



P10

SWIATEK SWEEPS INTO LAST 16 OF THE ITALIAN OPEN



P14

OMAN FLOUR MILLS EXPANDS PRESENCE IN FOOD SECTOR



P20

WINDS OF CHANGE BUFFET IRAN'S WOODEN BOAT BUILDING TRADITION



MUSCAT

MANJAM LABS TO STREAMLINE SERVICES

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, on Sunday launched the second phase of Manjam Labs which aims to streamline government service procedures. The second phase, held at Oman Institute for Oil and Gas, targets streamlining 120 government services. As many as 10 government establishments are taking part, distributed among 5 work labs.

OMAN WELCOMES SUDAN DECLARATION



The Sultanate of Oman's Foreign Ministry welcomed the Declaration on Commitment to Protect the Civilians signed between representatives of the Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces of the Republic of the Sudan in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Oman affirmed its full support to the unity, stability and security of the Republic of the Sudan and the importance to continue dialogue between all Sudanese parties in order to achieve the aspirations of the brotherly Sudanese people for peace and stability. At the same time, the Sultanate of Oman appreciates the essential role and positive efforts made by regional and international parties to reach this agreement led by the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the friendly United States of America. — ONA

Priority to maintain high health standards

70% OF PATIENTS CAN NOW GET THEIR FIRST APPOINTMENT WITHIN 4 WEEKS

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, has said that the ministry has embarked on a number of projects and initiatives to meet demand in accordance with current and future priorities. The minister delivered his ministry's statement as the Majlis Ash'shura's hosted him during its 13th ordinary meeting on Sunday.

Assuring the public that efforts are being made to speed up delayed hospital appointments, the minister said: "We were able to reduce the waiting period for appointments so that 70 per cent of patients can now get their first appointment within four weeks, compared to 30 per



Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health

cent previously." He also assured that the shortage of medical personnel is addressed, and lack of medicine supply in hospitals is covered. The shortage of medicines, according to him, is a global problem caused

by various manufacturing issues faced by pharmaceutical companies around the world. In order to ensure adequate supply of medications, the ministry is taking a variety of measures to address the issue, Dr Al Sabti said. The ministry is working on developing supply chains for medicines and medical supplies by introducing modern technologies into supply chains. It continues to establish and expand medical warehouses in the governorates, similar to the medical warehouses in Dhofar and Al Dakhiliyah governorates. Efforts are under way to establish a regional warehouse in Musandam Governorate. The ministry maintains a reserve stock that covers consumption for approximately three to

six months of vital and life-saving items. **HEALTH COVERAGE** The ministry also pledged to continue providing high standard healthcare and develop a world-class health system. The statement of the minister covered four themes: comprehensive health coverage, funding the health system, human resources and digital transition. The minister pointed out that the projects seek to consolidate decentralisation of health services by providing a package of specialised services at referral hospitals. To meet this objective, about 240 new specialised services have been introduced in hospitals and health complexes, he added. TURN TO P2

Omantel, Zain launch joint venture 'ZOI'

MUSCAT: Zain Group and Omantel on Sunday announced the launch of a joint venture by the name of Zain Omantel International 'ZOI', an independent company that provides wholesale services in the telecommunications sector. The venture is a first-of-a-kind and the groundbreaking partnership aims to revolutionise the wholesale telecommunications sector by offering a unique proposition that combines the strengths of both parties to deliver unparalleled service and support to customers worldwide. The joint venture will cater to the end-to-end telecommunications needs of operators in the Middle East, as well as international carriers, data



centres, hyperscalers, content, and cloud providers seeking services within the region and beyond. ZOI will manage all international wholesale requirements of Zain and Omantel operations in eight countries, serving over 55 million customers. Furthermore, ZOI will optimise the existing wholesale businesses of both companies by reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness through access to low-latency and high-capacity services over its extended footprint. **DETAILS ON P13**

ERDOGAN TAKES EARLY LEAD IN TURKISH POLLS



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan took an early lead on Sunday in Turkey's landmark election, state media reported, although the final outcome was likely to change substantially. Erdogan was winning 53.2 per cent of the vote with 34.4 per cent of the ballots counted, while opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu had 40.9 per cent of the vote. Most of the early ballots appeared to have been counted in heavily pro-Erdogan districts of Turkey's north and east. — AFP



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Priority to maintain high health standards

FROM P1

The new projects include the establishment and replacement of 13 hospitals with a capacity ranging between 50 and 700 beds. This raises the number of hospitals affiliated to the Ministry of Health to 64, said Dr Al Sabti, noting that 18 primary healthcare institutions have been set up or developed to meet population growth.

The ministry is currently expanding five hospital (adding 600 additional beds) and upgrading the level of three health centres into local hospitals, he said. This is in addition to the establishment and expansion of eight emergency units and construction of nine dialysis units, he added.

The minister said that the projects being implemented include the setting up of a central laboratory, a regional warehouse in Musandam Governorate, two centres for recovery from addiction in the governorates of Muscat and Al Batinah North and a national centre for organ transplantation.

NUMBER OF WORKERS

The minister said that the total number of workers at the Ministry of Health by the end of 2021 stood at 37,732. This accounts for a fall of 2.2 per cent, he observed, noting that, despite this the overall percentage of Omanisation remained at 73 per



cent in 2021.

Dr Al Sabti stated, “Due to the growth of private clinics in Muscat Governorate, we have suspended establishment of new clinics to monitor the existing ones and follow up on them.” He also mentioned that some centres have been suspended and that a female doctor practising without a license has been fired.

POSITIVE RESULTS

Citing other facts, the minister said that the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19 pandemic) prolonged patient waiting lists and postponed outpatient appointments and surgical interventions. This, he said, prompted the ministry to take contingency measures to address the problems and to reduce pressure. These measures yielded positive results, he added.

The ministry conducted a study on the rate of sudden deaths in the Sultanate of Oman. The results indicated that the rate is normal and comparable to that of other countries in the world, he said, adding that the increase in deaths during the recent period was due to the pandemic. The curve of deaths cannot be proven or predicted.

FUNDS

Speaking about funding issues, Dr Al Sabti stressed that the ministry has augmented the budget set for the strategic stock of medicines and medical supplies to RO 10 million. The aim is to ensure that enough

supplies are in place to meet emergency conditions, stave off the effects of epidemics and disasters and, eventually, protect the health of citizens.

In his statement the minister said that, by the end of last year, Oman had a suitable number of projects that support the pharmaceutical and medical sectors. Those included 14 factories, seven of which for medical drugs and 7 for medical supplies, others factories, he said. He added that nine more factories are under construction, of them 7 for pharmaceutical products and 2 for medical supplies.

The Ministry of Health is also implementing a National Strategy for Digital Transition, said the minister. He indicated that the strategy is being conducted through the automation, digitisation and computerisation of its digital systems.

Speaking in detail, the minister said that digital transformation projects include the establishment of a National Centre for Virtual Medical Services and an Electronic Repository for Digital X-rays and Diagnostic Procedures.

This is in addition to a project for medical prescriptions and drug tracking and another for re-engineering and designing a healing system, he said.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The upcoming challenge in the healthcare sector is that of human resources, so efforts must be made not to lose these resources and to provide qualification and training, not only for general physicians but also for specialised staff. Training depends on the number of beds and trainers.

On the achievements of the ministry, the Minister of Health said that a dialysis unit will be set up in the Wilayat of Barka as the ministry has approved the project. Due to high population density in the wilayat, Barka Health Complex has opened several new clinics, such as male infertility, ophthalmology, travel medicine, and counselling, among others.

The foundation-stone for Mahout Hospital in Al Wusta Governorate will be laid in June next year. The recently-built Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah has 700 beds and offers a comprehensive range of medical specialities. This hospital is expected to be on par with the Royal Hospital regarding its specialised services. Bahla Hospital will be among the top four priorities to be considered in 2024.

There is a forthcoming plan and initiative to open the Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Health Centre for 24 hours in the near future. A team of specialists will visit the physical therapy unit at Qurayat Hospital to assess its needs.

Al Buraimi industrial city project nears completion

AL BURAIMI: The completion rate of the infrastructure development project in Al Buraimi Industrial City has reached 98 per cent. It is expected to be completed in the near future.

Said bin Abdullah al Balushi, Director General of Al Buraimi Industrial City, said that the infrastructure development project in Al Buraimi Industrial City was awarded by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates



‘Madayn’ in June 2021, at a total cost of more than RO 5.5 million.

He added that the project includes the construction of a 35-kilometre-long sewage network that covers the first and second areas of the industrial city, the establishment of a wastewater treatment plant with a capacity of 400 cubic metres per day, paving several roads in the first area with a total length of approximately 2 kilometres.

The project also includes rainwater drainage channels with a total length of 8 km in the first and second areas, an irrigation network (approximately 7 km) extending from the wastewater treatment plant to pass through the first area and eventually reaching the second area.

Al Balushi pointed out that the project covered the development of an area of 300,000 square metres.

— ONA

Labour Minister reviews work concepts with UTAS students



MUSCAT: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) on Sunday organised a meeting between Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour and UTAS students.

The meeting dealt with current and future work concepts, identifying the ministry’s role in the National Programme for Training Job Seekers, and employment in the public and private sectors.

The meeting focused on consolidating national policies and strategies to boost the labour market’s ability to attract investment, the national strategy for human resources development, the national workforce employment strategy and the implementation of specific programmes that promote employment initiatives.



Dr Baowain also introduced new ideas and programmes designed to train and qualify job seekers and promote employment in both government and private sectors. The minister also highlighted that the ministry’s plan is focused on developing policies and strategies to enhance the labour market, attract investment, and promote a national strategy for human resource development and employment of Omani workforce. — ONA



OMANI INVENTOR WINS GOLD

Engineer Mohammed bin Saud al Balushi won the gold medal for the second time at the 34th International Invention, Innovation and Technology Exhibition (ITEX 2023) held in Malaysia recently for his invention that ensures the flow of heavy oil through transmission pipelines.

LIGHT OF HOPE ANNUAL INITIATIVE

In honour of the Mental Health Awareness Month in May, several buildings in Muscat have been illuminated in green. The colour green symbolises optimism, hope, and new beginnings, and the initiative is aimed at combating the stigma associated with mental health. The event has been a collaboration between several organisations, including Whispers of Serenity Clinic, Al Harub Clinic, German University of Technology, Aloft Hotel, Sheraton Hotel, Omantel and The Royal Opera House Muscat. The buildings were lit up in green on May 13, at 9 pm. Mental Health Awareness Month is celebrated globally to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and to spread awareness that mental health is something everyone should care about. This year’s theme is anxiety, one of the most common mental health problems people face.





MoD Secy Gen receives Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff

MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, received Lieutenant General Kim Sung-kyeom, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of Republic of Korea, and the military delegation accompanying him, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi welcomed the guest and his accompanying delegation. During the interview, issues of common interest between the two sides were discussed.

The meeting was attended by senior officers of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), as well as the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and the Military Attache at the Embassy

of the Republic of Korea in Muscat.

Lt Gen Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of SAF, also received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, Lt Gen Kim Sung Kyum and the military delegation accompanying him. During the meeting, cordial conversations were exchanged, a number of military issues were discussed, and issues of common concern were discussed.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier General Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Manthari, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea accredited to the Sultanate of Oman, and the Military Attache at the Embassy of Korea in Muscat. — ONA

CPA SEIZES ADULTERATED PRODUCTS IN AL BATINAH



As part of efforts undertaken by the Consumer Protection Authority, the Directorate-General of Consumer Protection in Al Batinah North Governorate, seized perfumes with an expiry date in 2019. The same commercial establishment was selling medical products that should not be sold without medical prescription.

Workshop explores provincial media role in governorates

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

The Ministry of Information organised a workshop entitled 'Provincial Media' at the Grand Millennium Hotel Muscat, under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar. The workshop was attended by dignitaries, governors, and representatives of institutions concerned with the governorates.

The workshop discussed the role of the Ministry of Information system and institutional media in the offices of governors and government institutions. It also looked into the role of media initiatives from private, community and voluntary levels.

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information (MoI), in his speech mentioned that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued the Royal Decree regarding the provincial system.

The decree ensures decentralisation in decision-making, and developing the governorates, achieving the goals and pillars of 'Oman Vision 2040', creating an attractive environment for investments, developing their resources, and upgrading local and municipal services and activities.

Dr Al Harrasi stressed that the 'Provincial Media' is an essential element in the media work system in Oman. He also indicated that the MoI is committed to empowering the governorates through effective communication and media participation. He emphasised that the media is a bridge linking the efforts of the governorates to the broader segments of society.

HH Sayyid Marwan al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and the workshop's sponsor, stressed the importance of the media tool in various stages of the development of governorates. He noted that it is a link between the recipient, the investor, and officials.

The Governor also added that the ability of the media to convey



MoI hosts 'provincial media' workshop to strengthen governorates' media role and development initiatives

the message from the government agencies to the beneficiaries enhances the reduction of the gap between the various spectrums in the governorate. He indicated the need to strengthen the capabilities of the existing cadres, the communication and media departments, and the existence of a mechanism for coordination between the different departments in the governorates.

During the workshop, Salem bin Abdullah al Rahbi, Head of the Visual Editing Department, spoke about ONA and the governorates' news. He discussed the expansion of the network of correspondents, using modern tools and technologies, and the strengthening of the role of the offices in all governorates.

Hilal bin Saif al Mushaifari,

Head of the Programmes Department at Radio Sultanate of Oman, spoke about radio experience in the media. He highlighted the role of the radio towards allocating large content in supporting and developing the media.

Rashid bin Khamis al Saadi, head of the programmes department in the public channel, spoke about Oman TV and its coverage of all governorates.

Asim bin Salim al Shidi, Editor-in-Chief, Oman Arabic Daily newspaper, discussed the role of the newspaper in covering events, while Zamzam bint Hamad al Hinaiyah, Head of the Integration Department, Government Communication Center, spoke about the importance of activating institutional media in the

governorates.

Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili, Editor-in-Chief, Oman Observer, observed that the media is no longer restricted to MoI alone. Rather, it is viewed as an enabler offering various assistance, including logistical, training, and educational support. Moreover, it is now possible for anyone to become a media person unto themselves.

Saif bin Sultan al Shaithani, an electronic content creator, spoke about the Ain platform and its prospects in supporting media content in the governorates. Said bin Abdullah al Salmani, head of the engineering department, discussed the engineering equipment in the provinces and its role in radio and TV coverage.

The workshop aimed to enhance media work in the governorates to contribute to achieving administrative decentralisation, empowering them in all aspects of development, providing services to beneficiaries, and promoting them in a way that enhances their attractiveness to tourists and investors.

Dr Al Harrasi, Minister of Information, thanked all the participants for presenting their ideas, noting that the presentations will be studied and developed further.

SQU students tackle car heat, reduce it by 85%

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Some enterprising students came out with a product that can reduce heat inside a car by 85 per cent. The product is the result of constant work by a group of Omani students who formed a company called 'Sadan' and produced a transparent, environmentally friendly solution for cars to be applied on the outer glass of vehicles.

The product named 'Nano Protection Heater' (NPH) is going to be a huge relief for car owners when it hits the market after proper compliance.

The 38th issue of 'Scientific Insights' magazine published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) covered 'Sadan' formed by a group of Omani students from Sultan Qaboos University.

The students were able to extract the basic material for the product from palm fronds, which are found in large quantities in



the Sultanate of Oman and are estimated at about 9 million.

The product has several stages until it reaches its final form. It starts with the collection of waste palm fronds, separating waste from it, grinding the fronds, treating them chemically, and finally, the solution. Then comes the stage of examining samples from the extracted material and then processing it with nanotechnology, after which the quality and efficiency of the product are tested, and then packaging and distribution.

The product is extracted from a natural substance that is available

Omani students develop revolutionary 'Nano Protection Heater' to reduce car heat by 85 per cent as Sadan's innovative solution takes the market by storm

in huge quantities. It is with high efficiency compared to commercial products in the market, and it isolates the heat inside the car by 85 per cent.

It is a transparent product that does not obscure vision and is cost-

effective compared to competitors.

