

UK investors due on Monday

A delegation of British investors, including 30 business owners and businessmen from the British community, will visit the Sultanate of Oman on Monday to learn about the investment opportunities. The visit of the British delegation and their choice to invest in the Sultanate of Oman is based on the efforts of the Omani Embassy in the United Kingdom in promoting and attracting investment and offering them incentives in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. – ONA



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AL RAWAHI FINISHES FOURTH IN ABU DHABI DESERT CHALLENGE



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OMAN'S HEALTH INSURANCE SEGMENT GROWS 17.9% IN 2022



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DOLL'S WORLD: 'JAPAN'S BARBIE' CASTS SPELL OVER GROWN-UPS



MUSCAT

27,141 PILGRIMS REGISTER FOR HAJ

As many as 27,141 pilgrims have registered for this year's Haj rituals on the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs portal after it was opened on February 21. The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah topped the list with 4,824 registrations while Muscat has 3,894 pilgrims. These were followed by Al Dhahirah (1,395), Al Wusta (165), Dhofar (2,232), Musandam (208), Al Buraimi (386), North Al Batinah (4,027), South Al Batinah (2,548), Al Sharqiyah North (1,816), and Al Sharqiyah South (2,610). The number of expatriates who have registered for Haj this year stands at 3,036 as of March 1. This year, 14,000 pilgrims will be visiting the holy lands where as many as 2 million pilgrims will be following the rituals of holy Haj this year. **DETAILS ON P3**

INITIATIVES TO CUT CARBON EMISSIONS

The Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that the laboratory for net zero emissions identified 18 initiatives to be implemented by 2050. The initiatives include automobile specifications in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion roadmaps for hydrogen-fueled heavy-duty trucks. The lab also called for developing the infrastructure for electric vehicles by providing charging stations in line with the Authority for Public Services Regulation. The initiatives will include reducing carbon emissions at the main ports of Suhar, Duqm and Salalah and the transportation network in general. **DETAILS ON P5**

INSIDE



BATTLE RAGES FOR CONTROL OF BAKHMUT



THE CLIMATE-SECURITY FAILURE

Oman to attend UN conference on least developed countries

MUSCAT: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, left here on Saturday heading to the State of Qatar to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), which will be held in

Doha from Sunday and last for several days.

The conference aims to help devise a new and ambitious programme of action for LDCs that focuses on investing in people in these countries, eradicating poverty, building capacities, harnessing the power of science, technology and

innovation to address multidimensional vulnerabilities, achieving sustainable development goals, and supporting structural transformation as an engine for prosperity, promoting LDC participation in international trade and regional integration, addressing climate change and environmental degradation,

recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, and building resilience to future shocks to realise risk-informed sustainable development. It also aims at mobilising international solidarity and revitalising global partnerships and innovative tools and mechanisms as a path towards sustainable exit from the category of

least developed country. The conference will witness official sessions for heads of delegations and sideline sessions with a focus on six tracks namely: the private sector forum, the civil society forum, youth, parliamentarians, South-South cooperation, among other topics. — ONA

AN IDEAL KITESURFING DESTINATION



Pioneering the kitesurfing programmes in the Sultanate of Oman, Marcelo Antunes believes that the country has all the potential to become an international destination for the sport and extreme outdoor adventure. Marcelo has mapped out the seasons perfectly and can distinguish which are the best locations for kitesurfing on a particular map – something he said comes with the territory and is a necessity for kitesurfing lovers. **DETAILS ON P20**

Muscat book fair attracts 300,000 visitors

KABEER YOUSUF AND AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

The 27th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair 2023 that attracted thousands of bibliophiles for 11 days, has come to a close at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) under the auspices of Sayyid Saeed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and other dignitaries on Saturday.

The exhibition which attracted participants from 32 countries along with the Sultanate of Oman, was held in collaboration with the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, and showcased a wide range of books, including fiction, non-fiction, and children's books, as well as academic and reference books.

MAJOR REGIONAL EVENT
The book fair attracted more than 300,000 visitors ever since it started on February 22, and a steady stream of families took part in various seminars and other brainstorming sessions

“The 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair witnessed a wide turnout from all categories. The Omani community affirmed the love of reading through its constant presence at the exhibition

AHMED BIN SAUD AL RAWAHI
Director, Muscat International Book Fair

held as part of the major regional event.

“The 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair witnessed a wide turnout from all categories.”

“The Omani community affirmed the love of reading through its constant presence at the exhibition,” said Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of the Muscat International Book Fair. **TURN TO P2**

UN nuclear chief cites ‘great expectation’ in talks with Iran

TEHRAN: The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said on Saturday talks were ongoing with Iran on two sets of important matters, including the science sector, and there was “great expectation” about the process.

Rafael Grossi began meetings in Tehran that diplomats said were meant to push Iran to cooperate with an IAEA investigation into uranium traces found at undeclared sites that had been enriched close to nuclear-

weapons grade. “Globally speaking, there are two sets of matters that are important. Clearly, there is great expectation about our joint work in order to move forward in the issues that Iran and the agency are working on, to clarify and to bring credible assurances about the nuclear programme in Iran,” Grossi told reporters in Tehran. “The second set of issues, which is very important, has to do with (the) scientific, technical cooperation we are having and



Rafael Grossi

will continue to have with Iran,” he said, speaking alongside Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran. Grossi said the talks were taking place in an “atmosphere of work, honesty and cooperation”. His visit comes amid contacts with Tehran on the origin of the uranium particles enriched to up to 83.7 per cent purity, very close to the 90 per cent threshold for weaponisation, at its underground Fordow

enrichment plant, according to a report by the UN nuclear watchdog seen by Reuters. Eslami told reporters on Saturday that the Islamic Republic was enriching uranium up to 60 per cent fissile purity. Grossi later met President Ebrahim Raisi and “expressed satisfaction with achieving a joint agenda with the Atomic Energy Organisation on measures to smooth the path of cooperation”, Raisi aide Mohammad Jamshidi tweeted. — Reuters

Cultural events constitute creative depth of MIBF

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair, said that the cultural activities constitute the creative depth of the book fair without which it would be a mere market for selling books and signing deals with publishers.

In comments to ONA on the closing day of the 27th Muscat International Book Fair, the minister said: "Since the exhibition seeks to spread books, support the publisher and promote the values of reading among society members, it becomes crucial to enhance the accompanying cultural events which constitute an additional attraction point for the audience seeking to achieve more than one goal by visiting the book fair. They can buy books and attend cultural events of their choice as well as meet writers and authors."



Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair

He added: "Most of this year's events witnessed remarkable turnout as was evident in all the halls where the cultural events were held. The simultaneous holding of cultural events did not prevent the visitors from attending their favourite events due to the variety of topics. We were so delighted to host the cultural week of the brotherly Kingdom of Bahrain as part of the activities of Muscat International Book Fair. The

week represented a qualitative addition to the book fair due to varied events that acquainted the public with many aspects of the Bahraini culture and heritage. The experience of the countries' cultural weeks is the first of its kind and will undergo study and evaluation by the committee to become part of the future editions of Muscat International Book Fair."

"We applied smart counting technology of the visitors of Muscat International Book Fair by using special cameras to enumerate visitors in order to get an accurate number of visitors. Smart cameras were installed on the gates and special cameras were allocated for school and university students at the bus stops and outer spaces."

The smart cameras have an ability to distinguish the entering and exiting visitors without counting the same visitor more than once, the minister said.

— ONA

Al Dhahirah guest of honour in 28th edition

FROM PAGE 1

"This was confirmed with a significant increase in the number of visitors compared to the previous year."

As many as 165 cultural events, apart from more than 300 various activities meant for children in as many as 1,194 pavilions which reflected the cultures and traditions of diverse countries were held at the fair, whose guest of honour was South Al Batinah Governorate, and proved to be a major pull for visitors from across the region.

In addition to over 260,614 Arabic books from nearly 826 publishing houses, along with 204,411 non-Arabic and 5900 new publications were a cynosure at the event.

In terms of cultural exchange and enlightenment, 47 globally renowned

intellectuals, media, GCC and Arab exhibition managers, and others were key participants at the book fair.

Al Dhahirah Governorate will be the guest of honour of the exhibition in its 28th session, which will be held from February 24 to March 3, 2024.

Al Rawahi said that the next edition would be even bigger and better, and praised the success of this year's fair, saying that it had exceeded expectations in terms of attendance and sales. He also expressed his gratitude to the participants and organisers for their hard work and dedication, which contributed to the event's success.

Oman Daily Observer and its sister publication Oman Daily participated with a dedicated stall for the public to view its present and past editions.



Oman to take part in ITB Berlin

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Tourism, will take part in the International Tourism Exchange (ITB Berlin) which will kick off on Tuesday and lasts for three days.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism.

The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion will highlight the country's unique tourism potentials in different governorates with the participation of a number of institutions and companies seeking to promote the Sultanate of Oman internally in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The exhibition will witness bilateral meetings between Omanis specializing in the tourism industry and international tourism stockholders with the aim of promoting tourism exchange. ITB

Berlin is the largest such exhibition in the world, it brings together countries, destinations, tour operators and travel and tourism agents.

This edition of ITB Berlin comes as the tourism sector is recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Official data shows that the Sultanate of Oman received around 2.9 million visitors by the end of December 2022, an increase of 348.2 per cent compared to the same period of 2021, while total hotel revenues amounted to RO 186 million.

The tourism sector greatly contributes to the government's economic diversification efforts and the gross domestic product of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Sultanate of Oman is eying RO 3 billion in investments in the tourism sector between 2021 and 2023. The ministry is currently investing approximately RO 1.7 billion in various tourism projects. — ONA

دار الأوبرا السلطانية مسقط
ROYAL OPERA HOUSE MUSCAT

Giselle

Ballet

9th, 10th March | 7:30 PM

11th March | 4:00 PM

A ballet featuring a classical love story, tragedy and redemption narrative, Giselle, is both charming and heart rending. The music is that of Adolphe Adam, and this production is dedicated to the memory of the great dancer Carla Fracci. The ballet captures both earthly and spiritual dimensions in stunning choreography and staging. Performed by Teatro dell'Opera di Roma Ballet with the Armenian State Symphony Orchestra.

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■ ROWING RACE HELD IN SUHAR



The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, represented by the Maritime Sports Committee, organised a rowing race for 30-foot traditional boats that saw the participation of numerous rowing teams from North Al Batinah Governorate. The 4-km race started at the fishing port and ended at the seafont of the Silver Jubilee Park. Seventy rowers on 7 boats participated in the race. The winner will represent the Sultanate of Oman in the rowing race that will be held in Dubai in the UAE. – **ONA**

Drive to raise awareness about digital security among students starts today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Electronic Information Security, is implementing the digital security week initiative, which its activities kick off on Sunday under the slogan “Digital Communication for Societal Success”.

On the importance of this initiative and the mechanism of its implementation in the various schools of the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmed al Ghatrifi, Assistant Director of the Department of Electronic Information Security at the Ministry, said: “It is an embodiment of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik emphasising the necessity of sensing the size of the responsibility that rests on society, its institutions and individuals, in dealing with and caring about building a family and raising children, benefiting from technology and digital and social communication, and not relying



on social networks alone in raising children. All educational directorates and the Directorate-General of Special Education and Continuous Learning, in light of the approved initiative document, in cooperation

with the Department of Electronic Information Security in the Ministry, prepared an implementation plan and formed work teams, as well as preparing an integrated programme during the initiative period for school

students and children, as well as their parents and those in charge of education and raising children.”

The initiative is implemented in all governmental and private schools across the Sultanate of Oman. It targets students, children, parents and those in charge of raising young people. The initiative aims at implanting the principles, values and concepts of digital security, and raising the level of safety through the awareness of the aspects of safe and optimal use of social networks, while raising the readiness level of response and dealing with digital security risks and threats. It also aims at providing the best practices to be taken and followed to achieve safe upbringing.

The drive includes many awareness workshops for parents and those interested in student affairs, lectures and demonstration by IT security specialists on parental control, risks and threats of digital security, how to respond to it, and promoting good digital citizenship while confirming the preservation of the national identity.

27,141 pilgrims register for Haj

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

As many as 27,141 pilgrims have registered for this year's Haj rituals on the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs portal after it was opened on February 21.

The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah topped the list with 4,824 registrations while Muscat has 3,894 pilgrims.

These were followed by Al Dhahirah (1,395), Al Wusta (165), Dhofar (2,232), Musandam (208), Al Buraimi (386), Al Batinah North (4,027), Al Batinah South (2,548), Al Sharqiyah North (1,816), and Al Sharqiyah South (2,610).

The number of expatriates who have registered their interest to carry out their Haj this year stands at 3,036 as of March 1.

This year, 14,000 pilgrims will be visiting the holy lands where as many as 2 million pilgrims will be following the rituals of holy Haj this year.

“We will be sending 14,000 pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman to perform this year's holy Haj during the season 2023 for the rituals based on an agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of Saudi Arabia where we agreed to maintain the status quo of pre-Covid time,” Ali al Ghafri from the Haj department of the Ministry told the Observer.

Saudi Arabia has earlier announced that it would be hosting 2 million pilgrims from across the world.

The deadline to apply for Haj, which is likely to be held during the end of June and beginning of July, will end on March 4 and both citizens and residents in the Sultanate above 18 years of age were urged to register on www.hajj.om.

The registration can be completed by entering the civil number, the personal ID card, or the mobile phone number if the identity card chip and the SIM card provided in the phone is supported by the online authentication system.

Priority to travel to Mecca will be given to first-timers and aged people besides people suffering from chronic or life-threatening diseases.

Any man who is not less than 67 years of age or any woman who is less than 65 years old or who has a visual or motor disability is entitled to obtain a companion for the Haj.

Taqah gets its first licensed private museum, first heritage lodge

TAQAH: The Wilayat of Taqah witnessed the addition of two new tourist landmarks on Monday with the inauguration of the first licensed private museum and the first heritage lodge in the Governorate of Dhofar. The launch ceremony was presided over by Shaikh Tariq bin Khalid al Hinai, Wali of Taqah, in Taqah last week.

Speaking on the occasion, Khalid bin Abdullah al Abri, Director-General of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), said the private museum and the heritage lodge aims at introducing the cultural heritage and boosting the historical or heritage tourism, which has recently witnessed a remarkable boom.

In a statement, Al Abri emphasised the significance of utilising investment opportunities in those heritage and green inns that come as part of the Ministry's endeavour to provide value added tourism products.

The newly inaugurated house is converted into a housing lodge after several renovations, making it a tourist attraction for visitors wishing to experience the old neighbourhoods of the Wilayat and to explore the old architectural designs.

Faisal bin Salim Koofan, the supervisor of Koofan Heritage House, said that the house is estimated to be 150 years old and is considered one of the most

beautiful traditional houses in the Wilayat in terms of shape, design, and its unique architecture.

The old neighbourhood surrounds Taqah Fort, which was built in the nineteenth century during the reign of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal al Said (1913-1932), and the Al Askar Tower, which housed the armed forces to protect the Wilayat in ancient days. One can also find here the historic Shaikh Al Afif Mosque, where the people used to gather for their religious rituals.

