

HM greets President of Madagascar

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Andry Rajoelina of the Republic of Madagascar on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sentiments and best wishes to President Rajoelina and the people of Madagascar.



P12

IRAN END YEMEN'S DREAM IN AFC U17



P13

DUALISATION OF 400KM OF ADAM - THAMRAIT ROAD EARMARKED FOR OMAN-SAUDI JVS



P20

BISON REINTRODUCED TO CANADA'S BANFF THRIVE AGAIN



Royal Decree ratifies pact with Egypt

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal Decree No. 43/2023 on the ratification of an agreement between the governments of Oman and Egypt. The decree deals with the elimination of double taxation for income tax, as well as the prevention and avoidance of tax evasion, signed in Cairo on May 22 after presenting the same before the Majlis Ash'shura. It reads as follows: Article (1) ratifies the above-mentioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and takes effect from its date of issue. — ONA

HM exchanges Eid al Adha greetings with leaders

MUSCAT: On the advent of Eid al Adha 1444 AH, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has exchanged cables of greetings with leaders of Arab and Islamic countries. In his cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to them and the peoples of their countries. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant the leaders happiness and success to achieve further progress and prosperity for their peoples and for the return of this occasion and similar occasions on all Muslims with blessings and well-being. On their turn, the leaders expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. They prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect his Majesty and grant him good health, well-being and a long life. They also prayed to the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on His Majesty, the Omani people, the Islamic and Arab nations welfare and blessings. — ONA



HM CONFERS ORDER OF FELICITATION ON PIOTROVSKY



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred the Order of Felicitation on Prof Mikhail Piotrovsky, President of the Union of Museums of Russia, Director-General of the State Hermitage Museum and member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Oman, in appreciation for his efforts and contributions to promoting cultural cooperation between the National Museum and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. The order was handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, to Prof Piotrovsky in Muscat on Sunday. **REPORT ON P2**

OIA allots RO 100 million to boost liquidity in Muscat Stock Exchange

The initiative emerges as an embodiment of priorities of Oman Vision 2040. It comes in pursuance of initiatives aimed at expanding MSX, realising sustainability in the stock market, enhancing its attractiveness to investors and augmenting client confidence therein

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced the allocation of RO 100 million to support Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) through a “liquidity fund” initiative launched by the OIA in cooperation with the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development. Aoun bin Abbas al Bahrani, Director-General of Public Market Investments at the OIA, said that the Liquidity Fund initiative, launched by OIA in cooperation with the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development last week, is a portfolio worth RO 100 million aimed to support the market maker and liquidity provider in MSX. He added that the Liquidity

economic news and the disclosure of listed companies. Al Bahrani told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the initiative is a financial instrument that enables the OIA to participate in a percentage of the daily trading at MSX. He affirmed OIA's keenness to cooperate with companies that will work in market making and attracting new investments and liquidity to MSX. The initiative emerges as an embodiment of priorities of Oman Vision 2040. It comes in pursuance of initiatives aimed at expanding MSX, realising sustainability in the stock market, enhancing its attractiveness to investors and augmenting client confidence therein. This will reflect positively on increasing trading volumes and attracting new companies. — ONA

Mood set for Eid al Adha in Oman

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The Sultanate of Oman along with Muslims around the world is getting ready to celebrate Eid al Adha, also known as the 'Festival of Sacrifice.'

In Oman, Eid al Adha is typically celebrated over a period of four days. As per tradition, it is the Islamic Lunar calendar determined by the sighting of the moon that declares the day of celebration.

Many families would be eagerly following up with the family members and relatives who are performing the Haj rituals in Mecca, Saudi

Arabia, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. During Eid al Adha, Muslims commemorate the Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail as an act of obedience to God. It is customary to participate in the ritual sacrifice of an animal, typically a sheep, cow or a goat and sometimes a camel, to symbolise Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son. The meat from the sacrificed animal is then distributed to family members, friends, neighbours and the needy. In Oman, there are strict guidelines to be followed while sacrificing the animals and the public is advised to use municipality

slaughterhouses. Eid day begins with the communal Eid prayer followed by the sacrifice. In Oman, it is common for families to gather together, exchange gifts, and share traditional meals during Eid al Adha. The first food eaten on Eid al Adha is Arsiya, consisting of pounded rice, meat and spices. Traditional ghee is also added. One must wear new clothes on Eid al Adha and an important feature of the festival is visiting each other. The Omani delicacies for Eid al Adha are distinct and it includes Arsiya, Mishakeek skewered meat grilled over charcoal and Shuwa.

TURN TO P3

INSIDE



PILGRIMS PERFORM TAWAF OR THE CIRCUMAMBULATION OF THE KAABA AT MECCA'S AL MASJID AL-HARAM

P6



State Council discusses Draft Tourism Law

MUSCAT: The State Council on Sunday held its 10th session of the 4th annual sitting of the 7th term.

It discussed the Draft Tourism Law and two studies; the first on legislative controls and regulations of e-commerce and the second on electric vehicles (EVs).

The session was held under the chairmanship of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

He valued the constructive discussions to come up with unified visions on draft laws referred by the government.

— ONA

Diplomatic under-secretary receives Austrian official



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs received on Sunday Peter Lewinsky, Secretary General of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation in political, economic and cultural fields, in addition to ways of enhancing them. The two sides also exchanged views on a number of regional and international issues of common interest.

The Secretary General of the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to the Sultanate of Oman for its recent role in the release of Austrian citizens from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The meeting was attended by Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of the Republic of Austria to the Sultanate of Oman, Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Mantheri, Head of the Europe Department at the Foreign Ministry and officials of both sides. — ONA

HM confers Order of Felicitation on Russian Union of Museums chief



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred the Order of Felicitation on Prof Mikhail Piotrovsky, President of the Union of Museums of Russia, Director-General of the State Hermitage Museum and member of the Board of Trustees of the National Museum of Oman, in appreciation for his efforts and contributions to promoting cultural cooperation between the National Museum and the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. The conferment underlines Piotrovsky's role in boosting cultural and civilisational promotion between Oman and Russia.

The order was handed over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, in the presence of Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum and the chargé d'affaires of the Russian Embassy to Oman.

— ONA

MoE honours winning students at international science and technology exhibition in USA

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, honoured in her office the Dohat Al Adab team for innovation, consisting of two students, Maryam al Rahbi and Shathar al Kharousi and the management of the team, Iman al Rahbi, Asila al Harthy and Asma al Saadi, for winning the fourth place in the International Science and Technology Exhibition in the United States of America.

Dr Madeeha thanked the school administration and the teachers for the efforts made in the field of innovation and thanked the parents of the students for their role in motivating and encouraging their children to participate in such international competitions.

She praised the achievements of the students of the Dohat Al Adab School, and their achievement of fourth place globally in the International Science and Technology



Exhibition in the United States of America in the field of environmental engineering, where the Sultanate of Oman participated with three innovations in this exhibition, of which the Dohat Al Adab School from Muscat Governorate won the fourth place for the innovation of 'using animal bones to produce filaments for a 3D printer' in the field of environmental engineering.

It is worth noting that the team obtained a number of advanced positions in local and international competitions, as the two students achieved first place at the Sultanate of Oman level at the National Olympiad for Engineering and Innovation and first place in the National University Innovation Competition.

Citizens call for implementation of Burj Al Sahwa Roundabout project

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Citizens demanded to speed up the development of Burj Al Sahwa Roundabout and its transformation as a central station and a land port connecting all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman through the modern transportation network surrounding the roundabout.

Drivers of public transport vehicles and passengers called on the relevant authorities to expedite the implementation of the projects that were announced a few years ago. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has not responded to the queries raised by the newspaper concerning the fate of the announced projects and its



plan to develop the area.

Over the past four decades that followed the establishment of Burj Al Sahwa Roundabout, some projects were added to the area which is considered as one of the significant landmarks of Muscat Governorate, however it did not meet the aspirations of thousands of people whose daily work is related to the roundabout and the adjoining facilities.

The area receives dozens of vehicles carrying passengers from all governorates and tonnes of goods are randomly dispersed on the ground since the time of the arrival of buses. What is needed now is to speed up the implementation of the projects announced by the Muscat Municipality last year and those announced by Asyad in 2019.



SQUH succeeds in implanting latest device for hard-of-hearing person

MUSCAT: A specialised surgical team at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) succeeded in performing a surgical operation for a 14-year-old girl suffering from severe hearing loss.

The operation involved the implantation of the latest hearing device of its kind and it is considered one of the most suitable solutions in such cases.

The operation was conducted by a surgical team led by Dr Khalid bin Said al Zaabi, Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) Surgeon at SQUH.

Dr Khalid pointed out that

the team did not encounter any difficulties during the operation, thanks to good preparation and prompt coordination with the manufacturer. The operation took about two hours.

Dr Khalid al Zaabi told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the device is the latest of its kind in the industry and that the operation was the first of its kind in Oman.

There is an ample scope to implant such advanced devices for patients in future, said Dr Khalid al Zaabi, who affirmed that coordination is underway with the manufacturers of such devices. — ONA



Mood set for Eid al Adha



FROM P3

The best of Omani Halwa and Omani Kahwa will welcome family members and guests to the houses. Elders are visited and everyone goes back to family homes to enjoy the feast together.

On the first day or in some places it could be the second day

of the Eid the dish much relished and cooked is Shuwa which as the word suggests is done underground grill. And the other dish that is popular is Mishakeek, a traditional barbecue.

While everyone is dressed in new clothes, women and girls have their henna done on their

hands. The festivities and joy has a special significance for the children as they eagerly wait for their Eidiya — money as gifts, which makes the last working day before the Eid holidays busy at the banks as people like to give fresh notes as Eid money to children.

Weather may cool down during holidays

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

Oman Met Office issued a weather forecast on conditions expected during Eid al Adha holidays indicating cooler temperatures and rains.

The days could be cooler during Eid holidays, according to the weather forecasters at Oman Met Office. But until then there are expectations of a rise in ‘felt’ temperatures in the coastal areas due to high humidity and wind activity during the noon period for the next two days.

During Eid holidays, the weather is expected to be affected by an upper air trough starting from June 28 to July 1, 2023. Temperature is expected to come down to a range between 35 to 45°C.

Clouds advection is expected to begin by Tuesday July 27th 2023, with chances of isolated rain, occasionally thunder



showers during the afternoon and evenings the areas. The governorates that are expected to experience the weather conditions are the mountainous areas of Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah South, Al Batinah North, Al Buraimi, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South.

Oman Met Office said that on Wednesday, isolated thunder showers ranging from 10 to 30 mm may cause wadis to flow.

Moderate fresh wind is expected with the speed of 15 to 25 Kt.

There are also expectations of the continuation of the sea wave rampage on the coasts of the Arabian Sea (2.5 - 4.5) metres.

Sea wave height of 1.5-2. 0 metres is forecast on the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the eastern coasts of Musandam Governorate from this evening until Tuesday evening.

The Civil Aviation Authority has requested public to take all precautions and make the holidays a safe one.

On Saturday, the desert regions witnessed a noticeable rise in maximum temperatures (ranging between mid-40s and early 50s), with the highest recorded in Fahud 50.5 degrees Celsius.

However, on Sunday morning there was spread of low clouds over parts of the coasts of the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, and Dhofar, and parts of the coasts of the governorates of Al Batinah North and Musandam.

There was also flow and spread of clouds of different heights over the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar and parts of the Al Dhahirah.

Overhead Aflaj architectural marvel of Oman

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Aflaj, especially those that run over the valley and along mountain slopes, are the architectural marvel of Oman.

These water channels have helped in the distribution of this precious resource in remote areas for irrigation and domestic use.

The importance of Aflaj to communities in Oman is reflected in law. While one must hold water rights to use the Aflaj for irrigation purposes, all communities hold common water rights, which allow them to use the water from Aflaj for domestic purposes freely.

Moreover, the right to use water from a falaj extends beyond the members of its immediate community. Animals, or humans in need of water for individual use or for basic sustenance cannot be refused access to the Aflaj. While only remaining as elements of protected heritage today, defensive structures, such as watchtowers, were originally built to protect and watch over the Aflaj, such was their importance to communities.



Overhead Aflaj attracts a lot of tourists to Oman's villages. This type of Aflaj was built with the aim of defying topographical obstacles. This type of water channel ensured that those who lived on mountain slopes had access to water to irrigate their farms and livestock. Some of them rest on concrete pillars to withstand flash floods from heavy rains.

“We dedicate one trip every month to discover the natural treasures of Oman. Here we enjoy talking with the people of rural areas. In every village we visit, they welcome us to their



homes with dates, fruits and Omani coffee. This type of water channel attracts our attention and makes us wonder about the mechanisms that were used during construction during the past centuries,” an Indian visitor said.

“It is amazing when we follow these water channels. They lead us to pools and small waterfalls. It is terrific that the Omanis still rely on these channels to irrigate their farms and are proud of this unique architectural heritage,” she said.

Some of the overhead Aflaj are currently dry, not because

of the lack of rain, but because they need maintenance.

“Many Omanis abandoned their villages after the droughts they suffered during the eighties and nineties. Aflaj were left without maintenance. Some of them collapsed, and their water sources dried up after dust and stones fell on them,” an Omani explained to the Observer.

Although the flow of water has stopped in some of these channels, they constitute tourist attractions in various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman.

The traditional irrigation system in Oman dates back more than five thousand years. Despite the similarity of the Omani Aflaj, there is a great difference in many aspects, such as breadth, depth, flowing water quality, composition, and the nature of the lands in which they originated.

According to official statistics, there are more than 4,000 Aflaj in the Sultanate of Oman. These channels depend on springs and rainwater that fall on mountains.

During the summer period, visitors camp near Aflaj to beat the heat and enjoy fresh local fruits like dates and mangos.



HABTA AL EID CELEBRATION OF COMMUNITY SPIRIT

AHMED AL KAABI

HABTA AL EID, a seasonal traditional market, is a vibrant marketplace, held in various locations across the country that marks a cherished tradition of Omani culture. The duration of the market varies from wilayat to wilayat, with some hosting it for the ten days leading up to Eid al Fitr and Eid al Adha.

Al Habta offers a diverse array of products essential for the festive season. From exquisite clothing to livestock, Omani sweets, and delightful children's toys, visitors can immerse themselves in the vibrant atmosphere while exploring the market's offerings.

Omanis embark on journeys from one region to another, traversing the nearby wilayats in search of the finest goods, particularly when it comes to procuring live meat. Al Habta activities, such as the captivating livestock auction known as 'calling,' enthrall attendees who eagerly participate.

Ahmed al Rashdi, a resident of the Wilayat of Ibra, highlighted the significance of the Habta as a cherished Omani heritage that has been passed down through generations. Each year, the Wilayat of Ibra becomes a hub of diverse descents, hosting Al Habta in various villages throughout the wilayat. "The Habta is characterised in some areas of Al

Sharqiyah North Governorate by many activities such as horse racing and shows, as well as camel racing and show," he added.

Al Rashdi further emphasised that these Habta serve as valuable social events, where community members come together to revel in the vibrant activities and forge stronger bonds with one another.

For children, Al Habta serves as a source of immense joy during both Eids. They don their finest Omani attire, eagerly venturing to Al Habta to purchase toys, nuts, and traditional Omani foods readily available in the market. Moreover, Al Habta caters to all the necessary items required to uphold Omani customs during the festive days.

It provides supplies for preparing the delectable Arsiya dish, consisting of rice and meat, typically enjoyed before attending the Eid chapel.

Additional items available for purchase include ghee, palm leaf, palm frond barbecue sauce, dry banana leaves, firewood for grilling and cooking meat, as well as tools essential for the slaughtering and preparation of Eid meat.

Al Habta also showcases a wide selection of Omani traditional attire for men, including daggers, sticks, dishdashas, shoes, and many more.

Al Habta is an enchanting experience for visitors of all ages, allowing them to partake in the rich tapestry of Omani traditions and celebrate the spirit of community.



