

P10

ARSENAL REGAIN TOP SPOT AS MAN CITY STUMBLE



P13

MUSCAT IS THE MOST AFFORDABLE CAPITAL CITY IN THE WORLD



P19

PHARRELL WILLIAMS IS LOUIS VUITTON'S NEXT MEN'S DESIGNER



MUSCAT

TREMORS IN DUQM, NO DAMAGE REPORTED

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) said that some citizens have reported slight tremors in Duqm, but confirmed that it had not received any reports of injuries or damage to properties. Earlier, the Earthquake Monitoring Centre (EMC) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) reported that a 4.1-magnitude earthquake in Duqm, at 7:55 am on Sunday. The EMC said that the alert level is zero for both Muscat and the rest of the Sultanate of Oman, but added that the direct impact will differ from one building to another.

SUR FESTIVAL DRAWS 72,267 VISITORS

The Omani Maritime Heritage Festival attracted 72,267 visitors over eight days, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said. The festival concluded recently in the Wilayat of Sur. The ministry said the festival was able to highlight the historical role of the Wilayat of Sur in the past and present, promoting and introducing the maritime heritage and tourism potentials in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah and stimulating tourism in the governorate.

DETAILS ON P3



INSIDE



ISRAELI STRIKE KILLS 15 IN SYRIAN CAPITAL

P7



A UNIQUE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL EDIFICE

P9

Abraj Energy Services IPO to boost economic diversification

MUSCAT: The initial public offering (IPO) of Abraj Energy Services (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group, opens on Monday. The offering allocated for the first category runs from February 20 until March 2, whereas

the subscription in the second category runs from February 20 until March 1. The shares of Abraj Energy Services are put for sale in an IPO as part of the divestment plan announced by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) to exit some government investments to

provide investment opportunities for Omani and foreign investments to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040. This step aims to promote the private sector's participation in various economic sectors at the national level. The IPO will also enhance economic

diversification policies and attract investors from Oman and abroad. By virtue of the IPO, 49 per cent of the issued capital of Abraj Energy Services (i.e., 377,398,000 shares of the company) will be put for sale. The selling shareholders will maintain their right to adjust the

IPO size at any time before the end of the subscription period. The company put 49 per cent of its shares for sale in an IPO after obtaining the necessary regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in the Sultanate of Oman. **DETAILS ON P13**

Immunisation coverage survey begins today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 19

The Ministry of Health (MoH) will begin implementation of National Immunisation Coverage Survey for children in the age group 1.5 and five years, as well as their mothers in all the governorates from Monday.

The survey, which continues until March 20, aims to validate the results of routine reports and provide information, in addition to number of people who have been adequately immunised at all levels (at the national, governorate and wilayat levels).

It also aims to guide executive policies by presenting best practices, highlighting challenges that require interactive intervention to improve the performance of the national immunisation programme, and identifying the reasons for delay in taking vaccinations from the scheduled appointments or any reluctance to take them.

The survey's target is to visit 5,289 homes to obtain immunisation data for 16,470 of the target groups, the category of children from one year and a half to five years of age to verify the

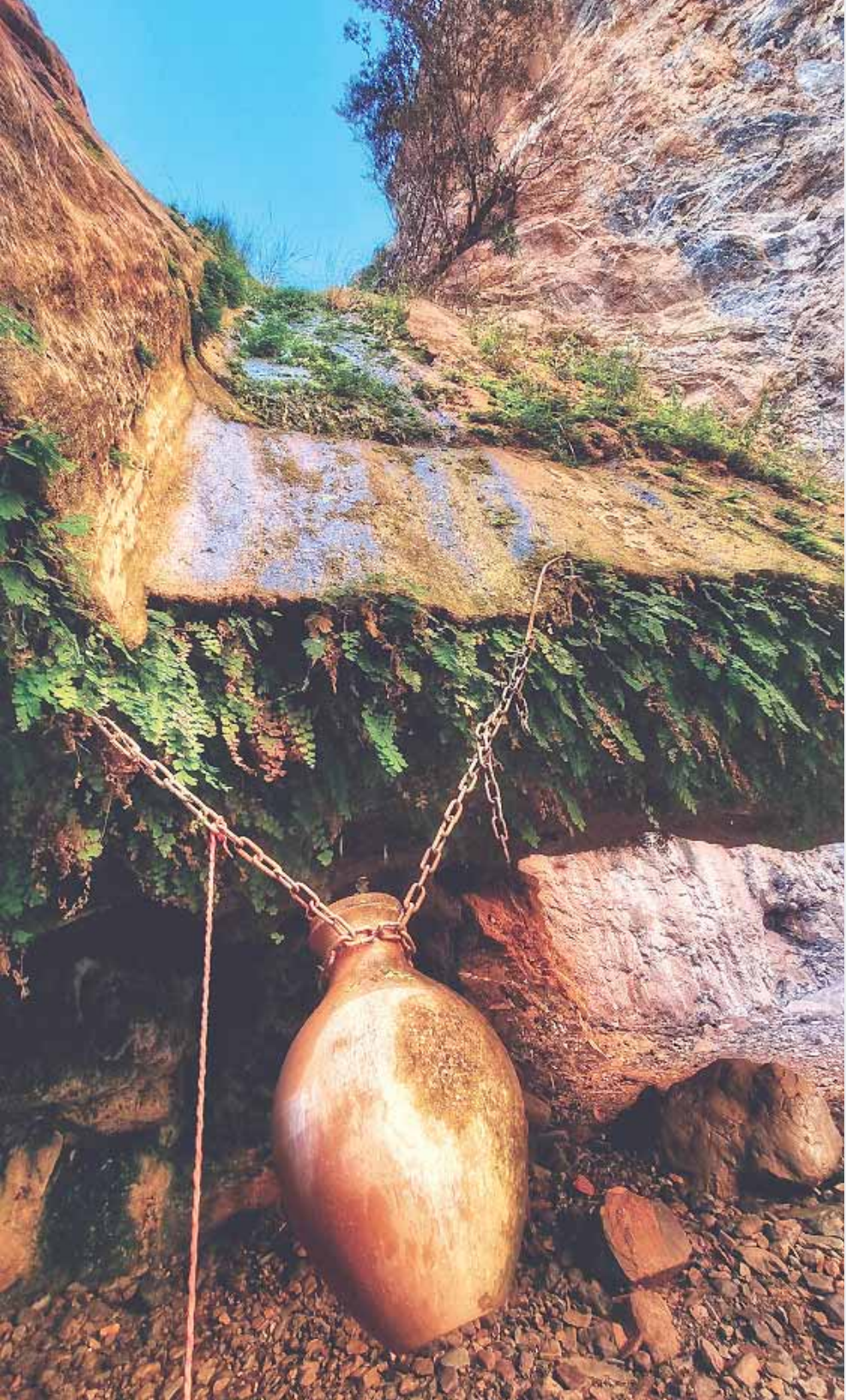
The survey's target is to visit 5,289 homes to obtain immunisation data for 16,470 of the target groups, the category of children from one year and a half to five years

immunisation data in different age stages according to the national immunisation schedule, and the category of mothers who have children under the age of 5 years (to verify if they have vaccinated during pregnancy).

The field survey teams will visit the randomly selected houses in various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman. The team will first ask whether there are target groups in the house; if any, a verbal consent to start the survey will be obtained.

The immunisation data of the target groups will be obtained directly from mothers or the child's caregiver. The survey team will use an electronic or paper questionnaire form prepared in advance by the team to collect the required data.

A LONG HIKE TO WAJMA



In an era when everyone likes to explore offbeat places, Wajma is a hiking destination one must add to the list when one is visiting the Sultanate of Oman. From Muscat, it takes almost a two-hour drive to reach Wadi Al Sahtan and another 30-minute drive by a four-wheel towards Wajma Village located on top of one of the surrounding mountains where the hike usually begins.

SEE P20

Oman Botanic Garden to have major attractions

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Oman Botanic Garden, which is expected to be ready soon, will be one of its kind in the region and the world. Ideally located in the flourishing Al Khoudh area of the city, the garden will be on a 430-hectare protected natural area surrounded by mountains. Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, recently said that the project would be completed



soon, and its major attractions will include cable cars. As of November 2022, the project was 65 per cent ready and, when completed, will showcase all the native plant species of Oman in a series of carefully created, naturalistic habitats from the deserts to the rich monsoon cloud forests. Sources in the ministry said that significant progress had been made, and it will be one of the iconic projects for the Sultanate of Oman when opened to public. The garden will also showcase

the traditionally cultivated crops and how people use plants in the Sultanate of Oman. The garden, one of the world's largest botanic gardens, will have a nursery, visitor centre, research centre, field study centre, outdoor habitat gardens, northern mountain biome, southern mountain biome, and nature reserve area. The project includes giant glass domes with multiple entries and exit points for easy accessibility. It is situated close to the Muscat Expressway.





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Abraj Energy to conduct roadshow in governorates

MUSCAT: Abraj Energy Services SAOC, a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group, will organise five information sessions about the initial public offering (IPO) of its shares during the period from February 20 to 26 in collaboration with the Capital Market Authority (CMA) and Oman Chamber for Commerce and Industry (OCCI). These sessions aim to educate investors, citizens and residents about the offered shares and the targeted categories.

The first information session will start on February 20 at the OCCI's branch in the Wilayat of Sur in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah, while the OCCI's branch in the Wilayat of Suhar will host the second session in the Governorate of North Al Batinah on February 21.

In cooperation with the CMA, the company will organise an expanded information session on February 22 to educate investors and brokers about the IPO. Another information session will be held in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah. The OCCI's branch in the Wilayat of Nizwa will host this session on February 23, while the OCCI's branch in the Governorate of Dhofar will host the fifth information session on February 26 at Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism.

The CMA has approved the public offering of more than 377 million shares of Abraj Energy Services. It also approved the stock prospectus of the company and its transformation from a closed to a joint stock company. It is worth noting that Abraj Energy Services has offered 49% of its shares for



The first session will start on February 20 at the OCCI's branch in the Wilayat of Sur.

public subscription.

The shares will be provided in two parallel categories. The first category will be allocated to major investors and will account for 85 per cent maximum of the total public offering. It will be directed to major and corporate investors in Oman and international investors. The subscription price in the first category will be set within the range of RO 0.242 to RO 0.249 per share. The second category of shares will be offered for small investors and will account for no less than 15 per cent of the total public offering. It is allocated to individual investors in the Sultanate of Oman. The shares of this second category will be offered at a maximum discounted price of RO 0.224 per share, calculated at a maximum price of RO 0.249 less a discount of 10 per cent. — ONA

Oman's longest zip line ready to welcome visitors on Saturday

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 19

Are you ready to zoom down Oman's longest zip line, and enjoy majestic Musandam? If yes, come to Jabal Fitt in the Wilayat of Khasab on Saturday.

Omran's 1,800-metre dual zipline project begins from Jabal Fitt and passes through scenic landscapes of Khor Qadi and Mokhi area over the coast of the Wilayat of Khasab.

The landing point of the zipline will be connected to the upcoming Atana Khasab Hotel, where a visitor centre will offer a host of facilities.

The project offers exceptional views of the Strait of Hormuz, Musandam zipline project represents the cooperation between the Office of the Minister of State and the Governor of Musandam and Omran Group, within the framework of implementing Musandam's development strategy for 2040. The project will also effectively contribute in adding a variety of exciting activities for tourists, and serve as a model for entrepreneurs to create multiple assets and services that support the tourism sector, particularly adventure tourism.

Ahead of the opening of the zipline on February 25, over 700 test rides were held to check safety



measures.

Work on the project started in 2022 with contractors ensuring that all components were built and installed in accordance with international safety standards and procedures, including an advanced braking system, and helmets, safety harnesses and jackets for riders.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is currently overseeing a host of other tourism and development projects in Musandam. A visitor centre is in the plans at the archaeological site of Daba with funding from OQ company. The project will also include a museum.

The Observer spoke to a group of adventurers who flew the zipline for a test ride. Youssef bin Abdullah al Shezawi, said: I was afraid to try the zipline at first.

Then I spoke to other riders. They said they enjoyed the experience. Looking at the safety measures, I became confident and tried the zipline." Shaikha al Shehiya said: "The Oman Adventures Center is a new addition to the governorate to stimulate tourism, and a wonderful experience, especially the ride over the creek from the top of Jabal Fitt. The addition of other activities to the centre, such as paragliding and other sports, will attract adventure tourists."

Osama bin Muhammad bin Ali al Shehhi said: "My experience of the zipline was beautiful and exciting. It was like a freefall from the launch pad to the arrival platform.

The official inauguration of the zipline is expected to take place in conjunction with the launch of Musandam Winter Festival.

International Sculpture Exhibition held in Suhar

SUHAR: The 10th International Sculpture Exhibition was opened under the auspices of HH Sayyida Hujaija bint Jaifer al Said, on Saturday.

Twenty-four sculptors, representing 11 countries in addition to Omani sculptors, are taking part in the exhibition.

The exhibition contains 22 artworks carved by the participating artists in eight days as part of sculpture camp. All the sculptures express the common theme 'sustainability'.

Dr Ali bin Sulaiman al Jabri, general supervisor of the camp, said that the success of the camp



enhances the state of sculpturing at the international level after ten years of conducting the camp in the Wilayat of Suhar.

A total of 246 sculptures were carved at the international sculptors camp since its inception as more than 235 sculptors from 40 countries participated in the camp, he said. — ONA

DRIVE TO WEED OUT RED PALM WEEVIL



The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) began a campaign to eradicate red palm weevil in the Wilayat of Yanqul in Al Dhahirah Governorate on Sunday. The campaign is conducted by 45 teams. The campaign is part of the measures to protect date palms and limit the spread of the insect in uninfected palm trees. It will continue until March and will target various villages and wilayats of Al Dhahirah Governorate. Since mid-1980s, the red palm weevil and Dubas bug have been reported to cause serious damage to date palms in Oman and in the Gulf region.

Sur maritime heritage festival attracts over 72,000 people

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Omani Maritime Heritage Festival attracted 72,267 visitors over eight days, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said. The festival concluded recently in the Wilayat of Sur.

MoHT sources said the festival was able to highlight the historical role of the Wilayat of Sur in the past and present, promoting and introducing the maritime heritage and tourism potentials in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah and stimulating tourism in the governorate.

The festival featured the Maritime Heritage Village, which depicted the story of the maritime

heritage for which Wilayat of Sur is famous and was well-known in the past for its naval activities.

According to official sources, the festival succeeded in affirming the Wilayat of Sur's role in maritime history is not limited to the Sultanate of Oman but the entire West Asia region. It will be strengthened in the years to come with the development of the Maritime History Museum project.

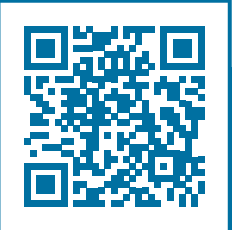
There is a plan to organise the festival annually to introduce such events in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman all around the year, Intisar bint Ali Bahwan al Mukhainiya, Deputy Director of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the South East Governorate, said.



The Heritage Village had corners dedicated to handicrafts related to maritime heritage, folklore sessions, a popular café, a theatre for recreational and cultural events and activities, folk games, and performances of traditional arts related to the sea.

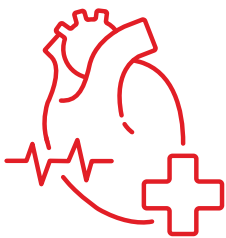
The activities included a simulation show of the traditional sea voyage to embody the historical journey of Omani ships to and from the Omani ports.

An Omani Food Carnival was also held that allowed visitors to explore the most famous Omani and international dishes, focusing on fresh seafood from local sources to reflect the richness of marine wealth in the state, in addition to heritage and entertainment shows.



