreased by 2.2 % until the end of September 2022 at current prices compared to the same period in 2021.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

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An escape to Masirah inspired a new odyssey of scents

A seven-hour drive from Muscat that includes an hour of ferry ride, Masirah seldom sees visitors that want to explore it for its scent. It has to take a fragrance connoisseur to make it an olfactory muse and thereby making it a destination not just for its beautiful scenery but for its ability to inspire creatives and artists... **P20**

Ancient Egypt's mummification ingredients came from far-flung locales

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS employed a host of exotic ingredients - some apparently imported from as far away as Southeast Asia - to mummify their dead, as revealed by a new analysis of containers unearthed at an embalming workshop more than 2,500 years old.

Researchers on Wednesday unwrapped the results of biochemical examinations of 31 ceramic vessels that once held embalming substances at the archaeologically-rich Saqqara site near Cairo, deciphering the chemistry of the mummification practice



used for millennia to prepare Egypt's dead for the afterlife.

The ancient Egyptians viewed preservation of the body after death as crucial to secure a worthy existence in the afterlife. Various substances, with roughly a dozen identified in this study, were applied to preserve human tissue and prevent decomposition stench - long before any understanding of microbial biology - before the body was wrapped.

For the past two centuries, scientists could only speculate about certain embalming

ingredients mentioned in ancient texts. But this workshop, discovered in 2016 by the late Egyptian scientist Ramadan Hussein near the ruins of the even-older pyramid of Unas and step pyramid of Djoser, held beakers and bowl-shaped vessels labeled with the ancient names of their contents, sometimes bearing instructions such as "to put on his head."

The researchers analyzed chemical residue in the containers.

"Most of the substances originated from outside Egypt," said archaeologist Philipp

Stockhammer of the Ludwig Maximilian University Munich in Germany, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature.

Many came from the eastern Mediterranean region, including cedar oil, juniper and cypress oil and tar, bitumen and olive oil. But a real surprise was the presence of substances sourced apparently from forests in Southeast Asia thousands of miles away. There was gum from the dammar tree, which grows only in tropical Southeast Asia, and the resin of the elemi tree, which came from Southeast Asia or tropical Africa.

"This points to the fact that these resins were traded over very large distances and that Egyptian mummification was somehow a driver towards early globalization and global trade," Stockhammer said.

"Embalming was carried out in a well-organized, institutional way," said biochemist and study co-author Mahmoud Bahgat of the National Research Centre in Cairo.

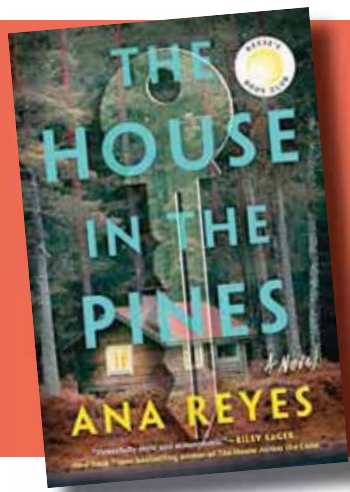
The underground embalming workshop was accessible through a shaft 40 feet (12 meters) deep. It dates to Egypt's 26th dynasty, or Saite period, from 664-525 BC at a time of Assyrian and Persian regional influence and waning Egyptian power. This was roughly two millennia after the Giza pyramids were built during the Old Kingdom period and six centuries after pharaoh Tutankhamun - whose mummy and fabulous funerary objects were found in 1922 - reigned during the New Kingdom period. — **Reuters**

READ

THE HOUSE IN THE PINES

BY ANA REYES

Seven years after witnessing her best friend drop dead, Maya returns to her Berkshires hometown to piece together what happened.