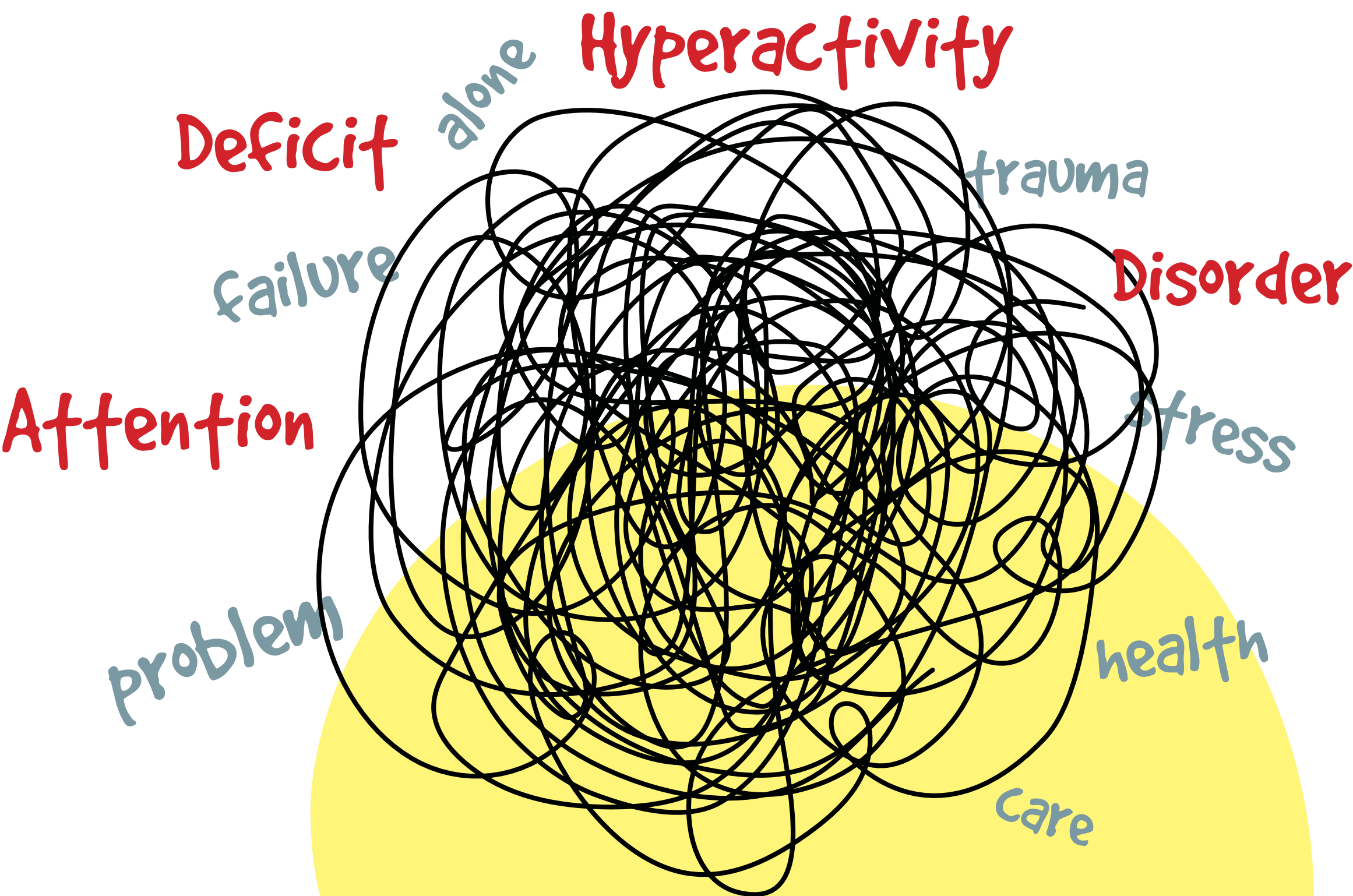
The Museum of Communication of Generations — the first private museum in the Governorate of Dhofar — includes four sections. The outer courtyard includes trees like frankincense, coconut palms, ancient windows, Ganja ship, several types of ancient fishing nets, and stones used in construction in the past.

The second section depicts Bedouin life meeting place with seats, cooking tools and utensils, the Bedouin costume, musical instruments and a library.

The fourth section of the museum illustrates rural life with firewood, ropes, kitchen utensils, and rural clothing for men and women, leather footwear and pottery. It also contains old metal and paper money, pictures of Sultans, models of ships, castles, forts, towers, houses, mosques, and naves. — **ONA**



WATCH OUT FOR THIS DISORDER IN KIDS



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

If a child shows symptoms like trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviour or be overly active most of the time, he may be suffering from ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), a neuro-developmental disorder that first starts in childhood and often lasts until adulthood. Certain precautions need to be taken, psychologists advise.

Dr Hamed al Sinawi, psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University, said that children with ADHD usually have symptoms such as excessive daydreaming, frequently forgetting or losing things, talking too much, making careless mistakes or taking unnecessary risks, while some children have difficulty resisting the temptation or waiting for their turn to speak or be served (e.g. at a restaurant) and have difficulty getting along with other people.

“Although some children have difficulty in focusing and behaving at one time or another, some children with ADHD have such symptoms most of the time, and it does not get better as they grow older; these symptoms cause difficulty at school, at home, or with friends,” said Dr Al Sinawi, who is also the chairman and founder of Oman Alzheimer’s Society.

SYMPTOMS OF ADHD

Children with ADHD cannot stay focused on a task requiring mental effort for more than a few minutes. They often act impulsively, ignoring social rules and lashing out with hostility when frustrated.

“For a child to be diagnosed with ADHD, symptoms like hyper activeness, exhausting parents and teachers, irritating other children with their excessive motor activity must have appeared before the age of 7 as a persistent problem,” said Bindhu Ajith Kumar, a teacher of Indian School Al Seeb.

Boys are diagnosed about four times as often as girls. However, many girls with ADHD seem to be overlooked, either because their symptoms are less flagrant or because of a gender bias. A difficult, disruptive boy is likely to be referred for treatment.

Children with ADHD score 7 to 15 points lower than others on intelligence tests. They have less capacity to inhibit action in favour of their thoughts, resulting in a wide range of inadequacies in strategic thinking and impulsive disorganised behaviour.

Research confirms that children with ADHD do poorly on tasks requiring sustained attention, ignore irrelevant information, have difficulty with memory, planning, reasoning, and problem-solving in academic and social situations, and fail to manage frustration and intense emotion.

HOW TO TAKE CARE?

According to studies by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the most effective treatment approach combines medication with the intervention that models and reinforces appropriate academic and social behaviour.

“Family intervention is also important. The inattentive, overactive children strain the parents and are patients who are likely to react punitively and inconsistently,” says Bindhu.

The incidence of ADHD is much higher in many communities. At times, children are overdiagnosed and unnecessarily medicated because their parents and teachers are impatient with inattentive, active behaviour that is within the normal range.

Adults with ADHD continue to need help in structuring their environments, regulating negative emotions, selecting appropriate careers and understanding their condition as a biological deficit rather than a character flaw, experts further said.

ATTENTION DEFICIT
HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER
IS COMMONLY DIAGNOSED
IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN
AND IS CHARACTERISED
BY SYMPTOMS OF
INATTENTIVENESS,
HYPERACTIVITY AND
IMPULSIVITY

AGENDA OF ANNUAL
ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

The Board of Directors of Halcyon Capital Holding Co. SAOC invites all Shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting, which will be held on Thursday, 23rd March 2023 at 3:00 pm through the electronic platform of the general meetings, which you can access through the Muscat Clearing and Depository website (www.mcd.gov.om) to discuss the following Agenda.

However, in case the AGM was not held on the said date, the Company will hold a second AGM on Monday, 27th March 2023 at 3:00 pm to discuss the same following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December 2022.
2. To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the financial statements (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss Account) in respect of the Company for the financial year ended 31st December 2022.
3. To consider and approve transactions entered by the Company with related parties during the financial year ended 31st December 2022 (as per the Annexure 1).
4. To consider and approve transactions that the Company will enter with related parties during the financial year ending 31st December 2023 (as per Annexure 2).
5. To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors of the company during the year ended on 31st December 2022. (As per the Annexure 3).
6. To consider and approve the sitting fees of the directors and sub-committees of the company during the next financial year ending on 31st December 2023. (As per the Annexure 4).
7. To appoint auditors for the Company for the year ending 31st December 2023 and to fix their remuneration.

According to the Articles of Association of the Company and the regulations for convening general meetings via electronic means by the authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

(a) Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the general meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that the proxy person has an investor number in the MCD.

(b) Voting on any of the items presented on the agenda starts three days before the date of the general meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting, and if the shareholder's share is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and he must re-vote again on the meeting day.

For further information, please contact Mr. Badar Mahfoudh Khalfan Al Wahaibi on telephone 22004507.

Chairman

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5

Robust aviation sector recovery in 2022

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The aviation sector in the Sultanate of Oman reported a robust recovery in 2022 in line with the global demand for travel.

The number of inbound and outbound international flights through the airports of Muscat, Salalah and Suhar increased 28 per cent to 65,220 flights at the end of December 2022, compared to 28,580 flights during the same period in 2021, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

This is in line with the recent International Air Transport Association (IATA) report that the Middle Eastern airlines saw a 157.4-per cent traffic rise in 2022 compared to 2021. Capacity increased by 73.8 per cent, and load factor climbed 24.6 percentage points to 75.8 per cent. December demand climbed 69.8 per cent compared to the same month in 2021. The number of passengers arriving through the airports of the Sultanate increased by 133 per cent, and the number of passengers departing increased by 109 per cent until the end of December 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

The total number of arrivals, departures and 'transit' passengers at the airports of Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Duqm reached 9.876 million. The incoming and outgoing international and domestic flights through Muscat International Airport increased by 107 per cent to 68,737 flights, carrying 8,602,791 passengers. Salalah Airport recorded a



The number of inbound and outbound international flights increased 28 per cent to 65,220 flights at the end of December 2022, compared to 28,580 flights during the same period in 2021

significant increase in the number of international and domestic flights by 71 per cent, as the number of flights through the airport reached 8,672, carrying 1,128,024 passengers. The number of international and domestic flights departing and arriving from Suhar Airport reached 813, carrying 78,482 passengers. Duqm Airport recorded 650 incoming and outgoing domestic flights, carrying 67,465 passengers until the end of 2022. Passengers of Indian nationality dominated the users at Muscat International Airport (147,032), followed by Bangladesh nationals (53,130) and Pakistan nationals (39,853).

According to IATA, total traffic in 2022 (measured in revenue

passenger kilometres or RPKs) rose 64.4 per cent compared to 2021. Globally, the full-year 2022 traffic was at 68.5 per cent of pre-pandemic (2019) levels. December 2022 total traffic rose 39.7 per cent compared to December 2021 and reached 76.9 per cent of the December 2019 level. International traffic in 2022 climbed 152.7 per cent versus 2021 and reached 62.2 per cent of 2019 levels. In December 2022, international traffic climbed 80.2 per cent over December 2021, reaching 75.1 per cent of the level in December 2019.

Domestic traffic for 2022 rose 10.9 per cent compared to the prior year. December 2022 domestic traffic was up 2.6 per cent over the year-earlier period and was at 79.9 per cent of December 2019 traffic. "The industry left 2022 in far stronger shape than it entered, as most governments lifted Covid-19 travel restrictions during the year, and people took advantage of restoring their freedom to travel. This momentum is expected to continue in the New Year, despite some governments' over-reactions to China's re-opening," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director-General.



Taghleef Industries SAOC

P.O. Box 38, PC 327, Sohar Industrial Estate, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 26751823/24, Fax: 26751822

Invitation and Agenda of the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Taghleef Industries SAOC (the "Company")

The Board of Directors of Taghleef Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting and the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held on Monday, 27th March 2023 at 2:30 pm via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened on Thursday, 30th March 2023, at 2:30 pm to discuss the following agenda:

First Meeting: Extraordinary General Meeting

1. To consider and approve the amendments to the Articles of Association of the Company.

Second Meeting: Annual Ordinary General Meeting

1. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
2. To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
3. To consider and approve the Auditor's Report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
4. To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2022.
5. To consider and approve the related party transactions which will be entered into by the Company during the financial year ending on 31 December 2023.
6. To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2022 at the rate of RO 1 for each share from retained earnings to the shareholders.
7. Election of five Members of the Company as Board Members (comprising shareholders or non-shareholders). Anyone who wishes to nominate himself for membership of the Board of Directors of the Company, must submit an application form pursuant to the application form prepared by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry during the specified period therefore which will expire five working days prior to the date fixed for the Annual General Meeting (Sunday, 19 March 2023). Forms submitted after this date will not be accepted.
8. To appoint Auditors for the Financial Year ended 31 December 2023 and specify their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Closed Joint Stock Companies issued by the Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

1. Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
2. Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact **Mr. Khaled Kharousi on 26650229 OR Mr. Zacharias Chacko on 26650268.**

Chairman

Initiatives launched to cut emissions

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT) said that the laboratory for net zero emissions identified 18 initiatives to be implemented by 2050.

The initiatives include automobile specifications in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion roadmaps for hydrogen-fueled heavy-duty trucks.

The lab also called for developing the infrastructure for electric vehicles by providing charging stations in line with the Authority for Public Services Regulation. The initiatives will include reducing carbon emissions at the main ports of Suhar, Duqm and Salalah and the transportation network in general.

Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaidhani, Under-Secretary for Communications and Information Technology, said that the ministry is working with automobile dealers to ensure that 79 per cent of the cars on the roads will be electrically driven by 2035.



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-44/2023	Provision of Cleaning and Pest Control Services to Directorate General of Professional Development Building at Al-Wattayah	09/March/2023	05/April/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-46/2023	Hiring of Buses for Students Transportation for the Higher Institute for Health Specialties				
MOH/HQ-48/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment (Topography) for Various Health Establishment				
MOH/HQ-49/2023	Supply & Installation of CCTV IP System for Directorate of Public Health Lab Medical Store Building at Madinat Sultan Qaboos at Muscat Governorate	12/April/2023			
MOH/HQ-50/2023	Supply and Installation of Fundus Camera for Retinopathy Screenings for Diabetic at Various Health Establishments	29/March/2023			
MOH/HQ-51/2023	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment for Adult Intensive Care Unit in Rustaq Hospital at South Al Batinah Governorate	16/March/2023	05/April/2023		
MOH/HQ-52/2023	Supply of Medical Equipment for National Heart Centre at Royal Hospital		29/March/2023		
MOH/HQ-53/2023	Supply and Installation of Echocardiography System & Recorders for the Royal Hospital		12/April/2023		R.O 32.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-54/2023	Integrate, Implement and Support a National Archive System at Various Hospitals				R.O 47.500 Per set
MOH/HQ-55/2023	Supply of Non-Medical Consumables for The Royal Hospital	09/March/2023	29/March/2023		R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-208/2022 Recall	Replacement of Air Conditioning Unit at Salalah Polyclinic in Dhofar Governorate	16/March/2023			

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

البنك الوطني العماني
لدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي
National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

Investment Manager Report

For the quarter ending
31st December 2022

2022 marked a challenging year for global equity markets, since 2008 crises. The geo-political issue and inflation, which made the fed take hawkish measures were the main villains of the year, impacting investor sentiments. The shrinking of money and the flight from equities to debt was evident in the last 7-8 months of the year. For the GCC region though it was positive in terms of economic benefits from higher crude oil prices and budgetary surplus after years of deficits.

On a YTD basis, for the year 2022, the fund posted a decline of 4.79% which is lower than the benchmark S&P GCC Composite Index which fell 7.16%, thus the fund outperformed the benchmark by 2.37%. The NBO GCC FUND turned negative in the 4th quarter of 2022, largely on account of its KSA and Qatar positions which weakened sharply due to the selling pressure. Overall, the US positions in 2022, impacted negatively as US markets had a negative year, especially the tech laden Nasdaq.

Saudi Tadawul which has the largest dominance in benchmark weight gained in 1Q but fell consecutive 3 quarters to end the year with a loss of 6.9%. Qatar had an eventful year hosting the mega FIFA event; however, the markets reflected a bigger concern over what next and gave up the gains in 4Q, ending with a loss of 8.1%. On the other hand, ADX continued to lead the region on the upside with 21.2% gains, with Dubai adding another 4.4%. After a sluggish start MSX, dodged the global trend and surged to gain 17.6%, in 2022. Bahrain and Kuwait also managed to end the year with gains of 5.5% and 3.5% respectively. All 3 major US indices ended the year in red.

