

OMAN WELCOMES EMPTYING OF OIL FROM TANKER

The Sultanate of Oman on Saturday welcomed the United Nations’ announcement of the completion of the process of unloading oil from the floating tank FSO Safer off the coast of Yemen. In a statement by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman praised the efforts of the United Nations and the international community and the cooperation of the Yemeni parties to avoid an environmental disaster.



P9

BRANKO ANNOUNCES RED WARRIORS’ SQUAD FOR MUSCAT CAMP



P11

RUMMANA: PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON JABAL AKHDHAR’S POMEGRANATES



P13

OMANI-OWNED FIRM TO EXPLORE PHOSPHATE, ROCK POTASH ORES IN JORDAN



SALALAH CRYPTOCURRENCY MINING PROJECT

The Centre for Hosting, Data Processing and Mining of Cryptocurrencies will be opened on Sunday at the Salalah Free Zone, under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. Set up by Exahertz International, a subsidiary of Afaq Advanced Technologies, the facility has been supported by the ministry in line with the government’s efforts to promote digital investment and localise advanced technologies. The company provides a comprehensive set of services that contribute in enhancing the performance of local companies and achieving the highest levels of operational excellence through the development of national cadres and talents. **DETAILS ON P13**

ISLAMABAD



PAKISTAN PICKS CARETAKER PM

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and opposition leader Raja Riaz agreed on Saturday to name Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar as caretaker premier to oversee elections, the Prime Minister’s office said. Kakar, 52, a little-known politician from the southwestern province of Balochistan, will name a cabinet and head a government to steer the nation through economic and political crises until a new government is elected. **DETAILS ON P6**

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Al Rusayl-Bidbid road to open next year as 70% of work over

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, AUG 12

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that Al Rusayl-Bidbid road expansion project is progressing well according to the plan with the implementation rate currently standing at 70 per cent. The road is expected to open during the first quarter of next year.

The project involves construction of additional two more lanes and flyovers, pedestrian bridges and viaducts. Eng Yousef bin Abdullah al Mujaini, Director of the Road Construction Department at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said: “Many parts of Al Rusayl-Bidbid road expansion project have already been opened to traffic, and the entire road will be opened next year as the



construction work is progressing as per schedule. A total of 18 km of the road has been constructed including 4 km of interim diversions starting from Al Rusayl intersection in the Wilayat of Al Seeb to Fanja in the Wilayat of Bidbid.”

The project involves a number of bridges (the implementation rate of the flyovers reached 93 per cent), valley bridges (the implementation rate of which has reached 90 per cent). The work is under way at two pedestrian bridges, while two other bridges

are under supply process. All bridges will be completed in the coming months, the official said. The total length of the project is 27 km starting from Al Rusayl-Nizwa intersection to Al Sharqiyah Expressway intersection.

Accidents remain a concern on Salalah route

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With most people, including those from neighbouring countries, choosing to travel by road to Salalah, there has been a surge in road accidents in recent days.

Two people died, and seven others, including children, were injured due to a collision between two vehicles in the Wilayat of Haima on Friday. Emergency medical care

was provided to the injured, who were taken to hospital in critical condition, according to the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority in Al Wusta Governorate. It may be noted that the Al Wusta Governorate, home to the Wilayat of Haima, reported 85 road accidents in 2022, resulting in 33 people losing their lives. Last Friday, in a separate incident, the Police Aviation transferred



five injured people to Nizwa Hospital for treatment after they were involved in a road accident after midnight in the Qarn Al Alam area. On Saturday, the Royal

Oman Police (ROP) also warned the users of Haima-Thamrait road about low level of horizontal visibility and lack of visibility in some areas due to blowing dust. “The enormous speed is responsible for accidents. The police should activate speed control patrols and summon every reckless driver to the nearest station,” said a citizen via post following the accident.

TURN TO P2



ANCIENT ELEPHANT SPECIES OF OMAN!

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

August 12 is World Elephants Day, but did you know that there was a species very much close to elephant which existed in Oman?

Proof of that is an exhibit at Oman Across Ages Museum in Manah.

While the museum takes one through geological and historical journey of the nation, it also introduces us to the natural wealth.

The journey begins from 800 million years ago till the modern history of Oman.

This specific animal was primitive and its fossilised jaw bone is on display at the first gallery of the museum.

The jaw bone belongs to a large primitive elephant species that lived in Oman around 35 million years ago and it’s been named Omanitherium dhofarensis.

As the name suggests, the fossil has been found in Dhofar, from which the scientific name has been derived. Such elephants were among the first trunked mammals (Proboscideans) to appear on earth and were related to mammoths and mastodons.

Why major powers are eyeing a lunar gold rush?

MOSCOW: Russia launched its first moon-landing spacecraft in 47 years on Friday amid a race by major powers including the United States, China and India to discover more about the elements held on the earth’s only natural satellite. Russia said that it would launch further lunar missions and then explore the possibility of a joint Russian-China crewed mission and even a lunar base. Nasa has spoken about a “lunar gold rush” and explored the potential of moon mining.

The moon, which is 384,400 km from our planet, moderates the earth’s wobble on its axis which ensures a more stable climate. It also causes tides in the world’s oceans. Current thinking is that it was formed when a massive thing collided with earth about 4.5 billion years ago. The debris from the collision came together to form the moon. Temperatures vary: in full Sun, they rise to 127 degrees Celsius while in darkness they plummet to about minus 173 degrees



Celsius. The moon’s exosphere does not give protection against radiation from the Sun. The first definitive discovery of water on the moon was

The moon, which is 384,400 km from our planet, moderates the earth’s wobble on its axis which ensures a more stable climate. It also causes tides in the world’s oceans made in 2008 by the Indian mission Chandrayaan-1, which detected hydroxyl molecules spread across the lunar surface and concentrated at the poles,

according to Nasa. Water is crucial for human life and also can be a source of hydrogen and oxygen - and these can be used for rocket fuel. Helium-3 is an isotope of helium that is rare on earth, but Nasa says there are estimates of a million tonnes of it on the moon. This isotope could provide nuclear energy in a fusion reactor but since it is not radioactive it would not produce dangerous waste, according to the European Space Agency. Rare earth metals — used in

smartphones, computers and advanced technologies — are present on the moon, including scandium, yttrium and the 15 lanthanides, according to research by Boeing. It is not entirely clear how moon mining will work. The United Nations 1966 Outer Space Treaty says that no nation can claim sovereignty over the moon — or other celestial bodies — and that the exploration of space should be carried out for the benefit of all countries. — Reuters



International Youth Day focuses on green skills

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Regarded as potent catalysts for change, young individuals possess an arsenal of knowledge, innovative solutions, and critical thinking acumen. August 12 is observed as International Youth Day as a mark of global commitment to equip the youth with education, awareness, a proactive mindset, and the requisite skill set.

This year's theme, 'Green Skills for Youth: Paving the Path to a Sustainable World,' underscores the vital significance of empowering young minds with the competencies needed to nurture a greener planet. The selection of the theme, a collaborative effort involving youth organisations and members of the UN Inter-Agency Network, is oriented towards fostering youth development.

It was in 1999 when the United Nations General Assembly officially declared August 12 as International Youth Day. Part of the custom is also to choose a particular theme looking at various challenges that face youth of the world.

The day is celebrated in many ways and one of the suggestions



had also been to have round table discussions between adults and young people.

An advantage of the day is also that the youth of the world come together. The youth is always known for creative and original ideas supported with energy and enthusiasm.

In Oman, the Dhofar Governorate hosted youths from the Gulf region at the Gulf Forum for Youth Volunteering, which brought together youth volunteers to create awareness for volunteering.

One of the workshops they were attending looked at, 'Designing non-profit projects' where the prospective young volunteers learnt how to evaluate a project's financial feasibility,

developing marketing plans for them, attracting funding, and sustainability.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth stated, 'Volunteer Project Management' workshop comes at the Gulf Forum for Youth Volunteering dealing with several topics, the most important of which are: Managing voluntary projects and their stages — setting goals and planning, managing project resources (financial and human), evaluating the project in all its stages, and basic strategies in implementing projects.

The forum at the Dhofar Governorate looked at spaces for exchanging dialogue and experiences among Gulf youth.

Training workshops were held in the field of volunteering as well as the design and management of volunteer projects as well as four proposals for projects that serve volunteer work locally and in the Gulf countries.

The Objective of the Gulf Forum for Youth Volunteering is to establish a culture of volunteering among Gulf youths and develop a sense of responsibility and interaction with others.

The forum also highlighted inspiring examples of pioneering youth initiatives in the field of volunteer work.

■ MORE INFRA PROJECTS IN SALALAH



A number of service projects that include roads expansion, execution of new roads and bridges and improvement of electricity and water networks will be implemented in the Wilayat of Salalah and will probably place Dhofar Governorate as a global tourist destination with an advanced position in the world tourism ranking, said Shaikh Mohammed bin Saif al Busaidy, Wali of Salalah.

Heavy rains lash parts of Oman

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The latest satellite maps show the formation of rain clouds in the mountainous areas of the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Batinah North and South, Al Dakhiliyah, and Muscat, which may lead to active downward winds, low visibility, and the flooding of wadis.

For the past two days, Al Dhahirah Governorate has been witnessing rain in a number of wilayats, including in Ibri.

Oman Meteorology said that



there are opportunities for cumulus clouds and thunderstorms accompanied by active downward winds on the Hajar Mountains

and neighbouring areas during the afternoon and evening, with chances of sporadic rain in parts of the Dhofar Governorate.

Accidents remain a concern on Salalah route

FROM PAGE 1

"Every year we witness these horrific accidents as a result of collisions as the major stretch of the Salalah-Muscat road is a single carriageway, and the tourist season attracts many visitors to Dhofar."

According to experts, overspeeding is the primary cause of road accidents and its severe human and material damage.

Research studies found that reducing the speed by 10 km/hr reduces the probability of

accidents by 20 per cent, the number of injuries by 30 per cent, and deaths by 40 per cent.

The Directorate-General of Health Services in Al Wusta Governorate has been reporting emergency cases in various hospitals in the area due to accidents, with travellers suffering light to moderate and serious injuries.

It may be noted that 84 per cent (305,350) of the total 396,108 khareef visitors to Salalah this year (until July 31, 2023) came via road, compared to 90,758 visitors

who took air route.

These include travellers from neighbouring countries. The 1,000-km stretch to Salalah has often turned out to be fatal for some motorists and their families.

The ROP has advised all visitors to the Governorate of Dhofar to abide by traffic laws and regulations and the speed limit to ensure their safety and that of others and to pay attention to the presence of stray animals, especially at night, and sands that may accumulate on roads near desert areas.



INVITATION TO TENDER

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Oman attends G20 anti-corruption meet

KOLKATA: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), took part in the ministerial meeting of the Public Bodies and Authorities Responsible for Preventing and Combating Corruption of the Group of Twenty (G20) on Saturday in Kolkata, India.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation was headed by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI). The Sultanate of Oman participated in the meeting as a guest country.



In his speech at the meeting, the chairman of SAI confirmed that the State Audit Institution is following up on the implementation of the National Plan for Enhancing Integrity, a reference tool for national action and institutional integration in the field of promoting integrity and combating corruption. He added the plan comes within the framework of the Sultanate of Oman's keenness to adopt international best practices and its commitment to the requirements set forth by the United Nations

Convention against Corruption.

The meeting discussed the issuance of the Accountability Report for 2023 and a compendium of good practices in addition to the adoption of the G20 second ministerial declaration on combating corruption.

Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI), held bilateral meetings with heads of delegations in the presence of experts from SAI in which they discussed joint cooperation and the exchange of expertise. — ONA

674 hotels employ over 6,000 citizens

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There were 674 hotels in the country at the end of December 2022, which employed 20,294 people, including 6,642 Omanis and 13,652 expatriates.

Five-star hotels employed 2,015 Omanis and 3,354 expatriates, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total number of hotels in the country increased to 674 in 2022 from 612 in 2023 and 548 in 2020. Of these, 27 were five stars, 32 were four stars, 61 were three stars, 66 were two stars, and 488 were in the others category.

Muscat has the maximum number of 14 five-star hotels, followed by eight in Dhofar.

As for occupancy rates, Muscat reported 34.9 per cent, compared to Dhofar at 45.5 per cent, Musandam at 22.8, Al Batinah North at 42.7 per cent, Al Batinah South at 42.2 per cent, and Al Wusta at 52.4 per cent.

Five-star hotels had an occupancy rate of 34.9 per cent, compared to that of four stars with 49.8 per cent and three stars with 42.5 per cent.

