

P18

ESCAPE TO THE TURQUOISE SEA AND CALM NATURE OF AL SIFAH



P13

DUOM EVOLVES INTO A MODERN CITY WITH WORLD-CLASS FACILITIES



P11

MESSI MAKES MAGICAL START TO MIAMI CAREER WITH LATE WINNER ON DEBUT



Oman condemns Quran burning in Denmark

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman expressed its strong condemnation of the burning of the Holy Quran by extremists in Denmark's capital Copenhagen on Saturday. It said these repeated provocative acts insult feelings of Muslims and incites violence and hatred.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement on Saturday expressed its appreciation for the statement issued by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in which it condemned this heinous act.

The ministry renewed its appeal to all countries to criminalise acts of incitement to hatred and offense to religions and beliefs.

The extreme right Danish group Danske Patriotet had on Friday posted on Facebook a video of a man burning what seemed to be a Quran and trampling an Iraqi flag.

— ONA and AFP

Omanis bring home top prizes in innovation

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Two Omanis made their nation proud by bagging global prizes in scientific innovation. While Dr Faris al Farsi won the award for the best innovative research project at the prestigious Lindau Nobel Laureate meeting in Germany, Razan al Kalbani won the Grand Prize at the Korea International Women's Innovations Exhibition and Competition (KIWIE) in Seoul.

Dr Al Farsi won the award for his smart biochips, which can identify and eliminate bacteria that causes infections in chronic wounds.

Al Kalbani bagged the prize for developing an eco-friendly paint made of Lycopene that absorbs X-rays. Lycopene is a red pigment found in tomato, watermelon and other vegetables. The concept claimed top prize after competing with 353 innovations from over 18 countries around the world.

Dr Al Farsi's achievement came in a Science Marathon in which more than 270 young scientists from around the world took part.

The event is supported by the Max Planck Foundation of Germany and research projects were evaluated by a scientific committee consisting of a number of Nobel laureates and international investors in scientific research.



DR FARIS AL FARSI



RAZAN AL KALBANI

He attended the event with the support of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. He said that the scientific marathon aimed to find solutions to medical problems by bringing together experts in medicine, physiology, physics, chemistry, biology, pharmacology, immunology, biomedical and IT engineering, and astrophysics.

Al Kalbani took part in the Korea event with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth. Earlier, she won first place in the Falling Walls Lab competition, silver medal at the Challenge and Innovation Forum in Qatar, gold medal at the Second Beirut International Innovation Exhibition, and silver medal in the Mabaret Fayda Al Saad competition in Kuwait.



UNDER THE SPELL OF GREEN MAGIC

Ain Hamran near Taqa in the Wilayat of Salalah is attracting tourists for its lush greenery and gurgling streams of water. Families can gather for picnic under the shade of trees amid the ceaseless chirping of birds. PHOTO BY AHMED AL MAASHANI

This champion donor gave blood 136 times in 31 years

ALI AL MATANI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Thani al Khalasi has donated his blood 136 times over 31 years since he was a student. Furthermore, he continues his humanitarian gesture year after year, providing an inspirational and magnificent example.

Al Khalasi is in his 50s and in good shape and cheerful. He is continually extolling the virtues of blood donation for the donor's health and vigour. He continues to teach others about blood



donation with confidence and trust. He even organises campaigns among his family and co-workers because he believes that one drop is insufficient to rescue the hundreds of wounded and injured who are waiting for this drop of life.

He confirms that his contribution to saving a human life represents that greatest honour and recognition for him, stressing that his biggest accomplishment is when he brings a smile back to the life of a sick or injured person.

TURN TO P2

OAA Museum shortlisted for WAF awards

VINOD NAIR
 @vinot_nair

Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah, which has been ranked among the best new buildings in the world, has been shortlisted for this year's World Architecture Festival (WAF) Awards in the completed category. The final awards will be presented in November this year in Singapore.

Nominated in the category of Cultural Buildings, WAF described Oman Across Ages Museum as "a celebration of the country's rich history, culture and economic growth through time while offering an insight into Oman's tomorrow. The museum is a cultural and educational landmark for



all Omanis and visitors. The sheer scale of the building as it rises out of the ground to the horizon is something to behold. It includes various galleries,

a library, an auditorium, and education, social and research spaces.

As a cultural landmark, the museum transports visitors

through the nation's 800 million-year history through a series of immersive, high-tech experiences.

The building emerges as a series of angular, geometric volumes that sit in dialogue with the encompassing backdrop of the peaks and ridges of the Al Hajar Mountain range.

In harmony with the architecture, the exhibition design celebrates Oman's rich heritage from prehistory to the modern day using the latest immersive technologies.

During this weekend, the museum received 7,708 visitors on the first day of the Hijri New Year from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

TURN TO P2



Over 40 institutions take part in higher education exhibition

MUSCAT: The highly successful second edition of the Exhibition of Higher Education Institutions, Training and Human Resources Development 2023, which commenced on Thursday, culminated on Saturday. Hosted at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, the three-day event witnessed the participation of both governmental and private institutions from within Oman and outside.

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, graced the opening ceremony which also saw the esteemed presence of several dignitaries, parents, and ambitious male and female students.

The exhibition coincided with the long-awaited announcement of the general education diploma and its equivalent, drawing in aspiring male and female students, as well as recent secondary diploma graduates. It also welcomed anyone seeking to further their educational pursuits by exploring the diverse array of university studies offered by the participating institutions.

Hafeez bin Muslim Jaaboub, Media and Marketing Officer at the exhibition, emphasised the significance of the event as



it allowed high school diploma students to directly address their inquiries concerning these esteemed educational institutions. This direct interaction served as a valuable resource for obtaining vital information with ease.

Moreover, the exhibition catered to professionals keen on upskilling and enhancing their career prospects in both public and private sectors through higher

education opportunities.

More than 40 public and private educational institutions, academies and training centres from Oman and abroad gathered to showcase their offerings and support the academic aspirations of the country's youth.

A student, Kholoud Abdel Amir Reda, a high school diploma graduate, shared her insights, saying, "The choice of

majors becomes clearer when you recognise your personal preferences." Having visited the exhibition during the period of considering university admissions, she found herself better informed about the courses available in various colleges and universities. Kholoud encouraged her peers to seize this opportunity to acquaint themselves with the participating universities. — ONA

Majlis Ash'shura panel proposes long-term cultural visa

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

A proposal to provide a long-term cultural visa for a period of 10 years was discussed at the recently concluded 16th regular session for the fourth annual session of the Majlis Ash'shura.

In its report, the Media and Culture Committee expressed a desire to create a long-term cultural visa for ten years.

It claimed that the proposed cultural visa scheme would help the Sultanate benefit from the contributions of creative minds and specialists in the intellectual and knowledge fields, which will enhance the cultural scene of the Sultanate.

It is also in line with the country's cultural strategy seeking to create a harmonious and sustainable society that attracts and embraces the most prominent Arab and international creative talents, the report said.

The committee said there is a need to pay attention to promoting the cultural fields in the Sultanate by providing visas to intellectuals and writers who deserve such facilities.

This time of visa will help to overcome the challenges, such as a long period taken for approvals and allow the cultural experts and artists to participate in the events organised by the competent authorities, the report said.

The committee stressed the importance of creating an environment that attracts intellectuals through the concerted efforts of all the authorities concerned with cultural affairs and other authorities concerned with visa and residence procedures for intellectuals from outside Oman.

Enter Schengen-visa issuing country first, Omanis urged

The Embassy of Oman in Berlin has warned all citizens that they need to enter the country that issued their Schengen visa first before travelling to any other destination in the bloc.

"Such a warning from the embassy was made to ensure that all Omani citizens are aware of the rules and do not face any inconveniences when travelling to the Schengen Area," the embassy said.

SchengenVisaInfo.com said that if a citizen of Oman or of any other country that is subject to the visa requirements enters Germany as a first destination with a visa that another Schengen country has issued, the German authorities have the right to deny their entry.

The embassy called on everyone to make their first entry to the country that issued their Schengen visa and then travel to the other Schengen countries.

According to experts, if a traveller intends to visit multiple Schengen countries during a trip, he or she must apply for a visa from the embassy of the country, which is the primary destination. The primary destination for a Schengen visa is the Schengen country, where you will spend most of your time during the trip. Travellers are urged to consider factors such as the length of stay in each Schengen country, the purpose of the trip and the itinerary.

If it is not clear which Schengen country is the primary destination, it is advisable to apply at the embassy of the country that you will enter first when starting the trip, SchengenVisaInfo.com said.

MoI at Azerbaijan's 'new media in the era of 4IR'



BAKU: The Ministry of Information, represented by the Oman News Agency, participated in the "New Media in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution" forum in Shusha, Republic of Azerbaijan.

The opening of the forum was sponsored by Dr Ilham Heydar Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. More than 150 journalists

and specialists representing 49 countries are participating in the forum, in addition to 60 participants from leaders and representatives of local media in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The forum concludes on July 23, Sunday.

During its session, the forum will discuss media developments in light of changes in the world, the exchange of experiences between



media institutions, the development of media relations and various media issues.

It is noteworthy that the "New Media Forum in the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution" hosted by the city of Shusha, the pearl of Karabakh, is being held on the occasion of the 148th anniversary of the Azerbaijani national press. — ONA

This champion donor gave his blood 136 times over 31 years

FROM PAGE 1

Al Khalasi is pleased with this feeling, and he is practically exceptional compared to those who make a simple effort in some fields, and we see them sprinting to stand in front of the cameras. He does, however, work quietly, impartially, and behind the scenes. Also, he does not want anyone to know anything about him and his good deeds and contributions as guided by Prophet's Muhammad's saying about a Muslim who gives alms to a fellow Muslim: "The left hand shouldn't know what the right is doing".

Al Khalasi's noble gesture comes at a time when blood banks across Oman are facing a shortage of blood and there are regular pleas to speed up the donation, those of especially rare blood groups.

This champion donor donates blood four times a year. A healthy individual can donate blood every three months without health risks. Of course, Al Khalasi is not the only one attempting to break records in the Sultanate of Oman's blood donation sector and get entry into the prestigious Guinness World Records.

Museum shortlisted for WAF awards



FROM PAGE 1

Nasser bin Said al Riyami, Head of the Visitor Services Department, said that a number of measures were taken to facilitate the movement of visitors inside the museum, including assigning an additional number of employees to facilitate the movement of visitors and answer their inquiries. The museum administration is working on improving procedures for booking tickets to enter the museum and exhibition halls by developing an online ticketing platform, which will soon be available to the public, and self-service ticketing machines.

The museum halls receive visitors from Saturday to Thursday from 9 am to 5 pm and on Friday from 1.30 pm until 7 pm. The museum, built under the Royal orders of the late Sultan Qaboos, who laid the foundation stone for the project on July 14, 2015, is the largest of its kind in the region, offering visitors an interactive experience of the cultural and geographic diversity of the Sultanate. The building includes galleries, a library, an auditorium, cafés, and social and research spaces. The permanent exhibition space is 9,000 sqm, and some galleries stretch more than 20 metres high.



Oman Vision 2040 and Sustainable Development 2030 goals reflect nation’s core principles, values

NEW YORK: The Sultanate of Oman has reaffirmed its dedication to Oman Vision 2040 and the Sustainable Development 2030 goals, which hold great significance to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

These initiatives reflect the core values deeply ingrained in Omani society, emphasising principles of peace, coexistence, sustainability, equality, justice, and community engagement.

Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations, emphasised Oman’s commitment during his speech at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, currently taking place in New York.

Since its endorsement in September 2015, Oman has



attached utmost importance to achieving the UN agenda by aligning the national priorities and goals of Oman Vision 2040

with the sustainable development objectives of 2030.

The Sultanate of Oman aims to achieve zero carbon neutrality

by 2050, focusing on renewable energy projects, particularly hydrogen and green hydrogen production, with the vision

of becoming a global hub for hydrogen production.

Furthermore, Oman is eager to embrace the era of knowledge, innovation, industry, and infrastructure development, striving to build sustainable cities and communities that align with the country’s fundamental system.

Education is considered a fundamental right for every citizen, and Oman encourages the establishment of both public and private educational institutions while maintaining the highest standards of education. Access to higher education is made available to all based on competence and merit.

Dr Al Hassan stressed the Sultanate of Oman’s unwavering support for scientific research and intellectual creativity, actively

encouraging and sponsoring researchers, innovators, and artists. Preserving and promoting tangible and intangible national heritage is considered a national duty, and Oman is committed to recovering any unlawfully taken cultural artifacts.

The permanent representative underscored Oman’s stance against attacking or engaging in the illegal trade of national heritage, firmly stating that such actions are punishable by law. Oman is fully devoted to fulfilling its international and regional obligations to various organisations, as well as friendly and brotherly countries. It diligently implements all ratified agreements, assuming responsibility as an active member of the international community. — **ONA**

Human rights awareness crucial, says OCHR

QASIM AL MAASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 22

The Omani Commission for Human Rights (OCHR) collaborated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Youth in Dhofar Governorate to raise awareness about human rights in the country.

An event marking the issue of human rights was held at Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah.

The OCHR representative gave a lecture, providing attendees with a comprehensive understanding of the commission’s vital role in safeguarding and promoting human rights. The lecture delved into the functions of key OCHR departments, including the Monitoring and Receiving Reports Department, the Legal Affairs Department, the Organisations and International Relations Department, and the Information and Communication Department.



Attendees also gained valuable insights into the OCHR’s dedication to monitoring legislation related to human rights and effectively responding to reports from international organisations.

OCHR also held an engaging educational session for children at the Children’s Library within the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex. This session aimed to familiarise young minds with their rights, as outlined in the Omani Child

Law of 2014 and the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. The topics covered included fundamental rights such as access to information, the right to life, education, healthcare, and family care.

Children participating in the session were provided with informative publications and captivating graphics, ensuring the learning experience was enjoyable and enlightening. By doing so, the OCHR aspires to empower

the youth with the knowledge of their rights and responsibilities, nurturing a culture of respect for human rights across Oman.

The event drew a diverse range of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society representatives, and members of the public. It proved to be a resounding success, effectively raising awareness about the OCHR’s pivotal work and underscoring the importance of human rights in the Sultanate of Oman.

Ali bin Salim al Shanfari, a participant in the lecture session, shared his perspective, saying, “Attending the event provided me with a deeper understanding of the OCHR’s efforts and the significance of human rights. Learning about the commission’s engagement with international organisations was particularly fascinating. Oman needs to lead by example in promoting human rights, and I am pleased that the OCHR is actively striving to achieve this goal.”

Discover Telegraph Island: Hidden gem of adventure and beauty

TEXT & PICTURE
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

The diversity of the topographical nature of Oman provides tourists with multiple options that enable them to move between the various governorates. Away from high temperatures, there are tourist sites that are characterised by mild weather. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Jabal Shams, Al Sharqi Beaches, and Dhofar Governorate, count among these and are currently experiencing Khareef season.

The Telegraph Island in the far north of Oman is located amidst charming nature, which is surrounded by tall mountains and blue warm waters. This island is located in Khoor Sham, one of the most famous lagoons in the Musandam Governorate.

After a short boat ride, it is possible to reach this island, which provides an opportunity for visitors



to contemplate the mountainous terrain and geological formations of the Musandam Governorate.

Khoor Sham, with its marine islands, scattered villages, and fish complexes, is one of the most beautiful destinations frequented by tourists from all over the world.

During this trip, tourists can camp and watch dolphins in glee. Rowing and diving enthusiasts can also enjoy stunning views of coral

reefs, fish, marine creatures, and underwater rocky cave formations.

Khoor Sham extends about 20 km, and while roaming this site, the visitor encounters “Telegraph Island”, which is a historical tourist attraction famous for Musandam, as it serves as a stopping point for tourist tours in the creek, informing them about geological nature, terrain, and topographical formations.

