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A FLOATING RESERVOIR OF KNOWLEDGE



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ROBUST ICT INFRASTRUCTURE TO UNDERPIN OMAN'S SMART CITIES



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ALCARAZ ENDS DJOKOVIC'S LONG WIMBLEDON REIGN



Schools to reopen on August 29

MUSCAT: All government schools, special education schools, and private schools, will reopen for the new academic year on August 29. Teachers must report to duty on August 27.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) on Sunday released the 2023-2024 school calendar, which has scheduled dates for study, exams and holidays for all public, special education, and private schools following the government calendar system. The academic year will end on Thursday, July 11, 2024. Meanwhile, the mid-academic year vacation for members of the teaching staff is set to begin from January 28 to February 2, 2024, while the end-of-school leave will be from July 14 to August 25, 2024, totalling 43 days.

The first semester exams for students of grades 5 to 11, students pursuing the General Education Diploma (GED) and its equivalent in public and private schools under the government evaluation system, including the associated correction work, will take place from December 12, 2023 to January 25, 2024.



STEP INTO AL RAZHA

A little girl watches a group of Al Razha performers in the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.
PHOTO BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI

#Habot_Dhofar is the hashtag for Khareef

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 16

#Habot_Dhofar is the hashtag of Khareef 2023. Habot, a traditional art form that originated in Dhofar, is characterised by its strong masculine energy, generosity, and courage.

The word 'Habot' derives its meaning from the concepts of power or helping people, as historically understood in Dhofar. It is derived from the local dialect spoken by the inhabitants of Dhofar, known as Al Shahriya or Jabalia.

During a Habot performance, participants arrange themselves in transverse rows, following a meticulously designed arrangement. The procession begins with esteemed figures such as shaikhs, notables, and the elderly, and concludes with the youth, without any specific age requirements for participation.

Participants carry their traditional weapons, including rifles, swords, and traditional daggers, which symbolise strength and determination. Poets gather to select the short verses that will be recited by everyone. Typically, the most skilled poet in the art of dialogue is responsible for choosing the poem.

In the performance, the first group, comprising half of the participants, recites the first verse, while the second group recites the subsequent verse, and so on until the intended destination is reached.

During the procession, the group presents their ranks, and a number of young men, wielding swords, perform high jumps known as "lying down" or "lying down," symbolising strength and courage.

3.5m tourists set to arrive in Oman this year

MUSCAT: Oman is expected to receive 3.5 million international tourists in 2023 compared to 2.9 million in 2022, a report by BMI, an entity affiliated with international rating agency Fitch said on Sunday. The average annual growth of the number of tourists arriving to Oman over the medium-term (2023-2027) is expected to reach 7.4 per cent, as demand for leisure and commercial tourism continues to drive recovery amidst high oil prices that boost domestic investments.

Another report by Forward Keys, a global leader in travel data and analytics, revealed that Oman has recorded an increase of 126.7 per cent in the number of arriving international flights from January 1 to June 25 highlighting the increase in the number of inbound tourists.

These international reports underscore the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's comprehensive plan to target the average annual growth of the number of tourists arriving to Oman over the medium-term (2023-2027) is expected to reach 7.4 per cent, says BMI report

the annual arrival of 11 million visitors by 2040. The plan includes new tourism and heritage projects that contribute to raising the volume of total Investments in the sector.

The BMI report expects steady gains for Oman's tourism sector until 2027 and beyond, supporting long-term prospects through economic diversification and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This is based on the efforts exerted by Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, to support the tourism sector through investments in infrastructure.

TURN TO P2



Record heatwaves sweep the world, from US to Europe and Asia

ROME: Tens of millions of people were battling dangerously high temperatures around the world on Sunday as record heat forecasts hung over parts of the United States, Europe and Asia, in the latest example of the threat from global warming.

A powerful heatwave stretching from California to Texas was expected to peak, according to the US National Weather Service, which warned of an "extremely hot and dangerous weekend".

Daytime highs were forecast to range between 10 and 20 degrees Fahrenheit above normal in the west. Arizona's state capital Phoenix recorded 16 straight days above 109F (43 degrees Celsius), with residents facing temperatures of 111F on Saturday, en route to an expected 115F.

California's Death Valley, one of the hottest places on Earth, is also likely to register new peaks on Sunday, with the mercury possibly rising to 130F (54C).

Authorities have been sounding the alarm, advising people to avoid outdoor activities in the daytime and to be wary of dehydration.

In Europe, Italy faces weekend



A man cools off in a public water playground at a park in eastern Tokyo on Sunday, as temperatures in the mid-30s Centigrade baked Japan's capital. — AFP

predictions of historic highs with the health ministry issuing a red alert for 16 cities including Rome, Bologna and Florence.

The weather centre warned Italians to prepare for "the most intense heatwave of the summer and also one of the most intense of all time".

The thermometer is likely to hit 40C in Rome by Monday and 43C on Tuesday, smashing the record of 40.5C set in August 2007.

The islands of Sicily and Sardinia could wilt under temperatures as high as 48C, the European Space Agency warned -- "potentially the hottest temperatures ever recorded in Europe".

The Acropolis in Athens, one of Greece's top tourist attractions, will close during the hottest hours on Sunday, for the third day running.

In France, high temperatures and resulting drought are posing a threat to the farming industry, earning Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau criticism from climatologists for having brushed aside conditions as "normal enough for summer".

— AFP



Royal Office Minister receives several ambassadors



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received in his office on Sunday Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting came within the framework of the attention accorded by the Sultanate of Oman to regional and international issues.

Al Numani reviewed areas of joint cooperation and means of enhancing relations between the Sultanate of Oman

and the Kingdom of Netherlands.

On her turn, the ambassador lauded the bilateral relations between the two countries.

The two sides also discussed several matters of common interest.

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani also received in his office Filali Ghouini, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation extended to him from all officials in Oman. He also lauded the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted during his tour of duty, wishing him success.

Moreover, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Abdullah Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi

Arabia (KSA) to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The Saudi ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty, which contributed to enhancing bilateral relations.

On his turn, Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in boosting bilateral relations, wishing him success in his future endeavours.

Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani also received Thomas Friedrich Schneider, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Sultanate of Oman to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty.

The ambassador expressed his appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his tour of duty in Oman.

The Minister of Royal Office thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in boosting bilateral relations, wishing him success. — ONA

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3.5 million tourists to arrive in Oman this year

FROM PAGE 1

It is worth noting that Habot in the Dhofar Governorate encompasses various occasions, customs, and regulations. Each social group or environment in the governorate has its unique style of Habot, including the desert, city, and countryside variations.

Habot performances do not differ significantly in terms of performance and organisation. However, they vary in cascades, melodic weights, and distinct characteristics that distinguish one region from another.

Habot events are held during religious and national celebrations, holidays, and social gatherings such as weddings, including “kshah” and others. The art of Habot is exclusively performed by men and is characterised by masculinity, generosity, and courage. There is no specific requirement for the number of participants involved in a Habot performance.



FROM PAGE 1

The report predicts that the Middle East region will be the largest source of arriving tourists to Oman in 2023 at 1.5 million, followed by tourists from the Asia-Pacific region (606,390), Europe (320,600) the US (72,800 and Africa (72,000).

BMI's report pointed out that there are various tourism projects under implementation process, and many adventure tourism projects that are slated for completion by 2025-2026, in addition to a number of other major projects.

The report also added that in

addition to strong government support and ambitious growth targets, the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman is enhanced by natural attractions, wildlife, historical and cultural heritage and Oman's proximity to tourist markets.

Oman has various areas with exceptional temperatures in summer and offers options for adventures, eco-tourism and marine sports. It has deep-sea ports capable of accommodating various cruise ships, in three international airports of which Muscat International Airport has the capacity to receive 12 million passengers annually. — ONA

UTAS Musandam branch to begin operation in January

MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), a branch-based Higher Education Institution, said its new branch in Musandam Governorate will commence its first academic year 2023/2024 in January, 2024 (spring semester).

In a statement, HE Dr Said bin Hameed al Rubei, Vice Chancellor, said, “This move comes in alignment with His Majesty's directives to promote comprehensive and sustainable development across the governorate, and in a step to foster a supportive environment for research and innovation.”

Musandam branch initially will begin its operations in a temporary building in the Wilayat of Khasab until the branch's main building is complete.

The first stage of the academic year will offer a diverse range of main specialised programmes, including Economics, Information Technology, and Education.

These programmes aim to equip students with skills and



knowledge necessary to excel in a dynamic and ever-evolving business landscape.

Meanwhile, the university has emphasised working on defining high-quality specifications for its buildings and facilities in line with international standards, noting that they will be equipped with the latest advancements in technology and electronic systems.

“These systems aim to achieve the highest level of efficient management and seamless handling of student data, including its storage, analysis, registration processes, and other admission and registration-related systems”, the university explained.

The university said the successful establishment of the Musandam branch signifies the government's commitment to cope with Oman Vision 2024 that prioritises education, scientific research and national potential.

Wadis are gateway for summer as temperatures soar

**TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI**

When temperatures soar over 40 degrees Celsius, finding respite from the scorching heat becomes a priority for many. One popular escape from the sweltering city life is trip to rural areas, away from Muscat yet breathtaking with agricultural oases.

These oases are characterised by sprawling, majestic trees and fresh water that trickles through rocky canyons. They offer families an ideal retreat amidst nature's embrace. However, not just families seek solace in these havens. Enthusiasts eager to explore the Sultanate of Oman's water sources and geological wonders also flock to these serene destinations.

The Sultanate of Oman offers places that serve as summer getaways. Wadi Shab, Wadi Bani Khalid, Wadi al Hookeen, and Wadi al Arbiyeen are noteworthy destinations. These valleys stretch across the country, serving as lifelines and sanctuaries for recreation and hiking. One such



valley originates from the eastern regions of the country.

These valleys are blessed with ample water flow throughout the year. Their rocky terrains store rainwater from the monsoon rains. Rainfall in the northern regions typically occurs between November and May. This water

sustains agricultural areas, particularly those nestled within the Al Hajar mountain range.

While access to these valleys is possible by four-wheel drive vehicles, some require moderate physical fitness due to the need for a 3-5 km walk.

At present, visitors revel in the

splendor of nature, indulging in the opportunity to taste a variety of local seasonal fruits. Dates and fresh mangoes are particularly cherished during this time.

These valleys embody a unique environmental system known for its abundance, diversity, and natural wealth. The summer



season witnesses a surge in visitors, contributing to the vitality of tourism. With ample shaded areas, recreational spots, and lush greenery amidst flowing waters, these valleys offer a haven for camping and entertainment.

Official sources highlight that rain is the primary source of

nourishment for various aquifers. Annual precipitation averages less than 40 mm in coastal and desert regions, whereas mountainous areas receive approximately 350 mm. The total volume of renewable water sourced from rainfall is estimated at around 1.3 billion cubic metres annually.



Sultanate of Oman sees significant improvement in mental healthcare

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Mental healthcare in the Sultanate of Oman has achieved a level where government and private hospitals are capable of handling all kinds of mental health issues.

Speaking to the Observer, Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Psychiatrist at the Department of Behavioural Medicine at SQU Hospital and Chairman of Oman Alzheimer Society in Oman, said that mental health services in Oman have seen a significant improvement in terms of public awareness about mental illnesses and professional support due to increased public awareness on social media.

“There are a few requirements that need to be addressed in Oman to meet the mental health needs of the people,” he said, adding that “This includes an ongoing awareness campaign that challenges common misconceptions about mental health and allows people experiencing mental illness to share their experiences and have a say on what service can be provided.” Last week a video went viral on social media about a recovered drug addict who was sharing his personal experience with addiction and how he could be on the way toward recovery.

“Such videos educate the public and stakeholders on what can be done to reduce the risk of addiction, which is one of the things destroying the health of teenagers and their families.” Government agencies and NGOs play a vital role in enhancing mental health services in the country. There are government and private initiatives to care for mental health issues of different age groups and nationalities.

Among the initiatives is educating couples to use divorce as the last option as it causes huge stress and ultimately cause for the mental health issue.

With an increasing rate of divorces in Oman (11 cases per day), counsellors and mental health educationists have been urged to address the issue as the ultimate victims turn out to be children who are left to live with one parent. According to Dr Hamed, many reasons lead



More people are facing loneliness and social isolation like the elderly who are often left alone at home with caregivers or a housemaid who doesn't speak Arabic and is often busy with housework

DR HAMED AL SINAWI

to divorces, and social changes also contribute to the surge in divorce rates.

“As recent reports suggest, around 11 cases of divorce take place in Oman on a daily basis, and mental health experts need to address this issue as this often leads to psychological harm to young children who end up living with one parent,” he said as Oman is to join the rest of the world to commemorate October 1 as World Mental Health Day. The theme for this year is ‘Mental health is

a universal human right’. Mental health needs for people in Oman, like in other countries, is an important issue that needs to be addressed and discussed, especially since stigma is still a barrier stopping people from seeking help for mental health professionals.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi spoke about older people facing loneliness and social isolation.

“This is due to the fact that their family members are away from homes with work and they are left with non-Arabic speaking caregivers blocking communication to a great extent,” Dr Al Sinawi, who has a special interest in elderly mental health.

“More people are facing loneliness and social isolation like the elderly who are often left alone at home with caregivers or a housemaid who doesn't speak Arabic and is often busy with housework. We need to create awareness and develop services to meet the changing social structure where”.

According to him, unemployment is also a risk factor for mental health as people feel frustrated for not getting the jobs they studied for or having to take a low-paid job because that is what is available.

Mental health at the workplace is also an issue. In terms of working groups or corporate organisations, a few companies have begun to create mental health awareness programmes looking at workplace mental health such as stress, bullying, and life-work-balance.

“These programme has been developed to address the mental health needs of workers to improve their mental health needs towards enhancing their well-being to result in their productivity and work engagement,” Dr Al Sinawi said.

Similar is the call for mental health for people with special needs.

Services to cater to the needs of people with special needs have been developed. These cases include children with autism, attention deficiency, hyperactivity and ADHD who are benefitting from these programmes, which have been rather lately developed to address the need of these categories of the population, said Dr Hamed al Sinawi.

ROP warns beachgoers of dangers during Khareef



QASIM AL MASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 16

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has issued a warning to beachgoers in Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef Dhofar season.

The ROP is urging tourists and locals alike to exercise extreme caution and avoid venturing into the sea or approaching the rocky edges adjacent to the beach due to the perilous high sea waves that pose a significant threat to safety.

It has taken several steps to ensure the safety of beachgoers, including broadcasting educational segments on radio and television programmes, leveraging social media platforms to spread warning messages, distributing informative pamphlets, and placing indicative panels in prominent locations.

It has also strategically positioned eye-catching billboards along the streets and is using social media platforms to maximise outreach.

The ROP's primary objective is to prevent any untoward incidents that could mar the tranquillity of tourists during the Khareef Dhofar season. As such, the ROP strongly advises beachgoers to heed its guidance and exercise utmost caution.

