

Added value of enterprises exceeds RO 9 billion by 4Q 2022

The total added value of enterprises by the end of the fourth quarter of 2022 in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to RO 9,237.6 million (221,523 enterprises), constituting a growth by 25.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The contribution of active enterprises to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices increased by 79.7 per cent for the fourth quarter of 2022, compared to 79.2 per cent by the fourth quarter of 2021. **DETAILS ON P5**



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VERSTAPPEN COMPLETES HAT-TRICK IN SPAIN



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CMA INSTRUCTS INSURANCE FIRMS TO GEAR UP FOR KHAREEF



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MYSTERY OF THE DESERT: THE LOST CITIES OF THE NIGERIEN SAHARA



MUSCAT

HM RECEIVES THANKS FROM JORDAN KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's 77th Independence Day anniversary. In the cable, King Abdullah expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's fraternal feelings that embody the advanced relations binding the two countries. He also prayed to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty. He also prayed for the Omani people to achieve their aspirations of further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. — ONA

HM GREET'S QUEEN OF DENMARK

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Queen Margrethe II of the Kingdom of Denmark on her country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to Queen Margrethe II. His Majesty also wished the people of Denmark further progress and prosperity.

Masirah ME's first healthy island

WHO's global initiative to strengthen public health at local level

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Oman's Masirah Island has been awarded international recognition as the first healthy island in the Eastern Mediterranean region by the World Health Organisation (WHO). At a ceremony organised by the Ministry of Health, the island received the international recognition certificate under the auspices of Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health.

The event was attended by various officials, including Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmiah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, and other distinguished guests.

Abdulhamid bin Ali al Abri, Deputy Wali of Masirah and



WHAT IS HEALTHY CITY NETWORK

Global problems are being dealt with at a local level. They engage the whole of society, encouraging the participation of all communities in the pursuit of peace and prosperity

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 PEOPLE
A healthy city takes a human approach to development | 3 PROSPERITY
Governance of common goods and services | 5 PLACE
Environment that facilitates the pursuit of health and well-being |
| 2 PARTICIPATION
Ensuring community participation in decisions | 4 PLANET
Health and well-being of both the people and the planet | 6 PEACE
Promotes and keeps peace in all its actions, policies and systems |

Chairman of the Executive Office for the Healthy Island, highlighted the environmental challenges urban areas face, including the island's expanding population and the impact of certain lifestyles on health. He emphasised that addressing these challenges requires the involvement of multiple sectors and community participation. The Ministry of Health has programmes and initiatives based on community and sectoral partnerships, such as healthy cities and villages, to promote health and encourage specific lifestyles among community members.

Saud al Nudhairi, Director-General of Health Services for Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, expressed the significance of Masirah Island's achievement in obtaining international recognition as a healthy island.

TURN TO P2

33 women to contest Shura Council polls

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee of the Majlis Ash'shura's 10th Term Elections today held its second meeting under the auspices of Shaikh Al Mukhtar bin Abdullah al Harthy, Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court, Chairman of the Committee.

The meeting endorsed the minutes of the previous meeting and procedures governing the announcement of preliminary lists of candidates for the Majlis Ash'shura membership through the 10th Term, among other issues of relevance.

Earlier, the Ministry of Interior unveiled the initial lists that comprised 883 candidates, among them 33 were women. The process took place via the elections' app "Intikhab", as well as the elections website (elections.om).

The ministry pointed out that it is permissible for any person to object to any name(s) included in the preliminary lists of candidates. Objections have to be submitted through the elections' website within five days from the date of announcement of candidates' names, said the ministry.

The applicants who submit the objections have to quote the reasons for their objection, along with supporting documents, to be attached to the claims. A verdict on the objections will be issued within 10 days from the date of expiry of the period set for objections, the ministry affirmed. — ONA

RO 10 million for AI projects

MUSCAT: Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, affirmed that the ministry's launch of the national initiative for empowering the national economy with artificial intelligence, stems from the necessity imposed by AI and applications to boost the economy's competitiveness and effectiveness. The ministry earmarked a sum of RO 10 million for the initiative's 2024 projects. In the first stage, it targets

government institutions and governorates, and it will later cover other sectors.

'National Initiative to Empower a National Economy Enhanced by Artificial Intelligence', seeks to enable government departments to use AI applications and technologies in development projects, besides boosting investment opportunities based on technology and innovation.

SEE MORE ON P13

Cool relief: Taxis, training cars can tint windows up to 30 per cent

FATIMA AL MARSHOUDI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Giving a cool relief to taxi drivers and driving instructors, the Royal Oman Police has allowed them to tint their car windows up to 30 per cent. The decision allows drivers to shield themselves from blinding sunlight especially in summers without compromising visibility. Earlier, private cars were allowed to tint the car windows.

The amendment is expected to benefit the taxi drivers who are on the road braving scorching heat.



Moreover, it will offer privacy for learners in training cars, creating a more conducive environment for learning.

The Royal Oman Police encourages all vehicle owners to comply with the amended law

promptly. It is essential to strike a balance between security measures and ensuring transparency on the roads. The decision seeks to provide a sense of safety to drivers while maintaining the necessary visibility for road users.

The amendment also emphasises that any violation of the tinting law, resulting in windows or glass exceeding the allowed limit, will attract penalties. Offenders can face fines starting from RO 10 or more, depending on the severity of the violation.

2 kids get organs from brain-dead donor

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team at the Royal Hospital succeeded in carrying out three organ transplants on three patients including two children, using organs donated by a brain-dead donor. The patients were being treated for chronic organ failure.

The first operation was a liver transplant for an adult patient suffering from chronic liver failure. It was performed by an Omani surgical team specialised in liver transplants. It was conducted under the supervision of a liver transplant team from King Fahd Specialist Hospital in Dammam.

The operation constitutes a



new achievement to be added to the accomplishments of the National Transplantation Programme endorsed in Oman. Dr Salah bin Mohammed

al Jabri, Liver Surgery and Transplant Consultant, Head of Liver Transplantation Committee at the Royal Hospital, said that the operation took about 8 hours

and met with success. He pointed out that liver resection requires well-trained staff capable of shifting the target organ in a precise and rapid manner to avoid inadvertent damage.

The second and third operations involved the transplantation of kidneys for two children, aged 9 and 10 years. The children were undergoing proton dialysis for years. The transplants came as a blessing to the two, who spent their childhood days frequenting hospital wards and facing grim chances of treatment, due to the fact that did not have donors from among their relatives.

— ONA

INSIDE



OMANI JOCKEYS INCH CLOSER TO WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

P10



GCC E-Mall empowers SMEs, transforming business landscape

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

An Omani entrepreneur has come up with a platform for GCC businesses to help them identify, benchmark and explore future clients by connecting local businesses and communities in the GCC market.

Wasan al Malki (pictured) got the idea of raising the platform from the need of regional SMEs to showcase their products and services to the international market.

The 'GCC E-Mall' project is a platform designed specifically for business owners in the GCC market. It offers them a highly effective medium to enhance their visibility and attract both online and foot traffic, thereby boosting their business prospects.

The platform provides an array of impressive features, including a user-friendly dashboard that allows businesses to manage their listings effortlessly and make instant changes as needed. Additionally, it offers robust analytics tools that enable businesses to monitor their performance and make data-driven decisions. Moreover, GCC E-Mall offers an API connection



The platform is a one-of-its-kind project because it has the ability to provide targeted recommendations for keywords and phrases that align with users' search intent

option, streamlining the process of updating listings and ensuring accurate and up-to-date information for users.

Speaking to the Observer, Wasan al Malki said the recently launched 'GCC E-Mall' is intriguing and has created a lot of curiosity among the regional business houses.

"The platform 'GCC E-Mall' is a one-of-its-kind project because it has the ability to provide targeted recommendations for keywords and phrases that align with users' search intent. This feature empowers businesses to optimise their search engine optimisation (SEO) strategies and capture a wider range of search queries, resulting in increased visibility

and potential customers," she said.

The GCC E-Mall provides businesses with a powerful tool to showcase their products and services and gain regional visibility. It also offers businesses easy-to-use, powerful tools to reach new customers, grow their business, connect with their community, improve customer connections and promote business details.

She added that to further support businesses, GCC E-Mall is currently offering a one-year rent-free period with no commission, per click or impressions, along with a one-time small setup fee. This allows businesses to leverage the platform's capabilities without any financial burden, making it an

enticing opportunity for them to strengthen customer connections and manage their operations more effectively.

The GCC E-Mall represents a unique concept that combines elements of a mall, local search, concierge, and lifestyle platform. Although the platform may not have all the answers to categorise it precisely, this podium for businesses has succeeded in offering the possible services, and GCC E-Mall will greatly impact the GCC business landscape.

GCC E-Mall offers a number of features that make it an attractive platform for businesses, including a wide range of tools to showcase products and services, easy-to-use tools to improve customer connections, the ability to promote business details, analytics and API connection options, and SEO recommendations.

"We believe that GCC E-Mall will be an essential tool for city living," she said, adding, "It also provides residents, tourists and business owners alike with an innovative and powerful platform that connects local businesses and communities like never before."

Information ministry operates new Al Shabab radio station in Duqm



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Information announced the start of transmission from a new radio station broadcasting Al Shabab (youth) programmes in the Wilayat of Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate. The radio service operates on the frequency of 103.5 MHz with a capacity of 1 kilowatt. The number of radio stations in the Sultanate of Oman now

stands at 136 distributed as follows: 16 stations in the Governorate of Muscat, 28 in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, 12 in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 4 in Al Buraimi Governorate, 6 in Al Wusta Governorate, 15 in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, 22 in North and South Al Sharqiyah governorates, 13 in Musandam Governorate and 20 in Dhofar Governorate. — ONA

PEC International Recruits First Batch of Omani Graduates for Training



Omani Trainee Engineers (back row, left to right) Balushi Said Salim Ali Salim, Hussain Ali Khafan Al Wahaibi, Balushi Ali Abbas Ali, Ghenaime Al-Khalil Ahmed Khalfan Amur, Suqri Mohamed Ahmed Abdullah with PEC Singapore Leadership team (front row left to right) Executive Chairman Edna Ko, Group Chief Executive Officer Robert Dompeling, Project Director Jonathan Chong.

PEC International LLC was established in Oman in 2020 and is a 100% owned subsidiary of the Singapore-based company, PEC LTD, a publicly listed company on the Singapore Stock Exchange with operations across Asia and the Middle East. PEC Ltd is a specialist engineering group servicing the oil and gas, petrochemical, oil and chemical terminal, and pharmaceutical industries with focused business activities on EPC works and maintenance services. PEC International LLC was established in Oman with the goal of providing the company's world-class services in EPC and maintenance services to the country's ever-growing energy and chemical sectors.

As part of the company's commitment to localize, PEC International LLC, recruited its

first batch of Omani graduates in 2022 for a year-long training program at various refinery and petrochemical sites in Singapore to develop and enhance their industrial, technical and management expertise and skills. Upon completion of the program, they will be placed in their respective operations in Oman and in PEC's global offices.

PEC's Group CEO, Mr Robert Dompeling said:

"PEC is excited and pleased to have its very first batch of Omani engineers who will be training with us at our Singapore maintenance sites. We are committed to develop and enable the skills of Omani engineers who wish to work in the industry and hope this is the first of many more batches to come. PEC is impressed with the engineer's enthusiasm and

willingness to learn"

"I am very grateful to PEC for investing in my growth and for entrusting me with this incredible training opportunity. It has been a humbling experience to learn from PEC's highly reputed and prestigious team of professionals here in Singapore. My experience and exposure to working in the refinery facilities of global leaders such as Shell and Exxon Mobil with PEC's Maintenance team are truly invaluable and transformative", says Hussain Al-Wahaibi, one of the members of PEC's training program.

In the final quarter of 2022, PEC International LLC was awarded a long term Turnaround Contract from Oman's leading energy investment company and is currently in preparation for a Turnaround at Salalah later this year.

NEW RECRUITS JOIN RAFO



MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) in coordination with the Ministry of Labour received a new batch of citizens to undergo military training at the Sultan Qaboos Air Academy after passing medical fitness and evaluation tests, on Sunday. — ONA

WHO names Masirah as ME's first healthy island

FROM PAGE 1

He commended the island's commitment to improving the health and social conditions of its residents, as well as its efforts to become a globally recognised healthy island by fulfilling the evaluation criteria consisting of 80 standards across various pillars.

Dr John Jabbour, the WHO representative in Oman, noted the simultaneous focus on establishing futuristic model cities in the country that prioritise the quality of life and well being. He highlighted the alignment between these efforts and the principles of sustainable development and the WHO strategies.

Dr Maha al Adawi, Director of the Population Health Promotion Department at the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean of the WHO, emphasised that Masirah Island met over 80 per cent of the required standards and indicators to be designated as a "Healthy City."

This makes Masirah the first island in the Eastern Mediterranean region to receive this recognition, joining the growing network of healthy cities. The island upholds the longstanding traditions of Oman and aims to adopt a lifestyle based on natural elements while contributing to the country's fish wealth. The achievement was made possible through the efforts of the national team for healthy cities under the guidance of the Minister of Health.

The Healthy Cities Programme is considered a tool and platform through which all government sectors, in collaboration with civil society organisations and the private sector, work together to engage with local communities. It addresses the social determinants of health, going beyond the provision of healthcare services and effectively contributes to improving the local environment and public facilities, leading to increased well-being and quality of life for people.

Formation of low-pressure likely: Met

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In the next 48 hours, a low-pressure formation could develop into a depression in the southeast of the Arabian Sea, according to Oman Met Office.

According to Oman Met Office weather forecasters, the direction of the movement is unclear since the system is yet to form.

"Once formed, the track will be clearer," said the weather forecaster.

"Until now, there has been no impact on Oman's weather. There would be no influence on Oman's weather conditions for the next five days." After the formation of low pressure in a tropical system, one of the first impacts will be on the wind, which could influence the temperatures.

On Sunday, it had mainly clear skies with cloud development over Al Hajar Mountains and adjoining areas during the afternoon. The weather forecast has given an alert on chances of dust rising over desert and open areas as well as late night to early morning low-level clouds or fog patches over parts of the coasts of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar governorates.

Fog is also expected, and this could have an impact on visibility.

Sur recorded the highest temperature with a maximum of 44 degrees Celsius and a low of 31 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, the coolest place was Jabal Shams, with a maximum of 18 degrees Celsius and a low of 13 degrees Celsius.



NINE ACTIVE ITALIAN ARCHEOLOGICAL MISSIONS IN OMAN

Oman-Italy relations poised for greater growth: Ambassador

KABEER YOUSUF
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The bilateral relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Italy are poised for greater growth, according to Pierluigi D’Elia, Ambassador of Italy to the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the 77th National Day, the ambassador said that the bilateral relationship dates back fifty-one years and both sides continue to explore newer areas of improvement on a constant basis.

“Our bilateral relations with Oman dates back fifty-one years and our mutual trade is worth more than €740,000m, one of the top volumes among European Union countries. In these first months since my arrival in Oman, I witnessed a growing attention and interest to Italian expertise and opportunities of cooperation in sectors that will be pivotal to



Our bilateral relations with Oman dates back fifty-one years and our mutual trade is worth more than €740,000m, one of the top volumes among European Union countries

PIERLUIGI D’ELIA
Ambassador of Italy to the Sultanate of Oman

implement the Oman Vision 2040, the transformative agenda which is being implemented under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik,” D’Elia said.

The bilateral cultural exchange relations are lively, with Oman joining in 2022 for the first time

programme of the amazing and prestigious Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM). Moreover, there are nine active Italian Archaeological Missions in Oman contributing to research on the rich history of this beautiful country,” he added.

In terms of tourism, Oman is also drawing increasing attention in Italy as a tourist destination. In the first three months of this year 23,000 Italians visited this country and the diplomatic mission has invited more Omanis to visit Italy and all its regions, from Palermo to Milan, even more often.

He said that Italy has always been seen as a bridge between Europe and the wider Mediterranean while Oman is often described to be a crucial hub and a bridge between Asia, the Gulf, Europe and Africa. “Working together will mutually strengthen this vocation in bridging continents and cultures,” he said.

HERITAGE MINISTRY SIGNS AGREEMENTS ON LEATHER, COTTON INDUSTRIES

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism on Sunday signed two agreements in the fields of leather industry and innovation in cotton industry involving the variety of ‘Al Khadranj’. The agreements were inked with the Industrial Innovation Academy.

The first agreement provides for conducting a study on the leather industry that focuses on areas of investment in raw materials, enhances added value, initiates projects for youth and generates



employment opportunities. The second agreement seeks to promote craftsmanship in cotton fabric, as Al Khadranj of cotton

bears cultural significance to the Omani identity. It aims at re-cultivating this variety of cotton and developing its production cycles to make it a national economic product.

The two agreements were signed by Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, and Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhaili, CEO of the Industrial Innovation Academy.

— ONA

CPA warns against sale of banned electronic cigarettes



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The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has warned electronic cigarettes and hookahs are banned in the Sultanate of Oman as per a ministerial decision of 2015.

The violators are subject to an administrative fine of not less than RO50, and not more than RO1,000, and the penalty is doubled in case of recurrence.

If this violation continues, an administrative fine of OMR 50 will be imposed for each day the violation continues, provided that the total fine does not exceed RO2,000, considering the health and safety of the consumer.

Meanwhile, Dr Ahmed bin Hamad al Wahaibi, a senior consultant of family medicine at the Ministry of Health, has said in a statement that nearly 20 per cent of adults in the Sultanate of Oman smoke and this is a large and dangerous number, as the global survey showed for the age group of 13-15

years. As for the electronic cigarette (vape), the study indicates that 5.3 per cent of students smoke it and that 26.6 per cent of the students bought it from within the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Wahaibi said “When a person smokes cigarettes or whatever form of tobacco is, the body responds immediately to the chemical nicotine present in the smoke and causes the following symptoms in the short term: high blood pressure, increased heart rate, increased blood flow. The outside of the heart, narrowing of the arteries.”

The cost of treating a smoker who has a respiratory infection and needs to be hospitalised for at least one day is estimated at approximately RO 355, as the cost of treating diseases caused by smoking is not limited to the disease itself, but also includes sick leave and absence from work due to illness, which causes the depletion of the workforce, which loses many of its cadres due to smoking.

