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March 2019

## Artificial Intelligence is the new buzzword

SUR  
By Suad Ali Al Alawi

The concept of 'Artificial Intelligence', or AI as it is called, entered our imagination through the movies. It is all about machines that can think and decide, and perhaps take action. Some of these all-time favorites from Hollywood are *Star Wars*, *Real Steel*, *The Terminator* and *Wall-E*. And then there is *Ra One* from Bollywood.

So will we have machines here in Oman in the future that will work instead of us, or simply support us so our work gets easier? So important is the idea of AI that a conference held in Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, focused on this futuristic technology.

Ms. Sanaa Al Hadabi, an instructor

from Communications Department, Sur CAS attended this conference. "The focus was on how AI will impact our careers in the future," she said.

Speakers at the conference touched upon such technologies as 'bots' (short for robots) that could write or edit news at a very high speed.

"Speakers also discussed about the future fears of the media in the light of artificial intelligence and how the media can maintain its function with the evolution of artificial intelligence," Ms Sanaa added.

Dr. Ramkumar from the Information Technology department, and also Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, explained what artificial intelligence is. "It is a technique that provides support for machines to behave like a human. It is not about replicating a human but about the support it provides to the human in an efficient and effective way," he clarified.

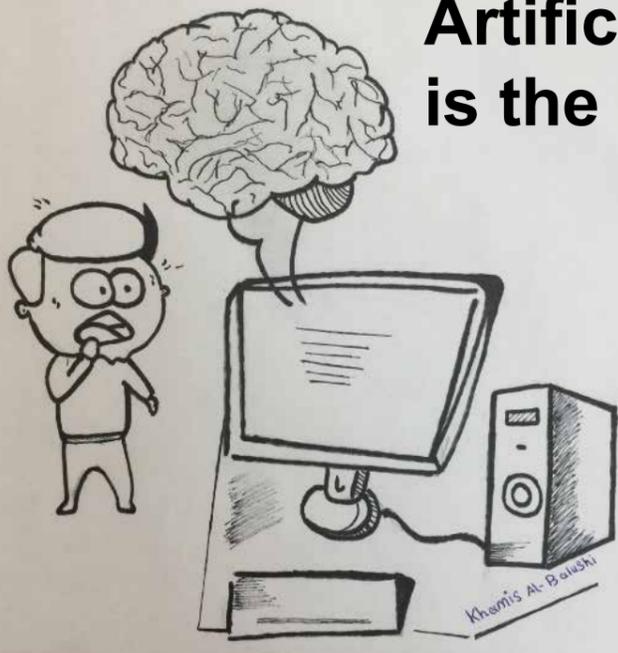
He added, "AI is not only about robots, but is also an intelligent way for the machine to think by itself and support the human being. This is what we call artificial intelligence."

Examples of AI implementation include forecasting the weather or a route map with the human giving the idea of what to do but the machine does it by itself.

Dr. Ramkumar points out that AI can be used in business. For example, a program can identify what major products consumers are using, and the area has further developed new things like machine learning and deep learning.

In Oman, which is a technology-driven country, areas like automation, health and business will bring about development of the organization, he added.

Maybe, the future will be like Hollywood and Bollywood movies after all!  
With inputs by Mashaal Al Saadi



## Sur students visit Muscat Book Fair

MUSCAT Feb. 27

By Suad Ali Al Alawi

Students of Sur CAS on Tuesday visited the Muscat International Book Fair where 5,23000 titles are on display. The Muscat International Book Fair is considered to be an important event in the Sultanate and every year attracts students from all around the country. Therefore the morning hours on certain days are reserved for students.

Speaking to the press, Minister of Information Dr. Abdul Monim bin Mansour Al Hassani, had said, "This edition features 882 publishers from 30 countries, and for the first time, we will see contributions from China, Bulgaria, Canada, and Sri Lanka."

Eman Al Batrani, a student of Sur CAS, said, "Behind every book there is a great writer. I Always choose books that helps to develop my abilities, skills and my positive side."

Another student visitor to the fair said: "It's awesome to visit this kind of book fair which gives me a chance to select my own books. This book fair fits all age groups due to the availability of a variety of books."