By doing so, visitors can enjoy their vacation and bask in the delightful autumn weather while ensuring their personal well-being and security.

OMAN PARTICIPATES IN GCC ACCOUNTING, AUDIT MEET



RIYADH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State's Audit Institutions (SAI) is taking part in the 34th meeting of the Training and Development Committee for employees of GCC financial audit and accounting bureaus. The two-day meeting, held at the GCC Secretariat- General in Riyadh, deals with the selection of training programmes for the years 2024 and 2025, drafting the operational plan for years 2023-2025 and selecting topics for the 6th GCC audit and accountancy research competition. — ONA

Oman celebrates anniversary of Prophet's migration



SALALAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, on Sunday celebrated the anniversary of the Prophet's Migration (Hijra), for the Hijri year 1445 AH.

The event was held at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri,

Chairman of the Environment Authority. The celebration was attended by Dr Wa'il bin Saif bin Salim al Harrasi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The programme included a visual presentation featuring the biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and highlights of his era. — ONA

CPA LOOKS AT WORLD OF THE YOUNG CONSUMERS

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) participated in the Summer Programme events of the Children's Museum 2023, in collaboration with the Ministry of Sports, Youth, and Culture.

The event took place at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher for two consecutive days.

The participation included the establishment of a village called 'A Journey into the World of the Young Consumers,' consisting of eight informative and entertaining corners, as well as various

educational activities. One of the corners was the Small Consumer Grocery Store, where a realistic simulation of proper shopping was implemented.

There was also an awareness corner to introduce the regulations regarding prohibited goods and violations of the Consumer Protection Law, including the decisions issued in this regard, and to highlight the harm caused by such products.

Furthermore, there was a photography corner and a corner where young consumers could explore and enjoy the content of consumer-related applications.

The village also included a corner called 'Tales of the Young Consumer' and an educational games corner, featuring games such as Snakes and Ladders. Additionally, there was a drawing corner and an informative lecture on smart shopping skills, both before and during shopping, as well as empowering consumer culture through an explanation of consumer rights and an introduction to prohibited products, their reasons for prohibition, and their harms. The activities included competitions, practical applications, and various other engaging activities.





BEWARE OF SNAKES



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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With the proliferation of snakes during the summer, a recent study comes handy to understand the gravity of snakebites and its peak time among the patients.

The *Oman Medical Journal* recently published a study, conducted by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Sultan Qaboos University, titled 'Assessing the Danger of Snake Poisoning and its Complications.' The study aimed to evaluate the risk factors associated with snake venom and the resulting complications, based on data collected from two emergency departments in the Sultanate of Oman.

The study gathered information from 236 individuals admitted to Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and Rustaq Hospital, shedding light on the common characteristics of snakebite victims. The findings revealed that the majority of snakebite victims were adult males, and most incidents occurred on farms during the summer months, with a peak in August.

Notable symptoms experienced by patients included 82 cases of blood clots, 149 cases of acute kidney injury, and five cases of external bleeding.

Among the patients who suffered acute renal insufficiency, 85.7 per cent encountered snakes in valleys, experiencing initial bleeding at the site of the bite along with a sensation of vomiting. On the other hand, 47.6 per cent of patients with coagulopathy were bitten on farms, with 72 per cent of those cases involving bites to the lower extremities.

The study also revealed that delayed administration of anti-venom increased the risk of acute kidney injury. Additionally, the time elapsed between the bite and receiving anti-venom was associated with the development of blood clots. However, no fatalities were recorded.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended to conduct further research, particularly in the Dhofar Governorate, known for its monsoon climate. Additionally, prompt administration of anti-venom is advised to prevent complications.

The Sultanate of Oman is home to over 20 snake species, of which nine are venomous. If you are bitten by a snake and experience symptoms, it is crucial to seek immediate medical attention. While awaiting medical help remember to move away from the snake, keep the bitten limb positioned below heart level, remain calm, and remove any tight jewellery or clothing from the affected area.

It is important to know what not to do in such situations. It is advisable not to extract the venom by opening or sucking the bite as it is ineffective. People should avoid using ice packs as they can cause harm. In addition, they should refrain from applying a tourniquet as it can worsen the situation. Similarly, there should not be attempt to catch the snake to take to the doctor as an evidence. If possible, a photograph of the snake on a cellphone, if dead, can be helpful.

In cases where medical care is distant and no symptoms manifest, the bite site should be cleaned with soap and water. It is essential to monitor the area for signs of infection and treat it as any other wound.



ROP ensures road safety for travellers to Dhofar

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Royal Oman Police, in close collaboration with the governors's offices, has undertaken significant measures to ensure the safety of the road leading to Dhofar Governorate. Recognising the importance of this route, patrols have been strategically deployed along the thousand-kilometre stretch.

Moreover, the Civil Defence stands ready to promptly respond to any accidents or similar incidents that may arise.

Emphasising the importance of compliance with regulations and laws, the Royal Oman Police strongly advises all highway users to adhere to these guidelines. Ensuring that vehicles are in optimal condition is also stressed to safeguard lives and prevent accidents.

Before embarking on long trips, it is highly recommended to ensure that the vehicle has undergone comprehensive maintenance. This proactive measure is crucial for both safety and the smooth operation of the vehicle throughout the journey, ROP assured.

It is crucial to note that specific sections of the road are exposed to challenging conditions, including high temperatures



and sandstorms. Certain areas are prone to the formation of sand dunes on the road, presenting additional hazards.

"It is crucial to reduce the speed to maintain control over the vehicle and navigate the dunes safely", ROP advises. This allow the driver to respond to any unexpected changes in the road conditions. ROP also warns that steering abruptly or making sharp turns on sandy surfaces can lead to loss of control and potential

rollovers. The road user should maintain smooth and gradual turns, allowing the vehicle to navigate the dunes with stability.

To effectively address these challenges, the Royal Oman Police consistently activates road guidelines and maintains close coordination with maintenance companies. Their primary objective is to ensure a seamless and safe passage for vehicles, eliminating any delays or traffic congestion that may occur along the way.

SQU organises maiden summer school programme for staff



SALALAH: The first-summer school of-its-kind, in Oman, for higher education institutions' academic staff was organised in Salalah by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

Activities of the 5-day programme took the slogan: 'Designing educational materials for a hybrid/blended learning style and a competency-based learning'.

The programme was held under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality. It comprised workshops on flexible blended learning and learning based on competencies with a view to enhancing teaching skills and achieve quality education.

Fifty academics from Oman and abroad took part in the programme. — **ONA**



The Ministry of Economy Announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Document Fees	Last Date For Tender Submission
2023/6	Preparing auditorium with LED screen and latest video conferencing solution	25 Omani Rials	31/ 7 / 2023

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

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

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

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

etenderhd@mtc.gov.om
+ 96824402200

Four injured in vehicle accident in Dhofar

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), has dealt with a vehicle accident in Jabal Ittin, Dhofar which resulted in four injuries.

In a statement, CDAA said its teams responded to an accident involving a vehicle with a family in it in Jabal Ittin, in the Wilayat of Salalah, where the teams dealt with 4 injuries.

It added that emergency medical care was provided, and they were taken to the hospital to receive the necessary treatment.



Good turnout to call for blood donation

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) responded to the call for blood donation at the Department of Blood Bank Services in Bausher under the Ministry of Health (MoH) recent. Some NGOs also followed the bill and supported the call.

The Al Batinah North Governorate Police Command organised at the Traffic Safety Institute in Suhar a blood donation campaign in cooperation with the blood bank at Sohar Reference Hospital urging the public to come forward to support the need for blood in the country.

"Providing appropriate amount of blood of all types for the benefit of blood banks in the Sultanate of Oman is part of our social support activities to achieve the goals of the Royal Oman Police in community service," said a top-placed ROP official from Al Batinah North Governorate Police Command which organised the blood donation campaign.

Inspired by the call of the blood bank, an NGO named 'We Help', also organised a public blood and platelet donation camp at the Blood Bank in Bausher.

"It is our duty to support any national drive to support such humanitarian causes," said volunteers of 'We Help'.

"Although we conduct blood camps very often, around this time, such a camp was of acute necessity as the blood unit stock



depleted due to less number of donors at the blood bank," they added.

A statement issued by the Department of Blood Banks Services (DBBS) urged donors to come forward and help save lives.

"There is a shortage of blood units owing to a smaller number of donors in summer and we, the Department of Blood Banks Services would like to call on everyone to donate blood over the summer months," the statement said.

The cases that require blood units or one of its components are mostly surgery cases,

Raod Traffic Accidents, other accidents related to workplace/home, malignant blood diseases, bone marrow failure, some cases of genetic blood diseases, some cancerous tumours, and in some cases of childbirth.

Anyone who is meeting the eligibility can donate blood from 8am to 8pm, from Saturday to Thursday, and from 8 am to 2 pm on Friday at the Bausher Blood Bank. A call or WhatsApp on 94555648, or by dial 24591255 prior to the visit is highly advised.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/107	HSE TRAINING COURSES	31 st July 2023	14 th August 2023	RO. 26.250
DISC/ 2023/114	DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW SEWER HOUSE CONNECTIONS IN DHOFAR REGION	31 st July 2023	23 rd August 2023	RO. 1,575.000

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "isupplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om



Dhofar Integrated Services Company S.A.O.C.
CR Number 2185229, P.O Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah, Sultanate of Oman
Phone Number 23232553, Fax 23201183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om





Iraqi PM Sudani, Syria's Assad meet in Damascus

BAGHDAD: Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani held talks with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Sunday in the first such visit by an Iraqi premier since the outbreak of the Syrian war in 2011.

Assad and Sudani discussed securing their shared 600km border from security threats, including IS fighting groups, and agreed to enhance cooperation to reduce drug smuggling, they said during a joint news conference.

Sudani said they also discussed ways to combat drought conditions in both countries caused by a reduction in rainfall, climate change and upstream damming by Türkiye.

"We need to cooperate to get our fair share of water," Sudani said.

Sudani said Iraq supported the lifting of sanctions on Syria, put in place and expanded by the US and European countries since 2011.

Iraq and Syria, which have close economic, military and political ties to regional heavyweight Iran, maintained relations throughout Syria's civil war even as other countries withdrew their



Syria's President Bashar al-Assad shakes hands with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani in Damascus, Syria. – Reuters

ambassadors and closed their embassies in Syria.

Baghdad and Damascus, along with different armed groups backed

by Iran, cooperated in the fight against IS, which spread from Iraq into Syria and at one point controlled more than a third of

both countries.

Farhad Alaaldin, foreign affairs adviser to the prime minister, said before the meeting that Sudani

was set to discuss combatting the flow of the amphetamine Captagon and possibilities for reopening a Mediterranean oil export pipeline,

which could help Iraq diversify its export routes.

Sudani's visit comes as other countries, including Saudi Arabia, rebuild relations with Damascus after years of tensions.

Syria was suspended from the Arab League in 2011 over disputed policies on protests while several other countries supported the armed opposition to his rule.

But Assad has regained control of most of Syria with military and economic support from Russia and Iran, Syria was readmitted to the Arab League in May, and regional countries are seeking dialogue with him to end drug smuggling and return millions of refugees.

Syria has agreed to help end drug trafficking across its borders with Jordan and Iraq.

Top Syrian officials and relatives of Assad have been put on sanctions lists in recent months in the United States, United Kingdom and European Union over their alleged ties to the trade.

The Syrian government denies involvement in the drug trade.

— Reuters

Senegal oppn leader stages noisy but peaceful protest

DAKAR: Senegalese opposition leader Ousmane Sonko led a peaceful protest banging pots and pans after authorities blocked a rally to publicly confirm he would run in next year's presidential elections.

Sonko, dressed in red in a sign of anger, appeared outside his home on Saturday evening to kick off the protest, "symbolically" banging pots for several minutes.

The 49-year-old had been "unanimously voted in as the PASTEF-Patriots' candidate for the February 25, 2024 presidential elections," a party statement said.

Sonko has been confined by security forces at his home in Dakar since May 28 and his nomination comes despite lingering questions over his eligibility due to criminal convictions and prison sentences.

Plenty of people joined the noisy protest in several districts of the capital Dakar and major towns such as Ziguinchor in the south and Mbacke in the centre, local media reported.

In Dakar's Parcelles Assainies area, Sonko supporter Malick Diedhiou took part "to send a message of peace... to show unhappiness at what the state is doing against Sonko because it's illegal," he said.

The governor of Dakar had banned the party's nomination rally, which was set for Saturday



Ousmane Sonko

afternoon, due to the "risk of disturbing public order".

Sonko told supporters "another date" would be chosen. He called for the "concert of saucepans, horns and firecrackers" on Saturday from 8:30 to 9:00 pm to peacefully express disapproval and call for President Macky Sall "to leave office in peace".

"Macky Sall is trying to eradicate PASTEF and prevent me from being a presidential candidate," Sonko said on Friday night, urging his supporters to wear red in protest.

The firebrand figurehead has generated a passionate following among Senegal's disaffected youth, mounting a fiery campaign against Sall, who he paints as a corrupt, would-be dictator.

Sonko has warned of "indescribable chaos" if he is prevented from running for the top office. — AFP

Flooding leave 37 dead in S Korea

CHEONGJU: Rescuers battled on Sunday to reach people trapped in a flooded tunnel in South Korea, where at least 37 people have died and nine are missing after heavy rains caused flooding and landslides.

South Korea is at the peak of its summer monsoon season, and there has been heavy rainfall for the last four days, causing a major dam to overflow.

The interior ministry reported that 37 people were killed and another nine were missing nationwide in the heavy downpours, mostly buried by landslides or after falling into a flooded reservoir.

Hundreds of rescue workers were still struggling to reach more than 10 cars and an unknown number of people trapped in a 430-metre underground tunnel in Cheongju, North Chungcheong province, the ministry said.

Rescue workers were trying to drain the tunnel to reach victims, but the water still appeared to be too deep, hampering search efforts.

The tunnel was inundated on Saturday morning after floodwaters swept in too quickly for the vehicles inside to escape.

Five people were rescued from a bus in the tunnel on Saturday, and nine bodies have so far been pulled from the site, with divers working around the clock



Rescue workers look for victims during a search and rescue operation in Cheongju, South Korea. – Reuters

searching for more victims, the interior ministry said.

The police have received missing person reports for 11 people believed to be in the tunnel, but a final official toll has not yet been provided, as it is unclear how many people were in each car, Yonhap reported.

"I have no hope but I can't leave," a parent of one of those missing in the tunnel told Yonhap.

"My heart wrenches thinking how painful it must have been for my son in the cold water."

Images broadcast on local television showed a torrential stream of water from a nearby river that had burst its banks flooding into the tunnel, as rescue workers struggled to use boats to get to people inside.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, who is currently on an overseas trip, held an emergency

meeting with his aides on the government's response, his office said.

