

P10

AHMAD TO ENTER FIA WORLD ENDURANCE RACE



P13

46 PER CENT JUMP IN OMAN'S TRADE WITH REST OF THE WORLD



P18

'LARGER THAN LIFE': INDIAN FILM-MAKER RAJAMOULI SHOOTS FOR OSCAR FAME



HM ISSUES ROYAL DECREE

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued Royal Decree No 12/2023 ratifying an agreement between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan on establishing the Oman-Kazakhstan Joint Committee, signed in Muscat on February 1, 2023.

Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned agreement in accordance with the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of publishing. — ONA

Damascus values Oman’s efforts in supporting Syrian people

MUSCAT: The Syrian Arab Republic values the Sultanate of Oman’s solidarity with the country on various issues.

This was stated by Idris Maya, Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Sultanate of Oman.

He expressed his thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the humanitarian stance in supporting the Syrian people to overcome impacts of the earthquake, which hit Syria recently.

The ambassador said that the visit of Syrian President Bashar Al Assad to the Sultanate of Oman, and his meeting with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik comes as an affirmation of the deep bilateral relations between the two countries.

He described Omani diplomacy as “distinguished” as it aims to strengthen Arab solidarity, particularly in light of the current regional and international situation. He said that the visit comes as part of the Sultanate of Oman’s endeavours to reunite the Arabs.

On the role of the embassies of the two countries in promoting economic and investment cooperation, the Syrian ambassador pointed out that the embassies of the two countries are working constantly to upgrade economic relations to reach the level of political relations and take advantage of the capabilities and opportunities available in the two countries to achieve further economic and investment integration.

He aspired that the Syrian-Omani Business Council would play an active role in enhancing bilateral relations and joint trade exchange.

He said that the joint governmental committee between the two countries will hold its sixth meeting before the end of 2023 in Muscat.

In the cultural field, the ambassador said that the Sultanate of Oman is keen to lend support and assistance in order to restore and preserve the Syrian antiquities damaged by the earthquake that struck several archaeological sites in Damascus and Aleppo. — ONA

MUSCAT

BHA AWARD CLOSING CEREMONY TODAY

The closing ceremony of the second edition of Bilarab bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design will be held on Tuesday under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said. During the event, winners of the first three positions will be announced. The second edition of the award is specified for designing the Maritime History Museum, which will be set up in the Wilayat of Sur, the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah. The winner of the competition to design Oman’s pavilion for Expo 2025 Japan will also be announced during the event. **DETAILS ON P3**



‘Invest Oman’ hall to promote investments

MUSCAT: ‘Invest Oman’ hall, a unified window for integrated services to provide all services to investors and offer investment opportunities of which size exceeds RO 1 million, was launched on Monday, in cooperation with relevant government institutions and private establishments, according to international best practices.

The hall was inaugurated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) premises. The step highlights the efforts exerted to develop the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman and attract and localise foreign investments. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

“Invest Oman” hall aims at enhancing the investment milieu through which all procedures and requirements for the establishment, operation and completion of an investment project in the Sultanate of Oman are completed.

The hall offers integrated and well-thought-out investment opportunities. The hall also displays investment opportunities in all sectors, as well as incentives and facilities provided to investors.

“Invest Oman” hall contributes to strengthening the principle of complementarity of roles with partners and striving to streamline investment services efficiently and effectively. The collaboration of government institutions is the main driver for serving and caring for the investor with ease, speed and perfection. **DETAILS ON P13**

Employment and replacement in public sector stands at 156%

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

There are more than 85,000 job-seekers by the end of 2022, and the minimum wage is determined through a study of the labour market. This was stated by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, when the Majlis Ash’shura hosted him during its seventh regular session.

The minister also made it clear approval for school guards is currently with the Council of Ministers.

He made it clear that there is no move to go for a four-day week and mentioned that the ministry is working on the Labour Law and the Civil Service Law. “Most of the decisions regulating the labour market are made through the Social Dialogue Committee,” he added.

A visual presentation clarified that the percentage of employment and replacement in the public sector reached 156 per cent, and in the private sector it stands at 117 per cent in 2022, with a total number of employed stands at 34,334. He dwelt upon important labour issues during the public



Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain
Minister of Labour

“There is no move to go for a four-day week and the ministry is working on the Labour Law and most of the decisions regulating the labour market in Oman are made through the Social Dialogue Committee

session, based on Article 55 of the Council of Oman Law.

In his statement, he mentioned the labour policies, plans and programmes of the ministry during the first executive plan (the Five-Year Plan 2021-2025) of Oman Vision 2040. The minister’s statement covered four main points which covered the ministry’s policies, plans and programmes, the most important being the National Employment Programme and its targets. Others were the ministry’s forward-looking vision for future jobs in line with the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

He also discussed policies regulating the work environment in the public and private sectors for medium and long term. He put emphasis on the Ministry of Labour’s efforts that helped avoid service termination of 26,161 Omani workforce in 2022.

The Minister of Labour said there were 12,521 training and job opportunities for job-seekers in 2022 through employment-related training, on-the-job training, training associated with preparing entrepreneurs, training associated with replacement and job support.

INSIDE



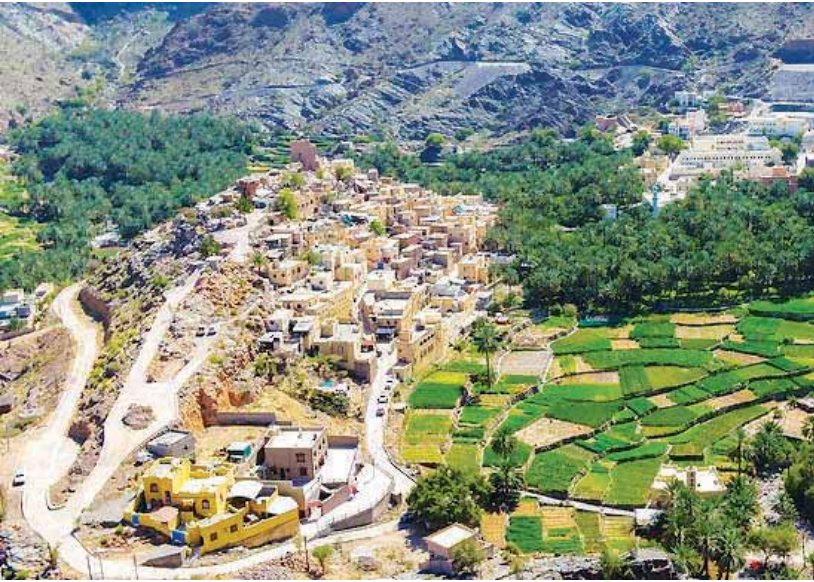
CHINA URGES PEACE IN UKRAINE | P7



WHO STANDS FOR FREEDOM? | P9

Experience South Al Batinah

The activities of the recreational tourism forum in Al Batinah South Governorate will start on Wednesday, under the title ‘Experience South Al Batinah,’ which includes many diverse activities, and is the first-of-its-kind at the governorate level. The forum aims to introduce the attractive tourist and economic potential of the governorate, as well as the unique natural, historical and heritage attractions of the South Al Batinah Governorate. — ONA



Oman welcomes Aqaba statement

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman welcomed the joint statement issued by the meeting in Aqaba in the Kingdom of Jordan, which included Jordanian, Egyptian, Israeli, Palestinian and American officials. Oman hoped that the understandings that took place will lead to de-escalation and prevent the cycle of violence between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as well as committing to what was agreed upon.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman reiterated its unwavering stance towards the Palestinian cause by enabling the brotherly Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights and establish their independent state on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

On Sunday, Palestinian and Israeli officials pledged after rare talks in Jordan to prevent more violence, which has surged this year. After “comprehensive and frank discussions” that included officials from Egypt as well as the United States, the Palestinian and Israeli sides “reaffirmed the necessity of committing to de-escalation on the ground and to prevent further violence”, a joint statement in English said after the meeting. — Agencies



Royal Office Minister receives ambassadors



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received on Monday Leslie M Tsou, Ambassador of the United States of America (USA) to the Sultanate of Oman, to bid her farewell at the end of her tour of duty.

The US ambassador expressed her appreciation for the cooperation extended to her in the Sultanate of Oman. She also lauded the bilateral relations

between Oman and the US.

On his turn, Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts she exerted in boosting the relations between the two countries during her tour of duty, wishing her success.

The Minister of the Royal Office also received Serigne Aliou Deme, Ambassador of the Republic of Senegal to the Sultanate of Oman.

Gen Al Numani praised the strength of the bilateral relations

between Oman and Senegal.

The ambassador expressed his thanks and appreciation for Oman's sincere efforts regarding a number of issues in the region and the world.

During the meeting, the two sides touched on a number of matters of common interest and means of enhancing them.

Furthermore, within the framework of the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to find

solutions for various regional and international issues, Gen Al Numani received Stella Kloth, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Sultanate of Oman.

During this meeting, the two sides reviewed the march of relations and areas of cooperation between Oman and the Netherlands. They also touched on matters of common interest.

— ONA

New education plan to cater for every stage of student's life

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Education (MoE) has said that the new education plan has been prepared to keep pace with the requirements of sustainable development and future skills, in addition to restructuring the educational system, with a focus on implementing vocational and technical education from the academic year 2023/2024.

Vocational and technical education will be implemented gradually in a number of public schools in cooperation with private education and training institutions to meet the requirements of the labour market.

The new education plan will be implemented for grades (1-4), (5-8), and (9-12).

For grades (1-4), the plan focuses on reducing the number of subjects, dividing the study materials into basic and accompanying subjects, and focusing on basic skills such as reading, writing, and future skills.

For grades (5-8), the focus will be on reducing the number of subjects and dividing the study materials into basic and accompanying subjects. Students will not undergo exams in the accompanying subjects, but other evaluation methods will be applied.

For grades (9-10), reducing the number of subjects, beginning with the stage of selecting options from the ninth grade and teaching foreign languages.

For grades, (11-12), the focus will be to address the requirements

Students can compete for vocational and technical education

MUSCAT: Dr Yahya al Harthy, Director General of Curriculum Development at the Ministry of Education, told Oman News Agency that all students in Oman have the right to compete for vocational and technical education in the post-basic education stage (eleventh and twelfth grades).

"Students have the right to compete for vocational and technical education in the post-basic education stage which is eleventh and twelfth grades. Initially the application will be limited to students from areas close to the experimental schools," he said.

"The ministry is working to prepare students on several aspects by developing the study plan for grades 1-10, and also by revising concepts related to the professional and technical field in the school curricula," he added.

of the labour markets.

The new plans have been prepared following feedback from educational experts and the business sector considering the requirements of the job market.

Two majors in business administration and information technology will be applied to start from the next academic year 2023/2024 in some schools in the governorates of Muscat and North Al Batinah.

Employment and replacement in public sector

FROM PAGE 1

Also, the minister of labour indicated that the grant for job-seekers is part of the Job Security Fund, which has been transferred to the social protection system.

The minister said that the ministry has made efforts in implementing strategic directions to develop labour market policies, provide facilities and support for the private sector, and direct efforts towards launching many job initiatives to provide suitable opportunities for job-seekers.

The statement stated that the ministry has worked on developing several strategic programmes, including finding a new mechanism for nationalising jobs, preparing the national employment policy and a sectoral strategy for developing human resources, whose outputs will contribute in providing job opportunities and training and qualifying the Omani workforce that will facilitate in stabilising the labour market.

During the statement, the



minister reviewed the efforts through the services it provides, which cover all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, and is working on providing them with 2,936 male and female employees, to serve a wide range of beneficiaries, including the units of the state's administrative apparatus and its employees.

He indicated that the ministry provides 91 different services, including 53 electronic services at a rate of 58 per cent, 17 semi-electronic services at a rate of 19

per cent, and 21 non-electronic services at a rate of 23 per cent.

The number of active establishments benefiting from the ministry's services reached 195,544, employing 283,982 insured manpower, and 1,458,498 non-Omani manpower, bringing the total workforce in the private sector until the end of 2022 to 1,783,512 workers.

The number of manpower seized through the joint inspection campaigns stood at 12,503 violators of the provisions

of the Labour Law, and the comprehensive inspection activity covered 3,406 establishments, in addition to the implementation of 2,136 inspection visits to ensure the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations for private sector establishments.

During the session, a number of decisions related to the labour sector at this stage were discussed, including the decision to reduce financial grades for employment in the public sector according to academic qualifications, and the generalisation of not linking educational qualifications to wages, as well as the decision to oblige the worker in the public and private sector to pay part of his wages to contribute to financing the Job Security Fund, the decision to work on temporary contracts in permanent jobs, in addition to the decision to place employees in specialised and auxiliary jobs and exclude them from promotions, and to terminate the services of those who have completed thirty years of service.

WELCOME

John Fareed
Global Chairman,
Horwath HTL

James Chappell
Global Business Director,
Horwath HTL

Sinisa Topalovic
Global Head of Tourism,
Horwath HTL

The Oman Forum on Hotel, Tourism & Leisure
under the Patronage of Ministry of Heritage & Tourism
at Crowne Plaza Hotel Muscat, Qurum, today at 8:30am.

For further details, please contact:
Crowe Mak Ghazali LLC,
Auditors and Business Advisors
Level 5, The Office, Al Khuwair,
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2403 6300
events@crowe.om • www.crowe.om

Chief Guest
H.E. Sheikh Faisal Al Rawas
Chairman, OCCI

Over 42,000 register for Haj: MoARA



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Over 42,000 people, including 2,736 expatriates, have registered online for Haj 2023 so far, according to the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA).

The ministry opened the registration for citizens and residents wishing to perform Haj for the year 1444 AH from February 21, which can be done online until March 4.

According to Saudi government, the minimum age for performing this year's Haj is 12 years, and the number of pilgrims returns to the pre-pandemic times.

A statement issued by MoARA, said, 'A total of 42,406 applications have been received, most of which are from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (4,349).'

Other governorates include Muscat (3526), North Al Batinah (3,650), South Al Batinah (2,319), North Al Sharqiyah (2,337), South Al Sharqiyah (1,608), Dhofar (1,941), Al Dhahirah (1,259), Al Wusta (131), Musandam (177), Al Buraimi (337), apart from 2,736 expatriates.



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TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 28 | 2023

3



BHA awards: Winners to be announced today

MUSCAT: The closing ceremony of the 2nd edition of Bilarab bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design will be held today (Tuesday) under the auspices of HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said.

During the event, winners of the first three positions will be announced. The 2nd edition of the award is specified for designing the Maritime History Museum, which will be set

up in the Wilayat of Sur, the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.

The winner of the competition to design Oman's pavilion for Expo 2025 Japan will also be announced during the event.

The awards to the first three positions will be handed over in the form of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) for the second year consecutively. — ONA

Symposium highlights Omani culture at Unesco

MUSCAT: The Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, in cooperation with the Omani Society for Writers and Literati, organised a national symposium entitled 'Omani Culture in Unesco' at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

The symposium was held as part of the cultural events accompanying the 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair.

The opening of the symposium was held under the patronage of Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education and Deputy Chairman of the Oman National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

The symposium aimed to focus on the position of the Sultanate of Oman in the world cultural heritage, and on the Omani cultural components



included in various cultural lists of the Unesco. It also aimed to discuss explore the mechanism for investing these components culturally and economically, in addition to getting acquainted with the Unesco cultural chairs in the Sultanate of Oman.

The opening ceremony included a recorded speech by Amna bint Salim al Balushiyyah, Secretary of the Oman National

Commission for Education, Culture and Science. She underscored the importance of culture in bringing people together, promoting harmony and understanding and spreading peace, and its role as a driver for comprehensive development through the important roles that culture plays in increasing common interests and promoting mutual benefits, as well as

empowering people in various aspects of creativity.

