

Temperatures above average

Temperatures recorded in many governorates of the Sultanate of Oman this year so far was higher than the average for the month of February. According to Oman Meteorology, the Buraimi station recorded an increase of 2.5°C in temperature while Khasab recorded a rise of 2.1°C compared to the average temperature for the month of February. **SEE P3**



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RYBAKINA KNOCKS OUT DEFENDING CHAMPION SWIATEK



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REGULATION OF MARKETING, PROMOTION ON WEBSITES TO BE EFFECTIVE FROM MARCH 24



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MISFAT AL ABRYYEEN IS A VISION OF COMFORT AND CHARM EVEN AT NIGHT



MUSCAT

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON AQUAFARMING

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will host today (Sunday) a regional workshop titled ‘The Basics and Criteria for Selecting Aquafarming Sites (Floating Cages) and Setting Guidelines’. Yaqoob bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries, will preside over the opening of the workshop. **SEE P3**

SYDNEY

DEAD FISH CLOG AUSTRALIAN IARIVER

Millions of dead and rotting fish have clogged a vast stretch of river near a remote town in the Australian outback as a searing heatwave sweeps through the region. Videos showed boats ploughing through a blanket of dead fish smothering the water, with the surface barely visible underneath. The government said on Friday that “millions” of fish had died in the Darling River near the small town of Menindee, in the third mass kill to hit the area since 2018. **SEE P6**

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INSIDE



PAKISTAN'S EX-PM MARKS COURT PRESENCE



AMERICANS HEAD TO EUROPE FOR THE GOOD LIFE

Theyazin to preside over ‘Together We Advance’ forum today

MUSCAT: As an embodiment of His Majesty’s approach of direct communication with the people, His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the forum ‘Together We Advance’, organised by the Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers, on Sunday. The forum aims to create a platform for reviewing the government’s policies and priorities in many axes and

discussing them with the attendees representing various society segments and groups. The forum, which is held for the first time, will cover three axes: Oman Vision 2040 and its follow-up mechanism through Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit; fiscal measures taken by the government and their economic and social dimensions through the National Programme for Fiscal Balance; and the National



Programme for Financial Sustainability implemented by the Ministry of Finance. The forum will see the conduction of a discussion session during which the dignitaries in charge of these axes will respond to the attendees’ queries. It is noteworthy that the Secretariat-General of the Council of Ministers opened the door for the public to submit online applications for attending the forum. The applications

were sorted out in accordance to the size of Omani population in each governorate based on the population data at the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NSCI). Also taken into consideration were the factors of age group, educational qualifications, gender and employment, among other factors. The mechanisms also ensured the representation of persons with special needs and other social segments. — ONA

Heavy rains likely due to air trough



STAFF REPORTER
Muscat, March 18

The Sultanate of Oman will be affected by an air trough for the rest of the week from Sunday. Oman Meteorology has warned that heavy rains will be accompanied by active downward winds and hail, leading to overflowing wadis in many places. The governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar are likely to be most affected, where the sea waves may rise to 2 to 3 metres on most of the coasts of the Sultanate of Oman. Clouds advection,

isolated rain and occasional thundershowers are expected over the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta starting from Sunday evening. The impact will extend, from Monday evening, to cover the rest of the governorates. The expected impacts are isolated rainfall and occasional thunderstorms which may cause wadis to flow, and fresh associated winds with speeds of 15 to 25 kt (2845km/h). The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has urged all to take precautions during rainfall.

Prepare now to make Ramadhan fasting easy

ONE MUST REDUCE SNACKING AND CONSUME LESS CAFFEINATED BEVERAGES

AHMED AL KAABI
Muscat, March 18

As Ramadhan approaches, it is time to start preparing your body for a period of fasting. While fasting has many health benefits, it can also be challenging for some people. There are many ways that people can get in shape for Ramadhan, from changing meal times to increasing physical activity. Dr Muna al Kaabi, general practitioner, said, “Many people get tired on the first days of Ramadhan, especially the first day it can be tough for some people. The body moves from one state to another through a lack of energy sources during the fasting period.” According to Dr Muna, the body takes time to adjust to the change in eating habits. To avoid feeling tired and lethargic during the first days of Ramadhan, it is recommended to change the routine a few days before the holy month. “Start adjusting your eating habits a few weeks before Ramadhan, by shifting meal



timing and avoiding eating snacks between meals,” Dr Muna told the Observer. Extending the time between breakfast and lunch without eating snacks to prepare the body for prolonged

fasting, she explained. Dr Muna also emphasised the importance of staying hydrated. “Make sure to drink plenty of water to keep yourself hydrated during fasting. **TURN TO P6**

International Criminal Court issues Putin arrest warrant

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court on Friday announced an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin on the war crime accusation of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children. The Hague-based ICC said it had also issued a warrant against Maria Lvova-Belova, Russia’s presidential commissioner for children’s rights, on similar charges. Moscow dismissed the orders

as “void.” Russia is not a party to the ICC so it was unclear if or how Putin could ever end up in the dock. War-battered Ukraine welcomed the ICC announcement, with President Volodymyr Zelensky hailing the “historic decision.” The court’s shock notice came hours after other news with the potential to significantly impact Russia’s war on Ukraine, including a Moscow visit from Chinese leader Xi Jinping and



Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Sevastopol, Crimea. — Reuters

more fighter jets for Kyiv’s forces. More than 16,000 Ukrainian children have been deported to Russia since the February 24, 2022 war, according to Kyiv, with many allegedly placed in institutions and foster homes. ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said Putin was now liable for arrest if he set foot in any of the court’s more than 120 member states. He said the arrest warrants were “based upon forensic evidence,

scrutiny and what’s been said by those two individuals.” “The evidence we presented focused on crimes against children. Children are the most vulnerable part of our society,” said Khan. The ICC said judges found there were “reasonable grounds” to suspect Putin’s criminal responsibility and grant Khan’s application for the warrants, which were made back on February 22. — AFP **SEE ALSO P6**



Bridging gap between skillsets, market requirements

KABEER YOUSUF

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The second edition of the 'Observer Round Table', that aims at brainstorming on a very pertinent subject by experts on a monthly basis and to exchange ideas on a social issue and to draw conclusions by the participants, was held at the Ministry of Information premises on March 15. It focused on 'how to bridge the gap between the skillsets possessed by the youth and requirements of the future job market'.

The key speakers of the round table discussion were Shatha al Maskary, Founder of Lahunna, Dr Neelesh Sogani, Representative from iosh RoSPA ambassador, and Samir al Zadjali, HR Adviser at Travel Point LLC. Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili, Editor-in-Chief of Oman Daily Observer, was the guest of honour.

For Shatha, there are many layers to the issues associated with the job market. "The first issue is that we are looking at individual level, second one we are looking at job level, industrial level, and how they are all going to collaborate with each other. There has been a major shift in the skills required in the job market in the last five to 10 years," she said, adding that technology has really taken over the skillsets and any skill without technology is not of any use.

"Every country has different types of disruptions happening," she added. However, the gap has been formed by the evolving technology and is responsible for the three aspects that she mentioned earlier.

Shatha furthered her stance saying that there is a close collaboration between education and job market. "I think some universities are offering apprenticeships and these programmes are proving to be highly effective. Having said that, as long as we get someone with



the right attitude and hunger to grow along with the organisation, I think inculcating these skills is possible at any stage of the career. All of us are victims of disruptions of technology," she said.

"Discipline, time management, to be independent and many other soft skills need to be taught along with the academic lessons. You can't change the curriculum overnight but slowly and steadily, we can achieve it. One solution is that they need to work with the industry leaders and offer programmes as a quick fix to the problem." The forum appreciated the initiatives that work towards bridging the gap between the skillsets and job market requirements as bridging the gap can bring in all-round benefits to the society and the economy as a whole," she added.

OBSERVER ROUND TABLE SECOND EDITION



Dr Neelesh Sogani opined that there is a large number of candidates graduating every year and there is an increasing demand for them but lack of desired qualification is deterring them from being employed. "When you look at the HSE sector, there is a huge demand for Omani HSE professionals."

He advocates that HSE is a novel profession just as a doctor or a medic, because HSE professionals safeguard from going to the doctor as they take care of the health and safety aspect of the employees.

"At iosh, we are trying to create an awareness among the Omani professionals that there is a huge potential for their services in terms of HSE. With the aggressive Omanisation programmes being conducted, I see a greater potential

for jobs in this sector. The human resources available in the country need to fit into the requirements of the job market," Dr Neelesh said.

For Samir al Zadjali, HR Adviser at Travel Point LLC, which was recently awarded the most trusted brand award, it is the room that corporates provide to grow and earn that differentiates it from the rest. "The one thing that makes us different is that we give ample room for our employees to explore and find themselves newer skills and pursue the same. Anyone from the branch interested in corporate business, we give him or her an opportunity. Anyone interested in leisure tourism, we shift him or her to the desired sector," Samir said.

However, trainees and job aspirants must strive to get themselves updated and educated in equipping themselves with the latest skill and knowledge in the market. "There should be an initiative to bring all these initiatives under one umbrella to reap the maximum benefits for the candidates and to the country as a whole. Self-learning is the best technique and unless one is driven by a thirst for learning, he or she cannot excel in her work," said Abdullah al Shueili, Editor-in-Chief, Oman Daily Observer.

The Round Table discussion urged that the education system should identify what the requirements of the market are and we shouldn't just remain science graduate or commerce graduate or art graduates or engineers but on the other hand, we should understand the requirements, core competencies and behavioural skills.

The first topic in the series was "The emotional conundrum in the post Covid-19 era" delving into the various facets of the pandemic and the need to provide emotional support to those who are traumatised in several ways.

Vanishing Houses — an artistic interpretation

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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At Matti Sirvio Art Galleria, Jawharat Al Shatti, the current work on display is titled Forma II - a contemporary sculpture exhibition.

Adjacent to the main hall is a dark room which hosts an exhibition by the team from GUTech. Their project includes the digital tools used for the video presentation of the sculpture they made on campus. The seating arrangement is part of the project, in fact when the viewer enters the room one has to remove the shoes and once in, the individual is surrounded by black curtains.

Once the viewer sits on the arranged boxes, he or she also becomes part of the sculpture project. "As architects and as planners they are always interested in the environment and according to what we see directly in Oman is that there is a very rich culture of traditional houses. Unfortunately, we are going to see it disappear and that is because of the material. Most of the old houses in the villages are made out of mud," said Prof Ercan Agirbas, Dean at GUTech, Architect and Urban Planner.

"When you build a house from mud, and it is exposed to sun and rain again and again,



after a couple of decades it disappears. But you get rid of this problem by making everything in concrete. This is in our opinion not the right solution because with it the beauty is also vanishing."

According to him, the beauty of the house lives with the family, however, the next generation may not want to live in the same structure, but the beauty of the mud houses remains even if they are abandoned. And this is what the architects wanted to highlight. "We wanted to make this beauty visible with our video installation where my colleague, Gazmend Kalemi, who had stayed in Oman for 10 years, had spent time drawing and sketching these vanishing villas, houses and villages," explained Ercan Agirbas.

Parallel to this work, the team of architects from GUTech, consisting of Hadiya al Qasmi,

Habiba al Harrasi and Fatma al Balushi led by Ercan Agirbas, has a project of video installation, but in reality the visitor becomes part of the sculpture project.

"Sculpture and video may not go very well at first, but in our case it flows well because the video art piece is sculpture. Even the projector is part of the sculpture. So what we did first was to build the nature," he explained.

He said the first thing was to understand the nature.

"We wanted to make it visible in the loop of first being the photography, so we built the topography for about three to four minutes. That is why our title has 135 million years, 7 months, 3 weeks, 20 days, 6 hours, 8 minutes, 45 seconds.

"135 million years is during the Jurassic Period, when tectonic plates moved the most, so after building the

environment, we had the phase of building the houses and this was portrayed with use of sugar cubes," he noted.

He said that they chose sugar purposely as they were going to exhibit it in the dark room.

"We were wondering what is the best brightest material we could use and sugar was ideal as it is a sign of our current society - sugar is in everything although it is not healthy, people want it," the architect pointed out.

Sugar is also manmade.

With the sugar cubes they made their houses and the whole village.

"The village could be anywhere in Oman and the last part of this art piece was that we let the houses and villages represented by sugar cubes disappear by rain," he explained.

The houses vanish but topography remains the same. He explained that this depicts the possibility to rebuild it all over again.

"It is a fictionary site that we created as a model. The topography was made of boards that are typically used by architects to represent topography as well as to depict mountains and other features. We used many techniques, old and new. For example, the laser cuts gave very sharp edges to create the topography."



جهاز الضرائب
TAX AUTHORITY

Announcement



The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to Excise Tax to submit their returns for the first quarter of 2023, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal: www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **April 30, 2023**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of submitting.



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Prepare your body now to make Ramadhan fasting easy

FROM P1

Moreover, people who consume high caffeine daily should reduce intake. If a person consumes three to four cups of coffee per day, s/he has to start reducing this amount before Ramadhan or replacing it with drinks that contain less caffeine, such as tea. This is essential to avoid headaches during fasting.”

As for those with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, she said it is crucial to consult a doctor before fasting. A healthcare provider can help determine if fasting is safe and provide guidance on how to manage medications and blood sugar levels during the holy month.

By following these tips, you can help prepare your body for Ramadhan and make the fasting experience more manageable. Moreover, remember to take care of your health during Ramadhan and listen to your body’s needs.

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Future Cities Project announced by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) will be an important and all-inclusive step with the participation of expatriates towards the decentralising the urbanisation process and thereby taking the load off the capital Muscat, whose boundaries have also expanded under the new Greater Muscat Plan.

According to Eng Ibrahim bin Hammoud al Waeli, Director of the Urban Strategy Office at MoHUP, the new cities will be developed in Salalah, Bausher, Suhar, Haima, Ibri, and Sur, which will offer an integrated, smart, efficient, healthy, and sustainable urban neighbourhood spread over 20 million sqm, catering to 150,000 people in 40,000 housing units.

He said the number of housing units targeted by these agreements is 40,000 and will be available for ownership to both citizens and expatriates.

MoHUP is also working on preparing a plan for a mixed-used township project in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, which will be completed



this year.

The volume of investments in the real estate sector was RO2.7 billion in 2022 and it offers several investment opportunities.

The new future cities have been proposed in line with the forecast that the Sultanate of Oman’s population will be

around 8 million by 2040, which will necessitate the need for investments in more housing units across all governorates.

Last week, the MoHUP signed seven agreements to develop masterplans for future cities spread over seven governorates as part of the efforts to attain a balanced

urban development.

It may be noted that expatriates can purchase units in multi-storied commercial and residential buildings under the usufruct system as part of the efforts to stimulate investment in the promising real estate sector to achieve specific growth rates.

It may be noted that the ministry allocated 51 lands this year under the usufruct system in various governorates, distributed over 24 plots of land for commercial use, 23 for industrial use, a site for a cooperative society, two sites for private clinics, and a site for a private hospital.

As part of the real estate development conference, the ministry signed contracts with an estimated investment value of RO 10.5 million.

According to the Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, that both the ministries are jointly developing and implementing regulations for real estate development, including Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs) in various governorates.

MoHT is currently working on 10 integrated tourism complexes, which will cater to the recreational and commercial needs of society, apart from being just for residential and hospitality purposes.

According to the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), for smart cities to be sustainable emphasis will have to be given to the development of communication services.

Oman to host regional workshop on aquafarming



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will host today (Sunday) a regional workshop titled “The Basics and Criteria for Selecting Aquafarming Sites (Floating Cages) and Setting Guidelines.”

Engineer Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Fisheries, will preside over the opening of the workshop.

The two-day workshop will be conducted in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization’s (FAO) Regional Commission for Fisheries (RECOFI) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM).

The workshop comes as an implementation of recommendations of 11th Session of the Regional Fisheries Commission regarding the selection of the Sultanate of Oman to host the workshop. — ONA

OHRC delegation concludes participation in GANHRI annual meeting

GENEVA: Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) delegation led by Shaikh Humaid bin Ali al Ma’ani, Vice-Chairman of OHRC, concluded its participation in the annual meeting of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI), which was held in the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

In its final communiqué, the GANHRI underscored the main role of national human rights institutions in contributing to strengthening the human rights system, advancing just and safe societies around the world and promoting and protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. The statement welcomed the progress made by the member



states in establishing and strengthening national human rights institutions in line with the Paris Principles relating to the status of national institutions. Currently there are over 120

national human rights institutions around the world.

The GANHRI called on member institutions to support states as the main responsible parties in the work of the national committees towards the full implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Paris Principles.

The OHRC delegation held a number of meetings on the sidelines of its participation to introduce the commission and its new work system. The delegation met Nada Al Nashif, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Amina Bouayach, Vice-President of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. — ONA

February temperatures were above the monthly average: CAA

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Temperatures recorded in many governorates of the Sultanate of Oman this year so far was higher than the average for the month of February.

According to Oman Meteorology, the Buraimi station recorded an increase of 2.5°C in temperature while Khasab recorded a rise of 2.1°C compared to the average temperature for the month of February.

The Wilayat of Suhar recorded the highest daily rainfall of 50mm since February 21, 1998.

The lowest temperature in February 2023 was reported at Jabal Shams (2.1), Saiq (5.1), Buraimi (5.1), and Haima (9.3).

The highest temperatures were recorded in Marmul (37.9), Bidiya (37.2) and Samayil (37.1).

It may be noted that several weather monitoring stations recorded temperatures that were above the monthly average in January.

The Sultanate of Oman’s National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation for Climate Change (2020-2040) focuses on the use of advanced tools to establish historical climate trends to better understand future climate change.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Environment Authority (EA) have supported the measures needed to reduce



the adverse impact of climate change, especially limiting the annual temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius by the end of this century from current predictions of over 2.5 degrees Celsius.

