



P12

MERLIER
MAKES
MERRY IN
FIRST STAGE



P13

OMAN TARGETS
3 NEW WIND
POWER PROJECTS
BY 2026



P20

NIZWA FORT
– GRAND,
VIBRANT, AND
FULL OF LIFE



CAIRO

OMAN TAKES PART
IN CAIRO MEETING

The State Council took part in the fifth Conference of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Parliaments and Assemblies which began in the Egyptian capital Cairo, on Saturday. The conference debated a draft parliamentary document on enhancing Arab food security. Titled “A Parliamentary Vision for Strengthening Arab Food Security”, the document focuses on the challenges and threats facing Arab countries with regard to food security and the parliaments’ role in handling the issue.

DETAILS ON P5

MUSCAT

TECHNICAL LAB
TO BOOST SKILLS

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, inaugurated technical development laboratory at the Ministry’s General Diwan. The lab is funded by Oman-India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO). The laboratory contributes to the development of smart digital systems and builds the capacities, skills and technical expertise of the ministry’s employees through the implementation of several workshops and development programmes in various fields. The lab’s objectives include digital transformation in education, building capabilities and skills, and empowering job performance.

DETAILS ON P5

Miracle rescues as quake death toll passes 25,000

OMAN SENDS RELIEF FLIGHTS TO TURKEY

MUSCAT/ANKARA: As an embodiment of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Sultanate of Oman, represented by Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO), flew relief flights to the Republic of Turkey, which experienced a devastating earthquake recently.

The relief flights, operated by the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), carried varied relief and humanitarian materials.

The sending of relief flights comes within the framework of the humanitarian efforts undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman and will continue in the coming days in solidarity with the brotherly Republic of Syria and Republic of Turkey in an effort to alleviate the impact of the earthquake.

Rescuers pulled a two-month-old baby and an elderly woman from the rubble on Saturday, five days after an earthquake devastated Turkey and Syria,



The National Search and Rescue Team of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), continued carrying out search and rescue operations in southeast Turkey on Saturday.

leaving more than 25,000 dead.

Tens of thousands of local and international rescue workers are still scouring through flattened neighbourhoods despite freezing weather that has compounded the misery of millions now in desperate need of aid.

However, Austrian soldiers and German rescue workers called off their searches in southern Hatay, citing a difficult security situation and clashes between local groups, without giving further details.

SEE ALSO P6

Renovated Omani museum opens in Kenya’s Lamu Island

MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) opened a permanent museum exhibition in Lamu Island in the Republic of Kenya. The permanent museum exhibition, which was opened after renovation, contains historic records, manuscripts and collectibles from the time of the Omani presence in East Africa and the joint history between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kenya.

The renovation work of the museum was carried out in coordination with the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya and the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, Culture and Heritage of Kenya. The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Peninah Malonza, Minister of Tourism, Wildlife, Culture and Heritage of Kenya. She pointed to the deep historical relations and the common civilisational and cultural links bounding the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kenya since antiquity, explaining that the island of Lamu is rich in agriculture and Omanis settled there since the sixteenth century.

DETAILS ON P2

Russia says blocks access routes for Western arms

MOSCOW: Russia said on Saturday that it has blocked rail routes for the transport of Western weapons, ammunition and reserves into Ukraine.

The Defence Ministry in Moscow did not give details on Saturday of where exactly the rail transport had been blocked.

The news comes only a day after Russia launched a massive missile offensive against Ukraine, once again targeting

critical infrastructure. The daily military bulletin said that all targets had been reached in the “massive strike” with missiles and drones on Friday, though none of the information could be independently verified.

“All the targeted objects were hit,” said ministry spokesperson. He said energy infrastructure that supplies the military industry and Ukraine’s transport system was destroyed. — dpa

Abraj Energy Services S.A.O.G. (under transformation) announces publication of the prospectus and details of the subscription period for its initial public offering

- A total of 377,398,000 shares, representing 49 per cent of Abraj’s share capital, will be offered, with Musandam Gas Plant LLC (“MGP”), OOCPE Holdings Limited (“OOCPE HL”) and OQ Exploration & Production LLC (“OQ EP”) (together the “Selling Shareholders”), reserving the right to amend the size of the Offering (defined below) at any time prior to the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the Capital

- Market Authority of the Sultanate of Oman (the “CMA”).
- The Offering will be split into two categories, i.e. a Category I offer and a discounted Category II offer.
- The Category I Subscription Price Range has been set at between Bzs 242 and Bzs 249 per share, implying a market capitalization of between OMR 186.39 mn to OMR 191.78 mn (c. US\$ 484.13 mn and US\$ 498.13 mn).
- The Category II Subscription Price is the Discounted Maximum Price of



- Bzs 224 per Share, calculated as the Maximum Price of Bzs 249 less a discount of 10 per cent.
- Minimum limit for subscription:
 - Category I: 803,300 Shares
- and in multiples of 100 Shares thereafter.
- Category II: 1,000 Shares and in multiples of 100 Shares thereafter.

- Maximum limit for subscription:
 - Category I (other than Anchor Investors): 37,739,800 Shares, representing 10 per cent. of the Offer size.
 - Anchor Investors: 75,479,600 Shares, representing 20 per cent. of the Offer size.
 - Category II Investors: 803,200 Shares.
- All investors will be allocated at the same Offer Price (notwithstanding the retail discount), which will be determined based on the Category

- I bookbuilding process.
- Saudi Omani Investment Company (a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund), Royal Court Affairs and Schlumberger Oman & Co LLC to be anchor investors in the IPO, with a total commitment of OMR 37,588,840 (40% of the Offer Size).
- Admission of the Shares to listing and trading on the MSX is expected on or about 14 March 2023, subject to receiving all required regulatory approvals.

Muscat: Abraj Energy Services SAOG (under transformation) (“Abraj” or the “Company”) today announces the publication of the Prospectus and details of the subscription period and process for its initial public offering (the “IPO” or the “Offering”) on the MSX.

Details of the Offering are available in the Prospectus under the Key Documents section on <https://abrajenergy.com/sites/jpQ> as well as at the branches of the collection agents detailed below.

Saif Al Hamhami, CEO of Abraj, said: “As one of the leading providers of onshore oilfield drilling and well services in Oman, we are confident in our leading domestic position and strong regional growth opportunities. Since announcing our intention to float on the MSX, we are extremely pleased to have received strong interest from investors. Amid robust sector fundamentals, a favorable market and with our diverse service offerings, including drilling, workover and well services, we believe that Abraj presents an attractive proposition for investors.”

DETAILS OF THE OFFER PRICE RANGE AND SUBSCRIPTION PROCESS

The Offering will be conducted in the manner approved by the CMA and will be

offered in a parallel offering as follows.

Category I

- Category I Offer (large investors) represents a maximum of 85 per cent of the total Offering and will be made available to eligible large and institutional investors in Oman and eligible international institutional investors outside the United States.
- The Category I Subscription Price Range for the Offering has been set at between Bzs 242 and Bzs 249 per share. The total Offering size is expected to be between OMR 91.33 mn to OMR 93.97 mn (c.US\$ 237.22 mn to US\$ 244.08 mn), implying a market capitalization at listing of between OMR 186.39 mn and OMR 191.78 mn (c.US\$ 484.13 mn and US\$ 498.13 mn).
- The Category I Offer is expected to run from 20 February 2023 to 2 March 2023.

Category II

- Category II Offer (small investors) represents a minimum of 15 per cent of the total Offering, and will be made to eligible retail investors in Oman.
- The Category II Subscription Price is the Discounted Maximum Price of Bzs 224 per share, calculated as the

Maximum Price of Bzs 249 per share less a discount of 10 per cent.

- If there is excess demand in Category II, the allocation to Category II Investors may be increased up to a maximum of 35 per cent of the Offer size.
- If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than 15 per cent of the Offer size, then after full allocation to Category II Investors, the balance of the Shares will be made available to Category I Investors for allocation at the Offer Price, if there is oversubscription in Category I.
- Category II Offer is expected to run from 20 February 2023 to 1 March 2023

All Shares will be issued and allotted to investors at the same Offer Price, which will be determined based on the Category I bookbuilding process. The Offer Price will be decided by the Selling Shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and the CMA on the Pricing Date, expected to be on or around 6 March 2023.

Any refunds due to Category II Investors will be calculated based on the difference between (i) the Discounted Maximum Price and (ii) the Offer Price less a discount of 10 per cent.

DIVIDEND POLICY

- In 2023, the Company intends to pay a dividend of OMR 15.4 million for the year ended 31 December 2022, or Bzs 20 per share.
- In 2024, the Company intends to pay a dividend which is the higher of 85 per cent. of net profit for 2023 or a six per cent increase on the dividend paid in 2023.
- In 2025, the Company intends to pay a dividend which is the higher of 85 per cent of net profit for 2024 or a six per cent increase on the dividend paid in 2024.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE OFFERING

377,398,000 shares, equivalent to 49 per cent. of the total issued share capital of Abraj, are being made available via the Offering, with the Selling Shareholders reserving the right to amend the size of the Offering at any time prior to the end of the subscription period at their sole discretion, subject to applicable laws and the approval of the CMA.

All the shares being sold by the Selling Shareholders are existing shares and the Company will not receive any proceeds from the sale of the shares in the Offering.

Offer expenses will be paid by the Selling Shareholders. Following the Offering, and assuming that the Selling Shareholders sell all of the shares being offered in the Offering and that the size of the Offering is not amended, the Selling Shareholders will continue to hold a stake of 51 per cent of the Company’s share capital post the Offering.

The admission of the shares to listing and trading on the MSX (“Admission”) is expected on or around 14 March 2023.

The completion of the Offering and Admission is subject to market conditions and obtaining all necessary regulatory approvals.

Ahli Bank S.A.O.G., EFG-Hermes UAE Limited (acting in conjunction with EFG Hermes UAE LLC) and National Bank of Oman S.A.O.G. have been appointed as Joint Global Coordinators, and Ahli Bank S.A.O.G. and National Bank of Oman S.A.O.G. have been appointed as Issue Managers.

ANCHOR INVESTORS

On 7 February 2023, the Company entered into anchor investment agreements with the Saudi Omani Investment Company (a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund), Royal Court Affairs and Schlumberger Oman & Co LLC (together,

the “Anchor Investors”). In aggregate, the Anchor Investors have committed OMR 37,588,840 to the IPO, representing 40% of the offer size, with their shares subject to a 90 day lock-up arrangement, following Admission.

ABOUT ABRAJ

Abraj Energy Services S.A.O.G. (under transformation) is an indirectly wholly owned subsidiary of OQ S.A.O.G., Oman’s leading integrated energy company. Established in 2006, the Company is the leading provider of onshore drilling and well services in Oman, as measured by number of contracted operating drilling rigs as at 30 June 2022. Through its two business segments, (i) Drilling and Workover Services and (ii) Well Services, the Company provides a wide range of complementary onshore oil and gas field services. The Company operates one of the youngest drilling fleets in the MENA region, and benefits from long-term contracts with leading national and international exploration and production companies. Abraj’s vision is to be the market leading provider of oil and gas field services in Oman, as well as one of the leading providers of these services in the region.



Omani museum opens in Kenya’s Lamu Island



MUSCAT: The National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA) opened a permanent museum exhibition in Lamu Island in the Republic of Kenya.

The permanent museum exhibition, which was opened after renovation, contains historic records, manuscripts and collectibles from the time of the Omani presence in east Africa and the joint history between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kenya.

The renovation work of the museum was carried out in coordination with the embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya and the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife, Culture and Heritage of Kenya.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Peninah Malonza, Minister of Tourism, Wildlife, Culture and Heritage of Kenya. She pointed to the deep historical relations and the common civilisational



and cultural links bounding the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kenya since antiquity, explaining that the island of Lamu is rich in agriculture and Omanis settled there since the sixteenth century.

The minister emphasised the importance of opening the museum which highlights the history of the Sultanate of Oman and its role in international navigation and

trade as well as its cultural role in Kenya and East Africa.

The permanent museum exhibition represents a significant archaeological landmark that plays multiple cultural roles highlighting the Omani presence and influence in the Lamu district of the Republic of Kenya. The museum confirms the deep-rooted relationship between the two countries and consolidates the Omani values



that still make their presence felt in East Africa.

Dr Hamad bin Mohammed al Dhawyani, Chairman of the National Records and Archives Authority (NRAA), delivered a speech at the opening ceremony saying: “The ceremony embodies the values of love, affection and the civilised treatment of the people Lamu who contributed greatly to making their city civilised and historical. The

Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Kenya maintain deep and firm historic relations and cultural bonds.” The chairman of the NRAA valued the efforts made by the embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Kenya in fostering existing fraternal relations that are based on cooperation in various fields. He added that Africa has witnessed a wave of migrations since the third millennium BC as well as the

trade movement via seas and oceans by Omanis. In addition, there were migrations from the African countries to the Kenyan coast that saw the newcomers integrating with the Arab settlers and setting up emirates in different cities.

The renovation project involved restoration to seven museum halls namely: Oman Through Time Hall, Oman’s Maritime Heritage Hall, Man and Community Hall, the Sultans of Al Busaidi Dynasty Hall, the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said Hall, Oman’s Modern Renaissance Hall and Omani Presence in East Africa Hall.

The museum exhibition in Lamu Island is aimed at conserving the historic presence and the civilisation of the Sultanate of Oman in East Africa by keeping a large collection of historic records and manuscripts and collectibles featuring the Omani presence in the island.

— ONA

Public opinion survey on roads, taxis begins today

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology will begin a public opinion survey on Sunday to get people’s feedback on the state of road infrastructure outside the Muscat Governorate, and taxi services in the Sultanate of Oman.

The survey, which will continue until March 9, aims to record the responses on road’s quality, utilities and safety aspects, in addition to measuring the knowledge about

the ministry’s maintenance of roads, and the extent of its commitment to the implementation of projects.

The survey also aims to gauge the quality of taxi services in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to record suggestions on how to improve the road infrastructure and taxi services.

It targets all citizens and residents aged 18 years and over, with a sample size of 2,500 individuals from various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman’s rescue team continues operations in Turkey

ANKARA: The National Search and Rescue Team of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), continued carrying out search and rescue operations and providing medical care to the injured at various sites in southeast Turkey following a devastating earthquake the country has witnessed lately.

Mubarak bin Salim al Araiimi, Director-General of Operations and Training at the CDAA who has been overseeing the CDAA team



since it arrived in Turkey, said that the team embarked on operations as soon as it arrived in Adana on Wednesday after registering

with the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG). The team set up its camp in the Turkish city of Hatay in coordination with

the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority of Turkey.

Al Araiimi noted that the team has carried out many operations in search of survivors in different locations by using advanced machines and equipment for finding survivors under the rubble. The team is also providing medical care to the injured in coordination with the local authorities while working side-by-side with the other search and rescue teams. — ONA

Took four hours to rescue dolphins in Dhofar: EA

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Directorate-General of Environment Authority (EA) in Dhofar Governorate said the recent rescue of dolphins took around four hours.

Eight stranded Risso’s dolphins washed off on the coast of Hasik; of these, seven were rescued, while one of them died.

The samples of Risso’s dolphins were taken for laboratory tests and analysis.

A specialist at EA said that these dolphins did not have any wounds from nets on them.

“The local citizens and fishermen made unsuccessful attempts to return the dolphins to the waters. Subsequently, specialists who went to the site succeeded in rescuing seven dolphins but could not save



the eighth dolphin because of the wounds due to friction with the rocks. It took about four hours to work to return the dolphins to the sea.”

The samples, such as tissues and teeth, were taken and transferred to the directorate’s laboratory for study and analysis.

The causes of dolphin deaths can usually be due



to the green and red tide or fishing nets, but there are indications that it is due to boat engines, or lack of food, the specialist said.

Risso’s dolphins, sometimes called grey dolphins, are found in the temperate and tropical zones of all the world’s oceans. These cetaceans generally prefer deeper offshore waters, especially near the continental

shelf edge and slope, where they can dive to at least 1,000 feet and hold their breath for 30 minutes. They are also very active on the ocean surface.

Risso’s dolphins are typically found in groups of between 10 and 30 animals, though they have been reported as solitary individuals, in pairs, or in loose aggregations in the hundreds or thousands.



We Are Hiring

Section Head – Quantity Surveyor: Degree in Civil Engineering / QS with 8+ years of experience in Construction Projects with complete knowledge of quantity surveying, estimation, and tendering. Should be capable of handling QS responsibilities independently for the pre- and post-tendering activities.

Procurement Engineer: Diploma / Bachelor’s Degree with 5+ years of experience in the IT field. The candidate should be dynamic with complete knowledge of the Purchase Department.

PRO: Omani candidate with a General Diploma and 3+ experience in all activities and procedures related to the Ministry of Labor and other governmental entities.

HR Administrator (Male only): Diploma with 3+ years of experience in HR and admin fields.

To apply and for more details kindly refer to the below website:
www.althabatholding.com/career
Closing date: 22nd Feb, 2023

Initial Public Offering of 377,398,000 Shares

Category I Subscription Price Range: Bzs 242 to Bzs 249 per Share

Category II Subscription Price: Discounted Maximum Price of Bzs 224 per Share, calculated as the Maximum Price of Bzs 249 less a discount of 10 per cent.

Category I Offer Period: 20 February 2023 to 2 March 2023

Category II Offer Period: 20 February 2023 to 1 March 2023

This summary has been extracted from the unofficial translation of the original Prospectus prepared in Arabic and approved by the CMA in accordance with Administrative Decision No. K/10/2023 dated 9 February 2023. This does not constitute an offer to sell or an invitation to or on behalf of the issuer to subscribe to any of the Shares in any jurisdiction outside of Oman where such distribution is, or may be, unlawful.

General Information on the Offer and the Company

Name	Abraj Energy Services SAOG (under transformation)
Commercial registration number	1044559
Date of registration	24 May 2006
Registered office	P.O. Box 156, Postal Code 130 South Al Ghuwair, Boushair, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Principal place of business	Sultanate of Oman
Duration	Unlimited
Issued and paid-up share capital	QMR 77020,000 divided into 770,200,000 Shares with a nominal value of 100 Bzs per Share
Issue Manager(s)	Ahli Bank SAOG PO Box 545, Postal Code 116 Mina Al Fahal, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 24577830 Website: www.ahlibank.om
	National Bank of Oman SAOG PO Box 751, Postal Code 112 Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman Tel: +968 2477050 Website: www.nbo.om

Articles of Association

The principal objectives for which the Company is established are for providing drilling, workover, fracturing, cementing & other well services and well engineering solutions to the oil & gas sector in the Sultanate of Oman. A copy of the Memorandum and Articles is available for perusal at the head office of the Company during business hours on any business day at MCOF Pension Fund Building, Fourth Floor, Building No. 420, Plot No. 944, Block No. 11 TH, Wuy Na 1005, Al-Mawaaleh, Sultanate of Oman.