A visual presentation on the Omani presence in the Unesco was also presented, which included the most important official visits made by Omani officials to the Unesco, the prominent of which was the visit of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said to the organisation in 1989.

— ONA

Joint work to achieve Vision 2040

MUSCAT: Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit on Monday held its annual meeting with directors of the Vision's offices at government units in the presence of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

This meeting demonstrates the joint work to achieve the Vision, enhances cooperation and continuous communication, and lends support to ensure the activation of the Vision's offices to carry out their roles.

During the meeting, Al Jabri said that the Royal interest



of His Majesty the Sultan, constitutes a great incentive for all relevant sectors and authorities.

He added that the Unit, in cooperation with the relevant authorities, has held many meetings to activate offices in government institutions, which will in turn follow up the implementation of plans

and programmes and ensure their quality, in addition to identifying and following up performance indicators and drafting the necessary reports.

Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, worked on developing a perception for the structure of the Vision's offices,

their specialisations, work mechanisms, the framework for knowledge transfer, mechanisms for building programmes, developing their indicators and following up their implementation, in addition to addressing the challenges associated with establishing the Vision's offices in government units. — ONA

Oman is a niche hospitality market

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Given that the tourism sector mainly hotel, tourism and leisure industry, is one of the biggest employers in the world, there is a scope for Oman to be a niche hospitality market.

To look at the opportunities that the country has, Hotel, Tourism and Leisure Forum is being held under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism by Crowe Oman with Horwath HTL at Crowne Plaza Hotel where representatives of the hotel industry and investment sector, owners of properties, and SMEs are delving into what Oman has to offer.

Speaking to Observer, John Fareed, Global Chairman, Horwath HTL, said, "Tourism is the only industry that I know where we run into very well. Many in the industry who reached the level of general managers started as dishwashers or bellmen. Then they worked up their way and got trained. I was recently moderating a forum with four CEOs, and three



out of the four said they had begun as dishwashers and now they make significant money. The story can happen anywhere in the world, so in other words, tourism is not just about bringing people to the country but gaining employability."

Howarth HTL, a global brand with 52 offices in 38 countries, will now have their presence in the country with Crowe Oman providing their expertise in development, including feasibility and planning, asset management, valuation, strategic advice, health and wellness, tourism as well as hospitality crisis management.

"The beauty of the hospitality industry is that what matters the most is

the attitude more than just qualification," said Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner, Crowe Oman. He added, "if you have the attitude, you can succeed; attitude is what counts."

The tourism industry today has many trends, such as the growth seen in the Spa sector.

"A trend that is growing in demand is glamping. People want nature, but they want to comfort in five-star facilities. This is today a fast-growing sector. It could be tents but with the best of facilities," pointed out John.

According to the experts, Oman has the advantage of its natural assets.

Sinisa Topalovic, the Global Head of Tourism Advisory of Horwath HTL,

said Oman is different in so many ways.

"Oman is different from the classic Middle East product - glass, steel and skyscrapers, which have their own global demand, but Oman has the culture, heritage, climate and ambience - all of this sets Oman apart. Covid has changed many aspects of the world, but tourism is back. It is great for outdoor activities, and there are great opportunities out there for Destinations Management Companies." The experts quickly pointed out that tourism of high consumerism is on its way out.

James Chappell, the Global Business Director of Horwath HTL, noted, "Tourism of the future is where people want sustainable tourism and genuine experience. They want true local destinations and holidays. The question is what direction the industry will take us between now and 2040. Tourism is the biggest employer, and all of the secondary and tertiary markets feed into that. It can give enormous employment opportunities for young people."

Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



Indian Social Club Oman
(SALALAH BRANCH)

NOTICE

On behalf of President & The Managing Committee, ISC Salalah hereby notify all the members of ISC Salalah that the Annual General Body Meeting has been scheduled on Friday, 17th March 2023 at 10.00 am at the Club's premises.

Request members to join as agenda circulated by emails and displayed at notice board at ISC Salalah.

Dr. Sandeep Ojha
General Secretary
Phone: 23235600
Email: iscsalalah@gmail.com



WHEN YOU DIVE INTO
A GOOD BOOK, YOUR MIND
GOES INTO OVERDRIVE,
PROCESSING LANGUAGE,
CREATING VIVID MENTAL
IMAGES, AND TRIGGERING
A CASCADE OF
NEUROLOGICAL RESPONSES

READING CAN EXPAND
YOUR VOCABULARY,
EXPOSING YOU TO NEW
WORDS AND PHRASES
THAT YOU MAY NOT
ENCOUNTER IN YOUR
EVERYDAY LIFE

READING AFFECTS
THE BRAIN IS BY
BOOSTING BRAIN
FUNCTION. AS YOU READ,
YOUR BRAIN INTERPRETS
THE MEANING OF THE
WORDS, VISUALISE
SCENES, AND CREATE
A MENTAL MAP
OF THE STORY

READING
REDUCES STRESS,
ANXIETY, IMPROVES
EMPATHY AND
SOCIAL SKILLS

READING BOOKS HAS A MULTITUDE OF POSITIVE EFFECTS ON THE BRAIN



READING: A MENTAL WORKOUT FOR YOUR BRAIN

AHMED AL KAABI

Reading is not just a pastime — it's a powerful mental workout that strengthens your brain and enhances your cognitive abilities. When you dive into a good book, your mind goes into overdrive, processing language, creating vivid mental images, and triggering a cascade of neurological responses. But the benefits of reading continue beyond there. From reducing stress and anxiety to improving empathy and social skills, reading can profoundly impact your mental well-being. Studies have shown that regular reading can even stave off cognitive decline and help prevent dementia. One of the key ways that reading affects the brain is by boosting brain function. As you read, your brain must interpret the meaning of the words,

visualise scenes, and create a mental map of the story, all of which require a great deal of mental effort. This mental workout strengthens the neural connections in your brain, improving cognitive processes such as concentration, memory, and focus. In addition to boosting brain function, reading can also expand your vocabulary, exposing you to new words and phrases that you may not encounter in your everyday life. Expanding vocabulary can enhance communication skills, boost creativity, and improve problem-solving abilities. Moreover, reading can reduce stress and anxiety by providing an escape from the pressures of everyday life. By transporting us to new worlds and allowing us to experience different perspectives, reading can lead to a sense of relaxation and calm. Reading also has a powerful impact on empathy and social

skills. As we read about different characters and their experiences, we are able to better understand their emotions and perspectives, which can translate to improved social skills and emotional intelligence. A study found that reading literary fiction can improve empathy and social perception. Finally, reading can enhance mental stimulation, which can help prevent cognitive decline as we age. Studies have shown that reading can help reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. By challenging our brains with complex narratives and ideas, reading can help keep our minds sharp and healthy. Reading books has a multitude of positive effects on the brain. It can boost brain function, expand vocabulary, reduce stress, improve empathy, and enhance mental stimulation, among other benefits. So, pick up a good book and start reading today! Your brain will thank you for it.

ANNOUNCEMENT



RECALL CAMPAIGN 2018 - 2019 (WK) JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE 2018 - 2019 (WD) DODGE DURANGO

Starting Date of Campaign: 28 February 2023
Recall Segment: **Brake System**
Recall Type: **Safety Recall**
Recall Code: **Z48**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE	NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
2018 - 2019 (WK) JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE	From 1C4RJFAG1JC483422	145
2018 - 2019 (WD) DODGE DURANGO	To 1C4RJFLG5KC783348	

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicles.

Description of Recall:

Approximately 12,850 of the vehicles mentioned above may have a faulty Hydraulic Control Unit Anti-lock Brake System Module (HCU/ABS) that reads false pressure in the primary circuit. This can cause the brake lights to turn on or allow the vehicle to start and shift out of park without depressing the brake pedal, leading to unintended vehicle movement without prior warning and increasing the risk of a crash or injury to others outside the vehicle.

Rectification Procedure:

Reprogram the ABS Control Module with the latest software.

Parts Number	Description
See Recall	No parts are required to perform this service procedure

Service Procedure:

If you have a 2018 - 2019 (WK) Jeep Grand Cherokee or 2018 - 2019 (WD) Dodge Durango, please get in touch with our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive on 24500530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 24 500 530

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com



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TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 28 | 2023

5

Oman and India hold political talks session



MUSCAT: The 12th session of political talks was held on Monday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India. The Omani side was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Indian side was headed by Ausaf Sayeed, Secretary of Consular, Passport,

Visa and Overseas Indian Affairs. During the session, the two sides underscored the joint advance relations and the importance of enhancing them in all spheres. They also touched on exploring business and investment opportunities. Further, the two sides discussed several consular matters. They also reviewed Oman's participation

as a guest of honour in the G20 meetings headed by India this year. The session was attended by Amit Narang, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Sultanate of Oman, Shaikh Hamad bin Saif al Rawahi, Head of the International Cooperation Department, and several officials from both sides.

— ONA

TRA to phase out 3G mobile services

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As part of the efforts to upgrade the telecom services to meet the needs of the future, the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) will stop providing third-generation (3G) mobile services gradually, starting from the third quarter of 2024.

With this move, mobile devices limited to 3G and 2G capabilities will have to be phased out as their users will be forced to upgrade their gadgets in line with the needs of telecommunication services.

TRA said its plans to stop the 3G services from July 2024 as part of the efforts to improve communications services, directing natural resources such as frequency band spectrum, investing in modern technologies, and focusing on offering services with better quality.

Earlier, speaking to the Observer, a top TRA official had said that there is a programme in place to close 3G networks so that service providers can use 3G spectrum capacities for new technologies such as 4G and 5G. The suspension of 3G services will take place gradually, starting with the least populated areas.

The decision also reflects the rapid development of the telecommunications sector in the world, which necessitates investment in modern technologies, which results in shutting down the least effective networks to allow the use of more effective networks, allowing subscribers better quality services and enhancing the experience of using the latest and most advanced networks.

In the first six months of 2022, 21 per cent out of 526,531 home fixed broadband subscriptions were via 5G wireless, while 49

per cent of fixed broadband subscriptions were in the Muscat Governorate. There has been a constant growth in the number of Fibre to Home subscriptions, with more homes and areas coming under coverage. It was revealed that nearly 80 per cent of buildings would be covered by fixed high-speed broadband, noting that over 600,000 buildings would be covered by fibre services in 2022.

According to GSMA Intelligence, by 2025, there will be around 50 million 5G connections, with around 20 million in the GCC States. The report added that 5G would also add pressure to phase out previous generation networks in markets where 5G network rollout has been quick. The timeline for phasing out 2G or 3G will depend on various spectrum factors as well as the number of devices used on 2G/3G networks.

Swift first-aid essential to prevent casualties

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Swift first aid is essential in schools to prevent injuries from escalating in the event of an accident or any such adverse situation, stated medical experts from the Oman Society of Emergency Medicine (OSEM).

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), every year, more than 350,000 people suffer out-of-hospital cardiac arrest, and only 10 per cent of them survive. Here comes the need to train the community members in CPR and first aid to make them able to save lives.

Whether it's a minor injury or something more serious like a fracture, preventing further complications is of paramount importance, and schools need to be well-equipped to handle the situation.

Speaking on the sidelines of the first aid lesson for the students of Ahmad bin Majid



Private School, experts added that children in all schools need to be trained in providing first aid to empower them against any eventualities.

"Such first aid sessions and presence of trained first aiders within a school will help the school become safe for everyone as empathy and safety go hand in hand," Dr Suad al Bulushi, Emergency Medicine Consultant and Director of OSEM said.

"Children spend most of their time in schools learning and playing. Young students are vulnerable to injuries and illness. This makes first aid care and CPR vital for students, teachers and school staff," he

said, adding that the teachers and other school personnel can provide prompt first aid care in the absence of health professionals.

Students and staff can act as first aid volunteers. Keeping this in mind, the PE Department of ABM conducted an in-house workshop earlier this year, equipping staff with basic first-aid training. The school also has a First Aid Club to empower them utilise skills to contribute to ABM's safe environment.

The students said that the workshop conducted by the OSEM instructors was extremely helpful.

Students were able to realise how they could help their peers

in an emergency situation.

"My father is a doctor and has always encouraged me to learn more about first aid, so I think it's a priority to take first aid training," said Raneem bint Saad bin Said al Juma of Grade 11 D.

Faisal bin Abdulraziz al Abri of Grade 10 A was confident after the training as he said, "I can now help my classmates if they get injured on the field or my siblings at home."

"We at OSEM are happy to create awareness in public and especially in school, which will raise awareness on first-aid and CPR training to increase survival," said Jawahir al Wardi, instructor.

Over 900 children take part in National Abacus Festival

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Over 900 children converged at the Middle East College, Student Hub in Muscat, Oman, to participate in the 4th National Brainobrain Abacus Competition, which was held on February 18.

The annual event saw a massive turn-out of children aged 5 to 14 years, making it one of the biggest Math-based events the city had seen.

The Brainobrain team strives to make Math both interesting and exciting by engaging children in competitions like these.

The event categorised the winners as champions, Gold toppers and Silver toppers. This year's competition had 274 champions, 278 Gold and 247 Silver toppers.

An active and alert mind plays



a big role in building a child's memory and concentration skills. Brainobrain always encouraged children to play small arithmetic games and mental exercises to sharpen their learning abilities.

This National Abacus event is one of the biggest platforms that children get to test their concentration and memory power.

The competition was planned in a way that it gives children Math-based questions that test their skill and speed in the calculation, memory power and concentration power.

The day-long programme

was inaugurated by Aanand Subramanum, Managing Director of Brainobrain International. Faculty and parents were also encouraged to be part of the event, which included fun activities, various cultural programmes and interesting talks about education and parenting.

Children also had an opportunity to be on stage and showcase their talent. The winners received their prizes from the chief guest Mazin al Sulaimani and Aanand Subramaniam. The faculty members also received special awards for their efforts.



Sultanate of Oman

The Supreme Judiciary Council

Tender Announcement

The Supreme Judiciary Council announces its desire to submit the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
02/2023	Maintenance Works At Dima W'attayeen Primary Court	02/03/2023	27/03/2023	Fourth	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:

Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:

Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:

Phone: +968 24402200

Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (General of Health Service North Sharqiya) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/ Date	Eligibility	Tender Free (Non-Refundable)	Office where Tenders are to be deposited (HQ)
2/2023	Rent Coffee Room (in the Directorate Building, Ibra Health Center, Al-Mudhaibi Health Center, Bidiyah Hospital, Samad Al-Shan Hospital, Dama and Al-Taeien Hospital)	Before 11 am on Thursday 9/3/2023	Before 10 am on Monday 3/4/2023	Specialized Companies	R.O. 25/= Per set	Office of the Directorate Finance at the Directorate General of Health Service North Sharqiya Governorate

Tender Documents can be purchased from the Office of the director of finance at the Directorate General of Health Service North Sharqiya Governorate between 8.00 am and 12.00 pm on working days, on payment of Tender Fee mentioned above.

Tenders should be submitted in plain sealed envelope, enclosing a bank guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a local Bank for One per cent not less than (1%) of the quoted value of the tender.

Tender(s) submitted without Bank Guarantee or a Certified Cheque will not be considered.

The ministry is not bound to accept the highest or any other tender.



Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad meets with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukri at the foreign ministry headquarters during a visit to Damascus. — AFP

Egypt’s foreign minister visits Syria, Turkiye

DAMASCUS: Egypt’s foreign minister met Syrian President Bashar Al Assad and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Monday in the first visits to Syria and Turkiye by a top Egyptian diplomat in a decade.

“The goal of the visit is primarily humanitarian, and to pass on our solidarity - from the leadership, the government and the people of Egypt to the people of Syria,” Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told reporters in Damascus.

Egypt was looking forward to providing more quake assistance “in full coordination with the Syrian government” after already having donated some 1,500 tonnes, Shoukry added, standing alongside Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad.

