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UNSEEDED VONDROUSOVA STUNS TEARFUL JABEUR TO WIN WIMBLEDON TITLE



P13

EXPAT WORKFORCE IN OMAN CLIMBS TO 1.784 MILLION



P18

WHERE EXTREME ADVENTURERS GO TO FLY



MESMERISING BEATS

Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman’s women musicians and men bagpipe players in vibrant uniforms on Arabian horses stole the hearts and limelight at Basel Tattoo 2023, an international military music show, which began in Basel, Switzerland, on Friday. [SEE REPORT ON P2](#)

Events of Khareef Dhofar kick off with fun games for children



QASIM AL MASHANI
SALALAH, JULY 15

The inaugural event of Khareef Dhofar, “Kiddy Time,” has kicked off at Salalah’s Awqad Public Park on Saturday, offering an array of engaging activities exclusively designed for children. This programme, which runs till August 31, promises a memorable summer experience for kids.

Featuring themed villages inspired by beloved characters like Panda Village, Smurfs Village, and Masha and the Bear Village, children can immerse themselves in a world of wonder. Additionally, the “Dress Up in Wonderland” section allows children to unleash their imagination through costumes and create their own adventures.

Keeping up with the digital era,

Kiddy Time presents a diverse collection of digital and interactive games. Theatre activities are also organised to nurture creativity and self-expression among young participants.

For the skating enthusiasts, a dedicated skating rink awaits, where children can glide and enjoy the thrill of this exhilarating sport.

Manea Al Masahli, the project owner, expressed his gratitude to Dhofar Municipality and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, stating, “I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Dhofar Municipality and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for their invaluable efforts, which have directly contributed to the realisation of our project goals. Their support has provided a platform for small enterprises to

showcase their creative talents across various fields. Moreover, these enterprises will play a significant role in creating temporary job opportunities that hold the potential for future permanence.”

Al Masahli emphasised the paramount importance of adhering to safety instructions at the site locations and following the guidance of safety guides, saying, “Ensuring the safety and well-being of all participants is our utmost priority. I urge everyone to diligently adhere to the prescribed safety guidelines and heed the instructions provided by our dedicated safety guides at the sites.”

Other events of Khareef Dhofar will be in held in Ittin, Al Haffa, Salalah Park and Al Saadah Garden. [TURN TO P3](#)

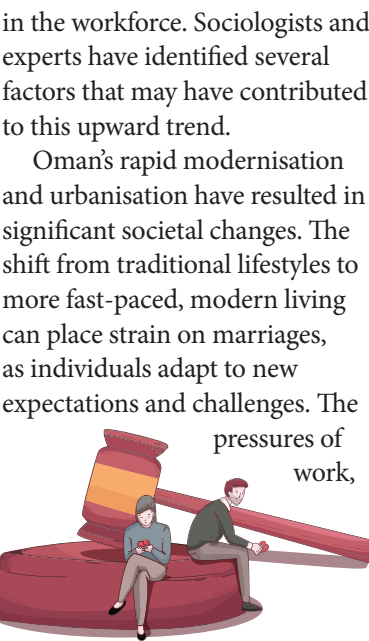
11 divorces daily in 2022

4,160 cases last year compared to 3,837 in 2021

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JULY 15

Divorce cases in Oman witnessed a significant upsurge in 2022, with the number reaching a staggering 4,160 compared to 2021 figure of 3,837, highlighting the need for a deeper analysis of the underlying causes and potential implications of this trend. That means 11 divorces per day.

The spike in divorce cases raises questions about the stability of marriages, the impact of social media, changing societal norms and the evolving role of women



in the workforce. Sociologists and experts have identified several factors that may have contributed to this upward trend.

Oman’s rapid modernisation and urbanisation have resulted in significant societal changes. The shift from traditional lifestyles to more fast-paced, modern living can place strain on marriages, as individuals adapt to new expectations and challenges. The pressures of work, financial responsibilities and maintaining a work-life balance often contribute to marital discord.

Changing societal norms and increased awareness of individual rights and empowerment have led to a greater willingness among couples to consider divorce as a viable option when faced with irreconcilable differences. Women, in particular, are becoming more independent and financially secure, enabling them to make decisions about their own lives without being solely dependent on their spouses.

TURN TO P2



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Museum marks anniversary of laying of the foundation stone

AMAL AL RIYAMI
MANAH, JULY 15

Oman Across Ages Museum in the Wilayat of Manah celebrated the anniversary of laying the museum's foundation stone in the presence of Her Highness Sayyida Mayan bint Shihab al Said.

Al Yaqthan bin Abdullah al Harthi, Director-General of Oman Across Age Museum, and media professionals attended the occasion.

During the celebration, the documentary film 'An Everlasting Foundation' was shown, which reviews the story of the museum's establishment and the roles it went through.

Al Yaqthan who spoke on the occasion said, "Today, Oman Across Age Museum celebrates an everlasting memory in our minds, the memory of laying the foundation stone for this architectural edifice. Let us go back in history, specifically to the last ten days of Ramadhan in 1436 AH. This was on July 14, 2015 when the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said laid the foundation stone for this museum. Today we tell the story of its construction, representing an icon of modern architecture in the Sultanate of Oman."

This wonderful design was the result of an architectural competition around the world, and it was adopted by His Majesty. It received his attention and care to preserve Omani history.

"The aim was to highlight Omani youth's skills in various fields. Until we reach this achievement, the museum was inaugurated this year under the



Today, Oman Across Age Museum celebrates an everlasting memory in our minds, the memory of laying the foundation stone for this architectural edifice

AL YAQTHAN BIN ABDULLAH AL HARTHI
Director-General, Oman Across Ages Museum

auspices of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stressing the importance of looking forward to Oman's future that meets the

aspirations of every Omani," he added.

The museum DG thanked "Acacia" media production

company, led by the director, Malek al Maslamani, the company's staff, and all those who contributed to this wonderful artistic production.

Her Highness later launched the documentary film 'An Everlasting Foundation,' which reviewed the most significant stages of the museum's establishment, starting with the design stages, site selection, working committees and design symbolism. The documentary film will be available for viewing during specific times in the museum.

UN official hails Oman's sustainable development success



NEW YORK: Dr Rola Dashti, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), has appreciated Oman's remarkable progress in its comprehensive and sustainable development journey. Oman's Vision 2040 goals, aimed at achieving sustainable growth, are yielding positive outcomes by elevating the country's credit rating, investment opportunities and financial status in the region.

During her visit to the Sultanate of Oman's delegation headquarters at the United Nations, Dr Dashti met with Dr Mohammed bin Awad al Hassan, the Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations.

The meeting encompassed discussions on various areas of collaboration between Oman and ESCWA, including statistics, women and children's welfare, empowerment of youth, and enhancing Oman's competitiveness in the fields of science and technology.

Highlighting the high percentage of young people in Oman's population, Dr Dashti emphasised that the country's vibrant youth demographic would contribute positively to its economy, infusing vitality and diversifying income sources for Omani citizens.

She expressed the United Nations' and ESCWA's eagerness for enhanced cooperation with Oman and other member states of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, recognising their increasingly interconnected economies with the global arena.

The commendation from Dr Dashti further validates Oman's commitment to sustainable development, while paving the way for expanded collaboration between the Sultanate and international organisations to achieve common goals. — ONA

11 divorces daily in 2022



FROM PAGE 1

Social media platforms offer a plethora of opportunities for individuals to interact, share their lives and connect with others. However, this constant exposure to virtual networks can have adverse effects on relationships. One of the most significant issues is the potential for emotional infidelity. It is not uncommon for individuals to reconnect with old flames, develop online relationships, or engage in secretive conversations, leading to feelings of betrayal and a breakdown of trust within the primary relationship.

Nuha's journey began innocently enough, as she connected with her partner through Snapchat, a popular multimedia messaging app. The allure of virtual communication and the perceived anonymity provided a platform for their relationship to flourish. However, as their interactions intensified, so did the inherent risks associated with online connections.

The exposure of Nuha's online relationship acted as a catalyst, unraveling trust and creating irreparable damage in her marriage. Discovering the hidden aspects of her virtual connection shattered the foundation of trust within her primary relationship, leading to a breakdown of the marital bond. The consequences of this revelation highlight the significant impact that online interactions can have on real-life relationships.

The surge in divorce cases highlights the need for stronger support structures for married couples in Oman.

Marriage counselling services and programmes that promote healthy communication, conflict resolution and relationship building could play a vital role in mitigating the rising divorce rates. Encouraging open dialogue about marital issues and offering guidance to couples experiencing difficulties may help salvage marriages before they reach the breaking point.

Military musicians dazzle at Basel Tattoo

BASEL: Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman's women musicians and men bagpipe players in vibrant uniforms on Arabian horses stole the hearts and limelight at Basel Tattoo 2023, an international military music show, which began in Basel, Switzerland, on Friday. Military bands from Oman and six other countries are taking part in the world's second largest military tattoo, in terms of performers and budget after the Edinburgh Military Tattoo, till July 22.

To celebrate 50 years of Oman-Switzerland bilateral relations, the musicians formed the number 50 on horseback.

The opening ceremony was attended by a large number of music lovers from different countries of the world to watch musical performances representing different cultures. Mahmoud bin Hamad al Hasani, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Switzerland, said that the relations between Oman and Switzerland are based on constructive cooperation, respect, exchange of common interests and service of peace, and witness distinguished official visits at a high level between officials of the two countries to strengthen and develop bilateral relations in all fields.

He explained that the participation of the Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman in the Tattoo Basel show comes with the aim of strengthening



the relations between the two friendly countries, which marks 50 years, as well as to promote the Sultanate of Oman and its cultural heritage.

Brigadier General Ramis bin Jamaan al Aweera, Director-General of Music at the Royal Guard of Oman and supervisor of military music in the Sultanate of Oman, said that participation in Basel Tattoo show is part of the joint cultural cooperation between Oman and Switzerland, and to highlight Omani music, which is an opportunity to promote tourism for the Sultanate. Oman is in one of the most prominent

music venues in the world. The Brigadier General indicated that the musicians of the Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman will play Omani music specially prepared for this global event. This is in order to introduce the public to the uniqueness of Omani music.

During the various international events, many requests are received to play Omani musical pieces due to its unique rhythms. He added that the musicians will play Arab and Swiss pieces of music alongside the Omani musical compositions on horseback, stressing that participation in such performances contributes to

refining the skills of the musicians.

Dr Sarhan bin Salem al Zaidi, Director-General of the Royal Cavalry at the Royal Court Affairs, said that the participation of the Royal Cavalry and the Royal Guard of Oman comes in response to the invitation of Swiss Defence Union, and the participation confirms the strong relations between the two friendly countries. He added that the participation in the Basel Show with various equestrian performances, formations and musical compositions will highlight the cultural and civilisational heritage of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



Oman, Syria boost economic, media tie-ups in joint committee meetings

MUSCAT: The sixth session of the Omani-Syrian Joint Committee concluded in Muscat on Thursday.

During the meetings, the two sides explored cooperation in economic, investment, industrial, agricultural, cultural, and media fields.

The Omani side was headed by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, while the Syrian side was led by Dr Mohammed Samer al Khalil, Minister of Economy and Foreign Trade.

Al Saqri said in a speech that the volume of commercial exchange between Oman and Syria grew by 18 per cent over the past five years, from 2018 to 2022.

He pointed out that the two countries share great potential

Oman, Syria sign three MoUs and an executive programme in the field of media, developing SMEs, and maritime education

for augmenting trade in the field of goods and services, among other spheres.

The Syrian minister said that the round of talks covered a review of memoranda of understanding (MoU) and agreements that were inked in a bid to boost joint cooperation.

Three MoUs and an executive programme in the field of media were signed on the sidelines of the 6th session's meetings.

The first MoU and executive programme was aimed at consolidating ties of cooperation in

the field of media, notably between the two countries' news agencies and in technical and engineering fields, as well as a joint production of radio and television programmes, drama, e-media, foreign media, media content production, and media training.

The second MoU dealt with developing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), with a view to establishing a strategic economic partnership, encouraging investment in media-related SMEs, and enhancing bilateral cooperation between SMEs

from both sides.

In particular, this MoU focuses on establishing business incubators and technology support centres, furnishing a suitable environment to stimulate innovation and invention, organising seminars and exhibitions, and exchanging visits and training courses.

The third memorandum dealt with the mutual recognition of certificates of competence and eligibility for seafarers.

Emphasis was laid on mutual recognition of the maritime education and training systems, including the accreditation of certificates of competence issued to captains, officers, and operators of the global safety and relief system. — ONA

Heritage Museum opens in Jaalan

JAALAN BANI BU ALI: The Al Hamidi Heritage Museum, which is considered one of the Omani traditional museums and one of the tourist attractions in the wilayat, was inaugurated on Thursday in the Wilayat of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali, Al Sharqiyah South Governorate, under the patronage of Mohammed bin Humaid al Ghabshi, Wali of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Humaid bin Saleh al Hamidi, owner of the museum, explained that the opening of the museum coincides with the summer tourism season and the activities of the Al Ashkhara atmosphere forum, in order to highlight the traditional culture which will largely benefit the visitors.

The museum consists of several corners, including a corner specialised in traditional weapons such as old swords and daggers, a corner for books and newspapers, and a corner for traditional Omani clothing, in addition to displaying a collection of pottery, and old coins. — ONA





Job Vacancy

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
GCC Office in Muscat has 2 positions available
(For Omani Nationals only)

1. Programme Analyst - Youth & Communication (National Officer - A Category)
2. Programme Analyst - RH & Gender (National Officer - B Category)

For details and instructions on how to apply,
please refer to our website: gcc.unfpa.org (Vacancies Section)

Deadline to apply: 29 July, 2023

Events of Khareef Dhofar kick off with Kiddy Time



FROM PAGE 1

Ammar bin Obed Ghawas, Director of the Events and Awareness Department at Dhofar Municipality, said events in Al Haffa will be launched on July 25. Laser and drone shows will begin in Ittin on July 20.

Ghawas said illuminations will light up Salalah Park on July 20.

Many international restaurants and chefs are taking part in an event in Al Sa'adah Garden in early August. It will also host a cookery competition. Khareef Dhofar also includes Salalah International Chocolate Exhibition, Gulf Perfumes Exhibition and Gulf Fashion Show.

The Ministry of Information on Saturday started its visual, audio, print and digital coverage of Khareef Dhofar. Oman TV is covering the events in three advanced studios, including two mobile studios.

One can also access Ain app of MoI to keep track of radio and television broadcasts of all programmes and events related to the season. It has many videos of tourist sites in the Dhofar Governorate.