According to the Director of the Oman Vision 2040 Office at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), the number of hotel rooms in the country at the end of Q1 2023 was 30,559 rooms, which will go up to 33,000 by 2025.

The government has been focusing on investments in integrated tourism complexes, which have been estimated at RO1.5 billion for the period 2021-2025.

Oman is expected to receive 3.5 million international tourists in 2023 compared to 2.9 million in 2022, a report by BMI, an entity affiliated with international rating agency Fitch said on Sunday.

The average annual growth of the number of tourists arriving in Oman over the medium term (2023-2027) is expected to reach 7.4 per cent, as demand for leisure and commercial tourism continues to drive recovery amidst high oil prices that boost domestic investments.

Diplomats mark 56th foundation day of ASEAN in Muscat

KABEER YOSUF
@kabeeryousef

ASEAN Committee in Muscat (ACM), an association of southeast Asian nations, celebrated ASEAN Day on August 8 in commemoration of the 56th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN.

Themed 'ASEAN Matters — Epicentrum of Growth', ASEAN Day is the annual commemoration of the founding of the regional intergovernmental organisation that fosters cooperation and integration among its 10 member states in Southeast Asia, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

On August 8 each year, member countries gather to celebrate the establishment of ASEAN. Throughout the ASEAN Day celebrations, member nations participate in various activities to promote regional solidarity and showcase ASEAN's achievements and objectives.

Suwat Kaewsook, Ambassador of Thailand and Chairman of the ACM, said for the past 56 years, ASEAN has been building



Shaikh Khalifa al Harthy, Political Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the members of the ASEAN Committee in Muscat (ACM).

a strong partnership of peace and stability for economic development and sustainability. The ASEAN community will be people-centred, leaving none behind and advancing towards the future altogether.

"I look forward to advancing ASEAN relationships with external partners, including Oman, in contributing towards continued peace, prosperity, and stability in the region in the years

ahead," said Noralizan Abdul Momin, Ambassador of Brunei Darussalam.

Mohamad Irzan Djohan, Ambassador of Indonesia, hoped that in partnership with ASEAN, member states could look forward to stability, growth, concrete implementation of the ASEAN outlook in the process of executing various treaties including in maritime cooperation, sustainable

development initiatives, meeting SDG's, as well as other possible areas of cooperation.

"Malaysia has chosen 'Our people, our community, Our Vision' as the theme during its chairmanship of ASEAN in 2015, where we aimed to steer ASEAN closer to its people. To this end, ASEAN has prepared itself well in ushering the region into its new phase in terms of its cooperation building on the three pillars of

the ASEAN community with the next milestone being 2025," Shaiful Anuar Mohammad, Ambassador of Malaysia, said.

Jacqueline Joan S Arquiza, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of the Philippines, expressed the commitment to work closely with fellow ASEAN members in the Sultanate of Oman through active participation in the ASEAN committee in Muscat.

"We believe that our connections will boost trade, investment and tourism growth in our own country and the ASEAN region as guided by its three fundamental pillars, political security, economic security and socio-cultural matters," Arquiza added.

"ASEAN is unity in diversity, and the vision for ASEAN is to be a peaceful, stable and resilient region within a global community of nations while still maintaining ASEAN centrality. With enhanced capacity and capabilities, the ASEAN community will be able to respond effectively to challenges and to seize the opportunities," said Syed Nouredin Syed Hashim, Chargé d'Affaires, Embassy of Singapore.

Osprey a common species found in any coast of Oman

YAHYA AL SALMANI
MUSCAT, AUG 12

Oman is home to hundreds of species of birds. Some of them are residents while others are migrants. According to official statistics, "there are 535 species of birds in the Sultanate of Oman. Migratory birds represent 80 per cent or more than 400 species, while 20 per cent are residents, which remain in the country throughout the year".

Prominent among residents are Osprey, which is often seen in Daymaniyat, Bandar Al Khairan, Qurayat, Sur, Masirah Island and Dhofar. This bird has several nicknames including sea hawk and fish eagle.

Globally, Ospreys nest in a wide variety of locations, from Alaska to New England, Montana to Mexico, Carolina to California. Their habitat includes almost any expanse of shallow, fish-filled water, including rivers, lakes, reservoirs, lagoons, swamps, and marshes. Whatever the location, Osprey nesting habitat must include an adequate supply of fish within a maximum of about 12 miles of the nest. They build nests in elevated areas to protect the eggs from predators such as raccoons during the ice-free season, which allow young birds' wing feathers to grow long enough for flight.

Environmental research indicates that the Osprey is the only hawk that eats almost exclusively live fish. In North America, more than 80 species of live fresh- and



Prominent among residents are Osprey, which is often seen in Daymaniyat, Bandar Al Khairan, Qurayat, Sur, Masirah Island and Dhofar. This bird has several nicknames including sea hawk and fish eagle

saltwater fish account for 99 per cent of the Osprey's diet. Captured fish usually measure about 6-13 inches in length and weigh one-third to two-thirds of a pound. The largest catch on record weighed about 2.5 pounds.

On very rare occasions, Ospreys have been observed feeding on fish carcasses or on birds, snakes, voles, squirrels, muskrats, and salamanders. Ospreys probably get most of the water they need from the flesh of their prey, although there are reports of adults drinking on hot days.

Environmental studies mention that this bird is "unable to dive to more than about three feet below the water's surface, Ospreys gravitate towards shallow fishing grounds, frequenting deep water only where fish school near the surface".

One of the most important facts monitored by environmental studies is that the Osprey may "log more than 160,000 migration miles during its 15-20 year life".

Ospreys are excellent anglers. Over several studies, Ospreys caught fish on at least 1 in every 4 dives, with success rates sometimes as high as 70 per cent. The average time they spent hunting before making a catch was about 12 minutes — something to think about next time you throw your line in the water.

Several studies in Oman helped to obtain new information and data that are related to the bird's behaviour. A lot of photographers are keen to document Osprey's life. "This task takes plenty of time. We are attempting to provide the specialists with new images for each bird in several sites and different habitats. This makes us proud and happy as we are participating in this national project," some photographers told the *Observer*.

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SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

While significant advancements have been made in enhancing inflight services, one aspect that needs attention is the size and design of toilets in the aircraft.

“We always have to endure various discomforts in an aircraft toilet that is just enough to accommodate a half-size of a slim body and trying to maintain hygiene and avoid health risks, and also complying with cultural and religious practices,” Ali al Rawahi told the Observer.

In most aircraft, particularly economy class, the toilets are cramped and compact in size. “We often struggle to enter and exit the toilet due to limited space, leading to discomfort and inconvenience. The confined area makes it challenging to perform even simple tasks like bending down to wipe or sanitise the toilet after use. Inside, we are unable to easily access essential amenities like sinks and soap dispensers,” Al Rawahi said.

“The absence of adequate space to hang personal belongings or clothing further adds to the discomfort. The task becomes more daunting during long-haul flights increasing the chances of discomfort and health issues.”

These unhygienic conditions pose not only a risk to individuals, but also contribute to the potential spread of illnesses on board and outside.

Providing a more comfortable and hygienic toilet experience should be a priority for airlines, as it directly affects passenger satisfaction and

overall travel experience.

Instead of treating extra toilet space as a cost, the airlines should treat this as an investment worth-for because after all, it is just the price of one less seat, which in practice, is nothing as many of these flights are often not filled. “During our recent flights to Istanbul and back to Muscat, an Airbus A330 was half-empty while the space for the toilets was terrible. A new mindset needs to be explored by both aircraft manufacturers and airline operators to address this issue,” said Al Rawahi.

“Passengers would appreciate and prefer airlines that prioritise comfort and well-being. This can lead to increased customer loyalty,

positive word-of-mouth marketing, and a competitive advantage in the industry. Furthermore, the provision of hygienic and spacious toilets would align with the preferred mode of travel for many individuals, especially for long-distance flights,” Al Rawahi said.

He pointed out that this issue presents an even greater challenge for caregivers of both the elderly and children as they always require assistance from family members, caregivers or flight attendants. Elderly individuals struggle due to physical limitations, while children’s smaller size and coordination limitations necessitate parental or guardian assistance.

Unfortunately, the limited space prevents the caregivers from entering the toilets to help them effectively.

For Muslim travellers, toilets are troubling. “The absence of a handspray (faucet), which is fundamental, hinders their ability to observe essential religious practices,” Malik Musallam said.

According to Malik, a practical solution to address these inconveniences is to reimagine and redesign the aircraft toilet.

By increasing the size of the toilet to approximately 1 metre by 1 metre, which is roughly the size of a single seat, passengers would have ample room to sit and stand comfortably, move around with ease, hang their clothing and access necessary amenities conveniently. Additionally, this larger space would even allow passengers to sanitise the toilet after use, further improving the overall experience.

By addressing these needs, airlines can foster inclusivity and cater to a broader range of passengers, making their journeys more comfortable and convenient.

Al Rawahi said Oman Air, which now has a new acting Chief Executive Officer, can embrace this unique opportunity to establish a pioneering benchmark that places the utmost importance on the well-being and comfort of flight passengers.

“By considering convenience, cultural and religious aspects, as well as addressing health risks through improved sanitation, Oman Air can position itself as an innovative and inclusive airline resonating with travellers from diverse backgrounds and countries,” he said.



Saudi names non-resident ambassador for Palestine

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia on Saturday named a non-resident ambassador for the Palestinian Territories who will also serve as consul general in Jerusalem, a new position announced amid speculation about possible future ties with Israel.

The role will be filled by Nayef al Sudairi, the current ambassador to Jordan, according to a social media post from the embassy in Amman confirmed by a Saudi foreign ministry official.

The appointment represents “an important step”

underscoring the desire of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman “to strengthen relations with the brothers of the State of Palestine and give it a formal boost in all areas”, Al Sudairi said in a video broadcast by the Saudi state-affiliated Al Ekhbariya channel.

The Palestinian Territories has traditionally been handled by Saudi Arabia’s embassy in Amman.

Saudi Arabia does not recognise Israel and did not join the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords that saw

the Jewish state establish ties with two of the kingdom’s neighbours, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

But during US President Joe Biden’s tour of the Middle East last year, the Saudi civil aviation authority announced it was lifting overflight restrictions on “all carriers”, paving the way for Israeli planes to use Saudi airspace.

The kingdom denied at the time that the move was “a precursor to any further steps” towards normalisation.

— AFP

DEATH TOLL HITS 80 IN HAWAII WILDFIRE

LAHAINA: Hawaii’s chief legal officer said on Friday she was opening a probe into the handling of devastating wildfires that killed at least 80 people in the state this week, as criticism grows of the official response.

The announcement and increased death toll came as residents of Lahaina were allowed back into the town for the first time — with most finding their homes reduced to ashes, and even the lucky few angry at a sense of abandonment.

“Where is the government? Where are they?” said a man who did not want to be named.

“This is insane. We can’t move freely, we don’t get the support, now we’ve heard about looting.”

Hawaii’s Attorney General Anne Lopez said her office would examine “critical decision-making and standing policies leading up to, during and after the wildfires on Maui and Hawaii islands this week.”

She added that her department would make the findings public.

Late on Friday, Maui County officials revised the death toll to 80, adding that 1,418 people were in emergency evacuation shelters. The fires follow other extreme weather events in North



A family look through the ashes of their family’s home on Malolo Place in the aftermath of a wildfire in Lahaina on Saturday. — AFP

America this summer, with record-breaking wildfires still burning across Canada and a major heat wave baking the US southwest.

Europe and parts of Asia have also endured soaring temperatures, with major fires and floods wreaking havoc. Scientists have said global warming caused by carbon emissions is contributing to the extreme weather.

For some of those who made it back into Lahaina, there was elation as they tearfully reconnected with neighbours they feared might not have gotten out alive.

“You made it!” cried Chyna

Cho, as she embraced Amber Langdon amid the ruins. “I was trying to find you.”

For some of the luckiest, there was joy -- albeit tempered by the scale of the tragedy that counts among the worst natural disasters to hit the state of Hawaii.

“I just couldn’t believe it,” Keith Todd said after finding his home intact.

“I’m so grateful, but at the same time it’s so devastating.”

Todd, 64, discovered his house and his neighbour’s house untouched, and his solar panels providing electricity to the fridge, which was still dispensing ice on demand. — AFP



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

Further to the announcement published on 25th June 2023 and 3rd August 2023 in respect of the proposed merger of HSBC Bank Oman SAOG (“**HSBC Oman**”) with Sohar International Bank SAOG (“**Sohar International**”) (the “**Merger**”), Ubhar Capital SAOC is pleased to announce that 172 shareholders of HSBC Oman have elected to receive cash consideration (the “**Cash Option Shareholders**”). The Cash Option Shareholders represent 96% of the total shareholding of HSBC Oman as of the record date, 3rd August 2023.