“When the foreign minister of Egypt comes to Damascus, he comes to his home, his people, and his country,” Mekdad said.

The earthquake killed more than 5,900 people in Syria, the bulk of them in the rebel-held northwest. In Turkiye, the death

Egyptian FM says ‘goal of visit primarily humanitarian’ and to ‘pass on our solidarity’ from people of Egypt

toll stands at more than 44,000.

Shoukry did not respond to reporters’ questions on whether Egypt would support lifting the Arab League’s suspension of Syria. Ties between Syria and Egypt were briefly cut during the Brotherhood-led government of President Mohammed Mursi.

Egypt reopened its embassy in Syria in 2013 after the army removed Mursi from power, but kept Assad at arm’s length. Shoukry met Mekdad in 2021 on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly.

Following the quake, President Abdel Fattah al Sisi spoke with Assad by phone for the first time and on Sunday a delegation of

parliamentarians from around the region, including Egypt’s parliament speaker, met Assad in Damascus.

Washington has voiced opposition to any moves towards rehabilitating or normalising ties with Assad, citing his government’s brutality during the conflict and the need to see progress towards a political solution.

Saudi Arabia, has said consensus was building in the Arab world that isolating Syria was not working and that dialogue with Damascus was needed at some point to at least address humanitarian issues.

Shoukry also visited Turkiye, pointing to another shift in Egypt’s foreign ties.

“Foreign minister offers condolences for the victims of earthquake, affirms solidarity of Egyptian leadership, government and people with Turkiye and asserting continuity of aid for supporting Turkiye and its brotherly people,” Ahmed Abu Zeid, spokesperson for Egypt’s Foreign Ministry, said. — Reuters

New Turkiye quake kills one, flattens more buildings

OSMANIYE: An earthquake shook southeast Turkiye on Monday, killing one person, injuring 110 and causing 29 buildings to collapse, Turkish authorities said, triggering frantic work to rescue several people believed trapped in rubble.

The latest aftershock, with a magnitude of 5.6 and depth of 6.15 km, hit three weeks after a massive quake that killed more than 50,000 people in Turkiye and Syria.

A rescue team carried out one man alive, strapped to a stretcher, from the rubble of a building in the province of Malatya, live footage on broadcaster CNN Turk showed.

A while later, it showed a woman, said to be the man’s daughter, rescued from the same apartment block. They were said to have entered the damaged building to retrieve possessions left there after the first quake three weeks ago.

At one building, where three people were believed to be trapped, a team intermittently called for silence while they listened for sounds of life within.

Yunus Sezer, head of Turkiye’s



A car damaged by a building that collapsed due to the 5.6 magnitude earthquake in Malatya in Malatya, Turkiye. — Reuters

Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) told a news conference that search and rescue teams had been deployed to five buildings. There have been four fresh earthquakes

in the region in the past three weeks, as well as 45 aftershocks with magnitudes between five and six, said AFAD’s general director of earthquake and risk reduction Orhan Tatar. — Reuters

SECURITY FORCES GRADUATE



Female members of the Hamas security forces march during a graduation ceremony in Gaza City. — AFP

S Korea rejects arrest request of oppn leader in graft probe

SEOUL: South Korean lawmakers on Monday narrowly voted down a motion to lift the parliamentary immunity of opposition leader Lee Jae-myung over corruption charges, fuelling criticism that his party abused its majority power to evade criminal investigations.

Lee, chair of the main opposition Democratic Party who lost to President Yoon Suk-yeol in last year’s election, faces several charges including bribery,

breach of duty and conflicts of interests in a graft probe from his previous stint as mayor of Seongnam, just south of Seoul.

Members of South Korea’s parliament enjoy the privilege to avoid arrest, and the government requested their consent earlier this month to waive his immunity so that a court can review an arrest warrant from prosecutors.

The motion was rejected by a slight margin of 139 to 129 in a



Korean opposition leader Lee Jae-myung

secret ballot in the 300-member single chamber, where the Democrats hold a 169-seat majority.

It needed at least 150 votes to pass.

Prosecutors said Lee colluded with a group of private property developers when he was Seongnam mayor to help them rake in profits totalling almost 790 billion won (\$600 million) in a massive public development

project, while leaving only 183 million won to the city.

He also demanded more than 13 billion won from four companies to bankroll a financially unstable professional football club based in Seongnam, in return for administrative favours, prosecutors said, calling it bribery.

Lee, who was Seongnam mayor in 2010-18, has denied any wrongdoing and described the

charges as political retaliation.

Some politicians accused Lee’s party of exploiting lawmakers’ privilege to sidestep investigations, and major parties of making sensitive decisions via a secret ballot instead of a transparent public vote.

“Lee promised to abolish the immunity only one year ago,” said Lee Jeong-mi, a lawmaker who heads the minority opposition Justice Party. — Reuters

BEIRUT

Lebanon’s national news photo archive stolen

A server containing photographs documenting Lebanon since 1961 has been stolen from the state news agency’s headquarters in a crime “of national proportions”, Information Minister Ziad Makari said.

“A National News Agency archives server that contains photographs of all the events since 1961 was stolen,” Makari said. This period includes the country’s devastating 1975-1990 civil war. “What happened was a crime of national proportions,”



the minister said. Unidentified individuals broke into the room housing the server at the information ministry before stealing the server itself and five computers, he added. — AFP

DAMASCUS

Syria landmine blast kills nine civilians

Nine Syrian civilians were killed on Monday when a landmine planted by fighters exploded, state media said, in the latest tragedy to have hit truffle-hunters in the war-torn country.

“Nine citizens were killed and two others injured... in the eastern countryside of Al Salamiyah”, in the central province of Hama, when a landmine left behind by IS group fighters blew up under their car, the official SANA news agency said.

The Syrian Observatory for



Human Rights war monitor said the victims had been hunting in the desert for truffles, a delicacy that can be sold at exorbitant prices. — AFP

VIENNA

Austrian cop held after colleague shot dead

An Austrian police officer who shot and killed a colleague during a Monday morning staff meeting at the police station in Trieben, south-east of Salzburg, was arrested, state authorities in the region reported.

The 46-year-old officer offered no resistance when taken into custody. The investigation into the shooting is being conducted by police in Salzburg. A police spokesman said that it was too early to say whether the shot that killed the 58-year-old victim was



fired deliberately or by mistake.

Emergency workers arrived on the scene soon after the shooting, but were unable to help the victim. — dpa



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In brief

WASHINGTON



IGNITION SYSTEM PROBLEM DELAYS LATEST SPACE LAUNCH

Problems with an ignition system led to the delay of a rocket launch due to take new crew members to the International Space Station (ISS). The flight was cancelled just minutes before the planned launch of the Dragon craft at the Cape Canaveral spaceport in Florida.

The next attempt to launch the spacecraft, which is from Elon Musk's space company SpaceX, is scheduled for Thursday, NASA said. "NASA and SpaceX scrubbed on Monday's launch attempt of the agency's SpaceX Crew-6 mission to the International Space Station due to aground systems issue," the agency said. — dpa

ROME



DEATH TOLL IN ITALY MIGRANT SHIPWRECK RISES TO 62

The death toll following the weekend shipwreck on the southern Italian coast of a boat carrying migrants rose to 62, after three more bodies were discovered early on Monday, the regional fire chief told Italian broadcaster RaiNews24.

The ANSA news agency reported that bodies had been found in the water and on the beach a few kilometres from Steccato di Cutro, a sea side resort in Calabria.

Around 80 people survived the wreck, either by being rescued by the Italian authorities or by making their own way to the shore.

Dozens are believed to be still missing. — dpa

GENEVA



GERMAN MINISTER CALLS ON RUSSIA TO RETURN TO NEW START

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Monday urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to return to the New START nuclear arms reduction treaty between Russia and the United States.

"Let us call jointly on President Putin to return to the New START and resume dialogue with the United States," Baerbock said on the sidelines of a disarmament conference in Geneva. "I'm firmly convinced that this is in the interests of all of us in the whole world."

Baerbock said that Russia had been breaching the most basic principles of the UN Charter and international law. — dpa

China urges peace in Ukraine as US warns against aiding Russia

KYIV: China said on Monday it sought dialogue and peace for Ukraine despite US warnings that Beijing might be considering weapons supplies for its ally Russia's bogged-down attack. Air-raid sirens blared in the capital Kyiv and other cities overnight and a Russian missile killed one person in the western town of Khmelnytskyi, Mayor Oleksandr Symshyshyn said on the Telegram messaging app. The all-clear sounded after daybreak.

China, which declared a "no limits" alliance with Russia shortly before the attack a year ago, has refused to condemn the onslaught and last week published a 12-point plan calling for a ceasefire and gradual de-escalation by both sides.

Kyiv struck a receptive tone on some aspects of the plan while reiterating there could be no peace without a total Russian withdrawal - a non-starter for Moscow.

"I really want (victory) to happen this year. For this we have everything - motivation, confidence, friends, diplomacy," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in a post on the Telegram messaging app on Monday.

China's foreign ministry said it had kept contact with all sides in the crisis including Kyiv and its position was clear. "The core



An MLRS, Multiple Launch Rocket System, based on the BM-21 'Grad' fires a rocket, near the frontline, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in Donetsk region. — Reuters

is to call for peace and promote dialogue and promote a political solution to the crisis," foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a news briefing in Beijing.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Monday the Chinese plan should be analysed in detail and account for the interests of all sides, but for now Moscow saw no signs suggesting a peaceful resolution was feasible.

"This is a very long and intense process," he said.

US warns of 'real costs to China' of giving lethal aid as Beijing says it supports peace and negotiations

China's proposals have not impressed Ukraine's Nato military alliance supporters, who say they are trying to dissuade Beijing from

supplying lethal aid for Russia, possibly including "kamikaze" drones.

Moscow's forces are incurring high losses in trench warfare as they struggle to make further gains in eastern Ukraine while Kyiv eyes a counter-offensive with advanced Western weapons, including battle tanks, pledged over the coming months.

Washington believes Beijing is considering military aid to Russia. — Reuters

Thunberg, protesters block Norway energy ministry

OSLO: Environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg and dozens of other activists on Monday blocked entrances to Norway's energy ministry, protesting against wind turbines built on land traditionally used by indigenous Sami reindeer herders.

Thunberg, a vocal advocate for the ending the world's reliance on carbon-based power, said the transition to green energy could not come at the expense of indigenous rights.

"Indigenous rights, human rights, must go hand-in-hand with climate protection and climate action. That can't happen at the expense of some people. Then it is not climate justice," Thunberg said while sitting outside the ministry's main entrance with other demonstrators.

Norway's supreme court in 2021 ruled that two wind farms built in central Norway violated Sami rights under international conventions, but the turbines remain in operation more than 16 months later.

Reindeer herders in the Nordic country say the sight and sound of the giant wind power machinery frighten their animals and disrupt age-old traditions.

"We are here to demand that the turbines must be torn down and that legal rights must be respected," said Sami singer-songwriter, actress and activist Ella Marie Haetta Isaksen.

She and a dozen other Sami demonstrators had occupied the ministry's reception area since Thursday.

Police forcibly removed them on Monday and detained them



Greta Thunberg attends a demonstration against the Fosen wind turbines not being demolished, with environmental and Sami rights activists blocking the entrances to the Ministry of Oil and Energy, in Oslo. — Reuters

before releasing them. The ministry said the ultimate fate of the wind farms is a complex legal quandary despite the supreme court ruling and is hoping to find a compromise.

The court's verdict however did

not say what should happen next to the 151 turbines, which can power some 100,000 Norwegian homes, or what should happen to the dozens of kilometres of better roads built to facilitate the construction. — Reuters

UN wants \$4.3 billion to help millions in Yemen

GENEVA: The United Nations appealed for \$4.3 billion on Monday to deliver aid this year to millions of people going hungry in war-ravaged Yemen -- and urged authorities to turn a fragile truce into lasting peace.

The UN was holding a seventh pledging conference for Yemen in seven years but hoped the next such gathering could focus on rebuilding the broken country rather than staving off hunger.

The UN says more than 21.7 million people — two-thirds of Yemen's population — need humanitarian assistance this year. With its appeal, it aims to reach the 17.3 million most vulnerable of them.

"Together, let us at long last turn the tide of suffering. Let us give hope to the people of Yemen," UN chief Antonio Guterres said in opening Monday's conference in Geneva. "We have a real opportunity this year to change Yemen's trajectory and move towards peace."

Yemen has been wracked by a devastating war since 2014, pitting Ansar Allah fighters against the internationally recognised government, supported by a coalition.

Since then, the war has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths both directly and indirectly, and pushed the nation to the brink of famine.

A truce that began on April 2 last year expired on October 2, but many of its provisions have held, giving "a measure of hope for the future," Guterres said. "After years of death, displacement, destruction, starvation and suffering, the truce delivered real dividends for people," he said.

Yemeni Prime Minister Maeen Abdulmalek Saeed told Monday's conference: "Ending the humanitarian crisis starts with ending the war."

Last year, the UN raised more than \$2.2 billion to enable aid agencies to reach nearly 11 million people across the country every month.

But many countries demanded an end to imposed rules that force women, including female aid workers, to be accompanied by male guardians, hampering the delivery of aid. — AFP

Outsider wins key battleground in Nigeria vote

LAGOS: Outsider Peter Obi defeated his ruling party challenger to win Nigeria's commercial hub of Lagos on Monday, in an upset two days after a presidential election marred by delays and complaints of irregularities.

A Reuters tally suggested that Bola Tinubu, of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party, was well ahead in other areas - though around two thirds of states in Africa's most populous country still have to declare.

But the win in Lagos state was a major boost for Labour Party leader Obi, whose run shook up politics by challenging candidates from the two long-established movements that have alternated



A presiding officer counts records from the Ikorodu local government area during the collation of the presidential election results at the Independent National Electoral Commission headquarters in Yaba, in the suburbs of Lagos, Nigeria. — AFP

in power since the end of army rule in 1999.

Obi got 582,454 votes in Lagos state, ahead of 572,606 Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos who had focused a lot of his campaign there. Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP), came third with 75,750 according to provisional electoral commission data.

Obi's campaign grabbed headlines with its use of social media and its focus on young people and urban voters fed up with widespread corruption and insecurity.

Across the country, Tinubu led with about 3.29 million votes, against 2.28 million for Abubakar

and 818,000 for Obi, according to a Reuters tally from 10 states out of 36 so far collated by the Independent National Electoral Commission.

To become president, a candidate needs to get more votes than any other candidate and also garner a quarter of the votes in at least 24 states.

By 12:00 GMT, INEC had uploaded results from 56,235 polling units out of a total 178,846, its website showed.

"We take full responsibility for the problems and regret the distress that they have caused the candidates, political parties and the electorate," the Commission said. — Reuters

Writing for reading...

Do you remember your first book?

It might have been one of your most precious possessions. Imagine the number of times you would have gone through it from page to page.

Initially it would not have been the text of the book. It might have been the texture of the pages, the font and the smell. Then it was the visuals and the imagination it took us to.

Books are companions and some of books received as gifts still give the vibes of the person who gifted them to us.

Think about it - that person who chose the book for us. They wanted us to read it, and they had felt the information will do good. If they wrote a line or two on any of the pages the value just went up.

The pages might have turned a bit yellow, and some pages might be willing to slip out, but that book has history and you think numerous ways to decline a request for it to be borrowed.

“No, not this one,” your mind would whisper it to you.. So imagine being at the 27th Muscat International Book Fair - it is a haven for students. It was delightful to see young ones browse through a variety of books.

Reading is a culture, the moment a youngster is exposed to someone reading in the family they are fine tuned and the concept of books and readings would be in the back of their minds. I know of a person who as a child would spend lot of his time in his father's office and library when he was away and almost read all the books. One can imagine how knowledgeable the mind had become.