DON'T JUST SIT THERE

SITTING LONG TIME IS BAD FOR YOUR HEALTH



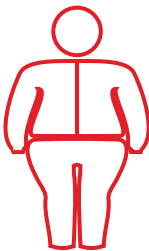
WOMEN WHO SIT FOR MORE THAN **10 HOURS** A DAY HAVE A CONSIDERABLY HIGHER RISK OF HEART DISEASE THAN WOMEN WHO SIT FOR LESS THAN FIVE HOURS A DAY



STANDING CAN HELP YOU FOCUS AND BOOST YOUR MOOD, MAKING YOU MORE PRODUCTIVE



STANDING BURNS BETWEEN 100 AND 200 CALORIES PER HOUR, WHILE SITTING BURNS BETWEEN 60 AND 130



SITTING FOR A LONG TIME NOT ONLY STRAINS YOUR BACK AND NECK BUT ALSO LEADS TO OBESITY



WHEN PEOPLE SIT FOR AN EXTENDED PERIOD, THEIR BLOOD MAY SLOW DOWN AND POOL IN THEIR LEGS

MAI AL ABRI

LACK of physical movement during the day causes severe health issues and, ultimately it is a productivity killer. Sitting for a long time not only strains your back and neck but also leads to obesity and raises the risk of various ailments, according to Dr Saleh al Hinai, Senior Consultant, Family Medicine Physician. A study published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology indicated that women who sit for more than 10 hours a day have a considerably higher risk of heart

disease than women who sit for less than five hours a day. Standing position lowers these risks and alleviates pain, Al Hinai indicated. “By standing, you burn more calories than sitting. Standing burns between 100 and 200 calories per hour, while sitting burns between 60 and 130. However, the calories burned might mount up over time.” A high sit-stand desk encouraged workers to spend more time on their feet, according to an analysis of 53 studies published in Applied Ergonomics journal. Researchers in the United Kingdom discovered that standing for one hour increased

productivity and revitalised 87 per cent of workers. Using a high sit-stand desk might help achieve proper posture. Ideally, the display should be at eye level, around 50 cm from your face and tilted 20 degrees, with your arms bent at 100 degrees at your sides. The wrists should be comfortably hovering above the keyboard, with the weight distributed evenly between the legs. When people sit for an extended period, their blood may slow down and pool in their legs. In the worst-case scenario, this can result in a blood clot. We move our legs as we stand, which causes blood to flow throughout our bodies. People who sat for long periods

had shorter lives in certain studies due to lower cardiovascular health. Standing can help you focus and boost your mood, making you more productive. Workers in a call centre who stood at work were 50 per cent more productive, according to a University of Texas study. Standing makes us feel healthier, and feeling better makes us happier. Sitting, like standing, may cause back pain, but it's not something you have to live with or accept as part of your job. “You can usually treat minor back discomfort if you have a comfortable chair with back support and alternate

intervals of standing,” Al Hinai advised. Our current technologically-focused environment allows us to become inactive quickly. However, technology can also motivate us to better our health by increasing access to physical therapy and telemedicine and even assisting us in staying on top of our prescriptions and managing diabetes. The development of smartwatches is transforming healthcare in an entirely new way, allowing us to control our physical and mental well-being from the palm of our hands. To encourage an active lifestyle, smartwatches give subtle reminders when you've been inactive.



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



DAMAGED RUSSIAN SPACE SHUTTLE SINKS

The damaged Russian space shuttle Progress MS-21 has been brought down in a controlled manner over the Pacific Ocean, the Russian space agency Roscosmos said, according to the Interfax news agency. “Today the Progress MS-21 was taken out of orbit, entered the atmosphere and broke up. The unburned elements of the structure fell into a part of the Pacific Ocean where there is no shipping,” it said.

The Progress cargo shuttle had docked at the International Space Station (ISS) in October 2022. On February 11, 2023, a leak was discovered in the capsule, which was already loaded with waste, resulting in the loss of coolant. — **dpa**

■ VIENNA



15 INJURED IN CARNIVAL PROCESSION IN AUSTRIA

Fifteen people were injured in an accident involving a Carnival float in Austria. According to the local fire brigade on Sunday, the side wall of the vehicle had collapsed during the parade in Reisenberg south-east of Vienna the previous evening. Several participants in costume fell from the low loader onto the road and into a ditch. One man was flown to hospital with serious injuries, while 14 people escaped with lighter injuries. Due to the large crowd around the vehicle and the “increasing drunkenness of several visitors,” the operation was difficult, the fire brigade said. — **dpa**

■ NOUMEA



SHARK KILLS AUSTRALIAN TOURIST IN NEW CALEDONIA

A shark killed a 59-year-old Australian tourist near a crowded beach in the French Pacific territory of New Caledonia, authorities said. The man was swimming close to a pontoon around 150 metres from the beach in the capital Noumea when the shark attacked, biting him several times, they said. Two people sailing their boat nearby rushed him back to the beach, where emergency services tried to save him. The man had major bite wounds in his leg and both arms, local prosecutor Yves Dupas said.

He died at the scene despite receiving cardiac massage. Many people were in the water at the time and witnessed the incident at the Chateau-Royal beach just south of Noumea. — **AFP**

Daughter of Thaksin banking on nostalgia to win Thailand election



Paetongtarn Shinawatra, Pheu Thai Party's most visible candidate for prime minister, greets supporters during the general election campaign in Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand. — **Reuters**

expected in May.

“So we go on each stage to tell people how our policies can change their lives. And only through stable politics can people's lives change in a sustainable manner,” she said, while campaigning in the northeast.

Thaksin and Yingluck were toppled by the army in 2006

and 2014 respectively, despite overseeing big economic growth. Both live in self-imposed exile to avoid prison convictions their allies say were designed to prevent their political comebacks.

The baton has passed to Paetongtarn, Thaksin's youngest daughter, who is using the same playbook in offering minimum

wage hikes, utilities subsidies and long-promised high-speed rail systems and infrastructure to manage floods and droughts.

Pheu Thai's slogan is “Think Big, Act Smart”, taking aim at incremental reforms by the military-backed governments of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha since

Pheu Thai's slogan is ‘Think Big, Act Smart’, taking aim at incremental reforms as the nation goes to polls in May

he seized power in 2014.

“The picture has to be big and we must be able to address longstanding problems that festered. These must be completely dealt with,” said Paetongtarn. Though yet to be named as Pheu Thai's prime ministerial candidate, Paetongtarn is far ahead in opinion polls for premier, with twice the support of Prayuth.

Pheu Thai is expected to win most votes, but could struggle to lead a government given the military's influence over an appointed Senate, which together with the elected lower house chooses the prime minister.

Paetongtarn said she consults regularly and remains close with her father, who lives mainly in Dubai. His chief worry, she said, was her campaigning while nearly seven months pregnant. — **Reuters**

■ NEW RECRUITS GRADUATE



Taliban's newly recruited personnel attend their graduation ceremony in Fayzabad district of Badakhshan province. — **AFP**

Japan bids farewell to 4 pandas returning to China

TOKYO: Thousands of Japanese fans on Sunday bade farewell to four beloved pandas which will be returned to China this week, with some visitors shedding tears.

Visitors flocked to Tokyo's Ueno Zoo to catch a last glimpse of Xiang Xiang, who has been a massive draw for the park since her birth in 2017, and to a park in western Wakayama region for the other three pandas.

In Tokyo, the final viewing of Xiang Xiang, the zoo's first baby panda since 1988, was limited to 2,600 visitors who won a lucky lottery ticket, but some fans who did not win still came.

“I wanted to breathe the same air,” as Xiang Xiang, Mari Asai told the Asahi Shimbun daily. “Even if I cannot see her, my heart is filled with joy knowing she's there,” the 48-year-old said.

Another visitor told local media, crying, that she wanted to be



A visitor records video of female giant panda Xiang Xiang ahead of her return to China at Ueno Zoological Park in Tokyo. — **AFP**

closer to the five-year-old panda. “Everything about her is adorable, whether sleeping or awake,” she said.

Ueno Zoo receives calls and emails everyday from panda fans asking it to keep Xiang Xiang, the Tokyo Shimbun daily reported, citing a zoo official.

The panda was initially set to head to China in 2021 but its departure was postponed multiple times due to travel restrictions linked to the pandemic.

In Wakayama, visitors came to say good-bye to Eimei, which became the world's oldest to father a baby panda in 2020 at age 28, the equivalent of being in his 80s for a human, as well as his twin daughters.

“Everyone is so cute I almost cried,” a woman in her 70s told public broadcaster NHK. “I'm sad they're going back to China.”

The black and white mammals are immensely popular around the world and China loans them out as part of a “panda diplomacy” programme to foster foreign ties.

There are an estimated 1,860 giant pandas left in the wild, mainly in bamboo forests in the mountains of China, according to environmental group WWF. — **AFP**

Hairdresser by day, drone hunter by night helps defend skies over Ukraine



Hairdresser and Ukrainian Territorial Defence unit volunteer Oleksandr Shamshur, works on the hair of his client, Oleksandra, at a beauty salon, in Kyiv. — **Reuters**

Ukrainian people,” Shamshur said as he combed the capital's moonlit skyline through a thermal camera with a range finder from his position on a rooftop.

Nearby, a fellow fighter was adjusting the green barrels of the Soviet-made “Maxim” machine gun.

“But at the same time I can come to the beauty salon and work with the people, do the work I know, cut hair and talk to clients,” said Shamshur.

He said it never occurred to him as a civilian to “run away and hide somewhere” when tens of thousands of Russian armoured

I am a very happy person. Because I am defending my country, I am defending our Ukrainian people

OLEKSANDR SHAMSHU

Hairdresser from Kyiv

forces stormed into a stunned Ukraine last winter and began bombarding Kyiv and other cities.

“With the enemy at the doorstep, I had to do something, I had to act in defence,” he said.

During the night of December 29-30, Shamshur said, his rooftop unit shot down two drones over

Kyiv. His team have also passed on the skills they have learned to other units.

Shamshur sports several badges on his camouflage uniform, including one, “Drone Hunters”, in English, and another in Ukrainian reading “Ronin” — a feudal Japanese warrior — that he has adopted as his nom-de-guerre.

When Russia invaded, Shamshur — an army reservist before the war — learned that his military base had already been destroyed by Russian shelling so he joined territorial defences, initially delivering food to civilians and helping evacuate people.

At work in his salon, still wearing military khaki as he styled a client's hair, he said he tries not to talk to his clients about the war, calling it “dark” in contrast to the “light” in the peaceful part of his life. — **Reuters**



AID GROUP ISSUES URGENT
APPEAL FOR SYRIA

AL HAMMAM CROSSING: The group Doctors Without Borders called for the “urgent scaling up” of earthquake aid to northwest Syria as it delivered a convoy laden with emergency assistance. Aid has been slow to reach Syria’s rebel-held areas since the February 6 quake killed a combined total of more than 44,000 people across Turkiye and Syria.



“An urgent increase in the volume of supplies is needed to match the scale of the humanitarian crisis,” said the

French aid group Doctors Without Borders (MSF). It charged that supplies “currently fail to even match pre-earthquake volumes”.

“Aid is trickling in in negligible amounts for the moment,” said Hakim Khaldi, MSF’s head of mission in Syria. “We emptied our emergency stocks in three days.” — AFP



A view of a living room in Demirkopru, a small destroyed Turkish village now divided by a large crack in Hatay. — AFP

RESCUE EFFORTS END
EXCEPT IN 2 PROVINCES

ISTANBUL: Turkiye has ended rescue efforts in all provinces except the two hardest hit by last week’s massive quake that killed tens of thousands of people, the Turkish disaster agency said Sunday. “In many of our provinces, search and rescue efforts have been completed. They continue in Kahramanmaras and Hatay provinces,” the agency’s chief Yunus Sezer told reporters in Ankara.



The epicentre of the 7.8-magnitude earthquake on February 6 was in Pazarcik district in Kahramanmaras. Sezer said search and rescue efforts continued at around 40 buildings in the provinces on the 14th day, but expected this number to fall by Sunday evening. The agency head also said Turkiye’s death toll had risen to 40,689. The total death toll including Syria is now 44,377. — dpa

BODY OF GHANA FOOTBALL
STAR FLOWN HOME

ACCRA: The remains of former Ghana international footballer Christian Atsu who died in a devastating earthquake in Turkiye were being flown home on Sunday, the country’s foreign ministry said. Atsu, 31, was caught up in a 7.8-magnitude quake that rocked Turkiye and Syria on February 6.



“The remains will be accompanied by his family and Ghana’s ambassador to Turkiye on a Turkish airlines flight and will arrive in Accra at 7:40 pm Sunday,” the foreign ministry said. On Saturday, the ministry said that Atsu’s older brother and twin sister were present at the site of the rescue when his body was recovered. — AFP

SCHOOLS IN SYRIAN CITY
FEEL THE BRUNT

DAMASCUS: Schools in Syria’s coastal city of Latakia have been doubly affected by the earthquake, which struck the war-torn country earlier this month.

Some schools in the city were damaged by the February 6 quake while others have turned into



sheltering facilities for the displaced, landing the schoolchildren’s parents in a dilemma.

“The two schools where my children used to study have been left out from the list of the reopened schools announced by the Latakia education directorate,” Hossam Hassan, a local government employee,said. “One school has been damaged by the quake while the second has turned into a sheltering centre,” added Hassan, who lives with his family in a populous Latakia neighbourhood.

— dpa

Turkiye quake death
toll nears 41,000 as
rescue close to end

ISTANBUL: The total number of people in Turkiye killed in the devastating earthquake has reached 40,689, the disaster authority AFAD said on Sunday.

Search and rescue efforts in nine quake-hit provinces have ended,except Kahramanmaras and Hatay, AFAD Chairman Yunus Sezer told reporters in Ankara.

More than 1.2 million people are believed to have evacuated the south-eastern Turkiye disaster zone. Over 1 million locals currently reside in temporary shelters in quake-hit provinces, AFAD’s Sezer said.

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Turkiye on Sunday to show support to the earthquake-hit country and Nato ally which has had tumultuous ties with Washington.

His visit comes after a 7.8-magnitude tremor hit southeastern Turkiye and northern Syria killing nearly 45,000 people but his trip had been planned before the disaster. It is his first visit to Turkiye since he took office more than two years ago.

The top US diplomat arrived at Incirlik air base in southern Turkiye through which the United States has shipped aid



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu sits in a helicopter with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for a tour of earthquake stricken areas of Hatay Province, at Incirlik Air Base near Adana, Turkiye. — Reuters

Blinken arrives in
Turkiye to show US
support after quake

after the worst natural disaster to hit the region in more than a century. He will meet officials coordinating the delivery of US aid and see the humanitarian effort under way in Hatay, one of the worst affected Turkish provinces.

The United States has sent rescue teams and contributed an initial \$85 million in relief for Turkiye and Syria, deploying helicopters to bring supplies to worst-hit areas.

US-Turkey relations have been strained in recent years,

but Washington has since viewed Ankara as helpful for its mediatory role between Russia and Ukraine since Moscow’s invasion last year.

Blinken visited Ankara late on Sunday ahead of talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Monday where two issues will likely be high on the agenda.

Turkiye wants to buy F-16 fighter jets but the sale is being blocked in Congress due to concerns over Turkiye’s record and threats to Greece.

Blinken will also likely bring up Turkiye’s refusal to ratify Sweden and Finland’s Nato membership applications.

— AFP/dpa

MORE THAN 6,000 AFTERSHOCKS
FOLLOW DEVASTATING QUAKE

ISTANBUL: The devastating quake in the Turkish-Syrian border region has so far been followed by more than 6,000 aftershocks, Turkiye’s disaster authority AFAD said on Sunday. AFAD registered tremors “every three or four minutes” since the quake, around 40 of which were above magnitude 5, AFAD’s Orhan Tatar told reporters in Ankara.



He urged locals to stay away from damaged buildings, adding the authorities were still assessing damage to strategic infrastructure,including dams and tunnels. — dpa

UN SAYS 8.8M PEOPLE
AFFECTED BY QUAKE

DAMASCUS: According to the United Nations, 8.8 million people have been affected by the earthquake disaster in Syria. “(The) majority (is) anticipated to need some form of humanitarian assistance,” UN Deputy Syria Representative Najat Rochdi wrote on Twitter on Sunday.

