

Hand gesture recognition system

A research team from Sohar University developed a hand gesture recognition system based on neural networks, image processing techniques, and Internet of Things (IoT). The system detects hand gestures and transfers the gestures to a written text then to audio. The research team consists Dr Abdallah Abualkishik, Sara Salim al Khaifi and Mojtaba Jaffar. Dr Abdallah Abualkishik said that the research team developed a recognition system that utilised the convolutional neural network method. **DETAILS ON P5**



HIS MAJESTY INAUGURATES ROYAL ACADEMY OF MANAGEMENT

ACADEMY GROOMS LEADERS AT VARIOUS ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS



ACADEMY'S MODEL OFFERS INTERACTIVE AND SMART USER EXPERIENCE

NATURAL LIGHTS, GREEN SPACES OFFER A HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

ALL-INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS BASED ON ADVANCED METHODS OF MANAGEMENT

REFLECTS HM'S KEENNESS TO DEVELOP OMANI LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Monday presided over the official inauguration of the Royal Academy of Management at the ministries' area in Al Khuwair. Upon his arrival to the Royal Academy of Management's headquarters, His Majesty was received by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy of Management, and Dr Ali bin Qassim Jawad al Lawati, President of the Academy, and members of the Board of Trustees of the Academy. As a gesture marking the opening of the Academy, His Majesty the Sultan placed a symbolic key on the gate's model. After that, His Majesty went on tour of the Royal Academy of Management's facilities. The 5-storey building has multiple spaces that were designed to enhance collaboration, efficiency and inspiration among the various teams at the Academy. The

building was also remodelled to offer an interactive, functional and smart user experience for both employees and the Academy's wider community. Focusing on creating an enabling environment for both working and learning, the natural lights and green spaces offer a healthy work environment, whereas the smart systems and meeting capsules create an ideal space to facilitate virtual meetings. The building also consists of various joint work spaces and community areas shying away from the traditional fixed workstations. During the tour, His Majesty met members of the International Advisory Board of the Royal Academy of Management. At the conclusion of the Royal visit, His Majesty received a commemorative gift from the Royal Academy of Management. It was presented by Dr Ali bin Qassim Jawad al Lawati. The gift was inspired by the inauguration event and embodies the Academy's official opening

gate. It conveys a balanced openness to the world while maintaining national originality. The gate, in its essence, reflects strength and influence, it also features a key that indicates a crossing to the future with determination. The official opening ceremony was attended by some members of the Royal Family, ministers, the chairmen of the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura, under-secretaries and members of the Board of Trustees and the Academy's International Advisory Board. The Royal Academy of Management enjoys His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's Royal patronage, since its establishment by a Royal Decree on January, 11, 2022. Through its all-inclusive system of centres, initiatives and programmes based on advanced methods of modern management, the Academy grooms national leaders at various administrative levels in the public and private sectors. — ONA
SEE P2 & 3

AUGMENTS IN-COUNTRY VALUE IN LINE WITH GLOBAL ECONOMIC TRENDS

TO DELIVER HM'S AMBITION OF POSITIONING OMAN AMONG TOP COUNTRIES

ACADEMY ENCAPSULATES ENVIRONMENT FOR LEADERSHIP COMMUNITIES

PROVIDES A STIMULATING WORKING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN OMAN



To groom national leaders at



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday presided over the official inauguration of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) at the ministries' area in Al Khuwair.





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various administrative levels



RAM reflects HM's keenness to develop Omani leaderships capabilities: Minister of Diwan

MUSCAT: Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal Al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM), expressed his sincere appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for the Academy's inauguration.

He affirmed that this Royal gesture reflects His Majesty's interest on taking up the approaches of knowledge and learning.

The Royal gesture also reflects His Majesty's keenness to promote and develop Omani leadership capabilities so that they could play their role in serving the Omani economy, while at the same time augmenting in-country value (ICV) in line with global economic trends, Sayyid Khalid added.

Meanwhile, Dr Ali bin Qasim al Lawati, Chairman of the Royal Academy of Management, expressed a feeling of pride and



responsibility in the association of the Academy with His Majesty the Sultan's patronage.

He reinstated the Academy's pledge to deliver His Majesty's ambition of positioning Oman among the global leading countries while maintaining the

Omani originality.

He expressed a sense of pride and responsibility in the association of the Academy with His Majesty the Sultan's patronage.

In this context, he valued His Majesty's wise directives

that establish interest in human capital and placing the Sultanate of Oman among developed countries, without prejudice to Omani characteristics.

He added that the role of the Royal Academy of Management is by no means limited to leadership development but rather encapsulates an environment for the various leadership communities in the Sultanate of Oman through programmes, systematic dialogues and participatory spaces to shape ideas, initiatives and solutions.

Dr Ali pointed out that the Royal Academy of Management will provide a stimulating working and learning environment that constitutes the pillars of creative ideas, exchanging knowledge, achieving interdependence and enhancing communication between leaders to add scholarly dimensions to practical experiences. — ONA

RAM to upgrade promising national competencies

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) is being accorded great attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik since its establishment by a Royal Decree issued on January 11, 2022.

The RAM aims to develop national leaders at all administrative levels in the public and the private sectors through an integrated system of centres, initiatives and programmes that are based on the most prominent concepts and methods of modern management.

The RAM is considered as a leading scientific beacon in leadership and modern executive management that help achieve Oman's future vision.

The Academy will serve as a reference for executive learning and a centre for developing national leaders and administrative competencies from the public and the private sectors.

It is envisioned as a platform for thought, administrative development and knowledge foresight to enhance the prospects of the Omani economy in a work environment that stimulates a culture of efficiency, productivity and innovation. The RAM rolls out its programmes and initiatives through four specialised non-structural, autonomous centres to ensure rapid response to changes in the workplace.

The first of these centres is the

Government Leadership Centre, established on Royal directives to enhance the efficiency of the state's administrative apparatus and modernise its work mechanisms in line with the requirements and objectives of Oman's Vision 2040.

The centre undertakes the process of developing national leaders at various administrative levels in the government targeting senior and executive leaders.

The second one is the Centre for Business Leaders inspired by the Royal address on the importance of the private sector and its role in development.

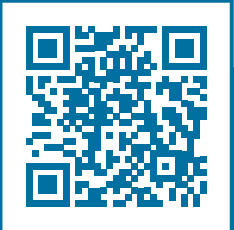
It is concerned with refining leadership competencies in the private sector and highlighting the latest trends.

The third one is the Local Administration Development Centre, implemented in response to the directives of His Majesty to direct development to the governorates, enhance their readiness for investment and develop their local role.

The fourth and last one is the Centre for Future Studies which comes in line with the priority of leadership and economic management in Oman Vision 2040.

It aims to establish renewable senior management based on competencies that suit market dynamics, future expectations, and rapid changes. — ONA





Sur to celebrate Al Shaabaniyah today

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

There is a celebration for Al Shaabaniyah in Sur on Tuesday. It is an ancient practice that is still part and parcel of people in Sur. The day, celebrated on the 14th of Shaaban, is a children's day when they get gifts from families, neighbours and friends. Elders of Sur city in the South Eastern Governorate have fond memories of such custom. Children eagerly wait for it every year. On the morning of Al Shaabaniyah, children wear traditional new clothes with a smile. They go to every house in the neighbourhood and knock on the doors for gifts. The people welcome the arrival of tiny tots and give them either money or candies. This is part of the intangible heritage of the wilayat that parents and grandparents have long preserved. Maryam al Araimi from Sur said, "This occasion marks the traditional popular legacy which is still in practice. It helps preserve our heritage, old customs

and traditions." 'Al Shaabaniya' is similar to 'Qarantashoo', which is celebrated by most of the governorates in the Sultanate of Oman in the middle of the blessed month of Ramadhan bearing the same name in most of the Arab Gulf countries. **SOCIAL HARMONY** The objective of Al Shaabaniyah is to create social harmony. This practice helps build social communication and instills a love of adherence to this beautiful heritage. This tradition also helps children learn to count money. It is important for the country's economy and significant in preserving Omani customs. Al Shaabaniyah reflects the spirit of harmony in Omani society. It brings joy among the children who are seen chanting 'Give us Shaabaniyah'. Civil society institutions, companies, authorities and charitable associations participate in this day by organising competitions, celebrations and distributing gifts in honour of children.



Deaths, accidents drop even as more vehicles hit the roads

MAI AL ABRI
NIZWA, MARCH 6

The latest report of the Royal Oman Police indicated decline in fatalities in road accidents despite more vehicles hitting the roads in recent years. According to the report, the number of registered vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 5,823, to 1996091 in January 2023. It also indicates a decrease in traffic accidents by more than 70 per cent, injuries by 49 per cent, and deaths by 51 per cent in 2022 compared to the 2012 statistics. The report comes as improved road safety standards in the Sultanate of Oman when the country and its GCC partners are observing the 35th Gulf Traffic Week. The Traffic Week titled 'Your life matters' is being observed across the Sultanate of Oman with events highlighting traffic awareness for all segments of society. The Gulf Traffic Week strives to raise awareness among all segments

The Traffic Week titled 'Your life matters' is being observed across the Sultanate of Oman with events highlighting traffic awareness for all segments of society

of society and road users about the significance of following to traffic rules and regulations in order to reduce the risk of accidents. The General Directorate of Traffic organised an exhibition at the Mall of Oman to raise awareness about the dangers of traffic accidents and their causes with the participation of various organisations such as the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority, the Oman Automobile Association, and the Petroleum Development of Oman. In addition to traffic services, the exhibits show the country's efforts to prevent accidents. The exhibition focuses on the Traffic Safety Institutes' efforts to improve road safety, spread traffic culture, and qualify road users, driving

instructors, and applicants. "Traffic weeks are a good opportunity for those concerned bodies with traffic in the Gulf Cooperation Council to unify the traffic awareness message that is directed to the community, through a unified slogan that aims to develop traffic awareness in society," said Brigadier General Engineer Ali al Falahi, Director General of Traffic. This year's tagline (your life matters) emphasises the significance of self-preservation through suitable measures that contribute to the safety of all road users. Al Falahi emphasised that the results are encouraging, since there has been a decrease in the number of recorded accidents, injuries, and deaths, despite an

Al Dakhiliyah holds dialogue session on youth for 2023



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, MARCH 6

The youth dialogue session for 2023 was held at the Nizwa Cultural Centre last week in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate under the slogan 'youth at the core of our interest'. The dialogue session was held as part of Al Dakhiliyah Festival 2023 in the presence of Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, Engineer Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, and other dignitaries. The dialogue session dealt with four themes, namely heritage and tourism, innovation and technology, community partnership, and discussion of the previous dialogue sessions held in 2022. The themes were derived from those of Oman Vision 2040. The session was moderated by media person Ahmed bin Salim al Kindi, with the participation of residents of Al Dakhiliyah and participants in the work of the

preparatory laboratory. At the beginning of the session, Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, spoke about heritage in Al Dakhiliyah, economic diversification in heritage tourism, contents of cultural heritage and the empowerment of families in heritage field. During the session, they discussed the outputs of the preparatory laboratory held in February last at Nizwa Cultural Centre for two weeks. About 130 people from the governorate participated in the laboratory. The percentage of participation from the government and private sectors reached 30 per cent and 70 per cent from civil and local social institutions, which included charitable teams, civil companies, associations, job seekers, students, and owners of medium and minor investment projects. The version of the youth dialogue session for 2023, followed three phases represented in defining the scope of work through a questionnaire launched to investigate the community's opinion.

Support continues for quake victims

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

One month after the deadly earthquake that hit Türkiye and Syria claiming more than 50,000 lives, the countries are in the process of rebuilding the affected areas, building new homes for those who are still in the rehabilitation camps while efforts are on to remove the wreckage and debris. "Things are moving positively, the Syrian government is working in cooperation with friends and brothers across the world, including the Sultanate of Oman in order to heal the wounds and remove the debris of the devastating earthquake despite many external obstacles," Samer Bakhour from Syrian Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman told the Observer. Dr Laila al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, expressed her sincere condolences and sincere sympathy to the families of the victims of the earthquake



that struck the two countries last month and sent her wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured, and reaffirmed that Oman will continue to provide all possible support to Syria to overcome the repercussions of this natural disaster. This was expressed to the diplomatic mission of Syria which was attended by Fattouh Qudsia, Minister Counsellor at the Embassy on Sunday. "Our state, institutions and NGOs are still arranging the

identifying through the DNA and photos, and from available data which we received from the relatives during the burial, and conducting mass burials are currently going on," she added. Oman extended wholehearted support to the two countries as soon as the disaster struck on February 6, 2023 and built an air bridge to facilitate the support and rehabilitation process. Several flights carried essentials to the quake-hit region and delivered provisions while the Omani Search and Rescue Team of the Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority (CDA) sent officials to support the rescue and rehabilitation operations. Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), the country's only official channel for collecting funds, started an account for those affected in the quakes and is still receiving donations. One can donate to the victims' families and take part in helping to rebuild the nations either through the OCO or by approaching the respective embassies.



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Foreign Ministry, WIPO sign Letter of Intent

MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received here on Monday Daren Tang, Director General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of joint cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and WIPO in the intellectual property sphere.

Further, a letter of intent (LOI) was signed between the Foreign Ministry and WIPO dealing with training Omani diplomats in the field of intellectual property. The meeting was attended by officials from both sides.