HABTA offers a diverse array of products essential for the festive season. From exquisite clothing to livestock, Omani sweets, and delightful children's toys, visitors can immerse themselves in the vibrant atmosphere while exploring the market's offerings





In brief

■ STOCKHOLM



ONE KILLED, SEVERAL INJURED IN ROLLER COASTER ACCIDENT

One person was killed and several were injured in a roller coaster accident at the Gronska Lunden amusement park in the Swedish capital on Sunday, the TT news agency reported, citing a park spokesperson. Public broadcaster SVT, citing eyewitnesses, said the park's Jetline roller coaster had partly derailed during a ride.

Police said they were still investigating. "We are emptying the park and we've started our investigation," a police spokesperson said.

The Gronska Lunden park was not immediately available for comment. The steel-tracked Jetline roller coaster reaches a speed of up to 90 kilometres per hour and a height of 30 metres, transporting more than one million visitors each year.

■ HONG KONG



ELEVEN INJURED IN CATHAY PACIFIC FLIGHT INCIDENT

Eleven people were injured on Cathay Pacific's flight CX880 at Hong Kong's International Airport early on Saturday after the carrier aborted its take off due to a technical issue, Cathay said in a statement. The flight, from Hong to Los Angeles, was carrying 17 crew and 293 passengers. It performed "an aborted take off in accordance with standard procedures after a technical issue was detected by the crew." After the aircraft returned to the gate a precautionary passenger evacuation was initiated by the crew and passengers exited the aircraft using five door escape slides, it said.

■ CHINGONO



ZIMBABWE PRESIDENT PLEDGES ECONOMIC REVIVAL

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa vowed to do "what we can to remain in power", promising to revive an economy that has collapsed under his watch as he launched his bid for a second term. Zimbabwe will hold presidential and parliamentary elections on August 23 which are expected to pit Mnangagwa, 80, of the ZANU-PF party against pastor and lawyer Nelson Chamisa, 45, of the Citizens Coalition for Change. The election comes amid a raging economic crisis, with high inflation and a currency that plunged more than 50 per cent this month.

■ RECALLING A SACRIFICE



Livestock vendors and customers walk amid sacrificial camels at a cattle market ahead of Eid al Adha in Lahore on Sunday. — AFP

Russian strikes kill 11 in Syria

JISR AL-SHUGHUR: Russian air strikes on Sunday on Syria's northwest killed at least 11 people including five civilians, in retaliation for deadly drone attacks blamed on rebel forces, a war monitor said.

"Six civilians were killed in Jisr al-Shughur and three rebel fighters were killed nearby by Russian air strikes," Rami Abdel Rahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said.

Ahmed Yezidi of the civil defence in Jisr al-Shughur, a city in rebel-held Idlib province, said the strikes killed nine people, without specifying whether fighters were included in the toll.

A fruit and vegetable market in the city was hit by the Russian strike, said the Observatory and an AFP correspondent at the scene.

Yezidi called it "a direct attack



A video grab of the aftermath of a Russian air strike at Jisr al-Shughour, Syria, on Sunday. — Reuters

on the popular market, which is a basic source of income for farmers" in the area.

One civilian and one rebel fighter were also killed in a strike on the outskirts of Idlib city, said Abdel Rahman, whose Britain-based monitor has a wide network of sources inside war-torn Syria.

At least 30 civilians were wounded in Sunday's strikes, he said, adding that the death toll was likely to rise.

Russian forces, which back the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, were responding to rebel drone strikes over the past week that killed four civilians including two children, according

to Abdel Rahman.

Damascus, with Russian and Iranian support, has clawed back much of the ground lost in the early stages of Syria's conflict, which erupted in 2011 when the government brutally repressed pro-democracy protests.

The last pocket of armed opposition to the regime includes large swathes of Idlib province and parts of the neighbouring Aleppo, Hama and Latakia provinces.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, headed by ex-members of Syria's former Al-Qaeda franchise, is the dominant group in the area but other rebel groups are also active, with varying degrees of Turkish backing.

Syria's war has killed more than half a million people and forced around half of the country's pre-war population from their homes. — AFP

US airport worker dies after 'ingested' by plane engine

WASHINGTON: US regulators said on Sunday they are investigating an incident in which a Texas airport worker was killed after being sucked into a passenger plane engine.

A Delta flight had arrived in San Antonio, Texas from Los Angeles on Friday night and was taxiing to the gate with one engine on "when a worker was ingested into that engine," the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said in a statement.

"The NTSB is continuing to gather information about the event," it said.

The worker was employed by Unifi Aviation, a company the airline giant contracts with for ground crew operations, according to local media.

Delta told San Antonio broadcaster KENS 5 that the company was "deeply saddened" by Friday night's events and that it is "cooperating with authorities as they begin their investigation."

Unifi Aviation told the broadcaster the incident was "a tragic accident."

"From our initial investigation, this incident was unrelated to Unifi's operational processes, safety procedures and policies," the company said. On Wednesday, regional carrier Piedmont Airlines was fined \$15,625 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), another regulatory body, for the death of a ground crew worker last year in a similar incident.

"Proper training and enforcement of safety procedures could have prevented this tragedy," an OSHA official said.

Piedmont is a subsidiary of carrier American Airlines. — AFP

■ MODI VISITS EGYPT



Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (R) awards the Order of the Nile medal to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Cairo on Sunday. — AFP

56-year-old millionaire fails China's toughest exam for 27th time

BEIJING: After failing to achieve a high enough score on China's dreaded college entry exam for the 27th time, 56-year-old Liang Shi is beginning to wonder if he will ever make it to his dream university.

Liang, a self-made millionaire, has taken the gruelling "gaokao" exam dozens of times over the past four decades, hoping to earn a place at top-tier Sichuan University and fulfil his ambition of becoming "an intellectual".

By most measures, Liang has had a successful life -- he worked his way up from a menial job on a factory floor to establishing his own construction materials business, making millions of yuan in the process, but his university dreams have so far eluded him.

In his quest for a prestigious higher education, he has put in 12-hour study days, abstained from drinking and playing mahjong, and endured the media mocking him as the "gaokao



Liang Shi is beginning to wonder if he will ever make it to his dream university.

holdout", as well as online suspicion that it is all a publicity stunt. But despite months of living like "an ascetic monk", this year Liang was 34 points short of the provincial baseline for getting into any university.

"Before I got the result, I had a feeling that I wouldn't be able to get a high enough score to enter an elite university," he said.

"But I didn't expect to not make it into the ordinary ones."

Shortly before 10 pm on Friday -- along with hundreds of thousands of high-school

students across southwestern Sichuan province -- the grey-haired businessman carefully typed in his exam identification information and nervously waited to find out how he'd done.

Several local media reporters livestreaming the scene were also avidly checking for updates -- and from their disappointed expressions, Liang knew before he even saw the screen himself that the result was not ideal.

"It's all done for again this year," he said to himself. "It's very regrettable."

In the past, Liang's repeated misses failed to deter him. Every time he fell short, he vowed to try again the next year.

Now, for the first time in decades, he is wondering if his hard work will ever lead to anything.

"If I truly can't see much hope for improvement, there is no point doing it again. I really did work very hard everyday," he said tiredly. — AFP

Haj

The fifth pillar of Islam

omanobserver.om f t i n y o

Haj Rituals

1

INTEND FOR HAJJ AND ENTER STATE OF IHRAM BEFORE MIQAT

2

TAWAF AL-QUDOOM

3

SAT BETWEEN SAFA & MARWA

4

GO TO MINA

5

SPEND TIME IN ARAFAT

6

SPEND NIGHT IN MUZDALIFAH AND COLLECT PEBBLES

7

PELT ONLY JAMARAH AL-AQABAH

8

SACRIFICE ANIMAL

9

SHAVE/ TRIM HAIR

10

TAWAF AL-IFADAH

11

PELT ALL JAMARAH AL-ULA, AL-WUSTA, AL-QABA

12

FAREWELL TAWAF

HUGE CROWDS CIRCLE KAABA AS HAJ BEGINS IN SAUDI ARABIA



Muslim worshippers and pilgrims gather at the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca. — AFP

MECCA: Vast crowds of robed Muslim pilgrims walked solemn circles around the Kaaba, at Mecca's Grand Mosque, on Sunday as the biggest Haj pilgrimage in several years began.

Islam's holiest site is expected to host more than two million worshippers from 160 countries during the annual rites that could break attendance records, with 1.6 million foreigners already there.

"This year, we will witness the largest Haj pilgrimage in history," if things go according to plan, predicted an official with the Saudi Ministry of Haj and Umrah.

"The numbers will exceed 2.5 million pilgrims," added the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he is not authorised to speak with the press. The Haj began early on Sunday with the "tawaf" — the circumambulation of the Kaaba, the large cubic structure draped in black cloth with gold trimmings that millions of Muslims pray towards every day.

"I am living the most beautiful days of my life," said Abdel-Azim, a 65-year-old Egyptian, as he performed the ritual. "The dream has come true," added the retiree, who had saved up for 20 years to pay the \$6,000 fee to take part.

The Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam and must be undertaken at least once by all Muslims with the means. A series of rites are completed over four days in Mecca and its surroundings in the west of oil-rich Saudi Arabia.

On Sunday night, pilgrims will start moving to Mina, about five kilometres from the Grand Mosque, ahead of the Haj's climax at Mount Arafat.

Mina, the world's largest tent city, readied to receive the influx of pilgrims on Sunday, with food supplies brought in and security forces deployed around the area.

Outside the Grand Mosque, thousands prayed on colourful carpets that adorned the pavement, with male pilgrims wearing simple white robes. The area was dotted with ambulances, mobile clinics and fire trucks.

Carrying white umbrellas to shield themselves from the scorching sun, policemen in the mountainous city have conducted foot patrols and set up checkpoints to inspect Haj permits. Others splashed water on pilgrims as temperatures climbed towards 45 degrees Celsius.

Thousands of paramedics were on standby inside the Grand Mosque. Saudi authorities said more than 32,000 health workers will be on hand to treat cases of heatstroke, dehydration and exhaustion.

The Haj also demonstrates social reforms in the deeply conservative country. — AFP

ISLAMABAD

Parliament approves revised budget

Pakistan's parliament on Sunday approved the government's 2023-24 budget which was revised to meet International Monetary Fund conditions in a last ditch effort to secure the release of more bailout funds.

The IMF in mid-June expressed dissatisfaction with the country's initial budget, saying it was a missed opportunity to broaden the tax base in a more progressive way. The revised budget was approved a day after Finance Minister Ishaq Dar introduced new taxes and expenditure cuts. Pakistan has been trying to secure the IMF funds, which are crucial to unlock other bilateral and multilateral financing for the country. — Reuters

JOHANNESBURG

Minister accused of hindering green transition

South Africa's energy minister was accused of failing to back the country's energy transition on Sunday after he "snubbed" a billion-dollar green hydrogen deal launched in partnership with the Netherlands and Denmark.

The country's biggest opposition party said energy minister Gwede Mantashe had not signed an agreement on the fund, which was approved and launched anyway on Tuesday.

The transition has been mired with infighting among the government, which has a long history of support from labour unions representing mine workers.

Mantashe said he "refused" to sign a memorandum of understanding on the deal. — AFP

NAIROBI

5 killed in attack in Lamu county

Five people were killed on Sunday when armed assailants attacked two villages in Lamu county in southeast Kenya, police said. The attackers also burnt houses and destroyed property.

Police described the incident as a "terrorist attack", a phrase they typically use to refer to incursions by Somalia's al Shabaab group. Police said a group of assailants attacked Salama and Juhudi villages early on Sunday morning. A 60-year-old man was bound with a rope. Three others were killed in a similar manner while a fifth victim was shot.

Houses belonging to those killed and other residents were torched in the attack and the assailants then disappeared into a nearby forest, police said. — Reuters



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | JUNE 26 | 2023

7

In brief

■ BERLIN



PROSECUTOR CONFIRMS WIRETAP OF LAST GENERATION

The Munich Public Prosecutor's Office on Sunday confirmed that investigators intercepted telephone calls of members of Germany's Last Generation climate group on its behalf. The Munich District Court had issued orders against group members on suspicion of forming or supporting a criminal organisation, including for the interception of telecommunications. The move reflects growing concern about the group's radical tactics to draw attention to the climate crisis, with some of their protests causing damage to private property. The activists say they will target the wealthy to highlight that the climate catastrophe was "primarily caused by the rich." — dpa

■ DECAN



PEACEKEEPERS GUARD MEDIEVAL MONASTERY

Located at the foot of the Balkans' Accursed Mountains, the Decani Monastery is seen as a symbol of Serbia's religious heritage in Kosovo — and a "miracle" of survival through many conflicts. The 14th century domed building is under 24-hour guard by Nato-led peacekeepers. They are stationed at the approach to the monastery, their armoured vehicle topped with a big gun and sandbagged sentry post anomalous in the bucolic valley. Inside the monastery compound, the soldiers' camouflage uniforms mingle with the black robes of the 20 Eastern Orthodox monks who live there. — AFP

■ PARIS



NEWSPAPER ON STRIKE OVER FAR-RIGHT TURN

France's flagship on Sunday newspaper, Le Journal du Dimanche (JDD), was not published this Sunday after its staff went on strike to protest against the nomination of a new editor-in-chief who worked for a far-right magazine. The newspaper's owner, French media group Lagardere, named Geoffroy Lejeune as JDD's new editor-in-chief, succeeding Jerome Begle who left for Paris Match. Lejeune is the former head of magazine Valeurs Actuelles, which has courted controversy with anti-immigrant covers and was fined for racist insult in 2022. — Reuters

Russian mercenaries return to base after deal ends mutiny

ROSTOV-ON-DON/VORONEZH:

Heavily armed Russian mercenaries withdrew from the southern Russian city of Rostov overnight under a deal that defused an unprecedented challenge to the authority of President Vladimir Putin and halted their rapid advance on Moscow. Fighters of the Wagner group returned to their bases in return for guarantees for their safety and the leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, will move to Belarus, according to the agreement mediated by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Putin has not made public comments since the deal was struck to de-escalate the crisis. State television released excerpts on Sunday of an interview in which Putin said he was giving top priority to the conflict in Ukraine and was in constant contact with the defence ministry. State television also said Putin would attend a meeting of Russia's Security Council this coming week, without elaborating. Prigozhin, 62, was seen leaving the district military headquarters in Rostov - hundreds of miles south of Moscow -

Fighters of the Wagner group returned to their bases in return for guarantees for their safety and the leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, will move to Belarus, according to the agreement mediated by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko

late on Saturday in a sport utility vehicle. His whereabouts on Sunday were not immediately clear. Western leaders had expressed concern over the turmoil in Russia, which has the world's largest nuclear arsenal. On Sunday, the foreign ministry in Moscow said China - a key Putin ally - had expressed support for the Russian leadership. China has not publicly commented on the mutiny. A senior Russian diplomat was in Beijing on Sunday for high level talks. Under the deal, brokered late on

Saturday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a criminal case opened against Prigozhin for armed mutiny would be dropped, Prigozhin would move to Belarus, and Wagner fighters who rallied to his cause would face no action, in recognition of their previous service to Russia. Peskov said Lukashenko had offered to mediate, with Putin's approval, because he had known Prigozhin personally for around 20 years. Putin said the rebellion put Russia's very existence under threat, vowing to punish those behind the revolt. Prigozhin has for months accused Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and the chief of the general staff, Valery Gerasimov, of incompetence and of withholding ammunition from his fighters as they battled to take Bakhmut in Ukraine. This month, Prigozhin defied orders to sign a contract placing his troops under Defence Ministry command. He launched the rebellion on Friday after alleging that the military had killed some of his men in an air strike. The Defence Ministry denied this. — Reuters



Members of Wagner group prepare to pull out from the headquarters of the Southern Military District, in Rostov-on-Don. — AFP



Pope Francis speaks to the crowd during his Angelus prayer from the window of the apostolic palace overlooking St. Peter's Square. — AFP