Another interesting aspect of the book fair is that it is not just about exploring books and having field trips to the event from schools. Many youngsters have had the opportunity of being volunteers. There are the young scouts present at the location ready to assist if the need be.

Imagine how rich their memories are going to be when they think back about books as they grow up.

This is an era when people continue to wonder whether print will survive or not. But this is a question that has been doing the rounds when radio made its appearance and later the television.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

THE 27TH MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR IS A HAVEN FOR STUDENTS

One element that explains why print has continued to thrive is that we write differently in each medium.

In print we want the details, imagination in fiction, exaggeration in poetry and briefness in digital media and in social media they are counted as characters and we want the influencers to be creative and hold a punch. Do we realise there is a connection to emotion in what we read and how it is presented?

Whichever medium we use it is letters and words we are looking at.

The book fairs too have evolved and they incorporate technology. Have always been fascinated with the idea of a reading pen.

Talk to young readers and they tell you they want their authors on social media. They follow them first on social media and then purchase their books. This is a different path compared to the old way of being introduced to books and authors by family members or availability at school libraries.

But this is one for the writers and authors - if you want to reach out to young readers, you need to have a presence in the social media.

If you are a writer but an introvert, still it would be nice to have a presence where young thinkers are hanging out. In this arena the generation gap may not be a big deal.

It is also heartening to see local publishers, booksellers and bookshops taking steps to promote local authors.

This might be an important part of literary history of Oman to see the growing number of authors writing educational, medical and literature as well as fictional. Oman has a rich history in poetry which was passed on from generations, sometimes as oral history and other times to celebrate and cherish.

In Khasab, Musandam, inscription of poetic verses on rocks still stand today written probably by travellers on the move or a poet who wanted to leave his thoughts and rhymes for others to read. In that case they probably were the early publishers.

Print is always there to go back and refer to, it does not disappear with the transmission and airing of it or with the post on the social media.

Let us continue to have bookshelves and fill it with books for what are words with the digital media, if not a connection, access to data or wifi?

FLYING HIGH



A great egret flies in Sultanpur bird sanctuary in Sultanpur, India, on Monday. – AFP

Who stands for freedom?

The Republican Party has long wrapped itself in the American flag, claiming to be the defender of “freedom.” The GOP

believes individuals should be free to carry firearms, spew hate speech, and eschew vaccines and face masks. The same goes for corporations: Even if their activities destroy the planet and permanently change the climate, the “free market” should be trusted to sort things out. Banks and other financial institutions should be “liberated” from regulation, even if their activities can bring down the entire economy.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, the pandemic, and the acceleration of the climate crisis, it should be obvious that this conception of freedom is far too crude and simplistic for the modern world. Those who still espouse it are either mind-numbingly blinkered or on the take. As the great twentieth-century philosopher Isaiah Berlin put it: “Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep.” Or, put another way, freedom for some is unfreedom for others.

In the United States, the freedom to carry guns has come at the expense of the freedom to go to school or the store without being shot. Thousands of innocent people – many of them children – have died so that this



Joseph E Stiglitz

The writer is a Nobel laureate in economics and University Professor at Columbia University, is a former chief economist of the World Bank

FOR DECADES, AMERICANS HAVE BEEN LED TO BELIEVE THAT LIBERTY IS MORE OR LESS SYNONYMOUS WITH ANTI-GOVERNMENT MARKET

particular freedom can live. And millions have lost what Franklin Delano Roosevelt thought was so important, the freedom from fear.

There is no such thing as absolute freedom within a society. Different freedoms must be balanced against each other, and any reasoned discussion among typical Americans (meaning one not captured by political activists and special interests) would inevitably conclude that the right to an AR-15 is not more “sacred” than others’ right to live.

In complex modern societies, there are innumerable ways that one’s actions can harm others without one having to bear any consequences for it. Social-media platforms constantly pollute our “information ecosystem” with disinformation and content that is well-known to cause harm (not least to adolescent girls). While the platforms present themselves as neutral conduits of information that is already out there, their algorithms are actively promoting a socially harmful substance. But, far from paying any costs, the platforms are reaping billions of dollars in profits every year.

The US tech giants are shielded from liability by a 1990s-era law



There is no such thing as absolute freedom within a society.

that was originally designed to foster innovation in the inchoate digital economy. The US Supreme Court is now considering a case involving this legislation, and other countries around the world are also questioning whether online platforms should be able to avoid accountability for their actions.

For economists, a natural measure of freedom concerns the range of things one can do. The greater one’s “opportunity set,” the freer one is to act. Someone on the verge of starvation – doing what she must just to survive

– effectively has no freedom. Viewed this way, an important dimension of freedom is the ability to realise one’s potential.

A society in which large segments of the population lack such opportunities – as is the case in societies with high levels of poverty and inequality – is not really free.

Investments in public goods (such as education, infrastructure, and basic research) can expand the opportunity set for all individuals, effectively enhancing the freedom of all. But such investments require taxes, and

many individuals – especially in a society that valorises greed – would rather free ride, by avoiding paying their fair share.

This is a classic collective-action problem. Only through coercion, forcing everyone to pay their taxes, can we generate the revenue needed to invest in public goods.

Fortunately, all individuals, including those who have been forced against their will to contribute to society’s investments, may be better off as a result. They will live in a society where they, their children, and everyone else has a larger opportunity set. In such circumstances, coercion is a source of liberation.

Neoliberal economists have long ignored these points and focused instead on “freeing” the economy of what they view as pesky regulations and taxes on corporations (many of which have benefitted massively from public expenditures). But where would American business be without an educated labour force, the rule of law to enforce contracts, or the roads and ports needed to transport goods?

SPORT

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Ahmad to enter FIA World Endurance race

Oman Racing to make 'dream move' into globe's biggest endurance series

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Oman motor racing sensation Ahmad al Harthy announced on Sunday his return to action in 2023 with a high-profile FIA World Endurance Championship. Al Harthy unveiled his 2023 season in a glittering event at the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) headquarters in Seeb in presence of dignitaries, sponsors and media persons.

Al Harthy proudly stated that he is delighted with this dream move to FIA World Endurance.

"Oman Racing team will debut in world class endurance event in GTE Am. It will be the biggest challenge of my career but one I am absolutely relishing alongside my very capable team-mates Eastwood Charlie and Dinan Michael. There are new circuits for me to learn and plenty of new competition, I can't wait to get started! I have to say the biggest thank you to my incredible sponsors for their support, none of this would be possible without them, and also to everyone at the Oman Automobile Association for our launch event and their support

as well," Al Harthy said. The double Pro-Am Class champion and multiple race winner in the GT World Challenge Europe Endurance Cup will compete for first time in a new racing tracks including USA and Japan. The prestigious championship will begin with the Official Prologue test days at Sebring in the USA on March 11 and 12 while the opening race of the 2023 FIA World Endurance Championship season – the 1,000 miles of Sebring – will be contested on March 17 at the renowned Florida track for eight hours duration.

Later, Al Harthy and his teammates will travel to Portugal when the championship will take place in Portimao in Portugal on April 16 for four hours race. Then, Spa-Francorchamps competitions will be held in Belgium on April 29 before endurance racing's crown jewel event, the Le Mans 24 Hours in France, over the weekend on June 10 and 11 – Al Harthy's debut in the legendary classic.

In July, the high portfolio championship will visit Monza in Italy for six hours race while the penultimate race of the season will be at Fuji in Japan in September as

2023 FIA WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR	
Prologue - March 11/12 - Sebring, USA	
Rd1 - March 17 - Sebring, USA (1000 miles)	
Rd2 - April 16 - Portimao, Portugal (6hrs)	
Rd3 - April 29 - Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium (6hrs)	
Rd4 - June 10/11- Le Mans, France (24hrs)	
Rd5 - July 9 - Monza, Italy (6hrs)	
Rd6 - September 10 - Fuji, Japan (6hrs)	
Rd7 - November 4 - Sakhir, Bahrain (8hrs)	

a new challenging experience for Ahmad and the championship will conclude in the Middle East on November 4 at Bahrain International Circuit.

"After several attendance and competition at a very high level in endurance racing for a decade and representing Oman proudly with some amazing success in many race wins, podiums and championship victories too, we are starting a new challenge. The Oman Racing Team is shifting focus to the pinnacle in FIA World Endurance, the top rung on the ladder, and I am more determined than ever to fly the flag high for Oman," Al Harthy concluded.

The highly competitive trio

will share the No 25 Aston Martin GTE in the GTE Am class of FIA World Endurance, the only class for production-based cars in the prestigious championship – which will feature a total of 38 entries across all three of its classes this season. Notably, 2023 marks the 110th anniversary of the world-famous Aston Martin marque.

Importantly, Al Harthy retains his incredibly supportive and very high-profile portfolio of sponsors for the coming season at world level, namely the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS.

WHAT THEY SAID
Ashraf bin Hamed al Maamari

– Chief Executive People, Technology and Culture, OQ:

"Our commitment to supporting the best Omani talents means we are delighted to continue our support of Ahmad and the Oman Racing team. This is reflected in the unwavering commitment of OQ, the Global Integrated Energy Group, towards excellence, aiming high and achieving success on international stages within integrated energy. So the synergy with Oman Racing is evident as we all strive to be the very best we can."

Saba bint Said al Busaidiyah – Senior Manager Corporate Affairs, Omantel:

"Once again Omantel is extremely proud to partner with Ahmad and Oman Racing for the new season and we are very much looking forward to an exciting year as part of the FIA World Endurance Championship. We have enjoyed a highly successful and rewarding partnership with Ahmad throughout his career, we are delighted to continue being a key partner at this exciting time."

Lujaina Mohsin Darwish – Chairperson, MHD-ITICS:

"MHD-ITICS is extremely proud of its association with Ahmad al Harthy as our Brand Ambassador. The Omani racing icon has raised the National Flag high at various international podiums in motorsports, we wish him all the very best as he takes up yet another new challenge this year at World Championship level. Our partnership is a testament to our unwavering faith in his abilities and our shared values, and this partnership has definitely helped us showcase and promote our brand 0 not just in Oman, but internationally."

Brigadier Jamal al Ta'ei – Vice-Chairman of the Oman Automobile Association:

"On behalf of the Oman Automobile Association, I would like to say how very proud we are to have been central to the official launch of Ahmad and Oman Racing's 2023 motor racing programme."

"It is going to be a huge year for Ahmad with the step-up into the World Championship, we are delighted to be supporting him as he takes on the very best competition in the world."

Australia win Women's T20 World Cup for sixth time



CAPE TOWN: Australia won the Women's T20 World Cup for the sixth time in the last seven tournaments when they beat South Africa by 19 runs in the final at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday. "It's a very special effort from this group," said Australian captain Meg Lanning after her players proved superior to a South African team that had the backing of a near-capacity crowd of about 15,000.

Opening batter Beth Mooney was named player of the match after making an unbeaten 74 in an Australian total of 156 for six.

"I walked off thinking we didn't have enough runs but maybe I was a bit hard on myself. It was a really tough wicket," she said.

Mooney said the Australian players were proud of their

dominance. "Other teams around the world are improving. We are being hunted but we want to enjoy it for as long as we can."

The defending champions quickly put the pressure on the South African batters who could score only 22 runs for the loss of opener Tazmin Brits in the six-over power play.

"Our power play with the ball was excellent," said Lanning.

South Africa were never up with the required run rate and were restricted to 137 for six despite opener Laura Wolvaardt hitting 61 off 48 balls. Captain Sune Luus paid tribute to the Australians.

"You guys have been inspirational to world cricket for many years," she said.

But Luus said the tournament had been a major boost for women's

cricket in South Africa, with big crowds supporting the home team even after they had lost their first two games of the tournament.

PROUD OF OURSELVES

"I think we can be proud of ourselves," she said. "It's very exciting for women's cricket. We have to keep on growing. We set a platform and we can't go backwards."

Luus challenged South African cricket officials and the government to push for girls' cricket in schools and to improve the club and provincial system, "so we can keep knocking on Australia's door."

Australia won all their six matches in the tournament to hammer home their dominance of the format. "Other teams came hard at us," said Lanning. — AFP



‘Bashair’, ‘Eftitah’ grab cars and icons on second day

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, FEB 27

The final competition of the Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) festival continued on its second day as part of its annual programme of the season 2022-23 at the Royal Camel Corps tracks in Barka.

On Monday, the 17th round for Lagaya category (3 years old) for 5 km was held for seven cars and two icons and cash prizes for the top ten.

In addition, there were two rounds for human riders (2 km) in the evening session.

‘Bashair’ owned by Dawood al Jahwari snatched the car and icon in the first round. In the second round, ‘Eftitah’ owned by Amer al Zaree came first to win the car and the icon.

LAGAYA CATEGORY

During the morning session’s first round, ‘Fnd’ for the Royal Camel Corp, coached by Hamad al Jedidi, won the top spot. ‘Hamloul’ owned by Sultan al Habsi, snatched first place in the second round, .

‘Al Asemah’ owned by Saud al Jabri came first in the third round. In the fourth round, ‘Al Shaklah’, owned by Butti al Maliki claimed the prize.

In the fifth round, ‘Al Hudaira’ owned by Mohammed al Jahafy won first place. As for the sixth round, ‘Saeb’ for Al Ghafeeq al



Maliki won the top place.

The seventh round witnessed the victory of ‘Heba’ owned by Ali al Omairi, the first place in the eighth round was taken by ‘Tamoh’ owned by Abdullah al Ghufaili.

In the ninth round, ‘Manhaj’

won first place, owned by Saad al Owaisi.

‘Najed’, owned by Hamed al Wahaibi, was at the top of the tenth round.

In the 11th round, ‘Enjaz’ won first place owned by Hamad al



Wahaibi. As for the 12th round, ‘Shajoun’, owned by Hamad al Dari won first place.

‘Thoq’ owned by Mansour al Wahaibi snatched the 13th round.

In the 14th round, ‘Almoktabar’ owned by Salem al Madhushi came



on top.

In the 15th round, ‘Sultanah’ came on top, owned by Dawood al Tabai. ‘Mashkorah’ claimed the 16th round, owned by Khadim al Shibli.

In the 17th round, ‘Alhather’

OCRF FESTIVAL RESULTS

- Round, camel, owner, prize
- 1 ‘Fnd’ Royal Camel Corps car
 - 2 ‘Hamloul’ Sultan al Habsi car
 - 3 ‘Al Asemah’ Saud al Jabri car
 - 4 ‘Al Shaklah’ Butti al Maliki car
 - 5 ‘Al Hudaira’ Mohammed al Jahafy car
 - 6 ‘Saeb’ Al Ghafeeq al Maliki car
 - 7 ‘Heba’ Ali al Omari car
 - 8 ‘Tamoh’ Abdullah al Ghafli cash
 - 9 ‘Manha’ Saad al Owaisi cash
 - 10 ‘Najed’ Hamed al Wahaibi cash
 - 11 ‘Enjaz’ Hamad al Wahaibi cash
 - 12 ‘Shajoun’ Hamad al Dari cash
 - 13 ‘Thoq’ Mansour al Wahaibi cash
 - 14 ‘Almoktabar’ Salem al Madhushi cash
 - 15 ‘Sultanah’ Dawood al Tabai cash
 - 16 ‘Mashkorah’ Khadim al Shibli cash
 - 17 ‘Alhather’ Salem al Wahaibi cash

HUMAN RIDERS ROUND

- 1 ‘Bashair’ Dawood al Jahwari car and icons
- 2 ‘Eftitah’ Amar al Zari car & icons

owned by Salem al Wahaibi came on top.

TODAY’S ACTION

On Tuesday, the competition will continue with three categories. ‘Al Ythaa’ for four-year-old

camels for 5 km with five cars and three icons as prizes for the first five rounds and cash prizes for the rest of five rounds.