WORLD MARKS 50TH ENVIRONMENT DAY TODAY

Fight plastic pollution to achieve sustainable development

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

ON the fiftieth anniversary of World Environment Day, environmentalists are focusing on finding solutions to plastic pollution. This annual event, led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), has grown to be the largest global platform for environmental outreach. Celebrated on June 5 each year, World Environment Day aims to raise awareness about environmental issues and engage millions of people worldwide.

This year’s celebrations will be hosted by Côte d’Ivoire in the African continent. Côte d’Ivoire is a country that has made significant efforts to address the problem of plastic waste. In 2014, Côte d’Ivoire banned the use of plastic bags in favour of more environmentally friendly alternatives. Plastic pollution is a global issue, with over 400 million tonnes of plastic materials being produced annually, and less than 10 per cent of that being recycled. As a result, vast amounts of plastic end up in lakes, rivers, and seas, threatening ecosystems and human health.

Plastic waste affects all aspects of the environment, including soil, water, and air. Micro-plastic particles, which enter the food, water, and air, pose a significant concern. Studies have shown that tap water in various regions around the world, including the United States and Lebanon, contains plastic fibres. Annually, approximately 8 million tonnes of plastic waste enter the oceans due to poor waste management in coastal areas, and if this continues, it is projected to reach between 100 and 250 million tonnes by 2025.

China, Indonesia, and Arab countries collectively contribute to ocean pollution, with China being the largest contributor.

While China ranks first to ocean pollution with plastic waste at a rate of 27.7 per cent, Indonesia’s rate is 10.1 per cent, while the Arabs collectively come in third place in the world at a rate of 8.6 per cent. Egypt alone ranks first in the Arab world and seventh in the world with a rate of 3 per cent, followed by Algeria in the 13th place at 1.6 per cent and then Morocco in the 18th in the world with 1 per cent.

At the regional level, it is estimated that Arab countries



dispose of around 200 million tons of waste each year, with plastic materials constituting a significant portion. Some Arab countries have implemented bans on plastic bags and are promoting alternative packaging materials, but more needs to be done to address the millions of tons of plastic waste being disposed of annually.

At the local level, it is essential to promote proper waste disposal and management, as well as implement awareness campaigns and enforce environmental laws. Recycling projects and sustainable industrial initiatives can also help address

Say no to single-use plastic, yes to recycling

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Nations across the globe celebrate on June 5 every year the World Environment Day. The theme for World Environment Day 2023 is ‘Beat plastic pollution.’

This year the host is the West African country, Côte d’Ivoire, in partnership with the Netherlands. The day urges everyone to look at ways to prevent plastic pollution.

According to the organisers of World Environment Day, “The world is being inundated by plastic. More than 400 million tonnes of plastic is produced annually, half of which is designed to be used only once.” A simple way to contribute would

be to take the step to use reusable products such as mugs, food containers and shopping bags.

This also requires refusing and saying no to single-use cutlery and straws.

In Oman, the focus has been on plastic bags, and on January 1, 2023, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) issued a ban on the import of plastic bags.

According to be’ah’s Sustainability Report for the year 2022, the most prominent initiatives that help decrease plastic’s impact are recycling it or using environmentally friendly alternatives and increasing community awareness about it.”

The damage caused by plastic is not that it reaches the landfills, it has non - degradable chemicals, and the fact that it is reaching the food chain show that action must be taken now.

“Plastic waste has been considered to be the biggest threat to our environment and makes up 21 per cent by weight and 50 per cent by volume of the engineered landfills set up across the length and breadth of the country,” stated Be’ah in its study.

Bangladesh was the first country to ban light plastic bags way back in 2002. The country imposed a total ban. But now the focus is also on plastic cups, cutlery, and much more, not to forget the water bottles.

provision, clean energy, and building sustainable cities.

World Environment Day serves as a vital platform for global environmental awareness and action. Since its inception in 1973, it has become a key event to promote environmental dimensions of sustainable development goals. With participation from over 150 countries, the United Nations Environment Programme advocates for environmental protection worldwide.



WHATSAPP STATUS HELPS SAVE LIFE

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

If you have always wanted to really understand any person's nature, attitude, behaviour, mood or way of life, it is now easier than ever before. Just go and visit his/her WhatsApp Status. In some cases, it can be very useful and helpful.

As in the case, when Syed Shaandar Ali Shah Bukhari, a marketing professional and social welfare worker hailing from Pakistan, saved the life of an Omani citizen last weekend.

"One of my Omani friends wanted to commit suicide. I happened to see his WhatsApp status by chance that he was preparing to commit suicide," he said.

"Then, after a struggle of two hours of contacting him via WhatsApp because he was not taking any calls, I managed to convince him not to commit suicide. I had to involve Royal Oman Police because he was not giving me his whereabouts," Bukhari added.

Explaining how he managed to convince him, Bukhari said, "It was really very tough. The situation came all of a sudden, and I didn't know how to convince him. He was getting angry with every passing minute. He was only communicating with me. Police were in touch with me because when they tried to call him, he became more angry and later, his family got involved, but no one knew where he was."

"Later, somehow, I managed to get his location, and I reached him and managed to open the room, and I, along with two of my cousins, managed to detach him from the fan where he had hung himself. I thank God all my efforts bore fruits after a long struggle, and I am so happy that I was able to save one life in this regard," he added.

Bukhari was of the view that there should be a hotline number for such cases. "This has become a very serious issue in society, especially among

young people. When they get into trouble and don't know what to do and whom to ask for counselling, they tend to commit suicide. There should be some number where such people get professional counselling to control their mood. I hope the authorities take action on this, and there should be a hotline where we can call and connect with such cases," he said.

"In this case, I was searching on Google if there was any number where I could inform and they could counsel him as I was finding it difficult to convince him, and it was merely a matter of minutes, the situation could have gotten out of hand," he added.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, a consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said reports of suicide cases in Oman are on the rise. "We have heard about the sad cases of people committing suicide, and indeed, we need a helpline for such issues in Oman," he said.

"There is a need for better awareness about mental health issues and when to seek help. Such cases are from the locals and expatriates alike who may be more vulnerable, especially when they lack family and social support," he added.

"But for the Omanis," Dr Sinawi said, "social support may not be enough." "When a person is suffering from a form of mental illness, that's difficult for people around him to understand or sympathise with him or her; hence there is a need for a professional helpline," he said.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO), 703,000 people take their own life every year, and many more people attempt suicide.

"Every suicide is a tragedy that affects families, communities and entire countries and has long-lasting effects on the people left behind. Suicide occurs throughout the lifespan, and it was the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds globally in 2019," WHO states.



CALL FOR PROFESSIONAL HELPLINE
TO CATER TO SUICIDE CASES



Biological control effective in curbing pests in Dhofar

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Biological control has proven successful in protecting agricultural crops from pests, as it contributes to restoring the natural balance of the environment and reducing the density of agricultural pests without posing any health or environmental damage.

Some insects are classified as threats to all kinds of crops and cause large economic losses in the agricultural sector. Some solutions are there to get rid of these pests through the process of chemical pesticide control, but they have side effects on plants and human health. However, other methods are considered the safest to combat insect pests, do not cause any damage and are known as biological control.

Dr Mohammad bin Muslim Habees, Senior Plant Protection Specialist and Biological Control Expert at the General Directorate of Agricultural and Fisheries



Resources in Dhofar Governorate, explained that biological control is also known as natural control.

"It is a sustainable method for managing agricultural, environmental and health pests and one of the attempts to restore the natural balance of the environment. The method proved beneficial in controlling pests naturally," he said.

Biological control elements include the use of insect organisms such as parasites, predators and pathogens such as nematodes,

fungi, viruses, bacteria and protozoa. Unlike chemical control, bio-control elements are completely safe and do not cause any problems to humans, animals and the environment. Some serious diseases like cancer, kidney failure, liver cirrhosis, congenital malformation, and chronic allergies are closely linked to the extensive and irrational use of chemical pesticides.

The agents that work as biological pest controllers on the

Salalah plains enjoy a moderate climate throughout the year, with average temperatures of 25 degrees and relative humidity of 70 per cent. This is an ideal climate for natural agents to act against parasites and predators. The results of research and studies in the Salalah plain also showed the presence of a large number of local biological agents, most of which are highly efficient and important against harmful insects, including 13 types of parasites and 14 predators.

Dr Habees mentioned that among the successful projects for biological control in the Salalah Plain, an integrated project to combat the 'black Nargil beetle' was developed by the ministry in cooperation with the International Commonwealth Institute (C.A.B) by using the Baculovirus in 1989. This method succeeded greatly, and the parasite 'Encarsia' was also imported. Opulenta was brought from Florida in 1984 to combat the black citrus fly, and the pest was controlled.



Enterprises' total added value exceeds RO 9 bn in Q4 of 2022: NCSI

MUSCAT: The total added value of enterprises by the end of the fourth quarter of 2022 in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to RO 9,237.6 million (221,523 enterprises), constituting a growth by 25.2 per cent compared to the same period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The contribution of active enterprises to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices increased by 79.7 per cent for the fourth quarter of 2022, compared to 79.2 per cent by the fourth quarter of 2021.

The added value of large enterprises amounted to RO 6,897.9 million constituting 59.5 per cent during the fourth quarter of 2022, comprising a rise by 27.6 per cent compared

the corresponding period in the previous year.

Further, the added value of medium enterprises amounted to RO 725 million (6.3 per cent) during the fourth quarter of 2022, comprising an increase by 20.7 per cent. Meanwhile, the added value of small enterprises reached RO 749.3 million (6.5 per cent) during the fourth quarter of 2022, constituting a rise by 16.8 per cent.

The added value of micro enterprises reached RO 865.5 million (7.5 per cent) during the fourth quarter of 2022, going up by 18.4 per cent.

It is worth mentioning that the number of workers in active private enterprises in Oman increased by 16.1 per cent to stand 1,688,110 during the fourth quarter of 2022 compared to 1,454,187 during the fourth quarter of 2021. — ONA

Vocational colleges board discusses progress

MUSCAT: The Board of Vocational Colleges at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation on Sunday discussed the progress made in a plan to develop the vocational training system, its projects and its foundation programme.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Khalid bin Abdulaziz Ambusaidi, Director General of Vocational Training. It looked



into the outcome of a workshop on mechanical, electrical and electronics engineering programmes. It studied ways of how best to follow up the visions

and challenges facing vocational colleges and find adequate solutions.

As many as 3,072 students received admission to vocational

colleges during the academic year (2022/2023). They took up different specialisations such as maintenance of electronic devices, automotive technology, operating mechanics, architectural drawing, electricity generation, marine navigation techniques, engine mechanics, wastewater treatment, aquaculture and business studies like marketing, and interior design. — ONA

TAISM honours 36 graduates at 23rd annual graduation ceremony

MUSCAT: About 36 grade 12 students from The American International School of Muscat (TAISM) walked across the Bosch Center of the Performing Arts stage and received their diplomas at the annual graduation ceremony.

More than 500 parents, faculty, and students attended the ceremony, which was followed by a celebratory reception on June 1.

Dr Kevin Schuttinger, High School Principal, says he was proud of the students who led the ceremony. "Their confidence and wisdom are an inspiration to us. The students' desire to step up and take on the responsibility of leadership is a moving example of the confidence and character instilled in them throughout their time at TAISM," he said.

The ceremony was led by the student master of ceremonies and featured speakers from the graduating class. Ekaterina Nadezhkina was the master of the ceremony for this year's graduation with Nandika Singh as the graduation speaker. Both of these important roles were determined through an audition process of interested



students who earned 'Academic Honours' and 'Highest Academic Honours' respectively.

TAISM's Class of 2023 will be attending universities worldwide and the students were accepted to over 300 universities in 10 different countries, with the US, Canada, and the UK being the most popular.

Students are pursuing a broad range of studies including Economics, Film and Television Production, Business Management, Engineering, Health and Sciences, Finance, Business Administration

and Entrepreneurship, Life Sciences and Psychology, Computer Science, and Artificial Intelligence. Fawzi Mushantaf, Chairperson of TAISM's Board of Directors, and Kevin Schafer, TAISM Director, awarded the diplomas to the graduates. The students were lauded for their outstanding achievements and personal attributes, which they embody as lifelong learners. Dr Schuttinger presented special awards to the graduates which included the award for Academic Excellence (Highest Honours) to seniors Eva Bonde, Liliana Castiblanco Guzman, Rami Idris, Shyaam

Lakshmanan, Nilanjana Sha Sudha, Jayani Singh and Nandika Singh.

The TAISM Concert Band, under the direction of Kristina LaMarca, conductor, performed the prelude and processional music, including Edward Elgar's 'Pomp and Circumstance.' In honor of the graduating seniors, the TAISM High School Choir, with some alumni, performed the choral anthem, 'Like an Eagle', directed by Mira Boyadzhieva. TAISM also held an awards ceremony to recognise the high school students who were named as the most outstanding in the following areas for 2022-2023.

شركة الصلان للصناعات الغذائية ش.م.ع.م.
Al Sallan Food Industries Co. SAOC
ص.ب. ٩٧٠ صحر - الرمز البريدي: ٣١١ - سلطنة عمان - تلفون: ٢١٧٥٠٦٢٣ - فاكس: ٢١٧٥٠٩٤٠

Invitation for attending the Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting

The Board of Directors of S Al-Sallan Food Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders of the Company to attend the **Annual General Meeting & Extraordinary General Meeting** to be held at 3:00 pm on Thursday 22/6/2023 via the electronic platform to attend the General meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om), if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, a second annual ordinary general meeting will be held at 3:10 on Sunday 25/6/2023, to discuss the following Agenda

First: Extraordinary General Meeting:

- To consider the company's financial situation and to approved the measures according to the proposal of the Board of Directors (as per the explanatory note)

Second : Annual General Meeting:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report for the year ended on 31/3/ 2023.
- To consider the Auditors Report and approve the Financial Position and Comprehensive Income for the year ended on 31/3/2023.
- To consider and approve the transactions entered into by the Company with related parties for the year ended 31/3/ 2023 (As per the Attachment).
- To consider and approve the transactions the company will enter into with related parties during the financial year ending 31/3/2024. (As per the Attachment).
- To elect a new Board of Directors for the Company from amongst Shareholders or non-Shareholders. Any person who wishes to be nominated to the Board of Directors of the company is required to fill in a Director's nomination form. Such form can be obtained from the company. The completed form should be delivered to the company at least five (5) working days prior to the date of the annual ordinary general meeting (by the end of business hours of **Wednesday 14/6/2023**. The company will not accept any nomination form received after this date.
- To appoint the auditors for the financial year ending 31/3/ 2024, and determine their fees.

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using electronic platform issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic persons, only, has the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For more information and enquiries, shareholders may please contact **Mr. Ismail Roushdi** on Ph. 26750623.

Vice Chairman	Legal Advisor	Auditors
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ANNOUNCEMENT

We, **HEALTH 4 ALL LLC**, hereby announce that we no longer represent Cryoviva in the Sultanate of Oman, effect January 1, 2023. All clients are requested to contact Cryoviva directly for any related issues or enquiries in accordance with their agreements with Cryoviva.



People unload boxes containing medical aid off a plane from Kenya, following the crisis in Sudan's capital Khartoum. — Reuters

Sudan battles rage as US, Saudi urge new truce talks

RIYADH: The United States and Saudi Arabia on Sunday made a renewed push for truce talks between Sudan's warring generals as deadly fighting has raged into its eighth week.

Multiple ceasefires have been agreed and broken, and Washington slapped sanctions on the two warring generals, blaming both sides for the "appalling" bloodshed.

Envoys of Sudan's regular army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) remained in the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah despite the earlier collapse of ceasefire talks, the kingdom's foreign ministry said.

The foreign mediators called for "the parties to agree to and effectively implement a new ceasefire, with the aim of building to a permanent cessation of hostilities," Riyadh said.

A five-day extension of a US- and Saudi-brokered truce formally expired on Saturday

evening, with no signs of the conflict abating and fears that the rival sides were poised for an escalation.

Upwards of 1,800 people have been killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, and the UN says 1.2 million people have been displaced with more than 425,000 fleeing abroad.

The RSF on Sunday claimed it had shot down a fighter jet after the army "launched an audacious airborne assault upon our forces' positions" in northern Khartoum.

A military source said a Chinese-made jet crashed near Wadi Seidna base north of Khartoum because of a "technical malfunction".

Witnesses said they saw an aircraft travelling from the south to the north of the capital with flames erupting from it.

Deadly urban battles have gripped Khartoum and the war-scarred Darfur region in the west,

forcing residents to flee or camp out for weeks as supplies of food and other vital goods have been depleted.

Sunday's Saudi statement comes two days before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due to arrive in the Gulf kingdom, with discussions on Sudan expected to be on the agenda.

The last truce was agreed to allow desperately needed humanitarian aid and safe passage into areas of Sudan ravaged by the fighting, but the accord was routinely violated by both sides.

The Sudanese army on Wednesday withdrew from the talks in Jeddah. A day later, the US-Saudi mediators declared the talks officially suspended, with Washington saying it was ready to resume the talks once the parties were "serious" about a ceasefire.

Both Burhan and Daglo have pledged repeatedly to protect civilians and secure humanitarian corridors. — AFP

Uganda reports 54 peacekeepers killed in Somalia attack



Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni

KAMPALA: Some 54 Ugandan peacekeepers died when militants besieged an African Union base in Somalia last week, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni said, in one of the worst recent attacks by Al-Shabaab group in the war-torn country.

"We discovered the lifeless bodies of 54 fallen soldiers, including a commander," Museveni said.

The veteran leader was speaking during a meeting with members of his governing National Resistance Movement party, the presidency said on Sunday.

The toll is one of the heaviest yet since pro-government forces backed by the AU force known as ATMIS launched an offensive against Al-Shabaab last August.

It was also a rare admission of a major military death toll by African Union members. Museveni had already said last week that "some of the soldiers there did not perform as expected and panicked" as some 800 assailants attacked. — AFP

India rescue ends as focus turns to cause of worst train crash in decades

BAHANAGA: Indian rescue workers completed operations on Sunday after the country's deadliest rail crash in more than two decades, with signal failure emerging as the likely cause of an accident that killed at least 275 people.