Activists and aid workers in rebel-held areas in north-western Syria have complained of a lack of UN assistance in the days following the February 6 quakes. During a visit to the region, UN



Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths admitted that the UN had failed to help the victims in the north-western opposition areas.

Observers also saw bureaucratic hurdles for the UN, whose goods could have arrived faster with smaller vehicles than with the usual large trucks in view of war-torn region’s broken roads.

Many left to mourn without a funeral in Turkiye

A N T A K Y A / KAHRAMANMARAS: Rescue efforts in earthquake-hit Turkiye were winding down on Sunday, nearly two weeks after the country’s deadliest disaster in the modern era, with many praying only for bodies to mourn.

“Would you pray to find a dead body? We do ... to deliver the body to the family,” said bulldozer operator Akin Bozkurt as his machine clawed at the rubble of a destroyed building in the town of Kahramanmaras.

“You recover a body from under tonnes of rubble. Families are waiting with hope,” Bozkurt said. “They want to have a burial ceremony. They want a grave.”

Many families just want a funeral and grave to mourn as survivors dug out of rubble 12 days after quake

The head of Turkiye’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), Yunus Sezer, said the search and rescue efforts would largely end on Sunday night.

More than 46,000 people have been killed after the quake struck Turkiye and Syria on February 6. The toll is expected to climb, with some 345,000 apartments in Turkey now



Rescuers search through the rubble of a collapsed building in Kahramanmaras after a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck the country’s south-east. — AFP

known to have been destroyed and many people still missing.

Neither Turkiye nor Syria have said how many people are still unaccounted for following the quake.

Orhan Tatar, General Director of Earthquake and Risk Reduction at Turkiye’s Disaster Management at AFAD, reiterated that the Eastern Anatolian Fault broke apart in five different branches, with 25 kilometres of fractures measured in the province of Malatya alone.

Some 400 kilometres of surface fractures and deformation on the earth’s crust resulted in large shifts, with the largest measured at 7.3 metres

with a depth of eight to nine kilometres.

In one of the last efforts to pull people out of the rubble 12 days after the earthquake, emergency teams on Saturday night began clearing debris with their hands at a rescue site in Antakya.

Search dogs and thermal cameras had detected signs of life from two people, rescuers said, but just after midnight, eight hours into the operation, the teams called off the rescue.

“No one is alive,” said Mujdat Erdogan, a member of AFAD, his face and uniform covered in dust. “I don’t think we can rescue people anymore.”

— Reuters



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In brief

■ MANILA



PLANE CRASHES IN PHILIPPINES, SEARCH UNDERWAY

A small plane with four people on board has crashed in the central Philippines and rescuers were searching for survivors on Sunday, officials said. The Cessna 340 aircraft went missing early on Saturday morning shortly after departing for Manila from Bicol International Airport in Albay province, south of the capital, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP) said in a statement.

The plane was carrying two passengers, a pilot and another crew member, the aviation regulator said. A search-and-rescue team has identified a possible crash site near the airport, CAAP spokesperson Eric Apolonio said. — AFP

■ NUSA DUA



INDONESIA TO REPATRIATE ALLEGED DRUG TRAFFICKER

Indonesian authorities will repatriate alleged drug trafficker Antonio Strangio, an Italian and Australian dual national who was detained in Bali earlier this month, to Italy on Sunday, authorities said. Interpol issued a red notice for Strangio, 32, in 2016 over the sale of 160 kilogrammes of marijuana and links to Italy's 'Ndrangheta' organised crime syndicate, police commissioner Anggaito Hadi Prabowo told reporters. "After coordinating with National Central Bureau in Rome, he must be sent to Italy immediately. He will be delivered from here to Italy, and there he will be called to account on his case until there is a ruling," Anggaito said.

— Reuters

■ SYDNEY



NEW ZEALAND'S CYCLONE DEATH TOLL AT 11

The death toll from Cyclone Gabrielle in New Zealand climbed to 11 as thousands of people remained missing a week after the storm struck the country's North Island. The cyclone hit the island's northernmost region on February 12 and tracked down the east coast, inflicting widespread devastation. Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has called Gabrielle New Zealand's biggest natural disaster this century.

Police said two more people had died in hard-hit Hawke's Bay in circumstances related to the cyclone. — AFP

Israeli strike kills 15 in Syrian capital

BEIRUT: An Israeli air strike on Syria's capital Damascus killed 15 people early on Sunday and badly damaged a building in a district home to several state security agencies, a war monitoring group said.

Civilians, including two women, were among those killed in "the deadliest Israeli attack in the Syrian capital" since the start of the civil war, said Rami Abdel Rahman, head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

The overnight strike cratered a road and wrecked the adjacent 10-storey building in the city's Kafr Sousa district, which is home to senior state officials and Syrian intelligence headquarters, said the Britain-based Observatory.

A woman was also killed in the capital's Mazraa district, possibly hit when Syrian anti-aircraft munitions crashed down from the night sky, said the Observatory.

It was not immediately clear who was the intended target of the strike, which correspondents reported shook the city and left a gaping hole in the street, also blowing out windows of nearby buildings.

Other missiles overnight hit a warehouse used by Hizbullah fighters near Damascus, said the Observatory, which relies on a



A view shows damage at the site of a rocket attack, in central Damascus's Kafr Sousa neighbourhood of Syria. — Reuters

wide network of sources inside Syria.

Syria's defence ministry overnight confirmed the Kafr Sousa attack and gave an initial death toll of five, including one soldier, and 15 wounded civilians, some in critical condition.

Shortly after midnight "the Israeli enemy carried out an aerial aggression from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights targeting several areas in Damascus and

its vicinity, including residential neighbourhoods", it said.

Syrian defence forces had "shot down several missiles", the ministry added in its statement.

Historic buildings near the medieval Damascus citadel were also "severely damaged", said the head of the Syrian antiquities department, Nazir Awad, who blamed "an Israeli missile".

An Israeli army spokesperson on Sunday said "Israel does not

comment on reports in foreign media".

Israel, during more than a decade of war in Syria, has carried out hundreds of air strikes against its neighbour, primarily targeting the country's army, forces and Hizbullah, allies of the Damascus regime.

Israel's military rarely comments on its operations in Syria, but regularly asserts that it will not let its arch enemy Iran extend its

influence to Israel's borders.

"We will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons and we will not allow it to entrench on our northern border," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at Sunday's cabinet meeting, but did not refer directly to the Damascus strike.

Late last year, the head of the Israel Defence Forces Operations Directorate, Major General Oded Basiuk, presenting an operational outlook for 2023, said the army "will not accept Hizbullah 2.0 in Syria".

In Tehran, foreign ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani on Sunday "strongly condemned the attacks of the regime against targets in Damascus and its suburbs, including against certain residential buildings". The raids had left "a number of innocent Syrian citizens" dead and injured, he said.

The Syrian conflict started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful protests, and escalated to pull in multiple foreign powers and global fighters.

Nearly half a million people have been killed, and the conflict has forced around half of the country's pre-war population from their homes.

— AFP

North Korea says it fired ICBM as warning to US, Seoul

SEOUL: North Korea said on Sunday it had test-fired an intercontinental ballistic missile as a warning to Washington and Seoul, saying the successful "surprise" drill demonstrated Pyongyang's capacity to launch a "fatal nuclear counterattack".

In response, the United States and South Korea staged joint air drills featuring a strategic bomber and stealth fighter jets, Seoul said. The United States and Japan also held a joint military drill on Sunday, Tokyo's defence ministry said.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ordered the "sudden launching drill" at 8 am on Saturday and a Hwasong-15 missile, a weapon first tested by the North in 2017, was fired from Pyongyang airport that afternoon, the official KCNA reported.

South Korea's military said it detected an ICBM launch at 17:22 on Saturday. Japan said the missile flew for 66 minutes before splashing down in its Exclusive Economic Zone, with their analysis indicating it was capable of hitting the mainland United

States.

North Korea's leadership hailed the test, its first in seven weeks, saying it showed "the actual war capacity of the ICBM units which are ready for mobile and mighty counterattack", state media KCNA said.

The launch was "actual proof" of the country's "capacity of fatal nuclear counterattack on the hostile forces", it said.

The South Korean military said on Sunday it had staged joint air drills with the United States featuring at least one US B-1B long-range bomber.

"The exercise displayed the timely and immediate deployment of the US extended deterrence assets to the Korean peninsula," demonstrating the "overwhelming force" of the allies, the defence ministry said in a statement.

US and Japanese forces also held a joint exercise on Sunday "amid an increasingly severe security environment", Japan's defence ministry said, although it offered no details about the type of drill conducted.

— AFP



The 2nd Air Wing of Japan Air Self-Defence Force's F-15s fighters hold a joint military drill with the US F-16s fighters at Sea of Japan, off Japan's southernmost main island of Kyushu, Japan. — Reuters

EU to help Ukraine with new munition procurement



The European Commission's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell Fontelles, Sweden's Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas attend a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in Munich. — AFP

MUNICH: In view of Ukraine's great need for ammunition, the EU is working on a new procurement procedure, EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Josep Borrell confirmed at the Munich Security Conference on Sunday.

According to Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, the aim is to use a procedure similar to the one used to ensure the swift procurement of vaccines during the coronavirus pandemic.

According to Kallas, EU states should make money available, which would then be used to award large contracts to the defence industry via the EU. The procedure could ensure that the industry can make the necessary investments to expand production.

"Russia is firing in a day the monthly European production of artillery shells," Kallas added, pointing out that the Russian defence industry was currently

working in three shifts. In the EU, production capacities had to be expanded quickly. Without ammunition, Ukraine could not win the war.

"We are in war mode, urgent war mode," Borrell said. It is now a matter of reacting quickly, he said.

According to Kallas, the so-called European Peace Facility could also play a role. It is a financial instrument through which the EU already supports arms and equipment deliveries to Ukraine and training programmes for the armed forces. So far, €3.6 billion have been released to support the Ukrainian armed forces.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian officials have urged US Congress members to press President Joe Biden's administration to send F-16 jet fighters to Kyiv, saying the aircraft would boost Ukraine's ability to hit Russian missile units with US-made rockets, lawmakers said.

The lobbying came over the

weekend on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in talks between Ukrainian officials, including Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, and Democrats and Republicans from the Senate and House of Representatives.

"They told us that they want (F-16s) to suppress enemy air defences so they could get their drones" beyond Russian front lines, Senator Mark Kelly, a former astronaut who flew US Navy fighters in combat, said on Saturday evening.

Biden last month said "no" when asked if he would approve Ukraine's request for Lockheed-Martin-made F-16s.

Four delegations from the Senate and House combined in what members called the largest number of US lawmakers to attend Europe's premier security gathering since it started in 1963, demonstrating clear bipartisan support for Ukraine. — dpa

Dealing with job loss anxiety



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

Last month, Google laid off over 12,000 of its employees from different sectors. This news caused negative feelings among employees in other companies ranging from guilt.

“Why do I still have a job while my friends are jobless” to feeling insecure “am I going to be next?”.

Psychological safety at work is an important concept that is often overlooked. We all need to feel secure so we can give our full potential to the work we are doing and focus on our performance, yet the recent climate of job losses and companies closing either due to Covid or any other causes leaves us worried about the future.

Some of us experience constant fear of being laid off which can be severe enough to affect our

mental health.

Therefore it’s not a surprise that more people overwork in order to prove their worth or use immoral techniques to keep their jobs and throw “others under the bus”, while others experience lack of confidence doubting their contributions to the company and falling prays for worrying overthinking which impact their performance and increase the chance that they do get laid off.

The advance in technology and the use of Artificial Intelligence in different industries including healthcare and education has also contributed to people losing their jobs.

What used to be the plot of science fiction movies a few years ago about machines taking over certain jobs are now reality. The

KEEP LEARNING NEW SKILLS AS THIS HELPS YOU FOCUS AT WORK RATHER THAN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND WHY YOUR COLLEAGUES GOT LAID OFF AND WHEN IT WOULD BE YOUR TURN

Internet of things and chatbots have taken the jobs of some customer service workers and public relation officers and are making progress in some health care jobs, in short, no one is safe.

So, what can we do if we are experiencing anxiety about being laid off from work?

Psychologist Mark Travers in an article published in Psychology Today suggests two

tips to overcome such feelings.

First, focus on maintaining the good quality of your work, it’s understandable that you may experience a lack of enthusiasm to continue working on a project if you are not sure whether you will be still around to complete it or not.

Psychologists suggest that uncertainty can be a great motivator to keep going. Think about it this way, if you are terminated from your current job you will need to show your new employer that you are confident and able to work under stressful situations which will make you ahead of other applicants.

If on the other hand you start to be occupied with the risk of being terminated you would lose focus on your work which

will have a negative impact on your performance, this would be noticed by your employer who may decide to add you to the list of people who would be terminated.

This way your fears become true because you’re overthinking.

The second tip is to keep learning new skills. This will help you focus at work rather than trying to understand why your colleagues got laid off and when it would be your turn.

Think about it as an opportunity to grow in your current organisation and bring new skills and contributions to the company.

It’s even better if you select to learn new skills that are beyond your areas of expertise as this will make you indispensable.

Quake fuels conspiracy posts on US antenna station

ROLAND LLOYD PARRY AND PAULA CABESCU

Conspiracy theories about a US research station have resurged, with social media users falsely blaming it for the Turkiye-Syria earthquakes, following debunked claims it causes weather disasters and spreads the coronavirus.

Scientists have for years been refuting claims that the High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP), with its Alaska facility boasting 180 radio antennae, is a US government-backed programme to weaponise the atmosphere and subjugate the population.

The series of earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, killing tens of thousands of people, gave rise to a new variant of the theory on social media in various languages. It has been dismissed by experts as science fiction.

Some users cited flashes of light before the quake as evidence they were artificially generated by HAARP.

Some claimed it was to punish Turkiye for resisting the admission of new member countries to Nato.

“This is so crazy. It’s like asking if the earthquake was caused by Bugs Bunny digging for carrots,” said David Keith, professor of applied physics at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

“There is simply no known mechanism for anything remotely like HAARP to have any impact on earthquakes.”

HAARP sends radio waves to heat electrons in the ionosphere, the top layer of Earth’s atmosphere, to study their effects on communications systems.

Its waves are not big enough to reach Turkiye. Quakes are caused by movements of the Earth’s crust.

Experts said lights are commonly seen during earthquakes.

Theories vary about their origin. In some cases, they come from power lines or electricity stations shaken by the quake.

HAARP was run by the United States Air Force and Navy before being handed over in 2015 to the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Michael Lockwood, professor of space environment physics at the University of Reading, said claims about HAARP being used as a weapon may have stemmed from the programme initially using radio waves to communicate with submarines — a function that became obsolete after the Cold War. — AFP

Give Ukraine what it needs to win



Nicholas Kristof

The writer is a NYT opinion columnist

Russian Air Force pilots are scaredy-cats who have been surprisingly absent over Ukraine. Russian ground forces are being mowed down as cannon fodder, and one of the best known examples of Russian military discipline involves an officer using a sledgehammer to execute a fellow Russian.

But the Russian war effort does excel in some areas:

It stands out at committing atrocities. In my interviews in Ukraine, I was struck by how commonly Russian troops engaged in torture, abuse and pillage.

Russia’s government has become a leader in child trafficking, transferring more than 6,000 Ukrainian children to Russia or Russian-controlled territory, with some put up for adoption.

Russia has manipulated Western fears that it might use nuclear weapons, thus deterring the United States from fully supporting Ukraine in this war. We give Ukraine enough to survive but, so far, not enough to win.

So a year after Vladimir Putin’s all-out invasion of Ukraine, it’s time for President Biden to reassess and give Ukraine what it needs to end this war and save Ukrainian and Russian lives alike.

“We are well past the point of trying to measure this a few systems at a time,” said James Stavridis, a retired four-star admiral and supreme allied commander at Nato. “Putin is all in, and we should be as well. That means fighter aircraft, ATACMS, high-end anti-ship cruise missiles — the kitchen sink.”

More on specific hardware in a moment. But many military experts agree that while Biden has generally done well in supporting Ukraine, we should be doing even more.