Since the Cash Option Shareholders represent more than 70% of the total shareholding of HSBC Oman as of the record date, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Merger approved by the Extraordinary General Meetings of HSBC Oman and Sohar International, each Cash Option Shareholder will receive 73% of their consideration in cash in the ratio of OMR 0.177 per eligible HSBC Oman share. Their remaining consideration will be issued as a whole number of shares of Sohar International calculated in the ratio of 1.467 Sohar International shares for every remaining 1 HSBC Oman share plus a pro-rata amount for any remaining fraction of an HSBC Oman share (rounded down to the nearest share).

HSBC Oman shareholders who did not elect or were not eligible to receive cash consideration will be issued a whole number of shares of Sohar International calculated in the ratio of 1.467 Sohar International shares for every 1 HSBC Oman share (rounded down to the nearest share).

The payment of the cash consideration to the Cash Option Shareholders and the issuance of shares in Sohar International is anticipated to be executed through Muscat Clearing & Depository between 16th to 17th August 2023.

The cash consideration shall be paid by Sohar International to each entitled HSBC Oman shareholder by funds being credited into the shareholder’s bank account registered in Muscat Clearing and Depository Company’s records. The shares of Sohar International will be issued in the names of entitled HSBC Oman shareholders into the investor accounts of such shareholders maintained with the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

Maximum Cash Component available (70% of HSBC Oman book value at 31 st March 2023)	OMR 248,141,600	70%
Total consideration elected as cash by HSBC Oman shareholders	OMR 340,786,324	96%
Total consideration payable as cash to HSBC Oman shareholders	OMR 248,141,600	70%
Total consideration payable as new Sohar International shares to HSBC Oman shareholders	877,826,210 shares	30%

Cash Option Manager:

Ubhar Capital SAOC

For any queries related to the Cash Option, kindly contact the following persons in Ubhar 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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Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)	
					Small and Medium Companies	Local Companies
263/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for people with disabilities in the North and South Al Batinah Governorates and Musandam Governorate	Companies specialized in the field of supplying medical supplies and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the excellent, first, second, third or fourth degree.	Friday 1-9-2023 02:00 PM	Thursday 21-9-2023 10:00 AM	10 R.O	25 R.O
264/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for people with disabilities in Al-Dakhiliyah and Al-Wusta Governorates					
265/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for persons with disabilities in the Governorates of South and North Al Sharqiyah					
266/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for people with disabilities in Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi Governorates					
267/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for people with disabilities in Muscat Governorate					
268/2023	Supplying prosthetic and assistive devices for people with disabilities in Dhofar Governorate					

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) . On **Sunday 13/8/2023**.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (**24402200**).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry"

www.mosd.gov.om



Malaysians vote in six state elections seen as referendum on Anwar

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysians in six states went to the polls on Saturday to vote for state assembly members in elections widely seen as a barometer of support for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's unity government.

While the elections are unlikely to immediately affect Anwar's current two-thirds majority in parliament, analysts said his hold on power could weaken if his Pakatan Harapan coalition suffers a setback, especially among Malay Muslim voters in the largely Islamic Southeast Asian nation.

Polls closed at 6:00 pm (1000 GMT), with the results expected to be known later in the day.

Voter turnout was between 56-70 per cent of the more than 9.7 million registered voters as of 4:00 pm, the Election Commission said.

The results for the 245 assembly seats at stake in the states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, Penang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan are expected to be known within hours.

Of the six, Anwar's coalition currently holds Negeri Sembilan and the country's two richest states: Selangor, home of Malaysia's biggest port, and Penang, which hosts a thriving semiconductor industry.

The other three states are controlled by an influential rural-based Malay Muslim alliance led by former prime minister Muhyiddin Yassin.

Malays account for two-thirds of Malaysia's 33 million population, which includes large ethnic Chinese and Indian minorities.



Selangor's chief minister Amirudin Shari (C) of Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) and his wife Masdiana Muhamad gesture before casting their vote at a polling station during the state election in Selayang on Saturday. — AFP

Anwar, in an appeal on Facebook on the eve of the polls, urged voters to give his coalition a "clear and strong mandate... to bring a better agenda for all races in this country".

The 76-year-old, who had campaigned on a promise of reforms in last year's general elections, is pushing for a more inclusive society where other races are allowed greater participation, while his opponents want primacy of the Malay Muslim majority.

Opposition coalition Perikatan Nasional has expressed confidence in making further inroads.

One key Perikatan member is the Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, which aims to create a theocratic state.

Having won 49 parliamentary seats, or more than 20 per cent of the 222-member parliament last year, PAS has in recent months stepped up racial and religious rhetoric to shore up support.

"I feel quite excited and I hope Perikatan can win again in this area," said housewife Jamilah Baharin, 48, who voted in Kedah state, a PAS stronghold.

PAS spokesman Khairil Nizam Khirudin said that Anwar

"promised a lot but has not delivered".

James Chin, a Malaysia expert at the University of Tasmania in Australia, said the election was being watched for the level of support reformist Anwar draws among Malay Muslims.

He warned of "dire" consequences if Anwar loses even a single state.

"The first direct implication is that he cannot undertake any major reforms or fundamental structural reforms to the economy or to politics," Chin said.

— AFP

Little-known senator to be Pakistan caretaker PM

ISLAMABAD: A little-known senator from Pakistan's least-populous province will be caretaker prime minister to see the country through to the next election, the leader of the opposition said on Saturday.

Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar, from Balochistan Province, was named by opposition leader Raja Riaz Ahmad following a meeting with outgoing premier Shehbaz Sharif.

"We first agreed that whoever should be prime minister, he should be from a smaller province so smaller provinces' grievances should be addressed," said Riaz.

Kakar will lead Pakistan through to the next general and provincial elections due by November, but which some officials have already said will be delayed until next year.

The country has been in political turmoil since former international cricket star Imran Khan was dismissed as premier by a no-confidence vote in April 2022, culminating in him being jailed last weekend for three years for graft.

Authorities have cracked down hard against Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party in recent months, crushing his grassroots power by rounding up thousands of his supporters and officials.

Parliament was officially dissolved last Wednesday with elections due within 90 days according to the constitution.

But there has been speculation for months that they would be delayed as the establishment grapples to stabilise a country facing overlapping security, economic and political crises.

Data from the latest census



Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar

carried was finally published last weekend and the outgoing government said the election commission needs time to redraw constituency boundaries.

Asked this week on television if a vote would take place this year, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah replied: "An absolutely straightforward answer — No."

The election commission has yet to comment.

Last month parliament rushed through legislation that gives the caretaker government more power to negotiate with global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, another clue it may be around for a while.

Some analysts think the delay could give time for the main coalition partners — the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) — to figure out how to address the challenge of Khan's PTI.

"But in reality, delaying the election could simply anger the public more and galvanise an opposition that has already suffered through months of crackdowns," said Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center. — AFP

India proposes sweeping overhaul of British-era criminal laws

NEW DELHI: Indian government unveiled new punishments for mob lynchings and crimes against women in a proposal for the country's biggest criminal justice overhaul since the British colonial era.

India's Penal Code and other statutes governing the police and courts were introduced in the 19th century, while the country was governed by the British crown.

Sweeping changes to the laws would remove archaic references to the British monarchy and other "signs of our slavery", Home Minister Amit Shah told parliament on Friday.

"These laws were made to strengthen the colonial rule, to protect colonial rulers, and the

intention was to punish and not give justice," he told lawmakers while introducing bills for the reforms.

"We are going to change this and the spirit of these new laws will be to protect the constitutional rights of our citizens."

New provisions in the laws would impose the death penalty on perpetrators of mob lynchings and minimum sentences of 20 years for gang rape.

The bills also introduce community service provisions for petty crimes to ease the chronic backlog of criminal cases in Indian courts, which have millions of pending cases. Fixed timelines would be imposed for trials and criminal investigations in a country where both can drag on for years



Schoolchildren dressed as freedom fighters and deities wave national flags ahead of the country's Independence day in Amritsar on Saturday. — AFP

without result.

The bills have been referred to a parliamentary committee for further deliberation but could be passed before the current legislature dissolves ahead of general elections next May.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has sought to remove lingering symbols of colonial rule from India's history books, urban landscape and political institutions. It has renovated the capital New Delhi's parliamentary precinct, originally designed by the British, to replace old colonial-era structures.

Last year Modi inaugurated a statue of Subhas Chandra Bose, an independence hero venerated for taking up arms against the British.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

VATICAN CITY

End political violence in Ecuador: Pope

Pope Francis has condemned the assassination of Ecuadorean presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio and called for an end to political violence in the South American country.

Villavicencio, a former lawmaker and crusading anti-corruption journalist, was gunned down as he left a campaign event on Wednesday, less than two weeks before the August 20 election.

"In the face of the suffering caused by unjustifiable violence,



which he condemns unreservedly, His Holiness calls upon all citizens and political forces to unite in a common effort for peace," the Vatican said in a telegram of condolence sent to Archbishop Alfredo José Espinoza Mateus of Quito.

ROME

Charity boat rescues 76 migrants

A charity rescue ship picked up 76 migrants on an overloaded wooden boat in the Mediterranean and was headed for the southern Italian port of Naples, the charity said on Saturday.

Another boat carrying 59 rescued migrants docked in Porto Empedocle in southern Sicily on Saturday as the number of people attempting the perilous central Mediterranean crossing grows.

There were seven women and 24 children among the 76 people picked up in international waters



in the Maltese Search and Rescue zone on Friday night, the charity EMERGENCY said.

Crammed on deck, they waved and cheered as an EMERGENCY crew came into view in a rubber dinghy launched from the main rescue ship.

PARIS

Alert prompts Eiffel Tower evacuation

A security alert on Saturday prompted the evacuation of three floors of the Eiffel Tower in central Paris, France's most emblematic symbol which drew 6.2 million visitors last year.

SETE, the body which runs the site, said bomb disposal experts as well as police were scouring the area, including a restaurant located on one of the floors.

"It's a usual procedure in this kind of situation which however is rare," a spokeswoman said.

Visitors were evacuated from



both the three floors and the square under the monument shortly after 1:30 pm.

Construction work on the tower began in January 1887 and was finished on March 31, 1889. It received two million visitors during the World's Fair of 1889.



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

You are being stalked

Last week I watched a movie about a young waitress who finds a handbag on the subway and decides to return it to its owner. The bag had a card with a name and an address which leads her to an eccentric French widow who lives alone. The two women become friends. The young woman, who has recently lost her mother, starts visiting the widow in her house and baking with her. One day, while looking for flour she discovers many handbags similar to the one she found on the subway each with the same card and address. She becomes suspicious of the widow and stops visiting or returning her call which made the widow very angry. She starts stalking the waitress at the restaurant where the young woman works and demands an explanation then keeps standing in the restaurant outside for hours. Later, she kidnaps the young woman and ties her up in a room and forces her to play the piano with her and pretend to be her daughter. Stalking is a pattern of unwanted contact or

behaviour that leads someone to feel upset, anxious, or scared for his or her safety. The behaviour is consistent and intentional as opposed to one or two isolated incidents and it persists after the individual has asked the stalker to stop contacting them. Stalking can sometimes escalate to a physical attack, sexual assault, or even murder. Stalking is a common theme that has been frequently featured in psychological thrillers. But tales of relentless pursuit of romantic interest dates back to 4,000 years ago with the story of Gilgamesh. Since then, psychologists have been trying to understand and deal with someone who engages in such obsessive and unwanted pursuits. Defining stalking has proved to be a challenge. In a recent paper, psychologists explained that there exist “gray areas” where accepted courtship practices and stalking overlap. Some cultures see stalking as a form of “romantic persistence” that is often celebrated, admired, or viewed sympathetically. A study from the UAS published in the year 2020 about men cyberstalking women reported evidence that among the study group, there

STALKING IS A PATTERN OF UNWANTED CONTACT OR BEHAVIOUR THAT LEADS SOMEONE TO FEEL UPSET, ANXIOUS, OR SCARED FOR HIS OR HER SAFETY

was a culture of normalising, minimising and romanticising stalking. Some people perceived stalking as a form of harmless flattering. This perception may arise when people fail to see that certain behaviours that may be acceptable or even welcome to a person within a relationship like sending them multiple gifts or calling their family members without permission. It can be seen as inappropriate or even criminal when the pursuer is no longer in a relationship with that person or never was. With advances in technology, stalking through social media can be practiced sometimes by average people with no criminal history or intentions. I remember a young woman who got divorced but continued to follow her ex-husband on Instagram using fake accounts. She described feeling angry that he moved on with his life while she had not. While realising she was stalking him, she felt it was her way of coping with the divorce. In this case, this behaviour was impacting her more than the victim. Being able to recognise red flags that suggest stalking is the first step to preventing it.

