

Jabal Akhdhar festival concludes

The cultural activities of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival concluded on Saturday. The weekend activities saw displays of folklore, folk music, parade of horses and traditional equestrian skills, and a SMEs exhibition of agricultural produce, aromatic herbal oils and extracts as well as handicrafts. In addition, there was a full-fledged stage, circus entertainment, musical shows and a fully equipped playground. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN CRASH OUT OF ARAB CUP U-17 CHAMPIONSHIP



P13

OMAN MULLS FORAY INTO PLANT-BASED MEAT PRODUCTS



P20

FARMING IS IN HIS DNA



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO PAKISTAN LEADER

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Pakistan President Dr Arif Alvi on the victims of the heavy rains and floods. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sympathies to the President, families of the deceased and the people of Pakistan and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

RISE IN GCC TOURISTS, HOTEL OCCUPANCY UP

The Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a sharp increase in tourists from the neighbouring GCC countries, especially during the months of June and July that coincide with the Khareef Season in South Oman. According to the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of arrival of GCC nationals increased by 1,187.9 per cent, to 88,0479 at the end of July from 6,870 during the same period a year ago, followed by an increase in European tourists by 703.2 per cent to 193,644 from 24,109 a year ago. **SEE P3**



Survey of wild animals to build database

MUSCAT: A team of the Environment Authority in the Governorate of Dhofar managed to monitor 13 Arabian Gazelles in the Wilayat of Sadah using camera traps.

The national survey aims to improve the ranking of the environmental performance index of the Sultanate of Oman in biodiversity, in addition to building a national database for different species and updating their areas of existence and changes in them.

The project aims to obtain accurate statistics for the enumeration of all types of medium and large-sized wild animals in order to identify areas of protection of the highest priority, in addition to publishing and documenting the biodiversity in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is noteworthy that this project will continue its work until the end of 2024 in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman by using camera traps, in addition to field surveys of project sites by a team of specialists.

— ONA

Schools reopen on Sept 4

TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING STAFF TO ARRIVE TODAY TO WELCOME STUDENTS

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

Teaching and non-teaching staff in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman will return to schools on Sunday to prepare for resuming classes in the new academic year on September 4.

For students, it will also mark the resumption of a normal opening for an academic year that was badly impacted due to precautionary measures imposed to limit the spread of Covid-19.

A total number of 57,033 teachers including 17,396 men ((30.5 per cent) and 39,637 women (69.5 per cent) will return to the work, apart from 10,834 technicians and administrators.



Meanwhile, the Director-General of Curriculum Development said that most textbooks will be available in time this year, apart from two books that are printed abroad.

He said that there have been changes in the curriculum for the 11th grade with regard to certain subjects. According to the director-general, both institutions and parents have been demanding for expansion of the humanities curriculum.

On teaching of the French and German languages, he said it has not yet been expanded in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, but only certain in specific schools. “There are agreements with the Omani-French Institute and the German GuTech Institute for teaching these languages.

The Ministry of Education has received three of the five approved school buildings in Liwa, which will become functional during the academic year 2022/2023 to keep pace with the expected growth in the number of students.

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has ensured the availability of school materials at appropriate prices. CPA is currently undertaking several initiatives aimed at raising consumer awareness in various fields.

40
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JABAL AKHDHAR FESTIVAL CONCLUDES

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The cultural activities of the Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival concluded on Saturday. The weekend activities saw displays of folklore, folk music, parade of horses and traditional equestrian skills, and a SMEs exhibition of agricultural produce, aromatic herbal oils and extracts

as well as handicrafts. In addition, there was a full-fledged stage, circus entertainment, musical shows and a fully equipped playground. The seasonal fruit pomegranate was in abundance and as it is the fruit of the season, but also available were the rose water, distilled mint water, garlic and walnuts amongst other products. Something unique, the walking sticks

made of wood of olive trees were also largely seen. The Under-Secretary for Heritage, Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, took a tour of the exhibits and activities lined up at The Sama Jabal Al Akhdhar Hotel. He said the festival will continue next year with more events and activities. Al Muhannad al Nabhani, Operations

Manager, Sama Hotel, said, “We tried to attract local entrepreneurs and encouraged them to exhibit what they can because we had people from all over Oman visiting us. We have also had the participation of restaurants and cafes from Muscat as well.” He explained that many SMEs have come up over the years, expanding the businesses from rose water and rose extracts to handmade soaps and healthcare

products from the sourced plants and flowers. “During the summer, most visitors are domestic tourists, mostly Omanis because it is hot in Muscat so they come to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar to cool off. We also have other nationalities like British, Indians and French who come to the hotel and during winter the visitors are Europeans,” he added.



Tender Notice

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Musandam Governorate) is pleased to announce the following Tender:

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Date of Submission	Tender Fee (RO)
T/003/OWWSC/2022	Automation & Civil Works in Al Rawdah Well Fields at Khasab Wilayat in Musandam Governorate (re-floating)	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	11/09/2022	25/09/2022	25 Rials (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable

- The tender documents can be obtained from Financial Control Section Support Services Department Musandam Governorate from the date of publication of this announcement (from 8.00 am to 12.00 pm, Sunday to Thursday) up to the last date of distribution of tender documents stated above.
- Tenders should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Chairman of the Sub Tender Committee Musandam Governorate and marked with Tender Number and the subject. No other marks or any reference thereto should be printed outside the envelopes.
- All participating companies shall submit a Bid Bond of 1% of bid value along with their offer. Bid Bond must be obtained from a Bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Sealed bid along with all required documents shall be delivered to the Tender Box, in the Support Service Building in Musandam Governorate, located at Wilayat of Khasab not later than 10:00 am on the date specified above.
- Tenderer should provide Tender Board registration certificate & Visa Card for Payment
- For more information, please contact: 26830810 - 26830843

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Families flock to enjoy Khareef

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

All roads are leading to Dhofar, where khareef is at its climax. The wilayats of Mirbat, Darbat, Wadi Samhain and Taqah are attracting tourists from far and wide for its rains and mist when the rest of the region is roiling under punishing summer. Not just individuals but families are out to explore green and foggy mountains of Dhofar. “A large number of tourists, predominantly Arabs and Europeans are visiting the major destinations of Dhofar during khareef and along with airlines and hotels, flats and small scale accommodation providers, we too are benefitted from the visitors,” a tea shop owner at the foothills of Ittin mountain said. The khareef season, which is characterised by the misty and rainy weather, paint Dhofar green with the temperature



dropping to less than 30 degrees Celsius. The khareef season, characterised by its beautiful tropical weather and moderate temperatures began in Dhofar Governorate on June 21 this year and will end on September

21, 2022. Khareef weather is usually experienced along the coastal wilayats from the Wilayat of Dhalkout in the west to the Wilayat of Mirbat in the east. Although tourists largely preferred flats and hotels in and

around the main city, Salalah, hotels and resorts in places like Mirbat too are reporting a busy traffic. “We receive both domestic tourists most families during the season and our occupancy is about 50 per cent these days with an increasing number of enquiries from allover,” said Juan Paulo Alphonso General Manager of Omran’s Alila Hinu Bay resort in Mirbat. Abdullah al Rawahi, an employee of the Ministry of Education has visited Dhofar during the khareef season before. But this year’s visit with his family and extended families was a remarkable one. “Khareef Dhofar is very close to my heart as we visit the region a couple of times from my home town Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and this time the weather is so lovely,” Abdullah, who was spotted at one of the outdoor camping grounds, said.



Surge in GCC tourists, hotel occupancy up

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a sharp increase in tourists from the neighbouring GCC countries, especially during the months of June and July that coincide with the Khareef Season in South Oman.

According to the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of arrival of GCC nationals increased by 1,187.9 per cent, to 88,0479 at the end of July from 6,870 during the same period a year ago, followed by an increase in European tourists by 703.2 per cent to 193,644 from 24,109 a year ago.

The number of Omani guests dropped 7.1 per cent from 447,659 to 415,711. The number of American guests increased by 191.6 per cent to 30,210, while the number of African guests increased by 103.3 per cent to 4,682 guests. The number of Asian guests increased by 33.4 per cent to 83,736 from 111,703 last year.

This Khareef, Salalah Airport has experienced a great rush with 315,000 passengers traveling the airport.

Among airline companies

frequenting the region, low-cost Wizz Air operates two weekly flights from Abu Dhabi to Salalah, Gulf Air operates two weekly flights from the Kingdom of Bahrain.

The revenues of 3 to 5-star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman grew by 117.6 per cent until the end of July 2022, while the occupancy rate of these hotels was 25.4 per cent.

The monthly bulletin for tourism issued by the pointed to an increase in the total number of guests of these hotels by 45.4 per cent, reaching 903,000 guests at the end of July last year, compared to the same period of 2021, with a total of 620,979 guests.

It may be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic had a serious impact on the tourism sector for two years as it was evident from the figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) in its annual bulletin.

The Minister of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) recently told media persons that the pandemic badly hit the tourism sector and nearly 20,000 job opportunities were lost in the process. He said the sector's losses amount to nearly RO 1.3 billion during this period.

Avoid burning farm waste

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The civic authorities have urged farm owners not to burn farm wastes or agricultural waste, causing serious environmental issues and, instead, dump them in landfills at Al Amerat and Barka for a safer environment.

It has been found that people choose to burn agricultural waste because it is the easiest and cheapest way to discard agricultural waste, but the danger of this detrimental practice is worse than the accumulation of the same, and is posing greater health hazards in and around the farm areas and is harmful to the environment as well.

"Setting fire to the agriculture waste is easy, economical and less strenuous, but burning agricultural waste disrupts the fertility of the soil and emits harmful carbon dioxides thus jeopardising the plans towards safe environment," said Fadel al Ameri, Head of the Public Hygiene Department in Muscat Municipality in Bausher.

He further said that the incidence of burning farm waste has increased and it has become a matter of concern and that there are a number of such a surge in cases.

"The major reason behind large scale farm waste is that it is a low-cost method and secondly, it does not require much physical effort. But the repercussions of such an act are long lasting. Some farm



waste poses significant risks to the environment and the public health, as the fumes carry many toxic compounds and lead to a decrease in soil fertility."

Muscat Municipality has issued a number of legislative measures to tackle the issue and to protect the environment, combat pollution and promote public health.

The Royal Decree No 114/2001 has stressed the protection of

the local environment, together with the controls which are set to ensure the Omani environment remains free of pollution.

The Muscat Municipality's local order No 55/2017 on the violations against anyone who dumps and burns solid waste, besides the local order No 1/2006 on the Prevention of Public Health under Article No 11 stipulates that 'any person is prohibited from dumping, leaving,

placing, or burning any waste in public places or disposing of it in other than the disposal sites specified by the municipality.'

Muscat Municipality further emphasised the safe disposal of such waste by discarding it at the existing landfills in Al Amerat and Barka, with a view to avoid the disastrous risks that can result from these random individual practices.

Oman supports Opec+ efforts

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 27

The Sultanate of Oman supports the efforts of Opec+ members to main market stability in the oil and gas sector, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said in a statement on Friday.

"The Sultanate of Oman supports Opec+ efforts to maintain market stability in the

The Sultanate of Oman supports Opec+ efforts to maintain market stability in the face of distortions and volatility

face of distortions and volatility. The Opec+ member countries participating in the Declaration of Cooperation (DoC) have demonstrated their relentless commitment, agility and flexibility to deal with the challenges that the

global oil market has faced over the past several years, especially in 2020," the statement said.

Oil prices ended higher on Friday, boosted by signals from Saudi Arabia that Opec could cut output, but trading was

volatile as investors digested and ultimately shrugged off warnings from the head of the US Federal Reserve about economic pain ahead.

Oil prices briefly fell after Fed Chair Jerome Powell said tight monetary policy may be in store for some time to fight inflation, meaning slower growth, a weaker job market, and some pain for households and businesses.

■ MONITORING OF ARABIAN GAZELLES



A team from the Environment Authority in Dhofar has managed to monitor 13 Arabian Gazelles in the Wilayat of Sadah using camera traps. – ONA



مبادرة
MUBADRAH

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Rusayl Industrial City Company L.L.C is a Subsidiary of Oman investment & Development Co. S.A.O.C (Mubadrah), announce the following Tenders:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
1/2022/O.D	Provide Maintenance, Cleaning and Landscaping Services in Rusayl Industrial City	08-09-2022	06-10-2022	Maintenance, Cleaning & Landscaping Services	Excellent Grade and Grade One	300
2/2022/O.D	Operation & Maintenance of Sewage Treatment Plants in Rusayl Industrial City	08-09-2022	06-10-2022	Operating and Maintenance Services of Sewage Plants.	Excellent Grade and Grade One	100

General Terms:

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from Headquarter of the Company in Rusayl Industrial City (Administrative Complex) from the date of issuing this announcement, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on Tender Box in the Headquarter of the Company in Closed Envelope addressed to **Chairmen of General Tender Committee**, the Tenderer should enclose Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days.
- Rusayl Industrial City Company is not bound to accept the lowest or any other offers and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

For Queries:

For further queries please contact the following: (24449610 – 24449614 – 24449619) during working hours from 9:00 A:M to 3:00 P: M.



GET THINGS BACK ON TRACK BUT WITH CAUTION

IT IS BETTER TO AVOID RISKS THAN STAYING OVERCONFIDENT. THE COMING MONTHS WILL BE CRUCIAL AS FOOTBALL FANS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD WILL COME TO THE REGION DURING WINTER



VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The world is finally getting back on its feet with the pandemic-hit two years of this decade to be relegated into history.

While airlines, airports and hotels struggled to get businesses back on track due to staff shortages, average people have spared no moments to travel across the world sans restrictions, masks and PCR tests, which have been confirmed by the figures released by IATA and UN World Trade Organization.

But in a subtle warning, the World Health Organization said that the Eastern Mediterranean Region has reported almost 23 million cases and almost 350,000 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The coming months will be crucial as football fans from all over the world will come to the

region during winter, which is also branded as the season of flu.

“While public health and social measures have been reduced, Covid-19 still poses a threat to us all. People are still being infected and dying. In the past week alone, more than 80,000 people were infected and more than 600 died of Covid-19 in our region, and over 5.4 million new cases and 15,000 deaths were reported globally.”

The Sultanate of Oman has eased all restrictions linked to Covid-19 and wearing masks or maintaining social distance is no longer mandatory. At the same time, in the neighbouring UAE, wearing a mask is mandatory in public transport and malls.

India has made masks mandatory on all international and domestic flights.

“This pandemic is not over, and Covid-19 is not going away. We are going to have to learn to live with this virus, but this does not

mean ignoring those measures that can protect us and our loved ones,” the WHO has said.

Speaking to the Observer, Mohammed al Balushi, a HR executive, said, “We are still seeing people struggling with cough, fever and throat issues. It is difficult to make out whether they have Covid or not as testing is hardly done these days. As a precautionary measure, we should continue to wear them especially in crowded places.”

A senior health official at a MoH clinic said, “It is better to avoid risks than staying overconfident. We suggest all our patients follow basic Covid-era measures like using hand sanitisers and wearing masks in crowded and indoor areas, even if not always.”