Earlier, Daren Tang, lauded Oman's interest in the intellectual property (IP) as it is considered "a catalyst for growth".

He added that Oman is among the first Arab countries to join

the Lisbon Agreement for the Protection of Appellations of Origin and their International Registration.

Eng Ibrahim Said Al Kharusi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, also received Daren Tang.

The meeting discussed topics and projects related to intellectual property, trademarks, and geographical indications of the elements and components related to the Omani cultural heritage.

The two sides also touched on means of enhancing cooperation in the field of national capacity building and training programmes rendered by the WIPO.

In a media meeting with ONA, the WIPO Director General expressed his admiration of Oman Vision 2040 that targets economic diversification and



The meeting discussed global trends in utilising intellectual property to support startups and means to enhance cooperation in the areas of commercial franchising, marketing and training for the SMEs

building communities that fulfil aspirations of the Omani youth. He added that the Sultanate of Oman enjoys a dynamic young population reaching more than 60 per cent of the overall population.

He said, "The Omani youth have become entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators, and they need to use intellectual property rights in order to protect their ideas and deliver their innovative, high quality products to various global markets".

In another meeting, Halima bint Rashid al Zariyah, Chairperson of the Authority of Small and Medium Enterprises

Development (ASMED) met with the WIPO chief and his accompanying delegation.

The meeting discussed global trends in utilising intellectual property to support startups and means to enhance cooperation in the areas of commercial franchising, marketing and training for the SMEs.

It also touched on the role played by intellectual property rights in encouraging innovation and creativity, as well as protecting innovations and transforming ideas into products and services, and enriching them with competitive advantages. — ONA

Al Buraimi governor inspects projects

AL BURAIMI: Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, inspected a number of development and service projects and followed up on their implementation in the governorate, on Monday.

Construction work continues in Al Buraimi Governorate to implement a number of service projects after the signing of 41 agreements by the



Al Buraimi Governor's office following several numerous meetings with various society segments and field visits that aimed to identify urgent needs.

The projects include construction of internal roads within housing schemes as well as new roads across Al Buraimi. Work is also underway to construct a walkway in front of Al Buraimi Public Park as well as paving of parking lots. — ONA

ASDS, NDC chief receive USAF Academy delegation

MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj on Monday a delegation from the United States Air Force Academy (USAF)

During the meeting, the two sides discussed several academic and training matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Nasser bin Abdullah al Qutabi, Head of the Centre for Strategic



and Defence Studies at the Academy.

Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National

Defence College (NDC) also received here the delegation from the United States Air Force Academy.

During the meeting, the

two sides discussed several matters of mutual of interest that are related to academic and training fields.

Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college's facilities and equipment. They also toured its various departments and halls. The meeting was attended by some strategic instructors at the NDC and the academic representative of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) at the NDC. — ONA

Research project develops hand gesture recognition system



MUSCAT: A research team from Sohar University developed a hand gesture recognition system based on neural networks, image processing techniques, and Internet of Things (IoT). The system detects hand gestures and transfers the gestures to a written text then to audio.

The research team consists of Dr Abdallah Abualkashik, Sara bint Salim al Khaifiyah and Mojtaba Jaffar.

Dr Abdallah said that the research team developed a recognition system that utilised the convolutional neural network method. It aims to convert the

dynamic deaf signs from live video to text and speech using a Raspberry Pi device and a normal camera.

The researchers created the dataset for this project. It contains 62,000 (64 x 64-pixel) images of the 30 letters of the alphabet and 1 word. Each pattern (Letter) has 2,000 images that are divided into 1,750 images for training and 250 images for testing.

Dr Abdallah also pointed out that the research was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. — ONA

Dhofar governor reviews role of youth in development projects

SALALAH: HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki bin Mahmoud al Said, Governor of Dhofar, stressed the importance of youth efforts which would have a great impact on enhancing the developmental role of projects being implemented in the governorate in various fields.

At a meeting with the members of Dhofar Municipality Youth Committee, the governor affirmed that the work will continue on developing the governorate through a package of projects and initiatives that will be implemented during the upcoming period.

He said the Youth Committee is a model for community participation and the strengthening of



partnership with various sectors to improve services and programmes.

The meeting was aimed at enhancing the role of youth and their participation in comprehensive and sustainable development, strengthening channels of communication with society and creating an innovative environment in order to achieve the goals of

Oman Vision 2040.

The governor said that the initiative of the Youth Committee comes within the framework of interest and benefiting from the youth segment in the development process. It also provides a space for young people to highlight their creative ideas and promote the values of citizenship.

The meeting included a review of Dhofar Municipality's plan for upcoming development projects and discussing them with members of the committee.

The plan includes developing tourist sites, humanising cities and enhancing the role of youth in raising awareness and promoting social communication. — ONA



الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (ش.م.ع.م.)
UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOC)
P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24698498, Fax: 24698496

Notice and Invitation to Attend the Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of UNITED POWER SAOC (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Wednesday at 05:00 PM on 22/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (Online) If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Annual General Meeting shall be held on Sunday at 05:00 PM on 26/03/2023, via the electronic platform which can be accessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (online) to discuss the following agenda:

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2022.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and approve the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022.
- To consider and note the transactions carried out by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31 December 2022 (as in Annexure).
- To consider and approve the transactions that will carry out by the Company with related parties for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 (as in Annexure).
- To consider and ratify the Board and Committees' sitting fees paid during the preceding year and specify the Board and Committees' sitting fees for the coming year (as in Annexure).
- To consider and approve the proposal of distributing cash dividends for the financial year ended 31 December 2022 as follows: -
 - Ordinary shareholder: 128 (1.280 Baiza for each share)
 - Preference shareholder: 138.7% (1.387 Baiza for each share)
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending 31 December 2023 and approve their remuneration.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to draw your attention to the following: -

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on
Telephone No 99219419 or email: salah.farsi@upcmanah.com



Khamenei orders ‘severe punishment’ for poisoners



Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks during the Arbor Day ceremony in Tehran, Iran. – Reuters

TEHRAN: Iran's Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Monday said those behind the poisoning of schoolgirls in recent months should face “severe punishment”, according to his website.

In total, several hundred cases of gas poisoning have been reported in more than 52 schools across Iran since the end of November, according to an official count.

Female pupils have reported suffering symptoms such as shortness of breath, nausea and vertigo after detecting “unpleasant” or “unknown” odours, sparking fear among parents and calls for authorities to act.

“If the poisonings are proven, it would be an unforgivable crime... (and) the perpetrators must be handed severe punishments, with no amnesty for them,” Khamenei said in his first public comments on the mystery poisonings.

Judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Monday that individuals arrested for poisoning the schoolgirls would be put on trial and charged with “corruption on earth” — an accusation that would lead to the death penalty.

Iranian officials have not announced any arrests so far.

Late Sunday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi denounced the poisoning cases, which have led some girls to be hospitalised, as “a new conspiracy by the enemies” of Iran.

This action, he said, was meant to “instil fear in the hearts of students, children and their parents”.

Meanwhile, authorities on Monday arrested Iranian journalist Ali Pourtabatabaei who had been covering the poisoning attacks for the Qomnews website, newspaper reported. — AFP

Seoul says to compensate Japan wartime forced labour victims

SEOUL: South Korea announced plans on Monday to compensate victims of Japan's forced wartime labour, aiming to end a “vicious cycle” in the Asian powers' relations and boost ties to counter the nuclear-armed North.

Japan and the United States immediately welcomed the announcement, but victims' groups said it fell far short of their demand for a full apology from Tokyo and direct compensation from the Japanese companies involved.

Seoul and Tokyo have ramped up security cooperation in the face of growing threats from Kim Jong Un's North Korea, which is expanding its nuclear weapons programme in defiance of UN sanctions.

But Seoul-Tokyo ties have long been strained over Tokyo's brutal 1910-45 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, when around 780,000 Koreans were conscripted into forced labour by Japan, according to data from Seoul.

This does not include the Korean women forced into slavery by Japanese troops.

Seoul's plan is to take money from major South Korean companies that benefited from a 1965 reparations deal with Tokyo and use it to compensate victims and their families, Foreign Minister Park Jin said.

The hope is that Japan will



South Korean protesters during a rally against South Korea's announcement of plans to compensate victims of Japan's forced wartime labour, Seoul. – AFP

“positively respond to our major decision today with Japanese companies' voluntary contributions and a comprehensive apology”, he added.

“I believe that the vicious cycle should be broken for the sake of national interest,” Park added.

Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi welcomed the new plan, telling reporters it would help to restore “healthy” ties.

head of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), as presidential candidate.

Instead, Aksener proposed that either Ekrem Imamoglu or Mansur Yavas, mayors of Istanbul and Ankara, be the candidate. She said opinion polls showed they would win against Erdogan by a large margin.

Hours before the five remaining parties in the alliance were set to announce Kilicdaroglu as their candidate, the two mayors held a brief meeting with Aksener who pitched her proposal.

Aksener put forward an “inclusive” proposal, IYI spokesperson Kursad Zorlu told reporters. “She has conveyed the proposal that the two mayors serve as executive vice presidents,” Zorlu said. “Our leader will convey this proposal to Kilicdaroglu in

The plan does not include a fresh apology, although Hayashi said Tokyo stands by a 1998 declaration that included an apology.

The two sides quickly moved to ease trade disputes linked to a raft of tit-for-tat economic measures imposed as relations soured after a 2018 South Korean Supreme Court ruling ordered some Japanese companies to pay compensation.

And Japanese media have

reported that South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol could soon visit Tokyo, possibly even for a Japan-South Korea baseball game this week. US President Joe Biden hailed “a groundbreaking new chapter of cooperation and partnership between two of the United States' closest allies”.

“President Yoon and Prime Minister Kishida are taking a critical step to forge a future for

the Korean and Japanese people that is safer, more secure, and more prosperous,” he said in a White House statement.

But analysts were more cautious.

“The significance of today's announcement will be measured in large part by what Japan does next,” Benjamin A Engel said, a research professor at the Institute of International Affairs at Seoul National University.

At a minimum, some kind of apology from Tokyo and donations from two Japanese companies which have been ruled liable by South Korea's Supreme Court would help ensure the public accepts the deal, he said.

“Without these steps by the Japanese side, the announcement by the Korean government will not amount to much,” he said. The move to resolve the forced-labour issue follows years of disputes over World War II sex slaves, which had soured Japan-South Korea ties.

Seoul and Tokyo reached a deal in 2015 aimed at “finally and irreversibly” resolving that issue, with a Japanese apology and the formation of a one-billion-yen fund for survivors.

But South Korea later effectively nullified that deal, citing a lack of victims' consent, which led to a bitter diplomatic dispute that spread to affect trade and security ties.

— AFP

Türkiye's oppn deal to reunite, elevate mayors

ANKARA: Türkiye's opposition neared a deal on Monday in which the right-wing IYI Party could return to an alliance that it quit three days ago, opening the way to mounting a united challenge to President Tayyip Erdogan in elections set for May.

Under a new proposal following a weekend of political intrigue, two popular mayors would serve as vice presidents should the opposition win in the presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14.

With polls showing a close race, the vote is the biggest challenge Erdogan has faced in two decades in power.

IYI, the second-biggest in the alliance of six parties, quit the bloc on Friday after leader Meral Aksener rejected the expected choice of Kemal Kilicdaroglu,



Leader of IYI Party, Meral Aksener, makes a statement at the party headquarters in Ankara, Türkiye. – AFP

of the government's initial response to the disaster, pollsters said Erdogan and the AK Party (AKP) appeared to have largely retained their support. At stake in the elections is the direction of a country which Erdogan has increasingly shaped to his vision.

Opponents have pledged to revoke the powerful executive presidency he created, returning Türkiye to parliamentary democracy and restoring independence to a central bank which implemented his call for low interest rates — driving economic growth but crashing the lira and firing up inflation.

The opposition alliance had initially planned to reveal their presidential candidate later on Monday but it was unclear whether that announcement would go ahead. — Agencies

BEIRUT

Syrians still struggling a month after quake

Syrians are still struggling with displacement, trauma and a slow aid response a month after a severe earthquake hit the north of the war-torn country, an aid organisation and monitoring group said on Monday. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) warned that there is a worsening humanitarian crisis on the back of the natural disaster.

The NRC said that donations have so far fallen short.

As of March 1, less than half of the nearly \$400 million that the UN says is needed for Syria has



been provided by donors, it added.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights also sounded the alarm over the deteriorating humanitarian situation.

JAKARTA

Landslide kills 11, dozens missing

Eleven people were killed and dozens were missing after torrential rains and landslides battered one of Indonesia's outermost islands on Monday, the country's disaster agency said.

The National Disaster Mitigation Agency's spokesperson Abdul Muhari said on Kompas TV that, according to the latest information from local officials on the Riau Islands, “11 body bags had been filled” and “50



people are estimated missing”.

Mud and debris from the landslides had flattened and fully covered the houses that were near the edge of a cliff on Serasan island.

BERLIN

Police puzzled by cash heist

A methodically planned holdup of a cash transporter that netted an armed gang millions of euros being ferried to Germany's central bank had police scratching their heads on Monday, four days after the heist.

