

78 shops fail in e-payments

During an inspection campaign carried out by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, it was found that 78 shops failed to comply with the requirement to provide electronic payment services to consumers. The ministry had implemented the e-payment decision as part of its efforts to achieve comprehensive digital transformation. **DETAILS ON P5**



P10

LIONEL MESSI
'SET FOR
MEGABUCKS'
SAUDI MOVE



P13

PACT SIGNED FOR
GREEN HYDROGEN
CERTIFICATION PILOT
PROJECT IN OMAN



P20

THE MUSICAL
AND CREATIVE
INGENUITY OF
ZIYAD AL HARBI



MUSCAT

42 IN HOSPITAL AFTER GAS LEAK

Forty-two people were hospitalised as a result of a gas leak at a site in the Muwailih Industrial City, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said on Tuesday. In its initial statement, the authority said, "The team dealing with hazardous materials accidents in North Al Batinah Governorate responded to a chlorine gas leakage from a cylinder in the Muwailih Industrial City, and the team has succeeded in containing the leakage." The Environment Authority in North Al Batinah said it dealt with an accident of chlorine gas leakage from a cylinder, which was removed from the accident site, in addition to implementing the procedures used in dealing with this type of accident. The Ministry of Health said that the affected were admitted to Suhar Hospital and other private and public health centres in the city. **DETAILS ON P3**

SURVEY OF BIODIVERSITY AND WATER RESOURCES



The Environment Agency is carrying out a survey of biodiversity and water resources in the Hallaniyat Islands in Dhofar Governorate. The survey will cover plants, animals and water sources on the islands, and is aimed to know the main ecosystems closely, protecting the biodiversity of the islands, and searching for fresh water sources in an effort to obtain accurate information about the natural resources of the islands. — ONA

Decree endorses organisational structure of Foreign Ministry

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued two Royal Decrees. Royal Decree No (28/2023) on endorsing the organisational structure of the Foreign Ministry. Article (1) endorses the organisational structure of the Foreign Ministry as per the annex attached to this Decree. Article (2) cancels Royal Decree No 69/2009 on the endorsement of the Foreign Ministry's organisational structure, as well as all that contradicts this Decree or

contravenes its provisions. Article (3) states that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. Royal Decree No (29/2023) on establishing an embassy for the Sultanate of Oman in Hungary. Article (1) establishes an embassy for the Sultanate of Oman in Hungary. Article (2) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

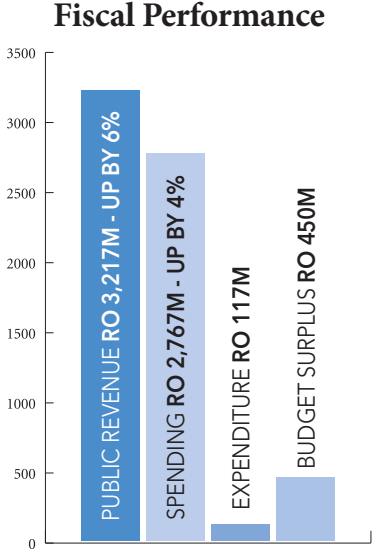
Over 700,000 displaced within Sudan

GENEVA: Heavy fighting in Sudan has displaced 700,000 people within the country since the middle of April, the United Nations said on Tuesday, adding the figure had doubled in a week. Sudan was thrown into chaos when fighting broke out on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). At least 750 people have died. "There are now more than 700,000 internally displaced by the fighting which began on April 15," Paul Dillon, spokesman

for the International Organization for Migration, said. "Last Tuesday, the figure stood at 340,000," he added. Even before the beginning of the fighting, 3.7 million people were registered as internally displaced in Sudan, added Dillon. Another 150,000 people have fled the country since the beginning of the conflict, according to numbers released by the UN refugee agency on Monday. The latest truce talks in Saudi Arabia yielded no progress, with a Saudi diplomat saying both sides consider themselves "capable of winning the battle". **SEE ALSO P6**

RO 325 million due for private sector repaid

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance announced that it has paid more than RO 325 million due for private sector in accordance with payment vouchers received through the e-financial system with a completed documentary cycle. The ministry's Fiscal Performance Bulletin pointed out that public revenue at the end of the first quarter of 2023 amounted to RO 3,217 million, up by 6 per cent compared to RO 3,025 million registered over the corresponding period in 2022. This is mainly attributed to an increase in oil revenue and current revenue, representing 53 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, of the total public revenue. Net oil revenue at the end of the first quarter of 2023 amounted to RO 1,707 million, increasing by 9 per cent when compared to RO 1,565 million achieved over the same period in 2022. This is driven by higher oil prices of \$85



per barrel, as well as an increase in oil production to 1,063,000 barrels per day. Net gas revenue at the end of the first quarter of 2023 decreased by 12 per cent to stand at RO 720 million compared to RO 819 million registered over the same period in 2022. The decline is a result of a deduction

of gas purchase and transport expenses from the total revenue collected from the Integrated Gas Company. Moreover, current revenue amounted to RO 787 million at the end of the first quarter of 2023, going up by RO 151 million when compared to RO 636 million registered over the same period in 2022. Public spending by the end of the first quarter of 2023 amounted to RO 2,767 million, comprising a rise by RO 99 million (4 per cent) when compared to the same period in 2022. This is mainly due to an increase in current expenditure and contributions and other expenses. Further, current expenditures of civil and government units at the end of the first quarter of 2023 amounted to RO 1,033 million, comprising a rise by RO 79 million compared to RO 954 registered during the same period in 2022. — ONA



Protests erupt in Pakistan over Imran's arrest

Huge crowds rallied in major Pakistani cities on Tuesday to protest against the arrest of former prime minister Imran Khan on allegations of corruption. At least one worker for Khan's party was killed in Quetta, Shireen Mazari, former minister and senior leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Inasaf (PTI) told the media. Protests erupted after Khan was arrested from the premises of the Islamabad High Court. "We will block the entire country and protest until Khan is released," Waseem Qayyum, a protester, said. **DETAILS ON P6**



Spotlight on architecture and interior design

The Sultanate of Oman continues to position itself as a leading tourist destination in the region. With a growing number of luxury hotels and resorts, as well as a booming real estate industry, there is a clear need to address the needs of architecture and interior design sectors in Oman. Oman Daily Observer highlights the rapid transformation in architecture and design as the country seeks to modernise while preserving its cultural heritage. In this second edition of The Correspondent, the team showcases the latest trends and innovations in design, as well as the work of local architects and designers who are making their mark in the industry. A free digital copy of the magazine is issued with the newspaper.

8,000 potential organ donors registered

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The shortage of organ donors leads to organ trafficking and exploitation of poor people who tend to sell organs for money. The situation leads to numerous ethical and medical problems that could prove fatal for both the patient and the donor. To address the issue, the Omani Association for Organ Donation has started a nationwide awareness campaign

to educate the society about the value of organ donation. The first kidney transplantation was done in the Sultanate of Oman in 1988. Then, many such surgeries were done with the organs donated by living as well as brain-dead people. Liver transplantation began in Oman in 2017, said Dr Noreen al Balushi, Liver and Pancreas Surgery Consultant, Specialist in Organ Transplants, President of the Omani Association for Organ



Transplantation, and added that so far, 320 kidney transplants have been performed, of which 19 were from brain-dead and 24 liver transplants from living donors. Dr Noreen commented, "The number of patients with organ failure is large, and the number of patients with renal failure dependent on dialysis stands at 2,300, and there are others who need transplantation of other organs such as liver, heart and lung, and the only source of organs is the human being. **TURN TO P2**



NCEM better equipped for disaster management

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The National Center for Emergency Management (NCEM), which will operate within the organisational structure of the Royal Oman Police (ROP) at the level of a general administration, will prepare plans to confront disasters and exceptional weather situations.

The decision 98/2023 issued by Lieutenant General Hassan bin Mohsen al Shuraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, on Sunday, is crucial as the Sultanate will be subject to risks from natural disasters and extreme weather

events, according to the Global Risks Report 2023 of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The government has been working on updating the climate affairs management regulation in line with local and global developments.

The new regulation aims to follow up on the performance of companies and establishments in the field of climate affairs, whether in the field of mitigation or adaptation.

The NCEM will coordinate with governmental and non-governmental agencies concerned with managing exceptional



emergency cases and can request a meeting of the National Committee for Emergency Management.

It will prepare and implement an annual plan to conduct specialised exercises, training, and imparting skills in managing general disasters and exceptional emergency cases, according to best practices, with the participation of various sectors and stakeholders.

The centre will maintain a national risk register in accordance with the requirements of the General Secretariat of the National Security Council, besides preparing plans for managing general disasters and exceptional

emergencies according to potential risks.

NCEM also works to follow up on plans and programmes to enhance the capabilities, resources, and capabilities necessary to face exceptional emergency cases in coordination with the concerned authorities and to ensure the readiness and ability of vital facilities. It will prepare necessary studies and research, and enhance cooperation and coordination with national, regional, and international organizations, bodies, and centers with regard to managing general disasters and exceptional emergency cases.

Gen Numani receives Iranian military official



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office received here today Maj Gen Mohammad Bagheri, Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The meeting touched on areas of joint cooperation and means of promoting them.

The two sides also reviewed march of the historical relations binding Oman and Iran.

The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), the Iranian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman and members of the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

Oman, Austria celebrate 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Austria celebrated here today the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In a speech, Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs said that Omani-Austrian relations are built on a solid foundation. The two sides are keen to advance cooperation in all fields.

Al Wahaibi pointed out that the two countries share mutual concepts and values, such as respecting international law and believing in diplomacy and dialogue as the means to solve regional and international issues



and achieve international peace. He added that the two countries aim to enhance cooperation in the fields of environment, the water sector, education, investment and tourism.

On his turn, Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of Austria

to Oman, described the relations between the two countries as deep rooted. Those relations, he said, kept on developing steadily over the last 50 years.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the ambassador said that the development of

mutual relations serves both sides. He also lauded bilateral relations in various fields, such as politics, economy, energy and culture.

It is worth mentioning that diplomatic relations between Oman and Austria were established in 1973. — ONA

Honey production thrives during Acacia flowering season

TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

As the Sultanate of Oman enters acacia flowering season, locals gear up for the active beehive formation that occurs during this time. Acacia trees are known for resilience to harsh desert environments, utilising dewdrops and occasional rainfall to sustain for many years without water.

During the flowering season, which occurs after heavy rainfall, these trees come to life, with the Al Silm (Acacia Ehrenbergiana), Al Sarh (Maerua Crassifolia), Al Samr (Acacia Tortilis), and Al Sidr (Zuiphus Spina Christi) being some of the most prevalent species in the region.

Beekeepers across the Sultanate of Oman flock to these areas to harvest the local honey. The Abu Tuwaiq honey is among the most popular varieties in mountainous and plain highlands. Other local varieties include the Al Baram honey harvested from Al Samr trees in October and the Jbab honey harvested from Al Sidr trees. Omani honey is renowned for its delicious taste and high nutritional value, making it a staple food in many households. It is also used as a natural remedy to improve and strengthen weak body structures.



The high demand for this local product has resulted in increased prices, with one bottle of honey (1.5 litres) of the Abu Tuwaiq variety costing up to RO 150. Given its social and economic importance, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources organises an annual

promotional event comprising Omani honey varieties from various mountainous and desert environments.

The ministry sets strict conditions and controls for participation in the marketing exhibition to ensure the honey's quality and safety.

Official statistics for 2022 indicate the engagement of 6,231 Omani beekeepers, with approximately 137,600 beehives producing around 712,551 kilogrammes of honey.

The ministry is implementing several projects to improve bee breeding, propagation, and pest prevention to boost this industry further. The projects also provide job opportunities for people with limited income and retirees by establishing incubators for breeding fertilised queen bees in various states.

Acacia trees are protected under environmental legislation issued by the Environment Authority. It is making great efforts to preserve pastoral areas in various governorates of the country. These trees serve as a major food source for many animals and are home to several species of wild birds and butterflies, making them an essential pillar in revitalising the trade of selling honey around the Sultanate of Oman.

Environmentalists assert that these trees will continue to represent the Omani environment and be an incubator for various species of wildlife.

As the Sultanate of Oman continues to invest in the honey industry, it is clear that Omani honey will remain a sought-after product with its unique flavours and health benefits.

8,000 potential organ donors registered

FROM P1

"The number of donors, whether living or brain dead, is very small compared to the number of patients, and the number of registered organ donors after death is 8,000 through 'Shifa' application".

Through the 'Shifa' application of the Ministry of Health, the campaign targets registration of 100,000 donors in its first year.

Dr Noreen emphasised that it is crucial to keep in mind that organ donation is both morally and legally permissible, and that it is also an ongoing act of charity. As a result of several factors, including consanguineous marriage, which leaves many families vulnerable to shortage of donors due to the presence of multiple patients in the family, most organ donation operations occur from brain-dead people. Death of the brain means the death of the brain stem, and the body works only through artificial respiration.

The campaign is being conducted through various media channels, including print, audio and visual media and electronic platforms, she added. It seeks to use community events as a starting point to spread the culture of organ donation.

"During the first year of the campaign, we seek to cover a large number of cases of organ failure and to build a special centre for organ transplants,"

said Dr Noreen.

She pointed out that the campaign will focus on the values of humanity, social solidarity, transparency and commitment to institutional and individual responsibility.

There are currently many patients in Oman who are suffering from organ failure. Unfortunately, some of these patients lack living donors, and lack of brain-dead donors as a result of lack of awareness and community education exposes them to complications and inevitable death.

According to Dr Noreen, each brain-dead donor can donate organs like the eyes, lungs, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, small intestine, and pancreas, which can save up to eight lives. A portion of the liver, one kidney, a part of the pancreas, and a portion of the lung can all be donated by a living person. Kidney and liver transplants are performed in Oman using living or brain-dead donors.

Dr Noreen hopes that the campaign will develop into a national drive and restore hope to many patients.

Meanwhile, Dr Neven al Kalbani, Head of the Organ Transplant Department at the Royal Hospital, member of the National Committee for Organ and Tissue Transplantation, said that, so far 24 liver transplants and 325 kidney transplants have been conducted.



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WEDNESDAY | MAY 10 | 2023

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42 injured in chlorine gas leak

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Forty-two people suffered moderate to critical injuries as a result of a dangerous gas leak at a site in the Muwailih Industrial City, the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) said on Tuesday.

In its initial statement, CDAA said, “The team dealing with hazardous materials accidents in the North Al Batinah Governorate responded to a chlorine gas leakage from a cylinder in the Muwailih Industrial City, The team succeeded in containing the leakage.” The Environment Authority in North Al Batinah Governorate said it dealt with an accident of chlorine gas leakage from a cylinder, which was removed from the accident site, in addition to implementing the procedures used in dealing with this type of accident.

The Ministry of Health said that the injured were admitted to Suhar Hospital and other private and public health centres in the city.

The ministry urged all those dealing with hazardous substances to follow the maximum safety and preventive procedures according to the standard competent authorities.

According to industrial safety experts, chlorine’s odour or irritant properties generally provide adequate warning of hazardous concentrations.

However, prolonged, low-level exposures, such as those that occur in the workplace,

How dangerous is gaseous chlorine



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Abdullah al Khaduri, a professional trainer against gaseous elements, said that gaseous chlorine, classified as a pulmonary irritant, is poisonous and can cause acute damage to the upper and lower respiratory tract if breathed in.

“Gaseous chlorine is heavier than air and may collect in low-lying areas. It is a strong oxidising agent and can react explosively or form explosive compounds with many common substances. If inhaled, it can cause damage to respiratory system and immediate medical action is required,” Al Khaduri said.

He added that upon notifying the leak of this yellow-green, non-combustible gas which has a pungent, irritating odour, one should not direct water at the spill or the source of the leak but prevent it from entering the waterways and isolate the area until gas has dispersed.

“The first action upon leakage is to prevent entry into waterways, sewers, basements, or confined areas and the leak should be stopped immediately without risk to personnel, and turn leaking containers so that gas rather than liquid escapes.”

Mohammed Minhajuddin, senior Chemistry teacher, Al Injaz

Private School, opines that the toxic effects of chlorine are primarily due to its corrosive properties and this can trigger various levels of retaliation.

“The action of chlorine is due to its strong oxidising capability. Acute exposure at low levels can cause nose and throat irritation, and excess salivation. Acute exposure at high levels causes dyspnea, violent cough, nausea, vomiting, lightheadedness, headache and chest pain. History says that it was used as weapon in World War I,” he said, adding that nebulisation with some base like sodium hydrogen carbonate may prove helpful for treatment.

can lead to fatigue and tolerance of chlorine’s irritant effects.

Chlorine is heavier than air and may cause asphyxiation

in poorly ventilated, enclosed, or low-lying areas.

Children are at increased risk for exposure to toxicants because they have a greater

lung surface area and may be more vulnerable to corrosive agents than adults because of the smaller diameter of their airways.

‘Fiscal programme enhances development of diversification’



MUSCAT: Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, said that the capital market’s fiscal sustainability programme asserts the existence of various opportunities to improve the current conditions. The programme also enhances the sector’s role in meeting the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and developing the targeted economic diversification sector.

Al Jashmi made the statement during a speech he delivered at the opening of the Annual Conference of Arab Federation of Capital Markets (AFCM), hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

He added that the next stage will focus on expanding the

volume and depth of Muscat Stock Exchange through initiatives to increase initial listings and encouraging private sector firms’ engagement.

The Fiscal Sustainability Programme seeks to devise an annual plan targeting a group of annual listings, enhancing trading and liquidity at the stock exchange and improving financial services provided to investors by increasing competitiveness between financial services companies and encouraging technology and innovation.

On his turn, Haitham bin Hamad al Salmi, CEO of Muscat Stock Exchange and AFCM Chairman, said that everyone should work to promote

and encourage sustainability practices, whether at the level of institutions or listed companies, and provide an attractive investment climate for international investors.

A set of panels were held during the first day of the conference covering the following topics: Future of Business: Spotlight on Oman, the Race to Zero: Challenges and Opportunities, Carbon Markets and Trading, Carbon Credit: Financing the Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy and Navigating a Challenging PIPE Market and Alternative De-SPAC Financing Structures.

The AFCM Annual Conference, the largest event for stock exchanges and capital markets in the Arab world, is

a distinguished platform that gathers leaders from across the Arab capital markets industry, to exchange ideas and visions on the most suitable means to provide key opportunities and the ideal environment to promote the growth of the Arabian capital market ecosystem, in addition to enhancing integration and liquidity among exchanges across the region.

The conference seeks to bring the interests of the Arab capital markets to life on all levels, boosting cooperation and coordinating efforts to ultimately enhance liquidity and motivate companies, in an effort to develop and enhance the region’s capital markets.

— ONA

Oman and France to explore opportunities in Blue Economy



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman and France will be exploring opportunities in the fisheries and agro-food sector with special focus on potential investments in the Duqm Fisheries Multipurpose Port Project.

In connection with this, the Omani and French stakeholders are meeting for a business conference titled “Omani-French Opportunities in Fisheries Sector” on Monday, May 15, at the Oman Arab Bank, according to Marie Eliçagaray, Coordinator of the Omani French Friendship Association (OFA). “The meeting will basically focus on exploring the global opportunities in Oman’s fisheries sector, particularly through the Duqm Fisheries Multipurpose Port Project which is a collaboration between the Port of Lorient in France and Fisheries Development Oman Company and the aim of the meeting is to connect stakeholders from France and Oman in different economic sectors and to highlight what are the investments to be made,” a statement from the OFA has said.

Eng Yaqoob al Busaidi, Under-Secretary for Fishing Resources at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will be the guest of honour while Maurice Benoish, CEO, SEM Lorient Keroman, and Louis Le Boulout, Shareholder, SAS Keroman, will be attending from France.

The panel session comprises of Maurice Benoish, President, SAS Lorient

Keroman, Louis Le Boulout, Shareholder, SAS Lorient Keroman, and four French panelists who will represent French companies interested in the project, while from Oman side, Redha Bait Faraj, General Director of Agriculture and Fish Marketing, MAFWR, Nabil al Bimani, CEO, Fisheries Development Oman, Dr Issa bin Mohammed al Farsi, Director of the Fisheries Development Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Salim al Harthy, Director, Fish Quality Control Centre, will be present at the panel. Ahmed bin Saleh al Harthy, Director of Oman Vision 2040 at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, will be the moderator of the session.

As many as 100 guests, comprising government officials, French and Omani companies in the fisheries, agro-food industries, shipbuilding and ship repair, valuation of products, training in trades in the fish sector, assessment, and management of marine resources, water and logistics sectors, and any other business related to Duqm area development, politics and technical actors from France, Bretagne Pole Naval, which brings together 280 Breton companies in the shipbuilding and maintenance sector, construction company, seafood research and development company, financials, trainers in the professions of the sea, representative of Ifremer, fisheries specialists, Fabrice Lohier (Mayor of Lorient and President of the Agglomeration: 250,000 Inhabitants), and OFA’s members will be present both in person and online at the event.

OMAN'S ONLY DESIGN AND FURNISHING SHOW

9th

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Oman

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8.9.10

MAY 2023

2:00 pm - 9:30 pm

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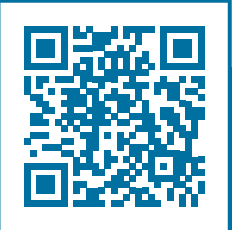
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STANDARDISATION OF OMANI HENNA



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

Henna has been an integral part of Omani culture and beauty practices for centuries. Henna artistry, which involves intricate designs and decorations, has not lost its charm over time. On the contrary, henna adornment has become a popular fashion trend, with women using it for various occasions and celebrations, including weddings, Eid, and other festivities.

Traditionally, henna leaves were picked, dried, ground, and mixed with crushed dry lemon and water. The henna mixture was then prepared days in advance, especially for holidays like Eid, when women would knead the henna and apply it to the hands and feet of their children a day before the celebration. As time passed, however, chemicals were introduced to the process.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

To ensure the health and safety of consumers, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion in Oman has established technical requirements for henna dough through the Omani Standard for Henna Dough (OS 1654/2022). The standard was developed in collaboration with the Municipality of Muscat, the Consumer Protection Authority, and the Ministry of Health, based on scientific studies conducted on the product.

According to the standard, henna is defined as a flowering plant or shrub grown for commercial purposes in several countries around the world. It is used to dye skin, hair, nails, leather, and wool. Henna dough, on the other hand, is defined as a homogeneous mixture prepared by combining the natural henna powder with water or other natural or industrial liquids, along with other materials, to intensify the colour and ensure that it remains on the skin for an extended period. This mixture is used for beauty or treatment purposes and is applied to the hands, feet, hair, or other parts of the body.

The Omani standard requires the henna dough to be free of Para-phenylenediamine (PPD), pork fat and its derivatives, unclean or undissolved substances, and toxic heavy metals. Henna leaves contain Lawson dye molecules that have the ability to bind to various proteins. However, when PPD is added to the henna mixture, it may cause skin sensitivity and increase the risk of dermatitis, making it crucial to detect the presence of heavy metals and toxic ingredients before marketing henna in the local market.

HERITAGE TRADITION

The growing demand for henna artistry has turned it into a heritage tradition that has evolved into a profession and a source of livelihood for many people. Henna artists must ensure that the packages they use for henna paste include explanatory data such as the product name, manufacturer name and trademark, net weight, mixture ingredients, batch number, production date, expiration date, country of origin, and cautionary phrases for the product's use.

THE OMANI
STANDARD REQUIRES THE
HENNA DOUGH TO BE FREE
OF PARA-PHENYLENEDIAMINE
(PPD), PORK FAT AND ITS
DERIVATIVES, UNCLEAR OR
UNDISSOLVED SUBSTANCES
AND TOXIC
HEAVY METALS



Recall Campaign



Date of Campaign : 10/05/2023
Campaign Type : Recall Campaign
Product Description : Multiple models as mentioned below

Production Period	Brand	Vehicle Model	Affected VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
July 18, 2011 through August 22, 2018	LEXUS	GS200T, GS250, GS350, GS450H, GS F, IS200T, IS250, IS350, RC F, RC200T, RC350	JTHBA1BL2GA001091 To JTHHP5BCXH5006517	4008

Note: Not all vehicles in these VIN ranges, are affected.

Description:
The subject vehicles are equipped with a fuel evaporative emission control unit (fuel tank vent tube assembly) that is attached to the fuel tank by a flange. The fuel tank vent tube assembly prevents the fuel vapour that is created in the fuel tank from being released directly into the atmosphere. Due to the design of the flange, there is a possibility that a stress related crack could develop on the exterior surface of the flange. The crack could expand over time and depending on the size of the crack, could eventually allow fuel to leak from the crack. Depending on the amount of fuel that escapes from the crack and if it is in the presence of an ignition source, this could increase the risk of a vehicle fire.

