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MODRIC'S CROATIA AIMING FOR FIRST TROPHY AGAINST BOOSTED SPAIN



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EDO'S STRATEGY FOCUSES ON SUSTAINABLE, COST-EFFECTIVE ENERGY PRODUCTION FOR OMAN



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HAS ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE BEEN EVOLVING?



MUSCAT

DHUL HIJJAH CRESCENT PANEL MEET TODAY

The Main Committee for the Sighting of Dhul Hijjah crescent for 1444 AH will convene today at the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The committee is chaired by Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs. The ministry has called on citizens and residents across the country to try and spot the crescent that marks the beginning of lunar month Dhul Hijjah and to keep in touch with the sub-committees in the walis' offices. SEE P2

SIGNING OF PACTS FOR SULTAN HAITHAM CITY

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will organize a 3-day media dialogue and accompanying activities on the Sultan Haitham City, at the Royal Opera House Muscat, starting this Tuesday. The first day activity will include a media dialogue, an exhibition about the Sultan Haitham City and the signing of development and partnership agreements with local and regional developers and institutions for the first phase of the Sultan Haitham City. SEE P2

TEHRAN

IRAN, SAUDI CEMENT DIPLOMATIC TIES

Iran and Saudi Arabia took a further step Saturday to seal their reconciliation as Riyadh's top diplomat made a landmark visit to the Islamic republic following a seven-year rupture. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan held talks with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian focusing on regional security, and was also to meet President Ebrahim Raisi. PHOTO ON P6

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GRAPES SEASON BEGINS

The village of Al Rawdah in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, is well known for its cultivation of grapes. It is blessed with nutrient rich soil and abundant fresh water from aflaj and wells. The farmers grow red, black and light green grapes. Customers often come to the vineyards to buy these grapes sparing farmers time and effort to take the produce directly to the local markets. Al Mudhaibi has led a qualitative leap in grape cultivation in the Sultanate of Oman. The governorate is cultivating grapes in an area covering 8 acres, producing approximately 55.9 tonnes per year.

Oman condolences over death of 37 students in Uganda terror attack

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its condolences and sympathy with the government of the Republic of Uganda on the victims of the attack on a secondary school in western Uganda. A statement from the foreign ministry affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's constant stance rejecting all forms of violence and terrorism.

Militants linked to the IS group massacred at least 41 people, mostly students, in western Uganda, in the country's deadliest such attack in over a decade,

officials said on Saturday.

The military said it was pursuing the attackers from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), who also abducted six people during a raid on a school late Friday before fleeing back towards the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Officials and witnesses said guns and knives were used in a grisly late-night assault and dormitories set ablaze at Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe.

Police and army officials blamed the ADF, one of the

deadliest militias over the border in DR Congo's strife-torn east, which the Islamic State group has called its local offshoot.

Sylvester Mapozi, the town council mayor of Mpondwe-Lhubiriha where the attack occurred, said 39 students were killed at the school.

Many of the deceased were burned beyond recognition while other students were still unaccounted for, he said: "We are yet to identify and establish their whereabouts."

SEE ALSO P6

Oman Vision 2040 to release annual report tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit will hold a media briefing to review the 2022-2023 report of Oman Vision 2040 which includes the efforts undertaken by concerned authorities.

During the media briefing, the report will thoroughly be reviewed through an integrated display that encompasses the comprehensive system for the realisation of the Oman Vision 2040 including its national priorities and programmes. Also, a discussion session will be held with the participation of journalists.

By publishing the report, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit targets to enhance the principles of transparency and community participation on which the Oman Vision 2040 is based. The report aims to acquaint the community with the progress in the implementation of the vision and the efforts being taken to overcome the challenges.

The report will be available on the website of the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and its digital platforms in addition to the community copy which contains a summary of the data included in the report for ease of viewing by all society segments.

By publishing the report, the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit targets to enhance the principles of transparency and community participation on which the Oman Vision 2040 is based

Oman Vision 2040 has been adopted as a guide and reference for planning during the period (2021-2040), taking into account the economic and social reality, objective foresight, and ability to keep pace with local, regional and global changes.

The vision aims to make Oman one of the world's developed countries in terms of economy, society and environment, as well as governance and institutional development.

From the earliest stages, Oman Vision 2040 has been characterised by broad participation from all sectors in its preparation, formulation and development, and societal consensus on its foundations, objectives, pillars and priorities, taking into account regional and international changes.

INSIDE



KING CHARLES CELEBRATES BIRTHDAY TWICE A YEAR

P6

Campaign to boost domestic tourism kicks off

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism launched the "Change the atmosphere" campaign to boost domestic tourism during the summer season and introduce new heritage and tourist sites. Through the campaign, the ministry aims to positively benefit the tourism sector partners.

The campaign includes the promotion of museums, commercial and entertainment centres, moderate-temperature places such as Jabal Shams and Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, and the beaches of Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and Al Wusta Governorate, in addition to marine activities.

As part of the campaign, tour companies are offering cruises and adventure tours, complete with accommodation, shopping and restaurant offers. It is noteworthy that the promotion of the campaign in the summer comes in cooperation with tourism sector partners and commercial centres, through



various promotional means, including social networking sites, local radio stations, outdoor digital screens, social media influencers, and others. Statistics issued by the Ministry

of Heritage and Tourism showed that the number of visitors coming to the Sultanate of Oman during the first quarter of this year amounted to about 956,600 visitors, of whom 322,400 came from GCC countries.

Statistics indicated that the occupancy rate of hotels operating in the Sultanate of Oman during the first quarter of this year amounted to 38 per cent. The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is witnessing a large turnout of tourists and visitors from Oman and abroad who flock to the wilayat to enjoy the cool summer weather.

As many as 57,867 visitors, among them 16,476 Omanis, arrived in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during the first five months of this year, according to the NCSE.

The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar has been the scene of active seasonal rains, with overcast skies, and this made it a regular hotspot for many in the summer.



Signing of development pacts for Sultan Haitham City on June 20

YUSEF AL HABSI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will organise a 3-day media dialogue and accompanying activities on the Sultan Haitham City, at the Royal Opera House Muscat, starting this Tuesday, June 20.

The first day activity will include a media dialogue, an exhibition about the Sultan Haitham City and the signing of development and partnership agreements with local and regional developers and institutions for the first phase of the Sultan Haitham City.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning intends to hold an investment and development forum under the title 'Seize Life Opportunities' on Wednesday to discuss investment in real estate and cities.

The Sultan Haitham City will occupy 14.8 million sq metres and it will have sustainable urban planning that focuses on the exploitation of green areas with 2.9 million sq metres.

The city will accommodate 100,000 people in 20,000 residential units that include independent villas, semi-attached



villas, townhouses and flats.

On Thursday, there will be a youth forum titled 'Where Dreams Bloom' to introduce young people to the Sultan Haitham City which

is designed to be an architectural icon and a gift from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the next generations and all society segments.

The Sultan Haitham City is the outcome of the comprehensive transformation journey adopted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning to achieve sustainable

urban development for prosperous communities through the implementation of national strategic projects for urban development in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The city will have a special significance being the building block for upcoming projects and a new model for sustainable cities in the Sultanate of Oman.

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TITLE 'SEIZE LIFE
OPPORTUNITIES'
TO DISCUSS
INVESTMENT IN
REAL ESTATE AND
CITIES

Al Harrasi: ARTF awards prove rich content of Oman's media

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said the winning by the Sultanate of Oman of many awards at the Arab Radio and Television Festival in Tunisia is proof of the high level and rich content of Omani media and its development.

In a statement to ONA, the minister said that these awards include radio podcasts category, children's programmes, youth initiatives, music and songs and environmental and interactive programmes. This is in addition to the television categories of films, documentaries, talk shows, nature reserves and news and programmes exchange.

The minister pointed out that this achievement in various fields of media reflects the progress witnessed by the radio and television production in particular and the media in general in the Sultanate of Oman. It is an international testimony to the tireless efforts of various public and private media institutions and the culmination of efforts made by media professionals who strive to produce attractive and useful content to the public within the Sultanate of Oman or at the Arab level. It also reflects the dedication of the Omani media in highlighting the ancient national heritage, the richness of the Omani society and the level of progress the country has witnessed in various fields.

The minister affirmed the Ministry of Information's commitment to continue developing the media industry in Oman through the preparation and implementation of comprehensive plans that boost creativity and innovation, and enhance the media culture



and skills of talented media professionals through training and qualification in various fields of media. He added that products

obtainment of such prestigious awards motivate us to reach higher levels of production and to adopt the latest technologies to raise the quality of our media production in order to achieve the noble messages of the Omani media and to enhance the Omani media outreach at the Arab level.

The minister extended his congratulations to all media professionals, radio and television channels, and specialised media companies that won the awards of the Arab Radio and Television Festival. — ONA

Oman bags 11 awards at Arab Radio, TV Festival contest

TUNIS: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, and a number of private media institutions, won 11 awards in the official radio and television competitions of the Arab Radio and Television Festival at its 23rd session in Tunis.

The Sultanate of Oman Radio won the first prize in the radio competitions for podcast programmes on 'From the Womb of Death', and the first prize for children's programmes (scout activities) 'Safran', and in the youth initiatives competition it also won the second prize.

The Sultanate of Oman Radio also won the gold award in the musical composition category for the piece 'Wahaj', and the silver award in the song category for the song

'Ayyanaak'. 'Hala FM Radio' won the second prize in environmental programmes for 'Hala Box'.

Al Wisal Radio also won the second prize in the interactive programmes for 'Al Wisal Forum'.

While the documentary film 'House of Wonders and the Age of Caravans between the Sultanate of Oman and Zanzibar' won the first prize in the category of general films and documentaries.

The Sultanate of Oman TV also won the first prize for the programme 'Al Sarb: Wildlife and Natural Reserves in Dhofar Governorate' in the category of the competition 'Across the Arab World: Natural Reserves in the Arab World', and won the first prize for the programme 'Athar: Engraving Rock Art and Ancient Writings.' — ONA



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MOH NO: 197/23



Oman, Hungary forge ties in economy, renewable energy

BUDAPEST: The meetings of the first session of the Omani-Hungarian Joint Committee concluded on Thursday in the Hungarian capital, Budapest, and lasted for two days.

The working group represented by a number of government institutions between the two friendly countries discussed prospects for cooperation between them, especially in the economic and trade fields, and the field of renewable energy and hydrogen. The agricultural sector and water management, as well as the development and transfer of science, technology, and high technologies were also discussed.

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, chaired the Omani side in the committee while on the Hungarian side it was led by Dr Tamas Varga, Deputy Minister of Defence of Hungary.



The two sides also discussed prospects for joint investment and stressed the importance of closely following up on what was discussed, and achieving the desired results for the benefit of

the two friendly countries.

At the conclusion of the meetings, the two sides signed the final statement of the first round of meetings.

The committee's meetings were

attended by Ambassador Munther bin Mahfouz al Mantheri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry, Yusef bin Ahmed al Jabri, the non-resident ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Hungary, and representatives from a number of ministries and government institutions.

It was also attended from the Hungarian side by Bernabash Fodor, Ambassador of Hungary accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and a number of officials of government institutions in the Republic of Hungary.

On the sidelines of his visit to the Republic of Hungary, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, also met with Leventy Mayar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Hungary, where the meeting discussed bilateral relations and regional and international issues of concern between the two friendly countries. – ONA

Hospitals in Oman collaborate for specialised surgeries



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An exceptional collaboration between the Colorectal Surgery Department at the Royal Hospital and general surgery at Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah to perform colectoproctology surgeries proved to be a milestone in offering the best healthcare to the public.

This groundbreaking initiative is aimed at providing outreach surgical services to remote areas, starting with Salalah, and marks a significant step towards extending specialised healthcare to geographically remote regions.

Under the visionary guidance of the Minister of Health and the dedication of the Royal Hospital administration, the collaboration sought to bring highly specialised services closer to patients, eliminating the need for them to travel long distances to access the care they require.

This joint effort exemplifies the commitment of the Omani healthcare community to prioritise patient well-being and ensure equitable access to medical services.

Led by Dr Manar Nassr, the Colorectal Surgery team embarked on a mission to address complex fistula in ano cases during their visit to Salalah. Over the course of this endeavour, the team

successfully performed six specialised proctology procedures; fistula in ano, enabling patients in Salalah to receive the highest quality care without the need to travel to Muscat.

“The collaboration itself required meticulous planning and coordination, spanning a period of two months,” says Dr Manar Nassr, Head of the Colorectal Surgery Unit at Royal Hospital, who worked in collaboration with Dr Salim al Mashani, Head of Surgical Department at Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah.

She further said that this synergy ensured a seamless experience for patients and exemplified the collective effort to bring specialised surgical services directly to their doorstep.

This collaboration not only expanded the availability of colorectal services but also played a crucial role in shortening the waiting list for specialised procedures.

This also aimed to empower surgeons to perform complex surgeries locally, patients can now receive timely and effective treatment, alleviating the burden of travelling long distances for medical care.

The success of this collaboration serves as a testament to the commitment of both institutions and the healthcare community at large in Oman.

Omani Haj delegation heads to Medina

MECCA: A team from the Omani Haj mission headed to Medina on Saturday to provide the services of the mission to the Omani pilgrims coming to the city, headed by Abdulaziz bin Masoud al Ghafri, deputy head of the mission.

The deputy head of the Omani Haj delegation said in a statement to Omani News Agency that the team will start, upon its arrival in Medina, providing preaching, guidance and health services. Members of the delegation supervising the Haj companies will carry out their field visits to check on the Omani pilgrims who arrived in Medina and meet them in places, their residence, and ensuring access to services in accordance with the terms of the contract between them and the Haj companies.

He also indicated that the



team will stay from the 28th day of Dhul Qa'ada until the 4th of Dhul Hijjah, and that most of the pilgrims will then head to Mecca to perform the rituals of Haj.

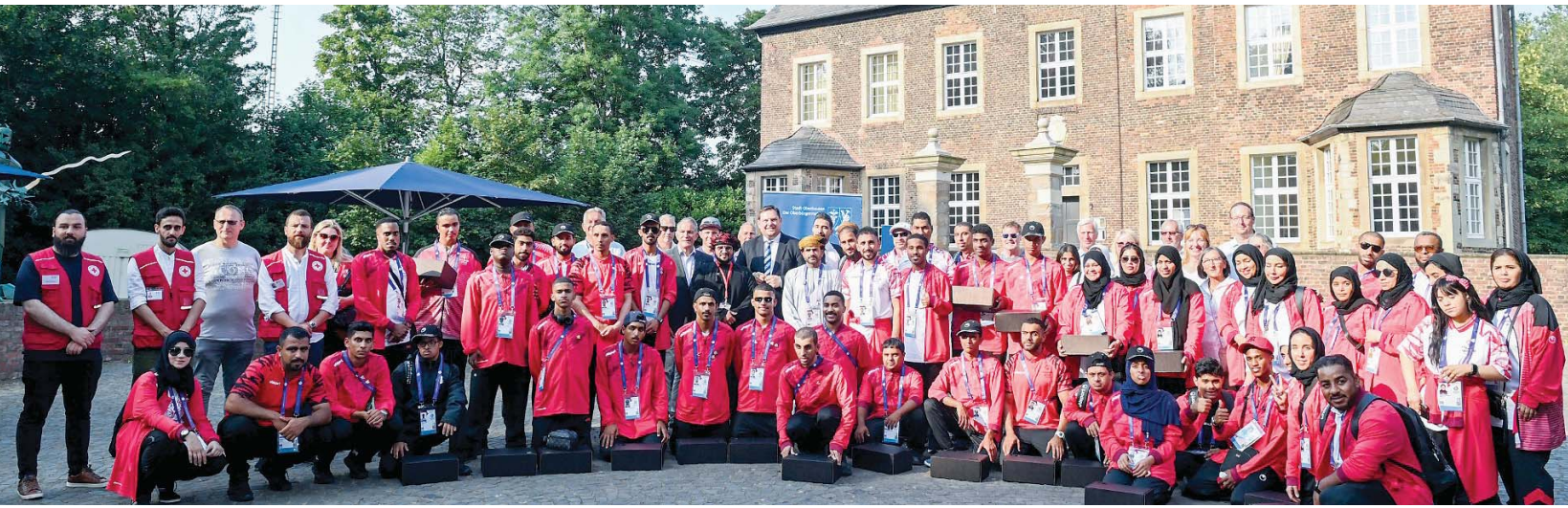
He also pointed out that more than 60 per cent of the pilgrims coming from the Sultanate of

Oman go to Medina to visit the Prophet's Mosque, before heading to Mecca to perform the Haj.