The death toll from Friday's crash was revised down from 288 after it was found that some bodies had been counted twice, said Pradeep Jena, chief secretary of the eastern state of Odisha.

The tally was unlikely to rise, he told reporters. "Now the rescue operation is complete."

Nearly 1,200 people were injured when a passenger train hit a stationary freight train, jumped the tracks and hit another passenger train passing in the opposite direction near the district of Balasore.

More than 900 people had been discharged from hospital while 260 were still being treated, with one patient in critical condition, the Odisha state government said.

India's Railway Board has recommended that the case be handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi visited the scene on Saturday to talk to rescue workers, inspect the wreckage and meet some of the injured.

"Those found guilty will be punished stringently," Modi said.

Preliminary investigations indicated the Coromandel Express, heading to Chennai from Kolkata, moved out of the main track and entered a loop track — a side track used to park trains — at 128 kmph, crashing into the freight train parked on the loop track, said Railway Board member Jaya Varma Sinha.

That crash caused the engine and first four or five coaches of the Coromandel Express to jump the tracks, topple and hit the last two coaches of the Yeshwantpur-Howrah train heading in the opposite direction at 126 kmph on the second main track, she told reporters.

This caused those two coaches to jump the tracks and result in the massive pileup, Sinha said.

The probe is now focused on the computer-controlled track management system, called the "interlocking system", which directs a train to an empty track at the point where two tracks meet. — Reuters



Heavy machinery remove damaged coaches from the railway tracks at the site of a train collision following the accident in Balasore. — Reuters

Israel demands Egypt help in full probe of attack at border

JERUSALEM: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday called the killing of three soldiers by a member of the Egyptian security services a deadly attack and demanded a full joint investigation with Cairo.

Egypt says it is working with Israel to investigate the incident which occurred on Saturday.

"Israel relayed a clear message to the Egyptian government. We expect that the joint investigation will be exhaustive and thorough,"

Netanyahu told his cabinet in televised remarks. "We will refresh procedures and methods of operations and also the measures to reduce to a minimum the smuggling and to ensure tragic attacks like this do not happen again."

More details of the rare incident along the border emerged on Sunday. The frontier is usually peaceful, as the neighbours share close security cooperation, though there are frequent reports of drug



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu chairs a cabinet meeting at the prime minister's office in Jerusalem. — AFP

smuggling, including one that took place prior to the deadly violence.

Israel's military said that two of its soldiers were shot dead early on Saturday by an Egyptian security services member who crossed through the border fence. Their desert post was remote and it took a number of hours before their bodies were discovered.

"From that moment a deadly event was declared, leading to sweeps of the area," Israeli military spokesman Daniel Hagari said in

an interview with Israel's YNET news. "A drone was sent up and 1.5 kilometres inside Israel a suspicious person was identified."

Soldiers then made contact and during an exchange of fire the Egyptian guard and a third Israeli soldier were killed.

On Saturday, the Egyptian military said the three Israelis and Egyptian guard had been killed in an exchange of fire as the guard chased smugglers across the frontier. — Reuters

BEIJING

14 killed in Sichuan province landslide

Fourteen people were killed and five are missing following a landslide in southwestern China's Sichuan province on Sunday, the local government said.

The landslide "took place high on a mountain" at 6 am at a state-owned forestry station in Jinkouhe, near the city of Leshan, the local government said in an online statement.

"As of 3:30 pm, the remains of 14 victims have been recovered, while five people remain missing," the statement said.



Authorities sent over 180 people and more than a dozen pieces of rescue and recovery equipment to the site, according to the statement. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Syrian top diplomat discusses aid on visit

Syria's foreign minister on Sunday discussed humanitarian aid and combating the illegal drugs trade with key ally Iraq during a visit to Baghdad.

The visit by Faisal Mekdad comes weeks after the Arab League agreed to end Syria's suspension, bringing President Bashar al Assad's regime back into the regional fold.

Mekdad on Sunday thanked Iraq for its "solidarity" after the quake, also hailing the "progression" of bilateral relations.



"We will continue to cooperate to combat terrorism and eliminate the danger posed by drugs," he added in a reference to the illegal trade in the stimulant captagon. — AFP

BENGHAZI

Eastern forces stage deportation of migrants

Eastern Libyan forces have expelled thousands of Egyptians who were in Libya illegally in recent days, deporting them to Egypt on foot across the land border, an Egyptian security source and an eastern Libyan security source said.

The Libyan security source said 4,000 migrants had been found during raids on people traffickers following a shootout between security forces and smugglers and they were all deported.



The Egyptian security source said only about 2,200 of the 4,000 migrants who were found by Libyan security forces were there illegally and they were the only ones deported. — Reuters



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In brief

■ ISTANBUL



NATO CHIEF URGES TÜRKIYE NOT TO VETO SWEDEN

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg on Sunday called on Ankara to drop its opposition to Sweden's bid to join the US-led defence alliance, hoping Stockholm's accession would be finalised "as soon as possible".

Pressure is building on Erdogan to greenlight Sweden's Nato membership ahead of a summit planned for July in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius.

"Membership will make Sweden safer but also make Nato and Türkiye stronger," Stoltenberg told journalists after meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and newly appointed Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, who was head of the intelligence agency. — **AFP**

■ MEXICO CITY



PRESIDENT'S PARTY POISED TO CAPTURE ELECTION

Mexicans began voting in a state election on Sunday that looks poised to bolster President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador ahead of the race to succeed him, with his party forecast to capture the chief remaining bastion of the country's old rulers.

Lopez Obrador's leftist National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) is expected to tighten its grip on power.

The most populous region of the country, the State of Mexico surrounds much of the capital and has been an economic and electoral bulwark of the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). — **Reuters**

■ KATHMANDU



GUIDE RESCUES CLIMBER FROM EVEREST DEATH ZONE

A Nepali guide abandoned his client's Everest summit bid to rescue a Malaysian climber in a deadly mountaineering season that has seen at least twelve deaths.

Gelje Sherpa was guiding a Chinese client to the 8,849-metre peak and planned to assist him to paraglide down.

Instead, only a few hundred metres from the summit, they came across a lone man clinging to a rope and shivering in the area known as the "death zone".

The area above 8,000 metres has earned its name because of its thin air, freezing temperatures and low oxygen levels that heighten risk. — **AFP**

Ukraine's military urges 'silence' ahead of expected Russian counteroffensive

KYIV: The Ukrainian military on Sunday renewed its plea for operational silence around a long-awaited counteroffensive against Russian forces, the latest in a stream of messages by Kyiv as it prepares for the assault.

Anticipation has mounted around what is expected to be a broad attack by Ukrainian forces to retake Russian-controlled territory in the east and south.

But Ukrainian officials have repeatedly discouraged public speculation over the operation, saying it could help the enemy.

SHARING IMAGES

Authorities in recent days have also cracked down on citizens sharing images or footage of air defence systems shooting down Russian missiles.

"Plans love silence. There will be no announcement of the start," the ministry said in a video posted to official Telegram channels, apparently referring to the counteroffensive.

The sleekly-produced footage featured masked and well-armed front-line troops holding their fingers against their lips, gesturing for silence amid the distant rumble of artillery and gunfire.

It ended with images of soaring F-16 fighter jets - long coveted by Kyiv as it seeks to boost its air defence against Russian missiles and drones.

Kyiv's Western allies in recent



Local residents stand next to a building heavily damaged by a missile strike, in the town of Pidhorodnie, Ukraine. — **Reuters**

months have provided weapons, armour and ammunition for the counteroffensive, which military experts have said could prove difficult against dug-in Russian forces.

In an interview published on Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Kyiv

was prepared for the operation but avoided making any predictions.

"To be honest, it can go a variety of ways, completely different," he said. "But we are going to do it, and we are ready."

Other senior officials, including Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov, have

similarly sought to tamp down expectations. In some cases, however, the military has also fed the anticipation. Social media outreach by Kyiv has often been intended to intimidate the Kremlin.

Clashes are continuing around the devastated city of Bakhmut

in eastern Ukraine and Moscow is still suffering "significant losses" despite a relative easing of combat operations in recent days, Kyiv's armed forces said. A flashy video depicting troops preparing for battle and reciting a rousing blessing, which was later aired as a recruiting clip. — **Reuters**

Renewed riots in Leipzig despite ban on protest at jailing of student

LEIPZIG: Police and protesters clashed again in the eastern German city of Leipzig on Sunday, after people gathered to protest in defiance of a ban of the left-wing demonstration.

Police said there were "massive riots" as protesters threw fireworks, stones, bottles and incendiary devices at officers during the demonstration at Alexis-Schumann-Platz.

Stones and other projectiles hit several officers and some were injured, the police said, though they did not provide exact figures.

In Leipzig's Connewitz district, several barricades made of garbage cans and pallets were set on fire while firecrackers were also set off on the street where a larger "Day X" demonstration by the radical left-wing scene was supposed to take place

in the afternoon. Masked people kept throwing new wood into the fire. Shortly before 11 pm police began to extinguish the barricades with water cannons.

Not far from there, according to the police, stones were thrown at a police station and other barricades were set on fire. Water cannons were deployed there as well.

The "Day X" protest was called after a Dresden court handed down a lengthy prison term to a left-wing student for leading a group found to have carried out violent attacks on people they saw as right-wing activists.

Five arrest warrants were issued, a police spokeswoman said. The five men affected, aged 20 to 32, are accused of breaching the peace. — **dpa**



Police stands in a street during a so-called "national day of action" organised by far-left activists in Leipzig, eastern Germany. — **AFP**

Polish opposition stages major anti-government protest

WARSAW: Half a million protesters packed the streets of central Warsaw on Sunday, Poland's opposition organisers said, claiming one of the biggest anti-government demonstrations in the 30 years since the end of communism.

Lech Walesa, a former Polish president, Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the fight against communism, joined opposition figures at the head of the march ahead of legislative elections in the autumn.

People travelled from across the country after former prime minister Donald Tusk, head of the centrist opposition party Civic Platform (PO), called for the protest against "the high cost of living, swindling and lying, and for democracy, free elections and the EU".

The leaders of most opposition parties encouraged their supporters to join the march against the nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS) led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski, which has been in power for almost eight years.

Smaller gatherings also took place in other cities and towns across Poland.

"City Hall estimates (the number of protesters) at 500,000 now," the organisers' spokesman Jan Grabiec said.

Decked out in the red and white colours of the nation, demonstrators carried EU flags and placards proclaiming "Enough's enough", "No to authoritarian Poland" and blaming the ruling PiS party for



Mayor of Warsaw Rafal Trzaskowski and Donald Tusk, former Polish President, take part in the march on the 34th anniversary of the first democratic elections in postwar Poland, in Warsaw. — **Reuters**

exorbitant prices.

Once the head of the European Council, Tusk addressed the crowds in Warsaw's historic old town, saying the opposition's role was "of comparable importance" to that in the 1980s and the fight against communism.

"Democracy dies in silence. From today, there will be no more silence... despite the daily attacks by Kaczynski's PiS against its very foundations," Tusk said.

Walesa, who led the Solidarity union in a successful battle against communism, has long been absent from politics.

He told the marchers he had been "patiently" waiting for the day when the nationalist party and Kaczynski will be forced out.

"Mr. Kaczynski, we have come to get you. The day has finally arrived," Walesa said.

Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki compared the protests to a "circus".

"It makes me laugh a little when the old foxes who have been in politics for years organise an anti-government march and present it as a spontaneous civic protest," he was quoted as saying by news agency PAP. — **AFP**

Coping with challenges is an important life skill



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

This is the season for a variety of academic results – school students get their final grades before going into their new classes, university students move on to another year and some of the graduating students have already begun to hear from universities to which they may have applied. The common thread to all these stories is the hope of success and the fear of failure. We are all scared of failure and try to avoid it at all costs. It may be counterintuitive, but learning to cope with failure is as important as trying to avoid it. A University of Arizona study found that failing at a task 15 per cent of the time actually kept students motivated to work harder. Anything more than that, it found, led to hopelessness. If a task is too easy, we are actually not learning anything from it. It is not failure per se that is a limiting factor – it is what we make of that failure. Far from being seen as the end of a road, failure in any sphere should be seen as an

opportunity: to acquire new skills and interests, make new relationships and increase motivation. It is not just a saying that failure is just another side of success. If one never fails, it means one has just not worked hard enough, aimed high enough. It also means that one has never gone outside the comfort zone. For those who may be looking for some inspiration in harsh times, studies offer many tips to overcome or cope with failure. These are as important skills as the learning that goes on inside classrooms. Knowing that failure is a part of life makes it easier to cope with it. Fear of failure limits us from aiming higher and wider. It keeps us within pursuits that are familiar to us. Letting go of this fear allows us to explore more opportunities and take risks. Failure teaches us valuable life lessons. Embracing it offers us insights into new strategies, avenues and may

COPING WITH HUMOUR AND ACCEPTANCE IS A FAR BETTER CHOICE THAN BEING DEMOTIVATED. IT ALSO HELPS TO GIVE PERSPECTIVE TO THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE AND SHOW US WHAT IS IMPORTANT.

help us to understand ourselves better. Coping with humour and acceptance is a far better choice than being demotivated. It also helps to give perspective to the challenges of life and show us what is important. Failure works at various levels: it teaches humility, increases emotional intelligence, provides resilience and creates empathy. Knowing that we have tried doing something is better than not having tried at all – it gives us the experience to know where we went wrong and what to do better next time. Dealing with failure is as much of a life skill as learning to avoid it, perhaps even more so. It is what give strength to a human being, the ability to rise above momentary disappointment and make it something more productive and meaningful “The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing,” said Henry Ford. This one lesson is enough to give a perspective on how to handle the failures of our life.

War hits sowing season in Sudan breadbasket

In past years Mohammed Haroun readily found work on Sudanese farms but this year he is left empty-handed as agribusinesses, starved of cash by fighting in Sudan, leave their land fallow. Like hundreds of farm labourers from across Sudan, Haroun made his way to Gedaref state, the country's breadbasket, at the first sign of rain, which heralds the start of the growing season. But this year — with the country embroiled in brutal fighting between warring generals — no one was expecting them. The state's large, mechanised farms are not taking on workers, as a cash crunch hits their finances, jeopardising a harvest that normally meets 40 per cent of Sudan's grain needs and fuelling fears of famine. Haroun makes the annual journey for work from his home region of Kordofan, hundreds of kilometres to the west. “In the past, I would never be waiting for more than a day,” he said, lying on the untilled soil with his possessions around him. “I’ve been here for five days now with no job offer and I’ve run out of money. I don’t know where my next meal is coming from.” Around him, the rain has already started falling on the fallow fields — meaning that it is now probably already too late to sow a crop this year. One bad season could spell disaster in a country where one in three inhabitants were in need of aid even before a power struggle between rival generals erupted into all-out fighting on April 15. More than 80 per cent of Sudan’s workforce is employed in agriculture, which generates 35 to 40 per cent of gross domestic product, according to the United Nations. Mirghani Ali sells farm supplies including seedlings, fertilisers and pesticides, and has never seen anything like this season. The central bank announced in May it would open lines of credit for farmers associated with local cooperatives, and government ministers -- who still hold press conferences despite the fighting -- assured the public that the sowing season is not at risk. Although Sudan’s production of staple crops -- sorghum, millet and wheat -- rose 45 per cent in 2022 compared with the previous year, it still met less than half of domestic needs, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). In the past, the balance has been covered largely by imports from Russia and Ukraine, but supplies have been hit since Moscow launched a full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February last year. Many Sudanese have been left unable to afford even basic staples, as world food prices have soared.

— AFP

Identifying our position in AI



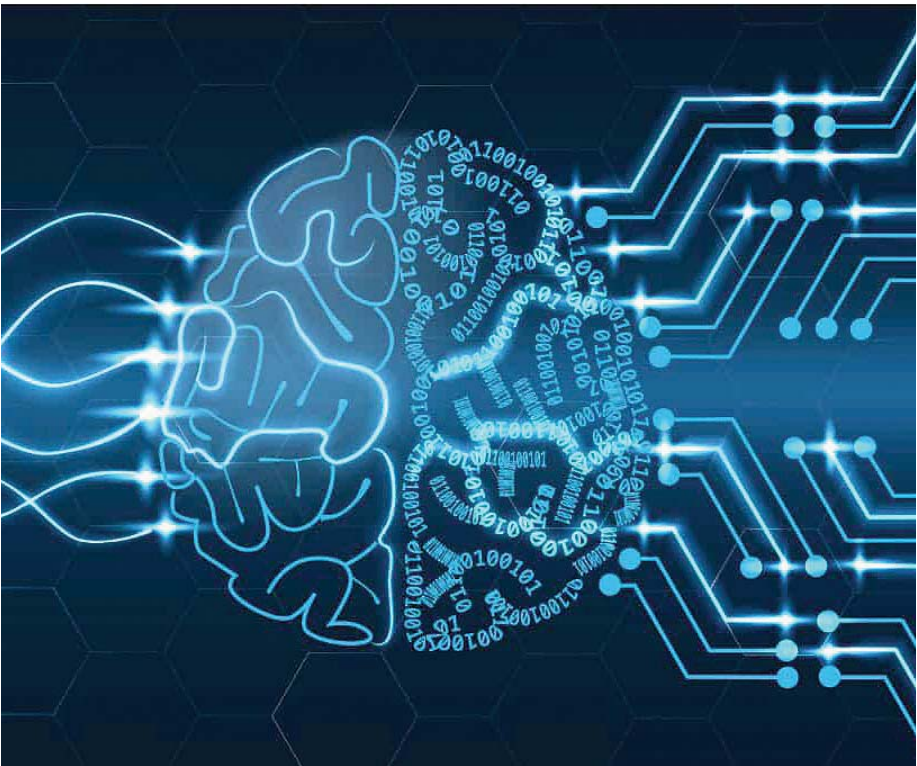
Dr Muamar bin Ali al Toobi

The author is a writer and researcher

One of the most important and most common questions among people concerned with the smart digital projects and their applications in the Sultanate of Oman, is: Where is the position of the Sultanate of Oman in the race for artificial intelligence? What role does the government and the private sector attach to developing this promising sector for the benefit of economy and society?