Earlier, he ordered Prime Minister Han Duck-soo to mobilise all available resources to minimise casualties.

The majority of the casualties were from North Gyeongsang province, and were largely due to massive landslides in the mountainous area that engulfed houses with people inside. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISLAMABAD

Bus plunges into ravine killing 12

At least 12 people, including women and children, were killed on Sunday when a minibus plunged into a ravine near the border with China.

The accident occurred while the minibus carrying tourists was travelling on Karakoram Highway in north-western Pakistan. The dead include at least three women and two children and 10 people were seriously wounded, Ziarat Ali, a spokesperson for Tourist Police Gilgit-Baltistan said.



The treacherous highway is the gateway to famous tourist destinations and remains busy during the summer with local tourists.

Road accidents are common due to a lack of adequate infrastructure and careless driving. — dpa

TEL AVIV

Protests continue over judicial reform

Tens of thousands of Israeli protesters took to the streets of Tel Aviv and elsewhere protesting reforms advanced by the coalition they say threaten the country's democratic character.

Rallies, the 28th since the reform agenda was unveiled in January, come days after parliament approved in its first reading a bill that would reduce the "reasonability" clause, through which the judiciary can strike down government decisions.

The proposals would also give



the government a greater say in the appointment of judges.

Following stiff opposition and growing international criticism, including from US President Joe Biden, PM Benjamin Netanyahu ordered a "pause" in March to allow for talks on the proposals.

— AFP

TRIPOLI

Oil production resumes after protests

Oil production has resumed at two major Libyan oil fields, the oil ministry said on Sunday, after a brief shutdown by demonstrators protesting the arrest of a former minister.

"Operations have resumed in the Al-Sharara and Al-Fil oil fields... after they were suspended" on Thursday, said the ministry, part of the UN-brokered Government of National Unity.

The ministry made no mention of the cause of closure in its brief statement.

Libya sits on Africa's largest oil



reserves but production has been frequently disrupted during over a decade of chaos.

Both Al-Sharara and Al-Fil have seen frequent interruptions amid clashes between groups loyal to the Tripoli-based GNU and those backed by a rival government in the east. — AFP



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In brief

■ MANILA



TOP COURT ORDERS RE-ARREST OF SUSPECT

The Philippines' top court has ordered the re-arrest of a former politician accused of killing a prominent environmentalist more than a decade ago, court documents published on Sunday showed. Joel Reyes, the former governor of the western island of Palawan, has been accused of masterminding the 2011 killing of Gerry Ortega, who used a radio show he hosted to frequently accuse Reyes of massive corruption.

Ortega was shot dead while shopping in the capital of Palawan.

The Supreme Court's ruling was the latest development in the long-running case.

■ MEXICO CITY



JOURNALIST SHOT DEAD IN ACAPULCO

A Mexican journalist was shot dead in a store parking lot in the southern tourist town of Acapulco, regional authorities said, the country's second journalist to be killed in a week.

Prosecutors said they have opened an investigation into the killing of Nelson Matus for homicide with a firearm, days after another journalist was found dead.

Matus, the director of news outlet Lo Real de Guerrero, was shot as he was getting into his car in a thrift shop parking lot. The Guerrero state prosecutor's office said in a statement that it "reiterates its commitment to exhaust every line of investigation" into his death.

■ BRUSSELS



60 FLIGHTS CANCELED DUE TO RYANAIR STRIKE

Nearly 60 flights to and from Belgium's Charleroi airport were cancelled on Sunday as pilots of low-cost airline Ryanair walked out on the second day of their planned two-day strike.

The walkout led to the cancellation of 29 flights arriving at and another 29 flights departing from Charleroi.

Belgian public broadcaster RTBF estimated that almost 8,000 passengers could not leave Belgium as planned.

On Saturday the pilots of Belgian-based Ryanair said they were ready to go on strike again if management doesn't meet their demands.

Putin says Russia has stockpiled cluster bombs that might use in Ukraine

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin said Russia had a "sufficient stockpile" of cluster bombs and reserved the right to use them if such munitions, the use of which he said he regarded as a crime, were deployed against Russian forces in Ukraine.

Ukraine said on Thursday it had received cluster bombs from the United States, its biggest military backer, which says the munitions are needed to compensate for shell shortages faced by Kyiv's forces at a time when they are mounting a counteroffensive.

Cluster munitions are banned in more than 100 countries because they typically release large numbers of smaller bomblets that can kill indiscriminately over a wide area. Some of them inevitably fail to explode and can pose a danger for decades, particularly to children.

Kyiv has said it will use cluster bombs to dislodge concentrations of enemy soldiers when trying to take back its own territory, but will not use them on Russian territory.

Putin told state TV Moscow would respond in kind if necessary.

"I want to note that in the Russian Federation there is a sufficient stockpile of different kinds of cluster bombs. We have not used them yet. But of course if they are used against us, we reserve the right to take reciprocal action."

Putin said he regarded the use of cluster bombs as a crime and



Ukrainian artillerymen load missiles onto a self-propelled 122 mm multiple rocket launcher BM-21 "Grad" near Bakhmut, Donetsk region. — AFP file photo

that Russia had so far not needed to use them itself despite having suffered its own ammunition issues in the past.

Human Rights Watch says both Moscow and Kyiv have used cluster munitions. Russia, Ukraine and the U.S. have not signed up to the Convention on

Cluster Munitions, which bans the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of the weapons.

Putin also told state TV he saw nothing wrong in Russian specialists examining captured Western military equipment and missiles, such as the Storm Shadow missiles Britain supplied

to Ukraine, in order to see if there was anything useful that could be used in Russia's own military hardware.

Putin said that a Ukrainian counter-offensive aimed at recapturing territory was "not succeeding" and that attempts to break through Russian defences

had failed. Putin made the remarks in an interview with state television, excerpts of which were released on Sunday.

"All attempts by the enemy to break through our defence ... have not been successful throughout the entire offensive," Putin said.

— Reuters

European right eyes fresh gains with Spain election



Spain's PM and Socialist Party (PSOE) candidate Pedro Sanchez gestures during a campaign meeting in Barcelona. — AFP

MADRID: Europe's eyes will turn to Spain next Sunday where a widely expected right-wing victory in a snap election would further consolidate the dominance of conservative parties across the bloc.

Called by Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez after the left was routed in May 28 local elections, the vote could see the extreme right taking a share of power for the first time since the country's dictatorship ended in 1975.

The polls suggest Spain's next government will be a coalition of the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the far-right Vox.

If the polls are accurate, it would confirm "an ongoing gradual normalisation of the far-right at a European level," said Steven Forti, a professor at Barcelona's Autonomous University.

For Sanchez, who has been in power since 2018 and heads a left-wing coalition with the hard-left Podemos, the stakes are high. The election also carries consequences for the European left.

"It is clear there's an ongoing shift (to the right) and Spain is a very important bastion against this regressive and reactionary current," Ecology Minister Teresa Ribera told La Vanguardia newspaper.

Following the PP's triumph on May 28, it appeared Alberto Nunez Feijoo's party was heading for a clear victory in the July 23 snap election.

But then polls suggested that although the PP would win, it would fall short of an absolute majority of 176 within the 350-seat parliament, meaning it would need Vox's support to govern.

Ultra-nationalist and europhobic, Vox emerged in 2013

out of a split within the PP, bursting into parliament in 2019 as Spain's third-largest party.

But the right's momentum has slowed as the PP and Vox negotiated deals to govern in several regions they won from the left.

During the talks, Vox has held firm to several of its key principles, refusing to recognise gender violence or to budge on its climate denial.

Sanchez has made the extremist threat his clarion call, warning that a vote for the PP would be tantamount to inviting Vox into government in what he argues would be a major step backwards for Spain.

His aim is twofold: to dissuade centrist voters from casting their ballots for the PP while also mobilising the half-a-million left-wing supporters who stayed at home on May 28. — AFP

US envoy Kerry arrives in China to restart climate talks

BEIJING: US climate envoy John Kerry arrived in China on Sunday, state media reported, to restart stalled talks between the world's two biggest emitters of planet-warming gases.

Starting on Monday, "China and the United States will have an in-depth exchange of views" on climate issues, state broadcaster CCTV said on Kerry's arrival in Beijing.

Kerry's trip to China, where he will meet with his counterpart Xie Zhenhua, follows weeks of record-setting summer heat that scientists say is being exacerbated by climate change.

Kerry, a former secretary of state, has enjoyed comparatively cordial and consistent relations with China despite Washington and Beijing locking horns over Taiwan and a number of other thorny issues, including advanced semiconductors.

His trip to Beijing is his third as President Joe Biden's climate emissary and also comes after two other high-profile visits by US officials -- first Secretary of State Antony Blinken, then Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen -- aimed at stabilising US-China ties.

The Biden administration has identified climate as an area for potential cooperation with Beijing, despite the tensions



US Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry delivers a speech at the Congress centre during the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos. — AFP file photo

elsewhere.

The restart of US-China climate talks will come on the heels of the hottest week on record globally, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

June was already the hottest ever logged, according to US and European agencies.

Kerry will aim to use his time in Beijing to engage with Chinese officials "with respect to increasing implementation and ambition and promoting a successful COP28", the State Department said, referring to the UN climate talks in November.

Nearly 200 nations will gather in the United Arab Emirates for COP28 to thrash out ways to mitigate global warming and its impacts. — AFP

The writer is Assoc
Prof, Dept of English
Language and
Literature, SQU

One major consideration today is that careers are not for life. Individuals often change paths, re-specialise and re-skill, often veering towards totally different career paths. In this case, it is not so much the subject of the major but the skills which it is providing that should be

This is not to say that the market determined majors are not a factor to be considered. According to Coursera, the online education platform, the most popular majors in 2023 include computer engineering, management and healthcare. These are all viable options, with employment opportunities widening for the next decade worldwide.

ONE OF THE MOST
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CONSIDERATIONS
BEFORE
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UNIVERSITY
IS TO REFLECT
ON ONE'S OWN
SKILLS, INTERESTS
AND CAPACITY

Choosing a major or a career path may be one of the most consequential decisions of a high school graduate and should be taken seriously. But it lightens the burden to know that these are not the life changing decisions they once were. Today, students are studying for jobs which don't even exist yet. As such, combining one's own interest, if not passion, with a practical understanding of the immediate context is enough to provide the right answer.

VALENTIN BONTEMPS

Always immaculately suited and booted, this telegenic politician — who likes running and looms over his rivals at 1.9 metres (6 foot 2 inches) tall — has made a name for himself as stubborn and tenacious. — **AFP**



Michelle Goldberg

THERE HAVE BEEN SO MANY CONSERVATIVE CORRUPTION SCANDALS THAT THE PHRASE “TORY SLEAZE” HAS BECOME A CLICHÉ, AND THE RULING PARTY’S DECADENCE IS MATCHED BY ITS INCOMPETENCE. COVID CREATED ECONOMIC MISERY WORLDWIDE, BUT SINCE THE PANDEMIC THE UK HAS PERFORMED SIGNIFICANTLY WORSE THAN ITS PEERS IN THE REST OF EUROPE.

Obviously, that's not guaranteed. When I spoke to Joshua Simons, head of Labour Together, a think tank close to Labour leadership, he suggested that Conservatives were strategically exaggerating their pessimism to lower expectations. Still, there's a broad sense that, with national elections due sometime in the next 18 months, the Conservative Party is imploding. "We Are on For a Massive Defeat," blared a headline in the Financial Times, quoting a former Tory Cabinet



In the election to replace Boris Johnson (pictured), Labour candidate Danny Beales is considered the favourite, a sign of just how far Tory fortunes have fallen.

Yet in Britain, the right appears to be approaching something like free fall, with a recent poll showing Labour with a 21-point lead nationally. It's quite a turnaround, given that, until recently, the Tories were often called the most successful political party in the world. Less than four years ago, the party won its fourth consecutive national election by a staggering margin, leaving Labour, then led by the leftist Jeremy Corbyn, decimated. "It was catastrophic," Reed said. "It was really in question as to whether the Labour Party could survive." A 2021 New Republic article was subtitled, "How the Tories Became

Today, inflation is no longer in the double digits, but as of May, it was still at 8.7 per cent, “the highest among the world’s big, rich economies,” as Reuters reported. Rent has reached record highs, and spiking interest rates are clobbering homeowners, since unlike in America, most British mortgages have their rates locked in for only two or five years. “People are seeing, you know, 500 pounds to 600 pounds a month increases in their mortgages, which people just can’t afford at the moment,” Reed said.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Lead by example, boss

Lead by example, many bosses never cease to tell their staff. This means an employee should perform well and be an obedient employee to his/her boss.

Unfortunately, the one stating “lead by example” every now and then rarely walks the talk. They are just giving the order to others while not trying to be a real example to their colleagues. Such behaviour is very common among bosses who are neither professionally competent nor show good leadership. Possibly, they know nothing about managing a team and got into the role by default. In other words, they are not even good at leading themselves, so how could they lead others!

Such kinds of bosses are present in many organisations where they are a pain in the neck to employees. On the other hand, they are arrogantly giving others a cold shoulder and messing things up sometimes. A bad leader demotivates those who work under him/her and is a source of irritation to employees.

In worse case scenarios, those bad bosses could even affect the performance of the organisations due to the negative impressions they spread all over among others. Such bosses sometimes control their employees’ day-to-day tasks regardless how important it is. They also interfere in whatever employees do, trying to micromanage them in a very unprofessional way.

Perhaps, they do this due to their lack of confidence in their employees, which is totally unprofessional. By this interference, those bosses believe it is a practical



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

DEAR BOSSES,
YOU ARE A REAL
LEADER IF YOUR
ACTIONS INSPIRE
OTHERS TO
DREAM MORE,
LEARN MORE,
AND DO MORE

way of managing the team. Indeed it is not. In fact, all they do is spoil their own team as well as giving their colleagues hard times and spoiling their spirit.

What is even worse is that those unpleasant bosses are depriving team members from exercising their basic rights such as taking leave or emergency offs to name a few. Here they are being aggressive and selfish by not being fair. Just imagine how you could work with such a bad boss with inhuman feelings and behaviour.

It is totally intolerable! Yet it is really unfair and unprofessional the way those bosses manage their teams.

Do you think giving those bosses special courses on leadership and management to change their attitudes?! It could be a useful way to fix and turn them into a better person, though it is not guaranteed as some of them would not even be willing to change their work style. However, it is worth trying for some at least.

Organisations should take such employee unfriendly bosses under intensive training, so they don’t lose other employees. Those arrogant bosses should clearly understand that leaders should always be real models to their colleagues. In other words, they should be a source of inspiration and guidance to others.

Dear bosses, you are a real leader if your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, and do more. Therefore, just be humble and responsible for the mission you are assigned too. Promote good chemistry and spread the spirit of teamwork among those who are under you. They will spare no effort to bring about their best to the organisation.