It is worth noting that the mission team in Medina will provide integrated services, as it was formed from all service delegations, and includes the

Fatwa and Religious Guidance delegation, the delegation supervising Haj companies, the medical delegation, the Royal Oman Police (ROP) delegation, the administrative and financial delegation, and the scout delegation. — ONA

Special Olympics athlete empowers others through leadership



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Athletes from all over the world gathered in Berlin for the Special Olympics World Summer Games which began on June 17 with strong participation from athletes from Oman participating in 13 games.

Amongst thousands of athletes is 24-year-old Abdulrahman al Raqadi who says, “Sports is about building life.”

In 2011 he joined Special

Olympics Oman and today is an athlete. In 2017 he participated in the World Winter Games in Austria for skating but soon he found his true passion — Tennis. Today, he is an assistant coach and a sportsman with lofty ambitions.

At the Special Olympics Oman Team he delivered a presentation on the ‘Importance of skill building’ with the project team — Leadership Development Sport.

“I like to spread awareness in my community about inclusion and the abilities of athlete,” says

I like to spread awareness in my community about inclusion and the abilities of athlete as sports is about building life

ABDULRAHMAN, 24
Asst coach, Special Olympics Oman

Abdulrahman.

He has a goal, that is to improve knowledge and skills of athletes who have the ambition to become assistant coach in specific sport.

The major part of the goal is to give the athletes confidence to train youth with and without Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, (IDD), enjoy inclusive sports activities, connect and make friends.

According to him, it is important to spread awareness in



the community about abilities of Special Olympics Oman athletes by showing their athletic and leadership skills, when given the right training. His project goal is to train eight athletes to become assistant coaches in tennis, bowling and equestrian.

The lessons he has learned through his journey are responsibility, and the fact that athletes with IDD can lead on the ground.

“We don't have to fear anything when we put a mind to it we must

always be looking at the potential,” he noted.

According to him, the next steps are to continue sports training, assure the continuation of training, apply the same concepts to other types of sports, and share the success stories with his friends and athletes.

Abdulrahman today has secured employment in the private sector working in the digital medium. His ultimate dream is to have his own Tennis Training Centre.



EMPOWERING WOMEN FOR LAND RESTORATION AND A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

JUNE 17 MARKED ‘WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION’

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

In Arab countries, desertification amounts to ‘about 88 per cent of the total land area which equals about 28 per cent of the total decertified areas in the world.’ This year, the theme of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, “Her land. Her rights”, emphasises that investing in women’s equal access to land and associated assets is a direct investment in their future and the future of humanity. It’s time for women and girls to be at the forefront of global land restoration and drought resilience efforts.

Locally, the Sultanate’s participation in this annual celebration comes as an affirmation of the importance of combating desertification and drought and standing up for cases of land degradation as a result of changing land uses due to urban development, logging, overgrazing and climatic effects that the various regions of the Sultanate have witnessed in recent years.

On the official level, the government affirms that the initiatives of planting wild trees will contribute to improving the quality of pastures and restoring the vitality of vegetation in dry areas.

Therefore, the Environment Authority (EA) has adopted the ‘Ashgar’ initiative, which aims to raise awareness of the importance of afforestation and activate community partnerships to combat desertification.

The EA has implemented an action plan to combat desertification. This plan included updating data on natural resources (water resources, vegetation cover and soil). A project will be implemented using models and remote sensing



systems to be able to monitor the condition of agricultural lands and water resources.

Among the most important activities carried out by EA to

combat pollution, the Authority renewed the invitation to all individuals and institutions to participate in the national initiative to plant 10 million trees

in various parts of the Sultanate.

An environment expert, Mohammed al Sheryani, in his academic research, emphasises that ‘the scarce natural resources are being affected by the concentration of socio-economic activities, which are concentrated around wadis and depressions, which tend to be better watered.’

Land degradation severity is variable and ranges from slight to severe, though this variability would change from one year to another depending on the climate. In addition, the impact of land degradation varies, both in terms of how fast the deterioration takes place and how difficult and expensive it is to alleviate it.

The mismanagement of natural resources caused by the various socio-economic pressures has led to increased degradation as well as to the loss of a high percentage of the plant cover, increased erosion, and the salinisation of cultivable soils.

The study areas are witnessing increasing aridity with minimal precipitation and frequent droughts. The soil has a weak disaggregated structure with a coarse texture and is poor in organic content and subject to aridity. Wind erosion increased tremendously after the introduction of cultivated agriculture, and the increase in human settlements.

Given the above results, the study recommends the need to promote biodiversity conservation and environmental awareness beyond the boundaries of the protected areas to sensitise the communities to the need to reduce land degradation. This will assist in encouraging proper management and wise use of environmental resources for sustained land productivity capacity, increase ecological integrity and enhance livelihoods.

AL calls for action against drought and desertification

CAIRO: The League of Arab States on Saturday called for strengthening efforts to confront the phenomenon of drought, desertification, and the lack of water resources in the Arab countries, which resulted in the deterioration and shortage of agricultural lands.

This came in a statement issued by the Arab League (AL) on the occasion of the 29th anniversary of the International Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, which is celebrated this year under the slogan “Women — their land — their rights”.

The statement stated that the issue of drought is one of the most important issues being pursued by the Arab League through

the Department of Environment and Meteorology (the technical secretariat of the Arab Ministers Responsible for Environmental Affairs, and through the Arab team concerned with following up international environmental conventions on biological diversity and combating desertification.

In this regard, he indicated that the team meets periodically every year for the purpose of coordinating Arab positions and coordinating the work of the Arab teams participating in the conferences of the United Nations Conventions on Biological Diversity and to Combat Desertification. — ONA



‘Desert Shadows’ initiative focuses on women’s land rights in Dhofar

SALALAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Environment Authority, celebrated World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought with a special emphasis on women’s rights to land ownership. Under the theme ‘Women’s land, their rights,’ the occasion marked the implementation of the ‘Desert Shadows’ initiative by the Directorate-General of Environment in Dhofar Governorate, as part of Oman’s national initiative to plant 10 million wild trees.

The ‘Desert Shadows’ initiative aims to create an action plan for optimal utilisation of areas near artesian wells, revitalising tourism and economic aspects in those regions.

Additionally, the initiative focuses on planting indigenous desert



trees such as Ghaf, Sidr, and Cactus, which offer various environmental benefits including increased green spaces, temperature reduction, and carbon emissions reduction.

Talib bin Ali al Abri, Assistant Director-General of Environment in Dhofar, says the initiative’s first phase targets specific areas in Najd. Collaboration with the offices of the governors and the private sector has been instrumental in the current stage of the initiative, covering Thamrait and Maqshan, with plans to expand gradually to other areas.

Ahmed bin Said al Mashaikhi, senior specialist, General Directorate of Environment in Dhofar and

chief of the Desert Shadows initiative team, highlighted the initiative’s purpose of cultivating remote areas in Najd and the Dhofar desert. The aim is to provide shaded spaces by cultivating areas near artesian wells, turning them into attractive destinations for citizens and tourists alike.

Said bin Mohammed al Shehri, Head of Biodiversity Department at Al Nadab, emphasised that the initiative aligns with the objectives of the national plan to plant 10 million trees across various governorates of Oman within a ten-year timeframe. Approximately 50 local trees were planted in the Barkanah 1 area in Al Hashman, an area which experiences increased tourist interest during the winter season. — ONA



Recall

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Elderly on nostalgic journey to Oman Across Ages Museum

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, JUNE 17

The Ihsaan Association in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate organised a remarkable trip for 160 elderly individuals from various wilayats. The group embarked on a journey filled with nostalgia and joy, visiting the renowned Oman Across Ages Museum. The excursion aimed to foster harmony among association members while paying homage to the cherished history of Oman, particularly the reign of the late Sultan Qaboos.

Under the guidance of Said bin Ahmed al Rawahi, an organiser from the Ihsaan Association, the elderly participants were carefully selected from Nizwa, Bahla, Al Hamra, Bidbid, Birkat Al Muz, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Manah and Adam.

Divided into smaller groups, they were granted exclusive access to the museum, with each group allotted a specific time slot. Following the museum visit, a delightful itinerary awaited them at the Manah Entertainment Centre, featuring recreational, cultural and sports competitions tailored to suit their preferences.

The visit proved to be an emotional and memorable experience for the elderly, evoking a myriad of emotions as they relished the memories intertwined with their heritage.

Latifa bint Mahel al Hashemi, an elderly woman from Adam, expressed her deep gratitude for the opportunity to explore the museum for the first time. Overwhelmed with joy, her heart swelled as she encountered images of the revered Sultan Qaboos, whose esteemed place in their hearts remained unshakable.

With tears of longing and joy, she found solace amidst the exhibits, particularly drawn to Sultan Qaboos' personal possessions, including his cars, clothes and fragrances. Her heartfelt prayers resonated through the halls of the museum, inviting all to partake in this journey to reconnect with the past and honour the late Sultan's enduring legacy.

Salim bin Said al Saifi, an elderly resident of Nizwa, shared his profound admiration



for the museum, applauding its seamless blend of history and modernity.

He yearned for more time to absorb the rich tapestry of the exhibits, recognising that a society without knowledge of its past lacks a strong foundation for the present. He extolled the significance of preserving ancestral heritage, paying tribute to late Sultan Qaboos and his monumental efforts in shaping Oman. Grateful for the completed museum, he believed it stood as a testament to future generations, enabling them to appreciate and comprehend the late Sultan's immeasurable contributions.

Thuraya bint Marhoon al Daghari,

another elderly participant from Nizwa, seized the opportunity to express her profound gratitude for the enchanting museum visit. As she wandered through its halls, memories of bygone days and her ancestors came flooding back, stirring a deep sense of loss for Sultan Qaboos.

Overwhelmed with emotions, she shed tears of gratitude upon witnessing his possessions and hearing his resonant voice. Her heartfelt prayers reverberated, while she warmly embraced happiness and contentment. She conveyed her sincerest thanks to the Ihsaan Association for orchestrating such a transformative experience.

Winners of Sohar Prize for Critical Studies and Research to be feted

SUJAR: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth will honour the winners of the Sohar Award for Critical Studies and Research in its second session in the Wilayat of Sohar today.

Khamis bin Rashid al Adawi, Consultant for Civilisation Studies and Chairman of the Award Committee, said: "The Sohar Prize for Critical and Research Studies is the first Arab award of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, with a message of creating an appropriate and

stimulating environment for creativity with the aim of achieving, developing and sustaining cultural leadership locally and globally."

The award also aims to highlight and motivate the Arab writers to research Omani literature, a goal the award was keen to achieve.

"The Arab and international awards are an essential tributary for research and cultural studies which dedicate its efforts to activate these awards and strive towards

their continuity," he adds.

He further explains that Sohar was chosen for the award among a number of other names, confirming Sohar's historical and literary status. It is worth noting that the award ceremony will continue to be held every two years. This will later be printed in books and be part of a research product produced by the award, and will be available to the Arab researchers and scholars interested in Arabic and Omani literature. — ONA

UTAS Shinas launches 'We Read to Advance' initiative

SHINAS: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Shinas launched the 'We Read to Advance' initiative in its first edition, targeting more than 400 beneficiaries of university students.

Dr Nawal bint Saif al Balushi, an Arabic language lecturer at the Department of Business Studies, says, "The initiative aims to promote a culture of reading among students, and to form a conscious and educated generation capable of understanding the daily scientific and practical life."

She indicated that the initiative, which began in February 2023, provided training workshops on the importance of reading for the individual and society, and how to use the daily reading, in addition to encouraging dialogue.

The initiative also is concerned with activating critical reading skills in the university environment, and oral communication skills that serve the academic and scientific affairs and help research and community studies.



She added that the initiative benefited more than 400 male and female students to read, in addition to encouraging the reading of paper and electronic books and exchanging them with each other, enhancing the sense of social responsibility in commitment and transferring the knowledge and experience gained.

— ONA

MoHT signs agreement to boost cultural heritage



AL KHAPOURAH: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed a contract for the management, operation and employment of Al Khabourah Fort, in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, North Al Batinah Governorate, with Al Hosoun Al Shamkha Heritage Trading Company.

The signing of the agreement comes as part of the ministry's efforts to employ cultural heritage, ensure its sustainability and increase its utilisation by providing direct and indirect job opportunities, empowering the private sector, including small and medium enterprises and productive families.

This would also create marketing

outlets for craftsmen, enriching tourism through value-added projects for the local community, and reviving sites and cultural heritage in accordance with Oman Vision 2040 and the strategic programmes of the 10th development plan.

The ministry also aims to develop, rehabilitate and provide various tourist destinations and experiences in various governorates that contribute to diversifying the tourist product and historical monuments as tourist destinations and to highlight the Omani civilisation and the authenticity of the Omani cultural heritage and its authentic culture. — ONA

هيئة تنمية المؤسسات الصغيرة والمتوسطة SMEs Development Authority



In order to support and enable small and medium enterprises and provide a business environment that contributes to developing these establishments and enhancing their growth, SMEs Development Authority floats the following tenders:

SR.	Tender Name	Tender No.	Last Date for Collecting Tender Documents	Last Date for Bid Submission	Tender Price
1	Promotion Initiative through Electronic Boards	153/2023	2/7/2023	23/7/2023	RO 25 (Twenty Five Omani Rials)
2	Promotion Initiative for SMEs on Social Media Websites	155/2023	2/7/2023	23/7/2023	RO 25 (Twenty Five Omani Rials)

Requirements for participating in the tenders:

Establishments and companies registered with the General Secretary of Tender Board, specialized in the tender's scope and interested in participating the aforesaid tenders can collect the documents related to the tenders electronically through Isnad Platform: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>



In brief

■ PARIS



MBS, MACRON CALL FOR END TO ‘POLITICAL VACUUM’ IN LEBANON

French President Emmanuel Macron and Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman called for a “rapid end to the institutional political vacuum in Lebanon”, the Elysee said on Friday.

It came after Macron hosted Saudi Arabia’s de facto leader for talks in Paris, where he had been expected to seek support from MBS, as he is widely known, to find a solution to Lebanon’s leadership crisis.

Lebanese lawmakers on Wednesday failed for a 12th time to elect a new president, as bitter divisions between Iran-backed Hezbollah and its opponents risk miring the country in a protracted power vacuum.

■ WASHINGTON



SINGAPORE SAYS ‘PREMATURE’ FOR ASEAN TALKS WITH MYANMAR

Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said on Friday that conditions were not yet right for ASEAN to open high-level talks with Myanmar on the country’s political situation. “We believe it would be premature to re-engage with the junta at a summit level or even at a foreign minister level,” Balakrishnan said when asked about a news report that Thailand had proposed talks. Speaking in a joint press conference in Washington with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Balakrishnan said the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations had recently reaffirmed their stance.

■ JAKARTA



JAPAN’S EMPEROR ARRIVES IN INDONESIA FOR FIRST STATE VISIT

Japan’s Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako arrived in the Indonesian capital Jakarta on Saturday for their first state visit since ascending the Chrysanthemum Throne in 2019.

The June 17-23 trip to Southeast Asia’s biggest economy includes a meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo at a palace south of Jakarta and a visit to a military cemetery honouring Indonesian and Japanese soldiers.

Japan ruled Indonesia for more than three years during and after World War II, capturing it from the Dutch East Indies without a fight and breaking the image of Dutch superiority.

■ SAUDI OPENS EMBASSY IN TEHRAN



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian meets with Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud in Tehran, Iran, on Saturday. Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed in March, in a deal brokered by China, to end a diplomatic rift and reestablish relations following years of hostility that had endangered regional stability including in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. Iran officially reopened its embassy in Saudi Arabia on June 7. The Saudi minister is expected to officially inaugurate the kingdom’s embassy, on Saturday, in the capital. — Reuters

37 Uganda pupils burned to death

MPONDWE: Militants linked to the IS group hacked and burned 37 students to death in western Uganda in the country’s worst such attack in over a decade, army and police officials said on Saturday.