Pope 'breaks taboo' with prayer for missing Vatican teen

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis offered prayers on Sunday for the family of a teenager who went missing 40 years ago this week, an intervention her brother hailed as a sign the Vatican was finally engaging seriously with its most famous cold case. Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year-old daughter of a Vatican employee, was last seen leaving a music class in Rome on June 22, 1983. Decades of speculation followed over what happened to her, with suggestions that mobsters, the secret services or a Vatican conspiracy were to blame. After his weekly Angelus prayer at the Vatican, Pope Francis said he wanted to use the anniversary "to once again express my closeness to the family, above all her mother, and assure them of my prayers." "I extend my remembrance to all the families who bear the pain of a loved one who has disappeared," he added. Orlandi's family have for years campaigned for the truth and in January the Vatican's chief prosecutor opened a file into the case. The Vatican revealed he had forwarded his findings to the Rome prosecutor's office, which is conducting its own probe. There had been "some lines of inquiry worthy of further investigation", the Vatican said in a statement, without giving further details. But it said it had collected evidence from Vatican institutions and accounts from senior officials at the time. The Vatican has been accused of obstructing investigation efforts over the decades, but Orlandi's brother Pietro expressed hope on Sunday that some progress might finally be made. — AFP

Greeks vote again with conservatives likely winners

ATHENS: Greeks went to the polls on Sunday for the second time in little over a month to elect a new parliament, with voters expected to give former Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' conservatives a second term in office. Mitsotakis' New Democracy party won an election on May 21, 20 points clear of the leftist Syriza party that ruled Greece from 2015 to 2019. But it fell short of the outright majority needed to rule without forming a coalition, prompting the second vote under different rules that make it easier for the winning party to secure a majority in the 300-seat parliament. Opinion polls in recent days have shown New Democracy winning with around 40 per cent



Leftist Syriza party leader Alexis Tsipras walks as he leaves after casting his ballot at a polling station, during the general election in Athens. — Reuters

of the vote, with Syriza headed by Alexis Tsipras on about 20 per cent. "I would like them to make an effort for a better Greece in all the sectors, in education, in wages, in jobs, for everything to be fair and right. A better Greece

for all of us," said pensioner Sofia Economopoulou, after voting. The shipwreck disaster dominated campaigning in the run-up to the election. Rescuers found 104 survivors and recovered 82 bodies but up to 750 people are thought to have been packed on the ramshackle vessel heading from Libya to Italy. The boat had been shadowed by the Greek coast guard, which said occupants refused all offers of help. Mitsotakis, whose administration has taken a tough line on migration, has blamed "wretched traffickers" for the disaster and praised the coast guard for rescuing people. Tsipras, who governed Greece during Europe's 2015-2016 migrant crisis, has questioned why the coast

guard did not intervene earlier. The Covid-19 pandemic and a deadly rail crash in February also exposed the shortcomings of the health and public transport systems. But a cost of living crisis and economic hardship have more recently topped voters' concerns. Mitsotakis urged Greeks to elect a government with a clear majority. Tsipras said the vote was a "final and crucial" battle, which would determine Greeks' future over the next four years. "What is being determined is whether we will have an uncontrollable government or balance in democracy ... whether we will have a strong opposition that can control the government," he said after voting. — Reuters

Reading the magic of the monsoons



SANDHYA RAO MEHTA

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

It may sound strange sitting in the sultry heat of Muscat, but the southern tip of Oman is presently experiencing the mystic, magical weather otherwise known as the monsoons. Derived from the Arabic ‘mausim’, monsoon in fact refers to the seasonal winds that sweep South Asia, especially the Arabian Sea, after a hot summer. The monsoon brings with it much needed rain for the crops which are waiting to be harvested, fills up the rivers, canals and wells and gives succour to animals and plants. Humans are no less enthralled by the magic of the monsoons which is typically imagined as consisting of overcast skies, tipping rain drops and endless cups of steaming tea and snacks. It is not a surprise that literature has covered this magical time in a variety of ways, through colourful children’s books full of the wonder and magic of rain, to adults admiring the cultural and anthropological life and rituals that the monsoons have made possible. Alexander Frater’s ‘Chasing the Monsoon’ is a non-fiction account of the author’s journey through India and South East Asia during the period of

the monsoons, reflecting on how each region prepares, experiences and celebrates this annual event in ways that showcases a region’s history and geography. The book voices a range of emotions over the monsoons, with the promise of a good harvest, the children’s joy of a good splash, and the pain of excess rain in the form of flooding and relocation.

THE BLUE UMBRELLA
For those familiar with Indian-English writers, Ruskin Bond’s ‘The Blue Umbrella’ uses the umbrella as a symbol to reveal a morality story of desire, greed and generosity. A film subsequently made by director Vishal Bharadwaj won the Indian National Film Award for best Children’s film. Uma Krishnaswami, in her illustrated children’s book ‘Monsoon’, lovingly details the varied changes in Indian weather, focusing on the anticipation of the monsoon rains after a parched, dry summer, with the eagerness of a young child looking to prance in the soft puddles outside her house. The monsoons have been known to Arab sailors

LITERATURE HAS COVERED THIS MAGICAL TIME IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, THROUGH COLOURFUL CHILDREN’S BOOKS FULL OF THE WONDER AND MAGIC OF RAIN, TO ADULTS ADMIRING THE CULTURAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL LIFE AND RITUALS THAT THE MONSOONS HAVE MADE POSSIBLE

and traders for millennia as they have made use of these winds to travel to places as far as China under favourable winds, settling down in adjoining port towns, only to return with the reverse monsoons later on in the year. According to the Smithsonian Institution, much of this trade was conducted using dhows which formed an intricate part of coastal lives: “Dhow routes created intricate loops of cultural exchange – gold and cotton, migrants and merchants, and marriages that tied together people from distant lands”. Other non-fiction books which centre the monsoon’s role in trade and culture include Blanche D’Souza’s ‘Harnessing the Trade Winds’ and William Holden’s ‘Dhow of the Monsoon: From Zanzibar to Oman in the Wake of Sindbad’. Closer to home and in a contemporary reading, there is Hadi al Hikmani and Andrew Spalton’s homage to Salalah in their book “Dhofar: Monsoon Mountains to Sand Seas”. If the mist laden mountains are not enough in the monsoons, there is a lot of choice of reading which evokes the magic of this season.

Two to watch in Greece’s election

ATHENS: Two former prime ministers from opposing ends of Greece’s political spectrum are vying for a new term in Sunday’s national elections. Conservative front-runner Kyriakos Mitsotakis is projected to win comfortably, but his left-wing rival Alexis Tsipras is hoping to deprive him of an absolute majority.

Here is a look at the two main players in the vote:
THE SCION
Mitsotakis, 55, is seeking a second four-year term as prime minister on the strength of his record of economic growth, budget management and a robust foreign policy that includes a pair of key alliance deals with the United States and France. “All the gains we have made must be consolidated and continued,” he said at his final rally before a ban on campaigning imposed from Saturday. A Harvard graduate and former McKinsey consultant, Mitsotakis has warned that the country needs a “stable government” amid the war in Ukraine and other challenges. A scion of a Greek political dynasty dating to the late 19th century, Mitsotakis has long struggled to shake off his elitist image. His father, Konstantine Mitsotakis, was also prime minister three decades ago. His sister is Dora Bakoyannis, a former foreign minister and the first woman elected mayor of Athens. The current Athens mayor, Kostas Bakoyannis, is her son and Mitsotakis’s nephew. Leader of the conservative New Democracy party since 2016, Mitsotakis is married to Mareva Grabowski, an entrepreneur who co-founded the Zeus+Dione luxury clothing brand. They have three children.

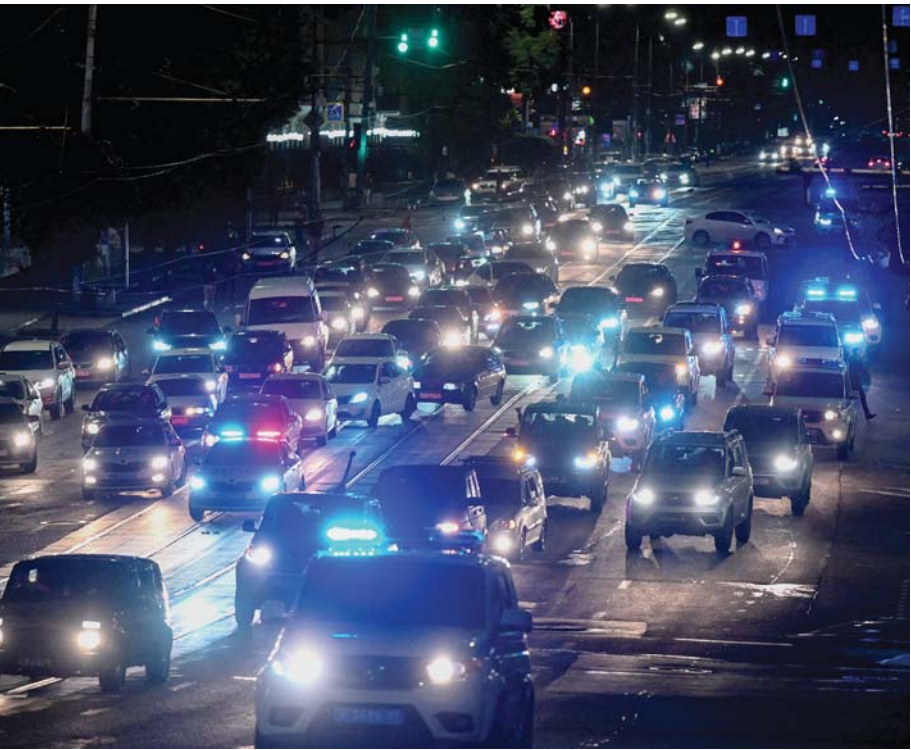
THE EX-RADICAL
Tsipras, who was prime minister from 2015 to 2019, some of the rockiest years of Greece’s financial crisis, is asking voters for a second chance to show what his labour-friendly Syriza party can truly do without the austerity shackles of EU-IMF supervision. With high inflation a key issue weighing on voters’ minds, Tsipras has campaigned for wage hikes. He has also warned against giving Mitsotakis a “blank cheque” to carry out a “hidden agenda” of policies that would unwind social welfare gains. But his bid has so far failed to gain momentum, and he remains for many Greeks the anti-austerity radical who as prime minister took on the country’s creditors and nearly crashed Greece out of the euro, before reversing course and accepting a third bailout by international creditors. Greece ultimately exited its austerity constraints on Tsipras’s watch in 2018, and he has since pulled his party towards the centre to broaden its appeal. — AFP

Has Putin lost Russia?



WACŁAW RADZIWINOWICZ

In his address to the Russian people in the wake of Yevgeny Prigozhin’s mutiny, Russian President Vladimir Putin alluded to the events of 1917, when General Lavr Kornilov’s infantry rebellion opened the way for the Bolsheviks to seize power and unleash a five-year civil war. From the Kremlin’s perspective, that smuta (dark age), is the most dangerous threat to Russia, though not merely for the military calamity that it portends. The men in Putin’s Kremlin do not care what happens to the Russian people, their homes, and their cities. For them, the most frightening prospect is that the state apparatus will take a neutral position at this moment of crisis, waiting to see who will win – and before whom it will be necessary to bow down. As of this writing, Prigozhin’s Wagner mercenaries have called off their “march of justice” to Moscow, where Prigozhin vowed to hang regime elites – including Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov, and numerous generals and oligarchs – in Red Square. Wagner’s convoy of thousands of troops and weapons along the M4 “Don” expressway, which at one point was no more than 400 kilometres (250 miles) from Moscow with the Russian army nowhere visible to stop it, has reversed course. But, before agreeing to turn back, they had taken control of Rostov-on-Don, which contains the headquarters of Russia’s southern military district, without a fight and, moving north, took over the important city of Voronezh as well. But the Wagnerites were never likely to repeat the success of the Blackshirts’ march on Rome in 1922; Benito Mussolini’s Fascists, after all, were invited to take power by Italy’s king. Had Prigozhin not agreed to accept immunity for his mercenaries and a new home in Belarus, the Wagnerites would most likely have suffered the fate of Hitler’s Sturmabteilung (SA), purged and shot by the army and police in 1934, a year and a half after the Nazis came to power. Putin’s elites, it seems, essentially went into hiding until the acute danger had passed. The fanatical avatars of Kremlin propaganda, such as Margarita Simonyan and



Wagner fighters pull out of the headquarters of the Southern Military District to return to base, in the city of Rostov-on-Don, Russia, on Saturday. — Reuters

PRIGOZHIN AND HIS MEN ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF MANY RUSSIANS. FOR THEM, PRIGOZHIN IS A HERO, NOT A TRAITOR, BECAUSE HE IS ONE OF THE ONLY PUBLIC FIGURES WHO DARES TO SPEAK THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KREMLIN’S INCOMPETENT MANAGEMENT OF THE WAR

Vladimir Solovyov, were silent or made incomprehensible, chaotic announcements. Other Russian politicians kept their lips sealed. Even former President Dmitry Medvedev, usually a big talker on the internet while Russians drink from Friday to Monday, posted very little, only calling once for the country to rally around Putin. Putin himself is clearly not up to the hellishly difficult task he now faces: re-asserting control over the country’s demoralised and divided military forces. Until now, his apologists, who have long seemed to believe that he is a political magician who can always pull a rabbit out of his hat, praised him for responding with boasts to the crises

his war against Ukraine has unleashed. Today, his boasts are an insecure bully’s threats. If he tries issuing them again, and Prigozhin (or some other rebel) does not fold, Russia will face the prospect of civil war – perhaps short-lived, but bloody. In that case, the biggest problem for Putin would be finding anyone willing to carry out the fratricidal orders to take on the Wagner fighters, who fought so savagely at Bakhmut and were, until recently, deemed heroes and “Russia’s best soldiers.” Putin, to be sure, is a far cry from Leon Trotsky, who sent the brilliant Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky to take on and defeat the rebellious Kronstadt sailors, recently heroes of the Bolshevik coup. After taking the fortress, Tukhachevsky executed every tenth Kronstadt rebel without batting an eye. There is also no Latvian rifle brigade, which saved Lenin from the revolt of the leftist Essenes. Today, there are perhaps 6,000 Wagnerites (though Prigozhin claims the number is 25,000). They are battle-hardened with combat experience in Ukraine, Africa, and Syria, and are well- armed (including with fighter aircraft). They appear to be superbly organised. To pacify them would require at least four full, well-motivated, and trained army divisions. — © Project Syndicate, 2023

Mirroring spiritual rituals

Annual Eid festivities are a different way of enjoying life and its blessings with loved ones. On such happy occasions, people share great unforgettable moments with their family, relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbours too. Being in this kind of celebration mood is very inspiring and encouraging to refresh minds and spirits alike. As well, it helps strengthen relations with others and break the daily routine of one's life. Observing Eid marks one of those much-awaited occasions.

That is why everyone needs to get into such a mood every now and then even if there is no occasion to celebrate or commemorate. Reviving the spirit of joy could be for the sake of refreshing ourselves, minds and spirits. Definitely, getting together with your loved ones in Eid's joyous gatherings will help people be more socialised, relaxed, satisfied and stimulated to do more especially at work. People have experienced this kind of festivity almost two months back when they observed Eid Al Fitr.

Again, the delight of celebration is coming back to commemorate Eid Al Adha, which is just 2 days away. Eid Al Adha is one of the annually-booked celebrations in our calendar. On such occasions, the great moments of enjoyment and happiness are always well-received by people of all ages. People will strive not to miss it in order to share the good times of fun and entertainment.

Eid Al Adha is a key yearly celebration falling on in the twelfth month, Dhul Hijjah, of the Islamic calendar. It is the second of two Islamic religious occasions commemorated worldwide each year and considered the holier of the two.



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

TO EXPERIENCE THE REAL FEELING AND MEANING OF GRATITUDE, YOU NEED TO REALISE THE IMPACT THAT “THANK YOU” MAKES WHEN ADDRESSED TO YOU?

This Eid is being celebrated on the 10th day of Dhul Hijjah every year and called Festival of Sacrifice or Feast of Sacrifice. It is basically linked with performing Haj, the 5th pillar of Islam.

The story behind it being called the Festival of Sacrifice is because it honours the willingness of the Prophet Ibrahim (Peace Be Upon Him) to sacrifice his son as an act of obedience to the command of the Almighty Allah. Before the Prophet sacrificed his son, Allah provided a male goat to sacrifice instead.

In commemoration of this, an animal is sacrificed during Eid Al Adha celebration and divided into three parts; one third is given to the poor, another third is given to relatives, friends and neighbours and the rest is retained by the family. This represents the animal that the Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) sacrificed in the place of his son.