In the shadow of his father and brother

PAUL HANDLEY AND CHRIS LEFKOW

Shadowy business deals, drugs and women: Hunter Biden has lived a turbulent life under two shadows — that of his father, President Joe Biden, and his older brother Beau, who died of cancer in 2015. The 53-year-old Hunter Biden’s efforts to put his lurid past behind him suffered a setback on Friday as Attorney General Merrick Garland named a special counsel to look into his affairs. Hunter Biden’s legal and personal troubles have made him a vulnerable target for Joe Biden’s Republican political opponents and the attacks have ramped up with the Democratic president now seeking a second term in office. Republicans in Congress have launched multiple probes into business deals Hunter Biden entered into in China and Ukraine while his father was vice-president under Barack Obama. A plea deal Hunter Biden reached with the Justice Department to avoid prison on tax and gun charges fell apart in July and Garland on Friday elevated the prosecutor who brought those cases to special counsel status. If some see Hunter as the family black sheep, his father has stuck by him. “My son has done nothing wrong. I trust him. I have faith in him,” Joe Biden said recently as Republicans lawmakers embarked on a new investigation. A graduate of the elite Yale law school, Hunter drifted between jobs in government, banking and lobbying before landing in a family-controlled hedge fund and his own international business consultancy in the late 2000s. But his life was marred by alcoholism and addiction to crack cocaine and stints in rehabilitation. Hunter ties his addictions to the car crash that killed his mother and sister when he was three years old and hospitalised him with a fractured skull. But he also lived in the shadow of Beau, who had a sterling military career and went into politics before being felled by brain cancer in 2015. Joe Biden frequently speaks publicly about the loss of his elder son, who he had predicted could become president one day. Meanwhile Hunter rarely got a mention. Hunter wrote in his memoir that after Beau’s death his drug usage only got worse, hitting bottom around the time his father’s vice-presidency ended in 2017.

— AFP

What we lose to shoplifting



Pamela Paul

The writer is a columnist, journalist, editor and author. Since 2022, she has been an op-ed writer for *The New York Times*

Few shopping experiences are more intimate than a visit to the pharmacy. The contents of your basket may disclose waxy ears, hemorrhoids, insomnia, constipation, a messy rash or the compulsion to try all permutations of Reese’s product line. The pharmacy is a place where people like to slip in and out unnoticed, hoping the cashier doesn’t linger over each item at checkout. But privacy is harder to preserve now that drugstores, to thwart shoplifters, increasingly lock their stock behind cabinet doors, with buttons to push in order to get an employee’s attention. A pimply boy has to hail an employee to free his benzoyl peroxide and a 14-year-old girl needs to be watched as she selects a tampon that suits her cycle. Even for adults, it’s hard not to be self-conscious about having a store employee trail you through the drugstore like a personal shopper as you ponder which dental floss to buy. I thought about this sad atmosphere of surveillance during one of my recent visits to San Francisco, where the broader downtown retail environment has been left tattered by store closures. Walking from aisle to aisle pushing a series of buttons, I felt like an imposition on a pharmacy’s staff. After a string of these requests, I left before securing everything I’d planned to buy. The whole experience felt bad: I was sorry for the shopkeeper, sorry for the employees, sorry for being there, sorry for not buying enough. I made no impulse purchases. There’s good reason for the added security. The material costs of shoplifting are considerable. In 2021, an estimated \$94.5 billion nationwide was lost to shoplifting and other forms of “retail shrink” (which includes damaged or lost goods and employee theft). According to a survey conducted by the National Retail Federation in June, 53 per cent of consumers believe that retail crimes such as shoplifting and looting have increased in their communities since the pandemic. The social and economic causes of shoplifting have become

a source of debate, as has the extent of the problem. There are complicated questions around criminal enforcement, policing and punishment. But leaving those issues aside, there is also an undeniable quality-of-life impact from the real or perceived increase in shoplifting. It is felt by shoppers, store employees, security personnel, store owners and our communities — and in ways more serious than awkward encounters over tampon purchases. The most obvious effect is a sense of increased danger. Stores simply feel less safe. For a variety of reasons, police now seem less inclined to

STORE OWNERS ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO BEAR THE COST OF RETAIL THEFT. SHOPLIFTING ISN’T JUST THEIR PROBLEM. WE ARE ALL PAYING A PRICE

arrest shoplifters. In Chicago, for example, overall arrests for reported thefts dropped from a rate of about 10 per cent in 2019 to less than 4 per cent in 2022, according to Wirepoints, a right-leaning watchdog group. Of the nearly 9,000 reported retail thefts in Chicago in 2022, only about 17 per cent resulted in arrests, Wirepoints said. This apparent shift in policing priorities can put increased pressure on store security personnel and front line workers to police their own stores, even when they are inadequately prepared to do so. Most people who work in stores expect to fold shirts, restock shelves and handle customer requests — not to confront brazen and sometimes hostile shoplifters or organised theft rings. Working in an environment in which shoplifting is prevalent is stressful and can be traumatising. Some workers are even punished for trying to help. In Rincon, Georgia, a 68-year-old Lowe’s employee was fired this year after leaving the store to try to stop suspected shoplifters, one of whom punched her. She

had worked for Lowe’s for 13 years, but her actions in pursuing the thieves who had left the store were apparently against policy. (She was subsequently rehired.) Shoplifting adds pressure to retailers still reeling from Covid-19 and the ongoing pressures of online alternatives. For small shopkeepers, bodegas and mom-and-pops, losses from theft can be devastating to the bottom line. Even large chains like Walmart, Whole Foods, REI and Walgreens have closed or are planning to close major retail locations in cities like Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco. While multiple factors are behind the closures, shoplifting is frequently cited as one of them. In May, Brian Cornell, the CEO of Target, called theft “a worsening trend that emerged last year,” warning of a projected loss from retail shrink, including theft, of \$500 million more than the previous year. “The problem affects all of us, limiting product availability, creating a less convenient shopping experience and putting our team and guests in harm’s way,” Cornell said. It can also lead to higher prices for everyone else. The reason retailers traditionally invest in training store personnel is that they believe employees are critical to creating a positive shopping experience. A store that signals that it expects shoppers to steal the merchandise has the opposite effect. “From the consumer’s perspective, the feeling that everyone is watching you, suspecting you of shoplifting, creates a negative atmosphere,” says Angela Y. Lee, a consumer psychologist and professor of marketing at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern. Lee compares the feeling to the way in which many people have long felt racially profiled while shopping. “If you’re treated like a potential thief,” she says, “you’re going to have a bad experience, which will then make you less likely to shop there.” Store owners are not the only ones who bear the cost of retail theft. Shoplifting isn’t just their problem. We are all paying a price.

— *The New York Times*

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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Covet their value... because you can't spend thanks

Despite our good natures, our concern for nature and the environment, and our humanitarian dispositions, we are still by nature, covetous. Not in the greedy, avaricious manner that the word accurately implies, but with subtlety, we would love to have the trappings of the more affluent, wouldn't we? Not all, and not always, and not always for ourselves, so...

It's our nature to want the better things in life, that being what has driven progress, socially, technologically, scientifically, architecturally, ecologically, environmentally, economically... well, you get the idea. So, from those perspectives, we can't complain, can we? However, there are sectors of our societies, all societies, that must occasionally look askance and ask themselves why am I doing this? Why do I not have a 9 to 5 job that I can forget about when I go home? Why do I not have a work-life balance? Why am I paid a worker's wage for what I do? I'm referring, of course, to those three bastions of every society, our teachers, nurses, and police, who are the three pillars of every, and any meaningful society, yet we, societies, treat them with appalling, bordering on callous, disregard, in terms of reward.

Health professionals are rarely motivated by 'the money,' however doctors do end up on a pathway to wealth, while our nurses are comparatively, on a pathway to penury, their salaries little better than shop assistants and secretaries. We rely, surely, upon their passion, compassion, and concern for their fellow human, to keep them 'locked-in' to nursing, yet we will not value them. The doctors of this world are amazing people and deserve every reward they get... yet they do not the messy, dirty, unappealing side of their profession. "Nurses," wrote Jean Watson, "are a unique kind, with an insatiable need to care for others, which is both their greatest strength and their fatal flaw." But this, we all know... so why not reward them better?



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

Our police, again, anywhere in the world, put themselves between us and the lawless. They protect us, and they are another sector of society that can take off and hang up their uniform after work and 'unbecome' a policeman. When you are a policeman or woman, you are a one for life, and the reprimands, penalties, and restrictions that go with the job are rarely forgotten by miscreants. The policeman's prayer asks for the courage to face and conquer their own fears and go where others will not. It seeks the strength to protect others and lead them to safety. It calls for dedication to their jobs and their communities. It begs concern for those who trust, compassion for those in need, and finally, for God to be at their side. Given these standards... surely, they deserve more?

And what about our teachers? Oh, you all throw your hands in the air... "They only work from 7 till 2, or 8 till 3, and they don't work half the year..." Try being a teacher and explaining how much of what goes into your workday, your work week, and your year. Typically, whoever you are talking to will either dispute your version in disbelief, or 'switch-off.' They will dismiss preparation as "easy," marking as "ticks and crosses," homework as "getting us to do your job..." and so on. Yet, these same people will, without a moment's concern, because it's "their job," place their children in the hands of a teacher, or teachers, for roughly 200 days a year with little concern and less support. How about some meaningful consideration?

Now some of you will be indignant... yet I will remind you... that these are your own sons and daughters. Your society's sons and daughters. They are the best of the best, who do what they do because of the goodness of their hearts, their intellect, their compassion, their bravery, and their resilience, and not for the money. That doesn't mean we should ignore them. Don't make them beg for what little more or greater consideration they deserve, because if we paid them their true value... we couldn't afford them.

IT'S OUR NATURE TO WANT THE BETTER THINGS IN LIFE, THAT BEING WHAT HAS DRIVEN PROGRESS

A RAINBOW IN THE BACK



A rainbow is seen over Auckland, New Zealand, on Saturday. – Reuters

Will generative AI make or break democracy?

Predicting how generative artificial intelligence might affect democracy is a formidable challenge, given that its potential applications are still largely unknown — and seem virtually limitless. While narrow AI tools, designed for specific tasks like reconciling voter records, are already in use in various countries, the impact of generative AI is harder to foresee. This technology is not merely another app, like a social-media platform, but rather a foundational technology more akin to the emergence of the Internet itself. It will influence democracy both directly, transforming the mechanics of elections and governance, and indirectly, as it threatens to shift the very foundations of information ecosystems, public trust, and opinion.

In terms of direct impact, generative AI could revolutionise policymaking by enabling a more accurate and nuanced understanding of potential policy outcomes. Organisations like Climate Change AI, for example, already use this technology to explore how "roads, power grids, and water mains must be designed to account for the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events."

Law-enforcement agencies use it for surveillance and predictive policing. More recently, lawyers and judges have begun to employ generative AIs like ChatGPT to assist them in filing cases and even in issuing court rulings.

Meanwhile, concerns are growing



Kelly Born

The writer is a former director of Stanford University's Cyber Policy Center, is Director of the Democracy, Rights, and Governance initiative at the David and Lucile Packard Foundation

WHILE GENERATIVE AI TOOLS COULD OFFER SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS IN FIELDS SUCH AS MEDICINE, MANUFACTURING, AND EDUCATION, HOW THEY ARE APPLIED TO ELECTORAL POLITICS MUST BE CAREFULLY REGULATED

regarding how generative AI will affect elections. At least 45 countries will hold elections in 2024, including globally consequential races in the United States and the European Union.

While narrow AI is already helping to streamline election administration, generative AI could introduce new biases and uncertainties. America's highly decentralised election system, for example, encompasses 10,000 jurisdictions, with each state maintaining separate voter records that must be constantly updated as voters move, die, or otherwise become ineligible. Narrow AI systems are now extensively used in this process, and while they can boost efficiency, early evidence suggests that the algorithms used to maintain voter rolls struggle with matching Asian names and may be biased against minorities in general. Similar biases have been identified in the use of AI for signature verification, a common requirement for mail-in ballots.

