

Sisters in sync



MUSIC REPORT

By NAMAN ARORA
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SYMPHONIC sisters Haya and Layan Al Hamad made history last weekend when they became the first young female pianists to represent Bahrain on a global stage and perform at the award ceremony for the prestigious Unesco King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa Prize for the Use of ICT in Education, at the Unesco headquarters in Paris.

Bahrainis Haya, 12, and Layan, nine, performed a three-minute dulcet duet of Valse Sentimentale, as composed by Catherine Rollin, before the first in-person ceremony for the award ceremony since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic got underway.

"We were contacted three weeks ago by the Education Ministry and are deeply honoured that Haya and Layan got this opportunity to represent Bahrain's pianists," the girls' mother Hind Kamal told *GulfWeekly* after the performance.

Layan and Haya were contacted three weeks ago by the Education Ministry and chose a contemporary piece, which they had practised previously, to play on stage.

Although they picked a contemporary composition, the two have a preference for Classical music, including Bach and Mozart.

The Abdulrahman Kanoo International School students have both been learning the



SYMPHONY: The two sisters during their performance of Valse Sentimentale

piano for the last five years, encouraged by their mother who studied piano for 10 years while growing up.

"We have been learning to play duets together since we started," Haya said, during an interview after breakfast in Salzburg, Austria – the birthplace of famous Classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – which the family is visiting as a treat for the girls' spellbinding performance.

Layan added: "We sometimes fight over which of us gets to play the primo – the primary – and secondo – the bass – parts.

"And, sometimes, we even learn both parts individually. Ultimately, a duet is more about a synced performance,

regardless of which part each of us play."

For their Unesco performance, Haya played the primo and Layan played the secondo part.

This might be the first time the two have played on a



HEIGHTS: The two sisters in Paris before their performance

global stage, but have been performing all over Bahrain at school music festivals.

The family credits local composer and Bahrain musical band composer Zeyad Zaiman for recognising the talent in the girls early on and encouraging them to take opportunities to showcase their musical acumen.

They both got distinction during the Russian Musical Examination recently and have performed at both the British School of Bahrain and St Christopher's School music festivals.

And, as a cherry atop their symphonic sundae, the sisters

will be opening the Bahrain Summer Festival on July 11 at 7pm at the Cultural Hall.

Haya will be performing Mozart's Fantasia in D Minor KV397, Elena Cobb's Arabia Étude-Tableau, Bach's Prelude in D Minor BWV935 and Catherine Rollin's El Torero.

Layan will be performing Mozart's Sonata in C Major Number 16 K.545 (First Movement), Bach's Prelude in C Minor BWV999, Franz Liszt's Étude in D Minor S136 Op. 1 No. 4 and an encore of Catherine Rollin's Valse Sentimentale.

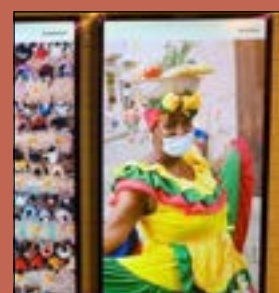
For more details, follow @haylaypiano on Instagram.



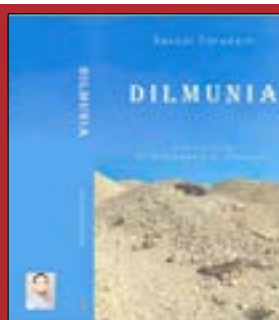
APPLAUSE: Education Minister Dr Majid Al Nuaimi, fifth from left, with Haya and Layan, fourth and fifth from right, after their performance



BOOKING THERAPY
Help for youngsters
SEE PAGE 2



COLOURFUL IMAGES
Bahrain in New York City
SEE PAGE 3



BAHRAINI AUTHOR
Going global
SEE PAGE 4



MELODIES FROM BUHAIR
Expressive event
SEE PAGES 4-5



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Therapeutic message...



BOOK REPORT

By MAI AL-KHATIB CAMILLE
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PROMINENT psychologist Dr Mariam Alammadi has written and illustrated a series of children's books in a bid to draw attention to mental health and encourage young or old to not shy away from seeking help when needed.