Sadan has won numerous awards, like Best Corner Award in the Student Companies Exhibition held by Injaz Oman in 2022; got first place in the universities category in the Al Araiimi Boulevard Innovation Award 2022; Won Manafaa 2022 Programme organised annually by Mawarid (Oman Animal and Plant Genetic Resources Center) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The Sadan team comprises 15 students from Sultan Qaboos University's different colleges and majors. The student company

consists of four departments – Marketing, Production, finance, and communication and sales.

The Sadan student company is currently working on developing the product, conducting many tests for the product in various specialised laboratories.

The results concluded that the product could reduce the temperature inside the car by 85 per cent.

Sadan has been working with the business development incubator at the Innovation and Technology Transfer Centre at Sultan Qaboos University and has signed some memorandums of understanding.

It has also submitted an intellectual property application and prepared the necessary licenses to display the product comprehensively and effectively in the market.

'Scientific Insights' is a scientific journal published every three months by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in Arabic and English.

World Intellectual Property Day on May 17

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Omani Association for Intellectual Property, will mark the World Intellectual Property Day on Wednesday May 17.

The celebration ceremony will be held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

The ceremony will include a visual presentation on the Sultanate of Oman's national strategy for innovation, a working paper on community awareness and the importance of intellectual property. During the event, winners of the Women's Intellectual Property Competition will be announced.

The event will also be accompanied by an exhibition showcasing the works of the finalists in the competition, in addition to a discussion session in which some female academics, researchers and entrepreneurs will take part to highlight the importance of women's intellectual property in various aspects. — ONA



SMART GOVERNANCE

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
[@shadadm](#)

WHETHER smartphones are making individuals smart or dumb can be a different debate altogether. However, the argument that these devices are making the world smarter is nobody's doubt, and the way the Sultanate of Oman is moving towards smart governance is a pointer towards this direction. While your phones may be preloaded with apps to help you perform your day-to-day activities efficiently, the increased use of apps has been evident in Oman's government services.

These days, municipal council elections are conducted via smartphones, while all ROP services and bank transactions are also being done mostly through e-services — making use of technology that is completely customisable now. About the municipal council elections late last year, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, had said that the government embarked on the modernisation of election procedures in line with its vision towards digital transition.

As the Sultanate of Oman embraces smart governance, smartphone and e-services revolutionise government services from elections to everyday transactions

"The new high-accuracy application was launched, ensuring both secrecy and cybersecurity. This process is fully reliant on artificial intelligence accessible via smartphones to enable the voters from Oman and abroad alike to elect their preferred candidates," he said.

With e-governance increasingly becoming helpful in the growth story, the concerns of naysayers about 'too much application' of technology are found to be not based on reality.

Information Technology experts say there is no proof that digital technology or our phones harm our biological cognitive abilities. Smartphones function as an auxiliary tool, which only enhances

our horizon to memorise more, calculate in bigger numbers, and to store more information and present them whenever we need them.

"Life is getting easier because of technology. Phones are becoming smarter, and things are getting easier because of their functionalities. So, things are getting easier now than ever," said a smartphone user.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology last year announced that the digital transformation programme (2022) included launching of the first phase of the National Unified e-Government Services Portal, unrolling 88 e-services rendered to citizens and businesses, and streamlining procedures and re-engineering of 70 per cent of basic e-government services. In the context of the Royal Directives to continue boosting digital competence and preparedness and to accelerate the pace of e-government transformation, the government has been working on a speedy implementation of the National Unified e-Government Services Portal to serve as a composite platform incorporating all government services.



Oman hosts meetings on air navigation and aviation safety



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is hosting the 20th meeting of the Air Navigation Planning and Implementation Region Group and the 10th Regional Aviation Safety in the Middle East.

Oman is represented by the Civil Aviation Authority at the four-day meetings which kicked off in Muscat on Sunday.

The meetings discuss major issues and challenges facing member states in the field of navigation and safety. The two meetings seek to exchange expertise on air navigation and aviation safety and devise practical solutions.

The meetings, held in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), are attended by 150 participants from 15 countries and 9 international organisations and companies specialised in the fields of air navigation and safety.

The opening of the two meetings was held under the auspices of Eng Nayef bin Ali bin Hamad al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority.

An exhibition organised on the sidelines of the event showcases advanced technology and the latest techniques applied in the field of aviation. — ONA

Minister honours 145 outstanding students, staff at Bausher School

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, honoured exceptional administrative staff, teachers, and students of Bausher School for their outstanding achievements in the academic year 2022-2023. The ceremony took place at the College of Banking and Financial Studies.

Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Wali of Bausher, and Chairman of the Parents Council, in his speech said, “our honour lies in celebrating the remarkable teachers who have ignited the flame of knowledge and served as beacons of inspiration, nurturing our children with valuable skills, and attitudes. We take pride in their recognition and glory.”

He emphasised the collaborative efforts between educational and administrative staff and parents, who played a vital role in shaping a new generation equipped with noble values.

The ceremony featured a series of artistic performances, including the operetta ‘Flag and Loyalty,’ which comprised four



acts namely ‘The Happy Era and Tourism in Oman,’ ‘The Teacher,’ and the depiction of the ‘Oman Vision 2040’ for education.

The minister accompanied by the Wali of Bausher, honoured 145 distinguished individuals, including outstanding faculty, administrative staff, and exceptional male and female students.

The minister also extended special recognition to the

Dohat Al Adab School team, representing the Sultanate of Oman, for their accomplishments in the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) in civil engineering held in Dallas, USA. She also acknowledged the students who achieved notable positions in the 14th Robot Championship held in Qatar.

Al Mahamed School for Basic Education secured the second position for the best project in the

Arab Championship for Robotics and Artificial Intelligence at the Arab level, while Al Firdous Private School earned the third position for group work among 6 to 9-year-olds at the Arab level.

The ceremony was attended by governors of Muscat Governorate, Majlis AshShura and Municipal Council members, parents of students, administrative and teaching staff of the schools. — ONA

Omani documentary wins Golden Palm Award at Saudi film festival

MUSCAT: The Omani documentary film ‘Long Distances’ received the prestigious Golden Palm Award for Gulf Film in the ‘Documentary Films’ category at the 9th edition of the Saudi Film Festival, held at the ‘Ithra’ Center in Saudi Arabia.

Directed by Ali al Bimani and Hamad al Qassabi, and produced by Khatt Films, ‘Long Distances’ is now available on the Ministry of Information’s ‘Ain’ platform, with

an English translation for a wider international audience.

The film portrays the inspiring journey of an Omani girl who begins as a shepherd in a remote village nestled between the mountains adjacent to Wadi Al Sahtan, also known as Mandoos Oman.

With global recognition and the support of her husband, runner Sami Al Saeedi, she transforms into a champion of long-distance

mountain races. Director Ali al Bimani shares that the film takes various forms, reflecting the remarkable story of the Omani girl’s triumph over challenges.

Participating in the Saudi Film Festival holds immense significance as it is one of the leading Gulf film festivals in the region, attracting talented film-makers, writers, and directors. It offers a valuable platform for extensive discussions, networking

opportunities, specialised workshops, and the showcasing of exceptional films.

Director Ali al Bimani also sheds light on the challenges faced during the production of the documentary. He emphasises that creating any documentary film is a complex undertaking, involving deep understanding of the story, study of the characters, and



continuous dialogue with them to gather essential information.

Regarding the film’s well-deserved award, Al Bimani expresses his belief that ‘Long Distances’ resonated strongly at the festival and garnered praise from Gulf critics, as well as Arab and non-Arab film-makers.

The film has not only inspired

film-makers, writers, and media professionals but also enticed them to explore the beautiful aspects of Oman’s environment, people, and shared issues.

Al Bimani underscores the urgent need for such films, emphasising the scarcity of Omani cinematic productions that prompt curiosity about Oman’s

culture, history, and surroundings.

Suad al Nusaibi, one of the runners featured in the film, expresses her delight at participating in this exquisite documentary that showcases two Omani individuals engaged in long-distance running competitions, both at local and international levels. — ONA



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	55/2023/MHT/HQ-12	Tender Name	DESIGN, SUPPLY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NETWORK SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	04/06/2023		
Last Date for Bid Submission	28/06/2023		
Grade	Excellent, First		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Companies must fill in the form of acknowledgment of commitment to the offer submitted by them.
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085

MoH holds scientific conference on premature babies, newborns

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health organised a Scientific Conference for Premature Babies and Newborns at Intercity Hotel Al Khuwair.

The conference was represented by the Intensive Care Department for Premature Babies and Newborns at Khowla Hospital, in cooperation with AdLife Private Hospital.

Dr Muhyiddin Yahya, Medical Director of AdLife Private Hospital, said that the conference focuses on important aspects of maternal and fetal medicine, which would improve the outcomes of the health service provided, stressing the importance of these meetings and conferences and their role in bringing medical practices closer and raising their efficiency.

The forum focused on developments in medical practices in the field of maternal and fetal health. With the aim of improving the health care provided, in addition to exchanging experiences and means of cooperation with the international speakers participating in the conference, and discussing common issues between the specialisation of obstetrics and gynaecology, prematurity and neonatology, which reflects positively on health outcomes in these two fields, and on cooperation between the two public health sectors. — ONA



Pakistan School Muscat

ANNOUNCEMENT OF TENDERS

PSM intends to offer the tender of **Development Works for the year 2023**. The contractors with relevant experiences are invited for following bidding:

Tender No.	Tender's Name	Tender Collection Date & Time	Site Visit Date & Time	Final Submission Date & Time
2023/001	Paint of school & residence	May 15 to May 22, 2023 09:00 AM To 01:00 PM Working Days/Hours	May 16, 2023 to May 17, 2023 09:00 AM To 01:00 PM	Before and Until May 23, 2023
2023/002	Water proofing			
2023/003	Supply & fixing of new doors & fixing of glass/ acrylic sheet in the existing doors			
2023/004	Supply & fixing of Portacabin			
2023/005	Renovation of office toilet			
2023/006	Construction of new washroom, ablution area & wall			
2023/007	Renovation of staff mess kitchen			
2023/008	Renovation of classrooms & staffroom			
2023/009	Construction of wall near basketball ground			

Experienced contractor(s) having relevant experience of at least 3 years of jobs of similar nature preferably in Oman, who wish to participate in the bidding may collect the documents after payment of **RO. 20.000** only through POS (non-refundable) per Job.

Admin Office
Pakistan School Muscat
P.O. Box 987, P.C. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman; Tel: 24702489 Fax: 24709746,
In case of any query you may contact 00968 93690691
Email: tulaib@pakistanischool.edu.om, directorfinancebods@pakistanischool.edu.om

The tenders shall be submitted in original and completed with all relevant documents. Tenders not in compliance with tender's requirements shall not be considered.

Tender Documents shall be submitted in sealed envelope with clearly mentioned Tender Number/name, Company Name and POC's Number/name. The sealed envelope shall be dropped in the Tender Box available at Admin Office on or before the date mentioned above and addressed to:

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Cyclone Mocha floods Myanmar port city, sparing major refugee camps

DHAKA: Storm surges whipped up by a powerful cyclone moving inland from the Bay of Bengal inundated the Myanmar port city of Sittwe, but largely spared a densely-populated cluster of refugee camps in low-lying neighbouring Bangladesh.

Some 400,000 people were evacuated in Myanmar and Bangladesh ahead of Cyclone Mocha making landfall, as authorities and aid agencies scrambled to avert heavy casualties from one of the strongest storms to hit the region in recent years.

Vulnerable settlements in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, where more than one million Rohingya refugees live, were left relatively unscathed by the storm that is now gradually weakening.

"Luckily, we could escape the worst of the cyclone," said Mohammad Shamsud Douza, a Bangladesh government official in charge of refugees. "We are getting some reports of huts damaged but there are no casualties."

Myanmar appears to have borne the direct impact of Cyclone Mocha, as winds of up to 210 kmph ripped away tin roofs and brought down a communications tower.

Parts of Sittwe, the capital of Rakhine state, were flooded and the ground floors of several buildings were under water, a video posted on social media by a witness in the city showed.

Communication networks in Rakhine had been disrupted after the cyclone made landfall, the UN and local media said.

Across Rakhine state and the north west of the country about 6 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance, while 1.2 million have been displaced, according to the UN humanitarian office (OCHA).

— Reuters



Strong winds and heavy rainfall are seen, as Cyclone Mocha approaches, in Sittwe, Rakhine, Myanmar. — Reuters



Palestinians inspect their belongings amidst the rubble of their house at Nusseirat refugee camp in Gaza. — AFP

Palestinians and Israelis resume normal life after Gaza ceasefire

GAZA/JERUSALEM: Life on both sides of the Gaza Strip border began returning to normal on Sunday after an Egyptian-mediated ceasefire halted five days of fighting between Israel and Islamic Jihad, which killed 34 Palestinians and an Israeli.

Leaders from both sides of the conflict confirmed their commitment to the truce, but gave different interpretations of the terms, such as whether Israel would end targeted killings of Palestinian groups' leaders.

The latest fighting, the longest bout since a 10-day war in 2021, began when Israel launched a series of air strikes in the early hours of Tuesday, announcing that it was targeting Islamic Jihad commanders who had planned attacks against it.

In response, Palestinian group fired more than 1,000 rockets, sending Israelis fleeing into bomb shelters. In areas of southern Israel around Gaza, schools were still closed on Sunday and many of the thousands of residents who had been evacuated had yet to return.

Palestinian health officials said 33 people, including women and children as well as Islamic Jihad fighters, were killed in Gaza. In Israel, an Israeli woman and a Palestinian labourer were killed by Gazan rockets.

Mohammad al Hindi, a senior Islamic Jihad official who co-negotiated a ceasefire in Cairo with Egyptian officials, said in a statement that the group was prepared to halt its rocket launches in exchange for Israel's agreement to stop targeting houses, civilians, and militant leaders.

"We are committed to the calm agreement as long as the enemy abided by it," he said.

But Israel denied it had made any such undertakings, saying only that it would hold fire as long as there was no threat. "I have said time and again: Whoever strikes at us, whoever tries to strike us in the future — his blood is forfeit," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told his weekly cabinet meeting in Jerusalem.

How long the latest ceasefire will hold remained unclear. The latest bout of fighting came only a week after another round of overnight barrages and even as the truce was being finalised, the two sides kept up their firing.

In Gaza, people were picking up the pieces after days of bombardment that Israel said targeted Islamic Jihad command centres and other military infrastructure but which also damaged or destroyed dozens of houses.

— Reuters

Thai opposition parties dominate elections, eye coalition

BANGKOK: Thailand's two major opposition parties dominated Sunday's national elections, with voters rejecting nearly a decade of military-backed government.

But in a kingdom where coups and court orders have often trumped the ballot box, fears persist the military could seek to cling on, raising the prospect of fresh instability.

The election campaign played out as a clash between a young generation yearning for change and the conservative, royalist establishment embodied by Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha, the ex-army chief who seized power in a 2014 coup.

With ballots counted from three quarters of polling stations, the reformist Move Forward Party (MFP) was on nearly 8.4 millions votes followed by Pheu Thai on 6.9 million. Prayut's United Thai Nation party lay third on 2.8 million, though it is not yet clear how the popular vote will translate into parliamentary seats.

MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat said his party could take 160 of the 500 lower house seats, declaring that the result "closed the door" on any chance of army-backed parties forming a minority government.

MFP will seek talks with Pheu Thai and a coalition deal is "definitely on the cards", Pita told reporters.



Thai's prime ministerial candidate Paetongtarn Shinawatra speaks to the media after the polling stations closed on the day of the general elections in Bangkok, Thailand, on Sunday. — Reuters

Pheu Thai leader Paetongtarn Shinawatra congratulated MFP on their success and said "we can work together".

"We are ready to talk to Move Forward, but we are waiting for the official result," she said.

Pheu Thai, the party of billionaire former premier Thaksin Shinawatra now fronted by his daughter, Paetongtarn, had urged voters to deliver them a landslide to see off the threat of military interference.

The Election Commission is not expected to officially confirm the final number of seats won by each party for several weeks. But without an overwhelming majority, MFP and Pheu Thai may still face a battle to secure power, thanks to the junta-scripted 2017 constitution.

The new premier will be chosen jointly by the 500 elected MPs and 250 senate members appointed by Prayut's junta -- stacking the deck in the army's favour.