“I planned for my trip about a year ago. I allocated a week to visit Dhofar Governorate, then I spent some days in Muscat, Wadi Bani Khalid, Nizwa, Bahla, and Jabal Shams. My goal from this trip to Musandam is to discover geological and archaeological sites in this beautiful province. I practiced diving hobby near this island and enjoyed watching various types of marine life. I also visited a number of old stone houses locally called ‘Bait Al Qufl’. Oman is a first-class tourist interface”, says a tourist from UAE.

At the height of the tourist season until Khareef ends, visitors to Salalah do not hesitate to plan a visit to dozens of natural sites in the Sultanate of Oman. Some tourists seek support for facilitating procedures for tourists and providing tourist guidance points along the roads leading to the entrances.

Royal Oman Police warns of AI-powered scammers

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With all kinds of cybercrimes involving tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Royal Oman Police (ROP) has advised people not to fall prey to luring messages or even video calls. This is best in their interest to keep their hard-earned money safe.

Scammers are on the lookout for newer ways to dupe people. The AI has given them yet another tool; hence a considerable amount of attention is necessary, the authorities have warned.

“Never encourage any soliciting emails, messages, or calls, even video calls, as the scammers are in the run for advanced modes of cheating,” urged an official from the cyber department of the ROP.

A man was duped of huge sums in a neighbouring country recently after he entertained an ‘urgent call’ of a ‘friend’ who posed as a needy and asked for some help. The duper even appeared on video to impress that he was really a needy person. “Artificial Intelligence and ‘Deep Fake’ app which helps to recreate a live video of any individual is a growing threat and unless and otherwise one confirms with the caller through other means, he or she shouldn’t render help,” he advised.

AI is a huge sector with vast potential for the present and future generations and has numerous productive tools. Knowing this potential, the Omani arm of Microsoft, led by a team of local IT-savvy youngsters, has worked out plans to train 200 students in AI per year, and as many as 300 students will be benefited yearly from a national IT programme with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI).

Speaking to the *Observer*, Sorav Jain, Founder, ‘Digital Scholar’ said, “Despite having several benefits, AI has been used for such illegal means (stealing) as well.”

“It is sad to note that AI, which has huge potential for the youth, has been misused for unscrupulous purposes, and scammers will keep using newer technologies to get their intentions fulfilled. All we can do is to be careful in dealing with such seemingly lucrative advancements,” he said.

Meanwhile, telecom companies advised their subscribers not to share any OTP (One Time Password) if someone poses to know the potential victim.

A fraud advisory from Ooredoo said: “Please do not share your OTP with anyone. Ooredoo will never ask for an OTP sent to customers. If you are unsure about the call/SMS, please contact us at 1500 to confirm,” it said.

6 EDU PROJECTS AT GLOBE 2023



The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education is taking part in the annual meeting of the Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE 2023) Programme, held in Colorado, United States. Oman’s participation includes presenting 6 projects of educational activities related to the subjects of science and social studies for 7th and 8th grades. — **ONA**



A D V A N T A G E S O F V A C A T I O N

1
RAISES
EFFICIENCY OF
IMMUNE SYSTEM

2
REDUCES
EXPOSURE TO
DISEASES

3
IMPROVES
COGNITIVE
PERFORMANCE

4
MAKES
BETTER
DECISIONS

5
SOLUTIONS
TO WORK
PROBLEMS

6
IMPROVES ABILITY
TO COMBAT
ANXIETY BY 29%

7
REDUCES ANXIETY
LEVELS FOR UP TO
45 DAYS

8
HAPPY,
REFRESHED
AND ENERGETIC

VACATIONS BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
[@Afrahalbalushia](#)

From time to time, we all need a period of rest, in which we recharge our energy, and during which we move away from the daily routine of life. A well-planned vacation is one of the best means to achieve the desired results. This provides an opportunity to get away from the pressures that cause tension and reduce the level of the hormone cortisol in the body, which gives the body an opportunity to repair what was damaged by stress. This will help stimulate the heart and blood circulation, raising the efficiency of the immune system, which reduces

the possibility of exposure to diseases. Some young people wait for vacations, even if they are short, to develop their hobbies, and refresh their memory again. While some of them find it an opportunity to clear their mind off work, relax and unwind, and do not want to engage in any other activity. According to a study, vacation is the best way to improve a person's cognitive performance, as it contributes to enhancing mental and physical health, and the time we spend on vacation helps reduce harmful biological processes related to stress, which contributes to improving human health. Vacation is also considered one of the most important

incentives that help employees make better decisions and find innovative solutions to work problems. Given that cells are affected by aging in response to improper handling of stress, the importance of vacations becomes even more evident. Some studies also show that vacation improves the ability to combat anxiety by 29 per cent as five days off reduces anxiety levels for up to 45 days. The question arises: How can employees take productive leave? Do they go out through it to charge their energy and achieve the desired balance between work and social life? In the beginning, employees are advised to take advantage of the leave to travel or go outside

in view of the nature of working life within closed office walls to breathe deeply, relax and rearrange thoughts. It is essential for the employee to make sure that his mind is completely disconnected from work and news so that he can recharge and actively return to work. A vacation helps enhance communication between a person and his relatives and friends. It also helps maintain the friendly spirit between co-workers, after long and stressful working hours. A study says that often our bodies cannot bear the pressures of work, and then all we want is a vacation in which we feel happy, refreshed and energetic, noting that some companies have introduced

company-wide vacations to encourage people to take care of their physical and mental health, according to a report published on the ETimes website. The study confirms that the option of leaving at the company level may be costly, but it will ensure greater production of employees, even if its activity stops for several days. A company, with a happy work team, means greater productivity and success. Giving up your vacation time can actually be detrimental to your career in the long run. Increased stress, inability to concentrate and in severe cases depression that can escalate, can all destroy your health as well as your ability to perform well at work.



Ministry empowers rural women with rainfed crops programme

QASIM ALMAASAHNI
SALALAH, JULY 22

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Dhofar Governorate is launching an innovative agricultural extension programme to empower rural women.

The programme, which is focused on rainfed crops, aims to support 40 women with expertise in agricultural practices.

The extension programme will provide well-cultivated seeds suitable for Dhofar's mountainous terrain and comprehensive training on crop selection, planting and harvesting techniques. Technical assistance and access to marketing opportunities will also be offered.

The primary goal of the programme is to improve the



livelihoods of rural women and enhance food security in the region by preserving the tradition of rainfed crops.

The programme also represents a significant milestone in women's empowerment in Dhofar and aims to foster self-reliance and prosperity among women pioneers in agriculture.

Eng Radwan bin Abdullah al Ibrahim, Director of the

Agricultural Development Department in Dhofar, emphasises the importance of rainfed crops as a lifeline for rural women during uncertain times.

"As the world faces uncertainties, these seasonal rainfed crops become more than just a tradition; they become a lifeline for rural women," said Eng Al Ibrahim.

"The extension programme



Eng Radwan bin Abdullah al Ibrahim

for rural women aims to empower 40 beneficiaries across different states known for their expertise in rainfed crops. These women will receive support and well-cultivated seeds that thrive in Dhofar's unique mountainous terrain."

The extension programme is scheduled to commence in early 2024.

EA launches Environmental Protectors Programme in Jabal Al Akhdhar

JABAL AL AKHDHAR: The Environment Authority, represented by the Environment Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, has launched the 'Environmental Protectors' programme for its second season. Timed to coincide with the start of the tourist season, the programme aims to foster a sense of responsibility among citizens and tourists alike in maintaining a clean and sustainable environment in the region.

Abdullah bin Sulaiman al Shaqsi, Head of the Environmental Monitoring Department, Environment Department in Al Dakhiliyah, expressed the programme's significance after the remarkable success of its first edition last year. The primary objectives of the initiative are to protect the environmental diversity and preserve the existence of perennial wild trees.

Participants are urged to recognise the value of preserving the environment, refrain from tree cutting, and dispose of waste responsibly. The programme also encompasses various measures related to the management of the Green Mountain Reserve and its stunning landscapes.

Following the positive impact of the



inaugural edition, Al Shaqsi shared how citizens exhibited increased awareness and a shared sense of responsibility towards preserving the region's natural resources and unique vocabulary.

By educating both citizens and tourists about the consequences of harmful environmental practices, the Department of Environment in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah seeks to cultivate a strong sense of social responsibility in safeguarding wildlife and perennial wild trees like Al Alan and Al Atm. Moreover, efforts are underway to reduce the occurrence of burning perennial trees by regulating grilling activities near these areas. — **ONA**

Awareness programmes evoke good response in Al Batinah

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SOHAR, JULY 22

Al Batinah is witnessing an exciting community involvement, thanks to an impressive set of more than 100 counselling and awareness programmes. These dynamic initiatives, organised by the Directorate of Social Development, are making a positive impact in all walks of life.

The ongoing programmes are covering important social issues like family bonds, children's rights, electronic addiction, drug awareness, heritage aspects, self-control, leadership, social consequences of divorce and other significant issues. They aim at emphasising values, principles, and other essential aspects that affect directly on our society, ensuring a brighter future for all.

Known as the 'Summer in Development'

initiative, these programmes have been running since June and will continue until August. Covering every corner of Al Batinah, these events include interactive activities, workshops, discussions and awareness campaigns, fostering unity and understanding in the community.

Saif bin Mohammed al Shukaili, Assistant Director for Social Development, North Al Batinah, expressed pride in the programme's transformative impact. With approval from the General Directorate of Social Development, this initiative aims to engage and guide the youth, helping them make the best use of their free time by developing essential life skills in social and psychological aspects.

Not only that, the Summer Social Development programme is making the best possible efforts to support families and individuals. It is for the community members

to get ready for captivating workshops, inspiring seminars, and empowering lectures that focus on nurturing resilience, boosting confidence and bringing out the best in everyone to reap maximum from the programme.

In a knowledge-driven society, this programme becomes a unifying force, promoting greater cognitive awareness. "Participants are bound to be inspired, uplifted and equipped with positive values that will create a ripple effect in the community, leading to transformation," said an event organiser.

The architects of this visionary initiative are firmly aligned with Al Batinah's strategic vision for social development. By empowering each individual, they are setting the stage for a more vibrant, caring and involved society. The impact of this noble initiative will undoubtedly make Al Batinah shine brighter on the map.

READING CHALLENGE IGNITES YOUNG MINDS



As part of the 'Treacherous' Award for Creativity, the first season of 2023 witnessed a remarkable reading challenge competition in Sinaw, North Al Sharqiyah Governorate. Organised by the Sinaw Public Library, the competition saw enthusiastic participation from 22 fourth to sixth-grade students. Hussein bin Salem al Sawafi, Vice-President of the Library and General Supervisor of the competition, emphasised the initiative's goal to revitalise the role of libraries and, more importantly, the significance of reading in shaping young minds. The competition aimed to ignite a passion for reading among young people and cultivate a reading culture as a daily habit, contributing to the development of their ideas, expanding their perceptions, and enhancing their intellectual, analytical and creative capabilities. — **ONA**

Rangrez Oman launches exquisite coffee table book on saris

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

'Navyathanchal: Celebrating Saris', a coffee table book, was launched recently by Rangrez Oman, the artist group of the Indian Social Club (ISC).

This 124-page book serves as a tribute to the weavers who have preserved and enriched this heritage for generations.

The colourful book showcases the skills and creativity of weavers and artisans who produce saris using different yarns, fabrics, colours, patterns and embellishments. The sari is a traditional garment worn by women in India and other parts of South Asia and is one of the oldest forms of clothing, known for its versatility and adaptability.

Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, released the book and emphasised that the sari is not merely a piece of clothing in India but an integral part of the culture, tradition and identity of the nation.

Narang expressed his appreciation for 'Navyathanchal', stating that it pays homage to the rich heritage of Indian saris and displayed the incredible variety that emerges from different regions of India. From the vibrant and colourful



Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, releasing 'Navyathanchal: Celebrating Saris', a captivating coffee table book.

silk saris of South India to the understated elegance of the cotton saris of West Bengal, the book highlights the diverse beauty of this traditional attire.

The ambassador commended the team behind 'Navyathanchal' for their vision and commitment to bringing this book to life. He expressed hope that it would inspire a new generation of weavers, designers and sari enthusiasts to continue appreciating and celebrating this art form.

The book features details about various sari forms, including Ajrakh, Pochampally, Taant, and popular ones like Chikankari, Kasavu and Kanjeevaram. It also includes

useful tips for sari care.

Sushmita Gupta, Convenor of Rangrez, describes the book as a journey into a world of beauty, colour and tradition that pays tribute to the skill, dedication and creativity of the weavers who breathe life into saris.

Sushmita explained that each sari needed to be accurately portrayed on the canvas, paying close attention to its border or 'pallu'. While they selected 28 saris in alphabetical order for the book, Sushmita acknowledges that there are numerous others that could have been included.

Dr Madhurani Sawanth who worked on the painting of Dongria sari says her immense

passion for wearing and collecting various traditional saris from all over India, especially towards Dongria because of its mesmerising vibrant colours used in handwoven cotton fabric. "The exquisite traditional geometrical and simple designs woven into it can make any woman look so graceful," she adds.

Shalini Kartik, the curator and, collector of saris, explains that the book provides insights into the history, symbolism and artistry of saris. "It also showcases how artists have recreated these stunning saris as paintings, reflecting their personal experiences and perspectives," she adds.

Babu Rajandran offered expert advice and guidance, while textile designer K Venketasan and MAH Design Strategy provided input for the book's design. Joaquim Mascarenhas and Yamini Sriram supported the project, with project coordination by Sushmita Gupta, Shalini Varma, Shalini Kartik and Uma Gopinath.

Designed by Akanksha Kartik and edited by Shalini Varma and Harini Kumar, the book has colourful photographs by Tariq Ansari, Bahar Alamy, DSource and Google Images.

Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV 12/07/2023 for the supply of Butterfly valve

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC have been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for the supply of **Butterfly valve**. To participate to bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of MSE card if any, to e-mail: barkav.site@inima.com, subject **TND GSI BV 12/07/2023** within **26th July 2023 1:00 PM**.

A reply including bid documents will be reverted to participants in the same day of receiving CR and copy of VAT certificate and copy of MSE card if any.

Deadline for quotations submittal is: 30th July 2023 1:00PM

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ELECTRONIC AUCTION

The Ministry of Information announces an electronic auction for discarded furniture and technical equipment and hardware will be held through Mazad Oman (www.mazad.om) in accordance with the following statement:

Statement	Location of Inspection	Date and Time of Inspection	Date of Electronic Bidding
Discarded Furniture and Technical Equipment and Hardware	Stores of Information Ministry 1) Madinat Al Ilam 2) As'Seeb 3) Ruwi	Wednesday 2/8/2023 Thursday 3/8/2023 From 8:00 am to 01:00 pm	From Sunday 6/8/2023 to Monday 7/8/2023

- Entry of persons shall be organized as per regulations to avoid crowdedness so that safety is secured for all.
- Requirements and registration can be viewed through www.mazad.om
- For further details, kindly communicate with us through info@mazad.om



North Korea fires ‘several cruise missiles’ into sea

SEOUL: North Korea fired “several cruise missiles” into the Yellow Sea between China and the Korean peninsula on Saturday, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

Pyongyang’s latest provocation comes as concern grows over the whereabouts and wellbeing of a US soldier who made an unauthorised dash into North Korean territory earlier this week, with the reclusive regime so far remaining tight-lipped about the incident.

Saturday’s launches are just the latest in a series by Pyongyang, and come as Seoul and Washington ramp up defence cooperation, with relations between the two Koreas nearing an all-time low.

The cruise missile launches took place around 4 am on Saturday.

“South Korean and US intelligence authorities were analysing the launches while monitoring signs of additional activities,” the JCS said.

North Korea had fired two ballistic missiles into the sea off its opposite coast toward Japan just three days earlier.

North Korean defence minister Kang Sun Nam said the Ohio-class submarine’s deployment might have fallen “under the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons specified in the DPRK law on the



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul. – AFP

nuclear force policy”, using an acronym for the North’s official name.