During Eid Al Adha, men, women, and children get dressed in their finest costumes to perform Eid prayers, usually in an open area or Masjid. Then, muslims who can afford it sacrifice best animals.

The sacrificed animals, called Aiya (sacrifice), have to meet certain age and quality standards or else the animal is considered an unacceptable sacrifice.

On this day, people become more united, welcoming as well as forgiving. To tell the truth, celebrating Eid Al Adha brings people together regardless of social and personal differences. It is an opportunity to open new chapter of life and welcome new Hijri year. Actually, the day is regarded as a sacred gift from Allah to reunite people and allow them to recall the sacrifice behind their celebration. Wish you all a happy and prosperous Eid with family and loved ones.

WIN ME THE SEAT



Presidential candidate of the VALOR-Unionista Zury Rios casts her vote at a polling station during the first round of Guatemala's presidential election in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on Sunday. – Reuters

Water crises might be coming to you soon

Bangladesh is a land of water. Now, its most profound threat is water, in its many terrible incarnations: drought, deluge, cyclones, saltwater. All are aggravated to varying degrees by climate change, and all are forcing millions of people to do whatever they can to keep their heads above it.

This matters to the rest of the world, because what the 170 million people of this crowded, low-lying delta nation face today is what many of us will face tomorrow.

The people of Bangladesh are rushing to harvest rice as soon as they get word of heavy rains upstream. They're building floating beds of water hyacinths to grow vegetables beyond the reach of floodwaters. Where shrimp farms have turned the soil too salty to cultivate crops, they're growing okra and tomatoes not in soil, but in compost, stuffed into plastic boxes that had once carried shrimp. Where the land itself is washing away, people have to move to other villages and towns. And where they're running out of even drinking water, they're learning to drink every drop of rain.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, a governing party lawmaker and the prime minister's climate envoy, compared his country's efforts to plugging a leaky barrel. "It's like when you have a drum that's got seven leaks, and you've got two hands," he said. "What do you do? It's not an easy thing." Bangladesh has succeeded in saving lives during cyclones and floods. But there's a host of other challenges to address, all at once: finding new sources of drinking water for millions along the coast, extending crop insurance, preparing cities for the



SOMINI SENGUPTA

BANGLADESH, A RIVER DELTA NATION, IS ON THE FRONT LINE OF CLIMATE CHANGE. ITS COPING STRATEGIES COULD OFFER LESSONS FOR THE WIDER WORLD

inevitable influx of migrants from the countryside, even cultivating good relations with neighbouring countries to share weather data.

All this, with little help from the rich countries of the world. There's mounting frustration in places like Bangladesh that wealthy nations have not shored up the funds that developing countries need to adapt to the hazards they already face. It's a theme of the Paris climate finance summit this week.

Among the 64 districts of Bangladesh, half are considered to be vulnerable to climate change.

New research from scientists in Nepal confirms that ice and snow in the world's highest mountains are disappearing due to rising temperatures and at a faster pace than previously thought. The report found that glaciers in the Hindu Kush and Himalaya mountain range region melted 65 per cent faster from 2010 through 2019 than in the previous decade.

The government, for its part, has an ambitious national adaptation plan with expensive projects, like dredging rivers of silt and building embankments to hold back the sea.

But much of that is yet to be realised, and critics say big infrastructure jobs are rife with potential for mismanagement and graft. "Climate vulnerability is there," said Zakir Hossain Khan, who analyses climate finance for a local nonprofit group called Change Initiative. "Also, corruption vulnerability."

What do you do when the rivers swell and drown your

crops?

If you're Shakti Kirtanya, you grow your crops on top of the water. If the water rises, they rise, too. They float and bob. "If you see the harvest, it will fill your heart with joy," he said.

Kirtanya learned this farming technique from his father, who learned it from his. It's been practiced for 200 years in his low-lying district, Gopalganj, where land is usually inundated for half the year.

Now, because climate change is spreading the risk of flooding to many other areas, the floating gardens of Gopalganj are spreading. Over the past five years, the government has supported floating gardens in 24 of the country's 64 districts.

Seawater is coming farther inland. Partly it's because of sea level rise, elevating the tides. Partly it's because rivers have been dammed upstream, and not enough freshwater is flowing down. Partly it's because too much groundwater is pulled up.

That salty future is already present in the 3,860-square-mile mangrove forest, the Sundarbans, on the edge of the Bay of Bengal.

The forest is the country's main defence against storm surges. The roots of the sundari, the mangrove species for which the forest is named, stick out of the mud like fingers of the dead. Tigers leave their prints in the ground.

Today, the almost unthinkable is happening. The water is becoming too salty for the sundari. They are dying. Other

mangrove species are taking over. The landscape is changing. Likely forever.

Sheela Biswas faces the crisis of salinity every single day. Salt has intruded into canals and ponds that her village relies on for drinking and washing. An estimated 30 million people who live along the coast face the problem of saltwater intrusion to varying degrees. The area where Biswas lives is among the worst hit. The latest solution to Biswas's problem came in the form of a hot pink 2,000-litre plastic water tank, the equivalent of about 530 gallons, with a filter on top. It sits in her courtyard collecting the monsoon rains, one of nearly 4,000 such tanks distributed over the past three years by a development organisation, BRAC, that assists the poor.

Three large pink tanks stand beside a two-storey brick building. A small cluster of children in blue-and-white school uniforms appears to be heading in through a gate. The sky is clear and sunny.

Shrimp is no longer white gold. Intensive shrimp production has brought new risks, including diseases that cut into profits. A few of her neighbours have begun closing their shrimp ponds, filling them with sand and waiting for the rains to flush out the salt below. That's rare. Most people here have very little land, and they can't afford to leave it idle so it can recover. They are stuck. "They can't rely on shrimp, and they can't change," Ms. Biswas said.

Even if they could, sea level rise, combined with the subsidence of the land for other reasons, now threatens to aggravate the menace of salt in the water. If the land is sinking, even a little bit of sea level rise is very dangerous. Embankments sometimes collapse in tidal surges, which are growing stronger.

Like Biswas, the people of the southwestern coast have tried all kinds of things to hustle for drinking water.

A few entrepreneurs are selling water that they desalinate using small reverse osmosis systems in their homes, but that ends up dumping salty slime into nearby ponds. Some people are moving to the busy port town of Mongla, but there, too, freshwater is scarce. Farther south, where the soil is too salty to plant crops, women have started growing vegetables in pots filled with compost and manure. Or they've turned empty rice sacks into planters, even plastic boxes that once took shrimp to market.

Their slapdash efforts to secure the most basic human needs, food and water, are a glimpse into the epic struggle of hundreds of millions of people who are trying to cope with climate risks every day.

Unless global emissions are reduced quickly and dramatically, Bangladesh can do little to stay above the surface, said Chowdhury, the lawmaker. "Whatever we do is not going to be enough," he said.

— The New York Times

sport

Follow us on
omanobserver.om/sports



Suwaiq pulls out of OFA championships to focus on rejig

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Al Suwaiq will withdraw from Oman Football Association (OFA) championships of 2023-2024. “After a thorough consultation with relevant stakeholders and considering the majority opinion expressed during these meetings, the Board of Directors of Al Suwaiq Club, under the leadership of His Highness Sayyid Firas bin Fatik al Said, has resolved to withdraw,” said the club statement on Sunday. The decision to withdraw the senior team of the club was not unanimously taken by the general assembly after a series of board meetings on June 16. Al Suwaiq said this tough choice was made to restructure the club keeping in mind its devoted fans and supporters. The club is still dedicated to carrying on its wide variety of social, cultural, and sporting activities.

Furthermore, Al Suwaiq confirmed its dedication to the investment prospects and redevelopment of sporting facilities as top priorities in the upcoming period. Al Suwaiq’s Board of Directors had proposed freezing the senior team’s activities in a statement issued at the conclusion of the league, expressing concern over the declining technical standards in the Omani Football Association championships, particularly during the 2022-2023 season. It cited a lack of progress in the development of football competitions and a clear decline in the public interest. The statement said it was challenging to run the club due to inadequate revenue from ads and marketing, insufficient incentives, absence of a comprehensive vision for development, stagnant level of quality of officials, recurring errors, and delays in the implementation of video assisted referee (VAR) technology.



Oman athletes all set for Arabian Sports Games in Algeria



SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The national sporting teams are all set to take part in the Arabian Sports Games which will be held in Algeria during July 5 to 15. Five sporting teams will represent Oman delegation in this Arabian meet including: Football. Athletics, Weightlifting, Sailing and Para-Athletics. Oman athletes are underway in their domestic and abroad gearing up plans and programmes ahead of the Arabian Sports Games start. Oman Olympic Committee (OOC)

Secretary-General, Taha al Kishry, met the representatives of the participating national teams on Sunday at the headquarter of OOC. “ We are looking forward for a successful participation of our national sporting teams in this event through registering the top results and clinching the medals,” Taha said “ The five participated teams from Oman are promising to achieve top performance in this top class event specially athletics and sailing. Oman Olympic football team will take part in this Arabian Sports Games to gear up for 2024 Paris Olympic Games. Oman weightlifting team comprised from

top weightlifters including Amer al Khanjari and Ilyas al Busaidy. Oman’s Para-Athletics star Taha al Harrasi selected as one of the athlete’s and I am confident he can impress in this meet as well,” he added Eng. Ibrahim al Mahdawi, will preside over Oman’s delegation in this meet while Ahmed al Jahdhami will be the chief de mission. Badar Awlad Thani will be the assistant chief de mission while Moosa al Hinai as administrative members. Fahad al Zuhaimi will the media in charge and Ahmed al Farsi as the delegation photographer.



Oman return from Arabian Athletics with 5 medals including 2 gold

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Oman’s athletes returned home from the Arabian Athletics Championship in Marrakesh, Morocco, with five medals including three gold, one silver and one bronze. Oman finished fifth place in the overall medal tally. The national athletes delivered an impressive show in the concluding day of the Arabian meet on Saturday as they raised the tally of the medals from two to five. Oman sprinter Mohammed al Saadi managed to clinch the silver medal in the men’s 200 meter race as he clocked 20.62 seconds. Gold medal went to Qatar’s Femi Ogunode after he clocked the race in 20.52 seconds while the bronze went to Saudi’s

sprinter Fahad al Subai with 20.71 seconds. Oman’s top long jumper Salim bin Saleh al Yarubi brought home another gold medal after he bagged gold with a distance of 7.75 metre. Silver went to Morocco’s Latif Zayid with a jump of 7.69 meter while his teammate Bu haila AbdulWahed got bronze as he registered 7.47 metre. Oman’s 4X400 meter relay team comprising Mohammed al Mabsali, Othman al Busaidi, Hamza al Jabi and Ahmed al Saadi emerged with the bronze medal after finishing the race within a timing of 3.14.25 minutes while the hosts Morocco clinched the gold medal as they ended the race within a 3.06.56 minutes. Iraq ended the race within a timing of 3.07.42 minutes.



Messi recalls ‘massive disappointment’ of PSG Champions League woes

PARIS: Lionel Messi has called his start at former club Paris Saint-Germain “very tough”, dubbing two successive failed Champions League bids a “massive disappointment”.

“I came to Paris because I liked the club, because I had friends in the dressing room... it seemed easier for me to adapt rather than another destination I could have gone to,” Messi told beIN Sports in an interview broadcast on Sunday.

“In reality, it was a very tough adaptation, much harder than I expected... with a new gameplan, new teammates, a new city.

“I arrived late, I didn’t have a pre-season. The start was difficult for me, my family.”

Messi, 36, signed for PSG in the summer of 2021 after 17 seasons at Barcelona, but will now head Stateside to Inter Miami in the MLS after quitting the French capital.

Messi’s first season, during which he scored 11 goals in 34 games for PSG, was made harder after he contracted Covid during the winter break back in Argentina, meaning he was sidelined for a month.

“It took me time to refine my physical form,” he admitted, adding that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar — which Messi won with Argentina — also took its toll.

“It’s not an excuse but the World Cup played a big role. Some came back later than others, some were

injured, like Neymar.

“I think, generally, the level of Ligue 1 and the Champions League was affected by the World Cup.”

Messi admitted that Champions League losses to Real Madrid in 2022 and Bayern Munich this season were a “massive disappointment”.

There were even sections of PSG fans who turned on Messi, whistling at him from the stands.

“In the beginning, it was great, I received a lot of encouragement... but later on a part of the Parisian fanbase treated me differently. The majority treated me well, but there was a rupture with a part of the public,” he acknowledged. — AFP

Football unites world on the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge



SYDNEY: The iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge on Gadigal land was transformed into a festival of football earlier on Sunday in a celebration of culture, bringing together diverse people and communities to mark the 25-day countdown until the Fifa Women’s World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023.

Amidst the sparkling backdrop of the Sydney Harbour, 4,000 fans kicked-off festivities on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and took part in this once in a lifetime opportunity for the Fifa Women’s World Cup ‘Unity Celebration’.

Hosted by former Australia international and Fifa Women in Football Leadership participant, Amy Duggan, soaking up the buzzing festival atmosphere were grassroots football and multicultural communities, local and international football greats including Fifa Legend Joy Fawcett, NSW Minister for Jobs and Tourism, John Graham, representatives from co-host Member Associations Football Australia and New Zealand Football, as well as Fifa officials.

Several of the tournament’s Beyond Greatness Champions were also in attendance, and they helped to carry the flags of the 32 nations preparing to compete on the international stage.

Eager to celebrate the tournament and the talented players who will represent the



very best of women’s football, fans gathered on the world-renowned landmark to hear a preview of the tournament’s official song, dance to the tournament’s ‘Unity Beat’, and view live cultural performances and presentations.

Representing the tournaments’ Beyond Greatness slogan and distinctive cultural elements, the 17-metre-tall Unity Jersey was unveiled in spectacular fashion on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Unity Jersey design reflects the vibrant local landscapes and rich colours of the two host countries, building a palette based on the rainforests, earth, mountains, cities, and water. A radial motif featuring 32 colourful squares celebrates the 32 participating nations coming together, serving as a visual testament to the spirit, values

and diversity that defines the sport and tournament.

Speaking at the event, Fifa Council Member, Johanna Wood, said: “What a fabulous morning of football, culture and community coming together – a fitting stage to set the scene for what is to come in 25 days. We are committed to delivering an exceptional tournament and experience that will not only captivate the hearts and minds of football fans but also empower women in sport across the globe. We are ready to go Beyond Greatness and football, once again, has demonstrated how it unites the world.”

NSW Minister for Jobs and Tourism, John Graham, said: “Today we stand on one of Australia’s iconic structures, excited to host the world’s best players and their passionate football fans in NSW. I am

excited to have 11 matches scheduled here in NSW and welcoming all the world class football teams and their fans at what is set to be the biggest Fifa Women’s World Cup ever.

“This tournament has the potential to be one of the biggest sporting events in Sydney since the 2000 Olympics and the NSW Government is happy to support the Fifa Women’s World Cup 2023,” he concluded.

While Football Australia CEO, James Johnson, remarked: “Today marks three years to the day since we won the right to co-host the 2023 edition of the Fifa Women’s World Cup and what a fitting way to celebrate atop one of the most iconic and recognisable structures in the world. Today, the Sydney Harbour bridge was closed to celebrate football. This is a significant moment for our game and is something which the Australian football community should take pride in and savour — this is our time.”

The Fifa Women’s World Cup 2023 will run from 20 July - 20 August 2023 across five Australian host cities: Sydney/ Gadigal, Melbourne/Naarm, Brisbane/Meenjin, Adelaide/ Tarntanya and Perth/Boorloo and four New Zealand host cities, Auckland/Tāmaki Makaurau, Hamilton/Kirikiri, Dunedin/ Ōtepoti and Wellington/Te Whanganui-a-Tara. — Fifa

Australia on top despite record-breaking Beaumont innings

NOTTINGHAM, United Kingdom: Tammy Beaumont’s 208 set the highest ever Test score for England women but Australia ended on Saturday on top of the one-off Ashes Test with a 92-run lead and all 10 second innings wickets in hand.

Resuming on 100 not out, Beaumont carved her name into the record books by surpassing Betty Snowball’s 189 against New Zealand in February 1935 as the previous best by an England player.