The gang lay in wait for the transporter on Thursday as it passed near the village of Gützkow on its way from Greifswald on the Baltic Sea coast to Neubrandenburg, setting up a fake motorway



construction site to hold it up.

Warning shots were then fired from machine pistols by two of the gang and black paint was sprayed on the windshield.



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world

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TUESDAY | MARCH 7 | 2023

7

Ukraine says ‘fulfils’ EU accession reforms

KYIV: Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal said on Monday that Kyiv had fulfilled all the recommendations of the European Union as his war-battered nation pushes to begin talks to join the bloc. Ukraine, which held a pro-EU revolution in

2014, has been battling a Russian war for over a year. President Volodymyr Zelensky has said his country “deserves” to start talks to join the bloc this year.

Shmygal said Ukraine had appointed a new head of its National Anti-Corruption

Bureau, thereby completing a set of reforms required by the EU. “Ukraine has fulfilled all seven EU recommendations,” he tweeted. “This demonstrates our determination to move on to the start of accession negotiations this year.” He announced that Semen

Kryvonos, 40, was the new chief of the anti-corruption agency.

Kryvonos previously headed Ukraine’s ministry in charge of town planning. Kryvonos, until now the chief of the State Inspection of Architecture and Urban Planning, will serve a

seven-year term as director of NABU, one of several bodies set up in recent years to tackle corruption.

In a video statement, Kryvonos said he would create conditions for officials to “fear God, the people of Ukraine and NABU.”

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal chose Kryvonos from a pool of three finalists and was supported by his cabinet. “Our team is committed to the principle of zero-tolerance to corruption and supporting anti-corruption institutions,” Shmyhal said.

OMAN CHLORINE S.A.O.G. عمان كلورين ش.م.ع.م. P.O. BOX 193, POSTAL CODE 134, MUSCAT, SULTANATE OF OMAN, TEL : 24695839 - FAX : 24695768



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2022

Dear Shareholders,

After greetings,

On behalf of the Company's Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the annual report for the year 2022 representing the 22nd year of the company's commercial operations.

1. Performance Overview of Parent Company:

The summarized performance of the parent company – ‘Oman Chlorine SAOG’ for the year ended December 31, 2022 is below.

Details	Amount in RO'000			
	2022	2021	Change	YOY % change
Net sales	12,764	9,672	3,092	32%
Operating profit	3,106	2,124	982	46%
Profit before tax	3,164	2,170	994	46%
Tax	(478)	(340)	(138)	-41%
Profit after tax	2,685	1,830	855	47%

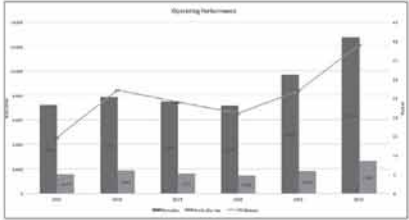
The following are the salient features of operations of 2022 (viz.),

- The Company's brownfield expansion of its Caustic Soda Plant (30 MTPD) commenced production in November 2021 and the new Calcium Chloride Plant came into commercial production from August 2022.
- The enhanced capacity of the Caustic Soda Plant from 45 MTPD to 75 MTPD has led to higher customer retention and improved revenues whilst cost efficiency has improved.
- The company consistently maintained the capacity utilization of the plant above 100% for both the plants on combined basis, the combined capacity utilization was 100.1%, the existing plant achieved over 96% capacity utilization and the brownfield expansion plant was operating at 107.8% during the year 2022.
- The global caustic and Calcium Chloride prices increased substantially due to global supply chain constraints resulting in higher realization of prices in our products during this period. Thus, the overall sales increased during 2022 by 32% due to combination of higher selling prices and increased capacity.
- The export sales volume was higher, and this is partly on account of reaching new areas in MENA, East Africa, and some European regions.

The profitability of the parent company is considered exceptional.

The operating performance of the parent company for the period 2017 to 2022 is as under:

The stable quality of the company's products and its solid HSE and reliability track record have enabled the company to maintain its position to a great extent despite stiff competition.



Your company continues to supply major multinational and local clients under mid and long-term contracts.

2. Performance overview of Subsidiaries:

2.1 Union Chlorine LLC (UAE)

For the year ended 31st December 2022, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 3,507,155 (2021 RO. 1,156,885).

After interest and depreciation of RO 2,388,445 the net profit was RO.1,118,710 (2021- loss of RO. 878,465).

The plant operating at capacity utilization of 103%, the revenue was higher while capitalizing on the international demand and securing more contracts at higher realizations.

Particulars	Amount in RO'000		
	2022	2021	YOY (%) Change
Revenue	9,342	6,272	49.0%
EBITDA	3,507	1,157	203.2%
Profit / (Loss) after Tax	1,119	(878)	227.3%

Profit of the company has increased by 227.3% in year ended on 31st December 2022 as compared to similar period of 2021. The parent company's share of profit (Direct) including its 100% subsidiary (Indirect) is RO. 670,108 (2021 – Loss RO.526,200).

2.2 Gulf Chlorine LLC (Qatar)

For the year ended 31st December 2022, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 3,530,455. After interest, depreciation, and Joint venture share of loss the net profit was RO 1,109,532. EBITDA included a positive impact of RO 1,477,456 which was write back of project related payable. The parent company's share of profit is RO 565,862.

Particulars	Amount in RO'000		
	2022	2021	YOY % Change
Revenue	9,825	4,690	109.5%
EBITDA	3,530	183	1829%
Profit / (Loss) after tax	1,110	(3,030)	136.6%

The company has further strengthened its long-term agreements and its position with the major players in Qatar and targeting more governmental bodies and leading entities in the market for a sustainable products supply. In 2022 the company further expanded its export market in the region and will continue to do the same.

During the year Oman Chlorine has contributed its share of cash call raised by Gulf Chlorine amounting to RO 809,064.

2.3 Oman Industrial Development Company SAOC

Oman Industrial Development Company is fully owned by Oman Chlorine and the company holds an 11.1% economic interest in Union Chloride LLC – Abu Dhabi. Posted loss of RO 3,286/- for 2022 (2021-RO 4,923/-).

3. Performance overview of Consolidated:

The summarized operating result of the consolidated operation for the year 2022 is as under.

Details	Group		Variance Amount	Variance %
	2022	2021		
Revenue	31,359	19,663	11,696	59.48%
Operating expenses	(21,634)	(15,597)	(6,037)	-38.71%
Other Income	1,673	392	1,281	326.79%
Share of loss in JV	(138)	(648)	510	78.70%
Profit before interest, tax, and depreciation	11,260	3,811	7,449	195.46%
Interest	(2,847)	(2,710)	(137)	-5.06%
Depreciation	(3,021)	(2,806)	(215)	-7.66%
Profit / (Loss) before tax	5,392	(1,706)	7,098	416.06%
Tax	(479)	(340)	(139)	40.88%
Profit / (Loss) after tax	4,913	(2,046)	6,959	340.13%
Profit/(Loss) attributable to parent company	3,919	(258)	4,177	1618.99%

4. Competitive position and degree of reliance on suppliers/customers:

The Group enjoys strong competitive position in GCC markets with excellent track record in safety and reliability.

The domestic market contributed 63.5% of the turnover of the Group (68.7% during 2021) and the balance 36.5% is contributed by export market (31.3% during 2021). GCC region contributed to significant portion of export revenue.

Three customers in each individual group company contributed to over 34.5% of the turnover and utilities payment to government entities in each group company constituted more than 30.8% of the total production costs during the year under review.

5. Dividend:

Your company's dividend policy is based on the availability of funds and the future requirements of the company for capital investments which may require all or part of the profits. The dividend policy is structured to enhance the shareholder value on continuous basis.

The following table of the parent company shows the dividend declared during the last five years.

Details	Amount in RO '000				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Net profit after tax	1,847	1,632	1,459	1,830	2,685
Share capital	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810
EPS (in Bzs)	27.1	24.0	21.4	26.8	39.4
Cash Dividend (%)	15%	10%	12.5%	17.5%	25%
Stock Dividend (%)	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%

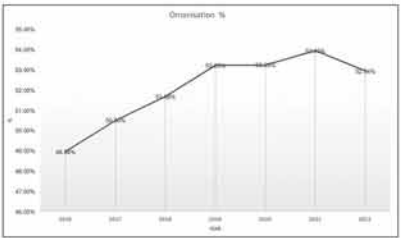
@ Earning per share (EPS) is computed on the face value of Bzs. 100.

Your Board is proposing cash dividend of Bzs. 25 per share and distribution of Bonus shares to the shareholders at the rate of 5% (5 additional shares for every 100 shares held by shareholders at face value). The proposed dividend is subject to the approval of the AGM.

6. Omanization:

Due to the continued efforts of the Board and the Management to enhance the Omani staff, the Omanization reached at 52.94 % as on December 31, 2022.

Management continues to strive to increase the Omanization percentage.



7. Outlook:

7.1 Parent:

The brownfield expansion of its Chlor Alkali plant from 45 MTPD to 75 MTPD and the new Calcium Chloride plant with the capacity of 85 MTPD in 2022 has led to cost optimization, thus enabling the parent company to cater for local demand and compete effectively with imports in the local market whilst offering competitive price to export customers.

The commissioning of leading industrial ventures in Oman will improve the demand for the products and the impact is fully reflected in the profitability as the expansion is now completed.

We are optimistic about product demand and stable prices in the near term.

7.2 Subsidiaries

7.2.1 Union Chlorine LLC

The company has established long term supply agreements with major oil and gas companies and has also established direct supplies to end user within UAE and GCC, this is expected to positively reflect in the performance. The management is continuously adopting cost cutting measures and has also managed to secure the lowest industrial electricity tariff by getting higher ICV and economic multiplier rating.

Management outlook for the selling Prices in the near term remains positive which is expected to generate positive returns and healthy inflow.

7.2.2 Gulf Chlorine WLL

The company expects promising outlook in terms of production, revenue growth, EBITDA and bottom-line, it has also managed to obtain reduced electricity tariff in Qatar which will reflect positively in the near term. The company has entered and stabilized various export markets in GCC, MENA and Europe.

The JV United Chemicals, producing Calcium chloride, in which the company holds 35% share is operating at 82% capacity and there is strong demand for the products.

Oman Industrial Development Co. SAOC (OIDC)

The improved operating performance of Union Chlorine LLC will result in improved operating performance of OIDC.

Group

The operating performance of the Group is expected to improve once the effect of optimal capacity utilization is reflected in the operating performance. The group is exploring all possible measures including optimizing the cost, enhancing the synergies to improve future profitability.

8. Corporate Social Responsibility:

The company continues to contribute as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility in Oman which are in line with Government efforts and strategies to improve the community and the standard of living. Our contribution focus on the following areas:

- Charities
- Education and on job training
- Sport activities
- Health
- Environment
- Cultural activities

During the year ended 31st December 2022, Oman Chlorine has donated to Oman Charitable Organization, Environment Authority and Al Noor Association for the Blind.

9. Corporate Governance:

I am pleased to inform that your company conducts the business with diligence, transparency, and accountability. We undertake to go a step further and equip stakeholders with the knowledge and information appropriate to make informed decision.

We will adhere to the stringent corporate governance measures whereby disclosures and accountability have paramount importance. The company's philosophy of corporate governance and a detailed report on the implementation of corporate governance appear separately in the Annual Report since 2014.

10. On record:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management, I wish to express our loyalty and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq May God protect Him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its People.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Government Authorities for their support and encouragement in particular the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority as well as all the employees of the company and management for their sincere efforts, leading to the continued success of the company.

Above all, we pay tribute to the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq as he leads Oman into 2040 vision and vow to support all his endeavors to take Oman to greater heights of prosperity and development.