Shareholding Pattern

Name of Shareholder	Number of Shares held	% of Total	Aggregate Value of Shares held (QMR)
OQ Exploration and Production LLC	693,180,000	90.00%	69,318,000
DOCEP Holdings Limited	77,012,258	9.99%	7,701,225,800
Musandam Gas Plant LLC	730	0.00%	73,000
Total	770,200,000	100.00%	77,020,000

Brief profile of the Selling Shareholders:

OQ Exploration and Production LLC (OQ EP) is a wholly owned subsidiary of OQ SAOG (together with its subsidiaries, the OQ Group), which in turn is 100 per cent. owned by the Oman Investment Authority. OQ EP undertakes the OQ Group's oil and gas exploration, development and production business.

DOCEP Holdings Limited (DOCEP HL), a wholly owned subsidiary of OQ EP, was established solely for investment in the oil and gas sector in Oman.

Musandam Gas Plant LLC, a subsidiary of OQ EP and DOCEP HL, was established solely for investment in the oil and gas sector in Oman.

Further information about the OQ Group and its subsidiaries is available at <https://www.oq.com>.

Anchor Investors

The Company has received irrevocable commitments from the Anchor Investors to subscribe to the Offer at the Maximum Price. The following table provides details of the Offer Shares to be allotted to each Anchor Investor:

Name of Anchor Investor	Number of Shares Subscribed for at the Maximum Price	Subscription Amount at the Maximum Price (QMR)	% of Offer
Saudi Omani Investment Company*	75,479,600	18,794,420	20%
Royal Court Affairs	37,739,800	9,397,210	10%
Schlumberger Oman & Co LLC	37,739,800	9,397,210	10%
Total	150,959,200	37,588,840	40%

(*) Saudi Omani Investment Company is a wholly owned entity of the Public Investment Fund of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Please refer to "Chapter XIX-Subscription and Sale - Anchor Investors" of the Prospectus for more details on the Anchor Investors.

Description of Abraj and Business Overview

Established in 2006, Abraj is the leading provider of onshore drilling services in Oman, as measured by the number of contracted operating drilling rigs as at 30 June 2022. Through its two business segments, (i) Drilling and Workover Services and (ii) Well Services, the Company provides a wide range of complementary onshore oil and gas field services. The Company's vision is to be the market leading provider of oil and gas field services in Oman, as well as one of the leading providers of these services in the region.

Competitive Strengths

The Company's competitive strengths include:

- being a leading onshore oil and gas field services provider in Oman, with a wide service offering including drilling, workover and well services;
- favourable market and sector fundamentals;
- possessing a well-invested fleet of modern, built-for-purpose rigs;
- revenue visibility that reflects long standing relationships with a diverse customer base that drives a healthy backlog with a long contract duration;
- a business that benefits from high barriers to entry in Oman;
- robust financial performance characterized by strong growth, margins and cash flow generation capabilities;
- a strong health, safety and environment culture;
- a highly experienced management team with a proven track record of growing the business and creating value, coupled with a committed shareholder base.

The Company's strategies include:

- further growing its leading domestic drilling market position and achieving further growth in other segments by capitalising on:
 - new build rig opportunities in the market, which will be driven by leading IOCs with whom the Company already has strong relationships; and
 - replacement of ageing rigs in the local market;
- establishing a market position in the MENA region by seeking to capture opportunities where the Company already has pre-qualifications, with a particular focus on Kuwait.

Risk Factors

Prior to investing in Offer Shares, prospective Applicants should carefully consider the risk factors relating to Abraj's business and industry described in "Chapter IV - Risk Factors" together with all other information contained in the Prospectus, including the financial information set out in "Chapter XII - Selected Financial Information", "Chapter XIII - Operating and Financial Review" and "Chapter XXIV - Historical Financial Statements" of the Prospectus, before making any investment decision relating to the Offer Shares. These risks and uncertainties are not the only issues that Abraj faces; additional risks and uncertainties not presently known to Abraj or that Abraj currently believes to be immaterial may also have a material adverse or beneficial effect on its financial condition or business success. The occurrence of any or a combination of the events mentioned in "Chapter IV - Risk Factors" of the Prospectus could have a material adverse or beneficial effect on Abraj's business, results of operations, financial condition and prospects and cause the market price of the Shares to fall significantly and investors to lose all or part of their investment. Unless otherwise stated in the relevant risk factors set out in the Prospectus, Abraj is not in a position to specify or quantify the financial or other risks mentioned therein.

Board of Directors

The current composition of the Board of Directors, in accordance with Article 6 of the Articles is as follows:

Name	Representing	Independent / Non-Independent
Mr. Ayad Al Balushi	MGP	Non-Independent
Mr. Ahmed Al Azkawi	OQ EP	Non-Independent
Mr. Ashraf Al Momani	DOCEP HL	Non-Independent
Mr. Khamsi Al Soadi	Personal Capacity	Independent
Mr. Muhsin Abdul Majeed Raja Al Rustom	Personal Capacity	Independent
Dr. Amer Al Rawas	Personal Capacity	Independent
Ms. Moshael Moosa	Personal Capacity	Non-Independent

Senior Management Team

The current composition of the Management is as follows:

Name	Position
Mr. Saif Al Hamhame	Chief Executive Officer
Mr. Lakshmi Rajan	Chief Financial Officer
Mr. Salah Al Harthy	Business Development Director
Dr. Abdulrauf Alkhatib	General Counsel
Mr. Saif Al Hussaini	Director - Drilling and Workover

Subscription Conditions and Procedures

The Offer entails two categories, (i) Category I Offer, and (ii) Category II Offer. Based on the Price Range, this Offer is being offered to Category I Investors through a bookbuild of listing (as described in more detail in "Chapter XX-Bookbuilding Process") and to Category II Investors at the Discounted Maximum Price. All investors will be allotted Shares at the Offer Price. The Offer Price is the final price at which Shares will be issued and allotted pursuant to the terms of this Prospectus. The Offer Price will be decided by the Selling Shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and the CMA on the Pricing Date.

The Category II Offer process shall be conducted through the E-PO Mechanism. For further information on the subscription conditions and procedures applicable to both the Category I Offer and Category II Offer, please see "Chapter XVII - Subscription Conditions and Procedures" of the Prospectus.

Offer Structure for Category I and Category II

	Category I Investors (Large Investors)	Category II Investors (Small Investors)
No. of Equity Shares	245,308,700 to 320,788,300 Shares	56,609,700 to 132,089,300 Shares
Percentage of Offer Size	65 to 85 per cent. The aggregate allocation to Category I Investors may be reduced to a maximum of 85 per cent. of the Offer size if there is excess demand in Category I. If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than 15 per cent. of the Offer size, then offer full allocation to Category I Investors, the balance of the Shares will be made available to Category II Investors for allocation at the Offer Price.	15 to 35 per cent. If there is excess demand in Category II, the allocation to Category II Investors may be increased up to a maximum of 35 per cent. of the Offer size. If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than 15 per cent. of the Offer size, then offer full allocation to Category II Investors, the balance of the Shares will be made available to Category I Investors for allocation at the Offer Price. If there is oversubscription in Category I, the allocation to Category II Investors may be reduced to a maximum of 15 per cent. of the Offer size.
Basis of Allotment	Determined by the Selling Shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and CMA.	Proportionate The CMA may decide to distribute a minimum number of Shares offered for subscription to all subscribers equally, with the remainder of the Shares being distributed as set out above.
Minimum Subscription	803,300 Shares and in multiples of 100 Shares thereafter	1,000 Shares and in multiples of 100 Shares thereafter
Maximum Subscription	377,398,000 Shares, which is equal to 10 per cent. of the Offer size (not applicable to Anchor Investors)	803,200 Shares
Terms of Payment	Investors must make payment to the designated bank account of the Collection Agents, and the Collection Agents will transfer the subscription proceeds, at least one business day prior to the Settlement Date to the designated bank account of the Issue Managers	100 per cent. of the Category II Application Money to be paid at the time of submission of the Application to the relevant Collection Agent(s).

Other Conditions	Applications to be submitted to any of the Collection Agents on or before 1 March 2023	Applications to be submitted to any of the Collection Agents on or before 1 March 2023
Offer Period	20 February 2023 to 2 March 2023	20 February 2023 to 1 March 2023

For additional details on the circumstances under which the allocations between Category I Investors and Category II Investors could change, see "Chapter XVII - Subscription Conditions and Procedures - Basis of Allotment" of the Prospectus.

Eligibility for the Subscription of Offer Shares

The Offer will be open in Oman to Omani and non-Omani individuals and juristic persons who have their accounts with MCDC. All individuals and juristic persons who are nationals of or registered in (as applicable) the countries comprising the Gulf Cooperation Council are treated as Omani individuals and juristic persons for the purpose of owning shares in Omani SAOGs. No single person shall by himself, or through a related person up to the second degree, hold or purchase more than 10 per cent. of the Offer size, except with the explicit written approval of the CMA as per the applicable regulations.

Prohibitions with regard to the Applications for subscription

In accordance with the Capital Market Law of Oman issued by Royal Decree 80/1996, as repealed and superseded by the Securities Law, the following persons shall not be permitted to subscribe to the Offer:

- Sole proprietorship establishments: the owners of sole proprietorship establishments may only submit Applications in their personal names;
 - Trust accounts: investors registered under trust accounts may only submit Applications in their personal names (except as detailed below);
 - Multiple Applications: an investor may not submit more than one Application;
 - Joint Applications: investors may not submit applications in the name of more than one individual (including on behalf of legal heirs);
 - Founding Shareholders: the founding shareholders of the Company may not submit any Applications; and
 - Related Parties: the related parties of the Company cannot participate in the Category I Offer except where such relationship is due to common shareholding or control exercised by the administrative apparatuses of the Government.
- Any Applications not complying with the above criteria may be rejected without contacting the investor, although Applications by Trust Accounts may be accepted in the Offer, at the discretion of the Joint Global Coordinators or the Collection Agents (as applicable). If they are satisfied that none of the underlying subscribers applying through such Trust Accounts have also applied or will apply to the Offer, then in case of multiple Applications by a Trust Account and its underlying investor(s) in their or their personal establishment's name, all Applications may be rejected at the discretion of the Joint Global Coordinators or Collection Agent(s) (as applicable).

Subscription on behalf of minor children

For the purpose of this Offer, any person under 18 years of age on the date of submission of an Application will be defined as a minor. Only a father may subscribe on behalf of his minor children. If an Application is made on behalf of a minor by any person other than the minor's father, the person submitting the Application will be required to attach a valid Sharia (Legal) Power of Attorney issued by the competent authorities authorising him or her to deal in the funds of the minor through sale, purchase and investment.

Investor's Investor Number with MCDC

Any investor who subscribes for the Offer Shares must have an account and investor number with the MCDC. Any investor may apply to obtain an investor number and open an account by completing the MCDC Application. This may be obtained from and submitted to the MCDC's head office at PO Box 952, Postal Code 112, Ruwi, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, or its website at www.mcdco.gov.om, or from brokerage companies licensed by the CMA.

Offer Period

The Category I Offer Period will commence on 20 February 2023 and end on 2 March 2023.

The Category II Offer Period will commence on 20 February 2023 and end on 1 March 2023.

CATEGORY I OFFER (LARGE INVESTORS)

Subscription and Application Process for Category I Applicants

Maximum Limit of Subscription

The maximum number of Shares that may be purchased pursuant to an Application for Category I Investors (not applicable to Anchor Investors) is equivalent to 10 per cent. of the total Offer size, or 37,739,800 Shares. An investor in Category I may not subscribe for more than this number of Shares, and at no time may a single person, either directly or through a related person up to the second degree, hold or purchase Shares equivalent to more than 10 per cent. of the Offer size, except with the explicit written approval of the CMA as per the applicable regulations. The maximum number of Shares that may be purchased in the Offer by Anchor Investors in aggregate is equivalent to 40 per cent. of the total Offer size, or 150,959,200 Shares, and any individual Anchor Investor may purchase up to 20 per cent. of the total Offer size, or 75,479,600 Shares.

The Company, in consultation with the CMA, has determined to limit the size of Applications for Category II Investors to 803,200 Shares. Each investor is advised to ensure that its Application for Shares does not exceed:

- 37,739,800 Shares for Category I Investors (not applicable to Anchor Investors); and
- 803,200 Shares for Category II Investors.

None of the Company, the Selling Shareholders, the Issue Managers, the Joint Global Coordinators or the Collection Agents are liable for any changes in applicable laws or regulations that occur after the date of this Prospectus. Investors are advised to make their own independent investigations to ensure that their Applications comply with prevailing laws and regulations.

Price Range

The Price Range has been fixed at Bzs 242 to Bzs 249 per Share, with Bzs 242 being the minimum price and Bzs 249 being the maximum price. The Price Range has been determined through an investor education process, in which the Joint Global Coordinators gathered feedback from potential Category I Investors on their views on the positioning of the Company, its strengths and weaknesses and the valuation of the Company. This was done both through the research analyst reports and directly by each Joint Global Coordinator. The Selling Shareholders evaluated the information collected during this stage with the CMA and the Joint Global Coordinators to determine the Price Range.

Subscription Process for Category I Investors

Category I Investors may place Applications with any of the Collection Agents during official banking hours prior to or on the Category I Offer Closing Date. Applications, once submitted, are binding and can only be modified once by submitting an Application Revision Form for a higher quantity of Shares, a higher price or both, on or before the Category I Offer Closing Date. Applications shall not constitute an offer of Shares and no subscription rights shall be created. Each Collection Agent shall be responsible for verifying if the Application complies with the instructions set out in this Prospectus.

Payment for the Shares purchased by Category I Investors shall be made in Omani Rials. Purchasers will be required to make full payment for the Shares to the designated bank account of the Collection Agents, and the Collection Agents will transfer the subscription proceeds, at least one business day prior to the Settlement Date to the designated bank account of the Issue Managers in accordance with the provisions of "Chapter XVII - Subscription Conditions and Procedures - Terms of Payment for Category I". In the event of a failure to make timely payment, purchasers of the Shares may incur significant charges and/or enforcement action against them.

Price Discovery and Determination of Offer Price and Allocation

After the Category I Offer Closing Date and once all Applications have been submitted to the Issue Managers by the Collection Agents, the Joint Global Coordinators will collectively analyse the demand generated by the Category I Investors at various price levels and discuss pricing strategy with the Selling Shareholders. The Selling Shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and the CMA will determine the Offer Price, which will be within the Price Range. The allocation of Shares to Category I Investors will be determined by the Selling Shareholders in consultation with the Joint Global Coordinators and the CMA. Factors that may be considered by the Joint Global Coordinators and the Selling Shareholders and that will be discussed with the CMA when determining the allocations between prospective Category I Investors may include participation in the marketing process for the Offer, holding balances in previous offerings, holdings in similar companies and other factors that the Joint Global Coordinators and the Selling Shareholders may deem relevant.

If there is undersubscription in Category I (such that it comprises less than 15 per cent. of the Offer Size) and provided that there is oversubscription in Category I, the Selling Shareholders will make any unsubscribed Shares of Category I available for allocation to the Category I Investors. If the demand from Category I Investors is less than the Shares offered for Category I, the Offer size may be reduced or the Offer may be withdrawn, in consultation with the CMA.

If Category II receives demand above the Offer size of 10 per cent. of the Offer size, the allocation of Shares to Category II Investors will be increased to such level as are required to meet such excess demand, up to a maximum of 35 per cent. of the total Offer size. Any increase in the Category II Offer size due to excess demand will result in a corresponding reduction in the allocation to Category I Investors.

On the next working day after receiving CMA approval of the proposed allotment, (i) the Offer Price will be announced by the Company on the MSX and (ii) the Issue Managers will send the investor allocation details to the MCDC and the Joint Global Coordinators, and the Joint Global Coordinators and/or the MCDC, as applicable, will notify Category I investors of their allocations.

Terms of Payment for Category I

Each Collection Agent will open an escrow account entitled the "Abraj IPO - Category I" account for the collection of the Category I Application Money.

The Issue Managers will open an escrow account entitled the "Abraj IPO - Category I" account to receive the subscription proceeds from the Collection Agents at least one business day prior to Settlement Date. This account will be managed by each Issue Manager for Category I. After deduction of all applicable fees and VAT, each Issue Manager for Category I will transfer the net proceeds in such account to the escrow account of the MCDC on the Settlement Date.

Each Category I investor shall be required to make full payment for their subscribed Shares to the designated bank account of the Collection Agents, and the Collection Agents will transfer the subscription proceeds at least one business day prior to the Settlement Date to the designated bank account of the Issue Managers. In the event of failure to make timely payment, the concerned Category I investor may incur significant charges and/or enforcement action against them. Investors can pay for their subscription by drawing a demand draft issued by a bank in Oman or by instructing on account transfer for the amount payable at the time stated above.

Delivery of the Offer Shares is expected to be made on the Settlement Date to the accounts of the Category I Investors through the book-entry facilities operated by the MCDC.

CATEGORY II OFFER (SMALL INVESTORS)

Subscription and Application Process for Category II Applicants:

Initially, 15 per cent. of the Offer (56,609,700 Shares) will be available for subscription by and allocation to Category II Investors, although this may be increased to a maximum of 35 per cent. of the Offer (132,089,300 Shares) if there are sufficient Applications from Category II Investors.

Mode of Application

The Category II Offer process will be conducted through the E-PO Mechanism.

Collection Agent E-PO Platform

Investors will be able to submit Applications to the Collection Agents during official banking working hours on or before the Category II Offer Closing Date. Investors will need to contact a Collection Agent for further guidance on the E-PO channel provided by the respective Collection Agent.

The investor will be required, before completing the Application through E-PO, to carefully read this Prospectus, including the conditions and procedures governing the E-PO Application. Copies of this Prospectus will be available to investors through the Collection Agents, on the Company's IPO microsite or can be downloaded from the websites of the CMA and MSX, as follows: www.cma.gov.om and www.msx.om, respectively.

The Category II Application Money will be paid by the investor as per the terms of the E-PO Mechanism used by each Collection Agent.

MCDC E-PO Platform

Investors can provide their particulars in the E-PO Platform on the MCDC website (www.mcdco.gov.om). After verifying all the particulars, the investor will need to print the E-PO Application. The investor needs to submit the E-PO Application along with supporting documents and Category I Application Money to one of the Collection Agents. The investor will need to contact a Collection Agent for further guidance on the E-PO channel provided by the respective Collection Agent. The Category II Application Money will be paid by the investor as per the terms of the E-PO collection process utilised by each Collection Agent. The Collection Agent will, after verifying the supporting documents and confirming the receipt of the Category II Application Money, validate the E-PO Application in the E-PO Platform and share a copy of the acknowledgement of the E-PO Application with each investor. The investor needs to ensure that they receive a copy of the acknowledgement from the Collection Agent as a valid proof of their Application.

Application Money

Along with submission of the Application, all Category II Investors must make a payment of 100 per cent. of the subscription amount, calculated as the total number of Shares applied for multiplied by the Discounted Maximum Price, which is Bzs 224 per Share (the "Category II Application Money").

Refunds

Any refunds due to Category II Investors will be calculated based on the difference between (i) the Discounted Maximum Price of Bzs 224 per Share and (ii) the Offer Price less a discount of 10 per cent. The Offer Price will be determined by the outcome of the bookbuild offering to Category II Investors. All investors will be allotted Shares at the same Offer Price.