Service Action:
To carry out the inspection/repair as advised by the manufacturer.

For more information:
Customers driving these vehicles may please contact M/s. Saud Bahwan Automotive LLC for further details / booking appointment etc from 10/05/2023.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073000 on all working days between 08:30 to 17:30 hrs after 10/05/2023.



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WEDNESDAY | MAY 10 | 2023

5

Minister of Social Development meets UNICEF official

MUSCAT: Dr Laila Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, held a meeting in her office on Tuesday with Adele Khader, Regional Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the Middle East and North Africa, who is currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman.

The meeting discussed a joint programme between the Government of the Sultanate of Oman and the United Nations Children's



Fund (UNICEF) for the period 2022-2025. It also touched on the vision of the Ministry of Social Development for developing

programmes related to child protection.

The meeting dealt with ways to benefit from the technical expertise of the

UNICEF in training Omani nationals in the field of childhood affairs.

The minister underscored the significance of the

UNICEF delegation's visit which, she said, "reflects the depth of relations and offers an opportunity to exchange views and expertise on various sectors of social action, most notably childhood care".

On her turn, the UNICEF official commended Oman's firm stance on issues related to childhood and expressed her appreciation for the efforts made by the Ministry of Social Development in the field of family care.

— ONA



Intl Day of Vesak celebrated in Oman



KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

The International Day of Vesak, also known as the Buddha Jayanti, was celebrated at Nepal House in Muscat recently.

The event marked the promotion of Nepal's tourist destinations with the attendance of hospitality, airline, tour and travel representatives.

Dornath Aryal, Ambassador of Nepal to the Sultanate of Oman, welcomed the guests and explained the importance of the International Day of Vesak/Buddha Jayanti. He also highlighted the cultural and natural attractions of Nepal.

Prof Dr Anil Shakya participated in the event virtually from Nepal and shed light on the multifaceted aspects of Buddhist philosophy and opined that it would be easier to establish a peaceful society by following the teachings of the Buddha. He also gave a motivational speech on how to live a happy life without stress and self-motivation by understanding that happiness lies within the soul.

Senior officers of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) made an informative presentation on Nepal tourism.

Members of the Nepali community presented folk performances, while some others among them played musical instruments of Oman.

Panche Baja (Traditional Nepali Music) drew appreciation from the audience. Guests were welcomed by 'Panche Baja'.

MoCIIP cracks whip on shops for non-compliance of e-payment services

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

[@AfrahAlBalushia](#)

During a recent inspection campaign carried out by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), it was found that 78 shops failed to comply with the requirement to provide electronic payment services to consumers. The ministry had implemented the electronic payment decision as part of its efforts to achieve comprehensive digital transformation and to reduce security risks associated with cash transactions. It was also aimed at streamlining buying and selling operations, enhancing customer service, improving financial management and inventory control, and reducing the risks of theft, internal fraud and fraudulent invoices.

Last year, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued Ministerial Resolution No 386/2022, which obligated eight commercial activities to provide electronic payment services to consumers. These activities included



all those in industrial areas, complexes, commercial centres and gift markets; foodstuffs outlets, gold and silverware; restaurants and cafes; fruits and vegetables, electronics, building materials and tobacco.

In the event of non-compliance with the ministerial decision, there is provision to impose administrative penalties such as a warning, obligating the violator to provide electronic payment services within a period not exceeding twenty days, or an administrative fine of RO 100.

According to statistics from the Central Bank of Oman, there has been an increase in the number of electronic payment service providers, with the number of devices increasing from over 63,000 in 2021 to over 85,000 in 2022, representing a 34-per cent increase.

In keeping up with technological advancements and innovations in e-commerce, electronic payment has emerged as a solution for remote payment transactions. Oman has adopted electronic payment as a means to serve citizens and meet their needs.

EA, UNEP sign MoU in environment field

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)'s West Asia Office on Tuesday signed via video conferencing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of the environment.

The MoU provides for the conservation, protection, promotion and support of nature and natural resources, including consolidating biodiversity in all parts of the world.

The signing of the MoU reflects the two sides' keenness to promote these common goals and objectives within the scope of their respective competences and as part of their joint vision.

The MoU was signed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman



of the Environment Authority, and Sami Dimassi, UNEP Representative and the Regional Director of the West Asia Office. The MoU provides for cooperation between the two parties in the fields of nature, including

the protection of biodiversity and ecosystems and combating pollution. It also sets grounds for fostering cooperation in exchanging expertise and developing capacities in the field of the environment. — ONA

SAI conducts training programme for govt units

MUSCAT: State Audit Institution (SAI) on Tuesday conducted a training programme on auditing tenders, contracts and procurements.

As many as 33 government departments took part in the programme, aimed at empowering the public sector's professional and functional workforce.

The programme reflects the existing institutional partnership focusing on protecting public funds and raising the efficiency of their use. The programme, which brings together employees of units of the State's Administrative Apparatus, runs until May 11. Eight groups



of trainees will benefit from the programme this year.

The training programme presents anomalies that were revealed to the audit institution during monitoring

operations. The aim is to develop the capabilities of the participants and enable them overcome such anomalies in their respective institutions. — ONA



Cruise ship with 1,377 passengers on board anchors in Salalah Port

SALALAH: Salalah Port on Tuesday received a cruise ship with 1,377 passengers on its board, including 918 tourists. The cruise ship has a tourist programme to visit many ports around the world.

The tourist programme of the ship, which came from Port Sultan Qaboos in the Governorate of Muscat and heads to the Port of Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, included tours to tourist attractions and archaeological sites renowned in the Governorate of Dhofar, besides visiting beaches and traditional bazaars in the Wilayat of Salalah.

The Sultanate of Oman annually witnesses visits of many cruise ships, thanks to its sea location overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Sea of Oman. — ONA

RAFO opens Air Centre for Specialised Training



MUSCAT: The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) on Tuesday marked the inauguration of the Air Centre for Specialised Training at Al Seeb Air Base.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman.

The Air Centre for Specialised Training provides the RAFO and the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) with qualified personnel and it observes high quality standards.

The centre serves as a state-of-the-art educational and military training institution offering a variety of disciplines. — ONA

INCO
ANNOUNCEMENT

Inco Engineering, Sohar Industrial Estate, wishes to dispose of fiber glass insulation blankets and old nuts & bolts on as is where is basis and is inviting offers from bidders to submit their best price. Loading and transporting from our yard is in Bidders scope.

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Contact Person:
Mr. Hazza Salim Said Al Ghaithi: +968-95145496



13, including 7 children dead in Israeli strikes

GAZA CITY: Israeli air strikes on Gaza killed three Islamic Jihad group leaders and 10 others, including several children, on Tuesday, officials in Gaza said.

Islamic Jihad vowed to “avenge” the deaths in the pre-dawn raid involving some 40 Israeli aircraft, which hit targets in the crowded coastal territory for nearly two hours from just after 2:00 am on Monday.

The health ministry said four children were among those killed and 20 people were wounded, some of them in serious or critical condition, in the attacks which left buildings ablaze and reduced others to rubble.

The Israeli army said that in its Gaza strikes it had targeted three leaders of Islamic Jihad, as well as its “weapon manufacturing sites”.

Asked about child casualties, army spokesman Richard Hecht said: “If there were some tragic deaths, we’ll look into it.”

Islamic Jihad confirmed three of its senior members were killed

in Gaza. It named them as Jihad Ghannam, secretary of the Al Quds Brigades military council, Khalil al Bahtini, commander of the military wing in northern Gaza, and Tareq Ezzedine, a military leader in the West Bank who operated from Gaza. Mourners carried the bodies of those killed through the streets as funeral processions got under way.

RETALIATION Moscow’s diplomatic mission to the Palestinians said one of the dead was a Russian citizen and doctor, who was killed alongside his wife and one of his children. Islamic Jihad vowed to retaliate, with spokesman Daoud Shehab warning that “the resistance considers that all cities and settlements in the Israeli depths will be under its fire”. Israel last week traded air strikes on Gaza for rocket fire from the enclave, an exchange sparked by the death in Israeli custody of a

Palestinian hunger striker with ties to Islamic Jihad, which ended with an Egypt-brokered truce. Islamic Jihad charged on Tuesday that Israel had “scorned all the initiatives of mediators” and vowed it would “avenge the leaders” killed in the latest air strikes. The Israeli military described Ghannan as “one of the most senior members” of Islamic Jihad who had coordinated weapons and money transfers with Hamas. Bahtini was “responsible for the rocket fire towards Israel in the past month”, Israel said. And Ezzedine, who was released from Israeli detention in a 2011 prisoner exchange, had been planning “multiple attacks against Israeli” civilians in the West Bank, it charged. An Islamic Jihad source said that Ezzedine was part of a delegation from the group that had been due to travel to Cairo for a meeting on Thursday, which has now been cancelled. — AFP



Palestinians inspect the heavily-damaged house of Jihad Ghannam killed in Israeli air strike, in Gaza. — AFP

Arrest hinders Imran Khan’s path to second Pakistan innings



Police fire teargas shells towards activists and supporters of former PM Imran during a protest against the arrest in Peshawar. — AFP

ISLAMABAD: Since being ousted from office last year, former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan has vowed he will captain the country a second time. But on Tuesday, Khan was arrested as he appeared at Islamabad High Court to face one of a slew of cases levelled against him. Since he was turfed out, 70-year-old Khan had successfully dodged detention and fought off dozens of charges which analysts say are a common tactic to quash dissent in Pakistan. He also survived a November assassination attempt which saw him shot in the leg — an attack he blamed on incumbent Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and a senior army officer. The political drama has

played out against a backdrop of economic freefall and dramatically increasing militant attacks, ahead of general elections due no later than October. With the charismatic Khan now locked away and his legion of supporters being called out on the streets to violent protests, his political prospects — and those of Pakistan — are unclear. Four Years after his retirement from international cricket, he tiptoed into politics and for years held the PTI’s only parliamentary seat. But the party grew hugely during the government of General Pervez Musharraf, becoming a genuine force in the 2013 elections before winning a majority five years later. — AFP

Sudan faces displacement crisis as truce talks yield no progress

KHARTOUM: Residents of Sudan’s capital reported air strikes overnight and sporadic gun battles on Tuesday morning amid what they call a surge in looting, with no sign of progress in ceasefire talks taking place in Saudi Arabia. The violence has accelerated a wave of people fleeing their homes, with the number of people internally displaced inside Sudan more than doubling in a week to more than 700,000 the UN’s migration agency said. “The biggest danger is the spread of robbery and looting and the total absence of the police and the law,” said Ahmed Saleh, 45, from Khartoum’s adjoining sister city of Bahri. Homes, shops and warehouses have all been targeted, residents said. The eruption of conflict between Sudan’s army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary risks a prolonged war that could draw in outside powers and unleash a new humanitarian crisis across the region. The United Nations estimates that 5 million additional people will need emergency assistance inside Sudan while 860,000 are expected to flee to neighbouring states that were already in crisis at a time when rich countries have cut back on aid. The World Health Organization



A soldier stands as Sudanese women who fled the violence in their country wait to receive food supplies near Chad borders. — Reuters

also raised the confirmed death toll to more than 600, with 5,000 injured, though the true figure is thought to be much higher. Meanwhile, there has been no outward sign of progress in the talks that have taken place in Saudi Arabia since Saturday despite their limited goal of a ceasefire to allow humanitarian access. Repeated earlier truce deals have already

been broken. The army, under General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, and the RSF under General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, had joined forces in a military coup in 2021, reconfiguring a planned transition to civilian rule. On Monday, Burhan said in a television interview that he wanted peace. “We believe the peaceful solution is the ideal route to handle this crisis,” he said, but gave no indication he was ready to make concessions. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan’s office said he had spoken with Burhan on Tuesday and said Ankara was willing to host further talks on a more comprehensive settlement. — Reuters

BEIRUT

Protesters attack bank amid economic crisis

Dozens of Lebanese protesters attacked a major bank in the central district of the nation’s capital on Tuesday, amid anger over a deepening economic crisis and the devaluation of the local currency against the dollar. Protesters smashed the windows of Audi Bank, one of the biggest banks in the country, burned tyres and blocked roads to protest against the continued limits imposed on Lebanese savers’ ability to withdraw their money. One witness said at least



five protesters were seen with blood running down on their faces and on their hands. The Lebanese currency has lost more than 90 per cent of its value since 2019. — dpa

NEW DELHI

21 dead after bus plunges off bridge in India

At least 21 people died when a bus crashed off a bridge in India, officials said, reportedly after the driver fell asleep at the wheel. The vehicle smashed through a barrier and plummeted around six metres onto a dry river bed south of the central city of Indore in Madhya Pradesh state. The dead included three children and 10 women, the Times of India newspaper reported. The bus driver had fallen asleep at the wheel before the



crash and had fled the scene, the daily said. The same report estimated there are about 150,000 car crash fatalities in India annually, or one person every four minutes. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Voters abroad wrap up landmark election

Millions of Turks living abroad wrapped up voting on Tuesday, in an election that has turned into a referendum on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s rule. Sunday’s presidential and parliamentary ballot will pass judgement on Turkey’s longest-serving leader and the social transformation spearheaded by his party. The vote is Turkey’s most consequential in generations and the toughest of the 69-year-old’s tectonic career. Polls show Erdogan locked



in a tight battle with rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu. Such voters comprise 3.4 million of Turkey’s 64.1 million registered electorate and tend to support more conservative candidates. — AFP



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In brief

■ WELLINGTON



SEARCH PAUSED FOR SCHOOLBOY MISSING IN CAVES

New Zealand rescue teams suspended their search for a schoolboy who went missing on Tuesday while caving with classmates and teachers during heavy rainfall.

The boy was part of an outdoor education class that “encountered a severe weather event” while visiting the popular Abbey Caves complex north of Auckland.

Heavy rain has lashed the area for days, with almost 10 centimetres expected on Tuesday alone, making caves liable to flash flooding.

It was not clear how the boy disappeared, but police, fire and emergency rescue crews searched for several hours in vain before suspending efforts as darkness fell. — AFP

■ NAIROBI



AUTOPSIES REVEAL ORGANS MISSING IN CULT DEATHS

Autopsies on corpses found in mass graves linked to a religious cult in Kenya have revealed missing organs and raised suspicions of forced harvesting, investigators said, with a fresh round of exhumations resuming on Tuesday.

Police believe most of the bodies belong to followers of self-styled pastor Paul Nthenge Mackenzie who is accused of ordering them to starve to death “to meet Jesus”.

While starvation appears to be the main cause of death, some of the victims were strangled according to chief government pathologist Johansen Oduor. — AFP

■ ROME



MELONI OPENS TALKS ON CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Tuesday began meetings with opposition parties to discuss her plans to reform the constitution and end chronic political instability in the euro zone's third largest nation.

There is little optimism that this time will be any different, but Meloni said it was important to try to find broad support for change as she headed into talks with the main parliamentary parties.

“We consider this to be an important confrontation for our democracy to approve measures that cannot be put off” she said. — Reuters

Zelensky demands faster support on EU chief’s symbolic visit

KYIV: Ukraine warned on Tuesday it needs more and faster support from Brussels, including a clear path to EU membership, as European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen made her latest visit to Kyiv.

Von der Leyen was in town to mark Europe Day, which promotes peace and unity on the continent and falls on the same day that Kyiv’s foe Moscow celebrates the Soviet victory in 1945.

Standing alongside the European Commission head, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urged the EU to speed up ammunition deliveries, lift “unacceptable” restrictions on Ukrainian grain exports and begin talks on Ukraine’s EU accession.

“The time has come to remove the artificial political uncertainty in the relations between Ukraine and the EU,” Zelensky told a joint press conference.

“The time has come to take a positive decision on the opening of negotiations on Ukraine’s accession to the EU,” he added.

Von der Leyen is to hand EU member state leaders a report in October on Ukraine’s progress in democratic and anti-corruption reform. At that point, members will have to decide whether to launch formal EU membership talks.

She arrived in the Ukrainian capital for a series of what she called “intense” meetings as Kyiv plans to launch a spring counteroffensive



President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen (L) and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (R) take part in a press conference in Kyiv. — AFP

against Russian forces.

“Ukraine is fighting for the ideals of Europe that we celebrate today. In Russia, Putin and his regime have destroyed these values. And now they are attempting to destroy them here in Ukraine,” von der Leyen said.

“But the aggressor has already dramatically failed. Ukraine has resisted the attack and is fighting

back successfully,” she added.

Zelensky thanked her for the EU decision to provide Ukraine with one million artillery shells but insisted on the need to deliver them more quickly. “The need for them on the battlefield is already present,” he said.

He then addressed restrictions on Ukrainian grain exports imposed by neighbouring EU

nations — a source of tension among the allies.

“All restrictions on our exports are completely unacceptable right now. They only reinforce the abilities of the aggressor,” Zelensky said.

“We are waiting for the EU to stop all restrictions as fast as possible,” he added, calling the measures “severe, even cruel” and

“disappointing” in times of war.

The conflict severely limited the traditional export channel of Ukrainian grain via the Black Sea, necessitating export overland via Ukraine’s neighbours.

Member states agreed to allow the import of certain products from Ukraine without quantitative restrictions, and without customs and official inspections. — AFP

Scholz urges integrated defence industry, migration agreement



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz delivers a speech during the “This is Europe” debate at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. — AFP

BERLIN: The European Union must work harder to integrate its defence industries and reach agreement on how to tackle migration, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in a keynote speech on Tuesday outlining his vision for the bloc’s future.

Europe should boost efforts for closer military cooperation, joint procurement and the integration of its defence industries as it will only be heard if speaking with one voice, Scholz told lawmakers at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on Europe Day.

“Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has shown us how essential this realisation is,” he added.

Scholz, who is under pressure from some German cities amid a renewed influx of refugees

from countries such as Syria and Afghanistan, also pushed for a deal on the overhaul of the EU’s asylum system before bloc-wide elections in 2024.

“We are united by the goal of better managing and organising irregular migration — without betraying our values,” he said, echoing the bloc’s goal of finding a solution before European elections.

The European Union’s migration and asylum system faced an unprecedented socio-political crisis in 2015 when more than one million people reached Europe’s shores.

The EU has since tightened external borders and asylum laws, but Mediterranean arrivals rose last year, with the bloc’s border agency Frontex reporting some

330,000 unauthorised arrivals.

Scholz also called on the EU to fast-track talks on free trade agreements with the South American trade bloc known as Mercosur, as well as Mexico, India, Indonesia, Australia and Kenya.

“Europe must turn to the world. If we continue fruitless negotiations over new free trade deals for years to come, others will dictate the rules — with lower environmental and social standards,” the leader of Europe’s biggest economy warned.

Echoing remarks in his first major speech on Europe’s future in Prague in August, Scholz reaffirmed his commitment to EU enlargement while pushing for qualified majority votes on topics such as foreign and fiscal policy.

— Reuters

Britain steadfast behind Ukraine says Sunak after Putin parade speech

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak brushed off Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Victory Day parade remarks, after the Russian president claimed that “a real war” has been unleashed against Russia by the West’s “untamed ambitions”.

Putin’s remarks in Moscow’s Red Square saw the Russian leader claim that “civilisation is once again at a decisive turning point”.

Speaking at the capital’s annual commemorations celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, he said: “A real war has been unleashed against our Motherland.”

The prime minister rejected such claims, as he said that the Russian leader was the only person to blame for the war.

In his speech, Putin insisted that the West’s “untamed ambitions, arrogance and impunity” are to blame for the conflict.

He welcomed soldiers fighting in Ukraine who were present at the parade, and concluded his speech: “To Russia! To our brave armed forces! To victory!”

Earlier, Russia unleashed



Rishi Sunak pictured while leaving Downing Street, in London. — Reuters file photo

a barrage of cruise missiles on Ukraine, hours before the start of the Moscow parade, which this year is taking place amid tight security measures.

The Kremlin’s forces rejected such claims, as he said that the Russian leader was the only person to blame for the war.

Speaking to broadcasters in Southampton, Sunak said: “There is only one person who is responsible for the illegal and unprovoked war on Ukraine, and that is President Putin. The crimes that are being committed are appalling. — dpa

Greening eastern Europe’s growth engines



Soňa Muzikárová

The writer is a former economist at the European Central Bank and diplomat at the OECD, is Senior Adviser to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Over the past three years, a series of overlapping crises has exposed the structural weaknesses in Central and Eastern European (CEE) economies. Coming on the back of rising labour costs and declining productivity growth, one setback after another – an unprecedented pandemic, supply-chain shocks, a brutal war raging next door, extreme weather events, and an energy crunch – pummeled the region. With such unrelenting pressure making it almost impossible to regroup or plan for the long term, CEE economies have struggled to retool for a rapidly changing world.

The stakes of inaction could not be higher – as demonstrated by last summer’s record-high temperatures. The extreme heatwaves severely reduced

supplies of potable water in some parts of Slovakia, a country known for abundant freshwater resources. The resulting drought was among the worst in several centuries, destroying more than 500,000 hectares of crops in Hungary, at an estimated cost of more than €1 billion (\$1.1 billion). Poland has suffered several years of drought, which, coupled with Russia’s war in Ukraine, has driven up food prices. Rising temperatures have also contributed to an increased risk of wildfires and other climate risks in Bulgaria and across the Balkan peninsula.

Yet even though global warming has resulted in sizable economic losses, the region has been fertile ground for climate skepticism, with political elites often downplaying risks or dragging their feet on

THE EUROPEAN UNION’S EASTERN FLANK WAS A LEADING BENEFICIARY OF GLOBALISATION. BUT THE REGION HAS MOVED FAR TOO SLOWLY IN RESTRUCTURING ITS ECONOMY FOR AN ERA IN WHICH DECARBONISATION AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE ARE ESSENTIAL

meeting European Union policy targets. Polish President Andrzej Duda has been a vocal critic of the bloc’s climate legislation. Former Czech President Miloš Zeman expressed the belief that the fight against climate change was “exaggerated” and that climate action had morphed into a “religion.” He also advocated

withdrawing from the European Green Deal.

The energy crisis triggered by the Ukraine war has, at long last, presented an opportunity for the region to wean itself off Russian natural gas and embrace renewables. To be sure, it prompted a quantum leap in supply diversification and energy-demand reduction. But implementing a long-term decarbonisation strategy took a backseat to keeping households heated and industry humming.

One could even argue that the war caused climate backsliding: high natural-gas prices led to a significant increase in dependence on coal – the “dirtiest” fossil fuel by far. Ultimately, however, the region – led by the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – resorted

to nuclear power, the preferred source of clean energy for many CEE countries, though detractors raise concerns about radioactive waste and the industry’s overall safety record.

The region has a large auto industry and heavy manufacturing sector; both are carbon-intensive and difficult to electrify, making large-scale industrial decarbonisation in the next decade an uphill battle. Nuclear is a familiar fallback, and the deployment of renewables has been lackluster, hovering below the EU average, which also reflects widespread climate skepticism and distrust of green policies, which CEE residents tend to view as a threat to their livelihoods, rather than as job creators.

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Asia rice output turns corner as farmers expand planting

NAVEEN THUKRAL

Asia’s rice output is set to climb this year as higher prices spur farmers to expand acreage and use more fertiliser, easing supply concerns after production suffered its first decline in seven years in 2022.

Production from recently harvested off-season rice crops in India and Thailand, the world’s top two exporters, has exceeded last year’s levels, and farmers are gearing up for main crops to be planted in coming months, with prices hovering near two-year highs.

Major northern hemisphere producers, including India, Pakistan and Thailand, will start planting their main crops in May and June, said Shirley Mustafa, an economist at UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

A greater area will be planted with rice “in response to increases in rice prices, and greater access to fertilisers could sustain an output expansion from these crops,” Mustafa said.

India’s export restrictions last year, combined with lower global production after a heatwave in China and floods in Pakistan, lifted prices of the staple, deepening worries over food inflation.

However, prices have declined in recent weeks, with the widely used 5 per cent broken rice variety in India , the world’s largest rice producer, and Thailand quoted well below two-year highs seen earlier in 2023.

Production from winter-sown rice in India jumped to 22.8 million tonnes from 18.5 million tonnes a year ago as above-average rainfall in September-October allowed farmers to expand. The rebound compensated for the drop in the summer-sown crop.

In Thailand, output from this year’s off-season crop is expected to have risen to 5.1 million tonnes, up 24 per cent from a year ago, according to the FAO.

“Last year, rains were very good and reservoirs had plenty of water for irrigation,” said a Bangkok-based trader at an international trading company, who declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Globally, the area under rice cultivation is forecast to climb to 165.70 million hectares in 2023/24, from 163.74 million hectares, according to the International Grains Council (IGC). World production is projected to climb to 521.49 million tonnes, up from 509.30 million tonnes.