What are the plans for enhancing capacity-building and investing them in the handling of advanced digital skills? To these questions I have to provide transparent and sincere answers in order to identify the challenges and the possible solutions. I'll begin by displaying the bright side of the orientation of Oman to keep pace with the digital developments, especially artificial intelligence. The trend overseen by the government is notable and acknowledged as can be noticed by all observers and stakeholders. The effort in this field is spearheaded by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) through its national artificial intelligence and advanced technology programme. I was surprised by the great efforts exerted by the programme's team. I talked with some of the programme's leaders who briefed me about their previous achievements and upcoming works all of which reflect the size of the dedication to realise one of the most important visions of Oman Vision 2040. The team's efforts and achievements are centred on following up the implementation of the plans of digital economic growth which is in harmony with the Oman Vision 2040 and all the sectors which should keep up with the digital development and its applications. I cannot afford to ignore the effective and persistent role being made by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) whose efforts are nothing short of those made by the MoTCIT. The role of the MoHERI lies especially in its national programme supportive of scientific research through which the ministry allocates funds for scientific researches at higher education institutions.

MINISTRIES AND PRIVATE SECTOR PLAYERS ARE WORKING ON DIGITAL ECONOMIC GROWTH WHICH IS IN HARMONY WITH THE OMAN VISION 2040



Besides, the ministry constantly oversees the progress of research and follows up their approved stages of implementation. I had the honour to obtain such significant support for one of my researches on the application of AI in the industrial sector. Educational sectors and their public and private establishments are exerting a great effort to support AI research and highlight the students' talents that bode well of a national generation capable of keeping pace with the digital advancement and putting it on the forefront. Other sectors are also making efforts to harness AI. These include the Ministry of Information (MoI) which seeks to raise awareness about such advanced technologies. I have previously received an invitation from the Minister of Information, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, to deliver a lecture in this field. The Ministry of Health is using AI in the early detection of breast cancer. Besides, other entities in the public and private sectors are making considerable efforts to make the best of the artificial intelligence systems. Even the small enterprises are training national in digital skills. The examples and initiatives I have just mentioned do not represent all the existing efforts but I have highlighted some of them. All these efforts, some of which I personally watched and others followed their progress, are a cause for pride and optimism that we are on a way that ensures keeping up with the digital development and that we are prepared

to take part in the global race with confidence and competence thanks to our national cadres who are equipped with the requisite knowledge and abilities and the necessary arrangements being made by the government and the other sectors. These efforts should be doubled and the accomplished experiments should be implemented in the appropriate field be it in the health, educational or industrial sectors or other sectors. Here comes the significant role required from the public and private investment establishments who ought to have a look at these constructive efforts by investing in them. Is it crucial to double the application of artificial intelligence technologies in all necessary services that need to be developed and their speed and accuracy be enhanced. These efforts, hopes and aspirations have something to do with many challenges, apart from the financial and investment factors, such as the availability of necessary and adequate data which is considered the major drive for artificial intelligence systems. This can be made possible by increasing devices connected to the internet of things and the computational storage capacities that are capable of the required digital operation. This is in addition to the presence of special governance for artificial intelligence and its operation which includes laws, legislations and ethics for the utilisation of artificial intelligence to ensure the safety of data and protection privacy rights.

Which colour do you feel?

Nature is dressed in joyful and fascinating colours reflecting its beauty. Colours glitter the universe and they are part of life. People use and experience colours everyday with some are not even appreciating them. A picture of many colours proclaims images of many thoughts.

In fact, colours have a great story to tell; just think deeply for a while and you will realise it. When you hear or read the word colour, what first comes to your mind? You might recall different colours you remember or see at that moment.

Colours are of great significance in life as our feelings and emotions respond to colours unconsciously. Probably, we are not aware of the deep impact that colours can have on our emotions and minds.

Out of the many vibrations reaching the earth, a tiny portion is registered by the optic nerves. Our eyes respond to these particular vibrations with a reaction that is known as colours.

Medical science has proven that different colours have definite and various effects upon our nervous system and they act quite independently of our eyes or minds. It has been suggested that the seven colours correspond to the seven major planets in the universe and are radiating down to the earth at their specific rates of vibration. The perfect combination of the seven colour waves in the bright sunlight gives us a white light. If the sparks are split up by being passed through a glass, they are at once visible as colours.

Colours can affect us profoundly and in ways that you may not have thought of. Colours can affect moods as some colours are uplifting and exciting while others are depressing and draining.

We often use terms like, ‘feeling blue’, ‘in a black mood’, ‘green with envy’ or ‘seeing red’, without really thinking of the meaning behind these phrases. Do you know that colours reflect your personality?

Each colour you choose for clothing or decorating a room can reveal much



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

COLOURS ARE OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE IN LIFE AS OUR FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS RESPOND TO COLOURS UNCONSCIOUSLY

about who you are.

Your favourite colour mirrors the kind of emotions and feelings you have! The best colour in the whole world is the one that looks good on you. Blue light, as an example, is used for a calming effect in some mental hospitals.

However, other hospitals are now using soft green, blue, peach and sunny yellow colour on walls and even sheets and gowns.

These colours seem to help the patients get well quicker.

In fact, researchers and psychologists strived to understand the impact of colours on life and emotions, so they can be used as a way of therapy. Over a period of time, humans have been able to identify the different colours and their meanings.

Colours are rich in various hidden meanings and symbolism. When asked about their favourite colour, some people answer immediately while others hesitate.

Colours are complicated; our response to a colour is often ambiguous and varies depending on the culture and circumstances.

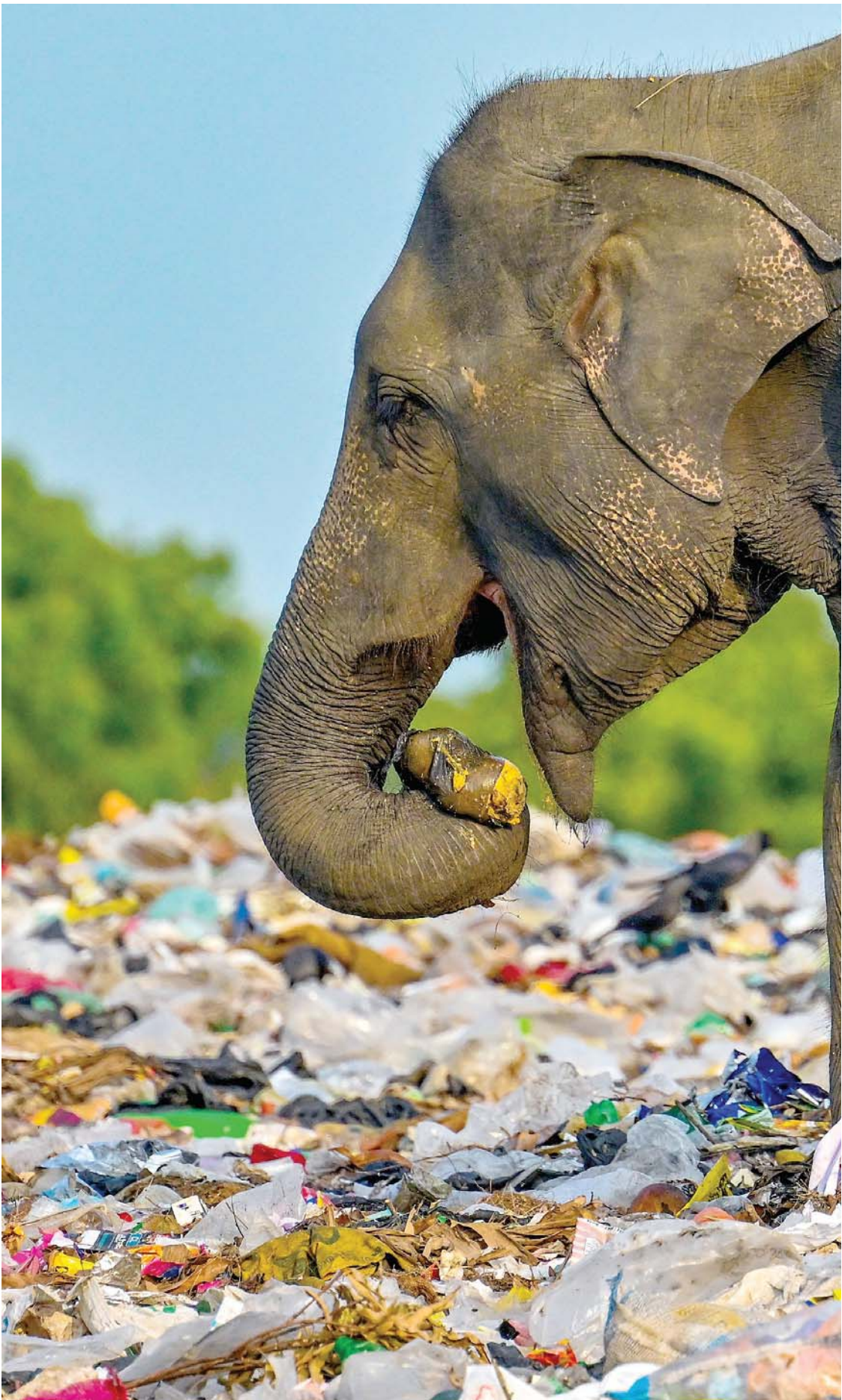
Perhaps, when you think of green, it symbolises nature and upcoming spring. In traffic signals, the green light indicates move ahead while the red designates a warning sign. Colours are deeply important to us throughout all phases of life.

They have more influence on us than we can imagine. If used intelligently, colours can help strengthen, soothe and inspire ourselves.

Colours are a power, which directly influence the soul. Colours are not only influencing human's life, but animals too. Some animals manage to blend in their environment and escape from their hunters, thanks to their colours, which could be changed according to their habitat.

Flamingos, for instance, are associated with pink, though they are born grey or white. They turn pink in later years after having eaten a huge amount of shrimp and their body starts absorbing the colour of their favourite food!

JUMBO PROBLEM



A wild elephant eats garbage containing plastic waste at a dump in Sri Lanka's eastern district of Ampara on Saturday. Sri Lanka is set to launch a nationwide clean up of plastic waste ahead of new laws banning the sale of single use plastics, the environmental ministry said, after a spate of deaths of elephants and deer in the island's northeast after foraging at open garbage tips filled with plastic waste, whilst shrinking habitat has led to jumbos raiding villages looking for food. – AFP

This may be the most important thing happening in the world today

NICHOLAS KRISTOF

One of the misimpressions people have about the world is that it's going to hell. Perhaps that's because humanity's great triumph over the past half-century — huge reductions in poverty, disease and early death — goes largely unacknowledged. Just about the worst thing that can happen to anyone is to lose a child, and historically, almost half of children died before reaching adulthood. We happen to live in a transformational era in which 96 per cent of the world's children now survive until adulthood.

That arc is visible here in Sierra Leone, a country that remains heartbreakingly poor — yet where the risk of a child dying is less than half what it was 20 years ago. You may have heard of Sierra Leone as “the most dangerous place in the world to give birth.” No longer true: Deaths in pregnancy and childbirth have plunged 74 per cent since 2000, according to United Nations figures. In a remote health centre, I met Yeabu Kargbo, 19, who had just given birth with the help of a trained midwife, after a full set of prenatal visits. Medical care for pregnant women and babies is mostly free now in Sierra Leone, as is contraception.

LET’S ALSO TAKE A NANOSECOND TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GROWING NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT HUNGRY, THE INCREASING SHARE OF MOMS WHO ARE NOT DYING IN CHILDBIRTH, THE PROVEN WAYS WE HAVE TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD.

Kargbo's mother, who was offering unsolicited parenting advice that Kargbo pretended not to hear, is illiterate and had six children. Kargbo herself has a sixth grade education and said she wanted to stop at three children — and with the country's improving healthcare and education, she has big plans for her new baby girl.

“I want this child to go to university,” she said. Sierra Leone is still a dangerous place to give birth by international standards. But I've been visiting West Africa since I was a law student in 1982, and one reason I often write about reproductive health is that I've seen too many women dying unnecessarily in childbirth in the region. The improvement in well-being is stunning.

More than 90 per cent of pregnant women in Sierra Leone now get prenatal care, and the great majority are assisted during delivery by a trained midwife, nurse or doctor. After delivery, nurses put babies to the breast right away and counsel moms on exclusive breastfeeding practices, reducing infant mortality.

At the bustling maternity ward in the city of Makeni, a nurse

told me that women in labour now often arrive on the backs of motorcycles, which doesn't sound great — until she explains that they used to arrive in wheelbarrows. Health centres are beginning to take on cervical cancer, a hideous disease (sometimes diagnosed partly by the stench of rotting flesh) that kills more people worldwide than maternal mortality but gets much less attention. Some girls in Sierra Leone now get the HPV vaccination against it, and some clinics offer low-cost screenings that bathe the cervix in vinegar and look for lesions.



Yeabu Kargbo rests after giving birth at a rural health centre in northern Sierra Leone. –The New York Times

Meanwhile, obstetric fistulas are being repaired, giving girls their lives back, at a pace that couldn't have been imagined 20 years ago. Enormous challenges remain, including turmoil to the north in Mali and Burkina Faso that could destabilise the entire region.

But one reason the world doesn't do more to help poor countries is exhaustion, a sense that nothing works. I fear that misperception is driven partly by journalists like me, and by aid workers, advocates and other bleeding hearts.

We pounce upon crises, so what the public hears about in

Africa is carnage in Sudan, hunger in Somalia and massacres in Ethiopia. Those are real problems that deserve more attention, not less — but we don't do enough to illuminate the backdrop of gains in health, education and well-being.

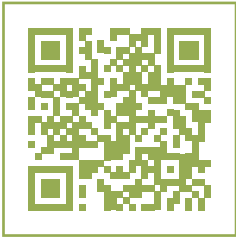
Many people believe that global poverty is hopeless — 87 per cent said in a 2016 survey that poverty had stayed the same or gotten worse over the previous two decades — while, in fact, the share of the world's people living in extreme poverty has plunged from 38 per cent in 1990 to about 8 per cent now. Historians may eventually look back and conclude that leaps in human well-being, health and child survival were the most important things happening in the world in the early 21st century.

I'm winding up my annual win-a-trip journey, in which I take a student with me on a reporting trip. This year's winner is Maddie Bender. We met President Julius Maada Bio of Sierra Leone, and I asked him if he thought journalistic obsession with crises was damaging. “Sure,” he said, “we do blame you.” We are privileged to live in an age of miracles.

— The New York Times

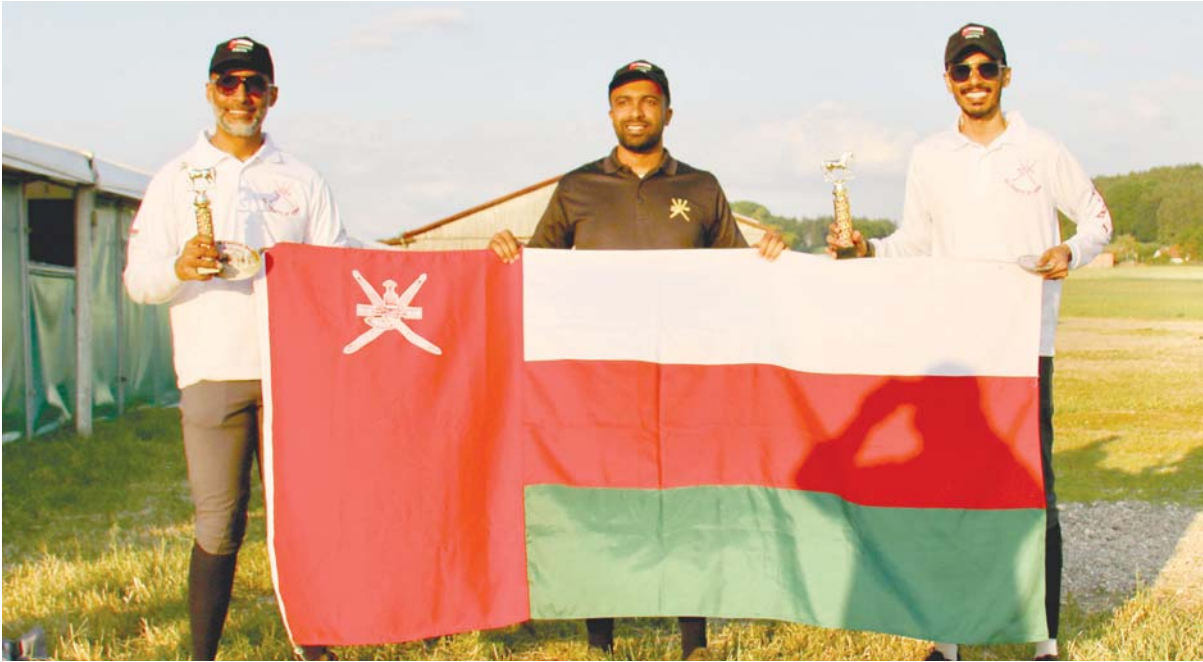
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OMANI JOCKEYS INCH CLOSER TO WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

HH Sayyid Loay, HH Sayyid Ali al Said claim Buch Endurance Festival titles in Germany



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

International jockeys HH Sayyid Loay bin Ghalib al Said and HH Sayyid Ali bin Ghalib al Said are inching closer to win spots in the World Endurance Championship as they won the titles of the Buch Endurance Festival in Germany. The festival was organised under an numerable of FIE and it is among the races which are qualified to the next edition of the World Endurance Championship.

The triumph meant, both jockeys moved a step ahead towards their road to attend the World Endurance Championship. One more race is remaining for HH Sayyid Loay to confirm his attendance in the forthcoming world class event while one more qualifier race is pending for HH Sayyid Ali on horse 'Efala' while two more qualifier races are pending on 'Atela'.

