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JAMAICA, SOUTH AFRICA ROAR INTO LAST 16



P11

FOUR NATURE RESERVES FOR ADVENTURE SEEKERS



P13

MOU SIGNED FOR EXPORTS OF IRON PRODUCTS VIA UAE-OMANI RAILWAY NETWORK



MUSCAT

CRUDE PRICE AT \$86.37 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Wednesday reached \$86.37, comprising a rise by 58 cents from the price of Tuesday which stood at \$85.79. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$74.78 per barrel, thus 16 cents per barrel lower than July delivery. Meanwhile, world oil prices gained and were trading near their highest since April, after industry data showed a much steeper-than-expected drawdown last week in US crude oil inventories. West Texas Intermediate crude futures were last up 0.9 per cent to \$82.07, while Brent crude rose similarly to \$85.57 per barrel. Gold was last up 0.4 per cent on the day at \$1,952.60 per ounce.

HM confers Al Nuoman Order on Saudi Ambassador

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Al Nuoman Order, First Class, on Abdullah bin Saud al Anzi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Sultanate of Oman.

At the behest of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, handed over Al Nuoman Order to the Saudi ambassador when he received the latter to bid him farewell at the end of his tour

of duty as ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Oman.

HH Sayyid Shihab expressed his thanks to the ambassador for his efforts to enhance bilateral relations, wishing him further success in his future assignments.

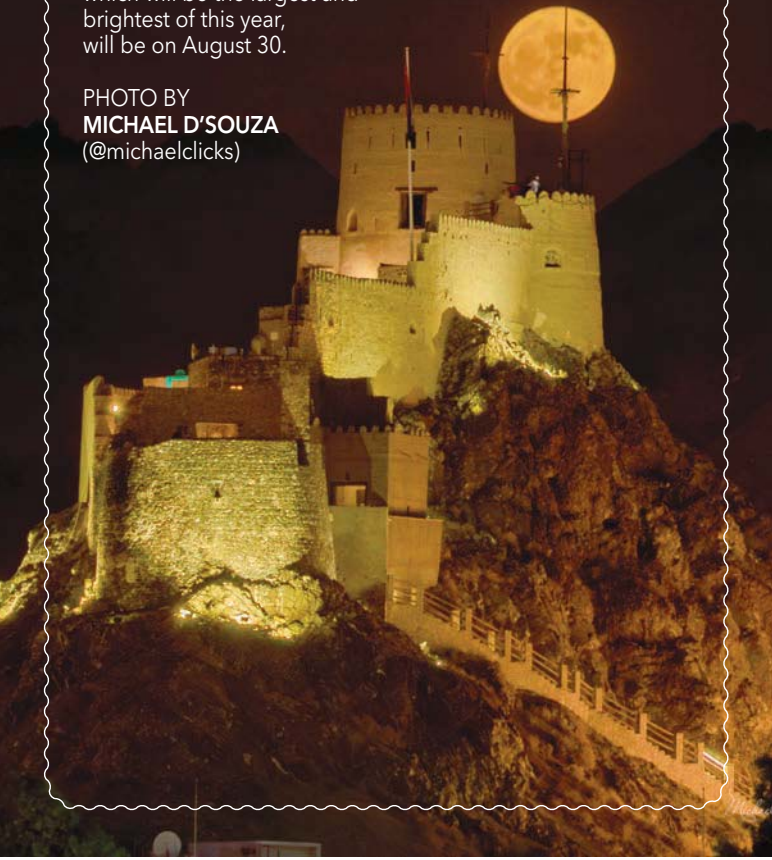
The ambassador commended the strong relations binding the two countries. He expressed pride and appreciation for the high level of cooperation extended to him during his tenure in Oman. — ONA



THE SUPERMOON!

The supermoon rises above the Muttrah Fort in Muscat on Tuesday night. The first of the two supermoons appeared on Tuesday when the moon was 357,530 km from the Earth. According to the Omani Astronomical Society, the skies will be brighter during August, and the second supermoon which will be the largest and brightest of this year, will be on August 30.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL D'SOUZA (@michaelclicks)



OIA’S ASSETS UP AT RO 18 BILLION

MUSCAT: Oman Investment Authority (OIA) assets by the end of 2022 increased to RO 18 billion, after realising an 8.8 per cent re-turn on investment during the same year.

This was indicated in the annual report published by OIA which provided a comprehensive overview of its business activities, investments, and key developments for the year 2022.

This is the second annual report published by OIA and reflects OIA's unwavering commitment to transparency and good governance, as well as its ongoing efforts to engage with the public and stakeholders.

OIA continued its support of the state's general budget with dividends that amounted to RO 5.6 billion from 2016 to the end of 2022. Moreover, it showcased OIA's commitment to generating job opportunities for nationals with over 800 jobs being created in OIA and its companies for Omanis.

Additionally, SMEs have been awarded tenders and contracts worth about RO 190 million, demonstrating OIA's ongoing efforts to support small and medium-sized enterprises and underscoring OIA's crucial role in driving economic growth and development of the national economy. **DETAILS ON P13**

20% DECREASE IN MARRIAGES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 2

The National Centre for Statistics and Information's (NCSI) data on marriage and divorce cases in 2022 reveals the total number of registered marriages in 2021 stood at 19,294, while in 2022, there were 15,400 marriages, thus a decrease of 20 per cent in marriages in 2022 over 2021.

Between 2017 and 2021, there were 39,400 marriages.

Out of 15,400 documents in 2022, there were 14,127

marriages between Omani citizens and fellow Omanis, while there were 613 between Omani citizens and foreigners.

Muscat Governorate recorded the highest number of marriages, with 3,162 marriage documents.

As for divorce cases, there were 4,160 divorces registered during the same year. Among these, 3,682 cases involved Omani citizens, while there were 208 divorces between Omani citizens and foreigners. Similar to the marriage trend, Muscat Governorate also had

the highest number of divorces, with 977 cases. The statistics include marriages from 2017 to 2021. The data reveals fluctuations and growth in the number of marriages over the five-year period.

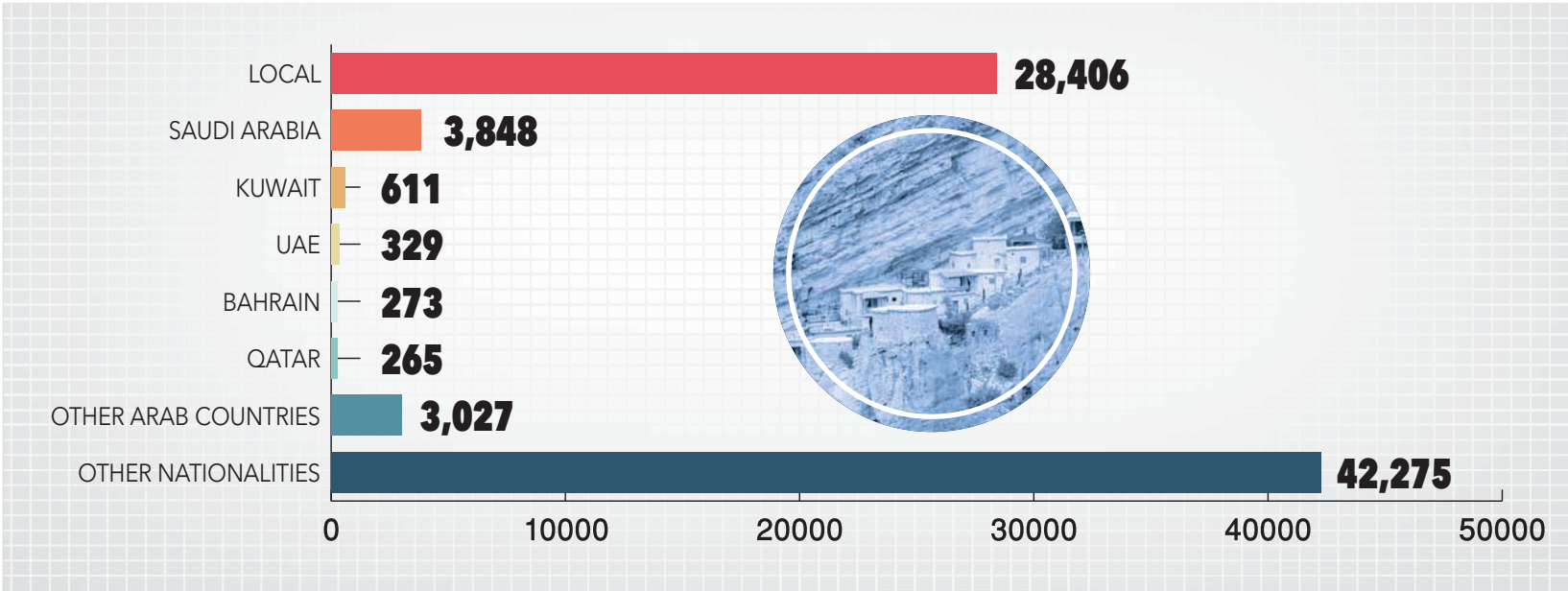
In 2017, there were 22,284 marriages, and in 2018, it was 20,005. Despite changing societal norms, 2019 saw 18,243 marriages, and 2020 recorded 18,621. Finally, in 2021, there were 19,294 marriages. The statistics offers valuable insights into the cultural and social dynamics influencing significant

life choices. One significant factor contributing to the decline is the shifting societal norms and values.

Younger generations in Oman are increasingly embracing modern lifestyles, prioritising education, career advancement, and personal growth over early marriages.

Economic factors also play a crucial role, as rising living costs, jobless rates, and economic uncertainty can deter couples from taking on the financial responsibilities of marriage.

79,034 tourists visit Jabal Akhdhar in first half



AL JABAL AL AKHDHAR: A total of 79,034 tourists visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar during the first half of this year, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of local visitors to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar was 28,406 whereas tourists from Saudi Arabia were 3,848 and those from Kuwait were 611, the UAE 329, Bahrain 273, Qatar 265. The number of tourists from other Arab countries reached 3,027 while the number of tourists

from other nationalities reached 42,275.

The second edition of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Festival will be held from today (Thursday) and will last until August 19. The festival aims to attract tourists from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism affirmed that it has a strategic partner with the Office of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in organising the festival with the aim of introducing the cultural heritage and natural beauty

of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general. The ministry urges entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium enterprises to participate in the festival to avail of the tourism promotional packages.

Ali bin Saif al Shukaili, Assistant Director of Heritage and Tourism Department in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, said the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism follows-up on tourism and hotel establishments and

urges them to provide quality services to visitors during the festival to reflect a positive image of tourism in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

The Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is expected to witness active tourist activities during the festival period, the official said, explaining that this period will be exceptional especially for tourists coming from abroad and heading to Dhofar Governorate coinciding with khareef Salalah. — ONA





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SINCE JULY 13, OMAN CRUDE HAS BEEN TRADING ABOVE \$80 PER BARREL

Surpluses from high oil prices will bolster development plans

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The prevailing oil prices, above \$80 per barrel, will help reduce economic pressures in the region while high-interest rates and financing costs continue to increase, weighing on the economy.

It may be noted that the State Budget 2023 has been based at \$55 per barrel while the monthly average price of the Oman Crude contract has been around \$74.78 per barrel. Since July 13, Oman crude has been trading at above \$80 per barrel.

Market expert Daniel Takieddine, CEO, of MENA BDSwiss, said, “Oil prices have been able to rebound to a certain extent lately after Saudi Arabia and Russia announced large production cuts.”

“While the market could continue to find support in the expectations of larger demand volumes than supply levels over the long term, production cuts have exerted an immediate upward force on prices. Expectations that Saudi Arabia could maintain its production cuts for a prolonged period could also keep prices within their current uptrend,” he added.

Takieddine said, “If GCC economies record budget surpluses we could see positive spillover effects on the whole economy and a boost in non-oil sectors’ growth. Surpluses could also help accelerate current plans to decrease the region’s dependence on oil and natural gas as well as bolster strategic development plans such as Oman Vision 2040.”

The surge in oil prices could continue well into next year when



Daniel Takieddine

demand is still expected to outpace supply levels. This difference could also be further exacerbated if the global economy proves more resilient than previously expected.

“Chinese demand is a particularly important factor and has been a point of focus for oil traders while the Chinese economic recovery was weaker than expected until now. On the other hand, higher oil prices could help maintain elevated inflation,” Takieddine said.



State Council studies memo on 2023 budget, 2022 audit report

MUSCAT: The State Council’s Office today held its 8th meeting of seventh term’s fourth regular convening. The meeting was chaired by Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The meeting reviewed a report on the tasks of the Council’s committees during the fourth annual convening and a follow-up report on the missions

undertaken by the Council’s members the current session.