BEAT THE HEAT



A woman floats on a rubber ring as swans swim in the sea at Torre Faro Pilone beach, near Messina, on the island of Sicily, during a heat wave on Sunday. Tens of millions of people were battling dangerously high temperatures around the world as record heat forecasts hung over parts of the United States, Europe and Asia, in the latest example of the threat from global warming. — AFP

How to break a country

Vladimir Putin has compared himself to the czar Peter the Great. But to travel through Eastern Europe is to see how much he has instead caused Russian influence to shrink.

I’ve been on a road trip through Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — and it’s clear that Putin has managed to unite nearly everyone against Russia. Even Russian speakers who often used to feel loyalty to Moscow are now fundraising for Ukraine.

One of my first memories is of a trip to Poland in the 1960s to visit my grandparents (Kristof is short for Krzysztofowicz). What I remember is that communist Poland seemed endlessly bleak and depressing. Later, when I began to travel around Eastern Europe as a law student and aspiring journalist, my main impression was that in the communist bloc, you didn’t need colour film.

Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., who was in Vilnius, Lithuania, for the Nato summit, told me that when he first visited the country in 1979, he had the same impression: “It looked like everything had been whitewashed with gray paint. It was drab and lifeless.” Flash-forward, and today these countries are almost unrecognisable: vibrant, colourful and far wealthier than Russia. Poland has become a sophisticated manufacturing base for Europe, and Intel just announced that it would build a \$4.6 billion chip plant near Wroclaw.

“Poland has been able to serve as a model for countries to the east,” Mark Brzezinski, the US Ambassador to Poland, told me. And Russia has been



Nicholas Kristof

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a model of a different kind.

“Putin’s actions since February 2022 have proven the thesis that Russia under Putin is interested in leadership by terror and authoritarianism,” Brzezinski added. “For other countries of the former Soviet bloc, if they ever were wobbly about joining the West, they certainly have had a clarifying experience.” The improvements in the Baltics have been as pronounced as those in Poland. Estonia is now a jewel of Europe, the global model of a high-tech and prosperous “e-state.” It has nurtured countless high-tech startups, including Skype, and as I walked through Tallinn, the capital, I shared a sidewalk with a robot delivering a takeout dinner to a nearby home.

In contrast, Russia and the places that have remained in its orbit like Belarus and Transnistria remain dismal and oppressive. A glimpse of that side of the chasm: One of the world’s bravest journalists, Elena Milashina, who has reported on human rights in Russia, was attacked recently in Chechnya; thugs beat her, shaved her head, poured dye on her and left her with a brain injury.

Putin claims to be a champion of the rights of Russian speakers, whose families often moved to neighbouring nations when they were all under Soviet rule. And historically many were allied with Moscow and had grievances against the post-communist pro-Western governments. Now Putin has upended that. His invasion and behaviour embarrasses many Russian speakers and makes them rethink their allegiance.

In Lviv, Ukraine, Oleksandra Kabanova told me that she and her husband are native Russian speakers who always spoke to each other in Russian. But after her husband joined the Ukrainian army last year to fight the Russian invaders, they switched to Ukrainian, even if she sometimes struggles to find the right word.

“It was way too toxic to continue speaking Russian,” she said.

Putin’s invasion paradoxically strengthened the Baltic countries, which until last year faced fundamental challenges. Each had a seemingly indigestible Russian minority, plus Nato’s real-life commitment to protect these countries was uncertain — especially during the presidency

of Donald Trump. (A nightmare for leaders in the region is that Trump is reelected in 2024, possibly wrecking Nato, cutting off aid to Ukraine and rescuing Putin from himself.) Putin also revived Nato. It has added Finland and is moving to include Sweden, and there is renewed commitment to Article 5, which would lead all Nato countries to rush in to fight off any Russian incursion. As for the Russian speakers, they are finally being digested.

“The majority of our Russian-speaking people are with us,” Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas told me. “They clearly see that life here is so much better than life in Russia.” The mood in the Baltics is reflected by a huge

poster in Riga, Latvia, showing Putin’s face as that of a skull-like monster.

The fundamental truth is that Putin has weakened Russia. It appears to be in a long-term economic and demographic decline that Putin has accelerated. Russia’s only claim to relevance is its nuclear arsenal; as a saying goes, it is “Burkina Faso with nukes.” Driving through the countries that Moscow once ruled, through societies now united against him, I’m ready to bet that Putin will not be remembered as a modern Peter the Great. Rather, he will go down in history as the leader who broke his country: Vladimir the Lilliputian.

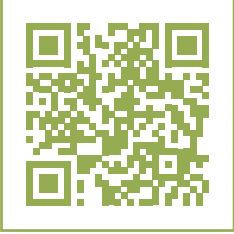
— The New York Times



A self-driving bus being tested in Tallinn, Estonia.

sport

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Stellar show by Oman athletes in Arab Sports Games in Algeria

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 16

Oman's sport teams delivered outstanding performance in the Arabian Sports Games in Algeria, which concluded on Saturday. The national athletes bagged 14 medals; seven for the athletics team, five for Oman Sail team and two for weightlifting team.

Oman secured 12th place in the overall medal tally while the hosts Algeria topped the list with 253 medals including 105 gold medals. Tunisia was runners up with 121 medals while Morocco finished in third with 84 medals.

The Oman national athletics team bagged the maximum number of medals with six medals including two gold, one silver and three bronze medals. The first medal for Oman in the Arabian Games was by Fatik Abdulhafoor, who claimed gold in the Men's high jump competition after he registered a jump with a mark of 2.16 meters.

Paralympics star Qusai al Rawahi won the silver medal in the Men's 100 meters in the T12/13 category, when he cleared the distance in a timing of 11 seconds and 83 parts of seconds.

Oman's top sprinter Barakat al Harthi clinched the bronze medal in the men's 100 meter after he clocked a timing of 10:37 seconds (10 seconds and 37 points of seconds).

Oman's long jumper Salim



al Yarubi took the bronze after he registered a jump with a remark of 15.41 meter. Oman's relay team in 4X100 meter comprising Rashid al Asmi, Barakat al Harthi, Ali al Balushi and Mohammed al Saadi clinched the gold medal in the competition after they registered a timing of 39 seconds and 70 points of seconds.

Oman's youngest sprinter Mohammed al Saadi clinched silver medal in the Men's 200 meter after cleared the distance in a timing of 20.94 seconds.

Oman Sailing team earned five medals including two gold, two silver and one bronze medal. The gold medal was in teams category for Optimist class with the sailor Tamim bin Suleiman al Balushi winning the gold and silver for Hassan bin Nasser al Wahaibil. The Sailor Firas bin Haitham al Nabhani won the bronze medal in the same category of the competition. The Oman sail team members continued their excellent performance with sailor Hatim al Oraimi bagging the silver medal in ILCA4 class competition.

Weightlifter Amur al Khanjari capped off an excellent show with gold and bronze medals in an exciting clean and jerk session of 89kg category. Weightlifter Ilyas al Busaidi was very close to capture bronze medal as he ended in the forth position of in the 73 kg category.



OT league in doubt after major clubs pull out

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT JULY 16

The starting of the Oman football season 2023-24 will be on a low note after the exit of big teams from OmanTel League. Al Suwaiq club and Al Mussanah club withdrew from the competition and Sur club is yet to get a licence.

Some clubs and in their boards of directors are still working on turnaround plans after they sank deep in debt during past seasons while others were unable to meet the demands of participation and the expenses of equipping the football team in technical and administrative level.

They also don't have the financial resources to sign up players, which is the biggest

and most common problem that they face with the start of each season.

Taking note of these developments, the Oman Football Association (OFA) has postponed the release of competition schedules, which are supposed to start in mid of August.

OFA in a statement last week said the working committee decided to postpone the draw without giving reasons for the delay.

It seems that Seeb and Al Nahdha are the only two teams that announced the readiness to participate in the Asia club matches, while others were hesitant about participating due to weak financial conditions. The boards are hesitant to make new commitments.

Get ready for thrilling motorsports events in Khareef Dhofar

SALALAH: The Oman Automobile Association is hosting exhilarating motorsport events as part of the much-anticipated Khareef Dhofar Festival in Salalah. The addition of these events aims to provide a unique and thrilling experience for the general public, families, and motorsports enthusiasts attending the seasonal annual festival.

Salalah Celebrations Square From July 15th to September 1st, will be transformed into a hub of adrenaline-pumping action, hosting a series of four captivating motorsport events for participants of all ages and interests.

“Bringing motorsport events to Khareef Dhofar Festival is a significant milestone for us,” said Sulaiman al Rawahi, Managing Director of the Oman Automobile Association. “We aim to create an unforgettable experience for not only motorsports fans but the wider community in Oman, showcasing the passion and excitement that motorsports can offer.” he added.

Hamood al Balushi, Event Director at Khareef Dhofar Motorsport events, explained, “We are thrilled to present these thrilling motorsport events as part of the Khareef Dhofar



Festival. With a diverse range of activities, from karting circuits to digital motorsports and bike ride parades, we are confident that participants and spectators alike will be captivated by the exhilarating atmosphere.”

Karting Circuit Experience:
Date: July 15 to August 31
Time: 4:00 PM to 10:00 PM
Location: Salalah Celebrations Square
Kicking off the motorsport

extravaganza, the Karting Circuit Experience promises an exhilarating adventure for individuals aged 5 and above. Participants will have the opportunity to unleash their inner speedster by racing on state-of-the-art karts, including Rt8, Dino, Baby Kart, and Double Seater models. It's an experience not to be missed!

Digital Motorsports:
Date: July 15th to August 31

Time: 4:00 PM to 10:00 PM
Location: Digital Room, Salalah Celebrations Square
In the digital realm, motorsport enthusiasts can indulge in the world of virtual racing and compete against each other in thrilling driving simulators. The Digital Motorsports event, held adjacent to the Karting Circuit Experience, offers an immersive experience for both casual gamers and competitive drivers.



Bike Ride Parade:
Nizwa Bikers: August 6 to August 10
Oman Riders: August 25 to September 1
Embark on an epic journey as two prestigious bike clubs, Nizwa Bikers and Oman Riders, traverse the scenic route from Muscat to Dhofar. Witness their awe-inspiring display of passion and skill as they make their way through the beautiful landscapes of Oman. Join us along the route

to cheer them on and be part of this incredible adventure!

These motorsport events are designed to captivate and entertain the entire family, offering a unique opportunity to witness high-octane action during the Khareef Dhofar Festival. Whether you're a motorsports enthusiast or simply seeking an adrenaline rush, these events are guaranteed to leave you breathless!



Serbia's Novak Djokovic with the runners up trophy after losing his final to Spain's Carlos Alcaraz. – Reuters



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy after winning his final match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic. – Reuters

ALCARAZ ENDS DJOKOVIC'S LONG WIMBLEDON REIGN

LONDON: Carlos Alcaraz heralded the changing of the guard in men's tennis as he ended Novak Djokovic's long reign at Wimbledon with a rip-roaring 1-6 7-6(6) 6-1 3-6 6-4 victory to win the All England Club title for the first time on Sunday.

The 36-year-old Serbian had been indestructible on Wimbledon's Centre Court for a decade but on Sunday he finally met his match as he ran out of ideas to stop young gun Alcaraz from hurtling towards the title.

After the 20-year-old had broken for a 2-1 lead in the fifth set with a stupendous passing shot winner, Djokovic's racket felt the full force of his anger as he smashed it against the wooden net post to leave it in a mangled mess.

That earned Djokovic a second warning in the match, with the Serb also being cautioned earlier for taking too much time to launch into his serves.

But all that distraction failed to throw an inspired Alcaraz off course as he became the youngest man in 37 years to win the gilded Challenge Cup after Djokovic scooped a forehand into the net, leaving the Spaniard to collapse on to his back in his moment of triumph. — Reuters

After the 20-year-old had broken for a 2-1 lead in the fifth set with a stupendous passing shot winner, Djokovic's racket felt the full force of his anger as he smashed it against the wooden net post to leave it in a mangled mess

Vingegaard retains Tour lead as Poels wins in Alps



UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar and Team Jumbo-Visma's Jonas Vingegaard in action before crossing the finish line during stage 15. – Reuters



Team Jumbo-Visma's Jonas Vingegaard celebrates on the podium wearing the yellow jersey after stage 15. – Reuters



UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium wearing the white jersey after stage 15. – Reuters

SAINT-GERVAIS, France: Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard kept the overall lead of the Tour de France on Sunday crossing the finish line in the second of four Alpine tests wheel to wheel with Tadej Pogacar.

Dutch climber Wout Poels won the 15th stage, raced in the shadow of Mont Blanc.

Vingegaard remains 10 seconds ahead of Pogacar.

Carlos Rodriguez is more than five minutes behind in third, but the 22-year-old Spaniard, on his first Tour, tightened his grip on a podium

The 179km run from Les Gets to Saint Gervais Mont Blanc was again dominated by the duel between the two favourites and by a series of falls.

place as Australian Jai Hindley dropped to fifth with Briton Adam Yates rising to fourth.

The 179km run from Les Gets to Saint Gervais Mont Blanc was again dominated by the duel between the two favourites and by a series of falls.

Pogacar twice attempted characteristic blistering late attacks. Vingegaard caught up both times and then sped past approaching the line, only to slow and look his Slovenian rival in the eye as they crossed together.

Monday is a rest day ahead of

a potentially decisive individual time-trial on Tuesday which is followed by another Alpine stage on Wednesday.

Pogacar said he was looking forward to the next two stages.

"Tuesday's time trial will provide a shake up, and Wednesday's stage has some of the hardest climbs in cycling," said the 2020 and 2021 Tour winner.

Sunday's winding route through wild Alpine meadows and valleys featured five mountains but the expected fireworks were doused by an early mass fall.

Rowdy roadside fans have caused continual havoc on this Tour and on Sunday a clumsy spectator brought down half the peloton after stepping out into the road about 60km in.

An escape group built an eight minutes advantage that the chief pretenders showed no appetite to close in sizzling summer temperatures.

Raced within view of massive Mont Blanc with its snow-capped peak French hopes were again battered a day after Romain Bardet crashed out, with David Gaudu dropped on the last climb.

Riders again tangled with motorbikes. On Saturday one had blocked a Pogacar attack and on Sunday Kristis Neilands was knocked over by a motorbike delivering water.

Colombia's EF rider Rigoberto Uran ran off a mountain road only to get back up and carry on and there were incidents of riders taking wrong turns.

Bryan Coquard, the French sprinter, broke his handlebars but, with his team car unable to reach him with a replacement, still negotiated a mountain descent. — AFP



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Consumer watchdog
launches unified
contracts initiative

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The General Directorate of Studies and Development at the Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has launched the Unified Contracts Initiative targeting multiple sectors in the Sultanate of Oman. The initiative aims to continuously develop all services provided to consumers and facilitate all existing procedures in the market.