The 32-year-old successfully overturned an lbw decision given against her on 152 and also had a reprieve on Friday when Australia failed to review a catch that would have been out on 61.

“What a day!” Beaumont told the BBC. I wasn’t aware of that milestone, that’s why I didn’t want to celebrate it and we still needed runs.

“It’s a great accolade to have but for me it was about getting as close to the Aussies score as possible.”

At one stage Beaumont’s

brilliance looked set to give the hosts a first innings lead at Trent Bridge.

Natalie Sciver-Brunt made 78 and Danni Wyatt 44 as England reached 411-5.

But the second half of the day belonged to the visitors as the final five wickets fell for 52 runs with Beaumont the last woman out. Australia then pressed home their slender advantage as Beth Mooney and Phoebe Litchfield reached 82-0 in the final 19 overs of the day.

“I’d say we have the upper hand just a little bit,” said Australia’s Ash Gardner.

“I think in the second innings for the English girls it’s going to be pretty hard to bat on.

“We’ve seen the odd ball stay pretty low which is kind of what we expect in a Test match wicket. I think for us the key is to play nice and straight and look to get on the front foot.”

The five-day match is part of a multi-format Ashes series including three Twenty20 matches and three one-day internationals. — AFP



England's Tammy Beaumont celebrates after reaching her double century. — Reuters

I BELONG HERE: SPURS INTRODUCE WEMBANYAMA



San Antonio Spurs draft pick Victor Wembanyama (left) speaks with general manager Brian Wright at a press conference at AT&T Center. – USA TODAY Sports

SAN ANTONIO: Victor Wembanyama’s whirlwind ride as the NBA’s most anticipated No. 1 draft pick since LeBron James has landed him right where he needs to be, the French phenomenon said on Saturday in San Antonio.

The towering 19-year-old, hailed as a transformative talent thanks to the skills he packs in his 7ft 4in (2.24m) frame, was eagerly looking ahead to developing his game under the guidance of coaching great Gregg Popovich, with Spurs greats including Tim Duncan, David Robinson and Manu Ginobili to call on for advice.

His rock-star style welcome from fans at San Antonio’s airport on Friday was followed by an eye-opening dinner with Duncan, Robinson and Ginobili.

“In probably a couple hours I learned more about the NBA than my whole life before,” he said.

“It’s super-reassuring to know that these guys still live in San Antonio, they still gravitate towards the club, they’ve kept a relationship with the franchise.

“It’s comforting to know that

there are legends, not only of the club but also of the NBA, who are there to help me and who won’t let me make the same mistakes twice.

“For a rookie, that’s a huge advantage.”

The Spurs, who won the most recent of their five NBA titles in 2014, also boast a French connection, with both Tony Parker and Boris Diaw featuring on championship San Antonio teams -- Parker on three of them.

“It’s just an asset, because I have good relations with those French people who have made history, and I can go to them if I need to,” Wembanyama said.

Fans anticipating Wembanyama’s arrival ever since the Spurs gained the top pick in the draft will be thrilled to know that he can already envision living in the Texas city “for a long time.”

“I feel I belong here,” he said. “Since I arrived, I’ve seen nothing but grateful people, so it’s easy to acclimatise when you’re already appreciated.”

Since being flown in after Thursday’s glitzy draft in Brooklyn,

Wembanyama has managed to sample San Antonio’s breakfast tacos and start house-hunting.

He’s got a trip to sponsor Nike’s Oregon headquarters on his schedule, but he admitted he was looking forward to returning the focus to basketball.

“Lately I’ve had so much stuff to do off the court, like with the media. “I’ve got to go back to being really focused on practicing, on lifting,” he said. “Because this isn’t what I’ve done most in the last couple days, and you know, it feels really weird.”

With his first taste of competition in a Spurs jersey expected to come in Summer League games next month, Wembanyama is already confident that the NBA will provide the perfect arena to develop his game.

“One very important factor for me is how seriously the players are taken here,” he said. “They’re looked after so well that everything is done to help them progress and develop.

“My game will have to adapt, but the NBA game is what suits me best.” — AFP



Iran end Yemen’s dream in AFC U17



PATHUM THANI: Islamic Republic of Iran advanced to the AFC U17 Asian Cup Thailand 2023 semi-finals with a 4-2 penalty shootout win over Yemen after the last eight tie ended in goalless draw on Sunday. Goalkeeper Arsha Shakouri was the hero, saving two of Yemen’s spot-kicks as Iran booked not

only a last four meeting with either Japan or Australia but also their ticket to the FIFA U17 World Cup Indonesia 2023. While it was a heartbreaking defeat for Yemen, Iran deserved the win based on the balance of play at the Thammasat Stadium. Iran, the 2008 AFC U-16 Championship winners, almost

carved up an opening in the first minute when Kasra Taheri sent Esmail Gholizadeh through on goal but an alert Ali al Hanbasi cleared the danger. Iran continued to pile pressure on Yemen with Hesam Nafari sending his shot from distance agonisingly wide in the seventh minute before Gholizadeh failed to find the

target in the 18th minute with a headed attempt after a set-up from Taheri just outside the box. Having found themselves under heavy pressure in the opening minutes, Yemen finally began to gain a foothold on the match and created a chance almost out of nothing in the 26th minute when Adel Qasem weaved his way into



the area before hitting it square for Abdulrahman al Khadher, who was however dispossessed by Abolfazl Zoleikhaei in the nick of time. At the other end, Yemen continued to frustrate Iran with keeper Wadhah al Radfani tipping away Nima Andarz’s dangerous ball in, before

Gholizadeh missed the target from inside the six-yard-box. The second half started on the same note with Iran pressuring and they almost found the opening goal in the 51st minute when Zoleikhaei did well to find space just above the box before sending a cross to Nima Andarz who headed the ball straight into the arms of Al Radfani. Yemen should have scored three minutes later through Ali al Hanbasi, who beat two Iranian defenders at the top of the box but sent his effort above the bar. Both teams continued to toil in front of goal with Yemen’s Qasem miscuing his effort, while Taheri wasted Iran’s best chance when he headed the ball from close range straight to a grateful Al Radfani. The 10 minutes of added on time saw Iran virtually camped in the Yemen half and Taheri thought he had won it at the very end when he slotted the ball home, only to be ruled offside as the tie went to penalties. Shakouri’s heroics, however, ensured it was Iran who celebrated at the end. — AFC



Up to 4% interest

With High-Yield Savings Account

To apply, simply visit one of our expanding network of branches, or call us on 2479 1111.

2479 1111

www.bankdhofar.com

/bankdhofar

@bankdhofar

@bankdhofar

Dualisation of 400 km of Adam – Thamrait road earmarked for Oman-Saudi JVs

KEY CARRIAGEWAY: Sections 3, 4 and 5 to be tendered out in phases

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Reflecting the strong uptrend in economic ties between the two friendly countries, the Omani government is tendering out large stretches of the Adam – Haima – Thamrait highway for dualisation to partnerships or joint ventures of Omani and Saudi construction contractors.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) announced that bids for the third, fourth and fifth sections of the key carriageway linking the north and south of the Sultanate of Oman may be submitted jointly by Omani and Saudi companies. The three sections aggregate to a total length of around 400 kilometres.

The announcement is in line with a pledge by the Ministry, made at a media briefing earlier this year, to ensure the expeditious completion of the dualisation of the Adam – Thamrait highway, presently the only lifeline for overland passenger and freight



movement between the north and south of Oman.

It is also the preferred route for GCC tourists driving from their respective countries to Salalah for a holiday during the khareef.

Tenders for the three sections will be announced in a phased manner, the Ministry said.

But to bid for the contracts, Omani and Saudi JVs must also register with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board and hold the requisite high grades.

Spanning a total distance of 717.5 kilometres, only 280 km of

the Adam – Thamrait highway have been dualised.

This dualised section covers the distance from Adam to Umm Al Zamayem.

A further 37.5 km stretch is due to be tendered out for construction soon. That leaves the lion's share of about 400 km yet to be dualised.

Divided into three roughly equal sections, the first is Section 3, which extends 132.5 kilometres from Haima to Maqshin. In addition to a dual track, the section will also feature two truck weigh

stations, five lay-bys for trucks, dedicated parking for emergency vehicles of the Royal Oman Police, and emergency exits.

Section 4, also roughly 135 kilometres long, connects Maqshin with Dawkah via Qatbit. Traversing important oilfield areas, the stretch will feature a total of 14 turning lanes, 27 parking bays, three truck lay-bys, and ROP parking.

Section 5 runs from Dawkah all to the Thamrait and covers a total distance of 132.7 kilometres. In addition to safe entry points and exits, this stretch will also include 20 turning lanes, 16 parking bays, a truck weigh station, four lay-bys and parking for the ROP.

Oman Flour Mills receives wheat subsidy

MUSCAT: Oman Flour Mills Company (SAOG) has announced that it has received a letter from the Omani government assuring it of subsidy on its wheat imports for one year. The measure, which is effective from May 1, 2023, is aimed at offset the high cost of imported wheat in global markets.

“As global wheat prices have seen a sharp increase, the government is keen to stabilise the prices of flour in the local market,” publicly-traded Oman Flour Mills said in a regulatory filing on Sunday.

Notably, the global price of wheat has witnessed a marked escalation in recent months.

Pact signed for setting up aqua feed project in Duqm SEZ



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) signed a land usufruct agreement with Blue Feeds to establish a \$20 million aqua feed manufacturing plant in the zone. The agreement was signed by the acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, Eng Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, and Executive Director of the Blue Feed Mohammed Ameen.

The 20,000 sqm project has an initial capacity of 60,000 metric tonnes of shrimp and fish feed per year.

The venture is one of the many emerging projects within the aquaculture industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), aquaculture production is expected to grow exponentially in 2023. This year alone, the Ministry announced that it has approved aquaculture projects worth over RO 160 million.

According to the Ministry, total aquaculture production is expected to reach 100 thousand metric tonnes by the end of this year, a huge difference compared last year's production of 3,469

tonnes.

Furthermore, the industry is expected to contribute by RO 300 million to the local GDP this year.

Aquaculture is one of the fastest growing food sectors globally according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

According to Vantage market research, the global aquaculture market was valued at \$289.6 billion in 2022, is expected to reach a value of \$421.2 billion by 2030. The local Omani aquaculture market according Invest Oman has an estimated market value of \$900 million by 2040.

OFFER UNDER THE TAKEOVER AND ACQUISITION REGULATION

Abra Holdings Ltd (“**Abra**”) extended an offer to acquire an additional 15.42 per cent. of the issued share capital (the “**Issued Capital**”) of Oman Cement Company SAOG (“**OCOI**”) pursuant to the takeover and acquisition regulation (CMA Decision No.2/2019)(the “**Takeover Regulation**”), to shareholders who are registered as of the Record Date set out below (the “**OCOI Shareholders**”), pursuant to the terms and subject to the conditions set out in this Acceptance Form and the Offer Document (the “**Offer**”).

Key Dates:

Record Date:

13th June 2023

Offer Opening Date:

14th June 2023

Offer Closing Date:

25th June 2023

Referring to the Offer, Ubhar Capital SAOC is pleased to announce that the offer of acquisition has been accepted by certain OCOI Shareholders, representing 5.07852% of the shares of the issued capital of OCOI.

Since the acceptance by OCOI Shareholders is below the 15.42% threshold stated in the Offer Document, Abra will be accepting 100% of shares from all participant shareholders as specified in the Offer Document published on the 5th of June 2023 at a fixed cash price of RO 0.379 per share. The transaction will be executed through Muscat Stock Exchange on the 5th of July 2023

Total voting shares held by Abra prior to Offer	197,136,637	59.58081%
No. of voting shares for which acceptance has been obtained	16,803,436	5.07852%
No. of voting shares accepted by Abra	16,803,436	5.07852%
Total voting shares owned by Abra post completion of offer	213,940,073	64.65933%

Offer Manager:

Ubhar Capital SAOC

For any queries related to the offer, kindly contact following in Ubhar Capital SAOC:

Talal Al Balushi

Vice President - Brokerage

Tel: +968 24 949 051 / 99267286

Email: talal@u-capital.net

Hunaina Banatwala

Vice President - Institutional Sales

Tel: +968 24 949 053 / 99378351

Email: hunaina@u-capital.net

Omani delegation visits Italy and Switzerland to explore and promote investment opportunities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Mohsin bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, headed an official delegation to the Republic of Italy, to discuss cooperation, consolidate bilateral ties, promote investments and exchange knowledge in the sectors of renewable energy, hydrogen and energy storage systems with leading companies, institutions and institutes in Italy.

The visit included a series of meetings with a number of leading Italian companies in the field of energy, during which opportunities for cooperation and joint investment in various energy fields were reviewed.

Views and experiences were also exchanged with Italian companies, focusing on sustainable technologies and innovations in the energy sector. The importance of joint cooperation in promoting investments in the energy sector and achieving sustainable development was also emphasised.

This visit also represents an important step towards achieving cooperation in the field of sustainability to enhance bilateral cooperation in the sector, strengthen economic ties between the two countries, and develop strategic partnerships that benefit both sides and enhance their



capabilities in the field of energy. It should be noted that the Italian companies visited have extensive experience in the energy field,

and are known for their progress in sustainable technologies in the fields of renewable energy, green hydrogen and energy storage

systems, as the Sultanate of Oman seeks to promote technology and innovation in the energy sector, and achieve sustainable

THE VISIT REPRESENTS AN IMPORTANT STEP TOWARDS ACHIEVING COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABILITY TO ENHANCE BILATERAL COOPERATION IN THE SECTOR, STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC TIES BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, AND DEVELOP STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS THAT BENEFIT BOTH SIDES AND ENHANCE THEIR CAPABILITIES IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY

development goals in line with Plans and programmes of the Sultanate of Oman in this context.

The delegation continued its visit to Switzerland to participate in the Business Forum of the Omani-Swiss Friendship Association, which aims to highlight best practices and discuss future expectations in key sectors such as renewable energy, green hydrogen, storage systems and carbon neutrality.

During the meeting, Al Hadhrami highlighted the vision of the Sultanate of Oman in the field of transition to a green economy in support of an environment conducive to green investments.

Dr Firas al Abdwani, Director General of the Directorate General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, gave a

presentation on the strategy of the Sultanate of Oman in the field of green hydrogen, reviewing the efforts made by the country to promote the use of green hydrogen as a means to achieve sustainability in the energy sector, as well as reviewing investment opportunities in Renewable energy and green hydrogen in the Sultanate of Oman.

The forum also discussed the investment opportunities, expertise and capabilities that the Sultanate of Oman possesses to achieve success in the field of hydrogen and renewable energy, where a group of specialists, investors and those interested in this field participated in the discussion.

The participants presented practical examples of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and Switzerland in the field of green hydrogen and negative emission technologies, and the exchange of experiences and knowledge in these areas.

A mini-discussion session entitled “Oman and Switzerland: Best Practices of Technology Transfer, Investment and Cooperation” was held, in which a group of experts and specialists participated. Best practices in technology transfer, investment and promotion of cooperation between the two countries in these fields were reviewed.

Double draw wins for OAB credit card customers during Khareef



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank credit card holders are keeping it cool during Khareef by doubling their entries to win holidays when they spend in Salalah this season.

The draw is giving away unforgettable vacations to 10 lucky credit card customers, with monthly draws worth RO 1,200 each. Customers using their credit cards in Salalah will earn two raffle tickets per RO 5 spent including online and POS transactions.

Khalid al Amri, Head of Branch Banking at Oman Arab Bank, said: “As part of our wider commitment to supporting tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, this added dimension to our summer promotion will encourage in-country visitors to travel to the wonderful surroundings of Salalah.

We are always looking for new ways to reward our customers, and as OAB celebrates its 50th anniversary, this gives a special opportunity for them to win exciting prizes while supporting Oman’s tourism and economy.”

OAB customers already benefit from partnerships with local establishments in Salalah offering exclusive discounts and special offers to cardholders, while they can conveniently check credit card balances, settle payments and change their limits using the OAB Online app.

Handling contracts worth RO 3m signed in Sur Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Sur Industrial City, affiliated to the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), organised a handling session for various public services between the investing companies at the industrial city and local companies.