According to the UN report on environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG), the Middle East is vulnerable to the effects of climate change because of its scarce water resources, high levels of aridity, and long coastlines threatened by rising sea levels.

With an average annual per capita water availability of 977 cubic metres, the Middle East is the most fresh-water-scarce region in the world, and the available resources are expected to decrease even further, to 460 cubic metres per capita, by 2030.



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AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

THE word green hydrogen has become common among many countries, especially in recent times. Green hydrogen is an important component of decarbonisation efforts because it is a versatile material that can store chemical energy and is also environmentally friendly, and can replace coal and gas as feedstocks in the steel industry. The Sultanate of Oman seeks to be a global centre for hydrogen production, depending on the presence of the main ingredients for its production, which are represented in solar energy, wind energy, extended lands, human resources, its experience in energy production and export, and its position in the markets.

Officials in the Sultanate of Oman are adopting an ambitious plan aimed at transforming the country into a leading destination in the field of green hydrogen production. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals is developing an ambitious strategy to advance the green hydrogen economy in the country. This comes in line with the Sultanate of Oman's ambition to reach carbon neutrality by using green (clean) energy sources by 2050.

GREEN HYDROGEN
The Sultanate is working hard to become one of the leading countries in the production of green hydrogen in the world, in addition to creating a competitive sector in this sector, devoting an attractive environment for direct foreign investments, supporting innovation and developing local capabilities.

Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shaithani, General Director of the Directorate-General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, previously said: "The ministry is in the process of appointing a specialised house of expertise to evaluate and study the existing legislation related to the sector and investment in it, and its adequacy and suitability, and start developing opportunities in the sector and work in parallel to determine the need for more legislation and the need for a special law."

Eng Al Shaithani stated that the strategic objectives of the Sultanate of Oman of investing in green hydrogen are to contribute to the security of energy supplies locally and globally, diversify the local economy, expand supply chains and associated industries, create attractive local job opportunities and reduce

carbon emissions. The most recent achievement of the Sultanate of Oman in the field is the inauguration of the first dual-combustion truck by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, as part of the ministry's efforts in the carbon neutrality programme 2050 (transport axis). Engineer Said bin Saif al Shibli, a mechanical engineer, said, "Blue Eyes is the first company operating in this field, and it is a 100-per cent Omani company. It has tested 20 per cent of hydrogen gas injection into the engine, and it will be 40 per cent next August. We are seeking to market the product within the Sultanate of Oman and the Middle East, reaching the global markets during the next year."

The 'fuel of the future' is green hydrogen, which is essentially hydrogen produced from the electrolysis of water

based on renewable energy. The resulting energy carrier can be used in many power applications. It can also be used in the form of hydrogen or converted into other derivatives for use in the fields of industry, energy or transportation which supports the decarbonisation of difficult sectors such as heavy industry, long-distance shipping, transportation and aviation. The Sultanate of Oman attaches great importance to attracting foreign direct investment in this sector, which will provide the Sultanate of Oman with an environment conducive to achieving the desired balance between sustainable development goals and limiting the effects of climate change, while achieving the maximum possible benefit from clean technology, and not relying entirely on fossil fuels as an energy source within the framework of Oman Vision 2040.



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Activities to promote oral health ends



SUHAR: The activities of the unified Gulf Week to promote oral and dental health in North Al Batinah Governorate concluded on Friday. The activities were held for two days, at the Oasis Mall in Suhar, and was organised by the Directorate-General of Health Services and organised by the Primary Health Care Support Department.

The oral and dental services this year were held under the slogan 'My health starts from my mouth', which is determined annually by the Gulf Health Council. This includes health exhibition, dental examinations, health cultural competitions, consultations, sessions and workshops, and other activities that

target all segments of society.

The Gulf Health Council approved unifying messages and topics for this year, including the importance of visiting the dentist, dental care, awareness of dental injuries, awareness of oral cancers, as well as focusing on emerging modern practices that negatively affect oral and dental health.

The Gulf Week for Promoting Oral and Dental Health is celebrated annually in the last week of March each year in all countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council since 2010, after it was approved by the Executive Board of the Council at its 72nd meeting in Riyadh. — ONA

British School alumnus youngest entrepreneur in Stanford

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

Aryan Siddiqui (19), an inspiring young Indian inventor and entrepreneur, has achieved remarkable success in the field of technology.

An Oman resident earlier, he has been accepted into two of the world's leading universities, Harvard and Stanford, where he is pursuing his bachelor's degree in computer science.

An alumnus of British School Muscat, Aryan's story can be a source of inspiration for many young people in Oman and around the world who dream of pursuing rewarding careers abroad.

Aryan is not only an accomplished student, but also a talented innovator and builder. He has co-founded several technology-oriented start-ups, including Crescendo, an online marketplace for renting musical instruments, and a R&D start-up that built AI tools for Covid-19 detection and prevention.

He is currently building Group1, a social app for Stanford students, which was a finalist in the consumer category of the BASES 100k Challenge, Stanford's biggest entrepreneurship competition.

Aryan's success is a result of his hard work and determination, as well as his ability to



Aryan Siddiqui

leverage his passions and interests to create innovative solutions.

He has a strong sense of social responsibility and has used his skills and knowledge to benefit society. He launched No One Will Sleep Hungry (NOSH), an organisation that delivers food to underprivileged families in India, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

He also founded Oman Coding Society (OCS), which offers courses in programming languages such as Python, C++, and Java to Omani children, and Mathletes Oman, which hosted a massive

summer competition for students from various cities and wilayats of Oman.

Aryan's achievements and initiatives have not gone unnoticed. He was coached by Crimson Education to get into top universities, and his extra-curricular activities and entrepreneurial capstones impressed the admissions committee.

Soraya Beheshti, Regional Director at Crimson Education and Aryan's coach, says, "Aryan was an exceptional student to work with, with a keen interest in pursuing Computer Science at the world's leading universities. However, most of his extra-curricular activities were focused on debate, where he had already displayed impressive skills."

To expand his portfolio and tie together his interests in both debate and computer science, Soraya worked with Aryan to develop a range of entrepreneurial projects that demonstrated his technical fluency and cohesion with his passions.

Aryan is confident that he will be able to use the knowledge and skills gained at Stanford to benefit Oman and its technological development.

His success serves as a reminder that with hard work, determination and a strong sense of social responsibility, anyone can achieve their dreams and make a positive impact on the world.



شركة المغليفات الصناعية المرنة (ش.م.ع.م)
Flexible Industrial Packages Co. (SAOC)

ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

The Board of Directors of **Flexible Industrial Packaging Company SAOC** is pleased to invite all Shareholders to attend the company's Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Wednesday 05/04/2023 at 10:00am, in the head quarter of Mohammed Al Barwani Company in Al azaiba. If the quorum not satisfied a second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held on Tuesday 11/04/2023, in the same place and at the same time to discuss the following Agenda:

- To approve the resignation of all the members of the Board of Directors in accordance with the provisions of Article (200) of the Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019.(as per the attachment)
- To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company from amongst Shareholders or non-shareholders. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the Company is required to fill in a Director's Nomination Form. Such a form can be obtained from the Company. The complete Form should be delivered to the Company at least two (2) working days prior to the date of the Ordinary General meeting (no later than the end of the business hours on 02/04/2023). The candidate must satisfy the company's board membership requirements.

Shareholder would have access to reports, documents and statements relating to the agenda items of the Ordinary General Meeting during the official business hours at the Company's head office, according to the Company's Articles of Association, each shareholder is entitled to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and to vote on his/her behalf on the decisions of the general meeting

The shareholders are requested to arrive a half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For further information please contact
Mr. Ahmed Sulaiman Al Amri on telephone No. 24446121

Chairman

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Legal Adviser

95 HEALTH ASSISTANTS COMPLETE TRAINING IN DENTISTRY

MUSCAT: The Dar Al Atta'a charity association held a ceremony to celebrate the passing out of 95 health assistants who completed training in dentistry last week.

The group forms part of the third batch of the association's Tamkeen programme. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

Siham bint Yousef al Kharousiyah, Director of Empowerment at Dar Al Atta'a, said in a speech that Tamkeen programme constitutes a key pillar of the association's drive to provide vocational opportunities to empower and qualify the youth to get jobs. — ONA

SQHCCS celebrates Teacher's Day



MUSCAT: The Sultan Qaboos Higher Centre for Culture and Science (SQHCCS) held its 12th annual ceremony last week on the occasion of Teacher's Day for the academic year 2022-2023 under the auspices of Habib bin Muhammad al Riyami, Head of the Centre, at the Institute of Islamic Sciences in Muscat Governorate.

Abdullah bin Zahran al Barashdi, the educational supervisor in the Center's Educational Affairs Department, in his speech said: "Today we celebrate the teachers of the Islamic Sciences Institutes and the Holy Quran Schools, and the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers, in honour of those who excelled to give their best for the students."

He added that Oman Vision 2040 stressed the importance of education, and gave it utmost care and importance, believing in its importance in representing the first building block in progress, development and prosperity. — ONA





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Advertisement No. (12/2023)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
2023/MM/HQ-6 (PRE/21/097)	Rehabilitation of Internal Roads at Al Udhaiba & Al Ghubra	40	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	First
2023/MM/QS-13 (PRE/23/010)	Paving Work at Embassies Area (Interlock)	25	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	(SME) Third
2023/MM/QS-14 (PRE/23/024)	Supply of Autodesk Softwares	25	26/03/2023	03/04/2023	Excellent
2023/MM/HQ-7 (PRE/23/039)	Cleaning Works at Willayat Muttrah	25	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/QS-15 (PRE/23/041)	Rehabilitation Project for the Front Yard of Kalboub Park	25	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	(SME) Second
2023/MM/QS-16 (PRE/23/049)	Supply Shoes and Personal Protection Tools for Workers in Various Units of Muscat Municipality	25	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/QS-17 (PRE/23/057)	Supply of Tires (Re-tender)	25	08/04/2023	27/04/2023	Specialist
2023/MM/HQ-8 (PRE/23/058)	Supply and Install of Playground Equipment, Benches, Litter Bins for Bousher Park	25	26/03/2023	03/04/2023	Specialist

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically and an Electronic Bond (E-Bond) issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1 %) of the tender value to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality, valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission.
Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Clarification and Support:**
 - For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
 - For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
 - For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH

NOTICE

The Ministry of Health (MOH) would like to announce to the citizens and residents who have been accepted to perform the Hajj pilgrimage this year (1444H/2023G) about providing vaccines in health institutions starting from the second week of April 2023.

According to the requirements of the competent authorities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the necessary vaccinations are:-

- The Quadric-Vaccination against Meningococcal Meningitis (ACYW135)**
- Seasonal Flu Vaccine**
- Covid-19 Vaccine (Bivalent Vaccine)**

Therefore, MOH urges all citizens and residents who want to perform the Hajj pilgrimage this year (1444AH / 2023) to adhere to taking the vaccinations. The above requirements are considered a prerequisite to entering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to prevent the spread of infection and safeguard public health.

Biden says Putin war crime charges justified

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin, alleging Moscow's forcible deportation of Ukrainian children is a war crime, as the Kremlin reacted with outrage.

US President Joe Biden said Putin has clearly committed war crimes and the ICC's decision to issue an arrest warrant for him was justified.

The ICC move obligates the court's 123 member states to arrest Putin and transfer him to The Hague for trial if he sets foot on their territory.

It provoked a furious reaction in Moscow, ranging from dismissal of the court's jurisdiction to vows to protect Putin from arrest. The Kremlin said the warrant was outrageous but meaningless with respect to Russia.

Moscow has repeatedly denied accusations that its forces have committed atrocities during the attack, which it calls a special military operation.

The United Nations is "doing everything possible" to ensure a deal allowing the export of



Young pro-Kremlin activists attend a rally in front of the British embassy in Moscow. – AFP

Ukrainian grain from Black Sea ports continues, UN aid chief Martin Griffiths told the Security Council on Friday, a day before the

pact is due to expire.

The International Monetary Fund said its executive board approved rule changes that

would allow the IMF to approve loan programmes for countries facing "exceptionally high uncertainty" — a move expected

Putin visits Crimea on annexation anniversary

MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Crimea on Saturday on an unannounced visit to mark the ninth anniversary of Russia's annexation of the peninsula from Ukraine. Putin was greeted by the Russian-installed governor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, and taken to see a new children's centre and art school on what the official said was a surprise visit. State media did not immediately broadcast any remarks from Putin, a day after the International Criminal Court said it had issued an arrest warrant

against him and accused him of the war crime of illegally deporting hundreds of children from Ukraine. Putin has yet to comment publicly on the move. His spokesman has called it "null and void", and said that Russia finds the very questions raised by the ICC to be "outrageous and unacceptable". Russia seized Crimea in 2014, eight years before launching its full-scale attack of Ukraine. Ukraine says it will fight to expel Russia from Crimea and all other territory that Russia has occupied in the year-long war. — Reuters

to pave the way for fresh Ukraine loans.

Türkiye's parliament will start ratifying Finland's accession to Nato, lifting the biggest remaining hurdle to enlarging the Western defence alliance as war rages in Ukraine, though he held off approving Sweden's bid. The US welcomed Erdogan's announcement, encouraging Türkiye to quickly ratify Sweden's accession.

In eastern Ukraine, Kyiv's forces continued to withstand Russian

assaults on the ruined eastern city of Bakhmut.

A commander of Ukrainian ground forces said Russian forces were trying to break through Ukrainian defences in several directions in an attempt to fully encircle Bakhmut.

The US has resumed surveillance drone flights over the Black Sea region following a Russian fighter jet intercept on Tuesday that led to the downing of a US surveillance drone, two US officials said.

— Reuters

Erdogan, Sisi to meet, says Turkish FM

CAIRO: Türkiye's top diplomat said President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al Sisi would meet to mark the end of a decade of estrangement between the two countries. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, speaking alongside his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry during a visit to Cairo, said Ankara wanted "to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries at the highest level". Cavusoglu's visit follows a

trip last month by Shoukry to Türkiye in a show of solidarity after the devastating earthquake that claimed tens of thousands of lives in Türkiye and neighbouring Syria. "It is possible that we will disagree in the future, but we will do everything to avoid breaking our relations again," Cavusoglu said. Relations ran into trouble after the 2013 ouster of Egypt's president Mohamed Morsi. At the time, Erdogan said he would "never" speak to "anyone" like SISI. — AFP

Millions of dead fish clog Australian river

SYDNEY: Millions of dead and rotting fish have clogged a vast stretch of river near a remote town in the Australian outback as a searing heatwave sweeps through the region.

Videos posted to social media showed boats ploughing through a blanket of dead fish smothering the water, with the surface barely visible underneath. The New South Wales government said on Friday that "millions" of fish had died in the Darling River near the small town of Menindee, in the third mass kill to hit the area since 2018.

"It's horrific really, there's dead fish as far as you can see," Menindee local Graeme McCrabb said. "It's surreal to comprehend," he said, adding this year's fish kill appeared to be worse than previous ones. "The environmental impact



is unfathomable."

Populations of fish such as bony herring and carp had boomed in the river following recent floods, according to the state government, but were now dying off in huge numbers as floodwaters receded.

"These fish deaths are related to low oxygen levels in the water (hypoxia) as flood waters recede," the government said in a statement.

"The current hot weather in the region is also exacerbating hypoxia, as warmer water holds less oxygen than cold water, and fish have higher oxygen needs at warmer temperatures."

Previous fish kills at Menindee — about 12 hours' drive west of Sydney — have been blamed on a lack of water in the river due to prolonged drought, and a toxic algal bloom that stretched over 40 kilometres. "Unfortunately this won't be the last," the NSW government warned in 2019.

State government fisheries spokesman Cameron Lay said it was "confronting" to see the river choked by dead fish. — AFP

Pakistan's ex-PM marks court presence as supporters clash

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan officially marked his presence in court in the country's capital on Saturday, his aide said, complying with judicial orders after a standoff with police that has led to intense clashes with his supporters.

Local media Geo TV reported that the trial court in Islamabad cancelled the warrants for his arrest as a result of his presence.

Khan, in office from 2018 to 2022, is facing a spate of legal challenges, including one that prompted a failed attempt to arrest him on Tuesday, sparking clashes between supporters and police, which also took place on Saturday.

Khan's aide Fawad Chaudhry said the former premier's presence had been recorded officially by the court and he had left to return to his home in the city of Lahore.

According to local media, Khan's vehicle reached the judicial complex in Islamabad amidst clashes between police and his supporters. They reported that, given the chaos around the complex, he was unable to physically enter the courtroom, and was ultimately allowed by the judge to sign his presence from his



Riot police detain a supporter of Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan in Lahore while Khan was leaving for Islamabad to appear in a court. – AFP

vehicle.

He was ordered to address charges in court on Saturday of unlawfully selling state gifts given to him by foreign dignitaries while in office.

Khan says he followed legal procedures in acquiring the gifts. Earlier in the day, police had entered Khan's home in Lahore after he left for his court appearance in Islamabad and arrested several of his supporters over allegations of attacks against officers during clashes earlier in the week.

Another Khan aide, Shireen Mazari, said police had broken

down the front gate of Khan's home.

In Islamabad, the police chief told local broadcaster Geo News that Khan's supporters had attacked police near the court and fired teargas shells, prompting police to fire more teargas back.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif took to Twitter to criticise Khan, saying he was using people as human shields and was attempting to intimidate the judiciary.

Khan has led nationwide protests since his ouster from power last year and has had a spate of cases registered against him.