Applications

The Application must be completed in full in accordance with the instructions contained in this Prospectus and in the Application form. Incomplete Applications may be rejected. Investors may only use the specified Application for the purpose of making a subscription for the Offer.

Each investor is eligible to submit only one Application. Submission of a second Application to either the same or to another Collection Agent will be treated as such investor having submitted multiple applications and may result in all Applications submitted by the investor being rejected at any point in time prior to the allotment of Shares in the Offer.

Terms of Payment for Category II

The Collection Agents will open an escrow account for the collection of the Category II Application Money.

This account will be managed by each Collection Agent, who will within the next working day after the receipt of Category II Application Money transfer the collection proceeds to the common escrow account maintained by the MCDC.

Each Category II investor can pay by cash, drawing a demand draft issued by a bank in Oman or instruct on account transfer for the amount payable at the time of submission of the Application.

Basis of Allotment

Applications received from Category II Investors will be grouped together to determine the total demand under Category II. The allotment to all Category II investors will be made at the Offer Price.

If the aggregate demand in Category II is less than or equal to 15 per cent. of the Offer (56,609,700 Shares), full allotment will be made to the Category II Investors up to the number of shares in the records of the MCDC if the transfer of funds to Category II is less than 15 per cent. of the Offer, then offer full allocation as above, the balance of the Shares shall be made available to Category I Investors for allocation at the Offer Price if there is oversubscription in Category I.

If the aggregate demand in Category II is greater than 15 per cent. of the Offer (56,609,700 Shares), then the allotment to Category II investors will be increased, up to a maximum of 35 per cent. of the Offer, and the Category I Offer will be reduced accordingly. If the aggregate demand in Category II is greater than 35 per cent. of the Offer (132,089,300 Shares), then allotments will be scaled back and made on a proportionate basis in consultation with the CMA.

Allotment Confirmation and Refund of Money for Category II

The MCDC will send an SMS to investors who have been allotted Shares to their mobile number registered with the MCDC after the end of the Category II Offer Period following receipt of the approval of the CMA on the proposed allotments. The MCDC is also expected to commence refunds of any excess money to eligible investors within three days maximum after receiving the approval of the CMA on the proposed allotments.

Particulars of the Bank Account of the Investors

In accordance with the instructions of the CMA, each Applicant will need to verify the details of the bank account listed in the records of the MCDC. The bank account listed in the records of the MCDC will be used for the transfer of funds to Category II investors. If an investor takes a leverage facility for the IPO from a Collection Agent, the refund will be made into the investor's loan account with the respective Collection Agent.

Documentation Required

A copy of a valid power of attorney duly endorsed by the competent legal authorities is required if the subscription is on behalf of another person (with the exception of a subscription made by a father on behalf of his minor children). For applications by juristic persons (non-individuals) which are signed by a person in his or her capacity as an authorised signatory, a copy of adequate and valid documentation should be attached.

Collecting Agents Receiving the Applications

The Collection Agent receiving the Applications is required to accept the Application, after confirmation of the Applications compliance with the procedures set out in the Prospectus. The Collection Agent must instruct the Applicants to comply and fulfil any requirements set out in the Application. Applicants must submit an Application to one of the Collection Agents on or before the closing of the relevant Offer Period. The Collection Agent shall refuse any Application received after the end of official working hours on Closing Date.

Acceptance of the Applications

The Issue Managers or the Collection Agents may not accept the Applications if:

- the Application does not bear the signature of the investor;
- the Application Money is not paid by the investor in accordance with the conditions set out in this Prospectus;
- the Application does not include the investor's Investor Number registered with the MCDC;
- the Application is submitted in joint names;
- the investor is a Sole Proprietorship or trust account;
- the investor Number furnished in the Application is incorrect;
- the investor submits more than one Application in the same name, in which case all of them will be rejected;
- the supporting documents are not enclosed with the Application;
- the Application does not contain all the particulars of the bank account of the investor;
- the particulars of the bank account provided for in the Application are found to be incorrect or not relevant to the investor, with the exception of Applications submitted in the names of minor children, who are allowed to make use of the particulars of the bank accounts held by their father;
- the power of attorney is not attached to the Application in respect of an investor who subscribes on behalf of another Person (with the exception of the fathers who subscribe on behalf of their minor children); or
- the Application does not comply with the legal requirements as provided for in this Prospectus.

If the Issue Manager or Collection Agent receives an Application that does not comply



PAYING WITH CASH HURTS!



**IT'S EASY TO CONVINCE YOURSELF,
WITHOUT EVER REALISING IT,
THAT WHEN YOU USE ON YOUR CREDIT OR DEBIT CARD,
YOU'RE NOT SPENDING "REAL" MONEY**

MAI AL ABRI

CASH is a tangible piece of paper having monetary value attached to it. You have less of it in your wallet when you spend it. You notice it and process it. However, with the growing use of credit cards, transactions have become less transparent. It's easy to convince yourself, without ever realising it, that when you use on your credit or debit card, you're not spending "real" money. That is technically correct.

My finding stemmed from personal experience. I forgot my debit card one day and had to pay for a cup of Spanish latte with cash. I'm not sure if I was correct or if it was

simply a feeling, but it was tastier that day, even though I thought the price for a cup of coffee was expensive. When I use my debit card, I don't usually get that feeling.

According to research, when we spend money, we experience pain. This is because we, as humans, prefer to prevent loss wherever possible. Purchasing using cash has been found to be more painful than paying with a credit or debit card. When we hand over physical cash rather than swiping a piece of plastic, our loss of money is more visible to the brain.

Expressing her thoughts on this topic, Ruqaya remarked, "Honestly, I love to pay with a credit card so that I remain joyful after any purchase, without thinking of the money that I have just lost. When I get the bank SMS or e-mail for the transaction, I dismiss it without reading

it. However, by the end of the month, I understand I have wasted a lot of money, but I continue to do the same thing every month."

Ruqaya, on the other hand, stated that when she donates in cash, she feels happier and values the money in her hands. "I also spray some perfume on the note to make it aromatic. When I spend money on anything else, I never feel the same."

"It is always painful". Muna also verifies that she has cash in her wallet, yet she continues to pay using her credit card. "Paying through a credit card feels less painful. I feel secure knowing that I will always have that sum of money with me. However, I place a higher value on items when I pay for them in cash. I keep telling myself that I paid a lot of money for those goods to appreciate them more."



Technical development lab opens

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 11

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, inaugurated technical development laboratory at the Ministry's General Diwan last week. The lab is funded by Oman-India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO).

Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, attended the inauguration ceremony with Said bin Salim al Salmi, Director-General of Human Resources and Work Culture at OMIFCO, and a number of advisers and directors-general of the Ministry's General Diwan.

Al Bahri said: "Based on the government policy that works to provide an opportunity for private sector institutions to contribute into development, and on the educational policy approach that emphasises the need to cooperate with private sector institutions to contribute in developing the educational process and its resources, and keeping pace with modern digital developments and the dimensions of the fourth industrial revolution, the idea of establishing a laboratory for technological development in the education sector came to support the Ministry's efforts in digital transformation, and a contribution from Oman-India Fertiliser Company to harness part of its resources to develop the educational process."

He added: "The laboratory contributes to the development of smart digital systems and builds the capacities, skills



and technical expertise of the Ministry's employees through the implementation of several workshops and development programmes in various fields. The laboratory also addresses a number of smart technologies based on future technology, which contribute to supporting education trends and the continuous enrichment and digitisation of the educational process without stopping on building a curriculum development plan. This laboratory also contributes to the development of e-learning by studying many supporting applications, or enabling capabilities, skills and technical expertise in this aspect, as well as helping to support the trends of institutional excellence in light of the laboratory's plans to study developmental educational projects enhanced by the use of information and communication technology in education on an ongoing basis, as the laboratory is expected to provide its services to train

more than 600 beneficiaries annually from various sectors in the Ministry."

Al Salmi of OMIFCO said: "We are pleased and proud in our cooperation with the Ministry of Education in supporting educational projects that contribute to the development of the innovation system in the Sultanate of Oman in general. The technical development laboratory project is part of the company's social responsibility programmes group, to develop human capital and to create a supportive environment to promote the technical, innovative and creative development of national cadres."

The inauguration ceremony began with a visual presentation on the lab's objectives that the Ministry seeks to achieve, including information and communication technology, digital transformation in education, building capabilities and skills, empowering job performance, studying and

developing digital projects, providing an attractive environment for all directorates and motivating employees to give more.

After that, Dr Badr al Hadidi, Awareness and Digital Services Specialist at the Directorate-General of Information Technology, gave a presentation of the general objectives of establishing this laboratory, including providing an incubating and supportive technical environment for capabilities and multi-tasking, and organising and implementing training workshops and programmes to build these capabilities. He also indicated the pillars of this laboratory which include a computer lab corner, a multi-purpose discussion area corner, a brainstorming area corner and a dedicated work booths corner. The presentation also touched on the stages of implementation of this laboratory, its operational and implementation plan, and reservation mechanisms, and how to provide feedback and continuous development.

After that, the minister and the attendees toured the corners of the laboratory, where in the discussion booth (1), an experimental project to raise awareness of virtual reality was shown, and in the discussion booth (2) displayed a presentation on developing the official website of the Ministry. In the laboratory, a presentation of technical services in schools (E-SCHOOL) was presented, in the brainstorming corner, the pilot project (Smart Student Card) was presented, and in the computer corner, a training workshop for the (Power Apps) programme was presented.

OMAN-EMIRATE DRILL CONTINUES



ABU DHABI: The Oman-Emirate military exercise (Cooperation 3) continued for the sixth day, on Saturday. A force from Muscat Regiment at the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), aircraft from the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), navy ships from the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) are taking part in the drill alongside different military units from the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces. The drill is set to conclude on February 16. – ONA

Oman takes part in Arab Parliament Conference



CAIRO: The State Council took part in the 5th Conference of the Arab Parliament and Speakers of Arab Parliaments and Assemblies which began in the Egyptian capital Cairo, on Saturday.

The conference debated a draft parliamentary document on enhancing Arab food security.

Titled "A Parliamentary Vision for Strengthening Arab Food Security", the document focuses on the challenges and threats facing Arab countries with regard to food security and the parliaments' role in handling the issue.

The speakers of Arab parliaments and assemblies and heads of delegations

convened a meeting to approve the conference's document.

Dr Badriyah bint Ibrahim al Shuhayh, Deputy Chairman of the State Council, delivered the State Council's speech in which she expressed the condolences of the Sultanate of Oman to the brotherly people of Syria and the victims' families of the devastating earthquake affirming the Omani people's solidarity with their brothers in both countries. — ONA

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يمكن للمرشحين الراغبين إرسال سيرتهم الذاتية إلى البريد الإلكتروني الآتي: hradmncf12@gmail.com

Siyaq's rock formations attract tourists

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Omani villages store unique archaeological and geological treasures.

Siyaq village is one such example. This beautiful village is located on a mountainous hill overlooking the valley's path of Wadi Bani Khalid (North Al Sharqiyah). It attracts tourists of all sorts to appreciate and indulge in the unique geological formations surrounding the village.

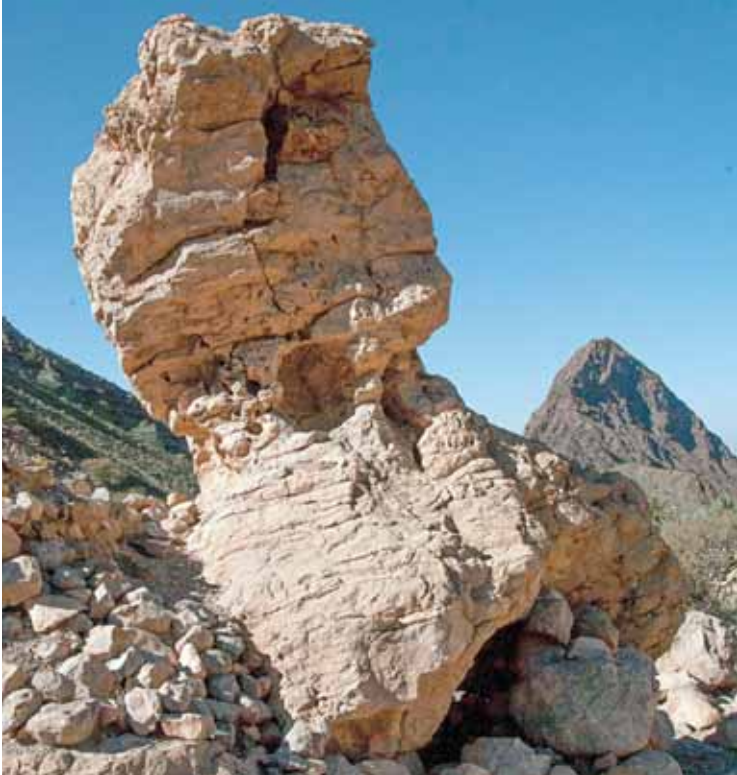
At the village entrance, the visitor is welcomed by the tower.

The cylindrical tower played a crucial role in the life of the villagers by helping them to warn against enemies in the olden days.

The tower still represents this village's cultural symbol, surrounded by ancient walls built in the style of ancient Omani houses made of mud and stones.

There are many geological formations which attract tourists. Some of these formations resemble the faces of animals and birds.

This village has exceptional terrain forms, different from other forms and natural phenomena from an aesthetic, scientific, geological or tourist point of view.



Its natural setting gives this village a unique value and importance to tourists and specialists in geological affairs.

"Nature has endowed the Sultanate of Oman with richness in its topography and geography over its wide area,

and this topography can be seen in many places, including distinct rock formations, formed by wind, rain or water, which gave it an aesthetic, exceptional and distinctive shape," says a visitor who has an interest in geological sites.

"These shapes were formed due to erosion factors and the effects of climatic conditions on mountainous areas tens of thousands of years ago. The spread of these shapes on the slopes of the mountains surrounding the village attracts the visitor's attention. These rocks look very ordinary, but as soon as you approach them, their shapes resemble the shapes of animals and birds," said another geologist.

Siyaq and its neighbouring villages, such as Sibt, Mazraa and Seeq, are characterised by unique geological formations.

Many geological sites in the Sultanate of Oman are famous for rare rock formations, the most important of which are the rock garden in the Wilayat of Al Duqm, the rock formations in the Wilayat of Qurayat and several eastern regions of the country.

"The sad thing is that many tourists visit these sites and do not adhere to the best touristic practices. Moreover, these sites face erosion. So it is necessary to conduct studies to protect and promote them," said an Omani tour guide.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (8/2023)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/069	2022/MM/QS-44 Re-Call-1	Site preparation for street vendors in Wilayat AL Amarat (Almahaj) (Re-Tender)	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	First
PRE/22/094	2022/MM/QS-58 Re-Call-1	Supply of Equipments and Hearse (Re-Tender)	25	20/02/2023	28/02/2023	Specialist
PRE/22/121	2022/MM/HQ-14 Re-Call-2	Design & Construction of Storm Water Drainage in Wilayat Boshier (Re-Tender)	47	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	First
PRE/22/130	2022/MM/QS-75 Re-Call-2	Design & Construction of Car Parking at Bousher HTS, Lump Sum Contract (Re-Tender)	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	First
PRE/22/152	2022/MM/QS-82 Re-Call-2	Construction of Proposed Solution to Resolve storm Water in Hail North Walayt AL Seeb (Re-Tender)	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	First
PRE/22/165	2022/MM/QS-88 Re-Call-1	Rehabilitation Works at Mutairah Roundabout in Mutrah (Re-Tender)	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	First
PRE/23/009	2023/MM/QS-10	Supply of and Installation of LED Street Light at Boshier	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	Specialist
PRE/23/021	2023/MM/QS-11	Supply and Installation of LED Street Light and Cloud based at Al Amarat	25	06/03/2023	27/03/2023	Specialist

Tender Conditions :-
1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
2. Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
3. For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
4. For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
5. For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).

TURKEY DETAINS 12 OVER
COLLAPSED BUILDINGS

ISTANBUL: Turkish police have detained 12 people over collapsed buildings in the southeastern provinces of Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, local media reported on Saturday, following the huge quake that hit Turkey. Those taken into custody included contractors, DHA news agency said. At least 6,000 buildings collapsed after a 7.8-magnitude tremor hit the region, killing more than 25,000 people, sparking anger over the poor quality of housing. There are expected to be more detentions after the public prosecutor in Diyarbakir, one of 10 southeastern provinces affected by the quake, issued arrest warrants for 29 people on Saturday, state news agency reported. — AFP



A woman and her son look on at a camp for the victims of a deadly earthquake in Kahramanmaraş. — Reuters



An injured local resident walks past rubbles in Hatay after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country's southeast. — AFP

TURKEY TO ACT AGAINST THOSE
INVOLVED IN LOOTING

ISTANBUL: Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday the government would take action against those involved in looting and other crimes in the region hit by this week's devastating earthquakes as the issue of security there came into focus. "We've declared a state of emergency," he said during a visit to the disaster zone. "It means that, from now on, the people who are involved in looting or kidnapping should know that the state's firm hand is on their backs," he said. On Friday he said there had been looting in some areas. It was not clear what incidents of kidnapping Erdogan was referring to. The security in the quake zone has come into focus after the Austrian army suspended rescue operations there due to what its spokesperson called "an increasingly difficult security situation". — Reuters



A child salvages a bicycle from the ruins of a building, as search and rescue operations continue days after a deadly earthquake hit Turkey and Syria, in Jindayris. — AFP

‘WORLD MUST
REMEMBER
THOSE
DISPLACED
BY QUAKE’

KAHRAMANMARAS: UN aid chief Martin Griffiths appealed on Saturday to remember thousands of people who needed shelter and food while rescuers kept searching for survivors of the devastating earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northwestern Syria. Speaking during a news briefing in the Turkish province of Kahramanmaraş, as rescuers worked behind him, Griffiths said he spoke to families who had been displaced and left cold and hungry by the quake. "I am here to make sure these people are not forgotten," he told reporters. Griffiths praised Turkey's response to the disaster as "extraordinary" and hailed the "courage of first responders working 24-hours, all the time, hoping for one more sound, one more person who survived." — Reuters



Turkish rescue workers pose with a cat named 'Mucize' (Miracle), after they saved it alive from rubbles, in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Islahiye, Gaziantep province. — Reuters



Residents try to salvage some items, as search and rescue operations continue days after a deadly earthquake hit Turkey and Syria, in the town of Jindayris. — AFP

ARMENIA-TURKEY CROSSING
OPENS FOR FIRST TIME

ISTANBUL: A border crossing between Armenia and Turkey opened for the first time in 35 years on Saturday, to allow humanitarian aid through after a massive earthquake hit the region, an official said. Five trucks with aid including food and water arrived in Turkey from the Alican border crossing, tweeted Serdar Kiliç, Turkey's special envoy for dialogue with Armenia. The assistance comes after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake rocked Turkey and Syria, killing nearly 25,000 people in both countries, and injuring tens of thousands more. State news agency Anadolu said this was the first time the crossing had opened since 1988, when Turkey sent aid to Armenia after the country was hit by an earthquake. — AFP

SURVIVORS WAIT FOR
NEWS OF MISSING,
BUT HOPES FADE

* Hundreds of thousands homeless in the middle of winter
* UN aid chief praises Turkey's quake response



A view shows tents of a temporary accommodation centre erected on a football pitch to support people affected by a devastating earthquake in Gaziantep. — Reuters

ANTAKYA,/JANDARIS: Rescuers in Turkey pulled more people from the rubble early on Saturday, five days after the country's most devastating earthquake since 1939, but hopes were fading in Turkey and Syria that many more survivors would be found.