Earlier this month, the founder of The Child & Family Foundation Centre independently published her first book called *My Therapist & I, Nasser Goes to Therapy* about a young boy living in Bahrain.

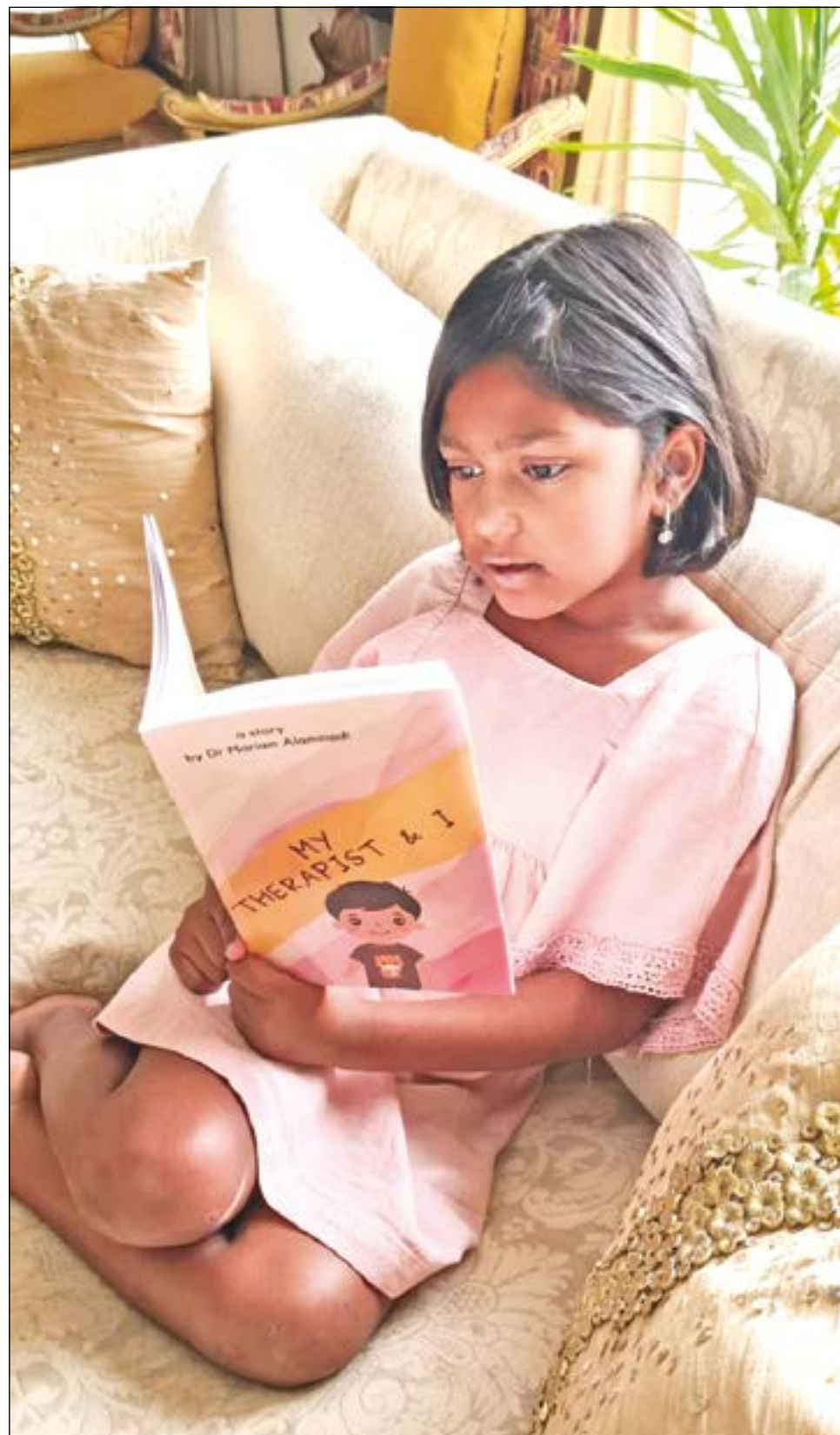
It is the first of three short children's stories, each 28 to 38 pages long, which will 'focus on exploring therapy from the eyes of a child'.