Tender Announcement

Tender No. NAHKEEL/014

Tender Name: Integrated Center for Collection, Sorting and Marketing for Agricultural Products. Dhofar region – (Al Najd).

Nakheel Oman Development Company invites you to participate in the above Tender. This Tender is in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources “Al Najd Agriculture development office” and Oman Food Investment Holding Company (Nitaj).

The submissions shall be addressed to:

Account Name: Nakheel Oman Development Company SAOC
Bank Name: Bank Nizwa
Account No: 00150000004001
Swift Code: BNZWOMRX

Tender fee	50/- OR (non-refundable)
Start date for Tender collection	17 July 2023
Last date for Tender collection	23 July 2023
Site visit	25 July 2023
Last date for receiving the technical queries	30 July 2023
Closing date of the tender	7 Aug 2023
Bidding company grade	Excellent / First Grade

- The Bidder shall submit their proposal no later than 7th of Aug 2023 at 12.00 PM.
- All bidders are required to submit their proposals in two separate envelopes (technical and financial) with writing the number (NAHKEEL/014) and name of the tender: **Integrated Center for Collection, Sorting and Marketing for Agricultural Products**, and addressed to Nakheel Oman Development Company office in Gala, Qatar Airways building 4th floor.
- All Tender communication must be addressed to: (tenders@nakheel.om) or (+968 91409620).

 nakheel _ om

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PLASTIC POLLUTION

A GROWING MENACE TO OUR OCEANS AND WILDLIFE

THREAT TO MARINE LIFE, HUMAN BEINGS

1

ALARMING **1.9 BN** TONNES OF WASTE ENTERING OCEANS ANNUALLY

2

HARMFUL EFFECTS ON ANIMAL POISONING, SUFFOCATION-INDUCED FATALITIES, AND WATER QUALITY

3

IMPACT ON FISHERMEN'S LIVELIHOODS DUE TO LOSS OR DAMAGE OF VESSELS

4

FINES FOR OFFENDERS VIOLATING THE POLLUTION LAWS. FINES RANGE FROM **RO 5,000** TO **RO 50,000**

5

IMPRISONMENT RANGING FROM 1 MONTH TO A MAXIMUM OF 2 YEARS

6

THREAT TO BOATS AND COASTAL HABITATS



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JULY 15

The escalating issue of dumping rubbish and the influx of floating plastic into our oceans presents a grave concern. This also poses a significant threat to marine life, including fish, seabirds, marine reptiles and mammals, as well as boats and coastal habitats.

An alarming estimated 1.9 billion tonnes of waste finds its way into the world's oceans each year, underscoring a concerning trend of indiscriminate disposal rather than utilising designated waste receptacles.

The potential repercussions of this garbage epidemic extend beyond environmental consequences, encompassing the well-being of human health and public safety. The harmful effects of waste pollution manifest

through animal poisoning, suffocation-induced fatalities in aquatic life, and adverse impacts on water quality.

Youssef al Abri, a seasoned fisherman since his youth, says that waste disposal into the sea does not solely affect marine organisms, but also significantly impacts fishermen. It can lead to the loss or damage of their vessels, compromising their livelihoods.

Al Abri further emphasises that marine pollution directly contributes to the loss of biodiversity in the seas. Plastic bags and other marine debris can adhere to the bodies of fish and other marine animals, leading to their demise when consumed. This perilous situation can potentially trigger a food crisis, given that a substantial percentage of the population relies heavily on fish as a vital food source.

"Public participation in preserving the marine



Public participation in preserving the marine environment is of utmost importance, necessitating awareness campaigns to shed light on the perils the marine environment faces and the cruciality of its preservation

YOUSSEF AL ABRI
A fisherman

environment is of utmost importance, necessitating awareness campaigns to shed light on the perils the marine environment faces and the cruciality of its preservation," adds Al Abri.

In the ongoing battle against marine debris and pollutants, a series of laws and policies have been implemented to curb pollution.

The Environment Authority (EA) consistently disseminates information through social media platforms, highlighting the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Law as part of raising awareness.

This law explicitly prohibits the dumping of waste or any other materials, irrespective of type, shape, or condition, into marine environments without prior authorisation from the Environment Authority.

The law enforces penalties for

offenders, including imprisonment ranging from one month and no more than two years, and fines ranging from RO 5,000 and no more than RO 50,000, or one of these two penalties.

Marine pollution can be reduced through the proper disposal of rubbish by ensuring they do not find their way into the ocean.

Confronting the imminent dangers of pollution, which threaten life and exacerbate human suffering, necessitates a collective understanding of the significance of preserving ecosystems.

Everyone should play an active role in environmental preservation and protect our surroundings from pollution, thereby securing prosperity and well-being for all and guaranteeing the rights of future generations to natural resources and a safe, clean environment.



Oman attends ECO meeting on communication, information tech

TEHRAN: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, participated in the communication and information technology meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), which was hosted at the Iranian capital, Tehran.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman to the meeting was headed by Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman accredited to the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the participation of Dr Nasser al Fannah, Director of the Office of Technical Programmes at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

The meeting discussed the future of technology and the importance of enhancing cooperation between members and neighbouring countries to increase the benefit of technology



and reduce its negative effects.

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology is working to develop the national programme and the digital economy, through a package of projects, initiatives and policies in various fields of technology, which aim to enhance the contribution of the digital economy to the gross domestic product. — ONA

■ MINISTRY LAUNCHES YOUTH AMBASSADORS PROGRAMME



The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), has officially launched the Youth Ambassadors Programme. This initiative, led by the Directorate-General of Youth, aims to enhance youth participation in the social and economic development of Oman by equipping young individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to engage in international and regional conferences, events and meetings. Hilal bin Saif al Siyabi, Director-General of the General Directorate of Youth, says the Youth Ambassadors Programme targets individuals aged between 18 and 25. It offers three primary activities to support their representation of Oman in various regional and international forums. Firstly, an online platform will be launched on the ministry's website, providing registered participants access to a range of training courses in fields such as diplomacy, leadership, media and cultural identity. Secondly, a training simulation session for regional and international meetings, such as the United Nations Youth Model (MUN), will be organised to address significant global and regional issues faced by youth worldwide and explore mechanisms for their resolution. Thirdly, the programme will facilitate meetings between young participants and diplomatic leaders in Oman. — ONA

OAAAQA confers academic accreditation on Al Zahra College

MUSCAT: Al Zahra College for Women has been recognised by Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) as conforming with institutional accreditation after meeting academic accreditation requirements.

The requirements are in three standards, namely Standard 2 Student Learning by Coursework Programmes, Standard 4 Staff Research and Consultancy, and Standard 8 Staff and Staff Support Services.

Dr Musallam al Maani, Dean of Al Zahra College for Women (ZCW), says the College's achievement comes as a result of strenuous efforts exerted over the last two years or so.

"ZCW devotes serious efforts to make certain that the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices of quality are customary characteristics of the College, highly commending the outstanding performance of ZCW academic and administrative staff, and their self-sacrificing devotion and loyalty, without which ZCW would have fallen short of achieving its target," he adds.

ZCW has clearly defined graduate attributes and learning outcomes for each programme of study, in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which are derived to the full and entire extent from its mission and vision.

As a result, teaching is in an intrinsic manner and by natural character linked to learning outcomes and to the academic weights of courses, including the credit points/hours and their overall intellectual and academic weight.

The College has a set of instructions and procedures for the development and review of the curriculum to make certain that courses are appropriate, up-to-date and effective in achieving the level required for the academic degree awarded.



To measure how academic standards are maintained, the College has introduced a number of mechanisms, including students' evaluation of courses, peer assessment and senior management classroom observation, and boosted by the recruitment of highly qualified and experienced academic staff.

Placing emphasis on the quality of teaching, the College has adopted a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, benchmarking it with other top universities at the national, regional and international levels.

The College also maintains an excellent staff-to-student ratio (1-20), which is not only benchmarked with other higher education institutions, but also conforms to the best international practices and norms.

To further maintain academic standards, external examiners have been invited from other HEIs to assess final-year students' graduation projects, with plans underway to establish an incubator that aids the development of new business ventures that would enter the Omani market as a byproduct of graduation projects.

A special strategy, named Staff Planning and Professional Development Strategy (SPDS), has been devised and brought about. As per SPDS, approximately 300 training workshops in the form of brief intensive educational programmes for both academic and non-academic staff will be conducted over 3 years, focusing especially on techniques and skills within the staff area of work.

Embark on an unforgettable 'Arabian Adventure in Oman'

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

Linda Pappas Funsch, a distinguished career educator and expert in modern Middle Eastern history and Islamic studies, is set to embark on her next captivating journey titled the 'Arabian Adventure in Oman'. Linda, a freelance writer, consultant, and author, holds a deep-rooted connection with the Sultanate of Oman, having first visited the country in 1974.

Scheduled to take place from January 18 to February 2, 2024, the 'Arabian Adventure in Oman' study visit is being arranged by Zahara Tours, a renowned organisation that has been honoured with the 'Oman Award for Excellence in Tourism' a remarkable six times.

This carefully curated programme will encompass a plethora of fascinating highlights, including visits to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Sultan Armed Forces Museum, SQU, Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), local and international



Linda Pappas Funsch

art galleries, archaeological sites such as Al Baleed, Samharam, Wubar, and the Unesco-listed frankincense trees and ancient trade routes at Wadi Dawkah.

Additionally, participants will have the opportunity to explore the Oman Across Ages Museum, and Al Hoota Cave, and immerse themselves in the vibrant local markets of Muscat, Sinaw and Nizwa, among many other exciting experiences.

With her unwavering dedication to promoting cultural understanding, Linda was honoured in 2019 with a research fellowship from the Sultan Qaboos



The 2024 'Arabian Adventure in Oman' study visit includes the enchanting city of Salalah and the Governorate of Dhofar, ensuring participants a comprehensive and unforgettable experience

Cultural Centre in Washington, DC. Her upcoming book, scheduled for publication later in 2023, will shed light on the pivotal role of Omani women in national development, further contributing to her extensive body of work.

Having led numerous 'learning on location' study visits to the Middle East, including Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Oman, Linda attracts a diverse group of participants seeking an enriching educational experience.

In the 'Arabian Adventure' held in 2023, approximately 13 guests took part and primarily comprised adult students from the Institute for Learning in Retirement at Frederick Community College in Maryland. This multidisciplinary programme of Middle East and Islamic Studies has been flourishing for over two decades, fostering a diverse and intellectually stimulating environment.

The 2023 'Arabian Adventure' participants showcased an

impressive blend of personal and professional backgrounds, representing three major Abrahamic traditions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Notable members included Karen, a professor of law, Rukhsana, a radiologist, Linda, a marine botanist, Donna, a US Navy veteran, Ellen, a chemist, and Dana, a clinical social worker, among others. Adding a refreshing and youthful perspective to the group was Christina, a practicing pharmacist, accompanied by her two daughters, Julia, a medical resident, and Jessica, an organic farmer.

Linda, who has a wealth of experience in escorting visitors to Oman, is delighted to welcome back Toni and John, a couple who joined her on the previous learning adventure in 2023. Toni, a retired teacher and community volunteer, and John, a mechanical engineer, are eager to embark on yet another captivating journey through Oman.

The forthcoming 'Arabian Adventure in Oman' study visit

for early 2024 promises to be an exceptional exploration of Oman's captivating landscapes, rich heritage and vibrant culture. The 2024 itinerary will include the enchanting city of Salalah and the Governorate of Dhofar, ensuring participants a comprehensive and unforgettable experience.

Linda's extensive teaching career spans several colleges and universities, with her current position at Frederick Community College in Maryland. A highly regarded speaker, she frequently graces scholarly symposia across the United States, sharing her knowledge and expertise.

Her commitment to promoting cross-cultural understanding is exemplified through her 'learning on location' study visits, which have catered to both laymen and senior US military officers from CENTCOM, offering unique insights into the Middle East.

For further information or inquiries regarding the study visit, interested individuals can contact Linda directly at lindafunsch@gmail.com.



South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol visits the town of Irpin, heavily damaged during attacks, outside of Kyiv. – Reuters

South Korea’s Yoon pledges more military supplies, aid to Ukraine

KYIV: South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol said on Saturday his country will provide a bigger batch of military supplies and humanitarian aid to Ukraine during a visit to Kyiv for a meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

The surprise trip came after Yoon attended a Nato alliance summit in Lithuania and visited Poland this week, where he expressed solidarity with Ukraine against Russia’s war.

South Korea is a US ally and the world’s ninth biggest arms exporter, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) think tank. But it is also wary of Russia’s influence over North Korea

and has been resisting Western pressure to help arm Ukraine directly.

In a press conference, Yoon said South Korea plans to provide “a larger scale of military supplies” to Ukraine this year, following last year’s provision of non-lethal supplies such as body armour and helmets. He did not give more details.

Yoon said South Korea also plans to provide Ukraine with \$150 million in humanitarian aid this year, following about \$100 million in 2022.

It would also cooperate with Kyiv in projects such as infrastructure construction, which can be backed by concessionary loans from South Korea, he said.

“We are discussing everything that is important for the normal and safe life of people,” Zelenskiy said, thanking Yoon for “powerful” support.

Yoon’s office said he also visited Bucha and Irpin, small towns near the capital where Russian soldiers are accused of war crimes against civilians. Moscow denies that.

Yoon said this week his administration was preparing to send demining equipment and ambulances, following a request from Ukraine, and will join Nato’s aid fund for Ukraine.

Yoon’s visit is significant because few other Asian leaders have visited Ukraine, said Ramon Pacheco Pardo, the Korea chair at the Brussels School of Governance

research organisation.

How much of a policy shift towards providing more support for Ukraine remains to be seen, he added, but the trip shows Kyiv’s approval for aid sent so far.

“If he’s going it’s because Zelenskiy allowed him to go, because he feels Korea is doing enough to warrant it,” Pacheco Pardo said.

Zelenskiy asked Yoon to boost military support when they first met in May. Yoon said on Saturday South Korea has delivered safety equipment and humanitarian aid that Ukraine needs, since May, including mine detectors.

South Korea’s defence ministry has said it was discussing exporting ammunition to the US. — Reuters

Azerbaijan, Armenia hold peace talks

BAKU: Azerbaijan and Armenia held a fresh round of EU-mediated peace talks on Saturday, as Baku accused Armenian separatists in its breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region of using radio interference against passenger aircraft.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met in Brussels for talks aimed at resolving their decades-long conflict for the control of Armenian-populated Karabakh, the foreign ministry in Baku said in a statement.