Chairman

Audited statement of financial position as at 31 December 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets:				
Property, plant and equipment	16,416,913	15,858,608	76,432,950	77,518,638
Investment in subsidiaries	14,353,156	13,544,092	-	-
Loan to a subsidiary	2,301,716	2,301,716	-	-
Investment in a joint venture	-	-	1,157,094	1,295,492
Right-of-use assets	788,468	830,874	2,467,301	2,556,308
Total non-current assets	33,860,253	32,535,290	80,057,345	81,370,438
Current assets:				
Inventories and consumables	1,527,425	1,178,421	3,675,476	2,850,199
Trade and other receivables	2,901,565	3,540,159	6,055,235	7,487,490
Cash and cash equivalents	2,560,410	1,473,427	4,013,499	2,712,483
Total current assets	6,989,400	6,192,007	13,744,210	13,050,172
Total assets	40,849,653	38,727,297	93,801,555	94,420,610
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity:				
Share capital	6,810,366	6,810,366	6,810,366	6,810,366
Legal reserve	2,848,394	2,848,394	3,011,726	2,848,423
General reserve	900,000	850,000	850,000	850,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	(242,770)	(269,833)
Retained earnings	19,112,588	17,669,360	13,451,473	10,937,093
Equity attributable to the Owners of the Parent Company	29,671,348	28,178,120	23,930,795	21,176,049
Non-controlling interest	-	-	7,187,273	5,399,764
Total equity	29,671,348	28,178,120	31,118,068	26,575,813
Liabilities				
Non-current liabilities:				
Lease liabilities	815,760	829,999	2,543,775	2,568,773
Long term borrowings	5,116,553	4,601,113	43,534,294	46,719,479
Employees' terminal benefits	162,693	156,588	353,630	301,820
Cash flow hedge	-	-	300,566	355,976
Deferred tax liabilities	865,289	742,194	865,290	742,194
Total non-current liabilities	6,960,295	6,329,894	47,597,555	50,688,242
Current liabilities:				
Lease liabilities	72,580	72,580	117,528	113,769
Current portion of long term borrowings	938,751	217,872	5,315,763	3,442,925
Short term borrowing	-	-	1,303,607	3,778,007
Trade and other payables	2,807,975	3,633,312	7,845,491	9,431,727
Cash flow hedge	-	-	104,839	94,608
Provision for income tax	398,704	295,519	398,704	295,519
Total current liabilities	4,218,010	4,219,283	15,085,932	17,156,555
Total liabilities	11,178,305	10,549,177	62,683,487	67,844,797
Total equity and liabilities	40,849,653	38,727,297	93,801,555	94,420,610
Net assets per share	0.436	0.414	0.351	0.310

Audited Statement of comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2022

	Parent Company		Group	
	Year ended	Year ended	Year ended	Year ended
	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO	31 December 2022 RO	31 December 2021 RO
Revenue	12,763,628	9,671,876	31,359,462	19,663,444
Cost of revenue	(7,564,722)	(5,503,916)	(20,144,640)	(14,192,871)
Gross profit	5,198,906	4,167,960	11,214,822	5,470,573
Selling and distribution expenses	(1,173,040)	(1,046,179)	(2,680,914)	(2,307,285)
General and administrative expenses	(920,197)	(998,126)	(1,829,311)	(1,829,187)
Operating profit	3,105,669	2,123,655	6,704,597	1,334,101
Other income	324,471	202,166	1,672,670	391,822
Impairment of goodwill	-	(73,651)	-	(73,651)
Finance costs	(266,503)	(82,089)	(2,846,800)	(2,710,399)
Share of loss of a joint venture	-	-	(138,398)	(647,615)
Profit/(loss) before income tax	3,163,637	2,170,081	5,392,069	(1,705,742)
Tax expense	(478,595)	(339,877)	(478,595)	(339,877)
Profit/(loss) for the year	2,685,042	1,830,204	4,913,474	(2,045,619)
Attributable to:				
Owners of the Parent Company	2,685,042	1,830,204	3,919,497	(258,052)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	993,977	(1,787,567)
	2,685,042	1,830,204	4,913,474	(2,045,619)
Other comprehensive income/(loss)				
Items that will be reclassified subsequently to profit or loss				
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	45,180	(166,945)
Total comprehensive income/(loss) for the year	2,685,042	1,830,204	4,958,654	(2,212,564)
Attributable to:				
Owners of the Parent Company	2,685,042	1,830,204	3,946,560	(327,062)
Non-controlling interest	-	-	1,012,094	(1,885,502)
	2,685,042	1,830,204	4,958,654	(2,212,564)
Basic and diluted earnings per share	0.0394	0.0269	0.0577	(0.0038)

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in these pages are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the opinion of the Observer.

Women... break the glass ceiling

The world is full of personalities. We look at people as part of population. Collectively we can be described as the 'public'. And we are growing in numbers so much that we are an entity. The entity because now what people in one part of the world experiences have an impact on others. A prime example are the quarantines we went through during Covid-19. The impact of wars and natural disasters are reminders too.

Yet we still try to distinguish ourselves with religion and nationalities even though hunger feels the same, colour of blood is red and emotions can bring tears with no language barrier. Yet we are aware of skin tones, facial features and cultural orientations. For these give us comfort in judgement. But the mass whom we label as public is dynamic because of the distinct personalities which are often derived from occupations people practice. The engineers, doctors and architects standing on the platform based on logic are quick to conclude whether, 'it can' or 'it cannot be done.' The teachers teach theories and hypothesis that they were taught, but the best are the ones who reflect with their students while sharing the knowledge.

And in come the artists of the world filled with emotions and ready with the question, "why not?"

Quite often they interact with other professions such as the scientists who liked philosophy and art.

Then of course men and women have tried defining their roles in the society and they are being redefined again. The women of the world will celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, and this year too it is time to reflect what is that women have achieved in the past year and what goals would she like to attain.

The question remains, 'Do women need empowerment or is she born empowered?'

To think in most societies, the limitations are only based on perceptions is still an eye opener when women have proven their mettle in variety of professions. Today she is an independent individual who does not have to prove it to anyone but herself. Could it be that most of the battles are her own personal ones?

Emotional, high amount of sensitivity, moodiness is some of the labels often



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

given to women especially now that she has proven her capabilities. So is it equality women are looking for in 2023? Gender equality might still be an issue at certain levels and cultures but her biggest challenge might be the mindset. The mindset that is based on the environment she has been in or her struggles of daily life. The best form of empowerment would be self-empowerment, of course mutual empowerment and then top it with social empowerment. In order for all this to happen we need awareness - most importantly self-awareness. To know our drawbacks and our strengths, to accept our reality and to have the courage to change for the betterment.

They talk about glass ceiling, what is important is to know and recognise the glass ceiling if there is one, to have faith in one self and not let someone else define us. At the same time, it is important to face the facts and analyse ourselves whether we have the necessary skills and experience.

On the other hand, there is so much to celebrate about having exceptional skills in multitasking, instinctively high emotional intelligence, natural leadership qualities etc.

Of course there is the recurrent doubt do women have to be overly assertive to prove her leadership skills. The fact is women have been the doer for centuries nurturing the family and playing their crucial role within the family and the society. The best part is that we have the opportunity to evolve each year by not competing with others but with ourselves by asking these questions - what have I learnt? What are the drawbacks and strengths? How can I improve? What are the opportunities?

The International Women's Day celebrates women's social, economic, cultural and political achievements.

This year the theme of the day that is marked by United Nations is DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for gender equality. The topic brings focus to the need for inclusive and transformative technology and digital education. If the transformation is not welcomed there is every danger that an individual will be left behind as the world leaps forward and immerse in the digital era with the emerging Artificial Intelligence.

There is no option but to learn, adapt and move forward.

THE WOMEN OF THE WORLD WILL CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON MARCH 8

THE HISTORICAL BUILDING OF AL QISHLA



Unesco's Director-General Audrey Azoulay visits the gate of the historical building of Al Qishla, near Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, Iraq, on Monday. -- Reuters

Evidence for equity...

“What gets measured gets done.” It is a well-worn maxim, attributed to everyone from management guru Peter Drucker to physicist Lord Kelvin. Regardless of who said it first, the point is a crucial one: if there are no data illustrating a problem or imbalance, it is unlikely to be a consideration, let alone a priority, for those in a position to address it. And solutions, if they are attempted, are unlikely to be well targeted or efficient. This is certainly the case for gender equality.

One might assume that, in today's world of information overload, policymakers have ample data with which to diagnose problems, devise innovative solutions, monitor implementation, and adjust policies to maximise their impact. But even in an age of big data, policymakers often lack accurate, consistent, timely, and representative information. As a result, they are working with an incomplete picture of socioeconomic conditions.

For example, data show that female labour-force participation in India has been declining since 2005. Reversing this trend, and achieving gender equality, could add \$770 billion to India's GDP by 2025, according to McKinsey Global Institute. But effective solutions would need to be informed by comprehensive data that capture the complex relationship between



Atiya Anis

The writer is a Salzburg Global Fellow, is a communications and advocacy professional who has worked in the social-impact sector in India for more than a decade

ONE MIGHT ASSUME THAT, IN TODAY'S WORLD OF INFORMATION OVERLOAD, POLICYMAKERS HAVE AMPLE DATA WITH WHICH TO DIAGNOSE PROBLEMS AND DEVISE INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

women's labour-force participation and various social, political, and economic forces, and they would need to link gender equality to broader development outcomes.

In any effort to boost gender equality, both sex-disaggregated data and reporting on issues that primarily affect women and girls are crucial. Consider gender-based violence: according to the World Bank, one in three girls or women aged 15-49 has experienced physical and/or sexual violence.

As Data2x has documented, the collection of data on violence against boys and girls in Tanzania led to effective government interventions, which brought about long-term, multi-sectoral change. Similarly, the World Bank reports that Vietnam used data from demographic and health surveys to boost protections for women and girls, such as by adopting legislation banning domestic violence.

Beyond informing policy, the data sparked debate in Vietnam about gender-based violence, leading to the creation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality. Women facing violence in their homes now have greater access to counselling, health, legal, and shelter services.

But producing comprehensive data is no easy feat. Any tiny statistical error or hint of

measurement bias, at any stage of collection and production, can render data unrepresentative, as can prejudice by respondents, who are often primarily men.

Before the Covid-19 crisis, the world broadly adopted the most representative method for collecting household data: surveys. But the pandemic forced a shift toward phone-based surveys, which are less likely to represent women and other groups with reduced access to mobile phones. Weak leadership, a lack of political will, and poor resource allocation have been mentioned as crucial impediments to the collection of sex-disaggregated statistics.

One way to overcome these constraints is to improve the integration of data at the national, regional, and international levels.



Reporting on issues that primarily affect women and girls are crucial.

Moreover, more effort must be devoted to enhancing the capacity of women to contribute and use data. Increased female leadership within open-data organisations can help spur progress toward new, more inclusive approaches to data collection.

Such efforts should, of course, be guided by existing best practices. Norway, for example, has been publishing national gender-equity indicators – including gender distribution in total income, the workforce, business, the public sector, education, and leadership – since 2008. Sweden, for its part, requires that all public agencies present sex-disaggregated statistics in their annual reports. These are models worth emulating.

Engagement by civil-society

and multilateral organisations can also make a big difference. As part of its Strengthening Gender Statistics project, the World Bank – with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation – is already providing technical assistance to 12 International Development Association countries, in order to improve the scope and quality of their gender-related statistics. Replicating and expanding this initiative can go a long way towards enabling governments to make evidence-based policy decisions that improve the lives and livelihoods of their citizens.

To be sure, data collection and analysis are just the beginning. Improved dissemination and uptake of gender-related data for policymaking is also needed. Defining useful and consistent indicators is crucial, because it enables comparison across regions and assessment of progress over time. Finally, the role of data in bolstering accountability and improving governance must not be overlooked. Just as high-quality, timely, and comprehensive data enable us to devise targeted policies and allocate resources more efficiently, they also enable us to measure those policies' impact – and the government's performance.

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PEREZ DISTANT SECOND IN RED BULL ONE-TWO
ALONSO THIRD FOR ASTON MARTIN
NIGHTMARE FOR FERRARI AS LECLERC RETIRES

Verstappen starts with one-two win in Bahrain

MANAMA: Formula One world champion Max Verstappen made a dream start to the season by leading Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez to a dominant one-two in Sunday's Bahrain Grand Prix as Fernando Alonso joined the podium party on his Aston Martin debut.

Mexican Perez took the chequered flag 11.9 seconds behind his team mate, whose win was the team's 10th in 12 races stretching back to last July.

"Very lovely that, really good result. We had good race pace," Verstappen, a hot favourite for a third successive title this season, told the team on his slowing-down lap.

"That's exactly the start to the season we wanted and needed. A perfect one-two".

As Red Bull celebrated and the night sky filled with fireworks, Ferrari were left licking their wounds again with Charles Leclerc retiring from third place and Carlos Sainz then overtaken

by Alonso.

Verstappen meanwhile cruised on untroubled from pole position.

It was the first time the Dutch driver had won in Bahrain, the first time he had triumphed in a Formula One opener and a marked turnaround from last year's race where he retired and Leclerc won.

Leclerc seized second place at the start from third on the grid and looked good for the podium until he slowed and pulled over 17 laps from the end, shouting "No, no, no! No power" over the team radio.

Ferrari blamed the breakdown, which triggered a virtual safety car period, on an electrical problem on the power unit.

"Of course we are disappointed, how could we not be? We knew we'd have to deal with tyre degradation but we had not expected reliability problems," said new team boss Fred Vasseur.

FORMULA 1

1. Bahrain Grand Prix

Sakhir International Circuit

March 5

1	Max Verstappen (NED)	1:33:56.736
2	Sergio Perez (MEX)	at 11.987
3	Fernando Alonso (ESP)	at 38.637
4	Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP)	at 48.052
5	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 50.977

AFP

Source: formula1.com

Driver standings

Verstappen (NED)	25
Perez (MEX)	18
Alonso (ESP)	15
Sainz Jr (ESP)	12
Hamilton (GBR)	10

Teams

Red Bull	43
Aston Martin	23
Mercedes	16

Veteran double world champion Alonso, in his 356th race, then passed Sainz with a thrilling wheel-to-wheel move 12 laps from the end and was voted Driver of the Day by fans.

"This is a lovely car to drive," the 41-year-old Spaniard, the oldest driver in the race and replacing retired four-times world champion Sebastian Vettel, told his team.

"To come here and finish on the podium in the first race of the year, it is amazing what Aston Martin did over the winter to have the second best car on race one. This is just unreal," he told the crowd after the finish.

WORST DAY

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton was fifth for Mercedes, who were a long way off Red Bull's pace and effectively the fourth-best team.

"That was one of our worst days in racing," declared team boss Toto Wolff.

Canadian Lance Stroll gave Aston Martin more points with sixth, lifting them to a giddy second in the constructors' standings.