In Kahramanmaraş, close to the quake's epicentre in southern Turkey, there were fewer visible rescue operations amid the smashed concrete mounds of fallen houses and apartment blocks, while ever more trucks rumbled through the streets shipping out debris.

The growing death toll, exceeding 24,450 across southern Turkey and northwest Syria, raised questions over Turkey's earthquake planning and response time, and President Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that authorities should have reacted faster.

Speaking on Saturday, Erdogan promised to start work on rebuilding cities "within weeks", saying hundreds of thousands



A view of the damaged Katolik Kilisesi (RC Church), in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Iskenderun. — Reuters

of buildings were now uninhabitable, while issuing stern warnings against any people involved in looting in the quake zone.

In the rebel enclave of northwest Syria that suffered the country's worst damage from the earthquake but where relief efforts are complicated by the more than decade-old civil war, very little aid had entered even after the Damascus government said on Friday it would allow convoys to cross frontlines.

In Turkey, 67 people had been clawed from the rubble in the previous

24 hours, Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay told reporters, in efforts that drew in 31,000 rescuers across the affected region.

About 80,000 people were being treated in hospital, while 1.05 million left homeless by the quakes were in temporary shelters, he added. Few rescue efforts now result in success. In Antakya, rescue workers pulled 13 year-old Arda Can Ovan from the ruins of a building after 128 hours, wrapping him in foil and bracing his neck as he was lifted free from the ground on a stretcher.

Overnight, a 70-year-old woman and a nine

year-old boy were rescued in Kahramanmaraş and a 55 year-old woman was pulled from the rubble in the eastern city of Diyarbakir. However, a woman who was rescued on Friday in Kirikhan in Turkey died in hospital.

The danger in such operations was evident in a video filmed in Hatay in Turkey on Saturday, showing a partially collapsed building suddenly slipping and burying a rescuer in an avalanche of debris before his colleagues could haul him out.

An Austrian rescue team said it was suspending operations over the security situation in the region, though it was not immediately clear whether it was responding to any specific incident.

Across the devastated region, people waited for news of missing loved ones. Soner Zamir and Sevde Nur Zamir were squatting in front of a mangled building where his parents and grandparents lived.

— Reuters

Turkish woman dies
day after her rescue

KIRIKHAN: A woman died in hospital on Saturday a day after she was pulled out of the rubble of a collapsed building in southern Turkey, where she had been trapped for 104 hours since Monday's devastating earthquake, rescuers said.

German rescuers pulled 40-year-old Zeynep Kahraman out of the rubble in the town of Kirikhan in southern

Turkey on Friday. They hailed her survival a "miracle" as search and rescue efforts in the aftermath of the region's deadliest quake in decades kept turning up more bodies.

"We have just learned from the brother and sister that Zeynep sadly passed away in the hospital," said Steven Bayer, the leader of German International Search and Rescue team. — Reuters



Members of the ISAR Germany react after rescuing a woman named Zeynep, as the search for survivors continues, in the aftermath of a deadly earthquake in Kirikhan. — Reuters

In Syria, scope of quake carnage stuns a war hospital



CORA ENGELBRECHT

Syrian doctors find themselves caught in the middle of a fresh humanitarian crisis after the earthquake, with rescue efforts obstructed by the location of the quake zone, which includes government and opposition-controlled lands in Syria

Dr Nehad Abdulmajeed thought he had seen the worst human suffering of his career as a surgeon in Syria. In 2016, he survived the siege of Aleppo, which left thousands dead or crippled in the midst of a civil war. After the city fell to government forces, Abdulmajeed retreated to a town called Al Atarib, in the country's northwest, where he worked in a hospital dug deep underground to protect it from relentless Russian and Syrian bombardments. "Our hospital has always been filled with tragedy," he said in a phone interview from his operating room. But the carnage he and his staff have seen this week, from an entirely different enemy, was of a scope he had never encountered. Hundreds of casualties from Monday's earthquake, which was centred nearby across the border with Turkey, have arrived this week at his hospital from the Al Atarib region, and many were already dead when they reached the hospital. Staff members say they had counted 148 bodies at the hospital. "Since Monday, the bodies have not stopped coming," said Abdulmajeed, 33, one of four doctors in the subterranean hospital known as the Cave. "Some arrive without heads. Others without limbs." After weathering more than a decade of civil war, Syrian doctors find themselves caught in the middle of a fresh humanitarian crisis after the earthquake, with rescue efforts obstructed by the location of the quake zone, which includes government- and opposition-controlled lands in Syria. That has meant a desperate scramble to save people trapped in the debris of collapsed buildings in the hope of taking them to hospitals like the one in Al Atarib. "People are digging through the rubble with their fingernails to reach the screaming voices on the other side," said one doctor, Murhaf Assaf, who worked in the Cave in 2018 and is in frequent contact with the staff there. He now lives in Wales. Hospital staff members shared videos and images with the Times that showed the dead, shrouded in blankets, lining the corridors. Another video showed a pickup, stacked with bodies, arriving at the hospital. "We have cried over children who lived through this war and are now dead for no reason," Abdulmajeed said. On Tuesday, the hospital received three siblings — including Abdul Haseeb, 3 — who had survived in the rubble for 36 hours. "It is a blessing they are still alive," said Abdulmajeed, who was eager to share what little hopeful news there was. Abdulmajeed was sleeping with his own children in a nearby village when the earthquake struck, sending tremors across the area. "I saw our lives flash before our eyes," he said. His family had huddled in the cold for hours to wait out the aftershocks, before he was able to make his way to the hospital and start saving people. "We kept looking up to the sky for jets," said Dr Osama Salloum, who drove to the Cave from Idlib on Monday morning after receiving an urgent call for help. "My mind was playing tricks on me — telling me it was war again."



An entrance to the Cave, a subterranean hospital and long the destination for war wounded, a day after the facility was bombed by Syrian forces, in Aleppo.

One boy, who looked about 6 years old, died as Salloum was performing CPR. "I saw the life leaves his face," said the doctor, who also operated on patients during the siege of Aleppo. "All the traumatic images from my work during the war flooded back to me," he added. "I felt like I was waking in a recurring nightmare." The doctors said their experiences during wartime had prepared them well for the human toll wrought by the earthquake — especially for the hard choices that such grueling work entailed. "There were days when we could only save some — if you tried to save all of them, you wouldn't be able to save anyone," said Assaf, who worked in the Cave in 2018. The hospital in Al Atarib was built in 2017 by the Syrian American Medical Society, or SAMS, a humanitarian group that supports 39 medical facilities in the country. Located close to the fighting on a main road connecting Aleppo with the city of Idlib, it was dug deep underground to evade the routine bombing and shelling of hospitals by Russian and Syrian forces in rebel-held areas. But the hospital came under a devastating artillery bombardment in March 2021 that killed seven patients and injured 15, including five medical staff members, according to a joint report by SAMS and the Physicians for Human Rights. The attack was emblematic of one of the most brutal tactics employed by the Syrian regime since the civil war

began in 2011. Physicians for Human Rights has documented 601 attacks on 400 healthcare facilities since the war began. The systemic crackdown on hospitals and clinics in opposition-held areas has devastated Syria's healthcare system, garnering international condemnation and prompting up to 70 per cent of Syria's healthcare workers to flee the country, according to a 2021 report by BioMed Central in London. "These doctors have been uniquely trained by war — but unfortunately only a few of them remain in the country," said Assaf, who left Syria in June 2019. "They need all the help they can get," he said. He added that the Cave's staff, which had at least 11 surgeons when its doors first opened, had shrunk to a few people at a time over the past five years. Important resources, like gloves and plaster for bandaging wounds, were already dwindling, the surgeons said. In the days following Monday's earthquake, aid to Syria has been hindered, in part because the roads surrounding a major border crossing from Turkey into opposition-held areas was damaged. And aid groups in Turkey have been affected by the quake. Any prolonged obstruction could pose a challenge for doctors at the underground hospital in Al Atarib. "I believed that maybe I had seen everything," Abdulmajeed said, "but these are the most tragic days that I have seen in my entire life."

How ChatGPT can improve education, not threaten it



PROF JOHN VILLASEÑOR

To read the news, the sanctity of everything from college application essays to graduate school tests to medical licensing exams is imperiled by easy access to advanced artificial intelligence like ChatGPT, the AI chatbot that can produce remarkably clear, long-form answers to complex questions. Educators in particular worry about students turning to ChatGPT to help them complete assignments. One proposed solution is to roll back the clock to the 20th century, making students write exam essays using pen and paper, without the use of any Internet-connected electronic devices. The University of California, Los Angeles, where I teach, is considering making it an honour code violation to use ChatGPT for taking an exam or writing a paper. That's the wrong approach. This semester, I am telling the students in my class at the UCLA School of Law that they are free to use ChatGPT in their writing assignments. The time when a person had to be a good writer to produce good writing ended in late 2022, and we need to adapt.

Rather than banning students from using labour-saving and time-saving AI writing tools, we should teach students to use them ethically and productively. To remain competitive throughout their careers, students need to learn how to prompt an AI writing tool to elicit worthwhile output and know how to evaluate its quality, accuracy and originality. They need to learn to compose well-organised, coherent essays involving a mix of AI-generated text and traditional writing. As professionals working into the 2060s and beyond, they will need to learn how to engage productively with AI systems, using them to both complement and enhance human creativity with the extraordinary power promised by mid-21st-century AI. In addition to the sound pedagogical reasons for treating ChatGPT as an opportunity and not a threat, there are practical ones as well. It simply isn't feasible to effectively ban access to this technology. Honour code or not, many students will be unable to resist the temptation to seek AI assistance with their writing. And how would an educational institution enforce a ChatGPT ban? While there are tools aimed at detecting text produced by AI, future versions of AI will get better at emulating human writing — including to the point of emulating the style of the particular person who is using it. In the resulting arms race, the AI writing tools will



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always be one step ahead of the tools to detect AI text. Enforcement of a ChatGPT ban would also inevitably produce the injustice of false positives and false negatives. Some students who use ChatGPT despite a ban would, through luck or thanks to careful-enough editing of AI-generated text, avoid having their writing flagged as AI-assisted. Worse, some students would be falsely accused of using ChatGPT, triggering enormous stress and potentially leading to punishment for a wrong they did not commit. And what of the argument that learning to write well provides benefits that go well beyond writing? Writing a good essay from scratch requires careful, often painstaking, thought about organisation, flow and communication. Learning to write without AI does indeed promote focused, disciplined thinking. But learning to successfully combine unassisted and AI-assisted writing to create truly good essays also requires these qualities. Writing is a craft worthy of enormous respect, one which few of us ever master. But most students don't aspire to become professional writers. Instead, they are preparing for careers where they will write to further goals beyond the production of writing. As we do today, they will write to communicate, explain, convince, memorialise, request and persuade. AI writing tools, when properly used, will help them do those things better.

A world with no morals



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

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

According to the American Psychological Association, demoralisation can be defined as the “breakdown of values, standards and morals of an individual or group, such as may occur in periods of rapid social change, extended crises (war, economic depression), or personal traumas.”

It can happen when one’s sense of purpose and meaning is gradually eroded, leading to feelings of hopelessness, apathy and a lack of motivation. This can occur in a variety of contexts, such as in the workplace, in relationships, and in society as a whole.

Demoralisation may affect societies on various levels, ranging from the more malleable teens and young adults to the most hardened older generations.

In the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution — where all societies are virtually

interconnected — people are exposed to a variety of morals and ideals stemming from different backgrounds. Take social media for example — you could throw out the most morally perverse ideology possible, and you would still find someone out there that would agree with your stance.

Perhaps one of the causes of demoralisation could be the substantial increase in globalisation — the interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures and populations, mainly brought about by cross-border trade in goods, services, technology and information.

Everyone is virtually connected, and we are exposed to many different ideologies, from the tamest to the most extreme. The continuous exposure to such ideologies may affect how one perceives their own beliefs and

ONE OF THE CAUSES OF DEMORALISATION COULD BE THE SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN GLOBALISATION — THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE WORLD’S ECONOMIES, CULTURES AND POPULATIONS, MAINLY BROUGHT ABOUT BY CROSS-BORDER TRADE IN GOODS, SERVICES, TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION

norms. This is not necessarily a negative, as we have a lot to learn from other cultures.

The issue arises however, when we start getting desensitised to our own morals. What is right and what is wrong are no longer dictated by personal thoughts, but rather by the thoughts of the majority.

In a society that is heavily dependent on social media, propaganda can be spread much more easily. Altruism is glorified and conservativeness is almost seen as a sin.

Following trends on TikTok and similar platforms is made out to be the best way to “fit in” with the rest. It gradually becomes a race of who can copy others the best and gain the most views. Eventually, the amount of attention one can get becomes the most important factor, regardless of the content being shared.

China — the origin of TikTok — limits access for students to only educational content, and only for a certain amount of time per day. Yet, we have access to such content and more for longer periods of time. Steve Jobs limited his children’s use of iPads. One of the reasons why they enforced these rules was to regulate what their youth

were exposed to — to differentiate between what was useful and what was not.

Continuous exposure to any act may lead to desensitisation. An example of this is when a soldier may become desensitised to death in a battlefield. This also applies to what we consume from social media, or rather what it consumes from us. Many people spend hours on social media and trade cheap entertainment for the most precious commodity — time.

As Earl Nightingale said, “We become what we think about most of the time.” When we spend hours on algorithms that are tailored to steal our attention, we can easily be influenced by what we view.

Demoralisation is a complex problem that can have significant negative effects on individuals and society, thus addressing it requires a multi-faceted approach.

In eastern Ukraine, snipers watch and wait

PHIL HAZLEWOOD

“I’m not afraid of Russians,” says “Voron”, a sniper with the State Border Guard of Ukraine in the eastern Donbas region. “But don’t tell my mum I’m here,” he adds, laughing.

The 29-year-old soldier’s mother probably guessed, as her son has been in the military for 12 years — and that he has wanted to be a sniper since childhood.

In action films, snipers are typically portrayed as ruthless, silent lone wolves, lying in wait to pick off prey with clinical efficiency.

But “Voron” — whose Ukrainian call sign means “Raven” in English — describes a different reality.

“Usually the kit I have doesn’t always fit into one car,” he says from behind a thermal balaclava ski mask to keep out the biting cold and protect his identity.

To carry out his tasks, Voron needs much more than his AXMC, a rifle that can hit targets up to 1.5 kilometres away.

“It’s shovels just for building up your position, ammunition of course, your covering group and spotter... usually five or six people, four at a minimum.”

Despite fierce fighting and heavy shelling in places like Bakhmut, the winter months have slowed down the battle for the Donbas region.

But the conflict is expected to intensify as the first anniversary of Russia’s war approaches on February 24. Snipers have been playing their part.

They can conduct reconnaissance missions on targets up to three kilometres away or shoot small groups of enemy fighters from hidden positions.

Their first task is to meticulously monitor for any changes in the area.

“Brushwood that wasn’t there the night before... might be an enemy sniper if it’s a rural area,” he explains.

“In more urban areas, you’re looking for any changes in the windows and the roofs and something that is not how it should be... everything is a threat.”

Voron dodges a question about how effective snipers have been in the war so far.

Still, he maintains that snipers remain essential, even if he acknowledges they are not a cure-all. “Some people hate us. But if there is any trouble people always want us there,” he says.

And they hold a special place inside the paramilitary unit, which in peacetime patrols Ukraine’s borders.

“You’re the eyes of your commander and you’re the one who will eliminate the most dangerous threat — unless it’s a tank, of course,” he says.

Looking into telescopic sights for long hours can be stressful, Voron says, but nothing is as difficult as withstanding the frost for hours on end. — AFP

Incorrigible anguish and distress from Turkey-Syria earthquake



Dr Musallam al Ma'ani

The writer is Dean of Al Zahra College for Women



A woman carrying a baby watches as search and rescue operations continue days after a deadly earthquake hit Turkey and Syria, in the town of Jindayris, in Syria's Aleppo province. – AFP

On February 6, parts of Turkey and Syria were struck with a violent earthquake with a magnitude of approximately 7.8 sending tremors to regions as far as Lebanon.

The event was marked by overwhelming upheaval and demolition, causing wide and general destruction and wreaked havoc on areas that directly came under sudden and forceful contact with the earthquake. It is an incontestable fact that this event is a major misfortune that causes an unfortunate and distressing result.

As some parts of both countries were suddenly swept by strong earth shake, the totality of human beings can do nothing in the face of the anger of nature and natural causes.

As an extraordinary interruption, it cannot reasonably be prevented, nor can any act be interposed to keep away its occurrence. It is nature’s irrefragable rules which are impossible to break or alter.

Scenes from distressed areas portray heartbreaking images of material destruction and loss of lives, bringing about an intense emotional reaction and response extended throughout the entire world and all the way from east to west. Such images irresistibly arouse

AS TIME PASSES, THE LAMENTABLE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EARTHQUAKE WILL BE FORGOTTEN BY PEOPLE, BUT DEPLORABLE DEATHS SHALL REMAIN AMONG THOSE BROKENHEARTED BY THE EFFECTS OF THIS CALAMITY

sympathy and compassion, cause sorrow and distress, and show gloom and depression.

The material impact is not only strong and widespread, but indefinitely extensive and immeasurable by all scales.

It is, by all means, hard to arrange, grade or classify. Buildings, regardless of size or height, were either razed and destroyed to the ground or broken into pieces by earth’s tremble, putting out of existence some settlements. Small hamlets, villages and towns were reduced to a ruinous state.

The event also resulted in great loss and perhaps lasting distress and suffering for those who lost their relatives as thousands of people lost their lives.

For the whole of the world, the event

is marked by incorrigible anguish and distress and overcome by grief and despair.

There is no doubt that countries around the world are willing to extend their hands and extend support and aid to both Turkey and Syria, but the only thing nobody can do is to soothe the grief and unhappiness of those who lost their beloved and dear relatives.

As time passes, the lamentable consequences of the earthquake will be forgotten by other people, but deplorable deaths shall remain among those brokenhearted by the effects of this calamity.

As nobody at this point of time can bring comfort, solace and reassurance to distressed people, all we can do is to pray that Allah have mercy on the relatives of deceased ones and instil courage and patience to overcome the state of instability and insecurity among them.

We also pray that the structure that holds together the social edifice and the fabric of the society and that peace, composure and quietude, are soon brought back into its former and original state both in Turkey and Syria.

With will of Allah, the people of both countries regain, calmness and repose of mind and bearing.