During the meeting, the State Council’s Office exchanged views on an explanatory memorandum from the Council of Ministers on the government’s response to the observations and views of the State Council and the Majlis Ash’shura on State Budget 2023. It also studied the State Audit Institution’s 2022 report. — ONA

IMF mission concludes visit



MUSCAT: Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, chaired the IMF mission’s last meeting held in the Sultanate of Oman to view a technical advice report and present IMF’s observations after the mission’s visit to the departments concerned.

The visit aimed to help draft the medium-term fiscal framework and the State Budget.

During its visit, the IMF mission met finance specialists of the ministry and other institutions.

The visit also sought to evaluate

practices on preparing and following up the implementation of the medium-term fiscal framework. It also provided advice on how to integrate this framework into the process of drafting and implementing the State Budget.

The meetings also touched on standard steps to prepare the State Budget, its legislative framework, its key parameters and the financial systems used in planning, preparing, implementing and following up the budget process.

— ONA

Conference on human resources productivity kicks off



SALALAH: The 11th GCC Productivity Conference kicked off in Salalah on Wednesday under the banner of ‘Integration and harmony at work as factors for increasing productivity.’

The two-day conference is organised by the Ministry of Labour in cooperation with Al Asayel conferences company.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, who honoured the speakers and supporting entities.

The conference comprises three working papers. The first deals with the concept of leading change and building institutional culture after restructuring and mergers.

The second working paper elaborates on strategic parameters of institutional structuring and mergers, taking Asyad Group as a model.

The third paper focuses on promoting job harmony by inculcating a culture of ‘happiness at work’, with the experience of Bank Dhofar as a model. - ONA

MoSD announces calendar of disability centres

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Wednesday issued a decision setting the calendar of the qualification and evaluation programme and vacations for the qualifying year 2023-2024 at the public and private disability rehabilitation centres.

According to the decision, the qualifying year 2023-2024 at the government disability rehabilitation centres will begin on Sunday, August 20, 2023 and end on Thursday, July 4, 2024. The first semester will begin on Sunday, August 20 and end on Thursday, January 25, 2024 for the qualifying staff, administrators and workers at the government disability rehabilitation centres and the second semester will



begin on Sunday, February 11, 2024 and end on July 4, 2024.

The qualifying year for disability rehabilitation centres and centres affiliated to private associations will begin on Sunday, September 3, 2023 and end on Thursday, May 30, 2024. The first semester will end on Thursday, January 25, 2024 and the second semester will begin on Sunday, February 11, 2024.

The first phase of admittance and transfer of people with needs should be conducted between Sunday, September 3, 2023 and Thursday, September 28, 2023. The second phase will be conducted between Sunday, January 7, 2024 and Thursday, February 1, 2024. —ONA



DEAD FISH WASHED ASHORE

No cause for alarm



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Several schools of fish were washed ashore at the Qurum beach earlier this week making the beach goers wonder of the reasons even as several residents living near the coastal area, mostly Shatti Al Qurum and adjacent to the Crowne Plaza Hotel being surprised to see the phenomenon.

“From Sunday on, I’ve been seeing several fishes being washed ashore at these

beaches of Shatti Al Qurum and near Crowne Plaza beach sides where I go for regular walks,” Ryan, a resident of the area, told the Observer.

Another woman from the area said, “I’ve not been eating fish ever since as I suspected something in the sea prompted these carcasses being washed ashore.”

When contacted, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources said it was a result of the red tide and there is no cause

for alarm. “Some parts of the coastal area of the Sea of Oman are witnessing a bloom of phytoplankton and this will last for some more time. These dead fishes being thrown to the beach are result of the red tide,” an official from the ministry said.

Red tide, also known as Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB), happens when colonies of algae grow beyond control and produce toxic or harmful effects on people, fish, shellfish, marine mammals and birds.

They can also cause illnesses to humans and although they are rare, can also be fatal.

The ministry has been monitoring and studying this phenomenon for many years to determine how to detect and forecast the location of the blooms in order to make adequate precautions.

Advance warnings are necessary to deal with the adverse environmental and health effects triggered by the ‘red tide’ events, according to the ministry.

SMEDA calls for participation in GEC

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia



The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) announced opportunities to participate in the Global Entrepreneurship Conference in Australia for this year.

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Authority, will participate in the Global Entrepreneurship Conference 2023, held in September in the Australian city of Melbourne, for four days. The participation of the Sultanate of Oman comes within a unified pavilion of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

The GEC is the largest gathering of entrepreneurs globally, providing a unique opportunity to meet with entrepreneurs from around the world and benefit from their experiences. This is also an opportunity to listen to international experts and decision-makers, present the challenges they face, and search for sustainable solutions that contribute to creating a unified, strong global entrepreneurial environment.

The Authority called on entrepreneurs to register and compete to participate in the conference, which includes many specialised workshops in the field of entrepreneurship with the participation of institutions supporting the entrepreneurship sector and more than 4,000 participants, including policy-makers, strategic experts, researchers, economists, entrepreneurs and owners of small and medium

enterprises from more than 200 countries around the world.

Qais bin Rashid al Tobi, General Supervisor of the Promising Omani Emerging Companies Programme at the Authority, stated: “The Authority’s participation comes to explore the economic challenges facing the global entrepreneurial environment, exchange experiences and identify future investment opportunities.

It is also an opportunity for pioneer businesses to gain insights, build relationships and launch into global markets, especially since the conference will witness a wide international presence and significant leadership momentum through a number of investment rounds and launches for projects, products and services.” At the international level, the conference will host several senior entrepreneurs, who will participate in panel discussions during which the conference discussion sessions aim to be a source of inspiration for entrepreneurs and a positive incentive to take innovative measures that keep pace with the accelerated efforts to develop the entrepreneurship environment at the local, regional and international levels.

One killed in worksite mudslide

MUSCAT: A worker lost his life following a mudslide at the worksite in Al Ansab where he was carrying out an excavation work.

In a statement, Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said it managed to pull his body out from the mud debris.

“The rescue teams of the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) in the Governorate of Muscat pulled out the body; it stated.

ROP arrests women for immoral activities

MUSCAT: The Muscat Governorate Police Command arrested a group of women on Wednesday of different nationalities in the Al Khuwair area on charges of violating morals and public morals and violating the labour and residence law.

ROP has initiated legal procedures against them.

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report For the quarter ending 30th June 2023

After a challenging Q1, thankfully we saw global data and news becoming investor friendly in Q2, helping the investor sentiments Globally and extending the same to some regional GCC markets. The Fed pause in June and expectation of reversing interest rate trend by end of the year is positive for equities. The GCC markets ended H1 on a mixed note. Corporate numbers have not been encouraging for sectors such as petrochemical and cement, while consumption, healthcare and Information technology sectors have seen growth in profitability. Brent Oil saw recovery after OPEC+ extended production cuts.

The NBO GCC FUND gained 14.6% in H1 2023 and outperformed the Benchmark S&P GCC Composite Index by 11.7%. Overall, superior stock selection in small and mid-cap stocks as well as allocation contributed to the returns. Our strategic position in US markets also aided the overall performance of the fund. The active risk of reducing banking and petrochemical sector exposure also helped positively.

Dubai led the gains in GCC region with a 13.7% gain in H1, driven by the Real Estate sector. KSA followed with a 9.4% rise on higher volume, encouraged by the broader medium capitalized stocks. Bahrain market also managed to end the period with gains. On the other hand, ADX saw selling pressure in heavyweights and lost almost 6.5% YTD, QE witnessed foreign and regional selling leading to a 5.7% fall in H1. All 3 major US indices ended the quarter in the green, led by Nasdaq with 31.7% gain.

Overall, we believe that our portfolio is well positioned to benefit from the transforming environment and is likely to deliver positive results to the unit holders. The corporate performance in GCC could be an important driver of equities. Besides IPOs giving new opportunities to diversify, we also believe that certain sectors like consumption and the new generation Information Technology stocks offer further scope for appreciation in the medium to long term.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2023			
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION			
	30 June 2023	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
	RO	RO	RO
ASSETS			
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	10,925,138	10,278,577	10,064,468
Cash and cash equivalents	649,805	789,116	466,929
Dividends receivable	2,054	646	65
Total assets	11,576,997	11,068,339	10,531,462
LIABILITIES			
Current liabilities			
Accruals and other payables	103,346	52,194	100,649
Total liabilities	103,346	52,194	100,649
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	11,473,651	11,016,145	10,430,813
Net asset value per unit	1.012	0.929	0.883
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME			
	30 June 2023	30 June 2022	31 December 2022
	RO	RO	RO
	(6 months)	(6 months)	(12 months)
INCOME			
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	1,291,616	(93,055)	(415,099)
Net realised gain / (loss) on investments at fair value through profit or loss	107,980	90,669	(56,445)
Dividend income	276,019	264,598	345,514
Foreign exchange gain	3,595	--	--
Interest income	705	942	1,349
Other income	11	78	674
	1,679,926	263,232	(124,007)
Expenses			
Management fees	62,139	73,186	138,344
Performance fees	55,118	--	--
Fund Management Body fees	28,000	24,068	35,000
Brokerage expenses	26,952	19,226	46,886
General and administration	10,250	10,349	20,182
Administrator fees	8,474	9,980	18,865
Custodian fees	4,918	4,886	10,525
Foreign exchange loss	--	16,544	42,581
	195,851	158,239	312,383
Net profit / (loss) and total comprehensive income for the period / year	1,484,075	104,993	(436,390)
Net profit / (loss) per unit	0.128	0.008	(0.036)

Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

OMAN’S BEACHES NEED BETTER AMENITIES

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, AUG 2

The Sultanate of Oman has an abundant coastline of approximately 3,000 kilometres, stretching from the Musandam Governorate in the north to the Dhofar Governorate in the south. This extensive shoreline offers an appealing environment for both locals and residents, as well as tourists visiting Oman from various parts of the world.

Oman’s coastal governorates, particularly during the summer season, benefit from the monsoons arriving from the Indian Ocean, making them an excellent destination to beat the heat. However, many of these picturesque

beaches need more essential facilities and services visitors require during day and night excursions. The absence of basic amenities, including toilets, chalets and small hotels, hamper the overall tourist experience.

During the autumn season, certain locations, such as Ras Al Hadd, Ras Al Jinz in the Wilayat of Sur, as well as Al Duqm, Barr Al Hikman, and Al Shuwaymiyah, become attractive summer tourism destinations, offering moderate weather with temperatures ranging from the end of June to August. To fully capitalise on these natural wonders, there is a pressing need to invest in tourist services, such as chalets and small hotels along the

coast. By doing so, these coastal sites can evolve into refreshing summer retreats with a pleasant climate.

Citizen Abdullah al Amri highlights the investment opportunities that exist for small and medium-sized companies or the government to leverage these coastal sites on a seasonal basis. These companies can establish camps and rest houses tailored for tourists and visitors, especially those travelling to the Dhofar Governorate during the khareef season, seeking a night’s rest along the coastal route.

Al Amri emphasises the importance of providing various services to visitors, while also considering auxiliary factors to stimulate tourism in different locations throughout the Sultanate of Oman, accommodating varying environments and climates, whether in summer or winter. There is a call to direct attention to the coastal strip of Al Sharqiyah South and Al Wusta Governorate, intending to transform them into vibrant tourist attractions, particularly during the summer months.

Anas Youssef points out that Al Seeb Beach attracts a large number of people, especially in the afternoon and evening, when they engage in beach soccer, walking, or simply enjoying the sea breeze until late at night. Despite its popularity, this beautiful beach lacks essential services, making it necessary to organise and provide entertainment options for children, ensuring a pleasurable experience for families.

‘The Muscat Municipality, along with other responsible governorates, is urged to re-evaluate the development of beaches like Al Seeb and the other beautiful beaches scattered across Oman. It is crucial to prepare these coastal sites adequately for visitors, enhancing their overall experience and promoting sustainable tourism in the region,’ Anas added.

Oman’s coastal governorates possess immense potential to be premier tourist destinations. By investing in essential tourist services and providing necessary facilities, Oman can show the allure of its coastal beauty and offer a new experience to visitors.