In the controversial last election in 2019, Prayut rode senate support to become prime minister at the head of a complex multi-party coalition.

Adding to the uncertainty, rumours are already swirling that MFP could be dissolved by court order -- the same fate that befell its predecessor Future Forward Party after it performed unexpectedly well at the 2019 poll. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BELEDWEYNE

22 people killed in Somalia floods: UN

Flash flooding in central Somalia has killed 22 people and affected over 450,000, the UN's humanitarian agency OCHA said on Sunday, after the Shabelle River burst its banks, forcing tens of thousands out of their homes.

Heavy rainfall earlier in the week sent water gushing into homes in Beledweyne town in Hiran region, submerging roads and buildings as residents grabbed their belongings and waded through flooded streets in search of refuge.

The floods "have left a trail of destruction... inundating homes and farmland, washing away livestock, temporarily closing schools and health facilities, and damaging roads," the agency said in a situation report.

— AFP



DAMASCUS

Permission extended on aid border crossings

Syria has extended permission for the United Nations to use two additional border crossings for post-earthquake aid for three more months, a Syrian official said.

"This decision is based on Syria's keenness on enhancing stability and improving the living and humanitarian situation of all Syrians, and comes within its efforts to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to all those in need in all Syria," he added.

The UN said in a statement that Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad conveyed to the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, Martin Griffiths, the decision to allow the UN to use the crossings for an additional three months.

— Reuters



BOCAS DE SATINGA

Petro proposes regional ceasefire to ELN guerillas

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro urged a guerrilla group to agree to a regional ceasefire aimed at ending decades of conflict after the two sides failed to ink a nation-wide deal this month.

"I propose that we work seriously on a ceasefire, that they stop killing each other and that we stop killing each other," Petro said during a meeting with farmers' organisations.

The president is pushing for peace talks with the National Liberation Army (ELN) to put an end to more than half a century of armed conflict between the state and the guerrillas.

The two sides failed previously to reach an agreement on a nation-wide ceasefire that began in Havana. — AFP





In brief

■ SANTA JUANA



FIREFIGHTING GOATS PROTECT A FOREST FROM BLAZES

In the southern Chilean city of Santa Juana locals have a special task force helping fight blazes: a herd of goats.

The goats have already saved the native forest of the Bosques de Chacay once, preventing the park from being consumed by February forest fires — fuelled by heatwaves and a punishing drought — that left dozens dead, thousands injured and almost 440,000 hectares destroyed in south-central Chile.

The technique relies on grazing goats to control dry pastures and other vegetation that fuel forest fires in the summer. Goat droppings also help enrich the soil and prevent further erosion. — **Reuters**

■ MOSCOW



LUKASHENKO SKIPS CEREMONY AMID HEALTH RUMOURS

The authoritarian ruler of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, failed to attend the ex-Soviet republic's State Flag Day events for the first time in 29 years on Sunday, fuelling speculation about health problems. The 68-year-old was represented by government head Roman Golovchenko at the pompous state celebrations in Minsk.

State television has not shown any current images of Lukashenko for days, although his message of congratulation was read out in the capital. Earlier, media in neighbouring Ukraine reported that Lukashenko had been taken to hospital. — **dpa**

■ BAMAKO



MALI REJECTS UN REPORT ON ALLEGED EXECUTION

Mali's interim military government has rejected a United Nations human rights office report on the alleged execution of at least 500 people by Malian soldiers and unidentified foreign fighters during an operation last year.

The ruling junta was responding to a report released on Friday after a months-long investigation into what rights groups described as the worst atrocity in a 10-year conflict between Islamist groups and the army.

"The transitional government vehemently denounces this biased report that is based on a fictitious narrative and does not meet established international standards," government spokesman Abdoulaye Maiga said in a statement. — **Reuters**

Zelensky in Berlin: Ukraine won't use Western arms to attack Russia



German Chancellor and Ukraine's President shake hands following their closed door meeting at the Chancellery in Berlin. — **Reuters**

BERLIN: President Volodymyr Zelensky issued an assurance that Ukrainian forces will not attack Russian territory with the powerful weapons he is demanding from Kiev's Western allies, during a visit to Germany on Sunday.

"We are not attacking Russian territory. We are liberating our lawful territory," Zelensky said at a meeting with Chancellor Olaf Scholz. "We have no time, no forces and no surplus weapons for this," he said.

Preparations for counteroffensive operations were focused exclusively on liberating "our territory, which is recognised by the whole world," the Ukrainian president added.

Zelensky expressed his country's thanks for German

support during "the most challenging time in the modern history of Ukraine" on being welcomed earlier by President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Hours before his arrival on his first visit to Germany since the Russian attack in February last year, Germany announced a substantial increase in military supplies to Ukraine.

Signing the visitor's book at Steinmeier's official Berlin residence, Zelensky wrote in English: "Germany proved to be our true friend and reliable ally, which stands decisively side-by-side with the Ukrainian people in the struggle to defend freedom and democratic values."

Scholz later received the Ukrainian president with military honours, Zelensky placing his

hand on his heart as the Ukrainian anthem was played.

During his talks with Scholz, Zelensky appealed for German support in securing modern combat jets, saying Ukraine was working on "creating a fighter jet coalition."

He said Russia currently had a preponderance of power in Ukraine's airspace, and that needed to change.

Scholz was non-committal, saying Germany had supplied Ukraine with a great deal of weapons and would continue to do. Berlin was "concentrating" on providing Ukraine with air defence systems, he said.

At the end of Zelensky's visit to Berlin, consultations were planned on Sunday in the context of Scholz's security cabinet. In

addition to Scholz, the committee includes Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock.

The Charlemagne Prize, a non-monetary and largely symbolic award, was established in 1950 to celebrate efforts towards European unification.

Zelensky was being given the award for his efforts to counter the Russian attack on his country, said the organisers.

Not only was he the president of his people and commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian army, they said, but he was "also the motivator, communicator, the motor and the brace between Ukraine and its great array of supporters."

— **dpa**

US border crossings down by half since rule change

WASHINGTON: US border authorities have seen a 50 per cent drop in "encounters" with undocumented migrants crossing the southern border since the country's Title 42 migration policy ended, the country's homeland security chief said on Sunday.

"Over the past two days, the United States border patrol has experienced a 50 per cent drop in the number of encounters, versus what we were experiencing earlier in the week," Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas said.

"We are in Day Three," Mayorkas cautioned, adding "it is too early" to predict the rate of future crossings.

Title 42 allowed the United States to swiftly expel a wide array of migrants on public health grounds, but that authority ceased on Thursday when the government ended its declaration of Covid-19 as an official public health emergency.

Instead, the country has reverted back to an immigration law known as Title 8, as President Joe Biden's administration tries to create a system that allows for expanded asylum and legal routes in some cases. — **AFP**



US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas takes questions during the daily press briefing in the White House. — **AFP**

UK troops to take part in major Nato exercise

LONDON: More than 1,500 UK troops will train alongside thousands of personnel from Nato members as part of a major exercise in Estonia, Britain's Ministry of Defence said.

Named Exercise Spring Storm, it is the largest annual military exercise involving the UK-led Nato enhanced forward presence battle group.

Around 14,000 military personnel are set to take part from 11 Nato countries, with the UK marking the first time it has conducted a brigade-sized deployment to Estonia.

The exercise will see ground troops tested on battlefield scenarios, including trench assaults, reconnaissance missions and light infantry tactics.

UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, said: "Hundreds of UK troops from across our armed forces will again train with personnel from 11 Nato nations, demonstrating the strength of our interoperability with partner nations and our combined



British and US maritime Nato forces carry out 'Exercise Trojan Footprint' exercises at sea off Constanta. — **Reuters** file photo.

commitment to the Nato Alliance.

"While the Russian Army continues their illegal attack of Ukraine threatening stability in

Europe, the UK and our allies will continue to support Ukraine and defend our shared values and freedom."

The two-week exercise will also see RAF [the UK's Royal Air Force] members carry out training exercises in reconnaissance and

air-land integration.

Royal Marines Commandos will also carry out a beach assault exercise as part of the manoeuvres.

The Queen's Royal Hussars Commanding Officer Lt Col Steve Wilson said that the enhanced forward presence is "is looking forward to the opportunities provided by Exercise Spring Storm."

"The chance to train over the terrain we might need to defend adds to the gravitas of the exercise," he added. "Our battle group is fully integrated with 1st Estonian Brigade and brings a highly trained and capable UK and French troops to the field."

"We will be bringing a wide range of hard-hitting capabilities from main battle tanks, anti-tank, and artillery to snipers, mortars, engineers and tactical air controllers."

"We look forward to demonstrating the capabilities and resolve of the Nato alliance over the coming days." — **dpa**

How real is the fear of losing jobs to AI?



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

Geoffrey Hinton, now 75, a man commonly labelled as the “godfather of AI” recently resigned from his job at Google Inc, warning that the future with Artificial Intelligence (AI) was “scary”. In an interview with the BBC, he says, “Right now, they’re not more intelligent than us, as far as I can tell. But I think they soon may be”.

So how scared should we be about the rapid rise of AI and its role in our lives? And more important to many, will it take away more than half of the jobs presently existing, as the McKinsey Global Institute states? There are now many studies which show that workers across specialisations fear for their jobs and that itself has led to uncertainty and mental health issues among employees.

The numbers are initially not very encouraging. Goldman Sachs foresees 300 million jobs being lost by 2050 to automation. The phenomenal rise of ChatGPT in 2023 has seen it be used in all industries, including restaurants, coding and even creative spaces like advertising.

Professionals in the education sector are having to come up with quick strategies to cope with students submitting work created by AI.

The reasons to embrace AI for employers is obvious. It could lead to less labour requirements, leading to savings, and maximise productivity.

A less doomsday-scenario situation would be more useful to understand and cultivate. As with all new technologies, from

THE UNPRECEDENTED SURGE OF CHATGPT’S POPULARITY HAS LED TO ITS ADOPTION ACROSS A WIDE RANGE OF INDUSTRIES, ENCOMPASSING NOT ONLY RESTAURANTS AND CODING BUT ALSO EXTENDING TO CREATIVE DOMAINS SUCH AS ADVERTISING

the printing press to cameras and the Internet, the knee jerk reaction has been one of panic. It is equally important to understand the limitations of AI, namely, critical thinking, creativity and emotional intelligence. Proponents of AI may disagree, but making connections

between varied human experiences, understanding the consequences of trends in human behaviour, and working around unexpected situations, are all human capacities.

This doesn’t mean that we stay unperturbed. Innovation, creativity and adaptability are crucial to human survival and regeneration, and the same holds true now. We may lose some jobs to automation, but other skills will become more important: prompt engineers, trainers and language model engineers will be in demand, according to the Millennium Post. Because AI depends on LLM (Large Language Model), there will an increased demand for language experts, across all languages.

Some requirements will never go away. Those include any which

need the human touch: therapy, education, diplomacy, even philosophy which will guide us into the ethics of AI, or sociology which helps us to understand the way that we behave as a community. Even to understand the repercussions of AI, we need humans.

It is too early to panic about the loss of jobs, although it may already be happening at different levels. As always, the trick is to stay in touch with recent developments, re-train, keep up with advances and make it work for us.

Eventually, society settles down somewhat, accepting technology as part of our lives, leveraging it for our own ends. Robots may not take over our lives, but knowing that they could is the more important lesson for us.

Meteorologists targeted in climate misinfo surge

Once trusted faces on the news, meteorologists now brave threats, insults and slander online from conspiracy theorists and climate change deniers who accuse them of faking or even fixing the weather.

Users on Twitter and other social media falsely accused Spain’s weather agency of engineering a drought, Australia’s of doctoring its thermometers and France’s of exaggerating global warming through misplaced weather stations.

“The coronavirus is no longer a trend. Conspiracy theorists and deniers who used to talk about that are now spreading disinformation about climate change,” Alexandre Lopez-Borrull, lecturer in Information and Communication Sciences at the Open University of Catalonia, said.

“These scientific bodies are seen as part of the establishment, so anything they say may get disputed on social networks. “They are providing evidence against what the climate deniers claim, so the latter try to discredit them.”

In a harsh drought and with local elections looming, Spain’s State Meteorological Agency (AEMET) spoke out after its members were threatened in Twitter messages, phone calls and emails.

“Murderers”, “Criminals”, “You’ll pay for this”, “We’re watching you”, the messages shouted.

They came from people who believe the widely debunked theory that aeroplane condensation trails are really “chemtrails” sprayed by the authorities to poison people or create weather disasters.

Some referred to the “2030 agenda”, a debunked theory that global elites are plotting to subjugate people through Covid and climate policies.

“Do you want us to publish your contact details and those of your family?” read one Tweet aimed at an AEMET employee.

“Crooks! You are destroying nature on the orders of the damned 2030 agenda,” said another.

“We have seen an increase in insulting messages as a result of a thread we published about condensation trails” on April 10, AEMET spokesperson Estrella Gutierrez-Marco said.

“What makes no sense is that they are insulting an institution that is constantly watching out for their interests, whose aim is... to contribute to people’s safety.”

Lopez-Borrull noted a “significant increase” in climate change denial — particularly among far-right supporters who see it as a leftist cause and oppose reforms aimed at curbing its impacts.

“People distrust politicians, judges and the media, and the cost of living is rising,” he said. “In this context people feel alienated and end up listening to people they never listened to before, with messages appealing directly to the emotions.” — AFP



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Toobi

The author is a writer and researcher

Artificial Intelligence; a thinking object

‘I think, therefore I am’. Is it possible for the Artificial Intelligence to repeat Descartes’ famous dictum and declare its intellectual independence from human control and become a thinking digital object that possesses the highest specifications of rational simulation?

Such are open questions raised within the scientific milieu.

Before, it was an hypothesis brought to us by science fiction movies but today they are coming close to its realisation by approaching general intelligence (AGI).

We have already begun to feed some of these features of rationality through the latest models of AI such as ChatGPT, particularly its fourth version.

Before knowing the work mechanism of the digital brain, I would like to repeat a piece of information which is rife in most of the literature on artificial intelligence.

It is that the mechanism of artificial intelligence is inspired by the biological brain of humans even though the functioning of artificial neural networks is somewhat similar to the working mechanism of the human brain which was the origin before the emergence of the digital brain.

However, a number of biological details related to the functioning of the human brain are still shrouded in mystery.

What we ought to know from this article is the relationship of the functioning of both the biological

brain and the digital brain in order to bring the idea of digital thinking closer to artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence has several methods. the most important of which is called ‘machine learning’ from which one of the most powerful and complex

THE MOST IMPORTANT OF AI IS CALLED THE ‘MACHINE LEARNING’ FROM WHICH ONE OF THE MOST POWERFUL AND COMPLEX TYPES OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE KNOWN AS DEEP LEARNING IS DERIVED

types of artificial intelligence known as deep learning, is derived.

Among the most efficient types of deep learning is the Recurrent Neural Networks mostly used for recognising and processing written texts. It is one of the main types that function with the generative conversational model ChatGPT.

The method of deep learning in

artificial intelligence functions on the principle of learning or training on a set of data. The greater the number and quality of data, the greater the speed and quality of learning.