“Prices are higher, and we are expecting that to encourage plantings for the 2023/24 crop, particularly in the major exporters,” said Peter Clubb, a market analyst at IGC.

— Reuters



Dr Muamar bin Ali al Toobi

The author is a writer and researcher

Artificial intelligence, a curse or blessing?

Artificial intelligence (AI) research and development has been gaining momentum day by day until we found ourselves in the face of a completely different digital era. Today, we have surpassed all former scientific concepts that were one day deemed science fiction and figments of human imagination. Oddly enough, science fiction has become a reality in the so-called digital revolution or artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence has transformed into a new digital shape that can be defined as artificial superintelligence (ASI) or artificial general intelligence (AGI). Artificial intelligence will invade all aspects of life, expand to all fields and handle various tasks in place of human beings with more effectiveness.

Approaching the digital mutation that has everything to do with the emergence of artificial general intelligence (AGI), is the beginning of what can be called the mind or artificial consciousness. I have always argued against the hypothesis that artificial intelligence would possess a brain or consciousness because artificial intelligence is close to a digital brain except that artificial mind is a simulation of the general awareness that characterises human beings and enables them to simulate sensitive decisions and experience feelings which cannot be identical with the unique human rationality and mental capacity. The human mind is distinguished by spiritual emotions that are mixed with the feelings of joy, sadness, etc. The rationality of artificial intelligence, regardless of the level of the digital leap, will only be a false conscience and awareness that has nothing to do with the human mind and consciousness.

Artificial intelligence is, up to now, linked to the principle of realising human’s aims but it cannot realise its own existential objectives. AI is a digital object that has no ambition but it has a digital brain that depends on deep mathematical algorithms that allows it to keep on learning and developing through the big data.

Big data is the driving force and secret of survival of artificial intelligence. These algorithms have astonishingly made the AI look independent. This independence sets the foundation for a digital hegemony that diverts humans from the normal path. Artificial intelligence possesses



THE RATIONALITY OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL OF THE DIGITAL LEAP, WILL ONLY BE A FALSE CONSCIENCE AND AWARENESS THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE HUMAN MIND AND CONSCIOUSNESS

enormous capabilities that work in economic, military and health fields and beyond. We are facing real concerns because we expect this digital giant to emerge out of human control. Hence, it is crucial to have clear governance of artificial intelligence before it reaches its general digital peak. That can be described as artificial rationality which allows artificial intelligence to act according to the digital boom that it had created inside its algorithm and within its digital mutation. However, it is difficult to predict the shape and make-up of digital mutations and its subcomponents.

Among the fearful digital mutations of artificial intelligence is the project of twinning AI and human beings through the humanisation of artificial intelligence to replace human beings in all or some tasks and fields of life. Also the digitalisation of human beings in such a way as to become compatible with the smart digital model.

The closest description of this digitalisation is the concept of the superhuman. Such projects may

be more akin to imagination than reality but they are getting closer to realisation. Artificial intelligence seeks to achieve these projects that have unknown results which, from many perspectives, might be a scourge that threatens human existence, survival civilisation.

However, it is difficult to foresee the form of this digital twinning whether with regard to the humanisation of artificial intelligence or the digitalisation of humans; however, its realisation is imminent but it is difficult to predict its final shape. I am someone who uses conspiracy theories but the unbridled science is difficult to resist or curb as it leads us into a world that we are not used to and had never thought of accepting. That is why it has become necessary to pay attention to the understanding of the digital present and its future and to evoke awareness and readiness including the readiness of our understanding of this digital world and ways to tame it by activating governance and forcibly applying it.

The governance of artificial intelligence is still in the initial phase and is yet to reach the stages of digital supremacy. That requires defining the legislation and laws most importantly the ethics of the artificial intelligence which determines the course of artificial intelligence and its developments and ensure that it does not affect human existence, safety and freedoms. This can be likened to what happened to the systems for controlling nuclear activities and research and limiting the spread of nuclear weapons.

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Covid-19 no more a health emergency

There are now no fears of lockdowns; all modes of travel including flights are available; malls, restaurants and cinemas are all open, and containment and control measures are no more in force!

The global health emergency, declared by the World Health Organization more than three years ago for the Covid-19 pandemic that has killed millions of people around the world and upended daily life in unimaginable ways, has also been lifted.

This follows the recommendation of a key UN advisory panel that the public health emergency be ended. “I have accepted that advice,” the WHO Director-General said, adding, “It is therefore with great hope that I declare Covid-19 over as a global health emergency.”

Although the common man is not under any imminent threat and the so-called surveillance for Covid-19 may stop or reduce greatly, there exists a possibility, however tiny, that the virus may mutate to cause more severe disease. This fear was conspicuous when WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus asked people, while announcing the lifting of the emergency, to remain cautious about the novel coronavirus as it still represents a global health threat.

He warned governments not to get complacent as the decision to lift the emergency does not signal an end to the pandemic. According to him, some critical uncertainties about the evolution of the virus persist, which makes it difficult to predict future transmission dynamics or seasonality.

He pointed out that efforts to track how the virus spreads and mutates have “declined significantly around the world, making it more difficult to track known variants and detect new ones.”

Now looking back, the end of the emergency declaration comes after the UN health agency announced it on January 30, 2020. At the time, there were fewer than 10,000 cases of the virus, most of them in China.

In the days that followed, we were flooded with reports of how hospitals



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OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS TODAY ARE NOT AS STRESSED AS THEY WERE DURING THE LAST THREE YEARS. AND AS SUCH THE FOCUS HAS TURNED ON FOR A GOOD 2023 AND THE YEARS AHEAD!

across the world struggled to cope with burnout among doctors, nurses and other workers. We read reports about how hospital emergency rooms jammed up with patients who were waiting long hours or even days to get a bed. So was the chaos outside the hospitals for food and other essentials due to lockdowns, travel bans, closures etc.

According to WHO figures, albeit a vast undercount of the pandemic’s true toll, there have been more than 765 million Covid-19 cases since the start of the pandemic. Nearly 7 million people have died. Cases peaked in December 2022 following the breakout of Omicron that swept the globe.

Indirect health impacts have also resulted from the disruptions to livelihoods, education and social protection consequent on the pandemic. The International Monetary Fund has estimated cumulative economic loss to 2024 as a consequence of the pandemic at \$13.8 trillion.

While vaccines reduced severe disease and death in countries fortunate enough to have them in sufficient quantities in the initial stages, the “shocking” global disparity in access remained one of the biggest risks to ending the pandemic.

Now the governments have strengthened healthcare systems and rolled out vaccination drives. Doctors and researchers have already figured out many measures including methods of transmission; the vulnerable group who are at the highest risk of severe disease and deaths and treatment protocol.

As a result, the population all over the world has now developed a ‘hybrid immunity’ that can offer better protection against future spread. Significantly, our health systems today are not stressed as they were during the last three years. And as such the focus has turned on for a good 2023 and the years ahead!

At the same time, what is required from the part of our society is that we must continue to adapt our collective response to the virus. We must continue to do all we can to protect those most at risk. Only the emergency phase is over, but Covid is not!

HIGH AND DRY!



A view shows the cracked ground of the Rialb reservoir as drinking water supplies have plunged to their lowest level since 1990 due to extreme drought, in the village of Bassella, Spain. — Reuters

The Ukraine war and European identity

The European Parliament elections are still a year away, but political parties across the European Union have already shifted to campaign mode. While the election will undoubtedly feature a wide range of views on climate change, immigration and religion, there is one issue that seems to unite politicians of all stripes: the war in Ukraine.

More than a year after Russian President Vladimir Putin started a war on Ukraine, all mainstream European parties are still singing from the same hymn sheet when it comes to supporting the Ukrainian cause. But the appearance of unity masks a brewing conflict over the soul of Europe: its conception of freedom. While it is widely acknowledged that Ukraine’s fight represents a fight for democracy and European values, it is also increasingly clear that victory would require Europe to abandon some of the key elements of its own freedom project. This is the paradox of freedom in Europe.

Over the past half-century, European countries have developed a concept of freedom that relies on universalism, the repudiation of military force, economic interdependence, pooled sovereignty, and the idea of Europe as a singular entity founded on a set of common institutions. This vision is what distinguishes the EU from other regions and even from its member states. But the war in Ukraine has



Mark Leonard

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WITH THE WAR IN UKRAINE WELL INTO ITS SECOND YEAR, EUROPEAN POLITICIANS FROM ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM ARE STILL EAGER TO SHOW THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRY

called into question the bloc’s basic tenets — and opened the way for skeptical national leaders to challenge them.

While Europeans previously viewed their project as post-national, they now acknowledge that the EU model is exceptional rather than universal. Over the past year, European policymakers have become increasingly fixated on fortifying the EU’s borders against other political projects to the East and the South.

Consequently, European integration, originally pursued to ensure peace on the continent, has been transformed — if not quite into a “war” project, then at least into an armed pacification-cum-security project. Europe’s institutions, which once relied on soft power, now provide military equipment to Ukraine and endorse the continent’s rearmament, and the European Commission has weaponized the EU economy through sanctions and accelerated the transition to a war economy, complete with rationing and energy-price controls.

But the most dramatic shift in European political thinking has been the reconsideration of interdependence. European integration was based on the belief that deepening economic ties between countries could transform former adversaries

into allies. But, as Putin has demonstrated, interdependence can also be exploited as a tool for extortion.

For decades, the main goal of the European project was to tame nationalism by pooling sovereignty. But now, Europeans recognise that sovereignty must be protected before it can be pooled. The EU’s transnational legal system cannot serve as a universal blueprint for the entire continent, let alone the world.

In the early stages of the war, the tension between the EU’s liberal values and its wartime mobilisation was less pronounced. The technocratic European Commission supported the war effort by advocating measures to arm and morally bolster Ukraine in its struggle against Russian war. The decision to grant Ukraine candidate status represented an exceptional



The war in Ukraine has called into question the bloc’s basic tenets.

step for the bloc — a marriage between geopolitical imperatives and the tools of process-oriented bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, both the left and the right have had to adjust their positions to find common ground on Ukraine. European liberals have become less resistant to nationalism and more attuned to the necessity of using force against Russia, and the right has been forced to reassess its stance on the EU’s role as a strategic actor.

The 2008 global financial crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis catapulted the far right to the forefront of the political debate. But the failure of Brexit, together with the Covid-19 pandemic, led to a decline in Euroskepticism, with mainstream parties benefiting from the public’s desire for stability. Polling by the European Council on

Foreign Relations has shown that during these crises, many right-leaning voters recognised that sovereignty could be reclaimed only through collective action, and many formerly Euroskeptic parties abandoned their pledges to leave the EU or abandon the euro.

Voters across the bloc have undergone a similar shift. ECFR’s latest opinion poll shows a blurring of the traditional left-right divide on geopolitical matters and a growing fusion of nationalism and cosmopolitanism under the European idea of freedom. This change, spurred by the war in Ukraine, goes to the heart of what the European project is really about, and in the long run will lead to a struggle over Europe’s identity. In that regard, the upcoming European elections could serve as a bellwether.

Although European parties are currently trying to outdo each other in showing support for Ukraine, thorny issues such as the conduct of the war, the treatment of refugees, and how a post-war Ukraine would be integrated into the EU could once again divide Europe. If fatigue from the war, the refugee crisis and the high cost of living sets in, the 2024 European elections could become a new battleground.

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LIONEL MESSI ‘SET FOR MEGABUCKS’ SAUDI MOVE

RIYADH: Argentine superstar Lionel Messi will play in Saudi Arabia next season under a blockbuster deal, a source close to the negotiations in the kingdom said on Tuesday.

The deal would mean Messi potentially joins his arch-rival Cristiano Ronaldo in the Saudi league as the Gulf state lavishes its wealth on sport.

There was no confirmation from Messi’s current club Paris Saint-Germain, who noted simply that he was under contract until June 30 when contacted.

The source said Messi will sign a “huge” deal with an as-yet-unnamed Saudi club just months after the 35-year-old lifted the World Cup in neighbouring Qatar in December.

“Messi is a done deal. He will play in Saudi Arabia next season,” said the source, who is not authorised to speak to media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

“The contract is exceptional. It’s huge. We are just finalising some small details,” added the source.

A separate PSG source said the Qatar-owned French club had not offered Messi a new deal.

“If the club had wanted to renew his contract, it would have been done earlier,” that source said.

Despite several reports linking Messi with Al Hilal, one of the top Saudi teams, club sources said they had not been in direct contact with PSG.

Lionel Messi’s father and agent Jorge insisted on Tuesday his son has not decided where he will play next season.

“There is absolutely nothing agreed with any club for next year,” Messi’s father wrote on Instagram.

“The decision will not be made before Lionel finishes the league with PSG.”

The world’s biggest oil exporter has thrown hundreds of millions at sports deals including Ronaldo’s signing, Formula One in Jeddah and the divisive LIV Golf tour.

Messi was suspended by Qatari-owned PSG last week for an unauthorised mid-season trip to Saudi, where he is a tourism ambassador.

He has also been heavily linked to a return to his former club, Barcelona. A spokesman for the Spanish La Liga leaders said, “We don’t know anything about that,” when asked about a potential Saudi deal.

NOT A SPECIFIC CLUB

Messi’s long-time sparring partner Ronaldo joined Saudi Pro League club Al Nassr in a massive deal in January.

Ronaldo’s agreement to June 2025 is said to total more than 400 million euros (\$439 million), making him the world’s highest paid athlete according to Forbes.

Both deals — along with others including LIV Golf and the 2021 purchase of Newcastle United football club — are being bankrolled by the Public Investment Fund (PIF), one of the world’s biggest sovereign wealth funds, the source said.

In any transfer involving such enormous financial stakes, last-minute changes are not unusual.

However the source in Saudi Arabia said the negotiations with Messi had gone smoothly.

“The negotiations didn’t take as much time as the ones with Ronaldo. As we now know the recipe to contract world-class players,” the source said.

“It’s Saudi Arabia that brought him, not a specific club. The money comes from one place — PIF.”

Ronaldo, 38, has not been a



NO DECISION MADE ON FUTURE: MESSI’S FATHER

guarantee of success at Al Nassr, who have slipped off the top of the Saudi Pro League and missed out on silverware in the Saudi Cup competitions.

But Messi is also intended to raise the profile of Saudi Arabia as it tries to bring in tourists and investment, the source said.

“He is a player at the end of his career and he is not here only for football. He is here to secure international attraction for the

kingdom,” said the source who is following the Messi negotiations.

“The plan is not only Messi and Ronaldo, the plan is to bring glorious players like these two and also upcoming youth players who have a promising future.”

“We want people to visit Saudi Arabia to watch football stars,” the source added.

WORLD CUP BID

Messi has had two lacklustre

seasons in Paris after a glorious era at Barcelona where he won four Champions League and 10 La Liga titles, and is still worshipped by the fans there.

The record seven-time Ballon d’Or winner, joining a mouth-watering attack featuring Kylian Mbappe and Neymar, scored just 11 goals in his first season as he helped PSG to a routine Ligue 1 title.

But PSG have got no closer

to a coveted maiden Champions League victory, bowing out twice in the last 16 with the illustrious Argentine in their line-up.

Saudi Arabia has held talks with Egypt and Greece about a joint World Cup bid, according to officials.

In coming years it will hold the men’s Asian Cup football tournament, the Asian Games and even the Asian Winter Games on artificial snow. — **AFP**

Messi, Fraser-Pryce win top Laureus awards

PARIS: Argentina’s World Cup winning captain Lionel Messi was named the Laureus Sportsman of the Year, while sprint champion Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce bagged the top women’s honour at the awards ceremony on Monday.

Messi also received an award on behalf of the Argentina men’s football team, who were named World Team of the Year after their triumph at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The 35-year-old Paris St Germain forward has previously won the award once before, sharing it with Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton in 2020.

Messi also became the first athlete to scoop both the World Sportsman of the Year Award and the World Team of the Year Award in the same year.

“I was looking at the names of the incredible legends that won the Laureus Sportsman of the Year Award before me:



LIST OF WINNERS

World Sportsman of the Year Award:
LIONEL MESSI

World Sportswoman of the Year Award:
SHELLY-ANN FRASER-PRYCE

World Team of the Year Award:
ARGENTINA MEN’S FOOTBALL TEAM

World Breakthrough of the Year Award:
CARLOS ALCARAZ

World Comeback of the Year Award:
CHRISTIAN ERIKSEN

World Sportsperson of the Year with a Disability Award:
CATHERINE DEBRUNNER

World Action Sportsperson of the Year Award:
EILEEN GU

Laureus Sport for Good Award:
TEAMUP



Schumacher, Woods, Nadal, Federer, Bolt, Hamilton, Djokovic... it really sunk in what unbelievable company I’m in and what a unique honour this is,” Messi said.

100M GOLD

Jamaican Fraser-Pryce enjoyed an outstanding 2022, which included winning the 100m gold at the World Athletics Championships.

Tennis player Carlos Alcaraz, who won the 2022 US Open and rose to number one in the ATP rankings, was named the Laureus World Breakthrough of the Year.

Christian Eriksen, who recovered from the cardiac arrest he suffered at the European Championship in 2021 to return to Premier League football with Brentford and then Manchester United before competing at the World Cup with Denmark, received the Laureus World Comeback of the Year Award. — **Reuters**

Russell, Rinku star in Kolkata's last-ball victory over Punjab



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh (2L) celebrates with Varun Chakravarthy (2R) after winning the Indian Premier League (IPL) match against Punjab Kings at the Eden Gardens Stadium in Kolkata. — AFP

KOLKATA: Andre Russell's blazing 42 and a finishing act by Rinku Singh kept Kolkata Knight Riders in the hunt for the IPL play-offs with a tense final-ball win over Punjab Kings on Monday.

Kolkata looked in trouble at 124-4 while chasing 180 for victory when Russell and Rinku, who hit an unbeaten 21 off 10 balls, put on a destructive partnership of 54 to win by five wickets at their home Eden Gardens.

Russell smashed three sixes off England left-arm quick Sam Curran in the 19th over but got run out on the penultimate delivery with Kolkata needing two off the final ball.

The left-handed Rinku, who

smashed five sixes on the final five balls in a match-winning knock for Kolkata last month to become an IPL sensation, hit the winning boundary off Arshdeep Singh.

"I didn't think about the last ball. Even when I hit those five sixes, I hadn't thought much," said an elated Rinku. "I was playing on the merit of the ball. I had the belief in me that I could finish the game."

Man of the match Russell said, "When I have Rinku at the other end I am not worried. I have confidence in him. I get goosebumps when I see what he is doing now. I have company at the backend."

Kolkata jumped from eight to

five in the 10-team table led by holders Gujarat Titans as teams jostle for the final four spots to make the play-offs.

Skipper Nitish Rana set up the chase with his 51 after England's Jason Roy, who came in as an impact player, gave the home team a solid start with his 38 off 24 balls but a few wickets set Kolkata back. But the Russell-Rinku combination tore into the opposition attack as Kolkata hammered 53 runs in the final four overs to pocket their fifth win in 11 matches.

Spinner Varun Chakravarthy set up victory with bowling figures of 3-26 including the key wicket of Liam Livingstone, lbw for 15, as

Punjab finished on 179-7.

Skipper Shikhar Dhawan's 57 and late cameos boosted Punjab's total with 36 runs from the last two overs, but the effort was not enough.

Fast bowler Harshit Rana provided the early breakthroughs including Sri Lanka's Bhanuka Rajapaksa for a duck.

Chakravarthy and Suyash, who got Punjab's big buy Curran caught behind four, combined to choke the flow of runs with their leg spin. The left-handed Dhawan attempted to keep up the charge despite getting little support from the other end as he reached his third fifty of the season before departing in the 15th over. — AFP

Oman Olympic coach calls up 26 players for domestic camp



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The Oman Olympic (under-23) team coaching manager Akram Habreesh has called up 26 players for a domestic preparatory camp which will begin on Wednesday and will run for one week. The training camp in Muscat is part of the team's preparation for their main forthcoming assignment of West Asian Championship in Iraq in mid of June.

The last presence of Oman Olympic team was back in Qatar at the International U23 Friendly Championship in March. Oman boys have ended the championship in sixth place after suffering a 1-0 defeat against Iraq in the concluding match. In the opening game, Oman team lost 3-0 against eventual champions South Korea while they edged Kyrgyzstan 2-0 in the second round match. South Korea were crowned as champions of the tournament after blanking UAE 3-0 in the final game while UAE finished as runners-up. Kuwait claimed third place as they beat Thailand 1-0.

The training sessions of Muscat's warm-up gathering under the watchful eyes of the national coach Habreesh will shape the player's readiness for the West Asian event. The other

upcoming major events that Oman Olympic team boys will take part will be attending in the U23 Asian Cup qualifiers in September.

The U23 Asian Cup finals, which will be held in Doha, will act as qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympics. Moreover, the national Olympic team players will take part in the Asian Games in China from September 23 to October 8.

The underway camp and the next gatherings will assist the squad's harmony ahead of the official tournaments start. Moreover, the team will play series of friendly games before the West Asian championship and the preparatory games will take place in the next gathering.

OMAN SQUAD: Khalid Yazeed, Asaad al Balushi, Ayman al Nabhani, Hudhaifa al Mamari, Qusai al Mamari, Sameer al Hatmi, Salim al Dawoodi, Abdullah al Fulaiti, Hammam al Mawali, Salim Abdulsalam, Khalid al Ghatrefi, Abdulrahman al Yaqoobi, Abdulhafidh al Mukhaini, Abdullah al Mukhaini, Omar al Hadabi, Said al Rawahi, Said al Salami, Ahed al Mashakhi, Mazin Saleh, Nibras al Mashari, Omar al Balushi, Mohammed Abdul Hakeem, Mohammed Moosa, Mohsin al Dawoodi and Abdullah al Alawi.

Delhi face biggest challenge against Chennai



The points table does suggest that this is the competition between the second best and worst team of IPL, but the points table doesn't tell the reality of this match. This is the league and sometimes its best to get the momentum late and then to be unstoppable. Delhi lost their first 5 games and since then they have transformed to an extremely dangerous team. Delhi have won 4 from their last 5 games and they are on a roll. In this they have beaten the table toppers Gujarat Titans and then the unpredictable Bangalore, Kolkata and Hyderabad as well.

Despite the glorious run, the actual test of Capitals is to just arrive. Delhi is to play Chennai and Punjab twice and the most difficult out of the 4 matches is this match for Delhi. Chennai is a great side at home and spin plays a big role, which makes Chennai an unbreachable fortress for most teams.

CSK VS DC AT CHENNAI TEAM INFO — DC are last in

the table and need to win all their remaining 4 matches to qualify, while CSK are well placed in second position and need to win 2 games out of 3 to qualify. Although, they would like to win all 3 of these games and finish in the top two. Delhi are confident after they RCB in the last game. The momentum is in favour for CSK as well, as they are coming from a one-sided win against Mumbai.

Head-to-Head - Played — 27; Won by CSK- 17; Won by DC – 10

CSK possible 12 — R Gaikwad, D Conway, A Rahane, M Ali, S Dube, R Jadeja, M S Dhoni, D Chahar, M Pathirana, T Deshpande, M Theekshana, A Rayudu

DC possible 12 — D Warner, P Salt, M Pandey, R Rossouw, S Khan, A Patel, R Patel, A H Khan, K Yadav, A Nortje, I Sharma, K Ahmed

Pitch & Weather Report — The pitch at MA Chidambaram Stadium is spin-friendly. The spinners will play a key role while bowling here as the ball tends to grip off the surface. Run-scoring isn't easy and the batters will have to be on their toes while batting here. Clear skies will greet both sides on Friday, with the



Delhi Capitals' Mitchell Marsh (centre) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Royal Challengers Bangalore's Glenn Maxwell in New Delhi. — AFP

temperature in Chennai expected to hover between 28 to 36 degrees Celsius.

Match Prediction — Delhi showed their real capability in their last match against Bangalore and they would like to repeat it to make them through. But Chennai's spin-assisting wicket and Dhoni's captaincy will not allow Delhi to play free-flowing cricket and calculative risks have to be taken. This is exactly where Warner and Pandey's aggressive contribution will be a must need for Delhi. Honestly, I

don't really feel that Delhi have, what is needed to breach this fortress of Chennai, and they will succumb to the quality spin attack of Chennai. So, it's going to be Masala Dosa, Sambhar and variety of coconut chutneys for dinner tonight.