Forum on frankincense to focus on research

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

A two-day international forum on frankincense and medicinal plants will be organised on September 3 and 4 at Dhofar University. The forum aims to revive frankincense farming and support advanced ways of research and development on medicinal plants. The forum's theme, 'Improvement and development of phytotherapy,' revolves around R&D of the unique Omani frankincense and other medicinal plants' properties by transferring knowledge to the related industries to help connect scientific and innovative activities in the fields of chemical, biotechnology, medical science and health to provide

a platform for international exchange and collaboration. The forum's focus rests on traditional herbal medicine and biomedicine. Additionally, the forum will help promote frankincense and other medicinal plants as Omani and international cultural heritage. Speaking to the Observer, Professor Louay Rashan, the forum's chief coordinator, said that the platform is a quantum leap in the history of frankincense in Oman and will witness new studies with experiments from across the world. "The forum holds great scientific importance on the effectiveness of Omani gum and frankincense oil as the speakers will also talk about the development of many products of frankincense



gum as food supplements and in multiple pharmaceutical forms." According to him, the economic and industrial transformations and the cultural and civilisational dimension of the Omani frankincense within the purview of the forum are closely linked with the history of Oman, where Dhofar Governorate, the birthplace of the frankincense tree, was known

as the 'Land of Frankincense'. The forum will welcome more than 45 experts and researchers from Western, Asian, Arab and local universities, institutes and companies, as well as experts in food and cosmetics who will present their innovative scientific papers at the forum. The forum, which will be conducted in hybrid mode,

includes presentations by keynote speakers, senior academic scientists and research scientists related to medicinal plants, nutrition, botanical medicine, natural chemistry and industries. The forum will also include plenary sessions and presentations of scientific posters and frankincense products. Dhofar Governorate is the region's rich source of plant, animal and marine biodiversity, and the land of frankincense includes more than 58 per cent of the known plants in the Sultanate, which are more than 800 species. Most of the cultivated, medicinal and wild plant species are found in the highlands of Dhofar Governorate. Historically, natural products

(secondary metabolites) have been used since ancient times and in folklore to treat many ailments, and they have been the most successful source of potential drugs. The area is rich in plants and trees such as Commiphora, Boswellia, Acacia, Anogeissus dhofarica, Aloe Dhofarensis, Aloe vera and many other interesting plants waiting to be explored. The unique aromatic gum resin is extracted from many species of frankincense tree, which includes about 23 scientific species, which are spread in many countries, including India, Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea of the genus Boswellia, including the Omani frankincense tree type Boswellia sacra (from the south of the Arabian Peninsula).

SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose of their used vehicles and equipment, in 'as is where is' condition. The items identified are presently located at their Al Khoud yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 7/8/2023, 8/8/2023 and 9/8/2023 between 08:00 am to 12:00 pm and 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 9/8/2023 at 05:00 pm at our Al Khoud office.

Interested parties may contact at
Tel: (+968) 26983767 / 26983777 / 24525303, Mob: (+968) 91354151

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TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Dhofar Services invites the specialize companies to participate and submit their offers for the below said tender in Dhofar Governorate.

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR) Including VAT (5%)
DISC/ 2023/129	SUPPLY OF HDPE WATER PIPE	10/08/2023	17/08/2023	RO. 52.500

- To view the tender details, you can visit www.dhofarservices.nama.om / scan the QR code
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 3.00pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through using "supplier portal". No hard copies are accepted.
- The company is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.
- For any clarifications contact us on:
Tel No. 23232554
email: purchase@dhofarservices.nama.om

Dhofar Integrated Services Company s.a.o.c.
CR Number 2185229 / PO Box 2609
PC 211, Salalah - Suburane of Oman
Phone Number 23232523 / Fax 23291183
www.dhofarservices.nama.om

'Nama Week' from Aug 6 to 10 in Dhofar

SALALAH: As part of the sustainability plan of Nama Group, Nama Dhofar Services will launch 'Nama Week' campaign in Dhofar, in cooperation with the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and Dhofar Municipality, August 6 to 10, 2023.

The campaign's main objective is to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the environment and achieving home safety, as well as encouraging the public's participation with the local community and the relevant entities in Dhofar Governorate.

Also, the event intends to engaging all segments of the society with the campaign through several entertainment activities.

It aims to promote economic, social and environmental sustainability through a set of innovative programmes. These programmes include upgrading conventional electricity meters to smart meters to reduce energy consumption and promote sustainability, in addition to the 'Baiti Amin' programme, which aims to spread a culture of home safety among all members of the society and raise awareness of the importance of safety in general.

A lecture will be organised about the efforts to rationalise electricity and water consumption to achieve a more sustainable balance in the use of natural resources. Additionally, the company will organise a few environmental initiatives that aim to encourage the community to actively contribute in protecting the environment and its beauty.

Uthmaniyah Capital

Proposed merger between HSBC Bank Oman SAOG and Sohar International Bank SAOG

HSBC Bank Oman SAOG ("HSBC Oman") and Sohar International Bank SAOG ("Sohar International") entered into a binding merger agreement dated 15 November 2022 ("Merger Agreement"). HSBC Oman will be merged with and into Sohar International and all of the rights, obligations, assets (including contracts and employees) and liabilities of HSBC Oman will be transferred (as a going concern) to Sohar International by operation of law with effect from the completion of the merger (the "Merger"). The Merger has been approved by the respective shareholders of both HSBC Oman and Sohar International on 20 June 2023. On completion of the Merger, HSBC Oman will cease to exist as a legal entity and its shares will be cancelled.

In accordance with the Merger Agreement, the shareholders of HSBC Oman are being offered consideration consisting of newly issued shares of Sohar International valuing both banks at 1.0X book value on 31st March 2023 such that each HSBC Oman Shareholder will receive a whole number of shares of Sohar International calculated in the ratio of 1.467 shares of Sohar International for each 1 HSBC Oman share held by them (rounded down to the nearest share) (the "Share Consideration"). As an alternative to the Share Consideration, shareholders of HSBC Oman have the option (the "Cash Option") to elect to receive cash consideration of OMR 0.177 per HSBC Oman share ("Cash Consideration") calculated using the same valuation of HSBC Oman as for the Share Consideration, provided that the maximum Cash Consideration payable by Sohar International to shareholders of HSBC Oman that elect to receive it shall not exceed 70% of the total consideration payable by Sohar International to HSBC Oman shareholders (the "Maximum Cash Component").

If the number of HSBC Oman shareholders electing to receive the Cash Consideration (the "Cash Option Shareholders") would result in the total Cash Consideration payable by Sohar International exceeding the Maximum Cash Component, then: (i) the Maximum Cash Component would be allocated to each Cash Option Shareholder on a pro-rata basis in accordance with the proportion (represented as a percentage) that the HSBC Oman shares held by such Cash Option Shareholder represented relative to the total number of HSBC Oman shares held by all Cash Option Shareholders; and (ii) the remaining consideration payable to such Cash Option Shareholders would be in the form of Share Consideration issued as a whole number of shares of Sohar International at the same ratio of 1.467 shares of Sohar International for each of their remaining HSBC Oman shares plus a pro-rata amount for any remaining fraction of an HSBC Oman share (rounded down to the nearest share).

Sohar International is extending this Cash Option to all shareholders of HSBC Oman as of the record date ("Record Date") specified below to determine which HSBC Oman shareholders elect to receive Cash Consideration:

Key Dates:

Record Date: 03rd August 2023
Cash Option Opening Date: 06th August 2023
Cash Option Closing Date: 10th August 2023

Cash Consideration:
OMR 0.177 per HSBC Oman share

IMPORTANT: This Cash Option is open to all HSBC Oman shareholders as of the Record Date. HSBC Oman shareholders are under no obligation to elect the Cash Option. However, if any HSBC Oman shareholder wishes to elect the Cash Option, such HSBC Oman shareholder must indicate her/his/its intention by delivering a duly filled and signed Cash Option Election Form to the address and before the deadline both prescribed in the Cash Option Election Form. If any HSBC Oman shareholder does not provide a duly filled and signed Cash Option Election Form with the required documents (as set out in the Cash Option Election Form) by the prescribed deadline below, such HSBC Oman shareholders will have been deemed to have declined the Cash Option and will only receive Share Consideration

Cash Option Election Conditions

- As noted above, the offer by Sohar International to pay Cash Consideration as an alternative to Share Consideration is subject to the condition that the total Cash Consideration payable by Sohar International to Cash Option Shareholders shall not exceed the Maximum Cash Component. If the number of Cash Option Shareholders would result in the Maximum Cash Component being exceeded, then: (i) the Maximum Cash Component would be allocated to each Cash Option Shareholder on a pro-rata basis in accordance with the proportion (represented as a percentage) that the HSBC Oman shares held by such Cash Option Shareholder represented relative to the total number of HSBC Oman shares held by all Cash Option Shareholders; and (ii) the remaining consideration payable to such Cash Option Shareholders would be in the form of Share Consideration at the same ratio of 1.467 shares of Sohar International for each of their remaining HSBC Oman shares.
- The Cash Option is only able to be exercised in respect of HSBC Oman shares that are not pledged, disputed or otherwise encumbered as at the Record Date
- By completing the Cash Option Election Form, an HSBC Oman shareholder will acknowledge and agree that:
 - their decision to exercise the Cash Option is binding and irrevocable;
 - notwithstanding their decision to exercise the Cash Option, they may receive a combination of Cash Consideration and Share Consideration; and
 - the shares held by him/her/it are not pledged, disputed or otherwise encumbered by any third party.

Trading in the shares of HSBC Oman will be permanently suspended after close of trading hours on the Record Date.

Cash Option Manager:

Uthmaniyah Capital SAOC

For any queries related to the offer, kindly contact the following persons in Uthmaniyah Capital SAOC:

Talal Al Balushi Vice President - Brokerage Tel: +968 24 949 051 / 99267286 Email: talal@u-capital.net	Hunaina Banatwala Vice President - Institutional Sales Tel: +968 24 949 053 / 99378351 Email: hunaina@u-capital.net
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The Cash Option Election Forms are available on Muscat Stock Exchange (www.msx.om) & Uthmaniyah Capital SAOC website (www.u-capital.net)



Russia strikes Ukraine’s main inland port across Danube

KYIV: Russia attacked Ukraine’s main inland port across the Danube River from Romania on Wednesday, sending global food prices higher as it ramps up its use of force to prevent Ukraine from exporting grain.

The attacks destroyed buildings in the port of Izmil and halted ships in their tracks as they prepared to arrive there to load up with Ukrainian grain in defiance of a de-facto blockade Russia reimposed in mid-July.

Commercial ship tracking data showed dozens of international ships halting and dropping anchor at the mouth of the Danube, many of them registered to arrive in Izmil from the Black Sea in an apparent bid to open a breach in Russia’s blockade. The port, across the river from Nato-member Romania, is the main alternative route out of Ukraine for grain exports, since Russia’s blockade halted traffic at Ukraine’s Black Sea ports in mid-July.

Video released by the Ukrainian authorities showed firefighters on ladders battling a huge blaze several stories high in a building covered with broken windows. Several other large buildings were in ruins, and grain spilled out of at least two wrecked silos. Two industry sources said operations at the port were suspended. Seaport authority head Yuriy Lytvyn said on Facebook that repair work had already begun and the



An inspector surveys the damage at a grain port facility after a reported attack by Russian military drones in Izmil on Wednesday. – Reuters

port infrastructure continued to operate. There were no reports of casualties, Odesa region governor Oleh Kiper wrote in a post on the Telegram messaging app. “Russians have once again attacked ports, grain, global food security,” President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Telegram.

Chicago wheat prices rose by nearly 5 per cent following the attack and were still up 1.2 per cent at \$6.60 a bushel by 11:19 GMT due to concern about a hit to global supplies from driving Ukraine, one of the world’s top exporters, off the market.

Russia has attacked Ukrainian agricultural and port infrastructure for more than two weeks, since refusing to extend an agreement that had lifted its war-time blockade of Ukrainian ports

last year. President Vladimir Putin spoke by telephone to the grain export deal’s sponsor, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan.

The Kremlin said Putin reiterated Russia’s condition for rejoining the grain deal: that a parallel deal improving terms for its own food and fertiliser exports be implemented. Those exports are already exempt from sanctions, which the West says Moscow aims to undermine by threatening the global food supply. Erdogan’s office said he and Putin agreed that the Russian leader would soon visit Turkey. Erdogan has long said he hopes to host Putin and convince him to rejoin the grain deal.

Moscow has described its recent attacks on Ukraine’s grain infrastructure as retaliation for

a Ukrainian strike on a bridge to Crimea, used to supply its troops in southern Ukraine.

US ambassador Bridget Brink condemned the attacks in a statement, listing recent Russian targets: “Homes. Ports. Grain silos. Historic buildings. Men. Women. Children. “Round-the-clock and intensifying Russian strikes on Kryvyi Rih, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Kherson make it clear once again Russia has no desire for peace, no thought for civilian safety, and no regard for people around the world who rely on food from Ukraine.”

Kyiv says the goal of the strikes is to reimpose Russia’s blockade by persuading shippers and their insurance companies that Ukrainian ports are unsafe to resume exports.

“It is the enemy’s priority to convince the international community and shipowners in particular that... navigation in the direction of Ukrainian-controlled ports is dangerous,” said Natalia Humeniuk, military spokesperson in southern Ukraine.