The army said it was pursuing militants from the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) after the cross-border raid late on Friday on a secondary school in Mpondwe in Kasese district near the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Investigators said dormitories were set alight and students cut down with knives in a brutal late-night assault by ADF, which is one of the deadliest groups active in DR Congo’s strife-torn east.

“Unfortunately, 37 bodies have been discovered and conveyed to Bwera hospital mortuary,” Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) spokesman Felix Kulayigye said in a statement, referring to a town near where the attack occurred.

Eight people were injured while six others were kidnapped



A boy is escorted from the scene of an attack at the Mpondwe Lhubirha Secondary School in Mpondwe, on Saturday. — AFP

and taken by the attackers toward Virunga National Park, which straddles the DR Congo border, he added.

“UPDF embarked on pursuing the perpetrators to rescue the abducted students.” The Resident Commissioner for Kasese, Joe Walusimbi, said that at least 25 of the deceased were “confirmed to be students at the school”.

It is the deadliest attack in Uganda since twin bombings in

missing, the report stated.

The school is less than two kilometres (1.2 miles) from the border of DR Congo, where ADF is primarily active and has been accused of killing thousands of civilians since the 1990s.

Major General Dick Olum said intelligence suggested the presence of the ADF in the area at least two days before the attack, and an investigation would be needed to establish what went wrong.

He said it appeared the attackers had detailed information about the school.

“They knew where the boys and girls’ dormitories resided,” said Olum from Mpondwe.

“This is why the rebels locked the boys’ dormitory and set it on fire. The rebels did not lock girls’ section and the girls managed to get out, but they were cut with machetes as they ran for safety, and others shot”.

He said some of the bodies were burned beyond recognition and DNA testing would be required to identify them. — AFP

Russia has sent nuclear warheads to Belarus

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that the first Russian tactical nuclear warheads have been delivered to Belarus and suggested that he had no intent of engaging with the West on the topic of arms reductions.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko had said last month that the Russian weapons were starting to be deployed, but until now Putin had not confirmed.

Russia has given various reasons for the decision to station the weapons in Belarus, including the expansion of Nato to include Finland and the fact that the US has nuclear armaments in Europe.

Belarus had not had nuclear missiles since the 1990s, following the voluntary surrender of the weapons after the collapse of the Soviet Union. “It has happened — the first nuclear warheads have been delivered to the Belarusian territory. This is the first batch. We will complete this work until the end of this year,” Putin told Russian elites gathered at an annual economic forum in St Petersburg. The Russian leader also touched on the subject of arms control talks.

“We have more of those weapons than Nato countries. They know that and are always trying to get us to start reduction talks. Screw them, you know, as people say,” Putin told the crowd.

A short time later, Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov told journalists that “Russia is ready to conduct negotiations,” despite Putin’s forceful language.

Putin suspended the New START disarmament treaty — the only major nuclear arms control treaty left with the US — in February 2023.

— dpa

King Charles III saddles up for birthday parade

LONDON: Britain’s King Charles III Charles inspected the troops at his inaugural birthday parade on horseback on Saturday, the first time the monarch has ridden at the event since his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 1986.

The annual Trooping the Colour parade marks the British sovereign’s official birthday.

Charles was followed on horseback by his eldest son and heir, Prince William, Charles’ brother Edward, the Duke of Edinburgh, and sister Anne.

Queen Camilla and William’s wife Catherine, the Princess of Wales followed in a carriage.

The colourful display of regimental precision and pageantry is the first of 74-year-old Charles’s reign.

Charles’s actual birthday is on November 14 but British sovereigns celebrate twice — once in private and again in public.

The June parade tradition



(L-R) Prince George of Wales, Catherine, Princess of Wales; Prince Louis of Wales; Prince William, Prince of Wales; Princess Charlotte of Wales; King Charles III; and Queen Camilla wave from the balcony of Buckingham Palace after attending the King’s Birthday Parade, ‘Trooping the Colour’, in London on Saturday. — AFP

began in 1748 under King George II, who wanted a celebration in better summer weather, as his own birthday was on October 30.

The televised event kicked off with a procession from Buckingham Palace to Horse Guards Parade in central London.

Some 1,400 soldiers, 400 musicians and 200 horses are

taking part, led in the parade by Juno, a 10-year-old shire mare, alongside three other Drum Horses — Perseus, Atlas and Apollo.

Drum Horses are the most senior animals in the army and hold the rank of major. They are traditionally named after figures from Greek mythology. — AFP

Why one upscale apartment building became a death trap

BEN HUBBARD, ANJALI SINGHVI, JAMES GLANZ, MIKA GRÜNDAHL, ELIF INCE, BERIL ESKI AND SAFAK TIMUR

Renaissance Residence was a testament to Türkiye’s grand ambitions, a large, iconic project designed to meet the rising expectations of an expanding middle class in a rapidly developing part of the country.

Towering over what was once farmland for wheat, okra and cotton, the upscale complex offered hotel-style amenities and helped transform the rural enclave of Ekinçi into a bustling suburb, attracting judges, teachers, doctors, police officers and professional soccer players.

Despite significant earthquake risk, Selma Keskin, a lawyer and single mother who moved into a third-floor apartment with her adolescent son, was reassured by the pedigree of the building, a signature work of a prominent local firm headed by a well-known architect. “We never thought he would build a building that was not earthquake-proof,” Keskin said.

Across southern Türkiye, the 7.8-magnitude earthquake before dawn February 6 and a second major tremor hours later killed more than 50,000 people and devastated hundreds of thousands of buildings.

Like many structures that collapsed, Renaissance was completed in the past decade, when updated seismic codes were supposed to ensure a building’s strength.

But a months long investigation and forensic analysis by The New York Times found that the death toll at Renaissance, the site of one of the deadliest building collapses in the quake, was the tragic result of flawed design and minimal oversight.

A series of poor architectural decisions and risky design choices left the building unfit to handle the stress of the seismic forces. An engineer who reviewed the structural plans and detailed them to the Times said the building violated the basic tenets of engineering, leaving the ground floor particularly vulnerable.

The system of safety checks was deficient, characterised by a lack of regulatory enforcement and professional rigor. All along, local officials, private inspectors and building engineers missed the problems. The municipal adviser who issued the construction permit said he



Rescuers at the Renaissance Residence, the site of one of the deadliest building collapses in the 7.8-magnitude earthquake that hit Türkiye on February 6 killing more than 50,000 people and devastating hundreds of thousands of buildings in Ekinçi.

didn’t have the right software to check the developer’s calculations. An inspector who signed more than 100 reports on Renaissance said he had never heard of the building until after the collapse.

“I cannot explain what was the intention here with this design,” said Osman Ozbulut, an associate professor of civil engineering at the University of Virginia who researches earthquake-resilient design. “It’s the most puzzling building.”

The Renaissance contractors insist that they followed all the codes in place at the time but that the regulations were insufficient to withstand such a powerful earthquake.

The Times’ findings were based on an extensive review of government documents, court records, structural plans, architectural drawings and images of the building, as well as site visits and interviews with scores of engineers, seismologists, local officials, survivors and professionals associated with the project.

Using that information, the Times constructed a 3D model of Renaissance that revealed multiple weaknesses and several points of failure that could have brought the building down.

The main building in the Renaissance complex toppled over, evidence that the

building had major vulnerabilities on the lower level and the south side.

When the earthquake hit, the three separate apartment towers that made up the main building fell in nearly identical ways, suggesting that they were built with the same flaws.

Just a few inches apart, the 13-story towers — A1, A2 and A3 — were superficially joined, with the gaps between them sealed so they appeared as one building.

The most vulnerable part of Renaissance was the ground floor, which had an open layout. To make room for recreational spaces, this level had fewer masonry blocks than elsewhere, as well as taller columns that were more susceptible to lateral motion in quakes. That most likely created a vulnerability called a soft story. The soft-story flaw made the lower level more prone to swaying. The horizontal forces could have weakened the ground-floor columns and possibly torn them apart. Images of the wreckage made clear that all three towers broke off around the ground floor.

The building may have also been vulnerable to a phenomenon known as overturning. In that situation, the movement of the upper floors creates a downward force on the ground-floor

columns, threatening their ability to remain intact. Both the soft story and overturning probably played roles in destroying the ground-floor columns, but experts varied in how much importance they assigned to each.

The building fell southward in part because the framework of beams and columns was misaligned and the structural connections were insufficient between the two sides. The strongest concrete walls, or cores, were also clustered on the north side. Cores are essential for a building’s resistance to seismic forces. Those flaws meant the south side didn’t benefit from the same seismic protections as the north side.

Renaissance was a product of a building boom throughout Türkiye, a pillar of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s plans for development and economic growth.

Renaissance sailed through a system of weak checks, the Times found.

Unqualified local officials granted its permissions, building inspectors filed shoddy paperwork and ambition overtook caution as the towers rose.

“Everyone was happy because it was a beautiful building, with a garden and a pool,” Seyfettin Yeral, the local mayor when Renaissance was built, said in an interview. Asked if his council had considered earthquake risk when approving the project, he said: “Sadly, no.”

In a statement, the contractors disputed many of the Times’ findings, saying that they had followed all the necessary procedures; that the building’s bearing system was consistent and solid; and that the design of the ground floor did not make it a “soft story.”

Most buildings around Renaissance remained standing, noted Baris Erkus, a structural engineer based in Istanbul who visited the site and dozens of others after the quake. If a building has been properly designed, “it would experience some large damage,” Erkus said, “but the structure would not fail in this manner.”

When Renaissance opened in the summer of 2013, the complex, which included the area’s largest residential building, cultivated a sense of exclusivity, the name emblazoned in orange and silver at the entrance. The lobby was designed to mimic a hotel’s, with a cafe where residents could socialise. The complex eventually featured a day care centre, a Pilates studio, a swimming pool, a hairdresser and Ping-Pong tables.

A series of poor architectural decisions and risky design choices left the building unfit to handle the stress of the seismic forces Renaissance was completed when updated seismic codes were supposed to ensure a building’s strength

Maria Shriver’s to-do list for better brain health



Maria Shriver

In our CEO wellness series, we ask executives about their day-to-day habits to gain insight into the tactics they use to minimise stress and maintain their well-being.

Maria Shriver is a mother of four, an Emmy and Peabody award-winning journalist, a seven-time New York Times best-selling author, an NBC News Special Anchor and the founder of The Women’s Alzheimer’s

Movement and Shriver Media. Shriver also founded brain health brand MOSH with her son Patrick Schwarzenegger.

Coffee or tea? And what do you put in it?

I like strong black coffee and put nothing else in it!

What is your go-to breakfast?

On a typical day, I’ll have a MOSH bar for breakfast. If I go out to breakfast, I’ll usually order oatmeal or eggs.

Tell us about your workout routine.

I work out after I meditate in the morning and sit in silence for a while. I mix up my routine quite a bit between Pilates, strength training, balance work, the treadmill or

Lifecycle exercise bike. Sometimes it’s just walking, which I love doing the most.

How many hours do you sleep on a typical night?

6-8 hours.

How do you de-stress?

I love to go for a walk where I can talk and call someone, usually either one of my brothers or friends.

According to your phone, what’s your daily average screen time from last week?

I have never looked this up and would prefer not to know.

What app do you use the most?

Instagram.

When’s the last time you took a day off? What did you do?

I went and visited a friend about two weeks ago, which was big for me and I loved it.

What’s one thing your company is doing to prioritise employee wellness?

I give people the ability to work from home and I am a really flexible boss if I do so myself.

What’s your favourite treat?

Popcorn.

Show us a photo of your happy place.

“Being in nature opens my heart and mind. It makes me realise that there is wisdom, healing, love, joy and forgiveness everywhere we turn.”



WHO calls for action on global stress epidemic



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

June 10 was dedicated by the World Health Organization (WHO) to mark the international stress day which aims to draw attention to this phenomenon that we all face in our life, one way or another. According to statistics, over 300 million around the world experienced stress on daily bases, 85 million of whom are children and young adults while women make over 60 per cent of the total number.

Stress in itself is not a mental illness but if not addressed and managed properly it can cause mental health problems such as anxiety, depression or even psychosis when the person typically loses sense of reality and experiencing abnormal beliefs.

We are agree that stress became part of our lives and that a little stress can be motivating to be more productive. Think about the student preparing for his or her final exams, a little stress would keep him more focused on his study instead of watching football or going out with his friends.

Yet if that stress becomes more it can have a daunting impact on his mental and physical health. Scientific studies showed that chronic stress is a risk factor for several diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and low immunity

which makes the person at risk of catching viral and bacterial infections.

Work related stress is a topic of interest to organisation and the classical situation is when work demands become more that what a worker can handle, be it long working hours, difficult working conditions or unhealthy working relationships with the boss and other colleagues.

According to surveys based on working population, work related stress can lead to loss of productivity due to time taken as sick leave or work accidents due to poor concentration or changing jobs frequently due to lack of satisfaction.

Staff who feel unappreciated tend to have low work engagement and would leave to a new job even when the salary would be the same.

So what can we do to manage stress? The obvious answer is to identify the source of stress and work on them. Sources of stress can either be internal, in form your personal traits, like when you are perfectionist or too relaxed, if you keep missing deadlines and arrive late to meetings work on your time management.

If you feel that you tend to please others and take up more than your allocated tasks, learn assertiveness skills and other essential management skills.

‘STRESS TENDS TO AFFECT PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS AND HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THEIR PERFORMANCE AND OVERALL WELL BEING’

Some organisations develop mental well being programmes to improve the working environment and encourage staff to attend gatherings to strengthen relationships between peers and senior and junior staff.

Awareness about mental health is important to insure good working atmosphere and improve work productivity and overall well being.

At a personal level one would benefit from adopting healthy life style which included healthy eating, regular exercise and sleeping adequately.

Learning relaxation methods, mindfulness and meditation is known to improve concentration and overall outcome. We all know that work is not the only source of stress as relationship problems, living environment and financial situations also play essential role in our happiness.

People who are experiencing marital problems or going through divorce are more likely to experience stress, as well as people with financial hardship or lack job security tend to experience high stress level which can impact their work engagement and productivity.

Finally, remember to seek professional advice when you feel that you are unable to manage your stress, in short, do not be shy and speak out.

Free school aims to breaks poverty cycle in S African township

CLAIRE DOYEN

The classrooms are bright and clean, their shelves filled with textbooks and stationery. The pupils wear neatly ironed blue and grey uniforms, complete with bright red jerseys.

The set-up could easily be mistaken for an expensive South African private school, yet all the pupils are from poor backgrounds.

The school, funded by philanthropists, offers hope to children who would typically get left behind in a country still plagued by inequality decades after the end of apartheid.

“Most of them, unfortunately, don’t have a nice background, mostly the parents don’t work,” said Lebogang Gobodo, 25, a former student who is now employed by the Ubuntu Pathways project.

“So, with us what’s different is that we then tend to give them food packages at the end of the month. They also attend a clinic here. So we try to cover everything,” she said.

The modern concrete structure stands cheek-by-jowl with rows of modest brick houses and corrugated iron structures in an impoverished area with thousands of inhabitants in the coastal city of Gqeberha.

Many in the neighbourhood did not complete school and most households live off a small government social welfare.

If the Ubuntu Pathways project did not exist “these kids may not be at school at all,” said a 32-year-old teacher, Taneal Padayachie.

Decades after the end of white rule, the effects of a two-tier apartheid system which offered inferior education to black South Africans, are still being felt.

Eight out of 10 schoolchildren aged nine or ten struggle to understand what they read, according to a study published last month.

Jacob Lief, a co-founder of Ubuntu Pathways, said the idea is to invest “in disadvantaged children the same way we’re investing in privileged children.”

The school has no fees and its \$7 million annual budget is funded by philanthropists and local companies.

But it only takes children living within a radius of seven kilometres.