The initiative raises awareness of the unified contract and its means of implementation, with a focus on the sectors of aluminium workshops, kitchens, and electrical and electronic goods.

The initiative seeks to introduce both the supplier and consumer to their respective rights during and after the purchase process, provide consumer security in Oman's markets, combat all forms of commercial fraud, reduce negative practices, identify consumer problems, and provide solutions to them.

Additionally, the initiative aims to reduce complaints and problems that consumers may encounter and improve the quality of consumer awareness programmes offered by the CPA.

The initiative will be implemented in two phases.

The first phase involves drafting, reviewing, and approving contracts, followed by the application of the contracts to commercial establishments and institutions in the second phase.

The initiative will be monitored annually by measuring verification indicators to overcome any difficulties and challenges that may arise during its application.

The Unified Contracts Initiative is expected to improve the business environment, particularly in the retail and services sector in Oman, through the regulation and filtering of negative practices.

It will also contribute to the development of legislation and field procedures that support the rights of the consumer and the supplier and raise institutional awareness of the regulations and requirements of the CPA to avoid violations and financial fines by retailers and mall owners.

The initiative is based on the principles of Oman Vision 2040, as well as international, regional, and Arab experiences based on the Consumer Protection Law.



Robust ICT infrastructure to
underpin Oman's Smart Cities



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 16

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has initiated a public consultation on its goal to develop a regulatory policy framework to support the growth of Smart Cities in the Sultanate of Oman.

A consultation paper issued by the telecom regulator last week seeks, among other things, public validation of its role in regulating key aspects of Smart City development and governance, given the critical importance of Information & Communications Technology (ICT) in the operation of these smart urban hubs.

"The authority is working on creating a regulatory framework for smart cities with the aim of covering all aspects and dimensions related to the application of modern and emerging technologies to enable smart cities and the integration of all facilities and services to operate the city efficiently, reliably

and flexibly," the TRA stated in its consultation paper.

The development of Smart Cities has been championed by the Omani government as part a strategic national initiative to help drive economic growth, employment generation and economic diversification. A roadmap for their implementation is set out in the Oman National Spatial Strategy (ONSS) designed to help achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

"The Smart City system is about integration of all the utilities, infrastructure, and citizen services on a single platform and a unified dashboard for efficient, reliable, and resilient operation of the city. There is a need to create and suggest frameworks to achieve the interoperability among all the devices and layers at every interface in the networks, be it a smart home network, a smart building network, a smart city/community network, or the smart grid network," the Authority explained.

"Development of Smart Cities' infrastructure and services is reliant on strong Information & Communications Technology (ICT) infrastructure and governance framework where the roles and responsibilities of all entities that contribute to ICT governance are set out clearly and transparently," it further noted.

In formulating a robust regulatory framework for Smart Cities, the TRA says it aims to, among other things, support market competition and create a level playing field for all ICT service providers operating in Smart Cities.

Besides safeguarding the interests of users, the proposed framework will also enable the growth of commercial data centres, cloud hosting services, Internet of Things (IoT)/Machine to Machine (M2M) devices and services, and the usage of emerging technologies including regulatory sandboxes.

Cybersecurity regulations and interoperability standards are

also proposed to be enforced. A regulatory framework, the Authority has pointed out, is also key to ensuring that ICT infrastructure is suitably embedded into city systems and the civil infrastructure of Smart Cities.

"By leveraging the power of technology, cities can improve the quality of life for their citizens, reduce waste, and promote sustainable development," it stressed.

To this end, regulation will help ensure the incorporation of the following digital components in the planning and development of smart cities: Digital infrastructure to support the Smart and IoT elements for providing smart city services; Shared digital infrastructure and high-speed internet connectivity for all smart cities; Digital skills enhancement to meet future industry needs; Open data and open government practices; Cybersecurity, and Digital Government Services, it added.

Tesla rolls out its first electric pickup, the Cybertruck

NEW YORK: US automaker Tesla on Saturday announced that its first electric pickup — a slick-looking silver Cybertruck — had rolled off the assembly line at its huge plant near Austin, Texas.

"First Cybertruck built at Giga Texas!" says a tweet from the company, accompanied by a photo of the futuristic vehicle amid a sea of helmeted and yellow-vested Tesla workers.

Elon Musk, who owns both Tesla and Twitter, reposted the tweet with the comment "Congrats Tesla Team."

Tesla will be making three models of the Cybertruck, a vehicle that can accelerate from zero to 60 miles per hour (100 kilometers per hour) in less than three seconds

Tesla did not immediately respond to an AFP request for comment on Saturday.

The company had promised in April that it would be rolling out the first Cybertrucks before the



end of the year.

Plans for the vehicle, with its silvery, tortoise-like shape and unusual angles, were first announced in November 2019.

Its original introduction went awry when Musk urged a Tesla employee to strike one of the prototype's windows with a hunk of steel to show its solidity. The window broke — drawing a laugh and a curse word from Musk — as did a second window on an ensuing attempt.

Yet within two days, Tesla said it had received nearly 150,000

advance orders.

In May, Musk said the company hoped to build 250,000 of the trucks a year — a number he said could eventually double, given a relatively accessible price tag.

Tesla will be making three models of the Cybertruck, a vehicle that can accelerate from zero to 60 miles per hour (100 kilometers per hour) in less than three seconds. The basic model will cost \$39,900 and offer a 250-mile range between charges; the top-line truck will have twice that range and sell for \$69,900. — AFP

Omantel celebrates triple win at Global Carrier Community Awards in Berlin

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, scored an enormous victory at the prestigious Global Carrier Community Awards recently held in Berlin, winning three significant titles.

Sohail Qadir, former VP of Wholesale at Omantel and recently appointed CEO of Zain Omantel International (ZOI — Omantel and Zain Group's new joint venture specialised in global wholesale business), was recognised as the 'Most Influential and Inspirational Wholesale Executive of the Year'.

Qadir's leadership has been pivotal in launching and driving ZOI, positioning the company for even greater success in the international wholesale domain.

Commenting on the achievement, Qadir said, "This recognition is a testament to the strong foundation that Omantel has built over the years. As we transition into the new era of ZOI, we are poised to take this legacy forward, combined with Zain's extensive regional presence and success in the retail and digital arenas, to elevate our role into a global powerhouse and reshape the future of the telecom wholesale industry.

Due to its unique characteristics, ZOI



has strongly positioned itself as the gateway from the Middle East to the world".

In a historic moment for the industry, Huda al Ghabshi, Senior Manager of Capacity and Submarine Cables at Omantel, was awarded the "Telecom and Tech Woman of the Year."

This achievement marks Al Ghabshi as the first Middle Eastern woman to receive

this prestigious award, an honour that testifies to her instrumental role in driving Omantel's expansion in the global wholesale domain.

"I am truly honoured to receive this award. I have only joined the wholesale industry back in 2019 but it has been a fast-learning journey since then. I would like to thank Omantel, management, colleagues,

and even our wholesale customers and partners for all their trust and support. this global recognition marks an important milestone in my career and gives me enormous motivation to further excel and positively represent my beloved country," Al Ghabshi commented.

Lastly, Omantel's unwavering commitment to global connectivity, which was demonstrated throughout the years, was recognised as the company bagged the 'Best Subsea Cable Operator of the Year' award.

This recognition celebrates Omantel's comprehensive international wholesale network, with the majority of subsea cables that connect the region with the rest of the world passing through it.

These triple awards stand as a testament to Omantel's robust and influential presence in the wholesale industry, its dedication to gender diversity and equality, and the influential leadership that continues to drive its growth. ZOI is set to take this journey forward and further expand its presence in the international wholesale scene.

As Omantel celebrates these achievements, it remains committed to pushing boundaries and leading digital transformation on a global scale.

GCET to host embassies representatives and cultural attachés

MUSCAT: As part of its keen efforts and continuous support for its students beyond graduation and to attract more international students, the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) will host various embassies' representatives, consultants, and cultural attachés during an introductory meeting and gathering on Monday, July 17, 2023 at the college's premises.

The meeting will provide a platform to introduce GCET, its programmes, and activities, along with discussing the collaboration opportunities in the areas of higher education and research.

Several embassies' representatives, consultants, and cultural attachés from various countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Arab Republic of Egypt, Republic of Iraq, Tunisia, Palestine, Republic of Sudan, Republic of Tanzania, Syria, UK, Pakistan, Morocco, and India will participate in the event.

"We seek to get recognition in various countries around the world to pave the way for more powerful employability opportunities for our students after their graduation," an official of GCET said confirming the importance of such meetings.

He added: "We would like to go beyond expectations when it comes to our most valuable asset; our students, by extending our support even after they graduate to help them gain more opportunities worldwide. This meeting was a perfect chance to engage with different countries' representatives to discuss collaboration opportunities."

GCET has students from different nationalities enrolled in over 10 academic programmes in the fields of Engineering and Technology offered in an academic affiliation with the University of West of England (UWE), UK. The college is considered one of the leading private higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman and is celebrating its 10th anniversary soon.

Ooredoo launches new auto pay service app

MUSCAT: Enjoy peace of mind by letting Ooredoo rethink your monthly phone bill-paying routine. By setting up Auto Pay, the latest and hassle-free automatic payment feature in the Ooredoo App, Shahry postpaid customers automatically and simply pay their bill every month when it is due.

So, no worries; you can carry on streaming, chatting and working without the hassle of remembering your bill due date every month. Based on an estimate, customers can set a fixed monthly payment amount to be deducted from their bank account.

Ooredoo will automatically get your bills settled every month based on your outstanding balance never exceeding the amount defined by the customer.

The new Auto Pay feature is available to Ooredoo mobile



and fixed-line customers on any of the Shahry postpaid plans, which include Shahry Endless, Omanuna, and Data Only plans. All contract-free Shahry plans offer affordable high-speed Internet, loads of data, and minutes to make calls to numbers in Oman and selected countries abroad.

Customers can easily and quickly set up the Auto Pay through the Ooredoo App's Auto Pay section and setting it up only takes moments. To activate Auto pay, head to the Ooredoo App, or visit: <https://www.ooredoo.om/AutoPay>.

ahli Islamic continues to offer 1% Hiba on Qitaf new to bank deposits

MUSCAT: Upholding its commitment to enhance customers' banking experiences with products and services that are rewarding and gratifying, ahli Islamic has extended its exciting 1% Hiba for new-to-bank deposits.

The cashback offer is eligible for all new-to-bank and existing customers of Qitaf for deposits of RO 5,000 and above, and the same who are seeking to grow their fortunes with the Qitaf Savings account that is based on the Shariah Mudaraba principle. As per the scheme, the 1% Hiba will be credited to the customer's Qitaf account after three-month deposit period. There is, however, a cap of RO 5,000 per cashback, per account.

Highlighting the benefits accruing from the Hiba offer, Noora Sultan, AGM – Head of Retail Banking ahli Islamic, said, "We are leveraging the popularity of our Qitaf Savings Account to help new to bank customers establish a strong financial base with the added benefit of gift.

Our objective is to reward customers with an attractive cashback offer that will augment their financial strengths and inculcate a strong savings culture. We have, from the very beginning, demonstrated our intent to enhance our customers' banking experiences and financial inclusion with products and services that are tailored to meet the customers' immediate and future needs, and the one per cent Hiba on Qitaf deposits is aimed at precisely this factor.

With the one per cent credited directly to the



account, after the 3-month deposit period, we are opening investment avenues for our new customers an easy and convenient option to grow their finances.

"The offer is a part of our ongoing efforts to provide easy platforms for new-to-bank. We have taken constructive steps to create better awareness and understanding of Islamic banking, inspiring new customers to join our fold.

ahli Islamic's Qitaf Savings Account is an investment account that enables you to invest your money based on the Sharia principles of Mudaraba, whereby the account holder (Rabb ul-Mal) invests funds with ahli Islamic (Mudarib) through an unrestricted Mudaraba contract. Furthermore, you can optimise your profitable investments with the option to withdraw funds at any time.

Bank Muscat updates its e-services to align with new RTGS system

MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to keep up with the latest developments in the banking sector, and to enhance the quality of payment system services, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has updated its systems to comply with the new national Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system recently launched by the Central Bank of Oman.

This system provides automated solutions for processing and final settlement between local banks of payment orders exceeding RO 20,000 very quickly and without any waiting period.

The Ministry of Finance and banks operating in the Sultanate of

Oman as well as Muscat Clearing and Depository Company are the direct participants in the system. After the new update, the RTGS system will work around the clock all days of the week.

Speaking on this occasion, Zuwaina bint Abdullah al Sharji, Assistant General Manager — Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is keen to keep abreast of all developments in the banking sector and develop its digital systems to align with global developments and meet the needs of the financial market in the Sultanate of Oman.

With the latest update to the RTGS system, customers will be



able to make money transfers at any time — during holidays as well as outside working hours, which enhances their banking experience.

Also, this system, through which large-scale and important operations are performed, can

affect the economy as a whole, takes more time.

On the contrary, reducing risks and speeding up transactions positively affects the efficiency of cash circulation within the economy and boosts economic growth.

For this reason, Bank Muscat is keen to keep abreast of all these updates in accordance with international regulations aiming at providing a better service to its customers by saving time and effort in clearing transactions in a fast and secure way."

The new system works in parallel with the AFAQ payments system to execute financial transactions between GCC countries through the Gulf Payment Company. In line with the developments in the electronic payment systems domain, the system was implemented in accordance with the best practices, international standards, and the Principles for Financial Market Infrastructures

(PFMI).

The system also achieves the settlement finality in the Central Bank currencies of different participants from financial and banking institutions, which helps in enhancing the financial stability of the Sultanate of Oman.

The enhanced liquidity management mechanism for RTGS participants is an additional feature for risk mitigation by enabling them to monitor their liquidity requirements in real time around the clock.

The latest gridlock resolution mechanism introduced in the system will help reduce the settlement risk among participants.



Raysut Cement sets strategic plans for future growth

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JULY 16

Raysut Cement, a leading cement producer in the Sultanate of Oman, has reported a significant reduction in losses for the first half of 2023. The company recorded a loss of RO 1.742 million, versus a loss of RO 5.3 million in the same period last year.

This positive development can be attributed to Raysut Cement's implementation of strategic measures to enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs, and boost sales volumes.

The company is optimistic that this positive trend will continue throughout the second half of 2023.

In a recent update to its shareholders, Raysut Cement Company SAOG highlighted the



latest advancements and strategic initiatives aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability and

growth of the organisation.

The company has engaged an independent technical consultant

to conduct a comprehensive audit of its Raysut plant. Simultaneously, the management

team is actively finalising a robust turnaround plan.

Expected to be completed within the next three months, the plan will be reviewed by an independent expert and the company's Board of Directors. Shareholders will be actively involved in the discussion and approval process during an upcoming Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM).

Recognising the need for additional capital to successfully execute the anticipated turnaround plan, Raysut Cement's Board of Directors plans to seek shareholder approval for the required capital injection through an EGM.