LIFESTYLE

Simon Colin, 37, a French orthoprosthesis by training and designer, shows a prosthesis he customised, at his U-Exist workshop in Roubaix. Colin created U-Exist in 2014, to "break the codes" of disability. — **AFP**



ENTERTAINMENT

A Bob Dylan signed record box set of "Bob Dylan - The Original Mono Recordings", is displayed during the media preview of Julien's MusiCares Charity Relief Auction, in Beverly Hills, California. — **AFP**





British piano musical comedy duo impresses Oman audience

By Georgina Benison

A British piano musical comedy duo, hot-footed from the Queen Mary II Cruise ship docked in Port Sultan Qaboos, performed a full length programme at the Oryx Theatre in MQ last week. The show was arranged by the British School Muscat, but open to all members of the public. Concert pianists Stephen Worbey and Keith Farrell regaled, amused and amazed music enthusiasts with their down-to-earth,

eclectic range of classics. In addition to their superb execution of their original arrangements, the whole concert was performed by heart – not a paper score in sight. They kicked off with an impressive rendition of Khachaturian's famous, "Sabre Dance" without falter and from then on their musical credentials and dazzling virtuoso technique were in no doubt. Johan Strauss' "Lightening Polka" lived up to its name, with the obligatory hand-clap audience-participation element not really

"Bohemian Rhapsody" at the piano, so they returned there with their four-hand arrangement. Contrast was the key to Worbey and Farrell's success, and Rachmaninov's 18th variation on a theme by Paganini was as sublime as any heart-rending concerto melody. Further interaction established an Australian connection with the audience and "Waltzing Matilda" was joined by a Didgeridoo effect emerging from the now dampened piano strings. An impossibly fast version of Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf

Crown Affair" which extemporised on, "Windmills of my Mind", and the rhythmically expansive, fast and furious "Czardas" dance by Vittorio Monti. The choreography as hands flew in the air and fingers danced on the keys in Khachaturian's, "Masquerade" was a sight to behold, a theatrical parody of criss-crossed Tango. They explained how they divide the piano into orchestral sections – hence the need to stretch and intertwine the hands to maintain the



accessible approach to the classical repertoire with no compromise in their technical showmanship. They were dressed in dapper performers' kit – with a novelty line in sparkly shoes! There was a constant banter throughout the two-hour show, building good audience rapport with anecdotes from their impressive show-biz history, endearing adults and young people alike to this odd couple's style of delivery. The Oryx Theatre's Yamaha Grand was featured centre stage, the four hands on one keyboard projected onto a screen behind them for even greater clarity of those twenty dazzling fingers as they danced their way through quite an

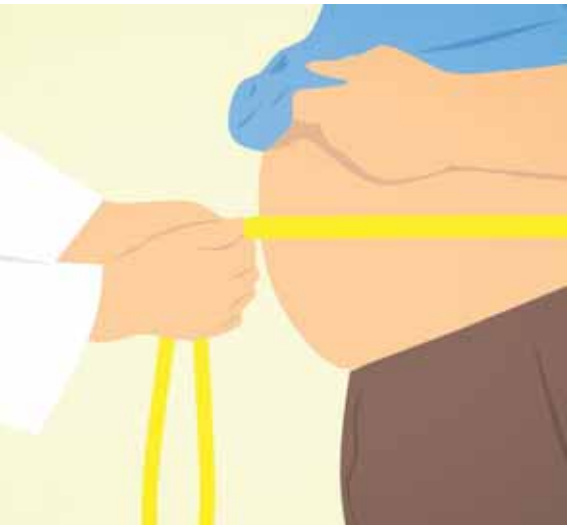
helping the discerning listener, but no doubt engaging others. Their digital dexterity made their work look so easy, but in fact the pair have a wealth of professional performance experience between them. Their knowledge of film music was exemplary too, and they dived inside the bowels of the piano to show how some composers prepared the strings for various filmic effects. They performed Bach's Prelude in C (which of course was not written for the contemporary piano forte but its predecessor) superimposed with Gounod's Ave Maria melody, hands overlapping and intertwined to keep each voice consistent. Pianist Freddie Mercury composed