FAN COMMENT'S

"Most associate nation players are getting a chance in the IPL, then why aren't the Omani players considered in the IPL? Are they not good enough or are they too old to be considered for



such high-profile tournaments? We don't even see them being considered in lower tournaments like LPL, CPL or BPL. Hope to see the transformation of Cricket in Oman just like Afghanistan and Ireland." — **Dr Satish Balasubramaniam, 52, Economics Professor, USA.**

"This year's IPL has been a total stand out from the previous editions and the points table would just suggest the same. If Delhi can somehow make their way through to the play-offs, then this would be one of the best come backs of all times. May be an OTT series or Blockbuster movie

is also possible on it. Other teams are also fighting their hearts out for making it to the top 4 spots." — **Chef Sanjeev Khanna, 46, Restaurant consultant and Advisor, Indian.**

"I have always wondered the reason for the consistent success that players have been able to derive from Chennai Super Kings team. So many players have moved to Chennai with struggling fate and believe it or not, they have been able to turn things around at Chennai. Wonder why other teams have not been able to understand the reason for Chennai's success." — **Dr Dravid Mathews, 48, Psychologist, British.**

"My 7-year-old Son (Arihan Jewrikar) is a hardcore fan of Gujarat Titans, while I am a diehard fan of Chennai Super Kings. We are just hoping that somehow, we get 2 more matches of them in the play-offs and finals. This year's IPL has been crazy, with so many matches of 200 plus, our evenings have been forced to stay at home to some serious quality of cricket. Most matches are just like highlights, with action on almost every delivery." — **Dr Makarand Jewrikar, 38, Specialist Pediatrician/Badr Al Samaa Hospital, Indian.**

Key lessons learned in impressive Premier Cup outing: Mendis



OMAN'S BILAL KHAN NAMED BEST BOWLER OF THE TOURNAMENT

SKIPPER ZEESHAN'S PERFORMANCE 'DESERVED' PLAYER OF SERIES AWARD

MUSCAT: Individual brilliance stood out for Oman despite the national team narrowly missing out a place in the final of the recently-concluded inaugural ACC Men's Premier Cup in Kathmandu, Nepal.

A third-place finish for Duleep Mendis coached team did secure the Men in Red a spot in the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup, along with Premier Cup champions Nepal and runner-up UAE.

The three Associate nations will vie with the A teams from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh in the fifth edition of the event in July.

The qualification for the Emerging Asia Cup is a small consolation for Oman as the team had the potential to go all the way in the Premier Cup, according to Mendis, the team's chief coach.

The former Sri Lankan Test captain said that "his boys returned with a lot of positives from the Nepal tour."

Oman lost to UAE by just two runs in a rain-interrupted semifinal that was decided on DLS method. The loss of two wickets in

one over just before rains stopped play gave UAE a narrow win.

Reflecting on the loss that saw Oman miss out a chance to battle with hosts Nepal in the final and a chance to make it to the Asia Cup, Mendis said: "A single-over madness cost us dear. We were ahead of UAE till that over."

Mendis added: "The boys learnt an important lesson. One can't lose focus while on the crease. Despite the defeat in the semifinal, we came back with a lot of positives. The individual performances of some of the players were top-notch and the best in the tournament. Overall, our players demonstrated good application and noteworthy performances in all departments of the game during the tournament."

BILAL NAMED BEST BOWLER

Oman's fiery left-arm pacer Bilal Khan was declared the best bowler of the tournament and the coveted award will give a world of confidence to the experienced speedster ahead of the ICC World Cup Qualifier in Zimbabwe next month. Bilal picked up a total of



17 wickets in the six matches at an average of 19.82 and an economy of 6.29. He had three four-wicket haul with his best figures of 4/42 against Qatar.

Another bowler who impressed was right-arm off-spinner Jay Odedra, who collected ten wickets including a five-wicket haul of 5/14 against Kuwait. With an miserly economy of 3.55, the best by an Omani bowler in the series, Mendis said that he was the "find of the tournament for us."

The opening pair of Jatinder Singh and Kashyap Prajapati had an excellent run with Jatinder garnering 288 runs in six games including an unbeaten century against Malaysia. An average of 72, Jatinder finished as the second-best run-getter in the tournament. UAE's Vriitya Aravind was the top scorer with 454 runs.

Prajapati scored a total of 222 runs in six matches at an average of 44.4 with the highest score of 66. He was the sixth highest run-scorer of the tournament.

Oman skipper Zeeshan Maqsood led from the front and his all-round display should have "earned him the player of the tournament award" according to Mendis.

His reasons were based on Maqsood's stellar statistics as the captain collected 187 runs at an average of 46.75 coupled with 13 wickets at an average of 16.46.

However, the player of the tournament award was conferred on Nepal's spinner Sandeep Lamichhane, who picked up 13 wickets in the tournament and scored 55 runs in six matches.



Maqsood ranked No 5 all-rounder in the world

MUSCAT: He is in the company of Bangladesh's all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, Rashid Khan of Afghanistan and Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza. An exclusive club of top-five ranked ICC Men's ODI all-rounders now features Oman's skipper Zeeshan Maqsood.

This is the first time that an Omani cricketer has scaled such heights and adding shine to his success is the fact that Maqsood is the only cricketer from Associate nations among the top-five.

As per the latest ICC rankings, Maqsood attained his career-best rankings with total rating points of 252 on April 29.

Maqsood also made the biggest jump among the 20 cricketers featured in the latest rankings, climbing three places to reach world No 5 from the previous rating update of the world governing body.

Among the 20 are star players of the likes of Mitchell Santner (New Zealand, 6th), Wanindu Hasaranga (Sri Lanka, 9th), Chris Woakes (England, 10th), Alzarri Joseph (West Indies, 11th) Hardik Pandya (India, 13th), Glenn Maxwell (Australia, 14th), Shadab Khan (Pakistan, 15th), Josh Hazlewood (Australia, 15th), and Moeen Ali (England, 20th).

It has been a long journey to the top-five for Maqsood, Oman's long-serving skipper.

The 35-year-old left-handed batter and left-arm orthodox bowler was ranked 216 in 2019 before breaking into top-100 in 2020 with the best rank of 77.

He then catapulted into 24th spot in 2021, then a year

later, Maqsood made the world notice by reaching No 8.

His achievements were hailed by the ICC when he was conferred with the 2021 ICC Men's Associate Cricketer of the Year award in January 2022.

From 2019-2023, Maqsood has played 37 ODIs and scored a total of 1,021 runs with the highest of 109 (against USA) and an average of 31.90. He made his ODI debut on April 27, 2019 vs Namibia. Maqsood picked up 53 wickets in 37 games with the best figures of 4/15 against UAE.

He had an economy rate of 4.06 and an average of 22.94 that included four four-wicket hauls.

Maqsood scored 969 runs in a series (ICC World Cricket League 2, 2019-23) to be fourth best in the world for most runs in a series by a captain. He is also among the top-10 bowlers for most wickets in the same series, having picked 47 in 34 games.

The Oman captain expressed happiness and said: "It is a great honour for me to be up there among the top-five all-rounders of the world."

"It is a great achievement to be No 5 in the world. This has been possible due to the support of Oman Cricket board, coaches, team-mates, and fans. I will try to push further as there is plenty to achieve ahead."

Maqsood said "hard work and dedication has been the key in his climb to the top-five."

"My individual rankings apart, it is the delight to have played my role in many Oman victories that gives me more satisfaction and I am looking ahead to contribute more in the team's success."

Everton struck five to stun Brighton

ANDY JALIL
BRIGHTON, MAY 9

In a match of considerable significance to both sides, Brighton's European ambitions were dented while a determined Everton gratefully climbed out of the relegation zone – at least for the time being. They are two points clear of the bottom three places. Brighton must continue to battle for a place in the Europa League while still holding a two-game advantage over their nearest rivals also aiming for Europe.

A disappointed Brighton manager, Roberto De Zerbi said: "We showed we are not yet ready to compete to achieve the big targets. (Playing) Three games in a week is difficult if you are not used to that. But if you want to fix your targets higher, you have

to improve your mentality. The greatest quality of the big teams is that they immediately forget after a win and are ready to play again straight away.

"Today we didn't forget our victory against Manchester United last week. We didn't turn up until the second half. If you watched the game with Manchester United, and if you watched this game, you can watch two completely different teams."

He added: "I hope we remember this date for a long time because it can be a very important day for us if we improve in mentality. We have won against Liverpool, United and Chelsea because we showed pride, courage, energy and passion. I'm sure we will show that on Sunday at Arsenal."

Everton took the lead before



Everton's Dwight McNeil celebrates scoring their fourth goal with Alex Iwobi, Abdoulaye Doucoure and Dominic Calvert-Lewin. – Reuters

the crowd had even time to settle in their seats. Dominic Calvert-Lewin ran clear of Lewis Dunk after receiving a cross from Alex Iwobi and he then passed to Abdoulaye Doucoure for an easy tap-in in the 34th second.

Doucoure doubled the lead in the 29th minute with an excellent volley from a cross by Dwight McNeil. Everton kept the pressure on and were quick to attack starting from deep inside their own half. Doucoure did well to retrieve a pass which wasn't quite accurate from Calvert-Lewin and he in turn passed to McNeil whose low cross found the net off the foot of goalkeeper Jason Steele for an own goal ten minutes before the break.

Brighton did improve in the second half bringing on four substitutes but Everton

maintained the momentum they had achieved. They extended their already comfortable lead in the 76th minute when McNeil beat Dunk and Steele to put the ball into an empty goal.

Three minutes later Brighton managed a consolation goal when Mac Allister headed in the ball which had come off the post from a shot by Kaoru Mitoma. But that was all too late and the visitors added their fifth in the sixth minute of injury time with McNeil unleashing a drive into the top corner.

Everton manager, Sean Dyche said: "We reminded everyone that there is life and quality in this team and we did it against a very good team. The feelgood factor is very important. We have to keep believing and focus on Everton and not what is around us."

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Oman posts budget surplus of RO 450m for Q1 2023

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Oman posted a surplus of RO 450 million for the quarter ended March 31, 2023 on revenue totalling RO 3.217 billion, which was 6 per cent higher than the corresponding revenue of RO 3.025 billion for Q1 2022. This compares with a surplus of RO 325 million for the corresponding quarter of 2022.

The latest 'Fiscal Performance' news bulletin of the Ministry of Finance attributed the increase in revenue to a 9 per cent growth in oil export revenue, which climbed to RO 1.707 billion in Q1 2023, up from RO 1.565 billion a year earlier.

The growth in oil revenue was fuelled by an increase in

oil production averaging 1.063 million barrels per day in Q1 2023, up from 1.025 million bpd a year earlier. Additionally, oil prices averaged \$85 per barrel this year, up from \$78 a year earlier.

Net gas revenue, on the other hand, declined 12 per cent to RO 720 million this year, down from RO 819 million a year earlier.

The decrease is attributable to deductions made from total revenues received by the new Integrated Gas Company towards the purchase and transportation of the gas, the Ministry noted.

Current revenues soared to RO 787 million in Q1 2023, up from RO 636 million a year earlier, the Ministry said. Total public expenditure for the quarter ticked up 4 per cent to RO 2.767 billion this quarter, up from RO 2.668 billion a year ago.

Current expenditures of civil and government units amounted to RO 1.033 billion, up by RO 79 million compared to RO 954 million recorded a year earlier.

Development expenditure of civil and government units amounted to RO 117 million, representing 13 per cent of total development spending of RO 900 million allocated for 2023.

Further, by the end of Q1 2023, 'Contributions & Other Expenses' amounted to RO 273 million for the quarter, which was up 53 per cent compared to the total of RO 179 million recorded a year ago.

Oil product subsidy amounted to RO 78 million, while an amount of RO 100 million was transferred to the future debt obligations budget item. The Ministry of Finance confirmed that it paid over RO 325 million by the end of the first quarter of this year in private sector dues received through the completed documentary financial system.

Madayn names new CEO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The Board of Directors of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), chaired by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Commerce and Industry Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, has announced the appointment of Eng Dawood bin Salim al Hadabi (**pictured**) as the new Chief Executive Officer of Madayn.

The Board stated in a statement: "The Board of Directors of Madayn welcomes Eng Dawood al Hadabi as its new CEO, hailing his rich expertise and notable achievements, and wishing him tremendous success in his new role to achieve Madayn's future objectives and vision.

The Board also takes this opportunity to express its sincere gratitude and appreciation to Hamad al Qasabi for performing the tasks of the CEO over the past months, lauding his dedication and dynamic involvement in driving Madayn towards its objectives."

With his Master in Business Administration and Information Technology from Coventry University and Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Glasgow Caledonian University, Eng Dawood al Hadabi has over 24 years of expertise and fruitful track record in various fields.

Pact signed for green hydrogen certification pilot project in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Belgian-based international renewable energy and marine infrastructure firm DEME is starting a pilot project for the certification of green hydrogen it plans to produce in the Sultanate of Oman. The green energy certificate will allow hydrogen to be imported into Belgium as a low or zero-carbon energy resource.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals and Tinne Van der Straeten, Belgium's Minister of Energy, signed an agreement on the experimental project of green energy certification in Brussels on Monday.

The agreement aims to evaluate the adherence of green hydrogen production in Oman to the requirements of the European Union. The move will pave the way to exporting green hydrogen to European markets in the future.

During the signing, the parties applauded the initiative of DEME that wants to start the certification, a recognised green certificate, for the hydrogen it plans to import from Oman to Belgium and the rest of Europe.

OQ (the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman and DEME Concessions (the renewable energy and offshore marine infrastructure arm of Belgium's DEME Group) are jointly building a hydrogen plant, Hyport Duqm, in the port of Duqm.

The joint venture was allocated a 150 square kilometres zone, with a space for 1.3 gigawatts of wind turbines and solar parks.

There will be a 500 megawatt electrolysis installation to convert the generated green electricity into hydrogen.

This will be shipped in the form of green ammonia to regions in the world, such as Europe, where the industry is looking for ways to reduce its

THE AGREEMENT AIMS TO EVALUATE THE ADHERENCE OF GREEN HYDROGEN PRODUCTION IN OMAN TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. THE MOVE WILL PAVE THE WAY TO EXPORTING GREEN HYDROGEN TO EUROPEAN MARKETS IN THE FUTURE.

carbon dioxide emissions on a large scale.

To guarantee that the imported hydrogen is really made from renewable energy and does not come from fossil natural gas, a system must be set up to trace its origin. DEME and OQ are now setting up a pilot project for this.

Strategy consulting firm Hincio was tasked to prepare the certification of the hydrogen. Hincio worked on CertifHy as the first GO certification system for Europe, a project that is now supported by the European Commission.

Talks have also started with the European Commission, which is working out the criteria that hydrogen must meet in order to be recognised as 'green'.

With this, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals, met separately yesterday in Brussels, Van der Straten, Belgian Minister of Energy, and Maros Sefcovic, Vice-President of the European

Commission.

During the two meetings, they discussed aspects of enhancing cooperation and coordination with the European Commission in the regulatory frameworks for clean hydrogen production and transportation projects, and opportunities to enhance existing cooperation with the Kingdom of Belgium in the areas of investment in green hydrogen production, transportation and storage projects.

A series of specialised workshops were held between the European Commission, the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Belgium during the visit and dealt with the general framework for hydrogen certificates, investment opportunities in supply chains and knowledge of Belgium's plans and projects to convert to hydrogen, and the initiatives supervised by the European Commission to stimulate investment in this sector.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Former Irish PM Enda Kenny to address key leadership forum

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Former Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny has been named as the keynote speaker of a prominent SME leadership and management forum due to take place in Muscat next month. The forum, organised by the Omani Academy for Small and Medium Enterprises under the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (Inmaa), will focus on financial management and investment.

Salah bin Hilal al Maawali, Chief Executive Officer of Inmaa, highlighted some of Kenny's key economic achievements. "The upcoming leadership and management forum will feature Enda Kenny (**pictured**), the Prime Minister of Ireland from 2011 to 2017. Kenny created a big shift in terms of the economy in Ireland. At the time Ireland was in a really bad situation, with an unemployment rate of around 15%, which fell to 6% during his time as prime minister."

Kenny will discuss the importance of financial management in ensuring sustainability, and managing budgets and resources. The forum will also host panel discussions on financial resources, investment leadership, and fintech trends.

The first edition of the leadership and management forum featured leadership author John C Maxwell, and over 1,400 people attended, according to Al Maawali.

TURN TO P15

OAB impacts 240 lives during Ramadhan



MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) brought the spirit of the season to 240 people in Oman during Ramadhan, with 223 volunteer hours completed during its four-week programme for the Holy Month, which positively impacted the elderly, children, cancer patients, several non-profit organisations and more.

The month of activities concluded when OAB hosted Eid preparations at the elderly home in Al Rustaq, with entertainment and gifts, preceded the previous week by a special Eid Exhibition at the bank's Head Office, promoting charity awareness and donations in coordination with non-profits, the Association of Welfare of the Handicapped, Kiswa Oman and Oman Food Bank, as well as selling a variety of seasonal goods.

The exhibition was

opened by Rashad al Zubair, Chairman of OAB.

The Association of Welfare of the Handicapped exhibited its products, while Kiswa Oman encouraged bank employees to donate clothes in good condition for Eid and Oman Food Bank raised awareness of its activities and asked for support.

Additionally, 24 SMEs and small business participated, with visitors able to purchase abayas, men's traditional musars, Omani keepsakes, jewellery, fragrances, accessories and children's clothing.

The month's second activity, a festive Qaranqasho evening at the Child Welfare Centre in Muscat brought joy to more than 100 children and family members – celebrating Ramadhan 15, which is traditionally marked by a gathering of children.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds launches world's biggest jewellery destination

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer in the world with an extensive retail network of over 310 outlets across 10 countries, has launched the world's biggest jewellery destination in the Kozhikode district of Kerala, India.

The Artistry store, which is being set up as a new global destination for gold & diamonds jewellery shopping, is incidentally being set up at the same place where Malabar Group originated three decades ago.

Indian Union Muslim League State President Syed Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal inaugurated the Artistry Store of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Ministers P A Muhammad Riyas, V Abdurrahiman, A K Sasindran, Ahmed Devarkovil, MLAs Kanathil Jameela, Najeeb Kanthapuram, T Siddique, Kozhikode Corporation Councillor Ramlath, DCC President K Praveen Kumar, Malabar Group Chairman M P Ahammed, Vice Chairman K P Abdul Salam, Malabar Gold & Diamonds India Operations Managing Director O Asher, Malabar Gold & Diamonds International Operations Managing Director Shamlal Ahamed, Group Executive Directors KP Veerankutty, A K Nishad, C. Mayinkutty, M



P Abdul Majeed, V S Shareej, Directors P A Abdullah, Samad Bapu, Corporate Heads R Abdul Jaleel, A K Faisal, V S Shafeekh, Shaji Kakkodi, M P Ahmed Basheer, Retail Operations Head, P K Siraj, Malabar Gold & Diamonds Zonal Head Javed Meyan, Chamayam Bapu and other management members, religious-social-political personalities and well-wishers were present for the event.

Covering an area of 110,000 square feet with five floors for shopping and three for parking, the Artistry Store will be the world's biggest jewellery showroom, offering a differentiated shopping experience and innovative bouquet of services to the customers.

It has a dedicated wedding arena exclusively for the selection

of ornaments for brides. A bespoke suite will enable the customers to design jewellery of their choice with the assistance of expert designers and craftsmen. A privilege lounge with personalised services is another feature of the showroom, to be run by a set of specially trained staff.

Malabar Group Chairman M P Ahammed termed the completion of 30 years as a momentous occasion in their journey which was made possible only because of the trust and affection of the customers.

"Their continued support and trust took us where we stand now as one of the biggest jewellery groups in the world. We are especially happy to set up the Artistry store, the world's biggest jewellery showroom, at the same place where we started our humble journey. This is a significant

step towards our goal to emerge as the biggest jewellery retailer in the world," he said.

"The artistry store here gives an indication of how we want to move ahead in the coming years. We aim to give a completely different experience to the customers, providing them information on design development and manufacturing. This is one of the crucial results of our continued and sustained research and development on how to elevate the shopping experience.

The trust from the customers and our commitment to give back the best to them made this brand the most favourite of the people," said O Asher, Indian Operations Managing Director of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Nesto Hypermarket launches Mango Carnival across all its stores in Oman

MUSCAT: Nesto Hypermarket Oman has launched Mango Carnival across all its stores in Oman. Largely popular among mango-lovers, this mango carnival, held from May 8 to 11, 2023, is a celebration of the king of fruits and everything about this juicy, golden fruit.

The festival was inaugurated by Mubarak al Dohani (General Manager – Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion), at Nesto Hypermarket Mabella, in the presence of Haris Pallatholil, Director of the Nesto Hypermarket, Nesto staff and customers. This festival will showcase several species of the delicious fruit from different parts of the world. Customers will also be able to relish some of the special mango treats in the hot food, bakery, sweets, and grocery section.

As part of the festival, Nesto has flown in more than 25 varieties of the tropical fruit from countries across the world, including India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Yemen and more.

The local collection of Omani mangoes is also a part of the highlight of this event. The promotion will also feature great deals and offers on freshly imported selection of mangoes across all Nesto Outlets.

Haris Pallatholil Regional Director – Nesto



Hypermarkets Oman, said "For the past several years, Nesto has been promoting the festival of mangoes and this year's 'Mango Carnival' is sure to become a popular event among our customers. We have coordinated with our sourcing centers worldwide to help us bring in this delicious fruit for our customers at the most affordable prices. The different varieties of this tropical fruit are equally loved by people of all nationalities."

Scratch and win Kia cars before season of rewards campaign ends

MUSCAT: Hurry! Now is the time to own a Kia and get a chance to win Kia Pegas or Kia Niro thru Scratch & Win offer before the campaign ends on May 11, 2023. You can also benefit with Scratch & Win up to 20 per cent off on new Kia vehicles and periodic service up to 100,000 kms.

Additionally, get 1 year insurance and cash gift. (Conditions apply. For details please visit any Kia showroom.) Kia has an exciting range of vehicles to choose from in Oman. They include the Sportage and Cerato.

Kia Sportage is a stunning performer, sporting an attractive look and a host of impressive features and technology.

The Sportage's exterior is bold and its impactful lines have an assertive presence, balanced with innovation and instinctive



characteristics.

Kia Cerato is one of Kia's most popular sedans. Designed to make an impression Eye-catching from any angle, the Cerato utilises full LED headlights which appear as slender lines with the radiator grille to underline the redesigning of the face of the model, defining

the car's sporty exterior.

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

Bank Muscat relaunches Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has relaunched its highly popular Asalah and Al Jawhar referral scheme for the year 2023 after the great success of last year's campaign.

The current referral scheme, which will run till September 30, 2023, offers cash rewards up to thousands of rials when referring new customers to the bank to enjoy an extraordinary banking experience.

The scheme offers existing Asalah customers and new customers a chance to win up to RO 100 for every successful referral after which the referees should meet the eligibility criteria

by transferring and maintaining a deposit of RO 30,000 in their saving accounts.

The referrer can get a sum of RO 100 and the referee will get a 10 per cent cash back if the referee has a monthly salary of RO 5,000 or more and successfully meets all eligibility criteria after opening the new Asalah salary account.

For Al Jawhar customers, the referrer and the referee will win RO 50 per successful referral once the referee successfully meets all eligibility criteria by maintaining a deposit of RO 10,000 in their Bank Muscat Al Jawhar saving account.

The referrer can get a reward of RO 50 while the referee can get up to a 10 per cent cashback if a new salary account is opened



by a referee with a monthly salary of RO 1,000 or more.

On this occasion, Abdulnaseer al

Raisi, General Manager – Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are very happy to once again offer guaranteed rewards for successful referrals for Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking from Bank Muscat after the great success of the scheme last year.

In line with its vision "To serve you better, everyday", Bank Muscat continues to focus on enhancing the customer experience and expand its customers base in the Sultanate of Oman that stood up to more than two million customers.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for the confidence and trust that they have placed in our cutting-edge products and

services.

Bank Muscat will continue offering special products and services that meet the customer aspirations."

The participation in Asalah and Al Jawhar referral schemes is based on successful referrals to the bank which requires customers to meet the eligibility criteria for both services. Customers having a monthly salary of RO 5,000 or maintaining a savings deposit of RO 30,000 are eligible for Bank Muscat Asalah Priority Banking.

To take part in the Asalah Referral scheme, the referrer should fill up the form available on the bank's website at <https://bm.click/3cZp9HL> and email it to Referral@bankmuscat.com.



Former Irish PM Enda Kenny to address key leadership forum

FROM PAGE 13

The Chief Executive Officer provided insight into the speaker selection process. “We look for people who are making changes in their own lives and in their societies. Most of the people we feature are world-class speakers and writers, so we have a long process ahead of us.”

According to Al Maawali, the process begins with a list of ten speakers, which is then reduced to five or six, of which three remaining candidates are then interviewed. “Essentially we choose people who will create an effect on people,” he shared.