WHO called on countries to maintain and continue to strengthen their surveillance efforts, including testing and sequencing to monitor the

impact of the virus in terms of transmission, hospitalisation, death and vaccine effectiveness.

The WHO director for the region urged everyone to continue following public health and social measures and to make sure that they get fully vaccinated and boosted when presented with a Covid-19 vaccine.

“This is particularly important if you are above 60 years of age or vulnerable because of a pre-existing medical condition. Vaccines save lives and protect health systems from being overburdened. They allowed us to reopen societies and our economies without placing anyone at increased risk.”

The WHO said almost 46 per cent of people in the region are fully vaccinated, with over 790 million doses administered. While the vaccine does not fully protect from Covid-19, it is effective at preventing severe forms of illness and deaths.



In brief

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA APPOINTS NEW SUPREME COURT CHIEF JUSTICE

Uday Umesh Lalit was sworn in on Saturday as India's Chief Justice for the Supreme Court, though he is only set to hold the post for 74 days before his retirement falls due in November. Under India's constitution, Supreme Court justices are required to retire aged 65 years. The chief justice is appointed by the president according to seniority. Earlier this month, Lalit's predecessor Chief Justice N V Ramana said 65 "was too early to retire" for a judge. He will also only be the second CJI to have been appointed directly from the Bar, without serving as a judge of a high court.

■ TUNIS



TUNISIA RECALLS MOROCCO ENVOY IN FRESH ROW

Tunisia said on Saturday it would recall its ambassador from Morocco for consultations, a day after the kingdom did the same in response to Tunisia's president hosting the Polisario movement's head. The Polisario wants an independent state in the Western Sahara. Tunisian President Kais Saied had on Friday recalled Polisario chief Brahim Ghali who arrived to attend the Japanese-African investment conference TICAD. In response to what it called a "hostile" and "unnecessarily provocative" act, Morocco immediately withdrew its Tunis ambassador for consultations and cancelled its own participation in the conference.

■ TRIPOLI



CIVILIANS WOUNDED IN CLASHES IN LIBYAN CAPITAL

Rival Libyan groups exchanged gunfire in the Libyan capital on Saturday, wounding civilians and raising fears of all-out conflict in a country facing a grave political crisis. With combat continuing, "we are having difficulties moving around", Oussama Ali, spokesman for the Tripoli ambulance service, said on Libya's Al Ahrar television. He said there were "injured among civilians", but did not give a number. Local media reported fatalities. Numerous images on social media purported to show cars burnt-out in the fighting and bullet-riddled buildings.



Tunisia's President Kais Saied and Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi attend the opening session of the eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) in Tunis on Saturday. — AFP

Japan vows billions at Africa investment conference

TUNIS: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Saturday pledged \$30 billion over three years for Africa in a virtual address to a development conference in Tunis aiming to counter China's growing continental influence.

The eighth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD8) takes place amid a "complex" international environment caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the Japanese foreign ministry said.

Host country Tunisia is among the countries bearing the brunt of global supply chain disruptions and price spikes unleashed by these two factors, since it is heavily import dependent and is not an energy player.

In his opening speech, Tunisian President Kais Saied urged delegates to "search together for ways for African peoples to achieve the hopes and dreams of the first generation after independence".

Praising Japan's strong track record of development and "preserving" its culture, he said that "the world cannot continue as it was. With all its wealth and assets, Africa cannot watch its people live through poverty".

Kishida, speaking over live video from Tokyo after testing positive for Covid-19 days earlier, pledged that

To improve the lives of Africans, we will provide up to \$5 billion in co-financing with the African Development Bank

FUMIO KISHIDA
Japanese Prime Minister

"Japan will invest both public and private funds worth \$30 billion over the next three years" across Africa.

"To improve the lives of Africans, we will provide up to \$5 billion in co-financing with the African Development Bank," he said. The pledge comes as China cements its influence on the continent with its "Belt and Road" infrastructure initiative, and as experts express concern about the long-term sustainability of some African nations' borrowing from Beijing.

Japan's initiative "includes up to \$1 billion in a new special quota to be established by Japan to promote debt consolidation reforms" in Africa, the Japanese premier said.

He also pledged \$300 million in co-financing with the African Development Bank to boost food production. — AFP

Pakistan orders thousands to evacuate near flood-swollen rivers



Rescue workers help evacuating flood affected people from their flood hit homes following heavy monsoon rains in Rajanpur district of Punjab province on Saturday. — AFP

MINGORA: Thousands of people living near flood-swollen rivers in Pakistan's north were ordered to evacuate on Saturday as the death toll from devastating monsoon rains neared 1,000 with no end in sight.

Many rivers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa -- a picturesque province of rugged mountains and valleys -- have burst their banks, demolishing scores of buildings including a 150-room hotel that crumbled into a raging torrent.

"The house which we built with years of hard work started sinking in front of our eyes," said Junaid Khan, 23, the owner of two fish farms in Chrasadda.

"We sat on the side of the road and watched our dream house sinking."

The annual monsoon is essential for irrigating crops and replenishing lakes and dams across the Indian subcontinent, but each year it also brings a wave of destruction.

Officials say this year's monsoon flooding has affected more than 33 million people -- one in seven Pakistanis -- destroying or badly damaging nearly a million homes.

On Saturday, authorities ordered thousands of residents in threatened areas to evacuate their homes as rivers had still not reached maximum capacity.

"Initially some people refused

Many rivers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have burst their banks, demolishing scores of buildings including a 150-room hotel that crumbled into a raging torrent

to leave, but when the water level increased they agreed," Bilal Faizi, spokesman for the Rescue 1122 emergency service, said. Officials say this year's floods are comparable to 2010 -- the worst on record -- when over 2,000 people died and nearly a fifth of the country was under water.

Farmer Shah Faisal, camped by the side of a road in Chrasadda with his wife and two daughters, described how he saw his riverside home swallowed by a river as the powerful current eroded the bank.

The Jindi, Swat and Kabul rivers flow through the town before joining the mighty Indus, which is also flooding downstream.

"We escaped with our lives," Faisal said.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Officials blame the devastation on man-made climate change, saying Pakistan is unfairly bearing

the consequences of irresponsible environmental practices elsewhere in the world.

Pakistan is eighth on the Global Climate Risk Index, a list compiled by the environmental NGO Germanwatch of countries deemed most vulnerable to extreme weather caused by climate change.

Still, local authorities must shoulder some of the blame for the devastation.

Corruption, poor planning and the flouting of local regulations mean thousands of buildings have been erected in areas prone to seasonal flooding -- albeit not as bad as this year.

The government has declared an emergency and mobilised the military to deal with what Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman on Wednesday called "a catastrophe of epic scale".

According to the National Disaster Management Authority, since the monsoon started in June more than two million acres of cultivated crops have been wiped out, 3,100 kilometres of roads have been destroyed and 149 bridges have been washed away.

In Sukkur, more than 1,000 kilometres south of Swat, farmlands irrigated by the Indus were under water, and tens of thousands of people were seeking shelter. — AFP

In risky recycling bid, Gazans burn plastic for fuel

JABALIA: Living in one of the poorest parts of the Middle East and facing some of the region's highest fuel costs, Palestinians in Gaza are burning plastic to make affordable diesel.

It's an economic and practical solution in a territory blockaded by Israel for 15 years, but one which poses serious environmental and health risks, experts say.

Standing before rusty metal machinery and fuel containers, Mahmoud al Kafarneh described how he and his brothers came up with their plastic recycling project.

"We started experimenting to implement the project in 2018, through searching the Internet," he said, at the site in the Jabalia area of northern Gaza.



Palestinians in Gaza are burning plastic to make affordable diesel, an economic and practical solution in a territory blockaded by Israel for 15 years.

"We failed a few times; after eight months we succeeded in extracting the fuel."

The distilling set-up features a series of crude-looking tanks and

connecting pipes set up outside on the dirt.

The process starts with the burning of wood in a furnace below a large mud-covered tank holding

up to 1.5 tonnes of shredded plastic. When the plastic melts, the vapours flow through a pipe into a water tank where they cool and drip as fuel into containers, ready to be sold.

Black-grey smoke pours from several pipes extending above the furnace and the tank holding the plastic.

Only a few of the workers wear face masks and gloves as they melt bagfuls of shredded plastic. Their clothing is stained black.

Kafarneh said no-one has experienced health problems since starting work at the site, which sits beside olive trees and away from residential buildings.

"We follow all safety procedures at work," he said.

But Ahmed Hillis, director of Gaza's National Institute for the Environment and Development, fears an environmental catastrophe from this unregulated industry.

"The method used is rudimentary and very harmful to the workers," mainly because they inhale toxic fumes, he said.

Burning plastic releases dioxins, mercury and other toxic gases which pose "a threat to vegetation, human and animal health", according to the United Nations Environment Programme.

Hillis adds another danger of burning plastic, which is derived from petroleum hydrocarbons.

The tank is "a time bomb because it could explode" from the heat, he says. — AFP



People inspect a damaged playground following an air strike in Mekelle, the capital of Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, on Friday. – Reuters

UN condemns Ethiopia air strike that ‘hit kindergarten’

ADDIS ABABA: The UN on Saturday condemned an Ethiopian air strike on a kindergarten in rebel-held Tigray that killed at least four people, as diplomats urged that civilians not be targeted.

Addis Ababa denied bombing civilian areas in Friday's air raid on the city of Mekele, and accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) of staging deaths.

But the UN children's agency Unicef said the strike "hit a kindergarten, killing several children, and injuring others."

"Unicef strongly condemns the air strike," said Unicef chief Catherine Russell.

"Yet again, an escalation of violence in northern Ethiopia has caused children to pay the heaviest price. For almost two years, children and their families in the region have endured the agony of this conflict. It must end."

The bombardment came just days after fighting erupted on Tigray's southern border between government forces and TPLF rebels, ending a five-month truce

and dashing hopes of peace talks.

The TPLF said the air strike, the first in many months on Tigray, demolished a kindergarten and hit a civilian residential area.

The government said only military sites were targeted and accused the TPLF of "dumping fake body bags in civilian areas" to maximise outrage.

An official at Mekele's Ayder Referral Hospital told AFP four people died in the strike, including two children, while nine others were injured.

Tigrai TV, a local network, put the death toll at seven, including three children.

The broadcaster aired graphic footage of mangled playground equipment and a compound brightly painted with cartoons in ruins at the apparent scene of the strike.

The claims could not be independently verified as access to northern Ethiopia is severely restricted.

Vicky Ford, the UK's Minister for Africa, said the protection of civilians must be prioritised under international law. — AFP

Trump papers ‘included material on intelligence and sources’

WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department on Friday disclosed that it was investigating former president Donald Trump for removing White House records because it believed he illegally held documents including some involving intelligence-gathering and clandestine human sources - among America's most closely held secrets.

The department released a heavily redacted affidavit that underpinned the FBI's extraordinary August 8 search of Trump's Florida residence in which agents seized 11 sets of classified records including some labelled "top secret" as documents that could gravely threaten national security if exposed.

In the affidavit, an unidentified FBI agent said the agency reviewed and identified 184 documents "bearing classification markings" containing "national defence information" after Trump in January returned 15 boxes of government records sought by the US National Archives. Other records in those boxes, according to the affidavit, bore handwritten notes by Trump.

The search was part of a federal investigation into whether Trump illegally removed and kept documents when he left office in January 2021 after losing the 2020 election to President Joe Biden and whether Trump tried to obstruct the probe.

Trump, a Republican who is considering another presidential run in 2024, has described the court-approved search at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach as politically motivated, and on Friday again described it as a



An aerial view of Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago home in Palm Beach, Florida. – Reuters file photo



"break-in."

Documents released with the affidavit revealed that "a significant number of civilian witnesses" knowledgeable about Trump's actions after leaving office were helping the probe, a rare disclosure.

The search was a significant escalation of one of several federal

Trump has described the court-approved search at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach as politically motivated, and on Friday again described it as a "break-in"

and state investigations Trump is facing involving his time in office and in private business.

‘EVIDENCE OF OBSTRUCTION’

The agent who drafted the affidavit wrote that after the FBI reviewed the materials Trump

returned in January to the National Archives - the agency responsible for preserving government records - it had probable cause to believe more documents were still inside Mar-a-Lago.

"There is also probable cause to believe that evidence of obstruction will be found at the premises," the agent added.

Other defence-related records Trump had returned contained references to topics including "clandestine human sources" who help US intelligence-gathering, the affidavit showed, as well as details on how the nation conducts foreign surveillance and information it collected using a law that established the US domestic surveillance programme.

— Reuters

Fresh shelling at Ukraine power plant raises radiation risk

KYIV: Ukraine and Russia traded fresh accusations of shelling at the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant on Saturday, as its operator warned of a radioactive leak risk at the atomic facility.

The Zaporizhzhia plant in southern Ukraine has been occupied by Russian troops since early March.

Kyiv and Moscow have repeatedly accused each other of rocket attacks in the vicinity of the plant -- Europe's largest -- located in the city of Energodar.

On Saturday its Ukraine operator Energoatom said Russian troops "repeatedly shelled" it over the past day.

Russia's defence ministry issued a counter-claim that Ukraine's troops were responsible for a salvo of 17 shells landing on the site.

"As a result of periodic shelling, the infrastructure of the station has been damaged, there are risks of hydrogen leakage and sputtering of radioactive substances, and the fire hazard is high," Energoatom said on Telegram.

The agency said that as of midday on Saturday (0900 GMT) the plant "operates with the risk of violating radiation and fire safety standards".

Russia's defence ministry said



Municipal service workers stand around a crater following an overnight missile strike in Kharkiv on Saturday. – AFP

Ukrainian forces "shelled the territory of the station three times" from the town of Marganets across the Dnipro River.

In a communique the ministry accused Kyiv of "nuclear terrorism" and said shells landed near areas storing fresh nuclear fuel and radioactive waste.

Radiation levels at the plant "remain normal" the ministry said.

On Tuesday residents in Khortytskiy district -- 45 kilometres (29 miles) north-east from the power plant -- were given iodine pills to reduce radiation risk in case of a leak.

POWER OUT

On Thursday, the Zaporizhzhia plant was cut off from Ukraine's national power grid for the first time in its four-decade history due to "actions of the invaders", Energoatom said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said the power cut was caused by Russian shelling of the last active power line linking the plant to the network.

It came back online on Friday afternoon but Zelensky warned "the worst case scenario... is constantly being provoked by Russian forces".

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

SANTIAGO

New bird species found at S America's edge

In a sparse, windswept pasture at the frigid tip of South America lives a tiny bird whose quiet life is shedding light on the importance of studying the world's most remote places.

In the Diego Ramirez Islands, 100km from southern Chile's Cape Horn, scientists have identified the Subantarctic rayadito, a 0.035 pound (16 gram) brown bird with black and yellow bands, and a large beak that is confounding biologists.

That's because the



Subantarctic rayadito, which resembles a rayadito species that inhabits the forests of southern Patagonia and nests in trunk cavities, was found "living in a place with no trees."

LONDON

Diana's sporty Ford Escort sells for £737,000

A sporty Ford Escort that was once princess Diana's runabout sold at auction for £737,000 on Saturday, a few days before the 25th anniversary of her death.

The modest car, with just 40,000 km on the clock, went under the hammer at Silverstone Auctions in Warwickshire in central England.