Producers in Ukraine are already feeling the impact. Kees Huizinga, a farmer in Ukraine’s central Cherkasy region said: “Because of the shelling a direct consequence to our farm is that we can not deliver 700 tonnes of contracted barley which we were supposed to deliver today.”

— Agencies



Pope vows to keep ‘stirring things up’ in Church

LISBON: Pope Francis promised on Wednesday to continue to “stir things up” in the Catholic Church as he moves on with reforms and changes that could leave a lasting legacy.

Francis was speaking at the start of a five-day trip to Portugal to attend a global gathering of young Catholics known as the World Youth Day, held every two or three years in a different city.

The trip is taking place in the shadow of Portugal’s huge clergy abuse scandal and local anger at the soaring costs for the event. Speaking to reporters on the plane from Rome, Francis was reminded of when he urged young people at his first World Youth Day, in Brazil, to not be complacent in the Church but to make noise in order to make themselves heard and instil change. “We will continue to stir things up,” he said.

Francis has enacted numerous changes in the Church since his election in 2013, sometimes

upsetting conservatives as he has given women more roles and made it more welcoming and less judgmental towards some groups.

The 86-year-old pope is making his first trip since intestinal surgery in June and uses a wheelchair and cane.

Francis, who seemed in good form as he walked with the help of a cane in the reporters’ section of the plane, said he hoped to return to Rome on Sunday “rejuvenated by his encounter with young people”.

It is the fourth such event Francis will preside over since he became pope.

In his first speech, to President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa and diplomats at a cultural centre, Francis said the world was currently “sailing amid storms on the ocean of history”, including the tempest of the war in Ukraine, and urged Europe to find the resolve to help end it and other conflicts. — Reuters

Swathes of China underwater after historic rain

ZHUOZHOU: Swathes of northern China were submerged in filthy floodwater on Wednesday after days of historic rainfall battered the capital city of Beijing and surrounding areas.

Torrents of brown water swept tons of rubbish through a park in suburban Beijing, while normally bustling main streets in Hebei province to the southwest of the capital turned to rivers.

Aerial photographs taken by AFP of Hebei’s Zhuozhou city showed inundated shopfronts and car roofs poking through the sludgy rainwater. Farmland in the surrounding areas was left submerged stretching for miles, the photographs showed.

Rescue workers in one part of Zhuozhou visited by AFP reporters used inflatable boats to transport instant noodles, bread and drinking water to besieged



residents, who were also left without power or mobile phone signal.

A 34-year-old man surnamed Liu who declined to provide his

full name told a harrowing tale of being trapped since Monday inside the Zhuozhou printworks where he is employed.

“First we tried to block the

water, but then it was impossible,” Liu said.

“We couldn’t get any of our plant’s equipment or materials out to shelter. We were trapped inside

until midday today before being rescued.”

Liu said that while they still needed to wait for the water to recede before assessing the damage inside the flooded factory, his employer’s estimated losses were nearly 20 million yuan (\$2.79 million).

Zhou Libin, 41, had been serving as the head of a rescue team when the floods hit.

“We were the first team to arrive in Zhuozhou,” said Zhou.

“Evacuation of people began at 3 pm yesterday because the water flow was relatively high. Around 1,000 people have been evacuated so far.

“Those who remain are some elderly people who aren’t easy to transfer, and we’re still coordinating that.”

Beijing’s weather service said on Wednesday the rains that

pummelled the Chinese capital in recent days were the heaviest since records began 140 years ago.

Scientists say such extreme weather events are being exacerbated by climate change.

In the nearby border area between Beijing and Hebei, vast piles of floating garbage and debris backed up by a bridge were seen by AFP journalists.

A policeman said that the place they were standing on Wednesday had been “extremely dangerous” the previous day. Elsewhere, a local 71-year-old resident surnamed Li was with her husband looking at a park she is very familiar with, but which now resembled a lake.

“I have never seen anything like this in more than 40 years,” Li said.

Even during the worst rainfalls in Beijing’s history, the area had never seen water flow in until now, said Li. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ABUJA

Nigerians march against rising costs

Hundreds marched through major Nigerian cities on the first day of a nationwide strike called to protest the removal of a petrol subsidy and demand a new minimum wage but businesses remained open, though with reduced traffic in some spots.

Since being sworn into office on May 29, President Bola Tinubu has embarked on the boldest reforms in decades, scrapping the popular but expensive subsidy, which cost \$10 billion last year, and relaxing foreign exchange



regime. While the reforms have been welcomed by investors, unions say they have led to soaring costs at a time when Nigerians are grappling with the highest inflation in nearly two decades.

TUNIS

Tunisia’s PM dismissed, new one appointed

Tunisian President Kais Saied has sacked the prime minister and named a new one amid economic woes in the country.

Saied had decided to terminate the duties of Najla Bouden as prime minister and appoint Ahmed Hachani as her replacement, Tunisia’s state news agency TAP reported on Wednesday.

Hachani, who previously worked at Tunisia’s Finance Ministry and central bank, was sworn in by Saied, the agency added.

But the move comes amid



growing discontent in Tunisia over food shortages, price hikes and frequent queues for bread, a staple item in the country. Tunisia is mired in its worst economic crisis in decades.

NEW DELHI

India finds string of deficiencies among drugs

India has found multiple deficiencies among drugmakers following wide-ranging inspections across the industry, including a lack of raw materials testing, the health ministry said.

Authorities have stepped up scrutiny of drugmakers in recent months after some cough syrups made in the country were linked to the deaths of at least 95 children overseas. Recent risk-based inspections of 162 factories and 14 public laboratories found issues including “poor docu-



mentation, lack of process and analytical validations, absence of self-assessment, absence of quality failure investigation, (and) absence of internal product quality review”, it said in a statement.

Unlocking creativity...

Would the most significant works of literature, such as “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” “The Odyssey,” and “The Philosophical Epigrams,” have survived in the age of modern media and censorship? Intellectuals, artists and writers engage with purpose, imagination and passion to produce their pieces. Books, paintings, songs, plays and movies inform and entertain. They are not just windows to the world; they are also about empowerment. Some of these materials can be turned into masterpieces. To quote Albert Einstein, “The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge, but imagination”.

If intellectuals had not been given the freedom to dream and to express their creativity, masterpieces like the Greek tragedies and Shakespeare’s plays would not have served as references to our cultural enrichment. Hamlet, by William Shakespeare; Oedipus Rex, by Sophocles; Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, by Edward Albee; Waiting for Godot, by Samuel Beckett; and Candida, by Bernard Shaw, are examples of cultural diversity and collaborations that enrich the soul and the mind. Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s “The School for Scandal” remains relevant, particularly in the realm of gossip; by letting people make assumptions, information is skewed.

In paintings, ‘Mona Lisa’, ‘Girl with a Pearl Earring’, or ‘Night Shining White’ from the period of the Tang dynasty, are the result of everyday life in different periods. The amazing works of Greek culture, Shakespeare, French writers, and playwrights from around the world ratify that intellectual expansion is attainable where there is space to grow. Intellectual creativity advances through curiosity, embracing diverse influences, learning from failure and collaborating with others.

In filmmaking, movies such as Ben-Hur, Titanic, A Space Odyssey, Avatar, Star Wars, and Oppenheimer are examples of innovative minds. They are films that inform, educate and entertain. Cinematography is the result of a scientific venture involving imagery, movement and lighting. The invention of the camera, the projector,



SONIA AMBROSIO
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INTELLECTUAL
CREATIVITY
ADVANCES
THROUGH
CURIOSITY,
EMBRACING
DIVERSE
INFLUENCES,
LEARNING FROM
FAILURE AND
COLLABORATING
WITH OTHERS

and approaches to images have opened the doors for the cinema industry, bringing short videos to social media. Advanced digital technologies have enhanced forms of narrative, the use of colour and sound, bringing filmmaking to new dimensions, all thanks to creative minds. It is inspiring when the fine-tuning of intellectual works is done within circles of collaboration and new approaches, but when an artwork is chopped or banned according to sets of imposed narratives, it is like trimming the wings of a bird. If weren’t for the chance to be creative, we wouldn’t have the Internet, computer code, space exploration, or a man landing on the moon.

Development in all areas, from health to the military to computers to news production and distribution to space exploration, has been possible because there are people with a passion for new possibilities. Yes, there are those with progressive thoughts, and there are those who either want to control ideas and information or merely object since the developments do not match individuals’ selective principles. The lazy habits of mind reinforce people’s tendency to repeat what was done yesterday.

From Antiquity to the present, censorship has been a threat to creative thinking. Censorship can be debated from different perspectives with the view of regulating the manners and morals of citizens. Every country has its own rules. But we live in a diversified society in a globalised world; we are connected in a web of both economic and social development.

A person’s ability to understand ideas and information while channelling knowledge towards evolution has shaped the world we know today. We have all experienced amazing developments brought about by individuals with various viewpoints, from ancient literary masterpieces and sacred texts to the development of the wheel, the atomic bomb, and the Internet. Creativity can’t be taught or assigned.

As the author Joseph Chilton Pearce wrote, “to live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong”.

FRUITS OF LABOUR



A farmer carries a bagged date branch during the annual harvest season in Yemen's northern city of Marib on August 2. – AFP

Making development finance work for Africa

If the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated our interdependence and hyper-connectedness, Russia’s war in Ukraine and its economic consequences have further underscored that no country or region can stand alone. We are all integrated — politically and by trade and investment linkages — into the global economy.

Given growing awareness of this, policymakers around the world are rethinking their approach to sustainable development and re-examining the role of multilateral development banks (MDBs). These institutions are of course still relevant. But whether they are fit for purpose in their current form is open to debate.

To determine how MDBs can best support developing countries, let us consider the difficulties facing Nigeria, where I served as minister of finance, budget, and national planning from 2019 until this year. During the pandemic, more of our citizens were pushed into poverty, and our economy faltered. The breakdown in global supply chains caused the price of crude oil, our largest export product, to crash, tipping Africa’s largest economy into recession. The economy rebounded



Zainab Shamsuna
Ahmed

The writer is a former minister of finance, budget, and national planning of Nigeria

after a series of reforms, but Russia’s war in Ukraine now confronts us with higher food, oil and fertiliser prices.

Nigeria is also dealing with fiscal stress, exacerbated by historically low non-oil revenues and adverse global economic conditions. A significant portion of the country’s revenues goes towards servicing its debt, and rising interest rates are pushing up debt-service costs further. Against this backdrop, our biggest challenge is getting the economy back on track and ensuring that our citizens live dignified lives.

MDBs, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, were created in the aftermath of World War II to help alleviate poverty and promote economic growth in developing countries. Seven decades later, these institutions have duly provided financial assistance and met some development metrics. But the world is still battling poverty, disease and hunger.

The leaders of the World Bank and other MDBs must pursue systemic reforms to fulfil their mandate. To be sure, MDBs have

played an important role in low- and middle-income countries and will continue to do so. But we must now face the reality that today’s problems cannot be fixed with outdated solutions. The current geopolitical climate, and the resulting economic and financial conditions, calls for a fundamental shift in these institutions, so that they are better positioned to respond to multiple, overlapping crises.

To be clear, African countries are seeking development partnerships, not handouts or aid. In Nigeria, we have requested longer-term financing from MDBs to weather the

current storm. These banks could also facilitate partnerships between private investors and local African businesses to boost economic growth and job creation. Nigeria has already shown remarkable resilience; now the country needs support to translate its economic potential into meaningful development that benefits its citizens.

African countries must work together with the global community to lift the continent out of poverty. But they should also focus on leveraging their abundant resources and young and dynamic populations. One

avenue that we are already pursuing is the promotion of intra-African trade through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). With more than one billion people, Africa can be its own market — but only if trade barriers are removed. Nigeria, for example, could unlock its manufacturing and export capacity, earning foreign exchange, attracting investment and becoming more globally competitive. AfCFTA is already providing a forum for Nigerian entrepreneurs to strengthen partnerships with business owners in other countries.

With the right investments and economic policies, Africa can and will overcome its challenges. Doing so is crucial not just for its own survival, but for the healthy functioning of an interdependent global economy. A string of crises — from the pandemic to the Ukraine war to the intensifying effects of climate change — has highlighted the MDBs’ shortcomings while simultaneously prompting calls for reform. Unless we build on the momentum generated by these disasters, they will engulf us all. @Project Syndicate, 2023



The leaders of the World Bank and other MDBs must pursue systemic reforms to fulfil their mandate.

sport

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South Africa's Thembi Kgatlane scores their third goal against Italy during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup. – Reuters

JAMAICA, SOUTH AFRICA ROAR INTO LAST 16

CRUSHING END TO MARTA'S CAREER AS BRAZIL EXIT

SYDNEY: Jamaica dumped out Brazil and South Africa sent Italy home on Wednesday as the supposed minnows roared into the last 16 of an increasingly open Women's World Cup.