“We’re modulating what we’re giving Ukraine,” said Wesley Clark, a retired four-star general and Nato supreme allied commander.

“We’re bleeding out the Ukrainians. People are dying as a result.”

“If we want to end the war with a negotiated peace, we have to figure out the battlefield situation that will lead to a successful negotiation,” Clark added.

“That probably requires going

RUSSIA HAS MANIPULATED WESTERN FEARS THAT IT MIGHT USE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THUS DETERRING THE UNITED STATES FROM FULLY SUPPORTING UKRAINE IN THIS WAR

after Crimea in a serious way to convince Putin that he can’t win.”

It is also important to send a message — to Xi Jinping as well as Putin — that invasions do not pay. Of all the geopolitical nightmares ahead, perhaps the most horrific is a war over Taiwan — and one way to reduce that risk may be to ensure that Putin lives a nightmare today.

So this is not just about Ukraine. Viktor Yushchenko, a former president of Ukraine who was mysteriously poisoned after he challenged Russian interests, told me that Ukraine is a hostage in the larger Russian challenge to the global order. “It is disappointing that the West has failed to grasp this and to define what victory

really means. It is not just ensuring that Ukraine wins, but also guaranteeing future international security.”

To his great credit, Biden has strongly backed Ukraine, held together support of allies and provided training for Ukrainian forces and increasingly powerful weaponry. Over time, the United States has agreed to send HIMARS rocket launchers, Patriot missile systems and M1 Abrams tanks — although the Patriots and Abrams tanks have yet to arrive.

Biden has pursued gradualism because of legitimate concerns that if Putin is backed into a corner, he could lash out at Nato territory or use tactical nuclear weapons.

“We believe it would be irresponsible if we weren’t thinking about escalation,” said a senior administration official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, and that’s true. But most analysts think it is unlikely that Putin would use tactical nuclear weapons, partly because they would achieve little on the battlefield and would antagonise China and India.

“Why would they do this in a fit of anger and get all the negative outcomes?” asked Ben Hodges, a retired lieutenant general and commander of Army forces in Europe. “I think we have just deterred ourselves.”

— New York Times



To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

One needs a journey of relief...

Life challenges keep emerging every now and then; regardless how big or small a challenge is, it marks a part of life experiences. Though challenges are not always serious ones, they are matters that need part of our attention, time and effort to overcome them. Hence, with every dawn comes with a different surprise that might be pleasing or frustrating.

All that matters is the way of handling every challenge comes across every single day! It is our call whether to make it or break it as possibly we could receive more than a challenge on a day! Occasionally, it is our work place, others' attitude, or finance-related issues could be the reasons behind getting us challenged or irritated. Our feelings, personalities and those working or living with us could be another reason too.

It happens like anything else in life as days are not always the same. Yet, it is us who control how we run the show on every single day in life; despite what happens around us. Being positive and looking at the positive side of each experience we come through is the best way to overcome the disappointing moments. Although it is not easy to manage our reaction, attitudes and feelings, we should always try our best to enjoy every moment of life.

Looking back at the old days of history, let's reflect on the story of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) Ascension Day. This day, which is also called Isra'a Wal Miraj, was a 2-parts night journey arranged by the Almighty Allah to the Prophet. The first part, Isra, was a travel on the back of a winged mule-like white beast, called Buraq, from Mecca to Jerusalem where he led the past Prophets in prayer. The second part was Ascension of the Prophet to Heaven where he was instructed by Allah of the duty



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WITH EVERY DAWN COMES WITH A DIFFERENT SURPRISE THAT MIGHT BE PLEASING OR FRUSTRATING

for Muslims to pray five times a day, which is still a pillar of Islam.

The occasion is being observed by Muslims all over the world on the 27th of Rajab, the seventh month in the Islamic Calendar. It is one of the most important events in the history of Islam. The anniversary of this historical story signifies the importance of patience while facing challenges of life. As well, it teaches human beings how strong they should be like all the Prophets of Allah who were struggling with their people. They were sparing no effort to guide their people and teach them the religions and messages from Allah.

The night journey was a matter of seeing Heaven and Hell and getting new revelations from Allah. Before the night was over, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had returned to Mecca where his journey started. In fact, this ascension was not the end of Prophet's life for he lived about another 10 years after that. The Isra'a Wal Miraj journey was a relief to the Prophet after he lost his wife Khadija and his uncle Abdulmotalib who was signifying the real family support to him.

The journey of Isra'a Wal Miraj is described in the Holy Quran, "Glory to Him Who carried His beloved by night from the Sacred Masjid to the Furthest Masjid, whose precincts We have blessed, to show him of Our wonders! He it is Who is All-Hearing, All-Seeing! Remember when We said to you that your Lord encompasses mankind in His knowledge. Nor did We make the vision We showed you except as a test to people, as also the accursed tree in the Quran."

It has been believed that the Isra'a Wal Miraj was not only a physical journey, but of a high spiritual level where the Prophet made the journey through spiritual vision. During his ascension, he was met by the past Prophets Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus and others as well. Further, the Angel Gabrieli accompanied the Prophet to some extent of the ascension.

COOLING OFF!



An Afghan vendor sprinkles water onto the vegetables arranged in a cart as he waits for customers along a road on the outskirts of Jalalabad on Sunday. – AFP

Oman — A unique structure of social edifice

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has given Royal directives to grant social privileges and benefits to certain categories of retired Omanis and other entitled for social protection. The Royal gesture succinctly reflects His Majesty's munificent heart as well as his noble and kind generosity.

Oman's family model is unique in its type, and perhaps without a parallel or equal elsewhere. As per this model, the family is always considered the basic social unit in the society, consisting of parents and their children.

The family is blended into a harmonious whole, forming a congruous unit within the society.

Traditionally, Omanis descend from remote villages and suburbs where family members dwell under the same roof and usually under one head.

But due to changes and compulsions of employment and work patterns as a result of development Oman has witnessed over the last few decades, Omanis moved to work in locations which are far from their home villages. Such a change meant that the family can no longer stay under the same roof, nor can the



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THE ROYAL DIRECTIVES ARE MEANT TO STRENGTHEN THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL EDIFICE OF OMAN, SO THAT OMANIS CONTINUE TO ENJOY HAPPINESS, WELL-BEING AND PROSPERITY FOR THE YEARS TO COME

majority of them, in most times, commute and travel back and forth between suburbs and cities on a daily basis. But the inherited and established customary pattern of Oman's family model is preserved, but with an improved way of integration.

Omanis, even if they are in the state of matrimony and have

children, they still remain close and strongly attached to their parents. By the end of week, Omanis travel to their home villages, no matter how remote or distant they are to see their elderly parents and visit relatives. The weekend commuting has become a habitual tradition among Omanis, for which they take

delight in visiting their elderly parents and providing them with the care and regard.

The passion Omanis have in serving their parents give them great pleasure, extreme satisfaction and a high degree of gratification, even though elderly parents cling to their home villages and refuse to move away

from them. It is a unique tradition which the Omanis still hold on tightly and tenaciously and are persistent in maintaining and adhering to such valued and desired distinguishing inherent quality. Omanis pass such customary patterns to their children from the early stage of life, to ensure that such traditions remain untouched by anything that diminishes them.

That is why Omanis are marked, at all times, by polished manners and respect to their parents who as they grow elderly, their sons and daughters never detach themselves from, a matter that reveals distinctive courteous and respectful behaviour among Omanis.

As His Majesty the Sultan ordered more public welfare benefits in the latest Royal directives, Oman is indeed fortunate to have a merciful and compassionate leader. There is no doubt that the Royal directives are meant to strengthen the structure of the social edifice of Oman, so that Omanis continue to enjoy happiness, well-being and prosperity for the years to come.



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Arsenal regain top spot as Man City stumble

LONDON: Arsenal regained pole position in the Premier League title race on Saturday as the Gunners fought back for a thrilling 4-2 victory at Aston Villa, while Manchester City were held to a damaging 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest.

Just three days after surrendering first place with a 3-1 defeat against City, Arsenal bounced back in impressive style to move two points clear of the champions.

With just minutes left at Villa Park, Mikel Arteta's side were in danger of slipping up again in their bid to win the title for the first time since 2004.

Arsenal twice trailed to goals from Ollie Watkins and Philippe Coutinho, only for Bukayo Saka and then Oleksandr Zinchenko to haul them level.

Deep into second half stoppage-time, Arsenal received a helping hand from their former keeper as Emiliano Martinez inadvertently deflected Jorginho's shot into his own net after it hit the bar.

Gabriel Martinelli capped Arsenal's remarkable escape when he tapped into the empty net in the final seconds after Martinez was caught upfield at a Villa corner.

"We are back with more belief than before because you have to turn performances into results," Arteta said.

"The team showed a lot of emotional qualities that are needed. I'm really happy."

Arsenal's first victory in five games in all competitions will give them renewed belief they can pip City to the title.

The Gunners, who have a game in hand on the champions, were

given a massive boost by their title rivals' stumble just hours later.

Bernardo Silva put Pep Guardiola's men ahead four minutes before half-time, taking Jack Grealish's pass in his stride and drilling a clinical finish past Keylor Navas from 20 yards.

But the tension mounted as City searched for a second goal and Guardiola was booked for manhandling the fourth official after Erling Haaland's penalty appeal was rejected following Joe Worrall's challenge.

PROFLIGATE CITY

City were undone by their profligacy as Haaland missed a series of chances before Chris Wood tapped in Morgan Gibbs-White's cross in the 84th minute.

"We had amazing chances but it's football. We have to score," Guardiola said. "It's one of the best games we played but we dropped two points. We should be more aggressive. There are many games still to play, we know it."

Liverpool got back into the hunt for a top four place after ending Newcastle's 17-game unbeaten league run with a 2-0 win at St James' Park.

Darwin Nunez fired Liverpool ahead from just inside the area after 10 minutes and Cody Gakpo doubled the lead seven minutes later with a close-range finish.

Newcastle keeper Nick Pope was sent off in the 22nd minute after handling the ball outside the area.

Jurgen Klopp's eighth placed side — who were the last team to beat Newcastle in the league in August — are six points behind the Magpies with a game in hand. Fourth placed Newcastle are winless in their last



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka in action with Aston Villa's Boubacar Kamara. — Reuters

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SATURDAY:

Aston Villa 2 (Watkins 5, Coutinho 31) Arsenal 4 (Saka 16, Zinchenko 61, Martinez 90-og, Martinelli 90+8)
Brentford 1 (Janelt 90+6) Crystal Palace 1 (Eze 69)
Brighton 0 Fulham 1 (Solomon 88)
Chelsea 0 Southampton 1 (Ward-Prowse 45+1)
Everton 1 (Coleman 64) Leeds 0
Newcastle 0 Liverpool 2 (Nunez 10, Gakpo 17)
Nottingham Forest 1 (Wood 84) Manchester City 1 (Silva 41)
Wolves 0 Bournemouth 1 (Tavernier 49)

four league matches.

"Both goals were outstanding. When you are not in your best moment you have to fight and that's what we did. It feels great

to be honest," Klopp said. "It's too early to say we are there again, but we are a step further forward."

Everton moved out of the relegation zone with a valuable 1-0

win against fellow strugglers Leeds at Goodison Park.

Seamus Coleman netted in the 64th minute when the veteran Everton defender hooked over a cross that caught out Leeds keeper Illan Meslier, who left a gap at his near post for the ball to squeeze into the net.

Sean Dyche's side have won two of their three matches since he replaced the sacked Frank Lampard and now sit one point above the bottom three, while managerless Leeds are in 19th place.

Under-fire Chelsea boss Graham Potter suffered another blow as bottom of the table

Southampton won 1-0 at Stamford Bridge. James Ward-Prowse scored his 17th Premier League free-kick — one behind David Beckham's record in the competition -- to give Southampton the lead in first half stoppage-time.

Chelsea were booed off at full-time after a result that left them languishing in 10th place, with just two wins in their last 14 games in all competitions and none in their last five.

Bournemouth climbed out of the relegation zone with a 1-0 win at Wolves.

Sixth-placed Fulham won 1-0 at Brighton, while Brentford and Crystal Palace drew 1-1. — AFP

Tight clashes in semis of HM Cup today



ADIL AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, FEB 19

Defending champions Seeb will focus to defend their title in the His Majesty's Cup football 2022-23 when they meet Al Suwaiq in the semifinal first leg on Monday. The match will start at 17:20 at Seeb Stadium.

In the other semifinal, last edition runners-up Al Rustaq will host Al Buraimi representatives Al Nahda at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The fixture will begin on Monday at 19:40.

All the teams who confirmed their presence in the last-four stage of the coveted cup are positioned in the top order of top-flight Omantel League. Al Nahda are leading the table order with 38 points while Al Suwaiq are positioned second with 32 points followed by Al Rustaq in third place with 31 points. Seeb are

in fourth position with 26 points.

Despite their positions in the Omantel League, Monday's both matches are classified as intense clashes and may decide the nearest final representatives for the scheduled final encounter on March 9 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Seeb, coached by experienced Rasheed Jaber, will depend on different key players including Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohsin al Ghassani, Mohammed al Musalami, Eid al Farasi and others. The team geared up for this match with series of internal training sessions at the club headquarters in Al Khoudh.

Seeb ended their last game in the league with a 1-0 win over Sur on Wednesday. Seeb's star Salah al Yahyaei scored the only goal and he is among the top members in the squad.

For the semifinal, Seeb's board of directors decided to open the stadium doors free for all the fans to attend and cheer the team.

Al Suwaiq, on the other hand, will eye for a bright ending of their season in the HM Cup competition.

AL SUWAIQ IN BEST FORM

Al Suwaiq coach Ibrahim Sumar led his team to a crucial win in the previous round of Omantel League as they beat Al Nasr 2-0.

The team is showing the best technical performance currently with no injuries as main scorer Issam al Subhi is back to the field. Al Suwaiq features strong players in the squad including Ahmed al Khamisi and Fayeze al Rushedi. The northern Batinah team's last title was in 2016 and they would like to rekindle the memories again this year.

In the Monday's late match, Al Nahda, who are chasing their historic title, will target to overcome Al Rustaq to be a step ahead from the long awaited title.

Coach Hamed al Azani's men are on the right track in the top-tier league as the team is leading the league order with a comfortable difference than Al Suwaiq by six points. The team will work hard to lift the two top domestic titles this season.

Al Rustaq will look forward for another top show in this year's HM Cup as they had registered their names in the top honours of the last season by reaching to the final game.

Despite their drop in the last game against Oman Club in the Omantel League, Al Rustaq players will be eager to clinch a positive result in last-four match against Al Nahda.



England's James Anderson (R) appeals for a LBW call on New Zealand's Scott Kuggeleijn (L) during day four of the first Test at Bay Oval. — AFP

England thrash Kiwis with 'Bazball' and Broad-side in first Test

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand: England's 'Bazball' revolution continued apace on Sunday when the tourists wrapped up a thumping 267-run victory over New Zealand in the first Test on Sunday with the best part of two days to spare at Bay Oval.

It was a first Test victory for England in New Zealand since 2008 and a 10th win in 11 matches since former Black Caps skipper Brendon 'Baz' McCullum and Christchurch-born Ben Stokes took over as coach and captain.

The Black caps were perhaps still shell-shocked after Stuart Broad's brilliant spell with the pink ball on Saturday evening and only Daryl Mitchell offered any real resistance as they slumped to 126 all out in the opening session of the fourth day.

"Another great performance," said Stokes. "Very clinical with the bat and very clinical with the ball. We executed as well as we wanted to." "It was entertaining cricket and that's what we want to do. We're just trying to put on a show."