Going forward, corporate performance in GCC could be an important driver of equities. Global cues expected to turn positive with China opening and expected turning of US interest rate cycle. We believe certain sectors like consumption and the new generation Information Technology stocks offer scope for appreciation. IPOs could further continue and widen the scope of our investment universe. Overall, we remain positive and expect the fund to deliver improved performance in the year ahead.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022		
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
	2022	2021
	RO	RO
ASSETS		
Investments at fair value through profit or loss	10,064,468	12,001,496
Cash and cash equivalents	466,929	134,577
Dividend receivable	65	306
Total assets	10,531,462	12,136,379
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Accruals and other payables	100,649	247,959
Total liabilities	100,649	247,959
Total net assets attributable to the Unitholders	10,430,813	11,888,420
Net asset value per unit	0.883	0.928
STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
	2022	2021
	RO	RO
INCOME		
Fair value changes in investments at fair value through profit or loss	(415,099)	2,241,695
Net realised (loss) / gain on investments at fair value through profit or loss	(56,445)	408,787
Dividend income	345,514	264,173
Interest income	1,349	6,030
Other income	674	1,079
	(124,007)	2,921,764
Expenses		
Management fees	138,344	117,592
Fund Management Body fees	35,000	35,000
Brokerage expenses	46,886	34,068
Foreign exchange loss	42,581	2,169
General and administration	20,180	17,373
Administrator fees	18,865	16,173
Custodian fees	10,525	9,600
Performance fees	-	181,462
	312,383	413,437
Net (loss) / profit and total comprehensive income for the year	(436,390)	2,508,327
Net (loss) / profit per unit	(0.036)	0.196

Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box 751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778757, Fax: 24778993 Email: GCCFund@nbo.co.om

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO
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BATTLE RAGES FOR CONTROL OF BAKHMUT

CHASIV YAR: Russian artillery pounded the last routes out of Bakhmut on Friday, aiming to complete the encirclement of the besieged Ukrainian city and bring Moscow closer to its first major victory in half a year after the bloodiest battle of the war.

The head of Russia's Wagner private army said the city, which has been blasted to ruins in Russia's more than seven month onslaught, was almost completely surrounded with only one road still open for Ukraine's troops.

Reuters observed intense Russian shelling of routes leading west out of Bakhmut, an apparent attempt to block Ukrainian forces' access in and out of the city. A bridge in the adjacent town of Khromove was damaged by Russian tank shelling.

Ukrainian soldiers were working to repair damaged roads and more troops were heading toward the frontline in a sign that

Russian mercenary chief says one route only out of Bakhmut but Ukraine national guard says situation 'critical'

Ukraine was not yet ready to give up the city. To the west, Ukrainians were digging new trenches for defensive positions.

Russia's RIA state news agency released a video showing what it said were Wagner fighters walking by a damaged industrial facility. One fighter is heard saying Ukraine's army is destroying infrastructure in settlements near Bakhmut to prevent the Russian encirclement.

The commander of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, visited Bakhmut on Friday for briefings with local commanders on how to boost the defence capacity of frontline forces.



A Ukrainian serviceman fires an automatic grenade launcher, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in the front line city of Bakhmut, in Donetsk region. — Reuters

Denys Yaroslavskiy, commander of a Ukrainian army unit at Bakhmut, told Espresso TV that parts of some units had been ordered to rotate to more secured positions, describing the situation since the morning as "a slaughterhouse on both sides."

A Russian victory in Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of about 70,000, would give it the first major prize in a costly winter offensive, after it called up hundreds of thousands of reservists last year. Russia says it would be a stepping stone to completing the capture of the Donbas industrial region, one of Moscow's most important objectives.

Before the war Bakhmut was known for salt and gypsum mines. Ukraine says the city has little strategic value and the huge casualties Russia has suffered trying to take Bakhmut could shape the course of the conflict.

— Reuters

Four dead, tens of thousands evacuated in Malaysia floods

YONG PENG: At least four people have died and nearly 41,000 were evacuated in Malaysia after floodwaters caused by "unusual" torrential rains lasting days swept through several states, officials said on Saturday.

Local reports and social media posts showed images of flooded roads, submerged cars, waterlogged homes and rows of shops closed in the affected areas, mainly in the southern state of Johor near neighbouring Singapore.



A general view shows a flooded residential area in Yong Peng, Johor, Malaysia. — Reuters

The rains have continued unabated, hampering relief efforts. Police said at least four people

have died since Wednesday, including a man whose car was swept away by floodwaters and an elderly couple who drowned.

Nearly 41,000 people from six states, although mostly from Johor, have been evacuated to schools and community centres where food, water, and clothes were provided.

The latest fatality was a 68-year-old woman who drowned near her flooded house after she left an evacuation centre in Segamat town in Johor, police said. — AFP

Oxygen plant blast kills 6 in Bangladesh

CHITTAGONG: At least six people were killed and dozens were injured in an explosion at an oxygen plant outside Bangladesh's port city of Chittagong on Saturday, officials said.

The blast rocked the oxygen unit of the Sheema steel re-rolling mill in the industrial town of Sitakunda at around 4:30 pm, trapping "many workers" inside the plant, local police chief Tofael Ahmed said.

"The fire brigade has doused the fire and they rescued the people from the plant," he

added.

District administrator Mohammad Fakhruzzaman said at least five people were killed in the explosion and another 25 people were injured.

Witness Muslim Uddin said the explosion was "so loud and devastating" that it shook all residential houses in the area.

"Glass in many houses was shattered. The entire area went dark," he said.

The death toll could rise as a rescue operation was ongoing at the plant at Sitakunda, 40 km from the southeastern port

city of Chittagong, they added.

It was not immediately clear what caused the explosion, a fire service official said.

"Six bodies were recovered from the site," local government official Shahadat Hossain said, adding a rescue operation was continuing. A huge bang was heard which shook an area with a radius of up to two kilometres, police official Nayhanul Bari said, quoting witnesses.

A massive fire at a container depot in the area killed 50 people and injured nearly 200 in June last year. — AFP/Reuters



الأكاديمية الصناعية
Industrial Innovation Academy

Industrial Innovation Academy L.L.C.

Reoffering of Auction

Industrial Innovation Academy L.L.C. announces organization of public auction for sale of number of its assets as indicated in the table below. Those assets shall be inspected as follows from 06/03/2023 AD to 08/03/2023 AD:

	Asset	Inspection Location	Field Inspection Date
0.1	(Half automatic) liquid filling system - 6 parts per system	Directorate of Agricultural and Livestock Research and Water Resources in Rumais	06/03/2023
	Maamoul and Biscuit sticker weighing, packing and printing system for		
	Sesame (tahina) grinding machine		
	Roaster and mixer of nuts, celery and other items		
	Butter, bread and biscuit crumb spreading system		
	Bread and biscuit dipping machine		
	Glass bottle air remover		
	Product chocolate coating machine		
	Dough and maamoul balling machine		
	Mixer and kneader		
	Office furniture		
0.2	Feed block factory	Animal Production Center- Al-Felaij	07/03/2023
0.3	Coal production factory	Barka Industrial Zone	08/03/2023

Terms and conditions:

- Industrial Innovation Academy L.L.C. shall not be liable for the offered assets in case the image or description of any goods doesn't match. In addition, it doesn't guarantee validity or technical safety of the assets which are offered for sale. Buyers shall check by themselves by visual inspection on the inspection days.
- Buyer shall immediately pay purchase price and value added tax in full.
- Buyer shall move all purchased equipment and assets within no later than (7) days from the date of purchase. In case of buyer delays movement of purchased assets beyond deadline, daily storage cost of 5% of purchase price shall be charged, and the asset will not be delivered to buyer, unless the amounts that result from delay are paid.
- Purchased assets shall not be returned or their value reduced. No petition that may be presented in this respect will be accepted.
- Industrial Innovation Academy shall have the right to cancel or postpone the auction at any time without assigning reasons.

Note:

- Inspection shall be carried out at normal work hours from 8 am to 2 pm.
- Request for auction shall be delivered in envelopes to headquarters of the academy- Knowledge Oasis, Muscat, Building 4, Level 6, within no later than 13/03/2023 AD. For further details, kindly contact Mr. Majid Al-Alawi via email: majid.alalawi@iia.om - 24445553/570

Tunisian labour union rally urges president to accept 'dialogue'

TUNIS: More than 3,000 people demonstrated against Tunisia's government on Saturday at a rally organised by the powerful UGTT trade union, which called on President Kais Saied to accept "dialogue".

Saied has pushed through sweeping changes to the political system in the sole democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings, concentrating near-total power in his office since he froze parliament and sacked the government in July 2021.

In the biggest crackdown since the president's power grab, police have arrested around 20 prominent political figures over the past two weeks, primarily Saied's opponents.

"Freedom, freedom, down with the police state," demonstrators chanted as they marched in Tunis on Saturday, also calling for "a halt to impoverishment" in the North African country.

UGTT chief Nouredine Taboubi accused the president of targeting the powerful union as part of a wider crackdown against critics.

Taboubi condemned the latest wave of arrests and the imprisonment since February of Anis Kaabi, a top UGTT official for highway workers, who had been detained after a strike by toll barrier employees.

"We will never accept such arrests," Taboubi told the protesters.

The UGTT has around one million members and shared a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 with three other civil society groups for promoting national dialogue in the country of about 12 million inhabitants. Journalists said that more than 3,000 people took part in the rally.



Tunisian General Labour Union Secretary General Nouredine Taboubi speaks during a protest against President Kais Saied in Tunis. — Reuters

Taboubi called on Saied to embrace "dialogue" and "democratic" ways, slamming the president for pursuing a "violent discourse... that is dividing the country".

The UGTT chief also defended "the rights of migrants, regardless of their nationality or the colour of their skin".

"Tunisia is a country of tolerance, no to racism," he told the crowd.

Saied last month ordered officials to take "urgent measures" to tackle irregular migration, claiming without evidence that "a criminal plot" was underway "to change Tunisia's demographic make-up".

The rally on Saturday came as some 300 West African migrants in Tunisia prepared to be repatriated, fearful of a wave of violence since Saied's comments.

Taboubi also criticised negotiations between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Tunisia, which is struggling under crippling inflation and debt worth around 80 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Tunisia is seeking a bailout package worth nearly \$2 billion from the IMF, which conditions any aid on a series of reforms.

Taboubi said the UGTT is unaware of the "details of the proposals" made by the Tunisian authorities but stressed that the union is totally opposed to any lifting of government subsidies on basic goods such as foodstuff and fuel. — AFP

‘I can’t find my child’: Agony as search of Greek train crash wraps up



NIKI
KITSANTONIS

The fire service in Greece started winding down a gruesome search on Friday at the scene of the country’s deadliest train crash on record as authorities informed the relatives of some victims identified by their DNA and other families desperately sought information about missing loved ones.

The crash occurred late on Tuesday near the Vale of Tempe, in northern Greece, after a passenger train carrying more than 350 people and a freight train raced toward each other on the same tracks for 12 minutes.

Railway workers in Greece were on strike for a second day, a reflection of the rising anger about the accident, which killed at least 57 people, and of the broader concerns about the country’s rail safety record, the worst in Europe.

As part of their investigation, Greek investigators were combing through audio files, documents and notes from the Larissa train station, about 17 miles from the crash site.

The 59-year-old station master, who has not been publicly identified, has been accused of making a mistake that led to the collision and is to appear Saturday before a magistrate on criminal charges of manslaughter through neglect.

Many of those killed in the crash were young people, touching a nerve in Greece and prompting demonstrations in the capital, Athens, and in Thessaloniki, which is home to a large number of university students and was the destination of the passenger train.

On Friday morning, schoolchildren and parents staged a protest outside the station in Larissa, holding banners saying, “No cover-ups” and “It wasn’t human error” — an apparent riposte to comments from Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis about the cause of the collision.

Later in the day, thousands of students marched in Athens, some holding white balloons with writing that said “57 tickets of death” and “Profits painted in the blood of students.” More rallies were planned.

Greek trains run along a rudimentary system with safety features that work only sporadically, according to union and safety officials, and the network is less sophisticated than those of many other European countries.

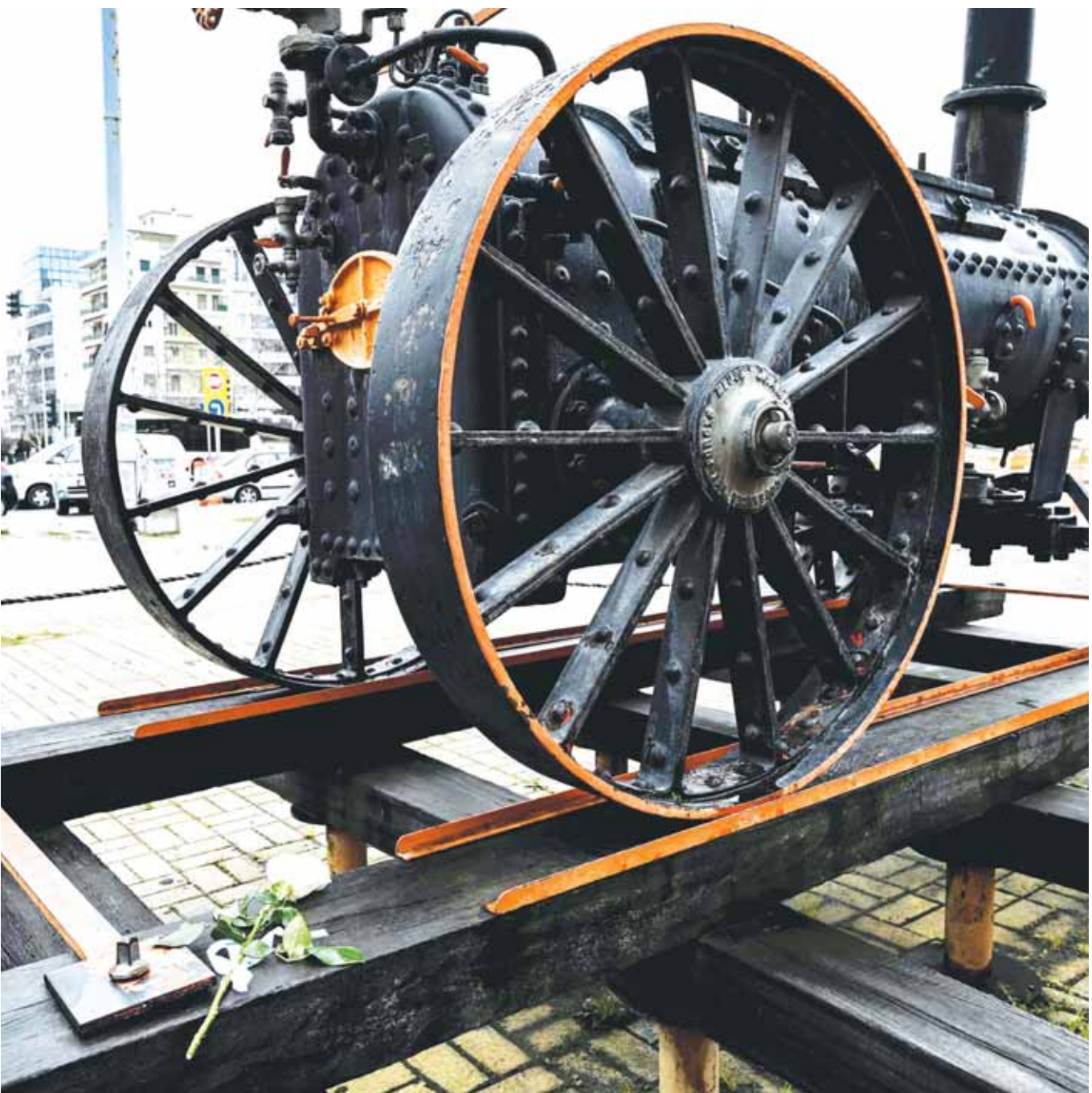
The crash left rail cars strewn about the tracks, and authorities were to begin moving the wreckage from the site once the search for human remains was complete.

“We will do a final search today, remove the carriages to search underneath them and then start clearing the area,” said Ioannis Artopios, a spokesperson for the Greek fire service.

He added that most of the human remains had been removed from the crash site, although rescuers were still pulling out the charred remains of belongings such as backpacks, cellphones and laptops.

Even though the official death toll was 57 as of Friday afternoon, there was an element of confusion: Only 56 people have been reported as missing by relatives. “There is the possibility that a missing passenger was not reported by relatives or that others boarded at stations along the route,” Artopios said.

Greek police were notifying relatives of the dead after



A flower is laid in memory of the victims of February 28’s train crash next to an old train outside Thessaloniki railway station. — AFP

family members submitted their DNA for identification.

A total of 36 matches were confirmed as authorities went through the painstaking process and continued to carry out tests on remains retrieved from the site.

Constantina Dimoglidou, a spokesperson for the Greek police, said that it was not yet clear whether those remains were from people who had already been identified. She added that mental health professionals were assisting police in informing relatives.