— Reuters

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Americans head to Europe for the good life on the cheap



RONDA KAYSEN

Mitas and his wife, Megan, moved to Portugal from Florida in 2019, renting a four-bedroom apartment for €2,500 (or about \$2,700) a month in Campo de Ourique, a quiet neighbourhood with small shops and restaurants. Last year, they bought a 19th-century house in Lapa, a historic neighbourhood perched high above the river, with embassies and 18th-century palaces and mansions with tiled facades, that they will renovate into their “forever home,” said Megan Mitas, 31. Ben Mitas, 40, a mortgage broker, travels back to Florida frequently for work, but their life is in Lisbon where their two small children are in pre-K and day care.

The family fits right in. Here in the Portuguese capital, English speakers are seemingly everywhere. On the day Ben Mitas took his daughter to the park, two women sat on a nearby bench, strollers at their feet, as they chatted in English.

The previous afternoon, Rita Silva, a researcher at Habita!, a housing rights organisation, leaned forward intently on a tattered red sofa, her elbows on her knees, surrounded by bookshelves and hand-painted banners inside the group’s storefront headquarters in the trendy Intendente neighborhood. She was preparing to meet with Lisbon residents facing eviction. Even Habita! is feeling the squeeze: The group’s landlord will not renew its lease, which expires next year. Lisbon “stopped being affordable for the people who live and work in this country,” Silva said.

Americans, unable to afford the kinds of homes they want in the kinds of domestic cities where they want to live, like San Francisco and New York, are moving to Southern Europe in significant numbers. Drawn to the region by its mild climate and low cost of living, made even more affordable by a strong dollar, many Americans gush about trading a car-dependent lifestyle for the chance to live in a vibrant, European city on the cheap.

What is cheap for these Americans is brutally expensive for southern Europeans, whose average wages are substantially lower than Americans’. Locals are competing for housing against wealthy foreigners in markets already distorted by Airbnbs and corporate real estate investment. The result is a generation failing to launch, with more than 90 per cent of southern Europeans under 35 still living at home, rates that eclipse their American counterparts. Those who have apartments face evictions and unpredictable rent increases in cities with weak rental protections, like Lisbon, Barcelona and Athens.

“It’s soul-breaking,” said Alkis Kafetzis, 40, a project coordinator at Eteron Institute for Research and Social Change in Athens, which studies housing inequities.

The surge in foreign investment is no accident. Portugal, Spain and Greece have courted deep-pocketed foreigners and corporations, hoping to attract talent, bolster their economies and spur development. Portugal and Spain recently introduced digital nomad visas that allow remote workers to live in the country for an extended period of time, echoing a similar visa in Greece. In Spain, home sales to Americans jumped by 88 per cent from the first half of 2019 to the first half of 2022. Americans were among those willing to spend the most per square meter, bested only by the Danes in how much they paid in the first half of 2022,



Alkis Kafetzis, left, with Danai Maragoudaki, who work for Eteron Institute for Research and Social Change, in Athens, Greece. — The New York Times

according to Spanish government data.

By 2022, nearly 10,000 American citizens were living in Portugal, up a stunning 239 per cent from 2017, according to data provided by the Portuguese government.

The Americans who are setting roots here are embracing a life where the weather is pleasant, the lunches are long and they can get by with translation apps and a handful of phrases. Americans say that even if they attempt to stumble through a conversation, locals quickly switch to English since the language is so prevalent in European cities. But their children arrive home from school bilingual, giving parents like Ben and Megan Mitas access to tiny translators to help them navigate the tricky moments when Google Translate isn’t sufficient.

“Their main concern is lifestyle migration. They really, truly want to live here and have a more cosmopolitan lifestyle,” said Luis Mendes, an urban geographer at the University of Lisbon.

Baptised in the Aegean “The way you live is so much more free and enjoyable here,” said Christian, 17, as his 8-year-old sister, Evangelia, glided past him on roller skates on her way to take a spin around the dining room table. “Everyone’s calm, it’s not like, ‘do this, do this, do that.’”

The Mallios family is from Colts Neck, New Jersey, a rural community in central New Jersey with sprawling estates and horse farms, including one owned by Bruce Springsteen.

They arrived in Greece in July 2020, after Melissa and Demetrios Mallios bought a 350,000 euro house on Evia, an island near Athens. The purchase qualified for a golden visa, a residency programme available in several European countries that gives homebuyers years of residency in exchange for spending a significant sum in cash on real estate.

The family spent the 2021 school year renting a house in Athens while their children attended an international

school there. By 2022, Melissa and Demetrios Mallios put their New Jersey home on the market, and bought the 1.45 million euro condo in Kifissia, a northern Athens suburb with tree-lined streets and multimillion-euro villas hidden behind high stone walls. At almost 427 euros a square foot, high-end homes sell in Kifissia for about 44 per cent more than comparable ones in the rest of Athens, according to RE/Max Europe.

On a Sunday evening, families were strolling around Kifissia’s downtown, which is full of upscale restaurants, cafes and boutiques — Bottega Veneta, Max Mara and Wolford, the Austrian lingerie brand.

The Mallios children now attend a private virtual school, Pearson Online Academy, which allows them to shuttle between their homes in Athens and Evia, but hasn’t given Evangelia many opportunities to learn Greek and make local friends. “I miss New Jersey,” she said.

Her brother, however, has learned the language from his friends on the basketball team. “Throw in a couple ‘malakas’ in your sentence and you sound pretty fluent,” he said, referring to the common vulgarity. And her father, Demetrios Mallios, 52, a venture capitalist of Greek descent, speaks the language.

In Athens, home prices were up 13 per cent in the third quarter of 2022 compared to the same time a year earlier, according to the Bank of Greece. Americans are increasingly interested in Greece’s golden visa programme, with applications up a stunning 740 per cent from 2020 to 2021, according to Aston, an investment immigration firm.

Georg Petras, the chief executive of Engel & Völkers in Greece, said Americans flooded the Greek market in 2022, accounting for a quarter of his firm’s foreign transactions. If the trend continues, Americans will become the third largest group of foreign buyers that his company handles.

Tension is painted on the streets of Athens, where graffiti scrawled on the sides of buildings proclaims, “Athens is Not for Sale” and “No Airbnb.”

The downsides of being a celebrity, if you’re an owl



SARAH BRANER

New York City’s latest celebrity fascination is fluffy, on the loose, and remarkably adept at hunting rodents. After escaping from Central Park Zoo and establishing himself in Central Park in February, Flaco has captured the imaginations of New Yorkers, amassing large crowds eager to see him enjoy his newfound freedom.

But, as Lady Gaga showed us all in her 2009 magnum opus, celebrity can have serious downsides. Is Flaco’s fame more harmful than hurtful?

All the attention could make it hard for the Eurasian Eagle Owl to get a bite to eat.

Rochelle Thomas, the Greenwich Center Director for the Audubon Society, says that crowds could “raise his profile,” meaning that he’s more visible to prey, and this could impact his late-night hunting abilities.

She described a phenomenon known as “mobbing” where birds like blue jays will make a call alerting prey animals that there’s an owl nearby — and they’re more likely to do this when there are a lot of people around. This means that Flaco could have to spend more energy hunting than he would if he were left alone.

“In general, humans observing a bird or a coyote or whatever is not really good for the animal,” said Ted Floyd, the Editor at Birding Magazine.

As is the case for humans, it’s just harder for animals to relax if they’re surrounded by fans constantly. The attention could result in Flaco having to spend energy looking for hiding spots.

All that energy expenditure, in turn, leads to the need for more food. All this means that owls should probably have a limited relationship with the internet. In an email, Dustin Partridge, Director of Conservation & Science at NYC Audubon, told me that “because owls are easily disturbed, we do not condone the public posting of owl locations, like on social media or listserves.”

However, Flaco’s fame could benefit other birds. Thomas described owls like Flaco as “charismatic megafauna,” which



If you must view Flaco, who escaped in Central Park, it’s important to practice ‘owl-iquette’

can act as an “expressive proxy” for other birds and wildlife.

Flaco may prompt people to also pay attention to other kinds of urban wildlife that didn’t escape from the zoo.

In a sort of sad irony for Flaco, a lot of the educational value from celeb birds is in raising awareness around the challenges that urban birds, especially hunters, face.

Rodenticide meant to combat rats can find its way into the raptors that eat them; window collisions kill more than 90,000 birds a year; cars are an ever-present threat.

In 2021, another celebrity owl, Barry the barred owl, was killed from a vehicle collision that may have been caused in part by a buildup of rat poison in her body.

The dramatic downfall of a celeb bird, while tragic, can spur people to take action to protect urban birds.

According to Partridge, you can make your windows safer by making them more visible, like letting them be dirty or applying bird-friendly film. You can also reach out to your building management to ask if rodenticide is being used try to get them to reduce how much they use.

Finally, you can make extra efforts to turn off as many lights as possible at night, as they can confuse migratory birds and cause more window collisions.

The motivation pyramid and its approach



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

Motivation is a widely discussed topic within various communities – whether they be personal or professional – and is an object of interest for many people, from managers who aim to boost productivity, to therapists who seek to better one’s mental health.

Everyone has a different approach towards motivation, yet we never stop seeking it.

In 1943, American psychologist Abraham Maslow published his paper ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’, where he conceptualised a pyramid portraying the needs that motivate people, a theory known today as ‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’.

This pyramid consists of five levels: Physiological needs (such as food, shelter, clothing and sleep), Safety needs (personal security, health, employment, resources), Love and belonging (family, friendships, acceptance, intimacy), Esteem (respect, recognition, self-

esteem, strength, freedom) and Self-actualisation (the desire to become the best version of oneself).

All of these levels are interconnected, as one cannot reach a level before accomplishing the requirements of the previous one.

While some may argue that this order is not definitive and that some parts of each level can be attained without the rest, I believe that Maslow’s theory focused on the needs as a whole by clustering them into groups in an effort to avoid characterising fragmented spurs of energy as consistent sources of motivation.

To put this into perspective, I often go back to the example of the Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl; the author of ‘Man’s search for meaning’. One could argue that he had achieved most of the levels, and may have even been close to attaining self-actualisation.

He was well-known within his community, and had his own family

MOTIVATION IS BORN FROM AN INTENSE DESIRE FOR SUCCESS AND THIS DESIRE CAN FLUCTUATE BASED ON THE DAILY LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS

to care and provide for.

Once he was subjected to the brutality of the Nazi concentration camps, he was immediately stripped from every source of safety, comfort and dignity. Thus, his priorities switched from trying to provide for his family and community to trying to preserve his own life. This was due to the scarcity of his physiological needs, the most basic of needs.

Another interpretation of Maslow’s hierarchy introduces new levels: Cognitive needs (creativity, curiosity, the intrinsic desire to be educated) and Aesthetic needs (the attempts to beautify one’s life), which must be met before realising

self-actualisation. Transcendence (integrity, altruism, spirituality, beliefs) represents the pinnacle of the motivation pyramid, and makes up a significant part of one’s pursuit for meaning in life.

An interesting perspective that I once came upon stated that motivation is supposed to get you started, while discipline is what keeps you going, no matter what it is you set out to achieve.

Even though they are often used interchangeably, discipline and motivation are completely different concepts. Motivation is viewed more positively, as it can be associated with feeling in control.

Many people are excellent planners, and can create flawless and efficient timelines to complete their personal and professional goals. This is due to the fact that motivation is born from an intense desire for success. This desire can fluctuate based on the daily lives of individuals. Everyone has good

and bad days, which proves why motivation may be considered an inconsistent source of energy. Discipline of the other hand, is more directly related to the will of a person. While it also utilises the concept of needs, it is more focused on consistency.

Constantly repeating a task without taking into account the various factors that may affect one’s ability to perform those tasks. Discipline requires intense focus and mental energy, as it is needed to repel any negative thoughts that may be formed when one goes about with their life. A widely known quote states ‘suffer the pain of discipline or the pain of regret’.

While differentiating between motivation and discipline may be beneficial for some, many people get lost trying to identify the perfect approach towards such existential topics that they never start to actively pursuing their goals.

So try. Try again. And again.

Economic stability threatened by vanishing rainfall

LAURIE GOERING

Human activities — from destroying forests to burning gas, oil and coal for energy — are disrupting the rainfall the world depends on, fuelling huge economic, health and social stability threats, scientists and economists warned on Friday.

“We’ve built our economies on the assumption we can rely on precipitation,” said Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and co-chair of the Global Commission on the Economics of Water, established last May.

But “what we’re finding is climate change and land use change is shifting that very significantly,” he said in an interview ahead of a major UN water summit in New York.

New tools allow scientists to track and quantify flows of water vapour rising from rainforests like the Amazon and falling in distant places such as Argentina’s soybean and wheat fields, which are experiencing worsening drought as the Amazon shrinks.

Vapour originating from the vast plains of Kazakhstan and other parts of Central Asia also provides about half of China’s water, Rockström noted.

But as losses of forests and other nature disrupt those flows — and climate change brings more extreme and unpredictable rainfall on a hotter planet — water security is weakening in much of the world, experts say.

That eroding water security poses a risk to everything from food supplies to hydropower production, a key source of low-carbon energy, the Global Commission on the Economics of Water warned in a report released on Friday.

Severe water scarcity — as seen today in the Horn of Africa after five failed rainy seasons — also has the potential to trigger political instability, conflict, displacement and migration, security analysts warn.

The Global Commission report comes ahead of a key UN water conference next week — the first in five decades — aimed at charting a path to shore up declining global water security.

Today about 2.3 billion people — almost one in three — live in water-stressed countries, a third of those facing critical pressures, according to 2021 data from UN-Water.

Even more — 3.2 billion — live in agricultural areas facing high to very high water scarcity or shortages, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization said in a 2020 report.

The World Economic Forum has said it hopes the UN summit can be a “Paris moment” for water, referring to the pioneering 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change. — AFP

As dreams of peace wither, nightmares flourish in Ukraine’s sleep



Maria Varenikova

The writer is a Kyiv-based freelance journalist, producer for NYT

The Russian tanks roll up to the house of 4-year-old Taras and open fire, burying his mother in debris. Taras tries, as hard as he can, to pull her from the rubble, but she is too heavy, and so he just pulls uselessly on her arm.

Then he awakes — sobbing uncontrollably.

Taras’s mother, Anastasia Haidukevych, 41, described her son’s nightmare in an interview. “I tried to hide the war from him,” she said, “but the war is everywhere around us.”

For many, even dreams offer no haven.

A year into the Russian attack, the war is touching Ukrainians in the small hours of night, even those who live far from the front line and have not personally witnessed the violence, like the Haidukevych family, which lives in Kyiv.

In a recent online survey, 70 per cent of Ukrainians reported having had a nightmare about war, and 30 per cent said they had seen death in their dreams.

Psychologists say that vivid dreams are a common response to major life change and that Ukrainians will probably still have war dreams long after the fighting is over.

Ukrainians who have seen combat or destruction often live through the trauma again in their sleep. “Some people see the disturbing events repeated in their dreams,” DreamApp said in a report on its survey, in which more than 700 people took part.

But psyches adapt to big life changes in different ways. And so some who took the survey recounted dreams not of distress but of safety and comfort, of life before the war, sometimes set during childhood.

These show “that what you are missing in life at the moment can come in dreams, and it helps them feel better,” said Victoria Semko, a psychologist who helped found a group of therapists that helps people who lived through the brutal Russian occupation of Irpin, a suburb of Kyiv.

But even nightmares can be helpful. “When people dream of



Anzhelika Vagorovska reads a bedtime story to her two daughters, Yaryna and Polina, in their bed, which they moved to the corridor for safety reasons, at their home in Kyiv.

PSYCHOLOGISTS SAY THAT VIVID DREAMS ARE A COMMON RESPONSE TO MAJOR LIFE CHANGE AND THAT UKRAINIANS WILL PROBABLY STILL HAVE WAR DREAMS LONG AFTER THE FIGHTING IS OVER

traumatising events, it helps to relive them again, but in a calmer environment,” Semko said. “It helps to heal.” But experiencing trauma with the understanding that it is in a dream traumatises others all over again, she said.

In interviews, more than a dozen Ukrainian civilians and soldiers who did not take part in the DreamApp survey all described vivid, anxiety-ridden dreams of a sort they said they did not experience before the war began, in February 2022,

Early in the war, Olena Bond, a 44-year-old Kyiv resident, struggled to sleep, she said. A doctor prescribed antidepressants — and then the dreams began. “Many dreams were about me killing people, killing enemies,” Bond said.

They became more frequent in the fall, after Russia began launching long-range missile strikes on critical infrastructure in cities far from the front.

“I had a dream recently that a very powerful explosion lifted me into the air, and then I fell down in a long, slow fall,” Bond said. “As I fell, I was thinking, I am alive, I am still alive.”

Ivan Chuiko, a soldier fighting in eastern Ukraine, recalled his dreams from before the war as being generally light and happy.

No more. “Once I woke in the trench in the middle of the night and couldn’t understand if I am still sleeping or it is reality,” Chuiko, 37, said. “I was talking with my friends, but we could not find a common language. It was as if some devil or evil force was standing between us. I couldn’t properly see the devil, but I knew it was there.”

Usually, the visions that haunt his sleep are less abstract.

“Mainly I dream of tank battles,” Chuiko said.

But another soldier, Svyatoslav, 45, said his dreams on the front line were for the most part extremely pleasant. “I often dream of what there will be in the future, after the war,” he said.

— New York Times

Procrastination: The thief of time.

Don't do it tomorrow, do it today! Can you not see how uncomplicated, how satisfying, how simple, life is when you just 'do it now, and get it out of the way?' Putting stuff off is, well, just a recipe for not getting it done, isn't it? I mean, what can be so difficult about doing 'it', whatever it is, now? Is it going to ever be any easier to do? No. Is it going to cost less if you 'wait till later?' No. So why would you ever want to wait?