But AI's influence could easily extend beyond merely administering elections; it could also be used to help shape electoral rules and structures, affecting how competitive elections are, the degree of political polarisation, voter turnout, and candidate incentives. As many as 90 per cent of US Congressional districts are

considered "safe" from a partisan perspective — meaning that the outcome is typically predictable, favouring either Republicans or Democrats. There are now dozens of apps helping legislators draw district lines. While advanced generative AI programmes could be used to improve the fairness and representativeness of the US political system, they could just as easily enable even more repressive partisan gerrymandering by political incumbents, further shielding parties and candidates from genuine competition.

Beyond redistricting, generative AI could facilitate other structural reforms. European countries, for example, use a mix of closed and preferential voting. By contrast, the US uses single-member winner-take-all districts. Reformers seeking to

promote moderation and reduce polarisation debate the merits of reforms such as ranked-choice voting, open primaries, and proportional representation. Yet the potential impact of these changes across diverse political environments and contexts, and their potential interaction effects when combined, remain unclear. Generative AI could shed light on these complex dynamics, enhancing our ability to estimate electoral reforms' long-term effects.

While these changes would directly influence the mechanics of democracy, the indirect effects are perhaps more concerning. AI is likely to disrupt labour markets profoundly, with all of the attendant political fallout. It may also reshape the information ecosystems that governments, candidates, and voters rely on.

Generative AI could prove to be a valuable asset for journalists, streamlining tasks such as summarising government hearings(as one effort just launched in the US is seeking to do), organising contributions from various sources, and even assisting in the drafting and editing of articles. And it could result in even more journalists being laid off.

Social-media platforms could use AI to moderate online content, combating the spread of election disinformation and sparing human content moderators from the often traumatic task of screening the Internet's most offensive content. But generative AI will also almost certainly exacerbate today's disinformation crisis, making it easier to craft highly personalised, persuasive content that can be tested, tweaked, tailored, and targeted across all media. In April, the Republican Party released its first-ever AI-generated attack ad against US President Joe Biden. It is not far-fetched to imagine a political landscape flooded with cheaply produced ads (or even podcasts) using the voices or images of trusted sources and crafted to manipulate specific audiences, using personal online histories to identify and exploit psychological vulnerabilities. Whether this really is a game-changer remains to be seen.

@Project Syndicate, 2023



Generative AI could revolutionise policymaking.



England's Alessia Russo scores their second goal. — Reuters

Russo's second-half goal lifts England into World Cup semifinals

ENGLAND NOW FACE HOSTS AUSTRALIA ON WEDNESDAY IN SYDNEY FOR A PLACE IN FINAL



England's Alessia Russo celebrates scoring their second goal with Georgia Stanway and Ella Toone. — Reuters

SYDNEY: Alessia Russo's second-half goal lifted England to a thrilling 2-1 quarterfinal victory over Colombia on Saturday and into the Women's World Cup semifinals for the third consecutive time.

Lauren Hemp also scored for the European champions, who now face hosts Australia on Wednesday in Sydney for a place in their first World Cup final.

"It's exciting, what more do you want in front of a home crowd?" Russo, who was named player of the match, told ITV. "We got a bit of that tonight against Colombia. You want to play against the best teams."

"England fans can always dare to dream but we'll carry on working hard," Russo said.

Colombia, who were the lowest-ranked team remaining at 25 and had never made it past the round of 16, opened the scoring with a goal from Leicy Santos to the delight of the large swathes of yellow-and-blue clad Colombian fans among the crowd of 75,784 at Stadium Australia.

The fourth-ranked Lionesses, missing top scorer Lauren James to a two-game suspension, were one of just four top-10 ranked teams left standing — along with Sweden (3), Spain (6) and Australia (10) — in a tournament that has been full of delightful twists and turns.

"I'm very, very happy to stay here for another week," coach Sarina Wiegman said.

"I think the team showed again some resilience and a lot of togetherness."

Asked what Wiegman — the lone female head coach remaining from the original dozen — said in the post-game huddle, Russo answered: "Sarina said that she was proud. Lots to work on and we get rested and go again."

Russo netted the winner in the 63rd minute, pouncing on a through ball from Georgia Stanway that bounced off a Colombia defender and into the path of the Arsenal forward, who fired low and hard into the bottom corner.

Santos scored against the run of play in the 44th minute, launching a curling ball that deflected off the leg of Rachel Daly and into the top corner of the 18-yard box, grazing Mary Earps's fingertips and going into the far corner of the net.

Trailing for the first time in the tournament, the Lionesses, who are undefeated in 37 of their last 38 games, kept their composure and when Colombian keeper Catalina Perez fumbled and lost the ball on Russo's shot, Hemp was there to poke it in from six yards out just before the half-time whistle.

"This team is really special. Long may that continue," Hemp said. "The atmosphere was incredible. The connection I have with Alessia is really strong. Bring on Australia. I am absolutely buzzing. I am over the moon and can't wait." — **Reuters**

Branko announces Red Warriors' squad for Muscat camp

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 12

Oman national football team coach Branko Ivankovic has announced a 29-man squad for the upcoming domestic preparatory camp which will take place during September 1 to 8 in Muscat.

The camp will prepare the team for the preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 for the Fifa World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 which will begin in November.

Oman, ranked 72nd in the world, will face Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Chinese Taipei/Timor Leste in Group D of the joint qualifiers.

Red Warriors' star defender Mohammed al Musallami is back in the recently announced squad besides the other top players like Al Mundher al Alawi, Amjad al Harthy, Mohsin al Ghassani and others.



The coaching staff will finalise the squad after the few rounds of the top-tier league which will begin on August 17. The forthcoming list will be for the external camp which will be held in Minnesota, USA, in September which will feature an international



friendly match against USA on September 12. Oman will commence their campaign in the Preliminary Joint Qualification against the winner of Chinese Taipei or Timor Leste on November 16 in Muscat. Later, the Red Warriors will take

on Kyrgyzstan in an away game on November 21 in Bishkek city before hosting Malaysia in Muscat on March 21, 2024.

Five days later, Oman will take on Malaysia again in an away match in Kuala Lumpur city ahead of playing against Chinese Taipei

or Timor Leste on June 6, 2024. Oman team will conclude their qualifiers campaign by hosting Kyrgyzstan on June 11, 2024 in Muscat. The group matches will be based in round-robin format including home-and-away games. All the matches will be played

during November 2023 and June 2024. The group winners from all the nine groups besides the runners-up will advance to the third round of World Cup qualifying. Meanwhile, all the qualified teams will confirm their presence in the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027.

OMAN SQUAD: Ahmed al Rawahi, Amjad al Harthy, Yazed al Syiabi, Zahir al Aghbari, Abdullah Fawaz, Harib Jameel, Al Mundher al Alawi, Fahmi Said, Fayez al Rushedi, Mohammed al Musallami, Abdul Rahman al Mushefri, Arshad al Alawi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Salah al Yahyaei, Essam al Subhi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Musab al Maamari, Khalid al Buraiki, Juma al Habsi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Amri, Ahmed al Matroshi, Ali al Hinaï, Omar al Malki, Mutaz Saleh, Ahmed al Adawi and Jameel al Yahmadi.

SAMSONOVA UPSETS SABALENKA, PEGULA HOLDS OFF GAUFF AT CANADIAN OPEN

MONTREAL: World number two Aryna Sabalenka crashed out of the Canadian Open on Friday, falling 7-6(2) 4-6 6-3 to Liudmila Samsonova in the round of 16, while top American Jessica Pegula staved off compatriot Coco Gauff 6-2 5-7 7-5 to make the semifinals.

Sabalenka, who arrived in Montreal with a chance to claim the number one spot from Iga Swiatek, showed plenty of fight in the nearly three-hour centre court battle but won only two of 13 break points while making 11 double faults, many at key moments.

Samsonova got two breaks from six chances, which helped the 15th-seeded Russian into the last eight, where she meets Swiss Belinda Bencic, a 6-7(3) 6-3 6-1 winner over seventh-seeded Czech Petra Kvitova in a clash of former champions.

Both players had little time to savour the upsets and faced off in the quarterfinals later on Friday, with Samsonova sealing a 6-4 6-4 win to advance.

“A really long day, I don’t really have the words right now, but I was happy of how I managed my energy,” said Samsonova. “I was feeling great on the court.”

Sabalenka, winner of three titles this season including the Australian Open, earlier hit 13 aces but more than offset those with double faults and one gave Samsonova the decisive break to move 5-3 up in the third, allowing her to serve out the match.

“Last year I played unbelievable in the States in general and this year I’m going crazy,” said Samsonova, who opened the North American hardcourt season last week with a run to the semis in Washington.

Later on Friday, world number three Pegula kept her nerve against her frequent doubles partner Gauff, saving five of eight break points, and will meet Poland’s world number one Swiatek in the last four.

Pegula confidently marched through the first set, but her serve lost its potency and Gauff kept the



Liudmila Samsonova returns the ball against Belinda Bencic during quarterfinal play at IGA Stadium.
– USA TODAY Sports



Jessica Pegula (USA) hits a forehand against Coco Gauff (USA) during quarterfinal play at IGA Stadium.
– USA TODAY Sports

game alive when she converted a break point in the final game of the second set.

Pegula got back on track when she broke Gauff in the third game of the third set but let the world number seven convert a break point when she whacked a backhand into the net in the eighth game.

“Always a tough match,” Pegula told reporters. “We know each other’s games so well, so we kind of know what we’re going to do to each other, know what our goal is.” Fresh off the biggest win of her career in Washington, Gauff was unable to keep the momentum on her side as she handed Pegula the break and lead in the penultimate game with a double fault, one of nine across the match.

Pegula, who lost in straight sets in their previous meeting in Eastbourne earlier this year, sealed the match with an ace before greeting her friend at the net.

Swiatek then battled past American Danielle Collins 6-3 4-6 6-2 in the evening.

She raced out to a 3-0 lead in the opener, but Collins broke back late in the set and carried that momentum into the second, which the tournament qualifier went on to level when Swiatek misfired on set point.

Swiatek regrouped to go on the attack again in the third, breaking Collins for a 2-1 lead and the best front-runner in the game rode that advantage to notch her 50th win of the season.

“I really wanted to play powerful and I’m pretty happy that I managed to even increase the power in the third set,” Swiatek said. “For sure, I was looking for that.”

“Today I felt like I really needed to go even higher in terms of the intensity. I’m really proud of myself that I made it to the semis. I’m happy that I can play another match.”

Third seed Elena Rybakina saved a matchpoint against Daria Kasatkina in a marathon encounter that she won 5-7 7-5 7-6(8) shortly before the clock struck 3 am. — Reuters

19 teams compete at School Beach Games 2023 in Salalah



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUG 12

The Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) unveiled the details of the second School Beach Games 2023 tournament on Saturday. The School Beach Games will be held on the sand courts at the Sultan Qaboos

Youth Complex in Salalah from August 13 to 17.

In beach handball, nine teams were divided into two groups -- five teams in the first group and four teams in the second group. In beach volleyball, 10 teams were divided into two groups of five teams each.

The 10 teams will start action



in the first round of beach volleyball with six matches. A total of 12 matches will be in the first round with another six in the beach handball also.

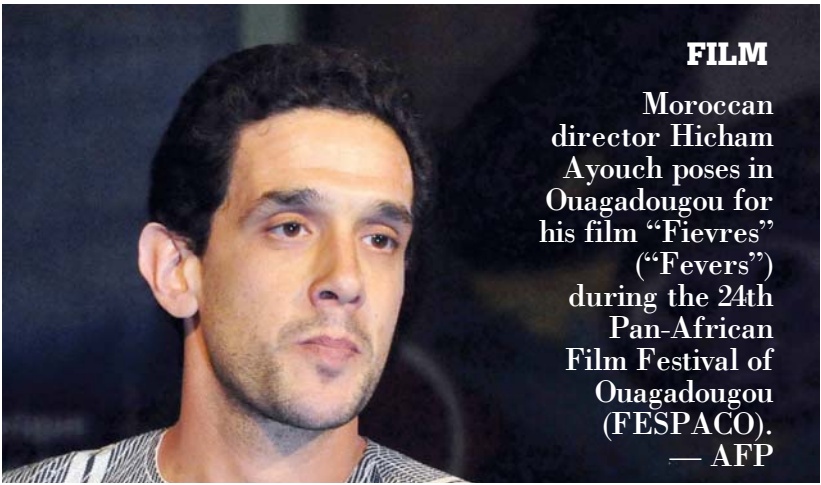
The group stage will continue on Monday and Tuesday with 36 matches, while 16 matches for handball and 20 matches for volleyball.



All the participating teams arrived in Salalah on Saturday, and settled in the accommodation facility specified by the organising committee.