Among the missing was Denis Ruci, a 22-year-old whose mother spoke to reporters outside Larissa General Hospital while holding a photograph of her son.

“He bought a ticket online for Carriage 5, Seat 22,” she said, adding that he had lived in Thessaloniki and had been visiting friends in Athens. “We have no idea where he is. But if anyone saw him in Seat 22 or recognises him, please inform me because I can’t find my child.”

In the immediate aftermath of the crash, much of the focus was on Greece’s poor safety record, but the chief prosecutor for the Greek Supreme Court, Isidoros

Doyiakos, said that a judicial investigation into the causes of the collision should be wide-ranging and look beyond the accident on Tuesday night.

“Judicial judgment should not be restricted to the criminal responsibility of specific individuals,” he said in a statement. “The proper dispensation of justice is the best way to commemorate the souls of the dead.”

Giorgos Andreou, whose son owns one of the hotels in Larissa that was allowing relatives of the victims to stay for free, said the fallout was reminiscent of war.

“It’s in times of war that parents bury their children,” he said.

Andreou partially blamed cutbacks imposed during the Greek financial crisis, which started in 2009 and ran for nearly a decade, for the inadequacies of the country’s railway. He also pointed a finger at the state’s chronic failure to remedy the enduring problems with the system. He said that the episode reminded him of another train crash, in 1972, when he was a teenager, near the village of Doxaras, in which 19 people died.

Geek trains run along a rudimentary system with safety features that work only sporadically, and the network is less sophisticated than those of many other European countries

The \$2 billion question of who you are at work



EMMA GOLDBERG

“Hello there, Protagonist!” Read the email that landed in my inbox on a recent night. “Have you ever had the sense that you were different from others? That your drive to right unjust wrongs and seek improvement runs just a little bit deeper than most?”

I was intrigued. These questions were deeper than the improvement I happened to be seeking at that moment, related to the consistency of a chickpea stew I was cooking with my roommate, so I gladly opened the email, which contained the results of my assessment from 16personalities.com.

I had spent that day taking every personality test I could find on the Internet — an alternately therapeutic and mind-numbing journey of the self. This was prompted, in fact, not by personal crisis, but rather by professional curiosity about the role of personality testing in today’s tangled-up world of work. Could describing people on paper, in the form of colours and animals and good old Myers-Briggs, be relevant to discussions about returning to the office?

Personality testing is roughly a \$2 billion industry,

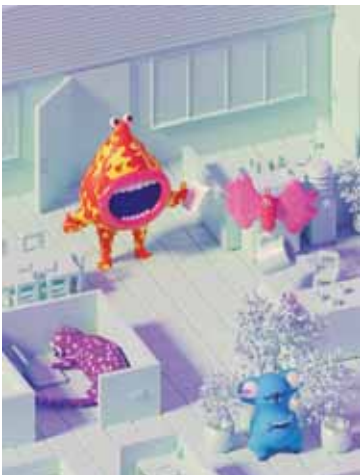
according to Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, a psychology professor and author of “I, Human,” who estimated the value of the largest personality testing companies. Their appeal is both magnetic and obvious: ego. But the tests have also come to be applied in practical ways in the office, helping to shape professional relationships. Some managers find them particularly useful for remote teams, because personality tests can prompt much-needed conversations about who workers are as humans, and how they like to interact.

“Covid has opened our eyes to the fact that there are different ways in which we can work,” said David Noel, senior vice president of global human resources at Scotiabank, a Toronto-based bank that uses a personality test called Plum. “Personality testing can be a part of that.”

After taking my own personality tests, I discovered that I was an ENFJ (extroverted and emotional); a Blue (motivated by intimacy, a “sainted pit bull” who doesn’t easily let go of people or projects); dominated, among the four temperaments, by sanguine (creative, sociable); and, according to my 24-page CliftonStrengths report, keen on collecting information and input from people (conveniently known as reporting).

Digging through these results felt like the type of fun that’s both earnest and indulgent. Like an iPhone burst of selfies fused with the self-help section of an airport bookstore.

For employers, the stakes of personality testing are higher.



In a world of remote jobs, some employers are finding personality tests more useful than ever, but they’re not always up-to-date.

Personality tests can prompt much-needed conversations about who workers are as humans, and how they like to interact

Managers often use them to make decisions about career development and sometimes even about hiring. Each year, some 100 million workers worldwide take psychometric tests, meaning tests designed to study personality and aptitude. The industry exploded in the late 1990s and early 2000s as the tests were computerised, Chamorro-Premuzic said.

Now, psychologists are exploring what changes need to be made to workplace personality tests — both to grapple with long-standing questions about their validity and to address the changing norms of hybrid work. It’s a moment when, managers say, the tests are more useful than ever but not always up-to-date.

At Scotiabank, which has 90,000 workers, executives decided in late 2020 to stop looking at resumes for applicants coming out of school. The campus hiring programme is now focused partly on Plum results, and the new approach is bringing in more diverse candidates, the bank said, because hiring managers are looking beyond familiar credentials. The share of Scotiabank’s new employees who are Black rose to 6 per cent from 1 per cent, and over half its hires are women.

Acolytes of personality testing are cautious, though, about how results should be used for workplace decision-making. They should be one factor among many, advocates say, with the understanding that there’s a gap between the way people present themselves on a test and how they’ll act on any given Tuesday, or in a fight on Slack.

The growth mindset – why we settle for less



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

Imagine that you have fifty 20-year-olds in front of you, and you are presented with the task of estimating how many of them would achieve their goals within a 40-year time span.

All of these participants are young, energetic and full of hope for the future. Why is it that only a very small minority actually accomplish what they set out to do, while the rest fail and end up stuck in their miserable daily routines?

What is it that these people lack? Is it motivation? The hunger for success? Or is it time?

In my opinion, it is none of the above.

No one starts out their journey while purposely aiming to fail. It also goes without saying that everyone craves success in its various forms, whether by achieving financial independence,

raising a happy family or becoming famous and well-known.

As for time, it is equally dispensed among all of us. Whether we make use of our time by being productive, or if we spend it in leisure, the unstoppable march of time is, well, unstoppable.

As young people generally have less responsibilities, they are often more open towards change. Their limited life experience also means that they are more susceptible to dynamical change. The older we get, the more resistant we become to change. As we become more jaded from life, we naturally start leaning more towards stability and predictability in our daily lives.

Does this mean that the inevitability of old age is what kills our dreams and aspirations?

While it does make sense that a fully loaded car would be harder

‘AS YOUNG PEOPLE GENERALLY HAVE FEWER RESPONSIBILITIES, THEY ARE OFTEN MORE OPEN TOWARDS CHANGE. THEIR LIMITED LIFE EXPERIENCE ALSO MEANS THAT THEY ARE MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO DYNAMICAL CHANGE’

to push forwards, it doesn’t mean that moving the car is impossible. Also, reaching the destination is more fulfilling the harder it is to reach. As long as one never stops moving towards what they idealise, whether by taking long strides or just inching forwards bit by bit, they will eventually reach their goals.

Continuous progress. This is

the essence of the growth mindset.

As explained by psychologists in Stanford university, it is “the belief that a person’s capacities and talents can be improved over time.” Self-learning is the essence of success. This can be observed in almost every setting, especially in education.

For example, if one does not practice solving problems while preparing for an exam, they are reducing their chances of success. On the other hand, if one spends adequate time revising and preparing, they are bound to get better marks.

Alternatively, if one believes that they are bad at mathematics, or that everyone else is better than them, they adopt a fixed mindset. This belief eats away at their resolve, until they eventually bring what they prophesised into reality.

This raises the question; how can one adopt a healthy and sustainable growth mindset? One way would be to view challenges and obstacles as opportunities for learning.

The fear of failure exists naturally in all of us, yet we must find comfort in failure, as it allows us to learn from our mistakes and eventually paves the path to success.

What I view as the pillar of the growth mindset is persistence – or “the indomitable human spirit” as younger generations describe it. Just as the waves eat away at rocky seashores, one should always push towards realising their ideals. After all, Rome was not built in one day.

It gets easier, everyday it gets a little easier, but you have to do it every day, that’s the hard part. But it does get easier.

Long-lost bed might finally serve UK monarch

JUSTINE GERARDY, SYLVAIN PEUCHMAURD

Although a little larger than king size, an unusual bed stored in Britain’s Palace of Westminster with a remarkable history could see its first royal sleepover ahead of Charles III’s coronation in May.

The regal crib, which has its origins in a thousand-year-old tradition observed up to the time of Henry VIII in the 16th century, was lost for decades but is ready for service after a remarkable journey.

On the night before coronation, the sovereign traditionally spent the night at the Palace of Westminster, then the Royal Palace.

After falling out of favour, the tradition was revived two centuries ago for the coronation of George IV in 1821.

But that bed was destroyed in the fire that ravaged Parliament in 1834.

So another one, finished in 1858, was made but has “actually never been used the night before the coronation”, parliamentary historian Mark Collins said.

It was not ready for Queen Victoria’s coronation in 1838 and subsequent monarchs chose not to spend the night at Westminster.

The bed was dismantled and stored away during World War II, forgotten as the Victorian era fell out of fashion.

Its whereabouts were unknown at the time of Elizabeth II’s coronation in 1953 and it was not until the late 1970s that a V&A Museum expert, Clive Wainwright, launched an appeal to try to find the bed.

His efforts proved successful, with a family coming forward to reveal it was located at a woollen mill in Wales.

It had been bought at an auction for £100 in the 1960s by the parents of Richard Martin, now 70.

“They knew it was a special item, they knew that it was something important, but they didn’t know where it had come from at all,” said historian Collins.

And for about 20 years, the bed had a very busy life. One of the family’s children, Benedict, was even born there in 1965.

The fantastical piece stirred the imagination of a young Richard Martin on his way to the land of nod.

“When I was a child... we thought that whoever lived in the bed, who slept in the bed, would put their cigarette” in little holes carved in the wood, while reading or drinking tea, he said.

“Nobody else had a bed like that”, he said, calling it “a night-time throne”.

The bed was bought back from the family and then restored. — AFP

The European Union offered to embrace Ukraine, but now what?



Steven Erlanger

The writer is the chief diplomatic correspondent in Europe for NYT



Residents line up to shop with subsidised food vouchers at a grocery store in Kherson, Ukraine, Feb. 16, 2023. – The New York Times

When the European Union offered Ukraine a path to membership last year, it was in many ways an emotional response to the Russian attack.

Leaders were under pressure to show solidarity with the victims of aggression, even though many opposed the idea.

Since then, preoccupied with passing sanctions, scrounging up aid and scouring military inventories to send Ukraine weapons, few in Europe have focused seriously on what that commitment might actually mean.

But this is a courtship with consequences for the future, not only for Ukraine’s aspirations and survival, but also for Europe’s own security and finances.

Ukrainian membership would reshape the bloc and its relationship with a post-conflict Russia.

It would also provide the best path toward internal Ukrainian reform as the country worked to meet EU standards of transparency and rule of law.

But tensions are already growing between Europe’s desire to maintain its tough requirements and Ukraine’s demand for quick entry into a promised land that has given hope to the embattled country.

EU officials like Ursula von der

THIS IS A COURTSHIP WITH CONSEQUENCES FOR THE FUTURE, NOT ONLY FOR UKRAINE’S ASPIRATIONS AND SURVIVAL, BUT ALSO FOR EUROPE’S OWN SECURITY AND FINANCES

Leyen, the president of the European Commission, have been slow-walking expectations for Ukraine, a country that nearly all agree is fundamentally unprepared to join.

“Now there’s more sympathy and the feeling that Ukraine is a part of Europe, but that’s sentimental and not hard-core,” said Anna Wieslander of Sweden, director for Northern Europe for the Atlantic Council organization.

“What’s the plan ahead? That’s what I’m missing,” she added.

“There’s no discussion of what the membership criteria in a new situation should be or what kind of union we get then. We’re putting our heads in the sand.”

European officials say quietly that there is no real way around the current, demanding process of accession, which normally takes many years. And

that assumes an independent post-conflict Ukraine, with strong security guarantees or assurances, which many think can only come with Nato membership, too.

One thing is clear: Restoring a shattered Ukraine and bringing it fully into the European fold will be expensive, turning some countries from net receivers from the EU budget to net providers. It also promises to shift Europe’s centre of gravity eastward in ways that could fundamentally change the balance of power in the bloc.

“The consequences of Ukraine in the EU will be complicated, even explosive,” said Thomas Gomart, director of IFRI, the French Institute of International Relations. “But it will be politically impossible to reject it.”

Since the founding of what became the European Union after World War II, European integration has been seen as a “peace project,” said Ylva Johansson, the EU commissioner for home affairs.

“The EU was intended to be a project to make war impossible on the European continent,” she said. In many ways, it succeeded, as it and Nato took in members of the former Soviet bloc, providing development, security and more prosperity to 100 million people.

— The New York Times

Reality called again...

As you read this, I'm probably winging my way back home from a week in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, after a much-deserved week off, a holiday, a vacation, or whatever. In fact, in a perfect world we probably all think we should get not one, but two holidays every year... each about six months long.

I'm pretty sure that the Sultanate of Oman offers the greatest certainty of sun-on-your-back, anywhere. It's beautiful, largely organic, distinctly cultural tourism, with significant points of difference, and I guess in terms of wooing more visitors to its shores, could be more aggressive in offering a culturally diverse experience to be integrated into many of Dubai's tourist packages. For most who travel to the emirates, a few 'down days' of heritage hospitality, natural beauty, contemplation, meditation, and relaxation, away from the hustle-and-bustle of the big city would be welcome, and as a tourism teaser would almost certainly result in a return to the Sultanate of Oman in the future. It would be a way of leaving them wanting more.

And although beauty does have an address, and it is in Oman, I still think that there are possibilities in two very different market places. The first for the desert-walking, camel-riding, desert camp, cultural and traditional aficionados, and the second for beach-loving, sun-seeking, all-inclusive, music-lovin' young ones. I know... not everyone's cup of tea but think of the money! But for those who are here, or who have been here, whether it's the Mediterranean hotspots like Ibiza, with its eighty beaches, one-of-a-kind Venice, breath-taking Santorini, charming Sicily, the walled city of Montenegro, historic Athens, the cobbled streets of Dubrovnik, the artistry of Florence, the incredible Los Ramblas of Barcelona, or the grand old lady that is Rome. Or how about 'living the life,' in Monaco for a few days, where



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BEAUTY DOES HAVE AN ADDRESS, AND IT IS IN OMAN, I STILL THINK THAT THERE ARE POSSIBILITIES IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT MARKET PLACES

you might run into a proper celeb, that's not just a reality TV wannabe? There's a price to pay for that conflicted decision-making that makes you choose between a lifetime of knowing that "You must save money," according to your parents, and your conscience, that voice inside your head that always seems to be advising of the 'right' thing to do. And then there's that cheeky little chap on your shoulder whispering, "Go... go on... you're only young once." And of course, sun, sand, and spending always win out, don't they? Hehe, and you always go on holiday with the best of intentions: staying cheap, cooking your own meals, taking in the 'culture, "I'm not gonna party all the time!" And what happens? You spend like there's no tomorrow, eat takeaways and fast food the whole time, shout more than your turn, and end up borrowing a few dollars on your last day 'coz you've maxed out your credit card. Hey, you're not alone... everyone does it... it's holidayitis.

Anyway. Holidays. They have always been something we feel we deserve, something we look forward to, and yet the reality is that they are something that rarely live up to their 'advance publicity,' involve spending more than you really want to spend, and you end up arriving home with a shedload of 'stuff' you bought that you will never use or wear, absolutely dog-tired because you tried to relive your youth and prove that a candle really does burn at both ends – it doesn't – and you can bet your boots that the homeward trip is more punctuated with either hangover-itis, sunburnt regret, or long silences, all due to you both wanting to do different things at the same time, leading to unresolved 'issues.' Then when you get home, there's all the post-holiday laundry to be done. It was such fun being away... But, with few genuine regrets, one may well forget the taste of foie gras, caviar, and champagne... yet still continue to dine on new travel experiences. Happy holidays!

TEA TIME!