The Dalai Lama, he of constant wisdom, says we shouldn't procrastinate because we know we will die, but we don't know when, so we should do all the things we want to do, while we can, so we have no regrets, and I can live with that! Procrastination is defined, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, as the action "to keep delaying something that must be done, often because it is unpleasant or boring, to dilly-dally."

Actually, to delay doing something unpleasant must be the worst indecisiveness ever. Do you want it hanging over your head like a cloud? Procrastination is that naughty little man sitting on your shoulder, the one you should always ignore, that says, 'Wait!' Well, don't wait any longer, or you'll end up like Oscar Wilde, who said, "I never put off till tomorrow, what I can leave till the day after," and get nothing done.

I have a friend who has toothache and he told me last night, when, over drinks, I noticed his grimaces of pain. When I asked him what the problem was, he said, "Oh, I've got toothache, so when I drink anything that's either hot or cold, I have to like, squeej (his word not mine) it down the other side of my mouth. It's really bad."

Of course, I asked, quite naively it appears, asking whether he had thought about going to the dentist? "Oh, I thought I'd go maybe tomorrow," he replied, "It depends. You know what dentists are like, they charge like raging



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bulls." "And what," I asked, "You think he's going to charge you less if you put it off for a day or two? Do you actually enjoy being in pain?" "Nah, yeah, you're probably right. I should get around to it... but I have heard clove oil is good for toothache so I might try that first." I was done. There and then there was nothing to add. All I could do was tut, tut, tut, and in my bemused state reflect upon a couple of minutes of my life that I'll never get back, reflecting too on other experiences of procrastination, not knowing whether to laugh or cry as Steve grimaced yet again, reaching smartly for his jaw. 'Well, that'll help a lot,' I thought, 'I wonder if it was the cold drink again?' and smiled as I watched his agony, tinged with a little less sympathy than I usually would.

He's a good sound lad is Steve, but sometimes... you just gotta shake your head, look at the floor... and admit defeat.

Some folks put things off for reasons of practicality, or in the name of pragmatism, like 'when we've got more spare cash,' or 'when we're older,' or 'when the time is right.'

What needs to change to make you try some gastronomic delicacies like oysters (yum), frogs legs (so-so), chicken feet (urgh), lambs tongue (niiiiice), or mountain oysters (no relation to the shell variety), or any other food? Delay, and it will be out-of-season, or unavailable. So, give yourself a wee treat... We need too, to not put stuff off because we're scared in an irrational way. Okay, I can't swim, and so I don't much go in the water, but I think I've come to the conclusion that really, it's my fear of being eaten by sharks that makes me scared to swim, and when you put all those sort of complexities together, they aren't so much procrastination as irrational. But that's another story, for another day.

Someone unfamous, once wrote, 'your future isn't guaranteed,' so live... today.

IS IT GOING TO COST LESS IF YOU 'WAIT TILL LATER?' NO. SO WHY WOULD YOU EVER WANT TO WAIT?

ROW ROW ROW YOUR BOAT



Crews gather at the start of the Head of the River Race, an annual rowing race dating back to 1926 where several hundred British and international rowing crews compete to be the fastest over a 4.25 mile (6.8 kilometre) course along the River Thames in London on Friday. – Reuters

A path out of the pandemic

We have made extraordinary progress in our fight against the Covid-19 pandemic since the dark days of 2020. Yet, in many ways, we are back to square one. Public-health precautions are virtually nonexistent in most parts of the world, and the current vaccines and drugs can neither prevent nor even effectively treat infections in broad swaths of the population.

Make no mistake: Covid-19 still poses a clear and present danger. Research shows that two or more Covid-19 re-infections doubles the risk for death, blood clots, and lung damage, among other negative health outcomes. The risk of cardiovascular events has been found to increase by 4.5 per cent for up to 12 months after an infection, regardless of age, race, sex, obesity, smoking, or other factors.

Nearly one in five Americans are reporting ongoing Long Covid symptoms, and recent research estimates that as many as four million people with the condition are unable to work. The long-term social and economic impact of continual re-infections cannot be underestimated.

Although the mRNA vaccines have done an excellent job of reducing hospitalisations and deaths, questions remain regarding waning immunity, and public uptake has decreased with each new booster. A mere 18 per cent



William A. Haseltine

The author is a biotech entrepreneur and infectious disease expert.

WE SHOULD BE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ADVANCES IN ARTIFICIAL-INTELLIGENCE ANTIBODY MODELLING TO REDUCE THE TIME SPENT DURING THE ANTIBODY IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

of Americans over the age of 18 have received the bivalent booster.

Moreover, no authorised monoclonal antibody treatments are currently available, and the preventative drug Evusheld has been rendered ineffective. More than 17,000 immunocompromised Americans and other high-risk people thus have been left vulnerable to severe disease and high mortality rates. While Paxlovid has proven to be a powerful tool against death and hospitalisation, it can have potentially negative interactions with many common medications, such as statins and blood thinners.

Paxlovid also must be taken within the first few days of an infection to be most effective. Owing to this limitation, as well as concerns about viral rebound and confusion about eligibility, uptake has been low, even among high-risk populations. In 2022, fewer than one-third of Americans over 80 who contracted Covid-19 ended up taking Paxlovid. This is very worrying, considering that those over 80 make up a significant proportion of Covid-related deaths.

But all hope is not lost, because we have a successful blueprint to follow. HIV was once a death sentence, but patients nowadays



A volunteer prepares a syringe containing a dose of Comirnaty, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), at a vaccination centre in St. Stephen's Cathedral, in Vienna. – Reuters file photo

can live almost unaffected by the virus, and the impact on life expectancy is relatively minimal. We owe this progress not to a successful vaccine but rather to a wide range of prophylactic and therapeutic antiviral drugs. More than 30 drugs are currently approved for the prevention and treatment of HIV, some of which provide durable protection for up to six months with a single injection.

We can use the hard-won lessons from the fight against HIV to combat SARS-CoV-2

drug resistance, thereby creating an insurance policy against future mutated variants. To that end, we must vastly expand our search for highly active, safe, long-lasting antiviral drugs, while also deepening our understanding of the cellular, molecular, and biochemical features of SARS-CoV-2.

Unlike previous waves of the pandemic, which were driven by a single ominous variant, current and future waves will be driven by multiple subvariants of Omicron. Each new subvariant accumulates

mutations in similar parts of the receptor binding domain (a critical spot in the spike protein where virus-blocking antibodies dock), enhancing the virus's immune-dodging capabilities. We therefore need to focus on new groups of antibodies that can circumvent future Omicron variants by binding at alternative sites that rarely mutate. Not only could these antibodies neutralise all SARS-CoV-2 variants; they also would help us fight related coronaviruses such as MERS and SARS-CoV-1.

We should be taking advantage of advances in artificial-intelligence antibody modelling to reduce the time spent during the antibody identification process. Why sort through millions of B-cell receptor sequences manually when a software program can greatly expedite that work? While there is some research and development under way on broadly neutralising antibodies, these typically have a lower affinity for SARS-CoV-2. Fortunately, in a recent study using an AI pipeline, researchers demonstrated a nearly 20-fold increased affinity to an existing drug. Similar successes could be replicated to develop treatments for Covid-19.

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OMAN SMASH KYRGYZSTAN 7-0 IN ASIAN CUP OPENER

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

Oman’s national beach soccer team started their campaign in the 2023 AFC Beach Soccer Cup with a resounding 7-0 victory over Kyrgyzstan on Friday at Jamtem Arena in Pattaya, Thailand.

With the victory, Oman now lead Group D and is well-positioned to advance to the semifinals and a chance to earn a spot in the UAE for the Beach Soccer World Cup in 2023.

Oman dominated the game in the first half, but they were unable to score, while Kyrgyzstan held strong in their defensive areas and controlled the game’s outlets effectively.

However, a strong kick from Sami al Balushi in the 15th minute of the second half broke the deadlock and set Oman on their path to victory. Then, Oman’s players made several attempts but Aman Aslebkov Kyrgyzstan’s goalkeeper prevented them from scoring the second goal.

Kyrgyzstan attempted to score in the third half, but Oman’s goalkeeper Younis al Owaisi extended his team’s lead with a powerful shot that nestled into the left corner of the goalpost in the 28th minute.

Yahya al Muraiki then scored two consecutive goals in the 29th and 30th minutes, taking advantage of a direct free kick and a rebound respectively.

SAMI STRIKES

With the Kyrgyzstan team’s morale in shambles, Oman seized the opportunity to score two long-range goals through Sami al Balushi in the 33rd minute and Khaled al Araimi in the 35th minute.

Then Al Yaqdhan al Hendasi concluded Oman’s series of goals with the seventh goal in the 36th minute.

The next round of group competitions will be held on Sunday, March 19, where Kyrgyzstan will meet Palestine, and Kuwait will meet Oman. The first two teams from each of the four groups will qualify for the quarterfinals, with matches to be held on Wednesday and Thursday, March 22 and 23. The final match will be held on Sunday, March 26.

During the post-match press conference, Oman head coach Talib Hilal appreciated the players for the good performance and the great result in the first match.” I am completely satisfied with the result. We managed to get our ranks in the second half.”

He added: “I was aware that after scoring the first goal, the opponent’s goal would open for more goals. And this is what happened. We will deal with a special tactic in every match we play, and the next match is not easy, despite our good knowledge of the Kuwaiti national team, but it has young elements.”



Ancelotti backs Vinicius to escape Araujo shackles



Real Madrid’s Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti (L) talks with Real Madrid’s Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior during the Uefa Champions League last 16 second-leg match between Real Madrid CF and Liverpool FC at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. — AFP

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti backed winger Vinicius Junior to escape Ronald Araujo’s shackles when Los Blancos face Barcelona on Sunday in the Clasico in La Liga.

The Brazilian winger, key for Madrid this season, has been shut down by Barca defender Araujo in recent clashes with the Catalans, with coach Xavi Hernandez deploying the centre-back on the right to directly confront him.

Vinicius has scored twice in 12 games against Barcelona, both times before Araujo started at right-back. No player has scored from open play against leaders Barca at Camp Nou in La Liga this season, giving champions Madrid a formidable task as they try to eat into their nine-point deficit.

“He’s had more difficulties than in other games, but Vini is always Vini, his mobility can help him get the best (from himself) in tomorrow’s game,” Ancelotti told a news conference on Saturday. “I’m thinking of putting him on the right, let’s see. He can play on the right, Vinicius.”

Ancelotti later said he was joking about using Vinicius on the right flank, but reiterated that the forward could be given more liberty to drift from the left.

“Obviously that wasn’t serious, but mobility could be important, not having a

fixed reference point. Speaking generally, against a forward that’s another problem for a defence. “Vini will play on the left, with more mobility.”

Xavi also looked forward to the battle between Araujo and Vinicius.

“Araujo is very physically strong, he’s quick, fast, and understands the movements of his opponents,” Xavi told reporters on Saturday. “He’s responsible, and a leader. He’s a world class defender, one of the best in the world. Having Ronald in the team, is a guarantee, an advantage.

“Usually when he takes on Vinicius, he comes out as the winner of the battle, but Vinicius can make a big difference.

“It’s not just Ronald, it’s (everyone) looking out, and collectively, we’ve been very good against Madrid.”

Xavi said he was looking forward to coaching in the Clasico at Camp Nou for the first time, with his prior clashes with Madrid all taking place away from home.

“I am very motivated, you know I’m a big Barca fan, these games get me going,” added Xavi. “It’s my first Clasico at Camp Nou (as coach), I’m excited, I’m motivated.”

DEFENSIVE BARCA

Barcelona beat Real Madrid 1-0 earlier in March in the Copa del Rey semifinal first

leg at the Santiago Bernabeu.

The visitors put on a defensive masterclass while Madrid had more of the ball, earning Xavi some criticism for betraying the club’s preferred style of possession football.

Barcelona were without several key players for that game, including Robert Lewandowski, Pedri and Ousmane Dembele — the latter two of whom are still out for Sunday’s derby.

The league leaders have also won 1-0 in the top flight nine times this season, keeping 19 clean sheets in 25 games.

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone even had a dig at Xavi, noting how some “lovers of the beautiful game” can now be heard saying 1-0 is an attractive scoreline.

The Barcelona coach responded saying that while he respected his Atletico counter-part, winning by a goal in the Clasico would be a “marvellous” result.

“What problem is there with 1-0? Barcelona won their first European Cup (in 1992) with (Ronald) Koeman’s goal, 1-0, and nobody said anything,” added Xavi.

“I’d prefer a 4-0, a 5-4, but it’s hard to score goals, people defend well, people who haven’t played the game can’t understand it. Winning 1-0 is a marvellous result.” — AFP



Verstappen on top as Alonso splits the Red Bulls

JEDDAH: Max Verstappen led both practice sessions for the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix on Friday while Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso prevented a Red Bull one-two at the top of the timesheets.

Double Formula One champion Verstappen picked up where he left off in winning the Bahrain season-opener, lapping the Jeddah Corniche circuit with a best time of one minute 29.603 seconds on the fastest soft tyres in the evening session.

Last year's winner in Jeddah had lapped in 1:29.617 in a hot practice one, when Mexican team-mate Sergio Perez was second fastest and Alonso third.

Alonso, also a double champion and third in the March 5 opener behind Verstappen and Perez, was again in the mix throughout the day.

Verstappen had delayed his arrival in the kingdom as he recovered from a stomach bug but he got straight up to speed, with the only drama being a close shave with the wall at the final corner in the more representative practice two.

"We had a positive day but I think there's still quite a few things we can do better," said Verstappen.

"In the long runs I think we all stood fairly close to each other, but it's more because of managing the tyres... I think the lap times are all very close so its definitely not like Bahrain."

Perez was 0.483 slower than Verstappen in session one and Alonso 0.208 adrift in the cooler evening floodlit running on the fast street circuit and with soft tyres.

"In Bahrain we were like P1 on Friday and then we were P5,

nearly P6, in qualifying," said Alonso. "So you never know until you go to qualifying.

"We tested what we wanted to test in the car. I think it's still not an ideal balance so we still need to chase a little bit of grip tonight."

Aston Martin's Canadian Lance Stroll, still recovering from breaking both wrists and a big toe in a pre-season cycling accident in Spain, was fourth in session one and seventh in the evening.

"Still a bit of pain but nothing bad," he said.

Alpine's Esteban Ocon was fourth fastest in session two, ahead of Mercedes' George Russell who was fifth in both with team-mate Lewis Hamilton sixth and 11th.

Russell said he had some test items on the car for the second session while Hamilton said his car was much the same as before.

"I struggled in both sessions," said the seven-times world champion. "It's just a tough car to drive."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz were ninth and 10th in the evening after precautionary engine changes in the morning.

The indications were that the Italian team were focusing on putting in plenty of laps rather than running their engines on full power.

Leclerc will have a 10-place penalty on the grid for Sunday's race after a change of electronic control unit. Worryingly, he reported problems with the clutch in the second session.

"We tested some new parts today and everything works as expected. It's difficult to get a sense of our competitiveness as everyone is on a different programme so far," said the Monegasque. — Reuters

Williamson, Nicholls double tons put New Zealand on top

WELLINGTON: Aggressive double centuries for Kane Williamson and Henry Nicholls powered New Zealand's dominance in the second Test against Sri Lanka in Wellington on Saturday.

The Black Caps declared their first innings at an imposing 580-4 before reducing Sri Lanka to 26-2 at stumps on day two, leaving the tourists with a very slim prospect of squaring the two-match series.

The in-form Williamson scored 215 and Nicholls posted a career-best 200 not out, with the pair's third-wicket stand of 363 virtually batting Sri Lanka out of the contest.

Their partnership was the fifth-highest by any New Zealand combination and they became the country's first batters to reach 200 in the same innings.

Sri Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne will resume on 16 on Sunday and nightwatchman Prabath Jayasuriya remains on four, with the deficit a daunting 554 runs.

Sri Lanka's bowlers struggled to generate life on a flat Basin Reserve pitch, forcing Karunaratne to set defensive fields during much of the mammoth partnership.

Williamson and Nicholls batted at a lively clip from the outset, advancing quickly from a 155-2 overnight score and barely looking troubled as they unleashed an array of attacking strokes through the first two sessions.

Williamson was impenetrable as he reached three figures for the third time in successive Tests, becoming the first New Zealander to pass 8,000 runs in the process.