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Fund (Inmaa) was established in 2014 to support the SME sector in the country through entrepreneurial development, financing, nurturing and legitimising.

In 2019, Inmaa established the Oman Academy for SMEs to provide entrepreneurs with the necessary skill sets to succeed.

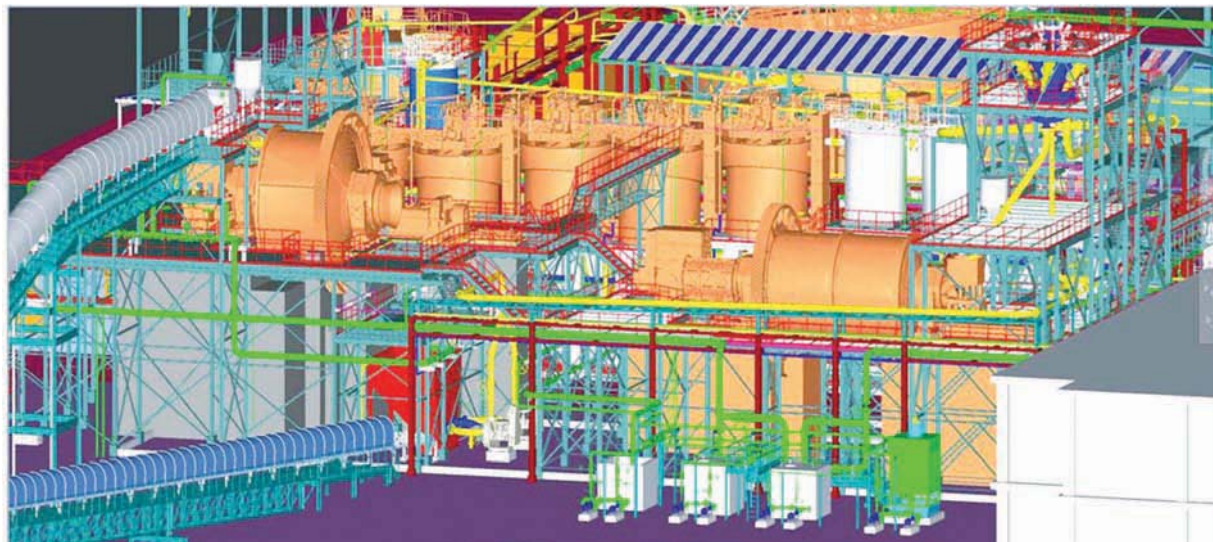
Upcoming Oman copper project inks deal for treatment of processed tailings

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MAY 9

Green Tech Mining & Services (GTMS), a subsidiary of Vienna-based BPG Precious Metal Storage, has been awarded a contract to treat the processed tailings of a new copper-gold project due to commence operations in Al Mudhaibi Wilayat (North Al Sharqiyah Governorate) later this year.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, a partnership of Alara Resources of Australia and Oman-based investors, is developing the copper-gold project at Al Washi-hi Majaza in Al Mudhaibi. At the heart of the venture, which will kick off a new phase of copper mining in the Sultanate of Oman, is a 1 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) capacity copper concentration plant currently nearing completion at the mine site.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Al Hadeetha Resources earlier this week, Green Tech Mining will reprocess all of the processed tailings generated from the project over the estimated 10-year life of



the development.

Additionally, the two parties will collaborate on the formulation of a feasibility study to identify environmentally safe options for the disposal of the tailings. Tailings are the left-over materials from the processing of mined ore.

If suitably reprocessed, they can be a source of valuable minerals. But if contaminated with chemicals, heavy metals and other hazardous ingredient, they must be made safe before their eventual disposal.

In a statement following the

MoU signing, Atmavireswar Sthapak, Managing Director of Alara and AHRL, said: “Al Hadeetha Resources continues to set new benchmarks by constantly looking for alternative ways for sustainable project growth and development.

We look forward to a positive outcome of the tailings disposal feasibility study. If proven viable, our partnership with GTMS will offer an alternative, more environmentally beneficial approach to disposing of processed waste from the Al

Washi-hi – Majaza project in Oman. Designing and building an appropriate processed tailings storage facility at the project site will proceed according to the original plan until the feasibility study is completed by GTMS.”

Ernst Grisseemann, Chairman and CEO of Green Tech Mining, commented: “The pioneering role of Al Hadeetha for Oman’s mining industry, in becoming the first copper producer in Oman after 2016, is manifested in it also becoming the first private mining entity in Oman to recognise the

importance of an environmentally sound approach to handling tailings.

In pairing with Green Tech Mining, Al Hadeetha is adopting a proven way to sustainably handle any potential long-term negative impact from the copper production waste stream.”

Significantly, Green Tech Mining & Services was founded by wholly government-owned Oman Mining Company (OMCO), in 2018 to help introduce green mining technologies and residual remediation solutions in Oman.

Since its launch, Green Tech Mining has been focused on addressing the sizable stockpiles of tailings and residuals left over from previous mining project sites in Suhar and Yanqul.

Besides supporting remediation efforts, which is key to the sustainable growth of the mining sector, Green Tech Mining also foresees the potential for the recovery of metal concentrates and minerals, which can then be processed to unlock any further value through the circular economy route or as feedstock for downstream value creation.

Forum highlights significance of Freelance Work Initiative

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 9

The National Employment Programme recently held an informative seminar for students from the German University of Technology and the Arab Open University, introducing the government’s role in supporting freelance work in the Sultanate of Oman through the Freelance Work Initiative.

The National Employment Programme is collaborating with several government agencies to promote the initiative and the Khuta platform for professional guidance and counselling.

This seminar is part of a series of informative, scientific, and methodological



events organised by the programme to inform various segments of society about the importance of benefiting from the Freelance Work Initiative, in line with the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham

bin Tarik to promote the philosophy and culture of freelance work among the Omani community to support and develop the Omani economy.

During his speech at the

seminar, Ghassan bin Fadhil Beit bin Salim, Head of the Economic Track at the Programme, emphasised that freelance work is a form of non-permanent contracting and employment not tied to a specific location or institution.

He also highlighted the flexibility of skilled labour mobility and the use of cloud-based databases, the ability to work remotely, the use of algorithm-driven smart systems, and the increase in short-term employment contracts worldwide as key features of the free economy labour market.

Global statistics on freelance work show that annual income from such work reaches \$1.2 trillion, and there are 777 active freelance

work platforms worldwide as of 2021.

Beit bin Salim explained that freelance work offers various benefits to individuals and the economy, including flexibility in work, ease of contracting, local and global job opportunities, skill and experience development for individuals, increased productivity for the economy, cost savings, access to skilled labour, and the ability to utilise their accumulated experience.

The National Employment Programme’s support for freelance work is part of Oman’s vision for sustainable economic development, diversification, and job creation, aligned with the Oman Vision 2040 objectives.

Pact signed for green hydrogen certification pilot project in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

The Omani delegation, headed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Oman’s Minister of Energy and Minerals, is on a three-day visit in Belgium and is set to tour the Fluxys LNG import terminal in Zeebrugge, an offshore wind farm off the coast of Ostend and the Royal Museum in Antwerp.

“A robust certification scheme is essential to kick-start the green hydrogen market of tomorrow,” says Van der Straeten, who asks that the European Commission speed up the certification process.

“The sooner Europe can certify green hydrogen, the sooner we can get the breakthrough of the molecule off the ground and the more Belgium can play to its strengths as a European energy hub for hydrogen.”

DEME’s certification project represents an investment of 1.3 million euros. The plan is to have certification for green hydrogen from Oman in place by 2025, so that production can start by 2026.

Firms quit or step back from CBI after misconduct

ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

An increasing number of firms have cut their association with CBI (Confederation of British Industry) after the group admitted it failed to sack staff, who sexually harassed female colleagues. It eventually

dismissed its director general, Tony Danker, following separate allegations about his conduct.

Danker claimed his sacking was unfair and in an interview with the BBC he said he was being made the “fall guy” for the crisis and that his reputation had been “totally destroyed.”

The details he gave about his dismissal prompted a response from CBI president Brian McBride, who told BBC’s Today programme that Danker’s description of events leading to his departure had been “selective.”

The UK’s biggest business lobby group continues to grapple with workplace misconduct allegations that have plunged it into crisis, with firms deserting the group in droves.

NatWest, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley are among a

host of banks and firms in the financial district of London (known as the City) to quit or pause their dealings with the CBI, as companies distance themselves from the scandal-hit lobby group.

While NatWest has ended its membership of the CBI, JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley have paused activities with the organisation, according to people familiar with the matter. HSBC, Barclays and Lloyds Banking Group have also distanced themselves.

Goldman Sachs had already terminated its relationship with CBI, in a move unconnected to recent events. Meanwhile asset manager Schroders has quit the group, while fellow fund giant Fidelity International has said it has decided not to renew its membership.

“At this time we do not feel the CBI is the right organisation to represent our views so we have decided to exit,” a Schroders spokesperson said.

A spokesperson for Fidelity International said: “Our CBI membership recently expired and we decided not to renew it in light of the deeply concerning situation.”

Relations between the firms and the CBI have been upended, as the result of an investigation into allegations of the most serious sexual misconduct, which have rocked the organisation and left it facing an uncertain future.

The lobby group, which says it represents 190,000 business “voices”, is facing multiple other allegations of sexual misconduct against senior figures.

Insurance giant Aviva has already pulled out of the CBI

and fund manager Abrdn is also considering quitting.

Fellow insurers Phoenix and Vitality said they would be quitting the CBI, as well the Association of British Insurers, while Zurich has already quit, according to Reuters.

Big Four auditor EY has also resigned its membership. A person close to the Investment Association, the trade body which represents the UK’s £10tn fund management sector, said it is “seriously considering” its membership as a result of the allegations. Baroness Helena Morrissey – one of the City’s most prominent business women – said the CBI should not survive in its current form.

Meanwhile, former cabinet minister for business, Sir Vince Cable said that while his experience of dealing with the

CBI was “positive”, he is “not clear any longer what their role is”. “Big international companies don’t need them, small business is better represented by the Federation of Small Businesses and the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC),” Sir Vince said.

“Maybe the best way forward is to be an umbrella body linking the regional CBI’s where the CBI has real strengths. And possibly merge with the BCC, which has an overlapping role.”

The comments point to an uncertain future for the CBI. The Lord Mayor of London Nicholas Lyons said that businesses would “absolutely need to reconsider” their future relationships with the lobby group if investigations conclude that “institutionalised bad behaviour” has been tolerated.

Classifieds

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The musical and creative ingenuity of Ziyad al Harbi

In this exclusive, young Omani oud player, composer, and producer Ziyad al Harbi shared insights about his early beginnings as a musician and broke down the challenges and the fun things being a musician in Oman... **P20**



'Picasso sculptor' exhibition opens in Malaga

An exhibition of sculptures by Picasso, who is better known for his Cubist and surrealist works, opens on Tuesday in the legendary Spanish artist's hometown of Malaga.

Housed at the southern resort city's Picasso Museum, the "Picasso Sculptor: Matter and Body" exhibition brings together 61 sculptures he made between 1909 and 1964.

It forms part of the global celebrations marking 50 years since the artist's death and will run until September 10.

"It is the first major exhibition in Spain devoted exclusively to Picasso's sculpture," the exhibition's curator Carmen Gimenez told reporters.

"The human body was always his primary interest and for that reason" it is the focus of this exhibition, she added.

Among the works on display are the "Reclining bather" (1931), a plaster sculpture of a woman lying down, "Woman with vase" (1933), a bronze woman fashioned from ovals, and "Child" (1960), a rounded face with arms and legs, also in

bronze.

The exhibition traces Picasso's development as an artist over almost six decades of sculpting.

It reflects the influences of Cubism, abstraction and 'found object' (pieces made with items not normally used in art) through works made in materials from wood and iron to cement, metal and bronze.

Sculpture was one of Picasso's lesser-known talents and the artist "may have made some 700 sculptures compared to the approximately 4,500 paintings he produced", the Picasso Museum said.

The start of the exhibition coincides with the 20th anniversary of the opening of the Picasso Museum of Malaga.

Picasso was born in Malaga in 1881 and died in Mougins on the French Riviera in 1973.

He first mooted the idea of a Picasso museum in Malaga in 1953 but it only became a reality five decades later in 2003, according to the museum's website. — AFP



READ

IN THE LIVES OF PUPPETS

BY T.J. KLUNE

When an unfamiliar android turns up, the security of a family consisting of a human and three robots is imperilled.



TRAVEL TALES

Camel rides and other water sports are available for the visitors of Iran's touristic Qeshm island in the Gulf.



CULTURE

Buddhist monks pray during an event to celebrate the upcoming Vesak Day, the birthday of Buddha, at Jogye temple in Seoul, South Korea.





Journey to the centre of the world

(Hint: it's in California)

EVERY MORNING, Jacques-Andre Istel has breakfast in bed at the centre of the world.

Istel is founder, mayor and postmaster general of Felicity, a stretch of California's Sonora Desert where for nearly four decades he has been building a museum of, y'know... the whole of human history.

"This doesn't exist anywhere else on this planet," the 94-year-old said. What started in 1986 with two small houses has grown into an amphitheatre of Istel's dreams; 2,600 acres (1,052 hectares) where the passage of time is marked by a sundial that uses the arm of God — as painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel — to cast its shadow.

Nearby sits a bit of an old staircase that used to be part of the Eiffel Tower, its steps ascending into the void.

The town's post office, which Istel has operated since December 1987, collects and distributes mail for a handful of residents and tourists. The \$1 stipend checks sent by the US Treasury every year are uncashed and framed.

Istel was elected mayor of Felicity shortly after it was founded in a three-vote landslide.

The ballots were cast by Istel, his wife Felicia, after whom the town is named, and the invisible dragon that stars in Istel's storybook about the centre of the world.

(A supervisor from Imperial County, in which Felicity sits, declared all three ballots valid, noting that a dragon's vote was recognised "for the first and only time in California history".)

THE 'CENTER' OF THE WORLD

Visitors to Felicity — dozens of tourists stop by every day between October and April — enter between symmetrical houses and are faced with a pyramid.

This is — officially — the middle of, well, everything. Honestly. There's paperwork to prove it: Supervisors in Imperial County declared it so.

Istel acknowledges with a twinkle in his eye that he's using a bit of creative license.

"The centre of the world can be anywhere," he smiles.

Beyond the pyramid, 723 red granite panels stretch out in thematic branches, exploring history, geography, politics, science, fashion and culture.

Here, a panel tells the story of slavery in the United States; there, one examines the life of Alexander the Great.

One slab deals with the sacrificial

Canada and enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and eventually died, and my mother and the rest of us kids came to America."

After a degree in economics, the young Istel went into the family banking business on Wall Street.

But in a seemingly emblematic bit of topsy-turviness, he wound up as a professional skydiver, the kind of

skydiving, becoming known in some quarters as the "Father of American skydiving."

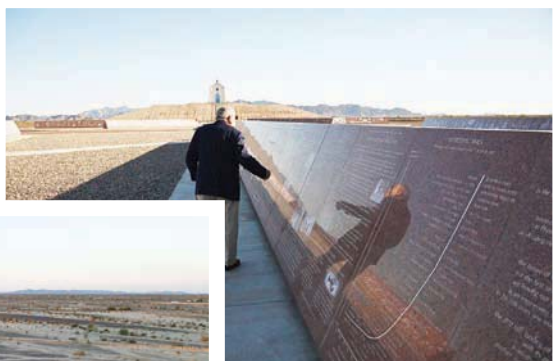
Contracts with the military and a roaring civilian business made the firm a success, and provided the nest egg for what later became Felicity.

In a study lined with memories from a very full lifetime — a diploma from Princeton, pre-war furniture and family photographs — Istel says his museum is not a legacy for himself, but a gift to all of humanity.

Perhaps it will become a place of pilgrimage for generations to come; or maybe in seismically-active California it will be destroyed in a catastrophic earthquake, he muses.

"The silver lining in that case is that archaeologists of the future will unearth a great find," he says.

And if they never find it? Well, that's just how things work out sometimes.



rites of the Vikings, while another logs America's eating habits.

SKYDIVER

Istel was born in 1929 into a privileged family in the French capital.

He left the country as the Nazis were preparing to march on Paris, and wound up in the United States.

"I'm here thanks to the Germans," he says.

"My family fought against them for three generations. My father left for England with [Charles] De Gaulle, my brother left the French Army for

career swap disappointment that usually seems to happen the other way around.

Seeking thrills outside of a job he did not really enjoy, he got his pilot's license, and did his first parachute jump.

A trip to Europe introduced him to the then-unnamed activity of skydiving, an idea Istel brought back to the United States, where the company he cofounded helped popularise the idea of recreational

lead to the chapel in Felicity.

There is, after all, still so much to do — almost 200 panels are yet to be carved. And who knows? There's still all that desert space to fill.

The magnitude of the task might keep a lesser man awake at night.

But not Istel.

"I sleep well. But I do think about the next panels," he says.

"At Felicity we don't do things by halves. We do them properly or we don't do them at all." — AFP

CHANGING WORLD

The resurgent Cambodian martial art nearly wiped out by Khmer Rouge



A REPURPOSED PHNOM PENH wedding venue becomes a seething pit of pugilism as the Cambodian martial art of kun bokator roars onto the international stage only decades after near-extinction.

The ancient form's inclusion in the Southeast Asian Games is the next step in what San Kim Sean — widely known as "The Grand Master" — calls his dream of bringing the sport to the world.

"I hope my dream will come true, to me and to the world," he said at the SEA Games, before detailing the story of how the fighting style of the Khmer Empire nearly died.

First discouraged by French colonisers, it was then hunted down by the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s, who saw a threat in organised and trained fighters with a stake in defending national culture.

"I almost died three times" during the persecution, San Kim Sean told a documentary film out later this month, "Surviving Bokator".

Fervent crowds packed the wedding venue in the Cambodian capital to wave flags and cheer on the fighters, who were both local and foreign.



One enthusiastic fan turned up wearing nothing but fighters' traditional gilded shorts, arm ties and a headband.

As well as punches and kicks, the graceful but brutal style deploys elbows and knees, locks and grapples. The battle is set to live music, with howling traditional pipes and percussion.

Combatants often dance while waiting to launch their next attack.

Ostentatiously good sportsmanship was also on display. Many contestants hugged before and after rounds.

And when a Cambodian fighter won the 55 kg men's final, his defeated Philippine opponent lifted him on his shoulders, to the delight of the local fans.

The winner, Nget Dab, then returned the favour.

As well as combat events, there have been performance rounds with stiffs and large blades. Cambodia have won 18 medals, including eight golds, across both slates.

SHOWN FOR EVERYONE

But other countries have held their own, especially in combat, where the sport overlaps heavily with the more universal mixed martial arts. Vietnam and Indonesia have both been in the medals.

Among dignitaries at the finals were defence minister Tea Banh, and Thiago Teixeira, a Brazilian kickboxer.

Teixeira was recently granted Cambodian citizenship on Prime Minister Hun Sen's orders for taking the country's side against Thailand over what to call kickboxing — "Muay Thai" or "Kun Khmer".

"I feel very great to see Cambodia is growing in the world and have their own style shown for everyone," said Teixeira, who wants to take up kun bokator training but ruled out competing.

The martial art was given a shot in the arm last year by Unesco, which inscribed it on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, dubbing it "an embodiment of Cambodia's social, cultural and religious values".

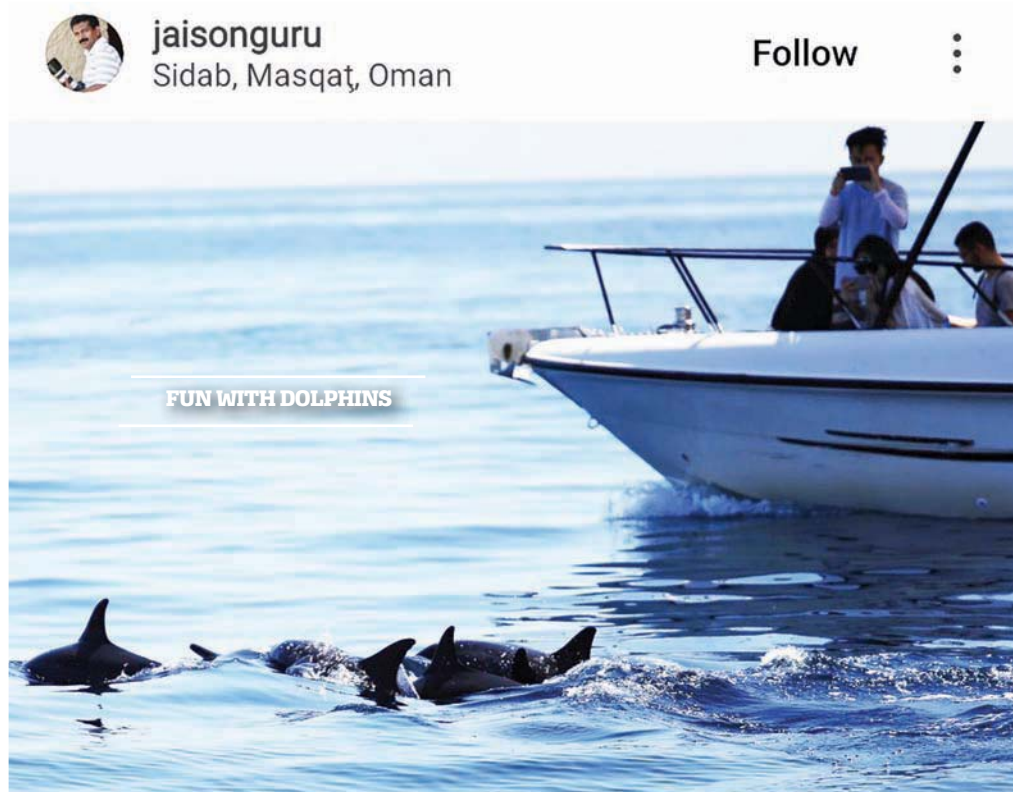
"Everything in my dreams have come true," said San Kim Sean, as medallists came over to bow in homage to him, before adding: "Not 100 per cent. The plan is still more."

But, for now, "in Cambodia everyone knows bokator". — AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Austrian billionaire's jewels seen fetching over \$150 mln at auction



THE 700-PIECE PRIVATE jewellery collection of the late Austrian billionaire Heidi Horten, the world's largest and most valuable collection of its kind to come to auction, could sell for more than \$150 million, Christie's said on Monday.
Some of its most spectacular pieces include the 90-carat "Briolette of India" diamond necklace by Harry Winston, and the "Sunrise Ruby" and diamond ring by Cartier that is worth up to an estimated \$20 million.
The collection, acquired between the early 1970s until Horten's death last year, is also comprised of more than 100 Bulgari pieces.
Horten's collection is set to exceed the record sales at Christie's for Elizabeth Taylor's collection in 2011 and the Maharajas & Mughal Magnificence auction in 2019, the only two jewellery collections to have garnered more than \$100 million.
Christie's said the estate proceeds of the auctions would go towards the Heidi Horten Foundation, which supports charitable causes including in the fields of health care and child protection.