Attendants serve tea during the opening ceremony of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Saturday. – AFP

The climate-security failure

World leaders, diplomats, intelligence officials, and scholars convened in Germany in February for the annual Munich Security Conference amid a raging land war in Europe and heightened geopolitical tensions. As a result, the focus was on traditional security threats. That is both understandable and disappointing.

While the first anniversary of Russia's war on Ukraine dominated the MSC discussions, along with mass migration and the advent of a new cold war, there was little interest in issues like adaptation to climate change and green finance. Given that the MSC's organisers defined the transformation of relations between the Global North and South as one of this year's themes, the lack of interest in mitigating the worst effects of global warming represents a missed opportunity. More importantly, it reflects a profound misunderstanding of the biggest threat facing our planet today.

This is not the first time that the intelligence community has downplayed a serious (albeit non-traditional) threat. Just as the 2019 conference ignored the risk of a pandemic, this year's conference largely ignored the systemic risks –



Bogolo Kenewendo

The writer is a Special Adviser and Africa Director for the UN High-Level Climate Champions

THE LACK OF INTEREST IN CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND MITIGATION AMONG NATIONAL-SECURITY POLICYMAKERS REFLECTS A PROFOUND MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE RISKS THAT CLIMATE CHANGE POSES TO GLOBAL STABILITY

including economic regression, food insecurity, and forced displacement – posed by climate change.

But unlike the then-hypothetical threat of a pandemic in 2019, climate change is already wreaking havoc around the world. Forty per cent of S&P 500 companies experienced supply-chain disruptions in 2021, and last year's devastating floods in Pakistan are expected to reduce the country's rice production by 7 per cent this year. This will exacerbate food insecurity and fuel political instability in countries that depend on Pakistan for rice imports, such as Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, and Kenya.

As extreme weather events become more frequent and intense, developing countries will likely be hit the hardest. Last year, flooding ravaged the port of Durban, South Africa, cutting off global supplies of cobalt and other commodities. A super typhoon smashing Taiwan or China's industrial heartland would cripple global semiconductor production, just as the devastating floods in Thailand in 2011 disrupted computer hard-drive supplies and caused the prices of cars, cameras, and phones to spike.

To bolster global security and resilience, we must acknowledge that adaptation finance is "an unavoidable necessity," as a recent report by insurer Swiss Re put it (and as last year's United Nations Climate Change Conference in Egypt affirmed by embracing the Sharm El Sheikh Adaptation Agenda). According to the UN, international finance flowing to developing countries for climate-adaptation programmes is 5-10 times lower than what is needed. And the gap is widening: developing countries' annual climate-adaptation needs are expected to increase to \$160-340 billion by 2030 and to \$315-565

billion by 2050.

Fortunately, governments have become increasingly aware of the urgent need to scale up financing for mitigation and adaptation. But they are not moving fast enough to shore up their supply chains ahead of inevitable disruptions. Last November, for example, the Climate Change Committee, which advises the British government, recommended that the United Kingdom offer financial support to countries on which it depends for crucial food imports. In a recent report, the Committee warned that nearly 20 per cent of UK trade relies on climate-vulnerable countries and

noted that a spike in food-import prices would hit the country's poorest the hardest.

This analysis mirrors similar studies conducted in Germany and Sweden that called on developed countries to reduce their exposure to climate risks rather than focus on disaster response. But, at a time when governments are spending billions on bolstering their defence budgets, progress on this front has been sluggish at best, even though neglecting this existential threat could have disastrous consequences.

To survive our age of "polycrisis" – accelerating climate change, war, inflation, and the ongoing pandemic – we must make large-scale investments in mitigation and adaptation. Developed countries must also step up and ensure that lower-income countries on the frontlines of climate change can strengthen their resilience. By funding initiatives like the African Development Bank's Adaptation Fund and the Africa Climate Risk Facility, the international community could provide much-needed protection for the world's most vulnerable populations.

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Last year, flooding ravaged the port of Durban, South Africa, cutting off global supplies of cobalt and other commodities.

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DO-OR-DIE CLASH FOR OMAN AGAINST TAJIKISTAN

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

Oman will look for a strong bounce back when they will take on Tajikistan on Sunday in their match two in Group C for the AFC U20 Asian Cup Uzbekistan 2023. The match will be held at Stadion Lokomotiv and will begin at 16:00 (Oman time).

Oman's junior boys will aim to begin a new chapter in today's encounter after they suffered a heavy 4-0 defeat in the opening match against South Korea on Thursday. Spanish coach David Gordo's boys will look to focus in the crucial tie after the ignominy of the opening match. It is a similar case for rivals Tajikistan as they suffered a 2-0 defeat against Jordan on Thursday after a red card for the latter in the early seconds of the match.

A win will revive Oman's chances to progress to the second round of the Asian championship. It is mandatory that Ahed al Mashaikhi and his teammates to stay calm throughout the game

and prevent missing any scoring attempts. In the previous match, Oman boys did not show the desired performance except two good efforts from Mohammed Bait Said and Ahed al Mashaikhi. The coaching staff of the national team focused during the few training sessions after Korean match on developing the short passes which was the cause for two goals in the previous match.

SHORT PASSES

Gordo analysed the match with the boys and addressed the mistakes that happened to shape the squad for the crucial match on Sunday.

"Despite the defeat in the opener, the team's goal now it to continue fighting in the tournament until the last moment. Our focus is to correct all our mistakes and improve the performance for today's significant fixture," said Gordo.

The philosophy of Gordo depended on style of play that will build-up from the back with a series of short passes.

"There are several ways of



playing style but we have our own specific play style. This is our style and we will work hard to ensure teaching the players to get much better on it. With our style, the boys managed to attend in Asian event. We believe in this approach to football despite the lack of

strong and tall players," he added.

'SHAKE THINGS UP'

The opponents Tajikistan had a good match against Jordan despite their loss but did not capitalise from the red card for a Jordan player early in the game. Tajikistan

head coach Oleg Kubarev affirmed that the team will correct some mistakes and shake things up in today's game.

"Our plan was to be more attacking in the opening game but the opponents changed everything because of the red

card," said Kubarev.

"We could not manage to change our tactics as the players made a few mistakes in the field. Our defence wasn't good. We will analyse everything and then we prepare our plans accordingly for Oman match," Kubarev added.

Seeb snatch fourth place from Dhofar



AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

Seeb defeated hosts Dhofar 1-0 to go fourth in the 17th round of the Omantel League at Al Saada Sports Complex Stadium on Friday.

Ahmed al Siyabi netted the lone goal of the match in the 55th minute.

With the win, defending champions Seeb moved up to the fourth spot in the league table with 29 points. The result put Dhofar in seventh place with 26 points.

Dhofar started the match with a pressing attack on Al Seeb goal. The former champions created continuous early pressure on Seeb goalmouth but could not take advantage of the opportunities available in front of the goal. Yazid al Maashani missed a chance in the sixth minute for Dhofar. Visiting Seeb started with counter-attacks to stay in the game.

Dhofar dominated the first half with several chances that the forwards fail to convert into a goal.

In the 36th minute, referee Mahmoud al Majrafi, gave Dhofar a free kick for a foul.

Ali al Nahhar's good effort was brilliantly saved by Seeb goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi.

The second half began with an exchange of attacks that did not pose a threat to the goal.

Seeb scored the decisive goal of the match through a counter-attack in the 55th minute.

Ahmed al Siyabi received a cross in the penalty area and deposited the ball past Dhofar goalkeeper Mazen al Kasbi.

SHOT OFF-TARGET

In the 73rd minute, Dhofar substitute Hussein al Shehri fired a shot from outside the penalty area. Seeb goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi managed to keep the shot off-target.

For the remainder of the match, Dhofar were active through counter-attacks. Those attempts lacked focus and organisation in front of the goal, so the match ended with Al Seeb winning 1-0.

The match was officiated by Mahmoud al Majrafi who was assisted on the lines by Rashad al Hakmani and Omar al Alawi. Abdulaziz al Ghanbousi was the fourth referee, Abdullah Baaboud, resident referee and Omar al Shezawi, match observer.



Barcelona's Spanish coach Xavi gestures during the Copa del Rey (King's Cup) semifinal first-leg match between Real Madrid CF and FC Barcelona at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid. — AFP

Barca hardest club in world to manage: Xavi

BARCELONA: La Liga leaders Barcelona are the hardest club in the world to manage due to their critics always being ready to snipe at them even after big wins, coach Xavi Hernandez said on Saturday.

Barcelona beat Real Madrid 1-0 in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg on Thursday at the Santiago Bernabeu, but were criticised for only having 34 per cent possession.

Xavi said the demands on his team to play good football as well as winning games and lifting trophies meant his job was trickier than any other in the game.

"You beat Real Madrid 1-0 and it seems that it's not convincing enough, whereas if it was the reverse there would be a national party," Xavi told reporters.

"So it is the hardest club in the world. Now you believe me? I said it last year and got bashed for it.

"At Barcelona you have to win and convince, to have 70 per cent of possession and create 16 chances while the opponent makes three.

"That is the objective, and that is our objective, but you have to understand that there is an

opponent who is the reigning La Liga and European champions, and we're competing with them."

Xavi said it was "absurd" to criticise Barcelona for not keeping the ball when they faced a Madrid side pressing them high up the pitch.

"We did not want to set up in our box, Madrid pushed us there, that wasn't our objective for the game," said Xavi.

On Sunday, Barcelona face Valencia in La Liga, where they have the chance to move 10 points clear before Real Madrid face Real Betis.

Last weekend Barcelona missed a chance to extend their advantage as they lost 1-0 at Almeria.

Valencia, 18th, recently appointed Ruben Baraja as coach and they beat Real Sociedad 1-0 last weekend to bolster their bid to escape relegation.

"They defend well with Baraja, they are more aggressive, generous in their defensive work, very fast," said Xavi.

"We come from the Almeria defeat, we have to change the mindset from the cup. We want three points but the opponent arrives in need too, they have a lot on the line." — AFP

DANIIL MEDVEDEV ENDS DJOKOVIC WIN STREAK

DUBAI: Daniil Medvedev appears to have returned to his best form as he ended Novak Djokovic's undefeated 15-0 start to the season with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over the world number one on Friday.

After briefly dropping outside the top 10 for the first time since July 2019, Medvedev has stormed back into that elite ranking bracket, winning his last 13 matches - within an 18-day period - to set up an all-Russian Dubai final against defending champion Andrey Rublev.

Medvedev had lost his last four meetings with Djokovic, who was on a 20-match win streak stretching back to last year's ATP Finals, coming into the contest.

The 27-year-old is looking to win a third title in as many weeks, having picked up trophies in Rotterdam and Doha in the build-up to Dubai. "Every time I beat Novak is an amazing feeling. He's probably the greatest tennis player of all time," said Medvedev.

"Every time it gives you an extra boost of confidence, like, 'Wow, I was able to beat Novak, I can for sure beat anybody.'"

Djokovic lamented his 14 unforced errors, twice as many as his opponent, but said he walks away from Dubai with lots of positives, feeling strong physically after recovering from a tear in his left hamstring. His participation at Indian Wells which starts on March 8 remains in doubt as the Serb, who has not been vaccinated against coronavirus, waits to hear if he has been granted a visa waiver to the US. "I'm still waiting for the news from America," he said.

"If there's no America, I guess I'll play clay. Monte Carlo is probably the next tournament. If that's the case, I'll take some time off, I'll prepare."

Djokovic will know one way or the other on his chances of playing in the United States on Monday when the draw for the Indian Wells event takes place.

In front of a full house in Dubai, Medvedev opened up a double-break lead and despite Djokovic slowing him down by getting one of the breaks back, the world number seven successfully served out the 39-minute set on his second attempt. Djokovic repeatedly overhit his forehand, which helped Medvedev claim an early break in the second set.

RUBLEV 'HAPPY'

Medvedev maintained his advantage and got his first match



ALL-RUSSIAN DUBAI FINAL PITS MEDVEDEV AGAINST RUBLEV

Russia's Daniil Medvedev serves to Serbia's Novak Djokovic during their ATP Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship semifinal in Dubai. — AFP



Russia's Andrey Rublev hits a return against Germany's Alexander Zverev during their semifinal in Dubai. — AFP

point with a drop shot that sent the crowd to its feet.

The ex-world number one capitalised on his first opportunity to book his place in the final.

He takes a 4-2 head-to-head record lead over Rublev into their Saturday showdown. This week, Rublev is trying to successfully defend one of his 12 career titles for the first time. The Russian second seed punched his ticket to the championship match with his first-ever victory in six tour-level meetings with Alexander Zverev. Benefitting from 39 unforced errors off the Zverev racquet, Rublev needed six match points to defeat the former US Open finalist 6-3, 7-6 (11/9) in just under two hours. — AFP

■ MOUNT HERMON EDGE MOUNT SINAI TO TAKE TITLE



Team Mount Hermon emerged winners of the Talent Scan-2023 football competition held under the auspices of team Mar Gregorios Orthodox Youth Movement (OCTYM) of Mar Gregorios Orthodox Church, Ruwi. In the final held on Friday, Mount Hermon edged out Team Mount Sinai, who finished runners-up, in an absorbing final of the annual Talent Scan competition. After a goalless full time, Hermon struck the winner in the extra-time.





BROKEN AXLE PUTS
NIZAR AL SHANFARI OUT

ABDULLAH AL ZUBAIR RETIRES
AFTER TECHNICAL ISSUES

Al Rawahi finishes 4th in Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge

MUSCAT: Young Omani driver Abdullah al Rawahi accompanied by navigator Nasser al Kawari from Qatar on Cam Am T4 finished fourth in the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge in T4 Group after five days of challenging competition in very high and long desert terrain and dunes. Nizar al Shanfari, the most experienced driver among the three Omani drivers who attended the desert challenge on Can Am T3, retired after an incident. Al Shanfari and his co-driver Ali Merza of the UAE were forced to leave the race as per the instructions received from the organisers due to safety regulations after day three. Al Shanfari was capable to continue the race after he had recorded improvement in the timing during the

stages. Abdullah al Zubair, the third Omani driver with navigator Faisal al Raisi on Jeep Wrangler faced a lot of technical issues in his car during the race. The issues affected Al Zubair's performance cutting down the pace and had to retire by the end of day four. Saudi driver Yazeed al Rajhi won the title in Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge after he pushed a lot during the last two days off the challenge. Dakar champion Nasser al Attiyah of Qatar pulled out of the race after a crash on day three.

NEW EXPERIENCE
Al Rawahi said it was a new experience for him.
“Glad to finish this long challenge and



happy also that I have got the fourth place in T4 Group in this very challenging race for five days. This is my first time on Cam Am in desert races, it was new experience for me and hope that I can do more of these kind of races in the future.”

Al Shanfari was doing well on his T3 group Can Am with improved timing during the initial stages until he faced unexpected setback on day three, when a broken axle forced him to leave the rally after it was the reason behind overlapping the Can Am twice without any injury of both sides neither Nizar or Ali.

The organising committee did not allow the re-entry of Al Shanfari to the Challenge as per the safety regulations. He said: “It was good to be back

behind the wheel. In fact, I was aiming to continue the race up to the end, but as you know these matters always happen in between. I will be back soon in the races but with full programme.”

Al Zubair said he was disappointed after facing several issues during the competition.

The young Omani faced a number of issues during the race specially electrical issues and technical engine problems which forced him to retire.

“I was trying to stay on till the fifth day to complete the race but couldn't do due to the technical issues. This year was very challenging for me with several issues but it was overall a new experiment for me,” Al Zubair said.

Team Charisma retain top on third day of 44Cup Oman

MUSCAT: A third day of breezy conditions at Al Mouj Muscat Marina gave the crews much to ponder as all three races ended with different winners, and entirely different top three finishers in two of the three races. After the winds eased, Team Charisma of Monaco extended their lead to seven points ahead of Igor Lah's Team Ceeref powered by Hrastnik 1860 from Slovenia with Team Peninsula Racing of Great Britain a further eight points back.

Indeed, it was Team Peninsula who set the early pace by winning the first race of the day – ahead of Team Artemis Racing of Sweden - this was followed up by two eighth placed finishes which severely hindered their progress. Team Charisma finished fourth with Team Ceeref in fifth in the opening race. The two teams remained close in the second race, but this time they were first and second when Team Charisma won and Lah's Ceeref had to settle for the runners-up spot.