Yousef Beit Selim, member of the Board of Directors of the Oman School Sports Association and head of the Games, said: “The second edition of the tournament

witnessed participation from all educational directorates. And this tournament aims to discover and hone the talents of students in beach volleyball and beach handball to represent the Oman team internationally. The tournament expects strong and exciting matches between the teams.”



FILM
Moroccan director Hicham Ayouch poses in Ouagadougou for his film “Fievers” (“Fievers”) during the 24th Pan-African Film Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO). — AFP



LIFESTYLE
Nursery worker Hamid tends to plants at a nursery in Kabul. — AFP



BOLLYWOOD
Bollywood actress Saiyami Kher attends the trailer launch of her upcoming Indian Hindi-language film ‘Ghoomer’ in Mumbai. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT
South African big wave surfer Fabian Campagnolo rides a wave at Dungeons offshore reef as seasonal cold fronts drive big swells into the Cape Peninsula in Cape Town, South Africa. — Reuters



TRAVEL
The tomb of Polish composer Frederic Chopin is seen at the Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris. — AFP

art & life

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Rummana: Putting the spotlight on Jabal Akhdhar's pomegranates

BY AL ANOOD AL WAHAIBI

The first agritourism experience in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Rummana is a pomegranate-focused experience that promises to delight, educate and leave visitors with cherished memories of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar's bountiful offerings, allowing visitors to indulge their senses in the rich flavours, vibrant colours and secrets of the pomegranates.

"People will come to discover the secrets of pomegranate through interactive workshops, art installations and guided hikes amidst the breathtaking landscapes of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. During the pomegranate picking season, the farm will allow visitors to pick the fruits and buy them," shared Umayma al Hinai, the co-founder of Teepee, a pop-up experience company that encourages cultural immersion, reconnecting with nature and igniting a sense of adventure, one of the driving forces of the event.

Founded in 2020 and the brainchild of Al Amjaad al Maawali, Teepee started as a pop-up glamping experience.

"The temporary structure of the tents gives us the flexibility to move our inventory around with the tourism cycle, which means adding and relocating rooms where needed. We use pop-up activations as a means of marketing our service and networking with potential vendors, activity providers and camp managers for our main service," Al Hinai explained.

Rummana, which translates to pomegranate in Arabic, is located on a pomegranate farm in a town called Saiq at the top of the mountains, in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. The initiative is a collaboration between Teepee, ABS Group and Janaana.



"Janaana (the land owners) gave us the green light to activate the farm at the end of April, and we hit the ground running by May. It's a fast-track project that took two months to design and implement," Al Hinai said.

Al Hinai's architectural background plays a crucial role in shaping the technical and aesthetic aspects of Rummana. "My architectural background certainly helped when dealing with the technical and aesthetic aspects, but we cannot deny the help from our sponsors, Nuqta, a creative platform that specializes in designing innovative busi-



ness identities and creative concepts, who were behind the visual identity and branding of Rummana", says Al Hinai. From merchandise design to art installations, the pomegranate theme weaved its way throughout, creating a cohesive and captivating environment for visitors.

"The main challenge was the logistics of bringing items to the mountain. We had to build most of the items in Muscat and transport them all the way to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. Rummana's implementation took merely two months from the design phase to its official launch, marking a remarkable

achievement in bringing the project to life," added Al Hinai.

"The team had a clear vision of what we wanted the experience to look like. Other than the help from Nuqta, we also worked with Hama Design, who helped in making the masterplan layout more efficient," Al Hinai said.

Looking ahead, Teepee envisions expanding its service regionally, introducing more pop-up activations in

"Special recognition goes to Nuqta for their outstanding branding work, Hama for masterplan layout assistance, Jotus for paint provisions, and Al Hilali Industrial Group for their contributions to restroom facilities and floral adornments," added Al Hinai.

Sustainability and social responsibility have always been the pillars of Teepee by ensuring that they offer low carbon footprint tents and a service



diverse settings across Oman, like beaches or deserts.

Al Hinai further extends her gratitude to their partners in this remarkable journey of making the project come to life. Janaana, a joint venture between Oman Food Investment Holding Co. (NITAJ) and Oman Tourism Development Co. (OMRAN), has been instrumental in developing and promoting agritourism in Oman.

ABS Group, an Omani food conglomerate, contributed through its culinary expertise to creating an unforgettable dining experience.

run with the help of locals, Teepee ensures that their offering is both environmentally and socially sustainable. Rummana is more than just a pomegranate paradise; it is a testament to the power of collaboration, art and sustainability, concluded Al Hinai.

Key Facts: The official opening of Rummana was on August 3, 2023. The event will last up until September 23, 2023, opening from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon, and 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm. Kids under the age of 6 are free of charge, while the rest pays an entry fee of RO 1.



INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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Jabal Akhdhar

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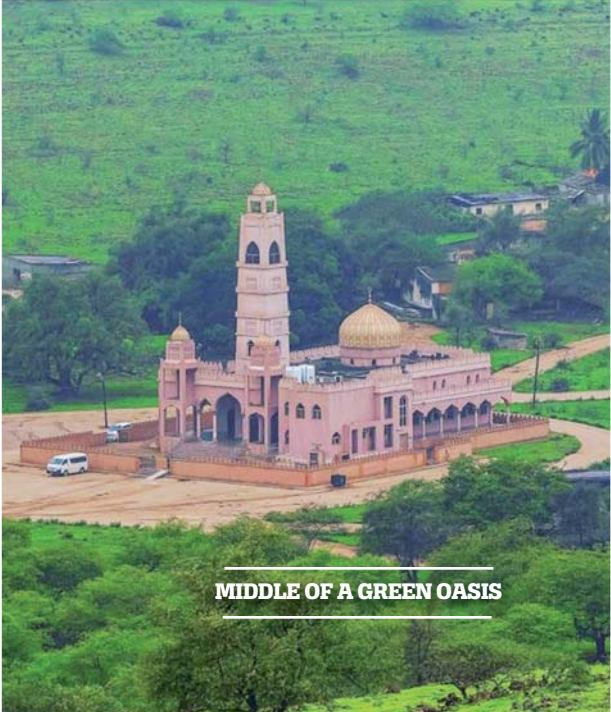




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Back in Black and White: It's the Hives

ONSTAGE AT THE COZY Chelsea club Racket in May, Howlin' Pelle Almqvist had an important announcement. "Ladies and gentlemen!" the front-man shouted to the mess of bopping heads and airborne limbs gathered before him. "Due to an unfortunate rift in the time-space continuum, it has been 11 years since the Hives played New York." He tossed his arms triumphantly in the air, as if landing a triple axel. "We are back!" The crowd gleefully erupted.

The Hives, a five-piece punk band from Sweden, released five studio

and shout-along choruses led by the explosive single "Bogus Operandi." The Hives have never seemed at risk of running out of steam. Almqvist and Arson, brothers born a year apart, grew up in Fagersta, a small city a two-hour drive from Stockholm, where they soaked up every punk record they could get their hands on — trading tapes, scraping together money for imports, taking in pals' rejects. "That's how we found the Sonics," Arson said. A friend handed the LP over, "and it kind of blew our minds." The guitarist rattled off a list

Almqvist, who is known for his strutting and agitating. (In June, he split his head open with a swinging mic.) "People who didn't like us would still watch us doing whatever we were doing, because no one kind of knew what was going to happen." The music was fast; Almqvist's wit matched it. "We grew up on 50% punk and 50% stand-up comedy," Arson said, including "Saturday Night Live" reruns on MTV and VHS tapes of Eddie Murphy specials. Before they could afford props, the Hives thrifted black-and-white clothes, painted a guitar and made their own light-up sign that blazed onstage, giving them heat rash. Almqvist estimates they played 500 shows in their first suits. "They smelled so bad," Dangerous said, "when we walked onstage at the end of the tour, the audience stepped back." But the efforts paid off. Scottish music business icon Alan McGee became an early supporter, putting out a greatest hits of sorts called "Your New Favourite Band" in 2001, which brought the Hives wider attention from listeners and US record labels. Interscope reportedly paid millions to secure the band (the Hives still won't confirm the amount) and gave them creative control. "They created a buzz on their own, a subculture," Jimmy Iovine, then the label's chair, told Spin for a 2004 cover story.

song with Cyndi Lauper, licensing "Tick Tick Boom" for a Nike commercial, taking on challenging assignments opening for both Maroon 5 and Pink in arenas across the US. "We have to go and find people who hadn't heard us before. And you want to be able to turn over a crowd," Arson said. "It's a way of keeping your tools sharp." But new songs — at least, new songs up to Hives standards — weren't flowing. When the pandemic hit, the band ruled out remote recording and turned to a fellow Swede: producer Patrik Berger, whose credits include Robyn's "Dancing on My Own" and hits by Charli XCX. Berger had started out in a punk band called Snuffed by the Yakuza and is "a proper music nerd," Arson said; the Hives trusted his judgment. "They played me some demos just to hear like, which of these, like, hundred songs do you think would fit on a record?" Berger said in a phone interview. "My role," he explained, was "getting them in the room and start having fun with these songs again and not overthink it so much." The result is a classic Hives album filled with boasts, powder-keg energy and punk angst. ("They say that life's for living/But life as we know it's a stick up.") Almqvist croons on "Stick Up.") "Countdown to Shutdown" is built on a bouncing bass line by The Johan and Only, who replaced Destruction in 2013. "What Did I Ever Do to You?"



albums from 1997 to 2012, making their biggest splash with the single "Hate to Say I Told You So" — a garage-rock gem that spent 11 weeks on the Hot 100 when the group's second LP, "Veni Vidi Vicious," arrived in the United States in 2002. The band got swept into the "rock revival" of the moment alongside the White Stripes and the Vines. But they had already made their name onstage, where their arsenal includes matching black-and-white suits and instruments, Almqvist's high kicks and charming provocations, roadies dressed like ninjas and a guitarist called Nicholas Arson who sneers, crowd surfs and dramatically blows on his curled fingers as he flicks picks into the crowd. "They're probably the best live band I've ever seen," said Max Kuehn, the drummer of the California surf-punk band Fildar, who was honoured when the Hives took his group on the road for its first national tour. "If you go to a lot of shows," he added, "you can really tell the difference of just how tight their songs are and how rehearsed everything is." Although the Hives continued to play concerts every year since the arrival of "Lex Hives" in 2012, they had no fresh music to offer — until now. On Friday they will unleash "The Death of Randy Fitzsimmons," 12 new tracks filled with head-snapping riffs



of acts that had made an impact on them: the New Bomb Turks, the Oblivians, the Remains, the Misfits, the Dead Kennedys, "a lot of '60s music." The original band — the brothers plus guitarist Vigilante Carlstroem, drummer Chris Dangerous and bassist Dr. Matt Destruction — came together in the '90s when the members were in their teens, and "the mosh pit thing was big for us," Almqvist said. "Going nuts and falling over each other was for us always a part of the concert experience. If the crowd wasn't doing that, it didn't feel interesting." Showmanship was a priority from day one. "I think before we were good, we were entertaining," added

"I respect that. I will pay for that. I will let them drive." The group stuck to its formula on "Tyrannosaurus Hives" from 2004 — 12 songs, less than 30 minutes — and stretched out on "The Black and White Album" three years later, which featured production from hit-makers including Pharrell Williams and Jackknife Lee. "We were probably the last rock band to have a big budget," Almqvist quipped. "We almost owe it to rock 'n' roll to use it," he recalled thinking. (They went independent and self-produced "Lex Hives" in 2012.) The Hives were continually presented with unlikely opportunities, which they wholeheartedly embraced: recording a Christmas



originated on a hybrid instrument — an organ, guitar, drum machine and microphone — that Almqvist picked up on Swedish Craigslist for \$400, which included the patent. The album's title is a nod to some Hives mythology — that they are the creation of a Svengali named Randy Fitzsimmons, who writes all their songs. In truth, the band labours over every track. "They turn every stone," Berger said, "a little bit like working a Rubik's Cube, trying to figure out how can we make this as good as possible?" The band's absence from recording coincided with a drop-off in rock's cultural and commercial might, a fact that provided Almqvist with an easy layup: "I'm just saying that the Hives don't release a record for 10 years, rock becomes completely unpopular," he said. "Coincidence? We think not." Onstage at Racket, Almqvist assured everyone that the new songs would soon be their favourites, and presided over the controlled chaos like an exacting but lovable school-master. "Everybody shut up for one second," he ordered as the crowd clapped slightly offbeat to the breakdown of "Hate to Say I Told You So." The room went silent. "And now," he said, "we restart." The audience laughed, obeyed and joyfully threw themselves in the air. — **NYT**