The Reggae Girlz' coach Lorne Donaldson declared it "job done" after his dogged Jamaica side strangled the life out of eighth-ranked Brazil in Melbourne for a 0-0 draw. It was the point Jamaica needed to progress into the knockout rounds for the first time in history and meant a crushing end to the World Cup career of Brazilian legend Marta.

The 37-year-old, arguably the greatest player in the history of women's football, was as shell-shocked as she was upset afterwards.

Brazil's meek group-phase exit at the hands of a team ranked 43 was their earliest departure from the tournament since being turfed out at the same stage in 1995.

"It's hard to talk at a time like this. Not even in my worst nightmares was it the World Cup I dreamed of," said Marta, once nicknamed "Pele in a skirt" by the late football icon.

Jamaica finished second in Group F and will meet the team that comes top when Group H concludes on Thursday. That is currently Colombia.

France topped Group F as Kadidiatou Diani hit a hat-trick in a 6-3 win over Panama and a possible meeting next with Germany.

Marta Cox's wonder strike on 67 seconds had left the French reeling, swerving a free-kick into the corner from 30 yards for Panama's first-ever World Cup goal. She spun away in celebration and was mobbed by teammates as the tears flowed at a sold-out Sydney Football Stadium.

SOUTH AFRICA JOY

There were also tears — of joy and devastation — after 54th-ranked South Africa showed Jamaica the way in a wet Wellington.

The African champions won a Women's World Cup match for the first time with a stunning 3-2 victory over 16th-ranked Italy in a thriller. Captain Thembi Kgatlane scored the winner in the 92nd



(Above) South Africa's Thembi Kgatlane celebrates after the match as South Africa qualify for the knockout stages of the World Cup. – Reuters



(Right) Jamaica's midfielder #02 Solai Washington celebrates after her team qualified for the last 16 following the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group F match between Jamaica and Brazil at Melbourne Rectangular Stadium. – AFP

minute to make history for South Africa and set up a meeting with the Netherlands — sending Italy home. Arianna Caruso scored twice for Italy and thought she had salvaged the draw they needed to

go through with 16 minutes left, before Kgatlane's stunning late intervention.

"Over the last two weeks, I've lost three family members. I could have gone home but I chose to

stay with my girls," said Kgatlane, who plays for Racing Louisville in the United States. "Because that's how much it means."

Sweden topped Group G with the maximum nine points to set

up a clash with holders the United States. It will be the teams' first meeting since Sweden beat the USA 3-0 at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago on their way to taking the silver medal.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP RESULTS ON WEDNESDAY:

GROUP F

In Melbourne, Australia
Jamaica 0 Brazil 0

In Sydney, Australia

Panama 3 (Cox 2, Pinzon 64-pen, Cedeno 87) France 6 (Lakrar 21, Diani 28, 37-pen, 52-pen, Le Garrec 45+5, Becho 90+10)

GROUP G

In Wellington

South Africa 3 (Orsi 32-og, Magaia 67, Kgatlane 90+2) Italy 2 (Caruso 11-pen, 74)

In Hamilton, New Zealand

Argentina 0 Sweden 2 (Blomqvist 66, Rubensson 90-pen)

"We have played really good group-stage games, we have won all three of them, and we also beat them in the Olympics," said Sofia Jakobsson, who came into Sweden's line-up against Argentina and set up the opening goal in a 2-0 win.

The Americans came into the tournament in Australia and New Zealand as favourites to win an unprecedented third World Cup in a row. But they have looked nothing like the team that has for so long dominated women's international football and only scraped out of the group phase with a shaky 0-0 draw against debutants Portugal on Tuesday.

CAICEDO '100 PER CENT'

Group action concludes on Thursday with Colombia needing only a draw against Morocco to top Group H.

Germany, stunned by Colombia and 18-year-old attacker Linda Caicedo in their previous match, are through with a win over a South Korea side who are more or less already out. Caicedo underwent X-rays after health scares at the tournament but is "100 per cent" fit for the Morocco game, coach Nelson Abadia said.

The teenage Real Madrid attacker, who was diagnosed with ovarian cancer at 15 but made a full recovery, has lit up the World Cup with goals in wins against South Korea and Germany.

In the upset over two-time champions Germany Caicedo scored one of the goals of the tournament, days after going down in training clutching her chest. — AFP

India blow away Windies to seal ODI series



Indian players pose after winning the third and final ODI match between the West Indies and India at Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago. – AFP

TAROUBA, Trinidad and Tobago: India swiftly erased the memory of a poor second match to annihilate the West Indies by 200 runs in the decisive third and final one-day international at the Brian Lara Stadium on Tuesday.

Even with senior players in captain Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli still rested the tourists' batting finally came good collectively to post a formidable 351-5 batting first. Their seamers then demolished the home side's top order and a ninth-wicket partnership of 55 merely delayed the inevitable with the West Indies bundled out for 151 off 35.3 overs.

India's margin of victory was their second largest in ODIs against the West Indies and also extended their run of bilateral series wins against the Caribbean team in the format to 13.

Openers Shubman Gill and Ishan Kishan set the tone for the India innings after they were put in with man-of-the-series Kishan benefiting from an early dropped



Shardul Thakur of India celebrates the dismissal of Alzarri Joseph of West Indies.

chance to belt 77 off 64 balls - his third consecutive half-century - in an opening stand of 143, a new record for the wicket for India in ODIs in the West Indies.

Gill was more circumspect in getting to a top score of 85 off 92 balls before falling to Gudakesh Motie, the left-arm spinner being the most economical for the home side in conceding just 38



Shubman Gill, of India, hits 4 during the third One Day International against West Indies.

runs from his 10 overs.

"This was definitely special to finally get a fifty on this tour," said Gill after receiving the man-of-the-match award. "It's all about playing according to the conditions and assessing the situation as quickly as possible."

Sanju Samson also wasted no time in taking advantage of another rare ODI opportunity to



India's Sanju Samson hits a six during the third ODI at Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba, San Fernando.

smash 51 off 41 with four sixes.

PANDYA PILES ON

However his impressive mid-innings assault was surpassed by Hardik Pandya, the stand-in captain hoisting five sixes and four fours in an unbeaten 70 off just 52 deliveries.

"I look forward to these sorts of games where there is



Indian captain Hardik Pandya hits a six during the third and final ODI match against the West Indies. – AFP

something on the line," said Pandya. "We knew there was something at stake and the way the boys were up for it, came out and performed but also enjoyed it was really satisfying."

In this first-ever men's ODI to be played at the venue, the West Indies were never in the hunt after Mukesh Kumar's opening burst removed openers Brandon

King and Kyle Mayers before adding the important wicket of captain Shai Hope. "I keep stressing on our attitude because I don't think we are consistent enough," Hope lamented. "Some days we compete with the best in the world, other days we get steamrolled. We have to work on this."

Shardul Thakur and Jaydev Unadkat, playing his first ODI in 10 years, then joined the rout to have the home side in ruins at 50 for six. Kuldeep Yadav's wrist-spin claimed two more wickets and although Motie (39 not out) and Alzarri Joseph provided a measure of entertainment for the home fans, it was left to Thakur to claim the final two wickets to finish with the best figures of 4-37 and end the series as the leading wicket-taker with eight.

Both squads now prepare for the final leg of the tour, a five-match T20 international series, with the first fixture on Thursday also at the Brian Lara Stadium.

— AFP

Oman Sail, Asyad Group launch Community Sailing Programme

MUSCAT: Oman Sail and Asyad Group, Oman's leading global integrated logistics provider, have sealed a partnership to use sailing to support youth development across the nation. The Asyad Community Sailing Programme will allow male and female students from grades 2-10 from 150 public schools across Muscat, Al Batinah North and Al Sharqiyah South governorates to experience the joy of being on the water and learn the basics of sailing at Oman Sail's Sailing Schools at Al Mouj Muscat Marina, Sur and Barcelo Resort Musannah.

Through this initiative, participants will benefit from the valuable life skills and personal growth opportunities that sailing offers, including building confidence, developing active citizenship, and engaging in physical activity. By sharing expertise and resources, Oman Sail and Asyad Group strive to introduce a new generation



of sailors to the sport and contribute to the overall development and well-being of the youth in Oman.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said, "We are delighted to be working with Asyad Group to deliver a

life-changing programme that will offer long-term benefits for young people of all ages across the nation. This is a unique opportunity to share the expertise of both Oman Sail and Asyad Group to teach valuable life skills through sailing as well as introduce a new generation of sailors to the sport and share our maritime heritage with the youth of Oman."

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhiri, CEO Asyad Shipping and Drydock, said, "Asyad Group is extremely proud to sponsor the Asyad Community Sailing Programme and create a platform for young people to develop and embrace

active living. This engagement is part of our strategy to support communities in Oman, focusing particularly on empowering the youth through innovation, exploration, and resilience building. We aim, by leveraging the expertise of Oman Sail, to enable children from all backgrounds to reach their potential, while shaping future athletes and sailing enthusiasts passionate about the maritime sports and industry."

The Asyad Community Sailing Programme will hold 32 youth development sessions at three of Oman Sail's sailing schools and, as part of the agreement also host an open day for people with special needs and a team building session for university students. Asyad Group employees will also have the chance to support the Programme and the community by volunteering to assist in its activities and sharing their maritime and professional experience and knowledge.

Australian track star Bol cleared of doping

SYDNEY: A doping investigation into Australian Olympic 800m runner Peter Bol was dropped on Tuesday, with the middle-distance star calling it "a dream come true".

Bol, who narrowly missed bronze when he finished fourth at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, returned a positive result for performance-enhancing Erythropoietin Receptor Agonists (EPO) in January.

He was suspended from all competition, but a later analysis of his B-sample returned an "atypical finding", meaning it did not confirm the original test.

The Sudan-born athlete, who always claimed innocence, has now been cleared, with further testing at a World Anti-Doping Agency-accredited laboratory confirming a negative result. "As a result, Sport Integrity Australia has taken the decision not to progress an anti-doping rule violation for this sample," the anti-doping agency said. "The investigation into this sample is finalised."

Bol said he had been "exonerated" and would now focus on the World Athletics



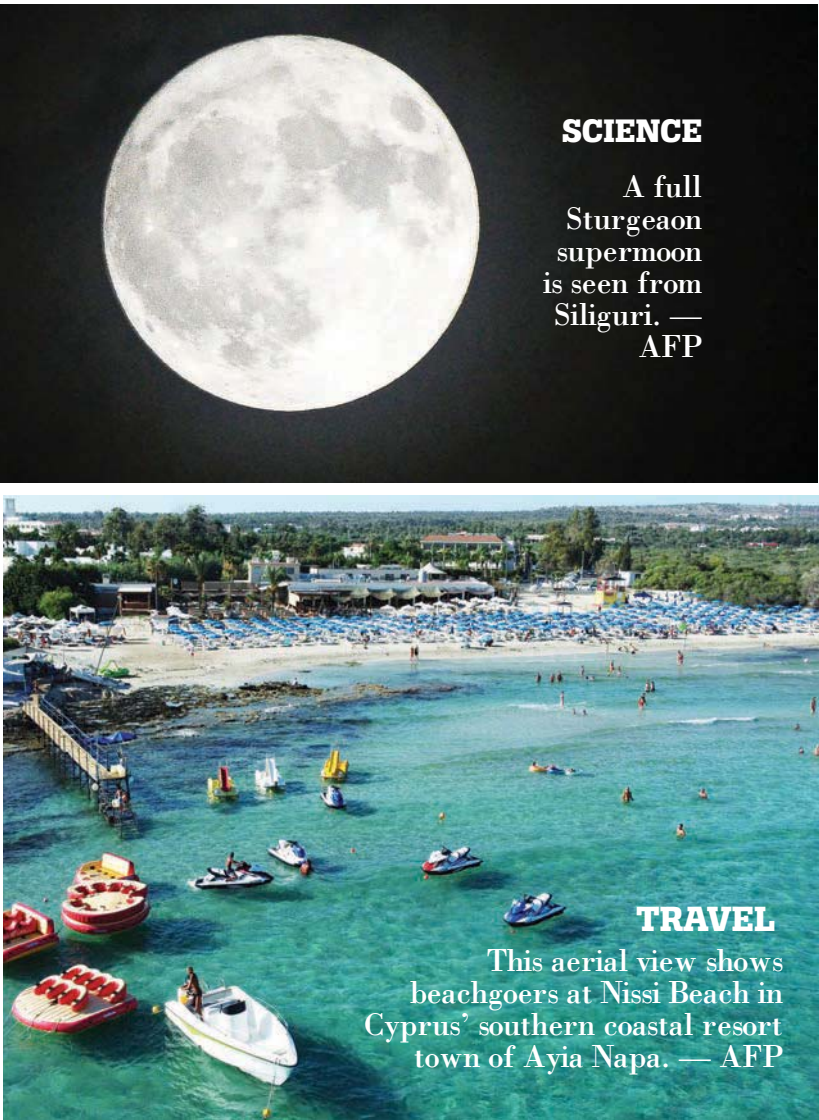
Championships in Hungary later this month.