North Korea last year adopted a sweeping nuclear law setting out an array of scenarios in which it could use its nukes, including pre-emptive strikes if threatened.

South Korea’s defence ministry reiterated that any use of nuclear weapons by the North would

prompt an “immediate and decisive response” resulting in the Kim regime’s demise.

Saturday’s launches came just days after US soldier Travis King was believed to have been taken into North Korean custody after he broke away from a tour group visiting the Demilitarised Zone.

Meanwhile, the Group of Seven nations, the European Union and three other countries have urged China to expel oil tankers from its waters that appear to be taking fuel to North Korea in defiance of UN sanctions, according to a letter seen on Friday.

“We have concerns regarding the continuing presence of multiple oil tankers... that use your territorial waters in Sansha Bay as refuge to facilitate their trade of sanctioned petroleum products to the DPRK,” read the letter, which was signed by the countries’ ambassadors and addressed to China’s UN envoy Zhang Jun.

In the letter, the ambassadors told Zhang they “would like to provide your government with additional information and satellite imagery” supporting the allegations, while calling on China to deny the vessels “all services, and ultimately expel them from your waters”. — AFP

Israel military reservists threaten protests over judicial revamp

JERUSALEM: More than 1,100 Israeli air force reservists — including fighter pilots — threatened to suspend volunteer service as protests intensified Saturday ahead of final votes on a bill that aims to overhaul Israel’s judiciary.

The judicial revamp has split the nation and sparked one of the biggest protest movements in Israel’s history, with weekly demonstrations often drawing tens of thousands.

On Friday at least 1,142 air force reservists declared their intention to suspend volunteer service if parliament passes the bill next week.

“We all share a responsibility to stop the deep division, polarisation and rift among the people,” the reservists said in a declaration whose signatories included 235 fighter pilots, 173 drone operators, and 85 commando soldiers.

They called on the government to “arrive at a broad consensus, strengthen the trust of all parts of the people in the judicial system



Protesters against the Israeli government’s judicial overhaul march from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem near Motza, at the outskirts of Jerusalem. – Reuters

and maintain its independence.”

Any legislation carried out in an “unreasonable manner would erode my agreement to keep risking my life and would force me, with great sorrow, to suspend my voluntary reserve service,” the signatories said.

It is unclear how the country’s military capabilities would be

affected if reservists followed through on their threat, but it comes against a backdrop of worsening Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said he was “taking measures in order to reach a wide consensus”.

Netanyahu, too, said late Thursday he was “still trying

to reach an agreement with the opposition”, mainly on the “reasonability” clause that allows the judiciary to strike down government decisions.

The bill is due for second and third readings in parliament on Monday.

If approved, it would be the first major component of the proposed legal overhaul to become law.

Other proposals include giving the government a greater say in the appointment of judges.

Thousands of protesters, including Guy Maidan, have been marching since Wednesday from the commercial hub of Tel Aviv to the seat of Parliament in Jerusalem.

“We will keep fighting... unless this extreme government goes away,” Maidan said.

Young and old, he said, are keen on “saving Israel from going down towards not being a liberal democracy.”

Netanyahu’s government argues that the changes to the judicial system are necessary to ensure a better balance of power. — AFP

Greece facing longest heatwave on record while record highs hit US



A woman cools off with cold bottles of water, distributed by the hellenic red cross organisation near the entrance of the Acropolis archeological site in Athens. – AFP

ATHENS: Greece was Saturday facing its hottest July weekend in 50 years, with temperatures forecast to soar above 40 Celsius, while a record-breaking heatwave stretching across the southern United States was expected to expand in the coming days.

Already 11 days into its heatwave, Greece’s national weather institute warned reprieve was still days away, setting this up to be the longest hot spell the country has ever seen.

“According to the data, we will probably go through 16-17 days of a heatwave, which has never happened before in our country,” Kostas Lagouvardos, the director

of research at the National Observatory, told ERT television Saturday.

The previous heatwave record in Greece was set in 1987, when scorching temperatures of over 39C lasted 11 days.

Across the southern United States, about 80 million Americans will swelter in temperatures of 41C and above this weekend, the National Weather Service (NWS) said.

The country’s worst heat of up to 46C is forecast for Phoenix, Arizona, which has seen a record-breaking three weeks in a row of highs above 43C.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraqis keep up the Holy Quran protests

Iraqi security forces on Saturday dispersed about 1,000 people who tried to march to Baghdad’s Green Zone housing foreign embassies, believing the Holy Quran had been desecrated in Denmark.

The protesters were reacting to reports of an apparent desecration of the Muslim holy book for the third time in a month, with the first two in Sweden already raising diplomatic tensions. The extreme right group Danske Patriot



posted on Friday a video of a man burning what seemed to be the Holy Quran and trampling an Iraqi flag.

Early Saturday, Iraq’s foreign ministry had condemned “the desecration of the holy Koran and the Iraqi flag” in front of the embassy in Denmark. — AFP

WAD MADANI

Rockets in Darfur kill 16 civilians

At least 16 civilians have been killed by rocket fire that hit their houses in war-torn Sudan’s western Darfur region, a local lawyers’ union said Saturday.

The vast region has seen some of the worst of the violence since fighting erupted in mid-April between rival generals.

“During an exchange of rocket fire between the army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), 16 civilians were killed on Friday, according to a preliminary toll,



in Nyala,” the South Darfur state capital, the union said. At least one man was killed by a sniper, it added.

Fighting in Darfur has recently concentrated around Nyala, after brutal clashes in El Geneina where the United Nations had reported atrocities. — AFP

MUMBAI

Death toll in landslide rises to 26

The death toll from a landslide in India’s western state of Maharashtra rose to 26 on Saturday, a disaster relief official said, with dozens still feared trapped under layers of mud and slush two days after the incident.

The landslide occurred on Thursday night in the remote mountain hamlet of Irshalwadi flattening several houses.

The hamlet is estimated to have been home to at least 225 people, more than 80 of whom managed to escape.



“We are working on our technical equipment, our rescue techniques,” S.B. Singh said, an official with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

Rescue operations are being hindered by incessant rainfall, poor visibility, and the hilly terrain, Singh added. — Reuters

A current war collides with the past: Remnants of World War II in Ukraine



Andrew E. Kramer

The writer is the New York Times bureau chief in Kyiv.

Ukraine is echoing that World War II offensive, fighting at sites southeast of Zaporizhzhia in what the Ukrainian military calls the “Melitopol direction.”

Clambering over boulders, past old tires and shellfish-encrusted scrap metal, Oleksandr Shkalikov ventured onto the dry bed of a vast reservoir.

Out in this wasteland rested a haunting reminder of long-ago battles on this same swath of southern Ukraine: a swastika, chipped into a rock, had emerged from the receding water. The year “1942” was written next to it.

“History is repeating itself,” Shkalikov, a tank driver on leave from the Ukrainian army, said of the World War II-era carving. He noted the timing: The Swastika had become visible because of more recent act of war, the explosion at the Kakhovka dam in June that drained a reservoir the size of the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

“We are fighting this war on the same landscape and with the same weapons” as those used in World War II, he said, evoking the heavy artillery and tanks that still shape the course of a land war.

World War II has been an ideological battlefield in today’s war in Ukraine, with Russia falsely calling Ukraine’s government neofascist and citing that as the rationale for its attack. The country’s military history is cropping up on the actual battlefield as well, not just with artefacts in the soil but in the lessons Ukraine has learned from a war fought long ago.

Terrain and rivers have often channelled the armies of today into the sites of some of the fiercest fighting in World War II, when German and Soviet troops swept over the valleys and the expanses of wide-open plains.

Indeed, key battles have coincided so closely with the sites of World War II fighting, the Ukrainian military says, that soldiers have found themselves taking cover in 80-year-old concrete bunkers outside Kyiv. They have discovered the bones of German soldiers and Nazi bullet casings in the dirt they removed from trenches in the south.

World War II reached what is now Ukraine in 1939 with a Soviet attack into territory then controlled by Poland in western Ukraine, at a time when the Soviet Union and the Nazi were in a military alliance. When that pact broke down in 1941, Germany attacked and fought from west to east across Ukraine.

Ukraine is echoing that World War



A Ukrainian soldier atop an abandoned Russian tank in the Siversky Donets River, in Bilohorivka, Ukraine.

II offensive, fighting at sites southeast of Zaporizhzhia in what the Ukrainian military calls the “Melitopol direction.” The strategic goal is the same as it was eight decades ago — to isolate enemy soldiers in the Kherson region and threaten Crimea — but Ukrainian troops are moving far more slowly, having gained only a few miles in more than a month.

“Historical parallels, unfortunately or happily, keep coming to the surface,” said Vasyl Pavlov, an adviser to Ukraine’s general headquarters who has closely studied the similarities of the two wars.

Strategically, he said, Ukraine’s generals most directly drew on World War II history in devising a defence of the capital, Kyiv, last year.

In the opening days of the war, the Russian army advanced from Belarus toward the flood plain of the Irpin River — only to find that the Ukrainians had blown up a dam and inundated a vast area of fields, blocking the advance. It was a reprisal of a Soviet trick in 1941, when

Moscow blew up an Irpin River dam to block a German tank assault, Pavlov said.

“Generals always prepare to fight the last war,” he said. “But the Russian generals didn’t even prepare to fight the last war.”

German troops eventually captured Kyiv in 1941; the Russians fought for a month in the suburbs in spring 2022 and withdrew.

When the current war turned from Kyiv to the east, it similarly retraced the battles of World War II. Then, as today, the looping course of the Siversky Donets River became a front line — with its high banks and swampy shores serving as natural barriers as rival armies fought over the cities and towns alongside them.

In World War II, the river formed a portion of the so-called Mius Line, a defensive position the Nazis built to slow Soviet counterattacks after the Battle of Stalingrad.

In the current war, various cities and villages along the Siversky Donets have come into play. Ukrainian forces used the

river’s high bluffs and flood plains, for example, to attempt a defence of the city of Lysychansk, ultimately unsuccessful, and to prevent a Russian crossing near the town of Bilohorivka.

Both wars left riverside towns and villages in ruins. The current fighting has also damaged with shrapnel pocks monuments erected to commemorate the World War II fighting.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive south of the city of Zaporizhzhia is, Pavlov said, “a direct analogy” to the German offensive in September 1941. The objectives were similar: to move across the plains, cut supply lines to Russian troops on the eastern bank of the Dnieper and move into position to threaten the isthmus of the Crimean Peninsula.

Zaporizhzhia, a sprawling industrial city on the shore of the disappearing Kakhovka Reservoir, was occupied by Nazi forces in World War II and is a front-line city today where air sirens wail multiple times a day and Russian missiles occasionally streak in and explode.

Biden moves to raise the cost of drilling on federal lands



Coral Davenport

The writer covers energy and environmental policy from The New York Times’s Washington bureau.

and 2031. After that, rates could increase again. Interior Department officials characterise the changes as part of a broader shift at the federal agency as it seeks to address climate change by expanding renewable energy on public land and in federal waters while making it more expensive for private companies to drill on public lands. “The Interior Department has taken several steps over the last two years to ensure the federal oil and gas programme provides a fair return to taxpayers, adequately accounts for

environmental harms and discourages speculation by oil and gas companies,” said Laura Daniel-Davis, the Interior Department’s principal deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management. “This new proposed rule will help fully codify those goals and lead to more responsible leasing and development processes.”

“Amidst a global energy crisis, this action from the Department of the Interior is yet another attempt to add even more barriers to future energy production, increases uncertainty for producers and may further discourage oil and natural gas investment,” said Holly Hopkins, a vice president at the American Petroleum Institute, which lobbies for oil and gas companies.

“The Biden administration is recognising that over a century of business as usual by the oil and gas industry is incompatible with a world being ravaged by climate change, a crisis induced primarily by the industry itself,” said Josh Axelrod at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an advocacy group. But he added, “we can’t continue to lease our public lands for fossil fuels while facing climate and biodiversity emergencies.”

Some of the changes were mandated by the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which directs the Interior Department to increase the royalty rates paid by companies that drill on public lands to 16.67 per cent from 12.5 per cent, and to increase the minimum bid at auctions for drilling leases to \$10 per acre from \$2 per acre, among other provisions. The 12.5 per cent royalty rates have been in place since 1920.



A drilling rig in the early stages of installation near Douglas, Wyo.

Interior Department officials characterise the changes as part of a broader shift at the federal agency as it seeks to address climate change by expanding renewable energy on public land.

The law also orders the agency to set a minimum rental rate of \$3 per acre on public drilling leases in the first two years after a lease is issued, rising to \$15 per acre after 10 years, and to establish a new fee of \$5 per acre for companies to formally register their interest in leasing public land for drilling. But the Interior Department’s new rule would go even further than Congress required: It would dramatically raise the cost of the bonds that companies must guarantee to pay to the federal government before drilling on public lands, which has not increased since 1960. The department wants to use those funds to remediate damage left by abandoned uncapped oil and gas wells, so that the cost is borne by companies rather than taxpayers.

The new rule proposes to increase the minimum bond paid upon purchasing an individual drilling lease to \$150,000 from \$10,000. The cost of a bond required upon purchasing a drilling lease on multiple public lands in a state would rise to \$500,000 from \$25,000. The changes would eliminate an existing national bond under which companies can pay \$150,000 as insurance against damaged, abandoned wells anywhere in the country.

The Interior Department estimates that there are 3.5 million abandoned oil and gas wells in the United States. When oil and gas wells are abandoned without being properly sealed or capped, which can happen in cases when companies go bankrupt, the wells can leak methane, a powerful planet-warming pollutant that is a major contributor to global warming.

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

One wonders if regret is a wasted emotion. would it be better to live life with no regrets? or does it have some hidden benefits? Researchers studying cognitive development believe that regret is an important topic that is discussed frequently during

Instead of using your energy to torture yourself

Accept that making mistakes is part of life and none of us are perfect.

MOHAMMAD YUNUS YAWAR AND
CHARLOTTE GREENFIELD

— Reuters

Dr. David A. Clark

The writer is the Rome bureau chief of The Times, covering Italy, the Vatican and Greece

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Life, like a movie... It never really ends

All of this week's offering is plagiarised... well maybe, copied... or maybe simply inspired, by someone else... but is made up of some of the most impressionable philosophers, homespun and professional, ever. In their words you may find comfort, strength, support, or encouragement.

Take them lightly or seriously... your choice, but if only one word resonates, I will feel a 'different' kind of message has been worthwhile.

Steve Jobs may, or may not have been a workaholic, and while his squillions ensure that whatever he says will be heard, has a message for every youthful generation saying, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't live according to someone else's dogma, the rules by which they live, because it means that you are living according to someone else's thinking, wasting your own imagination." These sentiments are very much echoed by James Cameron, director of the 'Titanic,' and 'Avatar' movies, who told a graduating student cohort, "Set your goals high, and whether you succeed or fail you will always be a winner. Aiming high and failing is a personal victory, a triumph over those whose goals are always achievable, and achieve only mediocrity"

Nelson Mandela lived a life of such intensity, such pain, and suffering, particularly when he was imprisoned on Robben Island, for 18 years. Every day he must have looked across the five miles of shark infested Southern Atlantic Ocean towards his beloved Cape Town with an incredibly heavy heart, yet with enough resilience to write, "The greatest glory lies not in never falling, but rising every time we fall." Indeed, he showed sufficient mental and physical strength to inspire the end of apartheid, and for the name Mandela to be immortalised. Ironically, many years before Mandela's imprisonment, convict David Stuurman actually escaped from the island in 1809, and upon being returned to his cell



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com

The writer is a media consultant

YOU HAVE WATCHED A MOVIE, AND AT THE FINISH YOU GET UP AND WALK OUT WITH THE CROWD... WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT. YEP... WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THE MOVIE ENDED... AND SUCH IS LIFE

four months later, stayed patient and escaped again in 1820, so perhaps he too provided some inspiration for Mandela's social and political successes.