Two rounds are allocated for ‘Al Ythaa’ five years old for 6km with a car and an icon as rewards. Three rounds will be held in the ‘Al Hool’ category (6 years and above for 8 km) with a car and an icon as rewards.

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Oman Cricket reforms Premier Division format

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket formulated the second round of the Premier Division League in the form of Super League and Plate League.

The first round of the 8-team Premier Division was played in a single round-robin format with the second round now being played as Super League and Plate League respectively. Both Super League and Plate League will be played in a 4-team double round-robin format i.e. each side facing an opponent twice. The four teams for the Super League to have qualified based on the standings of the first round as top four of the Premier Division are Muscat CT, Yalla Shabab, Oman Stallions and Renaissance CT while the Plate League will be played between the bottom four of the first round of the Premier Division and they are Zawawi Powertech, AER Bin



Ali, IAS CT and Majees CC.

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer - Oman Cricket, said, “ We have had a fairly competitive first round of the Premier Division this season and I am delighted with the improved quality of cricket in Oman giving us depth in the domestic circuit. The Super League and Plate League will

further help the teams to focus on their strengths by playing opponents of similar calibre and to increase the competitiveness between the teams further providing the national team with new and fresh talent and strengthen the pool. I wish all the teams the best to express themselves backing their strengths.” The Super League and Plate League fixtures will start from February 28 with matches of the Super League played on Turf 1 of the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds while the matches of the Plate League will be played on Turf 2 of the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds. The schedule for the matches can be followed on Oman Cricket’s official scoring platform - cricclubs.com/OMANCricket and on Oman Cricket social media channels.

Shotokan Karate Centre championship concludes

MUSCAT: The internal championship of the Shotokan Karate Centre concluded on February 24 at the sport hall of Imam Jaber bin Zaid School in Al Wattayyah.

The competition witnessed participation of 104 male and female players representing the centre’s branches in Muscat Governorate, and some players from Al Qudra Karate Club and Betes Karate Club, where the tournament competitions were moderated by a group of international referees of the centre and national referees according to the rules of World Karate Federation.

The competition was divided into kata competitions (mock fighting) and kumite competitions (free fighting). At the closing



ceremony, the male and female players who won the first three positions in all categories in the kata and kumite competitions were honoured by the management of the Shotokan Karate Centre.

The Shotokan Karate Centre is preparing to hold the national championship in May 2023, as well as preparing to hold the ninth edition of the International

Shotokan Karate Centre Championship, which will be held in Muscat Governorate.

The Shotokan Karate Centre thanked the management of Imam Jaber bin Zaid School (10-12), particularly School Principal Suleiman al Jabri and international referee Yacoub Abdelbaqi, school sports teacher, for their cooperation in the success of the event.

Al Hail CC to organise Super Cup tourney from March 3

MUSCAT: The Al Hail Cricket Club will organise the Super Cup hardball cricket tournament 2023 from March 3 onwards. The tournament is open for all the teams but the Premier Division players are not allowed. There will be exciting prizes for winner and runner-up teams, man of the series, best bowler, best batsman and man of the match.

The interested teams can register their team through our website. The website can be accessed on the following URL



www.alhailcricketclub.com.

Registration will be on a first-come first-served basis with limitation up to maximum of 12

teams. The tournament draw is scheduled to take place in HCT ground in Mabelah at 7.30 pm on February 28 in the presence of all the team captains and managers.

The main sponsors for the tournament are Baab Al Hail Trading, who are supporting the competition for the third year in a row. The entire Al Hail Management thanked Zuhair al Balushi for the backing. For more information contact this numbers: 00968 99623536 and 00968 96972291

ANNOUNCEMENT



RECALL CAMPAIGN

2019-2022 (D2) RAM 3500 PICKUP

2019-2022 (DJ) RAM 2500 PICKUP

2019-2022 (DT) RAM 1500 PICKUP

Starting Date of Campaign: **22 February 2023**
Recall Segment: **Tailgate Latch**
Recall Type: **Safety Recall**
Recall Code: **ZB8**



Product Description:

MODEL AND MODEL YEAR	CHASSIS RANGE	NUMBER OF UNITS AFFECTED
2019-2022 (D2) RAM 3500 PICKUP	From 3C6UR5CJ0KG651921 To 1C6SRFLT2NN241681	481
2019-2022 (DJ) RAM 2500 PICKUP		
2019-2022 (DT) RAM 1500 PICKUP		

Note: This recall only applies to the above vehicles.

Description of Recall:

About 24,000 of the vehicles mentioned above may have tailgates with one or both strikers misaligned, which can fail to latch properly. This may result in the tailgate opening unexpectedly while driving or when stationary, potentially leading to a loss of unsecured cargo, creating a road hazard for other vehicles, and increasing the risk of crashes.

Rectification Procedure:

Check the tailgate function, and adjust the tailgate strikers as needed.

Parts Number	Description
See Recall	No parts are required to perform this service procedure

Service Procedure:

If you have a 2019-2022 (D2) Ram 3500 Pickup, 2019-2022 (DJ) Ram 2500 Pickup, or 2019-2022 (DT) Ram 1500 Pickup, please get in touch with our Customer Centre at Dhofar Automotive on 24500530 to make an appointment for your vehicle to be repaired if required.

Contact Details:
Telephone No: +968 24 500 530

E-Mail:
info@da-oman.com



C.R.No. 1011003

Wattayah, Sohar, Muscat, Salalah, Mabelah
For more information call 245 005 30 | www.dhofarautomotive.com



Manchester United players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Carabao Cup at Wembley Stadium. – Reuters

United end long wait for a trophy

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, FEB 27

For a top club a six-year wait for a trophy is a long time and Manchester United ended that barren period with a 2-0 win against Newcastle to lift the Carabao Cup. Newcastle, on the other hand, have waited even longer for a major trophy. It is 54 years since they won the Inter-City Fairs Cup, now called the Uefa cup. United's manager, Erik Ten Hag, who is only in his first year with the club, has instilled confidence in the side, changed the attitudes and

banished complacency. Since early November, United have only lost once and this final was their 10th unbeaten consecutive match. Ten Hag said: "I just love United. This moment you have to celebrate. It's not business as usual, it's not a common day. We won a trophy, it means something. It's ok to be happy for 24 hours, we'll get a lot of inspiration from this. But don't be satisfied. Satisfaction leads to messiness, and then you become lazy." He added: "We are still at the start of restoring Manchester

United to where they belong, which is winning trophies and this is the first one. When I see our shirts, Old Trafford, the legacy of Sir Alex (former manager) left, so many big players that were developed in United teams and made a big impression, we want to do the same. This team wants to make its own history, its own legacy." In the final, Newcastle missed a fine chance to take the lead when Allan Saint-Maximin made good ground, beating Diogo Dalot on way to the edge of Newcastle's six-yard box, and drove a firm shot at

goal but David de Gea blocked it at the near post with his left arm and Bruno Guimaraes following up, volleyed high over. **FREE-KICK** United went into the lead in the 33rd minute when Marcus Rashford was fouled by Guimaraes. Luke Shaw took the free-kick and curled it perfectly for Casemiro to rise above Sven Botman and Fabian Schar to head superbly into the far corner. For his excellent performance throughout, Casemiro was the player of the match.

Just six minutes later the lead was doubled. It came with Wout Weghorst sending a short pass behind the Newcastle defence and Rashford was on to it instantly. He took a left-footed shot which hit Botman's leg, as he moved towards Rashford, and was deflected high into the net with the goalkeeper, Loris Karius, left helpless. Karius then denied United with an excellent one-handed diving save from a curling shot by Weghorst. Newcastle kept applying pressure, looking to score but United were too strong and determined to give

into any pressure by that stage. Newcastle manager, Eddie Howe, said: "We're left with a feeling of defeat in the final, which is never nice, and we're desperately disappointed. But already, for me, you look to the future and you're desperate to get back here and win a trophy." He added: "I thought we were really good between both boxes. But in the boxes is where games are won and lost. I thought we didn't get the big moments right defensively and with the chances we had, we weren't clinical enough."

OHA launches youth hockey training project

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

The Oman Hockey Federation (OHA) on Monday took a major step to improve the game's grassroots level by launching training centres in the clubs with a target to qualify for Hockey World Cup by 2031. During the launch ceremony at InterCity Hotel in Al Khuwair, Today, OHA Chairman Dr Marwan al Juma signed a partnership to establish 13 training centres for youth players in the clubs. Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, was the chief guest for the function. This project aims to achieve the OHA goals by preparing a base of emerging players. By discovering talents and honing their skills, and then including them in the ranks of the national team to represent it in various foreign tournaments. Said bin Khalfan al Maamari,



The chief guest and clubs officials with the OHA board members. – Saleh al Sharji

Chairman of the Centre's Committee, said that the Board of Directors of the Oman Hockey Association and the Centres Committee worked on a strategy aimed at developing and upgrading the hockey game system in clubs for male and female players.

"We plan to rehabilitate the upcoming players psychologically, technically and physically in order to reach a level capable of competition. It also contributes to the emergence of more Omani young talents, and it also contributes to the development of clubs, which are an important

source for the national teams to achieve more international achievements." "The opening of these centres comes in line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. It also shows the continuous interest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in finding ways to support

and empower young people," Al Maamari added. The training centre will include people born in 2010 or older to be trained and qualified to be players in the national teams to compete in the Asian Cup and the World Youth Cup. The inauguration of the centres

comes in five governorates, as a start, which are Muscat, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Dhofar and Al Dakhiliyah. Positions will be increased by 20 per cent every two years. Each centre offers two programmes, the first is to prepare players for both sexes, with an average of 13 male teams with 312 players and nine female centres with a total of 216 players. More than 5,000 hours of training is in the offing for the young talents. The second programme is the trainer's and technicians' development programme. The Oman Hockey Federation will provide the balls, transportation, and monthly bonuses for the technicians and goalkeeper uniforms. The training programme will present five various festivals to measure the players' levels and progress in training by organising a tournament among the participating centres in order to create a competitive sports generation.



Invest in Oman Hall: Unified window for integrated services launched

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

The ‘Invest in Oman Hall’ – the Sultanate of Oman’s premier hub for investment facilitation – was formally inaugurated at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) here on Monday, February 27, 2023. Its primary role is to support improvements to the business environment in Oman and attract local and foreign investments by offering various incentives.

The inauguration ceremony was under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in the presence of Qais bin Mohammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and a number of Royal Family members, ambassadors of the Gulf countries, and other business dignitaries.

The Invest In Oman Hall has been conceived as a unified window for integrated services to provide all the required assistance to investors and offer investment opportunities that exceed RO 1 million.

Besides showcasing investment opportunities, the Hall makes available information about pathways to project localisation, the investment environment, facilities and services provided by various agencies, target sectors for investment, expected timeframes for processing of proposals, and service level agreements reached with the various permitting agencies whose approvals are required as part of the overall process.

To achieve the objective of the Invest in Oman Hall initiative, 20 governmental and private entities are represented on the premises: They are: Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion; Ministry of Interior; Muscat Municipality; Royal Oman Police (Immigration



THE HALL MAKES AVAILABLE INFORMATION ABOUT PATHWAYS TO PROJECT LOCALISATION, THE INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT, FACILITIES AND SERVICES PROVIDED BY VARIOUS AGENCIES, TARGET SECTORS FOR INVESTMENT, EXPECTED TIMEFRAMES FOR PROCESSING OF PROPOSALS, AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS REACHED WITH THE VARIOUS PERMITTING AGENCIES WHOSE APPROVALS ARE REQUIRED AS PART OF THE OVERALL PROCESS.

and Passports); Public Authority for Economic zones & Free Zones (OPAZ); Environment Authority; Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning; Ministry of Heritage and Tourism; Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Water Resources; Ministry of Labour; Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary (Notary Public); Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; Ministry of Health; and Ministry of Education, in addition to six private entities, a commercial bank, telecom

company, legal advisory office, and accreditation office.

Further, in line with the government’s digitalisation strategy, a portal has been established to serve as an electronic platform for the benefit of investors (<https://investoman.om>).

The platform provides information, as well as investment procedural criteria, covering key investment sectors: logistics, manufacturing, Education, technology, information technology, health, circular economy, mining, fisheries, renewable energy, agricultural wealth and tourism.

With the aid of the portal, an investor can establish his company in only three main steps, thus enabling investment in Oman in a flexible and easy way.

The website also introduces the non-oil exports of Oman, features an interactive map, and includes the most important information that the investor should know, such as the incentives offers, laws, and investment-related guides.

A call centre in the Hall handles investor inquiries and complaints. Speaking at the event, Shaikh Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, Project

Head, said: “It is a matter of pride for everyone who contributed to this project across various stages of planning, implementation and operation.

Therefore, we are pleased to extend our sincere thanks and abundant gratitude to all entities, institutions and individuals who spared no effort to make this project a real and an effective element in the system of stimulating the business and investment environment in the Sultanate of Oman.”

Abbas bin Irshad al Lawati, Executive Director of The Invest in Oman Hall, said the platform enabled an integration with the investment procedures not prescribed by the government, but also the Oman Investment Authority, National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), investment promotion department at MoCIIP and other entities. This integration with help with facilitating and accelerating procedures.

Additionally, the “Invest in Oman Hall”, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its representatives in the hall, will enable links with the embassies of Oman across the world.

46 per cent jump in Oman’s trade with rest of the world

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows into the Sultanate of Oman reached to RO 18.14 billion by the end of the third quarter of 2022, recording an increase of 10.4 per cent, compared to the same period in 2021, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

Trade between Oman and the rest of the world also increased 46.18 per cent to RO 30.421 billion over the same period.

The value of FDI in the manufacturing sector amounted to RO 1.717 as of Q3 2022, up from RO 1.512 billion a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the number of investment licences issued through the “Invest Easy” portal totalled 25,484 from November 17, 2021 to February 22, 2023, according to the Ministry.

“Investor Residency” cards issued from the start of the service till February 22, 2023, reached 1416. They include 884 cards for the 10-year category, 527 cards for the 5-year category, and 5 cards for the retirees category.

According to Khalid Said al Shuaibi, Head of the National Programme for Investment and Export Development (Nazdaher), a number of initiatives have been launched to drive investment inflows.

Notable is the “National Negotiation Team” initiative, which works with investors to resolve any impediments. Likewise, the “Investment Incentives Guide” serves as an integrated system that includes all incentives offered to the investor in partnership with government and private agencies.

Further, the “Fast Track initiative” is overseen by a technical committee composed of agency representatives that meet on a weekly basis to solve the challenges facing investment projects.

There is also the “Framing Investment Opportunities” initiative, which aims at increasing the volume of Omani exports of non-Omani origin.

Other initiatives include the “Permanent Residency” initiative, which is also looking at adding innovators as a category; the “National Investment Strategy” which is an initiative to develop an integrated investment strategy that works to unify all investment efforts in Oman, and the “Investment Map” – a comprehensive guide to investment lands and investment opportunities.



OIA launches In-Country Value initiatives

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) unveiled four new in-country value programmes yesterday in Muscat. The programmes fall under the Authority’s ICV project ‘Qimam’ launched in 2021 with the aim of maximising retained value “by contributing to Omanisation efforts through high Omanisation rates, training and investing in Omani competencies, developing local suppliers, supporting SMEs, and encouraging and developing local industries.”

Director of In-Country Value (ICV) at OIA, Al Mutasim al Sariri shared the following, “In-Country Value is an important pillar to Oman Investment Authority, through this pillar we ensure the implementation of programmes that support not only small and medium enterprises (SMEs) but local contractors as well.”

The newly launched programmes include a mandatory list programme, vendor development programme,



ringfencing of products and services and research, development and innovation guidelines.