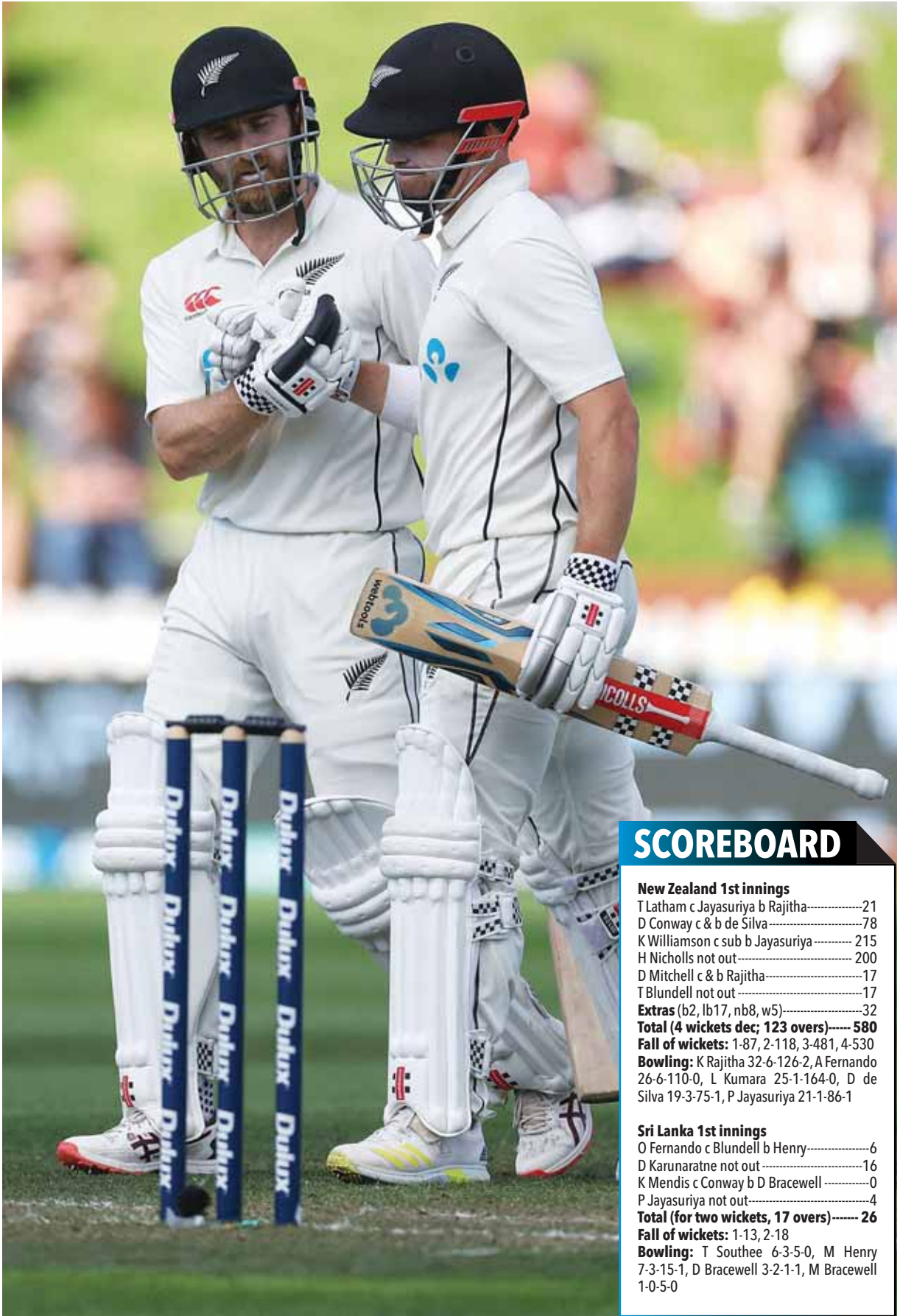
It was a sixth double-century for the 32-year-old — whose unbeaten 121 was pivotal in a final-ball first Test in Christchurch earlier this week.

Having resumed on 26, Williamson struck 23 fours and two sixes before holing out in the deep off spinner Jayasuriya as he tried to escalate the scoring rate.

Nicholls marched on from his overnight 18 to reach three figures before pushing past his previous-best score of 174.

His aggressive 240-ball knock, which featured four sixes, represented a remarkable return to form for the left-hander, whose place in the team was under pressure after failing to reach 40 in his 15 previous innings.

Nicholls said he was aware of criticism of his ongoing selection but said he was made to feel comfortable by support from his



SCOREBOARD

New Zealand 1st innings
T Latham c Jayasuriya b Rajitha.....21
D Conway c & b de Silva.....78
K Williamson c sub b Jayasuriya.....215
H Nicholls not out.....200
D Mitchell c & b Rajitha.....17
T Blundell not out.....17
Extras (b2, lb17, nb8, w5).....32
Total (4 wickets dec; 123 overs)---- 580
Fall of wickets: 1-87, 2-118, 3-481, 4-530
Bowling: K Rajitha 32-6-126-2, A Fernando 26-6-110-0, L Kumara 25-1-164-0, D de Silva 19-3-75-1, P Jayasuriya 21-1-86-1

Sri Lanka 1st innings
O Fernando c Blundell b Henry.....6
D Karunaratne not out.....16
K Mendis c Conway b D Bracewell.....0
P Jayasuriya not out.....4
Total (for two wickets, 17 overs)---- 26
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-18
Bowling: T Southee 6-3-5-0, M Henry 7-3-15-1, D Bracewell 3-2-1-1, M Bracewell 1-0-5-0

team-mates and coach Gary Stead.

"Everyone in the group's been great and you really feel that support," he said.

"For me, it was just about trusting that I had done it before. It hasn't happened as much as I'd like in the last period.

"Now the challenge is doing it again knowing that the blueprint is there."

'MISSED OUR LENGTHS'

Nicholls compared the partnership with a 369-run stand with Williamson against Pakistan in Christchurch two years ago.

"The way Kane's playing, he's in

a real zone out there. It was nice to make that partnership into another really big one."

Kasun Rajitha, who was off the field for a period nursing a shoulder injury, lodged the best bowling figures of 2-126.

Sri Lanka spinner Dhananjaya de Silva said the tourists were guilty of allowing the double centurions too much leeway.

"Obviously Kane and Henry batted very well. We have to be at our best when we're facing these players but we missed our lengths," he said.

De Silva said Sri Lanka hadn't given up on squaring the series

although he conceded it will be very difficult to force a victory.

"We're not playing for a draw, we're playing for a win.

"So we have to bat for at least one and a half days. We'll see what will happen," he said.

Their response began poorly.

Matt Henry removed opener Oshada Fernando for six before fellow-seamer Doug Bracewell dismissed Kusal Mendis without scoring via a spectacular catch at point from Devon Conway.

It came from Bracewell's third ball of the match in what is his first Test appearance for more than six years. — AFP

Oman U16 coach confident at ACC West Zone Cup

MUSCAT: Oman U16 cricket team head coach Syed Aamir Kaleem has expressed confidence in his boys as they look forward to a top-place finish at the ACC Men's U16 West Zone Cup 2023 in Dubai, UAE, from March 24-30.

Organised by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), and hosted by the Bahrain Cricket Federation, the tournament features all the six GCC countries. The event is being organised after a gap of three years.

Besides Oman, the other teams participating in the tournament are UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

The round-robin 35-over-a-

side matches will be played under floodlights at the Vision Cricket Centre Grounds in Dubai.

Oman, captained by Jeet Shah, will take on UAE in the opener on March 24. They play Bahrain on the next day and then meet Saudi Arabia on March 27. Oman face Kuwait on March 28 before concluding their campaign with a match against Qatar on March 30. Wicketkeeper Rahil Habibulla has been named the team vice-captain.

Speaking after a training session at the Oman Cricket Academy grounds in Al Amerat on Friday, Aamir Kaleem said: "We have been preparing hard for



this tournament for the past one month. We have a great bunch of young and talented cricketers, who have performed exceptionally well during the recently-concluded

junior domestic season.

"They have made it to the national team based on their merit and have displayed lot of talent in the local competitions. They

have the potential to make it big and I am confident that the team will do very well in the upcoming championship."

A former Oman international cricketer, who has served the country with distinction for a long time, Aamir Kaleem, added: "We have played series of practice games and did match-simulation trainings in the lead-up to the tournament along with regular skill sessions. We hope to reap favourable results as the boys have been putting in lot of efforts. The tournament is a perfect stage for them to perform and will give them the required exposure and experience to prepare them

for the bigger stage.

"I am excited to coach this young talented bunch of players and I thank Oman Cricket and its board members for the trust they have shown in me and the boys. We are looking forward to a top-place finish in the UAE."

OMAN SQUAD: Jeet Shah (captain), Rahil Habibulla (vice-captain), Prathiesh Ramesh, Devansh Loya, Wajih Abbas, Omindu Medagoda, Giriharan Kuttiraja, Aneek Chakraborty, Aryan Joshi, Kriv Patel, Saumya Sampat, Rishab Gupta, Jayapranesh, Kavish Shah. Head coach: Syed Aamir Kaleem, manager: Sher Mohammed.

Oman's fixtures: March 24: vs UAE, March 25: vs Bahrain, March 27: vs Saudi Arabia, March 28: vs Kuwait, March 30: vs Qatar.

23 TOP FINISH

AHMAD MAKES STRONG



SEBRING, UNITED STATES:

Oman's Ahmad al Harthy produced excellent pace during his maiden FIA World Endurance Championship qualifying session at Sebring International Raceway on March 16, to secure a highly competitive third on the GTE Am grid for the first race of 2023.

Having progressed well with team-mates Michael Dinan and Charlie Eastwood throughout the various testing and free practice sessions during the week, Al Harthy's first ever visit to the American track, the Oman Racing with TF Sport trio headed into qualifying in quietly confident mood.

Al Harthy climbed behind the wheel of the No.25 Aston Martin GTE for Thursday evening's session and the FIA WEC debutant delivered a fantastic performance. Ending the run with a best time of 1m59.657 seconds (181.1 km/h), he secured the third fastest time and only just missed out on the GTE Am front row by 0.3 seconds.

As well as emerging as the fastest of the Aston Martin

entries, the Omani – supported by Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS – was notably happy with the overall handling and performance of his car.

Now looking forward to returning to the six kilometre track for the start of his maiden race in the FIA World Endurance Championship, Al Harthy is hopeful the hard work completed by the team over the past few days in Florida will continue to bear fruit in the big eight hour race – the eagerly awaited 1,000 miles of Sebring.

Ahmad al Harthy said: "I'm really happy with our performance from qualifying, it was a great start to my first ever WEC qualifying and at a new circuit as well. I think we got the maximum we could from our strategy and our performance. In terms of the race, it's going to be a very long race at eight hours and a lot can happen. We want to have a good race where we can run our own pace and strategy and see where we end up. I'm really happy with how things have gone so far and I'm looking forward to the race."

THIRD PLACE ON GTE AM GRID FOR AHMAD AL HARTHY ON SERIES DEBUT

OMAN RACING DRIVER LOOKING FORWARD TO BIG 8HR RACE IN AMERICA

PLEASING START TO FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CAREER THUS FAR FOR AL HARTHY

Rybakina knocks out defending champion Swiatek



Elena Rybakina (KAZ) hits a shot against Iga Swiatek (POL) in the semifinal of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. – USA Today Sports

INDIAN WELLS: Elena Rybakina knocked out defending champion Iga Swiatek with a 6-2, 6-2 semifinal victory at Indian Wells on Friday to set up a clash against Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Two months after Rybakina knocked Swiatek out of the Australian Open in the fourth round, the Wimbledon champion once again put in an impressive display against the world number one.

Rybakina was in control from the start, breaking early to take a 2-0 lead, before going on to clinch the first set when Swiatek produced a double fault on set point.

Rybakina's serve was tested in the first game of the second set, but the Kazakh held under pressure and then won the next four games to take a 5-0 lead.

Swiatek was far from her best on the night and later revealed that she had struggled with "discomfort" in her ribcage during the match, but added that she was still expecting to defend her title at next week's Miami Open.

"We're going to consult with the medical team. For sure I'm going to use these days off before Miami (to recover)," Swiatek told reporters.

The Pole did manage to avoid a bagel in the second set by saving a break point to hold before breaking to then further reduce the arrears, but Rybakina broke back immediately to extinguish the comeback and secure the win.

"I really played well today, it was a

really nice atmosphere tonight," Rybakina said in her on-court interview.

"I didn't expect I would play that well today. I had nothing to lose, I just wanted to enjoy. I think it was one of my best matches this season."

Rybakina will be out for revenge when she faces Sabalenka, who defeated her in the Australian Open final in January. The Belarusian leads 4-0 in their head-to-head.

"It was really close, we had so many battles and so far I'm losing, but hopefully that will change," Rybakina added.

SABALENKA IN FINAL

Earlier on Friday, Australian Open champion Sabalenka was not at her best in a 6-2, 6-3 win over Greece's Maria Sakkari, but maintained her composure even when her old nemesis — the double fault — reared its ugly head on a sunny day in the Southern California desert.

"In the past I lost so many matches like that after a few not super smart mistakes," said Sabalenka.

"I was reminding myself that it is okay to make mistakes. I'm not a robot, I'm a human. I can miss those shots, and probably that's why I was able to keep fighting and keep trying."

After the start of the match was delayed by more than 30 minutes to fix an audio issue related to the electronic line-calling system, Sabalenka cracked an ace out wide to open the match. — Reuters



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Regulation of marketing, promotion on websites to be effective from March 24

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) will begin on March 24 the implementation of the regulation of marketing and promotion on websites and social media, as issued by Ministerial Resolution No. (619/2022) on December 25, 2022.

The regulation aims to oversee the marketing and promotion of all products, goods and services through social media. This is in order to protect the merchant and the consumer, provide the necessary protection for e-commerce transactions and preserve the rights of dealers.

Azza bint Ibrahim al Kindi, Director of the Commercial Affairs and E-Commerce Department at the MoCIIP, said: “The regulation aims to oversee the marketing or promotion of any goods or services, with or without charge, displayed and published in writing, drawing, image, symbol, sound, or by any other means on any websites or social media that allows user interaction, through what is shared with them by



means such as photos, blogs, videos, etc. to reach and interact with customers.”

Al Kindi explained that the method for obtaining a licence for “marketing and promotion on websites and social media” is by entering the “Invest Easy” portal through self-service or service centres, and creating a new commercial register or choosing

an active commercial register. This can be followed by choosing the commercial registry licensing service, then the activity, and after filling in data and attaching documents, the licence period can be chosen, which ranges from one to three years.

“The licence will be issued automatically without the need for other approvals, in order to

facilitate the start of their business,” Al Kindi added.

The Director of the Department of Commercial Affairs and E-Commerce confirmed that those addressed by the provisions of the regulation must reconcile their status within a period not exceeding six months from the date of its implementation.

Al Kindi indicated that those

wishing to work in this field must obtain a licence to engage in marketing and promotional activity. Persons who practice non-profit work, such as charitable and voluntary work, and activities carried out by the merchant for commodities or services that he sells or provides himself, are excluded from obtaining the licence.

“It is required to obtain a licence to practice the activity through a company registered in the commercial register, and that a licence issued to engage in marketing and promotional activities has not been previously suspended or revoked, as well as to specify the website or social media to be used in carrying out the activity,” Al Kindi said.

Al Kindi said the committee may impose one of the penalties on violators of the provisions of this regulation, which are: A warning and an administrative fine not exceeding RO 1,000; Suspension of the licence for a period not exceeding one year and; Cancellation of the licence.

— ONA

Maha Energy commences production test on Block 70 onshore Oman



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

Swedish upstream oil and gas company Maha Energy (Maha) has announced that it has commenced production testing on Block 70 in Oman. The production test will include all eight new production wells drilled in the 2022/2023 drilling programme.

The production test will start with the Mafraq-9 well. Biweekly, a new well will be added to the test until all new wells are connected to the testing system. Each well will be completed with PCP pumps before being placed on the test.

Produced oil will be transported by heated trucks to a third party's facilities for further processing and, afterwards, transportation through the Omani national pipeline system. Maha expects to be able to announce preliminary information about the quality of the oil and initial production potential by May 2023.

In January this year, Maha Energy and Mafraq Energy entered into a Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) for Block 70 in Oman. Through the JOA, Mafraq Energy acquired 35% interest in the exploration and production sharing agreement covering Block 70. Maha is the Operator of Block 70 with 65% interest.

The JOA require Mafraq Energy to reimburse Maha for their prorated share of all past costs, including the signature bonus required under the relevant agreement with the government. Mafraq Energy is also required to pay its share of all future expenditures on Block 70.

Credit Oman records 148% growth in value of insured sales in 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

Credit Oman recorded a 148 per cent growth in the volume of insured sales for Omani exports and domestic sales for 2022. The total value of insured sales for 2022 amounted to RO 333.28 million compared to RO 133.60 million in 2021.

In addition, insured domestic sales within Oman recorded a value of RO 145.46 million, a growth of 171 per cent, compared to the value of insured sales in 2021 which amounted to RO 35.64 million.

Insured sales of exports from Oman to the world recorded a remarkable increase of per cent last year, with a total value of RO 187.20 million compared to 2021, when it amounted to RO 79.95



The insured sectors in Credit Oman varied among the consumer food sectors, which topped the value of insured sales during 2022, with a total value of RO 158.57 million. The value of insured sales in the construction and building materials sector amounted to RO 125.42 million, in addition to the growth of

the petrochemical and plastic sectors, agriculture, mining and packaging.

The number of buyers for 2022 in Credit Oman reached 2,855 local and international buyers, as the number of local buyers in Oman reached 2063, while the number of buyers around the world reached 792.

These results came in line with the royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to enable Omani exports, and the facilities to attract investments and foreign capital, as well as in line with the directives of the tenth five-year development plan (2021-2025), which represents the first executive plan for Oman Vision 2040.

It focuses on priority goals concerned with stimulating economic activity and developing the macroeconomic environment by putting in place appropriate mechanisms and procedures to ensure the speedy return of economic activities, and ensuring the achievement of accelerated economic growth rates.

Credit Oman continues its efforts to advance economic development through its

insurance services that help manufacturers and business owners sell their products and increase their sales volume without worrying about non-payment by the buyer.

It also provides consultations, advice and guidance to Omani manufacturers to enter promising markets in various countries of the world, through the creditworthiness of the buyer and the exporting country and the mechanisms used for that.

Credit Oman also pays great attention to the owners of small and medium enterprises due to their vital role, and being one of the drivers of the national economy by providing facilities to the owners of small and medium enterprises through its services and integrated insurance solutions.

Omantel Group revenue ticks up to RO 2.408 bn in 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

Majority-state owned telecom operator Omantel announced group-wide revenue of RO 2.682 billion for the year ended December 31, 2022, representing a 11.4 per cent increase over the previous year's total of RO 2.408 billion. The dominant share came from the acquired business of Kuwait-based regional telecom powerhouse Zain Group, with a revenue contribution of RO 2.129 billion in 2022.