Bidders from Dubai, the United States and Britain held a heated bidding war for the one-of-a-kind model, resulting in a sale to a buyer from



Alderley Edge, an upmarket village in northern England that is home to many Premier League footballers. The sale price is equivalent to around \$866,000.

VATICAN CITY

Pope inducts 20 cardinals from around the world

Pope Francis on Saturday inducted 20 cardinals from around the world, choosing men who mostly agree with his vision of a more progressive and inclusive Church and influencing their choice of his eventual successor.

Francis, 85, presided at a ceremony known as a consistory, telling the new cardinals to show concern for ordinary people despite the high rank that will bring them into contact with the powerful of the earth. The ceremony marked the



eight time Francis has put his stamp on the Church's future with a new intake of cardinals who will serve as his top advisers and administrators at the Vatican and around the globe.

We might never know how much the Internet is hiding from us



FARHAD
MANJOO

The Internet is the most comprehensive compendium of human knowledge ever assembled, but is its size a feature or a bug? Does its very immensity undermine its utility as a source of information? How often is it burying valuable data under lots of junk? Say you search for some famous or semifamous person — a celebrity, influencer, politician or pundit. Are you getting an accurate picture of that person’s life or a false, manipulated one?

These aren’t new questions; they’re actually things I’ve been wondering for about as long as I’ve been covering the digital world, and the answers keep changing as the Internet changes. But a recent story got me fretting about all this once more. And I worry that it has become more difficult than ever to tune in to any signal amid so much digital noise.

Karen Weise, a New York Times reporter who covers the technology industry, had a blockbuster story last week documenting a pattern of hostile and abusive behaviour by Dan Price, the CEO who became Internet famous in 2015 for instituting a \$70,000-a-year minimum wage at his Seattle-based credit card processing company. “He has used his celebrity to pursue women online who say he hurt them, both physically and emotionally,” Weise reported, interviewing more than a dozen women who recounted ugly encounters with him in detail. (Price denies the allegations.)

But this was not the first time that Weise punctured the mythos surrounding Price. Late in 2015, months after he was first feted by media outlets around the world for his supposed do-gooder approach to capitalism, she published a piece in Bloomberg Businessweek uncovering many skeletons in his closet — among other things, an ex-wife who had accused him of extreme violence and an explanation for the employee raises that seemed more self-serving than he had let on. When Weise linked to that 7-year-old article in the new story, I clicked back to it and realised that I definitely read it at the time. I remembered its headline, “The CEO Paying Everyone \$70,000 Salaries Has Something to Hide,” and I remembered that its details had been widely commented on.

Price, who denounced Weise’s Bloomberg article as “reckless” and “baseless,” was cancelled temporarily after the story appeared. Then, over the years, Price began to master Twitter, eventually collecting hundreds of thousands of followers and becoming a fixture in some left-leaning Twitter circles. “Tweet by tweet, his online persona grew back,” Weise writes. “The bad news faded into the background. It was the opposite of being cancelled. Just as social media can ruin someone, so too can it — through time, persistence and audacity — bury a troubled past.”

This isn’t how the Internet is supposed to work. In different ways, Google, Twitter, Facebook and other big tech companies have made it their mission to disseminate and organise online data. Weise’s first story about Price contained important information about a semiprominent



online figure; it should have been highlighted, not buried, as he amassed his online following.

The more troubling thing is, how often is this sort of thing happening? In the abstract, the question is almost impossible to answer; by definition, you can’t make a list of stories the Internet is hiding from you. I would guess the Price story is an extreme example of information burying, but there’s reason to suspect that some version of this sort of suppression is happening all the time online.

Why? Three things. Recency bias: Google is far more focused on highlighting information from the present than it once was, making events from the past more difficult to suss out. Organised manipulation: Online mobs are bent on shaping online reality — and although the platforms say they are attentive to the problem, the mobs seem to have the upper hand. And, of course, capitalism: Lacking much competition and keen to boost quarterly numbers, tech companies may have little incentive to solve these problems.

The first issue, recency bias, is mainly about Google, and it’s one that journalists like me have been complaining about for years. Google’s search algorithm heavily favours content that was posted most recently over content from the past, even if the older data provides a much more comprehensive story. There’s a certain sense in this: Nobody wants to read ancient news. But as the Price story suggests, if you’re searching for someone with an active online presence — someone who tweets a lot, who makes a lot of media appearances or whose whole persona is based on riling folks up — the results get murky.

The situation becomes much worse when there are motivated parties trying to shape what the platforms show us. There has been no better example of this than the ugly

turn the internet took during the recent defamation case between Johnny Depp and his ex-wife Amber Heard. If you scanned Twitter, YouTube or TikTok during the trial, you were flooded with memes, clips and trollish posts about how terrible Heard was and how righteous Depp was.

This wasn’t because Depp’s case was so much stronger than Heard’s; as researchers have shown, it was more likely because the platforms were overrun by bots and trolls associated with people on the misogynist right who made it their mission to paint Heard in the worst light possible. They seem to have succeeded; even now, you’ve got to dig around online to find information supporting her.

The platforms say they’re constantly fighting such organised campaigns. But their efforts are opaque and seem half-hearted at best — and that’s where we get to misaligned incentives. Because bots are a kind of engagement and engagement is what pays the bills, there are few reasons for the services to really fight such campaigns. As Peiter Zatko, a former security chief at Twitter, said in a recent whistleblower complaint, “Twitter executives have little or no personal incentive to accurately ‘detect’ or measure the prevalence of spam bots.” In the same way, YouTube had little incentive to present a fairer, less manipulated picture of the Depp-Heard case — not when the Depp clips were doing big numbers.

For many readers, none of this will come as a surprise. I’m not breaking any news when I tell you not to trust everything you see on the Internet. But after reading the story of Dan Price, I think it bears repeating: The Internet probably isn’t giving you a fair picture of what’s happening in the world. And for any given story, you might never really know how much you aren’t seeing.

This is not the monkeypox that doctors thought they knew



APOORVA
MANDAVILLI

Early in the monkeypox outbreak, a man in his 20s arrived at an emergency department in Northern California, tiny blisters on his lips, hands and back. Within 12 hours, doctors diagnosed him with monkeypox.

That’s where their certainty ended. The patient did not have fever, aches, weakness, pain or other symptoms typical of the disease. He did not know when or how he had become infected. He had not had sexual contact with anyone for months, he said, and had not touched — as far as he knew — anyone with pox, as the lesions are called, or other symptoms.

At the onset of the outbreak, scientists thought they knew when and how the monkeypox virus was spread, what the disease looked like and who was most vulnerable. The 47,000 cases identified worldwide have upended many of those expectations.

Monkeypox patients have turned up with what looked like mosquito bites, pimples or ingrown hairs, not the large pustules usually associated with the infection. Some did not even have visible lesions but felt excruciating pain when swallowing,

urinating or emptying their bowels.

Some had headaches or depression, confusion and seizures. Others had severe eye infections or inflammation of the heart muscle. At least three of the six deaths reported so far were linked to encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain.

“We really are seeing a very, very wide range of presentation,” said Dr Boghuma Titanji, an infectious-disease physician at a clinic in Atlanta that serves people living with HIV.

Scientists now know that the monkeypox virus lurks in saliva, semen and other bodily fluids, sometimes for weeks after recovery. The virus has always been known to spread through close contact, but many researchers suspect the infection may also be transmitted through sex itself.

The California patient had virus in his throat, but no respiratory symptoms, and in his rectum, but without pain or pox. The case underscores other research suggesting that the virus may be spread even by people with atypical or asymptomatic infections, said Dr Abraar Karan, who diagnosed the patient and published a recent case report.

In another study, also published this month, anal swabs of 200 men without symptoms turned up 13 who were positive for monkeypox. Only two of them later developed symptoms.

“It’s no longer correct to say it can’t be transmitted



Dr Dimie Ogoina, author of a study of 228 monkeypox cases in Nigeria that documented unusual new symptoms. At the onset of the outbreak, scientists thought they knew when and how the monkeypox virus spreads, what the disease looks like, and who is most vulnerable. The 44,000 cases identified worldwide have upended many of those expectations.

asymptotically,” said Dr Chloe Orkin, an infectious-disease physician at Queen Mary University of London. “I think that it means that our working model of how it’s spread is incorrect.”

Early in the outbreak, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said that “people who do not have monkeypox symptoms cannot spread the virus to others.” The agency on July 29 changed that phrasing to say that “scientists are still researching” the possibility of asymptomatic transmission.

In a statement to The New York Times, an agency spokesperson acknowledged recent evidence that asymptomatic cases were possible but said that it was still uncertain whether people without symptoms could spread the virus and that more research was needed.

When the first few dozen cases of monkeypox emerged in Europe, spreading of the virus through sexual contact and genital lesions came as a surprise to many scientists. But it shouldn’t have. Nigerian researchers reported a similar pattern in 2017, when they documented 228 cases, many of them young men with genital ulcers. (The patients identified as heterosexual in a subsequent study, but Nigeria criminalises same-sex behaviour.)

The psychology of nostalgia



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

A few weeks ago, a middle-aged woman came to my clinic with her mother, and when she introduced herself, I took a closer look and said, “You were my teacher in my first year in university”. We were both surprised; who could have thought we would meet after nearly thirty years? We talked about other teachers who were around during that time, and she reminded me while smiling that she was a “fresh graduate then and probably the same age as her student.” Suddenly, her voice brought up old memories of me, the young medical student who recently moved to the big city, trying to work my way out through college of medicine and feeling the excitement of

becoming a doctor. My memory was also flooded with flashbacks from when the examination results were released, announcing our progression to the following year and getting closer to the dream. I was experiencing what psychologists call nostalgia, which is a “longing feeling for the past when things seemed better, easier, and more fun.”

From a psychological point of view, nostalgia helps to unite our sense of who we are, ourselves, and our identity over time. We all know that our personality changes as we grow older, so nostalgia motivates us to remember the past in our own life, helps to unite us with our older self, and reminds us of who we have been and then

NOSTALGIA CONNECTS US TO OTHER PEOPLE AND BONDS US TO OUR PARENTS, SIBLINGS, CHILDHOOD FRIENDS, AND THE PEOPLE WE MEET DURING OUR JOURNEY IN LIFE

compares that to who we feel we are today”. Nostalgia connects us to other people and bonds us to our parents, siblings, childhood friends, and the people we meet during our journey in life.

Some psychologists consider nostalgia as a bitter-sweet emotion. It’s sweet because we remember the best times of our lives, while the bitterness

comes from the fact that we can never return to that time. The irreversibility of time means that we absolutely cannot go back in time, so it helps us to deal with the conflict of the bitter longing for what can never be again together with the sweetness of having experienced it and being able to revisit it and relive it again.

Sometimes when we experience a change in our life, be it getting married or having our first child, or even retiring from our job, we look for comfort through nostalgia as the past reminds us that we can adapt to such changes in our lives as we did before. On the other hand, one needs to remember that nostalgia can be subjected to recall bias, meaning

that we select to recall pleasant memories and seek comfort. Also, since such events already take place, unlike the future, which can be unpredictable and out of our control, nostalgia provides us with a temporary feeling that helps balance our emotions.

Finally, we need to separate occasional nostalgia from a situation where people over-praise the past and constantly wish to go back in time and reject anything new or modern. Such people would eventually find it challenging to deal with those around them and become trapped in the past. This situation may push them to isolate themselves from others, negatively impacting their psychological well-being.

Dust to downpour: US weather whiplash shows climate change

HUW GRIFFITH

A series of “once-in-a-millennium” rainstorms have lashed the United States in recent weeks, flooding areas baked dry by long-term droughts, as human-caused climate change brings weather whiplash.

And scientists warn that global warming means once-rare events are already much more likely, upending the models they have long used to predict possible disasters — with worse to come.

At least 40 people have been killed in the last month by storms in Kentucky, Illinois, Texas and Missouri, inundating areas that in some cases had seen little to no rain for months.

Up to 12 inches fell in one of these storms — the kind of downpour that statistical models say should only happen once in a thousand years.

“This is ‘weather whiplash,’” tweeted Peter Gleick, co-founder of the Pacific Institute, a non-governmental organisation that works on water issues around the world.

It is “caused by an intensification of the global hydrological cycle & how it distributes water around the planet, influenced by human-caused climate change.”

The warnings scientists have been sounding for decades about the effects of unchecked fossil fuel use are suddenly coming into focus for millions of people.

A warming planet is not a benign place in a far-off future where it is always a bit sunnier; it’s a place of wild swings, where the wets are wetter and the dries are drier. And it’s now.

“The commonality between these and other extreme rainfall events is you need just the right set of ingredients to come together,” said David Novak, director of the Weather Prediction Center at the National Weather Service.

“You need moisture, you need instability in the atmosphere. And you need some sort of... feature to kind of ignite the storms.”

While a rainstorm in Texas or Kentucky or Illinois is not unheard of at this time of year, these events were supercharged by an oversupply of atmospheric moisture — a direct consequence of the planet being hotter.

“There’s scientific consensus absolutely on the fact that warmer air can hold more moisture,” Novak said.

“There is more moisture available... for these fronts to tap, and so you can get these really intense rainfall events.”

The science is uncontroversial — if a little complicated for those not familiar with linear equations and difficult-to-pronounce chemistry.

The Clausius-Clapeyron equation shows that for every one degree Celsius the air warms, it can hold seven per cent more moisture. — AFP

War brings Ukraine’s women new roles



MEGAN SPECIA

The writer is NYT’s correspondent on the International Desk in London

The road to the training site was lined with crumbling homes and damaged buildings, a reminder of how war had consumed the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv just months ago.

At the head of the class was a woman named Hanna, along with a board showing images of unexploded munitions and land mines. She explained to the class the risks of minefields and how they are marked. One woman attending the day’s training asked if it was safe to take her 3-year-old son to a local park.

“Don’t walk in the woodland — it’s best not to walk there,” said Hanna, 34, advising her to stay on undisturbed paved areas.

Hanna, who asked that her surname not be used because of fears for her safety, is among a growing number of Ukrainian women who have been trained in demining, which until just a few years ago was on a list of hundreds of jobs women in the country were barred from holding.

Originally from Mariupol, Hanna had joined a Swiss demining foundation there two years ago, and after Russia attacked Ukraine in February, she fled that southern port city and headed north.

Now, she is working in cities like Chernihiv, from which the Russian occupiers have since retreated, to make war-ravaged cities and towns safe from land mines.

Women have become an omnipresent force in Ukraine’s war six months in as they confront long-held stereotypes about their role in the country’s post-Soviet society.

They are increasingly joining the military, including in combat positions, and spearheading volunteer and fundraising efforts. And with men still making up a majority of combatants, women are taking on extra roles in civilian life, running businesses in addition to looking after their families.

“The perception of women, in general, has been very paternalistic,” said Anna Kvit, a Ukrainian sociologist who specialises in gender studies. “With this war that escalated in 2022, the agency of women not only increased, but it also became more visible.”

That shift has been underway for some time, Kvit said, with women increasingly taking on new roles after the 2014 conflict in eastern Ukraine, accelerating changes in the defence

and security sectors that filtered out broadly across society. Women had been barred from combat roles, but they were still taking part in the fighting, although without the same status, benefits or recognition as men.