European Council President Charles Michel was mediating the discussions, which come amid renewed tensions after Azerbaijan closed temporarily the Lachin corridor, the sole land link between Karabakh and Armenia.

Adding to the standoff, Azerbaijan’s defence ministry said Armenian separatist forces in Karabakh “use radio interference against GPS navigation systems

of local and foreign airlines’ passenger aircraft flying through our country’s airspace.”

The alleged interference impacted two Azerbaijan Airlines aircraft on Thursday, the ministry said.

“Such incidents pose a serious threat to aviation safety,” according to the statement.

Karabakh’s rebel authorities denied the claims.

On Friday, some 6,000 people rallied in Karabakh to demand the reopening of the Lachin corridor.

Local separatists, warning of a humanitarian crisis, urged Moscow to ensure free movement through the road.

Azerbaijan later allowed the Red Cross to resume medical evacuations from Karabakh to Armenia.

Karabakh has been at the centre of a decades-long territorial dispute between the two countries, which have fought two wars over the mountainous territory. — AFP



Demonstrators hold their fist in the air during a rally to demand the reopening of a blockaded road linking the Nagorno-Karabakh region, in Stepanakert. – AFP

China’s top diplomat urges stable ties with India

BEIJING: China’s top diplomat Wang Yi told the Indian foreign minister that bilateral ties need to be stabilised, as the two Asian neighbours searched for ways to ease simmering military tensions along their vast border.

On the sidelines of ASEAN meetings in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta, Wang told Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar that mutual support between the two nations is needed instead of suspicion, according to a readout from the Chinese foreign ministry.

India and China share a 3,800-km frontier, much of it poorly marked, and fought a brief but bloody war over it in 1962.

Since the 1990s, ties have improved after a series of border agreements, and China is now India’s second-largest trading partner.

A setback in 2020, however, when 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese soldiers were killed in hand-to-hand fighting during a border clash, spurred both militaries to fortify positions and deploy large numbers of troops and equipment.

Several rounds of military and diplomatic talks have helped to ease tensions between the two armies, but New Delhi has described the situation on the border as fragile and dangerous.

China and India need to work



Foreign Ministers attend the 30th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, in Jakarta. – AFP

in the same direction to find a solution to border issues acceptable to both sides, Wang told Jaishankar during their meeting on Friday.

“The two sides should support each other and accomplish things together, rather than wear each other down or suspect each other,” Wang said.

India and China should not let specific issues define their overall relationship, he said.

The two sides agreed to hold the next round of military commander-level talks on border issues at an early date, the Chinese foreign ministry said.

On India’s recent restrictions against Chinese companies, Wang urged a fair, transparent

and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese companies.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping said China must build a “solid” security barrier around its Internet under the supervision of the ruling Communist Party, in his latest call to safeguard online data and information.

Xi said in instructions delivered to officials attending a two-day cybersecurity meeting in Beijing that ended on Saturday.

“We must adhere to the Party’s management of the Internet and adhere to (the principle of) making the Internet work for the people,” state-run Xinhua news agency cited Xi as saying.

BARCELONA

Forest fire forces island evacuations

A forest fire in the Spanish island of La Palma has forced the evacuation of at least 500 people, authorities said on Saturday, in the first natural crisis on the island since a volcanic eruption on 2021. The fire started in the early hours of Saturday morning in El Pinar de Puntagorda, a wooded area at the north of the island in the Canaries.

At least 11 houses were destroyed as the fire advanced, said Fernando Clavijo, president of the Canary Islands.



“The number of people who need to be evacuated could reach 1,000. It depends on whether we can bring these strong winds under control,” Clavijo told reporters in La Palma. — Reuters

ROME

Strikes strand thousands of tourists

Strikes by airport and airline staff grounded hundreds of flights and left thousands of travellers stranded in Europe on Saturday at the height of the busy summer tourism season.

In Italy, some 1,000 flights were cancelled as a result of the strike by ground crew, according to airport and airline authorities.

Another 120 flights due to depart and arrive from Belgium’s Charleroi airport were cancelled on Saturday and Sunday, triggered by a walkout of budget



carrier Ryanair pilots over working conditions.

Italy’s strike left some 250,000 travellers stranded in one of the world’s top tourist spots. — AFP

TOKYO

Flood warning issued following rainfall

Authorities in Japan have warned of landslides and major flooding after the north-east of the country was hit by heavy rainfall.

The Akita Prefecture saw a river flood over its banks in the regional capital on Saturday, with residents urged to seek shelter.

Local media reported two people had been taken to hospital after a house was hit by a landslide.

The storm brought the Shinkansen high-speed train between the cities Morioka and



Akita to a temporary halt.

Several people in south-western Japan have died amid the weather in recent days, with rivers overflowing their banks and landslides. — dpa

Russian general denounces his bosses as officers are fired or questioned



Anatoly Kurmanaev

The writer is a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, covering Russia's transformation.



Paul Sonne

The writer is a foreign correspondent for The New York Times, focusing on Russia and Ukraine.

A top Russian general in Ukraine has lashed out at his bosses after being fired from his command, accusing them of undermining the war effort with dishonesty and politicking, in the latest sign of turmoil within the Kremlin's military leadership.

In a four-minute recording released late on Wednesday night, Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov addressed his troops, accusing his superiors of inflicting a blow on his forces by removing him from his post in retaliation for voicing the truth about battlefield problems to senior leadership behind closed doors. His firing, and the unusual public airing of his grievances, reflected the disarray that has roiled Russia's military command since a failed mutiny three weeks ago.

While the 58th Combined Arms Army he commanded has been holding off a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Zaporizhzhia region, "we were hit in the rear by our senior commander, who treacherously and vilely decapitated our army at the most difficult and tense moment," Popov said — an apparent reference to Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the armed forces.

Since the mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group and its boss, Yevgeny Prigozhin, several senior officers have been detained or pushed out of their posts, according to a person close to the Russian military, who spoke on condition of anonymity for security reasons.

Speculation has swirled in particular about the fate of Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the head of the air force and a former chief of forces in Ukraine, who hasn't been seen publicly since the rebellion and was said this week by a top Russian lawmaker to be "taking a rest."

The person close to the Russian military said Surovikin, a Prigozhin ally who reportedly knew in advance of the mutiny, was being detained. In January, the Kremlin removed Surovikin from overseeing Russian forces in Ukraine and put Gerasimov in direct control of conducting the war, even as he remains chief of the Russian General Staff, an unconventional conflation of duties for a military at war.

Adding to this week's upheaval, another top Russian commander in Ukraine, Lt. Gen. Oleg Tsokov, deputy commander of the Southern Military District, was killed



Ukrainian Marines from the 36th Brigade fire rockets from a Grad launcher toward Russian infantry in a frontline tree line position in the Zaporizhzhia region of Ukraine

in a Ukrainian airstrike on Tuesday in the occupied city of Berdiansk — one of the highest-level Russian losses since the war began.

The recording of Popov offered an exceedingly rare public glimpse into what a top Russian officer thinks about how President Vladimir Putin's costly war is being waged. Western governments are eager for that kind of intelligence, but US officials say they have limited insight into the views of Russian military leaders or the recriminations against them.

Also murky is the status of Wagner troops and their leader, Prigozhin — who, as of last week, was reported to be in Russia and roaming free, despite having mounted a rebellion that he said was aimed at removing inept military leaders, not Putin.

"We're not even sure where he is and what relationship he has," President Joe Biden told reporters in Helsinki on Thursday. "If I were he, I'd be careful what I ate."

Until his short-lived uprising, Prigozhin, a civilian, frequently denounced Russia's military command publicly, accusing it of incompetence and

backstabbing, which he said led to the insurrection. Popov's comments suggest that similar discontent exists high within the uniformed ranks.

But so far, there is little indication that the fallout from the mutiny has hurt Russian forces' ability to defend against the Ukrainian counteroffensive, which began last month and has made only incremental progress.

Popov said that he ended up in a "difficult situation" with the Russian military's leadership, in which he had to choose whether he would be a coward, who would tell his superiors only what they wanted to hear, or would "call a spade a spade." He told his troops he had no right to lie in their name or in the names of those who had died, and therefore "outlined all the problematic issues that exist in the army in the current day in terms of combat work and support."

Specifically, he said he had reported the lack of counter-battery and artillery reconnaissance capabilities and the excessive deaths and injuries that Russian troops were suffering on the battlefield.

"Apparently, in connection with this, the senior commanders felt some kind

of danger in me and swiftly, in a single day's light, concocted an order from the Minister of Defence that removed me from the deployment and got rid of me," Popov said. It wasn't clear whether he intended his farewell speech to his troops to be made public.

In an interview with state news channel Rossiya 24, Putin said on Thursday that the weapons and tanks the West had supplied to Ukraine weren't having the desired effect. He reiterated Russia's opposition to Nato membership for Ukraine, saying it would pose a security threat to Russia.

It was not immediately clear whether Popov's firing was connected to the Wagner uprising, but the removal of a high-level general whose forces appeared to be performing successfully, on one of the most important stretches of the front line, left many Russian observers shocked.

"The removal of Popov is a monstrous act of terrorism against army morale," military blogger Roman Saponkov wrote on Telegram, saying that Wagner's failure had emboldened the Russian military leadership to purge its ranks.

Since the mutiny by the Wagner mercenary group, several senior officers have been detained or pushed out of their posts, according to a person close to the Russian military.

Suspect in Gilgo beach killings led a life of chaos and control



Andy Newman

The author is a writer about social services and poverty in New York City and its environs



Nate Schweber

The writer is an award-winning journalist for the New York Times

A t his office near the Empire State Building, Rex Heuermann was a master of the meticulous: a veteran architectural consultant and a self-styled expert at navigating the intricacies of New York City's building code. He impressed some clients and drove others crazy with his fine-toothed directives.

At home in Massapequa Park on Long Island, while some neighbours saw Heuermann as just another commuter in a suit, others found him a figure of menace. He glowered at neighbours while swinging an ax in the front yard of a low-slung, dilapidated house that parents cautioned their children to avoid on Halloween. He was kicked out of a Whole Foods for stealing fruit.

"We would cross the street," said Nicholas Ferchaw,

24, a neighbour. "He was somebody you don't want to approach."

On Friday, Suffolk County prosecutors said that residents of Massapequa Park had a serial killer living in their midst. They accused Heuermann, 59, of leaving a quarter-mile trail of young women's bodies on the South Shore of Long Island in what came to be known as the Gilgo Beach Killings. Yet he was so careful in covering his tracks, they said, that it took them nearly 15 years to arrest him. Heuermann's friends and clients in the real estate business were flabbergasted.

His neighbour Ferchaw said, "I wasn't surprised at all — because of all the creepiness."

Heuermann, who was arrested in midtown Manhattan on Thursday night, was charged on Friday with three counts of first-degree murder and ordered held without bail during a brief appearance at a courthouse in Suffolk County. His lawyer said outside the courthouse that Heuermann denied committing the killings.

According to his resume and the website of his company, RH Consultants & Associates, Heuermann's customers included American Airlines, Catholic Charities, and the city's own Department of Environmental Protection. He represented clients before the Landmark Preservation Commission many times and claimed credit for hundreds of successful applications before city agencies.

Steve Kramberg, a property manager in Brooklyn who worked with Heuermann for about 30 years, called him "a



Police gather outside of the home of a suspect in a yearslong investigation in Massapequa Park, N.Y.

According to the timeline released by prosecutors and to Buildings Department and court records, Heuermann kept up his busy work schedule even as victims were vanishing.

gem to deal with, highly knowledgeable." Heuermann was "a big goofy guy, a little bit on the nerdy side" who worked long hours and was available day and night, Kramberg said. But he was also devoted to his wife, who Kramberg said had health problems, and to his elderly mother.

In Massapequa Park, a tightly gridded village of neat homes with manicured lawns, Heuermann, the son of an aerospace engineer, lived in the house that he grew up in and tinkered with furniture in his father's old workshop. A man who went to high school with him said he was bullied as a teenager but sometimes fought back. In 1990, he married an executive at an office supply company. He has a daughter who works at his firm.

Ferchaw recounted several run-ins with his neighbour, none pleasant. There was the time he said hello to Heuermann as he was cutting wood and Heuermann responded by silently glaring back between chops of his splitting maul. Other times he would be seated beside his stacked wood on the porch watching an old television.

Mike Schmidt, who has lived in the neighbourhood for 10 years, has a friend who lives behind Heuermann. Sometimes Schmidt would visit his buddy, have a few beers in the backyard, look out at the sagging Heuermann house, "and say 'He probably has bodies there.'"

According to the timeline released by prosecutors and to Buildings Department and court records, Heuermann kept up his busy work schedule even as victims were vanishing.

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

Remember the January 6 right-wing insurrection on Capitol Hill in Washington and how social media was used to spread conspiracies and motivate users to storm the capital and attack politicians and security guards. A similar thing happened during the Arab spring “also known as Facebook revolution” helped people to organise protest and motivated them to take

Such entertainment can keep us hooked for hours scrolling around and forwarding videos to our

'SOCIAL MEDIA
SHAPED
DIFFERENT
ASPECT OF OUR
LIVES, FROM
OUR POLITICAL
OPINIONS TO
WHAT BRANDS WE
USE OR WHERE
TO SPEND OUR
HOLIDAY, BUT
DO WE NEED
MORE OF SUCH
PLATFORMS?'

Faintly, a new social media platform may excite some people but for me I would prefer less virtual life and more activities that involve going and connecting with nature.

Caminando Fronteras says there is no news of three boats with at least 300 migrants on board, two of which left the Mbour region late last month. The coastguard are still searching. The Senegalese government has said 260 Senegalese “in distress... were rescued in Moroccan territorial waters” between June 28 and July 9. On Wednesday, 14 people died off Saint-Louis, Senegal’s northernmost town, when their pirogue overturned. — AFP

The writer is a Ukraine correspondent for NYT and a former Marine infantryman



The writer is a News Assistant with The New York Times

Before the war, Victor Kalyberda, 61, and Anatolii Solovei, 52, were little more than acquaintances. Kalyberda was a tractor driver. Solovei was a well-to-do landowner who grew wheat, corn and barley — staples of Sulyhivka's harvest. A cordial relationship was inevitable in a two-street village of around 50 people.



Ducks seen in Virnopillia, in eastern Ukraine.