This year's exhibition marks the launch of the e-procurement system for the first time, an official said.

The Muscat International Book Fair was opened on Feb 21, 2019 and will close on March 2, 2019.



## Traditional Horse Show at Sur Horse Track

By Mashaal Khaled Al Saadi  
SUR, March 2, 2019

A Traditional Horse Show organized by Sur Equestrian Club was held this evening under the patronage of His Highness Taymor bin Asaad Al-Said, as part of the traditional horse sports festival this year.

His Highness, the patron of the event, invited the people of the wilaya of Sur to participate in the event that showcased the talents of 40 horsemen from different wilayas. Men, women, adults and young people, all attended the event which began with the traditional dance of Razaha and was followed by poetry. Then began the Traditional Horse Show.

Abdul Razzaq Al Makhani, a participant in the event, said, "This was not my first time. Since 2015, I have been riding horses, and I continue to partici-

pate in such events that are a heritage and tradition, as these are important to me."

The Sur Equestrian Club has a vision for the development and enhancement of the sport and its conservation. Accordingly, it develops future plans to establish school equestrian education and the establishment of a horse track for use by owners of horses in society.

Mahfouz bin Dawood Al Balushi, an organizer of the event, said, "Our ancestors taught us the art of equestrianism. It is a beloved hobby and a tradition among young people and we are now trying to do as our ancestors did."

The Traditional Horse Show displays horses and the talents of their riders or owners. The performances are traditional Omani ones in which Omanis express their joy. The evening concluded with the dance called Azazi.



Photographs by Mashaal Al Saadi



Turn to Page 4 for more on Sur's horse traditions

## The Holy Qur'an Competition: Expanding Omani thought

**75 competitors from Jalan take part in the Sultan Qaboos Competition for Holy Qur'an**

SUR

By Bahja Al Muaasbi

People of all age groups participated in the Sultan Qaboos Competition for the Holy Qur'an which began in October with 75 competitors arriving at the Sultan Qaboos Mosque in Jalan Bani Bu Hassan.

A distinguished panel of experts received men and women competitors of different ages along with parents. In the morning, the competition was for men and in the evening, for women.

The 75 men and women competitors came from Jalan Bani Bu Ali, Jalan Bani Bu Hassan, Al Wafi and Al Kamil to take part in a competition consisting of six levels in memorizing and

reciting of parts of the Holy Qur'an.

Noting that the competition is meant to encourage Oman's citizens to memorize the Holy Qur'an and follow the guidance of its teachings, administrator of the competition in the Jalan Sector, Said Al Muhajiri, said: "We see a huge increase in the number of competitors. This means the awareness and spread of information about the competition has begun to increase amongst the individuals in society and they are becoming more aware of the importance of the Holy Qur'an in their lives."

The aim of the competition is to raise a Quranic generation, to identify find good readers of the Holy Qur'an and to enhance the Sultan-

ate's presence in international Quranic competitions. "This competition seeks to improve the students' abilities in memorizing Holy Qur'an," Said Al Muhajiri added.

Juwayriya Juma Al Muaasbi is one such young contestant in the competition. "My parents have encouraged me to memorize the Holy Qur'an from my childhood," she said, adding she is very grateful to them for their direction.

Considering that the Holy Qur'an consists of 30 juzah or chapters, it is not an easy task to render it to memory. How then do competitors achieve this end?

While some young competitors look to their parents to learn a correct reading of the Holy

Qur'an and take feedback from them to rectify any mistakes, others learn to read the Holy Qur'an in a mosque from a Sheikh – a person who is reputed for reading the Holy Qur'an in an excellent way. The sheikh seats his pupils in a circle around him and guides their reading.

Still others use technology, such as cassette tapes or CDs of readings to learn in an accurate way.

The popularity in Oman of the Sultan Qaboos Competition for the Holy Qur'an reflects the country's Islamic Culture and the interest of its citizens in the Islamic Religion. The Holy Qur'an Competition is considered to be an essential part of expanding Omani thought.