Romance, red roses, and Valentine’s Day

The ever more intrusive Valentine’s Day is almost upon us. As always, its origins are misted by time, however we can probably accept that the original Valentine was a martyr who comforted those being persecuted for their beliefs during the excesses that marked the fall of the ancient Roman Empire.

Whether he simply prayed for, or ministered to those in their last days. Whether he restored the eyesight of a young woman who then immediately fell in love with him, whether he actually married couples in the jails and prisons of Rome, or whether a passionate Valentine declared his love for another beauty before he died in the arena, we will certainly never know. Of the most likely candidates, Valentine of Rome, died only a few years before the second, Valentine of Terni, and both are said to be interred on the Via Flaminia, one of the first roads ever built, so they must have commanded quite some respect.

It may not be a coincidence that early history records a Roman festival of Chastity as being observed on or about the current date of February 14, while the very first concrete evidence of the date arose in the court of Charles VI of France and his Queen Isabeau, during the 15th century, where a celebration of ‘love’ emerged, the mind boggles doesn’t it? What we do know is that the romantics of those Middle Ages in Europe linked the early Spring hatching of the very fashionable, of the times, lovebirds evolved, during the 18th century, into a February 14 Saints Day with hearts, roses, and doves all linked to the festive event.

William Shakespeare perpetuates the day too, writing in 1601: “To-morrow is Saint Valentine’s day, and all in the morning betime, And I a maid at your window, to be your Valentine. Then up he rose, and donn’d his clothes, and dupp’d the chamber-door; Let in the maid, that out a maid, never departed more.” Richard Cadbury, the eldest son of John Cadbury founder of the iconic brand, was among the first



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AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE BEING CHALLENGED BY THOSE WHO WOULD CHANGE HOW WE SEE, RECOGNISE, APPRECIATE, AND TREASURE OURSELVES AND OTHERS

chocolatiers to romanticise chocolates with heart-shaped boxes of the confectionery produced for Valentine’s Day in 1868. It was never more than modestly observed however, until the American retail sector ‘reinvented’ it during the post-war 1950’s ‘feel-good’ years, to the extent that in that country, Valentine’s related spending by 52 per cent of the population, has reached \$32 billion in 2022, or nearly \$200 per person. Wow!

It’s a big thing, surprisingly, in the Sultanate of Oman too, with not only balloons and confectionary great sellers, but most of the upmarket hospitality and dining destinations thriving on the commercial opportunities Valentine’s Day offers. One resort invited last year’s guests to “dress to impress, and let our chefs do the rest.” While another alluded to romanticism and fine dining as an opportunity to “solemnise your bond of timeless love,” and a third exhorted its guests to “Relish the romance... to take your love to greater heights.” But the best was the invitation to “dine among the clouds... to get the one-to-one time you and your love deserve.”

All of these, for this culture, romantic, often touching, and spectacularly inviting, from the mountain heights to the seashores. I love that this nation, and its people are learning to express themselves outwardly, without reservation, for few nations can boast the grace, beauty, elegance, and absolute class of its womenfolk, while its men are slowly but surely coming to the realisation that romance has an inevitability in a successful life, and that love really does conquer all. Your spouses are as much a garment for you as you are to them.

At a time when we are being challenged by those who would change how we see, recognise, appreciate, and treasure ourselves and others, it is appropriate that we celebrate love itself. Surely we all need love, and less important than where we find it is that we find it. So, do the right thing... whether dining, dancing, or simply celebrating together, love, honour, cherish, and adore the one you love, on Valentine’s Day and every day.

IEFFEL TOWER AT SUNSET



This photograph shows the Eiffel Tower at sunset in Paris, France, on Saturday. – AFP

Oman laws and institutions a bulwark against extremism

The UN designated February 12 of each year as the International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism in 2022. The day is also celebrated in Oman, which is considered as an icon of peace in the world in terms of being free from acts of violence, and combating all types of extremism, violence and terrorism.

Oman is least exposed to terrorism, reveals the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), developed by international think tank the Institute of Economics and Peace. It continued to score zero.

Oman’s achievement came as a result of serious and systematic work at all levels and through various government and private institutions and through building a tight and efficient legislative system that is not only concerned with combating terrorist organisations, but also aimed at “drying up” the sources of terrorist financing.

The laws to combat terrorism went through many stages and continued to develop and modernise in line with global developments and best international practices.

Oman criminalised terrorist



Dr Saud Mohammed al Farsi

The writer is blogger and PhD in nuclear law

OMAN IS LEAST EXPOSED TO TERRORISM, REVEALS THE GLOBAL TERRORISM INDEX (GTI), DEVELOPED BY INTERNATIONAL THINK TANK THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS AND PEACE

acts under Article 132 of the Omani Penal Code - repealed – which was issued in 1974, and continued to do so in the Anti-Terrorism Law issued in 2007. The Anti-Terrorism Law has become the basic nucleus of the fight against terrorism in Oman. Moreover, the law provided that the National Counter-Terrorism Committee shall be reconstituted by a decision of the National Security Council and shall operate under its supervision.

As part of its efforts to dry up the sources of terror funds, the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism Law was issued in 2010. One of the most important provisions of that law was the establishment of the National Committee for Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, to be the competent authority to set public policies and issue guidelines. The Committee, in coordination with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, is responsible for the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council

Resolutions on the Consolidated Lists for the Freezing of Funds of Designated Persons and Entities.

In addition, the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) was established under the Royal Oman Police. The FIU is responsible to receive reports and information from financial institutions, non-financial businesses and professions, non-profit associations and bodies, and others on transactions suspected of relating to the proceeds of crime or terrorism.

The abovementioned law also obliges the competent regulatory authorities, including the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority, the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and the Ministry of Social Development to regulate the sectors in a way that ensures that these sectors are not exploited to commit money laundering and terror funding.

In response to international developments, Oman issued a new law to combat money

laundering and terrorist financing in 2016. By this law, the FIU was transformed into a national financial information centre with legal personality and financial and administrative independence.

Oman has not neglected to criminalise acts that may lead to terrorism using technology. The Cyber Crimes Law criminalises anyone who establishes a website for a terrorist organisation, uses the computer network or



Women hold a placard during a demonstration called “Not in my name” of Italian muslims against terrorism, in downtown Rome

information technology for terrorist operations and other violent acts.

Oman has signed and acceded to many conventions and treaties including the GCC Convention on Combating Terrorism, the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the Arab Convention for the Suppression of Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism. A very recent example of the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts on the international level is its accession to the International Convention on Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism which was promulgated by Royal Decree No 61/2022.

To conclude, the efforts mentioned in this article are a very small part of the great and continuous efforts carried out by the various authorities in Oman to protect the nation from extremism or terrorism. Oman will always and forever remain a global centre of peace.

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Kanaya on threshold of first overseas victory



MUSCAT: Takumi Kanaya continued to put together one of his most impressive performances outside of Japan on Saturday when he took the third-round lead in the \$2 million International Series Oman at Al Mouj Golf.

The Japanese star led at the start of the day by one shot from compatriot Ryo Hisatsune and that is how it finished on Saturday after they both returned five-under-par 67s. Thailand's Sodom Kaewkanjana, such an ever-present name on the leaderboard for the past year on the Asian Tour, also shot 67 to sit in third place, three back from the leader.

Spaniard Sergio Garcia and Joaquin Niemann from Chile moved ominously into fourth, four off top spot, after rounds of 68 and 69 respectively.

Kanaya showed why so much is expected of him with an exceptional round that showed he is comfortable leading from the front. Enjoying calmer conditions compared with the strong winds of Friday, the 24-year-old moved to nine under for the tournament, helped by a brilliant run of four birdies in five holes from the eighth. He made six birdies in total and just one bogey.

Surprisingly he missed a four-foot putt for birdie on 17 and another makeable birdie putt on the last. "I feel good, it is because this course really suits me," said Kanaya. "I am

able to play my shots, find the fairways, and find the greens. Will just take it shot by shot tomorrow."

Hisatsune, who is looking for his first big Tour win, is four years younger than Kanaya and looking forward to playing with his decorated compatriot tomorrow. He said: "Yeah, I respect my older friend, we're both Japanese and I'm so happy to play with him. Yeah, so happy to get both of us playing together and making a lot of birdies. Today was great, I feel like I was smart in my game management."

Sodom was fourth in last week's season-opening PIF Saudi International powered by SoftBank Investment Advisers and will no doubt be a threat tomorrow. "Today was pretty good for me, I hit more fairways than the last two rounds," said the Thai star, whose last win on the Asian Tour was the Singapore Open.

Garcia bounced back well today after yesterday's 76 – which considering the windy conditions was more like par for the course. "Obviously, today it was windy, but it wasn't as windy as yesterday," said Garcia.

Two-time Australian Open champion Matt Jones fired a 67 to finish on three under to give himself an outside chance on Sunday. The Australian is an expert playing in the wind and will hope for it to blow on Sunday.



Al Suwaiq, Al Rustaq seal spots in HM Cup semifinals

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 11

Three-time champions Al Suwaiq and runners-up Al Rustaq secured spots in the semifinals of the HM Cup as they moved successfully from the quarterfinals.

The northern Batinah team edged Al Bashayer 1-0 in the second leg match on Friday night at Nizwa Sports Complex. The first leg match ended in favour of Al Suwaiq as well with a 3-0 score on January 29. With the aggregate result ending 4-0, Al Suwaiq confirmed their presence in the semifinals of the coveted cup.

In the late match on Friday, Al Rustaq and Oman Club fixture ended in a 1-1 draw. The southern Batinah-based team benefited from their 1-0 away game win on January 29. The accumulative result finished in a 2-1 result for Al Rustaq to ensure their second successive entry in the last-four stage of the tournament.

Al Suwaiq will meet Seeb in the semifinals while Al Rustaq



will take on Al Nahda.

Abdul Muain al Marzooqi scored the all-important goal for Al Suwaiq in the 76th minute of the game after a perfect pass from Omar al Fazari reached Abdul Muain who converted it to a goal through a strong ball from outside the box.

In another crucial game between Al Rustaq and Oman Club, Ahmed al Adawi put his team Al Rustaq ahead in the 60th minute through a header.

Coach Idrees al Marabat's men pressed hard to return back to the match as Mahmood al Hasani managed to equalise

for Oman Club side in the 84th minute. Later, Al Rustaq players tightened their defence to break the opponent's attempts.

In this edition of the championship, Al Rustaq will chase their first title after they had ended as runners-up in the last edition in March, 2022.

Three straight wins conclude Oman camp in Saudi



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 11

Oman beach soccer team concluded their abroad camp in Saudi Arabia on perfect note as they registered three straight wins against hosts Saudis. The last preparatory match which was played on Friday ended with a 4-1 win for coach Talib Hilal's men while the second warm-up fixture finished in a 6-2 victory. The opening friendly match was won by Oman 5-2. All the preparatory games took place in Jizan city.

One week external camp in Jizan city was a crucial part of the team's preparation plan for the main assignment in AFC Beach Soccer Asian Cup Thailand 2023 which will take place in Pattaya from March 16 to 26. After the

conclusion of Saudi's camp, the team will return to action on Sunday with an internal camp which will be followed by another domestic camp. The second warm-up gathering will be scheduled during February 26 to March 10. During these camps, the team will play two strong friendly games against European teams including Ukraine and other teams which will be confirmed soon.

The head coach of Oman team, Talib Hilal, and his men will raise their expectation in the upcoming edition of the Asian event. Oman beach soccer team will target repeating feat in 2015 as they were crowned champions after beating Japan in the final.

Oman are placed in Group D besides Palestine, Kuwait and Kyrgyz Republic. Hosts Thailand

will vie for the title as they face 2006 champions Bahrain, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia in Group A. Two-time winners Iran will play against Malaysia, UAE and Uzbekistan placed in Group B. Defending champions Japan will play against Lebanon, China PR and Indonesia teams in Group C. The top three sides in the Asian event will join hosts United Arab Emirates at the Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup 2023.

OMAN SQUAD: Said al Farsi, Khalid al Orami, Abdullah al Souti, Salim al Orami, Mundher al Orami, Younis al Owaisi, Shareef al Balushi, Amjad al Hamdani, Sami al Balushi, Yahya al Buraiki, Omar al Balushi, Ahmed al Owaisi and Abdul Rahman al Fazari.



ASHWIN SHINES AS HOSTS WIN FIRST TEST BY INNINGS AND 132 RUNS

INDIA PUMMEL AUSTRALIA IN THREE DAYS

NAGPUR, India: Ravichandran Ashwin tore through Australia to set up India's comprehensive victory by an innings and 132 runs inside three days of the spin-dominated opening Test on Saturday.

Australia had been on the back foot since posting a below-par 177 on a treacherous track at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium where the ball kept low and spun unpredictably.

Rohit Sharma mastered those conditions to hit a majestic 120 and all-rounders Axar Patel (84) and Ravindra Jadeja (70) proved while the pitch was difficult, it was certainly not unplayable.

Even number 10 batter Mohammed Shami chipped in with a breezy 37 to help India amass 400 before they were all out on the stroke of lunch claiming a chunky lead of 223.

Ashwin (5-37) then wreaked havoc and Australia were skittled out for 91 in 32.3 overs, their lowest ever score in India, losing all 10 wickets in one single frenetic session. Steve Smith's unbeaten 25 was the highest individual score in Australia's sorry-looking scoreboard, which is likely to prompt some soul-searching heading into the second Test beginning in New Delhi on Friday.

Off-spinner Todd Murphy's 7-124 in his debut Test was the only highlight for world number one Australia, who still lead World Test Championship (WTC)



standings ahead of India.

Barring Murphy's memorable debut, there was hardly any positive for Australia and captain Pat Cummins felt batters who got set could not quite capitalise on those starts. "In the first innings, the wicket spun but it wasn't unplayable," Cummins said.

"Would have loved another 100 or so runs and put a bit more

pressure on their first innings."

Australia's spin frailties were laid bare in the second innings when five of their batters fell lbw to Indian spinners.

Ashwin sent back both the Australia openers, David Warner (10) and Usman Khawaja (5), and Jadeja removed Marnus Labuschagne (17) to effectively snuff out Australia's chances of

SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st innings 177	
India 1st Innings	
R Sharma b Cummins	120
K Rahul c&b Murphy	20
R Ashwin lbw Murphy	23
C Pujara c Boland b Murphy	7
V Kohli c Carey b Murphy	12
S Yadav b Lyon	8
R Jadeja b Murphy	70
S Bharat lbw Murphy	8
A Patel b Cummins	84
M Shami c Carey b Murphy	37
M Siraj not out	1
Extras (b6, lb1, nb3)	10
Total (all out, 139.3 overs)	400
Fall of wickets: 1-76, 2-118, 3-135, 4-151, 5-168, 6-229, 7-240, 8-328, 9-380, 10-400	
Bowling: P Cummins 20.3-3-78-2, S Boland 17.4-34-0, N Lyon 49.13-126-1, T Murphy 47.12-124-7, M Labuschagne 5-0-24-0, M Renshaw 1-0-7-0	
Australia 2nd Innings	
U Khawaja c Kohli b Ashwin	5
D Warner lbw Ashwin	10
M Labuschagne lbw Jadeja	17
S Smith not out	25
M Renshaw lbw Ashwin	2
P Handscomb lbw Ashwin	6
A Carey lbw Ashwin	10
P Cummins c Bharat b Jadeja	1
T Murphy c Sharma b Patel	2
N Lyon b Shami	8
S Boland lbw Shami	0
Extras (lb1, nb4)	5
Total (all out, 32.3 overs)	91
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-26, 3-34, 4-42, 5-52, 6-64, 7-67, 8-75, 9-88, 10-91	
Bowling: M Shami 4.3-1-13-2, R Ashwin 12.3-37-5, M Siraj 1-1-0-0, R Jadeja 12-3-34-2, A Patel 3-0-6-1	

avoiding an innings defeat.

Smith hung on but at the other end, it was an endless procession of batsmen who surrendered to the guile of the Indian spinners.

Ashwin claimed his 31st five-wicket haul in Tests but Jadeja, who claimed 5-47 in Australia's first innings, and picked two wickets in the second was adjudged player-of-the-match. — Reuters

‘Fearless’ Sri Lanka sink South Africa in T20 World Cup opener



Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu plays a shot during the Group A T20 women's World Cup match against South Africa at Newlands Stadium in Cape Town. — AFP

CAPE TOWN: Sri Lankan captain Chamari Athapaththu said a fearless approach was key to her team's upset three-run win against hosts South Africa in the opening match of the Women's T20 World Cup at Newlands in Cape Town on Friday.

"No one expected Sri Lanka to win," she said. "We had no pressure so we could play fearless cricket. In this format rankings is just a number."

Athapaththu's 68 off 50 balls enabled Sri Lanka to make 129 for four after they were sent in to bat.

Sri Lanka restricted South Africa to 126 for nine with accurate slow bowling backed by good fielding.

Left-arm spin bowler Inoka Ranaweera took three key wickets and conceded only 18 runs in four overs, while fellow left-armner Sugandika Kumari and off-spinner Oshadhi Ranasinghe took two wickets apiece as South Africa were unable to put together any substantial partnerships. Captain Sune Luus was the top-scorer with 28.

The left-handed Athapaththu hit 12 fours and shared a second-wicket partnership of 86 with 17-year-old Vishmi Gunarathne, who made 35.

They had to absorb early pressure and Sri Lanka scored only 40 runs in the first 10 overs before both players took the attack to the South African bowlers.

"Vishmi is an up-and-coming young superstar," said

Athapaththu.

Luus said the difference between the sides was that Sri Lanka had a big partnership while South Africa had none. Their best stand was 29 for the first wicket between Laura Wolvaardt and Tazmin Brits.

Ranasinghe made the breakthrough when Brits was caught at cover and the South African innings started to unravel when Ranaweera had leading batters Kapp and Laura Wolvaardt caught in her first two overs.

When Kumari had the big-hitting Chloe Tryon caught in the deep and bowled Anneke Bosch two balls later South Africa were in deep trouble at 72 for five.

Athapaththu said she believed Sri Lanka had the ability to reach the semifinals despite being in the same group as Australia and New Zealand. "But now our focus is on our next game against Bangladesh."

Sri Lanka play Bangladesh at Newlands on Sunday as part of an all-Asian double header which also features India and Pakistan.

South Africa are faced with a huge task if they are to emerge from the group stage. Their next match is against New Zealand in Paarl on Monday. "The World Cup still has a long way to go," said Luus. — AFP

Brief scores: Sri Lanka 129-4 in 20 overs (C Athapaththu 68, V Gunarathne 35) South Africa 126-9 in 20 overs (S Kumari 2-28, O Ranasinghe 2-20, I Ranaweera 3-18) **Result:** Sri Lanka won by 3 runs

5,642 camels to participate in 74 races at Al Bashayer Festival

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 11

As many as 5,642 camels will participate in 74 races as part of the annual Al Bashayer Festival for Arab Camel

Races, in its sixth edition, at Al Bashayer Camel Racetrack.

The race in the Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, will start on Monday and will last for six days. The camel owners and their followers from Oman and GCC countries are expected to feature in the competition.