THE VILLAGES OF
SULYHIVKA, VIRNOPILLIA
AND KAMIANKA IN
UKRAINE ARE NOW AT
RISK OF BEING LOST —
NOT TO ARTILLERY OR
PITCHED BATTLES, BUT
TO OVERGROWN WEEDS,
WILDFLOWERS, AND
MINEFIELDS

Ukrainian troops liberated Sulyhivka in September. The two men returned shortly afterward. Kalyberda

It was early July, and Nina Zagrebelna, 67, was sitting in the dusty secretary's office of Virnopillia's partially destroyed community centre. It was hot. A plastic sheet covered the smashed windows.

— The New York Times

To comment & email: opinion@omanobserver.om

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The journey matters as much as the goal

Experience, and experiences, have left me with a distinctly cynical perspective about many things, and disappointingly, too much of that is in the institutional encouragement to our young people to pursue their dreams.

I wish they could. I genuinely wish that the pursuit of dreams was a genuine option for every one of the hopeful young faces that walk into classrooms on their first day of school. But instead, I am a firm believer that what we should be preaching instead is patience.

What tends to happen is that our dreams, wherever they come from and whatever inspires them, will always be just that, the golden ring we can't quite reach, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the needle in the haystack, the four leaf clover, the unreachable star. As a consequence, they tend to be a distraction that can obscure genuine, achievable, realistic life objectives. I know... I know... I sound a bit like the Grinch, a harbinger of doom, and in some respects I am, but what I want to be is the saviour of youth, the saviour of their enthusiasm, and the gatekeeper to their imagination.

We see on posters in shopping malls, in cafes, restaurants and bars, in magazine ads, and television commercials expressions like: 'Risk it all for your dreams,' 'Dreams are free,' 'Dreams are pictures of you!,' and 'Live the dream... today!' Yet ironically, they have nothing to do with what you are conditioned, and even educated, to embrace as your dreams for the future. What they do however, is condition you towards thinking that dreams can be bought, or negotiated, or achieved by taking short-cuts. The dream, far from being what they have aspired to, become very much, corruptions of those emotionally charged visions they have for the future.

I want, with all my heart, for every young person to have hope... but they need reality, possibility, and as much as anything, patience, to be their inspirations.

Kalpana Chawla was the first Indian woman to go into space, and



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The writer is a media consultant

she spoke of the need to open yourself to the possibilities that lie ahead and to visualise yourself in that space. She spoke too of the courage needed to actually 'get on board' with it, to recognise that you must be able to do all the things that are part of the role, and further, to persevere, when the going gets tough. Chawla perished in 2003, living her dream, when the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated while re-entering the Earth's atmosphere after a 16 day journey to the stars.

I guess too, that she had few regrets having pushed the boundaries and possibilities since her birth. She must have been a remarkable individual, and in many ways, a 'poster child,' for how I see 'dreams' in today's society. Chawla's first name, Kalpana, was one she had chosen for herself at the age of five, because it embraces ideas and imagination, and all through her life she did things differently, and much of it in the face of opposition, but why? Because she could! Not just because she wanted to, but because she knew herself, and she kept achieving her dreams, and finding new ones, which really, she referred to as new challenges, not dreams, the key difference being the reality factor.

A graduate engineer, when women were a rarity, moving to America, becoming a US citizen, getting a doctorate in 1988, and a job at Nasa the same year. Achieving astronaut selection in 1994, becoming a specialist robotics lead on her first space flight in 1997, before her demise during that fateful second space mission. She never stopped achieving her goals, her objectives, and her dreams.

For me, Chawla embodied how we should see our dreams, by knowing and understanding ourselves, and what we are capable of. By setting achievable objectives, maybe in ethereal environments, as being one way to visualise the element of fantasy that we seem to need, and having achieved one dream, to chase the next one, and so on, always onwards, always upwards, and always within reach.

Leave impossible dreams... to literature and the arts, and be inspired by a child of the stars, Kalpana Chawla.

I WANT, WITH ALL MY HEART, FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON TO HAVE HOPE... BUT THEY NEED REALITY, POSSIBILITY, AND AS MUCH AS ANYTHING, PATIENCE, TO BE THEIR INSPIRATIONS.

RACING FOR SELFIE



A spectator wearing traditional attire holds a Danish national flag along the race route during the 14th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France in the French Alps on Saturday. – AFP

Changing the culture at the World Bank

Ajay Banga, the newly-appointed President of the World Bank, is taking the helm at a pivotal moment. The devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have impeded progress in developing countries and pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty. And Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which has exacerbated inflation and US-China tensions, promises to trigger even more volatility. Consequently, the bank projects that economic activity in emerging economies will not return to pre-pandemic levels by 2024.

Low- and middle-income countries need the World Bank to spearhead global efforts to reduce extreme poverty and enhance living standards. By helping them to reduce their debt burdens and combat climate change, the bank could also help to improve their air and water quality, increase their access to clean energy, and bolster their food security.

But scepticism about the bank's capacity to address the challenges facing developing countries is running high. In a recent speech, Banga said that the World Bank needs a "new playbook" for engaging with the developing world. While this is undoubtedly true, any updated strategy must acknowledge a fundamental truth: the bank is unlikely to have enough capital to finance the investments required



Bertrand Badré

The author is, a former managing director of the World Bank, is CEO and Founder of Blue like an Orange Sustainable Capital

to address the enormous challenges facing poor countries. Given this, it must mobilise its knowledge and relationships, as well as its capital, to encourage investments that enhance growth and employment while also facilitating the green transition.

That means establishing itself as its stakeholders' partner of choice. By collaborating with policymakers in developing and developed countries, other multilateral development banks, and the private sector, the World Bank could incentivise what Banga has called "informed risk-taking." This approach would enable the bank to use its limited balance sheet to encourage private, public, bilateral, and multilateral lenders to increase their annual investments in sustainable development from "billions to trillions" of dollars. But first, Banga must guide the institution towards complete transparency.

Fostering transparency starts with acknowledging the obvious. The debt crisis currently engulfing emerging economies was exacerbated by the pandemic, but these countries were on a perilous path long before. Today's debt conundrum is the result of borrowers and lenders – including the bank itself – pursuing low-return

projects that could not cover their costs. To avert future debt crises, multilateral institutions must stop financing economically unsustainable projects.

While technical discussions about how to generate additional financing are crucial, they must not distract the bank from the vital task of collaborating with decision-makers in developing countries. Identifying future investments that could boost growth and accelerate the energy transition would be far more beneficial.

The first step towards a more effective World Bank has already been taken by the bank's partners during the recent Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact. With roughly 1.2 billion people in poor countries lacking access to electricity and another billion living more than a mile from an all-season road, infrastructure investments could foster sustained growth, help reduce debt, and mitigate the effects of climate change. Given that two billion people in emerging and developing economies are expected to migrate from rural to urban regions by 2030, it is crucial to build climate-friendly power plants, roads, and railways in these countries.

The bank's technical teams, working closely with other

multilateral lenders, must estimate the additional output that each dollar invested in such projects could generate. For example, consider a project that contributes 30 cents to GDP for every dollar of investment, resulting in a 30 per cent rate of return. For such a project to be deemed economically viable, the borrowing cost would need to remain below 30 per cent.

As the bank increasingly evaluates partner project proposals based on expected returns, it will likely encounter pushback against climate-related projects whose benefits cannot be captured by GDP alone. While the bank's assessment process should emphasise that many climate projects can deliver high rates of return, it is crucial to recognise that there are valid reasons to invest in projects that may not yield short-term economic benefits. At the same time, to mitigate risks to debt sustainability, economic and non-economic investments must be carefully balanced.

To this end, the bank should adopt a two-tiered assessment process. The first tier would comprise projects approved solely on the basis of projected returns, and the second tier would include projects whose anticipated environmental benefits outweigh

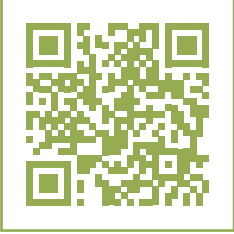
their cost. Projects approved on the basis of economic merit could be further divided into two groups: high-return projects that could attract private-sector financing and lower-return projects that require concessional funding.

The bank has the financial and human resources to implement a data-driven investment approach. But to succeed, it must produce estimates of expected returns on prospective projects, ensure that estimates are independently reviewed and verified, and make this information freely accessible to governments, investors, and the general public. Publishing this data would enable governments to identify infrastructure projects with the greatest potential to boost growth, help private investors make informed financing decisions, and allow civil-society groups to hold leaders to account.

By cultivating a culture of transparency regarding the costs and benefits of the bank's investments, Banga could boost its credibility. Increased trust would encourage shareholders to consider capital increases, and engagement with the private sector and other development institutions would generate scale and momentum.

sport

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In a first, Oman to take on US in Minnesota

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 15

For the first time, Oman will play against the United States in a friendly football match on September 12, at Allianz Stadium in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The match is part of Red Warriors' preparations for the Word Cup 2026 qualifiers, Asian Cup 2023 in Doha, Qatar, and Asian Cup 2027 in Saudi Arabia.

Sixteen cities of the US, Mexico and Canada are jointly hosting 2026 World Cup.

The American Football Association launched the sale of tickets for the friendly match with Oman. The tickets are priced between \$30 and \$80. Allianz Stadium can accommodate up to 19,000 spectators.

Oman national team will start the preparation for these events in September with a training camp. The Oman Football Federation is planning



to organise a friendly match on September 7 or 8 in Muscat.

Oman and the UA are facing off in a football match for the

first time. For US, Oman is 103rd opponent in its football history.

Earlier, Oman played against some CONCACAF teams,

including Haiti on March 20, 2013 at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. Abdulaziz al Muqbali's hattrick helped

Oman beat the visitors 3-0. Oman team also played against Costa Rica in Sohar Sports Complex on October 10,

2014, when they beat visitors 4-3. Oman goals scored by Rayed Ibrahim, Mohammed bin Ali al Siyabi and Emad al Hosani.

Shabab Al Miragh team lift elite football league trophy

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 15

Shabab Al Miragh won the Al Shabab elite football league after beating their rivals Shabab Al Hufri 2-0 in the concluding match that took place in Al Shabab stadium in Barka.

Shabab Al Hufri team was the winner of the last edition after they defeated Shabab Al Miragh in penalties, but the latter confirmed their dominance this season to lift the title.

The goals of Shabab Al Miragh came in the second half as the first half of the match ended in a goalless draw. The former Oman national football team player, Jamal Baksh, was the head coach of Shabab Al Miragh team. He managed to enter the second half with different technique and the squad created the difference.

Mahmood al Balushi scored the opening from header after a perfect cross ball from Jaweed al Balushi. Later, the opponent Shabab Al Hufri pressed hard towards registering the equaliser. Jaweed al Balushi benefited from the less presence of defenders to double the score as he made it to 2-0 in the dying minutes to deliver the title for his team.

The winner Shabab Al Miragh football team progressed into the final rounds after they placed as runners up in the group stage. They accumulated 12 points from four matches including four victories and two defeats. In the last 16 round, the champion beat Al Basit football team in penalties before edging Al Harm team in the quarterfinals 2-1. Shabab Al Miragh defeated Al Mazraa in the penalties to make it to semis before lifting the title in the final as they eked out Shabab Al Hufri in the final clash.

After the final match, the chief guest Haitham al Bahri, CEO of Al Zawia Company for real estate in presence of Ahmed bin Abdullah al Owaisi, Chairman of Al Shabab Club and officials. The chief guest distributed the awards to the top teams and players who won the individual prizes.

Shabab Al Miragh team captain received the trophy and cash prize with gold medals while the runners up Shabab Al Hufri team players received silver medals. Jaweed al Balushi from Shabab al Miragh team named as the best player of the league while Ahed al Hudaifi from Al Shamal team grabbed the top scorer prize with seven goals. Juma al Ghuzaili from Al Harm team claimed the best goalkeeper award. Al Billah football team fans named as the best fans in the tournament.



Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova celebrates with the trophy winning her final match against Tunisia's Ons Jabeur. — Reuters



UNSEEDDED VONDROUSOVA STUNS TEARFUL JABEUR TO WIN WIMBLEDON TITLE

LONDON: Marketa Vondrousova became the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon in the Open era as the Czech swept to a shock 6-4, 6-4 victory over Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in Saturday's final.

As the first unseeded woman in the Wimbledon final in 60 years, Vondrousova was a heavy underdog against sixth-ranked Jabeur.

But the 24-year-old upset the odds on Centre Court to win her maiden Grand Slam title at the second attempt after losing to Ash Barty in the 2019 French Open final.

"After everything I've been through — I had a cast on this time last year — and now I can't believe I'm holding this trophy," said Vondrousova who was sidelined with a wrist injury in 2022.

"I don't know what's happening now."

Vondrousova joins Jana Novotna and Petra Kvitova as the only Czech women to win a Wimbledon title.

She is just the ninth unseeded champion at a Grand Slam tournament.

Vondrousova's triumph

completed a remarkable comeback after a rash of injuries stalled her promising career.

Just 12 months ago, she was an injured bystander at Wimbledon, reduced to watching her best friend Miriam Kolodziejova attempt to qualify for the main draw.

Vondrousova's second wrist surgery had ruled the Olympic silver medallist out for six months, although her absence from the tour at least allowed her the space and time to get married.

She was the second-lowest ranked player to reach the Wimbledon final — only Serena Williams in 2018 was lower at 181.

So unexpected was her run that she told her husband Stepan Simek to stay at home in Prague to look after their cat Frankie until the final, when a pet sitter was found to allow her partner to make the trip to Wimbledon.

The defeat was another heartbreaking blow for world number six Jabeur, who wept during an emotional post-match trophy presentation.

Jabeur was the first Arab woman to reach a Grand Slam final last year at Wimbledon,



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur with the runners up trophy after losing her final match against Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova. — Reuters

but losing to Elena Rybakina in three sets took the shine off that achievement.

She endured more misery just weeks later when she lost to Iga Swiatek in the US Open final.

"It's going to be a tough day but I am not going to give up," she said while wiping away her tears.

"It's the most painful loss of my career. but we're going to make it one day, I promise you I'm not going to give up."

ICE-COOL VONDROUSOVA

Jabeur's bid to become the first African and Arab woman to win a Grand Slam singles title has ended in bitter failure once again.

Even for a player known as the 'Minister of Happiness', Jabeur's positive personality will be tested by her latest disappointment.

She fell well short of the standards shown in victories over four former Grand Slam champions on her way to the final.

Jabeur had already lost twice in 2023 to Vondrousova, at the Australian Open and in Miami, and she had no answer to the big-hitting left-hander despite the support of 15,000 partisan fans on Centre Court.

Under the closed roof, Jabeur drew first blood with a break in the second game when Vondrousova netted a nervous backhand.