## In search of water

**Residents of the mountain village Qawda take the initiative to dig their own well as the falaj running to their farmlands dries up**

SUR

By Zahra Mohammed Al Shaabi

Residents of Qawda village near Sur have been suffering due to a shortage of fresh water to irrigate their farms. In recent months, the villagers have been searching for new sources of water to save their farms, and have been drilling a new well.

Sheikh Mohammed Al Shaabi, the village leader, said, "We have not seen any rain for a long time. This has caused the *falaj* (canal) to dry up and has forced us to search for a new source of water."

Residents of Qawda decided to hire a locally well-known water scout, Mohammed Al Henaie, who reportedly has a device to explore for ground water. In addition, they hired some Asian workers to do the digging. After three weeks of effort, they finally found water!

Nasser Al Shaabi, one of workers, recounted the effort involved: "We worked very hard from the beginning, but we could not find water. Some of the workers were disappointed and disheartened. But we kept working. And finally we did find water. It has made us all very happy."

But finding the water was not enough. It needs

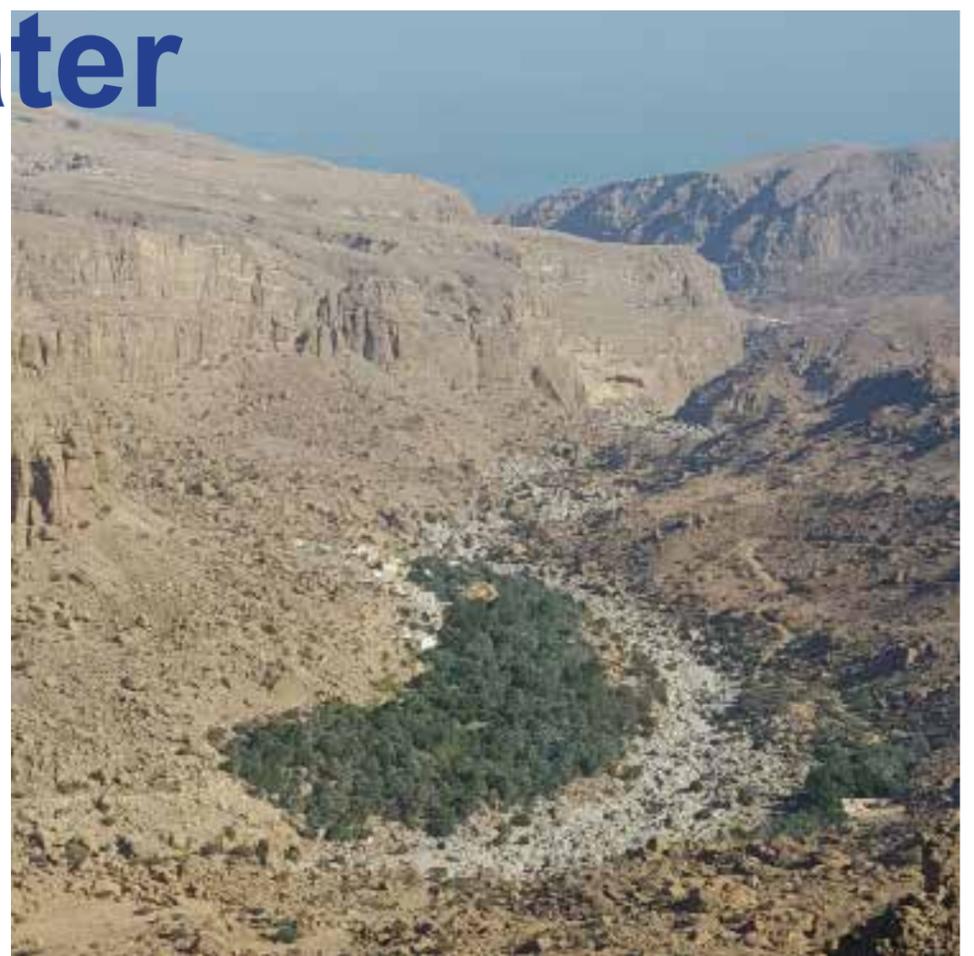


to be connected to the falaj for the water to flow to the farms. This was not only a difficult step in the work, but was also an expensive endeavor. The work on the well was stopped after a month due to a lack of funds.