The organising committees of the Department of Al Bashayer Square for Arabian Camels affiliated with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal



Representative of His Majesty the Sultan have completed all preparations for this festival.

The festival will include morning and evening rounds. The organising committee will present 20 cars and cash prizes allocated to the winners.

On the first day, 24 runs will be held for the category of Al

Hajaiz, for a distance of 4 km. For the second day, it will be for the category of Al Laqaya, for a distance of 5 km, and 20 runs are allocated for it. The third day is devoted to the Al Yathaa category and includes 15 runs for a distance of 6 km. The fourth day's runs, which are 11 rounds, were devoted to the category of

Al Hawl , Al Thanaya, and long-distance running, in addition to the endurance run for a distance of 12 km. The final day, which is Saturday, includes 4 runs of Al Hawl and Al Thanaya, for a distance of 8 km.

During the festival period, accompanying events will be held. That will include various



pillars with the participation of governmental, private, and civil agencies, which are a corner for the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, a corner for arts, a Bedouin village corner, a children's village corner, a theater corner for singing and poetry evenings, the Zaffin Al Bashir competition, a traditional weapon

shooting competition, and the festival's tourist convoy.

The annual Al Bashayer Camel Festival will be broadcasted by Oman Sports Channel on a daily basis during the course of the race in two periods, morning and evening, in addition to a daily analytical studio through the 'Al Manasa' programme.



The pack rides during the first stage of the 2023 Tour of Oman, from Al Rustaq Fort to Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, on Saturday. – AFP

Merlier makes merry in first stage

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 11

New father Tim Merlier of Soudal Quick-Step made a promising start to the 12th edition of Tour of Oman by claiming the opening stage on Saturday.

The Belgian national champion completed the 147.4 km Stage 1 from Al Rustaq Fort to Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in three hours and 31 minutes.

“I became a father 11 days ago, so today’s result is so special. This victory is for my son. It’s important to win early in the season,” Merlier, who celebrated the win with a ‘rock the baby’ gesture, said.

Merlier claimed the win

after a strong uphill sprint to get the best of David Dekker (Arkea-Samsic) and Axel Zingle (Cofidis).

Astana Qazaqstan’s Mark Cavendish was well-placed in the final kilometre after his team positioned up front. However, the Soudal-QuickStep team then took over to set-up Merlier and Cavendish was swamped to finish 21st.

The Belgian cyclist tasted his first victory on the road since joining Soudal Quick-Step in the off-season. He had won a cyclo-cross in January. The Stage 1 win enabled Merlier to top the charts in the stage and general and points classifications, getting the red and green jerseys. Dekker (+04) joined him second on both tables with Zingle taken over by ‘most active rider’ Jeron



TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 1 RESULTS

1.	Tim Merlier (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	03:31:00
2.	David Dekker (NED)	Team Arkea-Samsic	+ 00
3.	Axel Zingle (FRA)	Cofidis	+ 00
4.	Arne Marit (BEL)	Intermarche-Circus-Wanty	+ 00
5.	Kristoffer Halvorsen (NOR)	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team	+ 00
6.	Pascal Ackermann (GER)	UAE Team Emirates	+ 00
7.	Matthew Walls (GBR)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 00
8.	Alexander Salby (DEN)	Bingoal WB	+ 00
9.	Max Kanter (GER)	Movistar Team	+ 00
10.	Rudiger Selig (GER)	Lotto Dstny	+ 00

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1.	Tim Merlier (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	03:30:50
2.	David Dekker (NED)	Team Arkea-Samsic	+ 04
3.	Jeroen Meijers (NED)	Terengganu Polygon CT	+ 05
4.	Axel Zingle (FRA)	Cofidis	+ 06
5.	Rodrigo Alvarez (ESP)	Burgos-BH	+ 06
6.	Arne Marit (BEL)	Intermarche-Circus-Wanty	+ 10
7.	Kristoffer Halvorsen (NOR)	Uno-X Pro Cycling Team	+ 10
8.	Pascal Ackermann (GER)	UAE Team Emirates	+ 10
9.	Matthew Walls (GBR)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 10
10.	Alexander Salby (DEN)	Bingoal WB	+ 10

Meijers (Terengganu Polygon Cycling Team +05) in general classification. Dekker won the best young rider jersey after the first stage.

CAVENDISH SWAMPED
In the only opportunity for sprinters this week, Rodrigo Alvarez (Burgos-BH), Said al Rahbi (Oman National Team) and Meijers got in front with Soudal-QuickStep and Astana Qazaqstan leading the chase.

The attackers cover 42.7 km in the first hour and Alvarez dominates the first intermediate sprint of the day (60.1 km). Astana Qazaqstan also worked at the front of the peloton as they tried to deliver a first opportunity to sprint for Mark Cavendish.

The short Fanja climb mid-

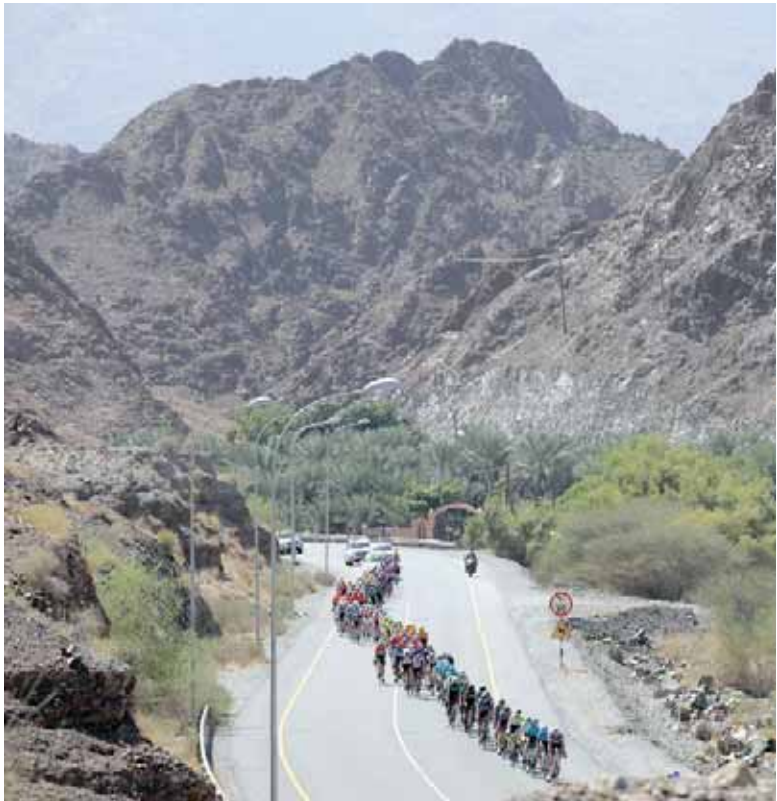
stage split the break, with Al Rahbi dropped. Then Meijers distanced Alvarez to take the KOM points and pushed on alone. Meijers took three more points in the intermediate sprint (101 km), followed by Al Rahbi and Alvarez. The two chasers are quickly caught by the bunch, trailing by 1’50”. Bora-Hansgrohe also joined the chase and Meijers reeled in with 16 km to go.

Then, Lotto-Dstny, UAE Team Emirates and AG2R-Citroen all moved to the front to position their sprinters.

Astana Qazaqstan cushioned Cavendish with three riders in the front until two kilometres to go. In the final 500 metres, Soudal came up from the left to take control of the sprint despite an effort from AG2R Citroen.



Belgian rider Tim Merlier (C) of Soudal Quick-Step goes for a sprint during the first stage of the Tour of Oman 2023, from Al Rustaq Fort to the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. – AFP



business

Lab proposes Green Industrial Cities to spur manufacturing

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 11

A roughly 3-week-long Converting and Future Industries Laboratory organised by the Omani government last week has yielded a recommendations, the implementation of which will have far-reaching benefits for the manufacturing and industrial sector of the Sultanate of Oman.

The outcomes of the Lab, organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in collaboration with the Implementation Follow-up Unit of Oman Vision 2040 and the Industrial Innovation Academy, were outlined during the Omani Industry Day celebrations held on Thursday.

Notable among these recommendations is a call for the establishment of Green Industrial Cities and Smart Cities modelled on sustainability principles. The proposed Green Industrial Cities will incorporate the principles and philosophy of the circular economy and powered by clean and energy efficient systems.

Further, by using smart applications and smart tools, investors and tenants in these green settings will reduce their operational and energy costs, while targeting markets that pay a premium for goods produced on the basis of sustainability principles.

“The initiative aims to diversify the Omani economy to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the goals of sustainable development, improve production efficiency through the optimal use of natural



resources, as well as reduce health risks resulting from environmental emissions, in addition to the existence of a green and circular economy that responds to national needs and is in line with the global trend,” said Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, CEO — Industrial Innovation Academy.

As many as 168 officials and experts, representing 83 different organisations, attending the Lab, which ran from January 2 – 26, 2023. At the end of nearly 30,000 man-hours of deliberations and analysis, the Lab came out with recommendations for 24 investment projects, 14 investment initiatives and 10 enabling measures.

The Lab discussed 5 main pillars: Industries of the future; Review of the industrial strategy; Outputs of clinics to analyse projects in the manufacturing sector; New investment opportunities; and Sectoral governance.

To help enhance the competitive of Omani products, the Lab proposed the establishment of the Oman Barcoding Centre, coupled with the enactment or new legislations (or the

review of existing statutes) to create, among other things, a National Brand Identity, new guidelines to regular commercial complexes and consumer cooperatives, and so on.

In other recommendations, it stressed the need for effective vocational training in skillsets that align with the needs of the industrial sector; Easier soft loans from banks; Developing the financial and administrative capacities of entrepreneurs; Increasing support for industrial projects through the Oman Development Bank; Providing support for distressed companies; and Establishing specialised industrial complexes.

Following a review of the industrial strategy, the Lab mooted the establishment of knowledge-based industrial clusters; Programme to support entrepreneurship and industrial innovation; Programme to strengthen industrial development and modernisation; and Programme to enhance governance and management of industrial development.

Additionally, the Lab outlined a total of 38 project and investment opportunities spanning medical supplies, plastics, mining, ferrous metals, nonferrous metals, petrochemicals and others. Investment opportunities linked to health, services, waste management and minerals were recommended as well.

The Lab firmed up investments targeted at 12 projects, focusing on salt extraction, chlor-alkali production, industrial salt refining, table salt production, and manufacturer of magnesium compounds, Sodium Sulfate, bromine compounds and potassium compounds. Other projects that were advanced related to a fish farming project, sodium carbonate plant, and water bottling facility.

Besides, the Lab advocated for the adoption of 4th Industrial Revolution technologies in new projects to help reduce production costs, boost efficiency, spurring Omani exports, automating production and providing new skillsets to Omanis to work in these industries.

At least 15% of Abraj IPO shares reserved for retail investors



MUSCAT: The Capital Market Authority (CMA) approved the prospectus for the issuance of shares of Abraj Energy Services (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ Group, pursuant to its conversion from a closed joint-stock company to a public joint-stock company.

Around 377.398 million shares, representing 49 per cent of the issued share capital of the company, will be offered for public subscription through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

To be launched in two parallel tracks, the first track targets major institutional and corporate investors (local and international) who are entitled to a maximum of 85 per cent of the total offer size.

The price range for subscription in this category is set at between 242 and 249 baisas per share.

The second track is targeted at small investors of the Sultanate of Oman who will receive not less than 15 per cent of the total offer size. The share price is a maximum discounted price of 224 baisas per share, calculated as the maximum price of 249 baisas discounted by 10 per cent.

The Category 1 investors (first track), the public subscription will run from February 20 to March 2. For Category 2 investors, the subscription extends from February 20 to March 1, 2023 — **ONA**

Oman targets 3 new wind power projects by 2026

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 11

Pressing ahead with its strategy to harness renewable energy resources for its electricity requirements, the Sultanate of Oman — represented by Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) — has unveiled plans for the development of as many as three wind-based Independent Power Projects (IPPs) at key locations around the country.

Wind-based IPPs are envisioned for implementation in AlDuqm (AlWusta Governorate), Jaalan Bani Bu Ali (South Al Sharqiyah Governorate), and Harweel (Dhofar Governorate), according to the state-owned power procurer and off-taker.

All three schemes are scheduled to be brought into operation during 2026, the company noted in tender announcements seeking legal, commercial and financial advisory support in the procurement of these projects by competitive tender.

“In line with Sultanate of Oman’s vision to diversify fuel sources through the use of clean energy for power generation,



OPWP wishes to initiate the procurement process for three wind projects (Duqm Wind IPP, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and Harweel Wind IPP) with a target Schedule Commercial Operation Date (SCOD) by Q2 2026 for Duqm Wind IPP and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and SCOD by Q4 2026 for Harweel Wind IPP.

OPWP is seeking proposals from interested bidders to provide commercial and financial consultancy services for the development of the Projects and to advise on the competitive tendering of the Projects,” said OPWP.

To ensure the suitability of the selected locations, OPWP has been gathering meteorological

data and other inputs — part of wind resources assessment studies to help underpin the overall bankability and deliverability of the projects. A number of 100-metre tall meteorological masts and monitoring stations have been installed in place at the proposed sites in Duqm and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Although power generation capacities for individual wind farms have not been disclosed yet as part of the latest tender announcements, OPWP had previously discussed the potential for a 100 MW capacity wind farm in Jaalan Banu Bu Ali, with a larger project of up to 200 MW envisioned in Duqm.



Announcement

The Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) would like to invite competent and experienced companies to participate in the below tenders:

Particulars	Tender No:01
Subject	Maintenance Of Integrated Security System (Cctv, Door Access, Road Barriers And Road Blockers)
Tender No.	OCEC/T/2023/03
Tender Fees Payment	25 Omani Riyals (non-refundable) SME (Riyada holders) Exempted Beneficiary: Oman Convention and Exhibition Center Bank: Sohar International Branch: Qurum - Sultanate of Oman Account No. 005020045872 Swift Code: BSHRCMRU Finance Code: 609109900
Tender Document Sale Start Date	12/02/2023
Tender Document Sale End Date	19/02/2023
Site visit	21/02/2023
Last clarification	23/02/2023
Tender Closing Date	26/02/2023
Tender Submission	All bidders must submit their offers with the terms and conditions of the tender by sending their bids to the e-mail: procurement@ocec.om Finance Department P.O. Box 1659, P.C. 130, Al Athaiba, Sultanate of Oman Tel: + 968 92139173 ▪ OCEC is not bound to award the contract to the lowest bid or any other bidder. ▪ Each Bidder must leave a business card with contact details for required tender communication (company name, contact name, telephone and email) ▪ All tender communication will be emailed to this contact person and email address Procurement@ocec.om ▪ Each Bidder must send a copy of its relevant Ministry of Commerce and Industry registration (except for International Bidders) - Notwithstanding the specific terms in the Tender Documents.
Companies Grade	G 4 and Above
Tender Document Collection	Tender documents can be obtained by e-mail after sending the electronic payment receipt during working hours: Sunday – Thursday 8:30am – 3:00pm.

Fitch affirms Omantel at ‘BB’; Stable Outlook

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 11

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has affirmed Oman Telecommunications Company SAOG’s (Omantel) Long-Term Foreign-Currency Issuer Default Rating (IDR) at ‘BB’ with a Stable Outlook. “Omantel’s rating remains constrained by Oman’s sovereign rating (BB/Stable) as a government-related entity (GRE).

This reflects that 51 per cent of the company is directly or indirectly owned by the Omani government, which consequently exerts strong control over it.

Omantel’s ‘bbb-’ Standalone Credit Profile (SCP) is higher than



its IDR.

This reflects a balance of its leading market share in its domestic market, low leverage and the elevated competitive risks

in a mature market following the entrance of Oman Futures Telecommunications Company (Vodafone Oman) in 2022,” the London-based agency stated in a

press announcement.

The sale and leaseback of Omantel’s head offices and 2,519 of its mobile towers in Oman in 2022 will lead to significant

deleveraging as proceeds will be used to repay debt, according to Fitch.

“Omantel should have ample leverage headroom at its ‘bbb-’ SCP on a deconsolidated basis for Zain Group as Omantel owns less than 50 per cent. We expect Fitch-defined EBITDA net leverage (including dividends from Zain) of 2.1x at end-2022,” it stated.

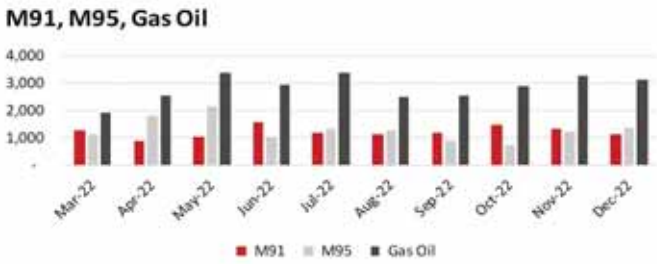
Omantel maintained its leading market share in fixed line services with shares of 71 per cent of subscribers and 82 per cent of revenue in Oman at 3Q22. Omantel has a national footprint in 5G and the leading market share in fibre to the home (FTTH) at 47 per cent at 2Q22, according to the ratings agency.

“As a result, the company is well placed to capture growth from upselling customers into gigabit speed-capable packages in 5G fixed wireless access (FWA) and FTTH,” it stated.

“Both technologies have higher ARPUs than traditional copper lines. Where both are available, we believe the increased demand for data consumption and lower latency will see fibre demand grow faster than FWA.

Omantel is expected to continue rolling out FTTH across Oman where only around half of premises currently have access to the technology. Outsourcing mobile tower capex to Helios could allow Omantel to roll out fibre more quickly,” it added.

MSX Industry sector index rises in weekly trading



Source: NCSI

MUSCAT: The benchmark index of the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) raise last week by 1.04% and closed at 4,768 points. All sectoral indices recorded a raise except for the Service sector index, which drop 7 points.

While the industrial sector index recorded the highest increase at 90 points, the Financial sector index increased by about 71 points, and the Shariah index gained about 1 points.

HSBC Bank Oman announced that it has received approval from the CBO for its proposed merger with Sohar International Bank.

The merger, which is still subject to approval from other relevant regulatory bodies as well as from the respective shareholders of the two entities at their EGM, is expected to complete in the second half of 2023.

National Finance issued RO 18.2 million Perpetual Subordinated Bonds on March 15, 2018 at a fixed annual interest rate of 8.00%.

Moreover, National Finance issued an irrevocable notice to the holders of the Bonds that will exercise its call option to redeem all the Bonds on March 15, 2023 (the Redemption Date) at their principal amount together with the interest accrued up to but not including the redemption date.

Following the redemption, the Bonds will be delisted from the MSX. Muscat Clearing and Depository (MCD) will process payment to Bondholders as per the records with MCD on March 15, 2023.

The total refinery products in the Sultanate of Oman

increased by 4% until the end of December 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the NCSI.

Oman’s production of petrol (M-95) rose by 12.6 % to stand at 14.8 million barrels compared to the same period in 2021. The production of standard grade petrol (M-91) rose by 0.5 % by the end of December 2022 to stand at 13.8 million barrels compared to the same period in 2021.