Broad (4-49) laboured in vain on Sunday to get his 20th five-wicket haul in Tests, but his strike partner James Anderson (4-18) stepped up to lead the mopping up of the New Zealand tail. The pair on Saturday supplanted Australia's Glenn

SCOREBOARD

England 1st innings 325-9	
New Zealand 1st innings 306	
England 2nd innings 374	
New Zealand 2nd innings	
T Latham b Broad	15
D Conway b Broad	2
K Williamson b Broad	0
H Nicholls c Foakes b Robinson	7
D Mitchell not out	57
T Blundell b Broad	1
M Bracewell c Brook b Leach	25
S Kuggeleijn lbw Anderson	2
T Southee c Root b Anderson	0
N Wagner c Foakes b Anderson	9
B Tickner b Anderson	8
Total (45.3 overs, all out)	126
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-14, 3-19, 4-27, 5-28, 6-68, 7-71, 8-71, 9-91, 10-126	
Bowling: Anderson 10.3-3-18-4, Broad 15-5-49-4, Robinson 8-0-34-1, Leach 11-4-25-1, Root 1-1-0-0	

McGrath and Shane Warne as the most prolific Test bowling partnership and now have a combined 1,009 wickets from 113 matches together.

"When you've got the likes of Jimmy Anderson and Stuart Broad in your bowling attack, it's always going to be tough for any side with bat in hand," Stokes added.

Promising young England batsman Harry Brook was named Man of the Match for his half centuries in each innings.

New Zealand have lost or drawn their last five Test series and now need to win the second Test in Wellington, which will start on Friday, to save this series.

— Reuters

7-WICKET JADEJA SHINES AS INDIA HAMMER AUSTRALIA

INDIA RETAIN BORDER - GAVASKAR TROPHY

NEW DELHI: India spinner Ravindra Jadeja on Sunday returned career-best figures of 7-42 to help India take an unbeatable 2-0 Test series lead with a six-wicket thrashing of Australia inside three days of a dramatic match.

Jadeja, a left-arm orthodox bowler, teamed up with fellow spinner Ravichandran Ashwin to dismiss Australia for 113 in a morning session when the tourists' batting imploded, thanks to overusing the sweep shot on a tricky New Delhi pitch.

The hosts romped to their victory target of 115 in the second session, guaranteeing that they retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy in the four-match series. They have won their previous three series against Australia and are now close to securing a spot in the World Test Championship final.

India lost skipper Rohit Sharma, run out after a fluent 31, and Virat Kohli, who surpassed 25,000 international runs during his innings, stumped on 20.

Nathan Lyon took two wickets to return a match-haul of seven.

Cheteshwar Pujara stood firm with 31 in his landmark 100th Test to steer his team home with a winning four, as wicketkeeper-batsman Srikar Bharat, unbeaten on 23, looked on.

"We were prepared for them coming out and playing shots," Rohit said of his team's bowling plan. "Our idea was to not panic and just hit the right areas, waiting for the mistake to happen, and that's exactly what happened." He added: "So our focus was keeping it tight in the morning, and these guys (Jadeja and Ashwin) are the masters of bowling in these conditions."

Australia, who also lost the opening Test inside three days, crashed from their overnight 61-1 to be bowled out in 31.1 overs, after losing nine wickets for 52 runs in just over 90 minutes of mayhem.

Jadeja improved on his previous Test best of 7-48, adding to the three he took in the first innings. Ashwin grabbed the remaining three in the Australian second innings. Off-spinner Ashwin struck in the first over of the day to get Travis Head caught behind for 43, three balls after the left-hander hit a boundary to add to his overnight score.

'THIS LOSS HURTS'

Marnus Labuschagne attempted



SCOREBOARD

Australia 1st innings 263 all out

India 1st innings 262 all out

Australia 2nd innings	
U Khawaja c Iyer b Jadeja	6
T Head c Bharat b Ashwin	43
M Labuschagne b Jadeja	35
S Smith lbw Ashwin	9
M Renshaw lbw Ashwin	2
P Handscomb c Kohli b Jadeja	0
A Carey b Jadeja	7
P Cummins b Jadeja	0
N Lyon b Jadeja	8
T Murphy not out	3
M Kuhnemann b Jadeja	0
Total (all out, 31.1 overs)	113

Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-65, 3-85, 4-95, 5-95, 6-95, 7-95, 8-110, 9-113, 10-113

Bowling: Ashwin 16-3-59-3, Shami 2-0-10-0, Jadeja 12-1-1-42-7, Axar 1-0-2-0

India 2nd innings

R Sharma run out	31
KL Rahul c Carey b Lyon	1
C Pujara not out	31
V Kohli st Carey b Murphy	20
S Iyer c Murphy b Lyon	12
S Bharat not out	23
Total (four wickets, 26.4 overs)	118
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-39, 3-69, 4-88	
Bowling: Kuhnemann 7-0-38-0, Lyon 12-3-49-2, Murphy 6-4-2-22-1, Head 1-0-9-0	

to take the attack to the opposition with the paddle shot and the reverse sweep, but was bowled by Jadeja for 35.

David Warner's concussion substitute Matt Renshaw looked clueless against spin in his eight balls at the crease, before he missed an attempted sweep, giving Ashwin

another lbw.

Wickets fell like nine-pins and Lyon narrowly averted a Jadeja hat-trick. The bowler kept up the charge to wrap up the Australian innings, which started on a promising note near the end of day two.

"Everyone controls their own game, some balls just have your

name," skipper Pat Cummins said on the overuse of the sweep. "But we need a review on the shot choice. "Both games were disappointing, this one in particular," he added. "We were ahead in the game and that doesn't happen often in India. This loss hurts."

Man of the match Jadeja said the sweep shot was "not a good option" against him on this pitch, which saw low bounce.

Axar Patel set up victory with his counter-attacking 74 on Saturday, lifting India from a precarious 139-7 to just one short of Australia's first-innings total. — AFP

Yalla Shabab, Oman Stallions register victories



Hasnain Ul Wahab, Mohammed Zahid and Hannan Rizwan of Yalla Shabab.



Mohit Patel, Bilal Khan and Jiten Ramanandi of Oman Stallions.

MUSCAT: Yalla Shabab beat Zawawi Powertech by 4 wickets and Oman Stallions beat Ibn Abdul Samad (IAS CT) by 44 runs in the Oman Cricket Premier Division League powered by Muscat Pharmacy at the weekend.

Opting to bat first, Zawawi Powertech cruised their innings through courtesy of Gowtham Sagar (40 off 62b; 3x4,2x6) , Muhammed Raheem (32 off 37b; 3x4,2x6) and Prabhakaran Kannan (29 off 27b; 3x4,1x6) scoring 199 all out in 49.1 overs.

Muhammed Zahid (3-43), Nester Dhamba (2-36) and Wasim Ali (2-31) were the key wicket-takers for the Yalla Shabab.

In reply, Yalla Shabab's Hasnain Ul Wahab (73 off 80b; 8x4,2x6) and Hannan Rizwan (61 off 74b; 7x4) sealed the deal to chase down the target in 42.4 overs. Nishad KS (2-32) was the key striker to restrict the chase to an extent for Zawawi. Yalla Shabab registered their fifth win in six games in the first round of the Premier Division.

STALLIONS THIRD

In another match, Stallions elected to bat first against IAS CT. Stallions kept losing wickets at regular intervals with only Jitenkumar Ramanandi (69 off 83b; 7x4) and Yasir Ali (38 off 78b; 1x4,1x6) being able to notch a few runs. Stallions reached to 149 all

out in 39.2 overs. Mehdi Hasan (4-40), Rana Naeem (3-11) and Sagheer Ahmed (2-16) picked key wickets for IAS CT.

In reply, the Stallions bowlers were on point with their lines and picked wickets not allowing IAS CT's batsmen to settle. Mohammed Waqas (52 off 74b; 3x4,2x6) was the lone scorer for IAS CT helping them get to 105 all out in 31.4 overs falling short by 44 runs to the target. Bilal Khan (4-30), Mohit Patel (4-40) and Faisal Shah (2-15) were the

wicket-takers for the Stallions. Oman Stallions stand at third in the standings with 5 wins out of 7 games in the first round of the Premier Division.

AUSTRALIA ENTER WOMEN’S T20 WORLD CUP SEMIFINALS

ENGLAND EDGE INDIA TO BOOST LAST-FOUR HOPES



Australia's Ashleigh Gardner watches the ball after playing a shot during the Group A T20 women's World Cup match between South Africa and Australia at St George's Park in Gqeberha, South Africa. — AFP

GQEBERHA, South Africa: Australia powered their way into the semifinals of the Women's T20 World Cup on Saturday, confirming their status as favourites, while England looked their most likely challengers.

Australia were put under pressure by South Africa and an enthusiastic home crowd at St George's Park in Gqeberha, but won comfortably in the end by six wickets with 21 balls to spare.

In the earlier game of a double-header England remained the only other unbeaten team by inflicting a first defeat on India, winning by 11 runs.

Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner ensured Australia would finish top of Group 1 with aggressive batting after their side had been in trouble.

Chasing 125 to win, Australia slipped to 40 for three but McGrath and Gardner went for their shots in a fourth-wicket partnership of 81.

McGrath hit 57 off 33 balls before being caught going for a big hit with four runs needed to win.

WOMEN'S T20 WORLD CUP TABLES						
GROUP 1						
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR	
AUS-W	4	4	0	8	2.149	
SL-W	3	2	1	4	-0.194	
SA-W	3	1	2	2	0.685	
NZ-W	3	1	2	2	-1.517	
BD-W	3	0	3	0	-1.721	
GROUP 2						
TEAM	M	W	L	PT	NRR	
ENG-W	3	3	0	6	1.776	
IND-W	3	2	1	4	0.205	
PAK-W	2	1	1	2	1.542	
WI-W	3	1	2	2	-0.913	
IRE-W	3	0	3	0	-1.989	

She reached her half-century off 29 deliveries. Gardner made 28 not out off 29 balls.

"Tahlia was excellent, Ash as well," said Australian captain Meg Lanning.

"They summed up the conditions really well and put the pressure back on South Africa."

South Africa captain Sune Luus said her team had failed to capitalise on a good start to their innings after they were sent in to bat.

"We just didn't have enough runs on the board," she said.

Australia completed their group matches with four wins from four matches while defeat was a blow to South Africa's chances of reaching the semifinals.

With only one win from their first three matches, South Africa will rely on New Zealand defeating Sri Lanka in Paarl on Sunday.

The hosts will then need to win their final match against Bangladesh in Cape Town on Tuesday to force a three-way tie for second place in Group One.

Net run rate would then be the tie-breaker.

"It's not ideal to have to rely on other teams but we're going to leave everything out there," said Luus.

England won a top-of-the-

table Group Two contest despite a career-best bowling performance by India opening bowler Renuka Thakur, who took five for 15.

But Nat Sciver-Brunt (50) and Amy Jones (40) scored freely as England posted 151 for seven. India replied with 140 for five.

"We started really well," said India captain Harmanpreet Kaur, "but in the middle overs we didn't stick to our plan."

England captain Heather Knight said it was a good sign for her side that they were able to fight back after Thakur's early onslaught reduced them to 29 for three.

"We talk about batting according to conditions. It was good after three wickets lost early to show we can still punch out a score," she said.

England, who play Pakistan in their final group match in Cape Town on Tuesday, are virtually certain to qualify for the semifinals.

India are also well-placed to reach the last four. They meet rock bottom Ireland in Gqeberha on Monday. — AFP



Swiatek sweeps past Pegula to win second Qatar title

DOHA: World number one Iga Swiatek won her second successive Qatar Open title on Saturday, sweeping past Jessica Pegula 6-3, 6-0 in the final.

It was the Pole's first title of 2023 and 12th of her career.

The reigning French and US Open champion, Swiatek dropped just five games all week on her way to the Doha title.

Swiatek completed victory over world number four Pegula in just 69 minutes to take her career head-to-head over the American to 5-2.

Doha remains a special place for Swiatek — last year her title triumph in the Qatari capital sparked a 37-match winning streak which culminated in her second Grand Slam title at the French Open.

"I'm really happy that I could kind of find more balance, comparing to how I felt at the beginning of the season," Swiatek said, after her win.

"I think this tournament is going to give me a lot of confidence, but still, I want to take everything step by step. I'm just really happy that I could win this match today."

Swiatek next makes the short journey to the UAE for the Dubai WTA tournament which gets under way on Sunday.

If nothing else, she'll be hoping the playing conditions are easier than in Doha where high winds presented challenges all week.

"Yesterday it kind of hit me that even though it's windy, I can use the wind properly," said the 21-year-old.

"I kind of use my intuition to sometimes imagine that I should play shorter, or on the other hand, play with more topspin so the wind is going to kind of take this ball even further."

"So today I just kind of continued that, but I didn't really want to over-analyse that, and I just kind of played how my intuition told me." — AFP

Alcaraz cruises into ATP final with Norrie in comeback event

BUENOS AIRES: World number two Carlos Alcaraz, who missed four months with injuries, cruised into the final of his comeback event on Saturday at the ATP Argentina Open.

The 19-year-old Spaniard who captured last year's US Open title dispatched compatriot Bernabe Zapata Miralles 6-2, 6-2 in 77 minutes to book a Sunday championship date with Britain's Cameron Norrie.

Top seed Alcaraz is playing in his first tournament since last year's Paris Masters after suffering an abdominal tear and in January said he would miss the Australian Open with a right hamstring injury.

Just reaching the clay-court championship match against second-seeded Norrie has great meaning for Alcaraz.

"It's a really special moment for me," Alcaraz said. "I was a little bit down after the injury, so I had to recover in those four months the confidence and the rhythm."

"Coming back for my first tournament of 2023 and making the final is so special for me."

Alcaraz has a 3-1 career record against Norrie, who beat Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 in an hour and 54 minutes in Saturday's other semifinal.

The Briton, however, won his most recent match-up last year on a Cincinnati hardcourt.

"Really tough player," Alcaraz said of Norrie. "I have to give everything I have in the final. I'm going to say it's going to be a really tough final, but at the same time a beautiful one."

Alcaraz seeks his seventh career ATP title, his fifth on clay, and his first since capturing his first Grand Slam title last year in New York.

Norrie, 27, seeks his fifth career ATP title and his first since last May on clay at Lyon. It's the left-hander's first final since losing to France's Richard Gasquet last month in Auckland.

"I lost a tough final in Auckland, so hopefully I can get some good feelings back tomorrow in the final," Norrie said. — AFP



British Cameron Norrie celebrates after defeating Peruvian Juan Pablo Varillas during the semifinal of the ATP 250 Argentina Open in Buenos Aires. — AFP



Abraj Energy Services IPO opens today

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 19

The initial public offering (IPO) of Abraj Energy Services (under transformation), a subsidiary of OQ, the global integrated energy group, opens today (Monday) February 20, 2023. The offering allocated for the first category runs from February 20 until March 2, 2023, whereas the subscription in the second category runs from February 20 until March 1, 2023.

The shares of Abraj Energy Services are put for sale in an IPO as part of the divestment plan announced by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) to exit some governmental investments to provide investment opportunities for Omani and foreign investments to achieve the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This step aims to promote the private sector's participation in various economic sectors at the national level. The IPO will also enhance economic diversification policies and attract investors from Oman and abroad.

By virtue of the IPO, 49 per



cent of the issued capital of Abraj Energy Services (i.e., 377,398,000 shares of the company) will be put for sale. The selling shareholders will maintain their right to adjust the IPO size at any time before the end of the subscription period.

The company put 49 per cent of its shares for sale in an IPO after obtaining the necessary

regulatory approvals from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) in the Sultanate of Oman.

The shares will be offered in two parallel categories. The first category will be allocated to major investors and will account for 85 per cent maximum of the total public offering. It will be directed to major and corporate investors

in Oman and international investors.

The subscription price in the first category will be set within the range of 242 baisas to 249 baisas per share.

The second category of shares will be offered for small investors and will account for no less than 15 per cent of the total

THE STEP AIMS TO PROMOTE THE PRIVATE SECTOR'S PARTICIPATION IN VARIOUS ECONOMIC SECTORS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. THE IPO WILL ALSO ENHANCE ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION POLICIES AND ATTRACT INVESTORS FROM OMAN AND ABROAD.

public offering. It is allocated to individual investors in Oman.

The shares of this second category will be offered at a maximum discounted price of 224 baisas per share, calculated at a maximum price of 249 baisas with a discount of 10 per cent.