“In Ukrainian society, the resistance was, and probably still is, that the army and war are not a place for women,” Kvit said.

HANNA IS AMONG A GROWING NUMBER OF UKRAINIAN WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN TRAINED IN DEMINING, WHICH UNTIL JUST A FEW YEARS AGO WAS ON A LIST OF HUNDREDS OF JOBS WOMEN IN THE COUNTRY WERE BARRED FROM HOLDING

Legislation adopted in 2018 gave Ukrainian women the same legal status as men in the armed forces, and the shift drove a broader push for gender-inclusive labour reforms.

The new laws ended bans on women holding any of 450 occupations in Ukraine, a holdover from the Soviet era, when certain work was considered damaging to reproductive health. In addition to demining roles, that list had included long-haul trucking, welding, firefighting and many security and

defence jobs.

Hanna Maliar, Ukraine’s deputy defence minister, said that more than 50,000 women were now in the country’s armed forces, and that the number had risen significantly since the war began.

With men ages 18 to 60 prohibited from leaving the country so they can fight Russia, women are volunteering to drive transport cars from other countries in Europe for use by Ukraine’s military.

“When the war started, I was just thinking, ‘How can I be helpful?’” said Yevgheniia Ustinova, 39, who is part of one of the countless groups that drive these transport cars to Ukraine.

During a brief stop at a cafe in Lviv, in western Ukraine, she described a two-day round-trip journey into Poland from her home in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, to pick up a truck and then return to Ukraine.

“Everyone is doing what he or she can do,” she said.

The female drivers have been well received, said Maria Stetsiuk, 35, who was passing through Lviv last month while driving east, where she planned to drop a truck off with friends in the military. But occasionally there are skeptics, like the police officer who stopped her on the way into Dnipro recently and asked her why she was driving and why she did not have a husband.

“I never thought I’d be doing something like this,” Stetsiuk said. “But nowadays everyone is doing what he or she can.” — **The New York Times**



Hanna, who joined a Swiss demining foundation two years ago, talks to a group of residents about the dangers of landmines in Chernihiv, Ukraine.

Motherhood: The gift that keeps on giving



Ray Petersen
rj.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

This day, the 28th of August, will only ever have one significance for me, as it’s my mother Dawn’s birthday, or Mum, as she was, as she’s been gone for four years now, but while we didn’t always saw ‘eye-to-eye,’ I do miss her so much.

I know. In the great scheme of things, the global scheme of things, my Mum’s achievements are of no moment, and she never changed the world in the manner of

say... Joan of Arc, who gave life to a revolution, but she was always a hero to me. After all, I’m no ‘oil painting,’ as they say, and am the son, “only a mother could love,” as has been chortled a thousand times, but she would have given me the very shirt from her back.

She was a brilliant cook, not in a Jamie Oliver, or Master Chef way, but in being able to always dish up high quality meals, which for the first twenty years of my life were cooked on a coal-fired range, or in its oven, with none of today’s mod-cons like temperature gauges, multiple hobs and ovens, as everything was done by ‘feel,’ ‘experience,’ and certainly, through need. Dad was a fisherman, so Mum had to know, or learn, how to cook a hundred varieties of seafood, and probably had twenty or thirty different recipes for cooking mince.

MUM’S COOKING WAS NOT THE QUALITY AND VARIETY SHE WOULD SERVE UP FOR US EVERY DAY, BUT RATHER THE LITTLE THINGS, LIKE COMING OUT TO THE KITCHEN ON A COLD MORNING TO THE SMELL OF PORRIDGE SIMMERING ON THE RANGE TOP

But what I most remember about Mum’s cooking was not the quality and variety she would serve up for us every day, but rather the little things, like coming out to the kitchen on a cold morning to the smell of porridge simmering on the range top, the crispy smell of toast ready for jam and marmite, and the ever-present teapot on the side of the range, in the days before tea bags, when the tea was hot and strong, almost stewed,

first thing in the morning... the perfect pre-school starter.

Mum would have the toast, porridge, and tea ready for us, and we kids would feed ourselves breakfast, while Mum made and wrapped the school lunches. We all had our own unique lunch packs, but with sandwiches or pieces of pie, a piece of fruit, and a couple of biscuits, home-made cookies of course: Ginger crunch, peanut brownies, choc-chip cookies, or a slice of cake, and a bottle of cordial. They were healthy lunches before Jamie Oliver made them a ‘thing!’ And on Fridays, we got a shilling each (about 5 baiza), to buy a fish’n’chip lunch from Girvan’s Chip Shop.

Then after ‘brekky,’ we had to wash our hands again, comb or brush our hair, and be inspected to make sure we were clean, tidy, Mum would give us a wee peck on the top of our heads and send us off to school. She walked to the gate behind us nearly every day, as we would be off, helter-skelter, to get to school, if I turned around, she would always be there, waving us bye-bye. She was never not there... and like all Mums, was always watching out for us.

She cooked, she cleaned, she washed, she ironed, she sewed, knitted, darned, and made do... and still had time to be the parent who went to talk to the teachers at school report times. She taught all of us kids to cook, she taught me to dance so I wouldn’t be out of place at the school dance, two left feet and all. She got me my very first job but encouraged me to be what I wanted to be as I grew up, even when I didn’t know myself, and was my most enthusiastic supporter.

I treasure my memories, as Mum suffered from and eventually succumbed to dementia, and I cherish those memories just in case she couldn’t. The motherhood, al’umuma, is a gift from God, one which Mum would be openly skeptical of if she were here, but would behind the bluster, appreciate anyway... Rest easy Mum... Dawn... it’s your birthday... and you don’t need to be an angel for it to be... your day.



SWIMMING TO SAFETY

A man swims in flood waters while heading for a higher ground, following rains and floods during the monsoon season in Charsadda, Pakistan on Saturday.
– Reuters

Energy crisis pushes nuclear comeback worldwide

As the costs of importing energy soars worldwide and climate crises wreak havoc, interest in nuclear power is on the rise with nations scrambling to find alternative sources.

Investment in nuclear power declined after Japan’s 2011 Fukushima disaster, the world’s worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986, as fears over its safety increased and governments ran scared.

But following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine in February, the subsequent squeeze on energy supplies and Europe’s push to wean itself off of Russian oil and gas, the tide is now turning back in favour of nuclear.

Governments face difficult decisions with rising gas and electricity bills and scarce resources threatening to cause widespread suffering this winter.

Some experts argue that nuclear power should not be considered an option, But others argue that, in the face of so many crises, it must remain part of the world’s energy mix.

One of the countries reconsidering nuclear energy is Japan, where the 2011 accident led to the suspension of many nuclear reactors over safety fears.

This week Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida called for a push to revive the country’s nuclear power industry, and build new atomic plants.

Other countries that were looking to move away from nuclear have discarded those plans — at least in the short term.

Less than a month after Russia’s attack on Ukraine, Belgium delayed by a decade its plan to scrap nuclear energy in 2025.

While nuclear power, currently used in 32 countries, supplies 10 per cent of the world’s electricity production, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) raised its projections in September for the first time since the 2011 disaster.

The IAEA now expects installed capacity to double by 2050 under the most favourable scenario.

Even in Germany, Europe’s biggest economy, sticking with nuclear is no longer a taboo subject as the energy crisis rekindles debate on shutting down the country’s last three nuclear power plants by the end of 2022.

Berlin said last month it would await the outcome of a “stress test” of the national electric grid before deciding whether to stick with the phaseout.

Greenpeace Germany’s climate and energy expert, Gerald Neubauer, said turning to nuclear was “not a solution to the energy crisis”.

He said nuclear energy would have “limited” efficacy in replacing Russian gas since it is mainly “used for heating” in

Germany not for electricity production.

“The reactors would only save the gas used for electricity, it would save less than one per cent of the gas consumption,” he added.

But according to Nicolas Berghmans, energy and climate expert at the IDDRI think-tank, extending the use of nuclear “can help”.

“Europe is in a very different energy situation, with several overlapping crises:

SOME EXPERTS ARGUE THAT NUCLEAR POWER SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AN OPTION, BUT OTHERS ARGUE THAT, IN THE FACE OF SO MANY CRISES, IT MUST REMAIN PART OF THE WORLD’S ENERGY MIX.

the problem of Russian gas supply, the drought that has reduced the capacity of dams, the French nuclear plants’ weak output... so all the levers matter,” he said.

The pro-nuclear lobby says it is one of the world’s best options to avoid climate change since it does not directly emit carbon dioxide.

In fact, nuclear energy accounts for a bigger share of the world power mix in most of the scenarios put forward by the IPCC, the UN’s climate experts, to alleviate the global climate crisis.

As the need for electricity booms, several countries have expressed a desire to develop nuclear infrastructure including China — which already has the largest number of reactors — as well as the Czech Republic, India and Poland since nuclear offers an alternative to coal.

Likewise, Britain, France and the Netherlands have similar ambitions, and even the United States where President Joe Biden’s investment plan encourages the sector’s development.

The IPCC experts recognise that the deployment of nuclear energy “can be constrained by societal preferences” since the subject still divides opinion because of the risk of catastrophic accidents and the still unresolved issue of how to dispose of radioactive waste safely.

Some countries, like New Zealand, oppose nuclear, and the issue has also been hotly debated in the European Union over whether it should be listed as a “green” energy.

Last month, the European Parliament approved a contentious proposal giving a sustainable finance label to investments in gas and nuclear power.

Other issues remain over nuclear infrastructure including the ability to build new reactors with costs and delays tightly controlled.

Berghmans pointed to “long construction delays”.

“We’re talking about medium-term solutions, which won’t resolve tensions in the market”, as they will arrive too late to address climate crises, he said, but suggested focusing on the “dynamic” renewable energies sector that can be immediately helpful. — AFP



The cooling towers of the nuclear power plant at Cattenom in eastern France. French energy giant EDF (Electricite de France) announced on August 24 it was prolonging the shutdown of four nuclear reactors due to corrosion risks, amid rising energy prices. – AFP

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Oman crash out of Arab Cup U-17 championship



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Oman crashed out of the group stage of the Arab Cup U-17 football championship after losing to Libya 2-1 in Algeria on Friday. Oman will meet Tunisia on Monday in the concluding round.

dashed hopes of progressing into quarterfinals. The team was stunned by Yemen 3-0 in the opener. The Arab Cup Championship will run until September 8.

This is the second official presence of the team in official championships in two months after the West Asian U-17 Championships in Jordan in

June. The team, which was under Spanish coach Pablo Herrero Fernandez during the West Asian event, is now coached by Egyptian Khalid Ghanim.

It had faced three consecutive defeats in the West Asian event. The first defeat was against the hosts Jordan 1-0 in the opener and then against the Iraqi team 2-0 in the penultimate match. In the

concluding fixture, Yemen trashed Oman team 4-0.

Despite an intensive warm-up camp in Turkey for two weeks ahead of the Arab Cup, the team did not present the desired performance in the group matches. The camp in Turkey during the month of August had featured three strong friendly games. The national team had managed to

register a 5-0 win over Qatar's Al Ahli club and then they had trashed Turkish' Sakaryaspor club 5-2 before a goalless draw against Fenerbahçe S.K. in their third encounter.

The forthcoming official assignment for the U-17 football team will be at the AFC U-17 Asian Cup 2023 qualifiers. Oman will host the qualifiers of group C

which will take place from October 1 to 9. The group will feature Iraq, Qatar, Lebanon, Bahrain and Oman.

The 10 group winners and five best second placed teams will join the hosts Bahrain in the finals. The qualifiers will act as a vital event for the team as they will eye for clinching the direct spot to the Asian finals in Bahrain next year.



‘Al Sharta’ lifts golden sword with best record

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

‘Al Sharta’, owned by Ahmed bin Mohammad al Junaibi, lifted the golden sword title and won the vehicle prize in the seventh edition of the golden sword camel race festival that was launched on Saturday in Al Bashayer Camel Race Track in Adam, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. The race is organised by the Al Bashaer Department for Arab Camel in cooperation with the local committee in Al Bashayer Square and the private sector under the auspices of Engineer Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries.

The race featured 16 races including 11 rounds for ‘Hagayag’ category, below 3 years old, for a distance of 2 km. Three rounds were for ‘Legaya’ category, four



years old, for a distance of 3 km, and two rounds were for ‘Elythaa’ category, five years old, for a distance of 4 km.

In the opening round for ‘Hagayag’ for 2 km, ‘Al Sharta’, owned by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Junaibi won the golden sword and the car after it finished the race distance in 2 minutes and 58 seconds, while in the second round, ‘Najed’, owned by Salem bin Hamad al Junaibi, snatched the golden dagger and the car. In the third round, ‘Shahania’,

owned by Muslim bin Hamid al Derei, claimed the Shield of Ruba’ Haima. ‘Shahania’, owned by Abdullah bin Mohammed al Junaibi, won the fourth round.

‘Shaheen’, owned by Hamid bin Mohammed al Derei, claimed the sixth race round, while ‘Al Hakmah’, owned by Imad bin Gharib al Junaibi, finished first in seventh round. ‘Shawaheen’, owned by Abdullah bin Mohammed al Junaibi, dominated the eighth round, while in the ninth race, ‘Hamlool’, owned by Hamdan bin Salem al Jahafi, came first. In the last round in this category, ‘Asilan’, owned by Hatem bin Saeed al Junaibi, finished first.

In the ‘Legaya’ category, for a distance of 3 km, ‘Shoheen’ claimed the golden icon, leading by Matar bin Ali al Junaibi, in the second race ‘Al Hather’ snatched the icon, owned by Muslim bin Hamid al Derei. ‘Shawaheen’ finished the race first leading by Ahmed bin Mohammed al Junaibi.

For ‘Elythaa’ category, for a distance of 4 km, ‘Qutnah’ grabbed the race icon, owned by Bader bin Salem al Junaibi.

Dr Shihab attends Asian volleyball tourney



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Dr Shihab Aldin bin Ahmed al Riyami is attending the 21st Asian Men's U-20 Volleyball Championship which is underway in Bahrain and will conclude on Monday. Al Riyami's role at the ongoing Asian volleyball event is a member of the technical committee which comprises Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) members. Al Riyami has been a member at the AVC since 2012. The selection of al Riyami as a technical committee member was based on his wide coaching experience.

Dr Shihab said this is his fifth time at the Asian events. “The role of the technical committee begins ahead of the event through conducting inspection visits to the facilities that will host the championship. The technical



committee was in charge of the ranking of the teams and distributing those teams in the right pools for the tournament's draw which occurred ahead of the championship. A technical meeting of the team managers run by the technical committee gives a detailed explanation to all the team managers prior to the

championship to clarify all the event's rules and regulations,” he said.

Dr Shihab, also Oman's FIVB International Volleyball coach instructor, said this participation in Asian Men's U-20 Volleyball Championship is another essential milestone for him. “Attending these events will add valuable technical experience to me as I was involved in different roles and tasks during the championship period. Moreover, working beside the multinational experienced technical committee members from different part of the world offers new lessons.”

At the Asian Men's U-20 Volleyball Championship, India beat Bahrain 25-22, 25-19, 26-28, 26-24 to move into the semis. Title holders, Iran, finished on top of Pool B and ensured their presence in the semifinals while India came in second place.