The upcoming event for HH Sayyid Loay will very crucial as he will take part in the Munbareez race, France which is allocated for a distance of 160 km. He will eye to pass the race and earn a direct spot to the world Championship. HH Sayyid Loay on 'Elsa De Faust' managed to clinch the first place in the race of 140 km (three stars category) for Buch Endurance Festival in Germany after he ended the race



on the top among 70 participants from different European jockeys. HH Sayyid Ali won the top title in the 140 km race (two stars category) which was divided into two days. The German race in Buch is classified as the most difficult race in the qualifying stage.

After the race end, HH Sayyid Loay sounded confident that he managed to pass one of the most critical stage in the qualifiers. "I am very pleased to pass this stage in Buch and one round is pending towards our attendance in the World Championship. Our focus is shifted now to the last stage of the qualifiers, and I will deliver my level best towards reaching to the World Championship. Oman's jockeys used to attend the top equestrian



events," he added. HH Sayyid Loay and HH Sayyid Ali dedicated their titles to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and to the HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth and to all the equestrian family in Oman.

"We are very proud of the achievement at the Buch Endurance Festival in Germany. This accomplishment reflected the development of the equestrian sport in the country. I believe we passed a crucial part in our qualifiers and there is one more stage which we hope to end on a successful note. We will work hard in the coming period to secure slot for the world event and raise our national flag," HH Sayyid Ali said.

Al Mouj Golf among world's best 100 golf courses

MUSCAT: Al Mouj Golf is celebrating the achievement of being named as one of the Best Golf Courses in the World in the Golf World Top 100 panel's annual review of courses which are open to the public. This is the second time the panel has carried out an assessment of 'accessible' courses which can be played by non-members and where according to Golf World Top 100 editor Chris Bertram, 'having one of the best layouts on planet Earth' is key to achieving a ranking. Situated within premier lifestyle destination Al Mouj Muscat, Al Mouj Golf's latest accolade was announced in Today's Golfer

magazine and adds another World 100 ranking to the oceanfront club having made it into the Top 100 Golf magazine's line up twice before and in the publication National Club Golfer. Al Mouj is one of only two courses in the Middle East to appear on this latest Golf World Top 100 list which was compiled by a panel of 13 experts drawn from every continent and different areas of the game, from former professional players and renowned course architects, to greenkeepers and golfing journalists. In the review, Chris Bertram describes Al Mouj Golf as "stunning" adding that "the way it mixes strong golf holes with a



spectacular setting gets it into this Top 100 for the first time". Nasser bin Masoud al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat says: "To see Al Mouj Golf placed by

experts in the world's best 100 courses is extremely gratifying and testimony to the hard work and commitment of the whole team who, every day, make playing at

our unique course memorable for all, from members and visitors to tourists alike." "This ranking will certainly help fly the flag not only for our beautiful, welcoming club but for Oman as a wonderful destination for holidays which sits within our strategy of offering world-class experiences to support the growth of our country's sports tourism and leisure sector." Designed by golfing legend Greg Norman, Al Mouj Golf opened in 2012 as Oman's first links-style course which set along 2km of coastline offers a challenging and rewarding game of golf for players of all standards. It was the first in the Sultanate

of Oman to achieve PGA status and has hosted the Oman Open (European Tour) Championship on three occasions, and it was the first in the region to host the Oman Stage of the Asian Tour, the pan-Asian competition supported by LIV Golf. The club is also recognised worldwide for its long-term commitment to environmental and sustainability awareness and implementation, and is one of only 20 across the globe to have been awarded dual certification for its work on nature, resource preservation and the community. Home to 173 different bird species, it has become a haven for wildlife.

Gundogan brace secures FA Cup for City

LONDON: Manchester City are one game away from a historic treble after Ilkay Gundogan scored twice to beat Manchester United 2-1 in the FA Cup final on Saturday.

Pep Guardiola's men completed a domestic double at Wembley and can become just the second side, after United in 1998/99, to win the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the same season should they beat Inter Milan to become European champions for the first time on June 10.

"We are in a position we will probably never be in again," said Guardiola. "To win the FA Cup, the emotions are so special and to celebrate it with our people is really great."

Gundogan scored the fastest goal in FA Cup final history after just 12 seconds.

United levelled on 33 minutes through Bruno Fernandes' penalty after Jack Grealish was harshly penalised for handball.

But the City captain, in what could be his final game for the club on English soil with his contract expiring at the end of the season, volleyed home the winner six minutes into the second-half.

"Everyone knows the FA Cup is the most beautiful domestic club competition in the world, so to win this trophy again and complete the double is amazing for us," said Gundogan.

"We have a chance to do something special and win the treble and we do not want to let this opportunity pass us by."

The first major final between the Manchester giants had the most explosive of starts.



Manchester City players celebrate with the trophy after winning the FA Cup final against Manchester United at Wembley Stadium, London. – Reuters

Most of the 83,000 crowd were still taking their seats from the pre-match festivities when Victor Lindelof's headed clearance sat up perfectly for Gundogan to volley home a stunning strike.

That appeared to set the tone for the Premier League champions as United were barely able to get across the halfway line in the first half hour.

But Erik ten Hag's men got the

slice of luck they needed to get back into the game.

Aaron Wan-Bissaka's header back across the City box brushed the arm of Grealish and referee Paul Tierney awarded a penalty after a VAR review.

Fernandes coolly sent Stefan Ortega the wrong way, but the Portuguese's celebrations in front of the City fans were met with a flurry of objects thrown from

the stands, one of which struck Lindelof.

DE GEA QUESTION MARK

Having fought so hard to gain a foothold, United were made to pay for another slow start in the second-half.

Gundogan was the goalscorer again as he fired home from De Bruyne's free-kick.

But more questions will be

asked of whether David De Gea remains the right man to be United's number one goalkeeper after the 32-year-old Spaniard's sluggish attempt to keep it out.

"They were tough goals, they were so soft and avoidable," said Ten Hag.

"When you play against City and you don't concede almost nothing from open play, it is a big credit for the team, but if

you concede goals like this it is disappointing."

De Gea did at least make big saves to keep United in the game from De Bruyne and Haaland, while Gundogan was denied a rare FA Cup final hat-trick by the offside flag.

United rallied in a tense finale as Marcus Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho flashed efforts inches off target. — AFP

A great opportunity to showcase our potential: Oman captain Maqsood

MUSCAT: With less than two weeks to go for the start of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe, Oman cricketers are currently in South African city of Durban to acclimatise themselves to the weather conditions and give final touches to their preparations.

Oman will be bidding to make history in Zimbabwe as they attempt to qualify for the ODI World Cup for the first time. The ICC Men's World Cup Qualifier will be played in Harare and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe from June 18-July 9 with ten teams vying for the two available spots in the World Cup to be played in India later this year.

Oman, coached by Duleep Mendis of Sri Lanka, face a tough challenge as they are pooled in Group B along with World Cup winner Sri Lanka, Ireland, Scotland and the UAE. Group A comprises hosts Zimbabwe, two-time winners West Indies, Nepal, Netherlands and United States.

Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood, also the most experienced all-rounder in the squad, believes that his players have the potential to beat any team on their day but admitted that the "mission to qualify for the World Cup is daunting" but promised that the team would give its best.

"It is a great opportunity to showcase our potential at the top level. We have played in two ICC T20 World Cups but to reach the final stage of qualification of the ODI World Cup is a new challenge for us. The boys are motivated to perform at this level and we have the belief and the potential to beat any team on our day. If we use our skills and execute our plans and play good cricket, as a team we can achieve the dream of qualification," said Maqsood.

On facing Sri Lanka and Test-playing Ireland in the group stage, Maqsood said: "It will be a big motivation to play against these teams. We will push more and try to do our best against these experienced and top-class nations. We are going into the tournament as a dark horse, and we know that we have the capabilities to upset any team."

For Oman's most experienced ODI cricketer and opening batter, Jatinder Singh, the "World Cup Qualifier is a great chance to perform at the big stage."

"We are fully focused on the mission and there is a calmness in the camp. We are aware of the challenges while playing against Test-playing nations and World Cup winners but as a batter, I know the responsibility and I hope to perform well," said Jatinder.

"The pre-tour now in Durban



is helpful and though the team has played in South Africa and Namibia in the past, we will be playing in Zimbabwe for the first time. We have a strong conviction that we can advance and as a batting unit, we have displayed good form in recent times. We hope to continue with the form," he added.

For Bilal Khan, the pace spearhead, who excelled in the WCL Division 2 picking up the

highest 76 wickets in 36 games, "it is time to deliver the best."

"To reach this stage was a result of our hard work. And, now to represent Oman at the World Cup Qualifier, we are excited. We will compete there and not just make up numbers. There is no pressure on us and will out our best foot forward," said Bilal.

Oman vice-captain and key all-rounder Aqib Ilyas said, "it is a very good chance for us."

"We back ourselves and have the talent to take on stronger teams. On our day, we can beat any team and I am looking ahead to the matches. I have come back after a gap of two-year and I am in good shape. I am confident of making a strong return as a comeback is much stronger than a setback," said Ilyas.

Maqsood said: "To beat the higher-ranked and experienced teams, we have to shell out an outstanding performance on all fronts – batting, bowling and fielding. We don't have the experience of those Test-playing nations, but we carry a lot of confidence based on our display in WCL Division 2 and Premier Cup in Nepal last month. The team has the hunger and desire to win and make a mark."

The quartet agreed that "Oman have nothing to lose, and the rivals be under pressure."

Oman Karate Committee unveils programme



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Oman Karate Committee convened a crucial meeting on Friday evening at the Diplomatic Club in Al Khuwair, under the leadership of Shaikh Salem bin Hamad al Mahrouqi, Chairman of Oman Karate Committee. The meeting witnessed the presence of the committee's secretary, Hamoud bin Salem al Touqi, and members including Obaid bin Moosa al Busaidi, Chairman of the Competitions Committee, Dr Ali bin Talib al Raisi, Suleiman bin Khalifa al Hinai, Chairman of the Referees Committee, and Faris bin Nasser al Busaidi.

Commencing the meeting, Salem al Mahrouqi expressed sincere gratitude and appreciation to the members of the committee for their remarkable efforts during the preceding period. The chairman proceeded to announce the committee's upcoming plans, which encompassed a diverse range of events and competitions.

The committee unveiled its agenda, highlighting two major

events to be hosted in Oman. Firstly, the 15th Sultanate of Oman Karate Championship for adults in September of this year. Secondly, preparations are underway for the 16th Sultanate of Oman Karate Championship for children. This championship, scheduled to take place in December 2023, aims to foster young talent and promote the development of karate in the region. Additionally, the committee has also committed to participating in the prestigious 15th Arab Games to be held in Algeria from July 5 to 15.

Moreover, the committee has set its sights on the Asian Championship for adults, set to be hosted in Malaysia from July 21 to 23. This esteemed championship represents a remarkable opportunity for Omani athletes to showcase their skills on an international stage and bring honour to their nation.

During the meeting, the committee also approved essential internal work controls designed to enhance the efficiency and organisation of its operations.

Verstappen completes hat-trick in Spain



Red Bull's Dutch driver Max Verstappen celebrates winning the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix race at the Circuit de Catalunya on Sunday. – AFP

MONTMELO, Spain: Defending double world champion Max Verstappen extended his lead in this year's title race to 53 points on Sunday when he completed a hat-trick by driving his Red Bull to a masterful victory in the Spanish Grand Prix.

The 25-year-old Dutchman led from lights to flag to come home 24 seconds ahead of revitalised seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton and George Russell, in their much-improved Mercedes' cars.

It was Verstappen's third consecutive win, his third in Spain, his fifth in seven races this season and the 40th of his career, achieved despite receiving three official warnings for exceeding track limits.

"It's such a big pleasure to drive a car like this," said Verstappen.

"And it showed again today. We were on different tyre strategies out there today and mostly I was on the right one! And to win here is incredible."

Hamilton's second place provided him with his 11th podium finish in Spain, where he has won six times.

"Oh, man, what an awesome crowd and result," said Hamilton. "And I didn't expect that so hats off to the team and our factory for pushing us so close to the 'Bulls. We are chasing them down — and George did a great job too today."

Russell said he was surprised to finish third after starting 12th. "Kudos to the team for that," he said. "I had a great car today."

Verstappen's Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez battled through the field, after starting 11th, to finish fourth ahead of Ferrari's home hero Carlos Sainz, Lance Stroll and his Aston Martin team-mate two-time champion Fernando Alonso, who was unable to extend his streak of podiums on home ground.

The race began in hot conditions with an air temperature of 25 degrees and the track at 42, but gathering clouds threatened. The risk of rain was 40 per cent. Verstappen made a clean start and resisted Sainz into the first corner before, behind him, Hamilton swept round Norris, only for the McLaren to make contact under braking at Turn Two. — AFP



Red Bull's Max Verstappen in action as he leads at the start of the race ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr. – Reuters

Benzema to leave Real Madrid amid reports of Al Ittihad signing

MADRID: Karim Benzema has agreed a deal to leave Real Madrid, the Spanish giants said on Sunday, with strong interest in the ex-France striker reportedly coming from Saudi Arabia.

Saudi state television channel Al Ekhbariya claims the 35-year-old had signed with Jeddah-based Al Ittihad, to feature against former Madrid team-mate Cristiano Ronaldo next season.

According to Al Ekhbariya, the president of Saudi champions Al Ittihad and his deputy were in the Spanish capital "to officially sign" Benzema in a "record transfer with Real Madrid".

The broadcaster said Benzema had agreed a two-year deal with the club, based on the Red Sea shores of the Gulf kingdom.

"Real Madrid and our captain Karim Benzema have agreed to put an end to his brilliant and unforgettable era as a player at our club," said Los Blancos in a statement.

"Madrid want to show their



gratitude and all their love to someone who is one of our greatest legends."

Benzema has lifted five Champions Leagues, four La Liga titles and three Copas del Rey with Madrid and is the holder of the Ballon d'Or for the world's best player.

Various team-mates including Brazil attacker Vinicius Junior paid tribute to Benzema after the announcement.

"When the boy from Sao Goncalo, so shy, arrived in Madrid in 2018, you were the first to welcome me. I will never forget," Vinicius said on

Instagram.

"I grew up with you. We conquered Spain, Europe and the world together.

"Karim, we will miss you very much," the 22-year-old added.

Benzema joined Madrid in 2009 from Ligue 1 side and hometown outfit Lyon.

Benzema established himself as a key player alongside Ronaldo and Gareth Bale in the vaunted 'BBC' attacking trident, before developing into the team's leader when the Portugal striker left in 2018.

He is Real Madrid's second top scorer of all-time, with 353 goals for Spaniard, behind only Ronaldo on 450.

Benzema's final appearance for them could be later on Sunday when they host Athletic Bilbao in La Liga.

Madrid confirmed on Saturday that Eden Hazard, Marco Asensio and Mariano Diaz are all leaving this summer too, allowing for plenty of space for new acquisitions in attack. — AFP

DJOKOVIC SWEEPS INTO FRENCH OPEN QUARTERS



PARIS: Novak Djokovic swept into the French Open quarterfinals for the 14th straight year on Sunday.

Third seed Djokovic, who is chasing a record 23rd men's Grand Slam singles title at Roland Garros, ended the surprise run of Peruvian outsider Juan Pablo Varillas in straight sets.

Djokovic, a two-time champion in Paris,

won 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 against the 94th-ranked Varillas to book a meeting with Russia's Karen Khachanov, the 11th seed who overcame Lorenzo Sonego in four sets.

"I had never played my opponent before. I knew he was a clay court specialist and that I had to earn the victory. It was the best I played this week," said Djokovic.

The 36-year-old Djokovic has yet to drop a set through four rounds. He is into a record 17th French Open quarter-final after making the last eight at a major for the 55th time.

"I am very proud of this record. I have put a lot of effort into my game and I am very motivated to continue," added Djokovic.

Varillas, 27, was the first player from Peru to reach the

second week of a Grand Slam since Jaime Yzaga made the US Open quarterfinals 29 years ago.

Djokovic raced 4-0 ahead in the opening set only for Varillas to break in the next game and then have a chance to get back on serve in the seventh game.

But once Djokovic held for a 5-2 lead it was plain sailing for him as he closed out victory in just under two hours.

He holds an 8-1 record against his next opponent Khachanov, who recovered from a bad start to down Sonego 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7), 6-1 to straight Slam quarterfinal.

"I didn't know what to do in the first set but I said just fight my way through," said the Russian. "I served for the third set, got broken and was 4-0 down in the tiebreak. It was just like the last match and I won that anyway."

Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, the 2021 runner-up, became the first woman through to the quarterfinals after rallying from a set and a break down to dump out Belgian 28th seed Elise Mertens 3-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3. The Russian, whose ranking has plunged to 333 after a serious knee injury, is the lowest-ranked Grand Slam quarterfinalist since the 2017 US Open.

Pavlyuchenkova will take on Karolina Muchova for a place in the last four after the Czech saw off lucky loser Elina Avanesyan 6-4, 6-3. — AFP



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Oman launches initiative to drive AI-powered national economy

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Economy yesterday launched an initiative to integrate artificial intelligence applications and technologies into development projects and programmes in economic diversification sectors specified in the 10th Five Year Plan (2021-2025).

Titled 'National Initiative to Empower a National Economy Enhanced by Artificial Intelligence', it seeks to enable government departments to use artificial intelligence applications and technologies in development projects, besides boosting investment opportunities based on technology and innovation.

The initiative will also contribute to upgrading the efficiency of development spending by raising productivity,



cutting down cost and developing smart government services to ensure quality in performance.

The Ministry earmarked a sum of RO 10 million for the initiative's 2024 projects. In the first stage, it targets government institutions and governorates, and it will later cover other sectors.

A first step in implementing the initiative begins with government departments' submitting their own initiatives and projects to the Ministry of Economy. The projects/initiatives will then be assessed and studied by a specialised team comprising members from the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. — ONA

Galfar wins RO 280m contract from PDO

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Leading Omani construction firm Galfar Engineering and Contracting SAOG has been awarded a multi-year contract with an estimated value of RO 280 million covering the delivery of off-plot facilities for the Qarn Alam oil field.

The contract was awarded following a competitive tender process, and Galfar was selected for its strong track record in the oil and gas sector.

The company has a long history of working with PDO, and has previously been awarded contracts for the development of the Marmul and Harweel oil fields.