This handling session comes in line with Sur Industrial City’s



efforts to support entrepreneurs and SMEs within and beyond South Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The session witnessed the signing of handling contracts between Hay Al Sharooq International School with Shaheen Sur Company and Al Berwaz Trading to provide general services and support.

These contracts, valued at approximately RO 3 million, will run for three years and are

expected to generate 80 job opportunities for Omanis.

As part of its annual plan for 2023, Sur Industrial City remains committed to its efforts in empowering and supporting SMEs through facilitating multiple handling contracts, in addition to localising supply chains, promoting economic sustainability, creating opportunities and achieving added value in alignment with Oman Vision 2040.

Bank Muscat’s Asalah customers can now access Entertainer offers through mBanking

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to provide time-saving services and enhance banking convenience to its valued customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has updated its mBanking app to include Asalah Entertainer offers.

This means that there is no need for customers to request their Relationship Manager for the Entertainer link or download an additional app for the same. The link will instead automatically appear within mBanking.

Customers can then enjoy many offers as the access button is placed on the main page itself. The Asalah Entertainer App provides great value to Priority Banking customers with exclusive lifestyle benefits including more than 3,500 “Buy 1, Get 1 free” offers in Oman and at international destinations, as well



as rewards of indulgence and merchant discounts across fine dining, entertainment, leisure, and the beauty and wellness segments.

The app offers the option of exploring new restaurants or treating children to fun holidays 7

days a week, all year round.

Asalah Visa Signature credit cardholders can enjoy airport lounge access at more than 1,000 lounges worldwide, up to 12 times a year, and a 24/7 global concierge service. Also available are exciting airport experience and dining

offers across the world courtesy the free DragonPass.

Asalah customers also enjoy access to a team of dedicated Relationship Managers, 41 Asalah Centres across Oman and a dedicated 24/7 Asalah Call Centre (24779999).

Bank Muscat’s ongoing digitalisation drive and the continuous updating of its applications and e-platforms are aimed at offering the customers an unprecedented banking experience.

The bank’s customers are at present benefiting immensely from the latest devices, solutions and technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology. Bank Muscat has announced plans to keep introducing new digital services and features that further enhance banking convenience and security in the future.

Its efforts in customer centricity and digitalisation have been well recognised by local and international media with the bank winning multiple awards across its different lines of business regularly.



Omani gypsum exports near 10 million-tonne mark

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Exports of gypsum from the Sultanate of Oman climbed 13.27% per cent to hit a new peak of 9.90 million tonnes in 2022, further consolidating the country's global reputation as the world's biggest supplier of the industrial mineral.

This compares with exports of 8.74 million tonnes a year earlier in 2021. The 9.90 million tonnes represent nearly 50% of the total imported gypsum demand in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asian, Southeast African and GCC countries.

India retained its leading position as the top destination for Omani gypsum exports, lifting 4.84 million tonnes – representing an impressive 49% of the total Omani gypsum exports during 2022.

It also accounted for 87.35% of India total imports of 5.54 million tonnes of gypsum for the year, the remaining 0.70 million tonnes (12.65%) coming from Iran, Bhutan and Thailand. Over the last 15 years, Oman has been growing in stature as the dominant supplier of gypsum to a region encompassing the Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asian, Southeast African and GCC states.

Between 2008 and 2022, historical gypsum importers of this region imported 238.98 million tonnes, recording a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 6%. Omani exports accounted for



30.60% (73.14 million tonnes) of this total. The remaining 165.84 million tonnes were supplied by Thailand, Iran, Pakistan, Australia, Mexico and Bhutan.

Demand for gypsum — a key raw material for the cement and gypsum board manufacturing industries — projected to grow exponentially over the next 15 years, an industry expert told the *Observer*.

During the 2023 — 2037 period, demand in the region in question is expected to

reach over 445 million tonnes with a CAGR of 5%," he said. Significantly, Oman's stellar rise as a gypsum exporter came on the back of efforts by Asia's past dominant gypsum exporter Thailand to cap its exports with the goal of conserving resources for their own significant domestic industries.

Thai authorities have regulated the minimum FOB (Free on Board) export selling price, which presently averages US\$20 per tonne.

Exports from Iran, another key player, also began to sharply decline due to US sanctions. Iranian exports to India, for example, slumped to 0.48 million tonnes in 2022, down from 1.99 million tonnes in 2021.

Historically, Iranian exported around 10% of its annual production of gypsum primarily to India and other GCC countries, such as UAE and Qatar. In the face of declining exports from traditional suppliers, Oman is now the unrivalled source of

supply for a growing number of countries in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia.

The list includes Bangladesh, Vietnam, Indonesia, Japan, Philippines, and South/East Africa. Of these countries, India remains the biggest consumer, by far.

The Indian cement industry is the second largest cement producer in the world after China and accounts for more than 8% of the global installed capacity. Cement demand in India is expected to continue growing in the coming years, backed by the government's push for infrastructure development and increasing demand in the housing sectors.

Since 2009, the gypsum supply deficit in the Indian domestic market has led to increased dependence on sizable imports of natural gypsum from Oman, among other countries like Iran and Thailand. Smaller volumes have been trucked by road from neighbouring Pakistan and Bhutan to industries in the northern parts of India.

Between 2009 and 2022, India imported 57.09 million tonnes of gypsum cumulatively at a CAGR of 16.60%. These imported volumes accounted for nearly 35% of the total gypsum consumed by the cement industry.

Based on the demand growth projections of the cement and gypsum board industries in India, gypsum demand is expected to reach nearly 380 million tonnes cumulatively by 2037

with a CAGR of 5.15%. Limited availability of domestic gypsum will lead to supply constraints and increased dependence on imports, necessitating imports of over 180 million tonnes gypsum to meet the domestic demand during this period.

India's dwindling domestic gypsum resources is imperiling the growth of its cement industry. Phospho-gypsum production is limited with the bulk of existing phospho-gypsum stockpiles expected to be consumed by the road construction sector, per figures shared by the Indian Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. At the same time, production of FGD (Flue Gas Desulphurisation) gypsum continues to be stymied by shortfalls in investments of \$13 billion necessary to build FGD plants.

In the light of the scenarios outlined above, Oman has emerged as the single most important supply source for gypsum. This dominant position, experts point out, should enable Oman to use its considerable leverage to control the gypsum export market and FOB prices in the region in question.

With effect from January 2017, Oman has set an FOB floor price of \$12.50 per tonne of raw gypsum exported out of the country. This is in line with government-led efforts to support the growth of gypsum exports and boost non-oil export revenue, according to the expert.



Muscat Stock Exchange modifies tick size to 1 baisa

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) announced the modification of the tick size for all securities to one baisa with effect from July 2, 2023. This announcement comes within the framework of efforts to enhance the attractiveness of investment in the stock exchange, and thereby boost trading activities and volumes, for the benefit of investors and brokers.

This decision is expected to contribute positively to investors' investment decisions by reducing the gap between supply and demand, and enabling investors to submit orders to buy or sell in smaller units.

Tick size is the minimum difference between the highest buy price and the lowest sell price of a security that can be displayed. It differs from market to market, but in the United States, it is 1 cent for stocks with a share price greater than \$1.

This amendment comes after the stock exchange announced a set of initiatives, including the

market-making activity and the licensing of two companies to practice the activity so far.

The change applies to all securities, including debt instruments (bonds and sukuk). Meanwhile, the Muscat Stock Exchange closed yesterday at 4,747.56 points, up by 16.4 points, or 0.35 per cent, compared to the last trading session, which amounted to 4,731.12 points.

The trading value amounted to RO 2,819,961, up by 18.99 per cent compared to the last trading session, which amounted to RO 2,369,971.

The report issued by the Muscat Stock Exchange indicated that the market value increased by 0.070 per cent from the last trading day, amounting to approximately RO 23.86 billion.

The value of non-Omani purchases on the stock exchange amounted to RO 391,000, representing a rate of 13.86 per cent, while the value of non-Omani selling amounted to RO 181,000 equivalent to 6.40 per cent, while the net non-Omani investment increased by RO 210,000 or 7.45 per cent.

JOMAR MENDOZA

MUSCAT, JUNE 25

Prominent Omani oilfield services company RAY International Oil and Gas has successfully conducted the first TCP CT perforation in Yibal Khuff horizontal wells in Oman. The achievement marks a significant breakthrough in the company's efforts to enhance productivity and maximise oil recovery from the Khuff formation. The perforation resulted in a production gain of 350 metric tonnes per day.

Tubing Conveyed Perforation (TCP) is a method of deploying perforating guns on the same production string to save time.

It is then extended to cover highly deviated or horizontal wells and also wells that require long perforating intervals.

This achievement was recognised across PDO UWI (Petroleum Development Oman Upstream Well Integrity) for meticulous performance on Yibal Khuff.

RAY International Oil and Gas has been working on developing and fine-tuning the TCP CT perforation technique for several years, and the successful completion of the first operation in the Yibal Khuff horizontal wells is a testament to the company's expertise and commitment to innovation.

The Yibal Khuff reservoir



is a significant source of hydrocarbons in Oman, and the successful application of TCP CT perforation is expected to have a positive impact on the country's oil and gas industry.

The technique has the potential to unlock new reserves and boost production rates, thereby contributing to Oman's economic growth and energy security.

The Yibal Khuff, a complex undertaking project, was set up with an investment of around \$2.6 billion and was inaugurated in December 2021.

It is one of the largest of oil & gas projects in the upstream sector of the industry that joins the likes of land ventures, such as the Rabab Harweel Integrated Project of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), and the Khazzan Central Processing Project of BP Oman.

Majority government-owned PDO, the country's largest producer of oil and gas, has also billed it as the company's second project and the most technically complex as well in its history.

Located around 360km southwest of Muscat, the Yibal

Khuff Project (YKP) began production in September 2021.

The successful implementation of TCP CT perforation in the Yibal Khuff horizontal wells is a major achievement for RAY International Oil and Gas and a significant development for the oil and gas industry in Oman.

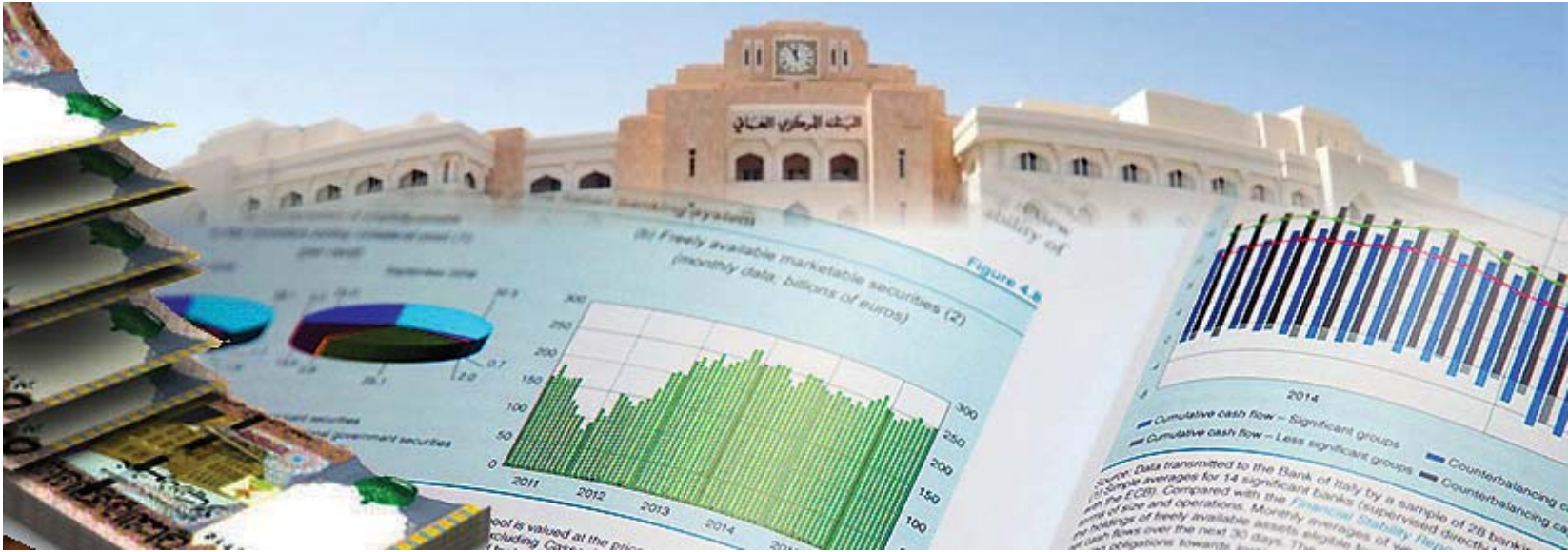
The company's continued investment in innovation and technology is expected to drive further growth and success in the years ahead, while also contributing to the sustainable development of Oman's energy resources.

Opportunity Oman: Financial industry



DR YOUSUF BIN HAMED
AL BALUSHI

The author is the founder
and CEO of Smart
Investment Gateway;
email: yousufh@
omaninvestgateway.com



The Financial sector acts as a catalyst for economic development through various key functions.

Firstly, it facilitates efficient capital allocation by connecting savers and investors. Secondly, it provides funding for investments in infrastructure, technology, research and development and other critical sectors, driving investment and innovation. Thirdly, it offers risk management tools like insurance and derivatives to mitigate risks for businesses and individuals.

Moreover, the financial sector directly creates jobs within financial institutions and indirectly stimulates economic activity in other sectors. It also promotes financial inclusion benefiting from digitalisation, ensuring access to affordable financial services.

By mobilising savings and ensuring economic and financial stability, the financial sector fosters a favourable investment climate, attracts foreign investment, and supports sustainable economic growth.

Additionally, it supports entrepreneurship and small business development by providing capital, advisory services, and financial expertise.

This is evident from the investment opportunities in the country's rapidly growing financial services sector encompassing Islamic finance and fintech.

Further, Development of microfinance, mobile banking, and fintech solutions demonstrates

Oman's mission toward financial inclusion of the underserved communities.

The banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman consist of 16 conventional banks (7 domestic banks and 9 branches of foreign banks), two government-owned specialised banks, two fully-fledged Islamic banks and five dedicated Islamic windows of domestic conventional banks.

The total number of branches spread across Oman exceeds 567 at the end of 2022. Oman's banking sector is in a healthy and a profitable position, backed by risk-based supervision from the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The decision by the CBO to support the banking sector during unfavourable economic situations, stemming from, for example, the steep fall of oil prices and Covid-19, has been fruitful.

Indeed, the capital adequacy ratio of the banking sector improved to 20.2% at end-December 2022, from 19.9% at end-2021 and 18.9% at end-2020.

Further, the ratio of non-performing loans to the total lending portfolio rose slightly to 4.4% at end-December 2022, from 4.2% in 2020-21, and despite the termination of the loan deferment scheme by the Central Bank for corporate borrowers in June 2022.

Meanwhile, the combined net profit after Provisions and Taxes of the eight listed banks at Muscat Stock Exchange (Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman, Bank Sohar, Oman Arab Bank, Ahli Bank, Bank Dhofar, HSBC Oman and Bank Nizwa) rose by 20.7%

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN OMAN ARE AMONGST THE MOST PROFITABLE INSTITUTIONS. THIS IS DUE TO A NUMBER OF REASONS INCLUDING A RELATIVELY LIMITED PLAYERS, GOVERNMENT SUPPORT, SOUND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES, PRUDENT OVERSIGHT AND LOW EXPOSURE TO RISKY ASSETS. OMAN'S MACROECONOMIC STABILITY IS CRITICAL FOR THE GROWTH OF ITS FINANCIAL SECTOR SERVICES.

y-o-y to \$1,064 million (RO 409 million) in 2022, exceeding its pre-pandemic level of \$1,052 million (RO 404 million) in 2019. Strong net interest income and "fees and commissions" income coupled with reduced net impairment charges were the main drivers of net profit growth.

Oman's financial sector has been cautiously managed and this approach was vindicated by the mild impact the global financial crisis had on the sector.

However, Oman should have taken advantage of its institutional progress in allowing the financial sector to play a larger intermediary role in the economy.

Financial institutions in Oman are amongst the most profitable institutions. This is due to a number of reasons including a relatively limited players, government support, sound management practices, prudent oversight and low exposure to risky assets. Oman's macroeconomic stability is critical for the growth of its financial sector services.