But she immediately surrendered the initiative as Vondrousova broke back in the next game.

Jabeur's anxiety was clear as her unforced error total reached double figures in another wild game that gave Vondrousova a 5-4 advantage that she gratefully seized to serve out the set.

Vondrousova made it five games in a row when Jabeur's weak forehand gifted her a break in the opening game of the second set.

Breaking twice in three games, Jabeur moved 3-1 up, only to falter again as the ninth break of the match allowed Vondrousova back into the set.

It was an opportunity the Czech was not going to spurn as Jabeur's unforced errors reached 31 by the final game.

In contrast to Jabeur's meltdown, Vondrousova remained ice-cool and sealed her unexpected triumph with a perfect volley before falling to the turf in delight. — AFP

Carlos Alcaraz

Spain

Age: 20

1.83 m

Right-handed

Pro since 2018

Wimbledon 2023 final

Men's singles

July 16

1 Seeding

1 ATP ranking

Head-to-head

1 Wins

11 Titles

0 Singles

0 Doubles

1 Grand Slams

1 Titles

\$16.7 million

Career earnings

\$169.8 million

Novak Djokovic

Serbia

Age: 36

1.88 m

Right-handed

Pro since 2003

Sources: ATP/Wimbledon

AFP

Head to head at Wimbledon men's final

LONDON: Novak Djokovic says the "world of sport" will be watching when he faces Carlos Alcaraz in a Wimbledon final where history and a generational shift are at stake.

Djokovic is attempting to equal Roger Federer's record of eight titles at the All England Club and match Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slam crowns.

Having already pocketed the Australian Open and French Open in 2023, victory on Sunday will put the 36-year-old just one major away from completing the first men's calendar Grand Slam since 1969.

"It's the ultimate showdown," said Djokovic, who will be playing in a record 35th Grand Slam final.

"Everything comes down to one match. All eyes of the tennis and sports world will be directed on this Sunday's Wimbledon final. It's probably the most watched tennis match globally."

At 20, Alcaraz is Djokovic's junior by 16 years.

When Djokovic captured the first of his 23 majors at the 2008 Australian Open, the Spaniard was still three months shy of his fifth birthday.

Djokovic can become Wimbledon's oldest champion while Alcaraz is bidding to be its third youngest after Boris Becker and Bjorn Borg.

"I obviously have more experience. It can help a little bit in some important moments, beginning the match, managing the nerves, managing the occasion, circumstances," said Djokovic.

"But it's not going to be the deciding factor really. Whoever, on a given day, is in a better state, mentally and physically, will be the winner."

Djokovic won the mind games when the pair clashed in the French Open semi-finals in June.

— AFP

RODRIGUEZ WINS ALPINE STAGE AS VINGEGAARD RETAINS SLIM TOUR LEAD



Ineos Grenadiers' Carlos Rodriguez celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win stage 14. – Reuters

MORZINE, France: Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard fought off a ferocious attack from Tadej Pogacar on the first of four Alpine tests in the Tour de France on Saturday as Spain's Carlos Rodriguez won stage 14. Ineos rider Rodriguez climbed into third place overall by one second from Jai Hindley with a great climb and daredevil downhill finish. Vingegaard now leads Pogacar by 10 seconds after winning a war of nerves in the battle for the title. On the last of the day's ascents Jumbo's Sepp Kuss took Vingegaard as far as he could

before Pogacar's own lieutenant Adam Yates attacked with the Dane isolated. Pogacar then launched his blistering turn of pace and opened a five second gap only for the Dane to doggedly track and then reel in the exasperated Slovenian with 2km still to climb. Vingegaard drew level with his younger rival and eyed him, but the latter refused to look back. Pogacar tried again atop the 17km climb to burst past last year's winner but was blocked in the narrow passage of fans by a motorbike carrying a photographer. Instead Vingegaard then burst



Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates on the podium with the overall leader's yellow jersey after the 14th stage of the 110th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 152 km between Annemasse and Morzine Les Portes du Soleil, in the French Alps, on Saturday. – AFP

ahead and took three bonus seconds atop that last climb. An infuriated Pogacar wasted precious energy racing past his rival in a show of anger. While all this was going on Rodriguez pulled back and drew level just after the hilltop before dashing off downhill to win the stage itself. The day was marked by French hope Romain Bardet's race-ending crash as rain-slicked roads made for treacherous racing. Bardet and English rider James Shaw fell at speed downhill after the day's first climb. A runner-up at the Tour de France and world

championships, Bardet had been in 12th overnight and was targeting an overall finish in the top five and a stage win. Ahead of the stage, the series of Alpine descents had put Gino Maeder's recent fatal crash in the Tour of Switzerland firmly in the minds of many in the peloton. Earlier, after a sudden shower, there was a mass fall on a corner just 5km into stage 14 that forced organisers to halt the race for 25 minutes. Up to 25 riders fell and 50 were blocked with about a third of those who hit the tarmac at 50kph struggling to get back in the saddle. — AFP

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Expatriate workforce in Oman climbs to 1.784 million

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 15

According to the latest data released by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the expatriate workforce in Oman is experiencing a steady growth trajectory.

The report sheds light on the key trends in expatriate worker demographics and sector-wise distribution, providing valuable insights into the labour market landscape.

The data highlights an overall increase in the total number of expatriate workers in Oman, reaching 1,784,736 individuals



as of May 2023. This represents a significant growth of 0.8% compared to the previous month.

The report further reveals a notable expansion in various sectors, contributing to the country's economic development.

In terms of sector-wise distribution, the private sector emerged as the largest employer of expatriate workers, with a substantial workforce of 1,406,925 individuals.

Employed in various government entities are a total of 44,236 expatriates.

Analysing the data by nationality, the report reveals Bangladeshis as the largest group of expatriate workers in Oman, totalling 703,840 individuals. They are closely followed by Indian workers with 530,242 individuals.

The Pakistani community also represents a sizable portion, with 275,719 workers actively participating in various sectors.

Moreover, the report highlights the prominent governorates hosting expatriate workers.

Muscat, the capital city, stands out as the leading governorate, accommodating 669,527 expatriate workers. Dhofar and Musandam also emerged as significant contributors to Oman's workforce, employing 220,705 and 14,727 individuals, respectively.

Oman's bourse issues Market Maker regulations



CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JULY 15

Executive regulations governing the operations of Market Makers and Liquidity Providers — an initiative designed to energise trading activity and create market depth — were published by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last week.

They came into force on June 12, 2023 via a resolution issued by Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of MSX.

With their issuance, the first of six ground-breaking initiatives outlined by the MSX last month has now come into effect. The remaining five — slated for roll-out in the coming months — pertain to: Securities Lending and Borrowing, Pooled Trading Accounts, Promising Companies, Tripartite Governance, and Liquidity Fund.

On the heels of their issuance last month, the first Market Making & Liquidity Providing licence was issued by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to well-known Omani investment services firm Ubhar Capital.

Other applications are currently under consideration, it is learnt. Market Making, as defined by the new regulations, is an "activity aimed at providing continuous orders for supply and demand for eligible securities during the trading session with the aim of promoting liquidity".

Liquidity Provision, on the other hand, is defined as a "financial service that the market maker commits to in order to improve liquidity of one or

more securities listed on the MSX under a contract with the issuing entity".

Significantly, market making and liquidity provision activities are limited to entities operating in the securities sector and licensed by the CMA to do so. Licenses to operate as market makers and liquidity providers are valid for one year against a fee of RO 10,000 for Market Makers and RO 1,000 for Liquidity Providers.

As a safeguard against potential conflict of interest and irregular trading activities, the regulations also mandate market makers to operate independently from their other business units.

It explained: "The market maker must separate the market making, liquidity provision, the trading floor and the employees of the activity from other activities. The separation requirements include, for example, digital and physical records, bank accounts and trading account. Access to the activity offices is limited to authorised employees only."

Seeking to support the Market Making and Liquidity Provision initiative, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) — which owns the Omani bourse — also recently announced an allocation of RO 100 million into a liquidity fund established in cooperation the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and Financial Sector Development.

The new fund has been described as a portfolio into which a percentage of the daily trading volume on the stock exchange will accrue.

Oman among the best countries to live and work for expats in 2023

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JULY 15

In the recently released InterNations Expat Insider survey for 2023, the Sultanate of Oman has achieved an impressive ranking as one of the best countries for expatriates to live and work.

Known for its rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes and welcoming atmosphere, Oman has emerged as a top destination for individuals seeking a fulfilling international experience.

InterNations Expat Insider, one of the largest expat networks worldwide, conducted an in-depth survey of over 12,000 expats worldwide, representing 171 nationalities and living in 172 countries or territories.

The survey covered 56 aspects of expat life, including quality of life, work-life balance, personal finance, healthcare and safety, among others. Oman stood out with its remarkable performance, securing top 12 overall country ranking.

Oman's success can be attributed to its remarkable efforts in creating an inclusive and supportive environment for expatriates. The country's strong economy, stable political climate, and a commitment to cultural diversity have made it an attractive destination for foreign professionals and families.

The Sultanate of Oman ranked 3rd in expat essentials index covering four subcategories like admin topics, housing digital life and language.



HOUSING IS READILY AVAILABLE (3RD) AND EVEN COMPARATIVELY CHEAP (6TH). IN FACT, OVER THREE IN FIVE (61%) GIVE THE AFFORDABILITY OF HOUSING IN OMAN A FAVOURABLE RATING, COMPARED TO JUST 38% OF EXPATS WORLDWIDE

"Expats in Oman do not struggle to get by without speaking Arabic (4th), though close to half (47%) also find the local language easy to learn (vs. 40% globally)," the report said.

"Housing is readily available (3rd) and even comparatively cheap (6th). In fact, over three in five (61%) give the affordability of housing in Oman a favourable rating, compared to just 38% of expats worldwide.

It is easy to open a local bank account according to 72% of respondents (vs. 62% globally), and the visa process is not much of an issue, either (64% happy vs. 57%). All in all, Oman places 8th in the

admin topics subcategory," the report added.

Another key factor contributing to Oman's high ranking was the exceptional quality of life it offers. Expats praised the country for its friendly and welcoming locals, affordable healthcare system, and excellent education facilities.

The report said in quality of life index, "Oman has seen gains across most factors of the index, rising 14 places in the ranking (24th). Changes include, for example, a more favourable view of government support for policies to protect the environment (from 14th to 2nd)."

Additionally, Oman's efforts to foster cultural integration and provide support to expats have been commendable. The country is among the top 10 in ease of settling in index.

Oman's thriving job market and career prospects were also highly regarded by expats. The country has been actively investing in infrastructure development, tourism, and

various other sectors, creating numerous employment opportunities for both locals and expatriates.

The survey highlighted that expats in Oman enjoy a good work-life balance, job security, and opportunities for career growth.

In working abroad index, the report said "Oman is one of the biggest winners of this index. It gains 16 places, ranking 23rd in 2023 compared to 39th in 2022. The country has made the biggest strides in the career prospects (from 40th to 19th in 2023) and salary & job security subcategories (41st to 26th)."

As Oman continues to prioritise the well-being and satisfaction of its expat population, it is expected to remain a sought-after destination for individuals looking to pursue new opportunities abroad. The recognition bestowed by Expat Insider further solidifies Oman's position as a leading destination for expatriates in 2023.

Renew commercial agency contracts one month before expiry date: MoCIIP

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) urges commercial agents which are registered with the Ministry's Register of Commercial Agencies and Agents to submit applications for renewal of registration of their commercial agency contracts one month before the expiration date of these contracts, in order to avoid the penalties stipulated in Article (19) of the Commercial Agencies Law, perambulated by the Royal decree No. 26 / 77.

The ministry also emphasised the importance of submitting the necessary documents indicating the continuity of these contracts, stressing that, the agency registration will be cancelled in the event that 90 days have passed from the date of its expiration.

Yaqoub bin Shaikh al Dabouni (pictured), Head of the Commercial Agencies Registration Department in the Secretariat of Commercial Registry, at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, emphasised that the ministry monitors commercial agencies and determines the levels of their compliance with the law.

He pointed out the submission of a commercial agency registration request is being done online through the 'Invest Easy' portal with the aim of facilitating the process of registering investors and following up their



transactions easily, or through service-providing offices (Sanad, law firms and auditing offices).

Al Dabouni noted that the total commercial agencies submitted during the first half of 2023, reached 853 commercial agencies, including 183 new commercial agencies, 458 renewed commercial agencies, 38 amended commercial agencies, and

174 cancelled commercial agencies.

The commercial agency is protected in accordance with the regulations and laws in force internationally, through what is agreed upon in the contracts concluded between the foreign principal and the local agent.

As for the protection of the local agent, Al Dabouni clarified that the Commercial Agencies Law has cancelled the protection matter after the amendments of the Commercial Agencies Law No. 26/77 and the issuance of the Competition Protection and Prevention of Monopoly Law No. 67/2014, with an emphasis on the importance of

the local agent's commitment to what was stipulated in Article (9) of the Commercial Agencies Law No. 26/77, which emphasised that agents must provide consumers with all the guarantees provided by the original producer or supplier of the commodities that, the commercial agent undertakes to sell, distribute or promote.

He also stressed on the importance of adhering to the condition of contracting with the original producer (factory) or supplier in the country of origin, without an intermediary, as indicated in Article (6) Clause (C) of the Commercial Agencies Law 26/77.



Ithca promotes adoption of 3D printing technology in real estate industry

MUSCAT: Ithca Group has announced its investment in the company InnoTech to promote the wider adoption of 3D printing technology in the real estate industry.

This investment will facilitate the exploration of new and innovative solutions and the integration of knowledge and technology to enhance the real estate sector.

InnoTech is a specialised company that focuses on innovation, 3D printing services, and educational technologies. It has achieved a significant milestone as the first company in the Middle East to construct a building using a locally developed 3D printer and building materials sourced from the local market.

Saif bin Abdullah al Abri, the Senior Director of Investments and Business Development at Ithca Group, emphasised the group's intention to invest in InnoTech, which specialises in 3D printing technology.

The goal is to revolutionise the industry by moving away from traditional methods.

This technology offers various advantages, including

localised expertise in real estate development, support for workers in the sector, and keeping up with global technological advancements. By harnessing the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution, Ithca Group aims to contribute to economic growth and accelerate project completion.

Eng Othman bin Maktoum al Mandhari, the Founder and CEO of InnoTech, expressed satisfaction with the partnership and investment from Ithca Group. They are eager to expand the utilisation of 3D technology in real estate development.