The Group recorded a post-tax profit of RO 278.9 million for the year versus RO 233.6 million in 2021. After adjusting for minority interest, net profit amounted to

RO 91.3 million in 2022, which was up 35.3 per cent from the previous year's figure of RO 67.5 million, Omantel — part of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — stated in its annual report for fiscal 2022.

On the domestic front, total revenues climbed 6.4 per cent to RO 565.5 million for 2022, up from RO 531.4 million in 2021. “Revenue growth achieved in Mobile Postpaid, Fixed Broadband and cost optimisation measures have contributed in managing the profitability for the year 2022,” the Chairman stated in the Directors’ Report.

Net profit rose 16 per cent to RO 86 million, up from RO 74 million in 2021. It includes capital gain



arising out of the sale of its passive telecom towers amounting to RO 28 million (net of taxes).

“Profitability was effectively managed by capitalising on growth

in Mobile Postpaid revenues which increased by 11.2 per cent, and Fixed broadband by 3.3 per cent with stable revenues from the Wholesale segment,” the Chairman

further stated.

The tower agreement, according to Omantel, represented one of two “high-profile deleveraging deals” pursued by the company in line with its Asset-Lite strategy to achieve an optimised capital structure and liquidity.

Under the deal, which was successfully concluded last December, Omantel sold its over 2,519 tower sites to UK-based mobile tower infrastructure company Helios Towers plc for a cash consideration of \$494 million.

The second deleveraging deal, the telecom operator said, pertains to its successful monetisation of its investment in Omantel headquarters building located in

Madinat Al Irfan in Muscat.

“The transaction included a sale and lease back of the HQ building through a REIF structure which has allowed Omantel to generate considerable liquidity, yet retaining a considerable degree of control over the REIF which will help Omantel in participating in the value created by the REIF in future for the shareholders. ‘Pearl REIF’, successfully completed its initial public offering corresponding to 136.7 million investment units at the offering price of RO 0.112/ share.

Following the IPO, Omantel is holding the remaining 142.3 million units of Pearl REIF translating into a 33.51 per cent shareholding,” it added.

NBO wins best practices for internal eLearning award

MUSCAT: In recognition of its achievements in digital capacity building, the National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Academy of Excellence recently won the 'Best Practices for Internal eLearning' Award. The accolade was presented by MEA HR (Human Resources) & Learning Achievement Awards. This acknowledgment highlights the bank's efforts to offer innovative and rewarding upskilling opportunities for its employees. NBO's Academy of Excellence, the bank's training arm, has been

using a Cloud-based Learning Management System, which is an eLearning platform, to deliver quality technical and soft skills courses for staff members. These online training opportunities allow NBO employees from across different divisions to benefit from an excellence standard in teaching and further refine their knowledge and skills across a range of bank-related subjects. The bank believes that its people are its most important asset and it



will therefore always aim to provide them with an empowering and innovative learning environment. Apart from using cutting-edge technologies, NBO has been increasingly looking to move beyond its traditional compliance training approach and recently implemented a rewards-based approach. Instead of assigning compulsory courses at the start of each year, the bank's Academy of Excellence has introduced monthly courses across different categories.

It also introduced a 'Rolling Trophy' competition providing another incentive for teams to do their level best during these courses. Both initiatives resulted in an increase in course completion rates from around 70% to 85%. More details about NBO's Academy of Excellence, achievements, range of products and services are available at www.nbo.om, by contacting the Call Centre on 24770000 or by visiting any of the 59 branches located across Oman.

Al Ansari unveils new brand identity



MUSCAT: Al Ansari unveiled a new brand identity at a function held at The Chedi, Muscat in the presence of business leaders of Oman. The Al Ansari group was established in 1975 in response to the growing needs of the infrastructure in Oman. Al Ansari operates in four main areas: Building Products Services & Solutions; Integrated Hospitality & Smart Solutions; Utility Infrastructure Solutions and Energy & Sustainability Solutions. Al Ansari's new brand avatar is a revitalised version of the company's original values and a tribute to the country where it has expanded and flourished. In the new logo, the colour Red takes deeper meaning and represents the red majestic mountain ranges of Oman. The colour Blue also takes a centrestage and represents both the sky and the sea of Oman and is associated with, imagination, inspiration, and sensitivity — with sky being the limit. Blue also represents faith, trust, loyalty and sincerity — the values Al Ansari live by.

Two simplified shapes are derived from the two A's in their previous logo. The two "A's" indicate — an A-grade company, for clients and employees equally. "Under the leadership of the late Sultan Qaboos, Al Ansari was able to participate in the growth of our beautiful country that I call my first and only home," Kiran Asher, Founder & Group Managing Director, said. He added, "Our suppliers are our partners, many of them being there with us for 40 plus years, have played a vital role in the success of our organisation. We partner with over 150 phenomenal suppliers who share our values and standards. This includes quality, commitment, innovation and an element of corporate social responsibility." Al Ansari is headed by young & dynamic leaders and operates successfully in Oman, and have expanded into various countries — UAE, Qatar, KSA, India, Sri Lanka and have executed projects in several more countries with their headquarters in Muscat, with a vision to be an inspiration for fostering human values and enhancing business performance.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches jewellery collection for Arab Mother's Day

MUSCAT: With an impressive retail network of over 305 outlets across 10 countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, currently ranked as the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world, is all set to celebrate Arab Mother's Day, which falls on March 21. To commemorate the occasion, the brand has unveiled a special collection of jewellery in 18K gold which can be gifted to mothers as a shimmering tribute to their selfless love. Mother's Day is celebrated on March 21 every year to honour and commemorate the unconditional bond of motherhood, with the exquisite collection from Malabar Gold & Diamonds rooted in the concept of "My Mom, The Jewel of my Life". Mothers are as precious as jewels in every individual's life, making Mother's Day a reminder of her love and sacrifice, and her role in nurturing the future generations to create happier and healthier societies. As part of the campaign, Malabar Gold & Diamonds has launched a special collection of jewellery in 18K gold. The collection involves delicate



designs in necklaces, pendants, bangles and bracelets that have been specially designed to be gifted as a timeless present to mothers, to cherish all that they have done for us. In addition to the special collections, an innumerable collection of jewellery in both tradition and contemporary styles, with designs curated from over 20 countries are also available across the brand's showrooms. In line with the ever changing jewellery preferences of its multicultural and multinational customers base, Malabar Gold & Diamonds constantly takes measure to update its portfolio of designs, which also included setting up of stand-alone store exclusively for local customers of the respective region.



IFN honours Bank Nizwa with four awards

MUSCAT: Nizwa, Oman's most trusted and prominent Islamic bank, has been named the 'Best Islamic Bank' in the Sultanate of Oman by the Islamic Finance News (IFN) Awards 2022, held in Dubai, acknowledging its development and excellence in servicing its clients. Bank Nizwa was also named the 'Best Retail Bank' and the 'Most Innovative Bank' in Oman. Furthermore, Towell Infrastructure Projects Co's (TIPCO) Syndicated Wakalah, valued at RO 14 million, was awarded the title of 'IFN Deal of the Year' in Oman, with Bank Nizwa being a major investor. "We are truly honoured to have received four prominent accolades in the country at such a prestigious event for the global Islamic financial sector. These highly sought-after titles are an exemplification of Bank Nizwa's position as a

dominant player in Oman's Islamic financial sector. Setting the blueprint for change, our growing multi-industry portfolio of Sharia-compliant products and services offered to corporate and private banking customers is an indication of the bank's competency to devise solutions that meet the ever-rising demand for Islamic products," said Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa. "I can proudly say that we have the talent and calibre to be deemed as the trusted financial partner for our customers. We will continue with the dedication to improve our customers' experiences, streamline our processes and explore new avenues that add value to our customers and shareholders as well as demonstrate realistic growth and profitability," he added.

Bank Muscat takes part in 3rd International Bioethics Conference

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to continuous participation in various events and activities in fields and sectors of national importance, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, took part in the third edition of the International Bioethics Conference held recently at the Sultan Qaboos University. Held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council, the event was attended by several high-profile attendees including a number of their highnesses, excellencies, representatives from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco), the World Health Organisation (WHO), leading scientists in the field, besides representatives from a number of ministries, government institutions and academic institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. During the event, Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, presented an award of partnership to Saleh bin



Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager — Capital Regions, Bank Muscat. The conference focused on highlighting and sharing the experiences of different countries in dealing with ethical issues during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, it discussed the importance of having ethical guidelines, allocation and distribution of scarce resources for the best interests of the community, the legal dilemmas of handling pandemic crises including the rights of the individual and the community in accepting or rejecting vaccination, and the

application of technology, artificial intelligence and data-privacy related issues. The conference also discussed ethical obligations from a public health perspective and handling the post-pandemic return to normalcy. Speaking on the occasion, Saleh bin Mohammed al Maaini, Deputy General Manager — Capital Regions, expressed his gratitude at being able to take part in the conference which discussed the repercussions and ethics of Covid-19 related measures. He pointed out how it touched various aspects of our lives as well as the ongoing initiative to develop legislative and regulatory policies in this regard at both the national and international levels. He said: "We are glad to participate in this very successful event. As a pioneering financial institution in Oman, the bank has been a part of many academic, cultural, economic and sports events and activities. It is a matter of great pride that Bank Muscat is always at the forefront in supporting and serving our community in all aspects."

OHI Marine & Motors presents Yamaha land products



MUSCAT: OHI Marine & Motors, the exclusive distributor of Yamaha products in Oman, has extended its offerings to include a new range of land products. This follows the company's strategic shift to extend services in meeting the need of an aspiring generation of customers in Oman, who are looking to balance professional ambition with personal goals whilst seeking new challenges and adventures, without compromising on safety, power and reliability. OHI Marine & Motors is excited to introduce a new range of products catering to a wider demographic of customers in

Oman. Over the years, OHI Marine & Motors has been a key player in Oman's commercial and luxury marine segments with a reputation for service. The company looks forward to bringing more energy into the market for land products, with the latest offerings from one of the world's leading brands — Yamaha. OHI Marine & Motors' new vehicle range introduces a wide selection of Sports & Utility product categories for Motorcycles and ATVs. For more information on OHI Marine & Motors follow us on Instagram @ohi.yamaha.marine.motors

E-commerce trends in the GCC and MENA



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The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on many aspects of our lives, including the way we shop. With lockdowns and social distancing measures in place, consumers turned to online shopping in record numbers.

As a result, the e-commerce industry saw a significant surge in sales during the pandemic. However, as vaccination rates increase and restrictions are lifted, the e-commerce numbers are beginning to normalise.

The initial surge in online shopping was largely due to the pandemic-related restrictions and the shift in consumer behaviour. As the world slowly returns to normal, consumers are gradually resuming their pre-pandemic shopping habits, which include a mix of both online and in-person purchases.

Despite the downward adjustment, e-commerce and online shopping remains the preferred mode of purchasing for a large number of consumers. The MENA and GCC regions are no exception to this trend, with e-commerce experiencing significant growth in these areas.

According to the DIGITAL 2023 Global Overview Report, over 57 per cent of global Internet users made online purchases in 2022, indicating a significant shift in consumer behaviour and preferences toward online shopping. In the GCC region, the size of the e-commerce market is projected to reach \$50 billion by 2025, up from \$29 billion in 2022, according to research conducted by Statista.

This growth is driven by factors such as increasing Internet penetration, rising

consumer demand and government support for e-commerce.

"Recognising that small businesses in Oman face difficulties scaling up and the challenges I faced when I opened my own business made me interested in creating a platform to help businesses like mine get into e-commerce. I wanted to develop a platform that has the potential to help other entrepreneurs and small businesses and make it easy for anyone to start and run an online store. With e-commerce being a dominant force in all of commerce in the GCC, this leaves us with a lot of opportunities," said Maha al Balushi, founder of Wensah Research.

In the wider MENA region, it is projected to be valued at \$69.5 billion by 2023. The use of mobile commerce or m-commerce is a major driver of this growth, with mobile penetration in the region expected to reach 89 per cent by 2023.

As per Arab News, more and more consumers are turning to their smartphones for shopping and purchasing products and services. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing is also expected to contribute to the growth of e-commerce in the MENA region.

A study by the Arab Marketing Association found that the use of AI in marketing is expected to grow by over 30 per cent annually in the region over the next five years.

Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are also becoming popular options for businesses to sell their products directly to consumers in the MENA region. Social commerce is projected to account for nearly 20 per cent of e-commerce sales in MENA by 2023.

The emergence of new digital marketing channels and technologies, such as m-commerce, AI and social commerce, is expected to drive continued growth and innovation in the industry. With government support and the development of e-commerce platforms, small businesses and entrepreneurs have numerous opportunities to expand their operations in the region.

MSX closes the week up 38 points

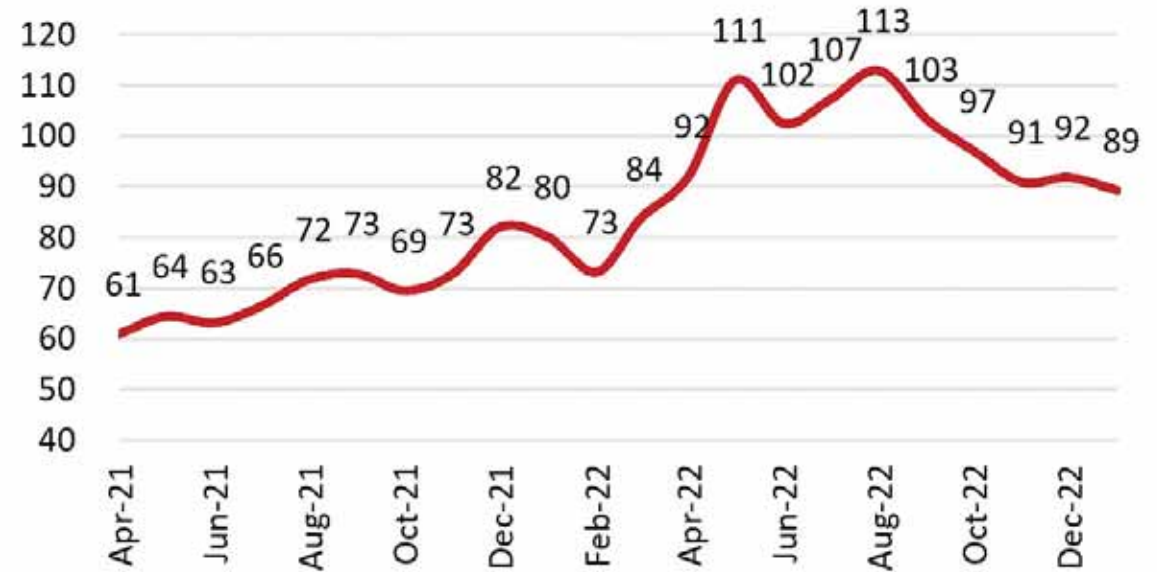
MUSCAT: MSM30 Index ended the week up 38.129 points, representing an increase of 0.79 per cent.

Oman Cement announced that it has received intimation from one of its major shareholders, namely Investment Authority SPC (IA), that IA has entered into a sale purchase agreement (SPA) with Huaxin (Hong Kong) International Holdings Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Huaxin Cement Co LTD, (Huaxin) for the sale of IA's entire shareholding in the Company to Huaxin, comprising 59.58 per cent of the issued capital of the Company.

The longstop date for completion of the transaction is June 1, 2023 subject to certain conditions, including regulatory approvals. Pursuant to the Share Purchase Agreement, the initial consideration payable at completion shall be \$193.1 million which corresponds to 59.58 per cent of the equity value of the Company as of December 31, 2022.

Leading Singapore-headquartered energy and urban solutions company, Sembcorp Industries, has announced that it has, through an 80-per cent-owned joint venture to be set up by its wholly owned subsidiary Sembcorp Utilities with Jinko Power Technology, received an award by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) to build, own and operate the

Average Oil Price (USD/bbl)



Manah Solar II Independent Power Project (IPP) in Manah, Sultanate of Oman.

The 500MW solar plant is expected to be operational by 2025 and will be backed by a 20-year power purchase agreement with OPWP. Oman Real Estate Investment and Services LLC (ORIS), the real estate arm of Oman International Development and Investment Company (Ominvest), has unveiled details of its latest project in Madinat Al Irfan, named 'La Vie', which translates to 'The Life' in French.

The project was announced during Ominvest's 40th anniversary celebrations. Raysut Cement, one of the largest

cement producers in Oman, has announced a revised net loss incurred by the Group for the financial year 2022 to RO 97.634 million, up from RO 90.924 million in initial unaudited financial results earlier this year.

Oman's domestic production of natural gas, including imports, increased by 14.6 per cent until the end of January 2023 to reach 4.35 billion cubic metres, compared to 3.95 cubic metres during the period in 2022. The data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the production of associated gas increased by 11.7 per cent to reach 909 million cubic metres, while the production of non-associated gas, including imports,

increased by 15.3 per cent to reach 3.62 billion cubic metres. Natural gas consumption increased in oil fields was 19.9 per cent, followed by industrial zones at 19 per cent, industrial projects at 13 per cent, and gas consumption in power plants increased by 11.6 per cent.

The volume of trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Jordan during the year 2022 amounted to about \$127.6 million, down by \$25 million compared to 2021, according to data issued by the Jordanian Department of Statistics. The data showed that the value of exports from the Sultanate of Oman to Jordan amounted to \$57.4 million last year, compared to \$79.4 million in 2021.

Courtesy: U-Capital

OCCI signs MoU with India-based INMECC

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 18

Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industries (OCCI) and the Indo Gulf & Middle East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost economical, commercial and trade activities between the Sultanate of Oman and India. Shaikh Faisal al Rawas, Chairman of OCCI, and Dr N M Sharafudeen, Chairman of INMECC, signed the MoU at OCCI headquarters in Muscat.