Rag" was followed by Albeniz' famous "Asturias" but with dampening inside the piano to imitate the timbre of a guitar. Who knew that the ubiquitous Nokia ringtone was actually taken from a 19th century composition by Francisco Tárrega – embellished upon by the four hands – or that the highly successful, rich, evocative score to the 1941 film, "Dangerous Moonlight" was in fact a cheaper yet flamboyant Rachmaninov Pastiche; the "Warsaw Concerto" by English composer, Richard Addinsell? The second half opened with three hands on "Highland Cathedral" composed for the Edinburgh Tattoo, followed by Michel Legrand's sound track to the 1968 film, "The Thomas

integrity, and this was demonstrated in a fine medley of John Williams' Superman and Jurassic Park supreme film scores. Les Dawson made an unexpected appearance for the English present, and Liberace featured with his iconic Boogie Woogie bass, eliciting panto-like responses encouraged by Worbey. The grand finale was an impressive and substantial arrangement of George Gershwin's 1924 "Rhapsody in Blue", with Keith Farrell playing most of the demanding piano solo and Stephen Worbey supplying the orchestral parts, bringing this most unusual instrumental Cabaret to a breath-taking conclusion.

HEALTH

Save Your Children



By Monika Seth

ALARMING FACTS
Worldwide obesity has tripled since 1975. Approximately, 39 million children (below 5 years) & adolescents (below 19 years) were overweight or obese in 2016. Being overweight and obese cause more deaths than being underweight. Childhood obesity is linked to a three-fold increased risk of mortality in early ages. The number of obese school children & adolescents will rise from 150 million to 250 million worldwide by 2030 (The World Obesity Federation). This will place a significant burden on healthcare & social services as the population ages.

Obesity – once thought to be a symbol of affluence in the past is now considered one of the most serious health concerns for populations globally. Obesity is among the most prominent, yet one of the most ignored public health concerns standing at the other end of the undernourishment scale; with overfed populations surpassing the number of underfed people. Increasing global outbreaks of obesity and co-morbidities cause approximately 2.8 million global deaths every year. Childhood obesity scaled more than tenfold in the last forty years and the trend to intensify further in the coming years is a matter of grave concern across the world. Childhood obesity is a preventable condition where a child is significantly overweight relative to their height, age and sex. It has reached global epidemic levels and is the most challenging health concern of modern life. Obesity – a multifaceted and complex condition arising due to incorrect energy balance & leading to the accumulation of too much body fat. Social, genetic, dietary, metabolic & psychological factors combine to influence the development of obesity. Our pro-obesity environment i.e. advanced technology, sedentary lifestyle coupled with a nutrient deficit diet rich in energy, saturated fats, salt and sugar may be the possible explanation for the current obesity epidemic. There has been an increase in the consumption of foods and beverages that are high in calories and energy. As a result of the sedentary nature of many forms of employment, education, play environments, and social interactions, there has also been a concomitant drop in physical activity.

Childhood obesity increases the likelihood of adult obesity, poor self-esteem, social isolation and discrimination making them nervous, and more likely to be the targets of abuse and bullying causing depression, anxiety and suicide attempts in extreme cases. Obesity in children leads to health complications that were previously exclusively seen in adults i.e. type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, fatty liver, joint problems, breathing issues like asthma and sleep apnea. While the function of calorie balance should be emphasized, there are additional, more complex factors that contribute to childhood obesity, such as the nutritional value of food, eating habits, lack of sleep, heredity, social variables like surroundings etc. By counselling and teaching caregivers, parents, teachers, and others about obesity and its comorbidities, healthcare professionals can greatly help avoid obesity at a young age.

THE WAY FORWARD
Observe the child's history of being overweight or obese (the prevalence of obesity will be approximately 40% if one parent is obese and rises to 80% with both obese parents). Check your child's BMI score and maintain a healthy body weight. Encourage healthy talks about food and nutrition, exercise and healthy habits. Avoid very restrictive diets without any professional help as it interferes with their growth cycle.