Defending champion Medvedev laments Djokovic's absence at US Open



NEW YORK: World number one Daniil Medvedev said he was disappointed his US Open title defence at Flushing Meadows would kick off without Novak Djokovic, after the 21-times major winner was unable to travel to the United States.

The lanky Russian pulled off one of sport's greatest upsets with cat-like agility a year ago when he denied Djokovic a calendar Grand Slam in a straight sets win on Arthur Ashe Stadium to collect his first major title.

But there will be no rematch this year as Djokovic, who has opted not to get the Covid-19 vaccine, said on Thursday he would not be able to fly to New York.

Current rules require travellers to show proof of vaccination to board flights to enter the US.

"I wish he would play here," Medvedev told reporters ahead of the US Open main draw, which starts on Monday.

"The rivalry against Rafa (Nadal) is really I feel like heating up in a way. Twenty-two, 21 (Grand Slams), a joke of a number," he said referring to the

number of major titles won by Nadal and Djokovic respectively.

"It's a pity he (Djokovic) is not here. It would be a great story I think for tennis. Not only tennis-wise, but it's not us tennis players, it's American government rules. Completely understandable also."

Medvedev rolls into the US Open after a handful of uneven performances, winning at Los Cabos before suffering a shock early exit in Montreal. He reached the semifinals at Cincinnati, where he has often thrived.

"The biggest challenge always is to play tennis," he said. "I say this because we want to win every tournament. I mean, I managed to win only one this year, but I played maybe 12, 13, 14. I want to win every one of them that I play. It's always a constant challenge."

His hunger for a second major title is as fierce as ever after losing a five-set thriller to Nadal in the Australian Open final. The six-foot six-inch, power-serving Russian said he wanted to try "something big" in New York.

"I'm working well. I'm working well with my team. I'm confident in myself," he added. — **Reuters**

Lyles trumps Norman as Fraser-Pryce misses Lausanne with injury

LAUSANNE: World champion Noah Lyles notched up another victory in his rivalry with fellow American Michael Norman in the 200m at the Diamond League meet in Lausanne on Friday.

Lyles clocked 19.56 seconds, with world 400m champion Norman second in a season's best of 19.76sec.

"I would have taken anything under 19.60, so 19.56 is alright for tonight," said Lyles.

"I am in a good physical and mental space and very capable of producing some good times this year. I feel if I have a 19.30 in me."

Lyles' team-mate Aleia Hobbs made up for the absence of Jamaican duo Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Elaine Thompson-Herah to win the women's 100m.

Five-time 100m world champion Fraser-Pryce, with six sub-10.70sec times to her credit this season, was a late withdrawal due to a "muscle sprain" she experienced during her warm-up.

And four-time Olympic sprint gold medallist Thompson-Herah was disqualified for a false start in front of a sell-out 12,700-strong Stade Olympique de la Pontaise.

Hobbs went on to clock 10.87sec for victory in a photo-finish ahead of a third Jamaican, world 200m champion Shericka Jackson.

Fraser-Pryce said she had been feeling "discomfort in my hamstring".

"Unfortunately it doesn't seem to be getting any better," said the 35-year-old mother-of-one.

"As a precaution my coach decided not to risk racing at this point."

Hobbs added: "I had a good start today and I know that if I start well I can get great times. I'm happy with the 10.87, it's another sub-10.9 for me."

Double European champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen set a world leading time of 3:29.05 as he won the 1,500m ahead of Kenya's Abel Kipsang.

The Olympic gold medallist, who had to settle for world silver behind Britain's Jake Wightman, was happy that he had kicked on after a strong pace was set.



US Noah Lyles (L) competes to win ahead of compatriot Michael Norman (C) in the men's 200m event during the Diamond League athletics meeting at Stade Olympique de la Pontaise in Lausanne. — **AFP**

"I've had a good season," the Norwegian said. "Obviously I was disappointed in Eugene. There are always things I can do better and it doesn't always go as expected."

"For the end of the season and next year I have to put in a lot of work to get faster and break records."

- Bol banishes blues — Treble European champion Femke Bol of the Netherlands smashed the meeting record in clocking 52.95sec to win the 400m hurdles.

Former world record-holder Dalilah Muhammad of the United States finished well off the pace in seventh.

"It's amazing to run a meet record here and run again in 52," said Bol.

"The first 200m felt easy and I wasn't too close to the hurdles. The second part is my better part this

year. I am getting tired.

"I was less tired than expected actually. In the last few days I've spent 11 hours a day in bed."

A loaded women's 100m hurdles featured all three medallists from Oregon: Tobi Amusan, Britany Anderson and Jasmine Camacho-Quinn.

The latter claimed the win in Lausanne in a meet record of 12.34sec, with Amusan at 0.11sec.

And there was another meet record, by more than 5sec, for Burundi's Francine Niyonsaba, who marked her return from injury with victory in the 3,000m in 8:26.80 ahead of American Alicia Monson and Kenya's Beatrice Chebet.

Dutchwoman Sifan Hassan came in fourth while Britain's Laura Muir finished seventh.

Jamaican Rasheed Broadbell

pulled off a surprise win in the 100m hurdles, going sub-13sec for the first time in his career as he beat a strong field in 12.99sec.

"I will never forget this race, it's my first time under 13 seconds and I'm very happy for it," he said.

"New training camp, much better results, the proof is there. I am happy with how things are going right now."

Americans Trey Cunningham and Grant Holloway completed the podium. Indian Neeraj Chopra outgunned the Czech Republic's European champion Jakub Vadlejch in the javelin, managing a best of 89.08m.

"I am delighted with my result tonight," Chopra said. "I had to skip the Commonwealth Games due to injury and I was a bit nervous."

— **AFP**

England seamers have South Africa on the ropes in second test



England's Stuart Broad in action. — **Reuters**

MANCHESTER: England's seamers have made steady inroads into South Africa's vulnerable top order after reducing the tourists to 88 for three in their second innings, still trailing the home side by 176 runs at lunch on day three of the second test at Old Trafford.

Keegan Petersen will resume in Saturday's afternoon session on 20 and Rassie van der Dussen, nursing an injured finger, has 14 as the pair attempt to keep England at bay and make their hosts bat again.

But that looks a long way off with England's bowlers superb in exploiting the conditions, finding the right lines to continually test the technique of the South Africans, who have come into this series with question-marks over their top six.

The visitors resumed on their overnight 23 without loss and captain Dean Elgar was the first out for 11 when he was bowled by James Anderson with a superb delivery that crashed into off-stump.

In doing so, the England seamer became the joint highest wicket-taker among fast bowlers across all formats, drawing level with Australian Glen McGrath on 949 scalps.

Opener Sarel Erwee never looked comfortable at the crease but made his way to 25 before he edged Ollie Robinson to wicketkeeper Ben Foakes.

Aiden Markram's wretched time with the bat continued when he was caught by second slip Zak Crawley off the bowling of Stuart Broad.

Markram scored six having been bowled by Broad off a no-ball in the seamer's previous over. He could not take the life given.

The wicket is helpful to the bowlers, taking spin and starting to keep low, adding to South Africa's woes as they fight for survival.

England are seeking to level the three-match series after South Africa won the first test at Lord's by an innings and 12 runs.

— **Reuters**

Oman Fencing Team win four medals in Jordan



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Oman national fencing team bagged four medals in the opening day of the West Asian Championship, held in Jordan from August 23 to 31. The event is witnessing strong competition with the participation of 150 male and female players from eleven countries including Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, the hosts Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq.

The West Asian Fencing Championship for age groups



kicked off on Friday, hosted by the Jordanian Federation in the hall of Al Hussein Youth City.

At the U-13 category, Oman team players showed excellent

performance and won victories and medals with great competence and efficiency. At the female category, the fencer Jana bint Mohammed al Sharjaihah won the gold medal

in the Epee competition while the player Salma bint Saeed al Daghishiyah claimed the silver medal in the same category. In the youth category, the player Ali bin Hamad al Busaidi won the gold medal, and he also won another gold in the Epee competition and to be crowned with two gold medals in his first international participation.

On the other hand, the Omani international referee of category "C" Omar bin Humaid al Harthy participated in the management of the championship competitions in his first external umpiring participation.

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Salalah Club wins Swimming Champion



Salalah Club captured Dhofar Governorate Swimming Championship title after collecting 101 points. Al Nasr club came as runner-up with 61 points while Dhofar Club finished third with 45 points. The final ceremony was held under the auspices of Musa bin Abdullah al Qasabi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Amer al Ma'ashani

Amin al Ansi

Amer al Ma'ashani (left) and Amin al Ansi participating in the Dubai Masters International Chess Championship, from August 26 to September 5.

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Fernandes on target as Manchester United sink Southampton

SOUTHAMPTON: A second-half strike from Bruno Fernandes was enough to give Manchester United a 1-0 win at Southampton in the Premier League on Saturday.

The victory, United's second on the bounce, halted their seven-match losing streak on the road stretching back to last season and provisionally lifted them to sixth place after four games.

With an unchanged line-up after their 2-1 win against Liverpool, United should have gone ahead in the 19th minute but were denied by Gavin Bazunu and Armel Bella-Kotchap, who kept out Anthony Elanga and Christian Eriksen from close range. Bella-Kotchap nearly gave Southampton the lead after bringing down a James Ward-Prowse corner only to blaze his shot over the bar on the half-hour mark. — Reuters



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Oman mulls foray into plant-based meat products

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

Oman Flour Mills (OFM), one of the biggest food processing companies in the Sultanate of Oman, is planning a major push into Plant-Based Meat Products — a multibillion industry that is growing exponentially around the world.

OFM Chief Executive Officer Haitham al Fannah said the proposed introduction of Plant-based Meat Products — also known as meat substitutes or vegetarian meat products — is in line with the company’s strategy to emerge as a major food producer in the region. “Oman Flour Mills always takes into account the global

shift in consumer demands when planning its future investment strategies.

Worldwide, Plant-Based Products are expected to grow 95 per cent by 2027 and after studying the market carefully, it became clear that introducing these products is not only economically feasible, but will place OFM as a leader in the food industry in the region,” the CEO told the *Observer*.

According to experts, meat substitutes made from vegetarian or vegan products are part of a thriving global industry driven by rising veganism, as well as concerns over animal welfare and the environment. The market value of the meat substitutes industry approached \$21 billion



in 2020, and is expected to grow to \$23.2 billion by 2024, according to Euromonitor.

“From the environmental side, reducing meat consumption is one of the most important challenges that affect the environment. Livestock farming has a wide ecological footprint and contributes to 18 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions. Replacing meat with plants

After studying the market carefully, it became clear that introducing these products is not only economically feasible, but will place OFM as a leader in the food industry in the region

HAITHAM AL FANNAH
CEO, Oman Flour Mills

would reduce emissions by more than 90 per cent while reducing biodiversity degradation,” a report by Euromonitor explained.

In the United States, for example, vegetarian meat products retail sales of plant-based meat grew by 10 per cent in 2019 compared to retail sales of animal meat, which grew only 2 per cent.

Commenting on the status of the novel project, Haitham al Fannah said the company is in the process of product development, having already identified product segments. The project is expected to be launched “within 1-2 years”, although this would depend on “penetration and opportunities as well”, he added.

Oman’s OQ Group delivers ‘exceptional performance’ in 2021

Strong growth:
Consolidated revenue
soars 62% to \$22.7 billion,
EBIDTA climbs 152%

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 27

OQ, the integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, posted a 62 per cent jump in consolidated revenue during 2021, which surged to \$22.768 billion, compared to \$14.006 billion a year earlier.

The state-owned energy conglomerate — part of Oman Investment Authority — posted a net profit of \$1.818 billion for the year, compared to a net loss of \$4.460 billion in 2020. OQ Group Chairman Mulham Basheer al Jarf described the group’s performance in 2021 as “exceptional”, driven primarily by the “improved market environment, as well as strong operational performance across the business”.

Group CEO Talal al Awfi added: “Financially, OQ posted an exceptional performance in 2021. Although product prices and spreads improved greatly compared to 2020, it is important to note that OQ delivered stronger operational performances, higher production rates and lower OpEx across most businesses. These efforts were pivotal in OQ delivering



strong financials for the year.”

Two key factors help spur the surge in the Group’s 2021 revenue: The increase in oil and gas production levels along with higher realised OEB (Oman Export Blend) oil prices; and Higher refining and petrochemical revenue due to the recovery of demand and prices of all products within the downstream spectrum.

EBIDTA — a key measure of the group’s overall financial performance — soared 152 per cent to \$3.699 billion in 2021, up from \$1.464 billion in 2020.

“OQ’s performance for the year significantly improved its Net Debt to EBITDA ratio, decreasing it from 7.80 times in 2020 to 2.95 in 2021,” said Group Chairman Mulham al Jarf.

Contributing to this strong growth in EBIDTA were a number of factors,

including an uptick in oil and gas production, mainly from operated blocks and JV assets respectively, along with higher OEB prices.

This was supplemented by the commencement of new projects, notably OQ Plastics and OQ LPG, lower operating costs and gains from divestments. Around 50 per cent of the Group’s EBIDTA came from its Upstream operations, followed by its Downstream & Commercial Activities with a 29 per cent share.

Crude oil and natural gas production levels had also perked up in 2021, buoyed by an uptrend in global demand. Total crude oil and condensate output from the Group’s operated blocks, JV assets and service contract blocks averaged 109K bpd (including 82K bpd from non-operated assets).

Natural gas production

averaged 435 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscf/d), the lion’s share — 401 mmscf/d — coming from non-operated blocks.

Output from OQ Group’s array of refining and downstream petrochemical projects was strong as well during 2021. Production from the Group’s refineries averaged 264K bpd of refined products.

Output from other units was as follows: Aromatics — 772,400 MT; Polypropylene — 204,800 MT; OQ Plastics — 592,000 MT; Methanol — 1.112 million MT, and OQ LPG — 114,200 MT. Group CEO Talal al Awfi also cited the Group’s energetic foray into the Alternative Energy space, noting that “many projects (are) progressing amid a strong interest from potential partners, and OQ finalising the decarbonisation policy”.

Project to upskill Omani fishermen to produce grade-A sashimi tuna

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver



A pilot project to promote Omani fisheries as a new source of grade-A sashimi yellowfin tuna in the global market was launched recently.

The project, launched in Masirah — off the Sultanate of Oman’s eastern seaboard, by the International Pole and Line Corporation (IPNLF) in partnership with Seafood Souq — includes equipping Omani fishermen involved in individual manual operations with the necessary skills to produce higher quality, top-notch tuna sashimi. Seafood Souq, which recently expanded its operations in the Middle East, will market the products on its digital platform.

“This collaboration focuses on targeted improvements in the tuna operations one by one offering high-quality, sustainably caught Omani tuna as an alternative source for the global seafood market,” IPNLF said. The pilot project, which uses the IPNLF’s Fisheries Improvement Toolkit, focuses on yellowfin tuna fishermen along Oman’s 3,165-kilometre coastline.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources estimated Oman’s total production of tuna in 2020 at 68,000 metric tonnes with a total value of RO 64 million compared to 37,000 metric tonnes with a value of RO 38 million in 2019.