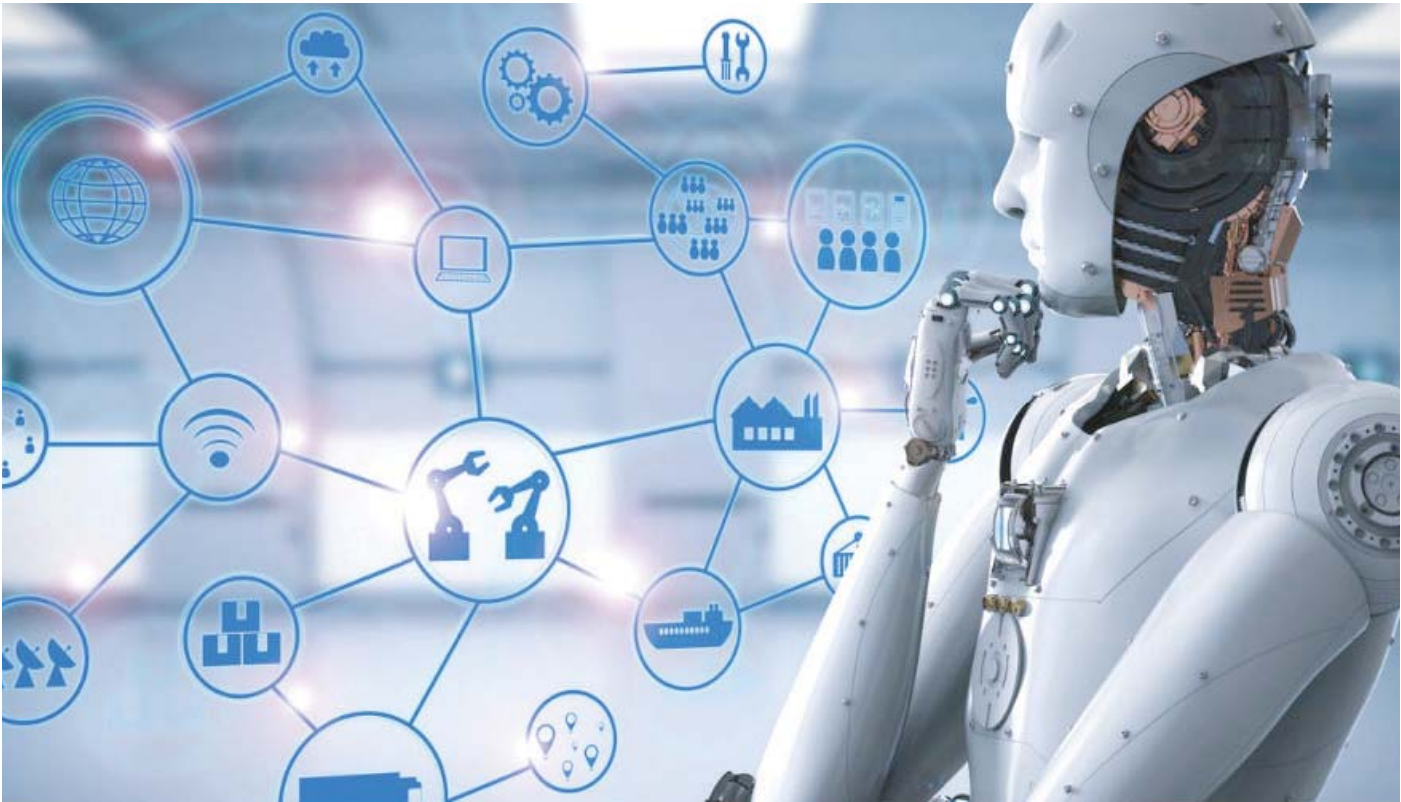
This type of learning is called the deep type and it works according to multiple mathematical algorithms that enables this digital object to refer to the general ability i.e its success in recognising entirely new inputs and its ability to deal effectively.

This digital object comprises three main layers: the input layer (data enters this layer to form a set of digital neurons), the hidden layer (it can be a multiplicity of hidden layers with a lot of neurons depending on the degree of complexity of the neural model of the digital object) and the third layer is the output which shows the outcome from analysing the input. What we should care about is learning to relate inputs and outputs and identifying the mechanism that falls within the scope of algorithms.

The functioning of the digital brain and its superiority has something to do with the type of the algorithm and its working mechanism.

This algorithm depends on a mathematical learning mechanism that allows the modification of weights.

One of the most popular types of learning algorithms is known as Back-Propagation which is the main and most important factor in the deep learning system of artificial intelligence.



To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Gratitude to healing hands...

Any profession in life is regarded more than just learning a number of skills, experiencing certain practices or acting in a particular way. Rather, being professional indicates administering precise care in a conscientious and knowledgeable way without causing harm to others. Nursing, for instance, is committed to providing care and nurturing of both healthy and sick people, individually, collectively or even as communities.

Although a nurse does not have a complete independency in decision-making and practice, nursing marks a profession that requires an extended education and has a theoretical body of knowledge.

No one can deny that a nurse makes an immense difference in a society. A nurse deals with patients with unconditional kindness, empathy, and compassion, regardless of age, gender and health condition. As a matter of fact, the care and compassion of a nurse are just as important as the medicines prescribed by a doctor. Dag Hammarskjöld, Swedish economist and diplomat, said, “Constant attention by a good nurse may be just as important as a major operation by a surgeon.”

Being like a hero in a battlefield, a nurse has compassion and knowledge to understand what needs to be done every minute she is in a ward. A nurse’s care has touched many lives, skill has relieved those in pain, and devotion has brightened the day of so many patients. The compassion with which she has nursed patients is commendable.

They will never forget a nurse’s kind heart, gentle ways of treatment and empathy.

With a smile on her face, she never stops amazing people with how much effort she accords every day.

A nurse’s selfless support towards a patient’s recovery is always praiseworthy! A nurse always leaves no stone unturned to make her job well done. It has been said that what love can’t cure, nurses can; I think nobody has any doubt or complaint on this! A nurse is someone whose smile inspires,



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

A NURSE’S CARE HAS TOUCHED MANY LIVES, SKILL HAS RELIEVED THOSE IN PAIN, AND DEVOTION HAS BRIGHTENED THE DAY OF SO MANY PATIENTS

hands that only know to care and touch make patients feel warmth and comfort.

Nursing, as a profession, is very difficult, challenging, and sometimes even unappreciated. A nurse is the first person who opens the eyes of a newborn and gently closes the eyes of a dying man. It is indeed a high blessing to be the first and last to witness the beginning and end of one’s life.

That is why nurses actually deserve great appreciation for what all they do, being the backbone of healthcare. Their strength and kindness are undoubtedly extremely extraordinary.

Becoming a nurse means being one of the most selfless acts that a person can undertake. The hard work, sacrifices and kindness that nurses deliver on a daily basis in every hospital should urge everyone to recall the fundamental humanity inside us all.

One has to always remember that behind the scrubs and lab coats there is an army of devoted professionals who deserve to be valued and celebrated. A nurse is regarded as a compassion in scrubs and a charming soul making a difference in every single day.

As the world is observing the International Nurses Day (May 12), it is time to express thanks and gratitude to every nurse who has been there for us all or loved ones during days of sickness.

Locally, as per the 2022 records of the National Centre for Statistics and Information, there are over 22,800 nurses working in different government and private hospitals in the Sultanate of Oman. Salute to all those nurses who spare no effort to provide comfort, compassion and care for their patients of different ages, sicknesses and attitudes.

The healing hands and caring hearts of nurses are a true blessing to those they care for. Doctors cure patients with medicines, whereas nurses cure them with hope, care, and compassion. Thank you nurses for never giving up on life! A sincere bow of respect to all the hard-working nurses whose skill and commitment make an impact on humans’ well-being!

THE COLOURS OF SPRING



Spring blossom colours are reflected in water as a duck swims at Richmond Park in London, Britain, on Sunday. – Reuters

Sustainable food needed as global hunger soars

As global hunger swiftly rises — by more than a third last year — curbing it will require not growing more food but rethinking broader systems of trade and aid, farming’s heavy reliance on fossil fuels, food waste and meat eating, experts said.

Farmers today grow sufficient crops to feed twice the current population — but but nearly a third of food produced globally is spoiled or thrown away, said Philip Lymbery, the chief executive of Compassion in World Farming International.

At the same time, grain that could feed billions of people is instead fed to factory—raised food animals — suggesting a reduction in meat consumption is one clear way to cut hunger, he said at a conference on global food systems in London this week.

In Europe alone, 60 per cent of grain is now grown for animal food, said Tim Benton, a food systems expert at the London-based think-tank Chatham House, which raises questions about whether scarce land could be better used.

As global leaders look for ways to keep food available and affordable, and prevent rising hunger, “it’s not about food scarcity because there’s no food



Laurie Goering

The writer is Climate Change Editor for the Thomson Reuters Foundation based in London

GLOBALLY, HUNGER IS SURGING, WITH 258 MILLION PEOPLE IN NEARLY 60 COUNTRIES FACING ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY LAST YEAR

scarcity,” Lymbery noted.

Globally, hunger is surging, with 258 million people in nearly 60 countries facing acute food insecurity last year, a 33 per cent jump from 2021, according to the Global Report on Food Crises 2023, released in March.

Problems are growing not just in traditional aid recipient countries such as Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan but also in nations from Nigeria to the Democratic Republic of Congo, it showed.

The report, backed by agencies from the UN World Food Programme to the World Bank, found that climate change impacts — from floods in Pakistan to drought in the Horn of Africa — were key contributors to the surge. But conflicts — including Russia’s war on Ukraine, which slashed wheat exports from Ukraine and drove up the prices of energy and fossil fuel-based fertilisers — also played a major role, particularly in contributing to rising food prices. “We depend more and more on a small number of countries for production of the major crops we depend on,” said Olivier De Schutter, co-chair

of IPES-Food, an international expert panel on sustainable food systems.

That means when climate change slashes production in one or more key producers, or a conflict breaks out in one, “global supply chains are disrupted... (and) the whole global food system is impacted”.

In the wake of the Ukraine war, food costs also rose as speculators, hedge funds and a handful of big agribusiness companies that control most global food trade made profits, said De Schutter, who is also a UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. He suggested that finding ways to wean global agricultural production off its heavy reliance on fossil fuel-based fertilisers could be a key way to protect access to food from volatile oil and gas prices.

Helping poorer countries escape their often heavy debt burdens could also help them shore up their food security, allowing them to focus more on growing food for their own people rather than raising export crops to bring in the cash needed to service debt, De Schutter said. Benton, of Chatham House,



A woman carries an infant as she stands in a line for food at the Tsehaye primary school, in the town of Shire, Tigray region, Ethiopia. – Reuters

said two very different views of how to achieve future security are now competing. In the first, the assumption that the world will need 50 per cent more food by 2050 — in part to meet growing demand for meat and dairy as poor countries grow richer — demands much more intensive production from limited agricultural land. That view assumes agriculture in the future will become much more technological and centralised, with heavy use of drones, satellites and the “Internet of things” driving

smarter production — and likely resulting in fewer farm jobs.

The second view, however, envisions farmers shifting to more ecologically friendly, smaller-scale and less fossil fuel-intensive agriculture, with food demand not growing significantly because food waste is cut and meat-intensive diets decline. “Everybody agrees food system transformation is needed” — just not what kind, said Molly Anderson, a food studies professor at Middlebury College in the United States.

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SWIATEK SWEEPS INTO LAST 16

ROME: Iga Swiatek cruised into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Sunday after thrashing Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0, while Daniil Medvedev won his first ever match in Rome, 6-4, 6-2 against Emil Ruusuvuori.

Losing finalist in Madrid last weekend, Swiatek looked again in imperious form in the tournament she won last year before going on to blitz the French Open.

The 21-year-old is trying for her third straight Rome title and made light work of Tsurenko after a slightly bumpy start.

Swiatek lost the first two games but then rattled off 12 in a row in a powerful demonstration of why she is world number one and favourite for Roland Garros.

“I’m just trying to be consistent and trying to play my game. I treat every match as a final, I try to have the right mindset,” said Swiatek on court.

Swiatek now faces either Donna Vekic or Ljudmila Samsonova in the fourth round after extending her winning streak in the Italian capital to 13 matches.

Her bid for a Rome hat-trick will be helped by five of the world’s top 10 women players being eliminated early, world number eight Maria Sakkari the latest victim after she was beaten 7-5, 6-3 by Marketa Vondrousova.

Sakkari joins world number two Aryna Sabalenka, third-ranked Jessica Pegula, world number four Caroline Garcia and seventh ranked Ons Jabeur in being dumped out of the tournament.

MEDVEDEV THROUGH
In the men’s draw Medvedev came

ITALIAN OPEN ATP/WTB RESULTS	
Men (second round)	
Andrey Rublev (x6) bt Alex Molcan (SVK) 6-3, 6-4; Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (ESP x27) bt Guido Pella (ARG) 6-0, 7-6 (7/4)	
JJ Wolf (USA) bt Hubert Hurkacz (POL x14) 6-3, 6-4; Bernabe Zapata Miralles (ESP x31) bt Jason Kubler (AUS) 6-4, 6-1; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) bt Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN x25) 7-5, 6-3; Borna Coric (CRO x15) bt Thiago Monteiro (BRA) 4-6, 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/5); Roberto Carballes Baena (ESP) bt Dan Evans (GBR x20) 7-6 (7/5), 5-7, 6-4; Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x2) bt Albert Ramos-Vinolas (ESP) 6-4, 6-1	
Women (third round)	
Veronika Kudermetova (x11) bt Anastasia Potapova (x23) 7-5, 3-6, 6-1; Zheng Qinwen (CHN x22) bt Anna Bondar (HUN) 7-6 (7/2), 6-4; Wang Xiyu (CHN) bt Taylor Townsend (USA) 6-2, 0-6, 7-5; Camila Osorio (COL) bt Caroline Garcia (FRA x5) 6-4, 6-4; Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA x12) bt Magda Linette (POL x17) 7-5, 6-4; Anhelina Kalinina (UKR x30) bt Sofia Kenin (USA) 6-4, 6-2	

through in straight sets against Ruusuvuori to claim his first win at the Foro Italico courts.

The former US Open champion won a second round match which was postponed to Sunday due to the torrential rain which hit the Italian capital on Saturday.

In much balmier conditions the world number three was dominant on a clay court surface he is famous for not liking.

Few would back him to go deep in Rome but his performances on clay have improved, reaching the quarterfinals at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Medvedev will face Bernabe Zapata Miralles in the third round.

“Every time I come to a tournament I know I can play well, so I’m happy to finally get the win here in Rome,” said Medvedev.

“I want to win as many matches

as possible, I know it can be a little bit trickier for me on clay but honestly this year I’m playing really well.

“The matches I lost I lost against great opponents who just played better than me... I’m just trying to play my best tennis until the end of the clay season.”

Stefanos Tsitsipas will take on home hope Lorenzo Sonego after finishing off Nuno Borges 6-3, 6-3 in a match interrupted by Saturday’s rain with the world number five already well on his way to victory.

ALCARAZ ADVANCES
On Saturday, Carlos Alcaraz marked his return to the world number one spot by comfortably seeing off fellow Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas in his first ever match at the Italian Open, as play was cut short by miserable wet

weather.

In-form Alcaraz ensured top spot just by taking to the court to play his second round match in Rome as he seeks a third straight tournament win.

The 20-year-old, who saw off Ramos-Vinolas 6-4, 6-1, will overtake Novak Djokovic as world number one and is assured of the top seeding at the French Open later this month.

He came through in a match which started several hours late due to the pelting rain which drenched the Italian capital.

“The conditions here weren’t easy, the rain, the waiting all day, not knowing if I was going to play or not. It was tough,” said Alcaraz.

He added: “For me it doesn’t change too much to be number one or number two seed. I just focus on the tournament and on my game.”

The Spaniard became the youngest ever world number one thanks to his US Open triumph last September, with Djokovic denied entry to the United States because of his Covid vaccination status.

Alcaraz will begin his 23rd week at world number one on May 22.

In the women’s section, Caroline Garcia became the fourth top 10 player to be dumped out after the world number four lost 6-4, 6-4 to outsider Camila Osorio. Qualifier Osorio almost broke down in tears after her shock straight sets victory in a match which started two hours late and was interrupted for more than an hour at the start of the second set. — AFP



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a backhand return to Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas during their second round match at the ATP Rome Open. — AFP



Russia's Daniil Medvedev returns to Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori during their second round match in Rome. — AFP



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Faf du Plessis plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match between Rajasthan Royals and Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. — AFP

Bangalore crush Rajasthan by 112 runs to move fifth

JAIPUR, India: Fifties from skipper Faf du Plessis and Glenn Maxwell, followed by inspired bowling, led Royal Challengers Bangalore to a crushing 112-run win over Rajasthan Royals in the IPL on Sunday.

Du Plessis made 55 and Maxwell smashed a 33-ball 54 to guide Bangalore to 171-5 before their bowlers then skittled Rajasthan for 59 runs in Jaipur.

South African left-arm quick Wayne Parnell took three wickets, including Jos Buttler for a duck, as Rajasthan fell to the third-lowest total in Indian Premier League history.