LIFESTYLE

Art therapy offers relief to Afghan women struggling with mental health



AT HOME IN northern Afghanistan, 19-year-old Khushi draws a self-portrait — a figure enveloped by a blue burqa inside a cage. The former university student once attended classes in law and political science at northern Balkh province's main university. But she sank into depression since the Taliban closed tertiary institutions to women in December, requiring psychiatric treatment where she was recommended art therapy classes. "When I realised that I am not mentally well, I got sad ... I was not happy at all, I was always depressed, I felt like a bird being stuck in a cage, one who has lost all her happiness," said Khushi, who is only being identified by only one name for security reasons. "After the Taliban banned girls from universities and announced that girls can no longer continue our education, I felt so upset, day by day my mental health deteriorated, I ... finally decided to see a psychiatrist in order to get better." The Taliban closed universities to women in December 2022, sparking rare public protests. The decision came in the wake of the closure of most girls' high schools and was followed by Taliban authorities ordering most Afghan female humanitarian workers not to work. The orders restricting women from public life have drawn heavy international criticism and Western governments have said it is a key hurdle to moving towards any formal recognition of the Taliban's government, which took over as foreign forces left two years ago. The Taliban say they respect women's rights in line with their interpretation of Islamic law and Afghan culture. But many women, particularly in urban areas, who gained opportunities in education and work during the 20-year presence of foreign troops and a Western-backed government are now struggling with a deep sense of despair and mental health challenges, Afghan women and mental health experts say. "Since the Islamic Emirate (Taliban administration) started ruling the country, they have imposed so many restrictions on women, they banned them from universities, amusement parks, beauty salons and so on, they have left nothing for women," said Khushi's psychiatrist, who also cannot be named for security reasons. "Art studios are the only avenue we have left to help our patients... they have become the only place where girls can clear their minds, catch up with old friends,

make new friends, and apart from that, they can learn art too." Khushi sees her psychiatrist twice a month. He used to see four to five patients a day but says the number of his patients has now increased to 10 to 15 daily, most of them women. The increase became even more noticeable after the Taliban banned female students from attending universities, he said. Health organisations estimate half of Afghanistan's 40 million people have suffered from psychological distress after decades of war and instability. There are few reliable figures on mental health trends but anecdotally doctors and aid workers say more women are struggling with mental health in the wake of the orders restricting women's work and education. In a small, colourful art studio in Balkh's capital Mazar-i-Sharif, paintings adorn the walls and several young women, including Khushi, gather for a pencil drawing class. Many of them have been sent here at the recommendation of a mental health expert to ease their isolation and learn a new skill, alongside talk therapy and medication. "When I felt depressed, the doctor prescribed me to go to a place where I can calm my mind. I chose the art studio. Not only did I make good friends here, I also receive art therapy," said a former university student at the class. Khushi said the art therapy gave her a respite from home and a little hope for the future. "It gives me a sense of accomplishment for having made something, over all, drawing empowers me with confidence," she said. "I'm disappointed in my life, but I am not giving up, I will fight. I hope things will get better in the future." — **Reuters**





Omani-owned firm to explore phosphate, rock potash ores in Jordan



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, AUG 12

In a significant move towards bolstering economic cooperation, Al Tasnim Enterprises, a 100-per cent Omani-owned company, has signed two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Jordan's Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources.

The MoUs pertain to the exploration of phosphate ores in the Risha region and rock potash ores in the Lasan area adjacent to the Dead Sea.

The agreements, reported by Ammon, a Jordan-based news portal, were formally signed by Jordan's Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, Saleh Kharabsheh, and Al Tasnim Enterprises CEO, Mohit Khimji.

Under the terms of the first MoU, Al Tasnim Enterprises has been granted a 2.5-year licence to conduct operations in an expansive area of 300 square kilometres in the Risha region. The company will be responsible for carrying out exploratory studies, identifying and analysing the ore deposits, and assessing the economic feasibility of potential phosphate mining activities.

This strategic initiative aims to establish transformational industries in Jordan, particularly in the areas of food and pharmaceuticals, leveraging the country's phosphate ore

resources.

The exploration and assessment of rock potash ores in the Lasan area will be the focus of the second MoU. Al Tasnim Enterprises has been entrusted with a 3.5-year mandate to conduct comprehensive exploration operations across a land area spanning 34 square kilometres.

The company's responsibilities include evaluating the reserves of rock potash ores and conducting extensive exploratory studies. This partnership endeavours to unlock the potential of Jordan's rock potash resources and contribute to the development of related industries.

The signing of these MoUs signifies a landmark collaboration between Oman and Jordan, strengthening bilateral ties and fostering economic growth. The agreements highlight the mutual commitment to leverage the natural resources of the region for the benefit of both nations.

The Risha region's phosphate ore reserves and the Lasan area's rock potash resources possess significant potential for industrial development and economic diversification.

Last month, an Omani-Jordanian joint committee meeting was held in Jordan which aims to expand the scope of cooperation between the two countries.

Major cryptocurrency mining project to launch in Salalah today

SALALAH: The Centre for Hosting, Data Processing and Mining of Cryptocurrencies will be opened today, Sunday, August 13, 2023 at the Salalah Free Zone, under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

Setup by Exahertz International, a subsidiary of Afaaq Advanced Technologies, the facility has been supported by the Ministry in line with the government's efforts to promote digital investment and localise advanced technologies.

Jad Kharma, founder of Afaaq Advanced Technologies and CEO of Exahertz International, thanked the Ministry, as well as the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), and other government agencies for their support in the development of the basic infrastructure based on blockchain and modern technologies, Artificial Intelligence, digital mining, cyber security, and others, designed to ensure that Oman keeps pace with global technological trends.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he stressed that the company provides a comprehensive set of services that contribute to enhancing the performance of local companies



and achieving the highest levels of operational excellence through the development of national cadres and talents.

Sam Verdus, representative of Moonwalk Systems and strategic partner at Exahertz, said Oman attaches importance to attracting digital investment as a key factor for innovation, growth and improvement of the economic environment.

Digitalisation places the

Sultanate of Oman among the ranks of developed countries in this industry, and creates job opportunities in the field of modern technology, while supporting knowledge transfer as well.

Haitham bin Yousef al Zadjali, Chief Financial Officer, said the new centre is the first project of its kind in terms of imported technological devices that the company attracted in the field

of hosting, data processing, blockchain applications and financial technologies, pointing to the success of the first phase of establishing and operating the centre, which took place in a record period at the lowest cost.

For three months, the company has been continuing its efforts to achieve a positive impact on the local market, and to enhance its vital role in advancing economic development, he added. — ONA

Real estate trading in Oman reaches RO 1.4 billion

MUSCAT: The total value of real estate trading in Oman during the first half of 2023 reached 1.402 billion compared to 1.179 billion during the same period in 2022.

Preliminary statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the fees collected for all legal transactions amounted to RO 33.4 million, an increase of 10.3 per cent compared to the end of June 2022.

The total value of sales contracts was RO



545.7 million for 32,907 contracts, with a decrease in value of 11.1 per cent and a decrease

in the number of contracts by 8.5 per cent.

The value of mortgage contracts increased by 52.6 per cent, reaching RO 852.1 million for 12,062 contracts, while the number of exchange contracts was 732 with a value of RO 4.8 million.

The number of issued properties by the end of June 2023 was approximately 117,870, an increase of 1.3 per cent, while the number of properties issued to citizens of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries was 633, an increase of 79.3 per cent. — ONA

Patent granted for fishing boat tracking invention

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 12

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has granted two patents on a device for "Tracking the locations and tracks of fishermen's boats, fishing vessels, and calculating the quantity of caught fish", and "A remotely controlling device for operating loop linkage unit".

The Ministry emphasised that the effective system of intellectual property and patents in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the strategic directions of Oman Vision 2040 contributes to achieve the objectives related to the performance and provision of high-quality government services.

It also contributes to create a competitive business environment that promotes economic growth and diversification, and empowers the sector.

It also contributes to create a possible tool for companies and

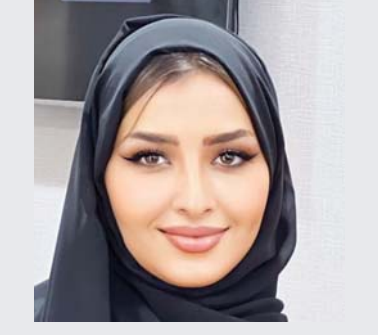


Nidaa bint Yaqoub al Tamimiyah

projects based on innovating new technologies, that are convertible into assets that can be utilised commercially and industrially.

Nidaa bint Yaqoub al Tamimiyah, Head of the Patents and Industrial Designs Department in the National Intellectual Property Office, said: "The Ministry plays a major role in spreading knowledge of intellectual property rights and providing many services related to encouraging, facilitating and registering patent applications.

"The Ministry provides technical advice to inventors in



Shaima bint Taher al Saadiyah

terms of the opportunities to benefit from the databases and the technical information of patents, as it contains scientific additions, which can contribute to developing local patents, facilitating the transfer of the technology of these inventions and the possibility to use it locally."

Suleiman bin Khamis al Khawaldi and Shaima bint Taher al Saadiyah, the owners of the invention of the "device for tracking locations and tracks of fishermen's boats, fishing vessels and calculating the quantity



Suleiman bin Khamis al Khawaldi

of caught fish," described their invention as an electronic device with assembled and programmed parts.

The device is divided into two parts, the first one is to be installed in boats, ships, trucks, or any other place in order to collect information, then to be installed on a radio to transfer the collected data, while the device is equipped with a weight sensor, theft sensor, a temperature and humidity sensor, a location sensor, and a small screen to display data.

The device is linked with a rechargeable solar cell, where



Badr bin Sulayem al Muqbali

other services can be added whenever needed. As for the second part of the device, it is a 7-inch screen that runs on an operating system.

The screen contains a special map that it's designed based on the needs of users, in addition to an interactive map, where the user can obtain all the required data, directions and voice alerts to inform the fisherman about the fishing areas and the restricted areas, as well as alerting him whenever he leaves the territorial waters, informing him of the places of throwing nets and other

services that the user needs, in addition to knowing the boats near him.

Badr bin Sulayem al Muqbali, owner of the invention of the "Remotely controlling device for operating the loop linkage unit, said: "The invention is a device that can replace the engineer who operates the loop linkage units in switching the status of the keys of the equipment in terms of performing the opening, closing, and grounding functions, while this device can also be controlled remotely via a wireless remote control. The device is also connected to a rechargeable battery as a powerhouse."

The number of national applications registered in all fields of intellectual property, particularly, applications related to patents during 2022, reached 85 national applications, while their number till the first half of the current year 2023 reached 32 national applications.

Toyota’s campaign with exclusive benefits ending soon

MUSCAT: Own a Toyota and enjoy exclusive benefits before the campaign ends on August 16, 2023. The benefits include service from 2 years/20,000 kms up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier), insurance 1 year, scratch and win fuel card raffle with prize up to 100 litres of fuel and attractive instalments.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

Customers can choose from an exciting range that includes the Corolla, Hilux, Land Cruiser, all-new Urban Cruiser and Camry.

The Toyota Corolla is available with monthly instalments from RO 108. The Corolla is equipped with a 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque.

For more immersive driving experiences, the engine is paired to a Direct Shift CVT transmission. Customers looking for a more fuel-efficient option can choose the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine



Corolla that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque. This is paired with a CVT transmission.

The Toyota Hilux is available with monthly instalments from RO 127. In Oman, customers have a choice of two versions of the Hilux. The rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck.

The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that’s been developed by Toyota to get your pulse racing.

The powerful Hilux Adventure is equipped with a mighty 4.0 Litre V6 Engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m

Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going. Similarly the Hilux 4X4 is equipped with a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The Toyota Land Cruiser is available with monthly instalments from RO 239. Powering the Land Cruiser is a choice of two powertrain options. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 650 nm. This is

paired to a 10-speed automatic transmission. Also available is a naturally aspirated 4.0-litre V6 petrol engine that produces 271 hp and up to 385 nm paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission.

The all-new Toyota Urban Cruiser is available with monthly instalments from RO 116. The 2023 Toyota Urban Cruiser is a five-seater vehicle which features a 1.5-litre gasoline engine and Integrated Starter Generator (ISG) that functions as both an electrified generator and motor. Combined with a compact Lithium-Ion battery, the powertrain delivers 102 hp and 135 Nm of torque, with

an average fuel consumption of 19.8 km/l and is paired with six-speed automatic transmission.

The Toyota Camry is available with monthly instalments from RO 145. The Toyota Camry takes style and performance to high levels with stylish exterior, advanced range of features and technology.

The Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options. They include a 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m of torque which is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic transmission.