Abraj has achieved outstanding performance during the financial year ending on December 31 2021, with revenues amounting to RO 125 million (\$322 million). The company recorded a compound annual growth rate of 23 per cent from 2007 – 2021, supported by the growth of its fleet of drilling rigs. Abraj Energy Services intends to pay dividends amounting to 85 per cent of its profits generated during the financial year ending December 31, 2022.

IEA's Birol warns of tighter energy supply next winter

BERLIN: International Energy Agency (IEA) head Fatih Birol has warned of possible energy shortages next winter as relatively little new liquefied natural gas (LNG) is coming to the market while China's consumption is set to rise this year.

European governments made many correct decisions over the last year to ensure energy supply, such as building more LNG terminals to replace pipeline deliveries of Russian gas, Birol said.

But they also got lucky, he said, with a mild winter dampening demand while economic weakness in China led to the first drop in consumption there for 40 years.

"For this winter it is right to say that we are off the hook. If there are no last minute surprises, we should get through...maybe with some bruises here and there," said Birol. "But the question is... what happens next winter?"

— Reuters

Muscat is the most affordable capital city in the world

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, FEB 19

The Sultanate of Oman received yet another feather in its cap with the capital city, Muscat, topping the list of the most affordable capital cities when comparing property price to income, according to report by Netcredit — an American online lender.

Netcredit's study analysed more than 800,000 property listings in 73 capital cities around the world and calculated the median house price for each city in total and in per square metre (sqm).

The report was supplemented with property studies conducted within the last 12 months from local real estate companies in each country. Netcredit then calculated the average net salary for each capital and used that figure to calculate affordability and the number of years an average earner would need to buy a median-value home.

The report found that it would only take 4.7 yearly salaries to afford the median house price in Muscat — a title it shared with Pretoria in South Africa. The median price of homes in Muscat costs \$108,875.

"Times are strange on the property market — and on a global scale. Covid-19 radically shook up our idea of where and how we wanted to live, and it also radically altered many peoples' options for doing so. On balance, prices rose; but now, in the fallout of the pandemic and with the added complication of the energy crisis and war in Ukraine, they're on their way down.

Higher interest rates and the cost of living have forced down demand for houses, although a general shortage of houses on the market has kept prices from bombing. Meanwhile, wages are falling in real terms (with a particular impact on lower-income workers), further inhibiting potential buyers from spending," Netcredit said.

"According to Oxford Economics, nearly all 38 OECD countries are likely to see a slowdown in house price growth, with prices actually falling in more than half of them. This would be the widest deceleration in housing price growth for over 22 years. And according to the IMF, real house prices could drop by 25 per cent in emerging markets over the next three years and by 10 per cent in advanced markets (although this is a worst-case view)," it added.

After Muscat and Pretoria, Belfast in Northern Ireland comes next with 6.9 yearly salaries to afford median home price. Completing the top ten list include Bucharest (6.9), Bandar Seri Begawan (8.7), Nicosia (9.5), Washington DC (9.6), Warsaw (9.9), Windhoek (10.2) and Kuala Lumpur (10.5).

In terms of price per square metre, Muscat ranks 7th cheapest in the world with \$751 per square metre



— behind Havana (\$234), Ankara (\$432), Tripoli (\$500), Pretoria (\$568), Dhaka (\$672), and Managua (\$732). Completing the least expensive cities in the world are Islamabad (\$752), Cairo (\$802) and Ulaanbaatar (\$829).

Havana in Cuba may have the lowest average house price, but it would take 91.4 yearly salaries to afford the median house price.

The top five in terms of median house price include Monaco (\$4,475,000) Luxembourg (\$1,416,610), Singapore (\$1,342,848), Seoul (\$921,600) and Bern (\$773,896). In terms of price per square metre, Monaco also topped the list with \$52,000 per square metre followed by Singapore (\$15,009), Seoul (\$11,244), Luxembourg (\$10,897) and Paris (\$10,880).

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.ش.
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Introduction

Duqm Power Company SPC (herein the "Employer" or "DPC") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake the provision of **Third-Party Laboratory Services to DIPWP at Duqm**. The Company invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Clarification Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
DPC-DPW -00-000-LE -TND-0040	Third Party Laboratory Services to DIPWP at Duqm.	The Tenderer shall provide laboratory services for sampling, testing of Sea Intake and Outfall, Treated Sewage, Potable water, Sludge from the treated sewage, Desalinated water, Boiler water, Fuel Oil (Diesel) and Fuel Gas. The Contract will for Twelve (12) months.	25 OMR	05.03.2023	09.03.2023

Request for proposal

The RFP will be made available in electronic form from **9:00 am, 20th February 2023 Oman time until 12 pm, 2nd March 2023.**

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with Government Entities for works of this nature and have necessary experience in Oman for similar Contract for providing laboratory services for operating power and water plants. We particularly encourage suppliers currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Suppliers shall contact DPC via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading **"Third Party Laboratory Services to DIPWP at Duqm."** to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

Oman seeks to become hub for space applications

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 20

The Sultanate of Oman's newly launched Space Policy & Executive Programme aims to position the country as a destination for downstream space activities and investments, according to Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The aim is to support the growth of the space sector, foster innovation and economic diversification, as well as promote cooperation with international partners, he said.

"It also emphasises the importance of investment in human capital and infrastructure to ensure that Oman is well-equipped to meet the demands of the industry and accelerate the Digital Economy," the official added.

In a conversation with Steve Boehinger, Chief Operating Officer of Euroconsult Group, a leading global strategy consulting firm specialised in the space and satellite sector, Dr Al Shidhani said Oman's vision for a new space industry is an integral part



Dr Ali al Shidhani (left) in conversation with Steve Boehinger of Euroconsult.

of a wider national strategy to harness the digital economy to power the country's economic diversification.

"What we did is we looked at the digital economy sector as one of the enablers of our economic diversification goal," the under-secretary explained.

"So we developed a national digital economy programme that aspires to lift our digital economy contribution in Oman from its current standing of around 2 per cent of the GDP to 10 per cent

by 2040. It consists of several executive programmes that will be rolled out in five-year chunks until 2040. For the current five-years spanning the 2020 – 2025 period, the executive programmes focus on Fintech, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Cybersecurity, Digital Government, Digital Trade and Space. These are all interlinked and co-related programmes that together will help us lift the contribution of the digital economy to 10 per cent of GDP?"

Oman's space policy, the official

said, is already helping lay the foundations of a future space industry in the country. Initiatives currently in hand include a strategy to launch the nation's first satellite in partnership with a number of international players.

In addition, Oman also operates a Remote Sensing Centre for R&D, a Satellite Applications Centre and a space radio monitoring station. Furthermore, Oman is ideally located to host a launch complex for scientific rockets, according to the official.

The aim is to support the growth of the space sector, foster innovation and economic diversification, as well as promote cooperation with international partners

DR ALI BIN AMER AL SHIDHANI

Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology

"Geographically, Oman enjoys a few advantages, such as its proximity to the equator, clear skies and excellent location (favouring) launch activities," he pointed out.

Additionally, with more than 20 submarine cables connecting Oman with the wider world, including one direct cable from the Sultanate to Australia, Oman can harness this capability to provide Internet availability and redundancy, he said.

"So we are looking at space

data centres to be hosted in Oman as well as take advantage of the richness of the submarine cables (in the country's proximity)," the under-secretary stressed.

As a proposed hub for downstream space services applications, Oman is also looking to harness space sciences as a vehicle to help accelerate the development of key economic sectors, notably logistics, mining, food security and urban planning, among others, Dr Al Shidhani said.

Other underlying goals behind the development of space sciences and related activities is to encourage young Omanis to explore careers in this emerging industry, as well as harness space technologies to mitigate the effects of climate and natural disasters which regularly menace the country, he stated.

In concluding, Dr Al Shidhani stressed the need for partnerships with international players to help Oman achieve its goal. Opportunities abound for collaboration in downstream space initiatives, including the development of ground station hubs, space observatories, accelerator programmes, and even space-related tourism resorts, he added.

Mazoon Dairy targets new markets through presence at Gulfood 2023

MUSCAT: Wholly Omani state-owned Mazoon Dairy will participate in Gulfood 2023, the largest F&B processing and packaging exhibition in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.

Many global F&B brands and entities in the food and beverage industry will attend the exhibition, which will take place during February 20 -24, 2023, at the Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Center.

Mazoon Dairy will take part in Gulfood for the third time since its participation in its previous edition in which it managed to introduce a variety of its distinctive products into the regional market.

Mazoon Dairy's keenness to participate in this regional exhibition reflects its ongoing efforts to expand its presence in the target markets and to enhance its position as one of the largest milk and dairy product producers in the region.

Ahmed al Ghafri, Chief Support Officer, said: "Mazoon Dairy's participation in these international exhibitions is a crucial opportunity for us to introduce our competitive high-quality products to the target manufacturers and suppliers, and to



strengthen our relationships with our consumers. Thanks to this event, we will be able to engage and communicate with hundreds of customers at these markets.

It is a perfect platform that attracts major global players in the food and beverage industry. In addition to sharing our experiences and deepening our relationships, this event will help us to develop new business relationships that will strengthen the Omani exports, and significantly boost the national economy."

Global Money Exchange inaugurates Port Sultan Qaboos branch

MUSCAT: The 60th branch of Global Money Exchange (GMEC), the country's leading financial institution, has started operations at Port Sultan Qaboos in Muttrah.

Port Director Badr al Shandudi lead the inauguration ceremony. He also thanked the promoters and management of the Global Money Exchange for providing such facility in the area.

Port Sultan Qaboos in Muttrah is the main area where tourists from different parts of the world arrive. It is estimated that tourists will arrive in 200 cruise ships during winter season. The new branch is designed to cater to the needs of such tourists.

A new branch was also recently opened within the Oman Convention and Exhibition



Centre (OCEC) as part of efforts to boost the country's tourism sector.

There was no currency exchange and remittance facilities for locals, foreigners and tourists. GMEC already provides currency exchange facilities to citizens, expatriates and tourists at Muscat

and Duqm International Airports.

Indian passport renewal services are also provided at selected branches in the Sultanate of Oman. Officials of GMEC said that the company is committed to providing the best financial services to all sections of the Sultanate of Oman.

Meethaq wins Leading Islamic Banking Brand Award

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat, the leading Islamic financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has won the award for Leading Islamic Banking Brand in Oman from Global Brands Magazine.

The latest accolade from the leading UK-headquartered brands magazine adds to several prestigious awards previously won by Meethaq, which celebrated its 10th anniversary at the end of 2022.

The Global Brand Awards honour companies, which have performed extraordinarily well in the fields of Finance, Education, Hospitality, Lifestyle, Automobiles and Technology. The awards seek to acknowledge key players across these sectors who are constantly striving to do better through exceptional service delivery and

focus on customer-centricity, and reward their performance with global recognition.

The latest award for Meethaq is an acknowledgement that it has been able to establish the largest customer-centric Islamic branch network in Oman consisting of 24 branches across different governorates with ongoing plans to further develop the network in the coming months.

In addition to its branch network, Meethaq also has a dedicated network of over 40 ATMs/CDMs and provides free access to about 800 Bank Muscat ATMs and CDMs across the country. Meethaq customers also benefit from world-class mobile and Internet banking facilities as well as access to a state-of-the-art call centre, which is easily reachable at 24656666.



Ali bin Ahmed al Lawati, Assistant General Manager — Meethaq Corporate Banking, thanked Global Brands Magazine for the recognition.

He then added: "The Award for Leading Islamic Banking Brand in

Oman is the latest accolade for Meethaq's exceptional efforts over the last 10 years and its continuing aim to offer the best value proposition and services aligned to the needs of its growing family of customers in the Sultanate of

Oman as well as the latest global financial trends. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for their strong confidence and trust in Meethaq. Going ahead, we will continue to innovate and launch new state of the art products and services which further enhance the customer experience."

Meethaq extends support to different customer segments and key economic sectors with its innovative Sharia based products. In addition to offering a full suite of Islamic banking products and services for its retail customers including savings accounts, current accounts, home finance, auto finance, debit / credit cards, mobile and internet banking and for its SME and corporate customers including current accounts, call accounts,

fixed deposits, working capital finance, short term and long-term financing facilities, Meethaq has heavily invested in its staff, systems and controls to ensure its services and products are delivered in a professional and Sharia-compliant manner.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Furthermore, Meethaq's adoption of AAOIFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) distinguishes its Islamic banking practices in terms of standardisation of its products and services complementing its world-class Islamic banking experience.

Social entrepreneurship through microfinance: A pursuit for sustainable business of small scale entrepreneurs in Oman



DR REVENIO C JALAGAT, JR

The writer is Assistant Professor, Managerial and Financial Sciences at Al Zahra College for Women



DR ANAS BASHAYREH

The writer is Assistant Professor, Managerial and Financial Sciences at Al Zahra College for Women

The concept of social entrepreneurship can be considered as a new business idea but an endeavour that has huge potential in Oman.

This was the promising statement issued in a local newspaper in 2016 when the country is motivated to increase the private sector's role in the nation's economy.

The most known type of social entrepreneurship model reminiscing back to the 1900s was Microfinance. This model provides loans to small-scale individual businessmen and was popularised by Professor Muhammed Yunus in 1976 when he lent his money worth 27 dollars to about forty-two stoolmakers in a small town in Bangladesh.

Pioneering microfinance has broken the poverty cycle which has led to the establishment of the Grameen Bank in 1983 to serve millions of people from

developing countries through microfinance and help them alleviate poverty.

The fundamental premise of microfinance is to assist individuals through loans especially those who cannot qualify for loans in traditional commercial banks. Services provided by microfinance include savings, loans, remittances, affordable financial services, insurance, and payments.

Studies have shown that 74% of the recipients of microfinance loans are women and, in line with the 90% of women customers of Grameen Bank.

In terms of benefits, microfinance uplifts the status of women, provides employment opportunities, and develops a successful community.

A statement by an official of Riyada named Khalid al Haribi in 2016 revealed that it is high time for Oman to embrace social entrepreneurship as a way to

WITH FEW LENDERS AVAILABLE INCLUDING SELECTED BANKS IN OMAN, THE PRESSURE OF MICRO ENTREPRENEURS TO SOURCE OUT REQUIRED FUNDING POSES A REAL CHALLENGE.

address the present economic situation and to raise the growing concern of business sustainability.

According to the data provided by the World Bank (2023), although Oman has a zero poverty ratio, many businesses in Muscat alone are classified as micro, small, and medium enterprises.

The Arabian Stories (2022) published a statement that the Governorate of Muscat has the largest percentage of micro,

small, and medium enterprises last March 2022 with 24,977 establishments.

This may imply that the necessity of strengthening the microfinance activity is a timely action to serve the individual businesses who experienced capital deficiency.

For instance, looking at the profile of businesses in Oman, there are approximately more than twelve (12) souks for example nationwide operated by small-scale entrepreneurs and they rely on daily sales and small capitalisation rolled daily.

With few lenders available including selected banks in Oman, the pressure of micro entrepreneurs to source out required funding poses a real challenge.

In the Asia-Pacific region, microfinance had been instrumental in providing affordable financial services to the poor and underprivileged as these

people don't have access to the formal services offered by banks.

Microfinance is sourced from rural banks and cooperatives, non-governmental organisations, and individual money lenders. Even though there is a disparity in the economic situation between Oman and the Asia Pacific region, the cases of micro-entrepreneurs operating their businesses possess similar characteristics.

The message of this article from the authors' viewpoint is that social entrepreneurs partake co-equal part in building the nation's economy.

To develop social entrepreneurs, the concept of social entrepreneurship needed to be promoted from the grassroots level to the national level. Massive campaigns can be an effective strategy for people to internalise the value and relevance of social entrepreneurship to the current entrepreneurial state of the country.

The devil's metal strikes again in Trafigura nickel fraud case

ANDY HOME

Another year, another nickel scandal as the devil's metal lives up to its reputation. When German miners first came across the stuff in fifteenth century Saxony, they dubbed it "Kupfernickel", or "Devil's Copper" because it looked like copper but wasn't. Appearances can be deceptive when it comes to nickel, as Trafigura has just found out half a millennium later.