The lowest IPL total was Bangalore's 49 against Kolkata in 2017. Bangalore, still searching for their first IPL title, moved up two places to fifth in the 10-team table, with the top four to make the play-offs.

"Really good for our net-rate," said Du Plessis. "We batted first and assessed the conditions. We batted in the powerplay and thought 160 will be a good score."

Inaugural champions Rajasthan dropped to sixth with a game left in the league stage after their heaviest defeat in the T20 tournament.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Siraj struck first to dismiss

Yashasvi Jaiswal, who hit the fastest IPL fifty in 13 balls against Kolkata on Thursday, for a duck.

The rest of the batting fell flat in just 10.3 overs, with only Shimron Hetmyer (35) and England import Joe Root (10) managing double figures.

New Zealand's Michael Bracewell and fellow spinner Karn Sharma took two wickets each.

Bangalore's batsmen set up victory after a strong 50-run start by du Plessis and Virat Kohli, who fell for 18 off Indian pace bowler KM Asif.

The in-form Du Plessis, who remains top of the batting chart

with 631 runs, stood firm and formed a key partnership of 69 with Maxwell.

Rajasthan hit back with three wickets in five balls, including Du Plessis after his seventh IPL 50, with Australian leg-spinner Adam Zampa grabbing two of them in one over.

Maxwell raised his fifth 50 of the season with a six but was out in the next over.

Anuj Rawat, a left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman, smashed an unbeaten 29 off 11 balls and finished the innings with two sixes and a four to boost the total on a tough batting pitch. — AFP

Punjab boost play-off hopes, Delhi out

NEW DELHI: Opener Prabhsimran Singh hit his maiden IPL century to set up a 31-run win for Punjab Kings and push Delhi Capitals out of the play-off race on Saturday, while Lucknow Super Giants beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by seven wickets.

Sunrisers batsman Heinrich Klaasen was docked 10 per cent of his match fee for showing dissent after a controversial no-ball call that sparked the home crowd to shout abuse at the Lucknow dug-out.

The match was briefly stopped as the umpires spoke to the Lucknow bench, including an animated coach Andy Flower, whose team moved back into the top four.

In the second game of the day, Punjab kept their play-off hopes alive after Prabhsimran hit 103 off 65 balls and guided his team to 167-7.

Harpreet Brar then returned figures of 4-30 with his left-arm spin as Delhi suffered a collapse

to end on 136-8 despite a strong start from skipper David Warner, who hit 54 off 27 balls.

"The way we brought the game back was amazing," Punjab skipper Shikhar Dhawan said. "Credit goes to the spinners and then the fast bowlers for closing it out."

Punjab moved to sixth in the 10-team table led by holders Gujarat Titans. Delhi remain bottom of the heap and are out of the running.

Warner seemed to have taken the game away with his power hitting but Brar led the spin charge, removing Phil Salt for 21 as Delhi slipped from 69-0 to 88-6.

Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar joined in to trap Mitchell Marsh lbw before Brar struck twice in an over to dismiss Rilee Rossouw and Warner, who registered his 60th IPL fifty.

Warner said his team had "found the right combination" during the tournament after a nightmare start. — AFP



Punjab Kings' Prabhsimran Singh plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match between Delhi Capitals and Punjab Kings at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi. — AFP

Hyderabad look for ray of hope against Gujarat



GT VS SRH AT AHMEDABAD

● **QUALIFICATION**

CRITERIA – Sunrisers Hyderabad are currently at the 9th position with just 8 points. The best that they can reach is 14 points, which is certainly not going to be enough considering their poor NRR. Although, SRH will be counting on that outside chance and hope to win these remaining 3 games and hope the other results go in their favour. While, Gujarat Titans can be considered qualified with them being already at 16 points. Gujarat will be looking to win one of the remaining 2 games and finish in the top 2 spots, that will give them an added advantage in the play-offs.

● **TEAM INFO** – Hyderabad are in a desperate situation and they have taken way too long to get their combination right. Despite the presence of people like Brian Lara, Simon Helmot, Hemang Badani, Muttiah Muralitharan, Ryan Cook and Dale Steyn, they have not been able to get their act right is

questionable for these legends. They invested on Mayank Agarwal and Harry Brook. But now that they have the team sorted, I feel that they can be the ideal spoilsport for all the 3 teams. Gujarat on the other hand have re-defined the way T20 should be played to the world. Sitting on top of the table, they are in an extremely comfortable position.

● **Head-to-Head** - Played — 2; Won by GT – 1; Won by SRH – 1

● **GT possible 12** – W Saha, S Gill, H Pandya, V Shankar, D Miller, A Manohar, R Tewatia, R Khan, M Sharma, N Ahmad, M Shami, A Joseph

● **SRH possible 12** – A Sharma, A Singh, R Tripathi, H Klaasen, A Markram, G Philips, A Samad, T Natarajan, M Markande, B Kumar, F Farooqi, V Sharma

● **Pitch & Weather Report** – The previous game at the venue saw a run feast with an aggregate of almost 400 runs achieved in the game. Batters have always had an advantage at this venue for quality shot making. With slightly longer boundaries, bowlers would also stay in the game. With the temperature being between 29 and 41 degrees, expect dew to play a role later in the evening. Average score here is 170.

● **Match Prediction** – Bowling has been the biggest concern for



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Abhishek Sharma (R) celebrates with Glenn Phillips after taking a catch to dismiss Lucknow Super Giants' Quinton de Kock during the Indian Premier League match between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Lucknow Super Giants at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Hyderabad. — AFP

Sunrisers Hyderabad. Wickets are extremely important to slow the momentum of the opponent and that's exactly what the experienced bowling line-up of Hyderabad hasn't been able to do. Moving currently on trial and error, Hyderabad will need Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mayank Markande to stand up tall. All said

and done, I feel that Gujarat Titans is just the perfectly balanced team and they are in some incredible momentum. They should be too good for a struggling Hyderabad team.

FAN COMMENTS

● "I am a Pakistani, while my husband is from India. My

son was born in Australia and daughter was born in New Zealand. And together, we live in this wonderful land of Oman. We all love cricket as a sport and surely, we follow it very closely. I feel that, my team Gujarat Titans are going to crush my husband's hometown Hyderabad and then he is going to cook special Hyderabad Chicken Biryani for us on the weekend." – **Fathima Sheikh, 32, Senior Business Analyst & Branding Advisor, Indo-Pak.**

● "My 3 children and 11 of their friends (both boys and girls) have together joined a cricket coaching centre after following this sports page in Oman Observer. It's wonderful to seeing them watching learning videos and discussing about this new sport. I feel that Oman Observer should do a 10–15-day course teaching the rules of this sport." – **Haitham al Amri, 46, Football Coach and Trainer, Omani.**

● "We also like many others took our children to learn cricket at academy, but its like Barka market. Why isn't this sport taught in school and there should be more academies with good rules. There should be a limit on the number of children allowed per session. I understand that its vacation season, but

its not healthy like this." – **Dr Salim Mahmood al Fikri, 41, Dermatologist, Omani.**

● "I hate this time of IPL. How can one like a time like this where the entire family gets together to watch a stupid sport, which raises the blood pressure and there is screaming and celebrations and cheers which can be heard down the street. Listening to the noise, neighbours also come and they all also join in and then there is massive party. Jokes apart, I totally love these 2 months of festive season, where I am actually able to bond and celebrate together." – **Rahima Suleiman, Mother of 4 kids, Housewife, Indian.**

Send us your comment for next day's match before 12 noon on WhatsApp on '+968 78795978' and the best comments will be included in our article. Thirty words on the team that you support, full name, designation, age, nationality.

You could post your views and questions on our social media handles and we will pick the best question in our future articles, Twitter — @OmanObserver @PranavMehtaOman or Instagram — @OmanObserver @pranav_mehta_18. Don't forget to use the #OOIPL2023 for better reach.

Man Utd near Champions League return

SOUTHAMPTON RELEGATED AFTER DEFEAT TO FULHAM



Manchester United's Aaron Wan-Bissaka in action with Wolverhampton Wanderers' Hugo Bueno. – Reuters

MANCHESTER: Manchester United edged closer to a return to the Champions League next season with a 2-0 win over Wolves as Southampton were relegated from the Premier League on Saturday.

Newcastle remain ahead of United on goal difference in third after being held 2-2 in a pulsating game as Sam Allardyce picked up his first point at Leeds manager.

United have stumbled towards a top-four finish in recent weeks after an exhausting season that will stretch to 62 games.

Erik ten Hag's men had won just two of their previous eight games from open play in all competitions.

But they shrugged off the absence of Marcus Rashford due to injury for a vital three points.

Wolves were welcome visitors at Old Trafford as the Premier League's lowest scorers rarely troubled the under-fire David de Gea.

Scoring goals has also been a problem for the Red Devils of late but Antony squared for Anthony Martial to slam home on 32 minutes.

Alejandro Garnacho then came off the bench to secure the points deep into stoppage time.

Newcastle and Manchester United are now four points clear of fifth-placed

Liverpool with three games to go.

Leeds close to within one point of safety, but that gap could grow if Everton shock leaders Manchester City on Sunday.

AWONIYI FIRES FOR FOREST

Nottingham Forest remain three points clear of the relegation zone after their own four-goal thriller at Chelsea ended 2-2.

Taiwo Awoniyi's bullet header opened the scoring for the visitors.

Raheem Sterling's quickfire double turned the game around in seven second-half minutes.

But Awoniyi had the final say as he

headed in once more from a long throw for his fourth goal in a week that could prove vital to keeping Forest up on their return to the top flight for the first time in 23 years.

Southampton's 11-year stay in the Premier League, though, is over after a meek 2-0 home defeat by Fulham summed up the Saints' season.

Carlos Vinicius and Aleksandar Mitrovic, on his return from an eight-game ban for pushing a referee, got the goals which moved Fulham up to ninth.

Defeat leaves Southampton still eight points adrift of safety with just two games remaining.

In the battle for a place in the Europa League next season, Aston Villa beat Tottenham 2-1 to move level on points with Spurs in sixth.

Jacob Ramsey gave Unai Emery's men an early lead and they were cruising to victory when Douglas Luiz curled home a free-kick 18 minutes from time.

Harry Kane's late penalty halved Tottenham's arrears, but their hopes of Champions League football next season are now mathematically over.

Eberechi Eze scored twice as Crystal Palace continued their revival under Roy Hodgson with a 2-0 win over Bournemouth. — AFP

Newcastle, Leeds drop valuable points

ANDY JALIL
LEEDS, MAY 14

In their current positions in the Premier League both Newcastle and Leeds could have done with maximum points from this game. With Manchester United on equal points with Newcastle and Liverpool just behind them, all three teams are looking for Champions League qualification. Whereas Leeds would have been lifted out of the relegation zone with a win but had to settle for a 2-2 result.

The match was interrupted by an incident shortly before the end when a spectator came on to the ground confronting, abusing and pushing the Newcastle manager Eddie Howe on the chest. This was a serious incident with regard

to safety and a shaken Howe said: "No one should have to feel their own personal safety is violated. It is something for us to reflect on. He confronted me, he said something that I can't repeat."

Howe added: "I'm okay but moments like that make you think. The safety of the staff and players is paramount. Security is so important." Howe's own staff quickly intervened and he added: "I don't know if I had time to be fearful, to be honest because it was over in a flash. I'm glad someone was there because I wouldn't have fancied my chances to be honest."

Leeds club issued a statement: "Leeds can confirm that following an incident at our Premier League match against Newcastle United today, an arrest has been made, and

a lifetime ban has been issued."

In this enthralling match Leeds took the lead after just seven minutes when goalkeeper Nick Pope saved Rodrigo's header from a cross by Patrick Bamford but pushed into the path of Luke Ayling who lifted the ball into the net. Leeds could have doubled the lead in the 28th minute when Junior Firpo was fouled in the box but the resulting weak penalty kick from Bamford was easily saved by Pope, diving to his right.

Three minutes later, Newcastle were on equal terms when Alexander Isak picked up a pass from Bruno Guimaraes but before he could shoot, Max Wober crashed into him to give away a penalty which was converted by Wilson, low to the goalkeeper's right.

The second half was intense, both

sides realising what was at stake with their positions in the league. Leeds brought on two substitutes while Guimaraes was booked for a foul and later Firpo too, for his tackle to bring down Guimaraes.

Newcastle went into the lead in the 69th minute from yet another penalty after Firpo tried to stop a cross from Joe Willock from reaching Isak and his arm hit the high ball. Wilson again took the spot kick and this time sent it straight down the middle into the net.

However, the lead lasted only ten minutes when Leeds drew level with a shot from Rasmus Kristensen going in off Kieran Trippier's head. Just before the end, Leeds were down to 10 men as Firpo was sent off for dragging down Anthony Gordon.



Leeds United's Luke Ayling in action with Newcastle's Allan Saint-Maximin. – Reuters

CHAIRMAN’S STATEMENT Q1 2023



Our Values

Safety | ESG | Respect | Vision | Integrity | Caring | Empowerment



On behalf of the Board of Directors, I present the audited accounts for Renaissance Services SAOG for the first quarter ended March 31, 2023.

While lower occupancy at Renaissance Village Duqm (RSVD) has impacted our performance in the first quarter as compared to Q1 2022 (which included a few one-off transactions that positively affected profitability), results across the rest of our verticals have shown a healthy uptrend.

We have successfully bid and recalibrated rates for contracts in 2022 that are yielding positive results in 2023. This helped us improve our order book backlog by 90 percent to RO112 mn as of Q1 2023, compared to the corresponding previous year period.

Also, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) price index has come down compared to the same period last year, the impact of which will further boost performance in the coming months.

We continue to remain positive on RSVD occupancy despite a timing gap related to the mobilisation of major infrastructure projects like steel, cement and roadways to green hydrogen and petrochemicals, and we expect to have clarity on potential requirements on all these projects in the third quarter of 2023.

Whilst we expect RSVD occupancy to rebound in full in 2024, the combined effect of new contracts, contract recalibrations, cost optimisation, Renaissance 2.0 and Operational Excellence initiatives, provides a positive outlook for the upcoming three quarters.

Financial Performance
RS Consolidated

	RO Million		USD Million	
	Q1 2023	Q1 2022	Q1 2023	Q1 2022
Revenue	26.82	29.90	69.66	77.66
EBITDA	5.81	7.05	15.09	18.31
Operating profit	3.84	5.14	9.97	13.35
Net profit after tax	2.82	4.10	7.32	10.65
Net profit after non-controlling interest	2.71	3.47	7.04	9.01

Performance

In keeping with our commitment to transform as an organisation under the Renaissance 2.0 programme, we are working on several operational excellence initiatives along with a focus on reengineering our cost structure.

We have redoubled our efforts to streamline operations and contract compliance to remain ahead of the curve in terms of service delivery to our customers. Real-time monitoring of contracts ensures both operational efficiency and on-track financial performance, with agility and adaptability being key to sustained growth. Proactive cost-optimisation measures and operational excellence projects that began in 2022 also helped soften the impact of short-term lulls in demand (as at RSVD), along with building a smarter, more efficient operation for the future.



We continue our investment in people as we add to the strength of our top management to develop strategic high-potential markets and businesses in Oman and the GCC. We entered Qatar with the delivery of a one-off prestigious catering contract in Q4 2022 and are currently engaged in exploring one of the fastest growing economies in the world, Saudi Arabia (KSA). Renaissance has proven capabilities in delivering workforce accommodation on a DBOOM/T model, which will be required as new mega projects are being constructed, in addition to IFM and waste management opportunities in KSA. Within Oman, we are actively pursuing long-term infrastructure and asset management projects in partnership with leading international sector experts.

Renaissance Village Duqm

An organisational restructure within the Operations team saw key members assume larger roles at RSVD to drive operational efficiency and maximise capabilities for enhanced service delivery to current and prospective clients.

In the hiatus before the commissioning of new projects and workforce mobilisation at Duqm, we have undertaken various cost management initiatives at RSVD including, but not limited to, building/room reassignment and consolidation, rationalising manpower, savings in finance cost by term loan prepayment and warehouse consolidation.



Operational Excellence

Operational excellence is an enabler for the larger objectives aligned with Renaissance 2.0 where business growth and customer satisfaction will continue to be delivered through a combination of smart strategy deployment, process excellence, high-performing collaborative teams, and innovation.