According to Al Sariri, the programmes’s key objectives are to enhance the capacity of local suppliers, support local manufacturers and service providers, prioritise local products, promote local manufacturing

of goods, and foster a culture of research, development and innovation within OIA enterprises.

The mandatory list programme dictates services and products OIA companies are required to purchase and acquire from local companies only. The list includes 76 products and 25 services.

Products include items such as

cables, office supplies, uniforms, food and beverages. While services include legal consultations, media, manufacturing quality tests, and waste management. According to Al Sariri, the programme will significantly contribute to the local economy.

“Through the programme we will be reinjecting more funds

Through this pillar we ensure the implementation of programmes that support not only small and medium enterprises (SMEs) but local contractors as well.

AL MUTASIM
AL SARIRI

Directo of ICV, OIA

into the country itself and that will definitely contribute significantly towards the GDP.”

Speaking on the vendor development and the ringfencing of products and services programmes, Al Sariri shared the following, “Ringfencing and the vendor development programme will primarily focus on providing more opportunities to SMEs and to the local market whereby they will produce products upon the request

of our companies themselves.”

Adding “Hence, it will be more focused , more structured and also linked to business needs rather than trying to develop a company that might not be necessarily producing things we require.”

According to the Authority, the ringfencing programme will operate by allocating a fixed percentage of the scope of work to local companies in hopes of increasing their market shares. While the vendor development programme will focus on enhancing and developing the capabilities of local companies within new sectors.

Furthermore, the new research, development and innovation guidelines will aim to enhance RDI within OIA entities with an emphasis on decarbonisation, digital transformation, circular economy and artificial intelligence.

Additionally, OIA unveiled the signing of multiple agreements with local companies and institutions. Most notably Nama Holding’s signing contracts of projects worth over RO 1 billion.

Salalah Port’s Container Terminal upgrade project to start in H1

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 27

Port of Salalah, the nation’s premier transshipment and logistics hub overseeing the Indian Ocean, says its investment in the upgrade of its Container Terminal is key to attracting a new generation of Ultra Large Container Vessels (ULCVs) to the maritime gateway.

Work on the Container Terminal Upgrade project is set to commence during the first half of this year and will run until Q1 2025, according to Keld Mosgaard Christensen, CEO – Salalah Port Services.

Last year, the publicly listed owner and operator of the port said it is investing around \$66 million in suitably upgrading the Container Terminal to support the installation of a fleet of 10 special cranes to enable the handling of these mega containerships.

The cranes will be leased from APM Terminals, one of the world’s largest port operating companies, which also owns a 30 per cent stake in Salalah Port Services (SPS).

A separate agreement reached with global shipping and logistics giant Maersk commits the latter to channelling large volumes of containers to Salalah Port by routing its mega containerships via the Omani hub. A mega containership is typically 366



metres long and capable of carrying over 14,500 containers.

“The Maersk volume commitment will support the financial cost of the Lease Fee,” said Keld Christensen, CEO – Salalah Port Services.

“The transactions are of paramount importance to the port and will allow us to service ULCVs within the current term of the container terminal concession which will be enabling to the company’s competitiveness in the region and prevent the migration of Maersk ULCVs volumes away from the port,” Christensen stated in the Management Discussion & Analysis Report published here on Monday.

Meanwhile, container volumes handled during fiscal 2022 remained flat at 4.504 million TEUs versus 4.512 million TEUs

in 2021. But the General Cargo Terminal witnessed a 9 per cent uptick in throughput to 18.395 million tonnes, up from 16.895 million tonnes in 2021.

The increase was driven by higher demand in export markets for gypsum and limestone, the company said. Commenting on the performance of the dry bulk segment, the CEO stated: “The main volume drivers were dry bulk commodities gypsum and limestone. The Russia-Ukraine political situation impacted our grain business, however, there was growth in liquid bulk with incremental volumes from Ammonia, Salalah LPG and FECO (the bunker service provider).”

Limestone and gypsum exports are expected to show “solid growth in 2023” due to

the softening of freight rates in the global container trade, which has eased the pressure on the availability of dry bulk geared vessels and corresponding impact on freight rates, Christensen noted.

Port of Salalah generated a consolidated revenue from operations of RO 70.909 million in 2022, representing an increase of 6 per cent over the previous year. Consolidated EBITDA was recorded at RO 14.012 million, which corresponds to an EBITDA margin of 19.68 per cent. This compares with RO 15.538 million (representing an EBITDA margin of 23.26 per cent) during the previous year.

Consolidated Net-Profit declined to RO 3.220 million in 2022, down from RO 4.638 million a year earlier.

Abraj Energy Services IPO subscription now live on OAB mobile banking app

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) customers can now use their mobile banking app to subscribe digitally to the initial public offering of Abraj Energy Services Company (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group.

Completely paperless and without the need to physically visit a branch, customers will be able to benefit from a seamless digital experience instantly through a click of a button from the comfort of their home, office, or on the go.

The bank is also one of the few financial institutions that is offering customers short term loans to finance up to 50 per cent of their total IPO investment which expires on February 28. “By leveraging cutting-edge technology, we are making investing simpler, easier, more accessible and secure for our customers,” expressed Sulaiman bin Ali al Hinai, General Manager — Head of Treasury, Investment and Government Relations/FI Banking Group at Oman Arab Bank. “We are both proud and excited to be supporting the government achieve the economic diversification objectives of Oman Vision 2040



by providing seamless access to market opportunities through our mobile banking proposition that will facilitate greater private sector participation.”

He added, “Innovation is at the core of everything we do and is driving the acceleration and scaling of our digital transformation plan to deliver greater value to customers. We are committed to constantly keep pace with the latest trends to enhance our offerings and provide the best possible service across all our channels.”

OAB has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the Sultanate of Oman. Today, OAB operates a nationwide network of 47 conventional branches and 142 conventional ATMs across the Sultanate of Oman. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App.

Bank Nizwa sponsors 18th Cultural Season at University of Nizwa

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, sponsored the 18th Cultural Season at Nizwa University as part of its ongoing efforts to support cultural events that promote knowledge and awareness.

The season featured a diverse range of cultural, artistic, and economic programmes, providing a platform for showcasing innovative student projects in the arts, literature and business. The event attracted a large audience of students,



academics, administrators and representatives from government and private institutions both within and outside the province.

Notably, senior representatives of universities and colleges in Oman were in attendance.

“At Bank Nizwa, we are

committed to supporting cultural initiatives that aim to enhance cooperation with various institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. Bank Nizwa’s sponsorship of the 18th cultural season demonstrates the importance of the event and its alignment with the bank’s strategy to support the growth of the Sultanate of Oman’s economy and society through Shariah-compliant products and services,” said HH Sayyidah Wisam bint Jaifer al Said, Head of Marketing and Communications at Bank Nizwa.

Entrepreneurs, business leaders feted

MUSCAT: Entrepreneurs, business houses and hotels were recognised for their services at the recently concluded award ceremony at Al Bustan Palace’s Ritz Carlton Hotel. The awards were presented by The Desert Stories at its first annual Business Awards 2022.

The awards were presented in six categories, while renowned singer Mohammed Vakil was honoured with ‘Pride of India’ award at the ceremony, graced by HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Salim bin Ali al Said as Chief Guest and Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman as Guest of Honour.

Mohammed Vakil is the Saregama Mega Final winner and playback singer of film Veer Zara. Farique A Tareen, Chief Executive of National Trading & Projects and Yusuf Nalwala, Chairman Al Yusr International, got the award under the Trading and Projects category, while Firoz Jariwala, Chairman Vanguard engineering and Oil Field Services was



awarded under the Service Provider category.

Other awardees included Nasser al Masaihly, CEO Island Bridge Company (Construction and Infrastructure category); Muslim Mehmood, CEO Al Hashar Tourism & Travels (Tourism and Travels); Farozan Imam, CEO & Managing Director Global Shipping Routes (Logistics); Talal al Hashmi, Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz Carlton Hotel and Ibrahim Shaikh, General Manager of Wanasa group of Hotels (Hotel of Oman).

Advancing Sustainability: Oman Sustainability Week 2023 to highlight progress towards Oman Vision 2040

MUSCAT: Upholding sustainability as one of the critical pillars of progress, Oman has been at the forefront of spearheading initiatives that advocate economic growth, social inclusion, and the protection of the country’s environment.

In line with the same, the dates and agenda for Oman Sustainability Week (OSW) 2023 were announced at an exclusive press conference on February 27, 2023. A national-level event hosted by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) as the Host Organiser, OSW is set to commence on March 12 and will run until March 16.



The week-long event dedicated to enhancing the future of energy, power, water, waste and environment and society is strongly aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and further reiterates the country’s commitment to

the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs).

Bringing together policymakers, sustainability experts and industry leaders, OSW seeks to engage influential national development stakeholders and position Oman

as a country that implements sustainable practices in every sector.

“With humanity making stellar advancements in technology, driving rapid developments in every key sector, it has become

even more critical that we take concerted efforts to implement transformational processes in everyday practices so we can operate in harmony with nature.

Every action aimed at promoting sustainability, however small or large, if steered in the right direction, has the potential to have a significant global impact that will contribute towards protecting communities and preserving the environmental ecosystem,” said Dr Ali al Rajhi, Director General for Planning and Studies, Ministry of Energy and Minerals and OSW Steering Committee Chair.

“OSW seeks to be that very platform that advocates

sustainability by facilitating meaningful dialogues between leaders who have the capacity to lead change, promoting the cross-sharing of technical expertise and resources and encouraging a business and community-wide shift towards adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

Large-scale events like OSW give the needed impetus, guidance and support to key industries, helping them to accelerate their sustainability drive and achieve net-zero carbon emissions in line with Oman Vision 2040. It also reaffirms Oman’s commitment to transitioning to a green, circular economy.”

MENA records \$24 billion in green, sustainable finance

Financial institutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have adopted environmental, social, and governance (ESG) as a key strategic element in their commitment to going green. As more reporting requirements become mandatory, and stakeholders determine the need for a comprehensive approach to ESG, these institutions have responded by shifting their focus from defining an ESG strategy to implementing it, with data governance playing a key role.

Published under the title “Middle East Banks drive growth in ESG finance, face calls for ESG strategy,” Arthur D Little (ADL) offers a two-part tailored and scalable solution for complex data to enable banks to efficiently manage ESG information in the region.

The Viewpoint reviews the impacts of recent and expected disruptions and explores options for banks to strengthen and grow their ESG strategies.

An impressive \$24.55 billion in green and sustainable finance was generated by the Middle East and North Africa region in 2021, an increase from \$3.8 billion in 2020, achieving an extraordinary 532 per cent year-over-year (YoY) growth, marking a huge momentum in ESG across the entire region.

Andreas Buelow, Partner, Arthur D Little, said: “ESG has become the new normal for financial institutions. Perhaps the most significant sign of this remains in the products and services being offered by banks, which reflect their sustainable ambitions. Green issuances from countries in

the Middle East and North Africa are not standing still but are in fact outpacing global growth.

With new reporting requirements taking effect, banks are facing an urgent need to kick-start their strategies and execute concepts throughout their organisations. In implementing their ESG strategies, banks are finding that the complexity of ESG data has not been entirely captured and addressed by current data governance frameworks, leaving these banks to resort to ad hoc solutions for collecting, managing, and governing ESG data.”

Nael Amin, Senior Manager, Financial Services Practice, Arthur D Little, added: “Many financial institutions in the Middle East have designed comprehensive ESG strategies that open the door to new pathways to top-line growth, business opportunities, cost reductions, regulatory compliance, and employee satisfaction.

This growing trend demonstrates the momentum that ESG is gathering in financial institutions, as the world’s banks increasingly emphasise ESG and infuse it into their business models. Banks in the Middle East have embraced the importance of a well-defined ESG strategy. During the next step, implementation, frameworks such as data governance are vitally necessary.

The shift from strategy to implementation is complex and detail oriented. Different use cases of ESG have different data requirements and multiple stakeholders who add to the complexity. Thus, there is no standard “one size fits all” in regard to ESG data.”

Opportunity Oman: Logistics



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

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

Oman’s geographical position is still a great opportunity to expand its trade and logistics sector. The Sultanate of Oman already has an excellent infrastructure, part of which is available and another is under construction.

The stable political climate is also of a value added to further expand the performance of the logistics sector.

The equation required to have a competitive logistics sector is available in the Sultanate of Oman with key ingredients needed for

Oman to make a quantum leap towards the growth of the sector and establishing the Sultanate of Oman as a hub for logistics acknowledged globally.

The above-mentioned factors only reinforce positioning of Oman as an ideal location for the suggested logistics hub, especially with its location at the crossroads of international trade and commerce that links the Eastern and Western worlds.

Access to important international markets such as Greater Africa, Indian subcontinent and Eastern European countries can be done through this proposed logistics hub.

The current Sultanate of Oman Logistics Strategy (SOLS) 2040 is base for enhancing the competitiveness of the sector. The Strategy is aimed at:

- The logistics contribution to GDP growth – expressed in monetary terms
- The market share of goods that flow into the region
- Related employment growth
- The position of Oman on various logistics and industrial indices
- The global perception of Oman in relation to logistics

The strategy presents a growth scenario in real terms, which has been developed on the basis that logistics contributes (12 per cent) of overall GDP by 2040, with an assumed stable annual growth of overall GDP by (5 per cent).

This recognises that the 12 per cent is based on the assumption that the current oil and gas production rates are sustainable. Knowing that this may not be the case, the contribution of logistics to the overall GDP is likely to be significantly higher and may reach (30 per cent).

The aim of the logistics strategy is to raise Oman’s ranking to (20) in each index by 2030 and to (10) by 2040. In doing so, demand for other support services will be created including cargo handling, construction, IT equipment and software, trade finance, packaging and labelling, assembly and transport support industries.

With a highly advantageous strategic location at the crossroad of east-west trade routes and a coastline stretching over 3,000 kilometres, Oman offers direct trade routes from its deep-water ports to the fast-growing markets of the GCC, India, Africa, Far East and Europe.

All major ports in these regions can be reached within two weeks, faster by two days than any other port inside the Strait of Hormuz. In 2020, Oman ranked #1 for Port Calls according to UN Conference on Trade and Development.

It took an average of only 12.5hrs to handle a ships container, compared to 13.8 hours in the second-best country. Oman also has 52 per cent lower cost of complying to import documentary requirements that GCC average while ranking #1 in GCC in World Bank Doing Business – Trading Across Borders index, saving time and cost for trade and logistics.

Oman has a great advantage from logistics point of view with open access to Indian Ocean, hence a large market access to Indian Subcontinent, East Africa and Far east.

Opportunities in logistic sector include: Developing cold chains, Warehousing, added value services, Cargo freight station (Multi Country Consolidation, LCL Import/Export), 3PL, Logistics Solution Providers, E-Commerce logistics hub, Feeder connectivity into the regional markets and Level playing field for Free Zones.

Commodities hurt by a crisis of confidence



OLE S HANSEN

The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank

The commodity sector remains on the backfoot this month after a supportive focus on China’s reopening was replaced by fresh growth and demand concerns, not least in the US where recent economic reports have shown continued strength in the labour market while inflationary pressures have eased by less than expected.

Continued strength in these numbers has forced the Fed to turn up the hawkish rhetoric, and the market has responded by raising the expected terminal Fed funds rate while at the same time sending bond yields and the dollar higher, thereby hurting risk sentiment across stock and commodity markets.

Meanwhile, geopolitical risks remain elevated, which may further speed up the transition to regionalisation following two decades of unconstrained globalisation.

Reshoring and friend sharing

may push up prices, thereby supporting our view that inflation is unlikely to drop to the levels that are being targeted by central banks, and currently priced in by the market.

In addition to a commodity-intensive green transformation, and continued growth in China and India, we see limited downside to the sector beyond the current weakness which is driven more by a lack of market confidence than an actual slowdown in demand.