It was a remarkable drive from the young Canadian, who broke both his wrists and a big toe in a cycling accident in Spain two weeks ago. "To finish sixth has made it worth enduring all that pain," he said.

George Russell was seventh for Mercedes with Valtteri Bottas eighth for Alfa Romeo and Pierre Gasly ninth on his Alpine debut after joining from AlphaTauri and starting the race in last position.

Gasly's team-mate Esteban Ocon picked up three separate time penalties before retiring.

Alex Albon took the final point for a markedly more competitive-looking Williams, with US rookie team mate Logan Sargeant a strong 12th.

Alfa Romeo's Guanyu Zhou set the fastest lap but there was no bonus point as he finished outside the top 10.

Australian Oscar Piastri retired 14 laps into his debut, with his stricken McLaren wheeled into the team garage after suffering an apparent electronics issue.

The 21-year-old had complained of gearbox problems and mechanics swapped the steering wheel when he pitted but he could not restart. — Reuters

Five HM Cups at RCC final camel race



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 6

The Royal Court Affairs represented by Royal Camel Corps (RCC) will begin the final race of the season 2022-23 at Royal Camel Corps track in Barka from March 13 to 16.

The Royal Camel Corps have 11 events in this season including two events for camel beauty in Thamrait and Barka. An 'Ardah' traditional show race for 400 metres in Barka followed eight events for camel races, four of them were refresher races, three qualification races and the

final race.

Oman Camel Racing Federation (OCRF) will organise the final as per Oman role, the online camel registration, participating for purebred Omani camels owned by Omanis only, also forbidden to use doping and electric shocks. The organisers will test random samples from all rounds.

As many as 27 cars and 16 icons including 5 HM Cup will be presented as prizes for the final races in six categories, 'Hagayeg', 'Lagaya', 'Ardah', 'Al Ythaa', 'Al Thanaya' and 'Al Hool' divided into four days,

The opening day is allocated for 'Hagayeg' which is for two-year old camels (4 km), competing in 22 rounds with nine cars, two icons and cash prize for the top ten.

The second day competition will be for the 'Lagaya' category for three-year old camels (5 km), challenging in 13 rounds with six cars, two icons and cash prize for the top ten.

Three categories will be on the third day. 'Al Ythaa' for four-year old camels for 5 km with three cars, two icons and cash prize for the top ten. In addition, three rounds are allocated for 'Al Ythaa'

five years old for 6 km with a car and two icons as rewards. Four rounds will be held in 'Al Hool' category (6 years and above for 8 km) with a car and three icons as rewards. Also, there will be one round for 'Ardah', a category for human riders for 2 km, with prize of a car.

The final day competition includes six main rounds for all categories, 'Hagayeg', 'Lagaya', 'Ardah', 'Al Ythaa', 'Al Thanaya' and 'Al Hool', with the camels qualified from earlier three qualification races in action for five HM Cups along with SUV cars as prizes.

Oman's Orion Gymnastics win 24 medals in Dubai

ANUROOPATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MARCH 6

Orion Gymnastics Oman excelled with 24 medals in the first international gymnastics competition at GymnastEx Club in Dubai on March 4.

The Orion Gymnastics Level 1 team participated in the championship along with 16 clubs from Oman, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan.

From Orion Gymnastics Oman, nine gymnasts aged 8 to 11 competed in the competition following the Level 1 USA Gymnastics Development Curriculum.

They performed routines on four artistic gymnastics events: vaults, asymmetric bars, beam and floor.

The young gymnasts team included Maya H, Lamees Hamad al Shaithani (Oman), Zazie Hoffman (USA),

Sophia Hughes, Aya Khorchid (UK), Aya-Rita Kattar (Canada), Anna Elizabeth Tan (Singapore), Alexandra Muromtseva (Russia) and Haya El Maghraby (Egypt).

The girls won a total of 24 gold, silver and bronze medals on apparatus events: vaults, asymmetrical bars, beam and

floor while Aya Khorchid claimed an all-around third place (bronze) trophy.

Khorchid bagged silver medals in floor and beam, while she had bronze in vault and bars categories.

Ionela Yammine (Romania) and Olena Miekha (Ukraine) trained the gymnasts for the competition.

Yammine said the girls performed excellently to bring laurels to the centre.

"Our efforts in training reaped rewards as the girls put in their best to win several medals."

Miekha also credited the young gymnasts for the splendid performance in Dubai.

Lamees al Shaithani shined with gold in floor and silver medals in beam and vault.

Other medal winners included Maya H (beam-gold, floor-silver), Alexandra Muromtseva (floor-bronze, beam-bronze), Aya Rita Kattar (floor-bronze, beam-bronze, vault-gold), Zazie Hoffman (beam-silver, vault-bronze), Sophia Hughes (vault-bronze, beam-bronze, floor-gold) and Anna Elizabeth Tan (vault-silver, beam-gold) while Haya El Maghrabi sizzled with twin golds in beam and floor.



Touring Pakistan veteran team, OHA members honoured at reception

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Pakistan veterans hockey team which is on an official tour, along with the members of the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) were hosted by the Pakistani community in Oman over a dinner in honour of their meritorious accomplishments in promoting hockey in the region.

Hosted by Abid Mugar and Dr Sharif, Mian Mohammad Munir, former chairman of Pakistan Social Club along with his team, Abbas, Asghar Ali, Shabir Ahmed, Nasir Maroof, Kaleem Akhtar, Imran Iqbal, Abdul Rahman Gullo, Ch Ashraf, Asif Shakeel, Iqbal Jafar and Syed Fiaz Ali Shah welcomed both the teams as well as the officials from the Pakistan Embassy in Oman.

The Pakistani veterans team had been in Oman to play a series of three matches against the Oman national veterans team at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher recently.

The first and third matches of the series ended in 2-2 draws,



Award ceremony after the hockey series. – Khalfan al Ruzaiqi



of Pakistan and Oman, and it showed that sports could bring people together and promote

peace and harmony in the world," Mohammad Kaleem Akhtar, spokesperson of the team said.

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Piyush, Rajeev clinch Open men's doubles crown at ISC TT



MUSCAT: Top seeded Piyush Dua and Rajeev Agarwal were in their spectacular form to claim Open men's doubles title defeating Chintan Goel and Sathisha at the annual table tennis tournament organised by the Indian Social Club Muscat.

The final saw both the teams exhibiting top game. The first game saw vigorous encounters from both ends and there was not much to separate the two teams. Sathisha brought some strategic movements and game plan but failed to realise any results in front of experienced Piyush and Rajeev who took the first set 11-6.

Chintan and Satheesh started off well but Piyush and Rajeev managed to keep at close terms in the second set for a 11-5 score.

In the third set, Chintan and Sathisha stepped up offensive

and played a brilliant game to win it 11-5. Same game plan followed in the fourth set by

Chintan and Goel but Albert and Haroos managed to win some crucial points to keep their nose in front until 9-all.

Closer to the end, Chintan and Sathisha held their nerve to fashion another close win at 11-9.

In the decider, a close one yet again, both teams played carefully and points were neck-and-neck and while closing in, the Piyush-Rajeev duo triggered past the opponents reeling in final points with their controlled aggression and overwhelming support of the crowd to win the Men's Doubles Championship.

Piyush Dua, in remarkable form, claimed the Veterans singles title defeating his doubles partner Rajeev Agarwal 11-9, 11-6, 5-11, 11-7.

Both players played several TT tournaments across Oman and earned many credentials including the World Veteran Table Tennis Championship held in Muscat from January 15 to 21.

Liverpool rewrite record books in 7-0 drubbing of Man Utd

LIVERPOOL: Cody Gakpo, Darwin Nunez and Mohamed Salah all scored twice as Liverpool shrugged off a season of frustration to thrash Manchester United 7-0 at Anfield on Sunday.

Jurgen Klopp's men set a new record margin of victory in the clash between English football's two most successful clubs.

"It was one of the best performances for a long, long time. Everybody saw what the boys can be," said Klopp.

"The second half couldn't start better. From that moment on we were flying and it was really difficult to play against us."

Just a second defeat in 23 games in all competitions realistically ends United's hopes of a first league title in a decade as they remain 14 points adrift of leaders Arsenal in third.

But there could even more lasting damage from a record-equalling defeat for the club in a competitive game and heaviest since 1931.

"The result is quite obvious. It is unprofessional," said United manager Erik ten Hag.

"There are many things which make me angry. To concede so easy the goals is definitely one."

Liverpool close to within three points of fourth-placed Tottenham with a game in hand on Spurs.

Klopp's side won the two league meetings between the teams by an aggregate score of 9-0 last season, but the tables had seemingly turned this season.

A 2-1 win over the Reds in August gave Erik ten Hag his first win as United boss and his team started the day 10 points clear of Liverpool.

Liverpool have looked a shadow of the side that came close to an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last season.

But either side of a 5-2 humiliation on home soil by Real

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:
Liverpool 7 (Gakpo 43, 50, Nunez 47, 75, Salah 66, 83, Firmino 88)
Manchester United 0
Nottingham Forest 2 (Johnson 19, 77)
Everton 2 (Gray 10-pen, Doucoure 29)

Madrid, they have got back in the race for a place in the Champions League next season thanks to a run of 13 points from a possible 15 in the Premier League.

"Everybody has to feel us. Everybody has to know we are still around," added Klopp. "That's what we have to be from now on"

UNITED CRUMBLE

Ten Hag told his players to embrace the hostile environment of Anfield, where United have not won since 2016.

But they crumbled after Gakpo opened the floodgates two minutes before half-time.

Andy Robertson sliced open the United defence to play in the Dutch international, who cut inside and fired low into the far corner. Ten Hag's men were then blown away in the second period as Liverpool's new-look front three finally clicked.

Nunez punished sloppy United defending as the Uruguayan stooped to head in Harvey Elliott's cross. Moments later, Gakpo scored his second with a delightful dink over David de Gea at the end of a lightning Liverpool counter-attack. It could have been even worse for United as Robertson and Ibrahima Konate saw efforts fly inches wide.

Salah got the goal his performance deserved as he crashed in Nunez's through ball off the underside of the bar.

Nunez then headed in his second as he was left completely unmarked from Jordan



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez scores their fifth goal against Manchester United at Anfield. (Below) Mohamad Salah scores Liverpool's fourth goal. – Reuters



Henderson's cross.

Salah became Liverpool's outright all-time Premier League goalscorer with 129 with a simple tap in after more shambolic United defending.

"It's very special, I can't lie," said Salah. "This record was in my mind since I came here. After my first season I was always chasing the record."

Roberto Firmino will move on at the end of the season it was revealed this week.

But the Brazilian came off the bench to have the final say as he slotted a remarkable seventh two minutes from time. — AFP

Mancini rocket fires Roma past Juve, Inter reclaim second



AS Roma's Italian defender Gianluca Mancini celebrates after opening the scoring during the Italian Serie A match between AS Roma and Juventus. – AFP

MILAN: Gianluca Mancini fired Roma into Serie A's Champions League places with the only goal in Sunday's 1-0 win over Juventus, while Inter beat Lecce to regain second place.

Italy defender Mancini let rip with a perfectly-struck shot six minutes after half-time of a tight contest in Rome, lifting Roma up to fourth with his first goal of the season.

Jose Mourinho's team are 12 points ahead of eighth-placed Juve who played the final minutes a man down following a moment of madness from substitute Moise Kean, who booted Mancini to the ground just 40 seconds after being brought on as a late substitute.

Roma moved above AC Milan on goal difference thanks to the champions' defeat at Fiorentina on Saturday night and are three points behind Inter.

"We won because the players gave everything... it was the players' attitude which won the match tonight," said Mourinho to DAZN. "We're a team that when we're on it, we're on it, but we need to be aware of our limitations. When you know them you play to hide them and you get results."

Champions League football looks increasingly unlikely for Juve, who hit the woodwork three times on a frustrating night, unless their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity is overturned on

appeal. Mourinho was in the Roma dugout after his two-match ban for a row with officials at Cremonese was suspended.

"If you don't score goals you won't win. We should have done better with the opportunities we had," said Allegri.

INTER HOLD SECOND SPOT

Goals in each half from Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Lautaro Martinez gave Inter the points against promoted Lecce and slightly closed the giant gap between them and Napoli to 15 points.

However, the league title is still a distant hope despite Napoli's shock home defeat to third-placed Lazio on Friday night, Inter's main

concern being Champions League football next season.

"We were focused and keep going, and that is how you win games," said coach Simone Inzaghi.

Defeat didn't have much impact on Lecce's survival hopes as they are nine points above Verona, who are just inside the relegation zone and drew 0-0 with fellow strugglers Spezia earlier on Sunday.

Verona are three points behind a Spezia team hovering dangerously above the drop zone and six ahead of troubled bottom side Sampdoria. Without a win in nine and weighed down by financial problems, Samp only managed a goalless draw with Salernitana in Sunday's early match. — AFP



WIPO to support value creation from Oman’s natural heritage

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 6

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), a specialised agency of the United Nation, has pledged to support efforts by the Omani government to preserve and safeguard elements of the country’s diverse natural and cultural heritage, while also helping authorities unlock value creation and innovation opportunities from this wealth.