Renaissance has adopted a multi-pronged approach to fast-track its operational excellence agenda, which is expected to deliver an estimated annual savings of approximately RO1.2mn.



A reputed international consultant was engaged in Q4 2022 to conduct a third-party current-state assessment of operations and present a data-driven solutions framework. In Q1 2023, the process of developing standardised industry benchmarks to reevaluate various operational parameters is underway that will enable a data-driven, analytical approach to business development and delivery.

Additionally, best practice initiatives by staff, several of which are based on Lean Six Sigma methodologies, have either been successfully piloted or are being scaled for rollout.

ESG

Renaissance operates in a regional and national context where growing social, economic and environmental concerns require concerted efforts through innovation and digitalisation, partnerships and targeted solutions. Our focus at the Board level is to facilitate effective ESG governance that will enable the organisation to achieve significant growth by enhancing business efficiency and reputational gains. This will also help us establish a unique market position through sustainability leadership.



Sustainability

Renaissance's commitment to sustainability underpins the values and purpose upon which we drive continuous improvement in service, standards, performance and growth.

Our Net Zero goals are underlined by the shift towards greener and renewable energy sources and sustainable changes in how facilities are managed on a day-to-day basis without compromising on guest experience and welfare. The partnership with SOURCE to bring the world's first premium renewable drinking water to RSVD is on track for on-ground implementation. Measures being currently implemented at Renaissance Villages are aimed at delivering long-term energy and resource efficiency with minimal or zero impact to the environment.

CSR

We view Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as an opportunity to make meaningful contributions that empower communities, build capabilities and create a safer and greener living environment. We continue to support the Environment Society of Oman to inculcate environmental stewardship in children and building skills of young Omanis with Outward Bound Oman. Local volunteering programmes, charitable causes, as well as encouraging local and regional sporting talent are commitments that Renaissance is proud of.

Additionally, the company is helping local communities across the wilayats of the Northern Batinah region to save lives and injury in road traffic accidents, while protecting camels from vehicle hits by sponsoring over 10,500 reflective collars for this valued livestock that holds a special place in Omani and Arab culture. Accessibility and inclusion projects have been earmarked to support Oman's efforts towards offering more options for the physically impaired.



Tribute

We express our thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham. His Majesty's steady, reform-driven and purposeful approach has successfully brought confidence and optimism while creating a platform for local and international investment in the sultanate. We pledge our support to this vision to drive economic diversification and growth.



Samir J. Fancy
Chairman

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT 31 st MARCH 2023		
	2023 Rial '000	2022 Rial '000
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	136,846	142,053
Intangible assets	1,928	1,945
Investments	5,946	5,320
	<u>144,720</u>	<u>149,318</u>
Current assets	71,413	78,048
Current liabilities	49,822	52,124
Non-current liabilities		
Term loans excluding current maturities	62,063	76,983
Non-current payables and advance	10,367	10,448
	<u>72,430</u>	<u>87,431</u>
Net assets	93,881	87,811
Equity		
Share capital	23,641	23,641
Treasury shares	(6,853)	(6,853)
Share premium	26,936	26,936
Legal reserve	9,012	8,831
Subordinated loan reserve	-	1,500
Other reserves	478	537
Retained earnings	19,398	11,563
	<u>72,612</u>	<u>66,155</u>
Non-controlling interest	21,269	21,656
Total equity	93,881	87,811

CONSOLIDATED STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS FOR THE THREE MONTHS ENDED 31 st MARCH 2023		
	2023 Rial '000	2022 Rial '000
Revenue	26,824	29,899
Operating expenses	(22,988)	(24,763)
Profit from operations	3,836	5,136
Net finance costs	(995)	(1,209)
Profit before tax	2,841	3,927
Tax	(17)	172
Profit for the period	2,824	4,099
Net profit attributable to :-		
Shareholders of the Parent Company	2,712	3,468
Non-controlling interest	112	631
	<u>2,824</u>	<u>4,099</u>

Note:
1) The complete accounts will be sent by mail to shareholders within 7 days of receipt of request.
2) The complete set of financial results can be accessed at www.renaissanceservices.com



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Oman Flour Mills expands presence in food sector

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Oman Flour Mills (OFM) and its investment arm, Atyab Investments, are pressing ahead with the implementation of a number of initiatives to strengthen its leading role in the domestic food sector, as well as support national food security objectives.

Ahmed bin Ali al Balushi, Chairman — Board of Directors, said multiple projects are being evaluated across the group. The projects focus on integration across the value chain as well as diversification into new ventures, he added in the Directors' Report for Q1 2023.

Significantly, OFM plans to build on its successful import of grain from Australian growers. In March, the group's Australian subsidiary, OMAUS Ltd, marked



the maiden shipment of a 34,728 metric tonne consignment of grain sourced directly from

Australian farmers. "Since the company achieved significant savings from the

transaction, it will continue the efforts to expand the operations," said the Chairman.

FOLLOWING THE RELAUNCH OF ITS AL KHAMAYIL DAIRY BRAND WITH THE REINTRODUCTION OF LABAN PRODUCTS, THE GROUP IS NOW FOCUSED ON THE COMMISSIONING OF ITS NEW STATE-OF-THE-ART FACTORY AT RUSAYL IN MUSCAT GOVERNORATE

With regard to its pipeline of new projects, OFM has announced the appointment of a consultant to support the development of its Mini-Factories project.

The consultant's role is to assemble a "portfolio of projects to be developed within the cluster", the Chairman said.

Following the relaunch of its Al Khamayil dairy brand with the reintroduction of laban products, the Group is now focused on the commissioning of its new state-of-the-art factory at Rusayl in Muscat

Governorate.

At the same time, civil works on the Group's pre-mix plant and feed mill expansion are on track and progressing as per plan, Al Balushi stated. In addition to its domestic growth plans, Atyab Food Industries is also looking to expand overseas. The company is exploring opportunities to set up additional facilities in the GCC region.

Publicly-trade OFM reported a profit of RO 604K for the first quarter of 2023, which represents an increase of 13 per cent from the same period last year. The company's profit was driven by a number of factors, including: Increased sales volume, Increased sales prices, Cost savings from the company's new factory in Rusayl, and Improved operational efficiency, the report added.

Omantel, Zain launch new international JV

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 14



Zain, a leading telecommunications operator providing digital and ICT services in seven markets across the Middle East and Africa, and Omantel, Oman's leading integrated telecommunications services provider, have announced the launch of 'Zain Omantel International' (ZOI), a joint venture that will establish itself as the Middle East's premier international wholesale services provider.

ZOI signifies a substantial advancement in the telecommunications industry and is poised to become a global powerhouse due to Zain's extensive regional presence and success in the retail and digital arenas, combined with Omantel's exceptional wholesale capabilities and comprehensive international subsea and terrestrial networks.

The joint venture will cater to the end-to-end telecommunications needs of operators in the Middle East, as well as international carriers, data centres, hyperscalers, content, and cloud providers seeking services within the region and beyond.

As a result, ZOI will manage all international wholesale requirements of Zain and Omantel operations in eight countries, serving over 55 million customers.

Furthermore, ZOI will optimise the existing wholesale businesses of both companies by reducing operating costs and increasing competitiveness through access to state-of-the-art low-latency and high-capacity services over its extended footprint.

Bader al Kharafi, Zain Vice-Chairman and Group CEO commented, "This strategic value-enhancing partnership reflects the next stage of industry collaboration and advancement, and represents another significant milestone of our '4Sight' profitable growth strategy.

It also demonstrates our commitment to transforming the business and creating synergies while extending our reach and capabilities to provide the highest quality services to our customers."

Talal al Maamari (pictured), Omantel CEO, added, "The joint

venture with Zain is a testament to our unwavering commitment to transforming the international arm of Omantel group into a leading global provider, building on our existing position as a top regional wholesale player.

ZOI is poised to become the primary gateway from our region to the rest of the world, leveraging the combined strengths of Omantel and Zain. With these differentiating factors, ZOI is the preferred partner with a truly unique presence in the international telecommunications landscape."

ZOI, in collaboration with the Omantel and Zain Group operating companies, will ensure that Zain and Omantel customers continue to experience supreme quality in international services such as Internet connectivity, voice, roaming, messaging and more.

Some noteworthy projects that ZOI will undertake, along with its consortium partners include the development of Blue-Raman; Africa-1; Jeddah to Marseille (J2M) subsea systems and an extensive terrestrial network connecting most of the regional countries to the landing stations and data centres.

Such high-profile projects, to name a few, will create an ecosystem that is unrivalled in the region. Sohail Qadir, CEO of newly established ZOI, said: "The region has matured in terms of the scope and consumption of reliable wholesale services, and this strategic partnership in this integral part of the telecommunications business is well-timed to capitalise on global trends.

I look forward to leading ZOI in delivering differentiated services to regional and international customers alike, and providing increased value and enhanced customer-experience to all associated stakeholders across our extensive operational footprint."

Oman Airports unveils 5-year roadmap for strategic growth



ON THE ANVIL: Single Token Identity Journey initiative; TRANSOM Handling/Cargo SATS divestment; Solar scheme at Salalah Airport; Fixed Base Operator Terminal; Phased development of Suhar Airport facilities; Airport City Gates; and Privatisation strategy

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 14

Oman Airports has outlined a corporate roadmap for the implementation of a number of strategic projects and initiatives designed to strengthen the positioning of Oman's aviation sector as a key enabler of airline travel, tourism, air-logistics, e-commerce, private aeronautical services, airport city developments and national economic growth in general.

A five-year 'Corporate Strategy 2027 & Financial Capital' roadmap, spanning the 2023 – 2027 timeframe, also envisions a goal to privatise Oman Airports, the state-owned enterprise — part

of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — noted in its latest Annual Report for 2022.

Key highlights are as follows:

SHORT TERM:

- Rollout of Phase 1 of Single Token Journey Initiative: Increasing adopted by leading international airports around the world, the initiative seeks to offer a seamless travel experience by enabling passengers to pass through various checkpoints from check-in to boarding using their biometrics.
- A 'single-token' digital identity will be created at check-in by matching a passenger's biometrics and passport. This improves the airport experience by reducing the need for repetitive travel document checks and queuing time.
- Launch of Logistics Gate (Phase 1): A key building block of a future Airport City & Free Zone Cluster at Muscat International Airport, the Logistics Gate will support the growth of air cargo services and e-commerce.
- Other goals: Signing of concession agreements for Muscat and Salalah International Airport; Oman Airports'

TRANSOM Handling/Cargo SATS divestment; and Implementation of In-Country Value programmes;

MEDIUM TERM:

- Implementation of the Airport Collaborative Decision-Making (ACDM) project at Muscat International Airport; 3MW solar power project at Salalah Airport; Launch of Hold Baggage System with Computerised Tomography scanning technology at Salalah; Plan Fixed Base Operator (FBO) Terminal hosting the facilities of private businesses licensed to provide aeronautical services for aircraft, passengers, and crew, typically for private and recreational flying.
- Infrastructure work for the Logistics Gate (Phase 2); Masterplan and Infrastructure Design of Airport City at Muscat International Airport; Construction of new Passenger Terminal Building at Suhar Airport; Construction of new Perishable Centre at Muscat International; and refurbishment work at Old Muscat terminal building

LONG-TERM:

- Oman Airports has identified six revenue-related initiatives: Development of Aviation Gate Muscat; Construction of new Cargo

Building at Suhar Airport; Infrastructure development work at Suhar Airport City; Development of Hospitality Gate at Muscat; and Rollout of Phase 2 of Single Token Journey Initiative.

- Key enablers for Oman Airports over this period include the privatisation of Oman Airports, and the ongoing development of the new Training Facility; and Development of Business Gate Muscat.

Oman Airports Management Company SAOC oversees a portfolio of seven airports comprising the international airports in Muscat and Salalah, regional airports in Suhar, Duqm and the three airports of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) in Marmul, Qarn Alam and Fahud.

Revenue generated during 2022 totalled RO 86.3 million, up from RO 57.8 million in 2021. Operating costs totalled RO 60.2 million for the year (exclusive of licence fees), compared to RO 52.7 million in 2021. The company recorded EBITDA of RO 19.4 million in 2022 as against RO 2.5 million in 2021.

Net profit amounted to RO 12.8 million for 2022, up from RO 1.0 million in 2021.



OBA holds financial inclusion campaign in Musandam

MUSCAT: The Oman Banks Association (OBA) organised an event in Khasab on May 11, 2023 for the Omani Women's Associations in the Governorate of Musandam.

This comes as part of the annual financial inclusion campaign that OBA organises under the guidance of the Central Bank of Oman with various activities and seminars held across the Sultanate of Oman aimed at enhancing financial awareness covering different segments of society.

This year, OBA continues focusing on an important segment in society and the role of Omani women in building civilised societies and their contribution to sustainable social development as part of the Oman Vision 2040.



The event started with an illustration provided by Marah

al Lawati from OBA on financial inclusion and the role of the

Oman Banks Association and the Omani banking sector in the field

of economic development. This was followed by a presentation by Samiha al Balushi from HSBC Oman covering a wide range of topics relating to savings, investments, financial management and financial stability.

The event concluded with an interactive discussion session by the audience and bank representatives.

Marwa al Zadjali, Projects and Events Manager at the Oman Banks Association stated, "The Financial Inclusion Annual Campaign comes as part of the efforts made by the Oman Banks Association to promote financial culture and awareness among different segments of the society especially the women.

Other activities under this campaign include podcast, radio interviews, social media posts, social media quizzes, lectures to college and university students, editorials, and press releases.

Financial Inclusion aims that individuals and businesses have easy access to affordable financial products that serve their needs. It promotes social justice and economic development and creates jobs in the economy".

Oman Banks Association is a non-profit professional association created to represent the banking sector, promote Omani banking activities, coordinate with regulators on matters of policy and strategy, and support banking excellence in Oman.

Al Ahlia Insurance announces winners of 'Insure & Win' campaign

MUSCAT: Al Ahlia Insurance Company, a leading insurer in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the names of the lucky winners of its recently concluded Ramadhan campaign, 'Insure & Travel'.

Held on March 23 to April 27, 2023, the campaign affirms the company's endeavours in enhancing the overall customers experience, as well as bringing the winning experience to its valued customers.

As per the campaign, customers who purchase a new or renew their motor insurance policy during Ramadhan through any of Al Ahlia channels: branches, agents, call centre or online website were eligible to enter the draw.

The lucky winners stood a chance to win exciting prizes like travel package for two people to Malaysia, Azerbaijan or Georgia. They also won a luxurious stay,

food vouchers from Crowne Plaza (Sohar, Salalah, OCEC) or Dusit D2, Naseem Resort, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

The prize draw was conducted in the presence of representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Hana al Hinai CEO of Al Ahlia Insurance Company, along with a number of representatives from the company.

These draws witnessed 5 winners won international packages for two, while 21 winners were given hotel stay, food vouchers from selected luxurious hotels. The campaign ensured it provides a unique insurance experience while offering customers more chances to win. Commenting on the campaign, Hana al Hinai, CEO of Al Ahlia Insurance Company, said: "We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all

the lucky winners and appreciate their continuous support and trust for Al Ahlia Insurance services.

The recent edition of the campaign has witnessed a great turnout of audience. Contributing to fulfil the aspirations and ever-changing needs of our customers, we remain committed to providing an unmatched insurance experience to our loyal customers, as well as enhancing their chances of winning through our on-going innovative campaigns and thoughtful initiatives."

With a focus on enhancing customers journey, Al Ahlia Insurance is committed to developing innovative solutions and fully digitised processes to ensure facilitating insurance procedures and enable customers to make the best use of various products and services that the company offers.

International food additives safety summit opens in Muscat today

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MAY 14

A safety summit centring on food additives opens at the Grand Hyatt Muscat Hotel today, May 15, 2023. Organised in partnership by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the University of Michigan, and the Gulf Standardisation Organisation (GSO), this summit aims to foster international collaboration and establish robust standards for food additives.

Bringing together esteemed experts from around the world, the summit will delve into crucial aspects of food safety to facilitate global coordination on regulations and standards pertaining to food additives.