The commodity trader will take a \$577 million charge in the first half of 2023 against potential losses arising from what it called a "systematic fraud" involving cargoes of nickel that were not nickel.

It's an age-old scam but this one is big, involving 1,104 containers with up to 25,000 tonnes of nickel. Or not, as Trafigura is discovering to its cost.

This year's scandal follows hot on the heels of the market blow-out in March last year, when the London Metal Exchange (LME) had to suspend nickel trading for fear of a complete market collapse.

Though unrelated, the two incidents reinforce a sense of crisis around how nickel is currently traded. The scam of delivering metal that isn't what it appears to be is, quite literally, as old as the hills.

The British Museum hosts a clay tablet dating from around 1750 BC, in which a Babylonian merchant called Nanni berates a supplier for trying to cheat him on a shipment of copper ingots.

The Babylonians didn't

THE COMMODITY TRADER WILL TAKE A \$577 MILLION CHARGE IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2023 AGAINST POTENTIAL LOSSES ARISING FROM WHAT IT CALLED A "SYSTEMATIC FRAUD" INVOLVING CARGOES OF NICKEL THAT WERE NOT NICKEL.

have formal assaying but Nanni obviously knew he was getting dud metal, warning his supplier that "from now on I will not accept here any copper from you that's not fine quality".

Misrepresenting the quality of shipments continues to this day, particularly in the murky world of raw materials such as metals scrap and concentrate.

UK newspaper The Guardian ran a lengthy feature in September last year about a Romanian entrepreneur accused of exporting large amounts of what he claimed was copper concentrates from the disused Baia Mare mines but which turned out to be a mixture of dirt and rubble.

When it comes to trading refined metals, the scam is now more commonly perpetrated in the opaque world of stocks and cargo financing, where physical metal underpins a carousel of repurchase and credit transactions.

The whole edifice can come crashing down if the metal isn't physically there or has been multi-pledged, which happened in spectacular fashion in the Qingdao warehousing scandal of 2014.

Chen Jihong, the man at the centre of a multi-pledging scam that cost banks and trading houses an estimated \$3 billion was last year sentenced to 23 years in prison. — Reuters



JOE RENNISON

The author covers financial markets and trading, a beat that ranges from chronicling the vagaries of the stock market to explaining the often-inscrutable trading decisions of Wall Street insiders.

It's dawning on stock investors that they were wrong about the Federal Reserve. After rallying behind a resilient economy, slowing inflation and the hope that the central bank would end its interest-rate increases sooner than it had communicated, stock trading has grown jittery.

The S&P 500 lost its momentum in February, after a drop this week that left it 2.4% lower than its peak early in the month.

Stocks have oscillated between gains and losses as new economic data has clouded the outlook for investors, marking a notable shift in the market after stocks jumped more than 6% in January.

The change in tone this week came as a steady flow of data has shown the economy continued to run hot in January. Despite high-profile layoffs at big technology firms like Meta and Microsoft, employers in the United States continued to hire at a rapid clip, consumers kept spending, and prices continued to rise briskly at the start of the year across an array of goods and services.

All those data points suggest that the economy retains significant vigour, even after a year of rapid policy adjustments aimed at cooling down the economy.

Fed officials had repeatedly

warned that there was more work to do to slow rising prices, but investors had hoped that a slowdown in inflation that took hold in earnest late last year would allow policymakers to hit pause on their rate adjustments sooner than they had predicted.

Now, mounting evidence that the economy remains surprisingly strong and price increases unexpectedly stubborn have begun undercutting that narrative.

In response, investors have sharply raised their expectations for the number of times the Fed will increase interest rates in the coming months. And even central bankers have begun to float the possibility that rates will need to climb higher than they previously expected if the economy does not cool down.

Higher interest rates raise costs for consumers and companies, slowing demand and typically weighing on the stock market. "I'm very negative right now on equities," said Eric Johnston, the head of equity derivatives at Cantor Fitzgerald, who predicted the recent S&P 500 rally but now expects a slump.

"I think the move we have seen

in the rate market, some of the inflation numbers that have come out and the expectation that the economy will be fine is all fairly problematic."

Johnston now thinks the S&P 500 will eventually fall below its 2022 low, a drop of more than 10% from current levels. Strategists at Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan Chase are also among those bracing for a fall. Bond investors had been quicker to shift their view. At the start of this month, investors betting on the path of interest rates predicted the Fed would raise its benchmark rate just once more this year, by a quarter of a percentage point in March.

Now, those traders are leaning to three increases of that size, through July, which would take the Fed's target rate to a range of 5.25% to 5.5%. That's above the Fed's own most recent forecasts, published in December.

But policymakers have also hinted that their own estimates could be poised for revision if the economy continues to run hotter than previously anticipated. John C. Williams, president of the powerful Federal Reserve Bank of New York, suggested this week

that rates were likely to rise to a range of 5% to 5.5% — slightly above the 5% to 5.25% median in the central bank's December forecast.

He and several of his colleagues have said they may need to do even more than that if consumption and the labour market remain so robust. "With the strength in the labour market, clearly there's risks that inflation stays higher for longer than expected or that we might need to raise rates higher than that," Williams told reporters in New York this week.

Loretta Mester, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, said during a speech Thursday that "we may very well have to move higher, hold it longer at that peak rate or even change what we do at any particular meeting" if economic pressures kept inflation elevated. Given recent data, economists at Goldman Sachs and Bank of America changed their forecasts.

They are now predicting that the Fed would raise rates to 5.25% to 5.5% this year — a quarter point higher than either bank had previously estimated.

— The New York Times



The US flag flies outside The Federal Reserve Bank of New York in New York City. — Reuters

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In accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Al Farsi Investment LLC**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No **1016268**, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from **RO 250,000,000 to 30,000,000**. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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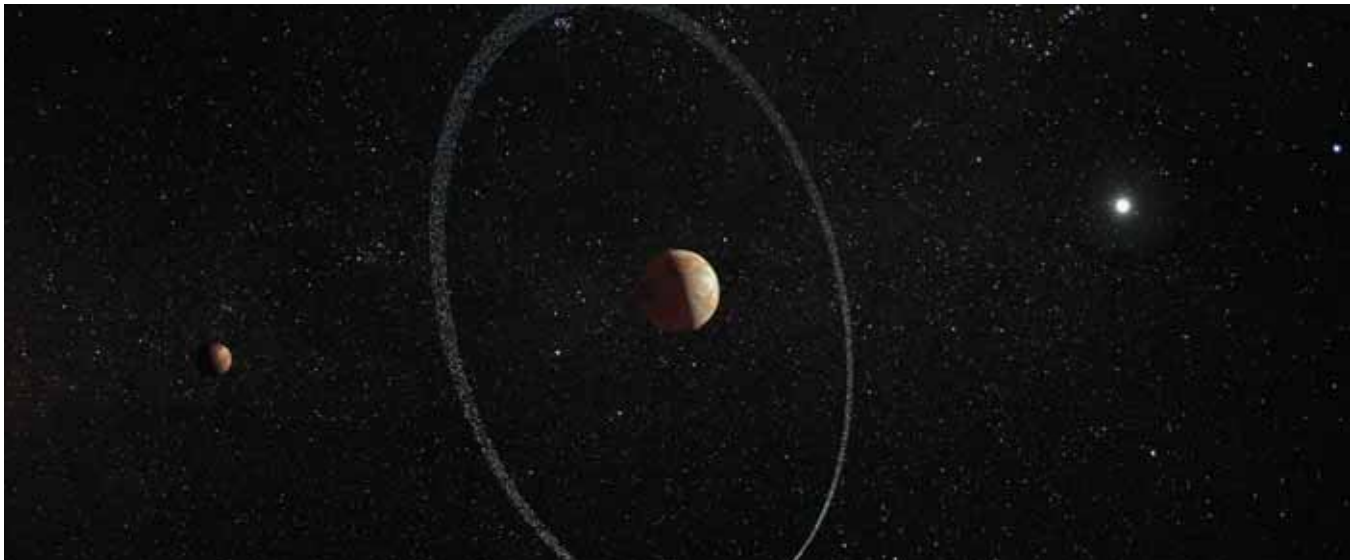
Four reasons why you need to go on a long hike to Wajma

Wajma is a hiking destination you must add to your list when you are visiting Oman. While the trails are not recommended for beginners, professional and seasoned hikers will enjoy not just the different scenic trails but also the different experiences... **P20**

There's a Ring Around This Dwarf Planet. It Shouldn't Be There.

A SMALL ICY WORLD far beyond Neptune possesses a ring like the ones around Saturn. Perplexingly, the ring is at a distance where simple gravitational calculations suggest there should be none. "That's very strange," said Bruno Morgado, a professor in Brazil. Morgado is the lead author of a paper published in the journal *Nature* that describes the ring that encircles Quaoar, a planetary body about 700

miles in diameter that orbits the sun at a distance of about 4 billion miles. Quaoar (pronounced KWA-wahr, the name of the creator god for the Indigenous Tongva people) is a little less than half the diameter of Pluto and about a third of the diameter of Earth's moon. It is likely to be big enough to qualify as a dwarf planet, pulled by its gravity into a round shape. But no one can say that for sure, because images taken by even



the most powerful telescopes have revealed Quaoar as only an indistinct blob. The blob also has a moon, Weywot (the son of Quaoar in Tongva belief). Quaoar orbits the sun in the Kuiper belt, a region of frozen debris beyond

Neptune that includes Pluto. The ring is not visible in telescope images. Rather, astronomers found it indirectly, when distant stars happened to pass behind Quaoar, blocking the starlight. From 2018

through 2021, Quaoar passed in front of four stars, and astronomers on Earth were able to observe the shadow of the eclipses, also known as stellar occultations.

— KENNETH CHANG/ NYT

READ

THE LAST HOURS

BY CASSANDRA CLARE

The adventures of Shadowhunter Cordelia Carstairs as she battles evil forces in Edwardian London.



ENVIRONMENT

A man holds fertiliser granules made in the Ovinalp plant, near Sisteron, southern France. The Ovinalp company, in partnership with local farmers, collects sheep droppings to transform them into organic fertiliser that are later used by local fruit producers. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

A student walks past a wall of the International School of Manga and Animation (EIMA), adorned with illustrations, in Toulouse, south-western France. — AFP





Where Even the Food Is Magic: A Treasure Hunt for the Flavours of Caribbean Colombia

IN A TINY COLOMBIAN beachfront town, a globally acclaimed chef was waxing poetic about a schmear.

Leonor Espinosa — who'd just been crowned the 2022 Best Female Chef by World's 50 Best, an influential ranking group owned by a British media giant — suggested the sesame paste known locally as pasta de ajonjolí was one of many delicacies in the area that transcend mere taste, and soon I'd know why.

I'd gone to Rincón del Mar, a three-hour drive southwest of Cartagena, to meet Espinosa on her home turf. Granted, Espinosa now lives in Bogotá, where her restaurant, Leo, has drawn accolades. But her roots trace back to the country's Caribbean region, where she spent most of her childhood.

Now she returns regularly to lead laboratorios: workshops sponsored by her foundation, FUNLEO, that bring together cooks from often forgotten and under resourced communities to prepare local dishes while cataloging and preserving as many traditional ingredients, recipes and techniques as possible.

I wasn't there to participate (the workshops are open only to the invited community chefs) but to ask Espinosa for some direction. Since her widely reported ascent to the gastronomic throne, I realised how little I knew about where she came from: part of the Caribbean tucked away from the well-trodden Cartagena-Barranquilla corridor. So I reached out to the foundation, and after chatting with its director, I hatched a plan: to meet up with the chef during a workshop in the area, get her local insights, then use them to spend a few days exploring and eating.

I emerged from our talks with a culinary treasure map that would lead me on a quest from beachside grills to a palm-shaded islet to a green thatch-roofed house, the whole journey flavoured with coconut, garlic, cassava, cheese and of course, sesame.

THE ISLAND OF SIZZLING AREPAS

My culinary map dispatched me to the palm-shaded shores of Isla Tintipán — about 40 minutes off the coast — in search of arepas de huevo, a deep-fried, egg-filled dough pouch that's practically synonymous with Colombian Caribbean cuisine.

Every boat driver would know a restaurant called Rocio's place, I was assured, even those who still referred to it by the owner's ancestors' names because it had been in the family for generations, albeit on the tiny neighbouring island of Santa Cruz del Islote.

Although Tintipán was distractingly beautiful — with aquamarine waters lapping at white-sand beaches and lush, navigable mangroves cutting inland — I remained single-minded in my quest for the Platonic ideal of an arepa de huevo. Fresh from the sizzling oil, perfectly spongy and extra plump, my lunch boldly defied the waiter's words as he placed it on the table: "Su arepita" (Your little arepa!) I sprinkled on some sea salt and drizzled on some



suelo (a whey-based condiment along the lines of labneh, but thinner and generally tangier), then I ate like no one was watching, because no one was. There were far more interesting things to see on the beach, where crowds of Colombian day-trippers were dancing to competing rhythms that reverberated from portable speakers.

Finishing with a coconut caramel, a bite-size dessert that's satisfyingly rich and chewy but not cloyingly sweet, I headed back to the mainland, where I suddenly wished I could book the arepa-making class that Dos Aguas offered at the home of a local expert. But the open road called, as did my driver to confirm an early pickup the next morning.

IN SEARCH OF A 'GOOD HAND'

We zigzagged deep into the Caribbean savanna, about three hours southeast of Rincón del Mar, to San Luis de Sincé, a small town with at least four big loves: Espinosa, whose family hails from there; author Gabriel García Márquez, who spent part of his childhood there; clarinetist and composer Juan Madera Castro, who was born there; and ajonjolí — not necessarily in that order.

Espinosa's family seat still holds pride



of place on the central plaza, as does a childhood home of García Márquez, whose devotees sometimes claim San Luis de Sincé inspired the fictional town of Macondo in the novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude." The Casa de la Cultura de Sincé has a fascinating installation on the author, as well as on Madera, whose most famous composition, "La Pollera Colorá," is basically the unofficial national anthem. But much as I enjoyed my immersion into local lore, I had some eating to do.

Espinosa had instructed me to scout out private homes for ajonjolí, an experience that reminded me of buying the fermented corn drink chicha in the Peruvian Andes at houses with telltale

little flags. But in Sincé, the big, bright "Ajonjolí here!" signs along the roads made my quest even easier.

The thatch-roofed house I chose had parakeet green walls, inside and out. Maybe García Márquez had gotten to me, but the magic realism vibes were tough to ignore — especially when I remembered something I'd heard about ajonjolí vendors: Only those who had been blessed with a "good hand" could grind the local sesame into a proper paste. The woman at the front door assured me she descended from a long line of good hands, and the moment I scooped a sample out of a repurposed instant-coffee jar, I was a believer.

A BOWL OF PURE BLISS

Luckily, I had time to digest on the drive to Galeras, a leafy, livestock-breeding town only about 15 miles to the southeast but still 45 minutes away on the muddy savanna roads. Next stop on the map was Restaurante Donde Mingo, where I was told not to miss the house mote, a yam-and-cheese soup that alone would have been worth the trip. Using a cream of various Caribbean yams for a base, the chef, Domingo "Mingo" Ramos, had added copious cheese, suero, local greens and a divinely inspired sauté of garlic and onion.

Taking a breather halfway through my bowl in hopes of being able to fit more in, I wandered to one end of the thatch-roofed, open-sided dining room, where a traditional piper, three drummers and a wild man on the maracaones (picture XXL maracas) had whipped the lunch crowd into a singalong frenzy.

I danced until I felt I had made enough room to continue with the next courses: garlicky eggplant, coconut rice and herbaceous aguardiente (direct translation: firewater, but more like a rustic brandy). No room for dessert, alas, but I took solace in the knowledge that I'd be back someday for the city's concurrent January festivals: one, a celebration of all treats carob-based, and the other, the Unesco-listed Cuadros Vivos — or "living paintings" — in which the locals themselves, elaborately costumed, made up and staged, become the open-air art installations.