The third race showed the excitement and unpredictability of the 44Cup as leaders Team

Charisma owned and driven by Monaco-based Dutch businessman Nico Poons, had to settle for third and Team Ceeref for fifth. Team Nika of Monaco, owned by Vladimir Prosikhin, founder of Monaco-based telecoms company Infosecurity Services, recorded their first 44Cup Oman race win with Team Aqua second.

While the top two continue to stretch the fleet, a tight battle is forming for third place.

Peninsula Racing currently occupy the position on 39 points but Aleph Racing of France and Artemis Racing are lurking in close proximity tied on 41. Team Nike and Team Aqua are tied on 48 points in joint fifth.

Nasser al Maashari, Main Trimmer onboard Team Oman Sail, said, “really hard conditions again today, very windy. We have not been used to strong winds on this boat, and hope for lighter winds tomorrow on the last day. We can perform better than we have so far, and the conditions will really help. There is still a lot to learn about this boat, but with practice and training on board we



feel we can improve quickly.

“There are eight members in the crew, and everyone has a job during the race. We are most accustomed to a five-person crew and while there is not much difference, it is natural that if you train more then you will perform better.”

The 44Cup is the world's most competitive 'owner-driver' multi-city yacht racing series which gives business owners the opportunity to race with and against the world's best sailors in some of the most beautiful and diverse sailing venues around the world. The

44Cup Oman provides a unique platform for Omani businesses to network with international C-class executives, founders, entrepreneurs and investors during a weekend of spectacular offshore action.

This season's 44Cup features

five stages. The second event in the 44Cup season will be in Marstrand, Sweden, from June 28 to July 2, and then Cowes, UK, from August 9-13. The fourth event of the season will be at the Alcaidesa Marina in Spain, next to the border with Gibraltar, before heading to Calero Marinas in the Canary Islands for the season finale.

The 44Cup Oman is presented by official partners Oman Sail, organisers of the event, and host venue Al Mouj Muscat, in association with Automotive partner Mercedes-EQ, and official supporters Transom Catering and Tanuf Water.

Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air, said, “We are proud to serve as the official airline partner of the 44Cup Oman. As the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, we extend our signature Omani hospitality and the highest standard of service to the sailors, coaches, and class managers, an experience that is guaranteed to leave them refreshed and ready to take on the challenge at Al Mouj Muscat Marina for the opening round of the championship.”

business



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Oman to showcase unique sustainable projects at OSW



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

As a nation that is committed to transitioning to a sustainable and circular economy, the Sultanate of Oman will showcase unique sustainability-driven endeavours pioneered by different organisations at the upcoming Oman Sustainability Week (OSW). The highly anticipated series of events are scheduled to take place on March 12-16, 2023, with many of the events taking place at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

A national-level event, OSW will be hosted under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and will witness the presence of decision-makers, industry experts and thought leaders from various sectors.

A key highlight of the event will be the OSW Site Visits programme on March 16, 2023, which is designed in collaboration with the Strategic Partners of OSW, ASYAD Group, be'ah, Nama Group, Petroleum Development Oman, Oman LNG, OQ and Shell.

The programme will offer attendees an opportunity to explore and gain invaluable insights into active projects, learn about international best practices and techniques, and better understand how these sustainable projects have been contributing to building a sustainable

environment across Oman.

As part of the site visits, Petroleum Development Oman will offer a tour of its MAF premises, specifically RAH and KW to provide attendees the opportunity to see the 3D-printed building.

Meanwhile, bp Oman will feature as part of the programme, its solar robot project at GUtech. be'ah Oman will take attendees through the operations of its Sohar Industrial Waste Treatment Facility (IWTF) as well as the Barka Engineered Landfill.

In addition, Nama Group's site visit will include the wetland sales center and lagoons, whereas ASYAD Group will illustrate developments in the SOHAR Port and Freezone in North Al Batinah, and OQ will showcase the Majis Industrial Services.

Ashley Roberts, General Manager said, "OSW is an excellent networking platform that will enable visitors to connect and collaborate with others in the industry who prioritise sustainability. The OSW Site Visit Programme, while imparting a deeper understanding of how large-scale sustainability activities function, will also shine the spotlight on the companies that have integrated sustainability into every aspect of their operations, thereby further attesting to their unfaltering dedication to fostering a sustainability-centric economy."

Green energy, green steel to power growth of Duqm SEZ

KEY BENEFITS: SEZs, free zones and industrial cities stimulate investment in local governorates and spur growth of SMEs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

Well-developed infrastructure and investment-friendly regulatory regimes continues to bolster the growth of Omani industries in the various special economic zones, free zones and industries cities managed by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ).

This, in turn, has spurred In-Country Value (ICV) development, exports of Omani goods to global markets, and the growth of the national economy, according to Dr Said bin Khalifa al Quraini, General Manager of Investment Development at OPAZ.

This broad strategy is in line with the Council of Ministers' recent exhortation to the Omani industrial sector for the development of a national policy aimed at reducing imports, increasing exports and enhancing local In-Country Value (ICV).

Citing the example of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) in Al Wusta Governorate, the official noted that the total volume of investments now exceed over RO 3.6 billion.

Major projects include Duqm Refinery and the Crude Oil Storage Park in Ras Markaz, in addition to clusters that will host modern industries. One such cluster of interest is related to renewable energy with a lot of international companies seeking to set up clean energy projects in SEZAD.

Accordingly, an area spanning 250 square kilometres has been allocated for renewable energy projects and two projects, specialised in the production of green hydrogen, are already under





The industries in OPAZ affiliated zones have played a pioneering role in introducing the national product into the supply chains of large and transformative industries, and working to facilitate introducing a service system to involve SMEs and logistical services that support foreign projects.

DR SAID AL QURAINI
Manager of Investment Development at OPAZ

preparation and construction, said Al Quraini.

Furthermore, there is interest in the development of green energy powered industry, including the green steel mill by Jindal. This plant will integrate with projects producing green hydrogen for the manufacture of green steel and aluminium for export to many countries worldwide.

Other factories include Karwa Motors, Duqm Hongtong Piping Factory, food processing industries and many others, he said.

Al Quraini explained that the industries in OPAZ affiliated zones have played a pioneering role in introducing the national product into the supply chains of large and transformative industries, and working to facilitate introducing a service system to involve SMEs and logistical services that support foreign projects.

The system also serves to attract the inflow of know-how, especially in the growing technological revolution, notably artificial intelligence, as well as building a skilled national workforce.

"The industrial cities and their economic growth in the governorates have contributed to empowering SMEs through the business opportunities offered by factories to these enterprises, providing job opportunities and supporting the In-Country Value", commented Dr Said Al Quraini on the important role of industrial cities in developing the governorates and their contribution to economic growth.

For example, the integration between Sohar Freezone, Port of Sohar and Sohar Industrial City has stimulated commercial and economic growth in the wider North Al Batinah Governorate of Al Batinah North.

This integrated area has so far attracted RO 11.7 billion in investments distributed across manufacturing and petrochemical industries, logistics and food services, and clean energy projects.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has witnessed a commercial boom in the marble industry and its byproducts, as well as and spare parts for the oilfield sector. Salalah Free Zone and Raysut Industrial City in Dhofar Governorate feature a number of pharmaceutical industries worth RO 76.5) million, he added.

Oman's health insurance segment grows 17.9% in 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 4

The health insurance sector – one of the fastest growing segments of Oman's insurance industry – recorded a 17.9 per cent increase in gross written premiums to RO 191.5 million in 2022, up from RO 162.4 million a year earlier – an uptick attributable to the impact of Covid-19 as well as the early uptake of Compulsory Health Insurance, which is set to become mandatory this year.

According to figures collated by the sector regulator, the Capital Market Authority (CMA), based on the unaudited financial statements of insurance companies, the overall industry's gross written premiums climbed 12.2 per cent to RO 545.5 million in 2022.

Aiding this growth was the

recovery of the economy, buoyed by high international oil prices and hydrocarbon export earnings.

Insurance companies are gearing up for an exponential rise in the health insurance class when a timeframe for the phased implementation of the Compulsory Health Insurance scheme is announced by authorities.

This timeframe, among other supporting guidelines, are anticipated in the Executive Regulation to be issued by the CMA. Known as 'Dhamani', the officially titled 'Unified Health Insurance Policy' will be mandatory for expatriate employees (and their dependents) of private sector organisations, domestic workers, and tourists and visitors to the Sultanate of Oman.

Many large companies and multinational organisations have



also extended health insurance coverage to their Omani staff and their families to help attract and retain talent.

Health insurance coverage now benefits an estimated 610,000 individuals in Oman, up from around 400,000 in 2017, according to official data.

This number is anticipated to surge over the next several years when a phased timeline is announced for the progressive implementation of compulsory health insurance in the country.

Other classes of the insurance

OVERALL, THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY HAS GROWN TO AROUND 21 INSURANCE COMPANIES AND ONE REINSURER WITH COMBINED ASSETS TOTALING RO 1.197 BILLION.

business have also posted positive growth during 2022 in line with the country's post-pandemic economic recovery.

Gross written premiums (GWP) increased 12.2 per cent to RO 545.5 million last year.

Growth in the GWP of individual classes was as follows: Group Life Insurance – 26.1 per cent; Liability Insurance – 21.1 per cent; Health – 17.9 per cent; Property Insurance – 14.5 per cent; and third party Motor Insurance – 8.4 per cent.

Overall, the insurance industry has grown to around 21 insurance companies and one reinsurer with combined assets totalling RO 1.197 billion.

Last year, in a move to safeguard the rights of policyholders and to ensure the sustainable performance of insurers, the CMA made it mandatory for insurance companies to adopt a new risk-based approach in calculating their solvency margin of insurance companies, which reflects their ability to discharge their obligations towards policyholders.

It replaces the previous mechanism in which the solvency margin was measured according to adequacy of assets compared to the liabilities. The new approach is expected to bolster investor investment in Oman's insurance industry.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds unveils gold rate protection offers ahead of the festive season

MUSCAT: With an impressive retail network of over 305 outlets across 10 countries, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, the 6th largest jewellery retailer globally is providing customers with the best opportunity to invest in gold, through the 10 per cent advance booking option, be it for personal use or as an investment.

The brand has announced this offer as part of the upcoming festive season, through which, customers can just pay 10 per cent advance for their favourite jewellery and block the gold rate until April 23, 2022, protecting themselves from any increase in gold rate during this period.

If gold rate increases at the time of purchase, customers can avail the blocked rate and if it reduces they can still draw mileage of the reduced rate i.e. a customer intending to buy gold jewellery worth RO 1,000 just needs to pay RO 100 to avail



the advance booking offer and in turn get protected from the increasing gold rates.

This offer will be valid across all Malabar Gold & Diamonds showrooms. Customers

can either pay the advance directly at the outlet or online, via Malabar Gold & Diamonds' mobile app.

"Even though Gold has retained its status as a safe haven investment, the constant fluctuation in prices can cause doubts amongst potential customers looking to invest in Gold.

With the gold rate protection offer, we are providing our customers with a great opportunity to invest in gold by paying just a 10 per cent of the overall value in advance. With this offer, customers can be assured that they can reap the benefits of the fluctuating gold rates, regardless of whether it goes up or down.

This is also a golden opportunity for customers looking to buy their favourite jewellery in light of the festive season that is fast approaching", commented Sham Lal Ahamed, MD-International Operations,

Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

With the upcoming festive season, this exclusive offer from Malabar Gold & Diamonds will help customers shop for their favourite jewellery, without having to worry about the gold price. Gold being a reliable investment is one of the intrinsic reasons for people buying gold jewellery while also serving as an adornment.

It is the ease to liquidate the metal for cash without losing much value even during difficult times that has further increased its dependability.

In addition to the 10 per cent advance option, customers can also pay 50 per cent and 100 per cent of the amount as advance to get gold rate protection for 90 days and 180 days respectively. This option will be available to customers throughout the year across all stores of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Vodafone Oman kicks-off one year anniversary celebrations



MUSCAT: Vodafone Oman is throwing open its first-year anniversary celebrations to customers across the Sultanate of Oman with a special raffle draw giving away a Tesla Model 3, a Sur-Ron electric motorcycle, Samsung S23 Ultra phones and daily 100GB.

Running from March 1 to April 13, customers will need to subscribe, renew, or upgrade their plans to Vodafone RED Premium, Explore, Elite or Pioneer plans to be automatically entered into a draw.

Usama al Saifi, Brand and Comms Manager at Vodafone, said: "Twenty-twenty-two will go down in Vodafone history as the year a new-generation of telcos was introduced in Oman – one that is radically different, radically digital and radically simple.

It has been a truly rewarding journey and our customers have joined us every step of the way, so to say, 'thank you', we chose to break even more new ground, offering the first ever grand prize of a Tesla in the Sultanate of Oman."

The winner of the Tesla Model 3 grand prize will be announced at end of the promotion, while the new owner of the Sur-Ron Light Bee X electric motorcycle be announced mid-promotion. Other prizes also include weekly Samsung S23 Ultra and a daily draw for 100GB of data valid for four weeks.

The raffle kicks off a series of celebration to mark Vodafone's entry into the market.

Bank Nizwa sponsors 2nd International Conference of College of Sharia Sciences



MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision and its ongoing plan to strengthen the bank's Phygital (Physical + digital) network to better serve its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has announced the launch of its self-service kiosks at prominent business hubs across the Sultanate of Oman.

The installation of the new kiosks is expected to greatly boost self-service by customers for a number of services in the future. The bank had earlier

showcased its self-service kiosk at Comex 2022, where a large number of customers and the general public were able to try it out. Customers can now apply for new debit cards and receive replacement cards on the spot by using the self-service kiosks.

The new kiosks are installed at the Bank Muscat Head Office, Mall of Oman, Salalah Grand Mall and Salalah Gardens Mall, with more kiosks to be soon launched at Nizwa Grand Mall, City Centre Sur, City Centre Sohar, City Centre Muscat and A'Raya Complex in Al Khuwair.

Bank Muscat launches self-service kiosks at business hubs across Oman

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Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir N al Raisi, General Manager - Personal Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is delighted to continue innovating and launch new products and services backed by state-of-the-art technology in close alignment with Oman Vision 2040. The new self-service kiosks enable our customers to apply for and print out new debit cards for themselves without the limitation of branch timings.

Customers can thus make use of this new



innovative channel to serve themselves quickly and efficiently, which is very much aligned to our customer-centric vision of serving you better, every day."

Bank Muscat offers a large number of innovative banking services and products in tune with Oman's move towards a cashless society. The bank's online and mobile banking platforms have been upgraded significantly over the recent past, resulting in a rapid increase in registered users. The consistent rise in active customers on its e-channels reflects the growing popularity of digital banking channels.

Omani law firm wins prestigious award

MUSCAT: Al Busaidy, Mansoor Jamal & Co (AMJ) has won the globally recognised 'Oman Law Firm of the Year' at the Chambers Middle East Awards held in Dubai recently.

Widely considered to be one of the leading publications on global legal rankings Chambers Awards are highly sought after. To be eligible the firm had to submit a detailed submission and be subject to a vigorous independent assessment process involving the input of clients and competitors alike.

The award is due recognition of the firm's involvement in innovative and complex legal deals that have taken place in the Sultanate of Oman over the past 12 months.

AMJ is a top-tier, globally-rated, independent, commercial law firm and the largest in Oman.

Panasonic unveils 2023 business strategy, registers impressive growth rate in Oman

MUSCAT: Panasonic Marketing Middle East & Africa (PMMAF) unveils the company's business strategy for Middle East and Africa for 2023. Held during a convention in Oman last week, Panasonic also renews its commitment to the Omani market as it strengthens its relationship with its local partner Oman Marketing and Services Company LLC (Omasco).

John Hardy, Director – Sales, Panasonic Marketing Middle East and Africa (PMMAF), said: "Oman has always been a key market for Panasonic and we are proud to say that we have been enjoying the trust and confidence of our Omani customers which helps us maintain market leadership status especially in the home appliances category as well as the air conditioning segment.



John Hardy

Today, as we emphasise anew our commitment to the Omani market, we are again honoured to have the support of Omasco as we strive harder to further Panasonic's mission of providing innovative solutions with industry-leading features and more importantly, with the requirements of our local customers in mind."