Notable attendees include legislative and regulatory authorities, representatives from the commercial and industrial sectors, consumer



protection associations, as well as experts from ministries such as agriculture and Commerce.

With a comprehensive agenda, the summit will cover a wide range of topics, emphasising the following key areas: Global coordination and adherence to international regulations on food additives; Valuable insights from the Codex Committee on Food Additives; and Technical regulations and standards specific to food additives in the Gulf region.

The collaborative partnership between the public and private sectors in developing resilient food safety systems for food additives.

This premier event provides an unparalleled platform for participants to exchange knowledge, share best practices, and strategise on ensuring the safety of food additives. It underscores the importance of international collaboration in safeguarding consumer health.

Proverbs offer a reminder for sustainability



MATT MINSHALL

A proverb is a simple and insightful, traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth based on common sense or experience. Over two thousand years ago the Greek philosopher Zeno said: The goal of life is living in agreement with nature.

Nature understood that too much exposed carbon would destroy her work. So she placed it into places of safekeeping in the ground and the seas allowing all flora and fauna to live healthily.

Mankind's ignorance and greed has allowed the carbon to escape, to the detriment of all. Ancient proverbs show that much we have learnt from nature about a sustainable world has been forgotten, but which may be learnt before it is too late.

Nature has finally retaught mankind that to survive it must put the carbon back where it can do less harm. But only a rapid move to a sustainable world can hope to redress this self-destruction.

Sustainability in all things from water and food, through housing and shelter, to industry and the economy must be managed in a manner which at least allows parity of give and take between humanity and nature.

Oman is a leader of the move towards sustainability which was showcased at Oman Sustainability Week in March this year and aims to be an even greater event in 2024. Oman's current and future ideas are encompassed in the Oman Vision 2040 of which one of the Pillars is "an environment with sustainable components".

The importance of water is key in sustainability and there is an Omani proverb which says, "Live near water and worry not of sustenance".

There are many lessons from nature in this simple saying. Two of the important ones are that



Wadi Bani Khalid: Beauty and power of nature in an arid land

first water is the most important aspect of life, and second that it is better to live where the water is than attempting to override nature by taking water to where you wish to be.

Over five hundred years ago Leonardo Da Vinci said, "water is the driving force of all nature".

The expression "give a man a fish..." originated in Britain in the mid-19th century when Anne Isabella Ritchie, the daughter of

William Makepeace Thackeray, wrote this line in Mrs Dymond: "He certainly doesn't practise his precepts, but I suppose the patron meant that if you give a man a fish he is hungry again in an hour; if you teach him to catch a fish you do him a good turn."

The common sense here appears twofold. First is that to be efficient you must look ahead and second that teaching is a vital aspect of development.

More important than the act of teaching is of course the learning.

"The acquisition of knowledge is from the cradle to the grave". Humanity must once again seek all knowledge of value rather than that of flimflam.

A lack of sustainability in the human world has created a crisis of dire consequence.

Crises often affect people without them knowing the causes, and a lack of awareness is



Cobweb Water: Water droplets from mist trapped by a spider's web (© Matt Minshall)

not compatible with the need for preparation and action.

Proverbs show that all that is needed for a sustainable world has been signposted by nature and understood by those willing to learn. We need to widen the teaching and apply the knowledge. Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better: Albert Einstein.

[The author is the Owner and Founder of Mayamn, a project which aims to provide clean water sustainably and is currently engaged in this project for Oman. Email: matt305@translucidus.co.uk]

Protecting your assets: A guide to intellectual property for entrepreneurs



KAMLA SAID
AL RAHBIYAH
kamlaa2040@gmail.com

The author is a renowned coach, trainer and consultant.

As a modern entrepreneur or business owner, protecting your ideas and innovations is crucial to the success and growth of your venture. This is where the concept of intellectual property (IP) comes into play. Intellectual property refers to creations of the mind, such as inventions, trademarks, and literary and artistic works that have economic value. In today's digital age, where ideas and innovations are easily accessible, it's important to have a clear understanding of intellectual property laws and how to protect your assets.

In order to protect your IP, it's important to identify what types of IP your business holds. This can include trademarks for logos and brand names, patents for inventions, copyrights for literary and artistic works, and trade secrets for confidential business information. Once you have a clear understanding of your IP, you can take steps to protect it, such as registering trademarks and patents, and implementing confidentiality agreements for trade secrets. One of the key aspects of protecting your IP is understanding the difference between registering a trademark, patent, or copyright. A trademark provides protection for logos, brand names, and slogans, while a patent provides protection for new and useful inventions or discoveries. A copyright provides protection for literary and artistic works, such as songs, books, and films. It's important to also be aware of the infringement of your IP. Infringement occurs when someone else uses your IP without your permission. This can include using a similar trademark, copying a patented invention, or using a copyrighted work without permission. To prevent infringement, it's important to monitor your IP and take legal action when necessary. In addition to protecting your

IP, it's important to also consider licensing and collaboration agreements. Licensing agreements allow you to grant permission to others to use your IP in exchange for royalties or other compensation. Collaboration agreements allow you to work with others to jointly develop and commercialise IP. To ensure that your IP is protected and your business is positioned for success, it's important to seek legal counsel. An intellectual property attorney can help you navigate the complexities of IP laws, advise you on protecting your assets, and handle any disputes that may arise. In conclusion, protecting your intellectual property is essential for the success and growth of your business in the modern entrepreneurial landscape. It's important to identify what types of IP your business holds, take steps to protect it, and seek legal counsel when necessary. By understanding and effectively managing your intellectual property, you'll be positioning your business for long-term success. *Are you eager to learn more about how to strategically plan and position your business for growth in the modern era? In our next article, we will delve into the world of strategic planning and explore the guide to strategic planning for the modern entrepreneur.*

Biden's power plant proposal poses huge test for carbon capture

VALERIE VOLCOVICI AND
TIMOTHY GARDNER

The Biden administration's plan to decarbonise the US power sector envisions the first-ever large-scale use of carbon capture and green hydrogen over the next decade — raising questions about whether the climate-fighting technologies can rise to the challenge. The issue could emerge as a legal vulnerability for the plan, one of President Joe Biden's biggest steps in his strategy to combat global warming, as fossil fuel companies and their representatives explore challenging it in court on the basis the technologies are unproven. A similar effort to clean up the power industry by the Obama White House in 2015 was hung up by legal challenges and ultimately repealed. The Environmental Protection Agency's new proposal, announced on Thursday, sets carbon emissions standards for power plants that would push many to either install carbon capture equipment (CCS) that can siphon the carbon dioxide from a plant's smokestack, or use super-low-emissions hydrogen — made by electrolysis using renewable energy sources like solar and wind — as a fuel. If it works, the plan would put the US on track to reach net-zero emissions from the power sector by 2035, according to the White House. But industry representatives are pushing back hard. "The proposal raises a number of critical legal questions, including whether EPA has the authority to force the use of technologies that are not economically or technically feasible for widespread use," said Michelle Bloodworth, president and CEO of America's Power, which represents utilities that burn coal. Jeff Holmstead, a lobbyist at Houston-based Bracwell LLC who formerly ran the EPA's air office during the Bush

administration, said betting on carbon capture is risky. "There isn't a single commercial-scale gas-fired power plant anywhere in the US — or as far as I know, anywhere in the world — that uses CCS to control its emissions," he said. "This fact alone could make it hard for EPA to convince the courts that CCS has been adequately demonstrated." EPA officials and some environmental groups say the rule was designed to withstand legal challenges because it focuses on available technologies that can be applied directly at power plants, and because Congress affirmed the agency's authority to impose technology-based carbon standards. They add that the Inflation Reduction Act, Biden's centrepiece climate legislation, offers billions in new tax credits and incentives that make CCS and clean hydrogen economically feasible. "As I've understood it, the main issue with scaling has long been economic and the economics have changed," said Michael Burger, the executive director of Columbia Law Schools' Sabin Center for Climate Change Law. Big utility companies, including Southern Company, CenterPoint Energy Inc, declined to comment on the feasibility of the technologies. The Edison Electric Institute, which represents the US utility industry, said it was assessing the plan. In its 651-page proposal, the EPA makes the case for why it considers CCS to be "adequately demonstrated", pointing to several examples of such projects deployed at power plants and industrial facilities in North America. It cited SaskPower's Boundary Dam project in Canada as one that has demonstrated CO2 capture rates of 90 per cent on an existing coal steam generating unit. And it namechecked NET Power, which has a Texas project that would capture nearly all emissions from gas-fired power starting in 2026. — Reuters

Debt and dysfunction in America



MICHAEL R STRAIN

The author, Director of Economic Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author, most recently, of *The American Dream Is Not Dead: (But Populism Could Kill It)* (Templeton Press, 2020).

Is American politics so dysfunctional that the United States government can't even pay its bills on time? That is the central question behind the latest debt-ceiling drama playing out in Washington. So far, efforts to increase the country's borrowing limit suggest the answer could very well be yes. The first sign of dysfunction is that elected officials have only just started talking to each other. The US is barreling toward a catastrophic default next month, and yet President Joe Biden, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, and other congressional leaders did not meet to discuss the situation until May 9, and a second meeting, set for May 12, was postponed. Biden's refusal to negotiate has been another cause for concern. He wants Congress to lift the debt ceiling without any accompanying conditions, including cuts to federal spending. While Biden may be right on the merits, the US system of government does not always settle disputes based on who is right on the merits. It has long been clear that the Republican majority in the House of Representatives is unwilling to pass a "clean" increase in the borrowing limit. They want conditions attached. On May 6, 43 Republican senators released a letter stating that they would not vote to increase the debt ceiling "without substantive spending and budget reforms." Biden may have assumed that the Republicans wouldn't be organised enough to coalesce around a coherent set of demands. To be sure, the House Republicans are chaotic,



THE LATEST DEBT-CEILING DRAMA PLAYING OUT IN WASHINGTON IS MORE WORRYING THAN USUAL. EVEN IF PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN AND CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICANS COME TO TERMS, THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL DAMAGE COULD BE SEVERE, ESPECIALLY IF THE WORLD LOSES PATIENCE WITH A US POLITICAL SYSTEM THAT APPEARS TO LACK ADEQUATE GUARDRAILS.

requiring more than four days and 15 rounds of voting simply to elect a speaker in January. But the House passed a bill over two weeks ago that would raise the debt ceiling, reduce the growth of federal spending, strengthen work requirements in safety-net programmes, and reform energy regulation and permitting, among other provisions. Moreover, Republicans in the Senate have supported the House's efforts and stand firmly behind the debt bill, which should be the basis of negotiations. Biden needs to soften his stance. Also worrisome is the bipartisan agreement not to reduce future spending on Social Security and Medicare. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office expects these two programmes to drive up spending as a share of annual economic output by 0.7 percentage points over the next ten years. But Republicans are focusing on cuts to budget categories that are already projected to shrink, like education, housing assistance, and funding for federal law enforcement. While Republicans are right to rein in those categories of federal spending, they need to match their rhetoric with action — namely, cuts to the programmes

that drive America's debt. Even if Biden and the leaders of the House and Senate can agree on a deal, it still must pass both chambers. McCarthy will have to convince his caucus that it is the best possible outcome. He could most likely wrangle most Republican members, but the minority of chaos agents in the House might go so far as to threaten his speakership if they are dissatisfied with the deal. Of course, signs of political dysfunction can mark a route that ultimately ends in compromise. But such a path must be travelled quickly. Even if Congress and the President raise the debt ceiling in time, waiting until the eleventh hour and flirting with default would have serious economic and financial consequences: a plunging stock market, falling consumer confidence, interest-rate hikes, taxpayers on the hook for billions of dollars in additional interest payments, and the beginnings of a global financial crisis. Financial markets already are beginning to reflect the current lack of progress, with large increases in short-term interest rates. There is even more at stake than that. If Congress and Biden fail to lift the cap before the US runs out of money, it would be another indication that the American political system lacks adequate guardrails. A president refusing to negotiate with Congress over a matter that is urgent and critically important is a sign of failure, as is a speaker whose job could be held hostage by a small minority of his caucus. The corrosion of norms and the lack of seriousness in Washington could unleash an economic disaster. This would follow on the heels of the January 6, 2021, insurrection and all that surrounded it — the first time in American history that a president tried to use his office to prevent the peaceful transfer of power after losing an election. Foreign leaders and global investors would look at the US and see a damning portrait. In this broken system, many elected officials do not respect the results of a presidential election and permit policy and ideological differences to stand in the way of honouring the government's financial obligations. Investors would think harder about allocating capital to US entities, and America's role as a beacon of liberal values — including free markets — would be severely undermined. To whom would the world then turn? There is no obvious candidate. But the absence of a better alternative is a thin reed for national greatness and global economic and political leadership. Sooner or later, it will be gone. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com

Salalah Office

Bakht Al Shihri
92998577
bakht.omandaily@gmail.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadialmeeh@yahoo.com



MUSIC

US singer Kane Brown performs on stage during the iHeartCountry Festival at the Moody Center ATX in Austin, Texas



ENTERTAINMENT

Martial artist Alfred Hsing arrives for the Los Angeles premiere of “Knights of the Zodiac”, at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures in Los Angeles, California



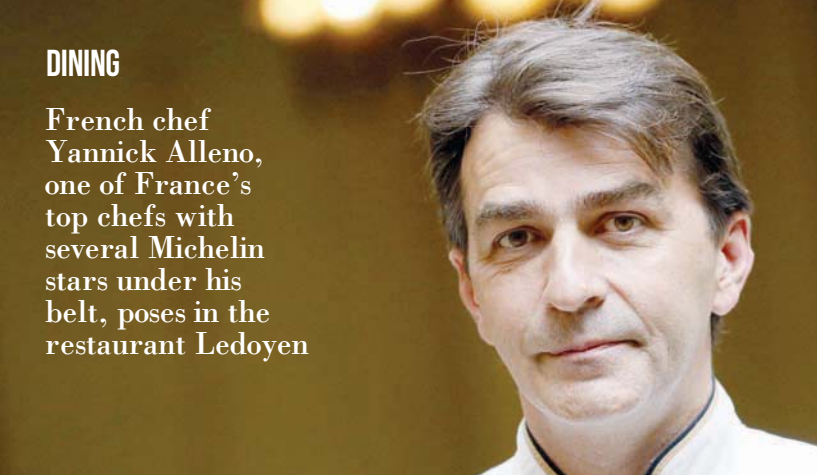
FASHION

Models present creations by A Modo M during Bogota Fashion Week



TRAVEL

A tourist rides a camel along the beach on the Tunisian resort island of Djerba



DINING

French chef Yannick Alleno, one of France's top chefs with several Michelin stars under his belt, poses in the restaurant Ledoyen

art & life

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Sall Al A'lá, the Switzerland of Musandam is a great alternative to khareef

Located about 30 minutes away from the airport, towards the valleys of Khalidiyah, Sall Al A'lá is a small agricultural town peppered with date farms. At the far end of this village is a mini-forest reminiscent of those found in Dhofar during the Khareef season



ENTERTAINMENT

Loreen makes history as Sweden claims seventh Eurovision victory

SWEDEN WON THE Eurovision Song Contest early on Sunday, as singer Loreen beat out 25 competitors in the finale of the world's biggest live music event, hosted by Britain on behalf of war-torn Ukraine.

A previous victor in 2012, Loreen is the first woman to win the eccentric, much-loved competition twice and only the second person to do so after Johnny Logan for Ireland in the 1980s.

It is a record-equalling seventh Eurovision crown for Sweden, and means the Scandinavian nation will host next year's contest on the

50th anniversary of ABBA's win — the country's first — with breakthrough hit “Waterloo”.

Loreen — real name Lorine Talhaoui — told reporters that her victory with dance-pop track, “Tattoo”, felt “surreal” and “so beautiful”, and had left her “seriously overwhelmed”.

Born in Sweden to parents of Moroccan Berber origin, the 39-year-old's win for Sweden over 25 other countries competing in the final was celebrated in her homeland.

“It feels wonderful,” she said. She narrowly triumphed over

Finland's Kaarija after the public and jury votes were combined following an evening of typically eclectic musical acts in Liverpool.

Third place went to Israel, with Noa Kirel's “Unicorn”, as more than 160 million estimated viewers watched on television around the world.