Davis Kallukaran, Founder Director of INMECC, in his welcome address said that India is among Oman's top trading partners. India is the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China. India is also the 4th largest market for Oman's non-oil exports for the year 2022 after the UAE, US and Saudi Arabia and second largest source of its imports after UAE.



He added that INMECC and OCCI can work together for the progress of the priority sectors identified by Oman Vision 2040 in the areas of agriculture, fisheries, mining, tourism, manufacturing, logistics, tourism, in particular, is promising for growth since its contribution to the Omani economy is only 2.4 per cent of the GDP compared to the global average of 10 per cent, he noted.

The MoU signing is the culmination of the visit of an Omani business delegation representing the health, pharmaceuticals, mining, tourism, telecommunication, energy, shipping, and real estate to Mumbai last May. It was headed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and then OCCI Chairman Redha bin Juma al Saleh.

'Artificial Stupidity': Another future for humanity

ROYA OMRAN AL ABRI

The term Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been around for some years now. But how many of us are familiar with 'artificial stupidity', the dark side of AI? Artificial stupidity is used to denote the condition when AI systems perform tasks in illogical ways.

As AI is used in almost all fields of human activity ranging from business to healthcare, road traffic to aviation, these mistakes can have catastrophic consequences.

According to a study conducted by Oxford University, AI will surpass human intelligence in all fields within forty-five years and assume all human jobs within a

hundred and twenty years. So, what will be the future of mankind if artificial stupidity grows hand in hand with artificial intelligence?

Elon Musk, the world-renowned business magnate, and the co-founder of OpenAI, which is known for its commitment to developing safe AI, is a staunch advocate of responsible AI systems.

His electric vehicle company, Tesla, which was at the forefront of developing an AI-assisted driving system initially introduced the 'autopilot' in 2014. Ironically, its AI system failed when a Tesla Model S with an autopilot system met with an accident in 2016, killing the driver. The fatalities of artificial stupidity were starting to unveil.

In 2018, a pedestrian was killed in Arizona when the AI system of an Uber car failed to

function properly. A similar accident happened in 2021 with another Tesla model this time crashing with a police vehicle. All these happen when the artificial intelligence programme fails to perform basic tasks adequately, logically and correctly. This situation is termed artificial stupidity.

Artificial stupidity can have consequences in other fields as well like the incident that happened with the robot 'Fabio the Pepper', UK's first AI marketing assistant in a retail store. Fabio was supposed to help customers find what they need, provide price information and do other valuable things that store employees usually do.

However, it started to repel the customers when its yells and hugs

became unbearable for them.

We have other tragic incidents in the realm of trade such as the \$440 million loss that Knight Capital Group suffered in 2012 due to a failure of its AI algorithm. Some insecure situations for banking customers also have been reported as a result of artificial stupidity.

There is a fear that we will fall prey to misleading artificial intelligence, a situation when errors are introduced deliberately in the algorithms to cause severe consequences. What if such things happen during AI-assisted surgical procedures, in education, and in the field of shipping and aviation?

Thus, artificial stupidity refers to the limitations of machine learning algorithms.

Many scientists argue that AI is devoid of contextual meanings; it cannot replace the common sense of humans. Consequently, machines may misinterpret the data, leading to tragic situations. However, those who reject the dangers of artificial stupidity point out that stupidity is not inherent to AI. 'Stupidity', if at all it exists, is designed by humans who lack sufficient knowledge of developing perfect AI systems, they argue. All innovations are prone to initial shortcomings and become 'perfect' through trial and error, according to them.

But for the common man, artificial stupidity is a matter of concern as it poses risks in everyday life when more and more of our systems are automated. There is fear that when social

interactions and dealing that require ethical concerns take place, AI may miserably fail.

Robots may acquire more abilities with the progress of time, but they cannot develop morals, feelings and intentions.

That is the dim view of artificial intelligence, which is artificial stupidity. As Dr Jay Leibovitz says: "If intelligence and stupidity exist naturally, then with artificial intelligence, there is artificial stupidity." The fear lies not in the development of artificial robots but in the stupidity of human minds.

A century ago, physicist Albert Einstein famously said, "The two things that have no limits are the universe and human stupidity." Simply, stupidity can destroy the world.

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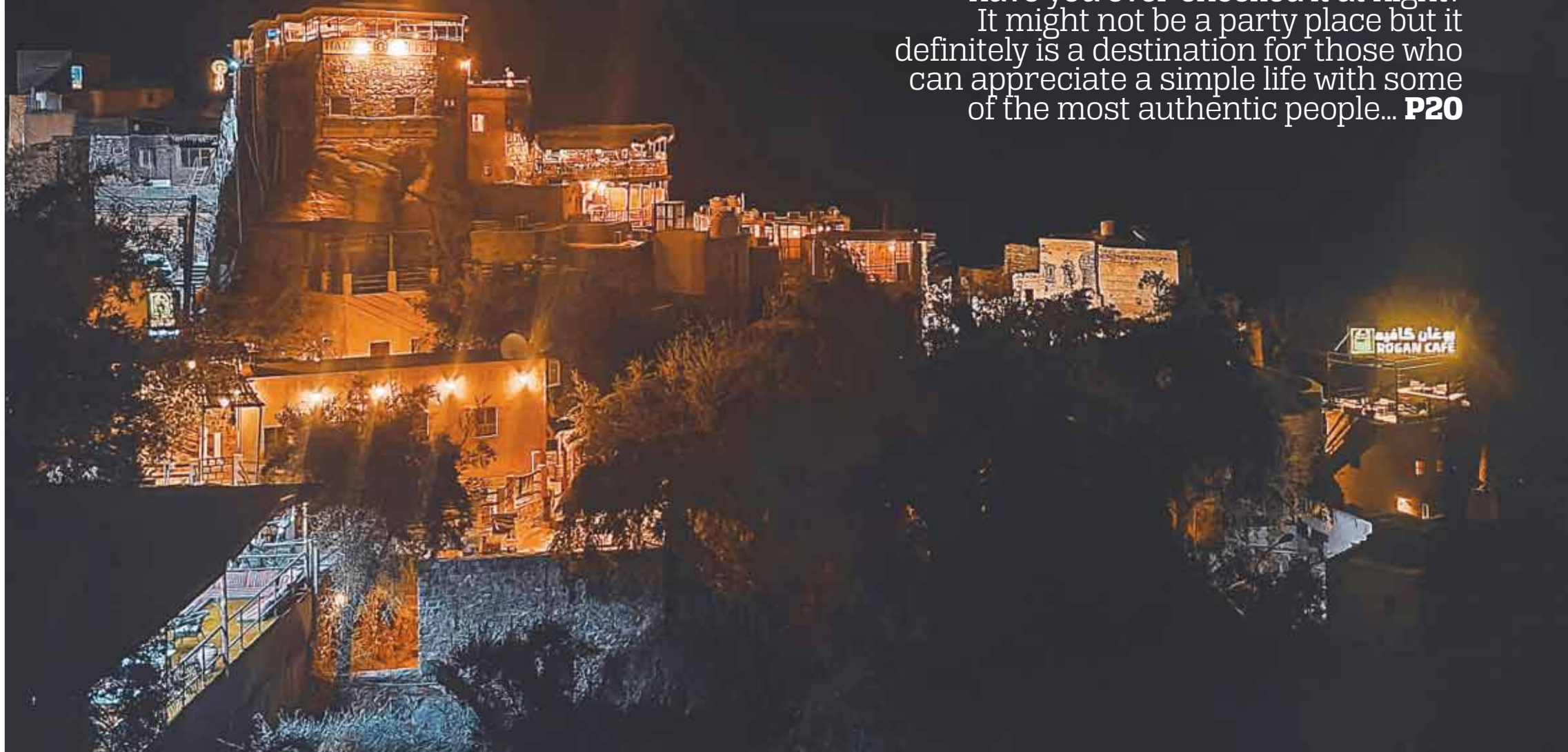
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Misfat Al Abriyeen is a vision of comfort and charm even at night

Misfat Al Abriyeen as a morning destination is already established but have you ever checked it at night? It might not be a party place but it definitely is a destination for those who can appreciate a simple life with some of the most authentic people... **P20**



Belgian hospital food earns restaurant guide accolade

HOSPITAL FOOD WOULD normally rank alongside school lunches on the culinary charts but a hospital in western Belgium has broken the stereotype after winning approval from a prestigious French restaurant guide.

AZ Groeninge in the city of Kortrijk becomes the first hospital in the Benelux to be officially recognised by Gault & Millau for the quality of the

food it serves to its patients.

Marc Declerck, chief executive of Gault & Millau Benelux said the guide producer has been collaborating for more than 10 years with the likes of companies and retirement homes on the meals served to employees and residents.

The hospital brought in Gault & Millau experts to inspect their food and offer advice for

improvement, notably for their fish dishes, their sauces and their potato servings.

The guide subsequently determined that the hospital's food was of a high standard, and Declerck said he would be happy to serve up some of its dishes in his own home.

The general advice, he said, is to work with good ingredients and stick to simple recipes. — Reuters



READ

THE LAST ORPHAN

BY GREGG HURWITZ

The eighth book in the Orphan X series. Evan Smoak must choose between his principles or his life. Read by Scott Brick. 11 hours, 46 minutes unabridged.



ENTERTAINMENT

Young artists perform during the Western Music Festival in Baghdad. Dozens of Iraqi singers participated in the singing festival which was held for the first time in the Iraqi capital.

— AFP

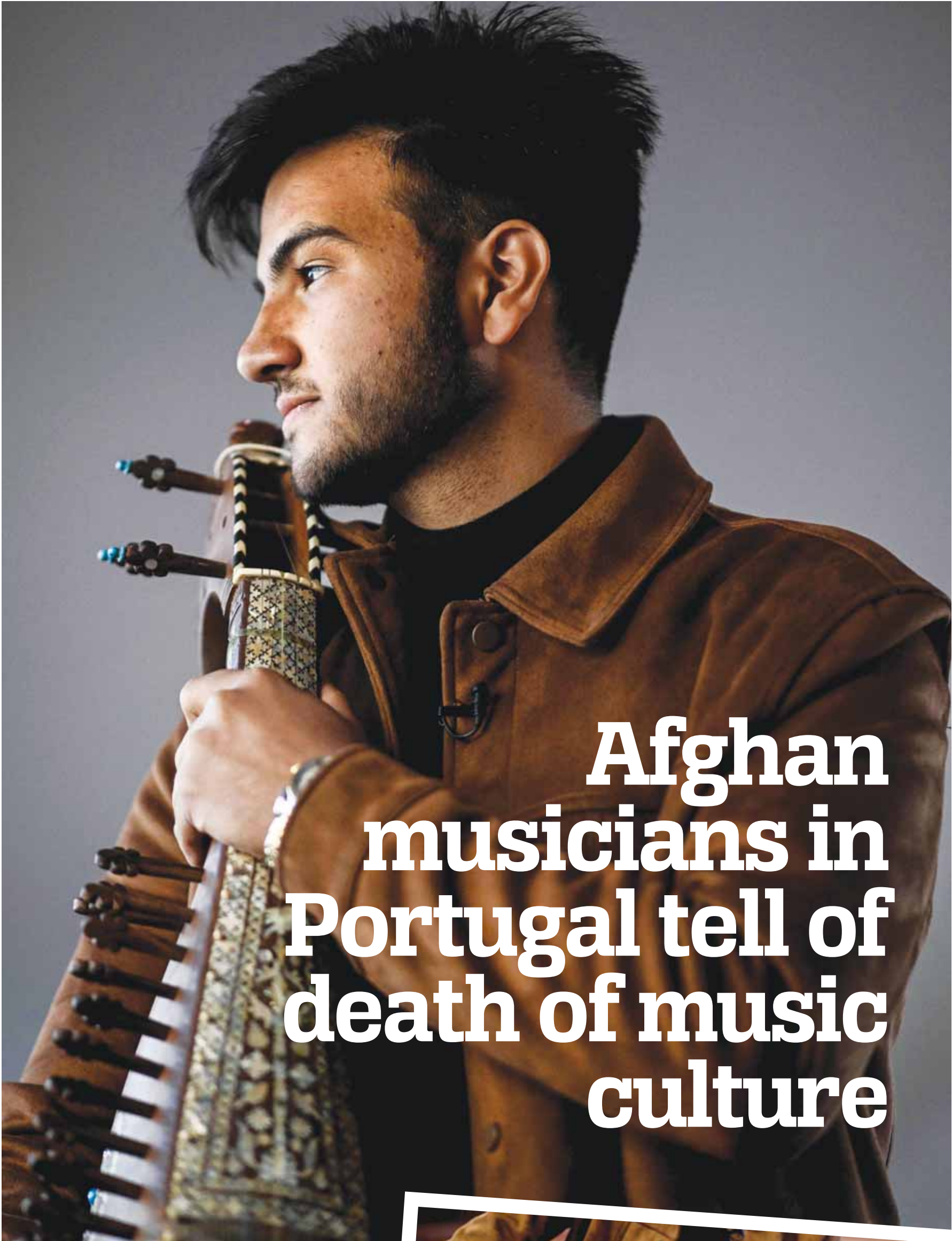


LIFESTYLE

A farmer unloads harvested pumpkins from a camel on the outskirts of Prayagraj.

— AFP





Afghan musicians in Portugal tell of death of music culture

"WE ARE HERE to save our music," proclaims Ramiz, a young Afghan musician who has been welcomed in Portugal, along with other students from the national music school he left as he fled the Taliban's cultural crackdown.

"We hope that one day we can go back to our country," the 19-year-old told AFP, holding his rubab, a traditional stringed instrument made of wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

Ramiz is one of 58 students from the National Music Institute of Afghanistan (Anim), aged between 13 and 21, who have settled in the northern Portuguese cities of Braga and Guimaraes.

He landed in Lisbon, along with his classmates, several teachers and some of their families in December 2021, months after the Taliban took power.

The 273 refugees fled Afghanistan for fear of reprisals from the ruling Taliban, who have banned non-religious music.

"When Taliban reached the gates of Kabul, it was clear that we should get out," recalled Anim director Ahmad Sarmast, who did everything possible to evacuate the students and staff of the music institute.

"Afghanistan is a silent nation," the 61-year-old said.

"When a country's music is banned, an entire nation is silenced," added Sarmast, who lost some of his hearing in an attack by the Taliban in 2014 when they were rebel fighters.

"It's nothing short of a cultural and musical genocide," added the Afghan music specialist, who has made it his mission to safeguard his country's musical heritage

and to recreate in Portugal the music school he founded in Afghanistan in 2010.

'EACH PERFORMANCE IS A PROTEST' -

While waiting to find a place where it can be reborn, his exiled students have been welcomed at the Braga Music Conservatory, where they continue to play music as an act of resistance.

"Each performance of our school is a protest against what is happening in Afghanistan," Sarmast said.

One of those acts of musical protest came earlier this month in a concert with celebrated Japanese-born violinist Midori Goto.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021, promising a softer version of their brutal 1996-2001 rule that was infamous for human rights abuses.

But they have squeezed women out of almost all areas of public life, recently banning them from secondary and higher education, public sector work and from visiting parks and baths.

Nineteen-year-old percussionist Shogufa, working in another part of the Braga conservatory with a fellow student, is trying to enjoy the freedom that her new life in Portugal offers.



In her spare time, the Beethoven fan likes to compose music, cook, go out for a hamburger or play sports with her friends at a local gym.

While women are not allowed to study in Afghanistan, Shogufa welcomes the opportunity to do so every day in Portugal.

She remains traumatised by the memory of musical instruments destroyed and burnt by the Taliban in Kabul.

"My huge dream is that one day I'll return back to Afghanistan," she said.

"I do believe that everything will be fine, because the Taliban... is not forever."

- 'OUR MUSIC IS NOT DEAD' -

Ramiz, taking a break from his rubab practice, is also optimistic and hopes one day to return to

Afghanistan "and show our music is not dead".

But his mood darkens when he thinks about his family back home.

He hopes they will soon be able to join him in Portugal as "the life is too dangerous for them".

He speaks to his mother every day. "One night if she didn't listen to my voice, she won't sleep," added the young man, whose father and two brothers are also musicians.

Shogufa, who spent over seven months in a precarious condition in a former military hospital in Lisbon before making her way to Braga, has similar concerns for those she left behind, including her six brothers and sisters.

"All of them just stay at home... have no plans for the future." — AFP

A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



By Dr Zainab al Ajmi
zeinbf@moe.om

Proven Benefits of Memorisation for Students' Learning

MEMORISATION SKILL referred to as an effortless skill, however, this skill constitutes an important, even if it's at the lowest levels in Bloom's taxonomy of learning outcomes, it's the foundation of learning. Memorisation still performs a vital role in learning, and in the brain's evolution of normal and abnormal functions.

Despite research emphasising that creativity, innovation, and creative learnings are critical success factors and a global priority in the future, memorisation is equally significant to thinking skills. It is crucial to acquire memorisation strategies to enhance learning where the study published by the American Physiological Society showed that 92.9% of students participating in the study experienced an improvement in information recall after only three 60- min sessions of training in such strategies. (Hoque, 2018). Moreover, Hoque (2018) states that the biggest weakness students have is that they either try to remember school material by rote memorisation or have no strategy at all. Likewise, many educators at all levels have disdain for memorisation, stating that we should focus education on teaching students to think and solve problems as skills for life. Disdaining for memorisation is a relatively new phenomenon in education. In ancient times, people took great pains and pride in memorising huge quantities of information.

On the other hand, Nowak (2022) describes memorisation as a critical learning method that establishes well lifelong mental abilities. It trains the brain to retain more information. Additionally, rote learning helps students store foundational concepts to use in upcoming situations, freeing their brains to grasp new concepts. In the age where technology provides every piece of information, memorisation cultivates the foundation of creativity and innovation. Thus, students can only get creative and innovative with their memorised information. Therefore, memorisation isn't an enemy of education, it doesn't kill creativity. Instead, it's essential in education. It also has a prominent place in the classroom, and its incorporation now and then is necessary.