Given that cement is one of the most widely used construction materials worldwide, the real estate development field faces significant challenges such as high labour costs and expensive traditional building materials. As a result, there is a global race to automate this sector.

InnoTech has taken on the responsibility of being the pioneering company in the Middle East by developing this technology, with the aim of becoming one of the leading companies in the field.

Khimji Ramdas ICT signs pacts strengthening commitment to education



MUSCAT: Khimji Ramdas ICT, one of the leading IT and Information security solutions companies and a part of Khimji Ramdas Group, a 150-years-old business conglomerate in the Sultanate of Oman took a significant stride towards transforming the educational landscape of Oman with a momentous signing ceremony.

Held at the esteemed KR Infrastructure campus, the event marked the establishment of strategic partnerships with two prominent principals, Academia-Serosoft and OneScreen. The signing ceremony was graced by the presence of KR directors, Hritik Khimji and Varun Khimji.

With these alliances, KR-ICT aims to bolster KR-ICT's capabilities in serving the educational industry in the Sultanate of Oman. KR-ICT firmly believes in the power of digital transformation to revolutionise the educational sector, ensuring enhanced access to knowledge for every student across Oman.

To achieve this vision, KR-ICT has strategically partnered with world-leading technology providers, Academia-Serosoft, and OneScreen.

OneScreen Solutions, a prominent player in the field of video conferencing and collaboration platforms, offers a comprehensive

solution that addresses the evolving needs of educational institutions.

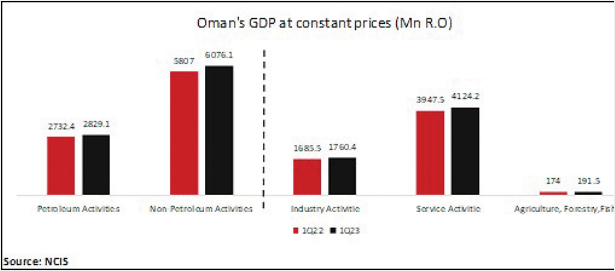
Recognising that transforming the teaching methods alone may not be sufficient, OneScreen Solutions ensures equal access to education by connecting students both physically and remotely.

The platform's interactive whiteboarding feature fosters active participation and engagement, creating an inclusive learning environment. Additionally, the user-friendly interface consolidates all necessary tools onto a single interactive screen, simplifying the learning experience and eliminating the need for multiple devices.

Whereas, Academia ERP provides a complete enterprise solution designed to automate academic and administrative processes in colleges and universities.

Built on cutting-edge Java technology, Academia ERP streamlines the entire student lifecycle, from initial inquiry to graduation, while also managing key administrative functions such as inventory, hostel, library, and human resources. By minimising manual intervention, Academia ERP enhances efficiency, providing greater control over the system and ensuring smoother execution of processes.

MSX30 Index closes higher by 6.5 points



MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange 30 Index closed last week at 4,796.66 points, up by 6.5 points and 0.14% low from the previous trading session, which stood at 4,790.15 points. All major sector indices dropped, except for the Service Industry Index, which rose by 1%.

The Sultanate of Oman's gross domestic product (GDP) at constant prices at the end of Q1 2023 increased by 4.7 per cent to reach RO 8.700 billion, compared to RO 8.306 billion at the end of Q1 2022, according to the preliminary data issued by NCIS.

This increase is mainly attributed to the growth of non-oil activities by 4.6 per cent, as it increased from RO 5.807 billion at the end of Q1 2022 to RO 6.761 billion at the end of Q1 2023.

The total service activities recorded a growth of 4.5 per cent to reach RO 4.124 billion, compared to RO 3.947 billion at the end of Q1 2022.

Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and industrial activities also increased by 10.1 per cent and 4.4 per cent, respectively. Oil activities recorded a growth of 3.5 per cent at the end of Q1 2023, recording RO 2.829 billion compared to RO 2.732 billion at the end of Q1 2022.

Barka Water and Power has invited shareholders to attend an OGM on July 19, 2023 to consider and approve the entering into related party transaction with ACWA Power Barka Services 1 (Mauritius) Limited and ACWA Power Barka Services 2 (Mauritius) Limited to provide certain advisory and support services related to the operations, maintenance, and administrative requirements of the power and water generating facility near Barka.

At the AGM of Bank Dhofar on July 5, 2023, the following resolutions were made: The proposal to increase the bank's authorised share capital from RO 500 million to RO 750 million.

The proposal to increasing the bank's issued share capital from RO 299,635,144 up to

a maximum of RO 470 million (the New Issued Capital), and approve the allocation of the New Issued Capital in favor of the shareholders of Ahli Bank SAOG who have elected to receive shares in the bank as a result of the takeover (the Takeover) and amending Article 5 of the Articles of Association of the Bank following the completion of the Takeover to reflect the New Issued Capital.

Dhofar Foods and Investment Company SAOG received on July 5, 2023 the CMA Decision approving the prospectus of the Company's share capital increase through right issue and offering (116,826,923) shares to Dhofar International Development and Investment SAOG and Dhofar Insurance SAOG through private placement at a share price of (80) baisa per share.

The total value of real estate deals in the Sultanate of Oman in May 2023 reached RO 272.7 million, compared to RO 151.5 million during the same period in 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCIS).

The figures revealed that the traded value of sales contracts increased by 73% YoY to stand at RO 117.3 million. The statistics indicated a rise in the traded value of mortgage contracts by 87%, to reach RO 154 million compared to RO 82 million during the same period in 2022 (2,524 contracts). Meanwhile, the number of properties issued reached 23,514 properties.

Moody's on Tuesday affirmed ratings of Sohar International positive but downgraded the ratings of HSBC Oman. 'Sohar International Bank SAOG's (Sohar International) Ba2/ NP long- and short-term deposit ratings, ba3 Baseline Credit Assessment (BCA) and Adjusted BCA, and maintained the outlook on the bank's long-term deposit ratings at positive, in line with the positive outlook assigned to the Government of Oman's Ba2 issuer rating', Moody's Investors Service stated.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]



Abraj Energy posts revenue of RO 33.3 million in Q1

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JULY 15

In the maiden report of its financial performance since its listing on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) earlier this year, Omani drilling services company Abraj Energy Services, a subsidiary of OQ, posted revenue of RO 33.3 million for Q1 2023, which was 3 per cent lower than earnings of RO 34.4 million for the corresponding quarter of 2022.

Profit after tax slumped 60 per cent to RO 2.6 million, down from RO 6.4 million a year earlier. Ayad al Balushi, Chairman of the Board of Directors, attributed the decline to an increase in operating cost as a result of major planned



maintenance activities.

Finance cost had also increased by 35 per cent due to higher

benchmark rate of USD LIBOR rate in Q1-2023 compared to Q1 2022, he stated in the Chairman's

Report for the quarter.

During Q1-2023, the Drilling and Workover segment

encountered a 6.5-per cent decrease in revenue, reaching RO 29.2 million, as compared to Q1 2022.

Despite no changes in the number of rigs and hoists, the decline primarily stemmed from planned major maintenance activities conducted on specific rigs.

Consequently, profit after tax for this segment declined significantly by 61.8 per cent, settling at RO 2.4 million, compared to Q1-2022's RO 6.2 million.

In contrast to the overall trend, the Well Services and Others segment witnessed remarkable growth, with revenue soaring by 30 per cent to RO 4.1 million in Q1-2023, as compared to Q1 2022's

RO 3.2 million.

The substantial increase was primarily driven by the segment's fracturing business.

Consequently, profit after tax for this segment experienced a marginal rise of 4.7 per cent, reaching RO 223,000, up from Q1-2022's RO 213,000.

Abraj Energy Services was formally listed on the MSX on March 14 this year, becoming the first local energy firm to be listed on the Omani bourse after a successful Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The company's public subscription raised more than RO 790 million, representing an eight-fold oversubscription – the largest of its kind in Oman's history.

Oman Flour Mills buys 5,000 tonnes of wheat from farmers



MUSCAT: Oman Flour Mills Company is keen on an annual basis to support Omani farmers by purchasing varieties of wheat, as part of the programme to support the purchase of wheat with the aim of encouraging them to expand its cultivation as one of the important strategic crops, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The company confirmed that it has so far received nearly 5,000 tonnes of wheat from farmers, as part of its efforts to enhance food security efforts, support farmers and enable them to enter the food products market.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Fannah, CEO of Oman Flour Mills, said, "The company appreciates the supreme interest given by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the

directions of the government and private investments aimed at strengthening the food security system in the Sultanate of Oman.

"This interest is a great motivation for all parties and investors to double investment in the areas of food in order to achieve self-sufficiency and export the surplus abroad."

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), he added that the company will continue with its plans to purchase wheat products from farmers during the coming years, develop it and put it as a product in the local and regional markets, noting that wheat is acceptable to consumers due to its high quality.

The Oman Mills is working to buy Omani wheat from farmers in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. — ONA

China invites global investors for rare meeting as economy sputters

HONG KONG: China's financial regulators have invited some of the world's biggest investors to a rare symposium next week, three sources said, seeking to encourage foreigners to keep investing in the world's second-largest economy despite its recent weakness and rising geopolitical tensions.

The meeting in Beijing will focus on the current conditions of US dollar-denominated investment firms in China and the main challenges facing them, according to the sources who have direct knowledge of the matter and invitation documents.

The gathering comes at a time when global investors and banks are warning that confidence is waning in China's economic outlook. Such a meeting, with a clear agenda to discuss challenges facing global fund managers investing in China, is rare, the three sources said, and reflected Beijing's keenness to shore up confidence among foreign investors.

Large foreign and domestic fund managers such as private equity (PE) firms, known as general partners (GPs), and their investors or limited partners (LPs) including sovereign wealth funds and pension funds are expected to join the meeting, said the sources.

They also will be encouraged to provide suggestions to help address



A worker speaking on his phone walks past a construction site in Beijing. — Reuters

challenges facing their businesses in China and share their outlook on the economy, according to the sources and documents.

The global funds which will attend will likely send their China-based senior staff, though some senior executives will be flying to China for the talks, the sources added. All three sources spoke on condition of anonymity as they

were not authorised to speak with the media.

Weighed down by strict Covid measures, China's economy grew just 3 per cent in 2022, one of its worst showings in decades. Activity rebounded early this year after the curbs were abruptly lifted, but momentum has faded sharply since, while policy uncertainty and tensions between China, the US and other Western powers

have heightened.

The meeting also comes as some PE firms and their investors have been rethinking their China strategies after a years-long, bruising crackdown on private enterprises such as tech companies, which has cast a long shadow over PE investors' return prospects and narrowed investment opportunities, separate sources said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

MOSCOW

Russia sets plans for oil export cuts in August

Russian oil exports from western ports are set to fall by some 100,000-200,000 barrels per day next month from July levels, a sign Moscow is making good on its pledge for fresh supply cuts in tandem with Opec leader Saudi Arabia, two sources said on Friday, citing export plans.

Opec and major producers including Russia, together known as Opec+, have been cutting supply since November to support prices. Moscow this month pledged to cut exports by 500,000 bpd in August, while Saudi Arabia extended its 1 million bpd output cuts.

As Russia did not reveal the baseline for its cut, analysts and traders had said it would be difficult to monitor. But



according to trading sources and Refinitiv Eikon data, the August cuts will deepen export reductions between May and July that already total 500,000 barrels per day.

July oil loadings from western ports, such as Primorsk and Ust-Luga in the Baltic Sea and Novorossiisk in the Black Sea, are set to fall to 1.9 million bpd this month compared to 2.3 million bpd in June and 2.4 million bpd in May. — Reuters

WASHINGTON

Bitcoin hovers near 13-month high

Bitcoin was hovering near its highest so far this year, the highest in 13 months, on Friday after crypto investors took encouragement from a legal victory in which the cryptocurrency XRP was ruled not to be a security.

A US judge said on Thursday that Ripple Labs Inc did not violate securities law by selling its XRP token on public exchanges.

The case marks the first win for a cryptocurrency company in a lawsuit brought by the US Securities and Exchange Commission.

Although the decision was specific to the individual case, it unleashed a wave of optimism among crypto investors that more cryptocurrencies may also



not be deemed securities.

Still, the enthusiasm for some was tempered by a report from the *Wall Street Journal* that Binance, the world's largest cryptocurrency exchange, has laid off more than 1,000 people in recent weeks.

The lay-offs are ongoing and could result in the exchange losing more than a third of its staff, the report said, citing a person familiar with the matter. — Reuters

ZURICH

Credit Suisse inquiry keeps files secret for 50 years

A parliamentary investigation into the collapse of Credit Suisse will keep its files closed for 50 years, newspaper *Aargauer Zeitung* reported, triggering concerns among Swiss historians.

The investigating commission will hand over its files, which include witness statements and documents to the Swiss Federal Archives after a much longer gap than the usual 30 years, the paper said.

The Swiss parliament did not respond to a request for comment on Saturday.

The Swiss Society for History raised concerns about the length of time, with its president Sacha Zala writing to commission head, Isabelle Chassot, a lawmaker from the Swiss upper



house of parliament.

"Should researchers want to scientifically investigate the 2023 banking crisis, access to the CS files would be invaluable," Zala wrote, according to the newspaper.

"Ideally, it should be possible to secure and make accessible the archive after an appropriate protection period has expired and, if necessary, subject to historical research conditions," he added. — Reuters

Transforming lives: The impact of technology in Oman



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In today's rapidly evolving world, technology plays an integral role in shaping societies and revolutionising various aspects of our lives. Oman, with its progressive approach, has embraced technology, witnessing remarkable transformations across multiple sectors.

to economic growth and sustainable living, technology has become a catalyst for positive change, enhancing the lives of Omani citizens. Technology has been instrumental in transforming the education landscape in Oman. The Ministry of Education has made substantial efforts to provide Internet access to schools, ensuring that almost 100 per cent of schools in Oman have Internet connectivity. This allows students to harness the power of digital resources for learning. Additionally, the integration of technology in classrooms has revolutionised the learning experience, making it more interactive, engaging, and accessible. E-learning platforms and online courses have also been introduced, expanding educational opportunities for Omani students.