The award of the Qarn Alam contract is a significant milestone for Galfar, and is a testament to the company's expertise and capabilities. The contract is expected to create hundreds of jobs, and will boost the local economy.

Galfar is committed to using local suppliers and contractors, and the contract is expected to have a positive impact on the local community.

Amnah Consortium to invest \$6 billion in Oman green hydrogen project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Amnah, the multinational consortium that signed agreements last week to develop a major green hydrogen project in the Sultanate of Oman, estimates investments in the venture to total around \$6 billion at full capacity.

Last Thursday, Amnah was named the winner of the first land block (Z1-01) offered by Hydrom, the orchestrator and master planner of Oman's green hydrogen industry, in the maiden round of an international auction process. The 320 sq km block is located in Duqm, with downstream elements to be established at the Port of Duqm.

Amnah comprises Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners (CIP), a Danish-based global leader in renewable energy investments; Blue Power Partners (BPP), specialists in solar and wind projects; and Al Khadra – part of Oman's Hind Bahwan Group.

Leading the consortium is CIP, according to Karsten Plauborg (pictured), Partner at Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners. "We are a fund manager, managing funds on behalf of pension funds, life insurance companies, and so on, and we invest in renewable energy projects.

CIP is the Primary Member of the consortium, but for sure, we will add new partners to the Amnah Consortium as we progress."

Speaking to the Observer, Plauborg described the project as immense in scale.

"It's an absolutely massive project – nothing has been built on this scale in renewable energy anywhere before. That also means you have to be really humble towards the task ahead. We cannot leave any stone unturned; we will have to be really diligent here."

TURN TO PAGE 15



Public Auction Announcement

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), in partnership with Worley Oman, is pleased to announce the sale of the following written-off materials on "As Is Where Is Basis" through online bidding as detailed below:

Auction Ref	Description	Location	Viewing Date	Last date for Document Submission	Online Bidding Date	Cheque Guarantee Amount
A2/2023/S13K	Assorted Scrap /line pipes / tubing/casing, sucker rod, structural materials etc. (Qty: 13,000 Tons)	Nimr/ Marmul	13-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 30,000/- (Thirty Thousand Omani Rials)
A2/2023/S10K	Assorted Scrap /line pipes / tubing/casing, sucker rod, structural materials etc. (Qty: 10,000 Tons)	Bahja	13-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 25,000/- (Twenty-five Thousand Omani Rials)
A2/2023/N10K	Assorted Scrap /line pipes / tubing/casing, sucker rod, structural materials etc. (Qty: 10,000 Tons)	Fahud	14-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 25,000/- (Twenty-five Thousand Omani Rials)
A2/2023/CD2	Used/Scrapped cables with metal drums (Qty: 600 tons)	Bahja	13-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 20,000/- (Twenty Thousand Omani Rials)
A2/2023/DB*	Used / Scrapped Drilling Bits	Qarn Alam / Fahud	14-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 20,000/- (Twenty Thousand Omani Rials)
		Nimr	13-06-2023			
A2/2023/IT	Used IT equipment's (Qty: 1 LOT)	MAF- Muscat	15-06-2023	19-06-2023 3:00 pm	22-06-2023	OMR 5,000/- (Five Thousand Omani Rials)

- This auction is open to all registered companies under the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion with activities of buying /selling scrap or Omani smelter factories or activities covered under the scope of sale items.
 - * International buyers (Outside Oman) are only allowed to participate in the auction lot A2/2023/DB.
 - All interested bidders shall be registered with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (Be'ah) for the activity of scrap metal collection and trade.
 - Bid documents, photos and details of LOTS offered for sale can be accessed via the following link: https://supplychain.requis.com/share/oman_pdo_assets
 - The Value added tax (VAT) of 5% of the value of the bid amount must be paid by the buyer.
 - All interested companies/parties must register their participation for the material viewing and submit visitors' ID cards to the "Auction Focal Point" via e-mail on or before **11th June 2023 (10:00 AM)**. Prior registration is a mandatory requirement for participating in the material viewing events and further online bidding.
 - The "Auction Focal Point" shall communicate the visit schedule / meeting points and other logistic details via e-mail to all registered bidders.
 - This auction is in line with PDO HSE Policy & HSE specifications SP2000 and SP2001 (Policy/Specifications can be viewed online through the following link: <http://www.pdo.co.om/hseforcontractors/> username: pdohse01 and password: contractor01). All HSE rules on the safe handling and transportation of materials from PDO sites will be applied. Please ensure that you are familiar with the PDO HSE requirements before participating in this auction.
 - Only two personnel from each company are allowed to attend the material viewing event as per the above schedule. Unregistered visitors will not be permitted in the material viewing
- For any clarification about this auction, please contact the Auction Focal Point (Tel: +968-24473498 or via email: Auctions.Focal@worley.com)

OAB inaugurates enhanced and relocated branch in Duqm



MUSCAT: The Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has successfully inaugurated its enhanced and relocated branch in Duqm, which is poised to become the nation's future economic hub.

Strategically moved from its previous location that first opened in 2008, the new-look branch offers an enhanced customer experience and journey, enabling it to serve customers more efficiently. The opening was held under the patronage of Engineer Ahmed bin Ali Akaak, Acting CEO, Special Economic Zone at Duqm.

Khalid al Amri, Head of Branch Banking, said: "Our new and improved Duqm branch will provide enhanced banking services to an extremely important location in Oman,

with numerous companies and international investors currently focusing their efforts on the city as an upcoming economic hub.

When redesigning the branch, we felt it was imperative that our customers in Duqm could conduct their business in the most up-to-date environment possible, while increasing our efficiency. We look forward growing to our customer relationships even further in the city."

The Duqm branch will also offer increased privacy for customers — which will include both Duqm residents and corporate clients — with each customer service representative located in a dedicated office, alongside enhanced digital capabilities.

Shell Oman, Vodafone join hands to enrich their customers journeys

MUSCAT: Committed to adding value to the lives of its customers, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG (Shell Oman) recently signed a retail partnership agreement with Vodafone Oman that will facilitate the sale of Vodafone eVouchers across all of Shell Oman's service stations. The agreement was signed between Dr Mohammed al Balushi, CEO of Shell Oman Marketing Company and Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone Oman.

This initiative, which unites two leading brands in the industry, is also in line with Shell Oman's efforts to provide a holistic experience across its Mobility service stations while adding to its line of motorist-oriented partnerships. With a keen focus on driving customer growth and satisfaction, Shell Oman has been at the forefront of securing meaningful partnerships that complement its comprehensive suite of services.

Commenting on this partnership, Dr Mohammed al Balushi, said, "Shell Oman is always looking to identify areas in which we can add more value to our customers. Our agreement with Vodafone builds on our existing service portfolio and gives motorists yet more connectivity



options and offers when visiting Shell service stations."

Starting its operations in Oman in early 2022, Vodafone has employed the latest technologies and digital solutions in the world of telecommunications, aligning its efforts to contribute towards the achievement of the Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone, said, "Since we launched Vodafone in Oman, we have been determined to do things differently. As the leading digital-first telecoms operator in the Sultanate of Oman our ethos is founded on providing flexible, accessible and convenient services to all of our customers. Embracing the reality that the value-add of yesterday is the basic of today, we strive to bring a new dimension to the table, giving customers what they need when they need it, and therein comes our strategic partnership with Shell Oman which will allow us to leverage their strong nationwide network, to better serve and reach existing and new customers across Oman."

Shell Oman places customer service at the heart of all its endeavours. Through its latest partnership with Vodafone, the company has reinstated its commitment to provide value propositions that are based on the evolving needs and demands of customers.

Shell Oman will also continue to focus on innovation while embracing the latest technological advancements to further enhance customer journeys.

Bank Nizwa appoints new assistant general manager for SMEs

MUSCAT: As the pioneering Islamic bank that has continued to invest in enhancing human capabilities whilst simultaneously focusing on attracting and retaining competent Omani talents, Bank Nizwa recently announced the appointment of Azzan al Saleh as the new Assistant General Manager of the bank's small and medium enterprises division.

As a highly qualified individual in the field, Al Saleh is set to inject fresh ideas into the department and lead high-impact campaigns that will offer added value to SMEs in Oman.

Speaking on the occasion, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer at Bank Nizwa said, "Bank Nizwa recognises that SMEs play a vital role in shaping a country's economy and have immense potential to generate employment opportunities, spearhead



the benefits of Islamic banking, we are certain that Al Saleh's years of expertise, strong industry knowledge and inherent zeal will help us achieve new milestones in the sector."

Al Saleh has more than 20 years of experience in the field and has held strategic positions at prominent banks in Oman.

Specialising in areas of asset management, recovery management, liability management and people management, along with a keen focus on enhancing customer experience and profitability, he has covered the entire spectrum of corporate banking, leading successful initiatives for SMEs, middle-market firms and large corporate companies.

Al Saleh is also proficient in the execution of corporate remedial strategies and managing collections.

sustainable ventures, and contribute to the overall social welfare of the community. SMEs are also quick to adapt to the changing requirements of the market.

Fast-paced innovation is, therefore, key to aligning with the needs of SMEs and servicing their varied demands. Bank Nizwa's SME division has been at the forefront of extending the necessary support to SMEs by addressing their unique needs through customised Sharia-compliant financial solutions.

As we continue to enhance our portfolio whilst advocating

National Finance wins two awards at New Age Banking Summit 2023

MUSCAT: National Finance, the leading financial institution in Oman, is thrilled to announce its resounding success at the eighth edition of the New Age Banking Summit (NABS) 2023 Oman. The event, which was conducted at the Sheraton Oman Hotel in Muscat, celebrated National Finance's achievement as the winner of the prestigious 'New Corporate Identity of the Year' award.

In addition, National Finance achieved another remarkable feat by also receiving the esteemed title of 'Best Non-Banking Finance and Leasing Company'.

Juma al Khamisi (COO), General Manager at National Finance, graciously accepted the awards on behalf of the company.

Tahir al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, honoured the event as the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker.

These recognitions further solidify National Finance's position as a leader in the financial industry, showcasing



its exceptional performance, innovation and commitment to providing top-notch financial solutions to its valued customers.

The dual triumph highlights National Finance's outstanding achievements and unwavering dedication to excellence in all facets of its operations.

Expressing his gratitude, Juma al Khamisi said, "We are incredibly honoured to receive these prestigious awards at NABS 2023. This esteemed recognition

underscores the dedication and tireless pursuit of excellence demonstrated by our exceptional team across all aspects of our operations.

It also affirms our strategic vision to adapt and grow alongside the dynamic financial landscape. We remain steadfast in continuously enhancing the value we provide to our customers, as we strive to set new benchmarks and redefine the standards of excellence in the industry."

Malabar Gold & Diamonds announces Sparkling Summer offers

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world with an extensive retail network of 317 outlets across 10 countries, has announced their Sparkling Summer offers.

Unveiling a special collection of jewellery in gold, diamond and precious gem, the offers also provide customers with assured gold coins on their diamonds and precious gem jewellery purchase. Sparkling Summer offer will

be available across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms in Oman until June 17.

The exquisite collection that the brand has launched, which included necklaces, bangles, bracelets, rings and earrings are available in Malabar Gold & Diamonds exclusive brands such as Mine, Era, Precia and Starlet.

Designs suitable for special occasions as well as daily wear have been incorporated into the collection.



"As school vacations are just around the corner, many of our customers are gearing up to travel to their home country. The

Sparkling summer offers, and special jewellery collections have been launched to meet the gifting requirements of those wanting to

buy jewellery for their loved ones back home.

The designs that we have arranged is assured to be the perfect gift, be it for yourself or for your loved ones and with the added offers, we are sure that we can add an extra value to their purchase", commented Shamlal Ahamed, MD — International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

As an added value to their purchase, customers can now

get assured gold coins on their diamond and precious gem jewellery.

Customers purchasing diamond or precious gem jewellery worth RO 500 will get a free 1gm gold coin and those purchasing for RO 300 will get a ½ gm gold coin. Malabar Gold & Diamonds is also offering free ear-piercing across all their showrooms in Oman until June 17.



26,000 standard specifications contribute to innovation and quality: MoCIIP

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) continues to pay great attention to the preparation and issuance of the Omani and Gulf standard specifications, and to the study of the measurement and calibration of the international, regional and Gulf standard specifications for all goods, products, materials, services.

The Ministry also works to update these standards in line with the continuous updating of the international specifications, in coordination with the concerned authorities.

The Directorate General of Standardisation and Metrology at the Ministry has emphasised the contribution of standard specifications in promoting trade, industry and investment promotion, promoting ,facilitating the investment environment, opening gates for the best options of goods, products and services.

The standard specifications also help to enhance the quality of products, increasing competition, enhancing innovation, raising productive efficiency, improving local investment, supporting the



organising of the relationship between the buyer and the seller, while emphasising aspects of health, safety and environmental protection.

The number of Omani and Gulf standard specifications in various industrial and service and other fields now exceeds 26,000 as of end-2022. These standard specifications cover many sectors such as the electricity sector,

electronics, mechanics, minerals, food, and agricultural goods, chemistry, weaving, oil and gas, building and construction materials, standards, quality management, information and information technology sector.

Nadia bint Mohammed al Siyabiyah (pictured), Director of the Standards and Metrology Department, stated: "The standard specifications are a document that defines the relationship between the manufacturer, service provider and the service consumer in an optional capacity.

It is issued by a third party, as it is prepared and formulated in cooperation and agreement between all the

relevant authorities and based on the fixed results of science and technology, experience and subject to improvement and repeated application on a commercial scale and without technical challenges."

She added: "The importance of the standard specifications in the advancement of local production to global levels and increasing its competitiveness, creating joint understanding between the parties who concerned with protecting the health and safety of consumer and the environment, reducing losses, raising the performance of the industries economies, supporting the national industry, and developing exports, through

raising the level of quality.

She emphasised that, the standard specifications help to provide a reference framework and a common language between manufacturers and merchants, facilitating trade exchange and technology transfer, and enable producers to develop their products and services, by granting them the capability to compete in various markets around the world.

The official clarified that in 2022 alone, 732 Omani standards specifications were issued, which includes the technical requirements of electric vehicles, the description of the water meter boxes made of plastic, the plastic packages used to mobilise and save water (Zamzamia), the liquid artificial detergent for fabrics and clothes, and the binding standard for Omani kummah.

The standard specification of the hydrogen vehicle was also issued to help encourage and support the use of clean sustainable energy and to reduce carbon emissions.

The standard specification of the hydrogen vehicles determines the requirements for safety needed to be provided in order to reduce the harm to humans when accidents occur, and to reduce pollutants resulting from gasoline and diesel fuel.

FDO participates in SIMEC 2023



MUSCAT: Fisheries

Development Oman (FDO), a leading organisation in the development of sustainable commercial aquaculture and fisheries sectors is participating as a platinum sponsor in the Saudi International Marine Exhibition and Conference (SIMEC) event, Aquafish Second Edition which is taking place from June 4 to June 6 at the Dhahran Expo in Saudi Arabia.

The SIMEC is expected to provide an exceptional forum for FDO to highlight Oman's flourishing fishing industry, innovative capabilities, and lucrative investment opportunities.

The FDO delegation's goal is to boost Oman's growing fisheries sector and highlight the profitable investment prospects it offers. This includes focusing on various areas such as Aquaculture, commercial fishing, management of fishing posts, and the provision of value-added products and services.

Amnah Consortium to invest \$6 bn in Oman green hydrogen project

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Given the scale of the project, total investment is estimated at around \$6 billion with an expected capacity of 215,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) of green hydrogen, he said.

Plauberg foresees more local and international companies joining the consortium, each with specialist expertise to support the delivery of the complex project.

"We will have to bring in other members into the consortium as well," he said. "CIP's expertise is in building and constructing complex renewable energy projects. Blue Power Partners is a world leader in modelling, and quantifying solar and wind resources, and modelling this into processing facilities. Al Khadra has extensive local experience that we will need to forge strategic partnerships including EPC and construction."

Amnah's green molecule

output is primarily earmarked for local consumption as energy feedstock for new steel plants slated to be developed in Duqm.

Signing offtake agreements with these and other customers will be key to the early success of the project, Plauberg pointed out. "The offtaker will ultimately play a crucial role, of course, in the whole financing of the project, etc. So getting the offtaker in place will be the first critical milestone of the project. We are working towards it."

Another key objective of the consortium is to support localisation and In-Country Value (ICV) development. "ICV has been a key focus for the Omani government and our proposal is focused a lot on optimising the in-country value. For sure, ICV is part of our commitment to the government, this includes facilitation of research programmes, educational

training and supporting competence development," he explained. Having sewn the initial deals with Hydrom on the project, the consortium will be firming up the development plan in the coming period.

"A huge part of that will be to basically lay out the critical path of the project. There will also be interdependencies on the offtake that need to be sorted out. Then we will start the wind and solar measurement campaigns to make sure we understand exactly the quality of the resources.

And we will also engage, at a deeper level, with banks to fully understand the bankability issues that we will face for the project."

Asked if a Final Investment Decision is targeted soon, Plauberg added: "There's a lot of preparation necessary to get there, and we will need to undertake both a pre-FEED and post-FEED to get there."

Restructured power distribution and supply firms start operations

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 4

In response to government directives, issued in December 2021 to restructure the electricity sector, and in-line with Nama Group's initiatives to enhance efficiency, Nama Holding has announced the commencement of the operations of the restructured Electricity Distribution and Supply companies.

Nama Group joined hands with a number of entities such as the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and the Authority for Public Services Regulation to ensure the restructuring project's successful completion based on a strategic plan.

Nama Group successfully merged and restructured the distribution and supply companies (Muscat Electricity Distribution Company,



Mazoon Electricity Company, Majan Electricity Company and Tanweer) into two main companies: "Nama Electricity Distribution" and "Nama Supply". Accordingly, the provision of electricity services to all governorates (except for Dhofar Governorate where Nama Dhofar Services provides electricity, water and wastewater services in the southern parts of Oman) has been reorganised.

Nama Electricity Distribution will be responsible for providing services related to meter reading, and low voltage networks. The company's mandate also includes constructing electrical lines and transformers to ensure reliable services to customers. Nama



Supply will be responsible for billing and collection operations.