During the convention, Panasonic also unveiled its new global motto for 2023 — "Create Today. Enrich Tomorrow".



Takashi Sasaki

The new slogan embodies Panasonic's commitment to advance further its efforts on building a greener planet for a more sustainable future and providing solutions that make life safer, healthier especially for the future generations. The company laid out its plans on expanding its market share, especially in Oman to cater to the evolving customer demands with solutions that make homes and businesses safer and healthier.

Takashi Sasaki, Director Consumer Marketing of PMMAF said that in Oman, the company registered a 209 per cent growth in sales in residential air conditioner with nanoe X technology and R32 refrigerant — its flagship product, and 130 per cent growth in Commercial AC equipped with Nanoe-X.

On the other hand the new Abaya Wash washing machines, especially front load segment, — positioned as distinctive hygiene systems that protect families by eliminating 99.99 per cent of bacteria from the clothes while washing — registered an impressive 282 per cent growth in sales in Oman, while its nanoe Hair Dryer records 129 per cent growth.

Meanwhile, for microwave

ovens, especially Air frying series, registered a 216 per cent sales increase here in Oman.

Sasaki emphasises "In the Middle East region, we aim to align our strategies and offer the widest product to cater to the demands of our customers." During the convention, Panasonic plans to introduce a lineup of 60 new products to support this mission in 2023.

Key highlights amongst many were the Nanoe-X Air conditioners which is capable of inhibiting pollutants, viruses, and bacteria to clean and deodorise. The air conditioners, with the revolutionary nanoe X technology, will not only cool and heat the surroundings but also clean the indoor air, so consumers can benefit from a healthier life.

The top 5 cybersecurity threats facing businesses today



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

In today’s digital age, businesses of all sizes rely heavily on technology to operate and store sensitive data. However, with this increased reliance on technology comes an increased risk of cyber threats. According to Statista, global cybersecurity spending is expected to reach \$270 billion by 2026, up from \$173 billion in 2020.

This demonstrates the growing investment in cybersecurity measures as businesses seek to protect themselves against threats such as phishing attacks.

Cybercriminals are constantly evolving their tactics, and businesses must be proactive in protecting themselves against these threats.

Here are the top 5 cybersecurity

threats facing businesses today:

1. Phishing attacks are one of the most common and effective methods used by cybercriminals to steal sensitive information from businesses.

These attacks often take the form of emails that appear to be from a trusted source, such as a bank or a vendor. The email will usually contain a link that, when clicked, will take the user to a fake website designed to steal login credentials or other sensitive information.

To prevent phishing attacks, businesses should train employees on how to recognise and avoid them, implement multi-factor authentication for all accounts, and use email filters to block suspicious messages. But this recommendations should apply to all types of cyber threats.

2. Ransomware is a type of malware that encrypts a business’s files and demands payment in exchange for the decryption key.

These attacks can be devastating for businesses, as they can result in the loss of important data and cause significant financial damage.

To protect against ransomware attacks, businesses should regularly back up their data, keep their software up to date, and implement strong security measures such as firewalls and anti-malware software.

3. Insider threats are a major concern for businesses, as they can come from current or former employees, contractors, or other insiders with access to sensitive information.

These threats can be intentional, such as a disgruntled

employee stealing data to sell to a competitor, or unintentional, such as an employee accidentally emailing confidential information to the wrong person.

4. Social engineering attacks are a type of attack that relies on manipulating people into giving up sensitive information.

These attacks can take many forms, such as a cybercriminal posing as a trusted authority figure to gain access to a business’s network, or a hacker using personal information obtained through social media to gain access to an employee’s accounts.

To protect against social engineering attacks, limit the amount of personal information available online.

According to IBM, the average cost of a data breach for a business is \$3.86 million, underscoring the

financial damage that can result from successful social engineering attacks.

5. The Internet of Things (IoT) refers to the network of devices connected to the Internet, such as smart home devices, industrial sensors, and medical equipment.

These devices can be vulnerable to cyber attacks, as they often have weak security measures and are not regularly updated.

The growth of the cyber security industry is driven in part by the rising threat of cyber attacks and the need for businesses to protect themselves against them.

However, the cybersecurity skills gap remains a challenge, with the global shortage of cybersecurity professionals which grew to reach 3.5 million in 2021, according to Cybersecurity Ventures.

Hong Kong’s office landlords face a tough rebound

THOMAS SHUM

Hong Kong offices are emptier than in other Asian financial centres. While its borders are open and the city has dropped its mask mandate, a recovery looks tough. Commercial real estate space is growing, and there are fewer tenants.

Overall prime office vacancies in the hub rose to over 12 per cent in the three months to December, up from less than 10 per cent last year, according to property consultancy JLL.

Singapore and Tokyo boast rates well under half of Hong Kong’s level, and figures there are either improving or roughly unchanged. Premium office rents in the gateway to China have fallen nearly 30 per cent since mid-2019.

Most worrying is waning interest from the People’s Republic. Last year, mainland-based companies accounted for less than 6 per cent of all leases in Hong Kong’s key Central business district, from nearly 30 per cent in 2019.

Ongoing weakness in the world’s second-largest economy means those tenants may be slow to return. Some developers have fared better than others. The \$10 billion Hongkong Land, the largest landlord in the Central district, maintained an enviable vacancy rate of around 5 per cent during Covid.

Elsewhere, the vacancy rate hit 21 per cent last year at CK Asset-owned Cheung Kong Center, home to Goldman Sachs’ main office. Meanwhile, HSBC, financiers in the city are fretting over losing their private offices as the bank aims to cut its non-branch real estate by 40 per cent globally on pre-pandemic levels, though a person familiar with the situation said the reduction may not apply to the city.

Positive signs are emerging. Invesco’s recent 10-year deal for a lease in Jardine House, walking distance from the IFC mall, shows tenants have won some pricing power, since earlier agreements typically lasted for two to three years. But it is a vote of confidence in the city’s long-term potential.

And it’s not just financial groups: auction houses Christie’s, Phillip’s and Sotheby’s, are all expanding their Hong Kong presence.

Even if business optimism is returning, office supply in Hong Kong is set to rise by 3 million square feet, roughly 3 per cent, this year as new towers such as the Henderson and Cheung Kong Center II come onto the market.

Hong Kong’s economy shrunk for three of the last four years, and its population is slimming too. Floored landlords will be eagerly awaiting the return of companies from mainland China.

— Reuters

What Europe’s economy needs now



WERNER HOYER

The author is President of the European Investment Bank.

Faced with growing investment gaps, most European policymakers seem to think it is time for another broad-based stimulus package, despite high inflation and high levels of public debt. But I am afraid they are wrong.

Stimulus would simply force the European Central Bank to increase interest rates further and faster. What we need instead is targeted support, namely investments in sectors that are green and likely to promote resilience and competitiveness.

The necessary resources must be mobilised quickly and on an EU-wide scale, with the express goal of mobilising private investment. There has been much handwringing in Europe over the threat posed by the US Inflation Reduction Act.

Yet despite all the fears it has provoked, the IRA is ultimately a step in the right direction. It provides massive support for green sectors where more investment is urgently needed, and it shows that the United States and Europe are finally aligned

in pursuing a sustainable economic transformation.

Europeans should welcome US eagerness to scale up its renewable-energy capacity, and that it is putting its money where its mouth is. The IRA’s goal of building modern low-carbon infrastructure is not itself a problem for the European economy.

On the contrary, in sectors like wind energy, where Europe is a technology leader, higher investment demand is a positive development. In addition to having a positive effect on the climate, US subsidies will provide new business opportunities for European firms. To be sure, some elements of the new US policy present challenges.

The IRA offers substantial support for solar panels, wind power, energy storage, and clean hydrogen equipment, but most of these benefits are limited to producers who can claim “made in America” status. This setup of course excludes European manufacturers, who do not receive the same subsidies from the European Union.

That raises the risk that some European equipment manufacturers and hydrogen producers pull up stakes and move to the US, adding to the plight of the EU’s already under financed innovation sector.

Just when we need to reinforce the emerging supply chain for green tech, some of the IRA’s provisions could disrupt it – benefiting America at Europe’s expense.

But, by keeping open communication channels with our American partners and targeting our own investments to the right

sectors, Europe can neutralise the problematic parts of the IRA while still capitalising on the good parts.

Such dialogue is crucial, because we do need to persuade the US to reconsider some of the IRA’s provisions, especially those that go against long-standing principles of open and fair competition.

In pursuing such talks, however, we must not present ourselves as victims. Europeans should accept that many of our current investment gaps lie far beyond the scope of the IRA.

As the European Investment Bank’s annual flagship report shows, over the past ten years, Europe has invested 2 per cent less per year in productivity enhancements than its competitors have. The IRA should be seen as a wake-up call for addressing this under-investment.

We urgently need to funnel more money into European clean power, cleantech manufacturing, and digitalisation all of which are crucial to the green transition and future competitiveness.

This may sound like a big job, but the truth is that we already have most of the tools that we need. The EIB Group provides a wide array of risk-sharing and long-term financing solutions that can make promising innovations more palatable for private investors.

Our model for crowding-in capital has allowed us to kick-start major breakthroughs in life sciences, the energy sector, quantum computing, and satellite technologies.

We can send a strong signal to the market that EU institutions and governments are willing to promote

cutting-edge technologies with debt and equity investment from the very early stages of development.

We are ready to work with the European Commission and EU member states to create a new pan-EU equity fund to support large ventures that are strategically important for the net-zero economy.

Some might wonder why we would focus on large ventures, given that “ventures” tend to call to mind start-ups that entrepreneurs launch in their garages.

But, in fact, we are seeing more and more massive ventures emerging at the cutting edge of innovation.

Consider battery producer Northvolt, with its new giga-factory in northern Sweden. It is a startup, but you would need a thousand garages to accommodate it.

Ventures of this size are precisely what Europe needs, and they require multibillion-euro investments up front, usually in the form of equity and equity-type funding.

An EU equity fund thus could add significant value by helping more cutting-edge firms get started. And though the investments I am talking about are huge, they would also be precisely targeted.

The beauty of this approach is that it is pan-European. It would promote a level playing field for EU member states and thus protect one of our key achievements: the single market.

It also would help us confront our global challenges without casting aside our values. It would be a quintessentially European response to the IRA and to the broader geopolitical challenges Europe faces.

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A man uses his mobile phone to take a picture of the euro sculpture outside the headquarters of the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. — Reuters

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Oman is an ideal kitesurfing destination

Marcelo Antunes is the pioneer of kitesurfing in Oman and he believes that the country has all the potential to become a top kitesurfing destination offering diverse location that is ideal for the extreme sport year round... **P20**



Phytoplankton blooms see two-decade surge along world's coastlines

HUGE BLOOMS OF phytoplankton — microscopic algae floating on the ocean's surface — have become larger and more frequent along the world's coastlines, according to new research, bringing benefits to fisheries but also potentially causing harm.

Between 2003 and 2020, coastal phytoplankton blooms increased by about 13 per cent in extent, covering an additional 4 million square kilometres of the global ocean, the Nature study found. And the blooms occurred more often, up by 59 per cent during that

period.

While marine animals such as fish and whales eat phytoplankton, it can also prove toxic in large amounts, starving the ocean of oxygen and leading to "dead zones" that wreak chaos on the food chain and fisheries. A 2016 algal bloom near Chile, for example, cost salmon farms \$800 million.

"Phytoplankton blooms can be really beneficial," said study co-author Don Anderson who leads the US National Office for Harmful Algal Blooms at



Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. "Many of the really productive fisheries in the world's ocean are driven by blooms. It's important to understand why they might be changing."

Scientists used satellite observations to look for blooms, programming a system to pick up the colour of the

algae. However, they weren't able to distinguish between benign and harmful blooms. While some regions saw weaker blooms over the past two decades, including the California Current, blooms strengthened in the northern Gulf of Mexico and the East and South China Seas.

BEHIND THE BOOM

What's driving the increase in phytoplankton blooms varies by region, scientists said. In some cases, warmer sea surface temperatures appear to be behind the boom. Changes in climate can also mess with ocean circulation, affecting mixing between ocean layers and how nutrients move around the ocean.

Human development also plays a role. Fertiliser runoff from agriculture can spike nutrient loads in the ocean, leading to blooms. Researchers also found that more aquaculture around places like Finland, China and Vietnam might be associated with more algal blooms.

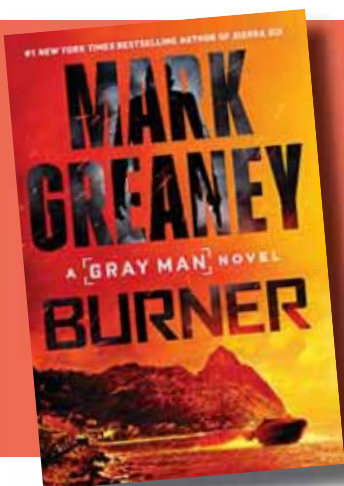
Outside of fertiliser use and aquaculture, "I would also be interested in relationships between population increases along coastal areas and bloom increase," said Nandita Basu, a Canada Research Chair in Global Water Sustainability and Ecohydrology not affiliated with the study. "This would be especially relevant for some countries in the southern hemisphere where a major part of the domestic waste is not treated." — Reuters

READ

BURNER

BY MARK GREANEY

The 12th book in the Gray Man series. Stolen records, the Russian mafia and the C.I.A. complicate things for Court Gentry and his lover.



FASHION

A model presents a creation from Balmain Womenswear Fall-Winter 2023-2024 collection during Paris Fashion Week in Paris. — AFP



ENTERTAINMENT

French soprano singer Faustine de Monès performs on stage during the 30th annual Victoires de la musique classique (Classical music awards) ceremony at the Dijon Opera Auditorium. — AFP





Gabonese village fights to save forest from logging

UNDER THE GREEN canopy of the ancient Massaha forest in northeastern Gabon, Arsene Ibaho leads a group of visitors towards a tree that he says is sacred and speaks to his people. Red clay is daubed on everyone's foreheads enabling them "to connect to the ancestors, and warn them of our coming," says Ibaho. With that accomplished, the 43-year-old conducts a ritual at the foot of the precious kevazingo tree, reciting words in the local language, Kota. Ibaho is one of around 200 inhabitants in Massaha, a village in the vast province of Ogooue-Ivindo more than 600 kilometres (375 miles) from the capital Libreville. The sacred tree is also embedded in folklore as the bringer of good luck for fishermen during the mid-year dry season, said Ibaho. Rituals at the tree enabled fishers to fill a 15-metre (50-feet)-long boat with a bounty of fish, "and all the village could tuck in," Arsene said. Beatrice Itsatsame, 69, recounted her trips into the forest, where she collected nkumu, a small edible vine, and also bushmeat for ceremonies. "The forest is rich, it supports us," she said, wrapped in a blue boubou robe with a yellow motif.

- DEBATE - Massaha, lying on the Libumba, a tributary of the Ivindo River, finds itself at the heart of a passionate debate about the future of logging and conservation in Gabon. The central African state is hosting a two-day summit starting on Wednesday on how to protect tropical forests — a treasure chest of biodiversity and buffer against carbon emissions. Loggers were given authorisation to exploit trees in the Massaha area covering 11,300 hectares (28,000 acres) — a territory nearly the size of Paris. Ibaho said the loggers set up a lumber yard in a forest clearing where there once had been a village. Their bulldozers gouged a swathe through the area, making it impossible to identify the location of three graves, he said, wielding a machete to clear undergrowth. "They had no idea where the old villages were — now our history



has been cut in half," said Serge Ekazama-Koto, a community spokesperson.