We can't all be winners, can we? Despite the old No Fear sports clothing message that, "Second place is the first loser," there has always been a special place in our hearts for truly 'unlucky losers,' hasn't there? Who can ever forget Devon Loch, owned by the Queen Mother Elizabeth I, going 5 lengths clear in the closing stages of the 1956 Grand National Steeplechase, when, ridden by Dick Francis, he slipped and fell just 40 metres from glory, perhaps inspiring Francis to write fictional racing stories. Until today, royalty still awaits that elusive Grand National winner, while ironically maybe, even religion has an opinion, with the biblical proverb (14:20), 'An unlucky loser is shunned by all, but everyone loves a winner.

"Life," said John Lennon, "is what happens when you are busy making plans," and certainly there is that often quoted adage that 'Man plans, while God laughs,' if you ever wanted a sobering reminder that life never really goes exactly as we would wish.

There are just too many intangibles, too many things that we don't know, and too many things that we don't have any control over for any level of certainty. In fact the wisest Oriental philosopher, Confucius is reputed to have said that, "Life is really simple, we just insist upon making it complicated, which probably isn't a hundred miles away from the truth, if one is possible, about life. However, being a bit of an old romantic myself... I appreciate Hans Christian Andersen's description of life as "the most wonderful fairy tale."

I'm still uncertain about how my, and our, 'fairy tales' will work out, and strangely, I don't think that when my story 'ends,' it truly will. Have a think about this. You have watched a movie, and at the finish you get up and walk out with the crowd... what are you thinking about. Yep... what happened after the movie ended... and such is life.

STAYING AFLOAT



A man uses an oar to remove water from a boat in the Dal Lake during rainfall in Srinagar, India on Saturday. - AFP

The Kremlin's mobster code

Russia has a long history of rule by criminals. Channelling French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's famous dictum "property is theft," the Bolsheviks emerged in the early twentieth century as a semi-criminal organisation partly financed by the "expropriation of the expropriators" — in other words, armed robbery. Young Joseph Stalin allegedly participated in these "exes," as the Bolsheviks called them.

The story of Alexander Orlov, one of Stalin's spies, underscores the criminal tendencies of the Soviet regime. After presiding over the controversial — and some say illegal — transfer of the Spanish gold reserves from Madrid to Moscow in 1936, Orlov defected to the West once he became the operation's lone survivor. Before leaving, he stole the entire operational fund of the Soviet station in Spain. Yet Stalin did not have him assassinated, as one might expect, because Orlov threatened to disclose the mission and the large network of Soviet spies.

Likewise, Wagner Group boss Yevgeny Prigozhin has so far suffered negligible consequences for his short-lived mutiny. His mercenaries have continued to receive state funds, and it is rumoured that weapons and large sums of cash confiscated by the state were returned to Prigozhin. This may suggest that Prigozhin is one of President Vladimir Putin's "wallets" or knows where Putin hides his money — or is blackmailing him.

The alleged meeting at the end of



Dina Khapaeva

The writer is a Professor of Russian at the Georgia Institute of Technology, is the author of Crimes sans châtiment (Crimes without Punishment)

THE WAGNER GROUP'S MUTINY DEMONSTRATES THAT POWER IN RUSSIA IS NOT NEARLY AS CENTRALISED AS MANY BELIEVE

June between Putin, Prigozhin, and Wagner's top commanders, which occurred after Putin accused Prigozhin of treason, is best understood as a mafia sit-down where disputes among crime families are hashed out.

But whatever Prigozhin's destiny may be, the Wagner Group's mutiny demonstrates that power in Russia is not nearly as centralised as many believe. While Western experts continue to view Russia as a modern state, they overlook the fact that Putin's cronies, who represent the mingling of the security services — particularly the FSB, the successor to the Soviet-era KGB — and organised crime, control most state functions as their private maindos. The Kremlin distributes property in a neo-feudal manner. Property in post-Soviet Russia is "conditional"; the suzerain can always reclaim it.

Like a matryoshka doll, Putinism — not necessarily Putin's power, but the system he and his cronies have created — contains smaller copies of itself, such as the Wagner Group and other private military gangs. The war in Ukraine has cracked open the doll's outer layer and granted a new degree of autonomy to the criminal organisations within. Given the vast resources under Kremlin control that are at stake, future infighting looks inevitable.

The existence of multiple private armies will make these power games more destabilising.



A Wagner fighter and a Belarusian soldier take part in a joint training outside Brest. - Reuters

As a commentator on RIA Novosti, Russia's official news agency, put it after documenting the private armies of several oil companies: "[W]e are on the verge of a major increase in corporate and other paramilitary structures, as well as major changes in the very approach to the use of military force." Against this backdrop, the Russian army has become another gang vying for power and property. But as the Kremlin's grip on power slips, Russia's generals will likely organise a putsch against Putin and his KGB/FSB cronies — the army's historical rival. The estrangement of the army officer class from the regime continues apace, as demonstrated by the dismissal of Ivan Popov, formerly the commander of the 58th army, for speaking out about the

military's desperate situation in Ukraine. Perhaps anticipating such a challenge, Putin is arming the National Guard — which is under his direct control and serves as his personal security force — with tanks and heavy weaponry.

For the time being, the Russian public seems to support Putinism. Prigozhin's march on Moscow did not spark widespread protests or revolts against the regime, much less against its pointless and appalling war. But some citizens in Rostov-on-Don expressed their sympathy for Prigozhin and his gang as they marched through the city, while others may support other private armies. Ultimately, these warlords represent the epitome of the political system that Putin has been constructing for the last 23 years.

The most sobering lesson of Prigozhin's mutiny is that Prigozhin treated Putin the same way that Putin has treated the West. Prigozhin's march on Moscow and his hysterical aggression against his nemesis, Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, recalls a mobster's effort to scare his victim into compliance with escalating threats.

Ever since his speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Putin has taken a similar approach to the West. But the groundwork was laid for this strategy during his first year as president, when the Russian government adopted a new military doctrine that included implicit nuclear blackmail. Since then, Putin has continually used the threat of nuclear aggression to demand Western compliance with his "red lines." The West has contributed to this dynamic by focusing excessively on Putin and giving him too much sway over global affairs. This was partly a consequence of the Kremlin's corruption of Western politicians and intellectuals, who downplayed his authoritarianism and positioned Russia as a modern state and reliable energy partner. Even today, despite Russia's war crimes, Western media often refer to Russia's elite with the blind objectivity reserved for the powerful, rather than conveying their essential criminality.

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OMAN TAKES PART IN MEETING OF ARAB BODY FOR ATHLETES WITH DISABILITIES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Omani Paralympic Committee, participated in the General Assembly of the Arab Federation for Persons with Disabilities in Al Ain, UAE, on Friday.

The meeting was chaired by Ihab Hassanein, who serves as both the President of the Arab Federation for Sports of People of Determination and the President of the African Paralympic Volleyball Confederation. The event was attended by members of the Board of Directors and Mohammed bin Abdullah Al Hinai, Secretary of the Omani Paralympic Committee.

A significant highlight of the assembly was the signing of a “cooperation protocol” between the Arab Federation for People with Disabilities and the West Asian Paralympic Federation, which is presided over by Dr Abdulrazzaq Bani Rashid. The protocol aims to foster collaboration, explore and discuss ways to enhance cooperation between the two esteemed federations.

During the meeting, Al Hinai expressed his delight at the successful convening of the General Assembly of the Arab Federation. He noted that the assembly addressed the crucial task of amending certain articles of the federation’s statute, as well as the formation of vital administrative and technical committees. These strategic measures are intended to propel the Arab Federation



Oman remains steadfast in its commitment to the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities, recognising the profound impact that sports and athletic pursuits can have on the lives of individuals with determination

for Persons with Disabilities towards unprecedented growth and advancement across all its domains.

Furthermore, Al Hinai emphasised that the upcoming period will witness the launch of numerous Arab sports championships. These championships will encompass volleyball, swimming, weightlifting, and boccia, which are aimed at enhancing the capabilities of athletes with disabilities. By providing opportunities to compete in upcoming international championships, the Arab Federation aims to promote inclusivity and encourage the empowerment of athletes with disabilities.

Oman remains steadfast in its commitment to the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities, recognising the profound impact that sports and athletic pursuits can have on the lives of individuals with determination through active participation in regional gatherings like the General Assembly of the Arab Federation.

Muhanad claims senior singles title at national TT meet



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Seeb’s paddler Muhanad al Balushi bagged Senior Singles National Table Tennis Championship title on Saturday. Muhanad beat his teammate and the defending Champion Asad al Raisi 3-1 in the final clash at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The three-day tournament, organised by Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA), featured 59 players representing 15 domestic clubs from Ibri, Saham, Nakhal, Qurayat, Al Rustaq, Al Ittifaq, Salalah, Yanqul, Seeb, Mirbat, Al Suwaiq, Ahli Sidab, Masirah, Dhofar and Nizwa.

Sultan al Riyami from Yanqul club took the third place award as he defeated Muadh al Shehi from Saham 3-2 in the third and fourth playoff. In the semifinals, Mashal lost against Asad al Raisi 3-0, while Muhanad edged Sultan 3-1.

The champions Muhanad topped his second group in the group stage as he claimed the full mark of points from two games. He won against Said Salim Ali from Salalah club 3-0 and against Abdulhakeem al Kharousi from Ahli Sidab club 3-0.

In the last 32 round, Muhanad qualified through bai system before thrashing Al Harith al Yafei from Salalah club 3-0 in



the last 16 round. Later, he won against Haitham al Mandhari from Saham club in the quarterfinals before defeating Sultan al Riyami to make it in the semis 3-1. Then, he won against Asad in the concluding game.

This year edition of the tournament featured advancing of Saham talented paddler Nasser al Zaabi who is in U15 years category. The young player impressed as he progressed into round of last 32 for the first time after he positioned as runner up in tenth group with five points. He managed to earn two victories against Khalid al Siyadi from Al Rustaq Club 3-0 and against Al Julanda al

Hadhrami (Al Rustaq) with the same result. Saham’s paddler Muadh al Shehi progressed for first time as well to the semis of the Senior National Table Tennis Championship for singles category.

The local event was officiated by the international umpires while Hashim al Salmi was appointed as the chief umpire. Khalid al Zaabi was the tournament manager and Mohammed al Jassasi and Masoud al Shaqsi were in the organising committee of the tournament.

The medals ceremony will take place soon as a part of top national event.



Inter Miami CF forward Lionel Messi (10) celebrates after scoring a goal against Cruz Azul during the second half at DRV PNK Stadium. – USA TODAY Sports

FORT LAUDERDALE: Lionel Messi made a Hollywood start to his American adventure, scoring a last-second winner with a curling free-kick in his debut game for Inter Miami on Friday.

Deep in the fourth minute of stoppage time, with the Leagues Cup match against Mexican club Cruz Azul standing at 1-1, Messi won a free-kick just outside the box, in perfect range for his famous left foot.

The script had been written and Messi delivered his line perfectly.

The seven-times Ballon d'Or winner took a glance at the position of Cruz Azul goalkeeper Andres Gudino, then put his head down before curling his shot high to the keeper's right and into the top corner to deliver the 2-1 triumph.

The capacity 20,000 crowd

at Miami's DRV PNK Stadium went wild, with some fans running on to the field before being apprehended by security. Smoke bombs in Miami's trademark pink went off in the area behind the goal, occupied by the team's most passionate supporters.

"We wanted to start like this by giving these people a victory," said Messi.

"We knew that it was very important for us to start this championship in winning fashion and luckily we were able to do it in the end, and I am very happy," he added.

Miami are rock bottom of Major League Soccer and without a win in 11 games in league play, so Messi said the victory was sorely needed.

"It is a huge joy to get this first victory after how we have done in the league," he



said. "It is important to start winning, beyond the fact that it is another championship, for confidence it is very good to get victories."

Miami and Major League Soccer hope that the arrival of the Argentine World Cup winner and all-time great will transform the sport and push it into the American mainstream.

If Messi's debut was any guide, the former Barcelona star still has plenty to offer.

Even before his wonderful goal he had looked sharp and alert, his touch belying the fact that until little over a week ago he was vacationing on a Caribbean beach with his family.

Sergio Busquets, the Spanish midfielder and former Barca team-mate, who has joined Messi for his American adventure, also made a strong impression after they both

entered the contest in the 54th minute as part of a triple change with Venezuelan Josef Martinez.

Busquets showed his famous, almost telepathic understanding with Messi remains, after over two years apart from each other, with the midfielder delivering pieces from all angles into the Argentine's feet.

But it was Messi's magical finish that will remain long in the memories of Inter Miami fans.

He also made sure that the club's co-owner David Beckham had a broad grin at the final whistle.

"To be honest, as soon as I saw the free kick given I thought this is the way it's meant to end. Especially when you've got players like Leo and Sergio on the pitch, that's what they produce," said the former England midfielder.

— AFP

Kohli hits landmark ton but West Indies fight back

PORT OF SPAIN: Virat Kohli's 29th Test century highlighted a solid batting effort by India in getting to 438 batting first against the West Indies on the second day of the second and final Test in Trinidad on Friday.

In response, on a Queen's Park Oval pitch offering little assistance for the bowlers, the home side were well placed at 86 for one in reply at the close. A repeat of the swift demolition West Indies suffered in the first Test in Dominica a week earlier seemed unlikely.

With a sense of occasion befitting someone of his vast experience and considerable success, Kohli reached three figures within minutes of the start of the day from his overnight score of 88.

A square-driven boundary off fast bowler Shannon Gabriel took Kohli to the landmark in his 500th international match and his determined demeanour throughout the innings suggested a monumental effort was in the making by the 34-year-old.

He was undone by an error of judgement when he was run out for 121. Alzarri Joseph's direct hit at the non-striker's end from square-leg found Kohli just short of his ground as he scampered a single.

Kohli's innings spanned four-and-a-half hours. He faced 206 deliveries, stroking 11 fours. He dominated an important 159-run fifth-wicket partnership with Ravindra Jadeja which restored India's ascendancy after a mid-afternoon wobble on the first day



when they slipped to 182 for four.

"This was an opportunity for me to stand up for the team and these are the sorts of occasions where I switch on completely," said the former captain on his first Test hundred outside of India for more than four years.

"The stats and milestones and all of that are for others to talk about," he emphasised. "If I do it in a situation where the team needs me that is more special because in 15-20 years' time the milestones won't matter but what will remain is the impact you left on the field and how you were able to help your team."

Jadeja's was the other wicket to fall in the morning session for a composed 61. He was adjudged caught behind off Kemar Roach, television umpire Michael

Gough overturning the "not out" verdict by on-field official Marais Erasmus.