Eng Alaa al Lawati has been appointed as CEO of Nama Electricity Distribution, while Salim al Kamyani has been named CEO of Nama Supply. Nama Group has made much headway in distributing the assets and employees in these two companies, without prejudice to operation efficiency and continuation of services.

This project will contribute to reducing the costs of the electricity sector in the medium term, raising the efficiency of the system, developing services and enhancing customer satisfaction by applying best practices and latest technologies.

CMA instructs insurance firms to gear up for Khareef

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has issued a circular to all insurance companies instructing them to prepare their branches and departments to provide proper insurance coverage, to be prepared to deal with the Khareef season in Dhofar Governorate in a proper way.

This circular highlights the desired integration among the units of the apparatus of the state

to provide an integrated tourism infrastructure that offers all services and facilities necessary for visitors; on which guarantees success of tourism seasons.

In its circular, the CMA stressed on the importance of ensuring the availability of the required facilities to get insurance services in border checkpoints and offering a package of procedures to support the insurance companies branches in Dhofar Governorate through providing enough number of



employees and ensuring 24-hour service during weekdays.

The circular also focused on the importance of activating online services for purchasing different insurance products and organising the claims processes.

In addition, the circular instructed the companies to provide direct contact numbers for the different branches and immediate support to speed up the process of dealing with claims.

The circular emphasised

the importance of enhancing awareness programmes and initiatives through participating in sending awareness messages related to traffic safety to reduce traffic accidents, cultivating insurance culture, introducing the importance of insurance as means to reduce risks and promoting and marketing insurance products especially health insurance policies for visitors, health insurance products, tractor-trailer insurance and cargo insurance.

Global tax would spoil investors’ plastic party



LISA JUCCA

The author is Breakingviews’ European Business Editor. Based in Italy, she focuses on key corporate trends across the European Union.

The days of carefree plastic use may soon be over. Even though the world is suffocating in polluting waste, sales of fresh polymers are projected to rise 40% to \$529 billion by 2031. This may change if supporters of taxes and other restrictive measures prevail at ongoing talks for a global treaty to end plastic pollution by 2040. Drastic action would shrink a promising market for Big Oil and cut packaging firms’ margins. Derived from fossil fuels, plastic represents an alluring business line for energy majors as

the green transition reduces the need to burn oil for electricity and heat. While growth in oil demand is expected to settle at a mere 0.5% annually, crude used for plastic is forecast to grow at around 3.5%. By 2050, 20% of global oil could be used to make plastic. That’s probably why petrochemical players are backing recycling as the solution to a waste crisis, rather than levies or outright product bans. Top virgin polymer producers ExxonMobil, Dow, Sinopec, Indorama Ventures and Saudi Aramco collectively contributed to about a fifth of waste from single use plastic in

2021, Minderoo Foundation estimates suggest. This approach is misguided. Turning used plastic into packaging and other products is complex and expensive. And the world lacks sufficient infrastructure to sort discarded resins: only 9% of global plastic is recycled each year, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development reckons. Trying to bulk up on waste management would be costly and come too late to fend off an environmental disaster. And even if the necessary infrastructure was in place, plastic weakens at each recycling step.

Taxes and other charges are the fastest and most effective means of reducing the allure of virgin polymers. Fresh plastic tends to be 30% cheaper than recycled alternatives. Until that gap is closed, packaging firms will have an incentive to produce bottles and food containers from new polymers. Recycled plastic is also scarce. “We cannot recycle our way out of this mess,” United Nations Environment Programme Executive Director Inger Andersen said. Hopes for a global treaty on plastic in 2024 are high. Some 90%

of people support measures to combat plastic pollution, a global Ipsos survey from 2021 shows. Countries including Britain have already started applying levies on virgin plastic packaging. A simulation from Barclays suggests the UK levy could cut gross margins by 5% at soft drinks players like \$3 billion Britvic and \$700 million A G Barr. Yet, financial players are ignoring the risks, buying up packaging companies to serve insatiable plastic demand, recent M&A data shows. With plastic increasingly under fire, investors should take notice. — Reuters

Licensing of new technologies in developing countries by international manufacturing companies



MUHANNA HAMED AL ZUHEIMI

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS WITH THESE LICENSES BRING IN NEW JOBS, BOOST PRODUCTIVITY, AND IMPROVE LIVING STANDARDS

Licensing new technologies by international manufacturing companies in developing countries can be a boon for manufacturing and developing countries. While the companies have a new market to tap into and increase their profits, the developing countries can benefit from technological advancements and improve their infrastructure. As such, the technologies owner tends to package their matured technologies as new technologies to developing countries; more to demand higher licensing fees and product royalties. Even if the company is registered as a new company but with the same brands, logos, and trademarks. When international manufacturing companies introduce new technologies to developing countries, it not only serves as an opportunity for the economy but also helps improve the quality of life for the people. Technological advancements with these licenses bring in new jobs, boost productivity, and improve living standards. The licensing process also leads to an exchange of knowledge that can result in collaboration between manufacturing companies and local businesses. This can lead to skills transfer and boost the local economy in the long run. However, there are challenges in licensing new technologies in developing countries. The process can be costly, and companies may hesitate to take on the risks of entering a new market. The licensing process also

requires extensive knowledge of the local culture and business environment, which may be challenging to navigate for an outsider. Additionally, developing countries’ legal frameworks and intellectual property laws may be less stringent than developed nations, leading to potential infringement issues. Despite these challenges, the benefits of licensing new technologies in developing countries outweigh the risks. International companies can use licensing agreements to expand their brand and secure their position in the global market. Local businesses in developing countries can also use these agreements to upscale their products and services and become competitive in the international market. To conclude, licensing new technologies by international manufacturing companies in developing countries can be a game-changer for both parties. With careful planning and appropriate due diligence, the process can be a win-win situation for everyone involved. The benefits of advanced technological assistance can ripple across the developing world, contributing to economic growth; job openings can provide a pathway to a higher quality of life—for people who need it the most. Additionally, developing nations must invest in building their technical capabilities to verify the authenticity and relevance of the technologies they adopt. They can only harness their potential and become fully integrated participants in the global technological landscape. [The author can be emailed at: Muhanna.it@gmail.com]

Levelling the financial playing field for Africa



AMADOU HOTT

The author is the Special Envoy of the President of the African Development Bank for the Alliance for Green Infrastructure in Africa.



MARK MALLOCH-BROWN

The author, a former deputy United Nations secretary-general and co-chair of the UN Foundation, is President of the Open Society Foundations.

Africa bears virtually no responsibility for the greenhouse-gas emissions driving the climate crisis. It is not responsible for the conflicts or supply-chain disruptions that have driven global inflation. Nor did it trigger the spread of Covid-19, let alone cause the pandemic’s economic fallout. And yet the long-term effects of this trio of crises linger perhaps more acutely in Africa than elsewhere. The International Monetary Fund has estimated that Africa’s additional financing needs resulting from the pandemic will amount to \$285 billion over the four years ending in 2025. But inflation, exchange-rate pressure, and unmanageable debt levels have complicated matters. These factors have eroded governments’ already-limited room to make short- and longer-term investments. Africa’s real needs are likely much greater. The continent has shown remarkable resilience. However, the anemic economic growth is compounding the economic struggles. Sub-Saharan Africa endured a recession in 2020 for



the first time in 25 years. And, according to the African Development Bank (AfDB), the region’s annual growth rate fell from 4.5 in 2021 to 3.5 per cent in 2022. It is expected to amount to just 3.8% this year. Behind these figures lies countless ruined lives. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 18 million more Africans slipped into poverty last year. This reversed the hard-won progress toward the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Conflicts and climate-related disasters—such as protracted droughts, extreme rains, and flooding—contribute to East Africa’s worst hunger crisis in decades. The human cost is horrifying. One person is predicted to die of hunger every 28 seconds from this crisis alone. This should concern the international community—and not only for humanitarian reasons. The world needs Africa. There is no path to a green, just, and prosperous shared future that does not have Africa at its core. So, it is in the self-interest of the rest of the world to support the continent, not through charity or handouts, but by backing African-led solutions, especially those focused on levelling a playing field that is currently tilted to the continent’s disadvantage. The allocation of special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF’s reserve asset) exemplifies the problem. The IMF created SDRs to supplement governments’ currency reserves. But, because SDRs are issued in proportion to countries’ IMF quotas, poorer countries receive the smallest

allocations, despite having the greatest need. Wealthier countries—with far less (or no) need—get the largest shares. In 2021, the G20 countries promised to channel at least 20% of their SDRs toward Africa. But their promises have yet to be fully realised. Faster progress on this front would go a long way toward helping African governments in the near term, especially if the recycled SDRs are channelled through multilateral development banks such as the AfDB. These institutions could then leverage their own AAA ratings to scale up the capital mobilised by a factor of three to four, transforming \$20 billion in SDR-funded projects into \$60-80 billion, with significantly better terms than those offered in commercial markets. Of course, a more dynamic and expansive private sector would provide a longer-term solution. But, as it stands, African governments are at a grievous disadvantage in private markets, where they face higher capital costs, not least because of subjective, discriminatory considerations. Comparing the risk premia of African and non-African states with similar credit ratings, one finds differences ranging from 150 basis points to more than 650 bps, sometimes reflecting a lack of on-the-ground knowledge and subjective judgment. A conference of credit-rating agencies, investors, and African governments is urgently needed to address this intolerable discrimination—which amounts to a powerful brake on progress—once and for all. Again, this

would not amount to charity or special treatment; rather, it would be a step toward levelling the playing field so African-led solutions can succeed. Removing the “Africa risk premium” would unlock much-needed capital for green development, including the clean-energy transition. The Alliance for Green Infrastructure in Africa is one African-led initiative that would advance this goal. Unveiled by the AfDB, the African Union, Africa50, and other partners at last November’s UN Climate Change Conference in Egypt (COP27), the AGIA seeks to raise \$500 million in grants, concessional resources, and blended and commercial finance to provide early-stage project preparation and development capital for green initiatives. Mitigating high-interest rates and the lack of risk appetite for Africa would result in the rapid creation of a strong pipeline of bankable green projects. The AGIA aims to unlock at least \$10 billion in green infrastructure investments. Similar efforts are underway elsewhere. One notable example lies in the ambitious Bridgetown Initiative launched by Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley to create additional fiscal space for development, climate mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage. V20 group of climate-vulnerable developing countries represents another example, currently chaired by Ghanaian Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta. The coming months offer several opportunities for breakthroughs. © Project Syndicate, 2023

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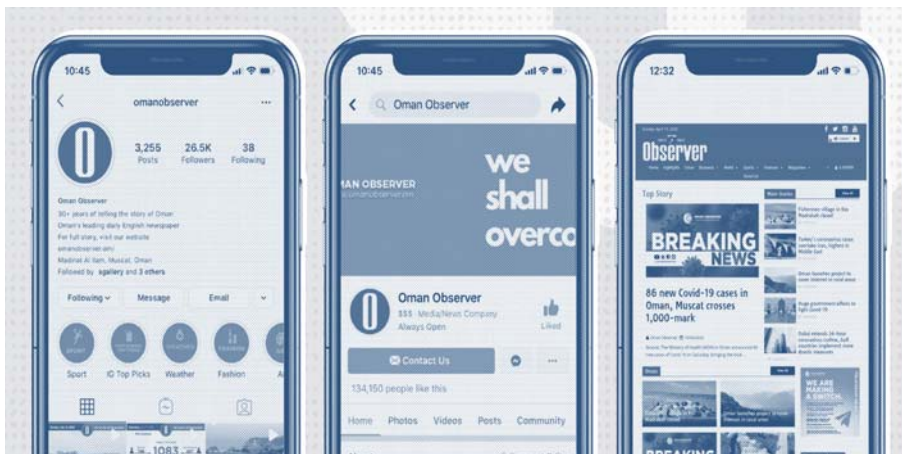
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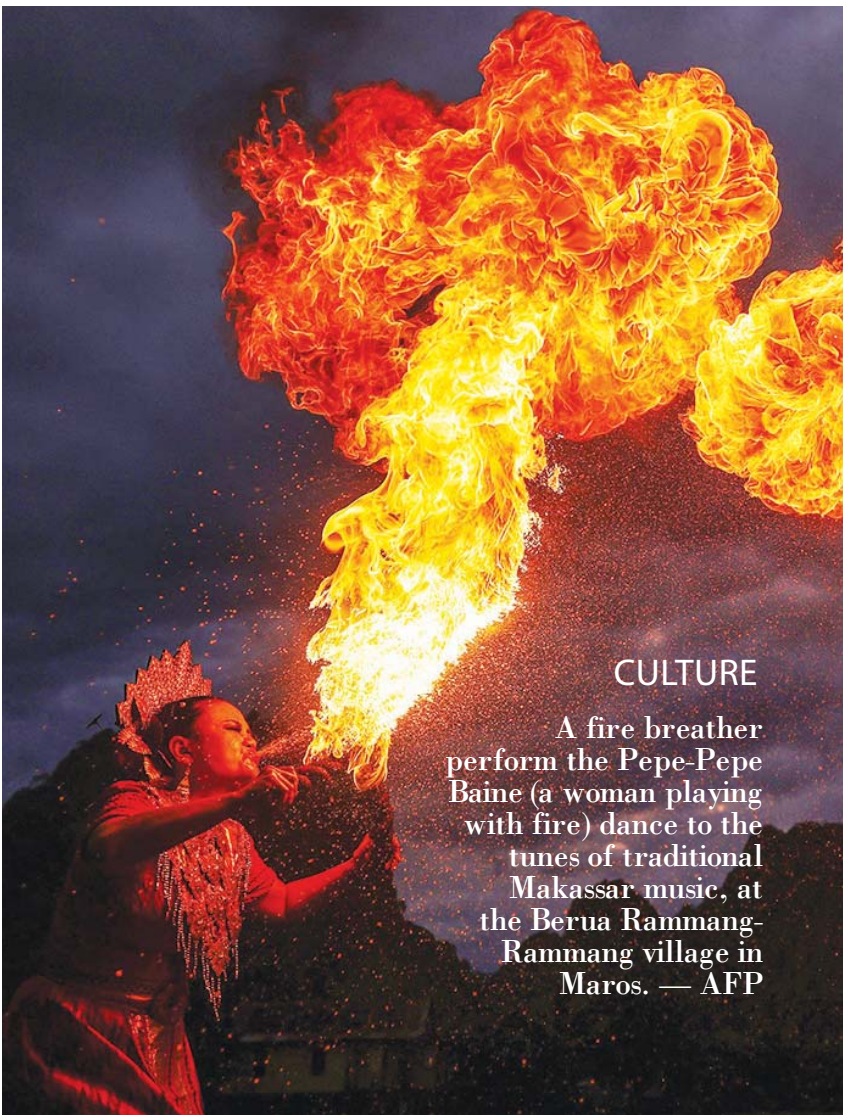
ENTERTAINMENT

Syrian director Bassel al-Khatib speaks to the media near a poster of Syrian actor Duraid Lahham's latest movie "The Sage" at the opera house in Damascus, Syria. — Reuters



ART

Russian National Guard (Rosgvardiya) officers stand guard by the historic Andrei Rublev "Trinity" icon exhibited at the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. — AFP



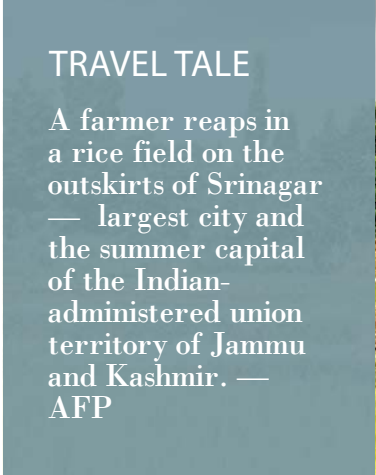
CULTURE

A fire breather perform the Pepe-Pepe Baine (a woman playing with fire) dance to the tunes of traditional Makassar music, at the Berua Rammang-Rammang village in Maros. — AFP



FASHION

Canadian model Coco Rocha attends the 2023 Veuve Clicquot Polo Classic at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey. — AFP



TRAVEL TALE

A farmer reaps in a rice field on the outskirts of Srinagar — largest city and the summer capital of the Indian-administered union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. — AFP



art & life

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Unbreakable Spirit: Defying Cancer, Inspiring Lives

After a diagnosis of multiple tumours, Ruqia bint Saud al Hasani, a 35-year-old kindergarten teacher, displays a tenacious spirit and unflinching will to conquer life's challenges

LOCAL SCENE

The hymns of an Omani poet collected on newly launched book *Traneem*

By Balqees Aloraimi

If there's a country in the world that is perfect for poets, Oman should definitely be at the top of the list. Oman's rich history and vibrant culture add depth and layers of inspiration for poets. The country's ancient forts, traditional villages, and archaeological sites provide a tangible connection to the past, allowing poets to tap into the collective memory of a land steeped in stories and legends.

Poets find solace and inspiration amidst the beauty of Oman, allowing

their verses to capture the essence of this remarkable land and share it with the world.

Such has been the case for poet and writer Abdullah bin Mohammed al Numani, who launched a collection of poems through his book *Traneem*, or Hymns in English.

Abdullah shared that the book is a reflection of his thoughts, feelings, and experiences as he went through life and has gone through numerous stages of progress, development, and challenges.

His main hope is that the book will become an inspiration and resonate



well with those who are also embarking on their own personal journeys.

Al Numani divided his collection into three chapters. The first chapter collected his patriotic, social, and emotional poems. The second chapter is devoted to the art of Al Razha, while the last chapter is devoted to the art of Taqrood, or the words chanted by the performers during Al

Razha and other cultural dances.

Al Numani said that "Traneem" is his first publication, a cathartic experience that reminded him what it was like growing up and admiring not only his culture but the evolution of Oman and the written and spoken word.

"It is a collection of poems that were written in different stages of

my life — some crafted during my study days, others while I'm travelling and the others conceptualised and came about by collaborating and corresponding poetic dialogues with other poets," he shared.

"When you go through the book, you will find a portion where I interacted with other poets. I have correspondence with celebrated poets like Mohammed bin Humaid al Harthy, Mubarak bin Saeed al Fawry, and Saif bin Ali Al-Rahbi and that correspondence was an honour of mine to be included in this collection," he said.