To ensure uninterrupted operations during the transition period, the company is actively pursuing a bridging loan as a short-term financial arrangement until the long-term capital raising

process is finalised.

Upon assuming their roles, the newly appointed Board of Directors have been implementing corrective measures to address the company's challenges.

These measures include stringent adherence to corporate governance principles, approval of a Delegation of Authority Matrix, reinforcement of internal controls, strengthening of the internal audit and audit committee, meticulous monitoring of financial systems, cost optimisation initiatives, and a thorough review of subsidiary performance to achieve financial independence.

To protect shareholder value, Raysut Cement has also engaged the expertise of a renowned international firm to conduct a comprehensive forensic investigation.

Musk says Twitter has lost half its advertising revenue

NEW YORK: Twitter has lost roughly half of its advertising revenue, according to owner Elon Musk, since he bought the social media platform for \$44 billion last October.

Musk, who has been outspoken about the difficulties facing the company, broke the figures in a tweet response to a user who was giving suggestions on financing for the platform.

"We're still negative cash flow, due to 50% drop in advertising revenue plus heavy debt load," the billionaire tweeted Saturday.

"Need to reach positive cash flow before we have the luxury of anything else," he added, without further elaboration. Insider Intelligence has reported that Twitter was set to earn less than \$3 billion in revenue in 2023, down one-third from 2022. Changes instituted by Musk since his takeover of Twitter have turned off users and advertisers alike.

Earlier this month, Musk announced that Twitter was limiting verified accounts to reading 10,000 tweets a day, in a bid "to address extreme levels of data scraping" and "system manipulation" by third-party platforms.

Non-verified users — the free accounts that make up the majority of users — are limited

to reading 1,000 tweets per day, while new unverified accounts are limited to 500 tweets.

Twitter has also said TweetDeck, a popular program that allows users to monitor several accounts at once, will only be available to verified users from next month. The changes came as Threads, an app launched by Facebook parent Meta as a rival to Twitter, registered more than 100 million users in its first five days.

Earlier this year, the artificial intelligence app ChatGPT, created by OpenAI, took two months to reach the same number of active users.

According to some estimates, Threads has now reached 150 million users, with India leading the way, boosted by its link to Instagram that gives it a built-in audience of more than two billion users and spares the platform the challenge of starting from scratch.

Twitter is thought to have around 200 million regular users but it has suffered repeated technical failures since Musk bought the platform and sacked thousands of staff.

Many have expressed privacy concerns over Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg's new platform, which asks users to give Meta permission to track them closely across the internet. — **AFP**

Yellen 'eager' to work with China on debt, other global challenges

GANDHINAGAR, India: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Sunday she was "eager" to work with China on areas of mutual interest, including debt restructurings for poorer countries, and that multilateral development banks needed reforms before capital increases could be considered.

At a press conference before a meeting of Group of 20 finance ministers and central bankers in India, Yellen said her visit to Beijing last week helped put the US-China relationship on "surer footing" and that the world's two biggest economies had an obligation to the world "to cooperate on areas of mutual concern".

"There is much more work to do. But I believe this trip was an important start," Yellen said. "I am eager to build on the groundwork that we laid in Beijing to mobilise further action."

Concerns remain about China's unfair trade practices, which prompted Washington to impose tariffs on Beijing. "They really have not been addressed," she said.

US corporations want to see an environment where they could "invest and thrive in China," Yellen



US Treasury Secretary Yellen addresses a news conference during a G20 finance ministers' and Central Bank governors' meeting at Gandhinagar, India. — **Reuters**

said.

Washington will continue to cut off Russia's access to military equipment and technologies that Moscow needs in the invasion of Ukraine, Yellen said.

"One of our core goals this year is to combat Russia's efforts to evade our sanctions. Our coalition is building on the actions we've taken in recent months to crack down on these efforts," she added.

India, which chairs the G20 this year, has sought a largely neutral

stance on the war, generally declining to blame Russia for the invasion Moscow launched in February last year, urging a diplomatic solution and sharply boosting its purchases of Russian oil even as Western nations seek to squeeze Moscow.

Yellen said she would continue to push hard at the G20 meeting, in Gandhinagar in the northwestern Indian state of Gujarat, for "full and timely participation of all bilateral official creditors on

pending debt restructurings".

She said she discussed Zambia's restructuring with her Chinese counterparts and, although it took too long to negotiate, differences were overcome.

"We should apply the common principles we agreed to in Zambia's case in other cases — rather than starting at zero every time. And we must go faster," Yellen said, adding she hoped debt treatments for Sri Lanka and Ghana could be finalised quickly so the International Monetary Fund (IMF) could move forward with initial loan programme reviews this fall.

She said a debt restructuring "user guide" was needed for borrowing countries and other stakeholders to provide clarity about the process.

Yellen said the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth trust, which provides zero-interest loans to the world's poorest countries, needed to be put on sounder financial footing.

The US Treasury is ready to assist the IMF to consider options for this, including using internal fund resources, she said.

— **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

China's economic recovery is fading quickly: data

A flurry of economic data from China on Monday is expected to show its post-pandemic bounce is quickly fizzling out, raising expectations that the country's government needs to unveil more stimulus measures soon to shore up activity and shaky consumer confidence.

After a strong start to the year following the dismantling of tough Covid-19 measures, recent data have pointed to a sharp loss of economic momentum due to weak demand at home and abroad and a protracted slump in the country's property market, traditionally a significant growth driver.

The world's second-largest economy likely managed just 0.5% growth in the second quarter compared with three



months earlier, on a seasonally adjusted basis, according to economists polled by media, with separate data for June expected to show industrial output, retail sales and investment continuing to cool.

Some economists have blamed the "scarring effects" caused by years of strict Covid measures and regulatory curbs on the property and technology sectors — despite recent official efforts to reverse some curbs to support the economy. — **Reuters**

LONDON

UK formally signs up to trans-Pacific trading bloc

The UK government on Sunday hailed what it said was its biggest trade deal since Brexit, as it formally signed a treaty to join a major Indo-Pacific bloc business and Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch signed the accession protocol for the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in New Zealand.

It makes the United Kingdom the first new member and first European nation to join the bloc since it was created in 2018.

The CPTPP comprises the UK's fellow G7 members Canada and Japan, plus long-standing allies Australia and New Zealand, alongside Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.



It has been seen as a bulwark against Chinese dominance in the region, although Beijing has applied to join.

Badenoch said in an interview with Sky News that the deal showed the UK "looking outwards towards the world". "We have a seat at the table in the fastest-growing region, countries are queuing up (to join). "I'm really excited that we've brought home the biggest trade deal since we left the European Union."

— **AFP**

NEW DELHI

India to push G20 to raise share of taxes on firms

India will push its Group of 20 partners at a meeting it is hosting to support its proposal to raise the share of taxes multinational companies pay to countries where they earn "excess profits", government officials said.

India's proposal, which has not been previously reported, could temper optimism among G20 members such as Australia and Japan that the meeting of finance ministers and central bankers in Gujarat would make progress on a long-awaited overhaul of global corporate taxation.

More than 140 countries were supposed to start implementing next year a 2021 deal overhauling decades-old rules on how governments tax multinationals.

The present rules are widely considered outdated as digital



giants like Apple or Amazon can book profits in low-tax countries.

The deal, pushed by the US, would levy a minimum 15% tax on large global firms, plus an additional 25% tax on "excess profits", as defined by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But several countries have concerns about the multilateral treaty underpinning a major element of the plan, and some analysts say the overhaul is at risk of collapse. — **Reuters**

The entrepreneurial mindset: Turning ideas into action



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The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

What is it that propels certain individuals from the spark of an idea to the establishment of a successful enterprise? Have you ever pondered this intriguing conundrum? Our exploration today delves into the core of the entrepreneurial journey, focusing

on the ‘entrepreneurial mindset’. It’s this unique amalgamation of beliefs, visions, and thoughts that energise enterprising individuals to transform their dreams into tangible reality. The entrepreneurial mindset is not merely important, but rather a non-negotiable prerequisite for success in the business arena. It’s defined by a relentless curiosity, a robust resilience, an adaptable spirit, and an insatiable appetite for opportunities. It’s not only about birthing fantastic ideas but also about having the grit and audacity to bring them to fruition. Take, for example, Elon Musk, the ingenious mind behind Tesla and SpaceX. Musk is not just an innovator; he’s a visionary who dares to actualise his dreams, even in the face of immense criticism and setbacks. This illustrates the essence of the entrepreneurial

mindset. A cornerstone of this mindset is resilience. The entrepreneurial journey is rarely smooth sailing; it’s frequently punctuated by a multitude of hurdles ranging from financial constraints to fierce competition. What distinguishes successful entrepreneurs, however, is their capacity to recover from these setbacks and keep propelling forward. They view failures not as terminal, but as valuable learning experiences and stepping stones towards growth. Spotting opportunities is another integral facet of the entrepreneurial mindset. Successful entrepreneurs excel at identifying market gaps, crafting innovative solutions, and converting these into profitable enterprises. They don’t just react to situations; they proactively sculpt

opportunities for their benefit and for the greater good. Another characteristic ingrained in the entrepreneurial DNA is flexibility. The business landscape is an ever-evolving beast, influenced by advancing technologies, shifting market trends, and dynamic consumer behaviours. Entrepreneurs must be agile and adaptable, ready to pivot their strategies swiftly to remain competitive. But an entrepreneurial mindset isn’t solely about resilience, opportunism, or adaptability. At its core, it is fuelled by a deep sense of purpose and a burning passion. Entrepreneurs are typically driven by a desire to effect change, to create something of significant value, far beyond the pursuit of profits. As the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) beautifully

said, “What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured.” This epitomises the essence of entrepreneurship - solving problems, alleviating discomforts, and ultimately, enriching lives. Now that we’ve comprehended the heart of the entrepreneurial mindset, the subsequent query is: How can we nurture this mindset within ourselves? How can we channel it to convert our ideas into action, to initiate and flourish successful businesses? Let’s delve deeper into practical strategies to cultivate this mindset. **1. Embrace Failure:** Don’t be afraid to take risks and make mistakes. Remember, every failure is a stepping stone towards success. Learn from your mistakes and keep moving forward.

2. Seek Opportunities: Always be on the lookout for opportunities. Be curious, ask questions, and explore new possibilities. This can help you identify gaps in the market that you can fill. **3. Be Flexible:** Be willing to adapt and change your strategies as needed. Stay informed about the latest trends and changes in your industry. **4. Find your Purpose:** Identify what drives you, what you are passionate about. This will keep you motivated and committed to your entrepreneurial journey. In our next article, we will dive into a practical method that many successful entrepreneurs swear by: the Lean Startup Methodology. This could be your first step towards transforming your ideas into a thriving business. Are you ready to turn your entrepreneurial dreams into reality?

Seed funding valuations sprout a bubble

ANITA RAMASWAMY

Venture capitalists might be down, but they’re not exactly out. A new report from data outfit PitchBook and trade group National Venture Capital Association shows that US investment firms that fund new companies did even fewer deals in the second quarter this year than in the already-sluggish first quarter. Higher rates meant valuations are down across the board too, with one exception: the earliest stage companies. The technology investment bubble hasn’t fully burst – it has just moved. These comparatively nascent companies seem largely immune to the venture downturn. So far in 2023, the median pre-money price VCs ascribed to seed-stage startups was \$10.9 million – the highest level in a decade, according to the report. That is up four-fold since 2006. While that isn’t a full reflection of valuation, necessarily, it’s instructive. Valuing startup companies can be somewhat of a crapshoot, and often the pot of new firms gets the same treatment. An investor might take a 10 per cent stake in all of them at a specific price, so directionally the overall pre-money value can be like an index. That seems a world away from late-stage startups, which are feeling the squeeze. Their need for new cash was nearly three times higher than the available supply last quarter, according to the report. Data from equity management platform Carta reflecting 13,000 recent funding rounds suggests that valuations for Series C and D startups last quarter were 23 per cent and 59 per cent lower than in the beginning of 2021, respectively. A largely frozen market for initial public offerings is partly to blame. That has hobbled investors’ confidence in their ability to exit positions. Some issues with late-stage valuations have also caused big problems, including for Tiger Global, making others shier. Many investors who had favoured mature startups have flocked to earlier-stage companies as an alternative, hoping they can hold those positions for longer – perhaps even until the IPO market kicks back into high gear. So the competition is going up. Companies raising seed rounds in today’s market might command higher prices in part because they are better prepared. But it’s unlikely that today’s cohort of seed-stage startups is so markedly superior to predecessors that it warrants record high prices. A newfound focus on seed companies could just be VCs’ latest justification for keeping the tech bubble afloat. — **Reuters**

The World Bank reflects our ambition



AJAY BANGA

The author is President of the World Bank Group.

World leaders are all too familiar with the global community’s challenges – loss of progress in our fight against poverty, an existential climate crisis, a fledgling pandemic recovery, and a crippling war on the borders of Europe. But beneath the surface, a deep mistrust is quietly pulling the Global North and South apart at a time when we need to be uniting if we are to have any hope of overcoming these intertwined crises. The Global South’s frustration is understandable. In many ways, these countries are paying the price for the prosperity of others. When they should be ascendant, they’re concerned promised resources will be diverted to Ukraine’s reconstruction; they feel their aspirations are being constrained because energy rules aren’t applied universally, and they’re worried a burgeoning generation will be locked into a prison of poverty. But the truth is that we cannot endure another period of emission-intensive growth. We must find a way to finance a different world, one where climate resilience is strong, pandemics are manageable, food is abundant, and fragility and poverty are defeated. Our challenges don’t respect lines on a map and won’t be adequately addressed piecemeal. They are affecting us all – but we’re feeling the effects differently. In the Global North, climate change means emissions reductions, but in the Global South, it is a matter of survival, because hurricanes are stronger, heat-resistant seeds are in short supply, drought is destroying farms and towns, and floods are washing away decades of progress. In the middle is the World Bank. While questioning its relevance, the world is looking to the 78-year-old institution to deliver solutions at scale.