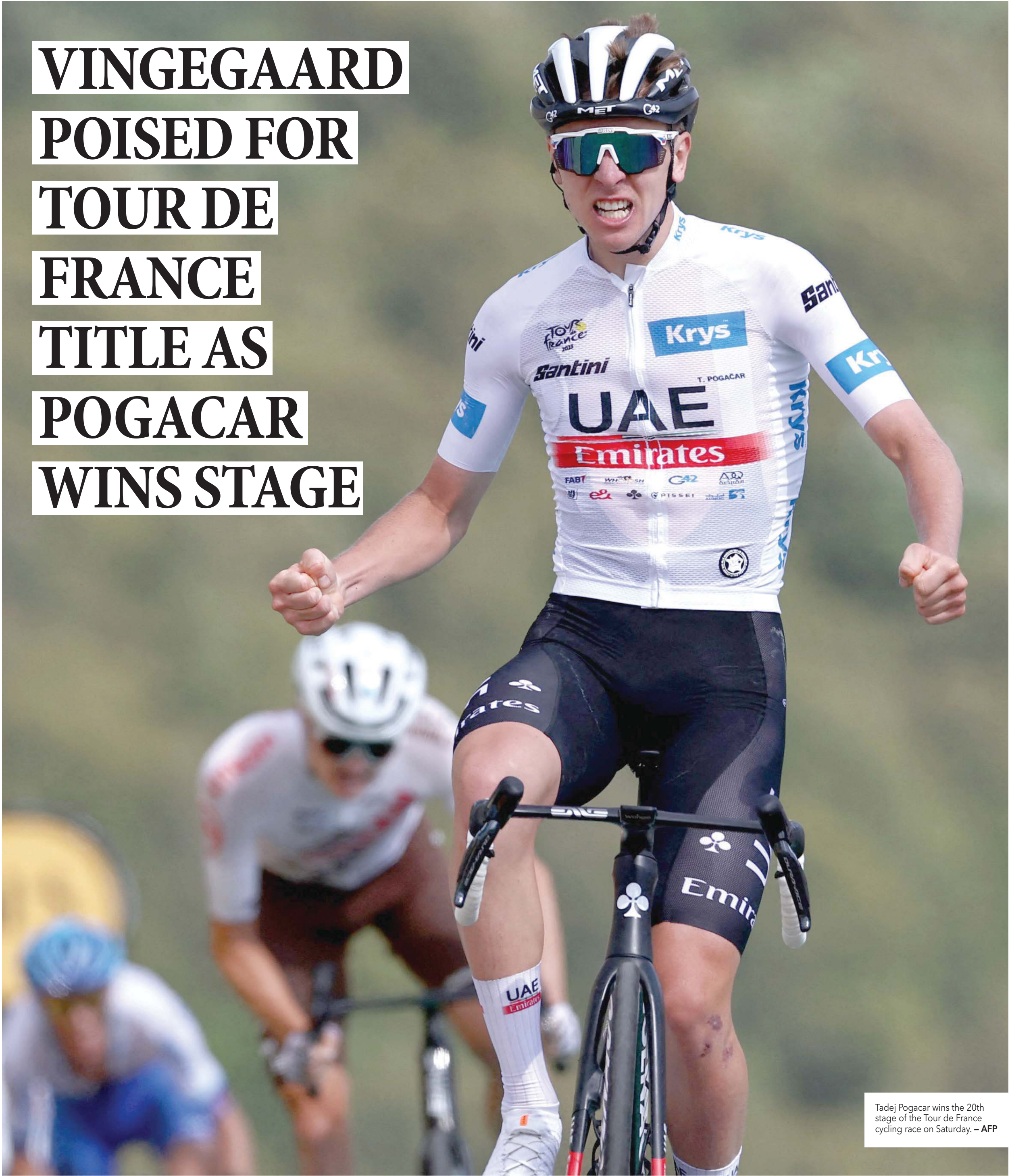
Ravichandran Ashwin held the rest of the innings together before being last out to Roach for a 78-ball knock of 56. Roach and left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican led the bowling effort with three wickets each.

Destroyer of the West Indies at Windsor Park Stadium, Ashwin, like all the Indian bowlers, found the placid pitch much less responsive.

It was only a poor shot by Tagenarine Chanderpaul in the final session which brought about his demise to Jadeja, leaving captain Kraigg Brathwaite and debutant Kirk McKenzie to carry the home side into the third day.

— AFP

VINGEGAARD POISED FOR TOUR DE FRANCE TITLE AS POGACAR WINS STAGE



Tadej Pogacar wins the 20th stage of the Tour de France cycling race on Saturday. – AFP

LE MARKSTEIN, Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard of Denmark was set to win his second Tour de France title after keeping a close tab on his main rival and 20th stage winner Tadej Pogacar in the final mountain ride of the race on Saturday.

Two-time Tour winner Pogacar, whose title hopes evaporated when he was crushed by Vingegaard in Tuesday's time trial and cracked in Wednesday's last Alpine stage, claimed victory on the day after 133.5 kilometres from Belfort, outsprinting Austrian Felix Gall for his second win in this year's race.

Overall, Jumbo-Visma rider

Vingegaard leads Pogacar by seven minutes and 29 seconds with his United Arab Emirates team mate, Briton Adam Yates, in third position, 10:56 off the pace.

Italian Giulio Ciccone secured the polka dot jersey for the mountains classification and Belgian Jasper Philipsen is set to win the green jersey for the points classification, providing that they both cross the finish line in Paris on Sunday.

"After such a hard week I felt like myself on the bike today. I was feeling great. I tried to go solo but I could not so it had to be a sprint," said Pogacar.

Pogacar attacked on the last climb of the day, the Col



Team Jumbo-Visma's Jonas Vingegaard, AG2R Citroen Team's Felix Gall and UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar in action during stage 20. – Reuters

du Platzerwazal (7.1km at 8.4 per cent), and was followed by Vingegaard and Gall.

The trio quickly caught French pair Thibaut Pinot and Warren Barguil and Briton Tom Pidcock and dropped them before battling it out for the stage win after being rejoined by the Yates twins, Simon and Adam. Enormously popular local boy Pinot, riding his last Tour on his training roads with thousands of fans gathered with flags, beers and flares to support him one last time.

Pinot went solo on the ascent to the Petit Ballon, riding as stage leader through a sea of roaring fans like a man possessed. Although he did not

have the legs to take it all the way to the line, the Groupama-FDJ rider finished seventh after a spine-tingling day on the bike.

"I really enjoyed it, I had a big pinch on my heart, it's the roads where I train, it was crazy," said Pinot, third in the 2014 Tour de France and by far the country's most popular rider.

"I did not think it would move me that much, I feel like I've closed a chapter in my history — it's stronger than I thought," he added.

Pinot plans to end his career after riding the Giro di Lombardia, the Monument classic he won in 2018.

— Reuters



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Social Protection Scheme: CBO directs banks to gear up for new account openings



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 22

With potentially thousands of Omanis set to benefit from monthly cash payouts from the newly instituted Social Protection Fund (SPF), the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has directly licensed banks operating in the Sultanate of Oman to dramatically ramp up their account opening capabilities.

Citing Royal Decree 52/2023 promulgating the Social Protection Law, issued last week, the Central Bank urged lenders to anticipate a tide of new account openings in the coming weeks and months, given the significantly enlarged scope of the new Social Protection Fund.

Beneficiaries include low-income segments of the Omani population, such as elderly, children, orphans, differently-abled, widows, elderly retirees and other financially vulnerable categories.

To help facilitate new account openings for these beneficiaries, the apex bank has assigned dedicated counters in branches and activate mobile branch units as well.

Additionally, manned kiosks and automated multi-function machines must be suitably equipped to facilitate

RAMP-UP: MOBILE BANKING UNITS, KIOSKS, MULTIFUNCTION MACHINES MUST BE SUITABLY EQUIPPED TO CATER TO ANTICIPATED FLOOD OF NEW ACCOUNT OPENINGS: CENTRAL BANK

account-openings. Besides, banks should roll out facilities to enable digital account opening by using the E-KYC (Know Your Customer) platform, the Central Bank stressed.

As for account openings for minors (beneficiaries below 18 years), as well as the onboarding of new customers electronically, the CBO has urged banks to put in place safeguards against possible misuse.

For example, accounts of beneficiaries below 18 years will be restricted from making international / cross border wire transfers.

Banking products and services offered to such accounts must also be linked with the accounts of parents or guardians, it said.

Banks, for their part, have been instructed not to levy any minimum balance charges on accounts of SPF beneficiaries.

Lenders should also promote a culture of savings by offering easy and innovative banking solutions, the Central Bank added in its missive.

Duqm evolves into a modern city with world-class facilities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Duqm's unique diversity, climate, and environment are so captivating that visitors often find themselves wanting to prolong their stay in the city. This has led to a significant increase in population and urban growth in recent years.

Today, the city boasts a vibrant mix of nationalities, cultures, and peoples who are all working together to build a modern city and an economic destination that caters to the needs and aspirations of both visitors and residents.

The commercial and tourism sectors in Duqm are committed to meeting the expectations of those who visit or live in the city. This dedication is reflected in the many businesses that have been established by the people of Duqm themselves, who are equally invested in the city's growth and development.

Health & Education

Education and healthcare are two crucial factors that people consider when choosing a city to reside in, whether as permanent or partial residents. In Duqm, which is still in its growing and development phase, these factors play a significant role in attracting investors, engineers, and experts who contribute to building the modern city of Duqm.

One of the most common questions raised by those interested in investing in Duqm is whether there is an international school to which an employee can transfer their family. The availability of quality education is essential for families relocating to a new city.

Similarly, access to healthcare services is also a vital consideration for those who want to ensure that their families are well taken care of. Aside from education



and healthcare, there are other amenities and facilities that people consider when choosing a city to reside in. These include the availability of airports, hotels, malls, restaurants, cafes, and recreational and entertainment facilities.

In Duqm, many of these amenities have already been realised, even though the city is still in its development phase.

International School

A'Soud Global School is a vital component of Duqm Modern City, providing a modern and inclusive educational community for Omani, Arab, and foreign students. Established three years ago, the school was designed to encourage families to relocate to Duqm by providing quality education for their children.

This has been particularly attractive to engineers and other professionals who come from all parts of the world and want to ensure that their children receive a top-notch education.

Year after year, A'Soud Global School has witnessed a steady increase in the number of its students and has firmly established itself within Duqm.

This success is driven by the school's unwavering commitment to providing quality education

and a wide range of educational, sports, and entertainment facilities.

Health facilities

In a city where the workforce exceeds 18,000, it is crucial to have adequate health facilities that can provide quality health services to the population. Prior to the establishment of the Special Economic Zone Authority at Duqm (SEZAD), Duqm Hospital served the limited population.

However, with the rapid growth of the city, there has been an increasing need to expand the health sector in Duqm. To address this need, several private health centres were established early on in the establishment of SEZAD to cater to the growing population.

Over time, the number of these centres has increased, and they now operate 24/7, with outpatient clinics covering all medical specialties and providing a range of scan, examination, and diagnosis devices.

Bowling Center

Said bin Nasser al Jabri, an Omani investor, recognised the importance of having a recreational centre that combines sports and entertainment and meets the desires of youth to enjoy their time in Duqm.

This led him to establish the Oman Bowling Center, which is located in the new commercial district of Duqm and has become a popular destination for residents, tourists from Oman and abroad, and families.

The Oman Bowling Center has 12 bowling tracks with high standard and accuracy screens to display the results. The bowling hall has high standards and specifications that allow it to host local and international competitions. In addition to the bowling hall, the centre has a variety of other halls that offer video games, modern electronic games, billiards, and snooker.

Business Center

Beladi Business Center, also known as Beladi Plaza, is a mall and business centre located in Duqm that was established by an Arab investor. The centre is situated next to the headquarters of SEZAD, and it is one of a group of modern architectural malls that contribute to the city's urban landscape.

The total built area of the Beladi Business Center is 7,200 m², consisting of two adjacent parts: Building (A), which is designed to be a mall, and Building (B), which is designed to be an office complex. **TURN TO PAGE 14**

Banks post RO 235.3 million net profits in first half of 2023

MUSCAT: The net profits of local banks listed at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) during the first half of this year rise to RO 235.3 million, recording a growth of 17.5 per cent. The assets of the eight banks listed on the stock exchange at the end June rose to RO 39.9 billion, recording a growth of 4.6 per cent.

The preliminary financial results showed an increase in the net profits of all banks, in conjunction with the rise of many local economic indicators, such as rise in government revenues,

increase in government spending, rise in exports, and the banking sector's tendency to finance investment projects, private sector projects and SMEs projects.

Bank Muscat recorded the highest profits at RO 104.3 million, National Bank of Oman came second with RO 29.3 million, Sohar International Bank ranked third with RO 23.6 million, HSBC Bank Oman came fourth with RO 21 million, Ahli Bank ranked fifth with RO 19.9 million, and Bank Dhofar sixth with RO 18.4 million and Oman Arab Bank came



seventh with RO 11.5 million, then Bank Nizwa ranked eighth with RO 7.2 million.

The eight banks were able to

per cent, followed by HSBC Bank Oman, whose net profits increased by 50 per cent, while the National Bank of Oman recorded a growth in its net profits by 33.1 per cent.

Most banks recorded growth in their total assets, with Muscat holding the highest volume of assets at RO 13.3 billion. Bank Dhofar ranked second with RO 4.6 billion, the National Bank of Oman ranked third with RO 4.4 billion, Sohar International Bank ranked fourth with RO 4.3 billion, while Oman Arab Bank ranked fifth with RO 3.9 billion.

The market value of banks rose by the end of last June to RO 4.702 billion, compared to RO 4.662 billion last December. At the end of last June, banks acquired 53.2 per cent of the total market value of public joint-stock companies listed on the stock exchange, amounting to RO 8.8 billion.

Bank Muscat leads the banks in terms of market capitalisation with more than RO 2.71 billion, Bank Dhofar ranked second with RO 518.3 million, then Sohar International Bank in third place with RO 495.7 million. — **ONA**

Kalyan Jewellers announces launch of Shop & Shine campaign

MUSCAT: Kalyan Jewellers, one of the most trusted and leading jewellery brands, recently announced the launch of its 'Shop & Shine' campaign.

Through this exciting campaign offer, the brand has announced assured giveaways on jewellery purchases worth RO 500 and above. The unique initiative aims to offer customers with a chance to maximise the value of jewellery purchases from Kalyan Jewellers.

As part of this campaign, customers will receive a ½ gram gold coin on purchase of gold jewellery worth RO 500. Customers are entitled to receive a 1-gram gold coin on purchase of uncut/precious stone jewellery worth RO 500, whereas on purchase of diamond jewellery worth RO 500, the jewellery brand will be giving away 2-gram



gold coins. The offer is valid till September 4, 2023.

Speaking about the offer, Ramesh Kalyanaraman, Executive Director — Kalyan Jewellers said, "At Kalyan Jewellers, our endeavour has been to enable our customers to extract best value from their purchase while providing a great shopping experience.

We have been consistently taking major strides towards offering a holistic shopping

experience to patrons.

As an extension to this thought, we are delighted to announce the 'Shop & Shine' campaign, offering patrons with a chance to maximise benefits on their jewellery purchase. We believe patrons will continue to shower their love and support for brand Kalyan Jewellers and make this initiative a huge success."

Kalyan Jewellers is committed to providing exceptional experiences and fostering a sense of delight for its valued patrons.

Customers can avail the exciting range of offers along with benefits of Kalyan's 4-Level Assurance Certification on their jewellery purchases, ensuring a seamless service-backed shopping experience.

The jewellery retailed at Kalyan Jewellers go through multiple

purity tests and patrons will also receive the Kalyan Jewellers 4-Level Assurance Certificate, which guarantees Purity, Free Lifetime Maintenance of ornaments, Detailed Product Information and Transparent Exchange and Buy-back policies.

The certification is part of the brand's commitment towards offering the very best to its loyalists.

Kalyan Jewellers offers popular house brands such as, Muhurat — Wedding Jewellery Line, Mudhra — handcrafted antique jewellery, Nimah — temple Jewellery, Glo — dancing diamonds, Ziah — Solitaire like diamond jewellery, Anokhi — uncut diamonds, Hera — daily wear diamonds, Rang — precious stones jewellery, and the recently launched Lila — coloured stones and diamond jewellery.

Avail exciting benefits with Yokohama's Summer Delights campaign



MUSCAT: Now is the perfect time to buy Yokohama Tyres and avail exciting benefits. The benefits include RO 10 discount on purchase of 4 tyres of rim 17 and below and RO 20 discount on purchase of 4 tyres of rim 18 and above.

The campaign is valid till August 17, 2023 (Conditions apply. Please visit Saud Bahwan automotive tyre retail outlets) Yokohama tyres are one of the finest in the automotive world backed by advanced research and technology for increased safety on the road.

The vast range of Yokohama tyres are specially engineered to withstand the harsh climate temperatures and varied driving terrains, making them an ideal choice for Oman. Yokohama tyres have always stood out when it comes to safety and reliability.

Every Yokohama tyre is engineered to offer excellent road grip and comfortable smooth drive, in addition to extended tyre life.