“It felt like coming back home when I got employed, because now it’s an opportunity for me to give children the childhood they deserve,” said the student-turned-teacher Gobodo. — AFP

‘I cannot believe we made it’: In the flood, a rescue behind the front



Andrew E Kramer

The writer is the NYT bureau chief in Kyiv



Maria Varenikova

The writer is a freelance journalist and producer for NYT

At night, she had looked at the twinkling lights of her home city, just a mile or so away but a world apart. For months, she had been kept away by the dangers of Russia’s war in Ukraine, stranded on a river island, after the front line shifted while she was on vacation.

To feed her children, she fished in the Dnieper River and scavenged for canned goods in abandoned summer homes. She hid from Russian soldiers who sometimes patrolled the island, and listened in fear as artillery streaked overhead.

Only by the chance of a massive flood washing over the island — and washing away some Russian positions — was Kateryna Krupych able to escape Russian-occupied Ukraine in the south.

The destruction of a dam along the Dnieper River and the flood that followed brought devastation to tens of thousands of people in southern Ukraine. To Krupych and dozens of others, it brought freedom, a chance to reunite with their loved ones.

The journey across the front was perilous. Three people were killed by Russian shooting while trying on Sunday, Ukraine authorities said. It would have been unthinkable before the chaos of the flood opened a window of opportunity allowing Ukrainian special forces soldiers to rescue 132 people from Russian-occupied territory, they said.

“Because of the flood, we managed to get home,” Krupych said in an interview after staggering out of a rescue boat with her children, barefoot and exhausted but out of Russian occupation for the first time in 15 months.

The Russian-held, eastern bank of the Dnieper River is a low-lying area of reedy swamps and deltaic islands, dotted with small villages and vacation homes for people living in the city of Kherson. In the flood, it became an expanse of open water, with just roofs of houses poking out. Krupych lives in Kherson, which



Volunteers on a mission to rescue animals and to deliver food to isolated residents, in an area flooded by the destruction of a dam in Kherson, southern Ukraine.

THE DESTRUCTION OF A DAM ALONG THE DNIEPER RIVER AND THE FLOOD THAT FOLLOWED BROUGHT DEVASTATION TO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN UKRAINE.

fell to the Russians shortly after they attacked early last year. In November, she, her father and her two children were visiting a vacation home on the island when suddenly the front line shifted. Ukrainian forces retook all of the Russian-held territory on the western bank of the Dnieper, including Kherson. The river became the new front. They were stranded, with no way home.

There were no stores on the island. Fearful of arrest by the Russians, Krupych, 40, did not dare venture deeper into Russian territory.

Instead she called acquaintances and asked to borrow from the pantries of their empty summer homes, and she fished. She and her children, Maksym, 12 and Maria, 4, also hunted for canned goods in the ruins of homes destroyed by shelling.

“That’s how we survived,” she said. “There was no possibility to buy food or go anywhere.”

Maria was too young to understand the predicament, she said, but Maksym became worried and took to biting his nails. “The child was stressed,” she said.

After the dam breach, the family piled into a boat to get to safety in the upper story of a neighbour’s three-story home. While climbing in a window, the roiling water carried away the boat with her father and a neighbour still aboard.

“I desperately screamed, ‘Do something!’” Krupych said, but the current washed the boat out of view. “They tried but the water took them away into the night.”

For the next 24 hours, she did not know what had become of them, and feared the worst.

Trapped alone with her son and daughter, Krupych spent the night in despair, shivering and hungry.

Taking advantage of the chaos of the inundation, Ukrainian special forces soldiers, working with drones, managed first to drop food and water to people stranded on rooftops in occupied areas, and then to zip across the front — over the flood-swollen Dnieper River — in motorboats and rescue some. — *The New York Times*

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Understanding, respecting disability

Have you ever had a pebble in your shoe, felt a twinge in a calf muscle, or in your back? Of course you have, and until you remove the pebble a couple of steps on, or until the twinge simply ‘goes away,’ as most do, you will be annoyed, frustrated, and even angry. How would you like to be like this all the time?

It’s almost natural, almost human nature, to see the disabled as imperfect, and in fact research has shown that we see the physically disabled as also being intellectually disabled. When we are ‘scanning’ for companionship, relationships, and interactions, research has also shown that we quickly dismiss those with disabilities. Are we really so banal and shallow? Well, apparently so. Andrew Steptoe, in the prestigious *Lancet Medical Journal*, wrote that it is the “risk of emotional distress,” and not intellect, that can be identified as a consequence of impaired mobility, which implies that we don’t offer enough emotional and psychological support for those who are disabled. We have much to answer for then, don’t we?

Put yourself in the shoes, so to speak, of someone with a disability, whether it is a birth defect or trauma doesn’t matter, then think about how you would see yourself, in order to reflect upon how others would see you. It’s not, for want of a better expression, a ‘pretty picture’ is it? We are really quick to make assumptions, to make invalid assumptions, and even when we know what is coming next, like the ‘how you see yourself,’ was always going to be followed by ‘how others would see you.’

It’s just that whether it’s our survival of the fittest instincts kicking in, or whether our basest instinct is the reproductive hesitancy of thinking ahead far enough that “we don’t want a child that is less than perfect.” So let’s step away for a moment, from the clearly selfish perspectives of ourselves, and



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IT’S ALMOST NATURAL, ALMOST HUMAN NATURE, TO SEE THE DISABLED AS IMPERFECT, AND IN FACT RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT WE SEE THE PHYSICALLY DISABLED AS ALSO BEING INTELLECTUALLY DISABLED

have some consideration, some reflection on the myriad of stress factors, transitions, evaluations, revaluations, and adjustments that our disabled societies face. Culturally, their lives either never have been, or never will be, the same, and most of the time, that’s because of us.

Knowing, or realising one has a disability must be incredibly shocking, in so many ways, emotionally, physically, and mentally destabilising. The defence mechanism of denial would frequently rear its ugly head, anger would be ever-present, and depression an absolute consequence, and how long do you imagine, in their place, you would mourn your loss before finding a level of social status and acceptance you could live with? In their place, could you, would you be able to rationalise the grief you experience every time you see your reflection, you watch your peers at play, or consider your future prospects? Be honest now!

How on earth do they rationalise the million and one adjustments they must make? How do they see potential as anything other than painful, or expectations as anything other than facile conjecture? How do they adjust to the realisation that many of their earlier hopes are now, not just dreams, but false hopes, betrayals that must hurt even more, and make the emotional transition an incredibly meaningful journey? Ironically, not a journey for the weak, but the immeasurably strong. How do they not withdraw into themselves? How do they not cry? How do they internalise their anger and not become aggressive. How do they accept their lot? I don’t know. They are better than most of us!

You have a disability? You are still you, and better than I. I have read that in every way that matters, disability does not alter who you are. Yes, it alters yours, and others concepts of who you are, however your faith, belief, ancestry, heritage, and qualities, are still all you, and we would be better to offer you our respect, than our pity.

TROOPING THE COLOUR



Members of the public watch a fly-past of aircraft by the Britain’s Royal Air Force (RAF) from The Mall, as part of the King’s Birthday Parade, ‘Trooping the Colour’, in London on Saturday. The ceremony of Trooping the Colour is believed to have first been performed during the reign of King Charles II. Since 1748, the Trooping of the Colour has marked the official birthday of the British Sovereign. Over 1,500 parading soldiers and almost 300 horses take part in the event. – AFP

How can the first year of a student be amazing?

The initial few weeks of undergraduate education should be a student’s springboard into an academic career. But some students vanish even before colleges know that they are there. Student retention has long been a focus of educational research and campus interventions, but few people have examined the earliest stages of a student’s academic life which is changing. A large number of researchers are scrutinising students’ early experiences on campus and devising interventions to simplify curricula requirements, increase the sense of belonging, and provide intensive advising during the first year. With the help from different organisations, those colleges are developing new ways to support students at risk of stopping out or leaving early without a degree. Many break off students are minoritised and the first in their family to go to college.

Several organisations that are working closely with colleges to improve educational interventions early in students’ academic lives.



SAJI UTHUPPAN

THE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES HAVE TO WORK ON “CARING CAMPUS,” WHICH SEEKS BEHAVIOURAL COMMITMENTS FROM FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS TO SHOW STUDENTS THEY ARE PART OF A CARING COMMUNITY

The key question is “how do we onboard, support, and transit students into, through and then out of the first year, and revamp it in a manner so all the students can succeed here?” According to an expert, the family income, and dream job determine which students will succeed in higher education. It has been noticed that colleges have increased transparency on areas where composite course requirements prevent students from advancing into the substantive courses of a major. It also offers colleges more insight into opportunities to implement early interventions and to improve the educational success of its students.

Colleges have often assumed that the students who failed few subjects or courses were simply not smart or hardworking enough to pass them. Many students coming from poorly resourced high schools were often declared not “smart enough” and assigned to do remedial lessons. One new

approach is to give students instruction in development material. I think orientations and other onboarding workshops for students should also be mandatory, not to be draconian but because otherwise the students most at risk will not attend. Embedded peer support can make an improvement in first- and second-year retention rates.

The schools and colleges have to work on “Caring Campus,” which seeks behavioural commitments from faculty and staff members to show students they are part of a caring community. The behavioural commitments are disarmingly simple and all based on research into the practices of teachers who have a track record of keeping their students in schools or colleges. One commitment, for example, is to learn students’ preferred names and use them. Another key suggestions, such as creating “moments that matter” by having instructors engage

students one on-one to learn about their lives.

Teachers should also consider changing the name of “office hours” to “student hours,” so students realise they are not interrupting the teacher’s work but are the central reason the teacher is there. One of the Caring Campus principles is situational fairness which encourages teachers to treat the students individually when they are not able to turn in assignments on time.

However, I do object to the idea that colleges are the main places where students should be taught the importance of deadlines. What I’ve noticed is that it’s not so much that they need help understanding what deadlines are. They need someone to understand that they sometimes have multiple deadlines, all at the same time, and there’s only so much time in their day.

For student success, rather than emphasising bureaucratic rigidity, colleges should focus

on academic rigour. Outside of faculty, staff members are unsung heroes and they need to be better utilised in student-success efforts. Staff members are often the first people students come into contact with as they find their way on campus. When they can’t help a student, for instance, they are committed to doing a “warm hand-off,” by calling ahead to another department or walking a student over. “We never want to leave a student feeling that they didn’t get the help they needed. Therefore, we have to prepare our institution to be ready for our students instead of making our students be ready for us.

I would say that redesigning higher-education institutions to make students feel a greater sense of belonging from their first encounters, and provide them with more sustained levels of support to complete their education is the top priority.

The author is lecturer of English in Muscat

Brave declaration by England on first day of Test



ANDY JALIL
EDGBASTON, JUNE 17

With his magnificent, and certainly timely, unbeaten 30th Test century Joe Root saw England to 393 for eight declared on the first day of the Ashes series, and in the process brought about a recovery to the innings which had begun to somewhat flounder halfway through. At close, Australia were 14 without loss.

Having decided to make first use of a fine batting pitch and in brilliant sunshine, England

lost the first wicket in only the fourth over when Ben Duckett was caught behind for 12 after playing shots somewhat tentatively from the start.

Zak Crawley, however, settled in quite quickly and England brought up the 50 of the innings at the rate of a run-a-minute after 10.4 overs. Crawley, having hit the first ball of the series for a lovely cover drive for four, continued to play shots freely which brought him seven fours in his ninth Test fifty from just 56 balls. It was exhilarating cricket with England batsmen living up

to their 'bazball' style of batting.

After putting on 70 for the second wicket with Crawley, Ollie Pope fell lbw for 31 to Nathan Lyon. It was a leg stump ball but he was given not out. Australia asked for a review and that went in their favour.

It was looking good for England on 92 for one at one stage and within nine overs it was suddenly 124 for three at lunch. Not long after the start of the second session there was further success for Australia. Harry Brooks got to 32 from 37 balls and included in his 4 fours



were two in one over off Scott Boland.

His dismissal was extraordinary, bowled by Lyon with the ball hitting him on the thigh pad and going up in the air before falling behind his leg and on to the stumps and England were 175 for four. A run later England lost Ben Stokes for one, attempting to drive Hazelwood, on the up, he edged behind. He asked for a review which went against him.

A revival of the innings came with Root's wonderful effort. At tea England were

240 for 5. In the final session Bairstow reached his 24th Test half century from 58 balls. He then drove Lyon to mid-wicket for 4 to bring up the hundred of the partnership. It was the 11th time in Tests that these two Yorkshiremen have put together a hundred stand, and it took them 25.5 overs.

On reaching 78 at a-run-a-ball with 12 fours, with England on 297, Bairstow was sixth out after deciding to go down the pitch once again to Lyons. He missed the ball and Carey behind the stumps did the rest.

It was an excellent, entertaining performance which revived the innings when it seemed to be losing its way. Root remained in control picking the right balls to hit his seven fours and two sixes.

Lyon claimed his fourth wicket with Moeen Ali caught behind for a quick 18 and with Stuart Broad bowled for 16, England were 350 for eight. Having patiently plodded through the 90s for 10 overs, Root finally reached the three figures and celebrated it with two mighty sixes off Lyon in the last over before the declaration.



KPA organise first joint friendship training

MUSCAT: With the participation of 90 players and 15 coaches from 10 clubs, centres and academies, and with the organisation of the Karate Pioneers Academy (KPA) and Lyft gym in Al Khoud, joint training was held for 10 clubs, under the supervision of Ahmed bin Said al Zakwani.

The training programme included basic concepts for the performance development of kata and raising the level of muscular strength through the performance of kata, as well as developing the level of kumite through some combat techniques.

After Ahmed bin Said al Zakwani, Chairman of the Karate Pioneers Academy, welcomed the participants in

this gathering, which was held for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman on this level of skills and training diversity, where Ali bin Mohammed al Raisi presented the basics of kata development by developing its basic standards as well. Yousef bin Musallam al Siyabi presented some techniques and skills to raise the level of strength of the muscles of the body through the performance of kata, then Said bin Nasser al Batrani presented some kumite skills and the way to move during the competitions, while Ahmed Balidi presented kicks techniques during competitions of Kumite and how to develop speed to implement it.

The clubs participating in this gathering are: Pioneers Karate Academy - Shotokan Karate Center - Golden Karate Group - Muscat International Karate Do Academy - Al Qudra Karate Club - Karate Champions Club - Al Suwaiq Karate Club Academy - Al Buraimi Karate Academy - Samayil Karate Champions Club - Freedom Karate Team.

Said bin Salem al Busaidi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Lyft gym in Al Khoudh, presented certificates of thanks and appreciation to the participating clubs. Al Suwaiq Club Academy, represented by Ahmed al Shehhi, gave a souvenir to the organiser of the first joint friendship training gathering, Ahmed bin Said al Zakwani. Then Al Busaidi gave a word of thanks to the participants, wishing them to continue their journey and continuous progress and success.

Martin claims second sprint win at German Grand Prix

GERMANY: P ramac Racing's Jorge Martin scorched to his second sprint win of the MotoGP season at the German Grand Prix on Saturday to move up to second in the world championship standings, while Ducati's world champion Francesco Bagnaia finished second.

Martin took the chequered flag 2.468 seconds ahead of Bagnaia, denying the Italian a fourth sprint win of the season. Red Bull KTM's Jack Miller finished third.

Bagnaia started well after taking pole earlier on Saturday, but was drawn into an early battle with Miller, with Martin taking advantage of the pair's tussle to sneak into the lead.

"I enjoyed the laps a lot, I was on the limit," said Martin, who leapfrogged Marco Bezzechi into second place in the overall standings after the VR46 Racing rider ended in seventh place.

"After seeing that I was creating this gap, I kept pushing until there were seven laps to go, then I tried to keep that distance to (Bagnaia). I'm happy, it's another sprint win and I hope we fight for the win tomorrow."

Martin, who started on the second row, quickly moved up with a fastest lap early on and by the end of the fourth lap the charging Spaniard had taken the lead.

There was no stopping him once he had clear roads ahead of him as he turned on the afterburners, opening up a sizeable gap over Bagnaia and crossing the finish line well ahead of the chasing pack for his fifth straight podium finish.

"It was fun in the first laps, I really liked the fight with Jack (Miller), it was intense," overall leader Bagnaia said.