The adoption of technology has brought remarkable advancements to Oman's healthcare sector too. The implementation of electronic health records (EHR) has significantly improved patient care by reducing medication errors and enhancing data accuracy and accessibility for healthcare professionals. Telemedicine services have also gained traction in Oman, providing remote healthcare consultations and reducing the need for unnecessary travel. These advancements have resulted in improved healthcare outcomes, increased efficiency, and reduced costs. Technology has played a crucial role in propelling Oman's economic growth. The technology sector has witnessed significant growth and contributes to Oman's GDP. While exact statistics on the

sector's contribution to GDP were not readily available, the Information Technology Authority of Oman actively promotes the growth and development of the technology sector. The emergence of the tech industry has led to the establishment of innovation hubs and the rise of startups, creating job opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship. Oman's commitment to building smart cities has transformed urban living. The city of Muscat, for instance, has made notable progress in becoming a smart city. The implementation of smart transportation systems has resulted in reduced traffic congestion, improving commute times and air quality. Additionally, the adoption of smart grids and energy management systems has

contributed to more sustainable and environmentally friendly cities. Oman's focus on renewable energy sources aligns with its commitment to sustainability. The digital divide and cybersecurity threats remain ongoing challenges in Oman. While specific figures on the digital divide were not available, the government has taken initiatives to bridge the gap through programmes like the National Broadband Strategy and digital inclusion efforts. As for cybersecurity, the Oman National CERT reports an increase in cyber-attacks in recent years, highlighting the need for robust cybersecurity frameworks and awareness campaigns. Looking ahead, Oman's future holds immense potential. As technology continues to evolve, emerging trends such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and

the Internet of Things (IoT) offer exciting prospects for further transformation. These technologies have the potential to revolutionise various sectors, from healthcare and government services to supply chains and transportation. Technology has become a transformative force in Oman, revolutionising education, healthcare, economy, and urban living. The government's commitment to leveraging technology, along with proactive measures to address challenges, ensures that citizens can fully benefit from these advancements. As Oman continues its journey toward becoming a knowledge-based society, the positive impact of technology will continue to shape the lives of its citizens, fostering progress, innovation, and a brighter future for all.

Germany's China policy makes life easier for its companies

BY YAWEN CHEN

German corporate bosses like Martin Brudermüller of chemicals giant BASF and Thomas Schäfer of carmaker Volkswagen have one less thing to worry about when it comes to China. So do their shareholders. Germany's coalition government, long divided among its parties on how far Berlin should go to insulate itself from its biggest trading partner, has finally published its first strategy on the People's Republic. Europe's largest economy made it clear it's now aligning more with Brussels and Washington on everything from supply chain risks and technology export controls to human rights concerns, after years of viewing China primarily as a lucrative market. The final document does not shy away from what used to be viewed as taboo topics such as positions on self-governed Taiwan, which China claims as its own. Yet it has been shortened and watered down from a confidential draft in November drawn up by the foreign ministry led by the Greens' Annalena Baerbock. Back then one idea was to aggressively push for companies to disclose details of their China business, and even to stress-test their exposure. That could have included non-public details on profit and joint ventures with local partners, a person familiar with the situation said. Some feared that would lead to forced divestment. Now such discussions can be held privately with the government, with no specific red lines drawn. The compromise likely stems from the realisation that China is simply too strategic to quit quickly without inflicting significant pain. It is the world's top chemical market, for example, prompting Brudermüller to stress in the 2022 annual report that "not having a presence in large growth markets, such as China, would be a major risk for BASF". The People's Republic is also Volkswagen's largest market, accounting for around 40 per cent of Volkswagen's global unit sales in 2022. A survey conducted by the ifo Institute showed that half of German firms in the manufacturing sector currently depend on important intermediate inputs from China. It's likely that when Germany rolled out the red carpet in Berlin last month for Li Qiang, China's new premier was well-briefed about this direction of travel. A weaker domestic economy constrains Beijing's scope to react aggressively, anyway. Doing so would only diminish the country's renewed commitment to expand market openness, and jeopardise its goal of stabilising foreign investment. There has also been an acknowledgment that the era when the government could shape its European Union relations through close ties with Berlin has gone. The likes of VW and BASF still face tricky times. If the EU sought to introduce tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, for example, German carmakers might still be caught in the middle. Even so, executives will be relieved they can for the most part undertake China de-risking at their own pace. — Reuters

Taking aim at sellers' inflation



ISABELLA M WEBER

The author, Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is the author of How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate (Routledge, 2021).

Key officials have acknowledged that profits have been a major source of inflation in Europe – a realistic position informed by facts, rather than by the economics of the 1970s. Now that they have embraced a new analysis of what's driving inflation, the policy response should change, too. In recent months, the European Central Bank, the OECD, the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), and the European Commission have all published studies showing that profits have accounted for a large share of inflation. But the coup de grâce for doubters came on June 26, when the International Monetary Fund tweeted: "Rising corporate profits were the largest contributor to Europe's inflation over the past two years as companies increased prices by more than the spiking costs of imported energy." What took so long? As ECB President Christine Lagarde told the European Parliament on June 5, "the contribution of profits to inflation ... had gone a little bit missing," because "we don't have as much and as good data on profit as we do on wages." Policymakers failed fully to appreciate the "transmission of the cost-push that was suffered by many corporate sectors into final prices." But now, the problem has come clearly into view. While some sectors "have taken advantage to push costs through entirely without squeezing margins," Lagarde explained, others have gone further to "push prices higher than just the cost push." Firms have been able to hike prices for two reasons according to Lagarde: mismatches of supply and demand where bottlenecks have prevailed; and the coordinating effect produced by recent mega-shocks. As



Christine Lagarde, European Central Bank (ECB) president addresses a news conference, in Frankfurt, in this file photo. – Reuters

ECONOMISTS AND POLITICAL LEADERS AT MULTILATERAL AND EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS HAVE FINALLY ACCEPTED THAT CORPORATE PROFITS ARE A PRIMARY DRIVER OF INFLATION TODAY. BUT GETTING THE ANALYSIS RIGHT IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP; NOW WE NEED A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN HOW WE ADDRESS THE PROBLEM. Lagarde put it: "everybody is in the same position, we are all going to increase prices." This "sellers' inflation" happens when the corporate sector manages to pass on a major cost shock to consumers by increasing prices to protect or enhance its profit margins. Of course, not all firms have won equally. The bottom line is that sellers' inflation results in an increase in total profits. The same simple truth led Adam Smith to warn, 250 years ago, that profits can drive price pressures. Some may counter that protecting margins against cost shocks is normal corporate behaviour, leaving no reason to rethink today's inflation. But no one denies that firms aim to protect or even expand their margins (hence, "greedflation" is a misnomer). Rather, the point is that, by historical standards, firms today have been spectacularly successful at doing so. Isabel Schnabel has pioneered this kind of inflation analysis at the ECB, and when she was recently asked whether today's inflation was really driven by profits, she did not mince her words: "If you do the macro decomposition, part [of inflation] is driven by profits, full stop. It's a fact." Consider the comparison with

unemployment and heightens the risk of recession and financial instability. The IMF suggests that, "Europe's inflation outlook depends on how corporate profits absorb wage gains." But there is no direct channel from rising interest rates to margin compression. An increase in borrowing costs has already increased financial risks and, if anything, reduces firms' ability to absorb wage increases. As some Wall Street analysts have observed, "price over volume" is now a widespread corporate strategy. Instead of lowering prices and boosting volume, many companies are making up for lower volume by boosting prices; in this environment, targeting lower demand is unlikely to halt inflation. Large corporations have learned that they do not have to pick up the bill for big cost shocks like the pandemic or Russia's war in Ukraine. Nor do they even have to adapt. Like big banks during the 2008 financial crisis, they have been folded into the culture of bailouts and buck-passing. But such behaviour will not make the economy more resilient. We should recognise the recourse to higher interest rates for what it is: a strategy to dump the costs of inflation on to labour (by suppressing wages), on to social programmes (through austerity), and on to future generations (by discouraging investment). © Project Syndicate, 2023

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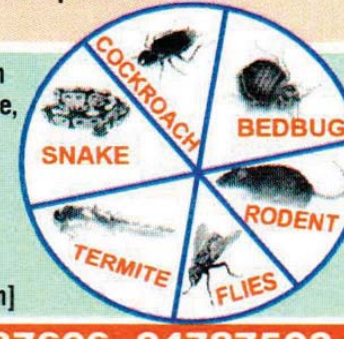
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LIFESTYLE

A child looks on as he stands in a queue to receive food at a temporary shelter after Yamuna River overflowed due to heavy monsoon rains in New Delhi.— AFP



FOOD

A Nike running shoe made of sugar was made by a 3D printer at Sugar Lab, a California company that is using its 3D printing technology to deliver 3D printed candy — Reuters



FILM

Norwegian actor Herbert Nordrum delivers a speech after having been awarded with the Crystal Globe for Best Actor for his role in the film ‘The Hypnosis’ during the closing ceremony at the 57th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival (KVIFF) —AFP



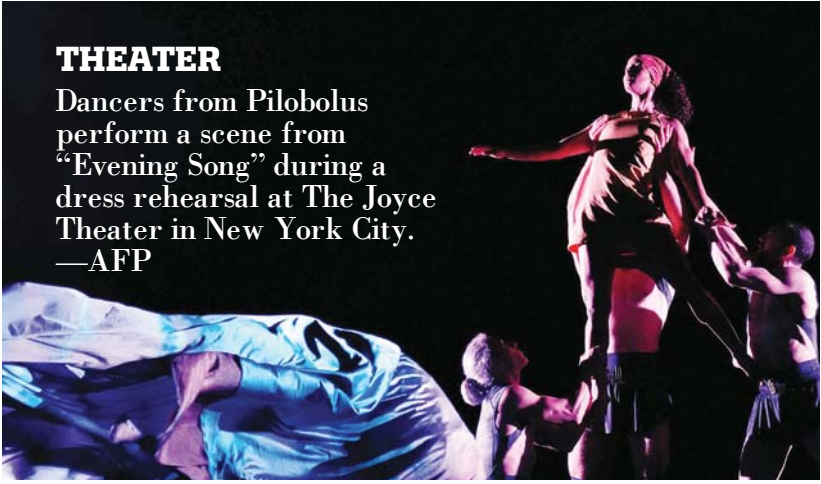
ENTERTAINMENT

US actor Brad Pitt arrives for the Formula One British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit in Silverstone, central England.—AFP



THEATER

Dancers from Pilobolus perform a scene from “Evening Song” during a dress rehearsal at The Joyce Theater in New York City. —AFP



art & life

SUNDAY | JULY 16, 2023 | DHUL HIJJAH 28, 1444 AH

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Where extreme adventurers go to fly

If you love extreme adventure and want to fly or surf, then you'd fit right in amongst the kitesurfers and surfers, who, during this time of the year, find a safe haven and are soaking up the sun in Masirah



ENVIRONMENT

The Anthropocene heralds disaster. Can humans change course?

HER DISTANT ANCESTORS paddled canoes across the Pacific Ocean to settle what became the island nation of Tuvalu, but now climate change means Grace Malie and her generation may live to see those islands swallowed by the sea.

Pacific island nations are ground zero for climate change impacts and their plight embodies the sweeping environmental damage that is the hallmark of the era of humans, the Anthropocene.

Confronted with a warming world that could engulf her home forever, Malie said it would be easy to think she and her people have “no future”.

But the 24-year-old climate campaigner said young people are deter-

mined to chart their own destiny — even if they cannot stop planet-heating emissions on their own.

“I remain hopeful,” she told AFP in an interview. “My generation is really taking matters into their own hands.”

Malie has worked to share the story of her community as part of her role with the Rising Nations Initiative, a global partnership launched by Pacific atoll nations to preserve their sovereignty and heritage.

“There may be solutions out there, things that we’ve never thought of, innovative ideas,” she said.

The fossil fuels that powered the industrial revolution and prosperity have already warmed the planet 1.2



degrees Celsius, unleashing extreme weather and human upheaval.

Last week saw records for the hottest day on Earth, on three successive days.

Oceans, soils and forests have been dangerously degraded, and key life-support systems across the planet are at risk. Humans have pushed their only home well into the danger zone. Can we change our ways and build a sustainable life on Earth?

Many experts say that is still — if only just — within our grasp, and that we should dare to imagine thriving, rather than simply surviving in a blighted

world.

COLLAPSE

Last year’s UN Human Development Report warned that people across the world were facing a perfect storm of uncertainties, linked to the “destabilising planetary pressures and inequalities of the Anthropocene”, societal transformations and political polarisation.

Pedro Conceicao, who led the report, said he worries that fears of “collapse” are clouding humanity’s ability to envisage a way to flourish. That echoes concerns from climate scientists that people’s sense of “doom” is blocking

progress.

Erle Ellis, a professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, concedes that the “best time for it to be a hundred per cent carbon neutral is yesterday”.

Yet humanity is not trapped in a cycle of destruction, he said.

“We’re capable of harnessing unbelievable amounts of energy to do things at scale, we can fly, we can leave the planet,” he said.

“Things are changing really fast now, so there are a lot of possible futures that would never have existed in the past, that are realistic now.”

But are people imagining these futures? Or how to avoid catastrophe?

“As a writer, as a creator, it is terrifyingly easy to build dystopias,” novelist Manda Scott told AFP.

She thinks the answer is “thrutopias” that tell the stories of change, and has run workshops to share these ideas with other writers.

“Our imaginings of the future are very locked within the current system,” said Scott, who has also written a new thrutopian novel.

“It’s easier to imagine the total extinction of life on Earth than an end to predatory capitalism, because we think this is the way it is.”

She describes imagining the transformation human societies and nature might go through in order to thrive as akin to guessing what form a caterpillar

might take in adulthood.

“If you didn’t know that process, I pretty much guarantee that there is no way you would predict butterfly from caterpillar,” she said.

CHARTING A PATH

Few places have to confront the possibility of radical change more directly than Pacific island nations, with some facing becoming uninhabitable even if the world meets the Paris accord goal of eventually limiting warming to 1.5C.

Tuvalu, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands are calling for a global settlement guaranteeing their states a “permanent existence” even as the seas rise.

It is real stories that inspire Grace Malie, who is working with others to record oral histories for an online cultural archive, part of a push for UNESCO protection for Tuvalu’s heritage.

Her grandfather, descended from chiefs, was among those interviewed.

As custodian of the family tree, the 75-year-old can trace heritage going back generations.