This week also marks the tragic one-year anniversary of Putin’s so-called special operation, which was only expected to last for a few days. The attack on February 24 last year was a major miscalculation on Putin’s part, with Russia having suffered one military and economic defeat after another.

Part of the miscalculation was Putin’s belief that the rest of the world would roll over just as they did following the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

However, attacking a sovereign

nation with an elected government on Europe’s doorstep was not going to be tolerated and, in the weeks and months that followed, Russia was increasingly targeted by sanctions.

Russia and Ukraine are both major suppliers of raw materials to the global economy and, faced with the risk of supply being disrupted, the weeks that followed the attack saw several key commodities—from crude oil and natural gas to wheat and some industrial metals—rally sharply.

Ukraine, a major supplier of grains to the global market, saw its supply lines being attacked and disrupted, thereby temporarily sending wheat futures in Chicago to a record last March before reversing lower after a UN-sponsored grain export corridor was opened.

Russia was hit by very severe sanctions resulting in a voluntary buyers’ strike which, for a brief period, saw Brent crude oil spike to near \$140 a barrel while the

gasoil (diesel) futures in Europe at one point hit \$223 a barrel.

The London Metal Exchange index meanwhile surged to a record high, led by nickel and aluminium—the latter a very energy intensive metal to produce—while nitrogen fertiliser produced from natural gas also went on a tear.

An attempt to reduce the resolve of Europeans through higher gas prices remains Putin’s biggest economic miscalculation. Gas and power prices did initially surge higher last summer when Gazprom successively turned off the taps on three of its five major gas pipelines to Europe, thereby reducing its pipeline exports by around 75 per cent.

While a period of market panic followed, the timing of the reduction in flows during the low summer demand season provided Europe with more time to source gas from other suppliers while also putting in place initiatives that would help reduce demand during the winter period.

One year on and the Dutch TTF benchmark gas contract is trading more than 40 per cent below pre-attack levels. This has been driven by a combination of mild winter weather and, in most cases, a voluntary reduction in demand from consumers and industry.

Earlier this week, Eurostat wrote on its website that EU consumption of natural gas had dropped 19.3 per cent between August and January, compared with the five-year average consumption for this period. Adding up total gas flows from rising LNG imports, stable supply from Norway and the trickle from Russia, we find a year-on-year drop of 20 per cent.

These developments have preserved gas in storage to the extent that EU gas storage sites are currently 63 per cent full compared with a pre-attack level of 31 per cent. Apart from a strong pick up in gas demand from China, these developments should see Europe comfortably through next winter as well.

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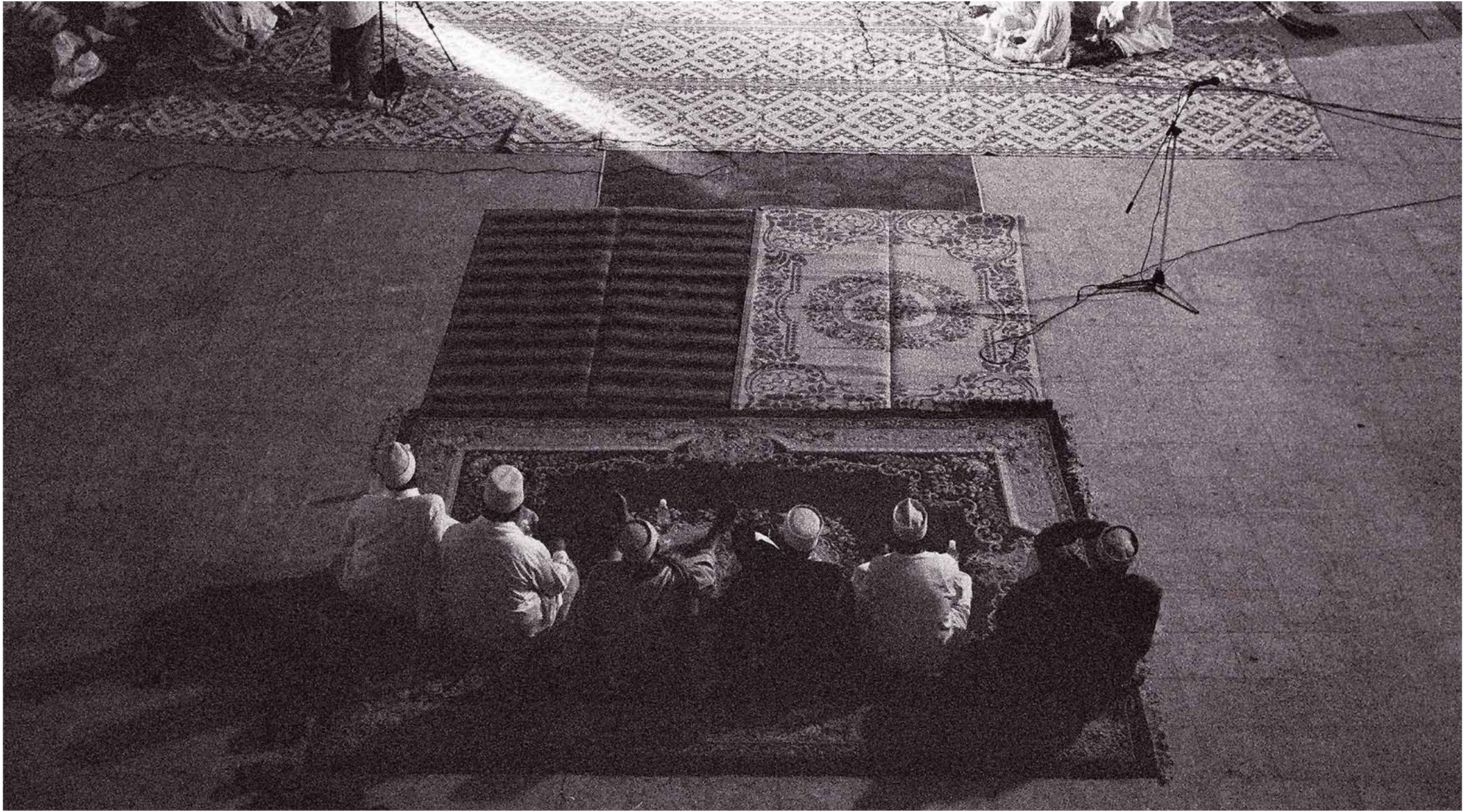
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Walioorejea: The intertwining of two cultures now on at Bait Al Muzna

By Laksmi Kothaneth

The most recent exhibition at Bait Al Muzna examines the relationship between Oman and Zanzibar. Ania Gruca's photography collection, titled Walioorejea, Returnees, is on display, with Aisha al Kharousi serving as the exhibition's curator.

"From courage and determination grew a stronger people, and through their endurance and desire to achieve, they excelled in various professions for the benefit of the growth of modern Oman," said Sayyidah Susan al Said, founder of Bait Al Muzna.

According to Ania, "Walioorejea" refers to the word "returnees," relating to the Zanzibar Omanis of Arab origin. Walioorejea interweaves an intimate dialectic between memory and forgetting, speech and silence, as well as presence and absence.

French photographer Ania is a freelance documentary photographer and videographer-based in Paris. This is her third visit to the Sultanate of Oman. She first went to Zanzibar in 2008 and started working there in 2010. Her interest lives in the lives of under-reported communities and individuals, whether it is through current social issues, the collection of memories, an investigation of the past, or new cultural trends as forms of expression.

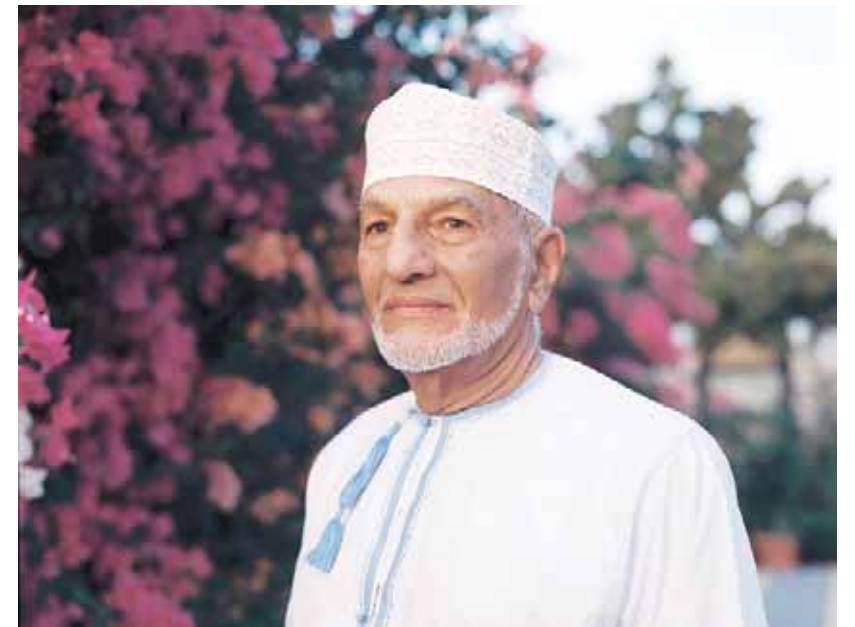


Ania's work raises questions of identity and belonging.

"To me, the exhibition is a celebration of Omani and Zanzibari cultures intertwined after centuries. In terms of selection for this exhibition, I believe Ania has done an excellent job," she said. "For me, it was more about placement and looking for quality in keeping this theme," said Aisha al Kharousi, the exhibition curator, and pointed out, "What I love about the exhibition is the fact that

this journey you will go through within the gallery will reflect on the Omanis of Zanzibari background and help you understand that Oman and Zanzibar have a fusion of cultures, and the similarities are truly spectacular." You see that with the portraits taken in Oman that are of the present versus the black and white landscapes that reflect the daily life of a Zanzibari."

The exhibition which is to be officially inaugurated on February 28 and open for the public on March



There are two sides to the exhibition. The black-and-white photographs were taken over many years in Zanzibar. They express culture and daily life, and there is also a search for identity as well as a representation of Zanzibari culture. In Oman, Ania Focused on colour images that include a series of portraits taken during two different residencies in Muscat, as well as a few landscapes of Oman.

What she also has in mind is a book with many specific chapters dedicated to her findings.

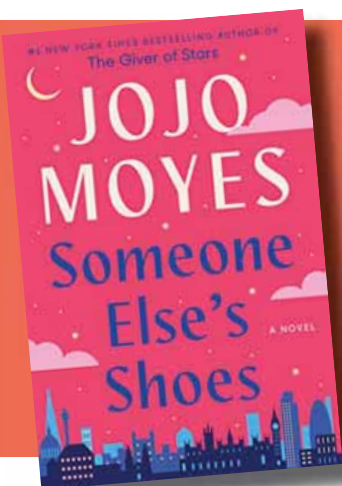
She has already started to work on it but says it is a long way to go, "I am still editing the interviews and finding the best way to present this whole body of work."

READ

SOMEONE ELSE'S SHOES

BY JOJO MOYES

Drastic changes and a pair of six-inch high Christian Louboutin red crocodile shoes shake up the lives of two women.



FASHION

Rom a makeshift studio in a cramped apartment in North Macedonia's Skopje, Satja Grabuloski has made his mark as one of the top sneaker artists in the world. With more than 300 celebrities as customers, Grabuloski has taken orders from famous athletes, actors, and musicians, including Lebron James and Dua Lipa. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A farmer feeds ostriches at his farm in Cengong County, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, in China's southwestern Guizhou Province. — AFP





‘Larger than life’: Indian film-maker Rajamouli shoots for Oscar fame

INDIAN DIRECTOR S.S. Rajamouli's films are all-singing, all-dancing spectacles — and he is now a favourite to secure the first ever Oscar for an all-Indian film.

His three-hour extravaganza "RRR" is a fictionalised story of two colonial-era revolutionaries, filled with large-scale, visual effects-laden action sequences and musical numbers.

It has smashed box offices in India, wowed audiences from the United States to Japan, and is a front runner for the Best Original Song award at next month's Oscars, having already beaten out Taylor Swift and Rihanna for the same prize at the Golden Globes.

"When I'm going to a movie, I would like to see larger-than-life characters, larger-than-life situations, larger-than-life drama," Rajamouli said.

"And that's what I like to make," he said at his office in the southern city of Hyderabad.

"Nothing holds the heroes back in delivering their action sequences." A word-of-mouth hit that has seen moviegoers dancing in cinema aisles, Telugu-language "RRR" has become one of the highest-grossing Indian movies ever.

It has also introduced the country's lesser-known but prolific southern cinema industry to a worldwide audience.

India's Hindi-language Bollywood cinema industry has long been known as the world's most productive, but international film awards beyond the festival circuit have largely remained the preserve of English-language movies.

That changed when Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite" swept four Oscars in 2020, including Best Film and Best Director, after decades when the plaudits for Korean cinema were confined to the critics.

The only previous Indian Oscars won were for English-language films — the 1982 British-Indian co-production "Gandhi" and 2008's Mumbai-set British drama "Slumdog Millionaire".

Now Rajamouli hopes a statuette

for the dance number "Naatu Naatu" will pave the way for Indian auteurs to do the same.

Shot in front of Ukraine's turquoise presidential palace — before the war — it features high-



energy performances from the two leads as they confront their antagonist.

"We are breaking ground, but I think we are in very, very initial, initial steps," said the 49-year-old.

"If you see (South) Korea, for example, the kind of inroads that they have made... we should aspire to do that, all Indian film-makers."

UNPRECEDENTED

Rajamouli was born in the southern state of Karnataka. His father was a scriptwriter who exposed him to the industry.

His early influences included prominent Telugu directors but he found himself drawn to epic Hollywood films such as "Ben Hur"

and "Braveheart", and is a fan of Steven Spielberg and James Cameron.

Rajamouli's 2015 historical action-drama "Baahubali" — then the most expensive film made in

North America's highest-grossing Indian films.

It was "unprecedented" and "a total outlier", said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research.

Audiences continue to flock to packed screenings for repeat viewings — a January showing at Hollywood's historic TCL Chinese Theatre sold out in 98 seconds.

Rajamouli's films have been compared to Marvel superhero movies and he said it would "be an honour" to be asked to do one — but he worries that a major studio would want to involve itself in the production process.

TROUBLING UNDERTONES

The accolades for "RRR" have also been accompanied by criticism of perceived troubling undertones in the film, including the promotion of Hindu nationalism and hyper-masculinity.

"RRR" contains Hindu mythology and nationalist fervour at a time when film-makers, mostly in Bollywood, have been repeatedly targeted by Hindu right-wingers on social media.

Rights campaigners say that under Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Bollywood stars are facing increased pressure — particularly minority Muslim actors like Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan.

Rajamouli grew up in a "deeply religious" Hindu family but is now an atheist and believes that "religion essentially is exploitation".

He blames criticism of the film on the polarisation of debate in India that does not allow for a middle ground.

"Any extreme point of view, I oppose," he said.

"I don't have any kind of hidden agenda... I make films for people who are willing to pay their hard-earned money on the film ticket.

"I like to get them entertained, make them feel dramatic about the characters, about the situations, have a good time, go back and live their lives." — **AFP**

India — made him a household name domestically, leading a wave of southern films to the top of the multilingual country's box office.

The 2017 sequel was well-received, with both movies among the highest-grossing of all time in the nation of 1.4 billion people, cementing Rajamouli's reputation as a blockbuster director.

He was "pleasantly surprised" by the buzz around "RRR" in the West, he said, pointing to what he called a "lack of maximalist entertainment".

"There's a section of audiences who wanted that, a celebratory kind of engagement with the cinema."