Mohammed Al Shaabi said, "We have asked the Sur Municipality for help to continue the work. So for now, the work is stopped until the authorities find the resources to help us."

Residents of Qawda are hoping that government help will come quickly so that they can finish a job well-begun.

Qawda is a mountain village near Sur and is



a region of agriculture, so there are many farms nearby. The people and the farms traditionally depend on the water flowing in the falaj. But a lack of rain in recent times in the arid conditions of Oman has caused the falaj to dry up.

Recent climate change is believed to have

caused the two major cyclones that the Sultanate has faced in the past 12 years.

The damage to property and infrastructure notwithstanding, these storms are thought to have resulted in a large supply of groundwater in the region.

# Dazzle with a smile

**A regular dental regimen can give you too a bright, beautiful smile to rival the smile of any celebrity!**

By Suad Ali Al Alawi

From the time she was a child, Mashael Al Saadi loved to eat sweets – toffees, candies, or chocolates. Her favorite time for eating them was after dinner, before she went to sleep.

"I wouldn't listen to anyone when they told me not to eat sweets," she rues. The sugar intake caused bacteria to proliferate in her mouth resulting in caries in her teeth. As a result, this student of Sur CAS has been a regular visitor to the dentist from childhood.

Many people in Sur society suffer from a lack of awareness about keeping their teeth clean, resulting in oral hygiene problems.

Dr. Asila Al Salty, Head of the Dental Department of Government Hospitals in the South Sharqiya region, offers some advice: "People

should brush two to three times a day after food. They should use dental floss to remove food stuck between the teeth and use mouthwash twice a week to kill oral bacteria."

She cautions that the steps of cleaning the teeth should be done correctly to avoid problems of inflammation and gum disease, like gingivitis.

Some foods, like sugar, promote the growth of bacteria in the mouth, which in turn damage the enamel covering of teeth leading to cavities and caries, and possibly to a lifetime of painful teeth.

In order to avoid dental problems, the World Health Organization urges people to adopt regular, healthy diets with a reduced intake of sugar. It recommends eating more vegetables and fruits; to stop smoking and taking soft drinks and

to visit the dentist every six months as a preventive step.

Sometimes, a lack of dental care can lead to serious diseases. Dr. Eman Juma Al Arimi, general dental surgeon in Sur city, said, "Studies show that bacteria accumulates in the mouth. Chronic gingivitis may contribute to causing Alzheimer's disease and heart disease as bacteria enter the bloodstream and reach the heart causing inflammation in the internal membrane of the heart, or reach the brain leading to the killing of cells in it."

Clean teeth and a beautiful smile are a reflection of a healthy body. Ameera Al Marzouqi, a mother of three, knows this. She said: "From the time they were two years old, I began to teach my children how to clean their teeth. Now, they clean their teeth after every

meal. I also told them a story about a boy who lost his teeth because he ate too many sweets. So now, they eat fewer sweets."

Mashael now wishes she had heeded her parents and friends when she was younger. "I recently had to have some teeth taken out, and I have many cavities. I visit the dentist regularly, but sugar has been my undoing," she says with regret.

Dr. Eman Al Arimi also cautions people against resorting to bleaching or whitening of teeth as the chemicals used can cause inflammation of the gums, sensitivity of the teeth to hot and cold foods and drinks and roughness of the teeth leading to attachment of bacteria. This is essentially due to the chemicals eroding the protective enamel covering of the teeth.



## Traditional games still have players in Oman

SUR

By Jameela Al Muqimi

In the high-technology world that we live in today, playing games means sitting with our eyes glued to the screens of our tabs, mobiles or computers and moving our fingers...

Luckily, in Oman, there are people who still play real games as opposed to virtual ones. Traditional games, such as *Al Hawalees*, *Al Amber* and *Lulu-kich* still flourish. But not everyone remembers the details of these games.

*Al Hawalees*, considered to be a traditional game, is still played in many towns across Oman. Abu Masood Said, an interested player of *Al Hawalees*, explains: "It is a game played by two people using 28 stones and by making 28 small pits in the sand. Each player owns 14 such holes, and tries to get all the stones of his opponent out of his holes by moving the stones from one pit to the next and so on." To win the game, one has to get all the stones of his opponent out, he added.