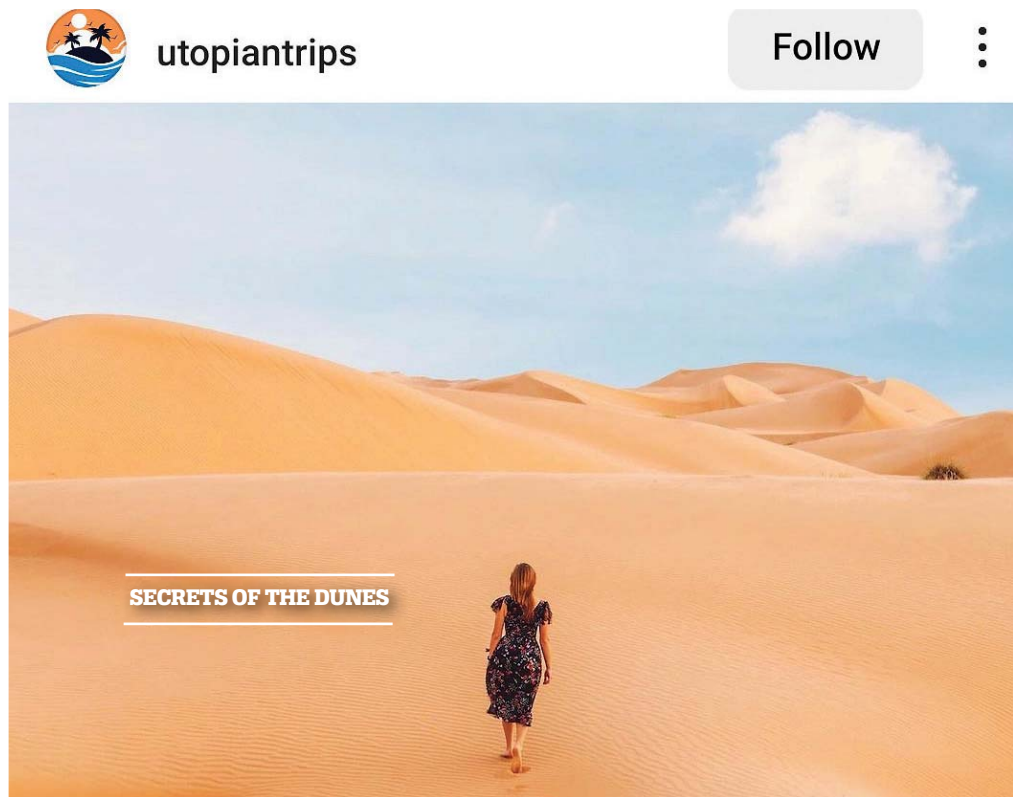
“Pacific people come from a long line of voyagers, of warriors and they carry that passion, that resilience,” said Malie, who said she was “humbled” to think of the great ocean voyages of her ancestors.

“Kudos to their resilience and hard work and their bravery. That’s passed on to us now, and we hope to make them proud.” — AFP



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A premier destination for surfing, kitesurfing Oman

BY YERU EBUEN
PHOTOS BY BASSEM EL ZEIN

If you're new to Oman, there's one thing you have to understand. While it may be hot and scalding in Muscat and nearby areas, a three or four drive however will totally gift you with a different weather and temperature.

We're not simply talking about the anomaly that is Khareef in Salalah or the 15-degree cooler climate in the mountains of Akdhar and Shams but head out to places like Ashkarah and Masirah and you will understand what we are talking about.

If you love extreme adventure and want to fly or surf, then you'd fit right in amongst the kitesurfers and surfers, who, during this time of the year, find a safe haven and are soaking up the sun in Masirah.

Affected by the same weather condition that brings vibrance and cool air to Dhofar, Masirah offers an unparalleled experience for kitesurfing and surfing enthusiasts for the next three months.

Not only does the island offer pristine beaches, but it also has consistent wind and perfect waves conditions sought-after by adventure seekers to practice their kind of fun.

Kitesurfing and surfing both have become trends in Oman in the last few years with a few private companies offering lessons on how to do them properly and the gears and equipment to get you started.

If you haven't tried kitesurfing yet, it is an extreme sport that combines the elements of windsurfing, surfing, and wakeboarding using a kite to harness the wind's power and a board to glide across the water. It offers an unmatched adrenaline rush as you ride the waves and perform awe-inspiring jumps and tricks.

Surfing on the other hand involves riding ocean waves using a surfboard. It requires balance, skill, and an intimate connection with the water. Surfers catch waves and perform graceful maneuvers,



experiencing an unparalleled sense of freedom and oneness with the ocean.

The wave and wind conditions are therefore crucial to do these activities and this is why Masirah has become a captivating island destination.

The prevailing southeast winds, known as the "Monsoon Winds," blow between July and August, offering steady wind speeds ideal for kitesurfing. The island's exposed coastline also receives long-peri-

od swells, ensuring excellent waves for surfers of all levels.

On top of this, Masirah Island boasts vast stretches of unspoiled beaches, allowing kitesurfers and surfers ample space to ride the waves. With fewer crowds compared to popular tourist destinations, Masirah Island offers a serene and uncluttered experience, enhancing the joy of these water sports.

It is normal to see at this time of the



year different athletes as well as sports lovers gliding and flying in specific areas of the island.

Whether you're a seasoned kitesurfer or a beginner trying to catch your first wave, Masirah Island caters to all skill levels. The calm waters of the lagoons provide a safe environment for beginners to practice kitesurfing, while the reef breaks offer more challenging conditions for experienced surfers seeking excite-

ment.

Masirah Island has earned its reputation as a premier destination for kitesurfing and surfing in Oman.

Beyond these water sports, Masirah Island offers a plethora of activities and attractions, including turtle watching, dolphin spotting, dhow cruises, and wadi adventures. So, pack your gear, get ready to ride the waves, and immerse yourself in the unparalleled beauty of this island.

SCIENCE

Dinosaur bones evoking Loch Ness monster to be auctioned: Sotheby's

TWO MOUNTED DINOSAUR skeletons — one a fierce flying reptile of the kind seen in the 'Jurassic Park' movies and the other evocative of the Loch Ness monster — will be auctioned off this month in New York, Sotheby's said on Tuesday.

The latter, called Nessie after the legendary elusive beast plying the depths of a Scottish lake, is estimated to draw between \$600,000 and \$800,000, Sotheby's said.

A kind of dinosaur called a plesiosaur, it was last auctioned in Paris in 2010 and at the time had come from a private museum in Germany.

The remains, which are nearly 11 feet (3.4 meters) long, were found in a quarry in England in 1990. The skeleton is about 75 per cent complete and in exceptional condition, said



Cassandra Hotton, Sotheby's head of Science and Popular Culture.

With its small head, long neck and flippers, the plesiosaur lived in the Lower Jurassic period about 190 million years ago.

"The history of the Plesiosaur is also intertwined with the elusive Loch Ness monster of Scottish folklore, as many have drawn morphological comparisons between the Plesiosaur and the infamous 'Nessie,' whose sightings stretch back to the sixth century," Sotheby's said in a news release.

This one will be auctioned on July 26 at a Sotheby's event focused on natural history.

Also on offer will be a flying reptile called a pteranodon, with a wing span of about 20 feet (six meters) and esti-

mated at \$4 million to \$6 million.

Named Horus after an Egyptian god, this particular specimen was found in the US state of Kansas. At Sotheby's galleries it is displayed outstretched in a flying position.

"Other than standard bone joining and stabilisation, almost all of the original fossil bones remain essentially unrestored, meaning that artificial filler was not used to replace missing bone sections," the auction house said.

It noted that this kind of creature made frequent appearances in the 'Jurassic Park' film franchise.

Fossils from prehistoric animals are now big draws at auctions.

The record in terms of money was a Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton that sold for \$31.8 million in 2020. — **AFP**

TRAVEL

Ice cream inspired by Thai temple tiles cools admiring tourists

UNDER A SCORCHING SUN, visitors to Thailand's renowned Temple of Dawn cool down by tasting an elaborately-shaped ice cream depicting intricate patterns inspired by the tiles of the pagoda.

"It's different and pretty," said Thai resident Doungkamon Koedthong, 29, holding up the ice cream against the backdrop of the temple, also known as Wat Arun, for an Instagram-worthy snapshot.

The ice cream, with butterfly pea coconut milk and Thai milk tea favours, was modelled after the blue ceramic plates and flower details of the pagoda, said ice cream maker Pop Icon.

"Thailand is rich in cultural heritage but it's not been presented or



seen in a new perspective," said Sirinya Hanpachearnchoak, 34, Pop Icon's owner and designer of the popsicles.

"I think that if we put the temple's identity on the ice-cream, people might spend more time examining the details (of the pagoda) than they otherwise would," she said.

The 'Flower of Dawn' ice cream is also popular among foreign visitors seeking some respite from the heat

in Bangkok.

"It's really refreshing. I was boiling, so it's really tasty and cools you down really nicely," said Sherin Babu, a 22-year-old medical student from Manchester, England.

Sold at 89 baht (\$2.56) each since May, the ice cream is made exclusively for the temple, where the maker said the money would go to its Buddhism education and medical expenses.—**Reuters**



CULTURE

Iraq's ancient sites, fragile stability spur new trickle of tourists

WHEN JACOB NEMEC'S family heard he was planning to go on holiday in Iraq, they pleaded with the 28-year-old American to reconsider.

"I got a text from my grandma for the first time in five years saying — being your grandmother and to respect me — I would appreciate if you don't go. I got crying phone calls from my mum," said Nemeć, a warehouse supervisor from Reno, Nevada.

He decided to go anyway, but understood his family's concerns.

Iraq has seen almost non-stop turmoil for decades, from an eight-year war with Iran in the 80s, to the first Gulf war in the 90s and heavy sanctions, the 2003 US invasion, years of bloody sectarian warfare and then conflict with Islamic State militants.

The situation, however, has gradually improved since Islamic State's territorial defeat in 2017, with blast walls coming down and cranes going up in Baghdad and other cities as they turn to construction and find a new sense of normalcy.

Iraq hosted its first Gulf Cup in more than 40 years earlier this year, with thousands of Arab visitors in attendance — an event that helped put the country back on the map.

Now, a small but growing number of tourists are heading to Iraq to see attractions spanning from vast desert and marshland ecosystems to ruins of the world's earliest cities and empires.

Many have come from neighbouring Arab Gulf countries, but defying warnings advising against travel, an increasing number of adventurous tourists are also trickling in from Europe and the United States.

Nemeć, along with a Russian and a British tourist, visited the maze-like ruins of the ancient city of Babylon, the Shi'ite holy city of Najaf with its tight alleys and mud-brick houses, and the old city of Mosul in the north.

"I was a little hesitant coming as an American, like 'Oh my God my government did really bad things here. Is everyone going to hate me for that?'" Nemeć said.

"That hasn't been the case at all. Governments can be bad, but people wherever you go are good."

The uptick in tourism coincides with a push by Iraq's government to show that the country is safe and open to foreign businesses and visitors as it looks to diversify its oil-dependent economy.

Tourism Minister Ahmed Fakak Al-Badrani said work was under way to build new hotels to keep up with growing demand and to refurbish tourist sites and heritage buildings.

He said the country's image in the West as an arena of conflict would gradually change as more people visited.

Tourists "are messengers who tell these states that Iraq has returned to being a safe country and is not a red line as some say. Maybe the issue needs some time, but not too long," he told Reuters.

Foreign governments are not convinced.

'DO NOT TRAVEL'

The US and European countries



still warn against any travel to Iraq due to security concerns. The US State Department website says: "Do not travel to Iraq due to terrorism, kidnapping, armed conflict, civil unrest".

It urges people to write a will and make funeral arrangements with their families should they choose to go.

Westerners became a main target of kidnappings and killings following the US invasion, including by extremist Sunni Muslim groups such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State, and hardline Shi'ite militias close to Iran, all of whom viewed the United States as an occupier.

In November of last year, a US citizen was killed in central Baghdad — a rare attack that nonetheless sent jitters through the foreign community in the city.

Five Western diplomats said that there would be no change to US or European travel advisories any time soon due to the continued possibility of unpredictable violence, such as

armed clashes in Baghdad last year that killed dozens of Iraqis.

That has not stopped people coming, though just how many are showing up is unclear.

A SIDE FORGOTTEN

The tourism minister did not provide figures of tourist arrivals.

Major-General Abdel-Karim Sudani, a security adviser to the prime minister, told Reuters just over 2.5 million foreigners had visited Iraq in the 6-month period between November 15, 2022 and May 15 of this year, including 312,000 Arab visitors.

In any case, the tourism sector remains heavily underdeveloped.

Few of the ancient ruins that dot the country have signs describing their significance, nor accredited tour guides.

Baghdad International Airport does not have its own website, with the top search item instead directing browsers to a page that warns: "We do not recommend to visit the country lit is one of the most dangerous places on Earth!"

Many Iraqis are trying to make up for those shortcomings and show another side of the country.

Alli Hilal, a travel blogger, is one of them.

He got stuck in Iraq during the Covid-19 pandemic while visiting from Canada where he lived, and decided to travel around the country, filming magnificent ancient palaces and lush green mountains in videos posted online and shared widely.

"Of course we have innumerable political and social and environmental problems," Hilal said.

"But there is a side we might have forgotten, and that's the side I am trying to see and have people see with me." — Reuters

DISCOVERY



At Peru temple site, archaeologists explore 3,000-year-old 'condor's passageway'

ARCHAEOLOGISTS WORKING in Peru have uncovered a 3,000-year-old sealed corridor dubbed "the condor's passageway" that likely leads to other chambers inside what was once a massive temple complex pertaining to the ancient Chavin culture.

Located around 190 miles (306 km) northeast of Lima, the Chavin de Huantar archaeological site is among the culture's most important centres, thriving from around 1,500-550 BC.

The Chavin are well-known for their advanced art, often featuring depictions of birds and felines. They date back to the first sedentary farming communities in the northern highlands of the Peruvian Andes, more than 2,000 years before the



Inca Empire rose to power.

The latest Chavin discoveries focus on a hallway inside a southern portion of the temple that was sealed due to what archaeologists believe was its structural weakness, but that now offers a glimpse into the earliest days of the Chavin.

"What we have here has been frozen in time," lead archaeologist John Rick told Reuters.

A large ceramic piece weighing some 37 pounds (17 kg) decorated with what appears to be a condor's head and wings has been found in the passageway, along with a ceramic bowl, both unearthed in May 2022 when the entrance was uncovered.

The condor, one of the largest birds in the world, was associated with power and prosperity in ancient Andean cultures.

The temple complex features terraces as well as a network of passageways, which have only recently been discovered.

Rick, a Stanford University archaeologist, has said much of the temple complex remains to be excavated.

The entrance to the "condor's passageway" was first explored by Rick's team using cameras mounted on robots, seeking to negotiate the debris that once filled it as well as avoiding the risk of further collapse of the ancient architecture.

The United Nations' educational, scientific and cultural arm UNESCO declared Chavin de Huantar a world heritage site in 1985. — Reuters