Despite appearing on Netflix only two months after it debuted across 1,200 US theatres in March last year, "RRR" has become among

DISCOVERY

Peruvian archaeologists unearth 30 pre-Inca era graves



PERUVIAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS have discovered some 30 pre-Inca era graves in a cemetery belonging to the Chancay people, a group who inhabited valleys of Peru's central coast from



1000 to 1500 AD.

The newly found 800-year-old graves have allowed specialists to know more about the Chancay culture, which has been little researched,



Pieter Van Dalen, archeologist at San Marcos university, said.

"In the last year we have discovered more than 2,000 burials in different cemeteries of the Chancay culture," he added.



Television footage show archaeologists brushing dust off vases in different shapes with visible artwork in the cemetery.

The graves unearthed belong to people from different social classes, according to Van Dalen, who noted some were found at up to five metres (16.4 feet) below the surface and belonged to Chancay's elite. — **Reuters**



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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Snakes, lizards and desserts meet in Malaysia's first reptile cafe



MALAYSIAN REPTILE enthusiast Yap Ming Yang hopes visitors to his pet-friendly cafe will learn to appreciate snakes and lizards as much as they do furrrier creatures such as dogs and cats.
Bearded dragons, leopard geckos, and corn snakes are among the species resting in glass tanks stacked around Yap's cafe on the outskirts of Malaysia's capital, Kuala Lumpur; species he says are commonly bred in the country.



Customers, including children, hold and pet the scaly animals while ordering drinks and food.
"People only care about furry animals, cats, dogs, but people always leave out reptiles and snakes," said Yap, who has a background in environmental science and is part



of a community of Malaysians with an interest in herpetology — the study of reptiles.
"So I hope showing the public how interesting (they) are, we can cause them to have a better outlook on reptiles and less loved animals."
The Southeast Asian country is rich in biodiversity but also a major source for illegally trafficked wildlife. — **Reuters**

CULTURE

Ayahuasca, 'source of knowledge' in the heart of the Amazon



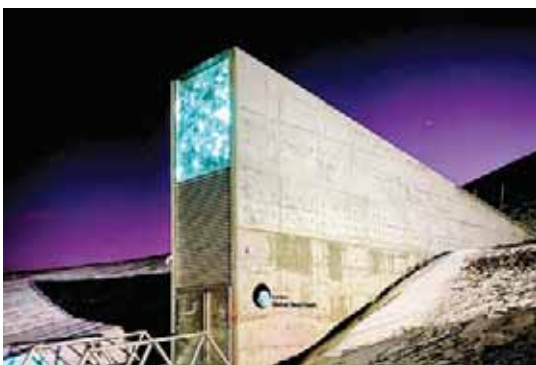
IN THE HEART of the Ecuadoran Amazon live the Cofan Avie, masters of Ayahuasca — the powerful hallucinogenic concoction said to open the door to the "spirit" world.
Here, they call it "yage" and consume it for health and wisdom.
"God once lived here on this planet", recounts Isidro Lucitante, the patriarch and shaman of nine Indigenous Cofan Avie families spread over 55,000 hectares of river and jungle along the border with Colombia.
This god "pulled out one of his hairs and planted it on the Earth. Thus was born the yage, source of knowledge and wisdom," the 63-year-old, his face painted in striking animal motifs, said.
Extracted from the "Banisteriopsis caapi" vine that has grown in the Amazon for thousands of years, Ayahuasca has also gained a reputation in the outside world.
In neighbouring Peru, and to a lesser extent also Ecuador, a tourist industry has taken root around the vine that is now also available for sale — in capsules or as an infusion — online.
For the Cofan Avie, yage is not a business but an umbilical cord that connects them to one other and to long-dead ancestors.
"Yage is not a drug. On the contrary, it is a remedy that makes us better," said Lucitante, who insists he is, above all, a healer, and dead set against the commercialisation

of yage.
"My grandfather drank yage every week, he lived to 115! We are all healthy!"
Becoming increasingly fashionable and even punted as a treatment for drug addiction, Ayahuasca can be dangerous for people who take antidepressants or suffer from heart or psychotic problems, epilepsy or asthma, according to medical experts.
Its active ingredient dimethyltryptamine, or DMT, is illegal in the United States, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, and in other countries.
Back in Bermejo, in the jungle, friends and neighbours gather every weekend in a wooden hut decorated with painted parrots, snakes and panthers, settle down in hammocks and imbibe some of the brown, bitter beverage.
Sometimes a visitor joins in. Under the supervision of shaman Lucitante and his assistants, songs are addressed to the "spirits" as the concoction — crushed, mixed with water and boiled for hours — starts to kick in.
REBALANCE THE WORLD
The Cofan Avie are known in Ecuador for a legal victory over the mining industry in 2018 that led to the scrapping of 52 gold mining concessions granted by the State.
Last year, Lucitante's son, Alex, was a co-recipient of the Goldman Environmental Prize for his contribution to that triumph. He had been responsible

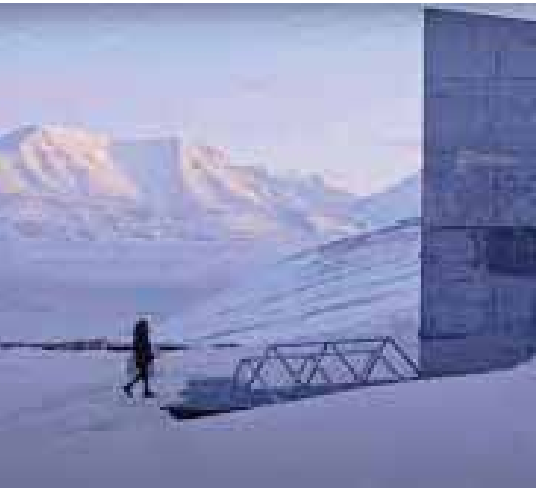
for setting up an Indigenous guard to conduct patrols to collect evidence of intrusions by gold prospectors.
Today, he acts as an assistant at his father's yage ceremonies, which he also accompanies with guitar song.
"It was a long and difficult struggle to protect our territory and Nature," the 30-year-old said, wearing a necklace of animal teeth, a feather stuck through his nose.
"We were inspired by the wisdom of the ancients and the knowledge of yage" which he started drinking at the age of five, said Alex Lucitante.
"The plant is everything to us, just like our territory. We could not live without it. It is through yage medicine that we can connect to the spirits and... rebalance the world."
The ritual is a gruelling one that starts for most people with violent vomiting as part of a purge of the body.
"It's like a great cleansing," explained shaman Lucitante.
Only then "can the visions come. First colours. Then, if you concentrate, the jungle appears. Then the animals: the boa master of rivers, the catfish, or the jaguar master of the hunt. And finally people and spirits... but not everyone can see them." In the hammocks, everyone prepares for their "journey" — novices in an apprehensive silence and regulars chatting away.
Lucitante invites each in turn to take a drink. Then orders AFP's cameras to be turned off. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

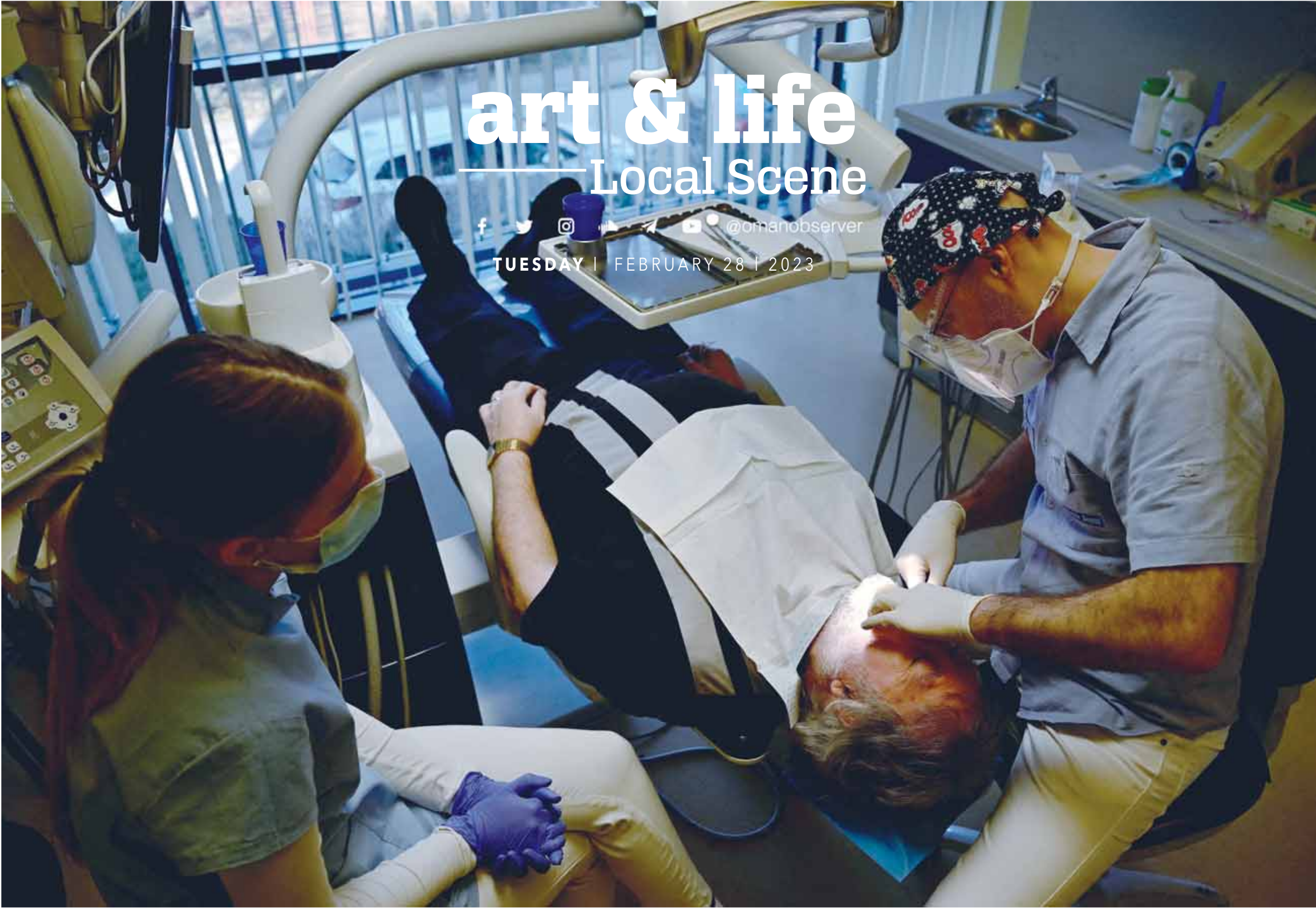
Norway's Global Seed Vault, dedicated to crop diversity, turns 15



ON THE NORTHERN Norwegian archipelago of Spitsbergen, the 15th anniversary of the Global Seed Vault will be celebrated on Sunday.
The seed vault contains almost 1.2 million seed samples from all over the world. Its central task is to secure crop diversity on Earth and the food supply for mankind.
The facility also gives gene banks the opportunity to access backup copies of their collections in the event of a disaster. Almost 1.2 million seed samples from all over the world are stored at a constant minus 18 degrees Celsius in the facility near Longyearbyen, the capital of Spitsbergen.



Local residents are invited to a ceremony at the Svalbard Museum in Longyearbyen, where Norwegian Agriculture Minister Sandra Borch will give a short speech on Sunday afternoon.
Teenagers from the village who are 15, the same age as the seed depository, are also expected to help deposit new seed duplicates in the vault on Tuesday.
In the days surrounding the anniversary, dozens of boxes with almost 20,000 new seed samples from 20 gene banks around the world are expected on Spitsbergen.
Among them are around 2,750 samples from the Leibniz Institute of Plant Genetics and Crop Plant Research in Germany, the country's largest such facility. Samples from the Julius Kühn Institute in Quedlinburg are also expected. — **dpa**



art & life

Local Scene

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TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 28 | 2023

Medical tourism looking sickly as patients watch their spending



Joanna Plucinska

ATTILA Knott has an empty dental hospital in Hungary. The foreigners with bad teeth he was counting on never arrived, deterred first by Covid-19 and now by a cost-of-living crisis that has left the medical tourism industry struggling to recover even after the lifting of pandemic travel restrictions.

"People are more cautious," Knott said, staring at the empty building across the street from his existing Kreativ Dental clinic. "They think twice about spending big money all at once on something like dental treatment."

The businessman had aimed to open the new facility in March 2020 to serve more patients seeking procedures in Hungary for a cheaper price than at home. Now, with patient numbers having halved from around 600 a month before Covid struck, he is thinking of branching out into colonoscopies and knee replacements.

For years, travelling abroad to clinics in countries like Hungary and Turkey has been an option for British and North American patients who face long waits, high costs or both for dental and medical procedures at home.

Operators had hoped for a rapid bounce back after curbs on travel were lifted.

But inflation fuelled by soaring energy and food prices since the Ukraine war started a year ago has left people with little money to spare, especially for cosmetic procedures.

In Hungary, which borders Ukraine, the war itself is making foreigners wary, Knott said.

Rising air fares and fewer flights - and the memory of last summer's travel chaos - are also putting off would-be patients, clinic operators and analysts said.

For some trips, like those to Turkey, airline tickets can be twice what they were in 2019, according to WeCure, which specialises in medical tourism to large hubs like Turkey from countries like Britain.

WeCure said flights, ground transfers and petrol now accounted for about 15 per cent of the cost of its travel and treatment packages, roughly double their proportion pre-Covid, putting upward pressure on overall prices.

Some clinics, facing their own higher costs, have hiked charges. A hip or knee replacement at Nordorthopaedics in Lithuania is about 15 per cent more expensive now than five years ago, the clinic said.

"There will be some trade-offs (for customers)," WeCure's CEO Emre Atceken said. "Instead of having a hair transplant, I'd rather pay my gas bills. I would rather pay my electric bills,"

PROCEDURES ON CREDIT

To encourage clients, some clinic operators are offering pay-as-you-go options, while crowdfunding has sprung up as another source of support. Atceken said WeCure is offering some customers payment in instalments to stretch out the cost. Lyfboat, an Indian company providing medical services for foreign patients, said it has collaborated with a fundraising platform called ImpactGuru to help patients pay for essential surgeries.

Some operators are targeting patients from Britain and Canada, where strained public healthcare services can mean long delays. Knott said most of his patients are from Britain and Iceland, while fewer are coming from other Nordic countries and France.

Linda Frohock, 73, from Staffordshire, said she delayed retirement, took out a bank loan and used savings to travel to Budapest for dental implants.

She paid 8,000 pounds instead of the estimated 32,000 pounds the procedure would have cost in Britain.

"If it's an emergency and only here could do it, then I wanted them to do it. Somehow you just have to find what you need," she said.

ACUTE VS ELECTIVE

The International Medical Travel Journal, published by market

intelligence service LaingBuisson, estimates the medical tourism market is currently worth around \$21 billion, less than pre-pandemic, although editor Keith Pollard warned data is poor. With about 7 million medical travellers a year the IMTJ sees annual growth of 5-10 per cent as realistic - far less than some projections.

Laszlo Pucsko, who runs Budapest-based Health Tourism Worldwide, said clinics specialising in urgent procedures would weather the economic climate as even customers feeling the financial pinch will pay. But those that have competed on price for elective treatments like rhinoplasty will find it harder to survive, he and others said.

"An orthopaedic surgery is something that you cannot postpone if you have severe arthritis and you cannot walk. It's a major, life-changing surgery," said Vilius Sketrys, who runs sales and marketing at Nordorthopaedics.

Bob Martin, 71, decided to pay around 18,000 pounds for new dental implants at Kreativ. A retired NHS nurse manager from Britain, Martin's adult teeth never came through and he has struggled for much of his life with dentures. "If I need to get the work done, what choice have I got?" he said.

Patients who need vital dental work done will press ahead whatever the cost, said Knott at Kreativ. — Reuters