Gas oil (diesel) output fell by 5% compared to the same period in 2021, reaching 32.5 million barrels.

Supported by the post-pandemic economic recovery and improved demand for Omani products in the United States, India and the Gulf region, Oman’s non-oil exports grew by nearly 48% in the first ten months of 2022.

Total non-oil exports increased by 47.8% to RO 6.204 billion during January – October period of 2022 compared to RO 4.199 billion recorded in the same period of 2021. As per the NCSI data, Oman’s mineral products export grew more than 186 per cent to RO1.838bn in the first ten months of 2022 from RO641.7 million in the corresponding period of 2021.

Shipments for chemical products also surged 25.7 per cent to RO1.193 million last year in comparison with RO 949.5 million in the same period of the previous year.

Moreover, the US has emerged as Oman’s biggest non-oil export destination, ahead of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, the NCSI data showed.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Oman Avenues Mall conducts prize distribution for mall mega raffle draw

MUSCAT: Curtains were drawn on the three month long “Shop & Win” promotion at Oman Avenues Mall with the announcement of winners of the weekly draws and the Mega Grand Prize. The entitled customers who made a combined purchase of RO 15 from the outlets at the Mall to take part in multiple raffle draws that rewarded 24 winners of the Al Saada Mall Gift Cards worth RO 100 each during the promotion period spanning 12 weeks.

In addition, customers with a single purchase of RO 15 also participated in the Mega Draw that was held on the last day of year of 2022 to win the mega prize of a Jeep Gladiator. The campaign evoked an overwhelming response from the customers and exceeded the expectations of the Mall Management.

The Grand Prize of the sporty Jeep Wrangler Gladiator was won by a two-year toddler Ahmed al Mashrafi who proved to be the lucky charm for his father Mohammed al Mashrafi. Mohammed, who received the



keys to his winnings drove away on his dream vehicle expressed his gratitude to Oman Avenues Mall for initiating such customer friendly campaigns and was overjoyed at his son’s name proving to be lucky for him at this instance.

The other winners were also presented the Al Saada Mall Gift Vouchers worth RO 100 each for the weekly draws. “Hearty congratulations to all the winners on behalf of OAM. Initiatives like ‘Shop & Win’ though traditional, when

packaged along with a slew of innovative ideas, add that extra edge to the consumer’s shopping experience. We at Oman Avenues Mall are constantly seeking to enhance the customer experience with innovation and adopting the industry’s best practices.

Our focus is always to build on ‘customer delight’ and ‘customer satisfaction’. We are thrilled that our efforts are seeing results far beyond what we envisioned,” said Gogi George, General Manager, Development & Leasing, Lulu Group International.

Exclusive benefits on Kia’s outstanding range ending soon

MUSCAT: Own a Kia and enjoy amazing ownership experiences with exclusive benefits. New Kia customers will get comprehensive service up to 50,000 kms, 1 year insurance and cash gift. The campaign will end on February 16, 2023 (Conditions apply). For details visit any Kia showroom.

The popular Sportage SUV is packed with impressive levels of power, dependability and fuel-efficiency. Standing out with its power-packed performance the Sportage is available as a 2.0 RVC 4WD with Nu 2.0 MPI churning 157 hp at 19.5 kg.m torque. This is paired to a 6-speed AT. The Sportage is also available as 1.6T 2WD SRF, 1.6T 2WD SPL and 1.6T 4WD SPL with Gamma 1.6T GDI with 176 HP and 27 kg.m. torque.

These are paired to a 7-speed DCT. For rewarding drives the Sportage is thoughtfully equipped with an inviting and exciting interior.



Donning a stylish design the Kia Seltos SUV combines advanced technical features, class-leading space and a suite of world-class safety features.

The Seltos SUV has a stylish exterior with long hood, a strong, character line on the front bumper, and sharp lines pressed into the

bodywork. The Seltos is equipped with a 1.6-litre gasoline engine producing 121 HP paired to a six-speed automatic transmission (6AT).

To further elevate the driving experience, the Seltos is equipped with a Drive Mode Select system that lets drivers adapt the car to

Oman targets 3 new wind power projects by 2026

FROM PAGE 13

In Harweel (Dhofar Governorate), OPWP had previously outlined the potential for a new wind farm of around 100 MW adjoining the site of Oman’s maiden wind-powered project at Harweel — a modest 50 MW venture that came into operation in 2019. Owned by the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer), a subsidiary of Nama Group, Harweel-1 comprises of 13 wind turbines.

Interest bidders have until February 25, 2023 to collect the tender documents to participate in the consultancy services tenders.

Submission of final offers is March 22, 2023 for Commercial & Legal Services bids and March 23, 2023 for Legal bids. Oman has a target to secure a 10 per cent contribution from renewables to its electricity requirements by 2025, rising to 39 per cent by 2040.

their preferred style or the road conditions.

Drivers can choose from ‘Normal’, ‘Eco’ and ‘Sport’ mode. For those preferring to make the most of SUV driving in the city, Kia’s compact yet exciting SUV — the Sonet is a great vehicle. The Sonet is equipped with a powerful 1.5L engine that is paired to a CVT transmission.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the ‘Good Partnership award’, ‘Family Like Care’ Service award’, and ‘Kia ‘Distributor of Distinction’ award.

Overcoming the main SME challenges



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

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the global economy, including in Oman, where they contribute significantly to the country's economic development and diversification efforts.

The market in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is highly competitive, and starting a new business in this environment requires hard work, determination and a good understanding of the market.

However, for SMEs, this journey is often plagued with obstacles that can make or break their success. In this article, we will explore the main challenges that SMEs face when starting a new business in Oman and how to overcome them.

Access to Finance

One of the biggest challenges that SMEs face is access to finance. Starting a new business requires a significant amount of capital, and many SMEs struggle to secure the funding they need to get off the ground. Banks and other traditional lending institutions in Oman may be cautious when lending money to start-ups, as they are seen as high-risk investments.

This can make it difficult for SMEs to secure the loans they need to finance their operations, purchase equipment, or invest in research and development.

Solution: There are alternative options available to SMEs seeking funding in Oman, such as crowdfunding platforms, angel investors and government grants.

Additionally, the Central Bank of Oman has implemented several initiatives to support SMEs,

including providing access to financing through participating banks.

These sources of funding may be less conventional, but they are often more accessible to SMEs and can provide the support they need to get their businesses up and running.

Talent Retention and Attraction

Finding and retaining the right talent is another challenge faced by many SMEs in Oman and in the GCC more broadly.

With limited resources, SMEs may struggle to compete with larger companies for the best talent. Furthermore, SMEs often have limited budgets for training and development, which can make it difficult to attract and retain talented employees.

Solution: To overcome this challenge, SMEs need to focus

on creating a positive and supportive workplace culture. This can include offering flexible working arrangements, providing opportunities for growth and development, and recognising and rewarding the contributions of employees.

Additionally, SMEs can partner with local schools and universities to create internship and apprenticeship programmes that can help to attract new talent and provide opportunities for growth.

Marketing and Branding

These are critical components of any business, and they are especially important for SMEs trying to establish a foothold in any competitive market.

SMEs often struggle to compete with larger companies in terms of marketing and advertising budgets, making it difficult

for them to reach their target audience.

Solution: SMEs can leverage digital marketing tools, such as social media and search engine optimisation, to reach their target audience at a fraction of the cost of traditional advertising methods.

By creating a strong brand and focusing on customer engagement, SMEs can differentiate themselves from larger companies and stand out in the market.

In conclusion, starting a new business in Oman, or any other market, is a complex and demanding process that requires careful planning and attention to detail. By leveraging alternative sources of funding, creating a supportive workplace culture and using digital marketing tools, SMEs can lay the foundation for long-term success and growth.

IMF's outlook on Russia is too rosy to be true

PIERRE BRIANCON

The International Monetary Fund delivered some uplifting economic news to Vladimir Putin. The Russian president should now make the case to his own government, which doesn't share the IMF's optimism.

The international body recently estimated that Russia will avoid a recession in 2023 and expand by 0.3 per cent after shrinking by 2.2 per cent in 2022. That amounts to a quasi-stagnation, but still looks too positive.

At first glance, the Fund's latest forecast is a reason for hope for an economy battered by the cost of its war of Ukraine and associated sanctions. And even though the global economic prospects do not look as dire as they did a few months ago, the Russian revision is significant. In October, the IMF was seeing the country's GDP contracting by 2.3 per cent this year.

The IMF hasn't detailed the assumptions underpinning its upbeat Russian outlook. Russian economists, polled this month by the country's central bank, are still expecting GDP to fall by 1.5 per cent this year.

And the economy ministry still predicts that output will contract by 0.8 per cent, according to Russian independent publication The Bell.

The key to the IMF's optimism may be its assumptions about oil prices and the effect of the recent bans and price caps by the European Union and the G7 group of industrialised countries. The measures will not "significantly" affect Russia's oil exports, the Fund says. That is a matter of intense debate among economists since oil prices remain below the cap set by the G7. Much will depend on the evolution of oil prices this year. Oil and gas exports amounted to about 15 per cent of Russia's GDP in 2021, and related taxes finance more than 40 per cent of the government's budget.

Urals, the Russian crude, trades at around \$56 a barrel. The discount to benchmark Brent is now at 33 per cent, against 7 per cent before the war. That is a sign that sanctions have had some impact. It also throws further doubt on the IMF's optimism.

In October, Russia's central bank predicted that the domestic economy would contract by between 1.5 per cent and 4 per cent this year. That assumed a \$70 a barrel price for Urals — the same number the government used for its budgetary planning.

Four months later, the world economy has brighter prospects and Russia may be more resilient than expected. But only a serious oil price rally, improbable in the context of the global economy's "subpar growth" — to quote the IMF — could justify looking at Russia through rosy glasses. — Reuters

America's widening productivity gap



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics Emeritus and a former dean of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University.

The United States has a productivity problem, though one would never know it from looking only at the industries producing goods and services that are traded internationally.

Because these goods and services account for only one-third of GDP and slightly over 20 per cent of employment, as is typical for a developed economy, it is important also to consider the non-tradable sector that comprises the remaining two thirds of the economy.

The economy's tradable sector comprises agriculture, forestry, fishing and manufacturing — the production of goods, as either final or intermediate products — which in 2021 accounted for one-third of tradable value-added.

The tradable sector also includes services such as research and development, consulting, information, and much of finance. Taken together, services account for about two-thirds of tradable value-added — a share that has increased over the last two decades.

Value-added for a firm or industry is calculated by subtracting purchased inputs like energy and intermediate products — excluding labour and capital — from total sales in dollars. It can be understood as the value created by the combination of labour and capital.

That value is then captured as income for the labour (forming the upper limit on the average compensation of employees in the sector) and returns for the owners of the capital. Value-added per employee is thus a measure of labour productivity.

And, in America's tradable sector, it has risen steadily over the last two decades in both manufacturing and services, reaching roughly \$185,000 (in chained 2012 dollars) in 2021.

Over the same period, productivity

growth in this sector averaged nearly 3 per cent. If this had been true of the non-tradable part of the economy — including large-employment sectors such as government, healthcare, traditional retail, accommodation and food service, education and construction — nobody would have to be worried about productivity.

There is no good way to measure government productivity, because markets do not price the value created by services that are generally not sold.

For accounting purposes, value-added for the government is measured by the costs of labour and capital, the assumption being that democratic collective-choice mechanisms will eliminate services whose costs exceed the perceived benefits.

But that approach does not provide much insight into productivity: the fact that value-added per government employee has grown very slowly — by 0.25 per cent, on average, over two decades — just means that, on average, labour and capital costs grew at roughly the same pace as employment.

For the rest of the non-tradable economy, however, we can measure productivity growth, and the results — based on industry-specific data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis for employment and real value-added (in billions of chained 2012 dollars) — are very different than the tradable picture and far from rosy: just 0.57 per cent per annum over the last 20 years.

This reflects below-average productivity levels and, in most cases, low-to-moderate productivity

growth in the large-employment sectors.

For example, in 2021, hospitality employs 12 million people, has value-added per employee of \$41,355 — less than one-third of the \$130,000 national average — and productivity growth of 0.26 per cent.

The healthcare and social-assistance sector employs 20 million people, with value-added per employee of \$73,624 and productivity growth of 0.71 per cent.

For construction, the figures are 7.6 million, \$87,425, and -1.21 per cent, respectively. There was not always a large gap between the tradable and non-tradable sectors.

On the contrary, as the chart shows, labour productivity was about \$100,000 across the economy in 1998. But by 2021, after more than two decades of steady divergence, per-employee value-added in the tradable sector was nearly double the level in the non-tradable sector.

By definition, there is no external supply or demand in non-tradable sectors, and thus no external competition or specialisation.

These sectors must therefore be supplied by domestic and even local entities. Put simply, the supply and demand side must match. Today, however, many non-tradable parts of the economy — including all the large-employment ones — are experiencing labour shortages.

This is partly because factors like stress, safety issues, low compensation and lack of flexibility are driving workers away from these jobs. But skills gaps are also playing a role.

Given this, removing barriers to the acquisition of higher-level skills and incomes is a critical component of any structural-transition agenda.

Demand for healthcare, hospitality and construction services is not going to drop. So, labour-supply constraints may lead to higher wages and higher prices, raising incomes and measured labour productivity to some extent.

But more must be done to boost productivity growth in low-productivity sectors, thereby mitigating supply constraints, which population aging is set to exacerbate. Digital technologies have been an important driver of productivity growth in rapidly expanding industries.

Given recent breakthroughs in robotics and artificial intelligence, there is every reason to believe this will continue. But progress in high-end services and manufacturing alone is not enough.

These powerful technologies must also be applied in low-value-added, low-wage and low-productivity-growth parts of the economy. Given labour-supply constraints and economic shocks — linked, for example, to climate change and geopolitics — the case for productivity-boosting interventions is clear.

Unless policymakers use a combination of investment and incentives to reverse negative productivity trends, the US will achieve modest growth, at best. Worse, the growth that it does attain will be highly uneven, excluding many from its benefits.

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An activist holds a placard demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage and tips for restaurant workers during a rally at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. — AFP

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

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Nizwa Fort: Grand, Vibrant, and Full of Life

The viewers held their breaths in anticipation. As soon as the man in the light brown dishdasha swiftly caught the sword, the crowd burst into loud applause. Welcome to the fun side of Nizwa Fort... **P20**

Swiss give 2,500-year-old stone sculpture back to Peru

THE SWISS ON WEDNESDAY handed a large stone-carved head back to Peru, where it was sculpted around 2,500 years ago by one of the country's earliest civilisations, the culture office said.

The monolithic sculpture, which weighs almost 200 kilogrammes (440 pounds), was brought into

Switzerland by truck in 2016 from Germany at the request of a German art dealer.

Switzerland's Federal Office of Culture (FOC) said in a statement that the sculpture had not been properly declared as a cultural property. It was later confiscated as there was "substantiated suspicion" it had been



illegally taken from Peru. FOC head Carine Bachmann presented the decorative stone sculpture to Peruvian Ambassador Luis Alberto Castro Joo at the Basel-Weil am Rhein customs office, where

the piece was discovered seven years ago. After it was discovered, FOC specialists reviewed the piece and determined that the "2,500-year-old stone head from the pre-Hispanic

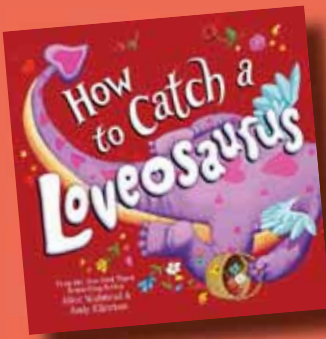
Chavin culture (circa 1200 to 550 BC) originates in what is now Peru," Wednesday's statement said. "That makes it a significant piece of cultural property that should have been declared as such when it was imported." Peru is heavily affected by the plundering and destruction of archaeological sites. And pre-Columbian pieces like the stone head returned on Wednesday are among Peru's most endangered categories of cultural property, the FOC said. Switzerland and Peru are both signatories of a 1970 UNESCO convention banning the illegal import and export of cultural property. The two countries also signed a bilateral deal in 2016 to strengthen their cooperation on the issue. "This restitution underlines the shared commitment of Switzerland and Peru to combating the illegal transfer of cultural property," the FOC said. — AFP

READ

HOW TO CATCH A LOVEOSAURUS

BY ALICE WALSTEAD
ILLUSTRATED BY ANDY ELKERTON

The Catch Club Kids attempt to catch a dinosaur that wants to spread love and kindness.



ART

Emilie Gordenker, director of the Van Gogh Museum, speaks at a press conference for the opening of the exhibition "Choosing Vincent – Portrait of a family history" at Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

Visitors walk past a screen showing an excerpt of a film during the opening of the European exhibition of Harry Potter in Vienna. Almost 25 years after the release of the first volume, the Harry Potter magic is still operating: beyond the books, films and other derivative products, it is the turn of the video game 'Hogwarts Legacy' to rekindle the flame of the universe. — AFP





The Future of Balenciaga Is on the Line

GET READY. Your feeds are about to be crammed full of colour, sparkle, celebrities and opinion. Fashion month is upon us: hundreds of shows in four cities vying not just for your wardrobes, but for your eyeballs and even sense of outrage.

Who will be bidding for Oscar red carpet glory? Can anyone top the Schiaparelli lion head? Will there be any scandals and controversies? Here's what you need to know:

It's make or break time for Balenciaga. That might seem like hyperbole, but it is not. This is the single most fraught show of the season. Maybe of any season. As you may recall, Balenciaga — regularly called the hottest brand of the last five years in any fashion ranking thanks to the ability of Demna, its designer, to hold a finger up to the cultural winds and capture them in clothes and context — had a spectacular fall from grace last fall.

It started in October when Ye, the artist formerly known as Kanye West, opened the Balenciaga "mud" show, only to follow up with his own Yeezy show to which he wore a White Lives Matter T-shirt, which presaged a host of antisemitic and anti-Black comments. Slow to distance themselves from the rapper, Balenciaga then went live with a holiday ad campaign featuring teddy bear handbags in BDSM gear held by children, followed by another campaign that contained papers related to a US Supreme Court child pornography case tucked in a pile.

A public outcry ensued, with Balenciaga accused of promoting pedophilia, boycotted and otherwise cancelled. Apologies, when they finally came (after an attempt to blame a set design team), were halfhearted. Assumptions were that heads would have to roll, but both Demna and Cédric Charbit, the CEO, remained in place. Holiday sales, especially in the United States market, have, by all accounts, been dismal. And the Lyst shopping platform reported that in the last quarter of 2022, Balenciaga fell out of its ranking of the top 10 most searched brands for the first time since the index was created in 2018.

Save for the apologies, Balenciaga has remained almost entirely silent, though on February 8 it announced a three-year partnership with the National Children's Alliance, focusing on training and raising awareness of child abuse and protection. The show will be its next major visible statement.

It's all riding on this show, scheduled on March 5 in Paris.

BURBERRY IS TRYING TO BRING BACK COOL BRITANNIA.