An average child spends around 25 hours/week watching TV and other gadgets; turning over just half of this time to sports/physical activity will make a monumental difference. Lowering the consumption of sugary beverages, and sodium rich, calorie-dense foods is of extreme importance. The best treatment for childhood obesity is prevention. As a parent, you are responsible for introducing and inculcating healthy habits in your kids and setting a good example so give them something healthy to follow. Healthy habits formed today at home will go a long way in their life and help them live a healthy happy and purposeful life ahead. Eat healthy live healthily and encourage your children to do the same. There is an Urgent need to pay more attention to creating an atmosphere that encourages improved eating and physical activity practices among children across the globe.



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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Pickle Soup
(Ogórkowa Zupa)



A **POLISH CLASSIC**, pickle soup can be creamy or brothy, depending on how you like it. There are as many variations as there are Polish cooks, but the key component – sour dill pickles – is always present. Here, the pickles are grated, rather than chopped, and their brine is added along with them. You can add sour cream, but leaving it out lets the vegetables' flavor shine.

Yield: 6 to 8 servings
Total time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:
6 to 8 cups vegetable or chicken stock
3 large carrots, peeled and coarsely grated
3 large russet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1 small celery root, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1 medium parsnip, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
7 sour dill pickles (8 to 9 ounces) with 1 1/2 cups brine from the jar (see Tip)
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
3 dried bay leaves
Salt and black pepper
1/4 cup sour cream, for serving (optional)
Chopped fresh dill, for serving (optional)

Preparation:
1. In a large pot, combine 6 cups stock with the carrots, potatoes, celery root and parsnip. The vegetables should be covered with stock, so add more as needed. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cover and reduce the heat to medium-low. Rapidly simmer until all of the vegetables are fork tender, about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to low.

2. While the vegetables are cooking, coarsely grate the pickles. You should have about 1 cup densely packed grated pickles. Melt the butter in a small frying pan over medium heat until it starts to brown. Stir in the garlic and bay leaves, and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the grated pickles and reduce the heat to medium-low. Cover and cook, stirring once, until the pickles become softer, 8 to 12 minutes.

3. Add the pickle mixture to the pot with the vegetables, along with 1 cup pickle brine. Taste, then season with salt and pepper. The soup should already be salty from the broth, pickles and their brine, so add salt carefully. Add up to 1/2 cup more brine if you want a more sour taste. Remove and discard the bay leaves.

4. If using sour cream, temper the cream so it doesn't curdle: In a cup, mix the sour cream with 1 to 2 tablespoons of cold water, stirring well after each addition, then repeat with 1 to 2 tablespoons of the soup. Add the tempered cream to the pot. Bring to a simmer and heat through, about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings.

5. To serve, ladle the soup into bowls. Top with chopped dill and black pepper.
TIP: If looking for Polish pickles, be sure to buy ogórkiszzone (cucumbers in brine), such as those sold by the Polonaise brand. Do not buy Polish dill pickles (ogórkikonserwowe). If substituting other pickles, use dill pickles that are low in vinegar. — **NYT**

ART

Clickbait or creativity? The art world wrestles with AI



ONLINE TOOLS THAT can create wonderful, absurd and sometimes horrifying images using artificial intelligence (AI) have exploded in popularity, sparking soul-searching over the nature of art.

Tech companies tout their inventions as a liberating force of art for all, but purists argue that the artist is still the central cog in the machine.

Art historian and AI expert Emily L. Spratt, whose forthcoming book tackles the ethics and regulation of AI art, told AFP that the art world has not yet found a response to the potentially transformative technology.

ARE WE ALL ARTISTS NOW?

Punch a few keywords into an AI art tool – something like “Brad Pitt in a rowing boat in space in the style of Mondrian” – and seconds later boldly coloured line drawings will emerge of the Hollywood star, paddling in the stars.

There are plenty of fans of tools like Midjourney, Stable Diffusion and DALL-E 2 who have proclaimed this as the democratisation of art.