"Jorge was faster today, I tried to close the gap, but it was



Ducati Pramac Racing Team's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the Sprint race ahead of the MotoGP German motorcycle Grand Prix at the Sachsenring racing circuit in Hohenstein-Ernstthal near Chemnitz, eastern Germany, on Saturday. — AFP



Ducati Pramac Racing Team's Spanish rider Jorge Martin (R) celebrates after winning the Sprint race with second placed Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia during the MotoGP German motorcycle Grand Prix at the Sachsenring racing circuit in Hohenstein-Ernstthal near Chemnitz, eastern Germany, on Saturday. — AFP

difficult. He was faster than me. It's certainly a great result, so I'm moving on and looking forward to tomorrow."

Six-times MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez's struggles at the Sachsenring continued as the Honda rider finished 11th after a couple of mistakes.

In the last lap of the race,

Pramac Racing's Johann Zarco and Red Bull KTM's Brad Binder collided while jostling for fifth position.

MotoGP said no further action would be taken after reviewing the incident, with the Frenchman finishing ahead of the Australian.

Yamaha's Fabio Quartararo, the 2021 world champion, ended in 13th. — Reuters



Oman defeated Turkmenistan 2-0 in the third round of the 2023 Central Asian Football Federation Championship (CAFA) in Uzbekistan.

■ OMAN HOPEFUL AFTER 2-0 WIN OVER TURKMENISTAN

Verstappen closes in on ‘amazing achievement’ of matching Senna

MONTREAL: Max Verstappen has admitted it is beyond his childhood dreams to draw level with Ayrton Senna’s victory tally ahead of this weekend’s Canadian Grand Prix.

Verstappen heads into Sunday’s race at Montreal’s Circuit Gilles Villeneuve just one victory shy of the great Brazilian’s haul of 41 after winning five of the opening seven rounds in his dominant Red Bull machine.

Verstappen was not even born when Senna was killed at the 1994 San Marino Grand Prix, but a victory here would take the 25-year-old into joint fifth in the pantheon of F1 winners.

“When I was a little kid, I would never have imagined being on that list,” said the two-time world champion.

“But you cannot compare it. People have different careers and some drivers get into a race-winning car sooner than others and now a days we have more races than back in the day.

“I never look at the numbers, but it is an amazing achievement, that’s for sure.”

A sixth victory of a one-sided campaign would leave only Hamilton (103 wins), Michael Schumacher (91), Sebastian Vettel (53) and Alain Prost (51) ahead of Verstappen.

Hamilton reached 41 wins to draw level with his boyhood hero Senna at the Japanese Grand Prix in 2015 before going on to surpass Schumacher’s haul five years later and stand on his own as the driver to have won the most races in the history of the sport.

However, the seven-time world champion, who has not won a race since his contentious championship defeat to Verstappen at the 2021 season finale in Abu Dhabi, admitted that his rival could “absolutely” eclipse his record.



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen ahead of the Grand Prix. — Reuters

But when asked if Hamilton’s record is on the horizon, Verstappen said: “It is very hard to beat.

“You need to be in the right car for a long time and we don’t know if we have that. I am just going with the flow and enjoying the moment.”

Verstappen has already established a 53-point lead over team-mate Sergio Perez on his seemingly unstoppable march towards a hat-trick of world titles.

The world champions are undefeated in the opening seven fixtures, winning 17 of the past 18 races, and could become the first team to win every round in a single season. A victory here on Sunday would also be the team’s 100th in F1.

“For the sport, I understand people get bored if one team is dominating,” added Verstappen.

“But we have seen it at Mercedes, we have seen it at Ferrari, and we have seen it at Red Bull in the past.

“For me, it provides me with even more motivation because I know I have a car that can win.

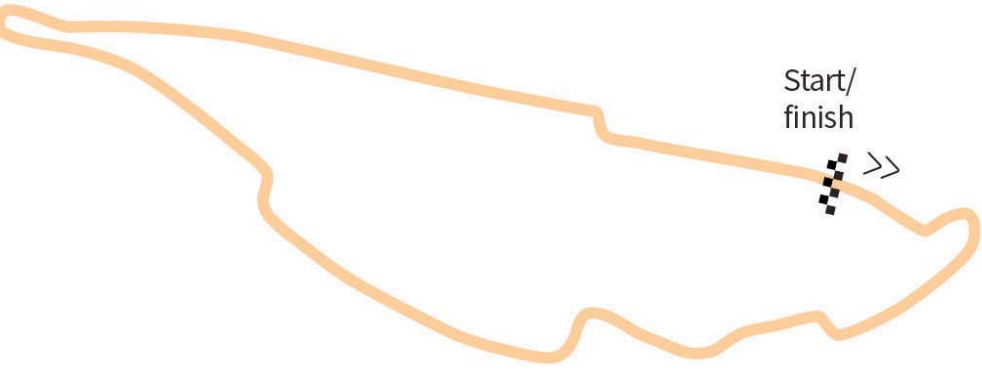
“If you look at how we are performing, yes we can win every race, but it is not realistic. As long as I win the championship, that’s the most important thing.” — dpa



Red Bull’s Max Verstappen in action during practice. — Reuters

FORMULA 1 9. Canadian Grand Prix Gilles-Villeneuve circuit in Montreal

June 18



70 x 4.361 km
laps = 305.27 kilometres

Lap record: 1:13.078
Valtteri Bottas (2019)

Source: Formula1.com



Driver standings

	Max Verstappen (NED) Red Bull	170
	Sergio Perez (MEX) Red Bull	117
	Fernando Alonso (ESP) Aston Martin	99
	Lewis Hamilton (GBR) Mercedes	87

Teams

	Red Bull	287
	Mercedes	152
	Aston Martin	134



Oman and Iran paddlers undergo joint training in Muscat

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

Oman and Iran paddlers are taking part in joint training camp in Muscat at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Many top seeded players are attending the the camp.

The training camp is being held under supervision of Oman national head coach, Omid Shams Shaharbabki, the national women head coach, Fatemeh Kivani and Dr Ali, physical trainer from Iran. The camp started on Monday following the ITTF training camp which concluded in Muscat last week and will run until Tuesday. The nine-day camp featured two training sessions on a daily basis during morning and evening sessions.

The aim of the camp is to shape the readiness of the players for the forthcoming events as Oman’s paddlers will take part in different regional and global championships including Asian Youth TT Championship



in Qatar in July, Arabian TT Championship in Iraq in July-August, Asian TT Championship for Senior in South Korea and WTT events in Jordan and Kazakhstan.

The camp focused on implementing the latest methodology in improving techniques and tactics of the



participants and working to increase the consistency within rallies and adapting to the playing conditions. During the warm-up camp, the paddlers gained the required technical skills, tactics, and strategies of game situations.

The players in the camp got training on understanding and anticipation of every move during

the game. The camp is playing a crucial role as the local paddlers are enhancing their performance through learning from the Iranian participants.

The Iranian Omid Shams Shaharbabki, Oman TT head coach, said that this training camp is different from other gatherings. “It will be a great opportunity for



Omani players to play and train against top players from Iran. Moreover, this camp featured attendance of players from different age group categories which enable the junior players to take on some tight matches against the seniors. This will help them to raise their technical and tactic levels for playing in the

international events,” he said. Coach Shams pointed out that this gathering will assist the players to enhance their technical performance level. “We will have different sessions to stand on the weakness areas and how to develop them beside enhancing the strength points,” he concluded.



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EDO’s strategy focuses on sustainable, cost-effective energy production for Oman

KEY MANDATE: Energy sector’s executive arms takes the lead in maximising financial returns and attracting global partnerships

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

Energy Development Oman (EDO) is spearheading efforts to enhance the efficiency of Oman’s energy sector and promote sustainable energy production at the lowest possible cost. Established by Royal Decree (2020/128), EDO acts as the executive arm of the country’s energy sector, representing the government in all commercial, technical, and financial matters.

In an exclusive interview to the *Observer*, EDO Chief Executive Officer Eng Mazin al Lamki (pictured) said the wholly state-owned company’s primary goal is to maximise the financial returns of Oman’s energy sector by pursuing new growth opportunities and forming sustainable global partnerships in line with Oman Vision 2040.

“As a key player in the sector, EDO is responsible for undertaking various projects, operations, and activities related to renewable energy,” said Al Lamki. “EDO plays a vital role in reviewing corporate governance, evaluating commercial oil and gas contracts, and implementing necessary strategies to rationalise

Picture by Faisal Al Baluchi

operation costs in the energy sector. By fostering partnerships that provide mutual benefits at local and global levels, EDO aims to enhance the capabilities of national talent and maximise in-country value.” With a significant stake in the Block 6 Oil Concession and full ownership of Block 6 Non-associated Gas Concession, EDO is actively seeking additional investment opportunities to boost the financial returns of Oman’s energy sector. The company works closely with public and private entities to create an attractive and supportive environment for foreign investment and small and

OBSERVER EXCLUSIVE

medium enterprises (SMEs), the CEO stated.

Earlier, Al Lamki emphasised the company’s efforts in developing the institutional structure, strategies, policies, and legislation that regulate the energy sector, including oil, gas, and green hydrogen. These measures aim to strengthen governance and improve the performance efficiency of EDO’s subsidiaries, he said.

Commenting on EDO’s financing approach, he said it involves direct financing and the

allocation of financial revenues to cover its share of oil and gas production and exploration costs in Block 6.

“The company actively explores competitive financing sources from local and foreign markets to minimise costs and promote energy sector investments. These endeavours contribute to achieving financial independence and reducing the burden on the government,” the CEO explained.

Importantly, EDO is set to play a pivotal role in Oman’s new Green Hydrogen sector. In

support of Oman’s renewable energy goals, EDO launched Hydrom in 2022 under the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

“Hydrom, wholly owned by EDO and regulated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM), plays a crucial role in developing the green hydrogen sector. It focuses on creating a master plan, facilitating large-scale green hydrogen projects, and managing infrastructure development through collaboration with the Oman Investment Authority,” Al Lamki said.

The recent signing of three

agreements by Hydrom marks a significant milestone in Oman’s journey towards becoming a global hub for green hydrogen production, said the official.

These projects, worth over \$20 billion, will leverage renewable energy capacity and cover a vast area in the Al Wusta Governorate. The agreements demonstrate Oman’s competitiveness in the sector and its commitment to renewable energy development, he stated.

A key part of its mission is to also support the energy transition under way in the Sultanate of Oman, according to the CEO. By embracing its abundant natural resources, including solar, wind, and green hydrogen, Oman attracts foreign investors and aims to reduce its dependency on traditional energy sources. EDO’s efforts in sustainable energy production and the development of the green hydrogen sector reinforce Oman’s leading position in the renewable energy landscape, locally, regionally, and globally, he noted.

In concluding, Al Lamki acknowledged the challenges faced by oil-producing countries in navigating oil price volatility, rising energy demands, and environmental pressures to reduce carbon emissions.

“EDO’s flexible asset structure and commitment to sustainable development enable it to proactively respond to market fluctuations. The company strives to produce energy at the lowest possible cost while upholding high levels of economic and environmental sustainability,” he added.

CMA’s Tamkeen initiative drives Omanisation in insurance sector

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) continues to develop national talent in the insurance sector through its Tamkeen national initiative first announced in 2015.

The initiative is a well considered approach to implement replacement in technical, senior, mediums management positions and operational positions with qualified Omanis able to lead the sector according to the needs of the local market and to enhance competition in the financial sector and investment on top of the objects the initiative endeavours to achieve.

By mid-2023, a total of 88

specialised training programmes were conducted across various technical and administrative areas in the insurance sector in collaboration with the various training institutes and centres. It contributed to the empowerment of 2,400 employees in the sector.

Such programmes started with HRPC for all human resources managers of insurance companies in cooperation with Opal to develop human resource departments in insurance companies. a number of specialised programmes were implements (such as Leadership Program in collaboration with Queen University, Advanced Diploma in Insurance (Dip CII) executed by Chartered Insurance Institute London, Diploma in Health Insurance in cooperation

with AHIP Institute, Fundamentals of Insurance and Internal Audit in collaboration with Risk Institute, Reinsurance Certificate in cooperation with the College of Banking and Financial Studies and executed by the Indian Insurance Institute.

As a result of the Tamkeen project, Omanisation in the sector has climbed to 83.36%, with 59.73% of senior positions now occupied by local talent, 78.13% in medium positions and 90.18% in operational positions.

Efforts are continuing to implement the 2023 Tamkeen plan to enhance the specialised positions of Omani employee with high competencies through execution of professional certifications such as CERT CII, ARM and CIPD.

BIDDING ANNOUNCEMENT

Request for Pre-Qualification tender submission:

MADAYN (Public Establishment for Industrial Estates) invites potential investors to invest in design, construct, operate and maintain the following:

Investing Opportunities	Qualification No.
3-Star Hotel	Sur/1/2023
Health Center	Sur/2/2023
Desalination Plant	Sur/3/2023

Last Date for Collection of Pre-Qualification Tender Document	3 July 2023
Last Date for Clarification	6 July 2023
Last Date for Submission from Potential Investor	13 July 2023

In this context, Companies with relevant experience in executing similar projects are invited to participate in investing in the project by submitting their Credentials as defined in the Pre-Qualification tender document. Send a request to the email sur@madayn.om to obtain the pre-qualification documents for any of the investment opportunities

For inquiries, Please contact us by email at sur@madayn.om.

madayn.om

Pact inked for new chemicals project in Sohar Freezone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 17

SOHAR Freezone, a leading industrial hub in the region, announced a strategic partnership with Nasim Chemicals SFZ LLC, a prominent player in the chemical industry. This collaboration will witness the establishment of Dioctyl Phthalate and Dioctyl Terephthalate Plant within SOHAR Freezone, aimed at catering to the growing demand for high-quality chemical products in the GCC, India, and African markets.

With a total investment of \$10.4 million, the plant covers an area of 5,000 sqm and will boast a production capacity of 30,000 tonnes, reinforcing the region's industrial capabilities. The partnership will significantly boost the logistics movement and elevate the throughput levels with more than 2000 TEUs annually.

Commenting on this agreement, Fayaz Hameedi, Co-Shareholder of Nasim Chemicals SFZ LLC, said, "We are excited about this joint venture with SOHAR Freezone and the opportunities it presents. Our partnership signifies our confidence in the region's potential and our commitment to providing high-quality chemical



products to the market. By leveraging the strategic advantages offered by SOHAR Freezone and its proximity to key markets, we aim to establish ourselves as a leading player in the industry."

Omar al Mahrizi, CEO SOHAR Freezone, DCEO SOHAR Port said: "We are thrilled to partner with Nasim Chemicals SFZ LLC in this significant agreement. The establishment of the Dioctyl Phthalate and Dioctyl Terephthalate Plant further

strengthens SOHAR Freezone's position as a key industrial player for business and innovation in the region. This collaboration aligns perfectly with our vision of fostering economic growth and attracting strategic investments to Oman."

The plant will create downstream opportunities including the production of PVC products as plastic film and sheets, wire and cable insulation, and flooring and wall coverings. It

will be developed in two phases, with construction commencing by the end of this year. Production is estimated to commence by the end of 2024.

SOHAR Freezone reaffirms its position as an integrated logistics and industrial hub, leveraging the latest global technologies and adhering to the highest sustainability standards across its diverse activities. The collaboration aligns with the objectives outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

KR honours staff with 20 years' service awards

MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas (KR), one of Oman's leading business conglomerates recently recognised 64 employees for their remarkable dedication and service, as they completed 20 years with the company. The grand event to felicitate long-service employees has been a tradition that has been upheld for over 25 years. The event took place at the InterContinental Muscat in the presence of KR's Directors and the management team.

Showcasing KR Group's commitment to fostering talent and nurturing their growth within the organisation, the long-service award reflects KR Group's people-centric policies; acknowledging and appreciating employees



for their contributions to the company's success and continued growth.