"It was a false positive like I have said all along," he said.

"The news from Sport Integrity Australia today was a dream come true. No one should ever experience what I have gone through this year."

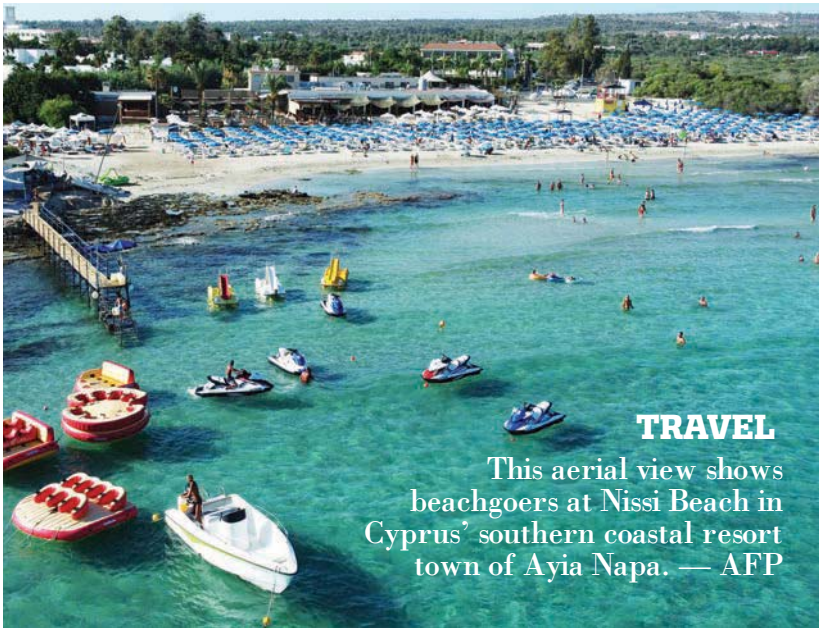
Wada said it was satisfied that Sport Integrity Australia followed all applicable processes, but would conduct a review nevertheless.

"While we have no reason to question the validity of the analytical method used for recombinant EPO, Wada will assess the current review process in light of the particularities of this case," it said. — AFP



SCIENCE

A full Sturgeon supermoon is seen from Siliguri. — AFP



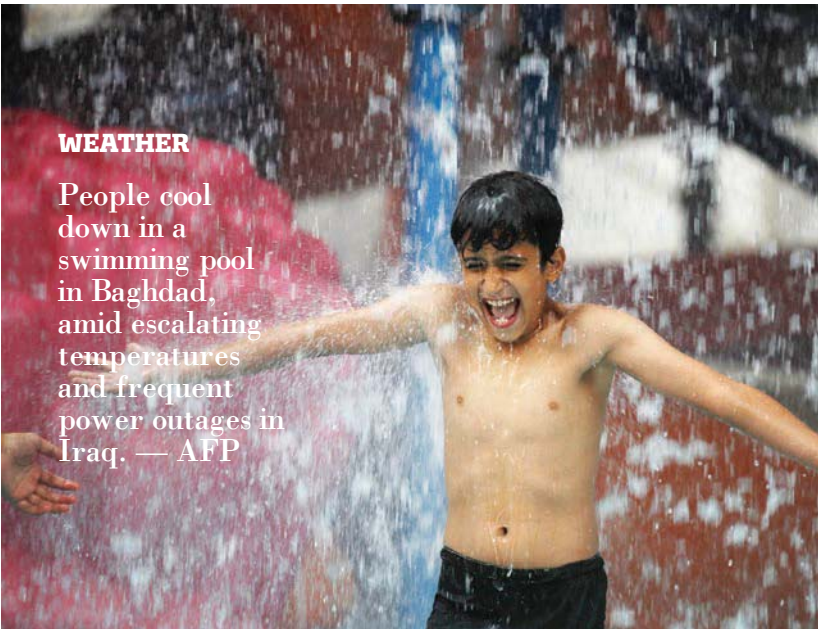
TRAVEL

This aerial view shows beachgoers at Nissi Beach in Cyprus' southern coastal resort town of Ayia Napa. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

An office worker rides a hired bicycle past an old phone box in Westminster, London, Britain. — REUTERS



WEATHER

People cool down in a swimming pool in Baghdad, amid escalating temperatures and frequent power outages in Iraq. — AFP



FOOD

A beekeeper displays honeywax for sale during the second Honey and Bee Products Exhibition in Sanaa, Yemen. — AFP

art & life

THURSDAY | AUGUST 3, 2023 | MUHARRAM 16, 1445 AH

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Four nature reserves for adventure seekers

By Yeru Ebuen

With its breathtaking diversity and remarkable landscapes, Oman is one of the best places in the Middle East to observe the delicate wonders of nature. Oman's nature reserves promise an unforgettable journey immersing travellers not just with its ancient traditions but also its harmonious relationship with nature



therefore making it a perfect place for those seeking to connect with nature on a profound level. Oman's nature reserves stand as a testament to the country's commitment to preserving its natural heritage. Check out the following reserves during your visit to the country.

AL WUSTA WILDLIFE RESERVE

Located in the yet to be fully explored city of Halma, this reserve

is located right at the heart of Oman and covering 2824 sq km of protected area that has become the successful home and safe haven for Oman's treasured animals like the Arabian oryx, the Arabian gazelle, hares and ibexes.

In the middle of a spectacular desert escarpment, this reserve is home to a small herd of reintroduced oryx. It offers a rare chance to see this magnificent desert antelope

up close as there is a large herd of over 600 animals in the reserve's breeding centre.

The reserve, access to which is by 4WD with a prior permit only, is 50 km off the Haima-Duqm road on a graded track marked 'Habab.'

WESTERN HAJAR STARLIGHT RESERVE

Renowned for its diverse natural wonders, Oman is one of the very few

countries from around the world that endeavours to protect the night sky. In the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, a celestial sanctuary beckons stargazers and astronomy enthusiasts from around the world.

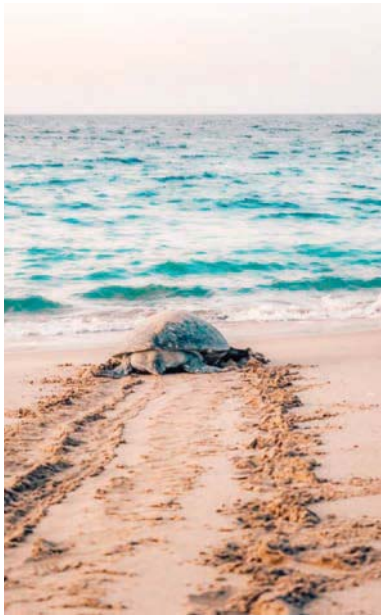
Its position away from urban light pollution and at an elevation that



maximises atmospheric clarity makes it an ideal spot for stargazing and astrophotography. The reserve is easily accessible by car, just a few hours' drive from Oman's capital, Muscat, or other major cities like Nizwa.

With the governing decree in place, the Starlight Reserve has become a haven for those seeking a celestial escape. Boasting some of the darkest and clearest skies in the world, visitors can witness a breath-

taking display of stars, planets, and even celestial events like meteor showers and eclipses. As you peer into the cosmos, you'll be greeted by the familiar constellations alongside celestial wonders only visible in the southern hemisphere.



RAS AL JINZ SEA TURTLE RESERVE

Located in the easternmost governorate of Oman, near the towns of Ras Al Hadd and Ras Al Jinz, is a popular destination for nature lovers and travellers alike. The Sea

Turtle Reserve encompasses several pristine beaches along the eastern coast. This reserve is an important place because of the annual nesting ritual of sea turtles taking place in the area. During the nesting season, visitors have the unique opportunity to witness the awe-inspiring sight of female turtles laboriously laying their eggs in the soft sands. Guided night tours are organised to observe



this magical event, under strict supervision to avoid disturbing the nesting turtles. While Oman is visited by different species of turtles, those that frequent and find safe haven in the country includes the Green Sea Turtle, the Loggerhead Sea Turtle and the Hawksbill Sea Turtle.

WADI SIREEN RESERVE

A hidden gem located at the

heart of the Wilayat of Al Amerat, Muscat Governorate, Wadi Sireen Reserve is a captivating destination that offers an unparalleled opportunity to explore the enchanting wadis (valleys) and appreciate the diverse flora and fauna that thrive in this pristine wilderness.

As a protected area, Wadi Sireen Reserve serves as a sanc-

tuary for a wide array of plant and animal species.

The reserve's lush vegetation contrasts with the arid surroundings, creating an oasis for local wildlife and migratory birds. Nature enthusiasts will delight in spotting rare bird species, including colourful bee-eaters and graceful falcons, amidst the verdant foliage.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



nicoletta_vittori
Paid partnership
Wahiba Sand Desert, Oman



DESERT LIFE



drsreejith
Somewhere on Earth



BIRD MELODY



michaelclicks
Jebel Shams, Oman



ENJOY WEATHER

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

0

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

Venetians plead 'please don't come' as tourists jam city

VENICE'S FAMED RIALTO Bridge was jammed with tourists on Monday, the same day UNESCO recommended the watery city be put on its endangered list citing overtourism and other concerns.

Taking selfies, licking gelato and wheeling suitcases, the hordes of visitors seemed happily oblivious to the possible downgrade UNESCO said was due to the risk of "irreversible" damage.

New York tourist Ashley Park, 28, said she knew it would be crowded in Venice, but it wasn't ruining her vacation.

"Obviously if we lived here with all these tourists it wouldn't be fun," she acknowledged.

Among the crowds on the historic bridge was city worker Diego Nechifrovo, 23, wearing an #EnjoyRespectVenezia T-shirt, who was busy keeping an eye out for misbehaving tourists.

"Sometimes I see someone throwing away his cigarette or walking around without a T-shirt," he said, noticing a bag of potato chips discarded on the doorstep of a jewellery shop.

The worst? One time a family "sat down right in front of the Doge's Palace and started to set up a picnic."

A few weeks ago, a distracted tourist fell into the water, Nechifrovo said.

"He was trying to get a good photo".

- PLEASE DON'T COME -

Not far away, a seller of watercolours had a sign on his stand pointing to St. Mark's Square.

"That's all they want to know," said the native Venetian, Claudio, who declined to give his last name. "They come to Venice because it's Venice. That's all."



The days of educated tourists visiting and enjoying the city's many churches and museums were over, he said.

"Those who come now don't even know what a museum is. It's not cultural tourism," he said.

"They need to go to the beach, or the mountains, but not here!" he lamented. "Please don't come anymore!"

The list of Venice's challenges are many, from environmental damage to its lagoon to its fleeing residents — with only about 50,000 left — leaving what many critics charge is now a city without a soul. Two years ago, Venice narrowly avoided being placed on the same UNESCO list — which is intended to spur gov-

ernments into action to preserve places deemed of "universal value to humanity" — after the city imposed a ban on massive cruise ships travelling past the centre.

Environmental groups warned the ships, carrying thousands of day-trippers and sailing exceptionally close to shore, caused large waves eroding Venice's foundations and harming the lagoon's fragile ecosystem. But the rerouting of the ships to the more distant industrial port of Marghera did not address the issue of overtourism itself. Some 3.2 million tourists stayed overnight in Venice's historic centre last year, according to official data, a number that does not include the thousands

of daily visitors who do not spend the night.

"It's pretty beautiful — it's a draw!" justified US tourist Mike McWilliams, 53, who had just arrived in the city for a two-day visit with his family.

- MANAGING THE MASTERPIECE -

UNESCO, the UN's cultural wing, put Venice on its heritage list in 1987 as an "extraordinary architectural masterpiece", but it has warned of the need for "more sustainable tourism management".

On Monday, it said progress had been insufficient while citing "a lack of overall joint strategic vision" by authorities.

Critics say measures put in

place to check tourism are ineffective and have come too late.

A long-discussed plan to introduce a paid booking scheme for day-trippers has been repeatedly postponed, now until 2024, over concerns it will seriously dent tourist revenue and compromise freedom of movement. Back at St. Mark's Square, city worker Lorenzo Seano, 21, was struggling to keep tourists from sitting on the steps of the surrounding arcades.