Said Ahmed, a young player interested in *Al Hawalees*, said, "This game can be played indoors also. You can draw circles on foldable boards and play it at home with the family."

*Al Amber* is another traditional game played by young people who are active and can run quickly. "You have to have a strong focus to hit the target," said Hamed, a player.

His friend, Said Ali, explained that the game involves two teams with an equal number of players. The playground is a long rectangle and on the middle of the pitch, empty bottles of water or soft drinks are placed around a heap of sand.

One team inside the rectangle starts filling the bottles with sand while dodging rubber balls that the other team outside the border targets them with to prevent them filling the bottles.

If the inside team is successful in escaping the balls and fills the bottles with sand, they shout the word "Amber", indicating they have won this round of the game. The team outside the rectangle is the winner if it is able to attack the team inside and prevent them from filling the bottles.

Another interesting game is called *Lulu-kich* or



"Lulu", and is played with glass marbles. Little boys can often be seen playing this game with marbles in the ground near their homes. They start by making a pit in the ground into which they shoot their marbles, also called "lulu". The kids use their index fingers and thumbs to catapult the marbles into the pit, and the owner of the marble that rolls near the pit gets the chance to play.

The real game starts when the players hit opponents' marbles. Players try to rescue their marbles from opponents near the pit while still trying to get their marbles into the pit in order to win the game. "The winner of this game is the person whose marble can touch his opponent's marble," said Maryam, a little girl who likes to play *lulu-kich*.

Traditional games also have an audience that is interested in watching. Salma, a member of the audience said: "The way of playing traditional games is so interesting for the people who are playing it and also for the people who are watching them."

While the name of the game may change according to the state or region, most traditional games are played in more or less the same way across the Sultanate, even today. Young players are showing an increased interest now in such traditional games and it is recommended to them that the games be played either in the morning or in the evening, to avoid the hot sun during the day.



Traditional games in progress (clockwise from top left), *Al Hawalees*, *Lulu-kich* and *Al Amber*



# Arabian horses display their mettle in event at Sur



By Khamis Al Balushi  
SUR, Nov. 15

About 50 horses ran at an Arabian horse event that started here on Thursday evening under the patronage of Sheikh Amer bin Said Al Mashrafi, Member of the Shura Council representing Sur City, in the presence of horse breeders and important community members.

Amer bin Said Al Mashrafi, a resident of Sur, said: "This festival celebrates horses, which all people in the Sultanate find interest in. It is one of the heritages that Omanis cherish, for the horses symbolize originality and pride and they also motivate the new generation to get interested in practicing this sport."

UNESCO has recently included camel and horse racing in Oman in its "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage".

The Arabian Horse Festival is a unique sporting event that has been maintained for many years and is held in many places across Oman. Arabian horses are well known the world over as fast, light horses. In Oman, they can be seen as part of desert sports tourism, in horse tournaments, equestrian

events and they also find a place in literature.

In Sur, the Arabian horse event featured sports related activities and also showcased talent and creativity.

Horse racing and the development of horse racing in Sur has contributed to the renewed interest in race horses. People come here to purchase the finest Arabian breeds and to train them for running in races, as well as for the purpose of breeding. So the Sultanate of Oman is a venue for the buying and selling of horses and motivates the participation of foreign citizens and horse breeders, and ultimately takes the Arabian steed to international podiums.."

Said Al Alawi, a horse rider, was happy to see many youth showing interest in the horses event. "Such events help to encourage young people to practice and refine their talents and motivate them. Pictures taken here in Sur of Arabian horses and their many achievements raise their reputation in the world."

Arabian horses in Oman were recently featured in an article in the *National Geographic* magazine.

Horse races in previous seasons have wit-

nessed great success with international acclaim from experts in the field of horse racing. The development of horse racing in the Sultanate has positively reflected on the development of the skills of the

Omani rider. The growing interest in high pedigree Arabian horses draws horse lovers and horse breeders to Oman, which has earned a good reputation for itself in international horse events and forums.



Photographs by Khamis Al Balushi

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