The Yokohama Rubber Co

Ltd is one of the world's leading manufacturers of rubber products, offering an extensive range of tire, rubber and adhesive products.

Established in 1917, Yokohama Rubber in its 100th centennial, has expanded its worldwide business scope with a line-up of high-technology products meeting customer needs in the fields of automobiles, civil engineering, construction, marine engineering, aerospace and sporting goods.

In Oman, Saud Bahwan Automotive markets Yokohama Tyres with a nationwide network of 40 branches and over 300 dealers.

The company's complete product line includes tyres for high-performance, light truck, passenger car, commercial truck and bus and off-the-road mining and construction applications.

The company has a wide network of tyre service centres across Oman, which have state of the art equipment, catering to the tyre service needs of the ever-growing market.

OQGN SUCCESSFULLY SIGNS FINANCING FACILITIES WORTH \$1.2 BILLION



MUSCAT: OQ Gas Networks (OQGN), the exclusive operator of the natural gas transportation network in Oman, has signed three complex financing agreements with local and regional banks for a total commitment of \$1.2 billion. Together, this financing is considered the largest syndicates of Islamic financing in the Sultanate of Oman, providing the company with access to capital in dual currencies to support its ongoing business activities and refinancing requirements.

Duqm evolves into modern city with world-class facilities

FROM PAGE13

The centre's marketing campaign focuses on attracting local and international brands in various sectors and businesses. The investor behind the Beladi Business Centre aspires to make it a new and outstanding addition to SEZAD, as it is the first centre of its kind in Duqm to provide services to the commercial and corporate sectors.

The centre is a suitable location for organising various exhibitions and events, thanks to the existence of a big hall that can host many commercial and marketing exhibitions and events, promoting this critical sector.

Modern infrastructure

Duqm is known for its well-planned and wide two-way streets, which provide smooth and easy transfer for those who come through Duqm Airport, travellers, and the movement of goods between the airport and the port.

Sultan Qaboos Road is a significant road that consists of three lanes, connecting Duqm Airport with the port and passing through many investment areas. It facilitates the movement of goods and people between these two essential points in the city.

Tourism and investment

Duqm has seen a significant increase in the number of hotel options available in recent years. Three years ago, the city had only

three hotels, but today there are more than 12 hotel options available, ranging from four-star hotels with sea views to three-star and two-star hotels located in the central area of Duqm.

The increased number of hotel options has brought a variety of choices to residents, tourists, and business travellers. Visitors can choose hotels that offer scenic views of the sea or those located in central Duqm, making it easy for them to access different parts of the city.

The increase in the number of hotel options and the development of tourism infrastructure in Duqm has made it an attractive destination for both domestic and international visitors. Duqm's location, picturesque beaches, and natural beauty make it an ideal destination for tourists seeking a relaxing holiday.

Duqm is also an optimal site for those interested in practicing various sports hobbies, including fishing, diving, and other water sports. The city offers a range of sports facilities and activities that cater to different interests and skill levels.

Moreover, Duqm is an important site for those interested in visiting the Arabian Oryx Reserve, which is located nearby. Tourists can also visit Barr Al Hakman or other tourist landmarks in Al Wusta Governorate, making Duqm an excellent base for exploring the region.

Bank Nizwa holds Islamic finance knowledge sessions across Oman

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, organised two impactful lectures as part of its educational programme for Islamic banking at the Cultural Centre in Sinaw and Imam Abdulmalik Bin Humaid Mosque.

The lectures aimed to enhance the level of awareness within the local community about the principles and concepts of Islamic banking in line with Sharia principles. Both lectures witnessed significant attendance and active participation.

The first lecture at the Cultural Centre in Sinaw was delivered by Mustafa bin Nasser al Na'bi, Deputy Manager of Sharia Training at Bank Nizwa, while the second lecture at Imam Abdulmalik Bin Humaid Mosque was delivered by Shaikh Dr Ali bin Sulaiman al Jahdhami, a member of the Sharia Board at Bank Nizwa.

These informative lectures reflect Bank Nizwa's continuous efforts to instill the principles of Islamic banking within the community and equip individuals with the necessary knowledge to maximise the



benefits offered by Islamic banking services and innovative solutions that adhere to Sharia principles, provided by Bank Nizwa.

By providing comprehensive Islamic banking solutions, Bank Nizwa ensures that individuals can make sound financial decisions that align with their aspirations and financial needs.

Commenting on the lectures, Shaikh Dr Ali bin Sulaiman al Jahdhami, said, "At Bank Nizwa, we are dedicated to spreading awareness about Islamic banking among the local community through our educational programme for individuals interested in financial solutions

aligned with our Islamic beliefs.

This programme equips them with the necessary knowledge to make sound financial decisions that meet their aspirations and financial needs, through the provision of innovative financial products and services that comply with Islamic Sharia principles and the lifestyle of the community.

Bank Nizwa will continue its efforts to keep pace with developments in the Islamic banking industry and contribute to the community by providing comprehensive Islamic banking solutions."

The educational programme for Islamic banking represents

the extent of Bank Nizwa's efforts to promote awareness in the communities it serves and enhance individuals' capacities to understand the principles and concepts of banking compliant with Islamic Sharia teachings.

Islamic finance is considered as a mean to enhance financial inclusion and achieve financial goals while developing projects that align with their beliefs and lifestyles for the Omani society.

It is worth mentioning that the efforts made by those responsible for the educational programme for Islamic banking come as a manifestation of the bank's continuous commitment to fulfilling its social responsibilities. Since its establishment, Bank Nizwa has continued participating in various community initiatives to raise awareness among different segments of Omani society about Islamic banking to make sound financial decisions.

Bank Nizwa has earned the trust and respect of the Omani community through its diverse and growing range of financial services and products tailored to meet the varied needs of its customers.



Oman witnesses expansion in money supply

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 22

Oman's economic landscape has recently presented a mixed picture, with the country experiencing a decrease in currency issued but witnessing an expansion in money supply.

According to a preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the currency issued has declined by 3.7 per cent, while both narrow and broad money supplies have registered positive growth.

The currency issued in Oman experienced a 3.7-per cent decrease from RO 1.72 billion recorded until the end of May 2022 to RO 1.65 billion until the end of May 2023. This decline may be attributed to various factors, such as changes in demand for money, fiscal policies and external economic influences.

On the other hand, the narrow money supply (M1), which includes currency in circulation and demand deposits, showed a 1.1-per cent increase to reach RO 5.84 billion until end-May 2023



compared to RO 5.78 billion during the same period last year.

This growth in M1 suggests that the availability of cash and demand deposits has expanded during the specified period. It can be an indication of increased economic activity and consumer confidence.

Furthermore, broad money supply (M2), which includes M1 along with time and savings deposits, exhibited a more significant increase of 4.5 per cent. M2 expanded from RO 20.37 billion until end-May 2022 to RO

21.28 billion until end-May 2023.

This surge in M2 reflects a broader measure of money in circulation and indicates that individuals and businesses in Oman have been saving and investing more during the specified period.

In terms of the Central Bank of Oman's foreign assets, there was a 0.9-per cent increase from RO 6.70 billion to RO 6.76 billion. Foreign assets play a vital role in a country's economic stability, as they provide a cushion to offset external shocks and help maintain the balance of

payments.

The growth in foreign assets indicates a steady accumulation of reserves, which can contribute to strengthening Oman's economic resilience.

In addition to the money supply indicators, the NCSI data also reveals positive trends in the private sector. Commercial banks and Islamic windows' private sector deposits increased by 4.3 per cent from RO 17.15 billion until end-May 2022 to RO 17.87 billion until end-May 2023.

This rise in deposits indicates growing confidence in the banking sector and suggests that businesses and individuals are saving more.

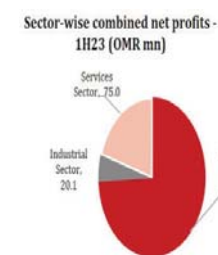
Moreover, total loans and financing of commercial banks and Islamic windows expanded by 6.4 per cent from RO 28.30 billion until end-May 2022 to RO 30.11 billion until end-May 2023. This increase in lending indicates a willingness of banks to provide credit, which can stimulate economic growth and investment.

The average interest rate on total credit experienced a slight decrease of 0.9 per cent from RO 5.493 to RO 5.444. This decline suggests a slightly more favourable borrowing environment, which can incentivise businesses and individuals to take on loans for investments or consumption.

Lastly, effective exchange rate index of Omani rial rose by 3.8 per cent from 111.0 until end-May 2022 to 115.2 until end-May 2023.

This means that the Omani rial has strengthened against other currencies by 3.8 per cent. The effective exchange rate index is a measure of the value of a currency against a basket of other currencies.

Net profit of MSX-listed firms climbs 13% in H1



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 22

The combined net profit of MSX-listed companies grew by about 13 per cent YoY during H1 2023 to about RO 369.7 million, according to Ubhar Capital, well-known Omani investment services firm. On a sector basis, the financial sector showed a solid YoY growth of about 14 per cent while the industrial sector posted a 96-per cent YoY growth in combined net profits of the companies compared to H1 2022 and supported the combined net profit of the stock market.

The industrial sector performance was led by electrical and mechanical sub-sector performance (+140 per cent YoY) and partial recovery in losses in the cement (+213 per cent YoY) and mining (+81 per cent YoY) sub-sectors.

The industrial sub-sector's performance was partially weighed down by significant drop in combined profits of food and beverage sub-sector (-41 per cent YoY).

The services sector saw a drop of 1.8 per cent YoY in its combined net profit, led by telecom sub-sector and oil and gas marketing sub-sector. Omantel, among a few other companies, are yet to report their H1 2023 results.

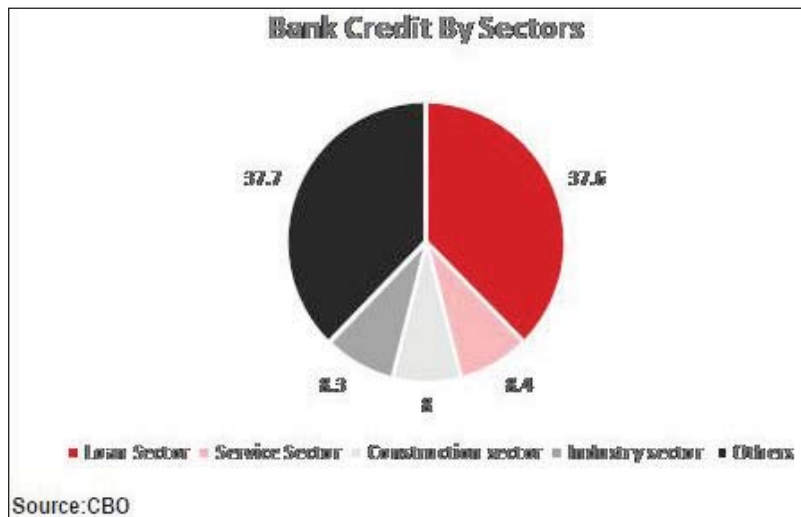
These companies have also been excluded from the H1 2022 results as well for a like-to-like comparison.

MSX30 Index closes week higher by 8.4 points

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange MSX30 Index closed last week at 4,805.07 points, up by 8.4 points and 0.18 per cent high from the previous trading session, which stood at 4,796.66 points.

All major sector indices declined, except for the Shariah index, which rose by 0.02 per cent. The financial sector decreased by 0.46 per cent, The industry sector index was down by 0.51 per cent, and the service industry index fell by 0.89 per cent.

Oman Investment & Finance announced the initiation a legal case to invalidate the resolutions of the EGM to dissolve and merge OIFC. The company informed its shareholders that it was notified by the competent court on Thursday that a case has been initiated against the company by a number of shareholders, requesting the court to invalidate the resolutions of the EGM of the company, regarding its approval of the merger of the Company with Dhofar International Development and Investment Holding Company



SAOG through incorporation.

Raysut Cement has engaged an independent technical consultant to conduct a technical audit to ascertain the technical integrity and advise on measures to be taken to ensure the operational sustainability of the company.

Management is also in the process of finalising the turnaround plan which will be later reviewed by an expert and the board.

The turnaround plan is expected

to be completed within the next three months. To ensure the sustainability of its operations, the company is working on securing a bridging loan with the objective of meeting the company's short-term needs until the successful structuring of the long-term capital raising.

The company also appointed an international firm to conduct a forensic investigation on the activities which led to the company incur losses.

The Oman REIT Fund announced that they have successfully secured a new Shariah compliant term facility from Al Muzn Islamic, the Islamic window of National Bank of Oman, for a total amount of RO 30,000,000. The facility documents were signed by both parties on July 9, 2023.

This facility will support the crucial role in advancing strategic objectives. They have already utilised the first portion of this facility on July 16, 2023, amounting to RO 7,600,000, to acquire a highly promising asset; Nesto Wadi Kabir Building, featuring an existing long-term lease with an unexpired lease term of c. 15 years with Nesto Hypermarket, which aligns perfectly with their strategy of stabilising future returns and increasing the weighted average unexpired lease term (WAULT) of their portfolio.

The total credit granted by commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman during the first quarter of 2023 increased by 5.5 per cent to

RO 24.28 billion compared to RO 23.10 billion in the same period of 2022.

The quarterly statistical bulletin issued by the Research and Statistics Department of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) indicated that the personal loans sector received RO 46.9 billion.

The services sector received RO 2.65 billion or 8.5 per cent of the credit granted, followed by the construction sector at RO 1.88 billion or 7.8 per cent, and the industry sector at RO 1.88 billion or 7.7 per cent of the total bank credit.

The CBO bulletin further indicated that the electricity, transportation and water sector received RO 669.9 billion, or 6.9 per cent of the volume of credit granted to commercial banks during the first three months of 2023.

The transportation sector received RO 497.2 billion, or 6.2 per cent of the total volume of credit.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON

US banks warn of interest income weakness

Comerica and Huntington Bancshares on Friday sharply cut their interest income growth forecasts for 2023, the latest US banks to sound the alarm over faltering loan demand and a rise in deposit costs.

The Federal Reserve's fastest monetary tightening cycle since the 1980s helped lift lenders' net interest income in the second quarter, but the high rates are forcing some customers to rethink taking loans and buying big-ticket items.

NII — the difference between what banks make on loans and pay out on deposits — rose for nearly all lenders reporting earnings for the April-June quarter, with Comerica and Huntington also topping profit estimates.



But the high interest rate environment is also forcing lenders to boost deposit rates to prevent clients' money from fleeing to high-yielding alternatives like money market funds, and that will weigh on NII going forward, analysts have said.

Mid-sized lender Regions Financial, which also reported results on Friday, said its deposit costs had risen in the second quarter. — Reuters

NEW DELHI

G20 ministers fail to agree on fossil fuels roadmap

Energy ministers from the group of 20 nations meeting in India on Saturday failed to agree on a roadmap to phase down the use of fossil fuels in the global energy mix. A final statement after the meeting did not even mention coal, a major contributor to global warming.

The dirty fuel is also a key energy source for many developing economies such as India — the world's most-populous country — and China, the world's second-largest economy.

The failure to reach agreement in Goa comes despite G7 leaders agreeing in Hiroshima in May to "accelerate the phase-out of unabated fossil fuels" and with global temperatures hitting



record highs, triggering floods, storms and heatwaves.

Explaining the stalemate, G20 president India said that some members had emphasised the importance of seeking a "phase down of unabated fossil fuels, in line with different national circumstances".

But "others had different views on the matter that abatement and removal technologies will address such concerns," it added.

— AFP

MOSCOW

Russian central bank surprises with 8.5 pc rate hike

Russia's central bank hiked its key interest rate by a greater-than-expected 100 basis points to 8.5 per cent on Friday, raising the cost of borrowing as the weak rouble added to inflation pressure from a tight labour market and strong consumer demand.