The pledges came during meetings by WIPO Director General Darren Tang with key government officials yesterday. Tang met with Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Further meetings are also scheduled with officials of the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Office of Oman Vision 2040, and the Youth Centre.

During the meeting with Dr Masan, the two sides explored ways of strengthening cooperation in Intellectual Property (IP) project. Oman has benefited immensely from the Geographical Indications system of WIPO, which a number of Omani products enjoying safeguards under this system.

The two sides also discussed the importance of adopting a National Plan for Intellectual Property.



Tang also voiced support for Omani institutions and initiatives that are advancing innovation and intellectual property goals as part of Oman’s Vision 2040 strategy.

Earlier, speaking to Oman News Agency (ONA), the WIPO Director General praised Oman’s Vision 2040 which seeks to, among other objectives, crystallise the aspirations of the Omani youth, who constitute around 60 per cent of the population.

“Omani youth have become entrepreneurs, researchers and innovators, and they need to benefit from intellectual property rights protection. With such protection, their creative innovations and products can be marketed internationally,” he said.

Also as part of the visit, Tang and his delegation will study new developments in the IP space that can benefit from the world body’s protections. Some elements of Oman’s diverse natural and cultural heritage are already covered by WIPO safeguards, helping local businesses commercial products for the benefit of the wider economy, the official said.

Besides Omani frankincense, there are efforts underway to bring some elements of Omani culinary traditions under WIPO’s IP protections, he said, noting that around 10 entrepreneurs from Omani frankincense producers will also be trained by WIPO in enhancing the commercial value of their frankincense products.

Power infra needs to adapt to energy sector in transition: CIGRE

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 6

A power symposium organised by the International Council on Large Electric Systems (CIGRE) was inaugurated under the auspices of Mohsin bin Hamed al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, yesterday in Muscat.

The three day forum focuses on “The transition toward resilient, flexible and sustainable power systems”.

“[This symposium allows us to] benefit from regional and global experiences and modern technologies that enable us to make good use of renewable energy by learning about technologies and mechanisms that help us understand storage methods and the sector’s continued growth and development,” stated Al Hadhrami.

Chairman of the GCC CIGRE committee, Eng Ahmed Naser al Naser, shared the following,



“The global electricity sector is currently facing many challenges.

The Muscat International Symposium is an opportunity to meet energy systems experts from around the world to discuss how infrastructure and electricity grids can adapt and adapt to rapid changes in the global energy mix.”

The forum includes panel discussions, technical tutorials and interactive sessions alongside a parallel exhibition.

Eng Ahmed al Rahbi, Senior Director of Asset Management at Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) and CIGRE GCC board member, shared the following, “Oman is in the middle of a big shift.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Oman Space Strategy targets investments in ground, receiving stations

New initiatives: National Space Data Platform proposed to help build national capacity in the downstream applications sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 6



As part of its long-term goal to position the country as a new regional gateway for space applications, the Sultanate of Oman is seeking international partnerships and investments in a number of strategic initiatives that will help create the underpinnings of a domestic space-based industry.

These projects, according to a new Space Policy and Executive Programme launched recently by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), will seek to leverage Oman’s strategic location, as well as advantageous environmental characteristics, to help deliver cost-competitive space-based services to customers globally.

One such initiative being keenly looked at by the Ministry envisions the establishment of a network of ground stations that will provide services (GSaS) to satellite operators or other businesses.

Oman’s location with respect to the Equator makes it ideal for the hosting of ground stations, according to the Ministry.

The proposed hub of ground stations will facilitate, among other things, the transfer of space-oriented technology and knowledge by allowing international satellite operators to benefit from Oman’s strategic location for their satellite systems.

Furthermore, the project will help create an ecosystem for the development of digital applications. Importantly, the ground stations can enable connectivity with the multitude of international submarine cables with landing points on Oman’s shores.

“Oman has a set of 21 submarine cables that could easily link in real-time the data downloaded from satellites to end users, or to develop data analytics services in the country and offer the final products, including solutions or applications, for the end users,” said the Ministry in an overview of its space programme.

Likewise, Oman is encouraging foreign satellite operators to establish their Direct Receiving Stations (DRS) here in the

Sultanate of Oman – a move that will enable Omani users to access data received through these facilities.

“The foreign partners will benefit from volume of data needs in Oman which is profitable through long term contracts with Government and private sectors. Moreover, Omani users will benefit from real-time data for development of applications and solution.

This project intersects with the Ground Stations as Services (GSaS) project,” the Ministry stated. The DRS project has the potential to facilitate and accelerate data downlinking, as well as support the development of services to support agriculture or disaster management.

Also offered up for investment and development is the National Space Data Platform – an initiative that aims to provide the Earth Observation (EO) sector with a state-of-the-art digital platform to gather, process and share data fostering applications and ecosystem development.

Invitation From Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G)

For an Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Bank

Bank Muscat “S.A.O.G” takes pleasure in inviting all its shareholders to an Annual Ordinary General Meeting at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 22nd March, 2023. The meeting will be convened via the electronic platform to hold the general meetings, which can be accessed via the Muscat Clearing and Depository’s website (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum for this meeting is not met, a second meeting will be convened at 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, 23rd March, 2023 through the same electronic platform. The meeting will consider and decide on the following Agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

3. To consider the Auditor’s Report and approval of the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Accounts for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

4. To consider the report of the Shari’a Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Islamic Banking window, for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

5. To consider and approve the recommendation to distribute cash dividend of 15 Baiza for each share for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

6. To consider and ratify the sitting fees for the Board of Directors and its committees’ meetings for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022 and approve sitting fees for the current financial year.

7. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ remuneration of RO. 300 K for the financial year ended 31st December, 2022.

8. To consider and approve the Related Party Transactions that will be concluded during the financial year ending 31st December, 2023.

9. To consider and approve a proposal to put in place standards for appraising the performance of the bank’s Board of Directors for the fiscal year ending on 31st December, 2023.

10. To appoint an independent third party to appraise the performance of the bank’s Board of Directors for the financial year ending on 31st December, 2023, and fixing their fees.

11. To appoint the statutory auditors for the Bank and the external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq, the Islamic banking window of the Bank, for the financial year ending 31st December, 2023 and fixing their fees, subject to the applicable regulatory approvals.

In accordance with the regulations for holding general meetings using modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the general meeting and vote on its behalf through the electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

2. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the meeting until the end of the voting process during the meeting. In the event that the shareholder’s shareholding balance is changed by increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, and he/she will have to vote again on the day of the meeting.

For any clarifications in respect of the agenda of the above meeting, please contact
Ms. Samiya Salim Al Busaidi, Tel. No. (24767197), E-mail (SamiaS@bankmuscat.com).

Khalid bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Ernst & Young
Statutory Auditors of the Bank and External Independent Sharia Auditors for Meethaq, the Islamic Banking Window

Legal Advisor

Bank Muscat honours 129 employees for completing long service milestone

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently held a special event at the Hormuz Grand Muscat to appreciate and commend 129 long-serving employees at the bank in line with its commitment and efforts to acknowledge and recognise their role in the bank's successes and achievements over the years.

The event was attended by Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, and members of the Management Team. A total of 129 employees were given long-service awards for completing the significant milestone of 20 years of service.

Addressing the gathering, Said bin Salim al Aufi, General Manager - Human Resources & Administration, Bank Muscat, said: "We are immensely proud to recognise the contributions of our longest-serving staff members through these long-service awards.

We thank all our colleagues who are here today for growing with the bank and continuing to inspire their colleagues. Thank you very much and we do hope that they will sustain their diligent performance in the coming years. It is a privilege to mark their outstanding contributions at the bank and honour them through today's special event."

Said al Aufi continued that Bank Muscat realises the importance of human resources in achieving the development plans in the country. He stressed how each and every employee at the bank was playing an important role in the bank's operations and supporting its leadership in the financial services



sector in Oman.

He added that the bank has achieved a high rate of Omanisation by providing training, development, and opportunities to its employees to upgrade their skills and abilities.

A number of Bank Muscat employees who were commended during the programme expressed their happiness and appreciation for the efforts made to develop Omani cadres in the financial sector.

In particular, they pointed out to the professional atmosphere and the various efforts made by Bank Muscat to provide learning and development opportunities through on the job training as well as formal educational qualifications and certification.

Alya Mubarak al Alawi, Head of Legal Services, Bank Muscat said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working at Bank Muscat,

the leading financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, for its very professional work environment and excellent HR practices.

The bank pays great attention to developing its employees and I am grateful for the many chances I have had to grow my knowledge and skillsets, and thereby develop further in my career. I thank Bank Muscat for providing me with many wonderful opportunities, which have made such a huge difference to my career and I also would like to thank all my senior colleagues who have monitored and supported me in this journey."

Qais bin Rabi'a al Balushi, Branch Manager, Khasab, said that Bank Muscat is a preferred employer for young people in the Sultanate of Oman as the bank is committed to developing the skills of its employees.

He thanked the bank for the various opportunities, which

were instrumental in improving his career path. He also expressed sincere thanks to the management for the continuous support and care taken for the development of employees.

Speaking about her experience, Basma bint Mohammed al Maamariyah, Assistant Regional Manager, North Al Batinah said: "My journey at Bank Muscat is an excellent example of how the bank encourages its employees to do well in their careers by providing them the right training, a professional work atmosphere, skills upgradation and cutting-edge technology and equipment.

Our experiences over the years have taught us to absorb the art of management and overcome various challenges in our journey at the bank. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Bank Muscat, especially the Executive Management, for the support and

attention accorded to employees."

As one of the top employers in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat constantly invests resources and time to further develop the skills of its employees and help them reach their peak potential. From the moment of joining the bank, suitable training and development opportunities are provided to make employees skilled with work-related processes and procedures such that they can deliver to the best of their abilities.

In 2022, over 28,000 training seats were utilised by employees over a total of 34,000 training man-days in various training programmes. It is indeed a testament of the bank's excellent HR practices that most of the senior and middle management have attained their current positions by rising within the bank's ranks over the years.

Power infra needs to adapt to energy sector in transition: CIGRE

FROM PAGE 13

Oman's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and its goal of becoming one of the leading producers of green hydrogen will affect power systems and grids in the Sultanate."

He added, "[the shift] will require greater reliance on electricity production through renewable energy, which will require more flexible and powerful grids."

"The symposium will provide an excellent opportunity for our engineers and specialists at the Omani Electricity Transport Company and the entire electricity sector to communicate with the best experts from around the world and learn about the latest technological trends and developments."

According to CIGRE, more than 60 international energy experts are scheduled to speak at the symposium.

The Sultanate of Oman has announced its commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 last year. According to the Sultanate of Oman's national transition to net-zero policy, the power sector accounts for 19% of the country's carbon emissions. However, the figure is expected to rise to 58% by 2050 under the current status quo due to an expected increase in electricity consumption.

92% of the Sultanate of Oman's electricity is generated using fossil fuels, mainly natural gas. The national net-zero strategy aims to reduce this figure by 52% by 2050 through renewable energy sources.



Geely launches 4th generation of Emgrand & Azkarra in Oman

MUSCAT: Towell Auto Centre (TAC), the sole distributor of Geely vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, is thrilled to announce the launch of the 4th generation of its two exciting models — all-new Emgrand and the all-new Azkarra across its showrooms in Oman.

The next generation of Geely cars is ahead of their time in being modern, eco-friendly, and reliable. Geely's innovative designers have given the All-new look to Emgrand and Azkarra with the right blend of exterior styling, interior comfort, and advanced technological features.

EMGRAND

The visually attractive all-new Emgrand is a stylish sedan

designed to impress. Made in Geely's advanced Changxing (an advanced 5G smart) factory using the B-segment Modular Architecture (BMA), it has been designed to exceed the criteria for 5-star NCAP safety ratings.

AZKARRA

The all-new Geely Azkarra Sport Utility Vehicle is a game-changer. It is a versatile SUV that combines style and performance.

It comes equipped with a 1.5-litre turbocharged engine with direct fuel injection that delivers a powerful driving experience, a spacious interior, and a host of advanced features that make it the perfect vehicle for families and adventure-seekers alike.

Saud Bahwan Group honoured with 'Gulf Excellence Award 2022' in UAE

MUSCAT: Saud Bahwan Group was recently honoured with the prestigious 'Gulf Excellence Award 2022' at the Sharjah Excellence Awards, held in the UAE. The event was held under the auspices of Shaikh Sultan bin Mohammed bin Sultan al Qasimi, Crown Prince and Deputy Governor of Sharjah.

Receiving the award on behalf of the Group, Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group. The Excellence Awards 2022, recognised the role and exceptional efforts taken by various categories of institutions in the GCC across nine categories.

Sharing his thoughts Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan said, "It is an honour to receive this prestigious award. The hard work, dedication and passion of each one in the Group has made this benchmark recognition possible.

Saud Bahwan Group has come a long way by embracing excellence in all aspects and offering distinctive customer experiences. An award like this will definitely encourage us to go even further on the journey of excellence."

Saud Bahwan Group has been at the forefront of touching people's lives with world-class products and services. The Group also plays a



responsible role by contributing in the development of the nation, by bringing leading brands across various fields to Oman. The fields include Automotive & Allied businesses, Heavy Vehicles, Construction Equipment, Turnkey Projects, Industrial Equipment, Manufacturing, Municipal & Civic Services and Property & Real Estate.