Before agreeing to auction the collection, Christie's said it had considered the business practices of Mrs Horten's late first husband, German department store tycoon Helmut Horten, who during the Nazi era "purchased Jewish businesses that were sold under duress."
"What's important is that we have been completely transparent," Rahul Kadakia, international head of jewellery at Christie's, said.
"We are selling this collection in its identity with the name Horten. It's not being sold as an anonymous collection."
Christie's said it would make a "significant contribution" from its final proceeds to Jewish organisations to advance Holocaust research and education. It did not disclose the amount.
"Of course we cannot erase history," said Max Fawcett, head of the jewellery department at Christie's in Geneva.
"But we hope that the funds from this sale will go to do good in the future."
Christie's will auction 400 pieces in Geneva on Wednesday and Friday and hold an online sale. It will hold a second online sale for the remainder of the collection in November. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Writers' strike freezes 'Handmaid's Tale,' 'Game of Thrones' spinoff



WRITING FOR A NEW season of "The Handmaid's Tale" and a coming "Game of Thrones" prequel was halted as a nearly week-long strike by thousands of film and television writers rippled across Hollywood on Monday.
The writers of Emmy-winning Hulu drama "The Handmaid's Tale" had penned some early episodes for a new season ahead of filming that was supposed to

agreement with higher pay from Hollywood studios such as Netflix Inc and Walt Disney Co. The studios have said they made a "generous" offer to boost compensation.
Late-night talk shows immediately went dark, and some TV series and movies have followed. The final season of Netflix hit "Stranger Things" was paused. Marvel movie "Blade," starring

in April, Martin said, and will continue in London and Wales. All eight episodes already were written and revised, he said.
Martin also expressed his "unequivocal support" for the WGA.
"I hope the writers are given a fair deal as soon as possible," US President Joe Biden said at a screening of the film "American



start in late summer, said co-executive producer and writer Yahlin Chang.
Writing of the dystopian drama stopped when the Writers Guild of America (WGA) called a strike last week, Chang said on Monday.
A representative for Hulu declined to comment.
Also on Monday, "Game of Thrones" author George R.R. Martin said in a blog post that the writers' room for prequel series "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms: The Hedge Knight" was "closed for the duration of the strike."
The WGA began a work stoppage on May 2 after failing to reach a new labour

Mahershala Ali, shut down just before filming was set to start.
"The Hedge Knight" was touted by Warner Bros executives last month as one of the marquee shows in development for Max, the new name for what had been HBO Max.
The series is set 100 years before the events of "Game of Thrones," a time when the Targaryen line holds the Iron Throne, and focuses on a young knight and his squire.
Warner Bros has not announced a release date for "The Hedge Knight."
The second season of "House of the Dragon," another "Game of Thrones" prequel, began filming



Born Chinese" at the White House as part of a celebration of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Heritage Month.
It is unclear how long the strike will last. No new talks have been scheduled between the Guild and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), the group negotiating on behalf of studios.
"Maybe the AMPTP members will come to their senses tomorrow and offer some meaningful concessions, and the whole thing can be wrapped up next week," Martin said. "I would not bet the ranch on that, however ... I have never seen the Guild so united as it is now." — Reuters

TRAVEL TALES

Hong Kong's bamboo scaffolders preserve ancient technique



MO JIA YU WRAPS his legs around a pole to balance high above the ground and secure a joint, a skill he must master to become a bamboo scaffolder in Hong Kong.
The metropolis is one of the world's last remaining cities to use bamboo scaffolding in modern construction and building repair.
Scaffolders perched on bamboo frames several storeys high are a common sight, and are nicknamed "spiders" by Hong Kongers for their agility over the web-like latticework.
Mo is among dozens of students who enrol each year at the city's Construction Industry Council (CIC) to learn the traditional method.
"You have to have a daring heart," said Mo, who has been at the school for nearly three months.
"You have to be aware of safety because you are working high up in the air."
Students learn how to firmly saddle the bamboo frame so that they can free up their hands to work on the scaffolds, which are held together with simple knots tied using nylon strips.
"This basic knot is something we learn first... we practise for an entire week to get it right," said another student, Ho Cheuk Wai.
"Then, the instructors will teach us how to put on the safety harness, and step-by-step we learn how to build all the way to the top."
Scaffolding using bamboo dates back centuries and was once a widespread practice across China and elsewhere in Asia.
Most cities in the region have phased it out to favour materials such as steel and aluminium.
In Hong Kong, intricate bamboo webs are still part of the cityscape, latticed around both old residential flats and glitzy skyscrapers.

COURAGE AND SKILL

Scaffolding is regulated by strict safety guidelines but is still viewed as a dangerous profession since the work is often done at dizzying heights.
"You need courage as well as skill to survive," said Wallace Chang, a professor at Hong Kong University's architecture department.
"This deters people from going into the industry."
Despite the perils involved in the craft, Chang hopes Hong Kong will preserve it as part of its cultural heritage.
Its popularity in the city is due to both price and efficiency.
Bamboo is readily available across the border in southern Chinese provinces. A pole costs around HK\$15 (US\$2) compared with HK\$280 (US\$35) for one made of metal.
Lightweight bamboo is also easier to transport through a cramped urban centre.
It is flexible, allowing builders to cut poles to desired lengths for different construction sites.
"Bamboo scaffolds are very suited to the odd and tight spaces in Hong Kong," explained instructor Kin Kee Wo, who has worked in the construction industry for nearly 30 years.
"It can be built in the most unthinkable places, in the most beautiful ways." — AFP



THE MUSICAL AND CREATIVE INGENUITY OF ZIYAD AL HARBI



Mai al Abri

People always connect over music. It is a universally understood language that doesn't require explanation or translation. Despite the fact that music and musicians don't receive much publicity in conservative settings, young Omani talents are making an effort to showcase their abilities to the entire world.

The persistence of young people in the music industry is demonstrated by numerous examples of diverse Omani artists who have achieved public recognition.

Young Omani oud player, composer and producer Ziyad al Harbi has achieved success in music and the arts despite majoring in maritime business and logistics management.

"My introduction to music came from both school and home because I was raised in a musical and artistic family and I went to my brothers' rehearsals," Ziyad shared, recalling the fond memory he has of when he began venturing into the world of music.

"My brother assisted me in building a strong foundation, developing my musical and auditory senses and memorising when I first began playing at the age of six. I started out with the piano," he shared.

"As with the oud, I began playing it almost in 2001, and I got my professional start by performing with the General Authority for Cultural and Youth. I also learned oriental scales and playing at the level of integrated bands during that phase," he shared.

Below is the rest of the interview with Ziad.

Which aspect of the creative process do you enjoy more—singing, playing, or composing?

I see myself more in composing and playing music

than singing. Of course, singing is still occasionally possible depending on the nature of the job, but I believe that musical composition and playing are the most closely related. The lack of workers in these two fields presents a challenge, but it also gives us a chance to contribute more to enhancing the Omani artistic scene with fresh works that contribute to the harmony of the Omani artistic and creative production.

How do you feel about the national song, and what does it mean for your artistic career?

The national song holds a special place in my heart, especially since the first melody I wrote that made me known to the public as a composer is a melody for the national anthem "Li Maqamak al Sami," which was written and directed by Dr. Saleh Al Fahdi and orchestrated by the musician Raed al Farsi. Then came a string of widely popular and well-received pieces, including Ya Bin Abadi, Shafat Fuwadi, and Raiyat al-Lisu, which marked an important turning point in my artistic development and are among the pieces of which I'm most proud.

Given the quality of the patriotic songs in the Omani art archive, wasn't exploring this topic a significant challenge?

Of course, and because there was so much production and spread, I eventually stopped presenting national works. I was careful to only present noteworthy and innovative works, and this is a general principle in which I firmly believe.

I made an effort to shed light on the Omani national art archive in the "Al Watan" Medley, which combined a significant number of patriotic songs from various eras and stages into



one piece.

I felt proud during the implementation of this work, because we felt the musical and artistic value of the Omani national songs, which were presented by elite Omani artists and composers, whether from the previous generation, such as Shadi Oman, Ibn al Sahel, Salem Ali Saeed, and Abdullah al Safrawi, or from the artists and composers of the current generation, such as Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad, Sayyid Shabib bin al Mardas, Fathi Mohsen, and Salah al Zadjali.

What about an audience with high taste and standards for musical arts, particularly occasion songs, wasn't that a challenge?

Satisfying the tastes of the audience is always the most difficult challenge for any artist, especially given the various segments of society and their tastes. The Omani audience has high taste and has advanced to a high level of musical awareness, and it is difficult to please them except with distinguished works.

We target a specific segment of the audience in some works, which is a matter of specialisation or diversification in the arts and highlighting cultural richness. However, sometimes the audience does not understand the orientation of a particular work, and the audience is not to blame because it is thirsty and eager to hear anything new, which is a legitimate right.

Bin Abadi Group strives to diversify its operations in order to serve the broadest possible segment of the public.

Concerning "Bin Abadi" song, did you expect it to be so successful?

I did not anticipate the regional spread of the song, but I did anticipate its success locally, and we felt this from the beginnings of establishing the idea and throughout the work's implementation stages.

Is it the birthplace of the "Bin Abadi Group"?

Yes. The success of Bin Abadi's

work inspired us as a team to continue researching the heritage, and it reinforced our belief in Omani folk arts as having a distinct identity and spreading throughout the Gulf, Arab and international regions. As a result, the Bin Abadi Group was formed.

Of course, the existence of common main goals and principles between me and my dear colleagues, poet and journalist Humaid al Balushi, and artist friend Nibras al Mullahi, contributed to the formation of the group, and this is very important, because, while our artistic relationship is an old relationship and we gathered previous works before the launch of the group, we also decided to frame our principles and create an identity that reflects our approach in the group. The next step is to cultivate and promote Omani folk art.

What about a contemporary patriotic song, was it successful in communicating its message and establishing its presence, especially in light of social media?

I believe that the modern Omani national song has evolved significantly in recent years, and that competition and expectations have risen, not only at the level of audio production, but also visually. We also saw the formation of an Omani musical identity, particularly for national acts, which was lacking in the past, and there is anticipation on the part of Gulf and Arab audiences, which we are proud of. Without a doubt, social media has aided in this spread.

Where do you see yourself in the future?

In addition to composing, I will continue to develop Omani folk arts and present them with a modern template.



AN OMAN DAILY OBSERVER SUPPLEMENT

THE CORRESPONDENT

ISSUE 2 | MAY | ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN EDITION

THE POETRY OF BUILDING AND THE EVOLVING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE

OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM:
**A PLACE OF MEMORIES
AND ENLIGHTENMENT**

Oman Tourism is
taking a quantum
leap in building
tourism complexes

Why Al Hamra's
living museum, Bait
al Safah, continues to
stand today

Artificial
Intelligence and
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EDITOR'S NOTE

ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN ARE VITAL COMPONENTS OF OMAN'S GROWTH

As Oman rapidly develops and modernizes, it is important not to overlook the role of architecture and interior design in shaping our cities and communities. In an era where aesthetics and functionality are equally important, innovative design solutions can make a significant difference in our quality of life.

While Oman has made significant progress in recent years in terms of architectural and interior design, there is still room for improvement. Our cities are growing rapidly, and we need to ensure that our infrastructure keeps pace with the latest trends and technologies. This not only improves the standard of living for our citizens but also helps attract tourists and investors to our country.

In the first two quarters of the year, we already saw several achievements, including the opening of the beautiful Bab Al Salam Mosque, prominently displayed at the centre of this magazine. We put the spotlight on the opening of the Oman Across Ages Museum, which not only houses Oman's historical treasures, it

also brings much-needed attention to the governorate and Manah, where it is built.

Our correspondents also reached out to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, so we know what to expect in the coming years on the tourism front, and suffice to say, there is so much to be excited about. We not only look at sustainability but also put a focus on trends in interior design, including the contributions that artificial intelligence makes to this sector.

As for the lead story, it makes one ponder if indeed, a lot of Arabic countries are embarking on fake nostalgia and have totally invalidated the integrity of Islamic architecture.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone of our readers for all the positive responses we got for our first edition. It inspired us to work harder and focus more on engaging stories. I would like to thank our team and the contributors who made this digital magazine possible. We hope you will enjoy this second edition as much as you did our first issue.

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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OMAN ACROSS AGES MUSEUM: A PLACE OF MEMORIES AND ENLIGHTENMENT



TEXT BY YERU EBUÉN
PHOTOS BY MUIYAD AL SIYABI

The successful opening of the Oman Across Ages Museum marks a new milestone for Oman. Not only a centre of the country's historical treasures, it is also a space dedicated to making an impression. The Correspondent talked with the museum's general director to unveil some of its best-kept secrets.

WITH REPORTS FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OF OMAN



BY DESIGN, THE OMAN

Across Ages Museum was built to represent many things: the importance of the country's history, the triumph of Oman from past to present, a subtle summary of Oman's building policy, and a celebration of its bright future.

It was designed to become an architectural wonder, taking inspiration from the pronounced beauty of the Al Hajar mountains and boldly representing the Oman environment and its geographical traits while bestowing modern and futuristic characters, all merging so well that the lines between the past and the present are well represented almost in every corner.

With an area of 300,00 sq m and the building being 66,000 sq m wide, it takes hours just to explore the installations from one end to the other.

For those who are curious about its technical parts, it uses steel-coloured glass, four layers of it, about 6 cm thick each, and is about 5 meters high. Its glass facade rises as high as 25 meters, and while its clear silhouette dominates the Manah landscape, its builders have successfully blended it with its surrounding landscape.

To achieve the design intent of

a weathered steel appearance, the about 2000 aluminium panels used underwent a process called double anodization. Quoting the report from the experts who worked on the project, Grankraft mentioned, "The different colours on the panels are produced with the electrochemical deposition of metal salts in the pores of the anodizing layer. The aluminium is durable, corrosion-resistant, UV-resistant, and has a life expectancy of over 80 years, without losing gloss or colour."

While everyone will have the opportunity to gawk at the different halls, pavilions, and displays, only a very few know the best-kept secrets of what makes the museum a true wonder.

Engineer Al Yaqdhan Abdullah Al Harthi, Director General of the Museum, was at every step of the museum's construction.

The late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos laid the foundation stone of the museum in 2015, and within the last eight years, he accomplished some of the most amazing engineering and architectural feats inspired by the traditional building methods in Oman.

"One of the true wonders of the museum will remain unseen by the public," Al Harthi shared.

"Below the floors of this

building is a labyrinth that allows for airflow that helps cool down the building all year round," he shared.

He said that a specially built tunnel was filled with containers that are naturally frozen by the cooler night temperature, with the stored energy being released later in the form of latent heat to the air supply system to cool the incoming air for the outside air supply.

"The museum was also built for maximum natural light, but not so much that it becomes too bright," he said.

The museum has a low profile on its eastern side, which shields the inside from direct sunlight during sunrise. On the museum's western side, the windows are built into sloped walls, which block direct sunlight and lower the energy needed for illumination.

What is most remarkable is that this technique was inspired by the building techniques used for the ancient castles and buildings of Oman, with walls clad by high-quality Omani stones taken from Dhahirah and North Batinah that help cool down the surrounding air.

Al Harthi was proud that, regardless of the time of day, the museum offers a comfortable space for its visitors.





WHAT'S INSIDE?

The museum is consists of two halls: the History Hall and the Renaissance Hall.

Once a visitor sets foot inside, they are taken on a journey through the geography and history of Oman; the oldest items in the museum date back to prehistoric eras.

The History Hall consists of a series of pavilions, each dedicated to a particular subject: The Land of Oman, Early Settlers, The Civilization of Magan, The Kingdom of Magan, Maritime Heritage, Aflaj Irrigation, Embracing Islam, The Al Ya'aruba Dynasty, and The Al Busaidi Dynasty. In this way, visitors can travel through time and space, from the country's geological formation, through the experiences of the early settlers to the modern Renaissance age.

The History Hall also relates various events to their historical epochs, with two basic features taking prominence: maritime heritage

and aflaj (a traditional irrigation system). The geological formation of the Land of Oman and the Stone Age is represented in the Early Settlers pavilion, the Bronze Age is seen through the Civilization of Magan pavilion; and the Iron Age is represented in the Kingdom of Oman pavilion.

The pavilions for different ages exhibit various aspects of daily life. These are evident in the settlements of Ras Al Hamra and Ras Al Jinz and their relationship with seasonal migrations, maritime communication, copper trade, and the construction of the Aflaj system.

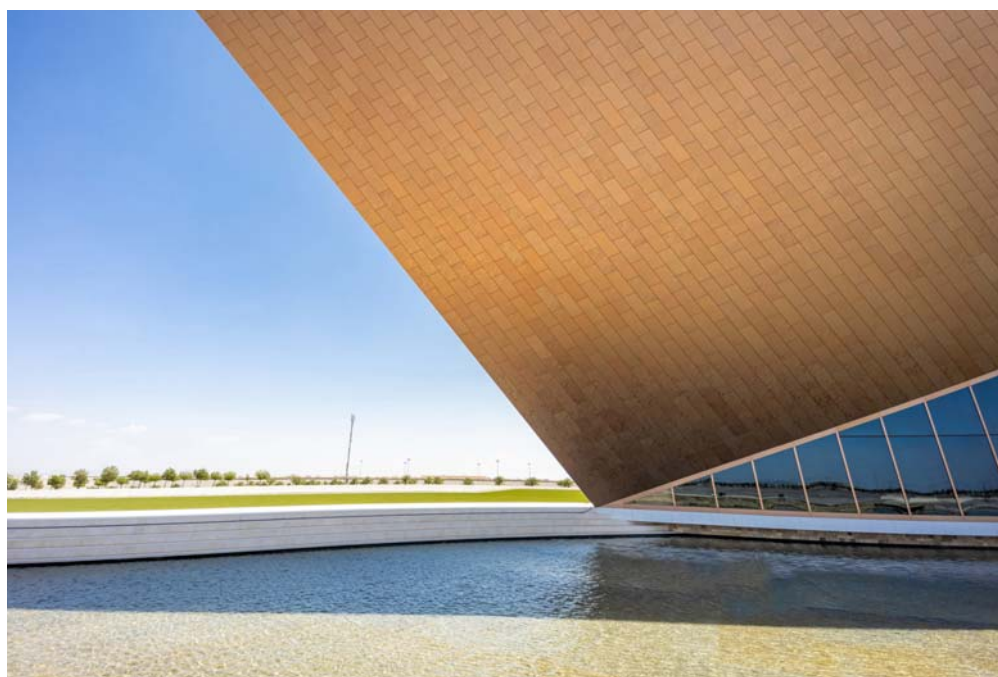
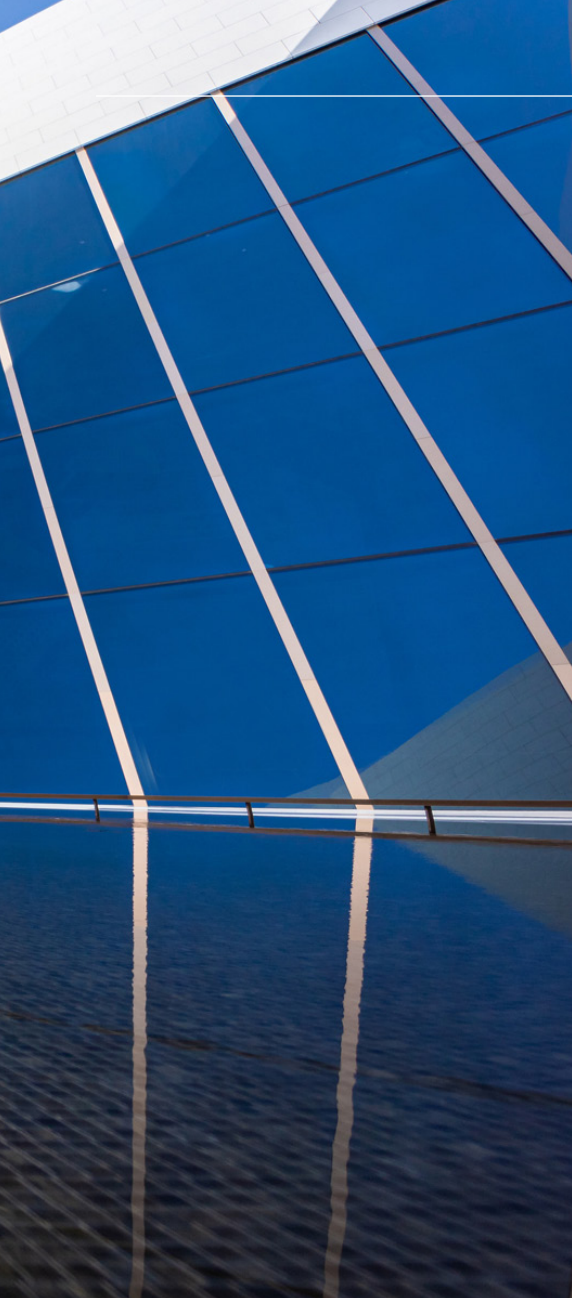
The pavilions offer a high-definition environment showcasing the contribution of the people of Oman to Islam, in addition to different aspects of intellectual, political, and social life and economic life.

Exhibits are introduced via digital media to create multi-dimensional environments that enable the visitor

to experience each era in virtual reality.

Through the use of high-definition audio-visual presentations and virtual maps, the History Hall also explores the eras of the Al Ya'aruba Dynasty and the Al Busaidi Dynasty. This chronicles the period of the state's establishment, the period of the Omani Empire, the period of division of government between Muscat and Zanzibar, and the period that led to the Renaissance. The emphasis is on aspects of daily life and achievements in various fields of life during the rule of the Imams and sultans of the Al Busaidi Dynasty.

The Renaissance Hall consists of pavilions titled Dawn of the Renaissance, Building A Nation, Our Society, Healthy Environment, Peace and Stability, Towards A Sustainable Economy, Infrastructure and Connectivity, Ash Shura, Oman, and the World, Inspiration, Creative Expression, and Media and



Communications.

The hall's entrance is an open space in the centre of gigantic columns, which form an interactive space with a panoramic view of presentations via a high-resolution audio-visual display system that deals with the years of the Blessed Renaissance. This explores various aspects of the social, economic, industrial, and political transformation experienced by Oman, while at the same time preserving its authentic identity and cultural traditions.

The Hall comprises interactive digital exhibits that display the speeches of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said. It also explores fundamental aspects of the Blessed Renaissance such as education, healthcare, infrastructure, foreign relations, tourism and the economy.

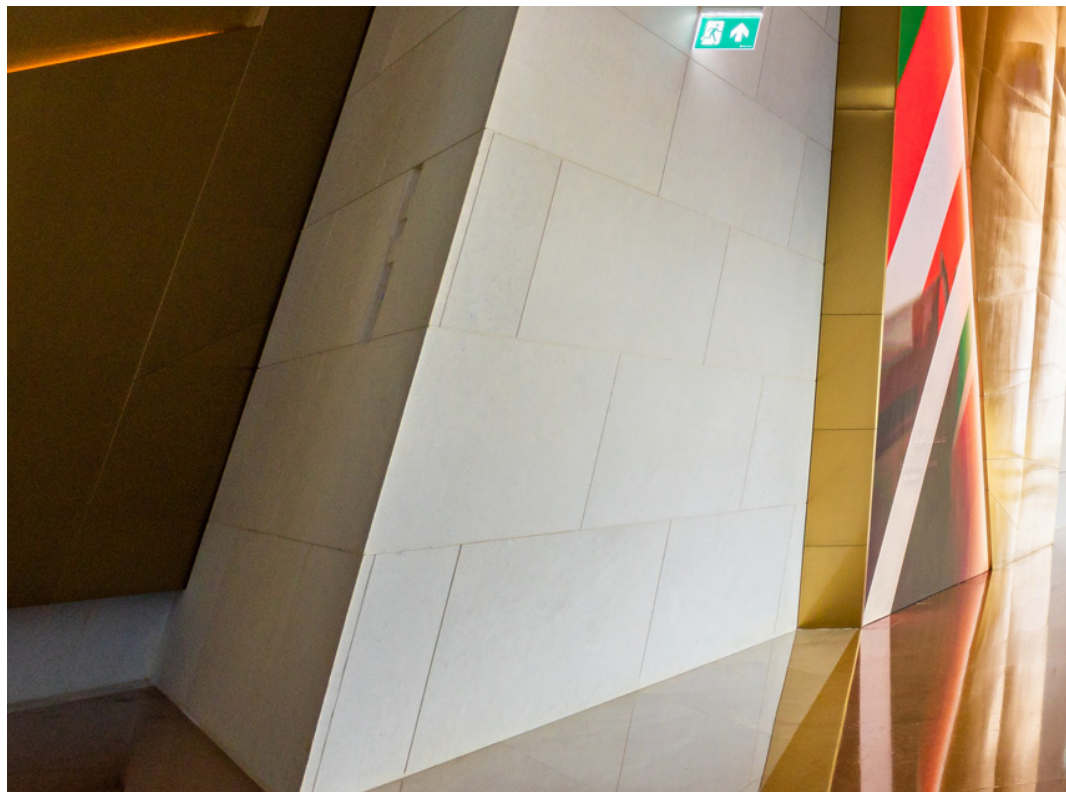
The Oman Across Ages Museum houses 310 video exhibits and 1,200 interactive, 2D and 3D screens, map projection technology, as well as 1,300 antique exhibits, 80 replica exhibits, 500 text panels and drawings, 150 display boxes, 61 km of fibre-optic cables, and 21 km of audio-video cables.

Notable exhibits in the museum include the jaw of the Omantherium, a type of huge primitive elephant that lived on the land of Oman about 35 million years ago, and trilobites found in the Wilayat of Mahut in the Al Wusṭa Governorate, which date back to 250 million to 500 million years ago.

The Museum also contains the Magan Ship, which is a reimagining of the vessels of the Magan civilisation made of reed bundles tied with ropes of palm fibres and woven mats sealed with black tar.

Another notable exhibit is a message from His late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said to his teacher in the month of Rajab 1374 AH, corresponding to February 1955.

The museum includes educational games for children with modern interactive technologies that provide a





unique museum experience. The museum also contains the Knowledge Centre, which is an information resource for students, researchers, and readers. The Centre represents a key feature of the Oman Across Ages Museum and comprises a rich source of information that contributes to building knowledge for all, from children to researchers.