It was the first time the bank had raised rates in more than a year, having gradually reversed an emergency hike to 20 per cent made in February last year after Russia sent its armed forces into Ukraine, which prompted the West to impose sanctions on Moscow. Its last cut, to 7.5 per cent, was in September.

"Pro-inflationary risks have increased significantly over the medium-term horizon," the bank said in a statement. "The



increase in domestic demand surpasses the capacity to expand production, including due to the limited availability of labour resources."

This was reinforcing persistent inflationary pressure, it said, while the rouble's depreciation this year was "significantly amplifying pro-inflationary risks". The central bank raised its year-end forecast for inflation, now just below 4 per cent.

— Reuters

The impact of 5G: Revolutionising connectivity and industries



STEFANO VIRGILLI
stefano@virgilli.com

The author is a member of the International Press Association

In today's digital age, fast and reliable connectivity is crucial for economic development and technological advancement. Oman, like many other countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), has recognised the importance of 5G technology in achieving its strategic vision for economic diversification and digital transformation. As part of its e.Oman 2030 strategy, the Sultanate of Oman aims to enhance digital literacy, develop e-government services, and revolutionise Omani industries through the deployment of a high-speed, high-density network infrastructure. According to the Open Data initiative provided by the TRA, the significant rebound in mobile penetration at 125.16% in Q1 2023, up from 117.33% in Q4 2022, indicates the increasing demand for advanced connectivity in the

country. The surge in mobile postpaid subscriptions, reaching an all-time high of 1,697,152 in Q1 2023, significantly higher than Q4 2022's 1,367,446 subscriptions, further underscores Oman's growing appetite for enhanced mobile services. 5G is a foundational element in the development of smart cities, where various technologies converge to improve urban living. The low latency and high bandwidth of 5G facilitate the seamless integration of devices and systems, enabling real-time data exchange for smart grids, efficient public transportation, and advanced public services. With the advent of smart traffic management, waste management, and energy distribution, 5G enables cities to operate more sustainably, making better use of resources and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The transportation industry

is one of the key sectors set to be revolutionised by 5G technology. 5G enables seamless communication between vehicles, infrastructure, and traffic management systems. This capability is crucial for the successful implementation of connected and autonomous vehicles (CAVs). By facilitating real-time data transfer and instantaneous decision-making, 5G can significantly enhance road safety and traffic management, reducing the number of accidents and improving transportation efficiency. Additionally, with the potential for vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) and vehicle-to-everything (V2X) communication, 5G can optimise traffic flow and reduce congestion, leading to a more sustainable and efficient transportation network. The manufacturing sector is undergoing a digital transformation, with Industry 4.0 driving advancements in

automation and data exchange. 5G plays a crucial role in this revolution, enabling real-time communication and coordination between machines and devices. With the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) becoming integral to modern manufacturing, 5G's high bandwidth allows for the seamless transfer of vast amounts of data generated by sensors and smart devices. This data-driven approach enhances production efficiency, enables predictive maintenance, and epitomises supply chain management, leading to increased productivity and reduced downtime. The entertainment industry is embracing 5G to deliver immersive and interactive experiences to consumers. With its high-speed data transfer capabilities, 5G enhances content delivery for streaming services, offering ultra-high-

definition video quality and reduced buffering times. The increased bandwidth opens the door to innovative technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), transforming gaming and content consumption experiences. 5G's low latency also enables real-time multiplayer gaming and interactive content, further blurring the lines between the digital and physical worlds. The advent of 5G technology is poised to revolutionise industries and transform the digital landscape in Oman. From transportation and manufacturing to entertainment and smart cities, 5G's increased speed and low latency offer unparalleled opportunities for innovation and progress. The impact of this transformative technology on Oman's economy and society is bound to be even more profound.

UK is in danger of becoming the Nigeria of wind

GEORGE HAY

Britain is supposed to be the Saudi Arabia of wind power. During former Prime Minister Boris Johnson's troubled premiership, a rare bright spot was his insistence that the United Kingdom could use its extensive coastline to become for renewable energy what Riyadh is for the global oil market. Vattenfall's decision on Thursday to halt the 1.4 gigawatt (GW) Norfolk Boreas project is just the latest sign that Britain's most appropriate fossil-fuel comparator may not be the biggest and most efficient producer. Vattenfall, a state-held Swedish power company, has gone cool for reasons that are well-discussed in the wind sector. Post-pandemic supply-chain crunches have pushed up the cost of raw materials, meaning manufacturers like Vestas and Siemens Gamesa have had to hike prices on turbines intended for projects like Norfolk Boreas, which is due for completion later in the decade. Vattenfall said on Thursday its own costs had jumped 40%. Similar to what recently happened to Orsted on its US wind scheme, the Swedish group has had to write down the value of its project by over \$500 million. The obvious move for UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak would be to allow developers to charge more for power, to make up for higher costs.

Vattenfall was one of the winning bidders in last year's Allocation Round 4, which gave successful players the chance to charge 37.35 pounds per megawatt hour (MWh), expressed in 2012 prices. Under the terms of these so-called contracts for difference, if the power price is lower the state tops up Vattenfall and other bidders, which include Denmark's Orsted. Unfortunately the UK budget is tight, reducing the chances of a taxpayer-funded handout. Another issue is that raising wind-power prices now, after a 70% drop in auctions since 2015, would play into the hands of net-zero sceptics. The big risk, a person familiar with the situation said, is that tortoise-like progress between now and the next UK election due by 2025 threatens Johnson's objective to hike offshore capacity to 50 GW by 2030. Orsted, SSE and RWE may look at the seemingly puny after-tax equity returns available from this year's Allocation Round 5 auction, which FTI Consulting estimates at below 7%, and instead just sit the whole process out. Britain can still be the Saudi Arabia of wind. But right now, it risks looking more like Saudi's fellow Opec member Nigeria, where internal strife and lack of support have seen it fail even to reach output restrictions imposed by the producer club. That would be an epic missed opportunity.

— Reuters

Navigating contrasting paths: Oman's economic perspectives



SAIF AL ABRI

The author, a student of economics at the University of Manchester, is interested in exploring the intersection of modern ideas and practices pertaining to economics in relation to the development of the Sultanate of Oman in particular and the Arab world as a whole.

Beware of those who prematurely call the 'awakening of the owl of Minerva' as it marks the dusk and the end of spontaneity. Looking ahead to its Oman Vision 2040, specifically regarding economic growth, Oman finds itself pulled between diverging paths in defining the boundary separating it from the private sector. A thorough and insightful analysis of the Omani's state and what its lines ought to be can only meaningfully manifest in the twilight, rendering its relevance in the present stage somewhat inconsequential. This article aims to explore these contrasting sides for the general reader. We will delve into the general concepts of two types of states in relation to the economy. The concept of 'market rational' and 'plan rational' refers to different approaches adopted by states in economic affairs. Coined by thinkers like Weber, Dahrendorf, and Dore, the distinction highlights the contrasting roles of the state in a market economy and a planned economy. Unlike the Soviet-type command economy, which is plan ideological, a plan rational state, such as Japan, utilises



THESE DIFFERING ORIENTATIONS PRODUCE DISTINCT GOVERNMENT-BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS AND ECONOMIC POLICIES, WITH THE PLAN-RATIONAL STATE PRIORITISING INDUSTRIAL POLICY TO ENHANCE NATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS, WHILE THE MARKET-RATIONAL STATE EMPHASISES RULES AND RECIPROCAL CONCESSIONS IN ITS ECONOMIC AND TRADE POLICIES.

state ownership, planning, and bureaucratic goal-setting as rational means to achieve developmental objectives. On the other hand, a market rational state, exemplified by the United States, focuses on regulating economic competition through rules and procedures but does not actively intervene in shaping the substantive economic and industrial goals. These differing orientations produce distinct government-business relationships and economic policies, with the plan-rational state prioritising industrial policy to enhance national competitiveness, while the market-rational state emphasises rules and reciprocal concessions in its economic and trade policies. The differences between plan rationality and market rationality are evident in their economic and political decision-making

processes. In plan-rational systems like Japan, economic bureaucrats from key ministries hold esteemed positions, attracting top talent, making significant decisions, and driving policy innovations. In contrast, market-rational systems like the United States rely on elected professionals, primarily lawyers, for national decision-making and top talent are often attracted to the private sector. The plan-rational system faces more challenges in identifying and responding to external effects due to its primary focus on goal achievement rather than efficiency. Nevertheless, when it does shift its focus to address issues, it can be highly effective, as seen in comparisons with the US during the 1970s. The plan-rational system's strength lies in

its reliance on widely agreed-upon overarching societal goals, allowing it to outperform the market-rational system on benchmarks such as GDP growth when a consensus exists. However, in the absence of consensus or during conflicts over goals, the plan-rational system can seem adrift and struggle to handle problems effectively. In contrast, the market-rational system excels in dealing with critical problems, utilising rules, procedures, and executive responsibility to promote action in uncertain circumstances. In conclusion, understanding the nuances and strengths of plan rationality and market rationality is essential for comprehending their economic dynamics and policy implications in shaping the future of a state's development. As Oman explore these contrasting sides, it becomes apparent that each system has its merits and challenges, providing valuable insights for policymakers and the general reader a like. (The article draws heavily from Assar Lindbeck and Chalmers Johnson.)

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

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

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
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Abdullah Al Abri
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nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

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ANIMAL PLANET

A polar bear is seen eating food that has been frozen in blocks of ice, at a zoo in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP



FOOD

Tunisian farmer Sonia Elbidhy collects edible flowers at her farm in Tabarka, Tunisia. — Reuters



FILM

Social media personality Jaycee Kawaii arrives for the world premiere of Disney's "Haunted Mansion" at the Hyperion Theatre inside the Disney California Adventure Park in Anaheim, California. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Melaku Belay, director of Fendika Cultural Center, poses for a photograph in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A beloved monument to Ethiopia's traditional cabaret culture, the historic nightclub Fendika is running on borrowed time, having just escaped demolition. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A staff member poses with the "Black Sheep Jumper" designed by Sally Muir and Joanna Osborne and worn on several occasions by Britain's late Princess Diana during a press view at Sotheby's auction house in London. — AFP



art & life

SUNDAY | JULY 23, 2023 | MUHARRAM 5, 1445 AH

OMAN OBSERVER f t i y u w www.omanobserver.om features@omanobserver.om

Escape to the turquoise sea and calm nature of Al Sifah

While Jebel Sifah provides a sense of seclusion and escape, it is conveniently located within a short drive of Muscat. This makes it an attractive option for day trips or weekend getaways

CHANGING WORLD

Climate change menaces China's ancient heritage sites

ANCIENT BUDDHIST murals in northwestern China are under "direct threat" as a result of unprecedented levels of rainfall brought about by climate change, researchers said on Monday.

Extreme rainfall in Dunhuang and Zhangye in China's Gansu province has put UNESCO-listed world heritage sites at risk, with cave monasteries dating back to the 4th century already damaged, environmental group Greenpeace said.

Rainwater leaks and rising humidity have damaged ancient

cave paintings, including those in the famous Mogao grottoes, it said, and some caves have even collapsed.

"Spikes in humidity, flash floods, and cave-ins are already happening," said Li Zhao, a senior researcher in Greenpeace East Asia's Beijing office.

Greenpeace said that while total precipitation has increased in Gansu since 2000, the number of rainy days has actually fallen, meaning that individual bouts of rainfall have become more intense. Temperatures in the province



have also risen faster than the global average.

China is conducting a nationwide cultural heritage survey, but Li warned that some of the country's treasures could already be gone by the time it is completed.

"The sites we looked at include some of the most well-funded, best-staffed cultural heritage sites in China," Li said. "There are hundreds of less-funded, less-studied sites all around China that are facing these same risks."

Gansu is not the only region at

risk.

Higher levels of rainfall in the normally arid northern province of Shanxi have also taken their toll on ancient buildings, some of which are more than 1,000 years old, said Friends of Nature, a Beijing environmental group, last month.

The Jinci Temple and Tianlongshan grottoes, both national heritage sites in Shanxi, have collapsed, and old towers and walls in the province have suffered damage due to unusually heavy rain, it said. — Reuters

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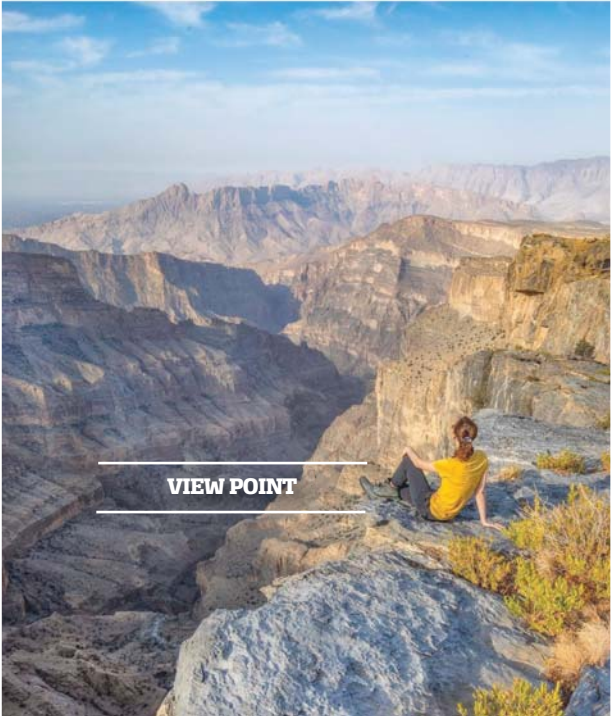


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A perfect escape just 45-minutes away

By Lara Brahim

The charming village of Al Sifah features a harmonious marriage between nature's two blues: the sparkling turquoise sea that embraces the gravelly sandy shores and the serene, azure sky. At night, the sublimely luminous moon carves unforgettable imagery into the visitors' hearts and minds! Al Sifah is worth the 50-kilometre drive for not just historical reasons but also for an escape in the lap of nature.

While Jabal Sifah provides a sense of seclusion and escape, it is conveniently located within a short drive of Muscat. This makes it an attractive option for day trips or weekend getaways for residents or visitors in Muscat who wish to experience a different environment without travelling too far.

Stepping onto the beach, a soft, welcoming breeze will tickle your face. The soothing weather never ceases to lure you into the water. As you submerge yourself into the cool salt water, you will be overwhelmed by the warm, captivating waves, warmed by the day-long sun's rays. The crushing of the waves on the shores will hypnotize your senses and plunge you into a relaxing world.

One of the distinctive features of Al Sifah is its gratifying calmness away from the hustle and bustle of the capital city. While walking through the hamlet, you will be able to enjoy the unique aesthetics of the houses' old architecture and the roaming livestock with their breeders.

When visiting Al Sifah, you can't miss stopping by its famous historic fort, which is called Al Sifah Fort. This fort overlooks the sea and the valley on one side. The walls of Muscat's city were considered to be the first line of defence against foreign attacks, as they acted as a fortifying factor for the village. The towering fort recounts the legend of Omani history, as it was where rulers and imams met people. This is in addition to the spot where armies launch from.

There are several villages spread



across the landscape. The village by the beach not only offers a look at the local's simple way of life but also offers plenty of opportunity to understand why fishing has become an important source of

income for the fishermen who call this place home. During Eid and other special days, the villagers can be seen celebrating together, connecting them to the rest of the country's traditions and preserved



culture.

A few meters away from the village is the four-star rated "Jebel Sifah Resort," a great destination for those looking for tranquillity and beauty away from the disturbance of the urban crowd.