As I contemplated my jar of ajonjolí and the rest of the Sincé sweets my driver and I would savor as our journey came to an end, my thoughts returned to that first encounter with Espinosa back in Rincón del Mar: You have to respect the ingredients, she had said. My short time in the place that had nurtured her renowned cooking had been packed with flavors, but to fully respect all those ingredients, I realised, I would need to return with far more time. — **NYT**

LIFESTYLE

Dress Like Your Inner Animal



WHAT IS IT WITH the animal world and fashion? Ever since man started wearing pelts, the two have been interconnected, flora and fauna used as a source of creativity, comfort, exploitation and politics. The results are sometimes beautiful, sometimes horrible, sometimes controversial. (Two weeks ago, during the couture shows in Paris, Schiaparelli set off a firestorm when designer Daniel Roseberry put a lifelike lion head on a gown that had some people thinking Great White Hunter.) But on Friday, as the New York shows began, Collina Strada unveiled a collection that suggested the relationship could be something else entirely.

Fun! Of the smartly absurdist kind.

Titled "Please Don't Eat My Friends" and held in the still-under-construction House of Cannabis in SoHo, it was a ... well, trip, featuring many of designer Hillary Taymour's (yes) friends, of all ages, sizes and physical abilities, strutting the runway in a room painted earthy green.

Or only partially strutting. The rest of the time they were crawling, hopping, prancing, sniffing the audience and otherwise giving in to their inner animals, all the while wearing deer ears, a pig's snout, a dog's head, a toucan's beak and other assorted creature-feature prosthetics created by makeup artist Isamaya Ffrench.

Along with the critter accessories came white Vans with hoofs printed on the upper; horse's tails made from skeins of recycled yarn, prints that looked like fur and pastures of wildflowers, and shoulder appendages that resembled horns. The colour scheme was like "My Little Pony" on acid. The soundtrack involved barks and roars.

Kathleen Engman, the mother of Collina's art director, Charlie Engman, wore a quilted sequin bed jacket over a corset over a tee with a long, paw-print skirt that looked as if the classic Collina cargo pants had been split up the seams (in a DIY jeans-skirt kind of way) and lizard spikes on her bald head. One model was carrying Powie, Taymour's actual dog, under one arm and wearing a matching Powie print T-shirt over a sheer puff-sleeve shirt, like a hipper version of a breastplate. At the end, actor Tommy Dorfman appeared as the bride in bunny ears and a white satin slip dress, bopping along.

The point, Taymour wrote in her show notes, was to underscore the idea that "we're all in this together."

She has been swapping anthropomorphism for animorphism for a while now. She built her brand on an environmentally responsible base, using mostly biodegradable, deadstock, organic or recycled materials. In early 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, she released a video in collaboration with "Animorphs" artist David Mattingly that transformed her models into their more feral selves. But rather than hector or preach her position, Taymour has made its expression almost radically ridiculous, so it is impossible not to smile.(She once made a video game, "Collina Land," that featured characters running across a collapsing baguette bridge. A baguette bridge!)

She is like the Mary Poppins of sustainability, except that instead of sugar she's dosing everyone with a spoonful of something a little more ... consciousness-altering.

Once upon a time, all of this put Taymour on the fringes of fashion week, a weirdo from the avocado set collaging her principles into cargo pants. Gradually, though, the rest of the world has come around to her point of view. Her work was included in the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "In America: A Lexicon of Fashion" exhibition, and Kim Petras wore Collina Strada to the Met Gala in September 2021. Aside from Vans, Taymour has collaborated with Levi's and Melissa, a Brazilian shoe company; she has also been considered for a big-brand creative directorship.

In part, this is because she is doing all of the above in the form of increasingly polished clothes, plundering the romance of history (trains and peplums and bloomers and capes) and filtering it through a hipster thrift-store lens. Technically and philosophically, she knows what she is doing.

Buried amid this season's barnyard mayhem was a sweeping power-plaid trench with narrow little shoulders, a bias-cut gown in bronze satin with a tantalizingly deep cowl framing the spine, and a swishy satin trouser suit with floral fretwork at the hem of the jacket and pants. They'd bring character and a bit of good-natured (pun intended) morality to any boardroom or cocktail soiree. As one T-shirt read: Woof. — **NYT**





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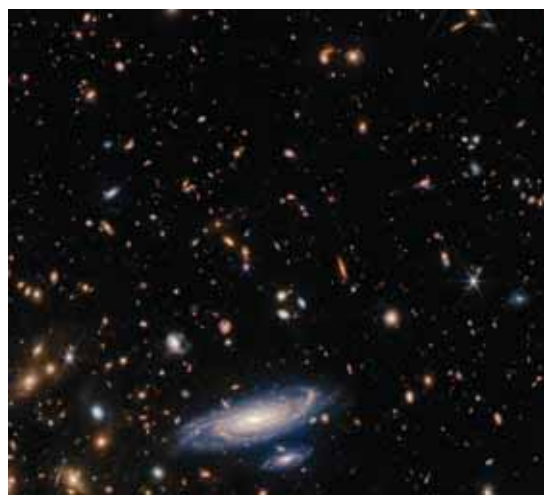
INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



AROUND THE WORLD

SCIENCE

Webb Telescope Spots a Distant Spiral Galaxy Like Our Own



IN THE UNFATHOMABLE darkness and time that is the universe, every star is an omen of hope, a promise of life and shelter, like the lights of a distant ship on a cold sea.

And so, courtesy of the James Webb Space Telescope, here is another reminder of the fecundity and generosity of nature: thousands of galaxies, trillions of stars and unnumbered planets, a boundless realm of possibilities stretching back 13 billion years in a small patch of sky in the constellation Hercules.

At lower centre is a spiral galaxy known as LEDA 2046648. It looks like a dead ringer for the great galaxy in Andromeda, M31, or its twin, our own Milky Way galaxy — except that the LEDA galaxy is 1 billion light-years away.

One billion years ago, when the light from this image was emitted, the first multicellular organisms had emerged on Earth and were groping their way up the evolutionary ladder towards plants, fish, dinosaurs, humans and whatever comes next.

One of the Webb telescope's main missions is to explore the age when the first stars and galaxies began to light up the universe. The Webb's secret sauce is its ability to detect infrared rays, or electromagnetic radiation of longer wavelengths than visible light that is thus invisible to human eyes. With the expansion of the universe, objects billions of light-years distant are moving away from Earth so fast that their light is "red-shifted" to longer infrared wavelengths, which the Webb telescope can see.

The universe as we think we know it came into being with the Big Bang some 13.8 billion years ago. Almost all the objects in this image are distant galaxies; the few stars among them are distinguishable by their six-pointed diffraction spikes. Some of the background blobs are thought to date from just 300 million years after the cosmos began.

Studying such primeval galaxies, astronomers say, should help to clarify what sorts of stars first condensed out of the Big Bang and how super-massive black holes came to occupy the centres of nearly all galaxies today. The preliminary results of these investigations have surprised scientists by hinting that there might be more early galaxies and massive black holes than traditional models of cosmic origins have predicted.

This image of the LEDA galaxy was obtained on May 22, 2022, while astronomers connected with the European Space Agency were testing the telescope's workhorse camera, the Near InfraRed Camera or NIRC2; ESA partnered with NASA and the Canadian Space Agency to build and run the telescope. On January 31, ESA released the image to the public as the Picture of the Month.

Viewing this snapshot of eternity, it's hard not to wonder whether microbes or something else were making a similar go of it in LEDA 2046648 or one of the other luminous blobs in the image, and whether we will ever know. — **NYT**

FASHION

Pharrell Williams Is Louis Vuitton's Next Men's Designer

THE FASHION AND entertainment industries, which have long been intertwined, converged even further on Tuesday when Louis Vuitton named Pharrell Williams, the American rapper and producer, as its new creative director for menswear.

The French luxury brand announced on Instagram that it had hired Williams about 16 months after the sudden death of its previous menswear designer, Virgil Abloh, in 2021. Williams, the brand said in a statement, "is a visionary whose creative universes expand from music to art, and to fashion — establishing himself as a cultural global icon."

Other names floated as successors to Abloh have included British designers Grace Wales Bonner and Martine Rose, as well as American designers Telfar Clemens and Colm Dillane, better known as KidSuper, who last month was announced as Louis Vuitton's first menswear guest designer, a sign many took to mean that he had been tapped to follow Abloh. But it was ultimately Williams, 49, who landed what is considered one of the most high-profile creative director roles in men's fashion. His appointment was the first major move by Louis Vuitton's new chief executive, Pietro Beccari, who joined the brand from Dior last month.

Williams, who was the first male ambassador for Chanel, has worked off and on with Louis Vuitton since 2004. More recently, he entered into a collaboration with jeweller Tiffany & Co. which with Louis Vuitton is part of luxury goods conglomerate Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy. During the January menswear shows in Paris, Williams was seldom without his pair of diamond-studded Tiffany sunglasses, which he also wore to the Grammys. His first collection for Louis Vuitton will be shown in June at Men's Fashion Week in Paris.

"I am glad to welcome Pharrell back home, after our collaborations in 2004 and 2008 for Louis Vuitton, as our new men's artistic director," Beccari said in the brand's statement on Instagram. "His creative vision beyond fashion will undoubtedly lead Louis Vuitton toward a new and very exciting chapter."

Williams' return to Louis Vuitton is also a return to menswear design. Earlier this century, he created influential streetwear brands like Billionaire Boys Club and Ice Cream in partnership with Japanese designer Nigo (who is now the artistic director at Kenzo, also owned by LVMH).

Still, Williams' appointment to the pinnacle of high-end ready-to-wear underscores an apparent trend among luxury goods makers: to put their futures in the hands of multi-hyphenate celebrities, not designers by profession. Other high-profile entertainers to be embraced by luxury fashion in recent years include Rihanna, whose Fenty clothing line in partnership with LVMH shuttered in 2021, and troubled rapper Ye, formerly Kanye West, who became a



fixture at fashion weeks around the world.

Spectacle is now a given at runway shows: The recent Louis Vuitton menswear event in Paris, for instance, featured astonishingly expensive sets; a front row studded with stars from the worlds of K-pop, Hollywood and hip-hop; and a supercharged performance by Spanish singer Rosalia, who sang from atop a souped-up car.

Louis Vuitton, which was founded in 1854, is the cornerstone of

the fortune amassed by LVMH founder and chief executive Bernard Arnault, who was recently ranked the world's richest person. While menswear constitutes a relatively modest percentage of overall revenue for the brand, it remains a source of optimism as the fastest-growing sector in a luxury goods industry that continues to struggle against headwinds induced by the pandemic and declining markets in both China and Russia. — **NYT**

DISCOVERY

The Biggest Penguin That Ever Existed Was a 'Monster Bird'



NEW ZEALAND HAS been a haven for earth-bound birds for eons. The absence of terrestrial predators allowed flightless parrots, kiwis and moas to thrive. Now researchers are adding two prehistoric penguins to this grounded aviary. One species is a behemoth that waddled along the New Zealand coastline nearly 60 million years ago. At almost 350 pounds, it is the heaviest penguin known to science.



Alan Tennyson, a New Zealand paleontologist, discovered the big seabird's bones in 2017 deposited on a beach in Otago known for cannonball-shaped concretions. The tide's churn cracked open some boulders, revealing bits of fossilised bones inside. Tennyson and his colleagues identified the fossilised remains of two large penguins. The humerus of one, nearly 10 inches long, was nearly twice the size of those found in emperor penguins, the largest living penguin. They also found evidence of a smaller penguin species somewhat larger than an emperor penguin.

The researchers named the larger penguin Kumimanu (from the Maori words for "monster" and "bird") fordycei and the smaller penguin Petradryptes ("rock diver") stonehousei.

By comparing the size and shape of Kumimanu's humerus with the bones of prehistoric and modern penguins, researchers estimated the bird's weight at 340 pounds — 15 pounds heavier than Lane Johnson, the right tackle who anchored the Philadelphia Eagles' offensive line in the Super Bowl.

— **JACK TAMISIEA/ NYT**

By Rumpa Mitra
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In an era when everyone likes to explore offbeat places, Wajma is a hiking destination you must add to your list when you are visiting Oman. From Muscat, it takes almost a two-hour drive to reach Wadi Sahtan and another 30-minute drive by four-wheel drive towards Wajma Village located on top of one of the surrounding mountains where the hike usually begins.

From this point, you will already see waves of mountains, layers after layers of peaks made even more beautiful by the usually blue sky. In winter, the sky becomes gloomy but one of the greatest treats is when the mountains form a sea of clouds that makes it feel like you are above them.

Here are the four reasons why hiking to Wajma should be your next mission.

THE ABANDONED VILLAGE OF WAJMA

The abandoned village of Wajma has its own charm thanks to the village being located on a massive mountain cliff. Heading to the village alone is already an adventure as the winding path is not only scenic but challenging. Wajma has been abandoned by its inhabitants because of water shortage and challenging access to education, electricity, and transportation. Every once in a while the villagers still visit Wajma as they still have farms there that are planted with root crops and date palms. Sitting on the rooftop of any of the cliff houses and watching the sunrise or just passing the time enjoying the peace already makes a trip to this village worth it.

SPRING WATER COLLECTION PROCESS

At the far end of Wajma Village is one of the most unique attractions that continue to drive people to the abandoned village. As access to clean, drinkable water is hard, the inhabitants have created a smart way of collecting droplets falling off the side of the cliff. They lined up the bottom of these cliffs with earthenwares and pots that collect the water. During the rainy season, Wajma also has one of the most beautiful falaj cisterns where water is collected and creates a pool where the inhabitants swim.

COFFEE WITH A VIEW OF AL HAJAR MOUNTAINS

There's no better place to see the entire range of Jabal Shams than from Wajma. There are five mountain peaks between the army camp which is near the Jabal Shams summit point and the actual mountain summit. The entire mountain range is more visible from Wajma than from the Jabal Shams viewpoint. To enjoy the view, Omanis usually have a habit of making coffee on top of these mountains. Collecting water from nearby springs, and picking up wood along the way for fuel, the Omanis can clearly demonstrate why coffee on top is a totally different experience worth checking out.

EXCEPTIONAL HIKING TRAILS

Jabal Shams summit hike (W4) is one of the most challenging hikes available in Oman, which needs stamina and mental strength. Surprisingly, Wadi Sahtan mountains can offer almost the same challenging and difficult hike routes especially since it has numerous steep ascents. While crossing these mountains, one can see old abandoned villages. Some cave mountain houses are also still usable and some hikers stay in these camps when they explore the area.

SOME OF THE ROUTES THAT YOU CAN TRY ARE THE FOLLOWING:

a. Start at Wajma and cross the villages of Al Seer, Al Hop, Al Bashop, Al Olah, and Al Wadaim and back to Wajma which is approximately 11 km. This is a challenging hike where you need to cross countless mountains and in between, you can see a wadi and waterfall.

b. Wajma Village to Al Huwaib Village (approx. 12 km) via Al Habna, Al Qabil. Al Habna is a great place to camp if one is interested in staying in the mountains.

c. From Wadi Sahtan mountain, there is a route that directly takes you to the highest peak of Jabal Shams (W4). This trail is said to be the most challenging one and a must to have a guide.

d. Wajma Village to Al Huwaib Village (approx. 11.17 km) only via the Sinsila route. "Sinsila" is an Arabic word that means Chains. Sinsila is a wooden step at the mountains, which connects Al Hamra and Al Rustaq mountains. These wooden steps are made of the trunk of trees tied together by chains and nails hanging at an elevation of 1,600 metres.

e. Misfat Al Abriyeen (W9) can also be accessed from Wadi Sahtan mountain. This is not a marked trail and needs special arrangements.

These trails are not recommended for beginners and must be explored with professional guides. Some of the hikes need special arrangements as they need camping within the mountains and can take 2-3 days. Interested hikers can contact Saif through his Instagram @saif91alsalami and @mazin_alabri for guiding services and information.

art & life
Local Scene

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Four reasons why you need to go on a long hike to Wajma