The problem of too many tourists invading cities went well beyond Venice, Seano said, but no one in government had tried to tackle the problem "on a structural level". "After all, there's a ton of money coming in," he said.

— AFP



THE CHANGING WORLD OF MEN



Shaddad al Musalmy

Home Alone

FROM THIS WEEK for a month, the woman of my house is on a mission to visit her folks miles away from Oman.

Whenever she travels, I always have this fear in me of being home alone, and my mind is completely disorganised because I know that without her in the house, it is never easy.

However, I take it as a challenge, but many questions come to mind which often have no answers.

These questions include: Who is going to take care of the laundry? Who is going to wash the dishes? Who is going to iron the clothes or put them into the washing machine? Who is going to manage the kitchen? In general, who is going to take care of the house chores?

Even though she had made all the necessary arrangements for me to be as comfortable as possible, with every item well arranged, placed, and easy to reach in case I need to make a meal, it looks like she will find them in the same order as she left.

I do not think I will want to cook something for myself. I have to confess that I am always too lazy to do such things.

Therefore, in order to avoid all the inconveniences of preparing myself a meal while I am at home until she comes back, I have decided to go on a self-forced diet to lose some weight.

One of my goals during this period is to be aware of my actions and choices of what to eat. Most times, I do not give too much thought to what I eat. However, I am sure this month will help me live healthier. On the other hand, being home alone could be advantageous because you might enjoy some freedom.

During this period, you at least get rid of abrupt outbursts like those days when she has tough days at home with the kids and with the housework.

Now that she is away, I get to release my stress in a quiet and cool environment after work. I just let the air conditioner on and let the feeling of coolness enshroud the place.

However, this good feeling only lasts for a few minutes. As soon as I remember that I am alone, my own home becomes a place of insecurity and anxiety especially when I start thinking about things that both of us share like that favourite delicious type of food.

Now, getting back to the real point — eating healthy — I emphasise that eating heavy meals and fried items can cause health complications. We need to stop overeating and watch what we eat.

During my interaction with health experts, they told me people should avoid spicy and non-vegetarian foods. They say such foods make you feel fatigued and should be avoided.

There is also a need to avoid cold water. Cold water further increases thirst; it does not quench it. On what to avoid, all health experts advise against soft drinks. Have natural juices instead.

But another big question is, 'who will monitor my diet plan?' In the past, whenever I was on the so-called 'good eating habits plan', the lady of my house is always there to help me achieve results.

No matter how much you have in the house, you need someone to be critical of everything that you do. In this regard, time will tell.

Shaddad al Musalmy is a seasoned Omani journalist who worked for top newspapers in the country. He's currently one of Oman Observer's senior editors and contributes across different beats. His commentaries about life in general paints a vivid picture of the changing landscape in Oman.

FOR FEEDBACK, EMAIL THE AUTHOR AT shadadm75@gmail.com

CULTURE

Tuareg flock to Algerian desert oasis for ancient festival



IN A RIOT OF COLOUR, music and dance, thousands of Tuareg have flocked to the Sebeiba festival that marks the end of an ancient tribal feud and which once a year transforms an oasis town deep in the Algerian Sahara.

The Tuareg are a semi-nomadic people of Berber descent who practice Islam and whose traditional desert homeland stretches across parts of Algeria, Libya, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

The annual Sebeiba festival,

held in Djanet, 1,500 kilometres (900 miles) southeast of Algiers, dates back over 3,000 years and is held to coincide with the Ashura commemoration.

During the 10-day event, male dancers, dressed as warriors and wielding swords, perform to the singing and drumbeat of women who are adorned with glittering jewellery and henna tattoos.

The men parade their weapons and "then stand in a ritual circle rattling their swords continuously as the women sing traditional songs to the rhythm of the tambourine," says the UN cultural organisation.

The festival marks the time, three millennia ago, when two Tuareg tribes, El Mihane and Zelouaz, put an end to a war between them.

Oral tradition says their conflict ended when both sides learned of the death of the Egyptian pharaoh who — as in the biblical story — perished in the Red Sea while pursuing Moses and the fleeing Israelites.

"Our ancestors kept the date of the day the pharaoh drowned in the sea and celebrated the death of the pharaoh," said local elder Elias Ali, 73.

In Djanet, a town of some 15,000 people, locals had been busy preparing long before the festival kicked off.

One participant, 64-year-old Hassan Echeikh, said that "during rehearsals, children learn to dance, and everyone can let off steam."

UNESCO in 2014 added the Sebeiba ritual and ceremonies to



its List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

It also noted the role of local craftspeople who make the uniforms, weapons, jewellery and musical instruments for the cere-

monies.

Sebeiba is "an important marker of cultural identity for Tuareg people living in the Algerian Sahara." — AFP



MoU signed for exports of iron products via UAE-Omani railway network



ABU DHABI: The Oman and Etihad Rail Co signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Jindal Steel and Power with the aim of providing sustainable logistical solutions to transport up to 4 million tonnes annually of Jindal raw materials and products, from its industrial complex in Sohar Port to the United Arab Emirates, via the Emirates-Omani railway network.

Under the MoU, Oman and Etihad Rail will support Jindal's operations by facilitating loading and unloading operations and integrating operations, in addition to supplying iron and steel requirements for the rail fleet and stations. Mohammed bin Zahran al Mahrouqi, Executive Vice-President of Oman and Etihad Rail, said: "The new partnership with the Jindal Shadeed Group is an affirmation of the company's commitment to upgrading integrated logistics services to meet the future needs and expectations of its customers, by providing comprehensive solutions that contribute to advancing growth in the various industrial sectors in the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE.

The MoU also contributes to enabling Jindal Shadeed Group to enhance the efficiency of its supply chain, benefiting from the sustainable, fast and cost-effective services of the UAE-Omani railway network.

For his part, Harsha Shetty, CEO of Jindal Shadeed, said that he is looking forward to increasing the spread of the company's high-quality products.

Its ability to transport nearly 4 million tonnes of material will greatly assist it in the company's operations, as well as its ambitions to reduce its carbon footprint while continuing its journey as an environmentally conscious company.

Oman and Etihad Rail Co have entered into many commercial and investment partnerships with major international companies in various industrial and transformational sectors to open new prospects of economic cooperation and provide more innovative logistical solutions and facilities that will contribute to raising economic efficiency and increasing opportunities for growth and sustainability for these companies. — ONA

OIA's assets rise to RO 18 billion, investments realise ROI of 8.8%

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has announced an increase in the size of OIA's assets to around RO 18 billion after realising an 8.8% return on investments during the year. In addition, OIA continued its support of the state's general budget with dividends that amounted to RO 5.6 billion from 2016 to the end of 2022.

Moreover, it showcased OIA's commitment to creating job opportunities for nationals with over 800 job opportunities created in OIA and its companies for Omanis. Additionally, SMEs have been awarded tenders and contracts worth about RO 190 million, demonstrating its ongoing efforts to support small and medium-sized enterprises and underscoring OIA's crucial role in driving economic growth and development of the national economy. The details are published in OIA's annual report which provides a comprehensive overview of its business activities, investments, and key developments for the year 2022.

This marks the second annual report published by OIA and reflects OIA's unwavering commitment to transparency and good governance, as well as its ongoing efforts to engage with the public and stakeholders.

The report offers valuable insights into OIA's performance and achievements throughout the year, highlighting its contributions to the national economy and economic diversification efforts of the Sultanate of Oman.

In his opening message in the report, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of OIA, said that OIA approached all circumstances and challenges in 2022 prudently. It developed strategies in line with future economic analyses and expectations, with an emphasis on diversifying investments and mitigating risks.



Sultan bin Salim al Habsi
Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of OIA

He added that the economic conditions did not constitute an obstacle to OIA's continuous journey toward promoting economic development and achieving financial sustainability in the Sultanate of Oman.

Through its investments that spread across more than 50 countries globally, OIA managed to record good returns on investment and rewarding profits.

This includes the Future Generations Fund; with investments in public and private markets, the fund realised a relatively better financial performance compared to a number of global sovereign funds. Meanwhile, the National Development Portfolio, which includes more than 160 companies in the Sultanate of Oman,



Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi
President of OIA

achieved total profits of more than RO 1.4 billion. Abdulsalam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, President of OIA, stressed in his foreword in the report that OIA addressed the events and economic conditions of 2022 through balanced plans and prudent investment decisions in line with local and global changes.

As a result, OIA realised good performance and productivity outcomes and expanded its investments.

Nationally, OIA's companies launched ten national projects across a number of governorates in some of the targeted sectors that have the potential to contribute to the desired economic stimulus, working hand in hand with the private sector and creating job opportunities for youth and business opportunities for SMEs.

Internationally, OIA invested in Group-14, a leading company that manufactures silicon anode car batteries; Crusoe Energy, which developed an innovative technology that captures flare gas emissions to generate clean energy; and Ascend Elements, a company that developed an innovative technology for recycling lithium-ion batteries.

In addition, OIA invested in 13 private equity funds across a number of continents, such as Europe, Asia, and North America. The report delved into the positive impacts of the Code of Governance for OIA Entities, which was published at the beginning of 2022.

It helped the companies improve their outcomes, enhance their performance, generate profits, and enhance their efforts toward reducing debts.

OIA companies reduced their debt by 23.4 per cent as a result of a structured plan that targeted the payment of RO 3 billion, including the prepayment of RO 600 million.

The report sheds light on OIA's divestment plan, which aims to enable the private sector to lead the Omani economy and enhance its contribution to driving economic development.

TURN TO PAGE 16

Pact signed for major veterinary vaccine project in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUG 2

National Veterinary Vaccine Co LLC (NVVCo), backed by Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj), has signed an agreement to set up a first-of-its-kind veterinary vaccine manufacturing plant at Sohar Freezone.

NVVCo, which is jointly promoted by Nitaj (part of Oman Investment Authority) and the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development (AAAID), has tapped leading consultancy firm STI Engineering to design and oversee the construction of the state-of-the-art animal vaccine production facility. NVVCo Chairman Ali al Shihhi, signed the agreement with Mutasim al Kindi, CEO – STI



Engineering on Monday.

"This will be the first such facility in the Sultanate of Oman, a landmark initiative that underscores our commitment to advancing veterinary healthcare in the region," said National

Veterinary Vaccine Co in a post.

"This act symbolises our forward-thinking partnership that aims to positively impact animal health through pioneering vaccines," it further stated.

Established in 2019 under the

auspices of Nitaj's well-diversified and vertically integrated food sector development company, National Veterinary Vaccine Co is a 50:50 partnership of Nitaj and AAAID, a pan-Arab financial institution that contributes to the

capital of agribusiness ventures in the Arab region.

The new project adds a biotechnology component to Nitaj's expanding portfolio with a focus on the development and production of innovative vaccines for livestock and poultry populations in the Middle East and the wider world.

According to joint venture partner AAAID, the veterinary vaccine project will be implemented in two phases: Phase I targets the aseptic filling and production of 114.5 million doses of different vaccines over an expansion plan period of five years; and Phase II – the production of 144 million doses of different vaccines from year 5 onward.

Earlier this year, the National Veterinary Vaccine Co signed a Memorandum of Understanding

with Indovax Pvt Ltd, a leading Indian animal vaccine manufacturer, for the supply of raw materials for veterinary vaccines manufacturing in Oman.

As the first international-class animal vaccine manufacturing facility in the Sultanate of Oman, the project will provide new impetus to the growth of the country's burgeoning poultry and livestock industry, which is backed by the government as part of its food security goals.

A sizable chunk of Nitaj's investments in the domestic food industry so far has gone into the dairy, poultry and livestock segments – the health and well-being of which will be further safeguarded when indigenously produced veterinary vaccines become available widely and cost-competitively in Oman.

UK law society calls to bring end to NDA misuse



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

The solicitors’ professional body has called on the government to tighten legislation governing non-disclosure agreements, to prevent their misuse in silencing victims of workplace bullying and sexual harassment.

In addition to that, the Financial Conducts Authority (FCA) has pledged to continue their crackdown on non-financial misconduct.

The Law Society of England and Wales said the legal framework and the enforcement process for NDAs also need improving, to ensure they “do not discourage matters of public interest such as some whistleblowing cases from being reported”.

“We urge the government to commit to making it harder for NDAs to be misused when they involve settling issues around workplace harassment or discrimination,” the society’s president, Lubna Shuja, said.

The government needs to fulfil its promise to legislate so that no provisions in a confidentiality clause can prevent disclosures to the police, health, legal or care professionals. This will make it harder to bury unacceptable behaviour.”

The Law Society’s comments come in response to an investigation by the Legal Services Board’s (LSB) into the role lawyers play when companies use NDAs to conceal wrongdoing in the workplace.