IN AN ENVIRONMENT OF INTERTWINED CHALLENGES – INCLUDING AN EXISTENTIAL CLIMATE CRISIS, A FLEDGLING PANDEMIC RECOVERY, AND A CRIPPLING WAR ON THE BORDERS OF EUROPE – THE WORLD BANK HAS NEVER BEEN MORE RELEVANT. BUT, TO DELIVER SOLUTIONS AT SCALE, THE BANK MUST ADOPT A NEW VISION THAT IS WORTHY OF ITS STAKEHOLDERS’ SHARED ASPIRATIONS. To do that, the Bank must adopt a new vision and mission that is worthy of our shared aspirations. In my view, the vision for the World Bank is simple: to create a world free of poverty on a livable planet. But that vision is threatened by these intertwined crises – and we are in a race against time. This urgency motivates us to write a new playbook that will drive meaningful development, leading to better quality of life and jobs for people. Our playbook must reach everyone, including women and young people, and the development it underpins must be resilient to shocks, such as those related to climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, and conflict and fragility. It also must be sustainable, delivering steady economic growth and job creation, gains in health and education, credible fiscal and debt management, food security, and access to clean air, and water, and affordable energy. Anyone who has studied the World Bank, as I have, knows that it is worthy of admiration, having emerged from conflict to channel countries’ energies from warfare to the pursuit of peace. But history and legacy cannot help us now, our legitimacy must be earned daily through the impact the Bank has achieved development goals, while thinking creatively about uses that will incentivise cooperation across borders and tackle shared challenges. But nearly all estimates make clear adequate progress requires trillions of dollars annually. So, we are opening our doors to private-sector partners, working in tandem to support the meaningful, sustainable progress that has eluded us so far. Mobilising the resources needed to generate growth and jobs, which we know is the single best way to drive down poverty, is hard work that will test our shared sincerity and capacity. Fortunately, our institution is designed to take on difficult challenges. But, while we are committed to building a better Bank, in time we will need a bigger Bank. The World Bank is merely an instrument that ultimately reflects the ambition of those on whose generosity it relies, and the progress we aspire to achieve comes at a cost. But if there is wisdom in our origins, it is that monumental challenges require a unified, and scaled, response. Development delayed is development denied, which is why we must overcome the effects of inefficient multilateralism, geopolitical competition, and the mistrust that has become widespread across the Global South. The World Bank must be a refuge from these forces, a sanctuary for cooperation, collaboration, and creativity. If we can build that Bank, we can do big things together. We can eradicate poverty on a livable planet. ©Project Syndicate, 2023

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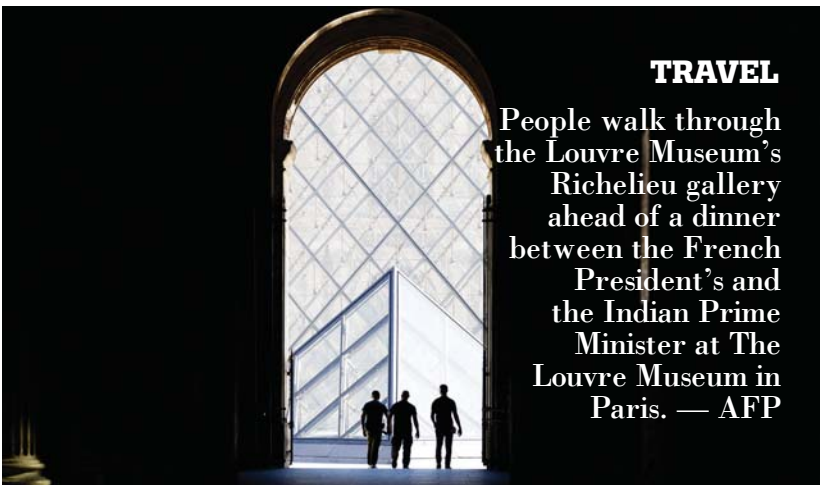
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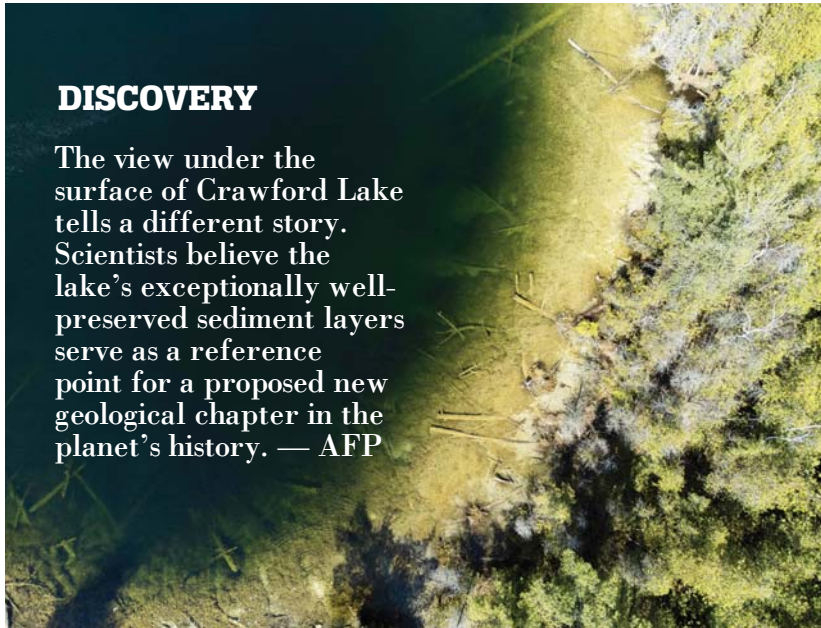


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TRAVEL

People walk through the Louvre Museum's Richelieu gallery ahead of a dinner between the French President's and the Indian Prime Minister at The Louvre Museum in Paris. — AFP



DISCOVERY

The view under the surface of Crawford Lake tells a different story. Scientists believe the lake's exceptionally well-preserved sediment layers serve as a reference point for a proposed new geological chapter in the planet's history. — AFP



FILM

Margot Robbie attends the European premiere of "Barbie" in London. — Reuters



MUSIC

American singer and songwriter Bruce Springsteen plays at Parken in Copenhagen. — Reuters



FASHION

A model presents a creation during the launch of Pierre Cardin Collection 2023, in Beijing. — AFP

art & life

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A floating reservoir of knowledge

MV Logos Hope, world's largest floating book fair that travels between countries, was welcomed in Oman by Ministerial representatives and ambassadors of different countries in Oman and the gargantuan ship will remain in Muttrah till July 22

ENTERTAINMENT

Japan animator Miyazaki's first film in a decade released

OSCAR-WINNING animator Hayao Miyazaki's highly-anticipated film — his first feature in a decade and probably his last — was released in Japan on Friday. The 82-year-old Miyazaki, co-founder of the celebrated anime house Ghibli, came out of retirement to make "How Do You Live?". It was years in production, with the studio taking the unusual step of keeping details about the plot tightly under wraps and offering

minimal publicity. The only clue about the storyline was a poster featuring a hand-drawn, bird-like creature with an eye nestled below its beak. "It was a very Ghibli-esque movie," university student Eisaku Kimura, 21, said after watching a morning screening of the film in the trendy Shibuya district. "It's not like I felt anything special about it just because it was his last work, but I saw a lot of (Miyazaki) in the movie for sure,



and it was exciting." "How Do You Live?" was inspired by a 1937 book of the same title, but the studio said previously the movie would be entirely different. The film is about a boy who moves to the countryside with his father following the death of his

mother. There, he meets a heron, who transports him to an alternate universe where the mystery of his mother's death slowly unravels. "It's such a crazy mixture of all the Ghibli movies I've seen before,"

Because there was no promotion, I had no idea what to think about it, but it was good." Miyazaki has built a cult following with his fantastical depictions of nature and machinery, and beloved characters like the cuddly forest spirit creature Totoro. His film "Spirited Away," about a girl who gets lost in a mysterious world and tries to save her parents, who are turned into pigs, won an Oscar for best animated feature in 2003. In 2013, Miyazaki said he would no longer make feature-length films, as he could not maintain the hectic intensity of his perfectionist approach to work. However, in an about-turn four years later, his production company said he was coming out of retirement to make what would be "his final film, considering his age." — AFP



Valeriia Matveeva, an English teacher from Russia, 30, said. "I think it takes the best of it, and I think it's kind of scary at times but it's also magical."



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Floating library's third time in Oman

By Kabeer Yousuf
Pics by VK Shafeer

A vessel carrying thousands of titles that transcend geographical boundaries, aiming to share knowledge with those who visit onboard in different countries, is attracting children and their parents alike at the Port Sultan Qaboos from July 13.

They sail through a vast collection of diverse titles ranging from atlases, education, and dictionary to titles on medicine, science, education, cookery, sports, arts, and languages and faith, besides children's titles.

MV Logos Hope, world's largest floating book fair that travels between countries, was welcomed in Oman by Ministerial representatives and ambassadors of different countries in Oman and the gargantuan ship will remain in Muttrah till July 22.

This is the third time that the floating book fair is visiting Oman after its last visits to Oman in 2011 and 2013. Visitors are welcomed onboard from 4pm to 10pm and entry fee is Bz500 for adults while children below 12 are given free entry.

On an average, the book fair receives one million visitors on board every year with more than 5,000 titles on sale and till date, the vessel has called on at over 140 ports in more than 70 countries and sold more than 10,000,000 different books. More than 49 million people from across 480 different ports in more than 150 countries have visited MV Logos Hope.

The nearly 350 crew and other staff from more than 65 different nationalities are all volunteers serving in their professional capacity and include from seamen to cooks and from engineers to nurses and electricians.

Her next port of call is Salalah on July 27 and will be stationed there until August 3 from where she will be heading to Seychelles where books will be displayed from August 10 to 17 before



heading to Mombasa in Kenya.

MV Logos Hope is a ship operated as a part of a faith based organisations by Gute Bücher für Alle. Built in 1973 as the ferry MV Gustav Vasa for service between Malmö and Travemünde and

later operated as the MV Norröna providing a ferry service to the Faroe Islands, she was later converted into a moving book fair, the seafaring book fair is operated by the German non-profit group Good Books for All (GBA).

Five things you have to know before checking out Logos Hope

By Yeru Ebuon

Logos Hope, the renowned floating library, has made its port of call in the heart of Port Sultan Qaboos. A former passenger cruise ship turned literary haven, Logos Hope offers a unique opportunity for visitors to browse and purchase books, engage in cultural exchange, and embark on a voyage of discovery. Here are five essential things to know before you embark on this captivating literary experience.



LOCATION

Logos Hope has found its temporary home in Port Sultan Qaboos, enchanting visitors with its grand presence. Private vehicles are not allowed directly at the port. To visit the ship, the public is directed to park in front of the Al Mina Offices, located about 500 metres away from the port. To find the location, type in Logos Hope in Google Maps, and it will direct you to the parking area.

After parking, the public will be asked to stand in line (expect a queue as they are experiencing hundreds of visitors daily) where the entrance fee is collected. A shuttle will drop off visitors to the port terminal.

OPERATIONAL TIMINGS

Logos Hope's doors are open from 4 pm to 10 pm. The last ticket sale occurs

at 9:30 pm, allowing ample time for exploration and discovery. Once on board, visitors will undergo a brief seminar explaining the layout of the ship as well as the guiding rules for exploring the library. There is no time limit for staying on the ship but stay within designated areas as other portions of the ship are not for public access.

ENTRY FEE



For the cost of a mere 500 baisa, adults gain access to the treasures aboard Logos Hope. Children, accompanied by adults, can delight in the journey without incurring any entry fee, fostering a love for literature and education from a young age. This nominal price grants access to a world brimming with approximately 5,000 titles of educational materials and other captivating books.

WHAT TO SEE ONBOARD

With an extensive collection of educational materials, encompassing diverse genres and subjects, visitors can find books that cater to their unique interests and passions. From classics to contemporary works, the floating library offers something for every reader. Whether you seek adventure in fiction or thirst for knowledge in non-fiction, Logos Hope has it all. Best of all is take the opportunity to interact with the crew as they love sharing and hearing your own journey.

AMENITIES AND ACTIVITIES

Beyond its vast collection of books, Logos Hope provides an array of amenities and activities to enhance the visitor experience. A food court tantalises taste buds with an assortment of flavours from around the world. Book club activities are held throughout the day, encouraging visitors to engage in discussions, author talks, and literary events. The ship truly becomes a hub for cultural exchange and intellectual engagement.

DISCOVERY

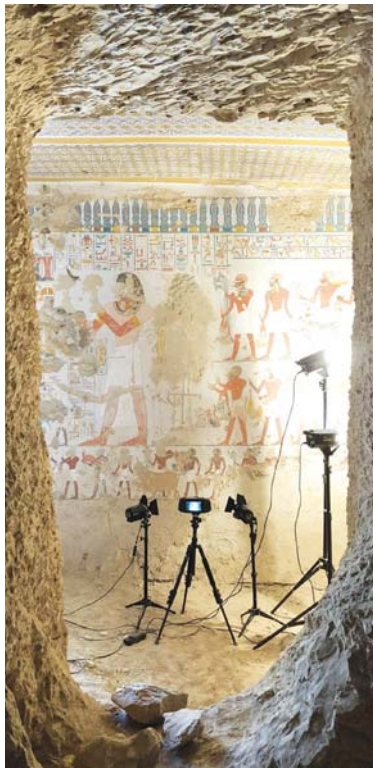
Ancient Egypt artists altered their work, study shows

FROM SUBTLY SHIFTING the position of Ramses II's sceptre, to touch-ups on a necklace or headdress, ancient Egyptian artists were more creative than previously thought, according to a study published on Wednesday.

Using new portable imaging and chemical analysis techniques, an international team of scientists took a fresh look at paintings in the Valley of the Kings — a royal burial ground for pharaohs and other ancient Egyptian elites.

Egyptologists have until now considered art in these tombs to be very conventional, adhering to certain rules and using predefined patterns which were transferred onto walls.

However, a small robot moving in front of the painted walls used X-ray, ultraviolet, and infrared vision to "scrutinise" the art in-depth, much like a medical scanner, said Philippe



Walter of the French centre for scientific research, CNRS, a co-author of the study published in the *PLOS One* journal.

On an image of Ramses II, decorated

ing the tomb of the priest Nakhtamon, painted some 1,200 years BCE, the pharaoh is depicted in profile, wearing a necklace and headdress and holding a royal sceptre.

However image analysis revealed a different composition, hinting at efforts to touch up the original work.

"We didn't expect to see such modifications of a supposedly very formal representation of a pharaoh," meant to be frozen in time, said Walter.

Similar alterations were found on the tomb of the nobleman Menna, depicted with his arms stretched out towards the god of the dead, Osiris.

Analysis showed the position of one of the arms had been moved, while changes were made in the pigments used for skin colour.

It is unclear how many years passed between the alterations, or why they were carried out, but the scientists said it showed evidence of "freedom of creation."

Walter compared this "personal touch" to that seen from "the great painters of the Renaissance," who were shown to make adjustments to their work.

Philippe Martinez, the other co-author of the study with the CNRS, said that if this practice was shown to be commonplace, it would bring pharaonic art closer to our "modern aesthetic standards, nourished by Greco-Roman art". — AFP

TRAVEL

Italian artist Pistoletto's 'Venus of the Rags' destroyed in fire

ONE OF ITALIAN contemporary artist Michelangelo Pistoletto's most famous works, "Venus of the Rags", has been burnt to cinders in a suspected arson attack in Naples, authorities said on Wednesday.

The installation, in which a statue of the Roman goddess of love, beauty and fertility stands next to a vast pile of coloured, discarded clothes, was destroyed where it stood on display near the town hall in the southern Italian city.