At Saud Bahwan Group prompt attention to customer needs has always been a top priority. Towards this, the Group has made substantial investments in

building a nationwide network of branches and state-of-the-art facilities.

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Private schooling lessons: A necessity or lifestyle trend?



DR YAHYA AL NAHDI

The writer is Assistant Professor at Al Zahra College for Women

Private schooling lessons have become widespread within Oman, to an extent that it is hard to find a family that does not direct their children to such lessons. However, this practice is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, these lessons can be useful to low-achieving students with an average and low educational attainment, to improve their grades at grade 12 of their basic education; a matter that may give them an opportunity to get a grant or scholarship from the government. On the other hand, private schooling lessons have become a great burden on some families who can hardly secure their daily needs. However, the neighbour who is proud of providing private tutors for his children forces other parents to do the same, so that the latter does not feel ashamed of his children being deprived this opportunity. Consequently, they will incur high financial burdens that they will spend on these private schooling lessons, which are to some extents unnecessary. Another problem with private schooling lessons is that it motivates some teachers not to work hard nor do they devote strong efforts while they are in the official duty on the grounds that they are aware that students in front of them in the morning are waiting for private lessons in the evening. Likewise — here I am not generalising — some of teachers themselves give private schooling lessons in the evening, and therefore they are

THUS, IT IS SUGGESTED THAT THIS PRACTICE BE PROVIDED THROUGH THE SCHOOLS TO WHICH THESE TEACHERS HAVE CONTRACT WITH, AND THAT A PART-TIME SYSTEM IS IMPLEMENTED IN THESE SCHOOLS AS THE CASE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS.

reluctant to encourage students to understand the syllabus in the formal classes at their schools, otherwise there would be no need for private schooling lessons and hence less income to such teachers. To strike a balance, and in order not to deprive students who really need private schooling lessons, this practice needs a kind of regulation. Firstly, private schooling lessons are most often provided by teachers of public and private schools, with official labour contracts with their employers. Thus, it is suggested that this practice be provided through the schools to which these teachers have contract with, and that a part-time system is implemented in these schools as the case in higher education institutions. A weekly schedule may be prepared for teachers wishing to provide private schooling lessons in the evening for the subjects they teach. However, these lessons should be reserved only for students with low achieving. Furthermore, such lessons should target only students from grade 10 to 12 as this is a critical stage for students through which they compete for government grants and scholarship to continue studying in higher education institutions. Students failing to secure scholarship must either stay at home and search for a job or their parents have to spend for them tuition fees. For families with low income, it would be difficult for them to pay for private scholarships. Legalising this practice and governing it by schools will help these families avoid spending money that they may need for other necessities.

OPPORTUNITY OMAN: INVESTMENT ECOSYSTEM



DR YOUSUF HAMED AL BALUSHI

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

Renew Oman Investment Ecosystem is a programme launched by the Omani government to create a favorable environment in Oman for investment and to promote economic diversification in the country. The government continues working to make Oman an attractive investment hub of the GCC, setting out a clear investment strategy which outlines its priorities and objectives for investment in key sectors such as tourism, logistics, and manufacturing. A range of reforms have been implemented to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country. Some of the key reforms include:

- Encouraging private sector investment: The programme seeks to encourage private sector investment by creating a supportive regulatory environment and providing incentives to investors. Oman has actively promoted public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract private investment in infrastructure development, such as roads, airports, and ports. This model provides investors with an opportunity to participate in the development of large-scale infrastructure projects in the country.
- Attracting foreign investment: The programme aims to attract foreign investors by offering a range of incentives such as tax exemptions, ownership, streamlined procedures, and access to various services.
- Promoting economic diversification: The programme seeks to promote economic diversification and create new job opportunities by attracting FDI in non-oil sectors such as tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, and logistics. Oman has implemented a range of measures to diversify its economy, reducing the country's reliance on oil revenue.
- Facilitating investment opportunities through Nazdaher — Oman National Investment Programme : The programme aims to facilitate investment opportunities by providing information on investment opportunities in Oman and facilitating connections between investors and local businesses.
- Investment Law: Oman has introduced a new investment law that aims to simplify investment procedures, reduce bureaucratic hurdles, and provide various tax exemptions and incentives for foreign investors.
- The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) : OPAZ plays a crucial role in promoting economic development and attracting investments to Oman through the establishment of Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. Oman has established several free zones across the country, which offer a range of benefits to foreign investors, including a streamlined regulatory environment, exemption from customs duties, and taxes.
- Developing human capital: The programme seeks to develop the human capital of the country by providing training and education to local talent and promoting entrepreneurship.
- E-Platform for Investors: Oman has launched an online platform called Invest Easy, which provides foreign investors with easy access to information on investment procedures, registration, and licensing.
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Oman Lounge aims at enhancing the investment environment through which all procedures and requirements for the establishment, operation and completion of an investment project in the Sultanate of Oman are completed. Labour Law: Oman has implemented a new labour law that offers more protection for workers and investors alike. This includes provisions for non-discrimination, equal pay, and protection against unfair dismissal. Develop Infrastructure: Oman continues to invest in its infrastructure, to provide a business-friendly environment for foreign investors, improving access to transport, communications and energy. This will help to enhance the competitiveness of the country and create opportunities for investment in various sectors. Renew Oman Investment Ecosystem is a comprehensive government-led programme that seeks to provide a supportive and attractive environment for investors, driving sustainable growth and economic diversification in the country. Growth and diversification creates new job opportunities and develops our human capital, enhancing the competitiveness of the Omani economy and attracting further investment.

China growth and inflation remain key drivers



OLE S HANSEN

The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank

Commodities started March on a firmer footing after data from China confirmed that activity in the world's biggest consumer of raw materials is picking up momentum. Gains however were held back

by the prospect of sticky inflation elsewhere leading to higher rates and lower growth. This comes after euro-area inflation rose 8.5% on an annual basis in February, unchanged from January, and contrary to expectations for a drop, while underlying price pressures surged to a new record high at 5.6%. In the US, 10-year Treasury bonds topped 4% for the first time since November in response to data pointing to continued price pressures. This supports the view that the US Federal Reserve will continue to raise rates and then hold them for as long it takes to get inflation under control. The swaps market is now pricing in a peak in US rates around 5.6% by September, with the futures market looking for a near one per cent cut in the

following twelve months. In other words, incoming economic data will need to remain strong in order to support the more than 75-basis point rate hike currently priced in. Any weakness would inadvertently lower expectations while shortening the duration of peak rates. This heightens growth concerns while also supporting risk appetite through an accompanying weakness in the dollar and softer bond yields. Following a February lull in the expectations for a post-Covid economic rebound in China, that focus returned to the fore after the February Manufacturing Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) surged to its highest level since 2012. Another report showed China's home sales rising for the first time

in 20 months, after policy makers stepped up their support for a struggling sector. The strength of the current economic recovery has, according to a report, surprised China's leaders, suggesting the government will be restrained in rolling out new stimulus measures this year. With that in mind, the focus now turns to the Chinese government and what they will do to further support an economic recovery. The first session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) will begin on March 4, followed by the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) the next day. During what is collectively known as the "Two Sessions", Chinese officials will release a set of

social and economic development goals as well as their official growth forecast and various policy measures to achieve them. The commodity sector spent most of February on the backfoot with losses seen across key commodities, from energy to industrials and precious metals. These losses were primarily driven by continued strength in US economic numbers, including inflation, forcing the Fed to turn up the hawkish rhetoric while at the same time sending bond yields and the dollar higher—thereby hurting risk sentiment across the stock and commodity markets. However, while some of these worries have been offset by the mentioned strength in Chinese data, the short-term outlook remains balanced with no clear driver yet emerging to

significantly change the stalemate between bulls and bears. This is most visible in the energy market, where crude oil has traded rangebound since late November. The Bloomberg Commodity index — which tracks a basket of 24 major commodity futures spread almost evenly across energy, metals and agriculture — t rades down 4.2% on the year after a 4.7% decline last month wiped out January's gains, especially among precious and industrial metals. Gains have primarily been concentrated among the soft commodities of coffee, sugar and cotton, all of which are supported by a tightening supply outlook. The energy sector scrapes the bottom, primarily because of losses in an oversupplied US natural gas market.

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Omani artist's painting included in prestigious Paris exhibition

The prestigious "Salon des Artistes Français" recently included the work of young Omani artist Jood al Hinai in its exhibition in Paris, France... **P20**

Last original Lynyrd Skynyrd member Gary Rossington dies age 71

GUITARIST GARY Rossington, the last remaining original member of US rock band Lynyrd Skynyrd, died on Sunday, the band said. He was 71. Rossington was a founding member of the Southern rock group best known for the 1974 song "Sweet Home Alabama."

"It is with our deepest sympathy

and sadness that we have to advise, that we lost our brother, friend, family member, songwriter and guitarist, Gary Rossington, today," the band wrote on Facebook.

"Gary is now with his Skynyrd brothers and family in heaven and playing it pretty, like he always does," it added.



The band did not announce a cause of death, but Rossington had suffered a series of heart problems, including undergoing emergency heart surgery in 2021, according to

a post from the group at the time.

Rossington was born in 1951 in the southern state of Florida, founding the first iteration of Lynyrd Skynyrd in 1964 with drummer Bob Burns

and bassist Larry Junstrom.

He contributed the distinct slide guitar leads that helped make the band's 1973 nearly 10-minute-long "Free Bird" a lasting hit.

The guitarist survived several brutal accidents in the 1970s, including a serious car accident in 1976 and the infamous plane crash in 1977 that killed three members of the band.

The group broke up after the deaths of lead singer Ronnie Van Zant, guitarist Steve Gaines and backing vocalist Cassie Gaines in the crash, but reformed in 1987 with new members, including Van Zant's younger brother, Johnny, on lead vocals.

Rossington was the only original member still with the band, which has continued to perform, with a festival date set for this month.

The right-leaning rockers were among bands that took to the stage on the sidelines of the 2016 Republican convention. — **AFP**

READ

THINGS WE HIDE FROM THE LIGHT

BY LUCY SCORE

The second book in the Knockout series. A woman with some secrets and the chief of police have different ideas about where things are headed.



ENTERTAINMENT

Bollywood actor and film-maker Ajay Devgn (L) with actress Tabu attends the trailer launch of her upcoming film 'Bholaa' in Mumbai. — **AFP**



LIFESTYLE

Belgian chef Mallory Gabsi (R) is awarded Young Chief of the Year award by chairman of Michelin group Florent Menegaux during the Michelin Guide France 2023 winners ceremony in Strasbourg, eastern France. — **AFP**





Beyond Pandora: Oscar films highlight man’s destruction of our own planet

WHILE JAMES CAMERON'S ecological sci-fi fable "Avatar: The Way of Water" is vying for best picture at the Oscars, his fellow nominees in the documentary categories have been busy chronicling very real threats to our own planet.

From the smoggy skies of New Delhi to the melting sea ice of Siberia, "All That Breathes" and "Haulout" each use complex, local stories to shine a global spotlight on man's desecration of nature here on Earth.

Brother-and-sister film-makers Maxim Arbugaev and Evgenia Arbugaeva are the first indigenous Yakut film-makers to be nominated for an Oscar with "Haulout," which follows a scientist in Siberia charting the disastrous impact of the climate crisis on walrus populations.

The short film, which has little dialogue, begins with stunning shots and roaring audio of the stark, windswept Arctic coastline, as marine biologist Maxim Chakilev waits patiently by his hut for migrating walrus to arrive.

Suddenly 100,000 of the rotund mammals appear outside his hut, squashed together on the beach. It is an initially mesmerising spectacle, but one that we later learn is the result of the loss of sea ice — and the dangerous overcrowding has deadly effects.

"We just hope that we can join the chorus of scientists and artists from all over the world and contribute to this conversation on the dire state of our planet," said Arbugaeva.

The siblings said that their Oscar nomination in the documentary short film category has been the cause for huge celebration in their remote homeland.

And they are even planning to bring Chakilev — their grizzled, solitary marine biologist — to the glamorous awards gala in Los Angeles on March 12.

But the spotlight on their ancestral region is vital to conveying how climate crisis is upending life for humans and animals, in wildly different ways, all across the globe.

"We have access to that very crucial area of the Arctic," said Arbugaeva.

"Talking from the native land, I think that's very, very important," she added.

"The stories we see, they're not the stories that are on the surface... it requires years and years of just being there and understanding."

NOT ENOUGH

Shaunak Sen's "All That Breathes," a feature-length documentary set in India's capital, also examines how animals have been forced to change their behaviour by human activity.

It follows three men who have devoted their lives to an improvised and largely self-funded wildlife clinic, caring for some of the hundreds of birds falling victim to Delhi's polluted air each day.

Every day, crates of injured black kite birds arrive at their basement, and the quixotic trio even perform a daring river rescue of one with a broken wing.

"Hundreds of birds falling out of the sky every day. What amazes me

entanglement of human and non-human life."

In addition to the acrid air, many of the birds are wounded by the strings of wooden toy kites flown by humans.

CRYING

But for Sen, even the recent spate of environment-focused films are "not enough."

"It should be way more, given how much attention the planetary

incredible natural beauty before revealing the insidious tragedy created by the loss of sea ice, which means walrus arrive exhausted on the crowded beach, where many are trampled to death.