The Centre provides equal opportunities for all to benefit from its facilities, equipment and services, promoting and developing cultural and historical knowledge by providing lifelong learning opportunities via interactive educational programmes, training workshops, lectures and seminars.

The Knowledge Centre, spread over three floors occupies a total area of 6,000 square metres. The ground floor houses the Ideas Lab and the Innovation Lab, which are equipped with tools and books suitable for children from 3 to 14 years old.

The first and second floors house the library of Husn Al Shumookh. The library contains more than 46,000 titles in various areas of science and knowledge. It is equipped with technology that allows researchers to access their desired titles and references, in hard copies or electronic form.

The Library provides services in person to visitors or remotely via a digital reference service operating through the Centre's website, an instant chat service and an "Ask the Librarian" form. Services are also available via email, smartphone applications and social media.

The Library's facilities also include a lecture hall, a multi-purpose hall and facilities for disabled people.

The Museum has a shop, which offers a wide range of exclusive gifts with attractive designs, many of which are inspired by the history, heritage and culture of the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman Across Ages Museum is located in the Wilayat of Manah in the heart of the Governorate of A'Dakhiliyah.

THE POETRY OF BUILDING AND THE EVOLVING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE



BY LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

What defines a Swiss design? Is Islamic architecture evolving or devolving? How would a well-respected architect describe Omani architecture? In this insightful interview, The Correspondent breaks down the view point of architect, designer and collector Pedja Hadži-Manovic about design





PEDJA HADŽI-MANOVIĆ is an architect with a keen eye for what goes into the depths. He's an architect, a designer, a gallery owner of rare 20th-century design objects, and a cultural critic who lives in Zurich, Marrakesh, and Belgrade, and focuses on classical Islamic architecture.

He's also the curator of the CH-DSGN Swiss Non-Conformist Design exhibition held at the National Museum of the Sultanate of Oman. Pedja Hadži-Manović established the P! Galerie in Zurich, Switzerland. Here, the gallery offers rough-designed objects, specialising in rare collector pieces and historic prototypes. The gallery provides items to other galleries worldwide and cooperates with auction houses like Sotheby's or Christie's.

He was in Oman for the exhibition CH-DSGN, which illustrated 100 years of Swiss design, and he selected furniture pieces that show the experimental, the primitive, the modest, and the playful, as well as the childishly naive. Original objects by the most famous architect of the 20th century, Le Corbusier, were brought together with objects from a UNESCO World Heritage Site. He

also shows contemporary design, such as that by Tom Strala, who uses the ordinariness of building-site materials such as concrete or reinforced iron. The six-month exhibition is accompanied by a supporting programme: the solo exhibition by designer and architect Tom Strala at Bayt Sayyid Nadir bin Faisal, a series of lectures on design, a critical manifesto and art photo work by the well-known Swiss photographer Renate Buser.

IS DESIGN IMPORTANT?

First, I don't think that design is important. It's not a must to be involved with design. Nowadays, I think that 98% of design furniture is just consumerist nonsense: superficial, produced with no conviction, to please the mainstream taste. It's an industry that aims to grow and make a profit. I have seen that IKEA came to Oman. They sell items for a quick "wow" moment to

catch attention. But after two years, people throw these items away. It happens not because of the low quality but because this design acts as a trendy hype. When the next trend comes, this design will be gone. I am glad that people are critical of design and the design industry.

But good design has depth, and here it gets interesting. Here, we talk about cultural goods. For example, the items we exhibit at the National Museum reflect us and our society.

LEAD STORY

These objects show the joy of failing; they are primitive, they seek spiritual depth, or they are open-minded to any experiment.

HOW DID THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN HAPPEN?

My first love was painting in oil as a teenager, then photography. Later, I studied architecture at ETH Zurich. I learned how to approach problems and how to express my own perception artistically. I don't see differences in architecture, graphic design, furniture, photography, urban planning, or interior architecture. Even though each has different frameworks, it's all about human perception and giving our reality a poetic quality.

Nowadays, we think that specialization is essential. But that includes the fact that more and more people are unable to see the wider context or to cross the borders.

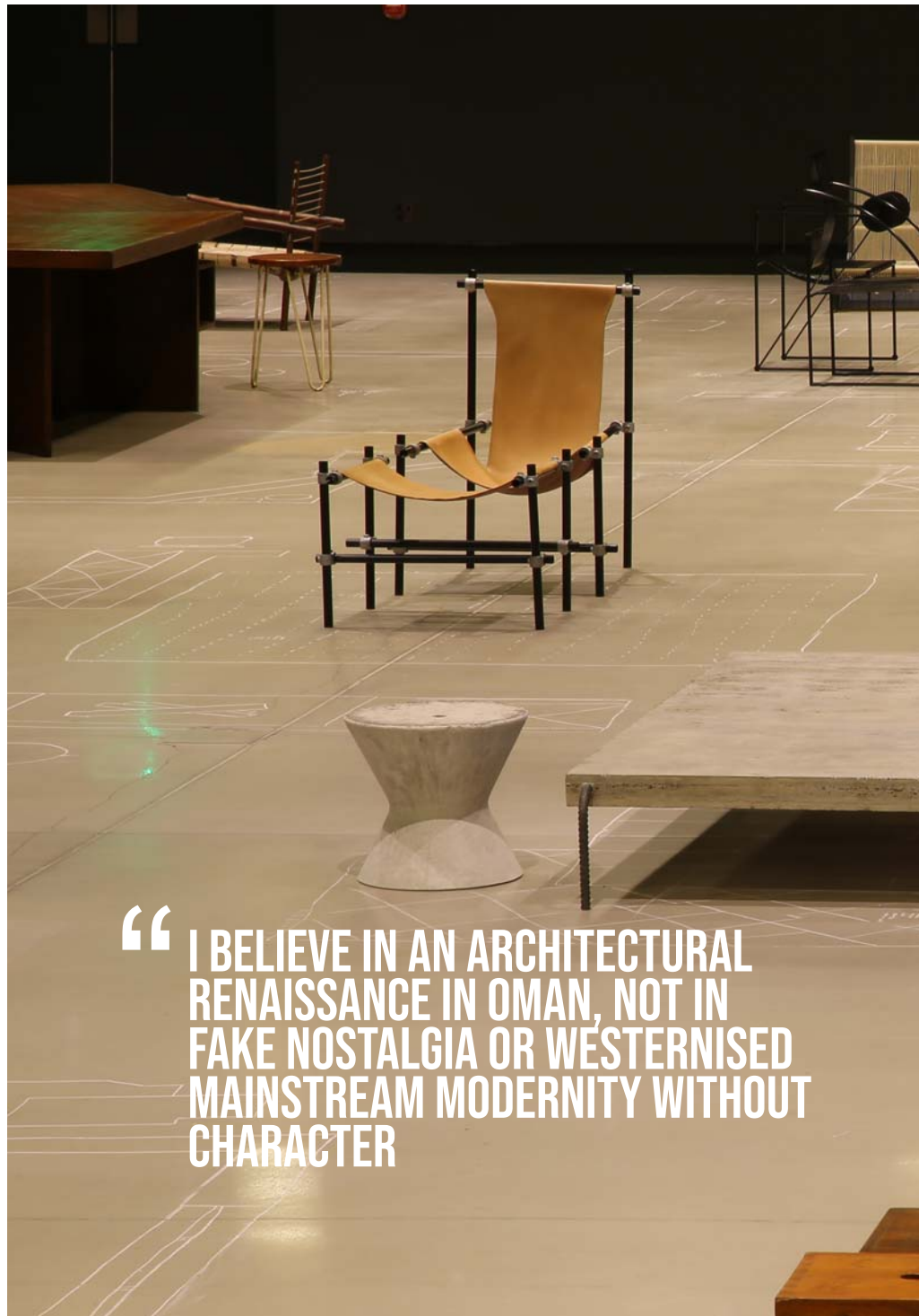
WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF CH-DSGN?

We show Swiss design, but it's about something more universal. Switzerland and Oman both traditionally have humble backgrounds. Both cultures have an affinity for simple but sensual solutions. The simple things know how to access our imagination. It's the same as what we have seen as children: a simple twig, a sword, a tool, or maybe a snake. We get stimulated, our mind starts playing, and our emotions feel joy. It doesn't matter if we live in Switzerland or Oman; it is enriching to become aware that we have this intuitive and naive side. Here are aspects that can touch us profoundly. I personally think that everywhere reality gets more inhuman, we get reduced to a function of following some defined paths. This design can reactivate our irresponsible and childish sides.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE SWISS DESIGN?

Swiss design has been labeled as simple, with technically smartly solved details, innovative, never luxurious, practical... good, well-behaved, and conformist. But strong conformism always creates an adverse reaction. So here, we show this non-conformist side, which is more unknown but finally expresses an experimental and much more radical design.

HAS ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE BEEN EVOLVING?



“ I BELIEVE IN AN ARCHITECTURAL RENAISSANCE IN OMAN, NOT IN FAKE NOSTALGIA OR WESTERNISED MAINSTREAM MODERNITY WITHOUT CHARACTER

My answer is based on my subjective perception, and I'm hopefully wrong. Maybe my answer is harsh, but it's all because of my emotional attachment to Islamic architecture.

In Oman, there is no contemporary Islamic architecture anymore. That is all Western architecture with Islamic make-up. Islamic architecture had a rich tradition in Oman even until the 1980s, much longer than in most other Islamic countries. There are simple fisher villages from the 1980s with a very Islamic character:

magical, humble, playful, and a joy to walk around in villages like Quantab or al-Manumah.

But all that slowly gets destroyed. Nowadays, we think that an Islamic arch or an al-Mashrabiya defines Islamic architecture. But that's like when I put a Mussar on my head, and I think I'm now Omani. Islamic architecture is about depth, the human scale, and being connected to the elements like stars, wind, heat, vegetation, sea, rocks, sand, night, or the moon. What a joy to walk in Old Muscat. It's not a question about



tradition or modernity, but about quality. If a culture is blessed with such a rich culture, it should try to understand its potential. There is an architectural crisis in Oman, and now Western mainstream prestige architecture is popular. Oman appears to fear being outdated and has started to follow all these global trends.

I designed right now a house [that is being built] in Muscat. The materials express the present Muscat with concrete, plastic, aluminum,

But the house's structure and soul are deeply defined by traditional Islamic architecture, trying to connect us humans to the elements in a poetic way. Here is the root of Omani architecture. I believe in an architectural renaissance in Oman, not in fake nostalgia or Westernised mainstream modernity without character.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO EXPLORE OMANI ARCHITECTURE?

My first trip to Oman was three years ago, when I came to see the outstanding Omani Mihrabs. Most Mihrabs worldwide are richly decorated, but the Omani ones are much purer, humbler, and express a unique spiritual depth. Exceptional. So, I fell in love with Oman. Then I saw several forts, of which Al-Hazm is my favorite. Then more and more cities and villages. As a result, I became more and more fascinated by the vernacular Omani architecture. Oman has a lot to offer.



THE SUSTAINABLE CITY – YITI: MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABILITY IN URBAN DEVELOPMENTS



BY JOMAR MENDOZA

Urban sustainability is fast entering the mainstream globally. Many developers have been pursuing the goal of providing residents with a superior quality of life for decades. In Oman, the pinnacle of this trend is The Sustainable City – Yiti, set to be the largest operational sustainable community in the world.

In line with its Vision 2040, Oman is moving away from one-sided socio-economic development dependent on oil and gas towards a diversified, inclusive, equitable and sustainable national economy. To make good on its commitment to the Paris Agreement that aims to keep global warming within 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, the country is working to reduce its carbon footprint, drive the transition to renewables and embrace circular economy practices.

Amidst these efforts, urban sustainability is fast entering the mainstream. Many developers have been pursuing the goal of providing residents with a superior quality of life for decades, but now they need to do so without compromising the needs of future generations. The pinnacle of this trend is The Sustainable City – Yiti, set to be the largest operational sustainable community in the world, which is taking shape on an ocean shore in Yiti, Muscat, in north-eastern Oman. The project is a joint partnership between Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) and Diamond Developers.

The city follows the blueprint for low-carbon living pioneered by The Sustainable City in Dubai which opened in 2015. The model ensures a reduction in carbon footprint from design to operation, using disruptive innovation to achieve transformational societal change.

The Sustainable City – Yiti aspires to become Oman's first Net-Zero-Emissions

community by 2040. Estimated for full completion by 2025, the city will serve as a living lab for testing sustainable technologies, presenting opportunities for research and learning and paving the way for a widespread deployment of cutting-edge green solutions.

Designed with the highest social, environmental and economic sustainability standards in mind, the masterplan of the one-million square-foot development was inspired by Omani heritage. As a result, the look and feel of the entire city will be in perfect harmony with the environment.

operational energy requirements from renewable sources (solar and biogas). In addition, it aims to achieve 100% water recycling, 100% waste diversion from landfill and 80% self-sufficiency in food. Each of its more than 1,650 residential units will feature energy-efficient appliances to minimise electricity consumption and associated costs.

Implementing circular economy principles will enable residents to enjoy a large reduction in their utility bills – up to 100% on electricity and up to 50% on water – compared to conventional households.

The extensive urban landscape

– Yiti will prevent transport-related air pollution.

The development will promote a culture of sustainability among its residents by involving them in urban farming and encouraging waste separation at source. The city will place high emphasis on celebrating environmental occasions, including World Environment Day, World Water Day, Earth Hour, and Earth Day, and organising eco-friendly events, such as the Electric Vehicle Road Trip. It will also be home to a sustainable market that will sell local and organic products.

The Welcome Centre at The



The Sustainable City – Yiti has adopted energy-efficient home design, eco-friendly building materials, and design and construction methods that surpass requirements set by major building rating systems. In construction, the \$1 billion development favours high-quality, durable materials with an extended lifecycle, as they cut down on the long-term costs associated with maintenance or replacement.

The Sustainable City – Yiti will use precast wall panels to reduce the volume of construction waste. It will also incorporate recycled materials in playgrounds and other outdoor facilities.

The integrated development seeks to generate 100% of its

and green spine will enhance the microclimate, lower ambient temperature, and improve air quality at The Sustainable City – Yiti. Shaded sikkas (narrow streets) and porous pavements will reduce heat islands, while wind corridors will further enhance thermal comfort.

In line with the development's live-work-thrive philosophy, everything – from retail, dining, hospitality, leisure, and services to healthcare, education, and jobs – will be available on site, minimising the need for travel and slashing the carbon footprint. By focusing on soft mobility (walking and biking) and deploying electric buggies and autonomous shuttles across its car-free premises, The Sustainable City

Sustainable City – Yiti will offer tours and field visits to relevant stakeholders, including government, private sector, academia, and professional associations, as well as school and university students.

Once open, the development will host prominent guests from across the globe to exchange best practices, share experience in green cities and climate action, and explore strategies for protecting the environment and conserving the planet's precious natural resources.

The Sustainable City – Yiti is a clear proof that sustainability can be achieved at no additional cost to developers and residents while creating in-country value and driving the adoption of a circular economy.

OMAN TOURISM IS TAKING A QUANTUM LEAP IN BUILDING TOURISM COMPLEXES



BY KABEER YOUSUF

Oman believes that developing domestic tourism through constant efforts to enhance its international presence is of paramount importance which is why the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is investing in massive building programme that will have ripple effect across all sectors

With as many as 363 projects valued at RO 2.290 billion across all the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, from 2021 to 2025, the Sultanate of Oman is making a quantum leap towards the future, whose ripple effect can be felt across all sectors, including the job market and the economy as a whole.

About 12 integrated tourism complexes have been implemented with a current investment value of RO 1.07 billion, while more than 24 projects are for domestic tourism development, 28 projects utilize heritage sites and historical monuments in the tourism sector, and 124 hotel establishments have been developed from 2021 to 2022, with a total investment value of RO 139 million.

It is all scaled to touch a whopping 2.290 figure as the Ministry is to attract additional investments worth RO 700 million by the year 2025, while indicators point to the possibility of exceeding the targeted number early.

The investment position of the projects that are under implementation, which was agreed upon with various segments of investors in the public and private sectors, from 2021 to 2025, reached 363 projects across all the governorates of Oman, with a confirmed



value of RO 2.290 billion.

Buoyed by the mammoth leap that Oman's tourism sector is poised to take, the country discussed sustainable decision-making and financing during the International Tourism & Investment Conference (ITIC) the Middle East Tourism Investment Session at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2023, which took place in Dubai on May 1-4, 2023.

The main highlight of the Sultanate is the strong growth in the hospitality and tourism sectors, with around 10,292

hotel rooms currently in the pipeline for development in the country.

According to a report published by STR, a leading global provider of hotel industry-related data, as many as 150,000 hotel rooms are in development across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. Saudi Arabia leads the list with 100,071 hotel rooms, followed by Dubai (27,095 rooms), Qatar

(17,145), Bahrain (3,452), and Kuwait (1,369). In total, there are 159,424 pipeline rooms under contract in the Gulf at present.

Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is looking forward to investments in the tourism sector reaching RO 3 billion during the aforementioned period and this comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to promote tourism investments in all sectors and keep pace with the growing tourism movement in the country.

"The Ministry's efforts in attracting investment come from the standpoint of the developmental role that relies on the tourism sector under the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the comprehensive plan for developing the tourism sector in Oman," stated Salem bin Mohammad al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

He further said that in addition, 113 hotel establishments with an investment cost of less than RO 5 million per facility are being implemented at an investment cost of RO 102 million, of which 15 projects are under

implementation on government lands and 98 projects are under implementation on private lands. Hotel establishments vary to include resorts and hotels with a rating of one to three stars, luxury camps, tourist camps, green lodges, hotel apartments, guest houses, rest houses, and others.

"These investments combine the economic aspect represented by the fact that the sector is one of the potential sectors to achieve economic diversification with direct investments to maximize the utilization of the potential the Sultanate of Oman is enjoying while highlighting and preserving the country's heritage as well."

These investments in the tourism sector also work to empower its role in developing the economies of the governorates, through projects that keep pace with the comparative advantages of each governorate, in addition to the benefit of these projects to local communities and small and medium enterprises in the governorates.

ITCS

According to Oman Vision 2040, the Integrated Tourism Complexes (ITCs) represent the biggest chunk of the volume of investments in the tourism sector and as many as 12 ITCs with an investment value of RO 3.9 billion are currently being implemented which include RO 1.07 billion as investment value from 2021 to 2025.

These complexes include the Al Mouj project, Barr Al Jissah Resort (the port district development), Mandarin Oriental project and residence, Al Diyar Ras Al Hadd Resort, HawanaSalalah (Salalah Beach Resort), Yiti Sustainable City, Phase Two of the Mirbat Tourism Project, Phases A and B of Jebel Sifah and Blue City Project, and The Orient and Palm Resort project, according to the MoHT.

Yet another package of



ITC is soon going to change the skyline of the capital city, the Governorate of Musandam, and the Governorate of South Al Sharqiya South, with an estimated total investment value of RO 2.5 billion. This is envisaged to diversify the Sultanate's tourism and recreational components while enhancing aspects of their benefit to local communities and their ICV (in-country value) by finding attractive opportunities for small and medium enterprises and providing varied employment opportunities to the labour market.

MULTI-USE PROJECTS

Several qualitative and multi-use projects with a total investment value of RO 262 million, including the Oman Botanic Garden, the Village Project, and the Salalah Gardens (The Nargil Farm) project.

Also, several projects are currently being set to be developed at Halanaiyat and Dimaniyat Islands with an

estimated investment cost of RO137 million from 2021 to 2025, while efforts are being exerted to attract prestigious hotel marks such as the Four Seasons Hotel.





THE HOTEL ESTABLISHMENTS' PROJECTS

As many as 124 hotel establishments have been developed from 2021 to 2022, with a total investment value of RO 139 million, including 4 hotel projects such as the Avani Hotel project in Al - Seeb, the Dusit D2 Hotel in Jabal Al Akhdar, the Intercity Hotel Muscat, and Jumeirah Muscat Hotel in Muscat.

Additionally, as many as 120 hotel projects with an investment cost of less than RO5 million per project are currently ongoing, and this will give yet another boost to Oman's ambitious tourism development projects. These projects include hotel apartments, guest houses, heritage inns, and green inns, and others, with a total investment value of RO 48.075 million.

The growth doesn't end there. Nearly 127 new hotel establishment projects with a total investment value of RO 340 million are under implementation, including 14 hotel projects with an investment cost higher than RO 5 million per project with ratings ranging from 3





to 5 stars and hotel apartments with a total investment value of RO 238 million.

DEVELOPING DOMESTIC TOURISM

Oman believes that developing domestic tourism through constant efforts to enhance its international presence is of paramount importance. The MoHT pointed out that the number of domestic tourism development projects that are being implemented through the executive programme of the recovery plan and by the governorates has reached 24 projects with a value of RO 16.6 million.

While work is underway on 14 projects to develop and invest in heritage sites and historical monuments, with a current investment value of RO 13.8 million, the number of projects to improve museums and private heritage houses reached 8 projects, with an investment value of RO 17,000, and

the number of projects for establishing museum exhibition halls in castles and forts reached 6 projects, at an investment cost of RO 45,000.

To conclude, extensive preparations are also underway to invest in 34 historical landmarks with an investment value of RO 1.884 million, which include several forts, towers, walls, lanes and other monuments in various governorates, which are allocated as investment opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME's)

There are several local tourism development projects being implemented directly by the governorates within the framework of their specialisations and through the governorate development programme, while there is an expectation of providing more requirements for service and tourism facilities to meet the requirements of domestic tourism in the various governorates during the next stage.

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM THE CRESCENT MOON

PHOTO BY MICHAEL D'SOUZA

The beautiful Bab al Salam mosque was opened to the public early this year and has been mesmerising worshippers with its beautiful design and creative structure.







WHY AL HAMRA'S LIVING MUSEUM, BAIT AL SAFAH, CONTINUES TO STAND TODAY



TEXT BY RUMPA MITRA
PHOTOS BY ABHILASH PILLAI

The importance of Bait Al Safah as an architectural destination cannot be overstated. The house is a masterpiece of Omani architecture, featuring intricate wood carvings, hand-painted ceilings, and traditional stone walls. It is a prime example of how traditional Omani architecture seamlessly blends with the natural environment, creating a harmonious and elegant space.

BUILT MORE THAN 400

years ago, Bait al Safah is one of the most remarkable living museums in Oman. Today, it is a destination that showcases best the traditional Omani way of life and providing a glimpse into the country's rich cultural heritage.

Al Hamra is famous for its abandoned mud village, whereas Bait Al Safah is among the few that are still operational and well-maintained. The family that owned it has worked tirelessly to restore the house to its former glory, ensuring that it remains a testament to Oman's rich architectural and cultural heritage.

Sulaiman al Abri, the owner, decided to convert the home where he grew up in to a living museum not only to preserve

important memories but also to allow tourists to witness different Omani traditions as well as gain an understanding of how an Omani home is structured. This beautiful 2-storey mud house is open to tourists, and all the rooms can be accessed to see the overall architecture and the concepts.

Elaborate processes have taken place to create the village to which Bait al Safah belongs. Beyond the ingenuity of forgotten and unnamed architects, the day-to-day chores of the villagers actually helped shape the place that it is now.

Sulaiman shared some important information about how the house is built.

FOUNDATION

The most important part



of the house, great care and attention had been given to the foundation of Bait al Safah which is why it remains standing today. In the old days, the foundation mixture was prepared manually. The traditional architecture of Oman is characterized by the few naturally occurring building materials and their practical simplicity, as people did not have access to a wide variety of building materials. The mountain houses stood on a foundation of stone to protect them from effluent rainwater. A good mix of mud, wheat grass, and clay was the main material used for the

foundation of these mud houses. All the mixing used to take place manually, with hands. To make it simpler, easier, and more fun-filled, the elderly people from that era used to hide coins in the mud so that kids would be tempted to find them and, in the process, help in mixing well the materials that would become the foundation.

STRUCTURAL DESIGN

This 2-storeyed mud house is well planned and meticulously segregated into different parts based on the needs of the inhabitants. The ground floor is

mainly for the storage of crops, utility items, animals, cattle, and kitchens. The first floor is for majlis (separate for men and women), living rooms, and other rooms used as bedrooms, dressing rooms, and toilets. In addition, the second floor usually comes with a terrace and extra rooms for guests.

While designing the building, they carefully thought about the exits, including those dedicated to fire emergencies. There was an exit from the second floor that led straight out of the house. Every room was also prepped with a ventilation system through which



sunlight comes and proper air circulation takes place.

CEILINGS

The ceiling of Bait al Safah, typical for the era, extensively used palm fronds and other palm materials. What a lot of people don't know is that there are usually three layers to provide proper support.

The first layer is usually made out of palm leaves, below it, a mat made from the same leaves, weaved together by the experts in the village. These are then covered with mud, clay, and wheat grass.