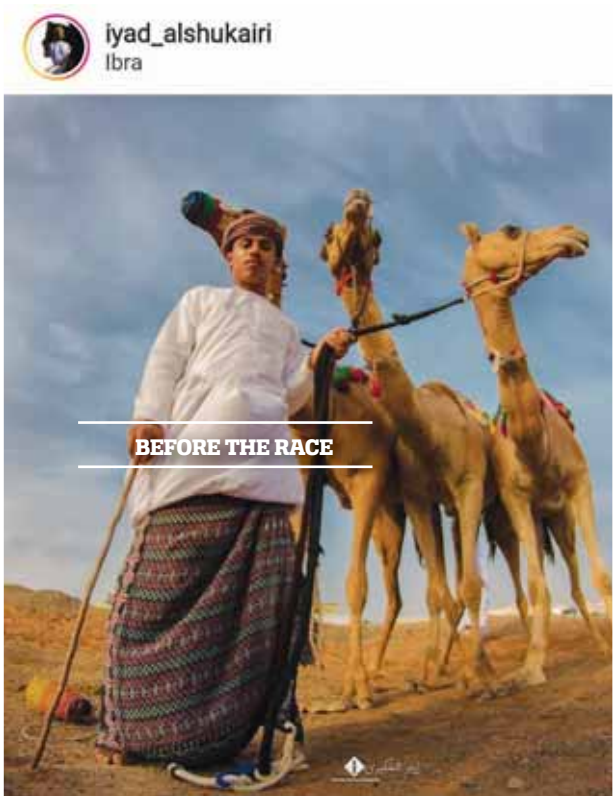
Moreover, Nowak (2022) states that there are a set of tools to assist students recollect information with ease, including 1. Simple Repetition: It involves reading the passage aloud from start to finish and repeating the reading until memorising it. 2. Disappearing Act: The teacher writes a passage on the board and lets students read it aloud a few times. Using an eraser makes a diagonal swipe on the passage. This leaves a blank line in each sentence. Ask each student to read through the passage again. Make another swipe with the eraser and ask the students to read again and repeat this. 3. Acronyms: words formed by combining the first letters in a string of words—for instance, LED (Light-Emitting Diode). Acronyms help to remember a topic in a particular order. 4. Melodies: it plays an influential role in encouraging memory work. Thus, some passages are easier to remember when memorised as a song. 5. Logical Patterns: such as chronological order, old to new, simple to complex, and small to large. thus, making memorisation more manageable. 6. Journey: This method of memorisation is also a type of visualisation. It involves using a specific path to remember by associating landmarks in a path with a specific item to retain.

To summarise, Memorisation should not be ignored in learning outcomes as a skill. While critical thinking and problem-solving skills are crucial for success in many fields, having a solid foundation of knowledge and basic facts is also essential. The memorisation process can be enhanced for students if the brain process is better understood and how memory works.



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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Ritzy cheddar chicken breasts



THEY'RE AS GOOD as they sound: cheesy chicken cutlets coated with buttery Ritz crackers. Skipping the usual flour-egg-bread crumb dredge, this recipe relies instead on a flavourful base layer of tangy sour cream, which has lactic acid that tenderizes boneless, skinless chicken breasts beautifully. When it comes to breaded white meat, thin cutlets are ideal, which you can buy from the store or achieve by slicing thick breasts in half horizontally (no pounding necessary). They cook more evenly this way, staying tender throughout as they're quickly baked in a hot oven. Serve with something fresh — a big green salad, perhaps — to balance the wonderful richness of this nostalgic number.

By Eric Kim

Yield: 4 servings
Total time: 30 minutes

Ingredients:
1 tablespoon olive oil, plus more for greasing wire rack
1/4 cup sour cream
1 large egg white
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Kosher salt (Diamond Crystal)
2 large boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 1 1/2 pounds total)
1 sleeve Ritz crackers (about 100 grammes)
2 ounces extra-sharp Cheddar cheese, coarsely grated (about 1 cup)
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/2 teaspoon onion powder

Preparation:
1. Position rack in the bottom third of the oven and heat oven to 450 degrees. Place an ovenproof wire rack over a sheet pan. Dab a folded-up paper towel with olive oil and rub it over the wire rack to grease it.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the sour cream, egg white and Dijon mustard until smooth. Season with salt. Lay the chicken flat on a cutting board and carve each breast in half horizontally so you end up with four thin cutlets. Add the chicken to the sour cream mixture, and using your hands, smear the sour cream all over the chicken.
3. In a large bowl, crush the Ritz crackers into coarse pieces with your fingers. Some crackers will turn to rubble while others turn to dust. Add the cheese, garlic powder, onion powder and olive oil. Season with 1/2 teaspoon salt and toss until evenly distributed. Holding one of the chicken cutlets by its thinner end, add to the bowl with the crumbs, and using your hands, pack the crumbs onto the chicken, pressing them in to create a thick coating. Transfer the breaded chicken to the rack in the sheet pan. Repeat with the remaining three cutlets.
4. Bake the cutlets until the outsides are crispy and the insides are no longer pink, 10 to 15 minutes. Let the chicken cool slightly so the coating can set, about 5 minutes, before transferring to plates and serving.

LOCAL SCENE

Students from UTAS Salalah bag Scientific Innovation Prize



By Dr Vandana Jyotirmayee

Society needs individuals who can think creatively outside the box to tackle societal challenges, and such has been the story of two students from UTAS Salalah.

Afnan bint Yaqoub al Rawahiyah a business student, and Anfal bint Yaqoub al Rawahiyah, an IT student from UTAS Salalah, bagged the second place and were honoured by the Royal Army of Oman for an innovative project.

For the first time, these sisters have found a local and natural way to resist the infestation of the Dubas bugs in date plantations in the Sultanate of Oman. This bug, known as Ommatissus binotatus lybicus de Bergevine, sucks the date palm sap, weakening and killing date plants.

Dubas bugs are deadly for date plantations in the Sultanate of Oman, which produce almost 250 varieties of date palms. The bugs attack and destroy the fronds and fruits. So not just the Sultanate of Oman; these bugs are a threat in even places like Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, and Tunisia.

Afnan and Anfal al Rawahi have innovated a chemical-free solution made by the locally available plants in the north of the Sultanate of Oman. Where chemical-based insecticides take three days to take effect, the chemical-free oil that Afnan and Anfal invented takes just 24 hours to show its effect. Moreover, the plant extracts used in the study proved effective in controlling the Dubas palm bugs with high extermination rates. Anfal al Rawahi said, "The results of experimenting with different concentrations of oils indicated the importance of producing insecticides from oil mixtures of low concentration and higher effectiveness in controlling the pest."

Hailing from the city of Izki in the Al Dakhiliyah Governorate,

while in school, Afnan and Anfal always found the families with date plantations worrying about the infestation of the Dubas bug. These bugs have two generations infesting in Spring and autumn, causing severe concerns to those



who own date farms. In addition, these bugs secrete a sticky substance that harms dates.

The sisters started to work on this research project in 2016. Gradually they expanded the number of plants used for different methods of experimentation and extraction. Later their project got new wings as they attended workshops from the department of Agriculture and scientific research and experimented in

labs of the Biological control research section for over a month. They were provided access to Sultan Qaboos University's labs and the Agricultural Insects' Research Department at the Plant Protection Research Centre. They experimented on the insect's nymph and adult stages by spraying and watering the plants with a high concentration of the extracts. UTAS Salalah provided students with a suitable platform for showcasing their talent and honing their communication and presentation skills.

When asked how they felt about the recognition and honour, Afnan said there was still a lot to experiment with for eliminating such insects and replacing chemicals with natural products for good production of dates. Regarding their future research, Afnan thoughtfully said, "We need to study the extract's effect on honey

bees as they are also very near to the trees. We can facilitate plant extract production, but we need companies to support and invest in that."

The scientific club competition ceremony, where Afnan and Anfal were honoured, was held at Al Murtafaa Camp in Muscat Governorate under the auspices of Major General Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman.

SCIENCE

Mutant, parasitic impostor queens lurk in ant colonies



TO THRIVE, ANT colonies rely on everyone pulling their weight. For raider ants, this means diligent scouts track down other nests, then direct hundreds of savage foragers to attack. They return with pincers gripping dead young ants to feed the settlement. Clones are produced. The colony thrives.

But raider ants are among about 50 species plagued by impostors: parasitic ants that resemble queens. They greedily eat the colony's food, but shirk their own foraging duties, and can only hatch more parasites instead of workers when they reproduce. How the fake queens emerge has long puzzled scientists.

"It's a real mystery how these things arrive," said Ken Ross, an evolutionary geneticist at the University of Georgia.

A new study offers a solution. A "supergene" that mutates rapidly, between a single genera-



tion of raider ants, is likely responsible for the royal impostors. The discovery arose from an observation in a lab at Rockefeller University, where Waring Tribble and his graduate adviser, Daniel Kronauer, studied raider ants.

"These weird, mutant queens just showed up," said Tribble, now at Harvard University, who led the study. Isolated from the rest of the colony in a petri dish, it was plain to see: Several of the ants had wings.

It's a typical trait for queens in many species, but it was odd because raider ants don't normally have wings, or queens.

"Seeing these winged females was very shocking, very striking, right away," Tribble said. "I immediately thought it was something genetic."

He set about sorting through the 10,000-ant colony. His needle-in-a-haystack search found a total of 14 impostor queens, which he then let reproduce. Their progeny were always the winged parasites.

Tribble and his colleagues devoted years to studying the mutants and trying to figure out their origin. Another geneticist, Sean McKenzie, compiled the regular ants' whole genome, while Tribble analysed the mutants' genome. Comparing the genomes let Tribble see where the regular and mutant ants differed. — **NYT**



art & life

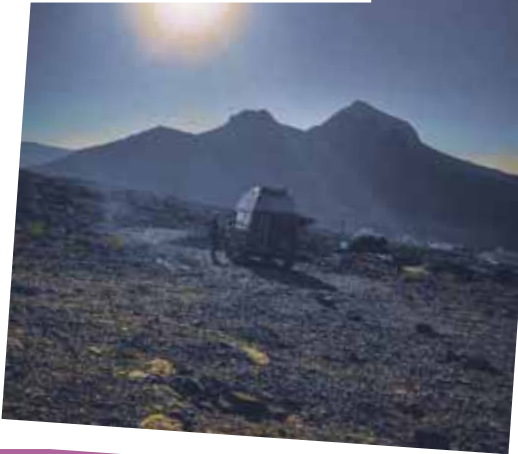
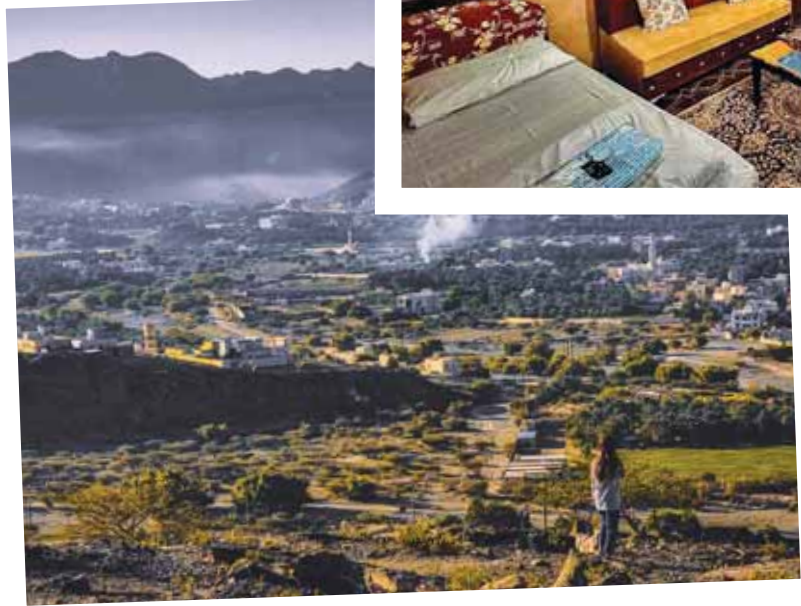
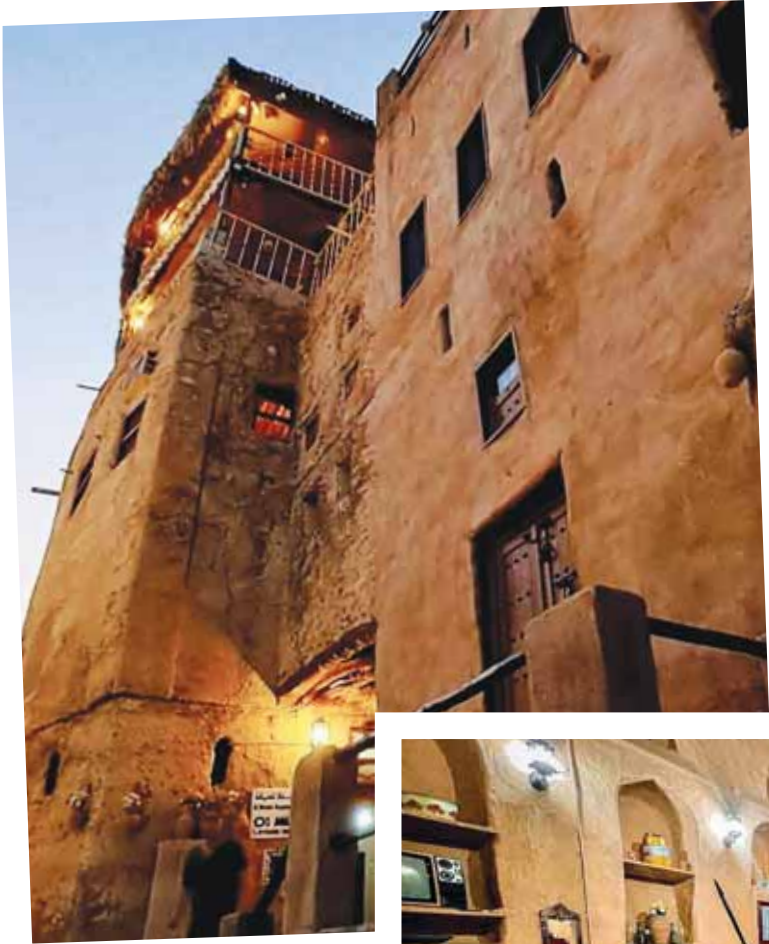
Local Scene

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SUNDAY | MARCH 19 | 2023



Misfat Al Abriyeen is a vision of comfort and charm even at night



By Yeru Ebu
Instagram: @yru_here

Anybody interested in learning more about the country's rich cultural and historical legacy should visit Misfat Al Abriyeen — a beautiful mountain village located in the heart of Oman's Al Hajar Mountains, which offer a stunning natural backdrop to the village's traditional architecture.

But while many people have probably explored this village in the daytime, walking through its gardens and exploring its ancient paths or even venturing into the challenging hiking path that leads out of the village, not a lot of people know that it is just as awe-inspiring at night time.

The distinctive architectural design of Misfat Al Abriyeen is one of the key factors making it a must-see location. All of the structures in the village are constructed from stone and mud bricks, and their charming wooden doors and windows add to their appeal. Visitors may get a real sense of Oman's cultural legacy as the

traditional style of architecture has been preserved over the centuries.

The recent renovations made possible through the cooperation between the villagers, private entities, and government support yielded great results. If in the past the village looked dead at night, it is now a vision of comfort and charm, as not only are the renovated structures well lit with hazy lights, but the pathways inside the village were also dramatically transformed and will almost remind you of the cobble-stone streets of romantic Paris, although those in Misfat Al Abriyeen are uniquely Omani in style.

At night, beautiful lanterns are lit. In the darkness, the first thing that will capture your attention is the towering Hissen Al Misfah and with the beautiful coffee shop on top, it is not only inviting but a testament that Misfat Al Abriyeen is moving towards becoming a day and night destination.

Walk through the maze inside the village, and you will find yourself in a big courtyard with a wide-covered pit in the middle. From here, there are several entrances to the different traditional inns all of them continuing the beautiful lighting found at the main entrance of the village. The beautifully painted doors are illuminated, demonstrating that even at night they are just as vibrant.

After watching the beautiful sunset, even late into the evening, Rogan café is also a vision in the middle of the dark garden. It's usually one of the last places that turns off its lights, and this serves as an amazing hangout for everyone who chooses the silence and nature-embraced expanse of

the village.

As a heritage village, the villagers usually go to bed early, so it's the best place for relaxation, and for anyone who abhors the intrusive noise of the city, this is definitely a welcome escape.

As one of the oldest settlements in Oman with a history dating back more than 1,000 years, Misfat has done quite well for itself to acclimatise and adapt to modern changes while keeping true to its brand and spirit.

Once dawn comes, waking up to the villagers getting busy with their agricultural chores is a great site to see. Sleeping at one of the traditional inns offers the opportunity to catch the fleeting sunrise. Without the intrusion of other visitors, one will uniquely experience walking alongside the ancient falaj system that is still in use today, learning how it works and what its importance is to the village's history.

The people of Misfat Al Abriyeen are well known for their warm hospitality. By staying in one of the village's traditional guesthouses and mingling with the inhabitants, who are always willing to share their culture and traditions with visitors, tourists can get a glimpse into the Omani way of life in a more intimate manner.

So while the rest may go and visit Misfat Al Abriyeen in the morning, I urge you to also check it out at night and see what difference the experience makes. To make full use of your stay, do not get lost in your own company but instead, strike up a conversation with the locals. It might not be a party place but it definitely is a destination for those who can appreciate a simple life with some of the most authentic people.