Emphasising the company's steadfast belief in the importance of its people, Anil Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group stated, "Our people are our greatest assets. We are grateful to our employees who have served the company with loyalty and

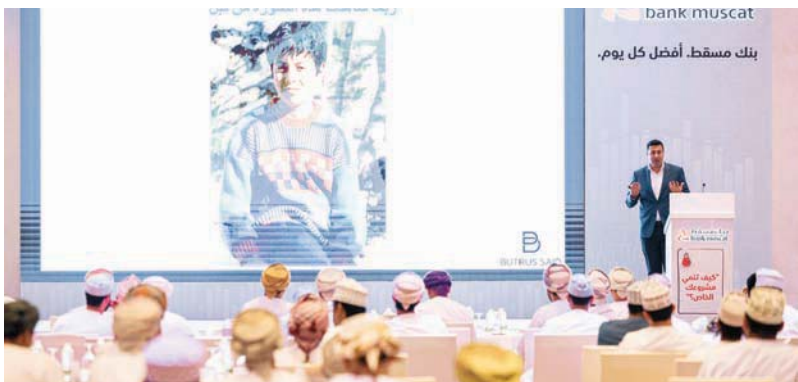
commitment over the last two decades. We believe in fostering a culture of learning, which gives our employees opportunities to build and improve their skills and knowledge. This process ensures mutual growth and helps build a competitive work environment. At KR, we remain committed to establishing an inclusive workplace that supports

and empowers employees to thrive both personally and professionally." By nurturing a culture of continuous learning and development, the KR Group enables its workforce to enhance their capabilities, contribute to the company's success, and succeed in an ever-evolving business landscape. The annual Long-Service Awards ceremony is a testament to Khimji Ramdas' dedication towards its employees and its core values of Trust, Care, Commitment, and Learning. Through its people-centric approach, the company aims to continue to motivate its workforce, fostering a sense of belonging and pride that further strengthens the organisation.

Bank Muscat hosts seminar for Najahi customers in Suhar

MUSCAT: In line with the growing importance of Micro, Small and Medium-sized (MSME) businesses in contributing to Oman's economic growth and development, Bank Muscat, recently organised a seminar titled "How to grow your own business." The seminar focused on ways to develop business projects and was presented by Butrus Said, a Corporate Consultant and Certified Guide in e-Commerce. Several customers of the bank, including entrepreneurs, and representatives of MSMEs attended the seminar, which was held in the presence of Abdulnaser N al Raisi, General Manager — Personal Banking, Bank Muscat and a number of bank officials.

On this occasion, Abdulnaser N al Raisi said: "We are pleased to



organise these events continuously for our Najahi customers. MSMEs have always been an area of focus which is keen to provide these businesses with various financial services and facilities. In addition, we ensure that it keeps organising such training and seminars on topics relevant to the requirements of MSMEs. I would

like to extend our thanks to our customers for their confidence in the services and facilities provided by the bank. The bank will continue to organise such events to provide the best options for customers.", Raya bint Habib al Shukailiyah, Senior Regional Manager, Bank Muscat said: "The current phase requires all of us

to work hand in hand to enhance the role of this important sector and invest in the development of various services that will provide incentives, benefits and facilities for entrepreneurs. I take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to all the attendees for their participation in the seminar. I wish all success to entrepreneurs in the development of their own respective businesses." Bank Muscat's Najahi has received excellent customer praise for the financial services and facilities it provides as it enables MSMEs to develop and expand their businesses in line with the development goals of Oman in order to contribute to diversifying income sources, and supporting Omani youth.

MHD-ITICS brings range of performance-packed phones

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 17



To establish a strong presence and ensure the seamless availability of its devices in Oman, Honor has appointed Mohsin Haider Darwish — ITICS as its exclusive distributor in the region. This strategic partnership has created waves in the market garnering attention from tech-savvy individuals eager to experience the latest innovations from Honor. Here is an overview of the latest Honor phones available in the local market.

1) Honor 70 – The phone won the EISA award for 'Best Buy Smartphone' and is renowned as the best vlog phone. It features a 54MP IMX800 Super Sensing Main Camera and a solo cut vlog mode for content creators. With video advantages like Auto Tracking, Intelligent Memory, and Double excellence, it offers a great user experience. Its elegant design and 6.67-inch Full HD 120Hz OLED display provide immersive viewing, while the 66W charging allows for a 60% charge in just 20 minutes.

2) Honor X9a — This stands out as a smartphone with a strong screen and a brilliant AMOLED curved display. It boasts a 64MP triple-lens camera that captures precise details in close-up shots. With its sleek 7.9mm body, it combines style and performance. The phone offers a two-day battery life, a high-speed 40W HONOR SuperCharge feature that charges the phone in just 30 minutes for 12.5 hours of uninterrupted video watching, and a capable 8GB + 5GB RAM for a smooth experience.

3) Honor X8a — The elegant Honor X8a offers a timeless design

with a 6.7-inch Honor Edgeless Display that maximises screen area for an enhanced viewing experience. It features a 100MP ultra camera for vivid images and a 16MP selfie camera that captures perfect skin tones. With a large battery and 8GB+128GB RAM, it ensures seamless transitions between apps.

4) Honor X7a — Experience the legendary performance of the Honor X7a with its ultra-large battery and smart energy-saving engine. With the 22.5W HONOR SuperCharge, you can enjoy 3 hours of watch time with just 10 minutes of charging. The phone's slim 8.27mm body houses an ultra-clear 50MP quad camera that seamlessly blends with its geometric design. It also features a 6.74-inch Full View Display for a captivating theatre-like experience.

5) Honor X6 — The ultra-chic and modern Honor X6 is a stylish and comfortable state-of-the-art phone. With its 50MP camera, users can unleash their creativity in photography, while the 6.5-inch Honor Full View Display provides an unparalleled visual experience. It also features Dark Mode and Eye Comfort Mode to enhance viewing in various lighting conditions. With a long battery life and expandable storage of up to 1TB, this phone excels in every aspect.

Bank Nizwa honours outstanding students from UTAS, Nizwa



MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the country, sponsored a ceremony to honour over 200 outstanding students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Nizwa held under the patronage of HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said head of marketing and corporate communication. This demonstrates the bank's commitment to its social responsibility and the importance it places on supporting and enhancing the education sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The bank aims to make a positive impact on society by contributing to the promotion and empowerment of the community's aspirations for significant progress in education, aligning with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to cultivate a highly competent generation of learners capable of meeting the diverse and increasing demands of our modern world.

Bank Nizwa's sponsorship is a testament to its commitment to remaining at the forefront of educational advancements and addressing the evolving needs of the sector. It also exemplifies the bank's steadfast support of talented students, inspiring them to actively engage in the pursuit of knowledge and innovation.

This valuable contribution not only strengthens the local and global economy through their remarkable achievements but also aligns perfectly with Oman's visionary approach, recognising education as a fundamental pillar for sustainable development.

HH Sayyidah Wisam al Said said, "At Bank Nizwa, we always prioritise caring for and supporting the education sector at different levels. Our aim is to enhance the quality of education and its outcomes. Sponsoring the ceremony honouring outstanding students exemplifies the bank's dedication to fulfilling its responsibilities towards the community and contributing to the journey of building and development, particularly in the field of education." In the spirit of sponsoring the ceremony, Bank Nizwa underscores the dedication of its team to actively engage and make positive contributions to the community through diverse educational initiatives. These endeavours are geared towards elevating the standard of education and empowering students to enhance their educational performance, enabling them to adapt to the ever-evolving and dynamic landscape of the job market.



Korean-led alliance set to clinch deal for Oman hydrogen scheme

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 17

A consortium of international energy companies, led by Korean steel manufacturing giant POSCO, is tipped to secure a land block for the production of green hydrogen at Duqm in the southwest of the Sultanate of Oman.

According to Korean media reports, the consortium — formally known as the Korea Hydrogen Alliance — is due to sign agreements later this week formalising the award of land for the upstream and downstream components of an integrated renewable hydrogen scheme, some elements of which will be housed in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) at Duqm.

Besides POSCO, the alliance is understood to comprise Korean Southern power (a leading energy utility in South Korea), leading Korean contractor Samsung Engineering, French-based international energy giant Engie, and Thai energy conglomerate PTTEP.

This week's anticipated agreements mark the culmination of a years'-long effort by POSCO



The logo of POSCO is seen at the company's headquarters in Seoul

and its partners to venture into Oman's green hydrogen industry, which was recently referenced by the International Energy Agency (IEA) as world-scale in its vision.

As reported by the *Observer* at the time, POSCO first made public its ambitions for Oman at the Korea-Oman Green Hydrogen Strategic Forum 2022 held in Muscat last December. A top executive of the steelmaker announced that it was weighing investment in a mega green hydrogen project, alongside a green steel mill, at Duqm. The official also revealed that POSCO had assembled a heavyweight consortium to bid for available

acreage offered up by the Omani government via the auction route.

In addition to producing green hydrogen to decarbonise its massive industrial assets distributed globally, POSCO also said it was examining the potential for establishing plants for the production of green hot briquetted iron (HBI) — the primary raw material for steel mills — in cost-competitive locations, including Duqm.

Boding well for the successful implementation of its renewable hydrogen project in Oman is the presence of international companies as consortium members, each with specialist

capabilities to ensure delivery of all aspects of the project's diverse scope.

POSCO, as lead partner, is expected to focus on the downstream green hydrogen plant, storage tanks and pipeline networks. Samsung will oversee the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC), among other project aspects. Engie is anticipated to focus on the upstream solar and wind-based renewable electricity generation components, with Korea Southern Power likely to oversee the operation of these facilities.

While a sizable part of the renewable hydrogen output from the alliance's project is envisioned for export to POSCO's global steel facilities, a portion could be potentially earmarked for a future green steel complex also planned in Duqm. If and when this complex materialises, it will add to a portfolio of green steel ventures slated to come up at the SEZ.

Oman is targeting the production of around 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen by 2030, partly for global export and the rest for local consumption in support of the country's Net Zero goals.

MoCIIP workshop focuses on crafting plans for 2024



QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JUNE 17

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) hosted a two-day workshop at which key officials brainstormed initiatives for implementation during 2024.

Under the theme of enhancing the nation's economic landscape, the workshop provided a platform for the ministry's employees to contribute their valuable ideas and suggestions. Their participation sought to streamline processes, improve work dynamics, and propel the ministry's growth in the years to come.

Discussions during the workshop centred on evaluating both individual and institutional proficiency within the ministry. Key areas of focus included trade and industry, specifications and standards, investment promotion, competition protection, and measures to facilitate and attract foreign investments. The objective was to cultivate an investment-friendly environment in the Sultanate of Oman while stimulating economic growth and development.

Nasima bint Yahya al Balushi, Director-General of Planning at the ministry,

said her department is leading efforts to formulate a targeted and systematic approach that harnesses the expertise of employees at all levels. The aim is to formulate a comprehensive set of initiatives aligned with the ministry's objectives and the country's long-term plans. These initiatives are expected to bring about significant advancements and progress for the ministry in the coming years.

In an effort to engage the wider community, the ministry also launched a survey on its social media platforms. Through this initiative, they hope to gather proposals and suggestions from the public on how to enhance the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman. By promoting a knowledge-based economy and providing necessary support, the ministry aims to create an attractive investment climate and improve the overall quality of services offered.

Taking part in the workshop were Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, along with Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary for Trade and Industry, and Pankaj Khimji, the Ministry's Adviser for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation.

The SME Development Authority collaborates with Bahrain's Hope Ventures to expand Beban TV show to Oman

MUSCAT: The SME Development Authority collaborates with Bahrain-based Hope Ventures to expand season 3 of Beban, an entrepreneurship-themed reality television show, to the Sultanate of Oman.

Beban is centred around entrepreneurs and business owners as they pitch their businesses before a panel of regional investors for equity investment and business opportunities. The show's expansion aligns with SME Authority's mission to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and support Omani small and medium enterprises to accelerate their business growth and success locally and internationally.

The show aired for two seasons, through which it featured a total of 62 businesses of various sizes and resulted in successful co-investments by the private and public sectors exceeding \$6 million



in GCC-based start-ups.

This collaboration between SME Development Authority and Beban TV show will contribute to the ease of access of Omani businesses to a diversified pool of investors and strategic partners who will fast-track their businesses' growth into regional markets. Furthermore, entrepreneurs will also benefit from the intensive training bootcamp

they will undergo as part of the Beban journey to develop their businesses in various aspects like expansion planning, financial modeling, and pitching in front of a panel of regional investors on a televised show.

It will also provide Oman-based entrepreneurs with the tools and resources they require to develop their businesses while giving them

added regional exposure through the show, all while promoting cross-border knowledge exchange between entrepreneurs of the region. We encourage and invite entrepreneurs based in Oman to apply for Beban season 3 and reap the show's benefits.

It is noteworthy to mention that entrepreneurs will be selected through an evaluation process comprising five stages, starting with screening businesses for viability based on certain criteria, followed by an evaluation stage led by experts and specialists in the business sector. Candidates will then be nominated to participate in an intensive training bootcamp stage. The final stage will announce the eligible finalists, who will then go on to film the production's episodes.

Beban invites Oman-based entrepreneurs to apply for season 3 online through the hopefund.bh/beban by July 6.

MSX 30 Index closes week higher by 22.3 points

MUSCAT: The MSX30 index closed last week at 4681.05 points, up by 22.3 points and 0.48 per cent high from the previous trading session, which stood at 4658.73 points. All major sector indices fell, except for the Financial Index index, which rose by 0.87 per cent. The Industry Index decreased by 0.01 per cent. The Service Index was down by 0.09 per cent, and the Sharia Index fell by 0.80 per cent.

Oman Cement announced that the board of directors has studied the offer document and appointed United Securities LLC to prepare an independent advice report on Abra Holdings. Early this month, Abra Holdings made an offer to acquire an additional 15.42 per cent of the issued capital which would increase the total shareholding from 59.8 per cent to 75 per cent of the issued capital. The offer opens on June 14 and closes on June 25. The cash-only offer price is RO 0.379 per share, which is the price Abra paid

to acquire 59.58 per cent stake from Investment Authority SPC on April 6, 2023.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the domestic production of natural gas in April, including imports, increased by 7.73 per cent to reach 4.590 billion cubic metres, compared to 4.261 cubic metres during the period in 2022.

The revenue of 3-5 star hotels in Oman recorded a rise of 56.3 per cent at April 2023 to reach RO 17.7m according to the latest data issued by NCSI. The number of 3-5 star hotel guests stood at 133 thousand, an increase of 137.4 per cent in April 2023 compared to 56 thousand guests during the same period in 2022. The occupancy rate stood at 39.2 per cent in April 2023.

Oman's budget surplus increased to RO 520m during the first four months of 2023, compared to a surplus of RO 468m



during the same period of last year, the Ministry of Finance announced last week. The government will

continue utilising the surplus for stimulating economic recovery, enhancing social spending and

reducing public debt, the ministry said in its Fiscal Performance bulletin. The rise in surplus was

mainly due to a 12-per cent increase in Oman's net oil revenue, amounting to RO 2.308 bn in the January-April period of this year compared to RO 2.059 bn in the corresponding period of 2022. Higher oil revenue was driven by increased oil prices and higher production, the ministry noted.

In a new development, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has granted permission for finance and leasing companies to engage in new business activities within Oman. According to the CBO's decision, finance and leasing companies are now authorised to engage in additional lending activities such as real estate financing, working capital facilities, personal loans, and lending against their own deposits. Furthermore, the CBO has extended relaxations to finance and leasing companies regarding their ability to accept corporate deposits and make investments.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Safeguarding security and fostering innovation in Blockchain



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In the fast-evolving landscape of blockchain technology, Ethereum has emerged as a key player, offering a decentralised platform that has the potential to reshape industries. However, one

aspect of Ethereum's architecture often goes underdiscussed: its multi-client philosophy.

As businesses increasingly explore the possibilities of blockchain integration, understanding the motivations behind Ethereum's approach to client diversity becomes crucial. In this article, we delve into the significance of Ethereum's multi-client philosophy from a business perspective, highlighting its role in maintaining security, decentralisation, and fostering innovation within the blockchain ecosystem.

Ethereum was founded in 2013 by Vitalik Buterin, a young and visionary programmer. Buterin recognised the limitations of existing blockchain platforms, such as Bitcoin, which primarily focused on enabling peer-to-

peer transactions. Inspired by the potential for blockchain technology to support more complex applications, Buterin set out to create a platform that would allow developers to build decentralised applications (dApps) and execute smart contracts.