Burberry, the biggest luxury brand in

Britain and a sort of doppelgänger for the country, lost its way in recent years under designer Riccardo Tisci and CEO Marco Gobetti, offering up an outsider-goth version of Britishness that included deer ear prosthetics, backless trench coats and a video inspired by a "love affair between a mermaid and a shark" that included white-clad acolytes swaying in a forest.

But after almost a complete shift at the top, two Brits — Daniel Lee, the new designer, and Jonathan Akeroyd, the CEO — are



now in charge, tasked with re-centering the heritage at the heart of the house. Change has already begun, with a new logo that is a throwback to the original Burberry Prorsum horse and rider minted in 1901, plus a teaser ad campaign starring Vanessa Redgrave, Liberty Ross, Skepta and Lennon Gallagher. Yes, the son of Liam Gallagher and Patsy Kensit, the original Cool Britannia couple of 1997. As clues to where this is going, it's pretty clear.

GENERATIONAL CHANGE IS HAPPENING IN NEW YORK.

There has been a lot of moaning about New York Fashion Week losing its superstars, after Calvin Klein closed its runway line and Marc Jacobs and Ralph Lauren decided to make their own schedules. But in their absence a rare thing is happening: generational change.

The new guard may not be household names, but they are rethinking what American sportswear means and who gets to define it, in a way that has the

potential to reshape fashion for the next decade or more, and to make New York another rare thing: a genuinely diverse design hub.

Thom Browne is taking over from Tom Ford as head of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. The two most thrilling showmen in the city, Browne and Willy Chavarria, lead with theatre and emotion, not commerce and calculation. Also look for Heron Preston, bringing his form of "instant language," upcycling and arche-

at home (upstate New York) and in Nigeria (where his parents are from) and who dressed Danai Gurira and Evan Mock for last year's Met Gala.

AND HARRY STYLES' FAVOURITE DESIGNER IS DEBUTING IN PARIS.

Harris Reed, 26, the half-American, half-British, much feted but largely unproven name who made the ballgown Harry Styles wore in Vogue in 2020, and the polka-dot Seussical suit Shania Twain wore to the Grammys on Sunday, is the new designer at Nina Ricci, a brand that has been struggling to define itself beyond its perfume pretty much since it tried to move beyond perfume. Reed's dramatic gender-bending one-offs garner a lot of attention and celebrity kudos when he shows under his own name in London, but they do not exactly scream "commercially viable" so there's a lot riding on his debut.

It's a similar story with Ludovic de Saint Sernin, 27, the new designer at Ann Demeulemeester, whose genderless shredded peekaboo aesthetic has found fans in Kim Kardashian, Dua Lipa and Rihanna. The Belgian brand, once the epitome of slouchy, existential hipness, has



types, back from Paris; Raul Lopez of Luar, who imbues his edgy, gender-agnostic lux with his own back story; Everard Best of Who Decides War, the designer turning jeans into couture; and Taofeek Abijako of Head of State, whose post-colonial storytelling pairs every product he makes with a community-improvement project, both

lost some of its mojo in recent years, existing on the good will of its former self. Saint Sernin's job is to change that trajectory.

The question, in both cases, will be how the designers translate their drama into wearability — or whether, in the Instagram-TikTok age, statement-making is actually the ultimate goal. — NYT

HEALTH

Who Should Get a COVID Booster Now? New Data Offers Some Clarity



THREE YEARS INTO the pandemic, it has become evident that Covid-19 isn't going anywhere, and neither are vaccine boosters.

Last week, an advisory committee to the Food and Drug Administration unanimously agreed that the vaccine and booster process for Covid-19 needs to be simplified in terms of which version of the shot is offered and when and how often people should receive it. There was less consensus about what that simplified process will look like.

The FDA's desire to streamline vaccine recommendations is a reflection of just how complicated and confusing they have become.

When the bivalent booster, which targets both the original coronavirus strain and the BA.4/BA.5 omicron subvariants, was rolled out in September 2022, there was little data about how well it would work. But the basis for the decision was relatively clear: The virus is evolving, and so should the vaccine. Over the past few months, as the results of initial studies have come in, the picture has gotten murkier.

The good news is the bivalent booster does appear to provide protection against severe infection, which is critical for high-risk individuals. It "is doing a much better job of protection, both for symptomatic infections" and hospitalizations, said Dr. Eric Topol, Executive Vice-President of Scripps Research.

The relative benefit for low-risk populations, who are unlikely to die or be hospitalised from Covid-19, is less clear. There are also questions of how often people should get boosted and how the vaccine should be updated as the virus evolves.

Here's what we currently know about the bivalent booster and how to decide when — and if — you should get your next shot.

IF YOU'RE HIGH RISK, GET A BOOSTER.

For high-risk people — namely adults 50 and older and people who are immunocompromised or have an underlying condition — the evidence is straightforward: If you haven't gotten the bivalent booster, you should. Just make sure it's been at least three months since your last shot or COVID infection.

Supporting this recommendation is data presented by Pfizer and Moderna at the FDA meeting, along with four studies published in January in The New England Journal of Medicine. That research found that people who received the bivalent booster had an increase in antibody levels. This suggests it improved immune defences against the virus, but it didn't protect against the new strains as well as it did against the old ones.

"There's a clear step down" in protection as the variants continue to progress, said Dr. Dan Barouch, a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School who led one of the studies.

When it comes to protecting against severe disease, the bivalent booster fares well in the real world, research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows. One study found that it was at least 38 per cent effective at preventing hospitalisation for Covid-19, and the more time that had passed since someone's previous vaccine dose, the more the bivalent booster helped.

Similarly, a second study focusing on adults 65 and older found that people who had received the bivalent booster an average of 30 days prior were 73 per cent less likely to be hospitalised than those who'd received only the original vaccine or the vaccine plus the initial single-strain (or monovalent) booster an average of nearly a year prior.

However, it's hard to know whether the added benefit of the bivalent booster was because it increased protection against the omicron subvariants or because less time had passed since people got it. Antibodies wane over time — that's why the CDC and FDA started recommending boosters in the first place — so it's not surprising people would be better protected the more recently they'd had a shot.

In either case, Barouch said, "for people at high risk of severe complications of Covid-19, it makes a lot of sense to get boosted because it has shown a reduction of severe disease, at least for a brief period of time."

The boosters also appear to be safe in an overwhelming majority of cases. Last month, the FDA and CDC issued a joint statement that said there was preliminary evidence the bivalent booster may raise the risk of stroke in adults over the age of 65. However, updated data revealed that it was because the comparison group had fewer strokes than normal, not because the recently boosted group had more.

WHAT WILL BOOSTERS LOOK LIKE IN THE COMING MONTHS AND YEARS?

The FDA has suggested that, for most Americans, the booster could be given annually in the fall, like the flu vaccine, and high-risk individuals could still receive multiple doses a year. It's not clear when or if it will formally recommend this approach.

Lin has unpublished research comparing outcomes by the number of booster doses people receive per year. His data shows that people who average less than one booster a year have higher hospitalisation and death rates than people who get one or more doses. There is a much smaller difference between one and more than one booster dose per year. He said this suggested that an annual booster was sufficient for most people; however, for older adults, even the small benefit derived from multiple boosters a year is probably worthwhile.

Based on all of the recent findings, there is consensus that if you are at high risk, getting a vaccine booster at least annually, and possibly more frequently, continues to be valuable. For young, healthy people, though, the decision of when to get a booster, or whether to get one at all, is more individual. The CDC and FDA recommend boosters for everyone, but some experts are less bullish on the idea.

"I think if you haven't had a booster in the last six months, and if you're over age 50 or even over age 40, you're going to get some added protection from winding up in the hospital or even dying," Topol said. "The case between age 5 and 40 is less strong because those people" are rarely hospitalised. — NYT



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Jack could have survived, says Cameron as 'Titanic' re-released 25 years on

JAMES CAMERON doesn't have many regrets — after all, he has now directed three of the four highest-grossing films of all time.

But if he could go back and remake "Titanic," the film that started his record streak 25 years ago and is being re-released in theaters on Friday, there is one thing he would change.

"Based on what I know today, I would have made the raft smaller, so there's no doubt!" said Cameron.

Such is the film's enduring popularity, even a quarter of a century later debates and theories continue to swirl around the fate of Leonardo DiCaprio's lead character.

Fans insist Jack could have survived the icy Atlantic waters after the ocean liner sank, if only he had shared an improvised raft with Kate Winslet's Rose.

Instead, Jack gallantly gave Rose an entire wooden door to float on, condemning himself to a freezing death but ensuring she survived.

It is just one example of how the story of the Titanic "never seems to end for people," Cameron told a press conference held for the anniversary re-release.

"There have been much greater tragedies since the Titanic — I mean, World War One, tens of millions of people died. World War Two."

"But the Titanic has this kind of enduring, almost mythic, novelistic quality. And it has to do with, I think, love and sacrifice and mortality."

"The men who stepped back from the lifeboats so that the women and the children could survive."

- 'FINAL VERDICT' -

Cameron put Jack's individual sacrifice to the test in a new National Geographic documentary, running experiments featuring two stunt performers and an exact replica of the film's door in a cold water tank.

In "Titanic: 25 Years Later with James Cameron," the stunt actors were fitted with internal thermometers to chart how quickly their bodies plunged towards hypothermia.

While the first test confirmed Jack would have died if he had acted according to the film's plot, a second found the pair could have both balanced on the door and kept their upper bodies out of the water.

"He got into a place where if we projected that out, he just might have made it until the lifeboat got there," admitted Cameron.

"Final verdict? Jack might have lived. But there's a lot of variables."

- EPIC LOVE STORY -

"Titanic" was first released in December 1997, and held the number one box office spot for 15 consecutive weekends.

While today most films earn their biggest profits on opening weekend, "Titanic" peaked on its eighth weekend — Valentine's Day.

The epic love story is now being re-released ahead of this year's Valentine's Day weekend, where it will hope to add to its \$2.2 billion total haul.

"I'll grant you \$100 million of our box office (was) for Leonardo DiCaprio's appeal to 14-year-old," girls, joked Cameron.

"Titanic" is currently behind only "Avengers: Endgame" and Cameron's "Avatar," but is expected to soon be surpassed by "Avatar: The Way of Water" — again, by Cameron — which has made \$2.18 billion and is still drawing crowds. — **AFP**

DINING

The Four-Star Restaurants of New York

PETE WELLS, **THE** restaurant critic of *The New York Times*, returns to Le Bernardin for this week's review, and awards it four stars. The Midtown Manhattan seafood restaurant has held that rating, the *Times*' highest, since it opened in 1986.

That year, the *Times* critic Bryan Miller bestowed four stars. Three of his successors did the same: Ruth Reichl in 1995, Frank Bruni in 2005 and Wells in 2012.

Three other New York City restaurants received four stars in their last starred reviews by *Times* critics. Here are the others:

Eleven Madison Park
Last given a starred review in 2015.

The Flatiron district restaurant founded by Danny Meyer was first given four stars in 2009 by the *Times* critic Frank Bruni.

Wells also awarded four stars in a 2015 review, four years after Meyer sold Eleven Madison Park to its chef, Daniel Humm, and restaurateur Will Guidara. "The restaurant tries as hard as any I know to bring delight to the table with every course," Wells wrote. "It succeeds so often that only the most determinedly grumpy souls could resist."

Humm is now running the restaurant without Guidara, whose share he bought out in 2019. Last year, Humm removed meat and other animal products from his menu, and in a subsequent review, Wells wrote that the new vegan dishes didn't measure up to their predecessors:

"Almost none of the main ingredients taste quite like themselves in the 10-course, \$335 menu the

restaurant unwrapped this June after a 15-month pandemic hiatus. Some are so obviously standing in for meat or fish that you almost feel sorry for them."

But the review did not include a star rating. The *Times* did not award stars while restaurants were dealing with the disruption of the pandemic's worst months. Wells resumed his starred reviews last June.

Jean-Georges
Last reviewed in 2014.

Not long after Jean-Georges Vongerichten opened his flagship on Columbus Circle in 1997, Ruth Reichl gave it four stars. Wells went back in 2014 and found that the chef continued to innovate there.

"Jean-Georges glides like a Mercedes sedan, but Mr. Vongerichten takes the curves like a Formula One driver," Wells wrote in his review. "Consider the squab dish that just popped up on the menu. It comes on like jerk

chicken, coated in a blackened rub, and while the seasonings are Middle Eastern, the searing heat is almost Jamaican. And here comes the creative leap that separates Mr. Vongerichten from other spice-peddlers: a hot sauce has been splashed around this charred squab, and it is made from flowers. A bright-orange blend of lime, fresh red chiles and peppery nasturtium petals, it makes the already fiery squab into

what may be the spiciest dish ever served in a French restaurant."

Yoshino
Reviewed in 2022.

Tadashi Yoshida closed his restaurant in Nagoya, Japan, Sushi no Yoshino, to open this New York sushi restaurant in 2021. Wells found the 10-seat dining room on the Bowery offered nonstop thrills from the moment diners are seated at the hinoki counter, from a vichyssoise garnished with caviar and mackerel of Hokkaido hairy crab to lumps of tamago that feels almost like crème brûlée.

"Of course, other sushi chefs have mixed outside ideas into this essentially Japanese idiom," Wells wrote. "But Mr. Yoshida does it in a natural, unforced way that is very rare. A meal in his restaurant glides like a sliding door in its groove." — **NYT**

SCIENCE

The Toxin That Helps Oyster Mushrooms Devour Worm Flesh

THE OYSTER MUSHROOM is a mild thing, a pert, often creamy-coloured whorl of fungus that goes well with thyme sautéed in butter. But among scientists who study mushrooms, it has earned a reputation for activities more sinister than you'd expect from a fungus found in fine dining. The oyster mushroom is a carnivore.

The mushroom's usual diet of damp logs is low in nitrogen. To get that essential element, it feeds on microscopic nematodes, a type of worm. When a worm makes the mistake of passing over the fungus, the oyster mushroom paralyses and kills it, devouring the animal's nitrogen-rich flesh with rootlike tendrils called hyphae.

Outside the animal kingdom, Venus flytraps, pitcher plants and others are well known for their macabre meal-making. But fungi, too, have an appetite for flesh, and it's not just the oyster mushroom, although it is the only carnivorous fungus you'll generally find in your grocery store. Some fungi craft sticky nets laced with tempting scents to snare their prey. Others create deadly collars that constrict as the worm struggles, immobilising the prey as the fungus's hyphae penetrate its body. Some even release tiny sickle-shaped spores that, when swallowed by a nematode, wreak havoc from within.

The scenarios all end with the worm's body invaded by the threads of its hungry captor. The oyster mushroom's weapon of choice seems to be a toxin: Worms that touch the fungus are paralysed, and their cells fall apart as they succumb to the hyphae. — **NYT/VERONIQUE GREENWOOD**

Earth's Inner Core: A Shifting, Spinning Mystery's Latest Twist

IMAGINE EARTH'S INNER CORE — the dense centre of our planet — as a heavy, metal ballerina. This iron-rich dancer is capable of pirouetting at ever-changing speeds.

That core may be on the cusp of a big shift. Seismologists are reporting that after brief pauses, the inner core changes how it spins — relative to the motion of Earth's surface — perhaps once every few decades. And such a reversal may now be under way.

This may sound like a setup for a world-wrecking, blockbuster movie. But fret not: Precisely nothing apocalyptic will result from this planetary spin cycle, which may have been happening for eons. The researchers who propose this speculative model instead aim to advance understanding of Earth's innermost sanctum and its relationship with the rest of the world.

In 1936, a Danish seismologist discovered that Earth's liquid outer core envelops a solid metal marble. "It's weird that there's a solid iron ball kind of floating in the middle of the Earth," said John Vidale, a seismologist at the University of Southern California who was not involved with the study. Scientists think the core crystallised out of a molten metal soup at some point in Earth's not-too-distant past, after the planet's internal inferno had sufficiently cooled. — **NYT/ROBIN GEORGE ANDREWS**

art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | FEBRUARY 12 | 2023



Nizwa Fort: Grand, Vibrant, and Full of Life

By Olga Velikaya
Instagram: face_a_story

A man threw his sword up. As he leapt into the air to catch it, everyone's eyes fixed on the shining metal. The viewers held their breath in anticipation. As soon as the man in the light brown dishdasha swiftly caught the sword, the crowd burst into loud applause. I was surprised to hear the drumbeats and singing behind Nizwa fort's golden-brown

defensive walls. More than twenty men dressed in traditional Omani clothes stood in two rows facing each other and performed the Razha Folklore dance.

The Razha imitated a swordfight, and the performers moved to the beat of the drums. The men mostly sang patriotic songs about the country, glory, and nation's pride, as well as folk ballads about love and friendship. On Fridays and Saturdays, enthusiastic Nizwa residents gathered at the fort to

keep the Razha tradition alive and introduce young locals and foreign visitors to Omani customs. Said al Mandhri, the group's leader who learned the dance from his father, was participating with his son Nofal.

"I like coming here with my father," said Nofal in a low yet determined voice. It was obvious he took the task seriously and gladly showcased different learned manoeuvres. The performers stood in the square in front of Nizwa



fort, built by Imam Sultan bin Saif bin Malik al Yarubi in the middle of the 17th century AD. The defensive fort had a cylindrical shape that allowed a 360-degree view of the area and an outstanding shooting power from 23 cannons placed on top of the high citadel. There was a double-leaf door at the fort's main entrance, and tower defenders threw rocks at the intruders who tried to reach it.

"If the enemies managed to go

through the main entrance, they were greeted with hot oil," our friendly Omani guide explained in fluent English. Vivid images flashed through my mind as if I were watching a historical action drama. The only way to reach the top of the citadel was through a narrow, winding passageway with deadly traps around every corner. When the enemies entered one of the many doors, a double-leaf hatch opened with their body

weight, and they fell into the holes.

Nizwa castle, adjacent to the fort, was built by Imam Salt bin Malik al Kharusi in the 9th century AD. It was a residential area with public and private rooms where Imam met with guests and lived with his family. The meeting room was accessible only through the school, which consisted of four rooms where bright young adults lived and studied various disciplines. Interestingly, Imam



placed the school directly before the meeting room so students could talk to visitors and learn new things.

"To check what was happening in and out the castle, Imam used this secret passage," the guide pointed at the hole in the ground which led to the underground tunnel. If he walked out with all his security, students, and advisers, people would have time to prepare and hide all the problems or mistakes, but this way, he could see what was

really happening. Also, the passage was used to bring food and armoury supplies when the castle was under attack. The ruler's living area was simple, consisting of a sitting room, bedroom, bathroom, and toilet. Atypical to other palaces, there were no paintings, ornaments, or embellishments on the walls, and the overall style seemed quite minimalist.

After the tour, I explored the territory on my own and went back

to the top of the fort to enjoy the magnificent view of Nizwa. Then, I watched an older gentleman weaving baskets from dry palm leaves and a young man making clay pots. Listening to distant chanting and singing, I sat in the shade and ate freshly-baked Omani bread. For a while, my eyes roamed the fortified complex. The towering walls of the fort held countless stories and preserved Oman's rich history for generations to come.