The group said that someone who suffers harassment “must still be able to seek compensation for the harm they’ve experienced.”

Shuja added: “If the case has a public interest aspect, it should be enforced by a separate body that encourages work environments to be free from harassment.”

The LSB’s probe comes as an increasing number of workplace sexual harassment and bullying allegations emerge in financial services.

In London’s financial district,

the most high-profile recent cases concern 19 allegations against hedge fund manager Crispin Odey, all of which he denies, and the widely reported allegations of sexual harassment at the Confederation of British Industry which led to the dismissal of the director-general, Tony Danker, last May, following separate allegations about his conduct although he claimed his sacking was unfair.

A Freedom of Information Act request recently revealed the Financial Conduct Authority has received 189 allegations or complaints since July 2021 about financial services workers’ behaviour.

Bullying, harassment and physical aggression accounted for 81 of the complaints, while another 40 related to sexual misconduct.

Bellevue Law barrister Georgina Calvert-Lee previously said that firms use NDAs to silence legitimate claims from staff that would be damaging. The agreement would prohibit staff from speaking about a matter or publicising it in any way.

Those signing are offered a settlement in return.

“Some may want to protect (an alleged perpetrator) because he may be the boss or founder. He could be a great rainmaker who brings in lots of money.

And so they know he misbehaves a lot of the time and they want to shut the person up because, of course, it is reputationally damaging,” Calvert-Lee said.

Data provided from non-profit Speak Out Revolution shows that 56 per cent of City (financial district) workers who lodged a formal complaint of unfair dismissal ended up leaving the company.

In its call for evidence, the LSB noted “evidence of misuse of NDAs to conceal unlawful activity, such as discrimination, harassment or abuse.”

In these instances, lawyers can be asked to enforce or advise on what amounts to an unethical or illegitimate use of NDAs, the board added.

Shuja said that solicitors are obliged by their code of conduct to act in their clients’ best interests, but noted the Solicitors Regulation Authority also has guidance prohibiting the misuse of the NDA.

“Those who advise on NDAs know they must meet good ethical standards otherwise they could face enforcement measures for non-compliance with legal requirements.”

PDO achieves historic milestone with drilling of 1,500th well at Nimr

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) celebrated the drilling of its 1,500th well at the Nimr cluster, the first achievement of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. The 1,500th well, referred to as NM-1500, is part of the Nimr cluster, located in the South of PDO’s concession area.

Covering a total area of 1,875 km, Nimr is the company’s largest cluster, and boasts the most extensive well stock spread across 23 fields. It contributes more than 12 per cent of PDO’s production (around 90,000 barrels per day) and possesses one of the most substantial hydrocarbon growth portfolios.

PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister said: “This historic accomplishment of drilling the 1,500th well in the Nimr cluster underpins our long-term commitment to sustainable growth and maximising value to Oman’s economy. We are setting new benchmarks in the energy sector, safely and competitively growing our core business, in terms of both cost and carbon performance.”

“This achievement is the result of a great cross-functional effort



within the organisation and we are immensely proud of everyone involved.”

The journey to NM-1500 began 43 years ago when the discovery well NM-1 was drilled in the Nimr-C area, with output starting a few years later following the commissioning of production facilities. The well is still yielding oil today.

Oil South Petroleum Manager Junaid Ghulam said: “NM-1500 symbolises the persistence,

resolve, sustainability and superb reputation of our company and its people to produce oil from the most challenging of sub-surface environments, consisting of heavy oil from complex classics with strong aquifers, for decades past and decades to come.”

In recent years, Nimr has evolved into an efficient well ‘factory’ delivering over 130 new wells a year. NM-1500 was operational just 15 hours after the rig move, a testament to the

well-oiled machine that Nimr has become.

This achievement was made possible through efficient management of operational issues and effective collaboration between various teams across the company.

Notably, the well NM-1000 was drilled in 2013 over a 23-day period in the complex and challenging Middle Gharif sandstone reservoir to a total depth of 2,100 metres and is now in production.

Honor launches H90 Series



MUSCAT: Leading global technology brand, Honor has announced the much-awaited launch of its H90 Series in Oman at a launch event held at the Crowne Plaza Muscat Hotel.

The event witnessed the presence of over 200 Honor channel partners from across Oman, and featured engaging presentations and interactive sessions, highlighting the unique selling points and functionalities of the new devices.

Equipped with remarkable camera advancements, display solutions focused on human needs, top-of-the-line hardware for lightning-fast performance, and intelligent operating software, the Honor H90 series includes two exceptional models: the H90 and H90 Lite.

The H90 model is available in two versions, 13 GB (8+5) + 256 GB

and 19 GB (12+7) + 512 GB; both versions are equipped with an ultra-clear 200 MP Back Camera, 50 MP Front Camera, and Eye-Comfort 380 Hz PWM Dimming.

Speaking on the sidelines of the launch, House Ma, GCC CEO of Honor, stated, “We are proud to extend our range of innovative product offerings to the Omani market. The launch of the Honor H90 series marks a significant step forward in our commitment to providing the most advanced technology to consumers. Representing our dedication towards delivering exceptional user experiences, the devices are designed to meet the evolving needs of tech-savvy consumers, and offer a seamless combination of innovative features, sleek design, and superior performance.”

Oman Vision 2040 workshop for private sector

MUSCAT: Oman’s Vision 2040 represented by Eng Harib al Busaidi, General Manager - Vision 2040, as well as Badriya al Maawali, Business Development Manager at

the National Programme for Investment and Export Development ‘Nazdaher’, and Shaikha al Rahbi, Performance Management and Organisational Planning at Nazdaher, among others visited the Mohammed Al Barwani Group of Companies to raise awareness on the vision’s role in facilitating the Omani business environment.

The session focused on how companies can align their strategies and operations with the Vision 2040 to make it a success under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The session was attended by around 100 employees from various MB Group companies in Oman, which included relevant employees in the energy, oil well services, engineering services, private air transport and mining sectors.

The session included presentations about various government programmes along with an overview of the Oman Vision 2040 Goals and Indicators, followed by a Q&A session to answer the questions of the attendees.



Air India Oman hosts agent and customers meet in Oman

MUSCAT: India’s premier carrier, Air India, recently held an exclusive agents’ meet along with its General Sales Agent (GSA) in Oman – National Travel & Tourism (NTT).

The event focused on strengthening the available agent network and offering better services for Air India customers across Oman.

The event was hosted by Parminder Pal Singh, Regional Manager – Gulf, Middle East & Africa. In attendance were

prominent travel agents and corporate customers from across Oman.

According to a spokesperson from National Travel & Tourism, “Air India has undergone a major transformation now being under the TATA Group. We wished to communicate this transformation and its benefits to our agents which in turn would benefit customers choosing to fly with Air India.

“Currently Air India and Air India Express caters to a vast base of customers



from various cities in India.”

Speaking about National Travel & Tourism’s association with Air India in Oman he said, “National Travel & Tourism has established a strong relationship as GSA for Air India/Air India Express (erstwhile Indian Airlines), as a flagship carrier, since 1995. We expect this relationship to grow even stronger with time as we look forward to welcoming customers to a whole new experience with Air India and Air India

Express.”

Established more than three decades ago, National Travel & Tourism (NTT) is Oman’s preferred Tours, Leisure, Travel and Freight Management consortium. Offering a unique one-stop total solution providing capability.

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saad bin Abdulhadi bin Issa al-Hadhri took the oath of office at Al-Burkhali Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SOME PEOPLE ARE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are failing, on deaf ears.

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and to commemorate the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new 50 OMR banknotes, which will begin circulation this month.

CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4



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Increased vigilance
against cybercrime
is a new imperative



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It is not uncommon to receive warnings and notifications about some companies offering 25-30 per cent profits on certain financial investments. One such recent warning was in the form of a video message shared by a Saudi youngster cautioning against certain misleading advertisements. The young man was referring to advertisements inviting unsuspecting investors to waste no time in buying shares in a certain company with the opportunity expiring in 72 hours. Such warnings have become an inevitable necessity today as a result of the losses incurred by some people due to the use of “deceptive” messages to mislead young people, and woo them to transfer their large sums of money to enter into these fictitious deals. Those who fall prey to such scams are particularly individuals who do not know much about investment. The aim of these warnings is the need to be careful and deal with these fraudulent messages, which ensnare the gullible into complex schemes at significant personal loss to them. The public is encouraged not to be deceived when receiving such messages, but rather should check the legality of the scheme

in question by cross-checking with those in established financial companies. The deceptive messages invariably make generous pledges of payments, while also using employing emotional pleas to snag their victims. The underlying goal is to scam the victim. Some of these scammers have specific expertise in these areas, and they take advantage of any loophole to obtain money, whether by legal means or by exploiting people and attracting them to these advertisements. In order to achieve their goals, the ‘WhatsApp’ service comes primarily as a fast messaging service that is popular with these fraudsters. Today, the ChatGPT service is also being misused to steal people’s personal data and then trade this info on the Dark Web. Identity theft compromises the victim’s credentials, credit cards, and other critical personal information. The hacked information and records are later traded on the dark web. Digital and net users should be careful to ensure their sensitive data is safeguarded. There are many methods of fraud in the world of communications today, in addition to the increase in the number of hackers as well as the victims of these fake operations. Hacking and other cybercrimes are increasing daily, while legislators are making efforts to combat unauthorised intrusions. Cybercrime in general has become one of the dangerous weapons that some possess and one of the important means in the world of white-collar crime, which is increasing with the emergence of more digital technologies, programs and applications for communications and related programmes.

Flexible rubber plant to expand
capacity at Samayil Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 2

Samayil Industrial City, which falls under the umbrella of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has signed a contract with Flexible Rubber Factory to expand the project, involving an investment of up to RO 1 million and covering a total area of 20,000 sqm. This expansion aligns with the efforts of supporting circular economy practices, promoting recycling initiatives, and boosting local value-added services. Sami al Kharusi, Owner and Executive Director of Flexible Rubber Factory (Marn), pointed out that the factory is the first of its kind in the Sultanate, specialising



in recycling used tires and transforming them into rubber-derived products following the process of extracting steel from the rubber powder. Notably, Marn stands as the

exclusive factory in the Gulf region that extracts and exports ‘rubber dough’ to global markets for tire manufacturing. Al Kharusi added that the factory stands out for its 100 per cent Omani management, and notably, 30 per cent of the production lines have been locally manufactured within the factory itself. A remarkable feat of the factory is its 100 per cent waste recycling rate, leaving no room for additional waste. Moreover, the factory plays a significant role in generating opportunities at the local level, as the rubber dough is used in the manufacturing of a wide array of products, including shoes, waterproof materials, asphalt and various rubber-based products.

OIA’s assets rise to RO 18 billion,
investments realise ROI of 8.8%

FROM PAGE 13
As for OIA’s divestment activities in 2022, it oversaw the listing of the Pearl REIF, the first real estate fund, in the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), as well as divesting from the International Maritime College Oman and preparing six assets in different sectors for divestment during 2023. OIA aims to utilise the returns from these divestments by directing them to investments in new sectors. The report also highlighted OIA’s positive efforts to attract foreign investments in its mandates. OIA signed agreements with its Saudi counterpart on investment opportunities in some projects at a value of RO 4.5 billion.

This includes the completion of the second phase of the Yiti Project and the Rakiza Fund. In addition, OIA signed agreements on some investments with the Emirati side, which include the Oman-Etihaad Rail Company and increasing the capital of Oman Technology Fund (OTF). The report indicates that OIA and its companies follow the government’s directives in regard to enhancing local content by maximising the in-country value efforts. In this regard, 4,700 SMEs were awarded contracts and tenders worth around RO 190 million, which represents 10.9 per cent of the total spending on the supply chain in OIA and its companies, of which Riyadh holders constituted 3.9 per cent. The report reflects the special attention OIA pays to recruiting and developing national competencies. It reported that the number of employees at OIA and its companies exceeded 38 thousand employees, with a total Omanisation rate of 78 per cent, with more than 1,700 jobs out of 4,000 identified for potential Omanisation within the next five years. The forty-one-page annual report addressed a number of topics, most notably OIA’s governance, the geographical distribution of its assets, and key updates about its strategic partnerships, companies, and other important topics.

OIA ranked second in the world, in the index of the development of governance and sustainability performance between 2022 and 2023, with an increase of 28 per cent, compared to 200 international sovereign wealth funds. According to a new report issued by the Global SWF platform that highlighted OIA’s commitment to international norms and principles, governance and transparency standards, and the disclosure principles and practices issued by the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds (IFSWF), adding that the data issued by OIA reflect on the investments and their strategies, in line with the goals of sustainable development.

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