"There are also poems written when I was still in school. Of course, they went through numerous stages of revision and modification, which is normal after a person grows in style and matures in his thinking," he shared.

"Poetic dialogues are more evident in the art of Al Razha, and they are of two types: dialogues and correspondences. So you write a poem about Al Razha, and the other poet

responds to you after a while," he said.

"The third chapter is devoted to the art of tweeting — and this chapter branched into three branches, a branch for individual poems, a branch for correspondence, and a branch for dialogues.

Al Numani explained that the poems touching on social topics, when read in-depth, show his personal development and evolution, something that would definitely resonate well in the current times.

Al Numani shared that he hopes to include the book in the Muscat International Book Fair, and he's working on some collaboration with different agencies, Omani bookshops, and Arab libraries to ensure that the book will have a wider reach.

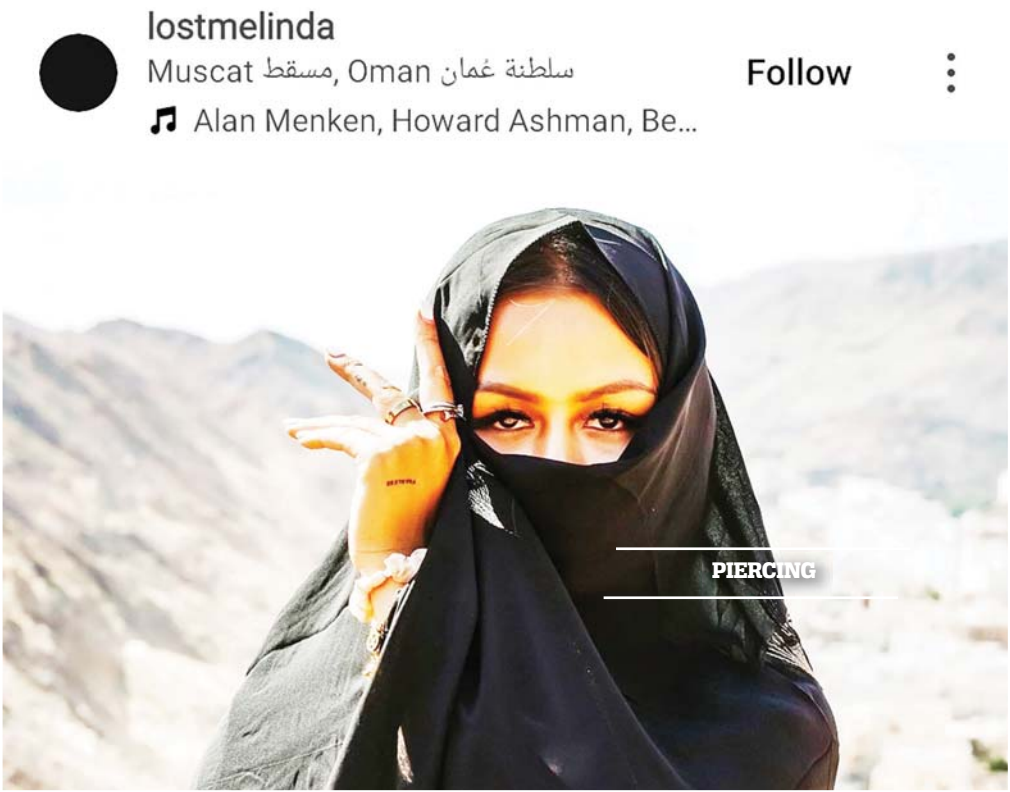
"I'd love the book to be part of different book fairs, as it is the perfect place where intellectual and cultural discussions take place, and with the right connection, there is also an opportunity to cooperate with different publishing houses.

"I hope that the book will resonate well with readers and those interested in popular poetry. While I do not claim the book to be perfect, it definitely has some great insights into my personal experiences, documenting success and challenges, and is a great addition and tribute to Oman libraries," Al Numani said.



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By Zuwaina al Sulimani

In a world full of hurdles and problems, some rise above them, inspiring others with their incredible resilience. Ruqia bint Saud al Hasaniyah, a 35-year-old kindergarten teacher, displays a tenacious spirit and unflinching will to conquer life's challenges. Her tale is one of bravery, strength, and empowerment, as she battled different challenges for years and emerged as a beacon of hope for many.

Al Hasaniyah's journey with the disease began in 2003 when she was diagnosed with a collection of benign tumours. She had a series of surgeries, radiation therapy, and hormone therapies throughout the years, each with their own set of obstacles. Despite the physical and mental challenges, Al Hasaniyah persisted, demonstrating incredible resilience and an unswerving mindset.

Al Hasaniyah gained a renewed love for athletics and physical fitness as a result of it all. One of her friends gave her a gym membership in 2014, which marked the start of her remarkable sports experience. Even while undergoing surgeries, treatments, and hospital visits, Al Hasaniyah turned to athletics for consolation, courage, and a sense of empowerment. She defied her disease by participating in sports such as hiking, mountain climbing, and boxing.

As Al Hasaniyah accepted her challenges, she saw the necessity of assisting and inspiring others who were going through the same hardships. She started a cancer-fighting group to challenge the notion of sickness and eradicate the anxiety connected with it, especially among women. They developed a support system based on what they had in common, encouraging one another to enjoy their lives fully.

Al Hasaniyah's inspirational path was not without challenges. In 2019, she was diagnosed with a genetic abnormality, which required more surgery, but she remained determined to live an active and meaningful life. She climbed mountains, including Kilimanjaro's peak, and ran marathons, defying the odds and demonstrating that disease does not have to limit one's capacity to enjoy life.



Al Hasaniyah continued to establish new objectives and ambitions for the future. She intends to run several marathons to communicate the message that nothing is impossible for



people who believe in themselves. Al Hasaniyah proved that patience and determination can lead to great results with her incredible weight loss journey, depicted by challenging



38 pieces weighing 10 kg. Al Hasaniyah's incredible journey exemplifies the human spirit's tenacity and endurance. Her relentless tenacity, love of athletics, and devotion to empowering others have made her an inspiration to those who hear her tale. Despite the hurdles she has experienced, Al Hasaniyah's unwa-

vering pursuit of a successful life serves as a compelling reminder that with conviction in oneself, everything is possible. Her message is clear: adversity can be overcome, and ambitions can be achieved. Al Hasaniyah embodies resilience, empowerment, and the unwavering force of the human spirit.

ENTERTAINMENT

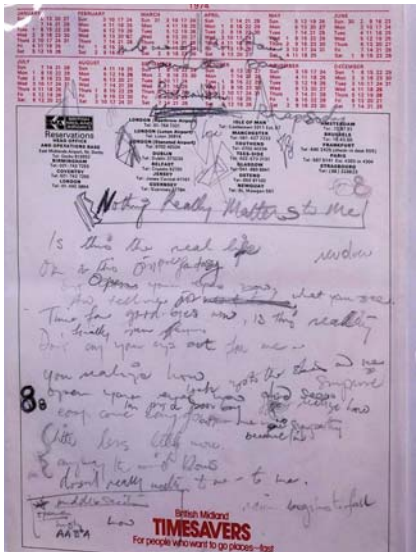
Freddie Mercury's draft lyrics for Queen hits unveiled

A TROVE OF FREDDIE Mercury's previously unseen handwritten draft lyrics for some of Queen's biggest hits goes on show on Thursday in New York, ahead of their sale in London later this year.

The manuscripts include working drafts for "Bohemian Rhapsody" — which Mercury initially planned to call "Mongolian Rhapsody" — "Don't Stop Me Now" and "Somebody to Love".

"In scope, quality and exceptional provenance, the collection of lyrics together afford an unprecedented glimpse into the creative mind of one of the 20th-century's most influential songwriters," said Sotheby's, which is staging the auctions in September.

More than 1,500 items from Mercury's private collection, including costumes and unique objects as well



as the draft lyrics, will feature in the eventual auctions in London and online.

Left largely untouched at his former west London home in the three decades since his death, they will be sold at live events in the British capital on September 6-8 and online August 4-September 11.

The vast array of items — being auctioned by Mary Austin, one of the icon's closest friends who has cared for them at his former home Garden

Lodge — are expected to fetch at least £6 million (\$7.5 million).

A highlight of the trove unveiled on Thursday is 15 pages of lyrics and melodies that led to "Bohemian Rhapsody", one of Queen's most globally beloved and streamed songs and the third best-selling UK single ever.

Written in black and blue ink and pencil, on stationery from the now-defunct British Midland Airways, they reveal Mercury originally planned to call it "Mongolian Rhapsody".

'MONGOLIAN RHAPSODY'

The songwriter, who died in 1991, had at some point crossed out the word "Mongolian" and replaced it with "Bohemian".

The 15 pages are expected to fetch up to £12 million at the auction.

Other draft lyrics going on display include nine pages of lyrics for arguably Queen's greatest anthem, "We Are the Champions", 19 pages behind 1976 hit "Somebody to Love" and seven leaves for "Don't Stop Me Now".

The collection of draft lyrics and other items will be in Los Angeles June 14-18 and Hong Kong June 26-30 before arriving in London August 4 for a month-long exhibition ahead of the auctions. — AFP

ART

It's complicated: NY exhibit offers feminist reassessment of Picasso

GENIUS OR MISOGYNIST — or both? Fifty years after art icon Pablo Picasso's death, his legacy is reassessed by comedian Hannah Gadsby in a Brooklyn Museum exhibition in New York, this time through a contemporary, feminist lens.

In her 2018 Netflix special "Nanette," Gadsby expressed "hate" for the Spanish master of Cubism and the creator of works like "Guernica" and "Les Femmes d'Alger".

But in "It's Pablo-matic: Picasso according to Hannah Gadsby" (June 2 through September 24) — one of the many eagerly awaited shows under the aegis of France and Spain marking the 50th anniversary of his death — the approach is more nuanced.

Picasso (1881-1973) remains one of



the most influential artists of the modern world, often hailed as a dynamic and creative genius.

But in the wake of the #MeToo movement, the reputation of this workaholic with a vast output of paintings, sketches and sculpture has been tarnished by accusations he exerted a violent hold over the women who shared his life and inspired his art.

In Gadsby's written and audio com-

mentaries accompanying the pieces in the Brooklyn Museum, the Australian humourist refuses to separate the man from the artist, unearthing symbols of misogyny in Picasso's paintings and drawings.

She points to the penis in the center of his 1931 painting "The Sculptor," proof in her view that Picasso "couldn't even separate himself from his art in his art." — AFP



CULTURE

Mystery of the desert: The lost cities of the Nigerien Sahara

A LONG TREK ACROSS the desert of northeastern Niger brings the visitor to one of the most astonishing and rewarding sights in the Sahel: fortified villages of salt and clay perched on rocks with the Saharan sands laying siege below.

Generations of travellers have stood before the "ksars" of Djado, wondering at their crenelated walls, watchtowers, secretive passages and wells, all of them testifying to a skilled but unknown hand.

Who chose to build this outpost in a scorched and desolate region — and why they built it — are questions that have never been fully answered. And just as beguiling is why it was abandoned.

No archaeological dig or scientific dating has ever been undertaken to explain the mysteries.

Djado lies in the Kavar oasis region 1,300 kilometres (800 miles) from the capital Niamey, near Niger's deeply troubled border with Libya.

Once a crossroads for caravans trading across the Sahara, Kavar today is a nexus for drug and arms trafficking.

Its grim reputation deters all but the most determined traveller.

"There have been no foreign tourists since 2002", said Sidi Aba Laouel, the mayor of Chirfa, the commune where the Djado sites are located.

"When tourism was good, there was economic potential for the community."

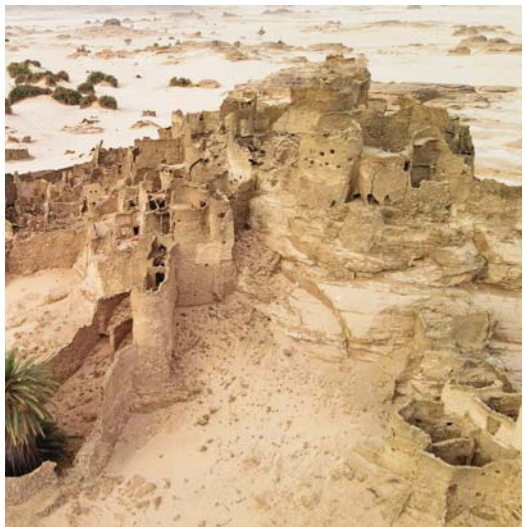
A blessing of sorts occurred in 2014, when gold was discovered. It saw an influx of miners from across West Africa, bringing life and some economic respite, but also bandits who hole up in the mountains.

Few of the newcomers seem interested to visit the ksars.

DEVASTATING RAIDS

The mayor is careful when speaking about local history, acknowledging the many gaps in knowledge.

He refers to old photocopies in his cupboard of a work by Albert le Rouvreur, a colonial-era French military officer stationed in Chirfa, who tried without success to shed light on the origins of the site.



The Sao, present in the region since antiquity, were the first known inhabitants in Kavar, and perhaps

established the first fortifications. But the timeline of their settlement is hazy. Some of the ksars still

standing have palm roofs, suggesting they were built later.

Between the 13th and the 15th centuries, the Kanuri people established themselves in the area.

Their oasis civilisation was almost destroyed in the 18th and 19th centuries by successive waves of nomadic raiders — the Tuaregs, Arabs and finally the Toubou.

The arrival of the first Europeans in the early 20th century spelt the beginning of the end of the ksars as a defence against invaders. The French military took the area in 1923.

Today, the Kanuri and Toubou have widely intermingled but the region's traditional leaders, called the "mai", descend from the Kanuri lineage.

They act as authorities of tradition, as well as being custodians of oral history.

But even for these custodians, much remains a mystery.

"Even our grandfathers didn't know. We didn't keep records," said Kiari Kelaoui Abari Chegou, a Kanuri leader.

THREATENED RELICS

Three hundred kilometres to the south of Djado lies the Fachi oasis, famous for its fortress and old town, with the walls still almost intact.

Some symbolic sites of the ancient city are still used for traditional ceremonies.

A traditional authority of Fachi, Kiari Sidi Tchagam says the fortress is "at least two hundred years old".

"According to our information, there was an Arab who had come from Türkiye, it was he who gave people the idea of making the fort there," he said, echoing theories of Turkish influence.

While the ruins are a point of pride, descendants are worried the fragile salt buildings, threatened by rain, are not properly safeguarded.

Since 2006, Djado has languished on a tentative list of Unesco World Heritage Sites.

"It's really crucial it's registered as a Unesco World Heritage Site," said Tchagam.

"We are reminded of ourselves in this fort, it's a part of our culture, it's our entire history." — **AFP**

LIFESTYLE



How chocolate could counter climate change

AT A RED-BRICK factory in the German port city of Hamburg, cocoa bean shells go in one end, and out the other comes an amazing black powder with the potential to counter climate change.

The substance, dubbed biochar, is produced by heating the cocoa husks in an oxygen-free room to 600 degrees Celsius (1,112 Fahrenheit).

The process locks in greenhouse gases and the final product can be used as a fertiliser, or as an ingredient in the production of "green" concrete.

While the biochar industry is still in its infancy, the technology offers a novel way to remove carbon from the Earth's atmosphere, experts say.

According to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), biochar could potentially be used to capture 2.6 billion of the 40 billion tonnes of CO2 currently produced by humanity each year.

But scaling up its use remains a challenge.

AMAZONIA

"We are reversing the carbon cycle," Peik Stenlund, CEO of Circular Carbon, said at the biochar factory in Hamburg.

The plant, one of the largest in Europe, takes delivery of the used cocoa shells via a network of grey pipes from a neighbouring chocolate factory.



The biochar traps the CO2 contained in the husks — in a process that could be used for any other plant.

If the cocoa shells were disposed of as normal, the carbon inside the unused byproduct would be released into the atmosphere as it decomposed.

Instead, the carbon is sequestered in the biochar "for centuries", according to David Houben, an environmental scientist at the UniLaSalle institute in France.

One tonne of biochar — or bio coal — can stock "the equivalent of 2.5 to three tonnes of CO2", Houben said. Biochar was already used by indigenous populations in the Americas as a fertiliser before being rediscovered in the 20th century by scientists researching extremely fecund soils in the Amazon basin.

The surprising substance's sponge-like structure boosts crops by increasing the absorption of water and nutrients by the soil.

In Hamburg, the factory is wrapped in the faint smell of chocolate and warmed by the heat given off by the installation's pipework.

The final product is poured into white sacks to be sold to local farmers in granule form.

One of those farmers is Silvio Schmidt, 45, who grows potatoes near Bremen, west of Hamburg. Schmidt hopes the biochar will help "give more nutrients and water" to his sandy soils.

CARBON COST

The production process, called pyrolysis, also produces a certain volume of biogas, which is resold to the neighbouring factory. In all, 3,500 tonnes of biochar and "up to 20 megawatt hours" of gas are produced by the plant each year from 10,000 tonnes of cocoa shells.

The production method nonetheless remains difficult to scale up to the level imagined by the IPCC.

"To ensure the system stores more carbon than it produces, everything needs to be done locally, with little or no transport. Otherwise it makes no sense," Houben said.

And not all types of soil are well adapted to biochar. The fertiliser is "more effective in tropical climates", while the raw materials for its production are not available everywhere, Houben said.

The cost can also be prohibitive at "around 1,000 euros (\$1,070) a tonne — that's too much for a farmer", he added.

To make better use of the powerful black powder, Houben said other applications would need to be found. The construction sector, for example, could use biochar in the production of "green" concrete.

But to turn a profit, the biochar business has come up with another idea: selling carbon certificates.

The idea is to sell certificates to companies looking to balance out their carbon emissions by producing a given amount of biochar.

With the inclusion of biochar in the highly regulated European carbon certificates system, "We are seeing strong growth in [the] sector", CEO Stenlund said. His company is looking to open three new sites to produce more biochar in the coming months.

Across Europe, biochar projects have begun to multiply. According to the biochar industry federation, production is set to almost double to 90,000 tonnes this year compared with 2022.—**AFP**