“Omani tuna is mostly sold for the local market rather than exported internationally, but it has huge potential,” IPNLF said.

“The partnership, which also includes the Omani government, local experts and staff, plans to develop a quality assurance project for the country’s fishermen to enhance their competitiveness in the global market. The initiative also uses the combined expertise of the seafood market, along with partner ocean experts Oman, IPNLF Fisheries Improvement Manager Craig Turley, and IPNLF member Ryan Nynaber.”

“Through this programme with IPNLF, we have successfully supported the four main goals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, such as Zero Hunger, Decent Work, Economic Growth, Responsible Consumption, Production and Life Underwater,” Seafood Souq CEO and Co-founder Sean Dennis said.

Ahmed al Ghabri, Omani fisherman in Masirah said, “This project taught us quality method (of fishing). We heard about it and saw it on TV, but fishermen here have no background on it. The method taught us how to make the quality of fish better. We can now see the difference in the quality. Previously, we would catch more but the price was low. Now we bring less catch, but the price is higher.”

During the pilot phase of the project, its partners provide technical training in fish handling and cold storage. The project hopes to “successfully demonstrate that with the right techniques, Omani handmade tuna can become of ‘first-class’ quality, and post-harvest losses can be eliminated”.

Continental Tyres unveils exciting campaign

MUSCAT: Customers buying Continental Tyres can now look forward to getting free Lulu vouchers on cash purchases. On purchase of 4 passenger car tyres customers will get a free Lulu shopping voucher worth RO 5, instantly. And on purchase of 4 Ultra High Performance tyres or Four Wheel Drive tyres, customers will get a free Lulu shopping voucher worth RO 10, instantly. The offer is valid until September 29, 2022. (Offer only for DOT 2022 from Saud Bahwan Group tyre retail outlets and authorised dealers.)

Continental tyres us renowned across the world for its reliability and dependability. Manufactured with world-class German tyre technology Continental has developed tyres that offer higher mileage, better fuel efficiency, improved braking on wet surfaces, and high levels of safety and comfort.

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Continental produces conversion sizes precisely matching the requirements of their customers. After all, a unique vehicle deserves unique tyres.

In Oman, the distributor for Continental tyres is Arabian Engineering Services — TBA Division (Tyres, Batteries and Allied Products) a part of the renowned Saud Bahwan Group. Providing a Nationwide Service network for its customers.

UAE-based pharmacy group opens flagship outlet at Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Renowned UAE-based pharmacy group — BinSina — is pleased to announce its foray into the Oman market with the launch of its flagship outlet at the Mall of Oman.

The state-of-the-art pharmacy's grand opening began with a ribbon-cutting by Dr Ibrahim bin Nasser al Rashdi, Assistant Director General of medical supplies at Ministry of Health Oman. Officiated by Dr Doaa Marouf, Chief Executive Officer of Al Khayyat Investments (AKI) Pharma, the ribbon-cutting ceremony was followed by a presentation, photoshoot and tour of the pharmacy for invited guests and the media.

Speaking on the sidelines of the pharmacy's grand opening, Dr Doaa Marouf stated: "Our ongoing success allows us to continue growing and expanding our network of pharmacies in the GCC, and with that opportunity we bring our innovative and modernised approach to managing pharmacies and customer experiences to the people of Oman. Particularly those residing and working in the vicinity of Mall of Oman."

"Our flagship outlet offers a



complete range of products and services. We couple these products and service offerings with a strong team of experienced pharmacists, who will deliver personalised services and a more holistic approach to wellness to our customers in Oman", he added.

Strategically located in the

centre of the city at Mall of Oman in Bausher, BinSina is a trusted brand that promotes good health and wellness.

The Pharmacy is located at the Mall of Oman's 2nd Floor (Shop J14); and dispenses a wide range of products and special offers including Healthcare,

Vitamins and Supplements, Over The Counter (OTC) medicines, Personal Care, Baby Care, Skin Care, Cosmetics, Fitness, Homecare, and Health Foods. It is staffed by experienced trained pharmacists who will serve the community in Muscat and neighbouring areas.

KR Shipping gets ISO certifications

MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas (KR) Shipping, the trusted name for integrated cargo movement is now ISO certified for its management system. The three ISO standard certifications include ISO 9001:2015 certification for Quality Management systems, ISO 14001:2015 for Environmental Management systems, and ISO 45001:2018 for Occupational Health and Safety Management systems.

Malvika Pankaj Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas said, "The ISO certification is an important milestone for KR Shipping. It demonstrates our rigorous commitment to international standards and continually improving our business processes. Quality and timely delivery remain our highest priorities, and we are happy to say that we excel at both. This is reflected in our business growth and high customer satisfaction index."

With over 35 plus years of industry expertise, KR Shipping operates at all major seaports as well as in-land logistics hubs and



special economic zones serving customers across Oman and UAE.

A preferred partner of choice for both global and regional associates, KR Shipping handles prestigious projects of Oman's cruise industry operations and is also the first Omani company to be accredited with the prestigious Authorised Economic Operator for Transport.

"ISO certifications benchmark us with world-class organisations. We strive for excellence and compete to enhance the country's logistics capabilities. Our well-designed procedures across all

business areas lay emphasis on excellence and business growth. We will make every customer touch point accessible to further better our customer service," said, Rajesh Vaidyanathan, Head of KR Shipping.

KR Shipping went through a stringent audit and analysis of its business processes, which included a thorough evaluation of its quality management systems, management of environmental responsibilities, and steps towards creating a safe working environment for employees, amongst other parameters.

Renault Koleos allows owners to elevate their everyday adventure

MUSCAT: Renault Koleos effortlessly blends refined luxury with functionality offering business class comfort for everyday adventure. Owners say it is a vehicle that offers the discerning driver a unique experience that combines innovative technology, unequalled comfort and uncompromising safety to perfectly serve all of their top-end vehicle expectations.

The 2022 Renault Koleos SUV is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort.

With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence. Featuring



a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.

The 2022 Renault Koleos also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system, lighting options, multimedia, navigation, Bluetooth and driving assistance systems in addition to easy park assist.

Renault Koleos has been capturing everyone's attention in Oman with its charismatic, features rich and packed with safety attributes. If you are looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling and unparalleled four-wheel drive technology, Renault Koleos is the car to buy. Afrah al Kharusi from Nizwa is fascinated with the brand's easy trunk access and hand-free function.

Bank Muscat offers special interest rates to first-time borrowers

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision of offering the best services and facilities to benefit its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the availability of financing options with special reduced rates for first time borrowers.

The special rates are meant for customers with salaries RO 1,000 and over who have either recently opened an account with Bank Muscat or those Bank Muscat customers who have accounts but have not availed any loan facilities

before.

Customers should be employed in Government, Quasi-government or approved private sector (Tier 1) organisations to be eligible. Bank Muscat launched the special offer after extensively analysing customer feedback and loan booking data, which is once again a demonstration of its commitment to customer-centricity.

Available to employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as select private-sector (Tier 1) companies, the special offer includes highly-competitive interest rates of 4.25 per



cent for Baituna Home Loans and 4.5 per cent for Personal Finance for loan tenors over 48 months. For more details, customers can go

to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24795555.

The bank added that customers

can visit its Baituna sales centres in Qurum, Maabela, Barka, Suhar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch across Oman for more information as well as to apply for Baituna. Baituna, which is well-known for its prompt processing, documentation and prompt disbursement, can be used to construct or purchase new homes as well as to buy land for residential construction.

The bank offers Baituna Home Loans up to RO 500,000 and for up to 25 years to eligible customers. At the same time, customers who

require personal finance can visit their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards, which will ensure speedy processing of their applications.

Financing up to RO 200,000 is available to customers based on fulfilment of the eligibility criteria. As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM.

MSX closes the week lower by 1.50 per cent

MUSCAT: MSX30 index ended the week lower by 1.50 per cent. Financial index ended the week down by 1.53 per cent. Services index also ended the week lower by 1.86 per cent. Industrial index closed higher by 0.58 per cent. The MSX Shariah index closed down by 0.32 per cent.

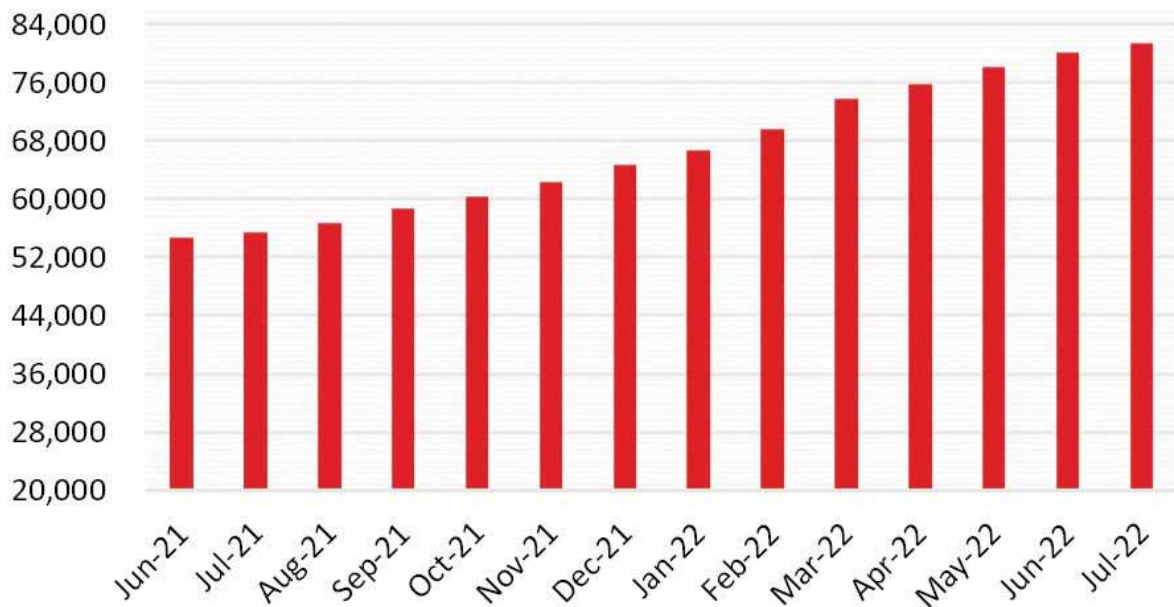
Sohar International Bank announced that they have obtained the regulatory approvals from the Central Bank of Oman and the Capital Market Authority for the Rights Issue of 1,600,000,000 shares at a price of 102 baisa per share.

Subscription for the Rights Issue is open to the shareholders whose names appear in the Bank's shareholder register with the MCD as on the record date. Persons who purchase the rights on the MSX within the trading period of the rights issue are also eligible to subscribe for the offer shares before the rights issue closes.

Bank Sohar issued RO 100 million Perpetual Tier 1 Capital Securities (the Securities) on September 25, 2017 at a fixed annual interest rate of 7.75 per cent.

The securities are listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) bond as BNK SOHAR PER.BND(BSPB) market BNK SOHAR Pursuant to clause 8.1(b) of the terms and conditions of the issuance in the Prospectus, the Bank hereby issues an irrevocable notice to the holders

SMEs in Oman



of the Securities that the Bank will exercise its call option to redeem all the Securities on September 25, 2022 (the Redemption Date) at their principal amount together with the interest accrued up to but not including the redemption date.

Following the redemption, the Securities will be delisted from the MSX. Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) will process payments to holders of the Securities as per the records with MCD on September 25, 2022

The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman reached 2.6 per cent in July 2022, according to the latest data issued by the

National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicate a rise in the prices of main groups in July 2022 compared to July 2021, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages by 6 per cent, education by 5.1 per cent, health by 3.5 per cent, transport by 2.6 per cent, restaurants and hotels by 2.2 per cent, miscellaneous goods and services by 1.4 per cent, recreation and culture by 1.3 per cent, furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 1 per cent, clothing and footwear by 0.9 per cent and housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 0.6 per cent.

The total number of guests in

hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in Oman increased 45.4 per cent to 903,000 total (end July 2022), compared to 620,979 guests for the same period of 2021.

The occupancy rate increased to 42.9 per cent, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) compared to 34.2 per cent last year. Total revenues of these hotels rose by 117.6 per cent to RO 95.332m YTD, compared to RO 43.820m during the same period of the previous year.

The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered in the Authority for

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF GUESTS IN HOTEL PROPERTIES OF THE 3 TO 5-STAR CATEGORY IN OMAN INCREASED 45.4 PER CENT TO 903,000 TOTAL (END JULY 2022), COMPARED TO 620,979 GUESTS FOR THE SAME PERIOD OF 2021. TOTAL REVENUES OF THESE HOTELS ROSE BY 117.6 PER CENT TO RO 95.332M YTD, COMPARED TO RO 43.820M DURING THE SAME PERIOD OF THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

Small and Medium Enterprises Development increased by 46.8 per cent in July 2022 to reach 81,460 compared to 55,491 in July 2021, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, Muscat topped the list by reaching 27,399 enterprises, comprising a rise of 46.3 per cent, followed by North Al Batinah with 12,538, comprising an increase by 42.9 per cent, Al Dakhiliyah with 9,104, going up 33.3 per cent and Dhofar by 8,584, constituting a surge by 84.0 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Telecom upgrade enhances operations in Eastern Central Oman



MUSCAT: CC Energy Development (CCED), in collaboration with Omantel, has delivered 4G GSM Services through its most recent telecommunication infrastructure upgrade in its operating blocks. This upgrade includes a 60m tall telecommunication tower and a fibre optic cable to camp facilities located in Eastern Central Oman. The construction of the tower also serves the local community by providing enhanced mobile services.

The telecommunication infrastructure hosts various services from both major service providers in Oman, including the previously hosted Ooredoo 4G+ Service as well as the recent introduction of Omantel 4G services. This infrastructure utilises modern information processes to transfer real-time operational data which advances remote field management.

Muna al Badi, Head of Information and Communication Technology at CCED, said, "Delivery of this major telecommunication infrastructure in our blocks is part of our strategy to drive digital transformation; this infrastructure supported Omantel 4G Services at our camp facilities as well as other major upgrades of services. We believe that the telecom services have direct and indirect benefits to our operations and the community at large.

"For example, with Internet, mobile apps, VoIP and other means of communication, our team can exchange information in real time and stay connected to our partners and clients. Having these technologies in place can also reduce operational costs, and increase productivity across all departments."

Pact signed to provide training for persons with special abilities

MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa's "Tasees" has entered into an agreement with Qadiroon, an initiative of ASAAS Muscat in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Small Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) at the second edition of the Qadiroon Forum, organised at the Grand Millennium Muscat.

The agreement was signed by Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group, and Mohammed bin Mustafa al Shamali, CEO of ASAAS Muscat.

Under the agreement, Tasees will conduct entrepreneurship training programmes for Omanis with special abilities from various wilayats. The workshops will



enhance their business skills and help them understand the requisites of starting their own dream business ventures, thereby helping them become financially independent.

Discussing the relevance of the tie-up, Nailesh Khimji mentioned: "We aim to align with the larger goal of building an inclusive society, Tasees is pleased to partner with Qadiroon and foster

an entrepreneurial spirit among Omanis with special abilities.