A 3.5-litre V6 engine with

D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg.m of torque and which is mated to an eight-speed multi-mode automatic transmission. And an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors.

The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp. It is also paired with an Electrically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT), delivering heightened driving pleasure. Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

Bank Nizwa launches first eco-friendly corporate debit card with smart features

MUSCAT: As Oman’s leading and most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has consistently been enhancing its corporate services and recently announced the introduction of the first of its kind eco-friendly corporate debit card in the Sultanate of Oman.

The newly launched cards cater to the specific needs of corporate and SME clients, providing a convenient solution for business transactions.

With round-the-clock access to company accounts, smart and customisable services and the highest levels of transparency in operations, the cards are aimed at making transactions more seamless and prompt while reducing the hassles of dealing with cash.

Cardholders can enjoy multiple benefits such as cash withdrawals and deposits, secure,



contactless payments at Point of Sale (POS) machines and e-commerce platforms and accessibility across a diverse network which includes OmanNet and GCCNet as well as Mastercard — International.

Whilst incorporating several innovative

features, the cards also firmly adhere to Islamic banking principles.

Khalid al Barwani, Deputy General Manager Wholesale Banking at Bank Nizwa said, “Vigilant and responsive to the evolving demands of the market, Bank Nizwa has been able to identify and address the common challenges encountered by corporates when it comes handling transactions and making payments.

The new eco-friendly corporate debit card will help companies to better control and monitor expenses and gain real-time insights into their accounts. For SMEs and other corporates, transparent and accurate expense management that reduces the chances of errors or frauds is a critical factor that contributes to growth.”

Budget Rent A Car introduces Tesla Model 3 to its rental lineup



MUSCAT: Oman’s leading car rental company, Budget Rent A Car, proudly announces its trailblazing entry into the electric vehicle era.

As the first car rental company in Oman to bring electric mobility to its customers. Not only it has added the renowned Tesla Model 3 but has also installed an Electric Vehicle (EV) charger at its parking bay.

By offering this sustainable option, the company aims to lead the industry in supporting Oman’s vision of achieving net-zero emissions.

Highlighting the significance of the new EV addition, Rami Maqbool al Saleh, Business Development Director of OHI Group of Companies, stated, “As the first car rental company in Oman to embrace an eco-friendly initiative, we now offer the exceptional Tesla 3 to our esteemed customers.

Additionally, our commitment to sustainability is reinforced through the installation of an EV charger at our parking bay. With Budget’s dedication to reducing environmental impact, our customers can now experience the thrill of driving a cutting-edge EV while simultaneously contributing to a more sustainable Oman. We are thrilled to play our

part in supporting efforts for a cleaner and greener future for our beloved nation, alongside providing our customers with eco-conscious driving choices.”

Budget Oman’s pioneering efforts in electric vehicle rentals underline the company’s commitment to environmental stewardship and its dedication to providing customers with innovative mobility solutions.

The new EV addition will provide customers with the opportunity to embrace sustainable travel without compromising on comfort, technology and convenience. The company’s electric vehicle rentals cater to both eco-conscious travellers as well as to those seeking a premium driving experience.

“At Budget, we believe that we have a responsibility towards the environment and the communities we serve. By introducing electric vehicle rentals, we are taking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable transportation options in Oman,” he added.

Budget Rent A Car has been operational in Oman since 1981 and was one of the first international car rental company to start operations in Oman.

NBO wins best brand identity in Oman

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been awarded the prestigious title of ‘Best Brand Identity in Oman 2023’ by the International Business Magazine.

This esteemed recognition not only reaffirms NBO’s purpose-driven and value-oriented communications strategy, along with its reignited brand identity, but also celebrates the bank’s illustrious 50 years of legacy and rich history.

For half a century, NBO has been committed to excellence and innovation, which has been instrumental in shaping its modernisation journey. By seamlessly blending tradition with contemporary values, NBO has crafted a brand that stands apart in the competitive banking industry.

Sherifa al Maskari, Head of Brand at the National Bank of Oman, said, “In 2022, NBO unveiled its new brand identity, featuring a vibrant look and feel to differentiate it further from other brands and competitors.

The new identity revamped the bank’s values, aligning them with its strategic goals, aspiration,



and the way it communicates its products and services. NBO’s four values of being authentic first and foremost, relentlessly pioneering, creating value through connection, and pursuing simplicity, are the guiding principles that empower the bank to unlock opportunities as one.”

“Winning the ‘Best Brand Identity Award’ has served as a

motivational factor to strive for even greater heights, continuing to innovate and expand NBO’s services to solidify its leading position in the local banking industry,” she further stated.

NBO’s journey towards launching its new brand has been marked by careful brand discovery and the development of a comprehensive brand strategy. This involved a thorough examination of the bank’s values, aspirations, and its communication approach. Directed by the four values, NBO’s messaging now aligns with the principles of its customers and employees.

Recognising the importance of a strong digital presence, NBO also developed comprehensive digital design guidelines to ensure a consistent and engaging visual representation across various digital platforms, providing customers with a seamless user experience.

Internally, NBO engaged employees through a series of activities designed to foster a shared understanding of the

brand’s values and goals. By nurturing a sense of pride and ownership, NBO empowers its employees to become brand ambassadors, ensuring consistent brand representation across all interactions.

Moreover, NBO introduced the Rawabit Program with a focus on reinforcing the bank’s values to deliver superior services, and launched the Values Recognition Program “Taqdeer”, as part of its commitment to building a high-performance culture based on the bank’s core values.

Furthermore, NBO has developed branch design principles that align physical spaces with its brand identity to create an authentically welcoming environment.

With a subscriber base that includes investors, C-suite employees, key stakeholders, policymakers and government bureaucrats, International Business Magazine’s core expertise lies in providing the latest news from the financial realm while actively advocating for innovative solutions within the industry.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Galaxi oilfield supplies & technical service LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1023962**, hereby announces that is going to reduce its capital from Omani Rials **150,000.000** to **58,000.000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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Navigating risks and rewards in the world of digital assets (Part I)



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The author is a member of the International Press Association

Securing crypto assets: A paramount concern

The intrinsic digital nature of crypto assets, coupled with their potentially immense value, paints a bullseye on both crypto businesses and their customers for cyber criminals. Unlike traditional banking transactions, which can be invalidated or reversed, crypto asset transfers lack intermediaries, rendering them irreversible and final.

Occasionally, certain transactions become entirely lost in the cyber realm due to errors in compiling transaction details. A prime example is when an individual sends a particular cryptocurrency to another user's wallet, but does so using the incorrect designated network or chain. This inevitably leads to a loss of funds.

This inherent feature of the crypto world places the spotlight on the paramount importance of securing private keys, which are the keys to possessing and utilising cryptocurrencies. The criticality of properly securing crypto assets stands as the foremost risk that companies in this domain must address.

The regulatory maze: Navigating compliance

The regulatory landscape surrounding crypto assets has been marked by scrutiny and evolution. In the recent times there was a particular spotlight on the crypto market in the United States by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The SEC is a federal regulatory agency in the US that oversees and enforces securities laws, regulations, and activities related to the financial markets. The SEC's primary mission is to protect investors, maintain fair and efficient markets, and facilitate capital formation.

The likes of the SEC have examined whether certain crypto assets should be deemed unregistered securities. Additionally, specific states impose stringent compliance obligations, such as New York's Department of Financial Service's BitLicense.

To navigate this intricate regulatory maze, companies must meticulously identify and inventory their regulatory obligations. This strategic step is not only about compliance but also about erecting a robust risk management framework to weather the regulatory storms. *(To be continued)*

Samayil Industrial City localises 15 projects during H1 2023

MUSCAT: Samayil Industrial City, which is under the Public Authority for Industrial Estates (Madayn), has achieved significant growth in performance indicators during the first half of 2023. It has signed 15 contracts to attract projects covering an area of 100,000 square metres, with investments reaching up to RO 13.5 million.

The total number of projects located in the industrial city reached 156, with 94 projects in the production phase, 43 projects under construction, and 19 projects in the planning phase. The total investment in these projects amounts to RO 150 million, and they are spread over an area of 2.2 million square metres, employing 2,600 workers.

Engineer Yasser bin Ibrahim al Ajmi (pictured), Acting Director General of Samayil Industrial City, said that Madayn continues to implement a range of vital projects in the industrial city, the most prominent of which is the Medical Fitness Examination Building project, which has reached 90 per cent completion.

And the continuation of implementing the supplementary works project for the industrial city, which includes the duplication of the road leading to the city and connecting it to the highway, with a progress rate of 98 per cent.

Additionally, the sewage tank of the second phase has been connected to the first phase, with



a progress rate exceeding 98 per cent.

In a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA), he added that the Public Authority for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has divided Samayil Industrial City into several sectors. Among them is the food sector, which has an occupancy rate exceeding 17 per cent, the logistics sector with an occupancy rate exceeding 34 per cent, the construction materials sector with an occupancy rate

exceeding 26 per cent, the iron and wood sector with an occupancy rate exceeding 60 per cent, the plastic and paper sector with an occupancy rate exceeding 85 per cent, and the marble sector with an occupancy rate exceeding 78 per cent.

In addition, there is the 'Entrepreneurs' sector for small and medium-sized enterprises, which currently has an occupancy rate of 34 per cent.

He pointed out that the most important investment opportunities that have preliminary feasibility studies available in Samayil Industrial City are in the sectors of dairy and juice production, date product manufacturing and packaging, breakfast cereal production, dolomite manufacturing and calcination, water leakage insulators manufacturing, copper

bars and sheets manufacturing, gypsum manufacturing, electrical conductors manufacturing, glossy ceramics manufacturing, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning equipment manufacturing, electrical switches manufacturing, marble products manufacturing, and precast building sector.

Al Ajmi clarified that the city has begun, in collaboration with partners, to market the services building, which has a total area exceeding 16,000 square metres and a rental area of over 12,000 square metres.

The building is designed to provide the best service to accommodate market requirements and provide various facilities for the city's workers. It complements the infrastructure and services and consists of eight floors.

The ground and first floors are allocated for commercial purposes, while the other floors are designated for offices and communication companies. The building also includes various facilities and services.

He emphasised that the "Masaar" Services Centre in Samayil Industrial City aims to enhance the level of services provided to investors by expediting and simplifying procedures, strengthening relationships with partners to provide integrated services to investors, and fostering a strong relationship with investors to create a safe business environment. — ONA

New floating dock to ramp up Oman dry-dock's capabilities

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, AUG 12

The launch of a new floating dock is set to boost the repair and maintenance capabilities of state-owned Asyad Drydock's yard at Duqm on Oman's southeast coast, a top official has revealed.

Dr Ibrahim al Nadhairi, CEO of Asyad Shipping & Drydock, said the operationalisation of the mid-sized floating dock will enable the handling of 40 more vessels annually to reach a new target capacity of around 240 ships, up from 200 previously.

"With its current facilities fully utilised, we invested in buying a Panamax-size floating dock, which is expected to become operational in Q2 2023 and ready to accommodate the growing global demand for the dry dock's services.

This substantial addition will allow us to manage one of the largest vessel types in circulation, from 50,000-80,000 dwt, and expand our capacity by 20 per



cent," leading energy news portal The Energy Year quoted the CEO as stating in a recent interview.

"As it stands, the dry dock is designed to service up to 200 ships per year. And thanks to the floating dock, we expect to be able to take 40 additional ones, bringing the yard's annual repair capacity to 240 ships," he further added in the interview.

Acquired during 2022, the floating dock is the first of a total of three that the Duqm yard is designed to accommodate as part of its long-term growth strategy.

It will also complement the yard's ambitions to develop its nascent shipbuilding capabilities with the ultimate goal of evolving into a full-fledged shipyard.

Those efforts were crystallised last year when Asyad Drydock delivered two indigenously built ships, each of less than 50 metres length, to customers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). One was fabricated from aluminium, necessitating the use of complex design and welding technologies.

"We provided an end-to-end service, taking care of the

whole process from A to Z, from design to manufacturing," said Dr Al Nadhairi. Currently in hand for construction is a fishing trawler for Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

Separately, Asyad Drydock is also building a landing craft ferry equipped for passenger and vehicle transport for National Ferries Company, a subsidiary of Asyad Group.

"Our aim within this segment is to be able to locally build ships of up to 100 metres, which would mean covering naval ships for military use, Coast Guard, fishing, tugboats, etc," the CEO stated.

Asyad Drydock also recently announced that it is weighing a landmark foray into industrial manufacturing with an eye on the mammoth opportunities linked to the supply of equipment for the mega green hydrogen schemes due to be implemented in Oman over the coming decades.