Continuous development of the existing strong and transparent institutional and legal framework and prudential regulations and supervision framework will further enhance its ability to grow.

Further, the banking sector is expected to benefit from the

mergers and acquisitions that taking place (Bank Sohar acquired HSBC Oman while the takeover of Ahli Bank is expected to finalised soon either by the Ominvest-led consortium or Bank Dhofar).

This consolidation will further strengthen the banking sector by raising efficiency and financing options.

Oman presents a range of investment prospects for local and international investors, aiming to facilitate strategic partnerships between parties.

The recently launched venture capital initiative by Oman is one of the many such opportunities. Venture capital funds can play a significant role by investing in promising areas such as tourism, logistics, agriculture, mining and addressing untapped financing opportunities in emerging segments

As a driver in stimulating growth, financial institutions are expected to play a major role in supporting opportunities in: Green Financing: Oman has announced its commitment to achieve the target of net-zero emissions by 2050, offering a substantial potential for transitioning to green energy.

In line with the Sultanate of Oman's National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net-Zero,

this transition presents investment opportunities valued at \$190 billion. It also provides avenues for collaborating with international partners for knowledge sharing, technology transfer, and attracting low-cost capital funds to finance the plan.

Islamic Finance: there is a growing demand for Shariah-compliant products and services. Establishing an Islamic bank or offering Islamic financial products, such as Sukuk (Islamic bonds) and Takaful (Islamic insurance), can be a lucrative opportunity.

Wealth Management and Private Banking: Oman has a high-net worth individual population, and the demand for professional wealth management and private banking services is increasing. Providing personalised investment advice, asset management, and financial planning services can be a profitable venture.

Insurance and Reinsurance: Oman's insurance market is expanding, driven by economic growth and regulatory changes. There are opportunities to establish insurance companies, offer specialised insurance products (such as marine insurance or energy insurance), or provide reinsurance services to local insurers.

Financial Technology (Fintech): Oman is keen on promoting fintech innovation and digital transformation in the financial sector. Developing fintech solutions for payment processing, blockchain technology, robot-advisory services, or online lending platforms can tap into this

growing market.

Capital Markets: Oman's stock market, the Muscat Stock Exchange, offers investment opportunities for brokerage firms, asset management companies, and investment advisory services. Additionally, there is potential for debt and equity capital market activities, including initial public offerings (IPOs) and bond issuances.

E-commerce and Digital Payments: Oman's e-commerce market is expanding rapidly, driven by increased Internet penetration and changing consumer preferences. Providing e-commerce platforms, digital payment solutions, logistics services, or online marketplaces can be a profitable business opportunity.

Financial Education and Training: With the development of the financial sector, there is a growing demand for financial education and training. Establishing a financial education institute or offering specialised training programmes for professionals can fulfil this demand.

Fintech Incubators and Accelerators: Setting up an incubator or accelerator programme to support fintech startups can be a lucrative opportunity. Providing mentorship, funding, and networking opportunities can help nurture and grow the local fintech ecosystem.

Corporate Advisory and Consultancy: As businesses expand and seek investment opportunities in Oman, there is a demand for corporate advisory and consultancy services. Providing guidance on mergers and acquisitions, capital raising, strategic planning, or market entry can be a lucrative business venture.

To conclude, the financial sector in Oman is growing rapidly, and so are the need for more financial services, funding, and investment instruments to meet Oman's developing economy. It is imperative that the financial institutions lead this growth by adequately funding private sector initiatives for economic diversification.

Efficiency and effectiveness: A guide to supply chain management for entrepreneurs and startups



KAMLA SAID
AL RAHBIYAH
kamlaa2040@gmail.com

The author is a renowned
coach, trainer and
consultant.

Hello, dear readers. Imagine this scenario: You have a groundbreaking product idea, a stellar marketing strategy, and a passionate team. But, if your product doesn't reach the customer at the right time, in the right place, and in the right

condition, is all your effort in vain?

This is where the often-underestimated aspect of supply chain management (SCM) comes into play in the entrepreneurial journey.

Understanding supply chain management

SCM is the active orchestration of all the activities required to deliver your product or service to the customer.

It's the entire journey from sourcing raw materials, processing them, managing inventory, all the way to the final delivery of the product to the customer's doorstep.

It's a complex process involving various players, including suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. In today's globally connected business world, managing these processes efficiently and

effectively is not just desirable; it's vital for a startup's success.

The symbiotic relationship of efficiency and effectiveness in SCM

Efficiency in SCM relates to accomplishing tasks using the least amount of resources, be it time, labour, or costs. It's about trimming the fat, reducing redundancies, eliminating delays, and epitomising processes.

On the flip side, effectiveness relates to performing the right tasks - those that align with the company's strategic goals and enhance customer value.

Why is this duo of efficiency and effectiveness crucial in SCM?

A well-managed supply chain can translate to reduced operational costs, quicker delivery times, increased customer satisfaction, and in the grand scheme of things, a robust

competitive advantage.

Conversely, an inefficient and ineffective supply chain can lead to unsatisfied customers, escalating costs, and a tarnished brand reputation.

Strategies for effective SCM

The question then arises, how can startups ensure their supply chain is a perfect blend of efficiency and effectiveness?

1. Integration: A well-integrated supply chain, where all elements are interconnected, paves the way for the smooth flow of materials and information.
2. Visibility: Technologies like SCM software can provide transparency at every stage of the supply chain, helping identify bottlenecks and swiftly address issues.
3. Collaboration: Forging strong relationships with all stakeholders, from suppliers to logistics providers to customers,

can lead to shared goals and epitomised performance.

4. Adaptability

Case study: Zara

Consider Zara, the Spanish fast-fashion retailer. Zara has carved its niche in the retail industry through a supply chain that's as swift as it is efficient. The company's design-to-store process is incredibly short, allowing them to respond to the latest fashion trends in mere weeks.

Their agile supply chain, combined with efficient production and distribution processes, has secured Zara's place at the forefront of the fast-fashion industry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the integral role of supply chain management in a startup's success is undeniable.

It's the unsung hero operating behind the scenes, ensuring your

products reach the right place at the right time.

So, whether you're just starting or already on your entrepreneurial journey, remember to give supply chain management the attention it rightly deserves.

Stay with me for more enlightening for entrepreneurs and startups.

We will provide a comprehensive look into the world of brand building. Our next article, "Building a strong brand: A guide to brand management building flexibility into the supply chain" can equip businesses to better respond to changing market conditions or unexpected disruptions.

Thank you for your time. Remember, in the quest for entrepreneurial success, every cog in the wheel counts, including supply chain management. Keep reading, keep growing!

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت
ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

WhatsApp

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp
<your name> to
96473232

MONDAY JUNE 26, 2023 DHUL HIJAH 8, 1444 AH

Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

AL NAMANI CARGO DOOR TO DOOR CARGO

INDIA BANGLADESH NEPAL PHILIPPINES UAE INDONESIA EUROPE UK CANADA USA

WHATSAPP 96353654 TOLL FREE NUMBER 80066766

Follow us: f i n t www.alnamanicargo.com

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in (Aziba - Khwair Qurum - Ruwi Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

FOR RENT

FLAT for rent.
96379095,
98403020

FLATS 2BHK and 1 bhk in Mumtaz. Contact 99341138 and 90991079.

EAGLE FREIGHT EXPRESS
DOOR TO DOOR COURIER SERVICES
INDIA | NEPAL | BANGLADESH

WORLD WIDE CARGO SERVICE Tel.: 99432926, 78211708, 92319472, 93350126
Head Office (H.O.) Room No.: 218, 1st Floor, Aircargo Complex, Branch Al-Hail, Email: eaglefreightexpress@gmail.com

AUDIT, ACCOUNTING, VAT, TAXATION

Contact: 97239696 95355638

Gulf Center Consultancy & Audit
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur

HAVE A PROPERTY FOR RENT?

Advertise with us.

Contact us on: **99639264**

سماء الخضراء للتجارة
SAMA AL KHADRA TRADING

SERVICES:

PIPING SYSTEMS VALVES
DRAINS INTERCEPTORS

Tel: 24501568, 24502479 • Fax: 24503566

Email: sales@samaalkhadra.com
Website: www.samaalkhadratradingco.com

SIT. VACANT

REQUIRED indoor/ outdoor sales staff for building material and oilfield supply. Oman driving licence required. Email: sangita@dhiyahilal.com Contact: 93559800

SIT. VACANT

INDIAN male, accountant with proficiency in Excel & Tally solutions required for a position in a company. Contact: 99810884. Email: damas.oman1@gmail.com

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocroaches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment [Pre & Post Construction]

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309

pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

Now get news on the go

WhatsApp

To receive news updates from OMAN OBSERVER,

WhatsApp
<your name> to
96473232

omanobserver.com f i n t @omanobserver

95210257

OMAN OBSERVER
www.omanobserver.om

3,256 Posts 26.5K Followers 38 Following

we shall overcome

134,150 people like this

DAWOOD JOB VACANCY

An Excellent grade, ISO 9001:2015-QMS accredited Construction company wishes to recruit enthusiastic personnel for the following positions:

- Head of Tendering Department:** Bachelor degree with min 18 yrs experience.
- Contracts Manager:** Bachelor degree with min 12 yrs experience.
- Estimator/Post QS:** Bachelor degree with min 10 yrs experience.

Required: Oman Driving License holder.

Interested candidates pls forward your CV's to **info@dawood.om**

OMAN OBSERVER

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suham Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

@omanobserver
www.omanobserver.om

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020 DHUL QAADA 18, 1441 AH

OMAN OBSERVER

Be Careful, Be Responsible!

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUELI VOL. 39 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Khalfalla al Butaidi, and Chairman of the Supreme Court Sheikh Al Mubarak bin Ahmad bin Al-Hadi took the oath of office at Al Rashid Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries backing the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed at establishing peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — ONA

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

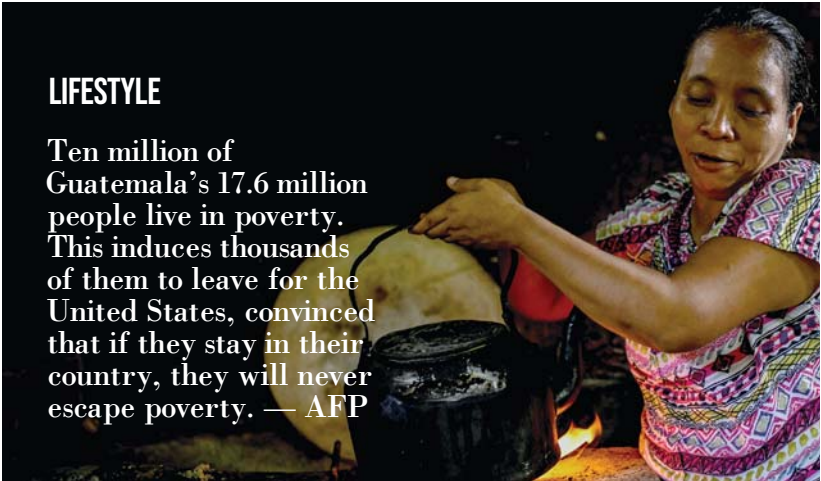
MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and to commemorate the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL RUTY

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears. A drive around the downtown Muscat and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves, and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamed al Wubaidi, who stepped his car to scare away a group of people at a sidewalk in Muscat. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his view, Hamed said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS



LIFESTYLE

Ten million of Guatemala's 17.6 million people live in poverty. This induces thousands of them to leave for the United States, convinced that if they stay in their country, they will never escape poverty. — AFP



FESTIVAL

A participant wearing a ghost mask and colorful costume takes part in the annual Phi Ta Khon carnival or ghost festival in Dan Sai district in Thailand. — AFP



ROYALTY WATCH
Britain's Catherine, the Princess of Wales, reacts on the day of the reopening event of the National Portrait Gallery in London, Britain. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
Bollywood actor Jackie Shroff (R) attends the 'CHATAK-The Monsoon Show' art exhibition by artist Anushree Jaiswal at Nehru Centre Art Gallery in Mumbai. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation for the Hermes Menswear Spring-Summer 2024 show as part of the Paris Fashion Week, in Paris. — AFP

art & life

MONDAY | JUNE 26, 2023 | DHUL HIJJAH 8, 1444 AH

OMAN OBSERVER [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [www.omanobserver.om](#) [features@omanobserver.om](#)



Bait Muzna hosts Through the Looking Glass expo

Bait Muzna Art Gallery is currently hosting the works of various artists, an extravaganza that focuses on the experience and depth of art and how this is connected to the mind of an artist

ENTERTAINMENT

Disney use of AI for Marvel TV series spooks Hollywood

THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL intelligence in the new Marvel superhero series "Secret Invasion" has sparked anxiety and anger in Hollywood, at a time when television and film writers are already striking over their uncertain futures. Director Ali Selim revealed in a recent interview that the Disney+ show — a paranoia-rich spy thriller about shape-shifting aliens that stars Samuel L Jackson — used AI as well as human illustrators to generate its opening credits. The abstract sequence in question blends green-hued urban landscapes, spaceships

and shadowy human characters, many of whom gradually reveal themselves to be the reptilian extra-terrestrial "Skrulls" of the series. Selim told the Polygon website that the use of AI was intended to provide a sense of "foreboding." "When we reached out to the AI vendors, that was part of it — it just came right out of the shape-shifting, Skrull world identity, you know? 'Who did this? Who is this?'" he said. "We would talk to them about ideas and themes and words, and then the computer would go off and do something. And then we could change it a little bit by



using words, and it would change." "It felt explorative and inevitable, and exciting, and different," said Selim. But the revelation did not sit well with many in Hollywood, where fears are mounting that

AI could replace jobs for script writers, designers and even actors. The refusal of studios like Netflix and Disney to rule out allowing AI to replace human scribes was one factor that led to the writers' strike, now in its eighth week.

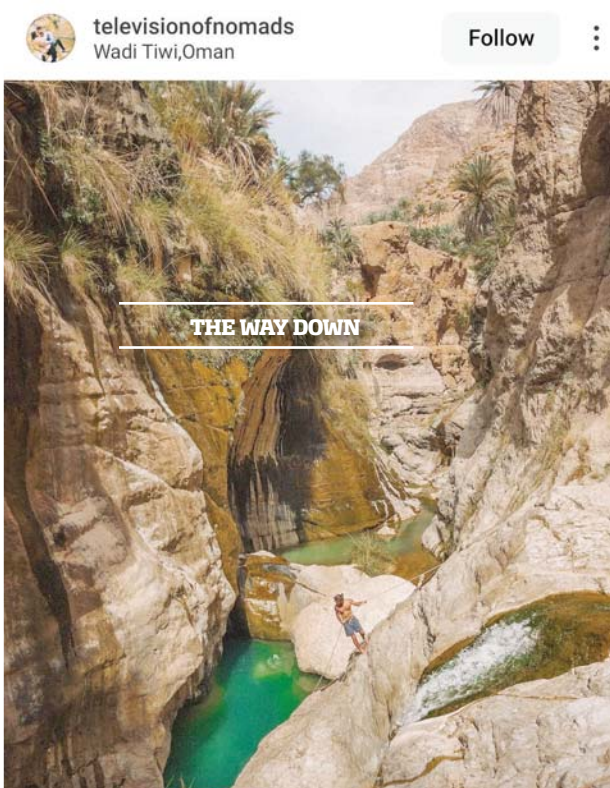
Jeff Simpson, who is credited as the show's visual development concept artist and worked on a different part of the series, tweeted that he was "really concerned about the impacts of this." "I'm devastated, I believe AI to

be unethical, dangerous and designed solely to eliminate artists careers," he wrote. Jon Lam, a storyboard artist, said the use of AI was "salt in the wounds of all Artists and Writers in the WGA strike." The Writers Guild of America has asked studios and streamers for binding agreements to regulate the use of AI. Under the proposals, nothing written by AI can be considered "literary" or "source" material — industry terms that decide who gets royalties — and scripts written by WGA members cannot "be used to train AI." But according to the WGA, studios "rejected our proposal," and countered with an offer merely to meet once a year to "discuss advancements in technology." Method Studios, the company credited with creating the main titles for "Secret Invasion," said AI was "just one tool among the array of tool sets our artists used." No artists' jobs were replaced by the use of AI, it said in a statement to the Hollywood Reporter. — AFP



find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Art has long been recognised as a medium for self-expression and exploration, providing a channel through which artists can convey their emotions, experiences, and perspectives. It is an undeniable fact that the creation and consumption of art can significantly impact one's mental well-being.