"Our objectives align closely with Qadiroon's goal of providing opportunities for men and women of determination to achieve success in the marketplace and reach higher personal goals. We keenly look forward to supporting individual and institutional advancement and the development of fresh ideas and business initiatives that are in line with Oman Vision 2040."

Qadiroon which means 'capable', works towards the rehabilitation, training and employment of people with special abilities. The initiative's second edition witnessed the launch of the first and largest online platform that promotes the businesses of

people with determination.

The platform is home to nearly 100 sustainable projects owned by persons with special abilities and aims to highlight specialised outlets offering shopping and direct electronic sale of all types of products of interest to them. Eshraqa's Tasees has been launched to nurture an entrepreneurial spirit among Omanis.

Since its launch, it has assisted aspiring local entrepreneurs to succeed in their innovative businesses. Khimji Ramdas' Eshraqa aspires to contribute meaningfully to the education and training sector by building infrastructure that will lead to the enhancement of knowledge, skills and capabilities in society.

E-Mobility not mature — and probably will never be



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com
@stefanovirgilli

The writer is a member of the International Press Association

O k. I get it. Maybe I am a bit old fashion. But there are some business models that make little sense to me.

Starting from the food delivery frenzy, where 99 per cent or the rides are subsidised with investor's money — thus making it nearly impossible to sustain in the long run — I now landed on the gigantic question mark of the e-mobility. The premise sounds great: environmentally friendly, decluttering traffic, personal mobility.

I am talking about the electric scooters for hire that users can unlock with a

mobile app and ride around. But... there are too many butts for the idea to work on scale.

It was 5 years ago in Singapore when I first came across bicycles and e-scooters for hire. At the beginning it was just one app - one bike. Then two, then three... then too many.

Bicycles operators would have taken the competition to the street. Literally. Looking for the competitors bikes around the Central Business District, and then parking a huge line of their own bikes at the back, to make it impossible to extract the competitor's one.

And a few hours later, in the middle of the night, competitor three would

STARTING FROM THE FOOD DELIVERY FRENZY, WHERE 99 PER CENT OR THE RIDES ARE SUBSIDISED WITH INVESTOR'S MONEY — THUS MAKING IT NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SUSTAIN IN THE LONG RUN — I NOW LANDED ON THE GIGANTIC QUESTION MARK OF THE E-MOBILITY.

come along and pile up even more bikes behind the two lines, forcing users to only pick up their bikes located in front of the others.

As a user, the next morning, I just needed a bike to bring me from point A to point B, but in the meantime, those parked at the back were either damaged, or the app simply refused to unlock them. Then there was the dump effect.

When commuters were done with their ride, they

would have abandoned the bike anywhere, without care. And if they did so in the middle of the pavement where an irritable person was walking, the bike could have just been thrown straight in the drain along the pathway, rusting its way to oblivion and never being used again.

An unhealthy business model that promoted mass production of bicycles to quantities that the market could not possibly absorb. And eventually all ended up

in bikes "cemeteries" around the world.

When it came to e-scooters I was particularly thrilled to find a designated parking lot in my condo. The trouble was to find another parking lot at my destination. In an instance, in the attempt to go from point A to point B, I ended up parking the e-scooter at point C, which ironically was further away than point A.

But even when the convenience of parking is available, there is another significant major issue: the business is not tech. Companies like Bird for example, tend to present themselves as a tech company operating e-scooters, but they still

need to deal with very hardware problems, like maintenance, battery levels etc.

In their report issued on March 31, 2022, Bird compared Q1 22 to Q1 21.

Although the revenues from operation went up from \$25 million to almost \$38 million, the operating expenses skyrocketed from \$40 million to \$100 million, generating an operational loss of almost \$97 million!

In the report there is an unclassified other income for \$108 million which brings back to profit, but the business model itself is clearly faulty.

I am interested in hearing the opinion of the readers on this topic.

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Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

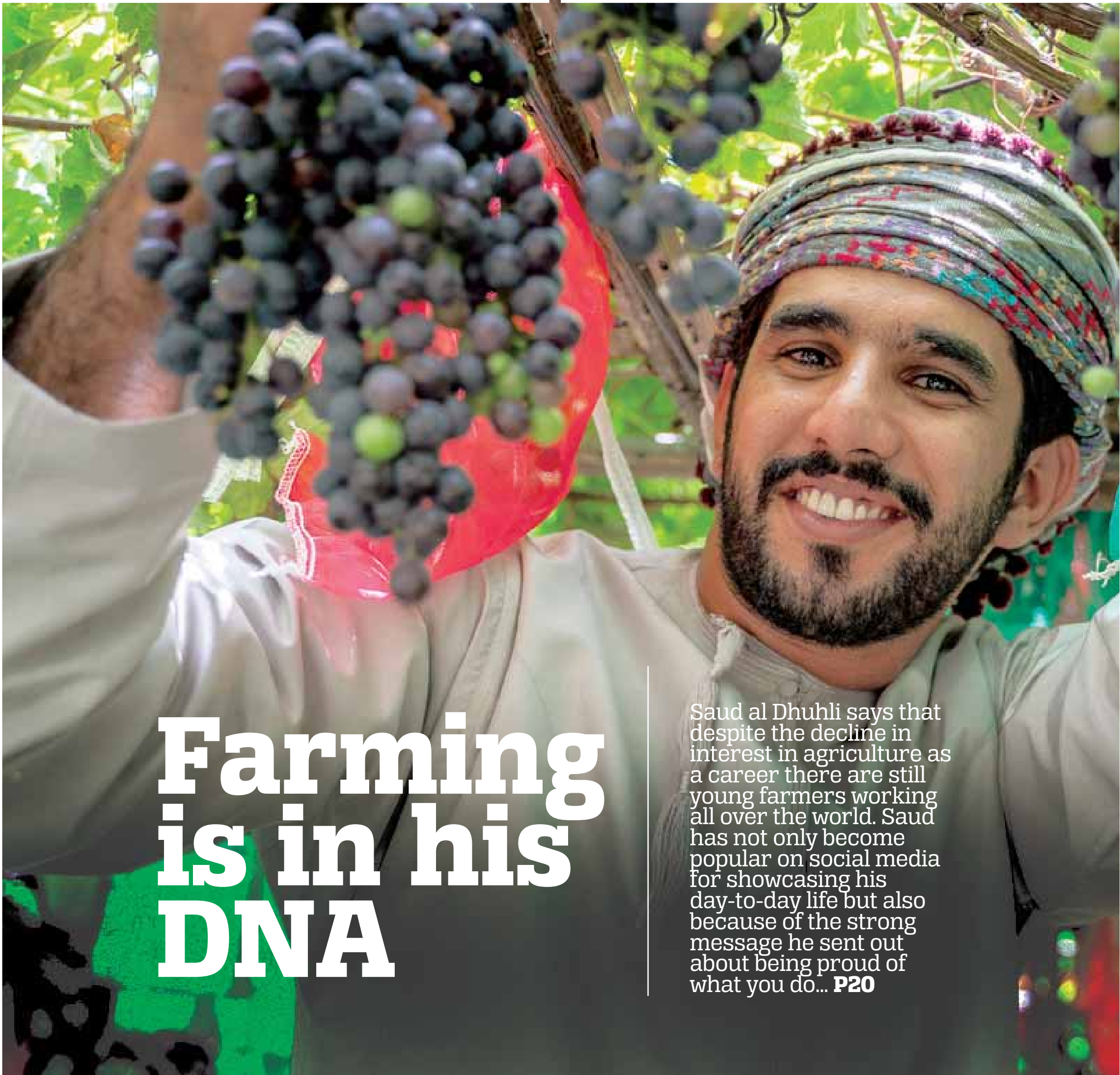
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Farming is in his DNA

Saud al Dhuhli says that despite the decline in interest in agriculture as a career there are still young farmers working all over the world. Saud has not only become popular on social media for showcasing his day-to-day life but also because of the strong message he sent out about being proud of what you do... **P20**

B.B. King's guitar, Marilyn photos up for auction



ELECTIC OBJECTS FROM pop culture and history, including a guitar owned by blues legend B.B. King and early photos of film star Marilyn Monroe, will be up for sale at Guernsey's auction house in New York next month.

"It's an auction of iconic objects, things that may have no relation to one another... What they do have in common is that in one way or another, they are pretty

remarkable — whether they relate to a famous incident or a famous person," said Arian Ettinger, Guernsey's founder and president.

B.B. King's very first and never-seen-before guitar is among the lots. Other items coming directly from the estate of King, who died in 2015, include handwritten music, an African tribal drum given to him by former South African leader

Nelson Mandela, and a half dozen stage-worn jackets.

Photos from Marilyn Monroe's first-ever photo shoot are also included in the sale, which come with an interesting backstory.

"In 1945, Captain Ronald Reagan of the US Army asked a private in the Army to go photograph attractive 'Rosie the Riveter'-type young women working at the local war plant... This is one of the original photographs. That woman... became the great and legendary Marilyn Monroe," Ettinger explained, while holding one of the photos.

Also included in the 120-lot sale are sports items from US baseball star Mickey Mantle, as well as jazz singer Billie Holiday's passport and fur wrap.

Historic lots include an engine telegraph used aboard the USS St Louis and a sword that was on display while President John F Kennedy's body laid in state at the White House.

Proceeds from a sale of tools used at the site of the World Trade Center attacks in New York in September 2001 will go to benefit the online 9/11 Tribute Museum.

The auction will take place online at LiveAuctioneers.com and invaluable.com on September 21. — Reuters

READ

LOVELESS

BY ALICE OSEMAN

Georgia, a British teenager, works on accepting her aro-ace identity.



BRAD AND THE RITUAL

Actor Brad Pitt attends a Buddhism ritual to pray for success for their movie 'Bullet Train' at Koyasan Tokyo Betsuin Temple in Tokyo, Japan, in this handout photo released by Sony Pictures Entertainment. — AFP



AT THE CINEMA

Andrei Tarkovski Jr (R), son of the Russian director Andrei Tarkovski, receives the grand special jury Award for "The Sacrifice" for the 39th Cannes Film Festival, in Cannes on May 19, 1986.(From L to R) American actor John Savage, son of Andrei Tarkovski Jr and Dutch actress Maruschka Detmers. — AFP





British Museum showcases ancient vessels smashed in Beirut blast

EIGHT ANCIENT glass vessels shattered in the 2020 Beirut explosion go on display at the British Museum from Thursday, walking visitors through the painstaking international project to piece them back together.

The vessels, from the Roman, Byzantine and Islamic periods, were reconstructed at the world-famous museum's conservation laboratories, and will be shown as part of its "Shattered Glass of Beirut" showcase, before returning to Lebanon later this year.

"(It) tells a story of near destruction and recovery, of resilience and collaboration," said Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum.

The vessels were among 74 contained within a case at the American University in Beirut (AUB).

The case fell over when the shockwave of the port blast, which occurred three kilometres (two miles) away on August 4, 2020, hit the building, smashing the glass objects inside.

A team of experts had the daunting task of sorting every shard of glass, deciding if it was part of an ancient vessel, rather than display case, and which vessel it belonged to, Duygu Camurcuoglu, a senior conservator at the British Museum, said.

"It's all pretty much done by hand or by eye — brain-work basically. You have to know certain techniques to be able to carry out this work," she added.

Once the pieces had been sorted, the conservators began the mammoth jigsaw-puzzle exercise of reassembling the vessels.

"It's a case of using an adhesive to reconstruct the vessels," said Camurcuoglu. But they could not just use anything.

"We don't use superglue, we don't use UHU," she joked.

- 'SCARS' -

The most challenging vessels were the "large dish and the Byzantine pitcher," Camurcuoglu recalled.

Eighteen of the vessels have so far been conserved as part of an emer-

gency recovery campaign in Beirut, along with the eight vessels at the British Museum and two that emerged unscathed from the fall.

Experts hope that at least half of the remaining 46 objects in Beirut can be conserved soon too.

The collaborative project between

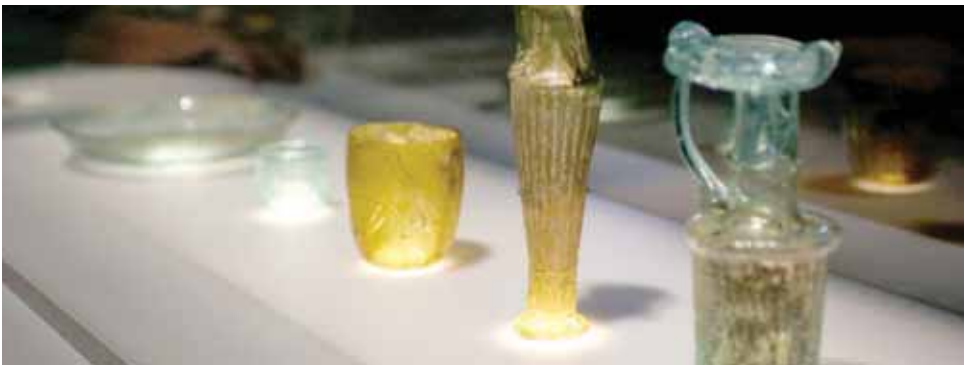
the explosion.

The exhibition will take visitors on the journey undergone by the glass vessels, from the moment of the blast to their display in the famous London museum.

Lighting will be used in the display to illuminate cracks and gaps in the

ment of revolutionary glass-blowing techniques in Lebanon in the 1st century BC, enabling the mass production of glass objects and making them available for common use.

Their restoration, and the teamwork involved, is a source of pride to the conservators, said Camurcuoglu.



the British Museum and the AUB's Archaeological Museum began in 2021, following an offer of help from the London institution.

Conservators agreed early on to make the vessels structurally sound but leave imperfections caused by the shattering visible, bearing witness to

glass.

"We really wanted to highlight the damage these objects went through, so we can all look at the scars, and remember how they were revived together," said Camurcuoglu.

The vessels are considered important in telling the story of the develop-

"We all individually felt that, I think, we contributed to something by working on these objects — by sharing this pain, these emotions.

"So it's not only about the conservation... but also the working together and achieving something together," she added. — AFP

DISCOVERY

Oldest human relative walked upright 7m years ago: Study



THE EARLIEST KNOWN human ancestor walked on two feet as well as climbing through trees around seven million years ago, scientists said on Wednesday after studying three limb bones.

When the skull of *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* was discovered in Chad in 2001, it pushed back the age of the oldest known representative species of humanity by a million years.

Nicknamed "Toumai", the nearly complete cranium was thought to indicate that the species walked on two feet because of the position of its vertebral column and other factors.

However, the subject triggered fierce debate among scientists, partly due to the scarcity and quality of the available bones, with some even claiming that Toumai was not a human relative but just an ancient ape.

In a study published in the *Nature* journal on Wednesday, a team of researchers exhaustively analysed a thigh bone and two forearm bones found at the same site as the Toumai skull.

"The skull tells us that *Sahelanthropus* is part of the human lineage," said paleoanthropologist Franck Guy, one of the authors of the study.

The new research on the limb bones demonstrates that walking on two feet was its "preferred mode of getting around, depending on the situation," he told a press conference.

But they also sometimes moved through the trees, he added.