But Spratt reckons such tools are more about “entertainment and clickbait” than art. “It is a way to foster engagement with platforms, which is of course going to help these companies,” she said.

“The idea that it is solely a tool of empowerment or that it will democratise the space is overly simplistic – it’s naive.”

Rather, she sees the boundary between AI and other technology becoming blurred, pointing to the image manipulation programs already widely used.

“I see the future of AI as being part of the omnipresent

background architecture for all digital image-making processes,” she said.

“It will be hard to avoid it because it seeps into all of our digital interactions, often unbeknownst to us, especially when we create, edit, or search images.”

ARE THERE AI MASTERPIECES?

Beyond the simple online tools that anyone can use, there are plenty of artists labouring over their own algorithms with bespoke datasets.

These works sell for tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands.

A standout practitioner, said Spratt, is German artist Mario Klingemann whose “Hyperdimensional Attraction Series, Bestiary” is a high point of the genre.

“It is a video of seemingly organic forms that morph from one physical entity to another and momentarily appear as recognisable animals,” she said.

“Honestly, it’s a bit unnerving but it works well as a commentary on the dividing lines between the material and immaterial and the limits of generative AI to replicate the natural world.”

She said his art is constantly asking questions about AI as a medium, and more widely about the nature of creativity.

WHAT DOES ART WORLD MAKE OF AI?

Until relatively recently, there was very little buzz around AI outside of video installations, largely because there was no bank of digital images with clear labels.

Without the source material, there could be no AI art as

we know it today.

That changed a decade ago when several projects began to supply huge quantities of digital images, sparking an explosion in creativity.

A French collective called Obvious sold a work for more than \$400,000 in 2018 after keenly embracing the idea that the AI “created” the work.

That sale became hugely controversial after it emerged that they had used an algorithm written by artist and programmer Robbie Barrat.

“The reason that the Obvious artwork sold, especially at that price, was largely because it was advertised as the first AI artwork to be offered at a major auction house,” said Spratt.

“It was really the art market experimenting with the offering of an AI artwork in step with long-established approaches to the sale of fine art.” At that moment, she said, there was huge interest in bringing together the tech sector and the art world.

But the tech industry has since been hit by a dramatic economic slump and investment and interest have waned.

Major auction houses like Christie’s and Sotheby’s have since worked hard to create separate platforms for selling AI art. “It’s like they don’t want to sully fine art with these new digital explorations,” Spratt said.

And critics are yet to catch up with the field and really express what is good, bad or indifferent, she reckoned.

“Unfortunately, the AI art discourse is not there yet, but I think it is on its way, and it should come from the field of art history,” she insisted.

— **AFP**

FASHION

A Fashion Show That Widens the Lens on Asian Identity



NEW YORK FASHION Week was more than 10 days away, but CFGNY, an art collective founded in New York City that challenges dominant narratives around Asian American identity, held a conceptual fashion show at the Japan Society in Manhattan on Saturday.

CFGNY, which stands for Concept Foreign Garments New York (its original name included the words “cute”), is led by four New York artists – Tin Nguyen, Daniel Chew, Ten Izu and Kirsten Kilponen – who use art and fashion to explore the term “vaguely Asian” and how it is often used to homogenize very different cultures.

“CFGNY is a project of critique, but we’re also interested in playfulness,” Chew, 35, said backstage before the show.

Fashion show front rows usually hold fashion editors and retail buyers, but here there was a cross section of the city’s Asian and queer-friendly creative class. Attendees included Beverly Nguyen, 32, a Vietnamese American stylist and design influencer who wore a chenille skirt by CFGNY made of large bumble bee patches; Kiko Soirée, 32, a drag artist and comedian, wore white knee-high socks that read “camp”; and Doris Ho Kane, 42, a Vietnamese bakery owner and archivist, wearing orange drawstring pants under a long off-white coat.

They were joined by reality TV stars, pastry chefs, party promoters, jewelry designers, museum curators and activists.