Bait Muzna Art Gallery is currently hosting the works of various artists, an extravaganza that focuses on the experience and depth of art and how this is connected to the mind of an artist.

"Through the Looking Glass" was launched late last week and inaugurated by mental health advocate HH Sayyida Basma al Said with Siham al Harthy and Cinzia Farise as guests of honour.

During the ceremony, Sayyida Basma, in her speech, shared that there is a direct connection between art and mental health.

"Art is a good way to release all types of energy, and emotions and the process can be healing. This is the best way for people who do not want to talk about what they are going through. Sometimes it also provokes feelings that one might not have noticed that they have. So it is one of the strongest tools to use," said Sayyida Basma, founder of Whispers of Serenity, the Chief Guest of the function.

The guests of honour, Siham al Harthy, CEO of Siham Investment and Development and Cinzia Farise, CEO of Oman Cables spoke about the important position Art holds in the society today and the significance of collecting arts.

Bait Muzna Art Gallery team and creative duo Lucia and Luca proved art is not just a decoration on the wall by highlighting the artists represented quotes of thinkers, riddles and games.

Artist Lucia Oliva is one artist who does not just depend on canvas to express her creativity. There are a lot of mirrors used that complement her work and most interestingly rock.

"I have always liked to do art in theatrical style because I have a strong background in theatre, dance, choreography and acting," said Lucia.

So in her fine art, all of these experiences are reflected.



"I like to see the scene alive. For everyone to enter and feel the magic of a fairytale. When I create a heart I like to give soul to the piece of art — there is the body of art that you can touch which is physical and the soul is in the vision, in the optical illusion but it has a deep meaning," she pointed out.

She does not know why she loves rocks but one reason is that they are

physical.

"With the theatre background, I like to create things that are real. They are actors, they are not flat on the wall because they also have a physical personality," she noted.

The visitor can become Alice in Wonderland for a few minutes.

To make the visit even more interesting, a riddle was also highlighted as



the main point of interest wherein during their visit, they can also get busy decoding the riddle and where it leads.

THE RIDDLE GOES AS FOLLOWS:
I am a quiet strength forming;
Power of the feminine rising; My art

reflects the ancient; And ideas echo the future.

I am pillars of grace; For I hold Nizwa close to my heart; Find my face, my art; and feel the peace; for I am Nizwa rising.

Find me & become the king of the moment!

LIFESTYLE

Rihanna steps down as chief executive of Savage X Fenty



AS OF NEXT WEEK, Rihanna will no longer be the chief executive of Savage X Fenty.

The 9-time Grammy-winning performer and fashion mogul announced on Friday that she'll step down from the helm of the lingerie brand she founded in 2018.

Hillary Super, the former chief executive of Anthropologie Group, has been named the new chief executive of the membership-based e-commerce line that has revolutionised the fashion business. Rihanna, meanwhile, will move away from the day-to-day business and serve as executive chair.

"It's been beautiful to see our vision for Savage X Fenty impact the industry at such an incredible magnitude over the last five years," the

35-year-old expectant mother said in a statement. "This is just the beginning for us, and we're going to continue to expand in ways that always

connect with the consumer."

"I'm so grateful and excited to welcome Hillary Super as our new CEO — she is a strong leader and is focused on taking the business to an even higher level," she added.

Super previously held leadership roles at Guess, American Eagle, Gap, and Old Navy.

"I'm thrilled to join the Savage X Fenty family," Super said. "The brand is a major powerhouse in the lingerie and apparel industry, and its unwavering commitment to celebrating inclusivity and fearlessness is inspiring."

Vogue Business reports that the handover will take place on June 26. Rihanna also launched the uber-successful Fenty cosmetics brand in 2017, which reportedly earned \$558 million in its first year.

The foundation of her business models appeal to a more diverse and inclusive consumer base, largely ignored by competitors. From darker shades of makeup and larger sizes of underwear to gender-neutral garments, the -born beauty blazed a trail in the beauty and fashion spaces.

Savage X Fenty, a partnership with California-based, reached a valuation of \$1 billion in 2021.

Rihanna currently has an estimated net worth of \$1.4 billion, according to Forbes. — tca/dpa

CHANGING WORLD

As Arctic warms, caribou and muskoxen slow biodiversity loss

RAPIDLY WARMING conditions in the Arctic and the loss of sea ice caused by climate change are driving a steep decline in biodiversity, including among plants, fungi and lichen.

But a new study out Thursday in *Science* found the presence of caribou and muskoxen help to reduce the rate of loss by roughly half, suggesting the large herbivores have an under-recognised role as ecosystem climate defenders.

Co-author Christian John of the University of California, Santa Barbara told AFP the results showed that "in some cases 'rewilding' (reintroduction of large herbivores) may be an effective approach to combating negative effects of climate change on tundra diversity."

The paper was the result of a

15-year-long experiment that began in 2002 near Kangerlussuaq, a small settlement of around 500 people in western Greenland.

An international team of scientists used steel fencing to set up 800-square-metre plots, or about a fifth of an acre, to exclude or include herbivores and measure the impact on the surrounding environment.

They also used "passive warming chambers," which act like miniature greenhouses to raise the temperature a few degrees, to see how biodiversity might fare under conditions even warmer than today. Herbivores were given access to some warmed plots and not others.

Each day, the team hiked for miles to tally up the ungulates.

"There were a lot of demands to the job, working long hours hiking across uneven terrain, living in a tent under a sun that doesn't set, all the while with the ubiquitous whine of mosquitos in the background," said John.

"But at the end of the day, none of



these challenges ever overshadowed the joy of seeing the first caribou calf of the year."

Sadly, tundra community diversity declined across the board over the course of the study, both as a direct result of warming but also changing precipitation patterns associated with melting ice, and the increasing shrub cover in the tundra squeezing out other species.

However, "tundra community diversity dropped at almost double the rate in plots where herbivores were excluded compared to plots where herbivores were able to graze," said John. — AFP



CONSERVATION

Bison reintroduced to Canada's Banff thrive again

WILD BISON THAT once numbered in the tens of millions in North America before being hunted almost to extinction are once again thriving in a pocket of western Canada.

Appearing from a distance as specks against the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains, these animals are also restoring balance at the top of a fragile ecosystem.

North America's largest land mammal — growing to 900 kilogrammes (2,000 pounds) and 1.8 meters (six feet) high at the shoulders — suffered a dramatic decline in late 19th century due to hunting and habitat loss as settlers pushed westward.

They were reintroduced to what is now Banff National Park in 2017.

"The moment the bison set foot on that landscape, it felt to me that I brought them home," says Wes Olson, who accompanied the first 16 bison to be released there.

Transferred by helicopter from a biosphere reserve near Edmonton, Alberta, the population has exploded and new births are expected to push their numbers to 100 by year's end.

A Parks Canada report published this week concluded that the reintroduction was a success, and it suggested that due to their robust growth rate, this bison subpopulation — one of only five that occupy a mere 0.5 per cent of their original range in North America — may no longer be considered endangered within a decade.

As soon as they arrived, Olson says, the ancient ecosystem was suddenly reactivated and the bison appeared to feel right at home, while other forest creatures quickly and "intrinsically" reestablished a symbiotic relationship.

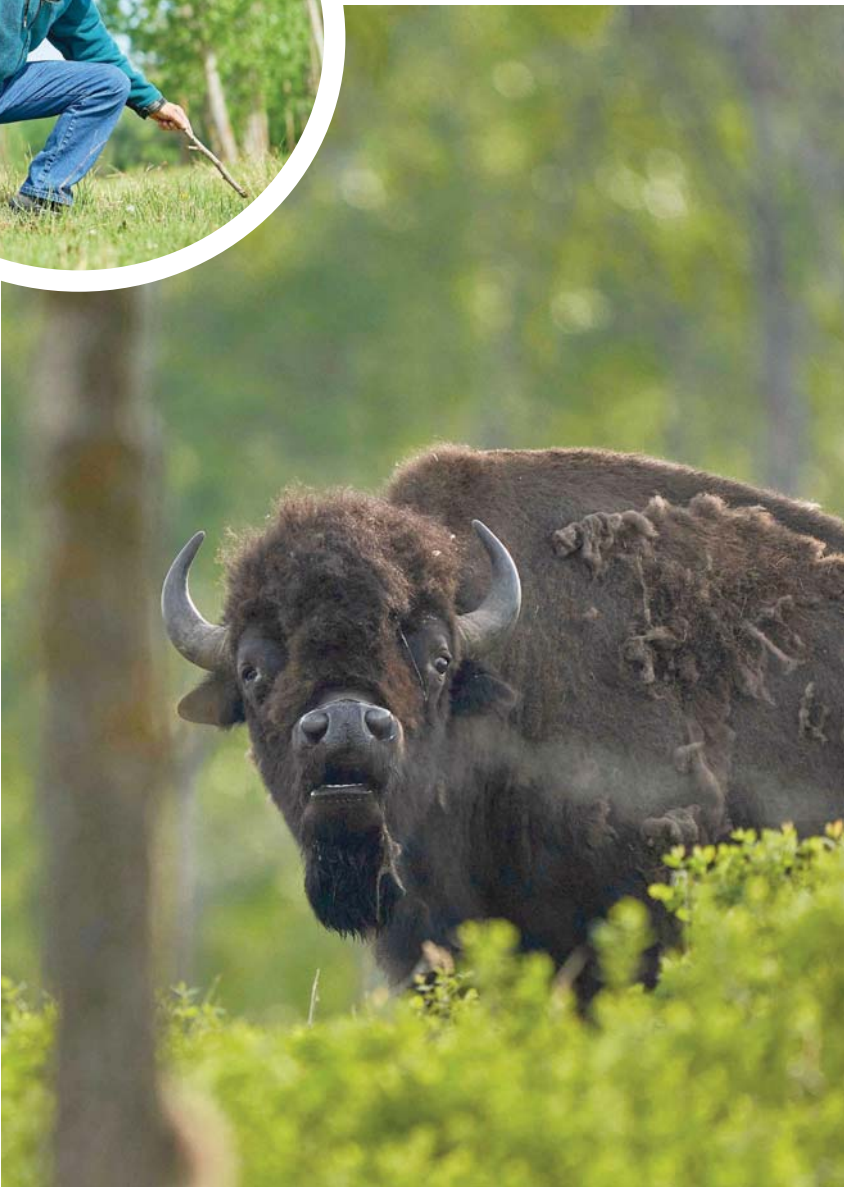
Squirrels with puffy cheeks can be seen busily collecting hairs shed by the burly beasts, says the 69-year-old former park warden.

One hundreds species of insects colonise its nutrient-rich dung.

Birds also get in on the action. They take turns sitting on bison's backs and plucking bits of fur to make nests, as well as bugs or seeds trapped in it to eat. Warmer and more comfortable fur-lined nests lead to better outcomes for the chicks.

GREAT PLAINS LANDSCAPE ENGINEERS

A "keystone species" of the Great Plains, a broad expanse of flatlands that stretch across 13 Canadian provinces and US states, from Alberta to Texas, wild bison, by way of their graz-



ing, have shaped this environment.

These "landscape engineers" are on the move as they graze rather than focus on the same patch of land, with their role somewhat like that of elephants in Africa, explains Marie-Eve Marchand of the International Buffalo Relations Institute.

And with herds mobile like that, grasslands are able to regenerate and better store carbon and water, according to a study by the University of Alberta. Other studies also found that the presence of bison makes them more resilient to drought.

Between 30 and 60 million bison once roamed North America. At the end of the 19th century, there were only a few hundred left.

Their decline had a devastating impact also on Indigenous tribes that relied on the animals for food, as well as clothing, shelter and religious worship.

Their return to Banff, an ancestral gathering place of local tribes, has helped revive "parts of our language, culture and deep, deep spirituality that the first peoples of this place had with the land," says Marchand.

INDIGENOUS FUTURE INCLUDES BISON

"At one point," says Violet Meguinis of the Tsuut'ina First Nation of southern Alberta, "bison was our main source of food."

"Bringing them back and releasing them in the wild is significant for us," she says.

Several Indigenous communities have been working in recent years to reintroduce bison to their ancestral lands and are eager to do more, including the Tsuut'ina, which started by raising a domestic herd of 400 bison about 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Banff.

Clayton Whitney has cared for the animals for eight years, helping to "bring them back from extinction," work that he considers to be a privilege given how important bison are to the community.

The tribe comes together to butcher a few each year for their meat and hides as their ancestors did, while the simple act of moving the herd from paddock to paddock to mimic their movements in the wild has stirred growth of plants used for Indigenous traditional medicines, he says.

The entire community takes part in the ritual slaughter, with elders passing on their knowledge of how to properly skin the animal, and leave none of it to waste.

"We depend on (the bison) as much as it depends on us," says Meguinis.

"We want this land to be there for them, we want the bison to be here because then that preserves our own future," she sums up. — AFP

LIFESTYLE



Philippines' women seaweed farmers keep coastal families afloat

DESPITE THE RAVAGES of storms, seaweed farming is transforming the lives of Filipino families in traditionally male-dominated fishing communities, turning women into family breadwinners who are paying for their children to go to college.

The Cherish Fisherfolk Cooperative of 120 seaweed farmers in the Palawan village of Balintang is named after the 1984 hit "Cherish" by US band Kool & the Gang.

"Cherish means to protect and care for what we have," Mardy Montano, president of the cooperative, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation as she rested after a day's work on a floating house in the midst of Palawan's turquoise waters.

"That's how valuable seaweed farming is for all of us."

Seaweed farming is the world's fastest-growing form of aquaculture and the Philippines is the fourth largest producer globally. More than 1 million Filipinos benefit from the seaweed industry, according to the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

In 1995, when Montano settled in Balintang, only a few women in the village farmed seaweed and their earnings were marginal.

Increased support from the local government



and private funders led to an uptick in production from 2017, when Montano and other women formed the Cherish Fisherfolk Association to grow their farms together.

It is now a lucrative business. Balintang seaweed farmers earn 20,000 to 40,000 Philippine pesos (\$358 to \$715) a month, compared to about 5,000 pesos made by small-scale fishermen.

Unlike fishing and rice farming — both capital and labour-intensive — seaweed provides an income every 45 days, the typical cultivation cycle.

"The women in our village are no longer just confined at home. We don't just simply wait for our husbands to come back from the sea," said Montano. "Through seaweed, we now play a huge role in our family and community."

Montano's eldest child is now an agricultural engineer.

"All because of seaweed farming," she said.

SEAWEED FARMING A FAMILY ENTERPRISE

On a typical day, Cherish women gather in a small nipa hut — a thatched house on stilts common in rural Philippines — to attach seaweed cuttings to long nylon ropes. The men then take the lines offshore to farms of about 2,500 metres squared.

Some six weeks later, the seaweed is harvested and the women set it out to dry in the sun for two to three days, then sell it locally for processing into crisps or noodles or to export as carrageenan — a valuable additive in food and pharmaceuticals.

Last year, the Department of Agriculture developed a five-year seaweed industry road-map to help the country become the "global market's preferred seaweed and carrageenan supplier".

The World Bank-assisted Philippine Rural Development Project has also identified seaweed as one of eight commodities of national importance, or priority crops for development and trade.

Seaweed farming is often a family enterprise involving the entire household. Mothers share the work with their children who help attach seaweed cuttings to the lines.

"Women lead the farming process from nursery to harvesting," said Palawan agricultural officer Pacita Bravo.

Melinda Gimotea, a mother of five, has managed the family seaweed farm for two decades while her husband is away fishing.

"I'm always happy during harvest time because it means I can buy my children's needs, like food and school supplies," said Gimotea, who has not only passed on her knowledge to her children, but also sent them all to college. She fondly recalled heading out towards the open sea to check their seaweed crop with her youngest daughter, Charry, who is now studying fisheries in college.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation