



HM OFFERS CONDOLENCES TO SYRIAN AND TURKISH PRESIDENTS



HIS MAJESTY SULTAN HAITHAM BIN TARIK on Tuesday made a telephone call to President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, expressing his deep condolences and heartfelt sympathies to the President and the Syrian people in the aftermath of the recent devastating earthquake. He wished the injured speedy recovery.

During the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the Syrian Arab Republic. He voiced Oman's support for all in view of this accident, praying to Allah the Almighty to alleviate its impacts, help the Syrian people overcome this ordeal and spare them any harm.

On his turn, President Al Assad expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for his kind initiative and noble feelings. He valued Oman's stand, praying to Allah the Almighty to spare His Majesty the Sultan and Omani people any calamity.

His Majesty also made a telephone call to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey. He expressed his sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathies to President Erdogan and the friendly people of Turkey on victims of the destructive earthquake. He wished the injured quick recovery.

In the telephonic conversation, His Majesty the Sultan reaffirmed Oman's stand in commiseration with Turkey, hoping that the country will overcome the impacts of this natural disaster. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to help the friendly people of Turkey overcome the crisis and to spare them all calamities.

On his part, President Erdogan expressed his deep thanks and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan for his kind initiative and noble humanitarian sentiments. — **ONA**

MASSIVE CASUALTIES



A Syrian man cries as he sits on the rubble of a collapsed building in the town of Jindayris on Tuesday. Across Syria, more than 1,600 people were killed. — **AFP**

NEW BORN BABY



A newborn baby who was found still tied by umbilical cord to her mother and pulled alive from the rubble of a home in Syria, receives medical care at a clinic in Afrin. — **AFP**

ALL IS LOST



Families wait through the rubble of buildings in Kahramanmaras after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country's southeast on Tuesday. — **AFP**

WORLD RUSHES TO OFFER TURKEY, SYRIA AID OVER QUAKE

Turkey-Syria quake toll tops 6,200 as rescuers battle cold



An aerial view shows damaged and collapsed buildings following an earthquake, in Kahramanmaras, Turkey, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

PARIS: Countries around the world have mobilised rapidly to send aid and rescue workers after a massive earthquake killed more than 5,100 people in Turkey and Syria.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday declared a state of emergency in 10 provinces devastated by two earthquakes that killed thousands of people and left a trail of destruction across a wide area of southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria.

A day after the quakes hit, rescuers working in harsh conditions were struggling to dig people out of the rubble of collapsed buildings in a "race against time".

As the scale of the disaster became ever more apparent, the death toll looked likely to rise

A day after the quakes hit, rescuers working in harsh conditions were struggling to dig people out of the rubble of collapsed buildings in a 'race against time'

considerably. One United Nations official said it was feared thousands of children may have been killed. Offers of assistance came from countries across the world. Here are some of the chief pledges of support.

The European Union has mobilised 27 search and rescue and medical teams from 19 countries to help Turkey, together over 1,150 rescuers and 70 rescue dogs, EU crisis management commissioner Janez Lenarcic confirmed on Tuesday.

President Joe Biden said that US teams were "deploying quickly to begin to support Turkish search and rescue efforts". National security spokesman John Kirby said the United States was sending two search and rescue teams of 79 people each, while the Pentagon and USAID were coordinating with their Turkish counterparts.

SEE ALSO P6 & 7

Omani researcher devises new model on chemical reactions

MUSCAT: Omani researcher Dr Maitha bint Rabee al Jabri, Assistant Professor of Engineering at the Chemical Engineering Unit of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Suhar, succeeded in devising a model to understand the interactions that take place between components of industrial products composed of chemical elements.

The model was the first-of-its-kind in the world in calculating the diffusion coefficient by discovering the concentration of the solute surfactants.

Dr Maitha told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the research study provided a new approach that influences chemistry-based industry, namely by developing a new mechanism that facilitates the handling of chemical elements entering into the composition of products.

She pointed out that the research study came out with several results. A major finding of the study is the fact that the dissolution of surfactants by changing the attractive forces between water and surfactant elements produces long-



lasting solvents, thereby slowing down the dissolution process.

Dr Maitha explained that the results of the research study were published as part of a scientific paper titled "The Effect of Hydrophobicity on the Dissolution of Reaction Phases with Lamellar Surfaces", published in the journal of the international publishing house Elsevier.

She pointed out that the research study is titled "Modelling Compound Products Used in Industrial Chemistry, and Chemical Engineering

Applications to Understand Interactions between Components and Their Properties".

The study received funding from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. It is noted that compound products in the form of liquid solutions have many uses in our daily life. They are available as medicines, detergent liquids, cosmetics, paints, foods, among other products. They contain different components that merge with each other at different stages during the manufacturing process. — **ONA**



Retired RNO vessel finds new life as marine habitat, dive destination



MUSANDAM: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) on Tuesday sank one of its vessels that went out of service to utilise its wreck in forming coral reefs

and attract marine organisms in a manner that suits Omani marine environment. It is intended that the ship will later act as a tourism



attraction spot and a site for marine research and studies to be conducted by scientists. The submerged RNO vessel was one of the fastest in



operations during its 35-year service that included a variety of national tasks and missions. Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, said that the site to sink the ship was selected due to the fact that it falls in a naturally secluded area, away from marine currents. The site is already frequented by divers. The vessel will add another element of beauty and activate tourism in the governorate.

— ONA

Oman organises consultations on culture, arts education



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman on Tuesday organised consultations for Arab countries on revising the version of the “UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education”, with support from the UNESCO Office for GCC states and Yemen. The two-day consultations are being held via videoconferencing. Oman is represented at the consultations by Dr Hamad bin Saif al Hammami, Oman’s Permanent Representative to the UNESCO. The consultations bring together a number of experts, professionals and specialists. They are aimed to reach in-depth ideas on regional needs, areas of deficiency and priorities.

The consultations are an opportunity to present recommendations that provide guidance for devising the desired framework. They also contribute to preparations for the “World Conference on Culture and Arts Education”, which will be hosted by the United Arab Emirates in December 2023. Al Hammami said that the recommendations of the session will help shape the future framework, which seeks to reach consensus on factors of priority to the Arab region. He pointed out that the unified summary of the consultations will be presented to the UNESCO’s Executive Board at its 216th session scheduled to be held in May 2023. — ONA

Muscat’s urban landscape undergoes major shift to meet changing needs

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The bustling downtowns of the capital are giving way to new urban hotspots, according to those associated with the real estate and retail sectors. The Central Business District in Ruwi was a sort of a financial hub of the country but its status has been changing since the shifting of Bank Muscat headquarters to Airport Heights followed by the National Bank of Oman (NBO) to Athaiba over the last 15 years. Ruwi High Street, once a popular shopping district for expatriates, is facing challenges to retain customers as the emergence of one-stop malls in various parts of the city with better facilities such as restrooms and parking spaces. With most private and government offices shifting their bases to around Bausher, Ghala, Ghubra, and Madinat Al Irfan, their employees also shift homes to avoid long travel hours and save fuel costs, which is no more fully subsidised as it was before. Speaking to the Observer, an executive with a real estate marketing firm said, “The changes are taking place in line with the demographic shift in the country for some obvious reasons. CBD and Wadi Kabir were getting saturated with limited scope for further development. New



plots were made available in the Bausher and Ghala, extending to the Airport Heights (now Madinat Al Irfan), as the accessibility to these places improved with the completion of the Muscat and Batinah Expressway projects.” With the improvement of road connectivity, Amerat emerged as a favourite destination, evident with the opening of several new retail outlets there. He added, “These apartments have been built in line with changing requirements for safety (restricted access), multi-story parking, free Wi-Fi, centralised cooling systems, and big glass windows.” Young Omanis coming to Muscat for work prefer to stay in Maabella, Amerat, or even Bausher as it is easy to get out of the city during the weekend to their family homes. Since 2016 as the government deregulated fuel prices, motorists have started considering that in daily travel costs. “My office was shifted to Rusayl from Wadi Kabir a year ago, which means I must travel nearly 100 km a day in 1.5 hours during peak time. By moving to Ghala, I can cut the travel costs and time by almost half,” Linson Joseph, a resident of Darsait. With the opening of an Indian school in Bausher and admissions easily available, he said concerns over shifting schools have been taken care of too. Several restaurant chains have shifted branches from Ruwi, CBD, and even Al Khuwair to Maabella, Al Khouh and Ghubra in line with the demographic shift. According to a source in Muscat Municipality, “A number of buildings in Ruwi, Wadi Kabir and Muttrah areas are nearly 30 to 40 years old, they need to be demolished, redeveloped or totally refurbished, which will take a couple of years.” The redevelopment of these areas will be done as per the master plan for the Sustainable Greater Muscat, which also covers Barka. “Muttrah will be developed as a primary tourism district with several projects in the pipeline.”

Largest snow park in the region officially opens

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The largest snow park in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region was officially opened at the Mall of Oman in the presence of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), and members of the Majid al Futtaim Group and other invitees on Monday. Spread over 14,830 square metres, the Snow Oman is the only indoor snow destination in the Sultanate. The must-visit destination features a 430-m ice

rink as well as a penguinarium, besides more than 20 family-friendly rides and other attractions, which is also home to a colony of king and gentoo penguins. Storytelling is integrated into the experience, which has a ‘Desert Blizzard’ theme and resembles an imaginary world where Oman’s cityscapes and sand dunes are covered in real snow whilst still reflecting the local culture and heritage. “We are proud to welcome the newest addition to our ever-expanding portfolio, Snow Oman. Entertainment plays an important role in the growth of the local



economies, and the opening of Snow Oman marks another major milestone in our investment strategy in the Sultanate, as well as demonstrating our ongoing commitment to deliver innovative experiences for guests across the region,” said Ignace Lahoud, Chief Executive Officer, Majid al

Futtaim Entertainment. “Entertainment not only impacts the local economy, but provides us with a much-needed sense of community, and Snow Oman delivers a unique and immersive way for families to spend quality time together,” he added. The rides vary from the Mountain Thriller, Snow Bullet, Slide Winder and Cloud Climber to Zorb Ball, besides unique attractions such as Cold Town Muscat, Frozen Shipwreck and Lighthouse, and a 475-square metre ice rink. It is the only snow ambience in the Sultanate

of Oman, which caters to those who love to explore icy alleys and frozen pathways between snow-frosted buildings. “We are the pioneers in offering indoor snow experience in the region. In 2005, we offered the first sub-zero leisure avenue in the Mall of the Emirates, which is Ski Dubai. Over time, the experience has been recognised as the World’s Best Indoor Ski Resort by the prestigious World Ski Awards for seven consecutive years. In 2017, Ski Egypt opened in the Mall of Egypt and set an all-new record for being the first of its kind in the African continent,”

said Mark Haak Wegmann, Managing Director, Leisure and Entertainment, Majid al Futtaim. “The response from the Omani population to Snow Oman has truly been overwhelming, and we are in the middle of adding more and more facilities to Snow Oman as the group is always in search of better entertainment avenues for the end users,” he added. The occasion was celebrated with entertainment programmes like ice-skating performances. Mohammed El Etri, Vice-President, Global Snow, Majid Al Futtaim Entertainment, attended the event.



PDO receives international recognition in HR field

MUSCAT: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has become the first organisation in the Middle East to achieve People Development Partner status from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), the world's leading professional body for human resources and people development.

PDO has achieved this by working closely with the CIPD team over the past several years, investing heavily in increasing the impact of its people function, ensuring their professionalism through CIPD qualifications and experience assessments, and providing entry-level jobs for people professionals.

CIPD Regional Director MENA Stuart Dunlop said: "We are delighted to recognise PDO as our first People Development Partner in the Middle East. The award demonstrates an exceptional degree of commitment to developing people professionals. To achieve PDP status, organisations must demonstrate a clear commitment to developing the capability



and credibility of their people function."

On his turn, CEO of CIPD Peter Cheese, commended PDO for their ongoing excellence and for leading the way in the Middle East by investing in their people professionals to help them adapt to the changing world of work.

Meanwhile, PDO People Director Farid al Harthy said: "We are honoured to have achieved PDP status from the CIPD, which recognises our commitment to developing our people and building a world-class human resources function. This is a significant achievement for PDO, and we are proud to be leading the way in the Middle East." — ONA

OVER 1.5 MILLION VEHICLES REGISTERED BY DEC 2022



The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,603,376 by the end of December 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Vehicles with private registration constituted 79.4 per cent of the total vehicles registered in Oman, to stand at 1,273,791, while the number of vehicles with commercial registration reached 238,512, constituting 14.9 per cent of the total number of vehicles. Meanwhile, rental vehicles reached 28,633, comprising 1.8 per cent and the number of taxi vehicles stood at 28,117, comprising 1.8 per cent. The number of government vehicles (military vehicles excluded) stood at 12,167 and motorbikes stood at 6,765. The number of driving instruction vehicles stood at 5,744 and the number of vehicles with temporary registration (temporary inspection, export and import) stood at 7,528. Moreover, the number of farming tractors stood at 1,280 and vehicles with diplomatic entity registrations stood at 839. — ONA

Oman-Britain consultative group holds meeting

MUSCAT: The Oman-Britain Strategic Consultative Group held a coordination meeting in Muscat on Tuesday.

The meeting discussed enhancing relations between the two countries in financial and economic fields.

The meeting also reviewed a range of topics pertaining to finance, business and renewable energy sectors, in addition to exchanging opinion and experience.

Further, the meeting explored opportunities of cooperation to realise the common goals to develop these sectors.

The meeting was chaired from the Omani side by Nasser bin



Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, Supervisor General

of the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development,

while it was chaired from the British side by Lord Grimstone. — ONA

Turkish embassy launches relief campaign for earthquake victims

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The Turkish Embassy in Muscat has launched a relief campaign for the earthquake victims. Anyone can contribute relief materials through the Embassy located at Shatti Al Qurum. The donated materials will be carried to the affected through Turkish Airlines, an embassy spokesperson told the Observer.

"We would like to thank everyone who sent condolences and extended support after the devastating earthquake in the Republic of Turkey on February 6," Muhammet Hekimoğlu, the Ambassador of Türkiye said.

The essentials needed for the survivors at the disaster spot are: Winter clothes for adults and children, overcoats, raincoats, boots, trousers, sweaters, scarves, gloves, beanies, socks, and underwear, food items such as legumes, rice, bulgur, flour, cooking oil, salt, canned foods, baby formula food, diapers, cleaning and hygiene products, women's hygiene products, and other materials such as tents, beds, mattresses



A woman reacts as she waits near a search and rescue operation following an earthquake in Gaziantep, Turkey. — Reuters

(for tent), blankets, sleeping bags, catalytic gas stoves, heater, gas cylinders, thermos bottles/flasks, flashlights, power banks, generators, etc.

"Aid and donations can be delivered in a box containing a list of materials to the embassy headquarters at Shatti al Qurum,

Street No 3019, Building No 1622," said Manal Allouzi, embassy representative.

The Embassy has opened a book of condolences. Those who wish to sign the book can do so on Feb 8, 9 and 12 between 10 am and 1 pm.

The Sultanate of Oman has

expressed condolences for the lives lost in the earthquake, which has affected 23 million people in Southern Turkey and Syria.

According to the World Health Organization, the earthquake has affected 23 million people in and around Southern Türkiye and Syria since Monday.

Adhere to modest dress standards in public areas

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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We wear what we think is comfortable for us, yet we want to follow a decorum when we go to meetings and offices. How about in leisure mode?

More and more shopping complexes and malls are putting up posters requesting people to be decently dressed while entering the premises. We followed the rules when it came to wearing facial masks during the pandemic but when it came to requests to be dressed modestly, there seemed to be hiccups.

Are we aware about Article 294, according to which public decency violations are punishable by a fine in the Omani Penal Code? According to the law, all nationals and expatriates, men and women are, "barred from wearing sleeveless T-shirts and shorts in public places" -- and this includes shopping malls, souqs, beaches, public roads and so on. Violations

of the regulations are punishable with fines that can range between RO 100 to RO 300, which could include imprisonment of one to three months.

These two or one of these two penalties "shall be imposed on any person who appears in public roads or places in a manner that undermines public morals or is contrary to the traditions and customs of society."

To be avoided also are T-shirts with inappropriate texts. In addition to the law, there are sentiments. "People can choose what they want to wear but in public places the thoughts are also connected with children being around people who are dressed disrespectfully and learning from them or copying them," said Mohammed al Mashani.

If one is new to Oman and is unsure of the dress code in the country, one of the easiest ways to find out what is okay would be to observe the citizens. The concept is to be modest and well covered,



this is what most of the malls require the visitors to follow. "For me I think what a person wears represents who they are and the values they have and of course their culture as well as religion," said Hasna Namani.

She noted that she feels if

someone dresses up and is comfortable and happy at the same time not wearing revealing clothes then even the society will have a good perception about them. "When you dress well you represent confidence and respect. At the same time, it is important

to acknowledge our surroundings and that is why when we dress it's not just about us. It is also about the public in general and the society we interact with every day. We have to consider the different places we go to and the people we meet. With this in mind, it is important to represent yourself the best way you possibly can through not only your clothing, but also your body language and your tone of voice. We need to have etiquette that represents us at all times," explained Hasna. Dr Vandana Jyotirmayee, a faculty member at mass communication department, UTAS, Salalah, who interacts daily with students, says, "Being an Indian, I find that certain values of Oman and India match to a great extent, that too when it comes to dressing modestly in public places. If you look at the traditional dresses of women in Oman, you will notice the similarities. When you enjoy the peace, beautiful environment and a good life which Oman offers,

then just to dress up gracefully, is a very small way to show respect to the country where you reside."

As tourists, visitors would travel to many locations. A perfect way of understanding what is appropriate in the culture is to see how people are dressed when they visit Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque. "Women must cover their heads with a scarf, wear full-length trousers or a long skirt, and not show their arms," writes a blogger while giving tips to potential visitors to the Sultanate of Oman.

The headscarf is not necessary in other places but being well covered is a respect one can offer to others in an Islamic nation. This is how marathonoman.com advised its participants, "It is essential to have arms and shoulders covered at all times. Strapless shirts and dresses are not acceptable. In addition, skirts should reach at least beneath the knee. Long skirts and dresses comply perfectly with the local dress code."



Stay safe online

THE IMPORTANCE OF RAISING
AWARENESS AND SETTING
BOUNDARIES FOR CHILDREN'S
INTERNET USE



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The use of the Internet has become unavoidable, making it imperative to raise awareness about its dangers, especially for children who have a broad audience through social media platforms and the Internet in general.

For a safe Internet, the Sultanate of Oman joined the global community to observe Safer Internet Day, which falls on the first Tuesday of February every year. The day reminds Internet users to be safe while using the Internet and become responsible digital citizens.

It is necessary to raise the level of awareness of the dangers of the Internet, the importance of preserving privacy, and warning against misuse and its legal consequences, in addition to developing ethical and behavioural standards and systems when using the Internet.

The number of Internet users in the Sultanate of Oman increased by about 104,000

users between 2021 and 2022, reaching 5.2 million users.

Since children are a wide audience through social media platforms, the average age of the users came down from 18 years to 12 years of age. The risk is greater because childhood, pre-mental maturity and adolescence are the most dangerous stages for a person.

Our children are born with a desire to explore, love and aspire to use electronic devices from an early age. As soon as a child grows and joins the school, he requires the Internet for research and school study purposes.

The European Commission says one out of every three Internet users is a child or about 33 per cent of Internet users in the world are children, and these children are accessing the Internet at a younger age than ever before through a variety of devices. They spend more and more time online, browsing social media, playing games and using mobile apps, often without adult supervision.

In this context, more attention must be paid to children while they use the Internet. Leaving children unattended for Internet use makes them vulnerable to exploitation by cyber criminals. Electronic bullying, electronic blackmail and some electronic games are great threats targeting children and may eventually lead them to psychiatric clinics or suicide if they are not directed properly.

The child may also be exposed to scenes of violence, ethnic and sectarian intolerance, inappropriate content or prohibited things that may lead to future problems.

Awareness of the safe use of the Internet is important. Among the things that we must remind our children are: Not disclosing any personal information to others on social networking sites is important and contributes to making the Internet a safe environment, and we must remind them not to publish any pictures or clips except after consulting

parents as some digital media are classified as unsuitable for children, and it is also important not to respond to any invitation to meet friends from the virtual world except after the parents' knowledge and approval and to ensure that the virtual friend is suitable for friendship in the real world.

Some families are exposed to security breaches due to children downloading programmes with undocumented or open links, so children must be assured not to download any programmes or games from undocumented sources. It is also necessary to check the accounts of children on social networking sites and what is published on these platforms. It is worth noting that most social networking sites do not grant membership to children without parental consent to protect them from the dangers spread on social networking sites.

To protect your child's safety, boundaries must be drawn by setting appropriate security privileges for your child. It's

recommended to activate the parental control feature on children's devices.

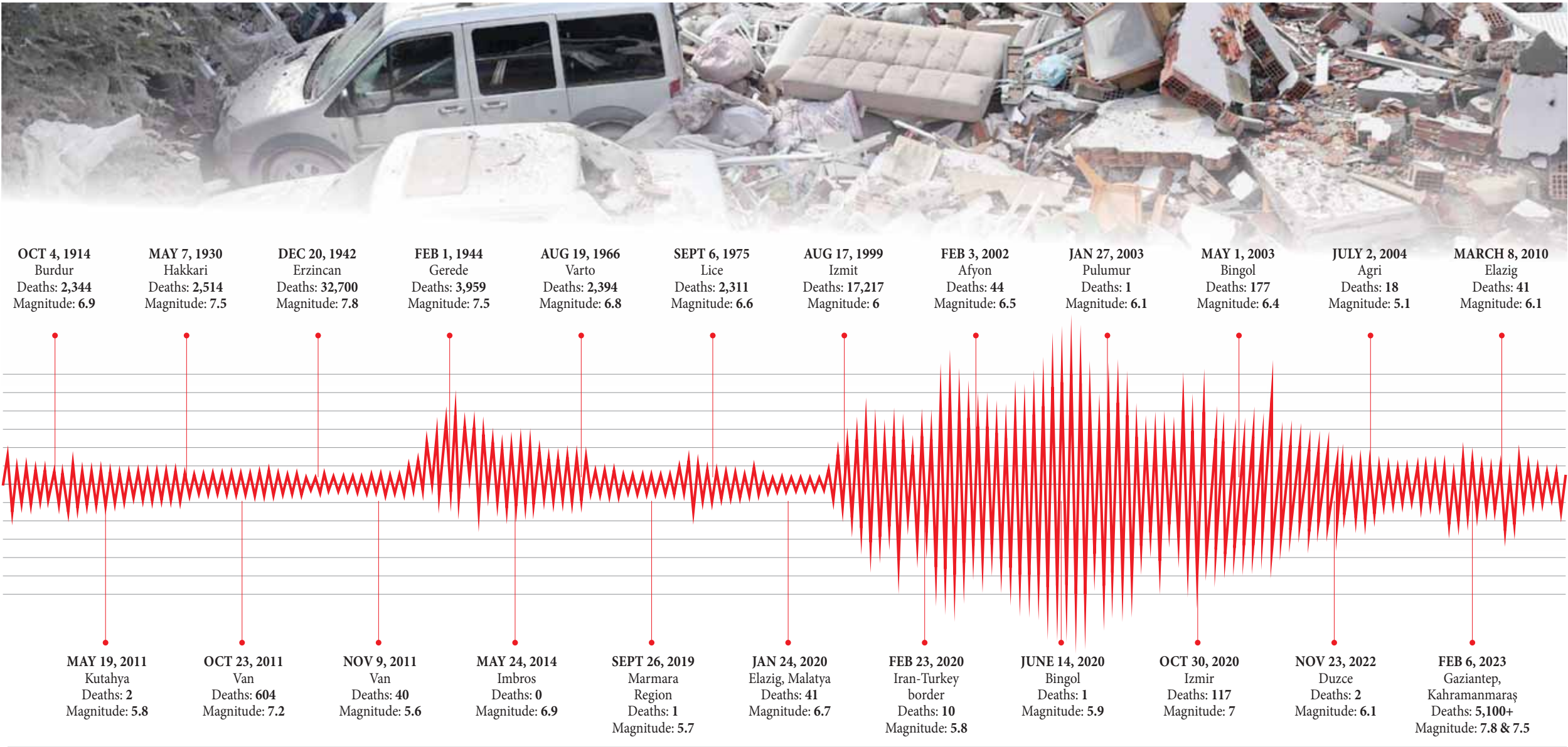
Secondly, advise children to avoid opening any unknown files or applications.

Third, parental friendship by showing interest in the games your child plays, sharing them with him, accuracy in checking the classification of games before purchasing them and choosing the most appropriate for your child's age. Fourthly, trusted applications download original applications from their official websites and trusted sources. Finally, raise awareness among children by teaching them correct behaviours and the truth about what they may encounter on the Internet.

For a safer Internet, most web search engines have a "Safe Search" function that allows parents to limit the content their children can access while online. This is usually in the "Settings" icon on your web browser's homepage. Use secure privacy settings on apps and online games.



TIMELINE OF EARTHQUAKES IN TURKEY
1900 TO PRESENT



NEARLY 6,000 BUILDING

ERDOGAN DECLARES S



A man walks near rubble in the aftermath of an earthquake in the old city of Aleppo. — Reuters



A newborn baby who was found still tied by her umbilical cord to her mother and pulled alive from the rubble of a home in northern Syria receives medical care at a clinic in Afrin. — AFP



A woman gestures while sitting amidst rubble and damages following an earthquake in Gaziantep. — Reuters

INDIA'S NDRF ARRIVES IN TURKEY

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India has dispatched a team of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) equipped with medical supplies, advanced drilling machines, and other crucial tools required for the aid efforts in the wake of devastating earthquake in

Turkey and Syria, In the wake of massive destruction and loss of life, India has also dispatched the second batch of aid to Turkey with an Indian Air Force (IAF) C-17 loaded with self-contained NDRF teams, including dog squads, search and rescue equipment, extrication tools, and vehicles

as part of the Humanitarian And Disaster Relief (HADR) to earthquake-hit Turkey, news agency ANI reported. More than 5,000 people have been killed in the early on Monday 7.8 magnitude earthquake in Turkey and Syria even as rescuers are struggling to save people trapped under the rubble.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

ANTAKYA: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday declared a state of emergency in 10 provinces devastated by two earthquakes that killed more than 6,200 people and left a trail of destruction across a wide area of southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria. A day after the quakes hit,

rescuers working in harsh conditions were struggling to dig people out of the rubble of collapsed buildings in a "race against time". As the scale of the disaster became ever more apparent, the death toll looked likely to rise considerably. One United Nations official said it was feared thousands

of children may have been killed. Thousands of buildings were toppled, hospitals and schools wrecked and tens of thousands of people were injured or left homeless in several Turkish and Syrian cities by the magnitude 7.8 quake — the deadliest in Turkey since 1999 — and a second one hours later. — Reuters



S D E S T R O Y E D I N T U R K E Y

STATE OF EMERGENCY



Rescuers carry a woman after she was evacuated from under a collapsed building following an earthquake in Kahramanmaraş. – Reuters

WORLD REACTIONS

EUROPEAN UNION: The European Union has mobilised 10 search and rescue teams for Turkey after the stricken country requested EU assistance, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and EU crisis management commissioner Janez Lenarcic said. The EU's Copernicus satellite system has been activated to provide emergency mapping services, it said adding the bloc was ready to support those affected in Syria too.

UNITED NATIONS: The UN General Assembly observed a minute of silence in tribute to the victims. "Our teams are on the ground assessing the needs and providing assistance. We count on the international community to help the thousands of families hit by this disaster, many of whom were already in dire need of humanitarian aid in areas where access is a challenge," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

GERMANY: Germany – home to about three million people of Turkish origin – will "mobilise all the assistance we can activate", Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said. Germany's Federal Agency for Technical Relief "can set up camps to provide shelter as well as water treatment units", she said. Generators, tents and blankets are also being readied.

RUSSIA: President Vladimir Putin promised to send Russian teams to both countries in telephone calls with Syria's Bashar al Assad and Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan. "In the nearest hours, rescuers from the Russian emergency ministry will take off for Syria," the Kremlin said. The defence ministry said 300 military personnel deployed in Syria were helping with the clear-up effort.

UKRAINE: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that his war-torn country was "ready to provide the necessary assistance to overcome the consequences of the disaster."

GREECE: Kyriakos Mitsotakis, prime minister of Turkey's historic rival Greece, whose relations with Ankara have suffered from a spate of border and cultural disputes, pledged to make "every force available" to aid its neighbour.

ISRAEL: Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he had approved the sending of aid to Syria – whose government does not recognise Israel – after receiving a request through diplomatic channels. The government will also send humanitarian assistance to Turkey, he said.

NATO: Chief Jens Stoltenberg voiced "full solidarity" with ally Turkey, saying he was in touch with Turkey's top leadership and "Nato allies are mobilising support now".

How safe and healthy are sugar alternatives



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician, content creator

Sugar alternatives are no longer confined to diabetics or with other medical conditions rather they have taken the fitness world by storm. Wanting to get slimmer, your step one approach is cutting your sugar and stacking your kitchen shelf with sugar alternatives.

But how safe and healthier choices do they project? Let’s take it from the beginning; “What is sugar and how much does your body need?” Sugar is a simple carbohydrate that our body needs as a primary energy source.

Usually, the sugar needs of the body are met through the food we eat, and our body doesn’t need any further sugar. Natural sugar sources include lactose in milk,

sucrose in sugarcane, glucose in honey, fructose in fruits. Anything we eat is ultimately broken down to glucose (simplest sugar) to be utilised by the body for energy. Well, is there any limit to added sugar intake?

The AHA (American Heart Association) suggests a stricter added-sugar limit of no more than 100 calories per day (about 6 teaspoons or 24 grams) for most adult women and no more than 150 calories per day (about 9 teaspoons or 36 grams of sugar) for most men.

The AHA also recommends a lower daily limit of added sugars for children ages 2-18 to less than 6 teaspoons or 24 grams per day, and sugary beverages should be limited

THE AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION SUGGESTS A STRICTER ADDED-SUGAR LIMIT OF NO MORE THAN 100 CALORIES PER DAY FOR MOST ADULT WOMEN AND NO MORE THAN 150 CALORIES PER DAY FOR MOST MEN

to no more than 8 ounces a week. And certainly, this means taking into account all food sources that say added sugar; not just direct sources.

What are various sweeteners and how safe are they? Natural, artificial, and alcohol-based sweeteners are in mainstream

consumption.

Typically, they contain fewer or zero calories and appear sweet to the tongue receptors owing to their resemblance with the sugar molecules.

As they are devoid of any calories, they help in reducing appetite and thereby encourage weight loss. So, switching to sugar substitutes a healthier choice?

These sweeteners do not contain calories or sugar, but they also don’t have beneficial nutrients like vitamins, fibre, minerals, or antioxidants.

They are regulated by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as food additives. (John Hopkins Medicine). Do sugar alternatives cause

cancer or other issues? A prevalent myth circulates that sugar alternatives cause cancer. However, recent studies indicate the unlikeliness of any such claims.

They might cause gut issues, headaches, or dizziness in some owing to individual tolerance but by and large they are considered safe to use.

The keynote is don’t give up on carbs altogether in the name of sugar. Instead check for added sugar that might be finding its way into your body through sauces, energy bars, juices, or other sweetened foodstuffs.

Incorporate healthier carbs, cut down on refined ones, and go for sugar alternatives in moderation keeping in mind the pros and cons.

Largest strike in NHS history will cause ‘huge disruption’

Britain’s National Health Service (NHS) is facing a “hugely disrupted day” after tens of thousands of workers began the biggest walkout in the service’s history.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) said strikes will continue for “as long as it takes,” while the Unite union warned of a “constant cycle” of industrial action.

Union leaders have implored the government to act to prevent further strike action but ministers in England have indicated that they will not budge on one of the main points of contention - pay for 2022-23.

Upheaval is expected across England as nurses from the RCN stage walkouts alongside GMB and Unite paramedics, call handlers and other staff at ambulance trusts.

It is the first time ambulance workers and nurses have walked out on the same day. Nurses will strike again on Tuesday, ambulance workers again on Friday and physiotherapists on Thursday. NHS leaders said it will be the “most disruptive week of strikes to date” - but urged people to seek urgent and emergency care if they need it and attend appointments as planned unless they have been contacted in advance.

Unions in Wales largely suspended similar action after the Welsh government came forward with an improved pay offer on Friday.

Saffron Cordery, deputy chief executive of NHS Providers, which represents NHS trusts, told Sky News: “I think it’s going to be a hugely disrupted day across the NHS. It’s going to be incredibly challenging.

“With both nurses and ambulance staff out on strike today, and nurses again tomorrow - and we’ve got physiotherapist later in the week and some ambulance staff again on Friday - we’re planning for an incredibly disrupted week.”

She urged the government to negotiate with unions on 2022-23 pay.

“I hope it ends by the government coming around the table to negotiate a settlement for this year’s pay for NHS staff,” she said.

“I think that we need to recognise that NHS staff have faced soaring costs, (the) cost of living has gone up, inflation has gone up, and the settlement from this year’s pay review body was made at a time when inflation wasn’t at the levels it’s at at the moment.

“So I think it’s really important that we focus on getting a deal for this year, as well as then thinking about what next year’s pay deal looks like.”

But during a visit to Kingston Hospital in south-west London, Health Secretary Steve Barclay appeared to rule out coming to a new agreement on 2022-23 pay. — dpa

Natural calamities and united human spirit



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

Human societies experience natural calamities such as earthquakes, volcanoes, floods and storms. Societies also experience man-made catastrophes like wars and the manufacture of weapons that take the lives of innocent people.

In both the cases, the human soul remains the same without distinctions whether in the East or West. Calamities strike all people, black or white regardless of their religion, all are equally harmed and victimised.

Some people rejoice when a natural disaster strikes a certain nation that differs in terms of politics, ethnicity or religion. Others still position themselves as deputies of God and judge people accordingly.

Consequently, they regard the calamities affecting people with different religions as divine rage even if the victims are women and children.

Some people apply double standards, if a society, with which he is in religious or ethnic accord is struck by disaster and they create a media frenzy and scramble into action and they respond by sending aid and relief materials.

When, on the opposite side, a different society is affected they keep silent and shy away from providing assistance. They can even hamper relief efforts or issue pre-judgments on religious grounds.

Today as we live in one human community we should overlook the differences of genesis such as race and skin colour and acquired differences such as language and religion.

These differences pertain to the laws of the universe and they have positive aspects when viewed from the perspective of the broad human essence or from the comprehensive compassion of Gnosticism.

However, when we view them from the narrow angle of religion, race or sect then strife ensues.

If we could not overlook that at times of prosperity we should at least do so at times of calamity and distress. Of course, crises strike all. When coronavirus initially afflicted China, some nations jubilated for religious or political reasons with some considering it as divine rage.



People work as members of a Turkish community in Berlin collect bags and boxes with warm clothes and other valuable goods to support victims of the deadly earthquake in Turkey, in a neighbourhood in Berlin. – Reuters

HUMAN SOCIETY SHOULD STAND TOGETHER TO HELP ALLEVIATE THE DISTRESS AND RECONSTRUCT WHAT WAS DESTROYED. WE SHOULD HELP THEM BY PROVIDING MEDICINES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT TO THE SURVIVORS

A short time afterwards the virus spread all over the world and many countries imposed restrictions and lockdown of schools, mosques and markets. The world was only saved by science which dealt with the virus naturally without discrimination among whosoever.

Natural disasters know no discrimination based on faith, race and skin colour because they are part of the law that emerged since the beginning of the universe.

Some areas are repeatedly affected by earthquakes, others are affected by

floods, cyclones or disease outbreaks. Other places suffer from water scarcity, desertification and heat or cold waves. All of these are natural conditions resulting from the law of nature but they are wrongly linked to theology and are attributed theological interpretations.

Accordingly, we strike discrimination based on the place or society struck by calamity. When calamities strike societies that bear similarity with our own in terms of religion then it is divine compassion otherwise its divine rage, according to some people.

Even at the individual level, everybody suffers from illnesses and other setbacks.

Some people have hearing or vision impairment, others are born with deformities. Other people fall sick due to malnutrition or old age. All these conditions have natural causes that fall within the domain of science.

God is the symbol of mercy among people, He had created them differently with natural and acquired variations. Had it not been for these variations, man wouldn’t be able to ameliorate the land.

The love and mercy of God lies in the differences among people. Changing the differences into conflict and discrimination in the name of God is tantamount to endorsing the theory of evil on the part of non-believers.

Together for a cancer-free world

We see thousands of individuals, communities, and organisations coming together every year on February 4 to demonstrate a shared responsibility in reducing the global impact of cancer.

On this global uniting day, we pledge our solidarity with the affected people to say that they are not alone. This means all of us will play a mutually respected role in the responsibility of reducing this global disease

Although we all join together in an effort to raise awareness about cancer prevention, detection, and treatment, it is time that we ask ourselves what role we play no matter who we are and how we are wherever we are.

We all also know that cancer is one of the world's leading causes of death, and its burden is growing.

According to WHO figures, each year, over 8.8 million people die from cancer, mostly in low- and middle-income countries.

Globally, there are an estimated 20 million new cases of cancer and 10 million deaths from cancer.

The cancer burden is expected to increase by approximately 60 per cent over the next two decades, further straining health systems, people, and communities.

The predicted global burden will increase to about 30 million new cancer cases by 2040, with the greatest increases occurring in low- and middle-income countries.

According to a study by researchers from Brigham and Women's Hospital, the incidence of early onset cancers — including breast, colon, esophagus, kidney, liver, and pancreas — has dramatically increased around the world, with the rise beginning around 1990.

One clear trend that emerged in the research is the dramatic changes that are taking place in our lifestyle resulting in a steep rise in the number of cancer cases among adults under 50.

Several modifiable risk factors early in life — like what people eat, how



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

ALTHOUGH WE ALL JOIN TOGETHER IN AN EFFORT TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT CANCER PREVENTION, DETECTION, AND TREATMENT, IT IS TIME THAT WE ASK OURSELVES WHAT ROLE WE PLAY NO MATTER WHO WE ARE AND HOW WE ARE WHEREVER WE ARE

much they exercise, and whether they maintain a healthy weight — can all play a role in cancer risk.

Surprisingly, researchers found that while adult sleep duration hasn't drastically changed over several decades, children are getting far less sleep today than they were decades ago.

Risk factors such as highly processed foods, sugary beverages, obesity, Type 2 diabetes, sedentary lifestyle, and alcohol consumption have all significantly increased since the 1950s

Care for cancer, however, according to WHO, like so many other diseases, reflects the inequalities and inequities of our world.

The clearest distinction is between high- and low-income countries, with comprehensive treatment reportedly available in more than 90 per cent of high-income countries but less than 15 per cent of low-income countries.

A recent WHO survey revealed that cancer services are covered by a country's largest, government health financing scheme in an estimated 37 per cent of low- and middle-income countries, compared to at least 78 per cent of high-income countries.

This means that a cancer diagnosis has the potential to push families into poverty, particularly in lower-income countries, an effect that has been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Increased efforts to scale up high-quality cancer programmes at international, national, and community levels are all the more important.

By collaboration, commitment, and solidarity, however, hope can be provided to the many millions of people for whom cancer treatment has in the past been little more than a dream.

So with the World Cancer Day theme "Close the Care Gap" that will continue till next year, every single person with the ability to make a difference, large or small, coming together can make real progress in reducing the global impact of cancer!

NEAR A STORMY BEACH



A Palestinian girl on the beach in Gaza City during stormy weather, on Tuesday. – AFP

Britain's Sunak shuffles cabinet to bolster pledges on economy

ELIZABETH PIPER,
ANDREW MACASKILL AND
ALISTAIR SMOUT

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak reshuffled his cabinet on Tuesday, breaking up two departments to better suit his pledges to spur the economy and turn around his party's fortunes before an election expected next year.

Sunak created a new energy security and net-zero department, to be led by minister Grant Shapps, and three other departments, with one focusing on science and innovation, a personal passion for Sunak.

The former finance minister and multi-millionaire, who once worked for a hedge fund, is trying to steer the economy through a prolonged period of double-digit inflation and stagnation, a situation worsened by the soaring cost of energy.

He is also under pressure to try to prove his belief that Britain can reap the benefits of its departure from the European Union by developing new trade ties with international partners.

"The government needs to reflect the priorities of the British people and be designed to deliver for them," Sunak said on Twitter.

"These changes will focus teams on the issues that will build a better

SUNAK CREATED A NEW ENERGY SECURITY AND NET-ZERO DEPARTMENT, TO BE LED BY MINISTER GRANT SHAPPS, AND THREE OTHER DEPARTMENTS

future for our children and grandchildren."

Trade Secretary Kemi Badenoch was given an expanded role including business and trade.

Former culture minister Michelle Donelan was appointed to run the department for science, innovation and technology, while former housing minister Lucy Frazer takes on the new role for culture, media and sport.

Greg Hands, a former trade minister and one-time party enforcer for the Conservatives, was appointed party chair.

The timing surprised some in Sunak's party.

But after he fired his party chairman over his tax affairs and with an investigation into bullying allegations against his deputy prime minister Dominic Raab ongoing, several lawmakers said he might be seizing a chance to stamp his mark. Raab denies the allegations.

Sunak's appointment of Hands as party chair finally filled a position made ever more important before the next national election expected in 2024, after Nadhim Zahawi was



Placards depicting British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak are seen on the picket line outside Cardiff Ambulance Station in Cardiff, Britain, on Tuesday. – Reuters

sacked nine days ago over his tax affairs.

It was largely welcomed by a party which is deeply divided and increasingly assertive after ousting two prime ministers last year over scandal and economic chaos.

Since entering Downing Street in October, Sunak has

been under pressure to stamp his authority, with some in his party questioning whether he was overly managerial and lacked an overriding ideology or vision for Britain.

He has so far failed to reduce the commanding lead in opinion polls held by the opposition Labour Party, which

is increasingly presenting itself as Britain's next government.

Sunak promised in January to tackle Britain's most serious problems, from cutting inflation to fixing the National Health Service (NHS) and reducing illegal migration, aiming to convince his lawmakers he can lead them into the next election.

He has also passionately espoused the need for Britain to become the "next Silicon valley", pledging in January to increase public funding in research and development to 20 billion pounds (\$24.06 billion).

But Tim Bale, a professor of politics at Queen Mary University in London, said that even if some investors welcomed the move, he did not believe the departmental changes would make "a blind bit of difference to their fortunes at the next election".

"I think these changes will look a little irrelevant to people facing the economic hardships they are facing and the problems they are facing in the NHS," he said. "I am sure he will just get accused of shifting the deckchairs on the Titanic."

—Reuters

sport



INTERNATIONAL SERIES OMAN POISED TO TEE OFF GOLFING SPECTACLE



(L-R) Sadom Kaewkanjana of Thailand, Chan Shih-chang of Chinese Taipei, Azzan al Rumhy of Oman and Graeme McDowell of Northern Ireland pose for a photograph with the International Series Oman winner's trophy at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat on Tuesday.

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH MUSCAT, FEB 7

The \$2-million prize money International Series Oman is all set to turn the Sultanate of Oman into a golfing spectacle when Major winners and elite players from the six continents tee off at the picturesque Al Mouj Golf course on Thursday.

The February 9-12 tournament, making its Middle East debut in Muscat, is headlined by Major winners Brooks Koepka, Sergio Garcia, Graeme McDowell, Louis Oosthuizen and Charl Schwartzel.

The elevated series begins at the Greg Norman designed Championship golf course, Al Mouj Golf, before heading to a further nine venues as part of the Asian Tour's season.

The 132-player field in Muscat includes golfers from 23 countries across 6 continents.

The 32-year-old Koepka is a former world number one and four-time Major winner.

The all-time Ryder Cup points earner, Garcia, is joined in the field by fellow Spaniards Eugenio Chacarra and David Puig.

The Asian Tour's enhanced tournament series' strongest field to date includes Chile's two top-ranked players Joaquin Niemann and Mito Pereira.

Dubai-based Shiv Kapur (India), Jeev Milkha Singh (India) and MG Keyser (South Africa), representing Jumeirah Golf Estates, are also in the fray.

TROPHY CEREMONY

On Tuesday, Graeme McDowell, Sadom Kaewkanjana, Chan Shih-Chang and Azzan al Rumhy attended Muscat's Grand Mosque to showcase one of the country's most impressive destinations during a photocall with the trophy.

The players gathered at Oman's largest mosque previewing the week ahead and what they expect from the Series' first visit to the Middle East.

Graeme McDowell spoke on playing in the Sultanate for the first time and commented: "I've played a lot of golf in the Middle East for the last 20 years and it's always amazing to come to new places. I like what I see so far, it's a beautiful country with great facilities and a great golf course and I'm really looking forward to competing this weekend."

One of Oman's brightest talents, amateur golfer Azzan al Rumhy discussed having the series in his home country for the first time adding: "I'm very excited, we've been waiting for this event since we heard about it last November and we are very fortunate, especially with some of the big names that are here and it's the strongest field we've ever had in Oman. The likes of Brooks Koepka, Sergio Garcia and Louis Oosthuizen, it makes it super exciting."

Sadom Kaewkanjana was asked on the opportunity the International Series provides players on the Asian Tour, saying: "It's great for me and the young players on the Asian Tour to play in the International Series, playing alongside great players in the field. The field is very strong so everyone will be looking to improve their games, get better and continue to grow the game throughout Asia."

Talking on his development through to the Asian Tour and International Series, Chan Shih-chang said: "Looking back at my career so far, I think it hasn't been easy getting to where I am today. I started playing on the Asian Development Tour (ADT) more than 10 years ago. Won a few times, got my status on the Asian Tour and then won on the Asian Tour. It has been a lot of hard work really, considering how late I picked up the game."

The first round draw was held on Tuesday with Koepka set for an afternoon tee-off while Oosthuizen and Milka Singh start early.

Zimbabwe's Ballance second to score centuries for two countries

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe: Gary Ballance became only the second Test batsman after Kepler Wessels to score a century for two countries, hitting an unbeaten 137 for Zimbabwe against the West Indies in Bulawayo on Tuesday.

Needing at least 248 runs in reply to a West Indies' declaration of 447-6 on Monday to avoid a possible follow-on, Zimbabwe declared at 379-9 after the second session on day four of the first Test.

That left the hosts trailing by 68 runs after the first innings in their first Test since losing to Bangladesh two years ago.

Harare-born Ballance scored four centuries for England during the last decade before returning home to make his Test debut for Zimbabwe in this match at Queens Sports Club.

South Africa-born Wessels scored four centuries for Australia before returning home and making two more for his homeland when they were readmitted to Test cricket in the 1990s.

Ballance and leg spinner Brandon Mavuta, who made 56 before playing across the line to a short delivery and being bowled by Jason Holder, put on 135 in a brilliant eighth-wicket stand.

Aware of his key role having come in at number five with Zimbabwe 114-3, Ballance was the epitome of caution, painstakingly building his innings.

By the declaration, the 33-year-old had faced 231 balls and his

total included two sixes, one of which took him to his century, and 12 fours.

While Ballance was foiling West Indies plans to bowl out Zimbabwe cheaply and force them to immediately bat again, Mavuta played a superb back-up role.

Having taken five West Indies wickets, he proved equally skilful with the bat and did not hold back when offered scoring chances as he slammed nine fours.

The day began with Test debutant Innocent Kaia on 59, but he could add only eight more before being trapped leg before by quickie Alzarri Joseph for 67.

Kaia fluffed an attempted flick and was hit high on the front pad. A review was not possible as the DRS (decision review system) is not being used in this series.

— AFP

SCOREBOARD

West Indies 1st innings 447-6 dec
Zimbabwe 1st innings
I Kaia lbw b Joseph67
T Makoni c Mayers b Joseph33
C Chibhabha c Da Silva b Motie9
C Ervine b Brathwaite13
G Ballance not out137
T Tsigia lbw b Joseph2
B Evans c De Silva b Roach7
W Masakadza c Mayers b Motie15
B Mavuta b Holder56
V Nyauchi c Da Silva b Holder13
R Ngarava not out19
Extras (b2, lb5, nb1)8
Total (9 wkts dec, 125 overs)379
Fall of wickets: 1-63, 2-84, 3-114, 4-128, 5-132, 6-147, 7-192, 8-327, 9-341
Bowling: K Roach 15-4-35-1, A Joseph 26-2-75-3, K Mayers 10-4-22-0, G Motie 33-10-110-2, J Holder 17-2-55-2, R Chase 14-1-45-0, K Brathwaite 5-1-12-1, R Reifer 3-0-7-0, J Blackwood 2-0-11-0



PCB bans Asif Afridi for two years after code violations

KARACHI: Pakistan banned spinning all-rounder Asif Afridi from all cricket for a period of two years on Tuesday after he pleaded guilty to two violations of the board's anti-corruption code.

"Afridi has been handed a two-year period of ineligibility, while he was given a six-month ban for the violation of a second clause," the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement.

Afridi was initially suspended in September last year over failing to report an approach "to engage in corrupt conduct" during the National Twenty20 tournament.

While announcing the decision, the PCB said it considered Afridi's request to consider his case compassionately. He claimed he had unintentionally breached the code.

The 36-year-old was part of a squad to face Australia in limited-over matches last year, but did not play in any of them.

Pakistan cricket has a history of match-fixing bans, with a judicial inquiry banning former skipper Salim Malik and seamer Ata-ur-Rehman for life and fining six top cricketers — including Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis — in 2000.

Salman Butt, who was then the team's skipper, Mohammad Amir and Mohammad Asif were banned for five years in a spot-fixing case in England in 2010.

Two years later, leg-spinner Danish Kaneria was banned for life over a spot-fixing case in English country cricket. In the more recent past, Umar Akmal, Sharjeel Khan, Khalid Latif, Shahzaib Hasan, Mohammad Nawaz and Mohammad Irfan were also banned in various spot-fixing cases. — AFP

Himesh and Harshpreet clinch open men's doubles crown

MUSCAT: Top seeded Himesh Haridas and Harshpreet Singh Arora were in their spectacular form to claim open men's doubles title defeating favourite duo Shanith and Mohammed at the Purshottam Kanji Exchange – sponsored ISC badminton championship organised by the Indian Social Club Muscat.

The final saw quality badminton played by both the teams. The first game saw vigorous encounters from both ends and there was not much to separate the two teams. Shanith and Mohammed brought some strategic movements and game plan but failed to realise any results in front of Himesh and Harshpreet



Mens A doubles finalists Nikhil and Aju with Vinod and Ratheesh.

who were at their best to take the first set 21-10.

Shanith and Mohammed started off well but Himesh and Harshpreet managed to keep at close terms at the interval. On resumption, Shanith and Mohammed

stepped up offensive but Himesh and Harshpreet managed to put these backs and win some crucial points to keep their nose in front. Closer to the end, the top seeded pair held their nerve to fashion another close win at 21-9 and



Mens open doubles finalists Shanith and Mohammed with Harshpreet and Himesh.

claim open men's doubles title. Himesh and Harshpreet reached final defeating Alan Anil and Anil in the semifinal while Shanith and Mohammed beat Guru and Riyadi in the other semifinal.

Vinod Abraham and Ratheesh

claimed men's A doubles title defeating Aju Mathew and Nikhil. Aju and Nikhil displayed superb skills to take advantage over their opponents in the first set to win it 21-14. The opponents brought some strategic movements and game plan but failed to realise any results in front of the experienced Vinod and Ratheesh who took the second set at 21-19. Vinod and Ratheesh beat Jinesh P and Robin whereas Aju and Nikhil defeated Irshaad and Anil in the semifinals.

In the women's open doubles final, Roopa and Tejali showed an excellent team work in their victory over Jisha Aju and Reshma scoring 21-19 and 21-14.

Aditya to lead Oman U19 team in Hong Kong series

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket will host a strong Hong Kong under-19 team for a four-match 50-over-a-side bilateral series at the Oman Cricket Academy ground in Al Amerat from February 15.

Aditya Gurumukhi has been named the skipper of Oman squad with Tanuj Sivakumar appointed his deputy for the series that will conclude on February 21.

The bilateral series is part of OC's endeavour to provide greater exposure to national U19 cricketers with coach Adeel Shafique hoping that his boys would gain experience and build on their match temperament

by playing against stronger opposition.

It may be mentioned that Oman U19 lads had missed out on a place in the Asia Regional Qualifier after going out in the semifinals of the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup Division 2 – Asia Qualifier at home last October. On the other hand, Hong Kong went on to reach the final before losing to Singapore.

Both Singapore and Hong Kong along with Kuwait, Malaysia, Nepal and hosts UAE will fight for the lone spot in the final qualification event - Asia Regional Qualifier - for the ICC



U19 Cricket World Cup 2024 in Sri Lanka. The Asia Regional Qualifier will be held in the

UAE from February 24-March 2 and Hong Kong's tour of Oman is expected to give them good

preparations ahead of the regional qualifier.

The 14-member Oman squad, supported by Majees Technical Services, will include few new faces since the national team played in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup Division 2 – Asia Qualifier. Among the new faces are Wajih Abbas Farista, Adarsh Srinivasan, and Mustaqeem Sayed.

The first of the four-match 50-over series will begin on February 15 while the second match will be played the next day. The third and fourth match of the series will be held on February 19 and 21.

According to Shafique, talks are underway with Hong Kong Cricket officials on enhancing the bilateral relations and making the series into an annual affair.

OMAN U19 SQUAD: Aditya Gurumukhi (captain), Tanuj Sivakumar (vice-captain), Aryan Bisht, Mohammad Arafat Islam, Lakshmi Narayana, Glen Menezes, Wajih Abbas Farista, Devansh Loya, Prateish Ramesh, Mustaqeem Sayed, Rahul Habibulla (wk), Aleem Matto, Adharsh Srinivasan, Ahmed al Zadjali (Omani). **Manager:** Sher Mohammad **Coach:** Adeel Shafique.

Top class field for Tour of Oman

HIRT JOINS MASNADA IN SOUDAL QUICK-STEP; CAVENDISH GIVES COMPANY TO LUTSENKO

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 7

Champion Jan Hirt is back to defend his title in Oman, joining 2022 edition runner-up Fausto Masnada in Soudal Quick-Step team for the 12th edition on Tour of Oman from February 11 to 15.

The 147.4-km first stage of the iconic cycling race will begin from Al Rustaq Fort and end at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on February 11.

British rider Mark Cavendish, who has 34 Tour de France stages to his name, makes his debut with Astana Qazaqstan Team led by two-time Tour of Oman champion Alexey Lutsenko.

The 2023 edition in Oman also hosts another race, Muscat Classic, on the eve of the championship.

The first edition of Muscat Classic road race will start at Al Mouj Muscat and conclude at Al Bustan for a distance of 173.7 km on February 10.

Organising committee chairman Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, said 2023 edition will be special with the start of Muscat Classic.

“Designed over five days, this year’s course is packed with climbing. Riders will return to Qurayat and discover new climbs in the coastal area of Yiti and up the ascent of Jabal Haat. The road will rise until the very last moment and the winner of the Tour of Oman 2023 will be crowned after a final battle on the slopes of Jabal Al Akhdhar, the iconic ‘Green Mountain’. Thrilling racing and exceptional views are in sight,” Al Rawas enthused.

Among the field, fast men such as Pascal Ackermann, puncheurs like Davide Formolo and climbers as talented as Emanuel Buchmann and Cian Uijtdebroeks also eye success on the explosive course



Past winners from 2010

2010 Fabian CANCELLARA (SUI)	2016 Vincenzo NIBALI (ITA)
2011 Robert GESINK (NED)	2017 Ben HERMANS (BEL)
2012 Peter VELITS (SVK)	2018 Alexey LUTSENKO (KAZ)
2013 Christopher FROOME (GBR)	2019 Alexey LUTSENKO (KAZ)
2014 Christopher FROOME (GBR)	2022 Jan HIRT (CZE)
2015 Rafael VALLS FERRI (ESP)	

of the Muscat Classic and the demanding roads of the Tour of Oman.

Among the teams, Belgium’s Soudal Quick-Step has made a major step by fielding Czech climbing specialist Hirt along with Masnada for a ‘climbing heavy’ Tour of Oman.

The Wolfpack is once again

expected to shine in the desert, with other assets such as Mauri Vansevenant to shake the race and Tim Merlier to show his speed.

FORMIDABLE CHALLENGE

Kazakhstan’s Astana Qazaqstan Team offers formidable challenge for the title with Cavendish joining Lutsenko.

Lutsenko, who had won the title in 2018 and 19, has won stages up Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain) and in Al Bustan. Cavendish has two stage wins in Oman to his credit. Under-23 world champion Yevgeniy Fedorov also looks to make his mark.

Kristoffer Halvorsen, U23 world champion in 2016, is the road captain for Uno-X as the Norwegian keeps growing towards their first participation in the Tour de France.

Hirt’s former team, Intermarché-Circus-Wanty of Belgium, will mount strong challenge for the honours.

Estonia’s Rein Taaramae, who was an essential asset to propel the Czech climber towards victory in 2022, partners up with pocket climber Louis Meintjes. The South African made history last year with a stage win in La Vuelta and a place in the top 10 of the Tour de France.

Strong contenders UAE Team Emirates also line up a top sprinter in Pascal Ackermann, along with punchy options such as Diego Ulissi and Davide Formolo. Classic experts like AG2R Citroën’s Greg Van Avermaet and Oliver Naesen will also be willing to bring battle on any occasion while climbers such as Ivan Sosa (Movistar) and Emanuel Buchmann (Bora-Hansgrohe) eye the final battles up Green Mountain, where Jesus Herrada (Cofidis) hopes to shine again (third in 2018, sixth in 2019).

Buchmann will join forces with the winner of the 2022 Tour de l’Avenir, Cian Uijtdebroeks. The Belgian wonderkid will face stiff competition from other young talents like Andrii Ponomar (Team Arkea-Samsic), Maxim Van Gils (Lotto Dstny), Roger Adria (Equipo Kern Pharma) and Matteo Jorgenson (Movistar).

Oman national champion Faisal al Mamari, 23, will lead the local challenge in the famed race.

18 TEAMS: THE MAIN PARTICIPANTS

BELGIUM
Bingoal WB: Kenneth Van Rooy
Intermarché-Circus-Wanty: Louis Meintjes
Lotto Dstny: Thomas De Gendt, Maxim Van Gils
Soudal Quick-Step: Jan Hirt, Tim Merlier

FRANCE
AG2R Citroen Team: Greg Van Avermaet, Oliver Naesen
Cofidis: Jesus Herrada, Axel Zingle
Team Arkéa-Samsic: Jenthe Biermans, Andrii Ponomar

GERMANY
Bora-Hansgrohe: Emanuel Buchmann, Cian Uijtdebroeks

JAPAN
JCL Team Ukyo: Benjamin Prades

KAZAKHSTAN
Astana Qazaqstan Team: Mark Cavendish, Alexey Lutsenko

MALAYSIA
Terengganu Polygon Cycling: Jambaljamts Sainbayar

NORWAY
Uno-X Pro Cycling Team: Kristoffer Halvorsen

OMAN
Oman National Team: Faisal Almamari

SPAIN
Burgos-BH: Miguel Angel Fernandez
Equipo Kern Pharma: Roger Adria
Movistar: Ivan Sosa, Matteo Jorgenson

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
UAE Team Emirates: Pascal Ackermann, Davide Formolo

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Human Powered Health: Stanislaw Aniolkowski



business

MUSCAT
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Light Crude \$75.72



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3-4 oil & gas blocks to be awarded in coming period: Al Aufi

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 7

The Sultanate of Oman expects to award between 3 and 4 oil and gas blocks for exploration and development during the coming period depending upon the quality of bids received, according to Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi (pictured), Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Al Aufi made the disclosure during a wide-ranging interview conducted by Oman Radio on Monday. The roughly hour-long interview covered, among other topics, issues related to international oil price trends, developments in the domestic upstream sector, hydrocarbon production costs, energy exports, and mineral sector developments.

At the outset, Al Aufi affirmed the continuing stability of the Omani Oil & Gas market characterised by ongoing



exploration activities and strong production capabilities.

In this regard, he credited cooperation with operators for this positive outlook. Crude oil output has increased to average of around 1.1 million

barrels per day (bpd) with Oman adhering to production limits set by the Opec+ alliance to help stabilise international markets, he said.

The price of Omani crude is expected to average \$80 per barrel

during the first quarter of 2023, he noted, adding that prices are expected to vary from month to month due to geopolitical conditions and other factors.

Sharing details about oil production costs in Oman, Al Aufi said it ranges from as much as \$20 – 25 a barrel to an operating cost of between \$7-9 a barrel for crude that is produced from the same site without new drilling expenditures. But technical cost of production can be as high as \$17 – 19 a barrel, he stated.

In the interview, Al Aufi also pointed out that Omani crude benefits from strong demand, particularly from China which procures its requirements via DME – a platform for buying and selling benchmark crudes.

As for hydrocarbon reserves, they currently stand at 4.8 billion barrels of crude and 23 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, he stated.

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Madayn BoD discusses plans for international port at Sur



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

The Board of Directors of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) held its second meeting for the year 2023 in Sur Industrial City, chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, and Chairman of Madayn's Board of Directors.

The meeting was followed by a field visit in Sur Industrial City, during which the board was briefed on the projects and achievements made during the

last period.

They also visited the waterfront site of the international port project planned in Sur Industrial City and discussed the developments to expedite the pace of work on this project.

The Board of Directors, accompanied by officials of Sur Industrial City, then visited then visited a number of localised companies and factories the industrial city including Al Hael Ceramic Company and Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to get familiarised with their production lines and observe the opinions and recommendations of the investors.

CMA mandates greater interactions by listed firms with stakeholders

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) issued guidelines to support interactions between public joint stock companies, the media, investors and analysts with the goal of strengthening transparency and enhancing the market's investment appeal.

A decision issued to this effect affirms the principle of equal opportunity for all and supports the relationship between the parties of the investment process.

This will reflect positively on the market and will address the drawbacks that might be the reason why some national and foreigner investors have pulled out of the market, the Authority noted in a press statement.

The decision underscores the importance of setting a framework specifying the tools for interaction and the applicable timeframes, while also simplifying and explaining the data to the public.

Additionally, it highlights the need to enhance the partnership with media institutions to publish and clarify the quarterly and material statements.

The decision also obliges the companies to establish a section for the investors' relations inside each company and conduct



an interactive meeting free of charge, where the stakeholders are invited to attend after the disclosure of the companies' semi-annual or annual statements, in coordination with the MSX within 30 days from the date of disclosure.

The decision allows the analysts to request for an additional meeting with the company in case they needed more information and obliged the company to accept the request and specify time and venue of the meeting.

Also, it permitted the company to collect requests every two months and respond to them during one meeting.

In case the company cannot answer all the requests, it shall clarify its justifications and disclose them via the MSX within five trading days from the date of receiving the request.

Notably, the decision has received a positive response from the companies as they conducted more than 95 interactive meetings from last July to date.

Oman LNG signs binding term-sheet agreement with China's Unipetec

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

Oman LNG has announced yesterday the signing of a binding term-sheet agreement with China International and Chemical Co (Unipetec) to supply 1 million metric tonne per annum (mtpa) of LNG starting in 2025.

This agreement comes to leverage the ever-growing partnership between Oman LNG and international energy firms, where UNIPETEC has become the latest beneficiary of the Omani LNG marking the first LNG term deal with a Chinese firm, a remarkable milestone for both companies and countries opening doors for new opportunities in the Chinese market.

The signed term-sheet agreement encapsulates supplying a total volume of 1 million metric tonne per annum of LNG from Oman LNG to Unipetec, the trading arm of the Chinese company Sinopec.

The agreement is based on a 4-year contract, starting in 2025. Signing term-sheet agreements beyond 2024 emphasises Oman LNG's role in sustaining the Sultanate of Oman's reputation as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier, coupled with the effective management of business processes to produce clean energy, and deliver it to



customers around the world safely and reliably.

The agreement was signed by Hamed al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG and Wang Yahang, General Manager of Unipetec, in the presence of Eng Salim al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, in Muscat.

Speaking after the signing ceremony, Hamed al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, said "The term-sheet signing with Unipetec marks another milestone, where the Omani LNG will be creating new opportunities in China. Such agreement will further enhance

our position in the global energy industry, and ensure we maintain our reputation as a clean and reliable energy supplier worldwide. This step boosts our on-going efforts to add value to the local economy through growth and collaborations with international partners such as Unipetec".

Oman's liquefied natural gas industry was born out of the vision of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said to diversify the country's economy and has attracted high revenue by harnessing natural gas resources for export as

liquefied natural gas. The country produced its first shipment of liquefied natural gas in 2000 after the first of an initial two-train plant began operations under Oman LNG, established by Royal Decree in 1994.

With a third train under Qalhat LNG, liquefied natural gas has played an even greater role in contributing to the national economy as the two companies, that integrated in 2013 and now operate as Oman LNG, have worked intensely with outstanding success to drive their organisations forward.

Majid al Futtaim officially inaugurates Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Majid Al Futtaim, the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, has celebrated the inauguration of Mall of Oman on Monday, following a soft launch of the Mall in September 2021.

The opening event was attended by Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Tariq al Futtaim, Member of the Majid al Futtaim Holding and Capital Boards; Ahmed Galal Ismail, Chief Executive Officer, Majid al Futtaim Holding; senior Government officials and members of the Majid al Futtaim Executive Leadership team.

Featuring distinct architecture and offering exceptional retail and hospitality options, Mall of Oman is home to Snow Oman — the largest snow park in the region, Oman's largest VOX Cinemas — complete with 15 screens, 260 international and local retail outlets and over 45 dining options,



with plans to introduce 15 more dining experiences in 2023.

Underscoring Majid al Futtaim's industry leading sustainability standards, Mall of the Oman was named the biggest mall globally to have achieved LEED Platinum under New Building Core and

Shell for its success in saving 28.59 per cent of energy, with a 49 per cent water saving and introducing low-emission-vehicle parking spaces. Ahmed Galal Ismail, Chief Executive Officer of Majid al Futtaim Holding, commented, "Our story in Oman dates back

to more than two decades. The inauguration of the Mall of Oman is the latest milestone in our unrelenting and unwavering commitment to the Sultanate of Oman. The guiding ethos that has underpinned our steady and resolute expansion from day



AS A LEADING INVESTOR IN OMAN, MAJID AL FUTTAIM CONTINUES TO POSITIVELY IMPACT THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY THROUGH ITS DIVERSE RANGE OF PROJECTS WORTH RO 705 MILLION.

one, has been an unrelenting commitment to contribute to the country's economic growth and the prosperity of its people."

"We remain honoured and privileged in being able to meaningfully contribute to Oman's Vision 2040 and do our part in furthering the Sultanate of Oman's drive towards a diversified and sustainable national economy."

Majid al Futtaim has invested RO 705 million in Oman through a diverse portfolio that ranges from physical assets such as

shopping malls and mixed use communities, to leisure and entertainment experiences, lifestyle stores and Carrefour hypermarkets and supermarkets.

These activities have generated an estimated 42,000 direct and indirect job opportunities over the last seven years, further reinforcing Majid al Futtaim's drive to empower and enable the growth and development of local communities to drive greater economic growth across the country.

Bank Nizwa invests in digital onboarding solutions

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman's leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has invested heavily in seamless and efficient digital account opening experiences for customers.

Individuals can open Shariah-compliant savings accounts remotely via their laptop or mobile device, elevating their experience and satisfying their appetite to be digitally onboarded. Transparency is at the heart of Bank Nizwa's operations whilst simplified technology enhances customer convenience. Innovation is considered a fundamental pillar of the bank's growth.

"Bank Nizwa has always been a pioneer in digital solutions, and we are committed to developing smart and fully digitised processes to ensure our efficiency. As a result of the digital onboarding process, we are able to manage cases efficiently, capture documents automatically, and collaborate more efficiently, resulting in less paperwork and more productivity. Offering self-service options allows the bank to attract new customers," said Sadiq al Lawati, Head Channels and Digitalisation at Bank Nizwa.

"Fine-tuned digital onboarding experiences are customer-centric and form a solid foundation for long-term relationships with their clients. By acting digitally and recommending tailored products, banks can increase customer loyalty and brand awareness," he added.

Locals and residents over 18 years of age can open a savings account virtually by downloading the Bank Nizwa Mobile App. They will need to



take a picture of both sides of their IDs, take a selfie, fill out the required information, and then make a deposit. Digital onboarding provides customers with faster access to all of the bank's products.

Once the process is complete the digital identity of the customer is fully set up, the savings account is open and the customer is able to use the entire portfolio of digital products of the bank. The debit card will be delivered to the customer where-ever he/she resides. The Bank Nizwa's savings account serves as the basic tool when it comes to investing and growing funds with the principles of Mudaraba. Under this, the client is Shaheb-Al Mal and the bank is Mudarib.

Khimji Ramdas Eshraqa to provide employment for DHH job-seekers

MUSCAT: Dedicated to building a more inclusive society, Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa has entered into an agreement with Al Tawasul Institute for the training of the Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) job-seekers in Oman. Under the agreement, Al Tawasul will conduct training for DHH Omanis, who will upon completion of the programme, be considered for suitable job opportunities within the Khimji Ramdas Group.

The agreement's signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development at Avani Muscat Hotel and Suites. It was signed by Nailesh Khimji, Director, of Khimji Ramdas Group, and Said bin Mohammad al Baddai, General Manager, from Al Tawasul Institute.

Discussing the significance of the initiative, Nailesh Khimji mentioned: "KR Eshraqa has always been focused on finding ways to improve the quality of life of the Sultanate of Oman's citizens. The signing of this agreement is a step in the same



direction and is part of our commitment to creating job opportunity for our citizens from all sections of society. Aligning our commitment to Oman Vision 2040, we are pleased to partner with Al Tawasul Training Institute to help DHH job-seekers to contribute to their field of expertise and reach higher personal goals."

General Manager of Al Tawasul Institute, Said bin Mohammad al Baddai highlighted: "We are delighted to join hands with KR Eshraqa to provide equal training and employment of persons with hearing impairment. Under this

agreement, Al Tawasul will work towards the rehabilitation and training of DHH individuals by means of a high-quality, interactive English and Arabic sign-language training module.

Job-seekers will also be taught to use computers, so that they are fully equipped to manage their roles in the Sultanate of Oman's vibrant labour market."

KR Eshraqa has been established on the premise that the private sector has a responsibility towards the development of local communities and the empowerment of talented individuals in Oman.

Experience benchmark luxury in the Lincoln Aviator

MUSCAT: The luxury Lincoln Aviator SUV is designed to stand out and be above expectations with its stylish and sleek design, range of advanced features and inspiring luxury.

The Aviator is powered to offer rewarding drives with its standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine that is paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission.

This helps the Aviator dish out an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration. The three-row luxury SUV is equipped with all-wheel drive capability.

Adding thrill to journeys in

the Lincoln Aviator is the Lincoln Drive Modes' five signature settings – Normal, Conserve, Excite, Slippery and Deep Conditions. This feature allows owners to further customise their driving experience, while a 10.1-inch standard configurable LCD instrument cluster confirms their choices with beautiful, easy-to-read dynamic graphics and prompts.

For increased safety the Lincoln Aviator is equipped with available technology that enables Aviator to "see" most potholes or uneven pavement and immediately make suspension adjustments to keep the ride as smooth as possible.



Adaptive Suspension with Road Preview uses an advanced forward camera to constantly scan the road, seamlessly adjusting the suspension as needed.

All Lincoln vehicles come standard with a suite of driver-assist features known as Lincoln Co-Pilot360.

Traffic Jam Assist helps

guide the vehicle using adaptive cruise control with stop-and-go, lane centring and traffic sign recognition, adjusting speed based on the information obtained.

Evasive Steer Assist offers assistance to the driver to help avoid a collision with a slower or stopped vehicle; it provides additional steering support when a collision cannot be avoided by braking alone.

Reverse Brake Assist can help stop the vehicle while backing up if Aviator's integrated rear sensors and camera detect an obstacle at the rear. Active Park Assist 2.0 removes the stress from parking by taking

over steering, shifting, braking and acceleration functions with the touch of a button to navigate parallel and perpendicular parking spaces with ease.

The boundless allure of flight has long inspired automotive design, and the all-new Lincoln Aviator takes that inspiration to the next level.

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Oman ranked 5th in Emerging Markets for Best Business Climate



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 7

Global supply chain executives say innovation and help for small businesses will do the most to drive non-oil economic growth for Gulf economies, which outperformed most others in the 14th annual Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index.

UAE ranked No. 3 behind China and India in the 50-country Index. Saudi Arabia was No. 6. Both countries were in the top 10 in all four Index categories: domestic logistics, international logistics, business fundamentals and digital readiness.

Qatar was in the top 10 in all categories except international logistics, where it was 19th.

GCC countries again dominated the business fundamentals rankings, which compare the legal, regulatory and tax frameworks of emerging markets countries.

UAE (1), Qatar (2), Saudi Arabia (3), Oman (5), Bahrain (6) and Kuwait (11) were clustered at the top for best business climate.

Among the six GCC economies, Kuwait (No. 15 overall) did most to improve its competitiveness, gaining ground in every category.

In digital readiness, Oman, up five spots to No. 10, and Bahrain, up six to No. 16, made the biggest strides among GCC countries.

The Index and a survey of 750 global logistics industry executives comprise Agility's 14th annual snapshot of industry sentiment and ranking of the world's leading emerging markets.

The Index ranks countries for overall competitiveness based on factors that make them attractive to logistics providers, freight forwarders, air and ocean carriers, distributors and investors.

In the survey, industry executives were asked to name the most important drivers of economic diversification for GCC countries, all of which are trying to reduce dependence on oil and gas by accelerating private-sector growth.

Respondents identified the key factors as tech development and innovation; small business environment; infrastructure development; regional and global integration; business conditions for multi-nationals;

a skilled labour force; ending energy subsidies; and creating career opportunities for women.

Outside of the GCC, there was significant volatility in the rankings. Conflict, sanctions, political tumult, economic missteps and continued Covid-19 fallout damaged the competitiveness of Ukraine, Iran, Russia, Colombia, Paraguay and others.

Among countries leaping forward in certain categories: Bangladesh, Pakistan, Jordan, Sri Lanka and Ghana.

COUNTRY RANKINGS

In the Middle East and North Africa, overall rankings were: UAE (3); Saudi Arabia (6); Qatar (7); Turkey (11); Oman (12); Bahrain (14); Kuwait (15); Jordan (16); Morocco (20); Egypt (21); Tunisia (32); Lebanon (33); Iran (36); Algeria (41); Libya (50).

Rankings in Sub-Saharan Africa: South Africa (24); Kenya (25); Ghana (29); Nigeria (34); Tanzania (37); Uganda (43); Ethiopia (45); Mozambique (46); Angola (48).

Overall Index rankings in Asia: China (1); India (2); Malaysia (4); Indonesia (5); Thailand (8); Vietnam (10); Philippines (18); Kazakhstan (22); Pakistan (26); Sri Lanka (30); Bangladesh (35); Cambodia (38); Myanmar (49). Rankings for Latin America: Mexico (9); Chile (13); Brazil (19); Uruguay (23); Peru (27); Colombia (28); Argentina (31); Ecuador (39); Paraguay (40); Bolivia (44); Venezuela (47). In Europe: Russia (17); Ukraine (42).

Transport Intelligence (Ti), a leading analysis and research firm for the logistics industry, compiled the Index since it was launched in 2009. John Manners-Bell, Chief Executive of Ti, said: "It is not possible to overstate the challenges faced by emerging markets countries in the past couple of years.

Geopolitical tensions have combined with financial uncertainty and the lingering effects of the pandemic to create an ever more complex business and investment environment. The role that the Agility Emerging Market Logistics Index plays in providing insight into this volatile, uncertain environment landscape is more critical than ever."

Tethys Oil to invest \$85 milion in Oman assets in 2023

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 7

Swedish energy firm Tethys Oil has pledged to invest between \$85 - 95 million in the development of its upstream oil and gas assets in the Sultanate of Oman during 2023. The allocation is roughly on par with the company's investments made across its sizable portfolio last year, the Stockholm-headquartered oil exploration and production firm said in a press statement.

It includes the non-operated Blocks 3&4 where it holds a 30 per cent working interest, and its fully operated Blocks 49, 56 and 58. The lion's share of its allocation for 2023 is earmarked towards onshore Blocks 3&4 located in eastern Oman.

Operated by CC Energy Development (with a 50 per cent interest), the producing blocks currently account for all of Tethys Oil's revenues from its Oman assets.

Tethys' share of production from 3&4, corresponding to its net working interest after government take, averaged 11,136 barrels per day (bpd) in 2021, although the output for 2022 is understood to have marginally declined due to technical challenges.

Mitsui E&P Middle East holds the remaining 20 per cent equity interest in the two adjoining blocks.

Tethys' investments in Blocks 3&4, estimated at \$65-75 million in 2023, will go towards, among other things, the drilling of a total of 47 new wells (compared to 36 in 2022), as well as support power generation and produced



water handling capabilities, the company said.

Spending on Tethys Oil's majority-owned and operated Block 56 is estimated at \$8 million during 2023, down from \$23.8 million last year. A good part of last year's expenditure went towards the acquisition of 2,000 km2 of state-of-the-art 3D seismic, which is now ready for interpretation, according to Magnus



Nordin (pictured), Managing Director.

"Over the next months, work on this Block should reach the same milestone of maturity, definition of drillable prospects with estimates of prospective resources, as we have reached on Block 58. While in parallel we continue to wait for the long-term test results from the Al Jumud discovery in Block 56," he stated.

2023 spending on Block 49, another of Tethys Oil's operated assets, is expected at a modest \$1.5 million primarily to fund the re-entry and re-testing of the Thameen-1 well.

Nordin commented: "On Block 49 the Thameen-1 well will undergo re-testing in the first half of the year. Rock studies completed during 2022 suggests that the reservoir rock is very tight. To attempt to establish flows during the re-test, the reservoir sandstones will be fractured to create increased permeability to allow the reservoir fluids to flow to surface."

Rounding off the list is Block 58 which stands to receive around \$10.5 million of investment in 2023, primarily to finance the drilling of an exploration well at the beginning of Q3 2023 – an investment that could potentially unlock a new hydrocarbon resource for Tethys Oil.

"On Block 58 we have reached the important milestone of establishing drillable prospects with estimates of prospective resources that could be unlocked by the exploration drilling scheduled for the second half of 2023. And the numbers are impressive. If drilling is successful, the time, effort and money spent on Block 58 could be a transformative event for Tethys and a new source for future oil reserves," Nordin added.

3-4 oil & gas blocks to be awarded in coming period

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Exports of gas in the form of LNG, on the other hand, are overseen by the operating companies concerned and not the government per se, he said.

Representing the government's interests, however, is Oman Investment Authority (OIA), which is a partner in the operating companies, he said.

Commenting on the outlook for the renewable energy sector, Al Auqi stressed that Oman has a promising future with studies indicating that the levelled cost of production is competitive at the global level.

Turning to the mining sector, Al Auqi said the sector has been restructured to mirror the licensing regime currently in force in the Oil & Gas industry.

This is designed to ensure that natural resources are prudently developed and commercialised.

A number of mineral sites have been offered for investment, including some earmarked only for local investors, he said.

Classified into broadly two category, one set of mineral blocks potentially containing valuable metallic minerals will be offered primarily to public sector and

global investors for development.

The other category will be offered to local investors based on the auction process.

In all cases, development will take place away from residential neighbourhoods, water resources and main roads, the Minister said, adding that as many as 12 mineral blocks have been awarded so far in the form of concession agreements.

IMF's gloomy predictions for UK economy



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Britain will emerge as economically the weakest of the world's richest countries, the only G7 economy to contract this year, according to forecasts by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The world's economic watchdog has cut its expectations for the UK GDP again, now pencilling in a 0.6 per cent contraction in 2023, down from 0.3 per cent growth prediction last October.

The downgrade means Britain is falling behind its G7 peers. The IMF believes the American, French and German economies will grow 1.4 per cent, 0.7 per cent and 0.1 per cent respectively this

year.

Rising inflation, still running above 10 per cent and more than five times the Bank of England's two per cent target, has eroded household spending power quickly, squeezing demand and bringing down the economy.

The Bank of England's (BoE) nine successive interest rate rises to tame price increases has brought more misery on consumers and businesses, further weakening the economy. BoE has put borrowing costs 50 basis points higher to four per cent, a post-financial crisis high.

"Tighter fiscal and monetary policies and financial conditions and still-high energy retail prices weighing on household budgets" has choked UK GDP, the IMF said in its latest global economic outlook released on January 31. A string of better-than-expected data recently had boosted confidence in the underlying strength of the UK economy.

Output unexpectedly rose 0.1 per cent in November, beating expectations of a small contraction and cutting the odds on the UK falling into a technical recession — two quarters of contraction — at the very end of 2022.

The IMF also believes Britain had the fastest growth in 2022, although that was driven by the country suffering a sharper hit from the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, the UK is still the only G7 country with an economy smaller than it was before the pandemic. Chancellor Jeremy Hunt wasn't overly concerned about the IMF's gloomy forecasts, saying they "should not obscure our long-term prospects".

Hunt, who a week ago warned against British economic decline, added: "The UK outperformed many forecasts last year, and if we stick to our plan to halve inflation, the UK is still predicted to grow faster than Germany and Japan over the coming years."

The IMF did lift its outlook for UK growth in 2024 to 0.9 per cent, up from 0.6 per cent expansion previously forecast. The Washington-based organisation also bumped its global GDP growth expectations to 2.9 per cent from 2.7 per cent.

There does of course remain a possibility that the British economy will do better than the IMF's prediction of 0.6 per cent fall, judging by its prediction in 2021.

The IMF made four GDP

projections then: in January, April, July and October.

The last three of these were all pessimistic than the average and ended up missing the actual outcome to a wider margin.

The four IMF projections were out by an average of 1.7 percentage points in 2021.

This was worse than average of a sample of 34 independent forecasters collected by the Treasury which missed by an average of 1.55 percentage points.

The Treasury's sample includes major banks such as HSBC, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan, as well as bodies such as the OECD and the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

It should also be kept in mind that the IMF regularly revises its forecasts. Just about a year ago it said the UK would grow 2.3 per cent in 2023.

Furthermore, new figures out from the lobby group the Institute of Directors (IoD) on January 31 indicated business leaders' optimism in the UK economy has rebounded sharply.

The IoD said confidence among its membership jumped to 30 points over the last month, although its index is still into the negative at minus 28 points.

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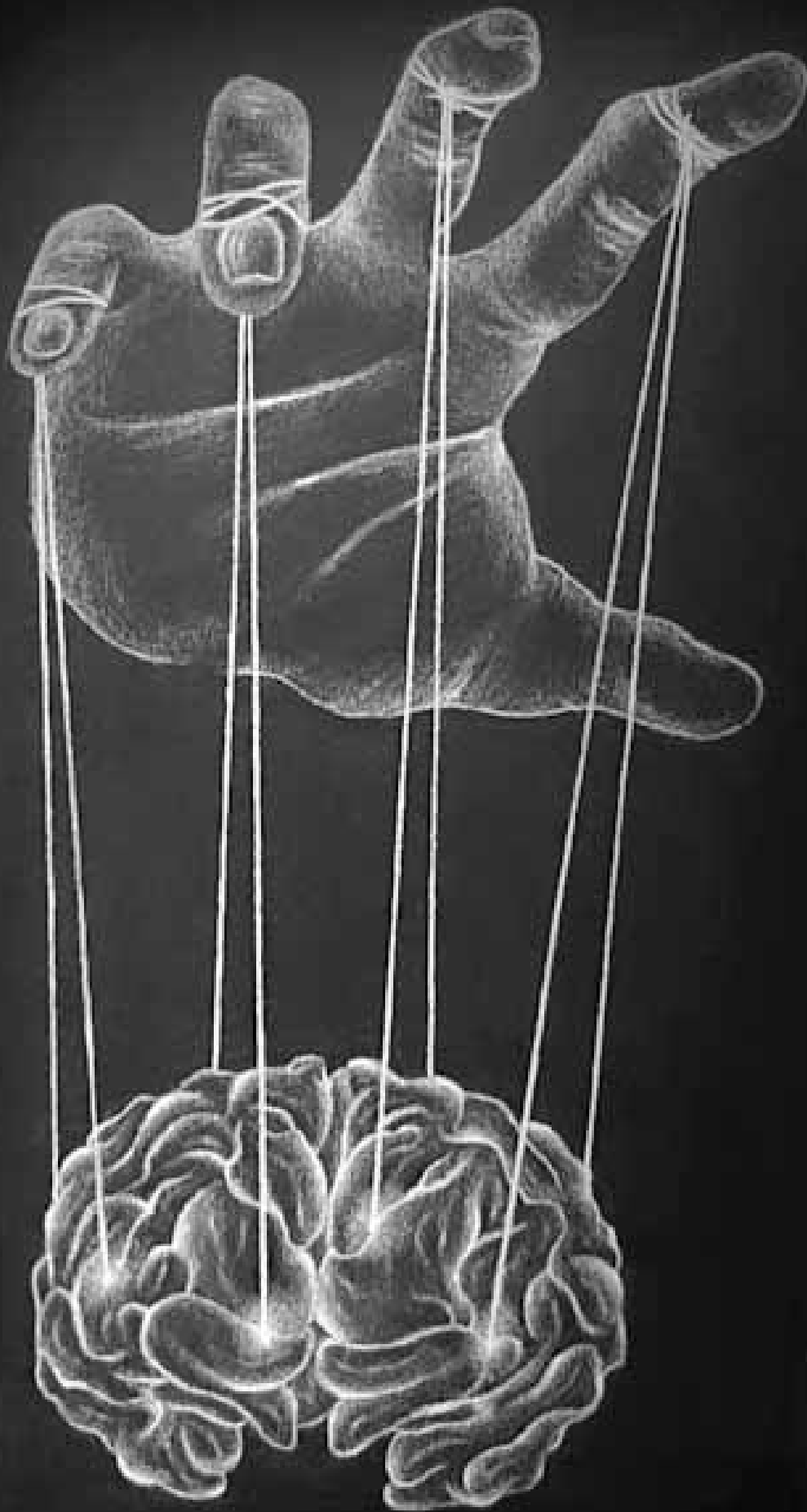


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Using art as a powerful tool to convey a message

Upon her discovery of black paper as a tool for her art, Fatima al Lawati searched for other artists who use the same medium and was disappointed that it wasn't a popular art form in Oman. But she forges on eventually becoming one of the most notable emerging artists who specialises on the said niche... **P20**



Swiss museums want to discuss looted Benin kingdom art with Nigeria

EIGHT SWISS MUSEUMS want to consult with Nigeria about 50 objects in their collections that were probably looted from the former kingdom of Benin.

It is conceivable that the

ownership could be "transferred," which could mean both the return to Nigeria and the conversion into a permanent loan, the museums announced on Thursday.

The eight Swiss museums have



identified a total of 96 objects from Benin. About a half are certain or very likely to come from the raid by British troops in 1897, the museums reported. The troops had stormed the capital of Benin, looted the royal palace and then burned it down. They are said to have taken 10,000 objects with them.

The former kingdom in the south of Nigeria is unconnected to the modern African republic of Benin.

There is frequent talk of the "Benin bronzes," but the objects are also made of other materials. They reached Switzerland via the art trade.

In December, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock visited Nigeria and handed over the first 20 Benin bronzes from German stocks.

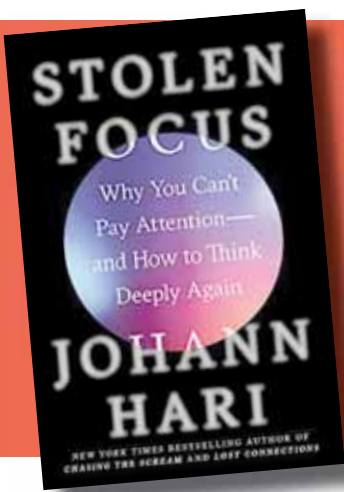
The Swiss initiative involves, among others, the Rietberg Museum and the Ethnological Museum of the University of Zurich as well as the Museum of Cultures in Basel. — **dpa**

READ

STOLEN FOCUS

BY JOHANN HARI

Potential causes for diminishing attention spans and how corporations might raid our attention for profit.



ENTERTAINMENT

Ten-year-old kabuki actor Maholo Terajima attends a press conference at the French embassy in Tokyo. French-Japanese actor Maholo Terajima will debut in May 2023 as the first officially recognised bi-national kabuki actor, following in footsteps of his grandfather, a star of the traditional art. — **AFP**



TRAVEL TALES

A man visits the exhibition 'Alexandria: Past Futures' or 'Alexandrie, futurs antérieurs' at the Mucem Museum in Marseille, southern France. — **AFP**





Vermeer shines at ‘once in history’ Amsterdam show

THE DUTCH MASTER Johannes Vermeer himself never got the chance to see so many of his paintings in the same place. Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum has brought together 28 of Vermeer's luminous masterpieces from around the world, in the largest-ever exhibition of the 17th century artist's works. Curators hope the blockbuster show, featuring some three-quarters of his modest output of around 35 paintings, will also shed light on the enigmatic creator of "Girl with a Pearl Earring" and "The Milkmaid". "Never in history have 28 paintings by Vermeer been gathered," Rijksmuseum General Director Taco Dibbits said at a preview. "He didn't even see that many together himself." Famed for their use of light and colour and their tranquil yet haunting indoor scenes, Vermeer's paintings practically shine from the walls of the dimmed galleries at the Rijksmuseum. The works have been brought from museums and collections around the world, including Washington, New York, Tokyo, London, Paris, Dublin. "It's a very happy reunion," said Dibbits. Interest is so intense that the Rijksmuseum has already sold 200,000 tickets for the exhibition, which opens on Friday until June 4, the most ever for one of its shows.

- 'WONDERFUL' - Part of the appeal is the mystery surrounding the man often called the "Sphinx of Delft". Vermeer (1632-1675) was born into a family of Calvinist traders but converted to Catholicism after marrying a wealthy woman with whom he had 11 children. But there are very few records of his life, and compared to Dutch "Golden Age" artists such as Rembrandt his work languished in

obscurity, until a reappraisal in the 19th century. Vermeer rose to megastar status with the publication of the novel "Girl with a Pearl Earring" by US author Tracy Chevalier, based on the painting that has been loaned for the exhibition by the Mauritshuis in The Hague. The book also spawned a 2003 Hollywood movie starring Scarlett

— apart from "Girl with a Pearl Earring", of course — was "The Lacemaker", a tiny work of exquisite beauty loaned by The Louvre in Paris, she said. **- 'TIME STANDS STILL' -** Highlights also include three works from the Frick Collection in New York, the newly restored "Girl Reading a Letter at the Window"

the pressures of the real, modern world, with the authenticity of one of its works — "Girl with a Flute" — being called into question by the gallery that loaned it. The National Gallery of Art in Washington said last year it was likely painted by a "studio associate of Vermeer" but the Rijksmuseum says it thinks it's authentic. "It's very important to have these



Johansson and Colin Firth. "Wonderful, it's wonderful," Chevalier said after viewing the exhibition. "I'm so glad people are going to see these paintings together and build a picture for themselves of what Vermeer was," said the author. Most of Vermeer's works focus on women, often caught in the midst of acts like writing a letter or playing a musical instrument, and Chevalier said he was "just presenting women in the best possible light, literally and figuratively". Her favourite in the exhibition

from Dresden, and "Woman Holding a Balance" from the National Gallery in Washington DC. For the curators, who say it is a "once in history" exhibition, Vermeer's appeal is also about his creation of quiet worlds so realistic that the viewer feels they could lose themselves inside. "We live in a world today where it's so hectic," said Dibbits. "He had more than 10 children, there was a war going on outside in Europe, yet still he creates these ideal spaces where time stands still." The exhibition has however felt

discussions," said Dibbits. The magic of the master is still bewitching for staff at the Rijksmuseum. "For me personally Vermeer is one of the greatest artists in the world," said Gregor Weber, the Rijksmuseum's fine arts department head and author of a recent book showing Vermeer was influenced by a pinhole camera that was first introduced to him by Jesuit priests. "To have three quarters of his oeuvre together here in Amsterdam under one roof is the crown of my work." — AFP

VERMEER IN FIVE MASTERPIECES

AS THE RIJKSMUSEUM in Amsterdam unveils the largest ever retrospective of Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer, we look at five highlights from the show.

- 'THE MILKMAID' (1658-59) -

One of Vermeer's most famous works, this simple domestic scene shows a woman in her kitchen absorbed in her task of pouring milk into a bowl, the light pouring in through a window. Best known for his depictions of middle-class life, this is the artist's only study of a working-class woman. Vermeer "endows this domestic worker with traits typically reserved for higher-class women — virtue, diligence and a rich interior life", wrote the New York Times in 2009. For years after his death, Vermeer was largely forgotten but "The Milkmaid", owned by the Rijksmuseum, was always heralded in art circles as a masterpiece.



- 'VIEW OF DELFT' (1660-61) -

French writer Marcel Proust declared this luminous view of Vermeer's hometown, a rare exterior painting in his oeuvre, the "most beautiful painting in the world". The painting of a quay and surrounding houses, which is owned by the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague, is one of the most famous cityscapes of the 17th century. Near photographic in its precision, the artist composes a scene of balance and calm, a few people mingling, the canal without a ripple and a church rising in the distance.



- 'WOMAN HOLDING A BALANCE' (1662-64) -

A quiet moment of contemplation dominates this painting of a woman standing at a table scattered with jewellery, delicately holding a set of dainty scales. At first glance, the work, loaned for the exhibition by the National Gallery of Art (NGA), Washington, looks like another of Vermeer's tranquil domestic scenes. But a picture of the Last Judgement hanging on the wall gives it distinctly religious overtones. The artist seems to be warning the woman to weigh up the eternal consequences of her actions.



- 'GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING' (1664-67) -

Dubbed the "Mona Lisa of the North" for the inscrutable expression of its subject, which recalls Leonardo Da Vinci's famous portrait, this painting attained global fame after inspiring a best-selling novel that was turned into a Hollywood film. The small canvas shows a young woman set on a dark background, her head turned towards the viewer and a pearl earring glinting from beneath her blue and cream turban. Johannes Vermeer was a master of light. As the NGA explains, "the soft contour of the girl's face creates a warmth that permeates the image".



- 'THE LACEMAKER' (1666-68) -

Another of Vermeer's masterpieces, this painting shows a woman bending over a piece of lace, bathed in light and deeply concentrated on her meticulous work.

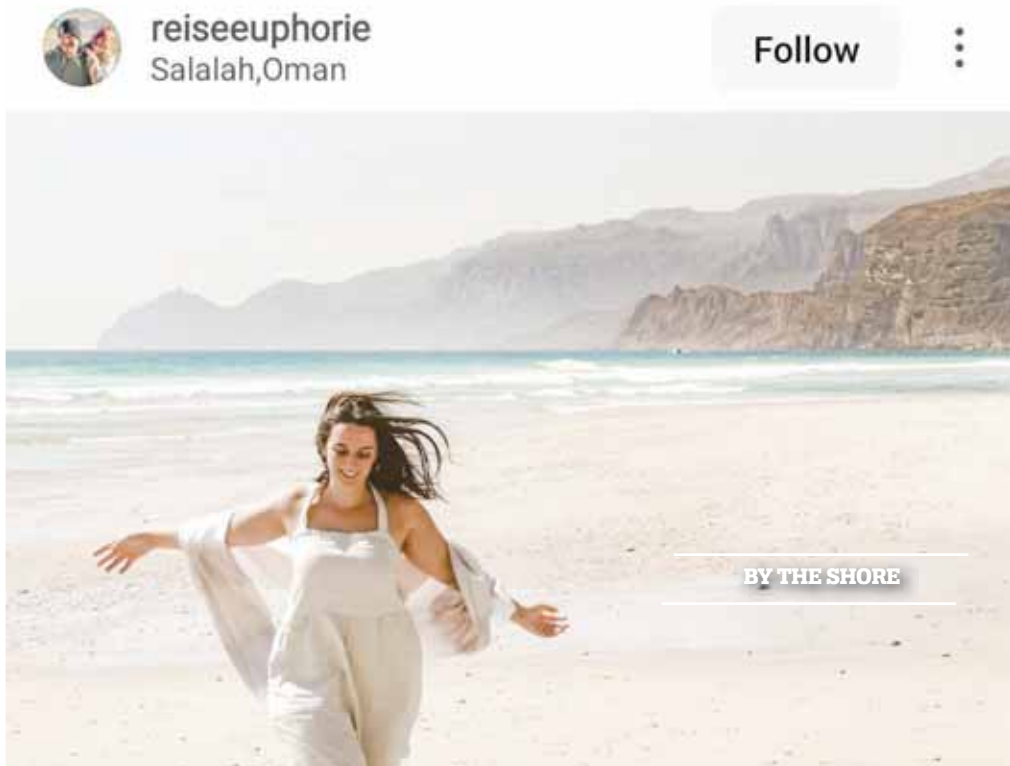


At 24 by 21 centimetres (10 by eight inches), smaller than an A4 page, this is the most diminutive of Vermeer's paintings. It usually hangs in The Louvre in Paris. It is also among his most beloved works, inspiring a French film of the same title, starring Isabelle Huppert. — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

SCIENCE

Small asteroid 'serendipitously' detected using James Webb telescope



EUROPEAN ASTRONOMERS using the James Webb Space Telescope have detected a previously unknown asteroid about the size of Rome's Colosseum in the main asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter.

The asteroid measuring between 300 and 650 feet (100 to 200 metres) in length is the smallest object observed to date using the telescope, the US space agency Nasa said on Monday.

The European astronomers "serendipitously detected" the asteroid, Nasa said in a statement, adding that more observations would be needed to better characterise its nature and properties.

"We — completely unexpectedly — detected a small asteroid," said Thomas Muller, an astronomer at the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany.

It was detected during calibration of the tele-



scope's Mid-Infrared Instrument (MIRI), which operates in mid-infrared wavelengths.

"Webb's incredible sensitivity made it possible to see this roughly 100-metre object at a distance of more than 100 million kilometres," Muller said.

Webb, which has been operational since July, is the most powerful space telescope ever built and has unleashed a raft of unprecedented data as well as stunning images.

One of the main goals for the \$10 billion telescope is to study the life cycle of stars. Another main research focus is on exoplanets, planets outside Earth's solar system.

Webb was not designed to look for small objects such as the newly-discovered asteroid, but Muller said its discovery "suggests that many new objects will be detected with this instrument." — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Marvel superheroes return to Chinese cinemas after nearly four years



MARVEL'S SUPERHEROES began their return to China's massive movie market after an apparent ban of nearly four years on Tuesday, with fans streaming into cinemas to watch "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever".

The Disney-owned studio's hugely popular franchises have been absent from Chinese screens since 2019, with no explanation.

Marvel blockbusters have raked in billions globally, and their return to one of the world's biggest movie markets means hundreds of millions of dollars in potential earnings for Disney — the first Black Panther film alone took in \$105 million at Chinese cinemas.

"I'm super excited," said a woman named Chen, beaming as she lined up to enter a packed theatre in Shanghai for the midnight premiere of "Wakanda Forever".

"I've had to use streaming sites to watch the last couple of movies... But I hope this means I'll watch Marvel movies more often in theatres now."

The end of the apparent block on Marvel films has coincided with China's loosening of the strict zero-Covid policies that disrupted its entertainment industry for years.

China's communist rulers have also recently eased a tech crackdown, including on the lucrative gaming sector.

"Because of Covid, it's already been a long time since we've been to the cinema," said hospital worker Kun, 25, who came to the Shanghai theatre to watch "Wakanda Forever" with his friends.

"We still have to work tomorrow but it's a rare opportunity so we came here."

For one mother-and-son duo at the Shanghai cinema, the return of Marvel revived a family tradition.

"He's always been a Marvel fan — during the Avengers series, we would always watch the midnight screening," said Lin Fan, with her visibly excited 13-year-old son Jiang Xiaoyi.

Next up for Chinese Marvel fans is "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania", set for release on February 17.

- LUCRATIVE MARKET -

"Spider-Man: Far from Home" was the last Marvel film released in China, in July 2019.

The China Film Administration, affiliated with the Communist



Party's propaganda department, has not given a reason for the absence of Marvel films from cinemas.

During that period, Disney declined requests by censors to remove references to same-sex relationships in Marvel films, including 2021's "Eternals" and "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness" a year later.

However, the global media giant has also faced accusations of bending to Beijing's will.

Its remake of "Mulan" faced boycott calls after it emerged that some of the scenes were filmed in

China's Xinjiang, where widespread rights abuses against the region's Muslim population have been widely documented.

And two episodes of the popular animated show "The Simpsons" have been unavailable on the company's Disney+ streaming service in Hong Kong — one that references the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown, and another mentioning "forced labour camps" in China.

Regulators and Disney have not publicly commented on the apparent restriction of these episodes.

MUSIC

Shania Twain dreams up joyful new music for post-pandemic celebrations



AFTER A LIFE-THREATENING bout of Covid-19, five-time Grammy winner Shania Twain hopes to bring joy to the world with her new album "Queen of Me". Like everyone else, the Canadian singer and songwriter was cooped up during the pandemic. But instead of navel gazing, Twain, 57, said she put herself in a playful frame of mind.

Now, she wants everyone to rejoice with her as the pandemic subsides.

"There's so many things to celebrate right now and we are still in celebration mode. That's the mode I'm in and I sense it with the fans as well," she said.



As an asthmatic, Twain's battle with COVID was bad and developed into pneumonia, she said in an interview with Apple Music 1. "Every day my lungs were filling up with inflammation. Within 12 days, I was pretty much dying."

After recovering, she drew inspiration by recording her new album. Released on February 3, it already has two singles — the line-dancing upbeat country number "Giddy Up!" and the aspirational and catchy "Waking Up Dreaming."

"When I'm getting into the songwriting mode, I'm just dreaming. I'm playing with my imagination, I'm letting it go, I'm in dream mode," she said. "It's my dreams that set my goals."

Twain, who has sold more than 85 million albums, began singing when she was 3 years old, and by 8 played at bars to help her family pay the bills.

The country music phenomenon is ready to tour the world with her new album, starting out in Spokane, Washington, in April and finishing in Vancouver, British Columbia, in mid-November. — Reuters

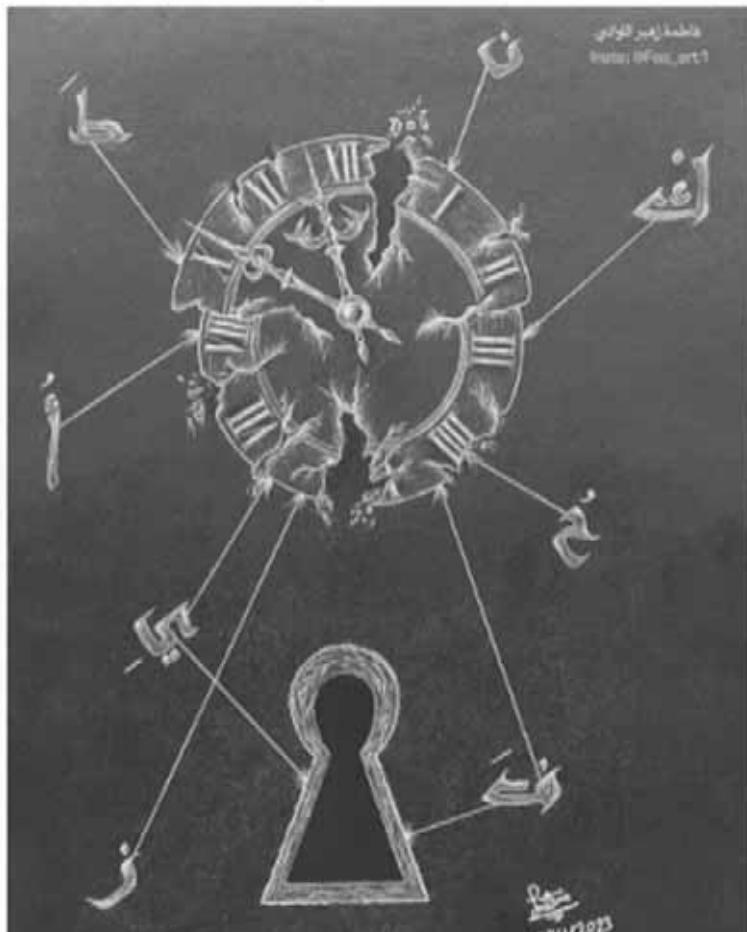


art & life

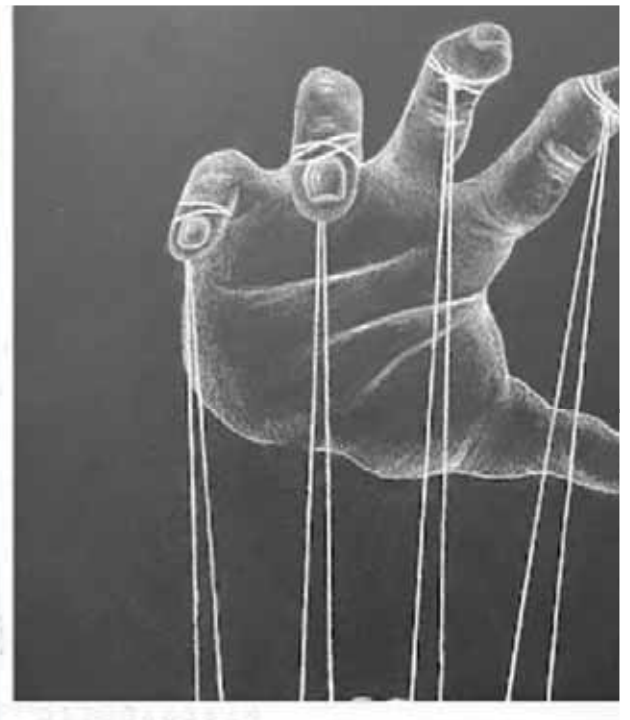
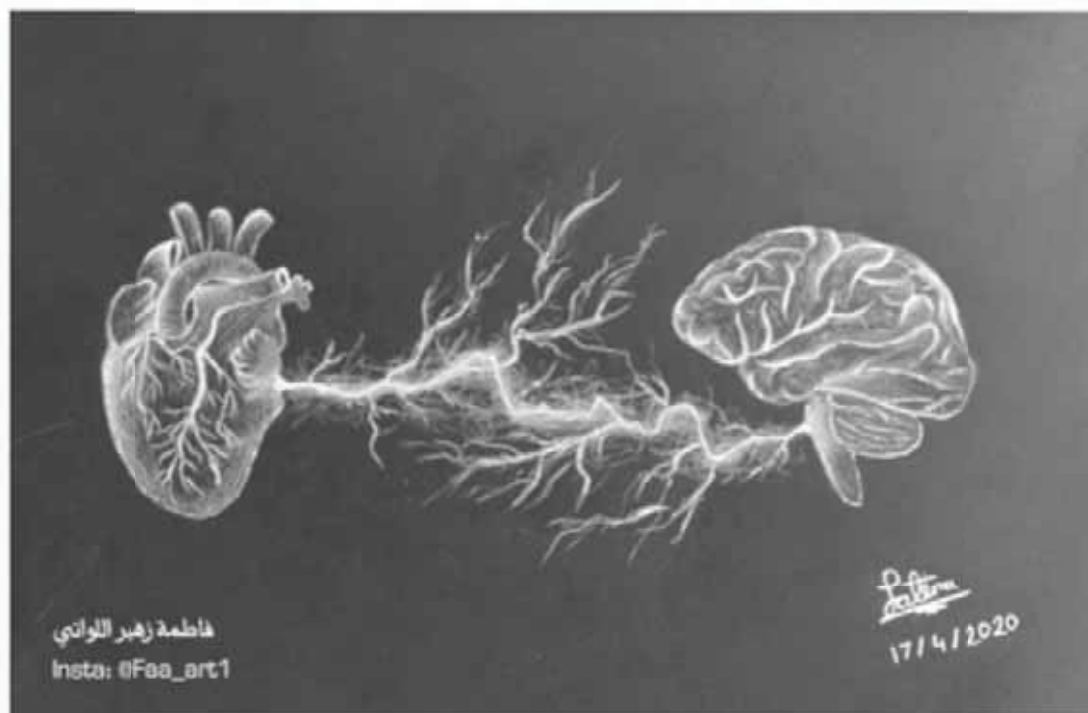
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USING ART AS A POWERFUL TOOL TO CONVEY A MESSAGE



As a self-taught artist, Fatima bint Zuhair al Lawatiyah, fell in love with art when she was just a young girl but it wasn't until 2014 that she finally discovered what would become her regular muse and medium.

She shared, "I noticed my classmate holding a white pencil and sketching on black paper. It was fascinating which is why I took the chance to explore it," she shared.

In her early beginnings, she used to draw little bears and flowers and has ventured into anime. When she found her beloved medium, her art became more complex.

She shared, "It was really difficult to find a proper white and coloured pencil on black paper, but it made me challenge myself and tried many art supply companies until I found what I was looking for exactly."

"Art in black paper" refers to

the use of black paper as a surface for creating art. This type of paper provides a dark, rich background that can enhance the colours and contrast of the artwork, making it an ideal choice for many different styles of art, including drawings, collages, mixed media pieces, and calligraphy.

Some artists prefer to work on black paper because it offers a unique challenge, as the colours and tones must be carefully considered to make the art stand out. Whether it's used as the primary surface or as a mat for a finished piece, black paper can add a striking and sophisticated touch to any work of art.

Upon her discovery of black paper as a tool for her art, Fatima searched for other artists who use the same medium and was disappointed that it wasn't a popular art form in Oman.

She decided to continue on the unfamiliar art path despite the

difficulties. With a lot of hard work, time, and effort she eventually discovered some techniques that made working with the medium easier.

Al-Lawati aimed to be an expert on black paper and to create something powerful which has a positive meaning with a hidden message. Her art pieces are infused with writings that make her audience even more curious.

Nearly a decade later, Fatima shared that among her peers, she's the only one that specialises in black paper in Oman.

THE MESSAGE BEHIND THE PIECES

One of her latest projects is a series of artworks that explore the "Stories of the Alphabets" that delves into Arabic letters and the meaning hidden behind their formatting and punctuations.

Fatima believes that every human being has a purpose.

"The poet conveys messages through poetry. I pass my message through art," she shared.

A niche art form, Fatima decided to open up about her process on social media in 2018 hopefully to inspire others to explore the said medium.

"The focus is not on the number of followers I have but on the quality of minds that access my art account and interact with the meanings behind each artwork," she shared.

Al-Lawati's work has attracted the attention of local, regional, and international media and she has been approached by a multi-media company to explore her work. She was also invited to participate in Art Exhibitions locally and internationally which help put her perspective into the consciousness of more people.

Unlike other artists though, Fatima opted not to sell her work in the beginning as she feels that everyone should have access to

her art and that people should be able to read through and interpret the different messages she infuses into her work.

"It's something precious, something that has a sentimental value. Its value is more than the money I can get out of it," Fatima shared.

As of late, she has plans of selling prints of her original artworks.

So far, Fatima has created about 20 art pieces. To view all her artworks, you can follow her on her Instagram: @Faa_art1.

Her advice to all young artists is to "be brave and have the courage to try different art materials and mediums to find what suits you."

She added, "Use the negative words you get from people as fuel for motivation and to continue this amazing journey that Allah has set for you, so dream the impossible, seek the unknown, and achieve greatness!"