By 7 p.m., the 350 attendees had found their places in the sprawling marble lobby that evokes a Japanese garden with bonsai trees, rock beds and shoji walls. A snaking catwalk had been carved out with temporary seating and wooden walkways over an indoor pond.

The last person to take her seat was the mother of one of the founders, Ngoc Le, 62, who came in from Massachusetts and made Vietnamese dishes for the cast and crew earlier in the day. Dressed in a conservative black dress and a single string of pearls, she filmed the crowd with her phone as she made her way through the room.

Around 7:20 p.m., the lights dimmed and a howling soundscape by Okkyung Lee, a South Korean cellist, started. CFGNY had its network of artists, influencers, designers and performers walk as models, instead of professionals. They drew from diverse pockets of the Asian diaspora.

The show opened with artist Stewart Uoo, who served corporate realism in a sage silk shirt tucked into cobalt chinos, with a sparkly dash of rhinestones fixed to one leg. Miho Hatori, an artist and co-founder of the band Cibo Matto, wore a baseball cap with an olive green work jacket and an indigo blue silk skirt with two stuffed animals tucked inside.

Blake Abbie, 32, who stars on the Netflix reality show “Bling Empire: New York,” wore a blue shirt with English non-words. And West Dakota, a Brooklyn Liberation March organizer, wore a sheer mesh top, Jelly platform heels and a skirt made from cartoonish caterpillar patches.

There was kawaii cuteness, references to K-pop and anime, blurred gender lines, and a mishmash of sartorial references including tartan, animal prints, Western logos and parachute pants. About 13 minutes and 35 looks later, the show ended.

After the designers took their bows, the chairs were cleared, a bar was set up, and sushi was served for an after-party in the lobby. (Some guests lingered upstairs to see CFGNY’s art installation, part of “Refashioning” on view until February 19.) — **NYT**

art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 5 | 2023

An escape to Masirah inspired a new odyssey of scents

By Yeru Ebuén

We know it as one of the nesting sites of sea turtles where the thunderous roars of waves attract some of the world's popular water athletes using its windy shores and deep waters as a spot for windsurfing, parasailing and diving.

A seven-hour drive from Muscat that includes an hour of ferry ride, it is teeming with sea life, white sandy beaches and dreamy coastal villages.

While many look at Masirah through a visual lens, only a few look at this island as an olfactory muse.

Masirah is not known as a sensory destination, especially for perfume connoisseurs, but it is a scenic location with pristine beaches, lush green landscapes and abundant wildlife — natural features that create a rich and diverse sensory environment.

It's seldom that travellers head to Masirah for its scent. It has to take a connoisseur like Renaud Salmon to look at it from that perspective and the island did spark his imagination leading to a personal odyssey that he is now sharing with the world through a new fragrance collection.

"I don't know why Masirah attracted me," shared Renaud Salmon, a mindful traveller, a talent-extraordinaire and a perfumery magnate who has called Oman home for a few years now being the chief experience officer of high-perfumery house Amouage.

For his latest project, Renaud has decided to look at Oman from an even more sensitive sense, through an abstract angle, zooming in to Masirah to inspire a new generation of fragrances that usher perfume lovers to a new odyssey — one that explores beautifully the concept of Lineage, Search, Guidance and Purpose which became eponymous to the four offerings that encompass a new chapter in its new scents collection.

BREAKING AWAY FROM LINEAGE

Renaud explained that for anyone embarking on an escape, particularly for the one he decided to take on, "the first step is breaking my anchorage from the land, my lineage — what traps me."

Exploring Masirah, he shared, "I took the boat, I went on the deck of the boat, and I could really sense the strong smell of the sea. When I arrived in Masirah, the first thing I saw was a lot of driftwood and these local boats that were bleached by the sun and the waves. Seeing and smelling them, it was quite an experience," he shared, recollecting what it was like travelling to the island with heightened olfactory senses.