Motivated by the desire to enable a more flexible and programmable blockchain, Buterin published the Ethereum whitepaper in late 2013, outlining his vision for a blockchain-based platform with a Turing-complete programming language. This capability would enable developers to create and deploy smart contracts, which are self-executing agreements with predefined conditions.

The Ethereum project gained traction and attracted a diverse community of developers,

entrepreneurs, and enthusiasts who shared the vision of a decentralised and programmable blockchain platform. Through a successful crowdfunding campaign, Ethereum raised funds to support its development and launched its initial version, known as Frontier, in July 2015.

The Ethereum blockchain's multi-client philosophy, where multiple teams develop and maintain different client implementations of the Ethereum protocol, plays a crucial role in maintaining security and decentralisation. This approach was motivated by both technical and social benefits.

One of the primary advantages of technical decentralisation is mitigating the risk of a single bug in a particular client leading to a catastrophic network failure. An

illustrative example is the 2010 Bitcoin overflow bug, where a transaction resulted in billions of bitcoins due to a software oversight. Although the bug was quickly addressed, had there been multiple Bitcoin clients at the time, it would have been less likely for all of them to have the same vulnerability. This would have resulted in an immediate split, preventing the buggy side from causing significant damage.

While the multi-client approach reduces the risk of catastrophic bugs, it introduces the possibility of consensus failure bugs. This occurs when different client implementations interpret protocol rules slightly differently, potentially leading to a chain split. Ethereum experienced a notable split in its history, but proponents of the single-client approach argue

that multiple implementations increase the likelihood of consensus failures.

However, Ethereum's co-founder, Vitalik Buterin, disagrees with this analysis. He argues that catastrophic bugs, similar to the 2010 Bitcoin incident, are significant and cannot be ignored. Additionally, he highlights that even in a single-client scenario, there is never truly just one client. The Bitcoin fork in 2013 exemplifies this, as a chain split occurred due to a disagreement between different versions of the Bitcoin client. In practice, a single client can have different versions, effectively functioning as multiple clients. Therefore, embracing multiple clients allows Ethereum to be on the safer side of the risk curve and encourages a diverse ecosystem.

Attracting tech matured companies to Oman

The globalisation of trade has greatly expanded the options for manufacturers seeking to establish their operations in different parts of the world. However, critical factors must be considered when weighing the benefits and risks in choosing between scientifically-advanced manufacturing companies versus technologically-matured global manufacturing companies.

One of the critical factors to consider is the level of technological advancement required for manufacturing advanced scientific products, which requires a high level of expertise and innovativeness to create. In contrast, technologically-matured manufacturing companies rely on proven, relatively simple, established techniques. In attracting international manufacturers of scientifically-advanced products, it is crucial to consider the level of expertise available locally. The local workforce may require significant training and development to achieve the necessary level of knowledge, which could result in longer start-up times and higher initial investments.

On the other hand, technologically-based global manufacturing companies require relatively less technical expertise. However, it shall mean a lower return on investment due to the need for more creative content in their products. Therefore, balancing between attracting international manufacturers of scientifically-advanced products and accepting technologically-matured global manufacturing companies requires weighing the costs and benefits associated with the level of technical content required for the manufacturing process.

The availability of local and foreign skilled workers is also a critical factor to consider. Scientifically-advanced products require a highly competent and skilled workforce with in-depth knowledge in specialised fields. In contrast, mature technology-based manufacturing companies need a skilled workforce that may be less specialised. Attracting international manufacturers of advanced scientifically based products may require significant investment in hiring knowledge workers and hands-on training to create a skilled local workforce. In contrast, accepting technologically-matured global manufacturing companies may require a more general training programme that may be less costly.

Balancing the right mix between attracting international manufacturers of scientifically-advanced products and technologically-matured products companies, Oman needs to seriously consider its readiness to embrace scientific and technological advancements, especially the availability of a skilled workforce.



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Lack of investment for sustainable development in the world's poorest, most vulnerable countries is one of the most pressing global issues today, especially now that many of these countries are in debt distress, or will be soon. The fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war on Ukraine, and ongoing climate-driven disasters are preventing many developing economies from achieving liftoff and exacerbating the global economy's structural asymmetries.

This is the decade when we should be ratcheting up investments in sustainable development. In Sub-Saharan Africa, an additional two million decent jobs must be created each month until 2035, just to keep up with growth in the working-age population. Yet major powers



like the United States, the European Union, and China are paying scant attention to such challenges. Instead, they are focused on their own technological competition, reindustrialisation, decarbonisation, and zero-sum strategic manoeuvring, all of which could aggravate conditions in developing countries.

As Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley warns, the Global South, including its emerging economies, remains in critical financial condition, much like Europe after World War II. Back then, the US committed reconstruction funding equal to 3 per cent of the recipient countries' combined national incomes, because it knew that the investment would pay off both economically and geopolitically. Now, the Western countries that still dominate the Bretton Woods institutions must recognise that they, too, have an interest in effectuating global financial and institutional transformative, not just incremental, reform.

Otherwise, the consequences would be catastrophic. The stage would

be set for the proliferation of humanitarian disasters in many parts of the world, ecological breakdown, and China's rise as the main power behind an alternative bloc of multilateral institutions that exist to serve its own interests. This scenario would ultimately leave everyone worse off, with fragmentation and competition between different rule-setters and institutions introducing zero-sum dynamics and destroying global public goods.

To prevent such outcomes, Western countries must join the effort to transform multilateral financial institutions, even if doing so means ceding some of their own influence to others who have previously been marginalised. Those pursuing systemic reforms must resist the temptation merely to tweak current arrangements. The entire conversation about development should be reframed to account for neglected issues such as infrastructure and the role of the private sector and non-public financial flows.

This is what the June 22-23 Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact aims

to do. But as important as the gathering is, it is also risky. If the only result is a hollow political declaration, the broader reform effort could lose credibility. That is why those in attendance must deliver a concrete blueprint that is ambitious but also realistic and feasible.

The summit is asking the right questions, and it presents an opportunity for everyone to think imaginatively about novel solutions to today's unprecedented challenges. The discussion should focus on three time horizons. The first is the day of the gathering, when governments must agree, for example, to a suspension of debt-servicing obligations for countries facing catastrophic climate events – as was done at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The second time horizon spans the next 18 months, through the rest of India's and then Brazil's G20 presidencies. Since it has been only six months since the Paris summit was announced, there has not been enough time to negotiate finalised agreements on critical political issues.

Even so, the summit can create an impetus for such deal-making in the months ahead as governments find ways to overcome domestic obstacles to more robust action. For example, a preliminary agreement to improve the efficiency with which multilateral development banks deploy existing capital could open the door for greater capital contributions by donor countries in the future.

The third time horizon covers the next few years, when far-reaching reforms to the global financial system will need to be implemented. To prepare the ground, the summit should explore the options for mobilising different kinds of donors and tapping new funding sources, with an emphasis on creating new international taxation mechanisms.

This would help broaden the debate beyond official development finance. Not only does the current financial system still favour carbon-intensive investments over sustainable projects; it also favours pure speculation (usually on arcane financial instruments and real estate) over productive investments in poorer countries.

Recognising how deep these problems run, UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently proposed a comprehensive programme of measures to redirect "unproductive and unrewarding" finance and rebalance structural asymmetries in the global economic system. The Paris summit should help launch this debate so that it delivers tangible results – including public money to support developing countries – in the months and years ahead.

This is the moment to articulate a reform agenda that is ambitious enough to give the Global South real hope for the future.

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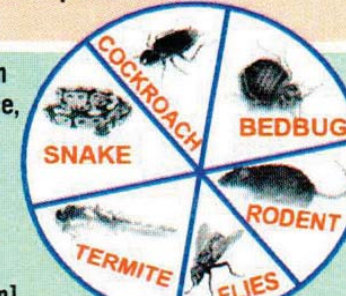
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CULTURE

A reveller from the typical Lisbon neighbourhood Alfama, poses for a portrait before attending the Santo Antonio de Lisboa's Parade on Avenida da Liberdade. Lisbon celebrates Saint Anthony's day, the city's protector saint, with a parade that gathers participants from several typical neighbourhoods of the city. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A set of the great hall of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is seen at the 'Warner Bros. Studio Tour Tokyo — The Making of Harry Potter' during a press preview before it officially opens to the public in Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan greets fans with his iconic pose at his residence Mannat in Mumbai. — AFP



MUSIC

US rapper Lil Nas X performs during the 2023 Governors Ball Music Festival at Flushing Meadows Corona Park in New York City. — AFP

CHANGING WORLD

A farmer tries to step on locusts near a wheat field during a locusts swarm at Kandali area in Sholgara district, Balkh province. — AFP



art & life

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Has Islamic architecture been evolving?

Architect Pedja Hadži-Manović shares his fascination for Oman and the country's beautiful architecture, his thoughts on the connection between architecture and design and whether Islamic Architecture is evolving for the better

Photo by Michael D'Souza

FASHION

Curators 'delighted' to add Chanel's 1926 little black dress to show

CURATORS IN SCOTLAND are "delighted" to have secured a little black dress designed by Chanel in 1926 to open an exhibition on the success of the garment over almost a century. Beyond The Little Black Dress, which launches at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh next month, will bring together more than 60 looks from collections and designers around the world. It opens with a long-sleeved black day dress designed by Gabrielle Coco Chanel in 1926, which was hailed by US Vogue as "the frock that all the world will wear."

The silk crepe dress is on loan

from the Kunstgewerbe museum (Museum of Decorative Arts) in Berlin. Georgina Ripley, principal curator of modern and contemporary design at National Museums Scotland, said: "The dress is incredibly significant for its own merit anyway, but for our exhibition it's really pivotal because we are opening the exhibition with the idea that this is kind of the birth of the little black dress. "The well-known story within fashion history is of Chanel being the inventor of the little black dress and 1926 being the date, and that's because a very simple long-sleeved day dress of silk crepe de Chine was



featured in American Vogue in the October edition and it called this dress the 'frock that all the world will wear'. "The dress that we have on loan from the museum in Berlin is not the exact dress that featured in that Vogue article, but it is the exact same style, made from the same sort of fabric, and it's incredibly rare to actually find little black day dresses from that date in collections. "It's been amazing for us to be able to locate one, to be able to tell this really important story within the history of the little black dress." Vogue compared the dress to Henry Ford's model T motor car, linking it to the idea of the democratisation of fashion, although it would still have been very expensive and only affordable to the wealthy. The dress drew on the functionality of menswear and of clothes worn by those working in the service industry, such as maids and shop workers. Chanel's contemporary Paul Poiret described the style as "poverty deluxe" — things that have humble origins elevated to couture-style clothing. While black was already in fashion before 1926 and other little black dresses had been created, something about Chanel's design was seen as being an important moment in the modernisation of women's fashion.

The exhibition was originally due to open in 2020 but was pushed back due to Covid, and curators were "thrilled" they could still borrow the dress from the museum in Berlin this year. Ripley said: "This is such a natural place to start this story because it's known in fashion history and we also wanted to confront head on that it really is just a moment that has been picked upon as the origin of the little black dress, but it would be really strange to tell that story without having that dress. "We had our heart set on telling the story in that way and opening with this dress, so we're delighted we've been able to see that mission through." The exhibition looks at fashions through the decades, from early pieces by Yves Saint Laurent, Christian Dior and Jean Muir to contemporary designers and brands such as Gareth Pugh, Simone Rocha and Off-White. Areas of the exhibition are dedicated to highlighting black British designers whose work explores both blackness in terms of identity and the role the colour plays in crafting a futuristic, sci-fi aesthetic. It also considers how perceptions of the colour black differ in a global context. The exhibition runs from July 1 until October 29. — PA Media/dpa

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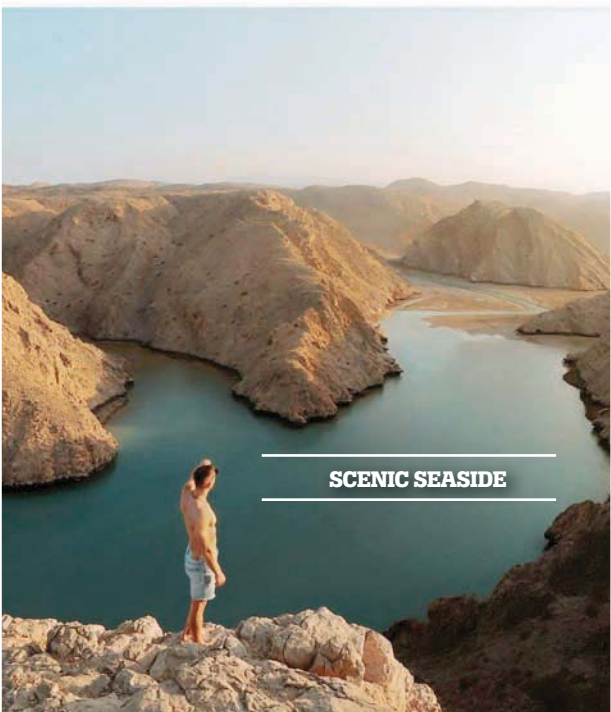
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By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Pedja Hadži-Manović is an architect with a keen eye for what goes into the depths. He's an architect, a designer, a gallery owner of rare 20th-century design objects, and a cultural critic who lives in Zurich, Marrakesh, and Belgrade, and focuses on classical Islamic architecture.

He's also the curator of the CH-DSGN Swiss Non-Conformist Design exhibition held at the National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman. Pedja Hadži-Manović established the P! Galerie in Zurich, Switzerland. Here, the gallery offers rough-designed objects, specialising in rare collector pieces and historic prototypes. The gallery provides items to other galleries worldwide and cooperates with auction houses like Sotheby's or Christie's.

He was in Oman for the exhibition CH-DSGN, which illustrated 100 years of Swiss design, and he selected furniture pieces that show the experimental, the primitive, the modest, and the playful, as well as the childishly naive. Original objects by the most famous architect of the 20th century, Le Corbusier, were brought together with objects from a Unesco World Heritage Site. He also shows contemporary design, such as that by Tom Strala, who uses the ordinariness of building-site materials such as concrete or reinforced iron. The six-month exhibition is accompanied by a supporting programme: the solo exhibition by designer and architect Tom Strala at Bayt Sayyid Nadir bin Faisal, a series of lectures on design, a critical manifesto and art photo work by the well-known Swiss photographer Renate Buser.

IS DESIGN IMPORTANT?

First, I don't think that design is important. It's not a must to be involved with design. Nowadays, I think that 98 per cent of design furniture is just consumerist nonsense: superficial, produced with no conviction, to please the mainstream taste. It's an industry that aims to grow and make a profit. I have seen that IKEA came to Oman. They sell items for a quick "wow" moment to catch attention. But after two years, people throw these items away. It happens not because of the low quality but because this design acts as a trendy hype. When the next trend comes, this design will be gone. I am glad that people are critical of design and the design industry.

But good design has depth, and here it gets interesting. Here, we talk about cultural goods. For example, the items we exhibit at the National Museum reflect us and our society. These objects show the joy of failing; they are primitive, they seek spiritual depth, or they are open-minded to any experiment.

HOW DID THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN HAPPEN?

My first love was painting in oil as a teenager, then photography. Later, I studied



architecture at ETH Zurich. I learned how to approach problems and how to express my own perception artistically. I don't see differences in architecture, graphic design, furniture, photography, urban planning, or interior architecture. Even though each has different frameworks, it's all about human perception and giving our reality a poetic quality.

Nowadays, we think that specialisation is essential. But that includes the fact that more and more people are unable to see the wider context or to cross the borders.

WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF CH-DSGN?

We show Swiss design, but it's about

something more universal. Switzerland and Oman both traditionally have humble backgrounds. Both cultures have an affinity for simple but sensual solutions. The simple things know how to access our imagination. It's the same as what we have seen as children: a simple twig, a sword, a tool, or maybe a snake. We get stimulated, our mind starts playing, and our emotions feel

joy. It doesn't matter if we live in Switzerland or Oman; it is enriching to become aware that we have this intuitive and naive side. Here are aspects that can touch us profoundly. I personally think that everywhere reality gets more inhuman, we get reduced to a function of following some defined paths. This design can reactivate our irresponsible and childish sides.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE SWISS DESIGN?