Al Sifah remains a perfect place that fascinates people and stirs emotions gently. One can also enjoy jet skiing, dune buggies, camping, and fishing because it's the perfect natural waterpark where, if you

RECIPE

Shrimp and Avocado Salad With Citrus Vinaigrette (Camarones a la Vinagreta)

VERSIONS OF SEAFOOD "coctel" are found around the Caribbean, usually with ketchup as a base for the sauce. In this recipe adapted from Von Diaz's "Coconuts and Collards" cookbook, the tomato and onion are part of the salad, and the dressing is based on citrus and olive oil, plus a bit of mustard to make it creamy. It's a refreshing and satisfying dish for hot weather, perfect with a cold beer at the end of a long summer day. Diced avocado makes the dish more filling, but it is optional.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings
Total time: 20 minutes, plus chilling

INGREDIENTS:



Kosher salt (such as Diamond Crystal) and black pepper
4 black peppercorns
2 dried bay leaves
1 pound fresh shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 ripe plum tomatoes, diced (or 12 cherry tomatoes, quartered)
2 tablespoons chopped red onion
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lime, lemon, grapefruit or any tart citrus juice
1 tablespoon fresh orange juice
2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro, culantro (also called reca) or flat-leaf parsley (or a combination)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano or thyme
1/8 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 ripe avocado
Whole lettuce leaves, for serving

PREPARATION:

1. Cook the shrimp: In a pot, combine 1 quart water with 1 tablespoon salt. Add peppercorns and bay leaves and bring to a boil over high heat.
2. Prepare an ice bath: Add enough ice to a large bowl until half full. Sprinkle the ice with 2 tablespoons salt and top with enough cold water to cover. Set aside.
3. When the water boils, stir the shrimp into the hot water and turn off the heat. Let cook until just pink and opaque, 1 to 2 minutes depending on size of shrimp. Drain shrimp and transfer to the ice bath. Stir well and set aside until shrimp are completely chilled, 3 to 5 minutes. Drain shrimp again and transfer to paper or kitchen towels to dry.
4. Make the dressing: In a medium bowl, stir together tomatoes, red onion, oil, fruit juices, herbs and mustard. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add shrimp, toss to coat and chill for at least 1 hour (or up to 1 day).
5. When ready to serve, peel and dice the avocado and fold into the shrimp salad. Serve chilled, in a serving bowl or on individual plates lined with lettuce leaves. — **NYT**

SCIENCE

A Peek Behind the Magic of a Cuttlefish's Vanishing Act

PUT A CUTTLEFISH on the spot — or, to be precise, a series of spots — and it will disappear. These relatives of the squid and the octopus mimic the colour and texture of their surroundings, camouflaging themselves to blend in with seaweed, sand or stone, which helps them escape predators.

But no one is quite sure how a cuttlefish brain takes what the eyes see and gets the muscles of the skin to copy it. Are they watching their own skin as it changes and tweaking it to fit the sand? Or what if getting the match doesn't rely solely on eyesight — does a certain kind of speckling feel different to the animal than, say, stripes? In an effort to answer this question, scientists have turned to high-resolution videos that can show what individual skin cells are up to as a cuttlefish changes colour.

In a new paper, researchers found that cuttlefish sampled a wide variety

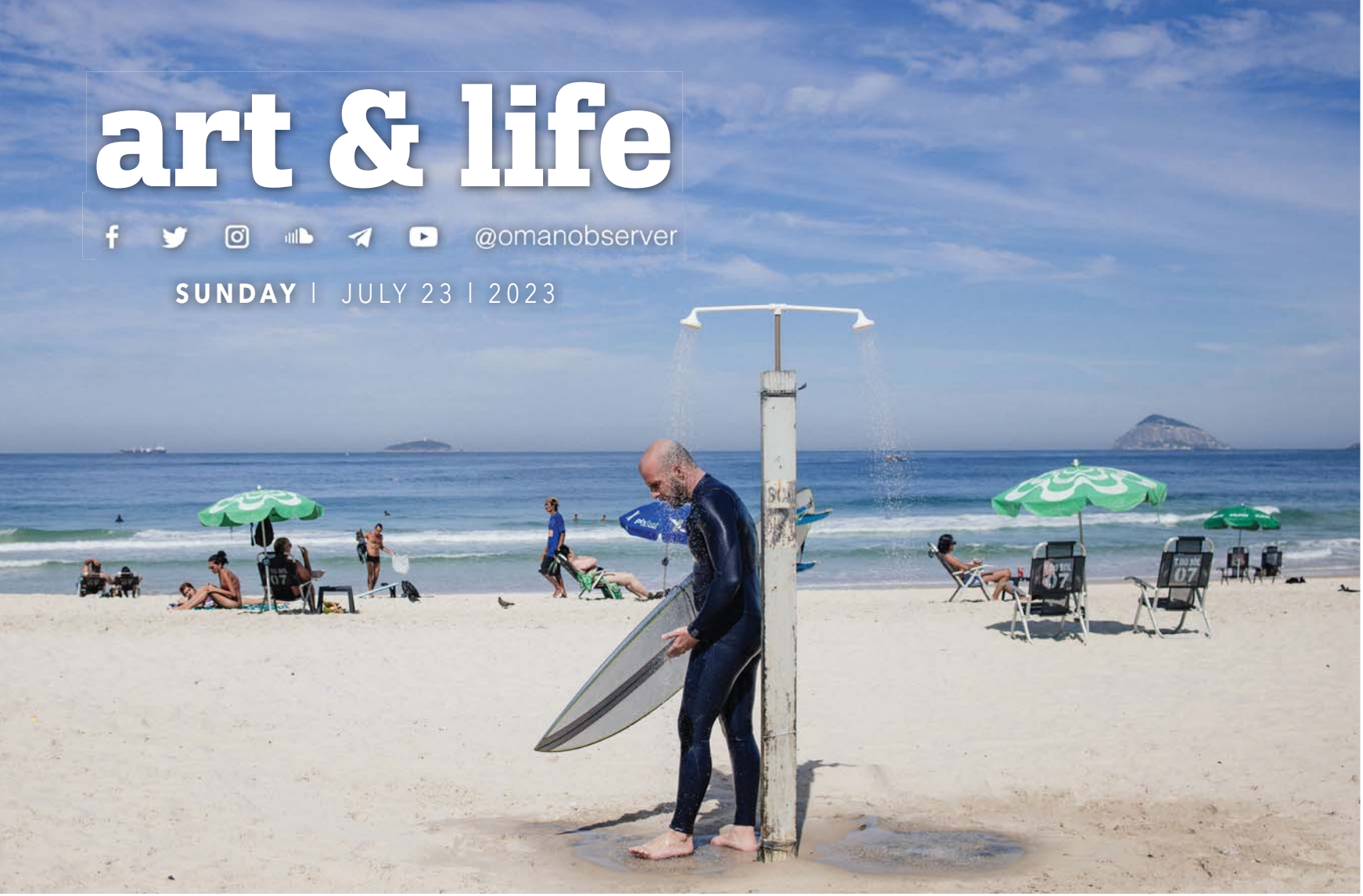


of different options while they worked to make a match between their skin and their surroundings. As they got closer and closer to a match, they repeatedly paused in their morphing, as if they were checking to see if this time, they had gotten it right. The findings are a glimpse at what's going on in a fundamentally different form of life as it does something that, to our eyes, seems almost magical.

To match their backgrounds, cuttlefish use pigment-filled skin cells called chromatophores and raised structures called papillae. Cuttlefish

contract tiny muscles that open and close the chromatophores, like pixels on a screen, to get the right pattern of any surface they swim over.

Research has established that cuttlefish can reach their final pattern in less than a second. It was possible, thought Gilles Laurent, a professor at the Max Planck Institute for Brain Research in Germany and an author of the new paper, the cuttlefish sees an image, decides how it's going to mimic it and then goes straight to a matching skin pattern. — **VERONIQUE GREENWOOD / NYT**



TRAVEL TALES

A walk in Rio de Janeiro: Along fabled beaches

FOR FIRST-TIMERS, a 5-mile stroll along Copacabana and Ipanema beaches — Rio de Janeiro's two most fabled sand parentheses — will stir up feelings even in those who have long and unironically listed "walks on the beach" as a favourite pastime.

Such reactions may range from counterfactual nostalgia ("Imagine coming of age in a place like this") to cultural aha moments ("Bossa nova makes so much sense now") to medium-term reverie ("What are the rules on Brazil's digital-nomad visa again?").

More than 20 visits in, I still turn some kind of emotional every time I return to Rio and set foot on the boardless boardwalk where the vast majority of this stroll takes place. Brazilians call such a beachfront sidewalk the "calçadão," but forget pronouncing it and focus on its official sound: a thousand flip-flops slapping the wave-patterned Portuguese pavement.

The route is simple: Walk along the first beach, cut inland briefly to skirt a rocky peninsula, and then walk along a second beach. Stop for refreshment at the countless kiosks along the way. As the desire strikes, turn left for a dip in the water or right for an urban foray.

Start midafternoon on a sunny day — the Rio beach scene under gray skies is like Italy during a pasta shortage. Weekends are good, December to February summer weekends are better, and Sundays are ideal, as the city closes the adjacent beachfront avenue for throngs and thongs of promenading locals.

Sneakers or flip-flops will do, but please no sandals with socks: Rio de Janeiro beaches accept all body types and locals are accustomed to touristy foibles like baggy bikinis and gringo skin broiled to the colour of juicy shrimp, but even they draw the line somewhere. Take sunscreen, a credit card — wireless tap to pay is nearly ubiquitous, even at street vendors — and keep your smartphone buried in your pocket. (This is one stretch of Rio where tourists can walk by day in relative safety, but still.) No need for a step counter; keep track of progress by the lifeguard posts (postos) along the way, numbered 1 to 12.

Start at the northernmost end of Leme Beach (which soon becomes Copacabana), taking the time to stroll out to "Fisherman's Path" along the rocks to say hi to the bronze statue of Clarice Lispector, one of Brazil's great



20th-century novelists, or to actual, potentially more responsive, fishermen. Then pass the scene around Posto 1, with young people sunbathing and playing altinha, the show-offy, keep-the-soccer-ball-in-the-air game.

Posto 2 means you're in

Copacabana, at once touristy (because of the hotels) and diverse (thanks to public transportation). It's crackling with energy, foot volleyball, sand sculptures and one notable non-sand sculpture of Ayrton Senna, the championship Formula One driver who holds near-Pelé status around here. Stop and stare at the Copacabana Palace, the French Riviera-inspired hotel, opened in 1923 and still classing up the beach.

Not far past Posto 6, your first beach comes to an end at Fort Copacabana. Cut across on Francisco Otaviano Street for three-plus blocks, ducking through a park to Arpoador Beach — known best for morning



Rua Vinícius de Moraes (named for the lyricist of "Girl From Ipanema") onto the posh Ipanema neighbourhood's main drag for either ice cream at Vero or an icy guava juice or grilled sandwich at Polis Sucos.

Then cut back to the beach and cross the canal and you're in the mellow (even posher) stretch known as Leblon. From the end of the beach, climb the short but winding road to the lookout point or, even better, head inland to join the local crowd at Boteco Boa Praça and order a chopp: There's a lot more of Rio to get to, but there's no Rio at all without an icy, foamy draft beer at the end of a beach day. — NYT

LIFESTYLE



Jane Birkin: An adventurous artist made in England, forged in France

FOR MOST OF HER LIFE, Jane Birkin, who died on Sunday at 76, acted as a bridge — an elegant one, with an affectless grace that never betrayed the strains of load bearing. She connected her native Britain and her adopted France, two countries physically close but often at odds. She never lost her English accent when she spoke, somehow joining the two languages into her own Birkin-ese, "the improbable French that added to her charm," as *Le Monde* put it. She floated among song, cinema and theater, and she could reach large, varied audiences while also connecting with France's auteur culture.

Her career did not go in a straight line. She made the most of her unassuming, breathy voice in her recordings, and while her unconventional glamour stood out on-screen, she was never afraid to veer off in unexpected directions when choosing roles. She let herself be guided by adventurousness.

After a small role in Michelangelo Antonioni's ode to Swinging London, "Blow-Up," Birkin left England in 1968 to make a French movie, Pierre Grimblat's "Slogan." On the set, she met Serge Gainsbourg, the brilliant, tortured musician, who was in the cast and wrote the film's score.

They fell in love and soon became an It couple, impossibly stylish and cool. Crucially, she also became one of the leading interpreters of his songs, starting with their erotically charged duet "Je t'aime ... moi non plus," and continuing through six solo Birkin albums, released from 1973 to 1990. The poppiest and catchiest is "Ex fan des sixties" (1978); the poignant "Baby Alone in Babylone" (1983) largely deals with the couple's separation.

Birkin left Gainsbourg in 1980, fed up with his drinking and temper, but their personal and professional partnership outlasted the breakup. And despite a reductive media habit of describing Birkin merely as Gainsbourg's muse, it enriched both of them.

Birkin remained loyal to the Gainsbourg songbook throughout her life. Five years after his death, she released an album of Gainsbourg covers, "Versions Jane" (1996); followed by "Arabesque" (2002), an album of Gainsbourg songs arranged by Algerian violinist Djamel Benyelles; and "Birkin/Gainsbourg: Le Symphonique" (2017), backed by a symphony orchestra.

But she also escaped Gainsbourg's shadow, working with younger musicians and producers, and eventually writing or co-writing the lyrics on her albums "Enfants d'hiver" (2008) and "Oh! Pardon tu dors..." (2020), both largely drawing from her life.

That last record is a good illustration of the way Birkin hoppedscotched among artistic fields, one feeding into another: "Oh! Pardon tu dors..." has the same title as, and was inspired by, a made-for-TV movie Birkin directed in 1992 and a 1999 play she wrote and appeared in.

Beyond her success as a singer — not blockbuster by any means, but attracting a loyal fan base around the world — Birkin had a thriving career as an actress, communicating a similar vibe onscreen as she did in music: a natural, unadorned beauty; a seemingly nonchalant demeanor, camouflaging a melancholy core.

In 1969, the year that "Slogan" came out, Birkin had a supporting role in Jacques Deray's scorching, now cult thriller "La Piscine" alongside Alain Delon and Romy Schneider. With "La Piscine," and popular comedies like "La Moutarde Me Monte au Nez" (1974) and "La Course à l'Échalote" (1975), she could have continued to mine her gamine charm and cute accent for a comfortable if predictable acting career. But in typical Birkin fashion, she made an abrupt stylistic U-turn by starring in Gainsbourg's provocative debut feature "Je T'Aime Moi Non Plus" (1976), in which she portrayed an androgynous waitress who has a rather complicated relationship with a gay man played by Joe Dallesandro, the Andy Warhol and Paul Morrissey regular.

For much of the 1970s and early '80s, Birkin alternated between making Gainsbourg records and appearing in mainstream movies, including "Death on the Nile" (1978), which featured the kind of international star buffet that blockbuster movies of the time ate up: Her co-stars included Peter Ustinov, Bette Davis, David Niven, Mia Farrow and Angela Lansbury.

Throwing yet another twist into her career is that after Gainsbourg, Birkin was in a relationship with the uncompromising film-maker Jacques Doillon. In 1984, she starred in his brutally intense, fever-pitch movie "La Pirate" as Alma, who is torn between her husband (played by Birkin's own brother, Andrew) and a woman (Maruschka Detmers). It felt like a new Jane Birkin, inhabiting her physicality in a way that was almost dangerously unrestrained — and it earned her the first of three César Award nominations.

The next year, she appeared in a Marivaux play directed by the influential Patrice Chéreau at his Nanterre theater. Despite her trepidation, her performance was a success, and Birkin continued to appear onstage, alternating, as was her wont, between boulevard fare and Euripides.

Another consequential encounter in the 1980s was with director Agnès Varda, who made the gloriously unconventional film "Jane B. par Agnès V." (1988), in which, as Glenn Kenny noted in *The New York Times*, Birkin "retains a slightly breathy girlishness that complements her largely cheery, open personality and her intrepid intelligence" — words that neatly capture Birkin's enduring appeal. Varda encouraged Birkin to write, and the two collaborated on the script of Varda's "Kung-Fu Master" (1988). Birkin went on to direct an autobiographical film, "Boxes" (2007).

For Birkin boundaries were porous: between public and private, high and low, art and life. In his tribute to her, President Emmanuel Macron called Birkin "a French icon." Of that there is no doubt.

— NYT