"Lineage, which is the beginning of this odyssey, as a scent, therefore, has very strong sea notes. The top notes are very mineral. You smell the sea then very quickly, you know there was something more like white flowers that almost smell like suntanning lotion," he shared.

Working with Karine Vinchon who is known for her sense of poetry in her work, they explored together the soul and identity of Oman in Lineage and finally locked down the first notion of Escape — a thrive of curiosity and breaking from the past.

THE SEARCH BEGINS

"The natural next step to an escape is the Search. When you escape and go somewhere, the first thing you do is wander. What am I searching for? What do I want? My visit to Masirah led me to these questions and at first, I thought there were not a lot of things to do on the island.

When I started to look at the experience critically, I began to realise that upon my arrival, there were fishermen on the beach... people grilling," he said.

"The fishermen love cooking with dried black lemon called Lomi. It reminded me of my visit to the oasis and seeing lemons growing. I was fascinated by the presence of the lemon's presence in Oman. I didn't associate lemon with the country," he added.

In Search, Renaud wanted to capture the essence of one of the hardest scents to work with scouting far and wide to discover young and talented scent creator Alexis Grugeon who has masterfully captured the

essence by collecting the best qualities of lemon, mixing it with other notes like mandarin, bergamot and tangerine infusing it with Omani frankincense and trapping them all together in wood and setting them on fire to create a burning and smoky sensation.

This would mark the characters of Search that aspires to embody the hunt for a new life, the drive to seek courage and the fight to become our ideal selves.

CAPTURING THE STRENGTH OF OMANI WOMEN AND THE SPIRIT OF THE PINK LAKES IN GUIDANCE

Renaud's odyssey has a side trip to the Pink Lakes that inspired Guidance.

"If you go to Masirah before you arrive at the port to take the boat, there are those beautiful pink lakes. I started being obsessed with them. I find them very interesting because every time I want to see them, they are not pink because it isn't the season," he said.

"At some point, when I was working with people and seeing drone shots of pink lakes, it became the inspiration for Guidance which was also inspired by strong femininity and emphasises the strength and the fragility of Omani women and what I can perceive from their very refined behaviours," he shared.

Working with the equally talented Quentin Bisch, Renaud said they tried to put together something refined and nuanced, very fruity but mixed with a lot of incense and the original scent that the house is known for. Because the journey is inspired by Masirah, the smell of wood found on the shores of the island yielded the use of sandalwood which created a blend that promises triumph and an ode to the inner strength needed for perseverance as one carries on the journey.

WRAPPING IT UP WITH A CLEAR PURPOSE

Renaud's Masirah journey ended with realising what Purpose is all about.

As a nesting site for sea turtles, Renaud shared that Masirah inspired him to look at the imagery of wisdom for Purpose explaining that cultures from around the world associated turtles with this important value.

For Purpose, Renaud has to reexamine several things that he loves taking inspiration from the imagery of a frankincense tree at the National Museum and how a journey to Oman will not be complete without understanding the importance of frankincense's contribution to the country's reputation and place in history.

"The scent of Purpose is also inspired by the frankincense tree and how the peeling of the tree is an abstract of the olfactory journey. There are a lot of layers to this fragrance — the complexities mixing earthy, mineral and woody fragrances in a contemporary but memorable creation," he said.

Renaud said that together with Bisch, Purpose wrapped up an odyssey and through it, one finds a sense of awakening, a sense of feeling at peace and finding serenity in life empowered by one's roots.

For this chapter of Amouage's new Odyssey Collection, Masirah became a fitting muse bringing it to the attention of the world as an island, different from those in Greece, but worth a journey from an olfactory perspective.

Masirah now stands along proud destinations like France that inspired Chanel's No. 5, Greece that inspired Dior's 'J'Adore', the flora and fauna of Italy that inspired Gucci's Bloom and the exotic and mysterious aura of Morocco that inspired Yves Saint Laurent's Opium.

We've never really looked at Masirah and its power to inspire creatives. Perhaps, that should change. And the world, with this odyssey, will finally take notice.