One heartbreaking scene finds a malnourished walrus pup prodding the body of its dead mother, before feebly trying to swim off into the ocean.

"When local storytellers tell stories of their environment, it's



is that people go on as if everything's normal," says one of the men, to his wife.

The men discuss how the birds have learned to feast on trash, collect cigarette butts as a parasite repellent, and — apparently — even to sing at a higher pitch to communicate over Delhi's thunderous traffic.

Sen said he chose his subjects to make audiences "consider the

condition requires," the director said. Sen believes film-makers must make "more sophisticated stories that make us think of the planet" rather than focusing on "just gloom and doom and despair."

His film begins with a sweeping shot of piles of refuse, before gradually revealing the wildlife that has learned to thrive within the squalor.

By contrast, "Haulout" begins with

something that is so personal... you're talking about your own heart and the heart of your community that is breaking," said Arbugaeva.

Filming the tragic walrus footage, "my hands would be shaking because I would be just so emotional or crying that the camera would be not stable," she recalled.

"Sometimes some footage was not usable. Key, crucial moments. But it's just very hard." — AFP

LIFESTYLE

'Zany' for Proust: Brazilian builds massive manuscript library



STEPPING THROUGH THE piles of books and fireproof document cases that line his overflowing three-storey home library, Brazilian collector Pedro Correa do Lago is the first to admit his life's passion is a bit crazy.

"I ought to be in a straightjacket," laughs the 64-year-old art historian as he gives a tour of his house in Rio de Janeiro, home to what he says is the world's largest private collection of manuscripts.

"It's a virus, an illness... My wife says manuscript sellers are my 'dealers,'" he says, showing a visitor around the home in the upscale Gavea neighbourhood where he recently moved, along with the more than 100,000-piece collection he has spent his life amassing.

"You're here with a zany man, in a bit of a strange house with an incredible mess. It's the result of a more than 50-year passion," adds Correa do Lago, a large, bearded man, speaking flawless French.

Correa do Lago's sprawling collection includes documents penned by Newton, Mozart, Darwin, Picasso and Einstein. But his "absolute fetish," he says, is early 20th-century French novelist Marcel Proust.

The imposing library is 11 metres (36 feet) tall, with an internal staircase and dehumidifiers to protect its contents.

It is built on an "outlandish ambition," says its owner: "to reflect Western culture for the past five centuries."

\$200 LETTER

A diplomat's son, Correa do Lago started collecting at the age of 12 or 13, he says.

He bought his first Proust letter at age 20, when he was living in New York.

He had \$500 to live on for the month, he remembers. He paid \$200 for the letter, which he found in a shop.

"It was an extraordinarily important letter written to Grasset," the French publishing house, at a time when Proust was looking for a publisher, he says.

Today, Correa do Lago has no fewer than 90 letters penned by Proust, who was known for his voluminous correspondence — an estimated 80 per cent of which has been lost. Correa do Lago went on to become auction house



Sotheby's representative in Sao Paulo for 26 years, head the national library in Rio de Janeiro and found the art publisher Capivara with his wife, Bia, daughter of late Brazilian writer Rubem Fonseca.

Along the way, he wrote some 20 books of his own. Meanwhile, his collection grew and grew.

In 2018, the Morgan Library in New York dedicated an exhibit to his collection, putting 140 of his documents on display, including a Michaelangelo drawing, a letter from Gustave Flaubert to Victor Hugo, another that Mozart wrote to his father, manuscripts by Einstein, Newton and Darwin, and a 12th-century parchment.

The show also included a draft first sentence of Proust's masterpiece, "In Search of Lost Time" — before he had settled on the famous, "For a long time, I went to bed early..."

"It's the first time they've displayed a private manuscript collection," Correa do Lago says proudly.

- 'A FANCY CAR' -

Last year, for the 100th anniversary of Proust's death, Correa do Lago lent several pieces to the national library of France.

He also made "a lot of friends among the Proust-lovers" by publishing a book based on his collection in October, featuring 450 mostly unseen documents and photographs.

"I was a bit nervous — a little unknown Brazilian writing a book on Proust," he says.

Correa do Lago has zigzagged the Earth following his passion and attending auctions.

"I always have something to do, wherever I am in the world," he says.

He continues to throw financial caution to the wind in the name of his passion.

His biggest impulse buy? The manuscript of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Library of Babel."

"It cost the price of a fancy car. I paid it off over four years," he says.

"I don't have a personal fortune or anything. I've put everything I've earned in my life into my collection."

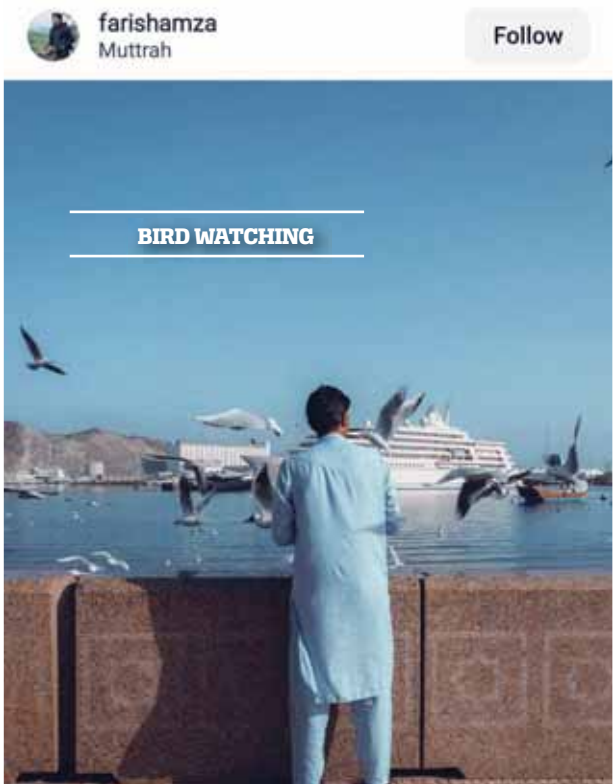
He has no regrets.

"Maybe I could have spent that money on my family. But they've never complained," he says with a laugh. —AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Portrait of Picasso's daughter sells at auction for over £18 million



A PORTRAIT BY Pablo Picasso of his daughter Maya has sold for more than £18 million (\$21.6 million) at auction.

The piece was one of five works that was sold for more than £15million at the sale by auction house Sotheby's on Wednesday.

Titled Fillette au bateau, Maya, it is a "joyful" portrait of the Spanish artist's daughter, Maya Widmaier-Picasso - painted in 1938 when she was just two and a half years old.

Filled with exuberant colour and energy, the piece was created shortly after Picasso had completed his monumental Guernica, and encapsulates the happiness Maya brought into his life during these challenging years

The sale was the piece's first appearance at auction since 1999, when it was sold for £3.7 million as part of Gianni Versace's collection of 25 works by Picasso.

Picasso's work sold for £18.1 million at the Wednesday auction, having previously been estimated at £12 million.

Other works sold for over £15 million included those by Gerhard Richter, Lucian Freud, Edvard Munch, and Wassily Kandinsky.

Kandinsky's 1910 masterpiece Murnau mit Kirche II (Murnau with Church II), was sold for £37.2 million - establishing a new auction record for the Russian artist.

Painted during a transformative moment for the artist, Murnau mit Kirche II encapsulates the very beginnings of the revolutionary abstract language that later underpinned Kandinsky's career.

Munch's seminal four-metre-long painting, Dance on the Beach (The Reinhardt Frieze), sold for £16.9 million, placing it among the top ten prices ever achieved for the artist at auction, all of which have been realised at Sotheby's.

Lucian Simmons, vice chairman and Sotheby's worldwide head of restitution, said: "This year marks the 25th anniversary of the conference, held in Washington DC, that first established the ground rules for the restitution of art works looted by the Nazis during the Second World War.

"Since then, Sotheby's restitution department has worked with many heirs and families to reunite them with their stolen property and, at the same time, to help re-tell their stories and celebrate their lives." Sotheby's two sales of modern and contemporary art on Wednesday achieved a combined total of £172.6 million - an increase of 15 per cent on the auction house's equivalent sale last June. — **PA Media/dpa**

FASHION

Pierre Cardin returns to Paris Fashion Week with space age lineup



FRENCH LABEL Pierre Cardin returned to the official Paris fashion week schedule for the first time in decades, sending out a colourful, off-beat lineup of styles that recalled its space age heyday.

Models paraded two-toned suit jackets with triangular shaped lapels, asymmetrical dresses and capes, shimmering gold trousers and thin ties that formed an arrow-like shape at the tip.

Attendants flashed spotlights on models as they made their way down the temporary runway, set up in the label's empty flagship store that is undergoing renovations.

Spinning holograms were projected in the windows of the store - located across the street from France's Elysee Palace - and one model carried the three-dimensional projection in a handbag.

The late designer's great nephew, Rodrigo Basilicati Cardin, who took the reins of the label following Cardin's death in 2020, said he worked with the design studio to pare back the looks, which were made from recycled materials as well as fabric that sat in storage for decades.

Seeking to spark interest in the label among younger crowds, Basilicati Cardin said he set up competitions to bring on talent from other countries, like Mexico and South Korea, for stints at the label.

"My goal is to manage the label and bring it on track," he said, speaking to journalists after the show as he greeted guests including French singer Mireille Mathieu. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Creed III' punches its way to top of N.America box office



MGM'S BOXING drama "Creed III" scored an opening-round knockout this weekend, taking in an estimated \$58.7 million to top North America's box office in one of the biggest debuts ever for a sports film.

That made first-time director Michael B Jordan - who again plays rock-hard boxer Apollo Creed - the "undefeated box office champion," said industry analyst Exhibitor Relations.

"This opening is sensational," said analyst David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "Weekends like this are good news for the industry."

In this ninth film in the "Rocky" franchise - the first without Sylvester Stallone in the Rocky Balboa role he created - Creed comes out of retirement for a dramatic showdown against an old friend played by Jonathan Majors.

That makes this a pretty good weekend for Majors, the villain in Marvel and Disney's "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," which placed second for the Friday-through-Sunday period at \$12.5 million. Paul Rudd stars as the title ant; Evangeline Lilly is the Wasp.

In third place was Universal's "Cocaine Bear" at \$11 million. The horror comedy is based loosely on the true story of a black bear that wreaks havoc in the Tennessee woods after consuming a cache of lost cocaine. Keri Russell plays one of the locals caught up in the crazy.

"Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - To the Swordsmith Village," an anime sequel from Crunchyroll, placed fourth at \$10.1 million. The previous "Demon Slayer" film in 2021 had a record debut for a non-English language feature, taking in \$19.5 million, Variety reported.

And in fifth was Lionsgate's Christian drama "Jesus Revolution," a story of a 1960s religious movement in California. It took in \$8.7 million.

ROUNDING OUT THE TOP 10 WERE:
"Avatar: The Way of Water" (\$3.6 million)
"Operation Fortune: Ruse de Guerre" (\$3.2 million)
"Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" (\$2.7 million)
"Magic Mike's Last Dance" (\$1.2 million)
"80 for Brady" (\$845,000) — **AFF**

art & life

Local Scene

TUESDAY | MARCH 7 | 2023

Omani artist's painting included in prestigious Paris exhibition

By Alanood Al Wahaibi

The 20-year-old Omani artist Jood Al Hinai's path from a high school student to a student of interior design and a budding artist has been nothing short of extraordinary. The prestigious "Salon des Artistes Français," which brought together artists from all over the world to showcase their work, recently hosted an exhibition of Al Hinai's artwork in Paris, France. The Grand Palais Ephemere hosted the exhibition from February 15 until February 19.

Al Hinai was searching for venues in 2022 to display her artwork when she came across a post from the Art Capital Exhibition in Paris. She thought the application form was still open, but it turned out to be closed. She waited until 2023 when they reopened. A jury selects artists for each of the areas of the Salon des Artistes Français, which include painting, sculpture, architecture, engraving, and photography.

Al Hinai's piece "A Child Sewing" was chosen by the jury for the painting area of the show on December 9th, 2022. The piece of art is a stunning acyclic painting that conveys emotion and tells a tale. Several observers believed the painting to be a photograph due to its meticulous details, composition, lighting, shadows, colours, and emotions, according to Al Hinai.

Al Hinai was thrilled to be a part of her first international exhibition. She described her experience as "a very excellent chance, full of inspiration since I got to meet so many amazing artists from different cultures that had different styles of art. I'm overjoyed. Her involvement was a novel experience that put her in contact with different artists from around the world.

Al Hinai's family, who have always been

encouraging and supporting, has served as her inspiration throughout her quest. She also appreciates the friendships, love, and encouragement she has received from her coworkers, professors, and fans on social media.

Al Hinai received a tag with the word "mention" next to her painting. This tag is awarded by the judges to the preferred artworks and is the first step to obtaining bronze, silver, or gold medals in the future. Al Hinai concludes, "Your goals have no expiration date. Work hard to achieve your goals and more. With an eye on the future, Al Hinai wants to create artistic works that show concept originality, exhibit globally, and have her own solo exhibition. Al Hinai has many goals and ambitions for the future, and she is determined to achieve them.

JOOD Al Hinai (E)

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LE SALON
2023

Société des
Artistes Français
Grand Palais Éphémère
233^e édition

ART CAPITAL