Swiss design has been labelled as simple, with technically smartly solved

details, innovative, never luxurious, practical... good, well-behaved, and conformist. But strong conformism always creates an adverse reaction. So here, we show this non-conformist side, which is more unknown but finally expresses an experimental and much more radical design.

HAS ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE BEEN EVOLVING?

My answer is based on my subjective perception, and I'm hopefully wrong. Maybe my answer is harsh, but it's all because of my emotional attachment to Islamic architecture.

In Oman, there is no contemporary Islamic architecture anymore. That is all Western architecture with Islamic make-up. Islamic architecture had a rich tradition in Oman even until the 1980s, much longer than in most other Islamic countries. There are simple fisher villages from the 1980s with a very Islamic character: magical, humble, playful, and a joy to walk around in villages like Qantab or Al Manumah.

But all that slowly gets destroyed. Nowadays, we think that an Islamic arch or an Al Mashrabiya defines Islamic architecture. But that's like when I put a Mussar on my head, and I think I'm now Omani. Islamic architecture is about depth, the human scale, and being connected to the elements like stars, wind, heat, vegetation, sea, rocks, sand, night, or the moon. What a joy to walk in Old Muscat. It's not a question about tradition or modernity, but about quality. If a culture is blessed with such a rich culture, it should try to understand its potential. There is an architectural crisis in Oman, and now Western mainstream prestige architecture is popular. Oman appears to fear being outdated and has started to follow all these global trends.

I designed right now a house [that is being built] in Muscat. The materials express the present Muscat with concrete, plastic, aluminium, ... But the house's structure and soul are deeply defined by traditional Islamic architecture, trying to connect us humans to the elements in a poetic way. Here is the root of Omani architecture. I believe in an architectural renaissance in Oman, not in fake nostalgia or Westernised mainstream modernity without character.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO EXPLORE OMANI ARCHITECTURE?

My first trip to Oman was three years ago, when I came to see the outstanding Omani Mhabs. Most Mhabs worldwide are richly decorated, but the Omani ones are much purer, humbler, and express a unique spiritual depth. Exceptional. So, I fell in love with Oman. Then I saw several forts, of which Al Hazm is my favourite. Then more and more cities and villages. As a result, I became more and more fascinated by the vernacular Omani architecture. Oman has a lot to offer.

LIFESTYLE

'World's best restaurant' to reopen in Spain as museum

SPAIN'S ELBULLI, repeatedly voted the world's best restaurant before it closed over a decade ago, is set to reopen as a museum dedicated to the culinary revolution it sparked.

Nestled in an isolated cove on Spain's northeastern tip, the museum is dubbed "elBulli1846" – a reference to the 1,846 dishes ground-breaking chef Ferran Adria says were developed at the eatery.

"It's not about coming here to eat, but to understand what happened in elBulli," the 61-year-old said near the kitchen of the restaurant he ran for over two decades.

The museum will open on June 15, nearly 12 years after the restaur-

rant served its final dish to the public.

Visitors will be able to see hundreds of photos, notebooks, trophies and models made of plastic or wax that emulate some of the innovative dishes which were served at the eatery.

Adria pioneered the culinary trend known as molecular gastronomy, which deconstructs ingredients and recombines them in unexpected ways.

The results are foods with surprising combinations and textures, such as fruit foams, gazpacho pop-sicles and caramelised quails.

Under Adria's watch elBulli



achieved the coveted Michelin three-star status and was rated the world's best restaurant a record five times by British magazine The Restaurant.

"What we did here was find the limits of what can be done in a gastronomic experience," Adria said.

"What are the physical, mental and even spiritual limits that humans have. And that search paved paths for others."

PASSION FOR CUISINE

Some of the world's most famous chefs were trained by Adria at elBul-

li, including Denmark's Rene Redzepi of Noma and Italy's Massimo Bottura of Osteria Francescana.

A foundation set up to maintain elBulli's legacy invested 11 million euros (\$11.8 million) in the museum.

Plans to expand the building on the idyllic Cala Montjoi cove near the towns of Roses had to be adjusted after they ran into opposition from environmentalists.

Adria headed to the white-walled restaurant overlooking the Mediterranean in 1983 for a one month internship on the recom-

mendation of a friend.

He was invited to join the restaurant's staff as a line cook the following year, and became its solo head chef in 1987.

Adria bought the restaurant in 1990 with his business partner Juli Soler, who passed away in 2015.

"The most important thing that happened to me at elBulli is that I discovered for the first time passion for cuisine," he said.

"At the table, when the staff ate together, we did not talk about football, or our weekends, we talked about cuisine."



RIGHT TO CLOSE

The restaurant opened usually just six months of the year to give Adria and his staff time to conceive new dishes.

The meal consisted of a set menu comprising dozens of small dishes which cost around 325 euros, including a drink, when the restaurant closed in 2011.

A team of 70 people prepared the meals for the 50 guests who managed to get a reservation.

Adria said he accepted that his culinary innovations did not please everyone.

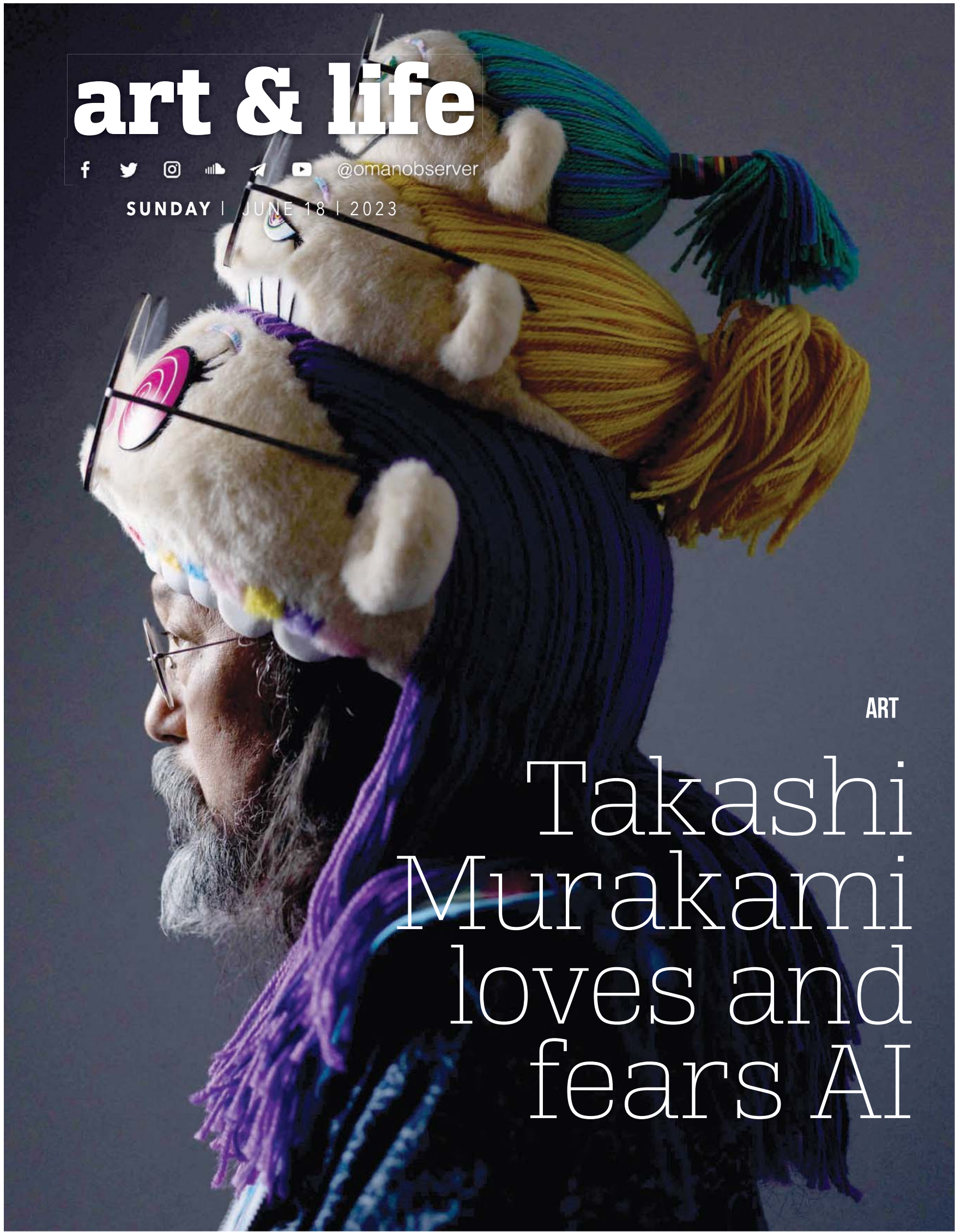
"In the end they are new things and it's a shock after the other, it is normal that it makes you reflect on what you like," he said.

In the final years of the restaurant, demand for reservations was so high that Adria allocated seats mostly through a lottery.

When Adria decided to close the restaurant, he justified the move saying it "had become a monster".

"I was very certain that we were right to close. We had reached what we felt was a satisfactory experience at the maximum level," Adria said.

"And once we reached it we said 'why do we have to continue?'. The mission of elBulli was not this, it was finding the limits," he added. — AFP



ART

Takashi Murakami loves and fears AI

NEO-POP ART SUPERSTAR Takashi Murakami has always embraced new technology and was an early adopter of crypto and NFTs, but even he admits fearing that AI might make him obsolete.

Murakami, 61, has become a brand unto himself thanks to his lovable technicolour paintings that mix tradi-

shifting from artists to tech engineers, who will be able to explore things that are hard to imagine at the moment.

"Artists who create familiar things will be left behind," he said.

"I myself work with a certain kind of fear of one day being replaced."

He spoke to AFP in front of an enormous 23-metres-long by 5-metres-high fresco that tells a Kabuki narrative in his dazzling, cartoonish style.

"I'm not very appreciated in Japan," he said, wearing Bermuda shorts and a jacket adorned with his famous smiling flowers.

"My reputation is fairly bad because

very pleased."

'A NEW CONTINENT'

Nonetheless, his commitment to technological change is clear.

Visitors to Saturday's gallery opening — requiring some dedication since it was hidden away among the private jet hangars near Charles de Gaulle airport — were set to receive an NFT of a flower-adorned virtual coin.

The show includes a wall of NFT-style pixelated portraits that draw a line from Karl Marx and Adam Smith to current tech honchos Vitalik Buterin and Elon Musk.

Like all his work, they are deceptively simple, seemingly printed, yet in fact painstakingly painted by hand and then lacquered to remove any sign of human involvement and create his renowned "Superflat" aesthetic.

He sees this work as building a bridge between traditional and digital art, but admits they can be a hard sell.

"Collectors who have been fans of mine for a long time clearly have some trouble with these pixelated drawings," he said.

"But I created my works following Japanese or Eastern styles, not Western, and I consider pixel art to be a sort of representation of Japanese cul-



tional Japanese art motifs with modern anime and manga.

His paintings have sold for millions of dollars, led to fashion collaborations with Louis Vuitton and Kanye West, and been shown at some of the world's great institutions, prized as insightful commentary on the fine line between art and commerce.

It has not always made him popular with Japan's art establishment, but Murakami likes being a disruptor.

He sees another wave of change coming thanks to AI-powered software.

"The generational change will be dramatic," he told AFP at the opening of a new exhibition at the Gagosian gallery on the outskirts of Paris.

It reminds him of the arrival of the Apple II computer in the 1980s that swept away an older generation of design professionals, but empowered those who embraced it.

"AI will certainly do damage to technical trades but I don't think it will be able to block our ideas," he said.

"The wackiest ideas, those that even AI cannot generate, will become even more valuable."

That does mean power perhaps



'NOT VERY APPRECIATED'

Ironically, Murakami says he was touched to finally receive some praise from a more traditional part of Japanese society with his recent work in homage to Kabuki theatre.

I'm seen as presenting a false image of Japanese culture to the rest of the world.

"This is the first time I was welcomed in this way in Japan. I was

ture from the video games of the 1970s."

The world of crypto is "like a new continent" still being discovered.

"It will take several more years for people to get used to it," he said. — AFP

LIFESTYLE



Snakes as therapy animals: reptiles help heal in Brazil

A YELLOW-AND-BROWN boa constrictor wraps itself around David de Oliveira Gomes's neck like a scarf, but the 15-year-old Brazilian with autism is fascinated, not afraid.

For him, this is therapy.

"His name is Gold. He's cold. He eats mice," Gomes tells his therapist at a treatment centre in Sao Paulo, gently holding the large snake as it slithers around him.

That is exactly the kind of sentence his therapist, Andrea Ribeiro, is trying to elicit.

She specialises in treating people with disabilities, autism or anxiety, using an unusual method: reptile therapy, which she says helps patients relax and improve their communication, motor skills and other abilities.

"He's working on speech and memory formation," the 51-year-old language-speech therapist says of Gomes, sitting at a table with him and the large snake.

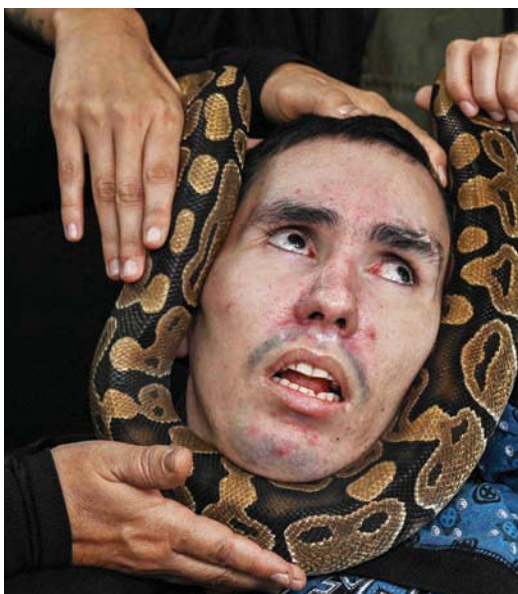
Ribeiro has pioneered this method over the past decade at the treatment centre, which features an open-air space where patients interact with lizards, turtles and a "jacare" — a kind of alligator native to Latin America that is common in Brazil, including in the Amazon rainforest.

The treatment is not scientifically proven.

But "it's been medically demonstrated that when people come in contact with animals, it releases neurotransmitters such as serotonin and beta-endorphins that give a sense of pleasure and well-being," says Ribeiro.

"That makes (patients) feel good and want to learn."

The reptiles "enable us to achieve better, faster results," she told AFP.



STEP ASIDE, DOGS

Ribeiro used to use dogs in her treatment sessions.

But she found their constant attempts to play and interact made some patients uneasy, especially those with autism.

So she turned to reptiles.

It's a class of animals that makes many people squirm.

But people with autism tend to approach them "without prejudice," she says. The animals spark their curiosity without making them uncomfortable.

The reptiles, for their part, "are indifferent," she says.

"They don't seek attention the way some mammals do."

Ten-year-old Gabriel Pinheiro is petting a small alligator, trying to imitate Ribeiro's syllables by opening his mouth wide three times: "Ja-ca-re."

"It's wet," he says, his eyes fixated on the creature from behind his glasses.

The alligator's scales are "hard," its belly "soft," he says, as the therapist helps him work on opposites.

He and Ribeiro then sing a song about the jacare to practice auditory memory skills.

Pinheiro's mother, Cristina, credits four years of this therapy with helping improve his listening, communication and motor skills.

"He's always happy when we come," she says.

REPTILIAN MASSAGE

Another patient, 34-year-old Paulo Palacio Santos, suffered severe brain damage in an accident that left him paralysed and speechless.

Ribeiro wraps his face with a thick snake, whose weight and cold temperature help reactivate Santos's swallowing reflex, she says.

She then uses a smaller boa constrictor to work the muscles around his mouth.

The handling of these species is regulated by Brazil's environmental authority, IBAMA.

Ribeiro works side-by-side with biologist Beatriz Araujo, whose job is to monitor the animals' stress levels and ensure patients remain safe.

There has never been an accident in 10 years of treatment, the centre says.

The reptiles, which are raised on site, are accustomed to human contact. No poisonous snakes are used.

"I'm always here, just in case (an animal) reacts unexpectedly," says Araujo.

"The dangers are the same as for close contact with any animal." — AFP