This mixture is usually applied manually, using hands to give it

a smooth surface. To decorate the ceilings, they hand-painted the palm fronds with various traditional designs, which are visible from the floor beneath. To protect the woods from termites, frankincense powder was also extensively used.

WALLS

The height of the ground floor is almost 5.8 meters, whereas the first-floor height is a little less than 5.3 meters. The other rooms are mostly 2.5–3 meters, depending on the design. The wall of the house consists of mud, clay, wheat grass, and some very small stones and is almost 1.5 meters thick. The

walls are also painted with the liquids from the expired dates. Every wall has windows to allow fresh air to move inside the house.

DOORS

Omani doors are always impressive, and they are visual treats. The wooden door is well structured and designed in traditional ways. Most of the designs carry tales from that era. For Bait al Safah, the owner's name as well as the date of construction had been inscribed on the main door. All the doors have hinges to hang the locks. On the ground floor, mainly in the storage rooms, the doors







normally have a 10-diameter circle cut out of it. This is specially dedicated to cats who are allowed access to the crops and kill the rats that attack the produce.

TERRACE

From the open terrace, the magnificent view of the Al Hamra mountains can take your breath away. A part of the terrace is also kept open to let in sunlight and fresh air. It is designed in such a way that when it rains, the water doesn't come inside the house. They have carefully monitored the wind and rain direction.

SAFETY LOCKER

In Bait al Safah, they also have a specially made safe that's kept as a secret and used for storing away coins, pieces of jewellery, and other important items. A literal hole in the wall, they can be about 8–9 cm deep and are covered with a cap that was painted the same colour as the wall.

Bait al Safah is one of the most visited places in Al Hamra and is loved for its authenticity. The owner preserved the house so well that it is capable of taking you back to 100 years ago. The importance of preserving Oman's architectural heritage cannot be overstated. Bait Al Safah is a shining example of how traditional architecture can be restored and transformed into a cultural destination that celebrates the country's rich history and cultural heritage. It is a must-visit for anyone interested in Islamic architecture and the traditional way of life in Oman.

To visit al Safah, you can book an appointment or reach them through their Instagram: @bait.alsafah

You can follow the writer on Instagram on @rumpa_mitra and the photographer on @theimagegrapher.



CONTEMPORARY & CHIC TRENDS IN INTERIOR DESIGN THIS 2023



BY MAI AL ABRI

Staying up-to-date with the latest interior design trends is essential if you want to create a space that's both stylish and functional. From bold colors and patterns to sustainable materials, there are plenty of exciting new trends to explore in 2023. We talked to an Omani interior designer to share insight about the popular trends for this year

Interior design has always been an important aspect of creating a welcoming and comfortable living space. With the ever-changing nature of design, it's important to stay up-to-date with the latest trends to ensure your home is not only stylish but also functional.

For interior designer Arwa Al Saadi, it is important to follow trends that are practical and tend to become classic. That way, you don't have to change home interiors often, as designs definitely come and go.

"When thinking of interior design, one should follow the maxim 'Less is More,'" Arwa shared.

This maxim usually leads to people favouring more modern designs because they are comfortable and usually remains fresh and chic.

Arwa explained that in 2023, there will probably be more of a focus on sustainable and eco-friendly designs as environmental concerns continue to





rise. Using natural materials like wood and stone, as well as energy-saving lighting and appliances, could be examples of this. Designers will continue to create serene and restful spaces using plants, natural light, and organic shapes and textures.

A greater emphasis on flexibility and adaptability in interior design is also likely as more people work from home and live in smaller spaces, according to Arwa. Furniture with multiple uses and design layouts that are simple to modify to suit changing needs could be examples.

As a result of its compatibility with the Omani environment and way of life, the traditional style will remain to be popular among the locals. However, as the field of interior design grows, people will eventually opt and embrace modernity.

TRADITIONAL VS CLASSIC DESIGNS

The traditional style mimics the Omani environment

and values originality and sophistication. It conveys a sense of elegance and simplicity. This model stands out from others thanks to its raw materials—for instance, the quality of the wood used in the castles and forts and the engravings on the wood. It imparts a genuine, opulent, and distinctly individual style. Additionally, carpets and furniture play a part in traditional design.

Regarding the classic style, it has been utilized for many years and is still in demand today. The materials that stand out the most are furniture, wood, and marble. They are muted beige or gray shades in terms of color. The majority of characters tend to be modern and classic, though there is a category that designs a contemporary traditional character.

HOW DOES LIGHTING AFFECT A PERSON'S MOOD?

One of the most important



TRENDS

aspects of interior design is lighting, which has a significant impact.

"The presence of lighting creates a sense of balance and enhances the beauty of the design," Arwa explained.

Whether it is an interior space for a home, office, or even a restaurant, lighting is not only an effective factor in interior design; it also influences the psychological factor and gives a feeling of comfort. The distribution of lighting, however, in proportion to the location's needs and available space, is what matters most. Another significant natural resource that the designer can use in the design is the sun. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that lighting influences color selection because different lighting intensities result in varying degrees of colour.

WHAT SHADE OF LIGHTING IS ADVISED?

Depending on the intended functional area, White lighting is preferred when designing an office because it promotes focus. For instance, some restaurants favor the color yellow. The natural color, which is a blend of yellow and white, is preferred by the majority of people. Most people advise using it in particular rooms of the house. But as I said, that depends on the location's purpose.



WHAT ABOUT THE USE OF WOOD? IS IT ALWAYS APPLICABLE?

The majority of people prefer wood because, among other reasons, it complements the majority of designs, whether classic or modern. Given that wood comes in a variety of colors, shapes, and types, using it creates an atmosphere of sophistication, luxury, and a connection to nature.

As opposed to the majority of trends, which become outmoded over time, using wooden decorations in the home assures people of a pattern or style that will endure. In order to convey elegance and renewal, wood is being used in interior design more and more. Additionally, wood improves the aesthetics of furniture.

According to my interior design experience, most people tend to incorporate wooden elements into the required design spaces.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND INTERIOR DESIGN

BY MEYYAN SHIAHAB AL SAID

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral part of the interior design industry. AI-powered algorithms are changing the way designers approach their work, from personalized design to space planning and beyond

COMMENTARY



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) is revolutionizing many industries, and interior design is no exception. AI technology is being used to generate interior design concept images that can help designers, architects, and homeowners visualize potential designs for their spaces.

Traditionally, interior designers would sketch out ideas and create 2D drawings or 3D models to present to their clients. However, this process maybe time-consuming and may not always represent the designer's vision. With AI-generated images, we can now get faster more accurate ways to convey design ideas and concepts like never before.



One example of AI-powered interior design software is the platform developed by the startup, Havenly. The company uses machine learning algorithms to analyze design trends and create customized design concepts for each of their clients. Users can input their preferences and upload photos of their space, and the software will generate a variety of design options, complete with furniture and decor suggestions.

Another big example is Midjourney. It also uses machine learning algorithms to generate interior design concept images. It allows designers to quickly and easily create custom designs by inputting preferences

and constraints such as budget, style, and room dimensions. Midjourney's software analyzes this data and generates a variety of design options, complete with furniture and decor suggestions. The resulting images are photorealistic and allow designers and clients to see how different design elements will look in their space.

AI technology is being used to create hyper-realistic renderings of interior design concepts. The company, Unreal Engine, has created a platform that uses real-time rendering technology to create photorealistic images of interior spaces. This technology allows designers to create immersive experiences for their clients, showing them how a room will look and feel before any construction begins.

There are many benefits to using AI-generated interior design concept images. For one, they allow designers to create and present ideas more efficiently. Instead of spending hours sketching and modeling designs, designers can use AI software to quickly generate multiple options. Additionally, these images can help clients better visualize the designer's vision and make more informed decisions about their space.

However, there are also some limitations to consider. AI-generated images may lack the creativity and personal touch that a human designer can bring to a project. Additionally, these images may not always accurately represent the real-world constraints of a space, such as lighting or structural limitations.

In conclusion, AI technology is changing the interior design industry by offering new tools and techniques for designers and homeowners to visualize potential designs. While there are limitations to AI-generated images, they offer many benefits, including efficiency and accuracy. As AI technology continues to evolve, it will be interesting to see how it further impacts the world of interior design.



HOW TO ENGINEER BUILDINGS THAT WITHSTAND EARTHQUAKES

BY ANDREA THOMPSON
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Though deadly quakes can't be prevented, science does have some ways to protect buildings—and the people inside them

Our planet is covered by tectonic plates that are slowly moving around, pushing into or sliding past one another along boundaries called faults. Friction sometimes causes two of these plates to get stuck to each other at spots along a fault. Tension builds up over years, decades or even centuries until suddenly the fault snaps. The two sides lurch past each other, unleashing an earthquake.

From the place where the fault ruptures, seismic waves ripple outward in all directions. When they reach Earth's surface, they can set buildings or any other structures shaking—violently and destructively if the quake is strong and close enough, as were the two massive temblors that struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, which was followed by a large aftershock on the same day.

These quakes killed more than 45,000 people, many of them in collapsed buildings. Though earthquakes can't be prevented or predicted, science does have some ways to protect buildings—and the people inside them. Scientific American spoke with several earthquake engineering experts to learn more about how using the right building methods can prevent homes, offices and other structures from succumbing to the capricious movements of the Earth.

WHAT HAPPENS TO A BUILDING DURING A QUAKE?

Imagine you're driving a car down the road, and you suddenly need to stop. As you slam on the brakes, those groceries sitting on the passenger seat (and anything else not strapped down) will fly through the air in the same direction and at the same speed as the car was originally going. This is because of inertia—an object's tendency to stay at rest or to maintain a uniform speed and path until some other force acts on it. That same tendency is what puts a building at risk during an earthquake.

During a quake, the ground beneath a building moves quickly back and forth. But because the building has mass,

it has inertia. "The earthquake is shaking the ground, and the building is trying to stay put," says Ertugrul Taciroglu, a structural engineer at the University of California, Los Angeles. But once it does start moving, the building wants to keep going in whatever direction the earthquake has pulled it—essentially, it is always lagging behind the ground motion. These lags generate horizontal inertial forces on the building, causing any vertical columns and walls to deform at an angle (creating a parallelogram shape if one were looking at a side view of a rectangular building). When a building has multiple stories, each story is holding up the weight of those above it. That means lower stories have to bear larger inertial forces than those above. If walls and columns are not properly designed or reinforced, they may not be able to support the weight they once held.

The larger an earthquake is and the closer it is to the surface—and the nearer a building is to the fault rupture—the larger the inertial forces will be on that building during a quake. The type of ground a building is sitting on can also play a role: compared with hard rock, looser soils magnify ground motions.

HOW DO WE BUILD BUILDINGS SO THEY DON'T COLLAPSE DURING AN EARTHQUAKE?

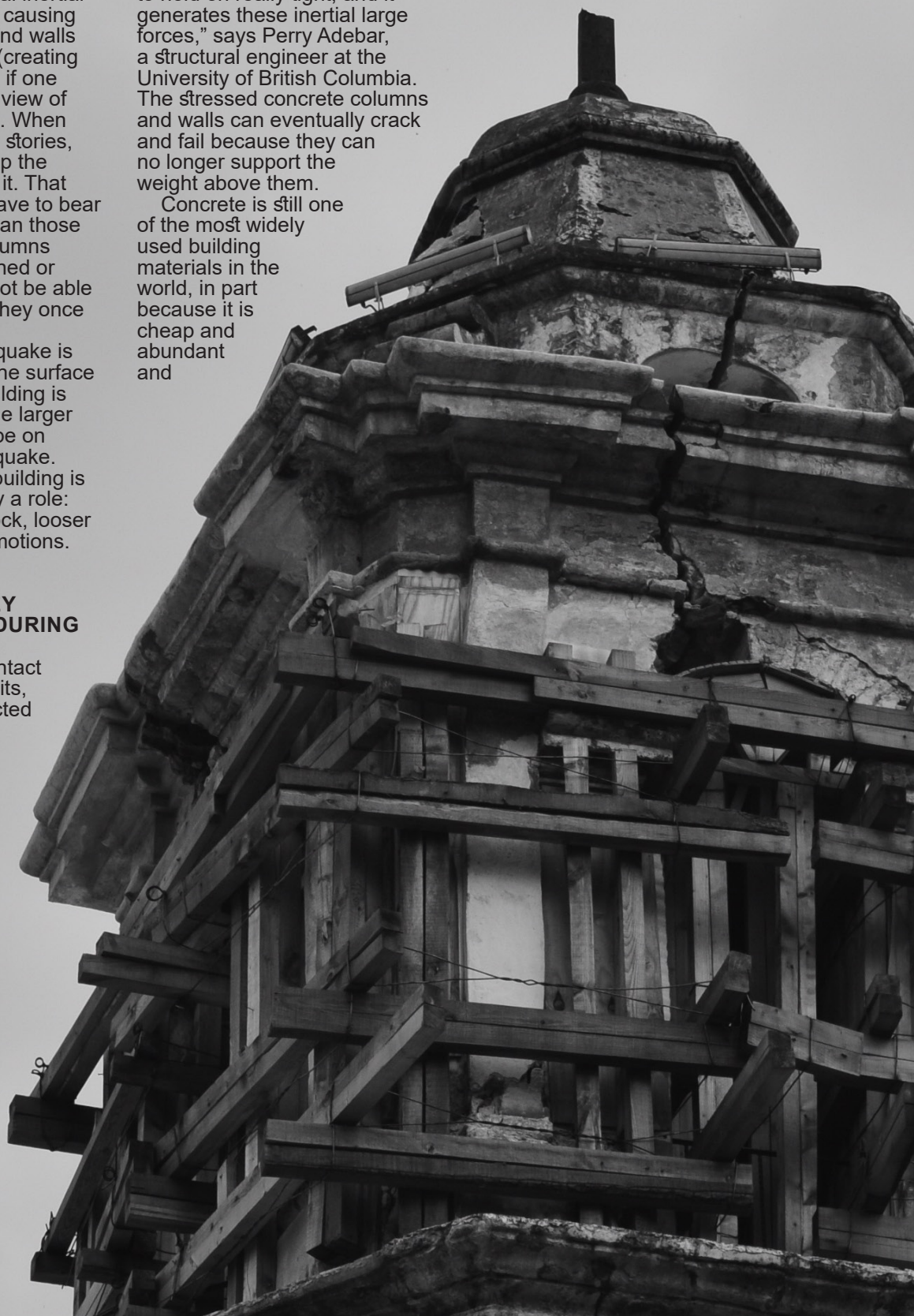
To keep a building intact when an earthquake hits, it needs to be constructed to resist horizontal inertial forces. Exactly how that can be done depends on the building material being used. Let's focus on two of the most common: concrete and steel. Much of the building stock in the affected area of Turkey used these materials.

Under normal circumstances, concrete is a great material for holding the weight of a building because it performs well under what engineers call

compression. A concrete building can easily last for decades if it only has to support its own weight. Yet the quake-generated inertial forces that set vertical walls and columns swaying put the concrete into tension, the opposite of compression. Although the forces are trying to stretch the concrete out, "it doesn't give. It doesn't let the building form move but tries to hold on really tight, and it generates these inertial large forces," says Perry Adebear, a structural engineer at the University of British Columbia. The stressed concrete columns and walls can eventually crack and fail because they can no longer support the weight above them.

Concrete is still one of the most widely used building materials in the world, in part because it is cheap and abundant and

because it has an ability to bear structural weight. To make concrete more suitable for seismically active areas, engineers add steel (in the form of rebar), which is much more flexible. "You have to put steel in wherever you're going to have tension," Adebear says.



BY THE CORRESPONDENT

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES

Architect Markus Dochantschi's philosophy of what he calls the "soft white cube" has grown popular in TriBeCa, where he is the unofficial planner of New York City's new arts district growing between Walker Street and White Street, some 50 galleries strong. In this article, he explains how a gallery might find its own identity when virtually everyone has the same white walls and concrete floors

NEW YORK — Construction crews were roaming TriBeCa. All around, one could hear the omnipresent drills echoing from within historic cast-iron buildings. Inside 384 Broadway, standing before a junk heap quadruple his size, architect Markus Dochantschi was explaining how a gallery might find its own identity when virtually everyone has the same white walls and concrete floors. God is in the details — and in the lighting fixtures and in the floorboards.

"The architecture must speak," Dochantschi said above the noise of sledgehammers and buzzsaws, which are transforming the derelict space

into a flexible showroom for the multicultural artists of Alexander Gray Associates. The architect insisted on keeping ornamental details like the Corinthian columns and tin ceilings from the early 1900s.

"If it was just another completely neutral space, then why come to this gallery?"

Designs for contemporary art galleries have stayed relatively unchanged for the past century, with most dealers favoring a rigid "white cube" style harking back to when artists from the de Stijl and Bauhaus movements sought to minimize distractions. Institutions like the Museum of Modern Art soon adopted the white aesthetic

as a neutral space in which to view abstract art. Critics have grumbled for decades that the style is antiseptic and restrictive, but few major galleries have been willing to abandon the industry standard.

But Dochantschi has cultivated a loyal following by gradually weaning the art world off its addiction to harsh lighting, frosted windows and architecture that intimidates people rather than welcoming them. He is best known for the 2021 renovation of the Phillips auction house at 432 Park Ave., where he dropped the main concourse into the basement and upset the classic image of a "behind closed doors"



HIS 'SOFT WHITE CUBE' IS CONQUERING TRIBECA

auction with large windows that allowed the public to watch sales from the street.

His philosophy of what he calls the “soft white cube” has grown popular in TriBeCa, where he is the unofficial planner of New York City’s new arts district growing between Walker Street and White Street, some 50 galleries strong, according to neighborhood real estate brokers.

“An architectural design should not take center stage when it’s supposed to recede into the background of an artist’s work,” said Gray, who is moving to TriBeCa after 17

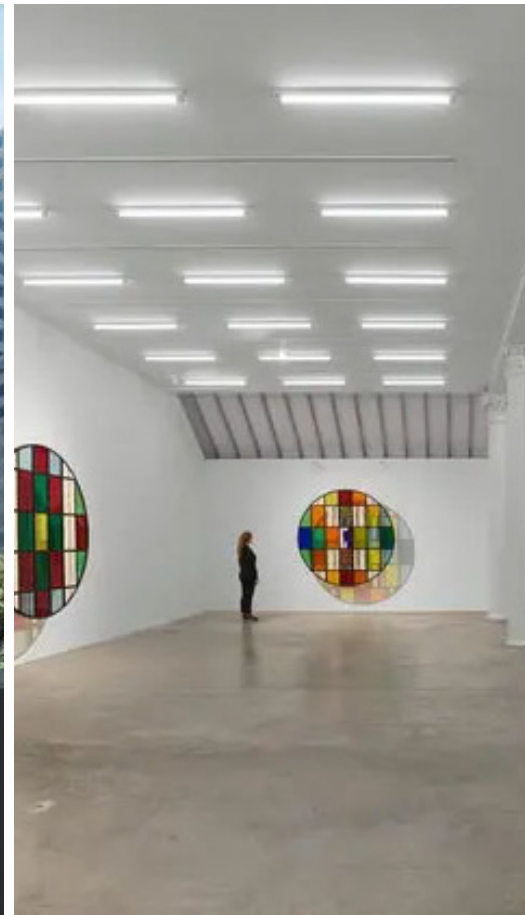
years in Chelsea. He selected Dochantschi for the project because of “the quietness” of his other projects — and a strong recommendation from his broker.

Behind every hungry architect is a hungry real estate agent, and Dochantschi has received many projects through referrals from Jonathan Travis, who estimates that he has placed almost 35 galleries around the block, including Alexander Gray Associates, Luhring Augustine and Marian Goodman.

Travis began selling TriBeCa to galleries nearly a decade ago, after the Whitney Museum

started construction on its new space in the Meatpacking District and Chelsea became saturated with galleries interested in ground-floor showrooms with big skylights. TriBeCa was a good alternative because its renovated warehouse buildings already had high ceilings and large basements above water levels that could be used for storage, a feature that Chelsea lacked.

“About 10 years ago, I started cold-emailing gallerists like Marian Goodman,” Travis said, recalling the swift rejection letter that he received from the gallery. But the story changed recently



when the dealer was ready to leave the midtown Manhattan space she had rented on 57th Street for more than 40 years. The contracts were signed in February on a space that will become one of TriBeCa's largest galleries, which Dochantschi is also renovating.

"I find them, he designs them," Travis said.

Dochantschi became interested in architecture as a teenager in 1980s Germany, when a friend he was photographing noticed that he kept focusing on the buildings she was posing near instead of on her face. He studied architecture, briefly worked as a construction worker and landed a job with Zaha Hadid in 1995, eventually becoming her teaching assistant at the Yale School of Architecture.

"She was very demanding," he recalled. Dochantschi experienced the up-and-down challenges of working for a starchitect when Hadid lost two major commissions, including the Cardiff Bay Opera House in Wales, resulting in studio layoffs

and leaner budgets. (Hadid died in 2016.)

Dochantschi opened his design firm, studioMDA, nearly 20 years ago in TriBeCa. One of his first commissions was designing an art fair booth for David Nolan Gallery. He has designed more than 250 booths since then, which led to the renovation of the headquarters for Phillips.

"In Holland, we have a saying that playing good soccer is simple and playing simple soccer is very difficult. It's a little bit the same here," said Jean-Paul Engelen, the Americas president at Phillips who helped select the architect. "There is no ego to his work."

Engelen said Dochantschi earned the commission because of the simplicity and flexibility of his design, which includes movable walls. Curators who need to present a growing number of untraditional art mediums with screens and projectors appreciate these details. It's just one component of his soft white cube philosophy.

"The white cube implies

neutrality, but I don't think there is any neutral space," he said.

What differentiates him from a designer like Richard Gluckman, whose layouts for galleries at Gagosian in Chelsea and Sotheby's were built around architectural details like skylights?

"I'm not celebrating the skylight. I'm using the skylight," Dochantschi said. "I love clean, well-proportioned white walls, but they can coexist next to an old wooden floor or a typical TriBeCa tin ceiling."

Gluckman, 75, helped popularize the adaptive reuse of buildings that he transformed into contemporary art spaces, as well as the interior renovation of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; and the Dia Center for the Arts in Chelsea. But he disagreed with the idea that his designs could ever upstage the art on display.

"There is a myth of flexibility, and galleries expect to have a tabula rasa," Gluckman said in a phone interview. "But flexibility is not necessarily appropriate for every single space."



Instead, the architect suggested that most galleries should be designed with a sense of permanence, abandoning their track lighting and removable walls. Not that Gluckman is some great defender of the white cube.

"I'm a bit tired of it," he said, adding that digital artworks might look better in galleries with gray walls that can reflect the highly saturated colors of a computer screen.

Dochantschi introduces warmth by refurbishing historic TriBeCa details such as old flooring, exposed wooden beams and extravagant columns. The renovations do not come cheap, with a range from \$150 to \$300 per square foot — which puts the price of a typical 2,500-square-foot gallery glam-up in the neighborhood of \$500,000 to \$1 million.

Most gallerists said that it was money well spent. Stefania Bortolami relocated to TriBeCa in 2017, hiring Dochantschi to renovate a former Social Security office filled with

plywood and drop-ceiling tiles. She has expanded twice with him since then, taking over two more floors.

"It was a wreck, but I thought, OK, let's take this gamble," she said during a tour of her gallery. Dochantschi designed the space with concrete floors, a skylight above the back wall, and a basement hatch that would make installing shows easier for art handlers.

Bortolami leaned over to Dochantschi and congratulated him on the Goodman commission — a multimillion-dollar renovation of 385 Broadway, where the annual rent is nearly \$2 million. The gallery will encompass 30,000 square feet, with five floors and a basement.

"But I hope it is not too expensive because we have to make sure that the gallery stays in the neighborhood," Bortolami warned the architect.

Despite the many construction crews roaming around Walker Street, gallerists still worry about the longevity

of TriBeCa's arts scene. After their decadelong leases end, will everyone be looking for the next hot neighborhood? Luxury brands usually follow galleries, eventually pricing tenants out in a pattern that started in TriBeCa nearly 40 years ago, trailed dealers into SoHo and eventually to Chelsea.

But for the moment, galleries keep flocking to TriBeCa.

This spring, hotelier and art collector Lio Malca plans to open a three-story gallery at 60 White St. that has Dochantschi digging into the basement for more storage.

Dochantschi is also more than halfway through construction of a new gallery for Nino Mier, whose space inside a former jeans shop has gaping holes in the floor and a wall of storefront windows. One of Dochantschi's first acts was to remove the metal grates that covered the windows; they obstructed the southern light and stopped passersby from looking inside.

The architect wasn't so worried about the security.

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