- PROTECTED STATUS? - Angry and fearful, the local community three years ago asked the government to scrap the logging licence on the grounds of suspected violations and a threat to "biocultural heritage." In March 2022, their activism garnered a visit from Lee White, the minister of water, forests and the environment. White, a British-born conservationist, subsequently stopped the logging, ordered the company to withdraw its machines and floated the theory of creating a new status of protected area. The idea is being discussed as part of an overhaul of the logging code. White, in an interview with AFP, acknowledged there had been problems. "The fact that bulldozers came to a sacred forest close to a village means that we failed at every stage," he said. That's why, he said, "we are currently asking — do we need a stronger status?" Local people say they have been heartened by recent progress since White's visit. Last month,



a government team went to the area to geolocate the coordinates of sacred sites — a key step in the process of protection. The authorities, representatives of the community and NGOs are looking at the status options. They include a model inspired by West African countries that aims to protect traditional sites, permits sustainable harvesting of resources and facilitates participation by local people. Communities "want to be at the heart of governing the area" yet current protection status reflects "a model of state management," said Alex Ebang Mbele, head of

an NGO called Nsombou Abalge-Dzal Association (NADA), which is calling for new conservation laws. "Often, it's the state that imposes the creation of protected areas," said Lucien Massoukou, director-general of wildlife and protected areas at the forest and environment ministry. But "when a community has the will to preserve its space, it starts to take on ownership of the concept of conservation," he said. Ibaho said local people had already chosen a name for the site in the Kota language — Ibola Dja Bana Ba Massaha, meaning "the reserve for all the children of Massaha." — **AFP**

DISCOVERY

Genetics study lays bare Ice Age drama for humans in Europe

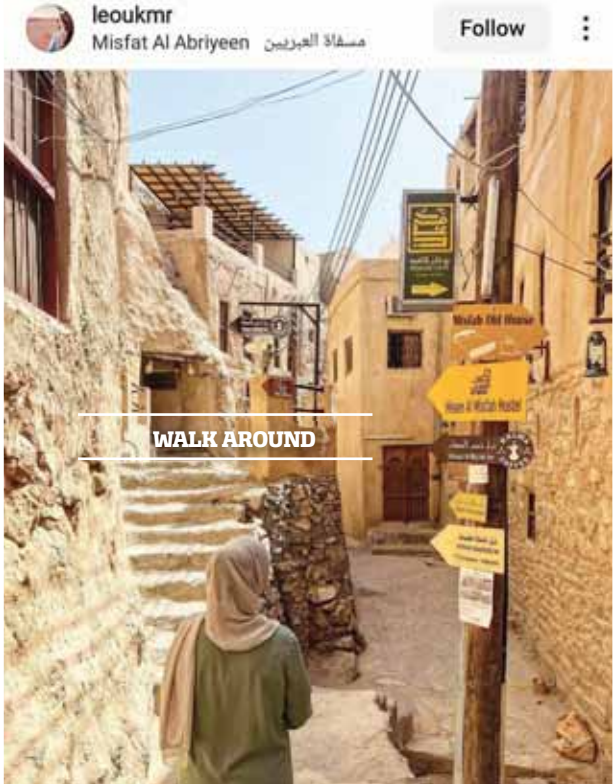


EUROPE WAS NO balmy paradise during the Ice Age, with the vast glaciers that blanketed large parts of the continent rendering wide swathes inhospitable for humans. But our species — a new immigrant to Europe — Researchers on Wednesday unveiled an analysis of genome data from 356 hunter-gatherers who lived in the region between 35,000 and 5,000 years ago, a span that included the Ice Age's coldest interval between 25,000 and 19,000 years ago. This enabled them to decipher prehistoric Europe's population dynamics, including the movement of groups of people and some key physical traits. While some populations hunkered down and survived in relatively warmer parts of Europe, including France, Spain and Portugal, others died out on the Italian peninsula, the study showed. It also provided insight into the advent of characteristics such as light skin and blue eyes in Europeans. "It is the largest ancient genomic dataset of European hunter-gatherers ever produced," said paleogeneticist Cosimo Posth of the University of Tübingen in Germany, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature. "It refreshes our knowledge of how human beings survived the Ice Age," added paleogeneticist and study co-author He Yu of Peking University in China. Europe had been the domain of the Neanderthals, our robust and large-browed cousins, but they went extinct roughly 40,000 years ago once our species, Homo sapiens, established a firm foothold on the continent. Homo sapiens arose roughly 300,000 years ago in Africa, then spread worldwide, reaching Europe at least 45,000 years ago. Various groups of hunter-gatherers roamed the European landscape, hunted large mammals including woolly mammoths, woolly rhinos and reindeer, and collected edible plants. During the Ice Age's coldest period, known as the Last Glacial Maximum, ice sheets called continental glaciers covered half of Europe, with much of the rest in tundra conditions with frozen subsoil. The only people who survived this harshest period in Europe were hunter-gatherers who had found refuge in portions of France and the Iberian peninsula, the study found. The Italian peninsula, previously thought to have been a refuge for people during this period, was just the opposite — all its inhabitants perished. "It is a big surprise that humans went extinct on the Italian peninsula," said study senior author Johannes Krause, director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Germany. That region was repopulated around 19,000 years ago by hunter-gatherers from the Balkans, who subsequently expanded throughout Europe and by around 14,500 years ago had replaced everyone who had lived there, the researchers found. "From around 14,000 to 13,000 years ago, the climate became warmer and most parts of Europe gradually turned into forest, similar to today," Yu said. The Homo sapiens individuals who entered Europe after a migration out of Africa were dark-skinned. The genome data showed a change towards light skin among people in Europe between 14,000 and 8,000 years ago that accelerated with the subsequent spread of farming on the continent. Certain traits of Western European hunter-gatherers, known for blue eyes and dark skin, differed from their counterparts in Eastern Europe, who had light skin and dark eyes. Those two populations started to interbreed around 8,000 years ago only after the first farmers arrived in Europe from Anatolia and pushed all the hunter-gatherers northward. The genome data showed that populations associated with what is called the Gravettian culture dating to around 34,000 to 26,000 years ago — known for certain types of stone tools, cave paintings and small sculptures called "Venus" figurines — were not in fact homogeneous. Instead, there were two largely unrelated populations sharing cultural attributes. "A big surprise for me," Yu said, "is the fact that Gravettian populations carried two genetically distinct ancestries and that one of those disappeared from Europe." — **Reuters**



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AROUND THE WORLD

RECIPE

Chicken Breasts With Lemon



IN THIS RECIPE, which Pierre Franey brought to *The New York Times* in 1992 in one of his 60-Minute Gourmet columns, two teaspoons of lemon zest are added to a simple sauce of lemon juice, thyme, garlic and shallots. It is, at once, lively and elegant. To round it out, it needs a sturdy accompaniment. Franey suggested mashed potatoes with garlic and basil, with just a little olive oil swirled in.

By Pierre Franey

Yield: 4 servings
Total time: 25 minutes

Ingredients:
1/2 cup flour for dredging
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
4 skinless boneless chicken breasts, about 6 ounces each
2 tablespoons olive oil
4 sprigs fresh thyme or 1 teaspoon dried
2 tablespoons finely chopped shallots
2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
2 teaspoons grated lemon zest
3 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 cup chicken broth, fresh or canned
2 tablespoons butter

Preparation:
1. Season flour with salt and pepper, and dredge the chicken all over. Remove the excess flour.
2. Heat the oil in a heavy skillet large enough to hold the chicken pieces in one layer. Add chicken and cook, uncovered, over medium heat for 5 minutes or until lightly browned.
3. Flip the chicken and cook for 5 minutes more, or until cooked through. Carefully remove the oil from the skillet, leaving the chicken. Discard the oil.
4. Add the thyme, shallots and garlic, and cook for about a minute. Do not burn the garlic. Add the lemon rind, the lemon juice and the broth.
5. Scrape the skillet to dissolve the brown particles that cling to the bottom. Add the butter, and cook for 3 minutes longer. Serve immediately. — **NYT**

LIFESTYLE

Doll's world: 'Japan's Barbie' casts spell over grown-ups



WITH HER WIDE EYES and demure smile, Licca-chan is known as "Japan's Barbie". And her appeal is spreading to all ages, with adults turning the doll into a social media superstar. One fan posts wry videos of the plastic poppet to over a million Instagram followers, while others painstakingly craft miniature clothes and share photos of their fashion shoots. Minami Murayama, a 34-year-old homemaker who once had ambitions of becoming a fashion designer, said that her "dream has come true at one-sixth of the size" thanks to Licca-chan. "If I see a stylish woman wearing something that I couldn't wear because of my age or body size, Licca-chan can still wear it and look good," said Murayama, who owns around 40 dolls and has hand-made over 1,000 outfits for them. Licca-chan has been a favourite of Japanese children since she appeared in toy shops in 1967, and manufacturer Takara Tomy has sold over 60 million of them. The company's official biography casts her as an 11-year-old girl with a Japanese designer mother and a French musician father. At 22 centimetres (8.5 inches) tall, she is smaller and less glamorous than Barbie, who Murayama describes as "a supermodel" compared with Licca-chan's more "familiar" look. Murayama spends hours making clothes for her dolls and favours denim, which her husband helps her bleach and tear to achieve the "distressed" look. She has built a series of intricate sets, using tiny props to decorate mini cafes and fashion studios. "There are lots of different jobs I would like to do, such as running a cafe or a bakery or being a fashion designer," she said. "Of course, there's no way I could do them all in real life, but I can do them all in a doll's world."

- 'SHE MAKES MISTAKES' -

Murayama is a fan of a popular social media channel whose name translates as "Licca-chan's Real Life". It features tongue-in-cheek videos and photos of the doll in mundane situations such as struggling with an overstuffed rubbish bag or relaxing at home in pyjamas. The channel offers an antidote to the idealised lives that people project online, said its creator, who has over a million Instagram followers but prefers to remain anonymous so her videos don't get her into trouble at work. "The Licca-chan in Licca-chan's Real Life doesn't live a glamorous life — she lives a real

graphic designer, played with Licca-chan as a child and revived her interest around two years ago as a way to relieve stress. She thinks the lingering effects of the Covid pandemic have given people more time to spend at home with their hobbies and less chance to leave the house. "When you want to go out but you can't, you have far fewer opportunities to buy new clothes," she said. Many people have "satisfied that desire by dressing up dolls instead", said Baba, who often recreates outfits from her own wardrobe for her dozens of dolls to wear. Takara Tomy is aware of its



life in a messy room and she makes mistakes," she said. "If you show people that even someone like Licca-chan lives like that, it gives them the courage to be comfortable with themselves." Takara Tomy is not keen on "Licca-chan's Real Life", saying the videos have "a different worldview" from their fiercely protected official image of the doll. But the channel has struck a chord with Licca-chan's adult fans, who form an online community and swap homemade garments and accessories. Ryoko Baba, a 33-year-old

growing adult fan base and has launched a "stylish doll collection" aimed at older customers. Murayama said "there are lots of adults who play with kids' toys" in Japan where "there's not really a separation" between the two, with train set collectors being one example. Baba, who describes Licca-chan as a "national icon", believes the doll's appeal will only grow. "Recently I've seen a lot of comments from people saying they didn't know that this world existed," she said. "I hope I can help spread the word." — **AFP**

ART

Kandinsky masterpiece sells for record \$45 million



WASSILY KANDINSKY'S masterpiece "Murnau Mit Kirche II", recently recovered by the descendants of its owner, a German Jew killed by the Nazis, sold for \$45 million on Wednesday, a record for the artist according to auctioneers Sotheby's. The 1910 painting, a colourful vision of the German village of Murnau with its church spire stretched like the peaks of the Bavarian Alps, heralded the Russian master's move towards abstraction. The oil work once adorned the dining room of the Jewish couple Johanna Margarethe Stern and Siegbert Stern, founders of a textile company. At the heart of Berlin's cultural life in the 1920s, counting Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka and Albert Einstein in their circle, they built up a collection of around 100 paintings and drawings. Siegbert Stern died of natural causes in 1935.



His wife fled to the Netherlands but died in Auschwitz in May 1944 after being captured by the Nazis. "Murnau Mit Kirche II" was identified only a decade ago in a museum in the Dutch city of Eindhoven, where it had been since 1951. It was returned last year to the heirs of the Sterns, whose 13 survivors will share the proceeds. They include one member of the family who was in hiding during the war. "Nothing can undo the wrongs of the past," said a statement from the family. But the painting's restitution was "immensely significant to us, because it is an acknowledgement and partially closes a wound that has remained open over the generations". Also up for auction was Edward Munch's 1906 "Dance on the Beach", which was sheltered from the Nazis in a barn in a Norwegian forest and which has been the subject of a restitution agreement. The painting fetched £16.9 million (\$20 million, 19 million euros). A Frantisek Kupka painting, "Complexe" (1912), which once belonged to the actor Sean Connery, sold for £4.6 million. Proceeds will go to the Connery Foundation, which operates in Scotland and the Bahamas. The sale is part of a series of auctions in London devoted to modern and contemporary art. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | MARCH 5 | 2023

Oman is an ideal kitesurfing destination



By Rumpa Mitra
Instagram: @rumpa_mitra

Photos by Abhilash Pillai
Instagram: @theimagegrapher

Pioneering the kitesurfing programmes in Oman, Marcelo Antunes believes that the country has all the potential to become an international destination for the said sport and extreme outdoor adventure.

Marcelo has mapped out the seasons perfectly and can distinguish which are the best locations for kitesurfing on a particular map — something he said comes with the territory and is a necessity for kitesurfing lovers.

"I fell in love with the waves and winds of Oman. To my surprise, the country actually has one of the best weather conditions for the sport," the Brazilian kitesurfing instructor said.

Marcelo founded Majan Sea Sports, which has been operating in the country for almost a decade now. It has established itself as the best kitesurfing training school in Oman, and it has also paved the way for international kitesurfing celebrities to discover the potential of Oman.

"Oman is one of the best places to try and learn kitesurfing amongst the Gulf countries. Oman's waves and wind

provide an opportunity to practice the sport nearly for the entire year. From late April until the beginning of September, the best place to learn is Masirah Island, and from mid-December to mid-March, Muscat is the favourable place," he shared.

Kitesurfing is a sport that involves using wind power with a large power kite to pull a rider across a water, land, or snow surface. It combines the aspects of paragliding, surfing, windsurfing, skateboarding, and wakeboarding.

The kite is attached to the body by straps, allowing the person to jump high in the air. Understanding the controls of the kite is one of the prerequisites before riding a kitesurfing board. An experienced kiteboarder knows how to utilise the wind using the large kite and smoothly ride the surfing board to propel through the water.

One of the countries where kitesurfing is the most popular is in Brazil where Marcelo is from.

"In Brazil, there are coastal places where local Brazilians choose to live to do the sport regularly," he said.

As a professional trainer, Marcelo shared that one has to go through a basic course consisting of three levels to be able to kitesurf.

The first covers risk awareness, safety procedures, and how to fly the kite on the beach and shallow waters. The second covers sailing the kite

with and without a board. On the third level, the student reaches the independent level where she/he can safely cruise around autonomously. Students who learn from him can get certified by the "International Kiteboarding Organization (IKO)" as he is one of the authorised to certify the learners and give them their kitesurfer certification.

Believing and investing in the potential of Oman as a kitesurfing hub, Marcelo has taken it upon himself to spread awareness and the benefits of the sport, enticing a new generation of Omanis and residents to give the sport a try.

Kitesurfing is commonly known as an extreme sport, but Marcelo said that it can be learned by any age group with a moderate fitness level. For him, it's always safety first, so before anyone hits the board or the wave, he has to be confident in their abilities first.

Most of the students take 12-15 hours to complete the basic course, where you can learn safety points, how to handle the kite, and how to surf with the board.

While some may think that the price of learning is expensive, Marcelo said that they've made the equipment easily available for rent.

Marcelo suggested that the best way to learn is by taking the full package, which ensures 5-6 days of continuous

training and faster progress. Apart from the fun outdoor activity, this sport teaches you how to keep calm in any adverse situation, something that can also be applied in real life.

Marcelo looks forward to seeing more people on the beach enjoying the sport and he is working hard to make it as a fun, engaging activity that everyone can do.

For his personal record, Marcelo recently created a buzz when he kitesurfed nonstop from Dimaniyat to Al Sawadi Beach, an adventure that covered 40 kilometres and took 1 hour and 35 minutes to complete.

Marcelo shared that its success heavily relied on the support of his team, including a rescue boat on standby, as well as the professional photographers who documented the attempt.

Currently, at this time of the year, kitesurfing lovers are mostly seen at the Quriyat or Ras al Hadd beach due to the favourable wind direction. Marcelo can be contacted through his Instagram account: [@ma.br.oman](https://www.instagram.com/ma.br.oman)