Naples Mayor Gaetano Manfredi said the fire in the early hours of Wednesday was "an act of great violence which leaves us speechless", and promised the installation would be rebuilt.

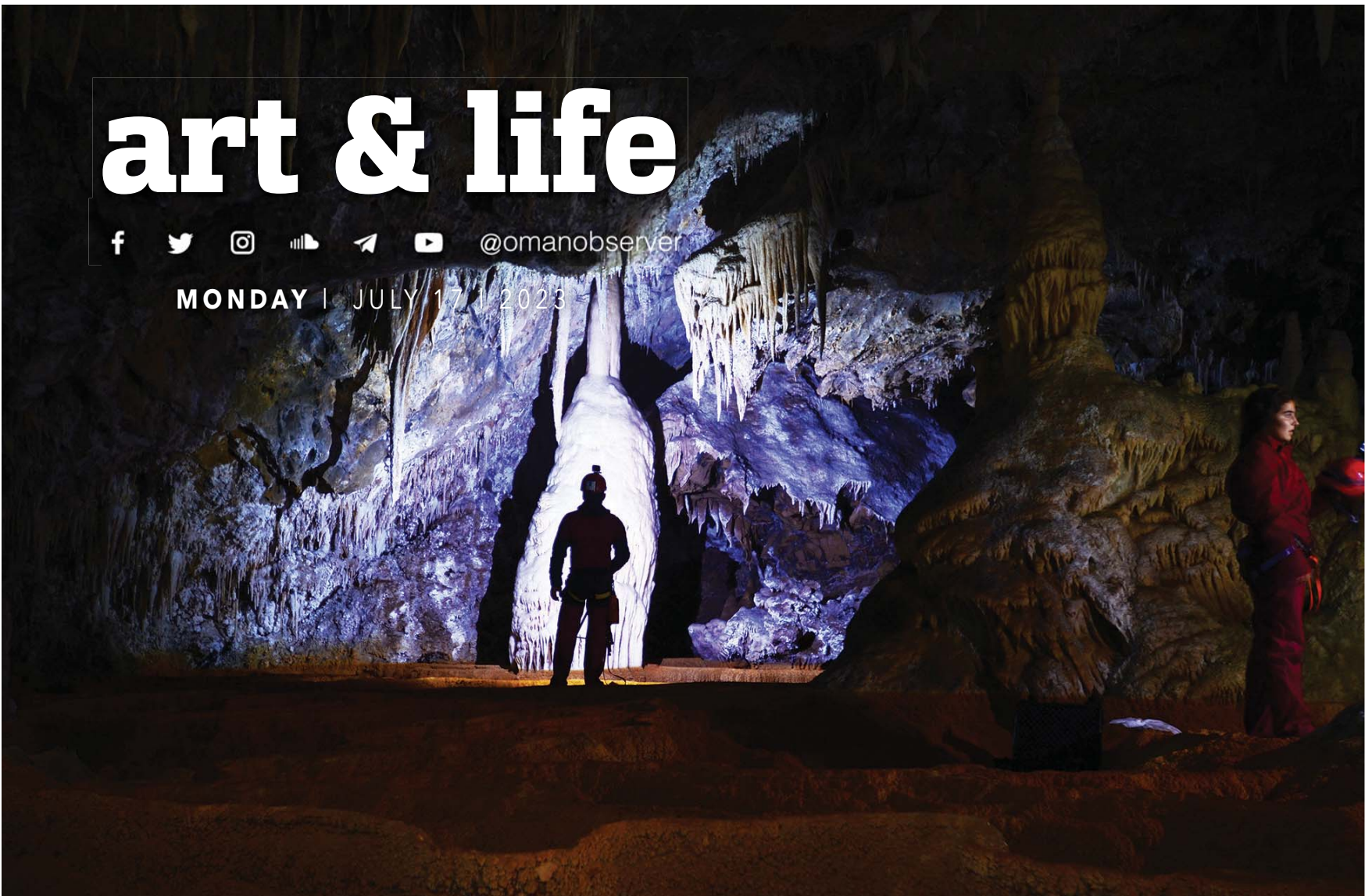


Pistoletto was "embittered and hurt" by the "vandalism", Manfredi said, but keen that the fire be "interpreted by us as a (chance for a) fresh start".

After examining neighbourhood surveillance camera footage, police arrested a 32-year-old homeless man on suspicion of arson and destruction of artistic works, according to *Il Corriere della Sera*.

There are several versions of the "Venus of the Rags", which was first created in 1967 and juxtaposes an iconic figure of classical culture and beauty with the detritus of contemporary society.

Pistoletto, 90, is a central figure in Italy's Arte Povera (Poor Art) movement, and his works have been shown across the world, including in London, New York and Paris. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

From Curiosity to Exploration:
The Tale of Jeita
Cave's Upper
Galleries

By Khaled Abdul Malak

It was like an explosion of happiness and joy. We fell into each other's arms and started jumping like kids." With these words, 85-year-old Lebanese cave explorer Sami Karkabi recalled the reaction of his team when they first saw the upper galleries of Lebanon's Jeita cave in the 1950s.

"It is the most beautiful show cave in the world. It is a wonder," said Karkabi, co-founder of the Spéléo Club du Liban (SCL). Established in 1951, SCL is the oldest caving club in the Middle East. Karkabi was driven by curiosity when he decided to climb a 10-metre-high cornice in the cave, which led to the discovery of the upper galleries in 1958.

"We used a telescopic mast to reach that ledge and then the marvelous foundations of limestone stalagmites and stalactites started unfolding in front of our eyes. It took us two days to complete the visit of the whole upper gallery," Karkabi said.

Jeita cave, a tourism landmark in Lebanon, was a candidate in 2011 to become one of the seven natural wonders of the world. From a list of 440 sites in 220 countries, the Lebanese wonder reached the final stage with 13 other contenders but wasn't selected for the list.

Signs of the existence of the cave, which has two galleries, including a lower one that follows the course of an underground river, were reported in 1836 by an American, Reverend William Thomson, who ventured some 50 meters into the cave, stopping at the edge of the water.

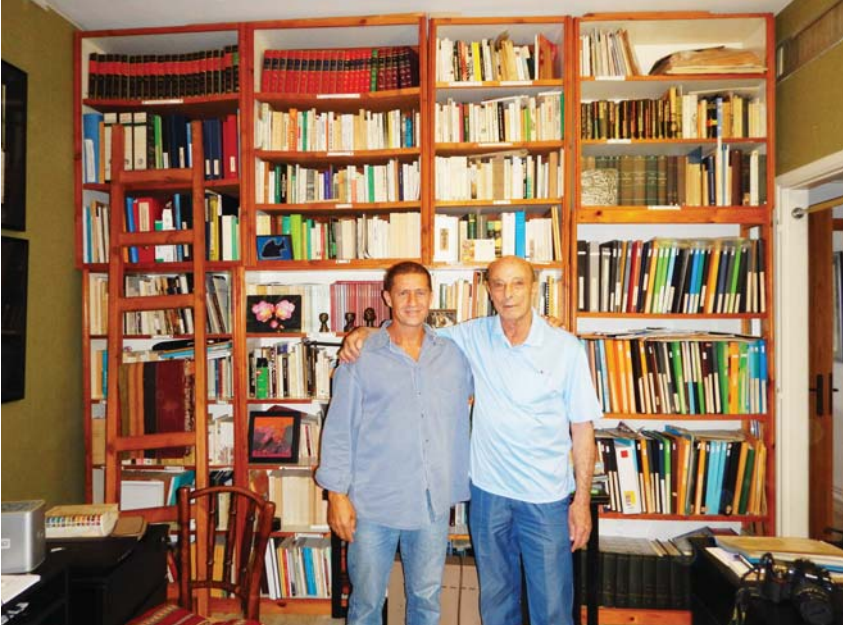
Some 40 years later, American W.J. Maxwell, ventured deeper into the cave, following the river stream about 1,060 metres into the mountain.

Many other expeditions were undertaken by Americans, British and French cavers(they reached 1500m), in addition to Lebanese explorers, including Karkabi, who ventured as far as 6,400 metres into the lower gallery, which is commonly referred to as the "water gallery".

Karkabi recalled how he pushed further the exploration of the "water gallery" after fellow cavers, Lionel Ghorra and Albert Anavy, were discouraged by a 15 metres cliff at 2,800 metres deep.

"In 1949 Ghorra and Anavy reached a spectacular room, which they baptised as the 'Dome Room' but they hit a cliff, which they estimated to be probably 40 metres high and thought it was off the limit of the Lebanese team capacities," he said.

"Pushed by my curiosity, I imported a special telescopic mast with a ladder from France and managed with my team to climb that obstacle, which turned out to be only 12 metres high," Karkabi said. His exploit opened the way for cavers to progress into the grotto and reach the "terminal sump" at 6,400 metres from the entrance in 1954.



Karkabi recalls the risks and difficulties cavers faced at the time, "Our equipment was rudimentary, as we had no wetsuits to protect us from the cold and we were using 'Lux' for the light, instead of headlights," he said.

"It took us many days to do the mapping of the cavern. It happened that in one instance, we had to stay underground for more than one week in a row without seeing daylight," he said, boasting that they "never had a single accident".

SCL was entrusted to transform Jeita into a show cave. The work, involving the construction of alleyways and bridges in the upper gallery, started in 1967 under the supervision of artist and sculptor architect Ghassan Klink. The cave was opened to the public in 1969 with a concert given by the famous composer François Bayle.

"To protect the calcite formations from dust during the work we had to cover them with plastic sheathing," Karkabi said. "Stalactites, stalagmites and other marvellous shapes take thousands of years to develop and grow, breaking one or polluting it could lead to its death."

For Karkabi the showcasing of Jeita is unfinished. Visitors have



access to only 200 metres of the more than 6-kilometre-deep "water gallery". "It's a shame not to share more from this extraordinary artwork of nature with the public," he said, noting that "visitors should be able to reach 2,000 metres had the work been done by the government".

Lebanon is widely known for its richness in caves, which are usually caused by the wide coverage of carbonate rocks of the country's surface area, fracturing and faulting due to tectonic activities and the high rate of precipitation. Rainwater attacks carbonate rock, dissolving it along frac-

tures and faults, forming caves.

Joey Abou Jawdeh, a young architect and member of the club, acknowledged SCL's decreasing activities, pointing out that the club has more than 100 members but only 30 are active.

Nonetheless, Abou Jawdeh said, the club is credited for the discovery of several caves and 60 new sinkholes with depths of 15-60 metres in the area of Jajj in Mount Lebanon. "In Lebanon, we have more than 700 caves and sink holes listed, many of which are unexplored," he said. Caving in Lebanon has become a popular sport in the last decade. Trips into caves range from simple touristic activities to complicated extreme sports.

I had the chance to know Georges Farra and Sami Karkabi, who was the first to climb in the upper gallery of Jeita Grotto. I used to visit Sami every time I travelled to Lebanon and since he passed away around 6 years ago, I

started connecting with Georges and we became very close friends.

Georges is an 85-year-old retired pilot of Lebanon's flag carrier, the Middle East Airlines. He was a very active member of the Speleo Club du Liban and was part of all the expeditions of the club. Every time I visit him and his wife, Therese, I spend hours listening to his exciting stories about their expeditions. I would live his stories because Georges tells them with so much passion.

I visited him last week with a very good friend Johnny Tawk, the current president of the club and again Georges fascinated us with some of his "old "stories .

Touristic caves such as Jeita and Qadisha offer a walk through beautiful scenery. But adventure lovers, who are driven by the exhilaration of facing the unknown, can venture with SCL teams into caves that are not equipped for touristic purposes but are sites for ecotourism. Those sites include Roueiss, Nabaa el Qana and Mgharet Nabaa el Mghara in the northern part of Mount Lebanon.

Definitely, Lebanon has many wonders in its belly waiting to be discovered.

LIFESTYLE



Zayn Malik Talks
Life Since One
Direction in His
First Interview in
Years

AFTER A HIATUS from public life and interviews, Zayn Malik, the former One Direction member, appeared on a podcast that aired on Wednesday and talked about his decision to leave the group, what life has been like since then and his new single in his first interview in years.

"There were great experiences, I had great times with them, but we'd just run our course," Malik said of his time in the band on the "Call Her Daddy" podcast, hosted by Alex Cooper.

Malik was the first to leave One Direction in 2015, after the group had steadily put out chart-topping songs like "What Makes You Beautiful," "Story of My Life" and "Best Song Ever." The boy band, assembled through the British musical competition show "The X Factor," was together for about six years and developed a feverish following among its young fans, who were known for their shrieking and devotion to the five members.

One Direction continued to make music after Malik's departure, but the group officially disbanded in 2016. Malik put out his debut solo single "Pillowtalk" that same year.

During the interview, Malik told Cooper that around the time of his departure, the bandmates were beginning to clash.

"We'd been together every day for five years, and we'd got sick of each other, if we're being completely honest," Malik said. "I look back on it now in a much fonder light than I would've as I'd just left."

He began to see signs that it might be time to go and that others might be doing the same, he



said, and he wanted to "get ahead of the curve" and "be the first" to release his own record.

"I don't want to go into too much detail, but there was a lot of politics going on. People were doing certain things. Some people didn't want to sign contracts, so I knew something was happening," he said.

Cooper also broached the topic of a reported confrontation between Malik and Yolanda Hadid, the mother of his former girlfriend, supermodel Gigi Hadid, with whom he shares a daughter, asking about his decision to largely remain silent on the issue. In response, Malik said he believed that the issue should stay within the family.

"I just keep to myself. I knew what the situation was, I knew what happened and the people involved knew what happened, too," Malik said. "I just didn't want to bring attention to anything."

In recent years, he has lived a much quieter life in suburban Pennsylvania, he said. He said he was happy to get away from the bustle of New York City, enjoying a life mostly free from paparazzi and spending many of his days in the studio, writing and making music.

He said he enjoyed spending time with his cats, dogs, turtles and chickens. (Malik noted that he got too attached to one chicken that died and decided to stop naming them.)

Being out of the public eye also allows for his daughter to live a more private life, should she choose to do so, he said.

"I'm just trying to give her an option," Malik said. "If she wants to be away from it, she can be out here."

Malik said there was a constant stream of fans following the band around when it was together. He recalled one day before the band had ever released a single when fans hid in trash bins outside of a studio in Sweden waiting for the performers to emerge, then popped out and grabbed at them. "I think I had a mini heart attack," he said, jokingly.

One Direction's hit song "What Makes You Beautiful" was on Billboard's Hot 100 list for 34 weeks, peaking at No. 4 in 2012. In 2013, "Story of my Life" had similar staying power, with 32 weeks, and peaked at No. 6 in 2013. "Best Song Ever," however, climbed the highest — it reached the No. 2 spot in 2013 and spent 21 weeks on the chart.

The group held four world tours, performing in North America, Asia, Europe and South America, and sometimes sold out shows in minutes. — **NYT**