- 'NOT A MAGICAL TRAIT' -

The leg and arm bones were found alongside thousands of other fossils in 2001, and the researchers were not able to confirm that they belonged to the same individual as the Toumai skull.

After years of testing and measuring the bones, they identified 23 characteristics which were then compared to fossils from great apes as well as hominins — which are species more closely related to humans than chimpanzees.

They concluded that "these characteristics are much closer to what would be seen in a hominin than any other primate," the study's lead author Guillaume Dayer told the press conference.

For example, the forearm bones did not show evidence that the *Sahelanthropus* leaned on the back of its hands, as is done by gorillas and chimpanzees.

The *Sahelanthropus* lived in an area with a combination of forests, palm groves and tropical savannahs, meaning that being able to both walk and climb through trees would have been an advantage.

There have been previous suggestions that it was the ability to walk on two feet that drove humans to evolve separately from chimpanzees, putting us on the path to where we are today.

However, the researchers emphasised that what made *Sahelanthropus* human was its ability to adapt to its environment.

"Bipedalism (walking on two legs) is not a magical trait that strictly defines humanity," paleontologist Jean-Renaud Boissarie told the press conference.

"It is a characteristic that we find at the present time in all the representatives of humanity."

- OUR 'BUSHY' FAMILY TREE -

Paleoanthropologist Antoine Balzeau of France's National Museum of Natural History said the "extremely substantial" study gives "a more complete image of Toumai and therefore of the first humans".

It also bolstered the theory that the human family tree is "bushy", and was not like the "simplistic image of humans who follow one another, with abilities that improve over time," Balzeau, who was not involved in the research, said.

Daniel Lieberman, a professor of human evolutionary biology at Harvard University, said in a linked paper in *Nature* that the study's "authors have squeezed as much information as possible from the fossil data".

But he added that the research will not offer "full resolution" of the debate.

Milford Wolpoff, a paleoanthropologist at the US University of Michigan cast doubt on whether Toumai is a hominin, saying that "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence".

Wednesday's study was carried out by researchers from the PALEOVOPRIM paleontology institute, a collaboration between France's CNRS research centre and Poitiers University, as well as scientists in Chad.

Guy said the team hopes to continue its research in Chad next year — "security permitting".

Chadian paleontologist Clarisse Nekoulngang said the team was "trying to find sites older than that of Toumai". — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRENDS

Twenty-five years since Paris death, Princess Diana still captivates



A QUARTER OF A CENTURY after her death at the age of just 36, Princess Diana remains a source of fascination to people around the world and her fate still casts a shadow over the British royals.

Diana was killed on August 31, 1997, when the limousine carrying her and her lover Dodi al Fayed crashed in the Pont de L'Alma tunnel in Paris as it sped away from chasing paparazzi photographers on motorbikes.

Her death plunged the monarchy into crisis, coming after the highly public disintegration of her marriage to heir Prince Charles with its revelations of feuding, adultery, and the misery she had felt in her royal role.

Millions globally mourned the "people's princess", as the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair described Diana, who was one of the world's most recognised and photographed woman.

Twenty-five years on, her allure shows little sign of faltering.

There has been "Spencer", a movie about the tumultuous end of Charles and Diana's marriage; "The Princess", a documentary by Oscar-nominated director Ed Perkins; while the hit Netflix drama "The Crown" has focused on Diana in its recent series.

There have been books, countless newspaper articles, numerous TV programmes, recriminations over a controversial 1995 interview she gave to the BBC, and even "Diana, The Musical", a much panned and shortlived Broadway show.

"Diana still has an impact, there are still documentaries being made about her, stories written about her, people are still intrigued by this woman," said author Andrew Morton, whose 1992 biography first exposed the deep divisions in her marriage and with whom she secretly cooperated.

"She just had a charisma, she had an appeal which went beyond her royal moniker — it was of an extraordinary human being," Morton told Reuters.

WHY THE INTEREST STILL?

So why does Diana and her death generate such interest?

"I think the only other moment in my life that I really feel like time just stopped was 9/11," film-maker Perkins told Reuters. "Diana's death really was a moment where the whole world just seemed to be focused on this singular event."

He was 11 at the time, and remembers the collective outpouring of emotion and the unprecedented scenes of mourning.

"We as humans have been telling ourselves variations of the fairytale myth for thousands and thousands of years. And suddenly this real life fairytale sort of came into being," he said.

"And this marriage, this fairytale romance, came onto the public stage and gave a lot of people a beacon of hope, something that they really bought into and wanted to work. And I think a lot of people became emotionally invested in wanting that story to work."

In his 2010 biography, Blair wrote that his famous description of the "people's princess" now seemed "corny" and "over the top", but said it was how Diana saw herself and should be remembered.

"Was Diana, the queen of people's hearts? Just look at the evidence," Morton said. "The mountains of flowers, the fact that people mourned her loss probably in some ways greater than their own members of their own family." — Reuters

LIFESTYLE

Tired of Shopping the Same Old Vintage? Try Newburgh



While driving to hike in Goosepond Mountain State Park in Chester, New York, one Saturday, Grace Briggs and Marie La Tourette passed a building that caught their eyes. It was on Route 17K, and it had a black-and-white striped exterior and a massive green sign above the entrance that read: Newburgh Vintage Emporium Ware-House.

Briggs, 30, a creative director, had recently moved into a new apartment in Brooklyn; and La Tourette, 28, a design producer, had a new apartment in Manhattan. Both places still needed furnishings, so they decided to make a pit stop.

Also at the Ware-House that day was Jonathon Chanthamala, a technical designer who lives in Queens. He had travelled by train from Grand Central Terminal to Beacon, New York, and then took an Uber across the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge. Chanthamala, 32, discovered the store on Instagram. A frequent vintage shopper, he made the two-hour trip because he had found it hard to find worthwhile pieces at vintage retailers closer to his home.

"By the time I get the chance to look in the city, it's always picked over," Chanthamala said. "That's why I thought I'd try my luck out here."

After combing through the more than 30,000-square-foot space, which used to be a roller rink, Chanthamala bought a black-and-gold lamp from the 1930s "that's not traditional looking," he said. Briggs left with a dress, boots and a few jackets, while La Tourette picked up a red leather blazer, blue suede jacket and a leather vest.

The three of them are among a group of resale shoppers who have flocked to the Ware-House and its original sister location, the Newburgh Vintage Emporium, since Anthony Vesnaver and D. Matt Smith became owners of the business in 2019. Vesnaver and Smith, who are partners in life, live in nearby Marlboro, New York.

Shoppers have included the

actress Lucy Hale, who bought an Elvis lamp at the original Emporium, on Route 9W in Newburgh, while filming "The Hating Game" in the Hudson Valley in the fall of 2020. "I didn't even know it was her until after she already left," Vesnaver said.

They also include the actor Nico Tortorella, who has homes in Manhattan and Dutchess County, New York. Tortorella, who uses the pronouns they and them, regularly visits both stores with their partner Bethany Meyers, ounder and chief executive of the Become Project, an online fitness platform.

"There's really nothing that compares," Tortorella, 34, said. "There's so much there, like anything you could possibly want is there."

When Vesnaver, 41, and Smith, 40, took over three years ago, there was only the original location. Smith, who has been a vintage dealer for 15 years, was one of the store's vendors before he and Vesnaver, a former executive in the beauty industry, started to run it.

"Business was steady for a bit" after Smith began selling items at the Emporium in 2016, he said. "But in 2018, sales started to dip. There was no outreach to get new customers to the store."

The previous owner "couldn't grow it," said Bill Rieschl, a vendor at the Emporium since its inception. "The idea of the store was good. The location was good. But it wasn't a destination."

One of the first things that the new owners did to attract customers to the original 11,000-square-foot store was to paint its exterior black. "This building is the first thing you see when you arrive in Newburgh" via the New York Thruway, Vesnaver said. "We didn't want it to blend into the background anymore."

Another priority was revising the requirements for becoming a vendor, which now include a ban on selling "junk found in their grandmother's basement," as Smith put it. "Vendors need to sell high-quality, good condition

items that are priced very well, and present everything in a way customers haven't seen before," he added.

There is also now a three-month trial period, even for veterans like Rieschl. "Numbers don't lie," Smith said. "We pretty much know if it won't work out based on sales." Those who outlast the trial period can rent space to sell their wares for a monthly fee, which starts at \$400. Each vendor pays the owners a commission on all sales; Vesnaver and Smith declined to say how much it is.

Vesnaver and Smith said that business soon started to pick up at the Emporium after their changes, so much so that by December 2019, less than a year after they took it over, they had opened the second Ware-House location.

Together, the stores now feature some 150 vendors. Though inventory is constantly changing, it has included Adrian Pearsall couches, authentic Eames chairs, 1950s bathing suits, Lionel train sets and a selection of beat-up, paint-splattered coveralls and work wear pants that Rieschl sold for \$125 a piece, at Smith's recommendation.

"Apparently everyone wears this stuff in Brooklyn," said Rieschl, who typically sells wood tables and other wood pieces from his Old Wood and Rust booths at both locations.

The business's revival has only furthered what some in the area describe as a sort of renaissance for Newburgh, which was the subject of a 2011 New York Magazine article headlined: "Welcome to Newburgh, Murder Capital of New York." According to data from New York state, 569 violent crimes occurred in Newburgh in 2011; in 2020 that number was 331.

"Attractions like the Emporium have helped turn Newburgh into a buzzy area that I can only imagine will continue to grow," said Alexandra Kelly, an owner of Liberty Street Bistro, a local restaurant that opened in 2016. — NYT

ART

New York, cartoonist Sempe's spiritual home



OVER THE COURSE of his storied career, Jean-Jacques Sempe became a fixture on the newsstands of New York, illustrating more than 100 covers of the prestigious *New Yorker* magazine.

After republishing one of those iconic covers on an inner page this week, the magazine will reuse one of his drawings on the cover of its September 5 edition, said the periodical's art editor Francoise Mouly.

This week's drawing by Sempe — who died on August 11 at age 89 — depicts a tiny person carrying a briefcase as he walks a red carpet into the heart of the city, surrounded by enormous skyscrapers.

It's a theme Sempe toyed with for much of his career: normal people navigating the mundanities of life, dwarfed by the world's gigantism.

The cultural weekly founded in 1925 is known as much for its covers that showcase artists as it is for its investigative reports, commentaries and satires.

Sempe worked with *New Yorker* from 1978 to 2019.

Mouly, a French woman who worked with Sempe for 30 years and has been the magazine's art editor since 1993, told AFP it "will be the 114th cover" from the beloved illustrator.

114 COVERS

Both New York City and the esteemed *New Yorker* were childhood dreams of Sempe, who suffered a difficult childhood, dropping out of school at age 14 before lying about his age to join the army.

In the 1970s, he met the American illustrator Ed Koren, who took him around Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens, introducing him to the magazine's journalists and editors.

In August 1978, the French artist signed his first cover,

which showed a bird in business casual at the edge of an open window, hesitating to take flight.

With his 113 covers, Sempe traced his love for New York, which he travelled on foot and by bike, amazed by the Big Apple's colours, energy, cats, green spaces, music, and tiny humans traversing great swaths of urbanity.

"Jean-Jacques was a very modest man, very humble," said Mouly, who is married to cartoonist Art Spiegelman, who wrote the renowned "Maus."

Sempe "was expelled from school, from the army — he was self-taught and found it marvelous to be published in an American magazine," the 66-year-old editor and graphic artist said.

AT HOME IN NEW YORK

For Mouly, Sempe "always felt like himself in New York."

Much of his popularity stemmed from his depiction of "individuals, a man, a woman, alone in the city — half of my colleagues would say to me, 'That's me, that's me!'" said Mouly with a smile.

"Like me, I thought this morning on my bike, I'm the drawing of Sempe, the little old lady on her bike heading to work."

Sempe even has his place on the city's walls.

At the intersection of 47th Street and Ninth Avenue in Manhattan stands a giant mural signed by the illustrator behind the beloved "Little Nicolas" series of children's books — a man carrying a woman on a bicycle, trailed by a boy on two wheels.

In 2009, the publisher Denoel put out a book of Sempe drawings entitled "Sempe in New York."

Another book, "Sempe in America," is planned for September, according to Mouly.

"The New York of Sempe will live on," she said. — AFP



By Mai al Abri
Photos by Ahmed al Toqi

Do young people still practice and truly love farming?
This question was answered by Saud al Dhuhli, a young man who grew up in the village of Talha in Wadi Bani Ouf in Al Rustaq. A village that is about 140 km from Muscat. The road to the village is rocky, and requires off-road vehicles to be reached. a distant village that is not distorted by modern trends and wired practices. A village where pristine nature allows you to think clearly and grow healthy.

Saud says that despite the decline in interest in agriculture as a career there are still young farmers working all over the world. Talha is an agricultural village. Most of the youth here are raised to be farmers and they love the practice.

"Growing up on a farm where I could work alongside my family has meant a lot to me. The lessons learned and the memories we shared as a family are priceless. I was born in this village and from a tender age, I learned to grow crops and beekeeping."

Saud al Dhuhli is an adventurer himself who loves each place of the Sultanate of Oman and enjoys traveling across the country and abroad, yet, never missed the pleasure of being around his village to learn more about agriculture.

This small agricultural village is a big source of different crops. Each acre can provide not only for the village but the nearby towns as well. Talha (means acacia) is named after the abundance of acacia trees in the village, says Saud.

"Surrounded by acacia trees, nature helped me nurture my hobby of beekeeping. I extract honey from acacia, sumur and sidr trees, in addition to shou and sarh honey. The annual production of honey reaches 300 to 400 bottles of honey. The special care given to the honey cells is something extraordinary, requires patience and professionalism".

Bu twaiq type of honey is another story. The search for hives takes effort and time. "it exists where water is, so we follow the water sources and then follow the bees to lead us to the hives. At night, when all the bees return to the hive, we move the hive to a shady area because the high temperature of summer kills the bees. In certain cases, I have to check if there is a queen in the hive, if not, I have to mix the bees with other hives, until they co-exist and in two weeks, they start producing honey. The production each season is about 20 bottles.

Hiking is a usual routine for people living in a mountainous village. The hikes of Saud developed another hobby, the search for Quartz stones. This hard, crystalline mineral glittering in the daily route of Saud, caught the attention of the young man who

later, for personal use, made some tables out of them.

Sometimes, Saud regrets, "the lack of rains in some years, impedes us from growing all the crops. I love agriculture because of its unique ability to combine progress and tradition — two ideals that naturally and typically clash. We have some attempts to grow cherry tomatoes but due to the shortage of water and the heat rise, we couldn't harvest any crops. We also tried to cross-breed crops, mixing the seeds of apricot with peach. The same tree on the right side gave us apricot and on the left side grows the peach".

"I derive my power from the bees that I take care of. Bees, through complex and patient communication, work together to ensure that their colony thrives. Honey bees provide a model for the precise, compas-



sionate community that can be achieved only through attentiveness, communication and hard work. The land is full of treasures. We need to dig to unearth them".

I love this career also because it teaches life lessons early. Those lessons regarding the unjustness of nature, the payoff of perseverance, the redemption found in faith and hard work, the value of honesty, and the lasting impact of friendships formed through the lifestyle.