PROUD

Last year's runner-up Britain selected Liverpool — home of The Beatles — to stage the Europop music festival after organisers ruled it was impossible for 2022 victors Ukraine to do so amid Russia's ongoing attack.

During the glittering spectacle in northwest England, reports emerged that Moscow was unleashing a fresh barrage of bombs on Ukraine.

The attack included Ternopil, the hometown of Ukraine's entry this year.

Band Tvorchy were performing electro-pop offering “Heart of Steel”, which was inspired by the siege of the Azovstal plant in Mariupol, as air raid sirens rang out across their city.

“Ternopil... was bombed by Russia while we sang on the Eurovision stage about our steel

hearts, indomitability and will,” the band said on Instagram.

“Europe, unite against evil for the sake of peace!”

Throughout the contest, Britain sought to keep Ukraine front and centre.

Central Liverpool was awash in the yellow and blue of the country's flag while displaced Ukrainians were among the 6,000 fans packed into the M&S Arena host venue.

“It feels like I'm home,” Vasylyna Kindrat, who fled Lviv in December, said as she headed into the water-front arena.

The 25-year-old added she was hoping for victory not in Eurovision “but for the war”.

Earlier, British spectators echoed the sentiment.

“We're supporting Ukraine, our heart is bleeding for them,” said Jenny Birchett, 70, a theatre worker dressed in Ukrainian colours.

“We feel it's theirs, the Eurovision, more than ours,” she added, flanked by her daughter.

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak lauded the “fantastic celebration” shortly after Loreen's win.

“Liverpool, you've done the United Kingdom and Ukraine proud,” he said. —AFP



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By Yeru Ebuen
Instagram: @yru_here

Musandam has always been associated with Norway, aptly earning the monicker "the Norway of the Middle East" because of the beautiful fjords that continue to amaze travellers whenever they visit this governorate well-positioned between the Arabian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Sea of Oman.

A few hours' drive from Dubai or an hour's flight from Muscat, Musandam has been the perfect escape for those wanting to experience the beautiful culture of Oman, made even better by dhow cruises, pristine beaches, and lots of water adventures, including diving, snorkelling, and dolphin watching.

As the capital of the governorate, Khasab is known for its rugged mountains, turquoise waters, and rich marine life. The villages surrounding Khasab are scattered throughout the mountains and along the coast, each with its own distinct charm and character.

Till today, the majority of the conversation revolves around Khasab, Kumzar, and Bukha — all beautiful places with their own unique attractions and identities but there is actually more to Musandam than forts and beaches.

A recent visit to Khasab yielded another discovery. While the waters of Musandam are perfect for beach lovers, on the mountainside, one will also find a wide area that remains green even today. Several online watchers said it reminded them of Switzerland, and by extension, it will probably earn that nickname in the days to come.

Located about 30 minutes away from the airport, towards the valleys of Khalidiyah, Sall Al Ala' is a small agricultural town peppered with date farms. At the far end of this village is a mini-forest reminiscent of those found in Dhofar during the Khareef season.

The most striking feature of the area is the rugged mountain range that serves as a backdrop to the village. The jagged peaks surrounding the mini-forest create a breathtaking view, while the grounds are covered with



yellow and white flowering grasses that become more pronounced and mesmerising during sunset.

The road in Sall Al Ala' branches to the right near the end of the village. From here, wooden posts line the unpaved road that leads to a park that is hidden between the cliffs of the towering mountains on one side and the mini-forest on the other.

A local farmer shared that the village enjoyed torrid rains in the early part of this year, and as a result, the meadows and wadis came to life with grasses and mini-forests turning lush green.

Covering an area the size of Al Khuwair, Sall Al Ala' has actually been popular among the people living in Musandam as a great place for picnics. The park has been installed with facilities that children can use, including swings and see-saws.

For the locals, the place is best enjoyed by the goats, who climb the trees and celebrate the vast supply of grass covering the valley.

For those travelling from Muscat to Musandam, Sall Al Ala' will be perfect for an afternoon hike, with the trees and the roads in between offering the perfect spot for that scenic adventure.

Though far from Switzerland, Sall Al Ala' and Khalidiyah in Khasab will definitely charm every visitor passing through. It is important to note that the lush, green landscape, similar to Dhofar, is only seasonal and greatly depends on the rain. With high temperatures staying longer in the coming days, it won't be long before the lush colour of the surroundings of Sall Al Ala' will give way to summer.

It is something to look forward to, and on your next visit to Musandam, don't miss out on passing through this village.

CONSERVATION

Platypus returns to Australian national park for first time in half a century

THE PLATYPUS, A SPECIES unique to Australia, was reintroduced into the country's oldest national park just south of Sydney on Friday in a landmark conservation project after disappearing from the area more than half a century ago.

Known for its bill, webbed feet, and venomous spurs, the platypus is one of only two egg-laying mammals globally and spends most of its time in the water at night.

Due to its reclusive nature and highly specific habitat needs, most Australians have never seen one in the wild. The relocation is a collaborative effort between the University of New South Wales (UNSW), Taronga



Conservation Society Australia, World Wild Fund for Nature Australia and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Four females were released on Friday into the Royal National Park, which was established in 1879 and is the second oldest national park in the world.

No confirmed platypus sightings have been reported in the park, located about 35 kilometres or one hour's drive south of Sydney, since the 1970s.

The relocation comes at a time when the platypus is increasingly threatened by habitat destruction, river degradation, feral predators, and extreme weather events such as

droughts and bushfires.

Estimates on the current population vary widely, from 30,000 to some 300,000.

"(It is) very exciting for us to see platypuses come back into the park, for a thriving population here to establish themselves and for Sydneysiders to come and enjoy this amazing animal," said Gilad Bino, a researcher from UNSW's Centre for Ecosystem Science.

The platypuses, which live along Australia's east coast and in Tasmania, were collected from various locations across south-eastern New South Wales state and subjected to various tests before relocation. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Johnny Depp signs record-breaking \$20m fragrance deal with Dior

JOHNNY DEPP IS breathing in the sweet smell of success.

The "Pirates of the Caribbean" star has reportedly signed the biggest men's fragrance deal of all time.

Variety cites a source confirming Dior closed a deal with Depp for a three-year deal estimated to be worth a whopping \$20 million. The outlet said the French luxury label did not respond to a request for comment. Depp's handlers also declined.

The veteran actor has been the face of Dior's Sauvage since it launched in 2015. Bernard Arnault, the chief executive of Dior's parent company LVMH, has credited the "image of Johnny Depp" as one of the main reasons why Dior Sauvage has been "a remarkable success."

During the actor's controversial



legal battle with ex-wife Amber Heard, Disney and Warner Bros. pulled the plug on long-term associations with the actor. However, LVMH stood by Depp's side. Commercials and print ads for the popular men's fragrance continued running throughout the highly publicised court proceedings.

Depp successfully sued Heard for defamation over a 2018 *Washington Post* op-ed in which the actress described herself as "a public figure

representing domestic abuse." While Heard didn't specifically mention Depp's name in the piece, she had previously accused him of domestic violence.

Depp's lawsuit claimed that Heard's allegations cost him tens of millions of dollars in lost work.

A Virginia jury decided the "21 Jump Street" star should receive more than \$10 million in damages. Heard was awarded \$2 million in a counterclaim.

The two were married in February 2015 after meeting on the set of 2011's "The Rum Diary." Heard filed for divorce the following year.

After the acrimonious split, the couple were embroiled in various civil lawsuits, including Depp losing a libel case against a British tabloid that referred to him as a "wife beater."

Depp has publicly rebounded quite a bit since his highly publicised legal battles.

Last August, he made a surprise appearance at the MTV Video Music Awards, with his face edited onto a Moon Person hovering above the crowd. In November, he walked the runway as a special guest in Rihanna's Savage X Fenty fashion show.

Last month, it was announced that "Jeanne du Barry," Depp's first film since the Heard trial, would premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on Tuesday, May 16. — [tca/dpa](#)



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MONDAY | MAY 15 | 2023

Winds of change buffet Iran's wooden boat building tradition

IRANIAN CAPTAIN HASSAN Rostam has braved the Strait of Hormuz aboard his lenj for four decades, but now watches with despair as the wooden ships are being replaced by cheaper, faster boats.

The sturdy vessels, built by hand, have sailed Gulf waters for centuries, their potbellied silhouette emblematic of regional maritime traditions like the dhows of the Arabian Peninsula.

But these days, "there are fewer and fewer" of them, said Rostam, 62, who has spent his life travelling the waterway between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

With a lean body and weathered face, he gazes at the calm seas that are criss-crossed by huge tankers taking Gulf oil to the world's markets, and naval vessels patrolling the strategic waterway.

But the island of Qeshm off Bandar Abbas is also home to the much older tradition of building wooden boats, around 30 of which were resting at low tide in the coastal village of Guran.

This small port has long housed several shipyards specialising in their maintenance and repair. But that morning, fewer than two dozen workers were there, barefoot in the mud.

A half-built lenj hull propped on beams will not be finished for lack of money, as its owner plans to dismantle it and use the boards for other projects.

"Today, a new lenj is very expensive" because "the wood comes from abroad" and construction is done entirely by hand, said Ali Pouzan, who supervises the Guran site.

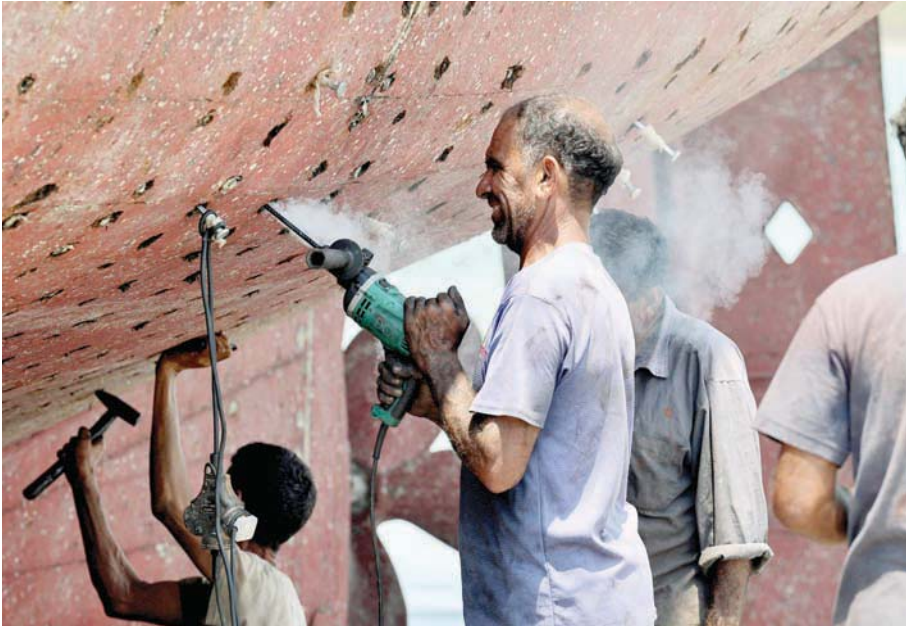
Each lenj is unique and the ships vary in size, with the craft "transmitted from generation to generation", he said.

Unesco back in 2011 recognised the lenj as intangible cultural heritage requiring "urgent safeguarding".

As modern alternatives have taken the wind out of its sails, "the philosophy, the ritual context and the traditional knowledge linked to navigation in the Arabian Gulf... are gradually fading", the UN body warned.

OPEN-AIR MUSEUM

In their golden age, the rustic lenjes were used to transport cere-



als, dates, dried fish, spices, wood and textiles across the Gulf and as far as the coasts of East Africa and the Indian subcontinent.

But commercial shipping has been taken over by engine-powered boats made of fibreglass or steel, navigating the turquoise waters where huge oil tankers now roam.

Lenj vessels were also used for fishing, as well as the lucrative pearling tradition, which has nearly disappeared altogether.

Younes, a 42-year-old Guran res-

ident, has been repairing lenjes in his native village for more than 20 years.

"It's a painful job," he said in the baking heat, as he used an old technique called "kalfat koobi" to water-proof a vessel with strips of cotton soaked in sesame and coconut oil.

Recognising the demise of shipbuilding in Guran, Pouzan is betting on tourism instead, a promising sector on Qeshm as the island attracts a growing number of visitors.



"We have restored several boats to adapt them to sea trips," he said.

An old ship was being repurposed into a cafe, and there are plans to transform the scenic port, with coloured lenj hulls lying in the sand, into an open-air museum.

Near mangroves on the beach, Pouzan plans to build lenj-inspired huts for tourists. Each will bear the name of the most famous destinations the ships once reached — from Zanzibar and Mombasa to Kolkata. — **AFF**

CHANGING WORLD

Top French Museum flips the Roma narrative



THE FACES OF THE Roma community's best and brightest beam down at visitors from a multicoloured wall inside one of France's top museums.

There is world-famous British comic Charlie Chaplin, Belgian jazz great Django Reinhardt and Alfreda Markowska, a Polish woman who during World War II saved dozens of Jewish and Roma children from a Nazi death camp.

"It's very moving," said Romani-Romanian academic Cristian Padure, admiring the exhibits inside the MUCEM museum in France's second city Marseille.

The show, whose title "Barvalo" means spiritually or materially rich in the Romani language, is the first such exhibition to draw together contributions from so many artists and curators within Europe's Roma minority of 12 million.

Padure said it was "recognition" of the community's contributions to European culture and history after centuries of discrimination.

In Romania, where the linguist grew up, Roma were slaves for five centuries until the 19th century.

Among the show's exhibits is an antique ad drawn from the country's archives that advertises "a young gypsy" for sale for 29 coins.

On another wall are so-called "anthropometric cards" of Roma living in France in the early 20th century, complete with racist measurements, mugshots and fingerprints.

All French Roma — who call themselves Sinti, "gitans" or travellers — were required to carry the identity documents, which were designed to limit their movement and paved the way for their deportation during World War II.



SHAPE THE NARRATIVE

The Nazis and their allies killed up to 500,000 Roma during that period, according to the US-based Holocaust Museum.

The exhibition highlights the work of late Romani-Austrian writer and artist Ceija Stojka, who wrote about and painted the horrific ordeal after surviving three separate death camps.

It also shines a light on Romani members of the French Resistance during the Nazi occupation.

"We too had forefathers who fought in all the wars," said Sylvie Debart, whose French Sinti grandfather Marius Janel was part of the underground army fighting the Germans.

But "travellers sadly are only ever in the news when they stop their caravan somewhere," she said.

US anthropologist Jonah Steinberg spent years lobbying to hold the exhibition.

"It's one of the first times that Roma history, art and culture has been presented at such a scale," said the professor at the University of Vermont.

"But most of all, it's unique because it is driven by Roma community voice, vision, experts, advisors, artists and guides."

Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka was one of 19 people — mostly Roma — to help organise the exhibition.

"For once, in this way, we could shape the narrative about us," said deputy head of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture.

Romani artist Emanuel Barica sketched all the black and white portraits of famous Romani people on the museum wall.

"Perhaps people who are racist — who discriminate — really like Charlie Chaplin and didn't realise he was Romani," said the 28-year-old, who was bullied at school in Romania before moving to Germany.

"Perhaps they'll change their point of view." Chaplin in his autobiography said his grandmother was "half gypsy".

SEE OUR HUMANITY

Earlier this week, AFP saw a group of Romani teenagers who had at least partly grown up in Marseille's slums tour the exhibition with stars in their eyes.

On Barica's wall of fame are also Pierre-Andre Gignac, who has played on the French national football team, and Alina Serban, the first Romani playwright to see one of her plays added to the repertoire of a Romanian state theatre after growing up in a shack and orphanage.

"For me, for my community, this exhibition is like achieving the impossible," said 35-year-old Serban, who has won awards for her lead role as a boxer in 2019 German-Austrian film "Gypsy Queen".

"It's essential to show contributions not stereotypes so that others can see our humanity," she said.

Romani-Italian artist Luna de Rosa, 31, said she hoped the show would help bring about social change. "Sometimes, when society has so much prejudice against an identity, you start yourself to believe in this prejudice," said the artist, who is exhibiting a collage in Marseille.

"This exhibition can give self-confidence to young Roma who often go to school and are ashamed of their identity." — **AFF**