"As a psychologist working in Bahrain, I always get asked by parents how do they explain bringing their child to a therapist, or what books do I recommend," said Dr Mariam. "They are often fearful as to how their child or teenager will react. I honestly could never really find books that I felt would resonate with patients and I felt that this would be a great way for our community to relate to the subject and its message."

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), in 2019, nearly a billion people – including 14 per cent of the world's adolescents – were living with a mental disorder. Suicide accounted for more than one in 100 deaths and 58 per cent of suicides occurred before age 50.

Mental disorders are the leading cause of disability and people with severe mental health conditions die on average 10 to 20 years earlier than the general population, mostly due to preventable physical diseases.

Depression and anxiety went up by more than 25 per cent in the first year of the pandemic alone and the stigma, discrimination and human rights violations against people with mental health conditions



READING TIME: Isabel Arackal enjoying the book

continues to be widespread in communities and care systems everywhere.

As for WHO's 2022 global statistics, 10 per cent of children experience a mental health disorder but never receive help, treatment or care.

"The consequences of children not addressing mental health concerns extends into adulthood subsequently affecting and limiting their opportunities to

lead happy, fulfilled lives," she explained.

"We need to help break the stigma, particularly in the Middle East and GCC regions. Although we have been lucky in that mental health has come to the forefront recently, we want the conversation about good mental well-being to always be discussed.

"I hope my book will help explain therapy to children in a non-threatening and

comforting way. If my little book can help in any way to encourage even one child or parent to ask for professional help that is all I could ask for or hope for."

Dr Mariam also has a range of gratitude and mood tracking journals to help people on their journey to good mental well-being.

"They are actually a great tool for someone who is attending therapy, particularly the mood



DRAWING ATTENTION: Dr Mariam's journals



THE AUTHOR: Dr Mariam

tracking journals," she explained. "They vary in design to appeal to more people and I love creating them. I am a huge believer of journalling and have witnessed the benefits first-hand."

The advocate for writing down daily thoughts also believes that keeping a diary offers the chance to improve self-awareness.

"Psychological research into diary keeping has shown that the act of writing provides a tool that can unlock the thoughts and feelings you might be disregarding," she said. "It has the ability to reduce our anxieties and settle our nerves in potentially stressful situations and enables you to develop a sense of control.

Understanding your moods and taking notes help you

manage them, feel better faster and be more aware of your behavioural patterns.

"This will help you feel empowered to make better lifestyle choices, make informed health decisions, learn and identify triggers to work towards a higher quality of mental well-being. When we learn to show gratitude for our blessings in life we become more positive and it can actually help our self-esteem."

Dr Mariam is currently working on more books and enjoying the feedback from the public and local community. She says that she has received an amazing response for her first book, especially from children.

The books are available from Amazon and for details, follow @allthingsmariam on Instagram.

Striking images

CLOURFUL images taken by two of Bahrain's most prominent photographers are entrancing commuters on their journeys across New York City's subway stations.

The underground public transport system is famed for its tile mosaic installations, as well as other artworks, and the latest offerings on show have been produced by Mustafa AbdulHadi and Rasha Yousif.

The travel photographers were thrilled to participate in the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) Photo Club (MCP) initiative themed 'people' and for their photographs to be displayed side-by-side on digital screens in New York City's (NYC) subway stations for all to see. Every day, some 4.5 million passengers take to the subway in New York.

"It feels fantastic to be sharing my work with the rest of the world and representing Bahrain," said Rasha, a 40-year-old documentary photographer, who lives between Muharraq and Kenya's Lamu island. She had posted her delight about being featured in NYC's subway after being tagged by the MoMa Photo Club @themuseumofmodernart on Instagram and had her picture snapped by a friend who happened to spot her photograph while visiting the city.

Rasha's photo is of Colombia's Palenqueras that symbolise the women of Cartagena. The Palenqueras, dressed in colourful costumes and wearing great smiles, embellish the Historical Centre of Cartagena de Indias. The reason for their name is due to their origins, because these women, who sell delicious tropical fruits and sweets, are native to the first slaves-free people town in



TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER: Mustafa



PHOTOGRAPHY REPORT
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America, called San Basilio de Palenque, a district of Mahates-Bolivar.

"The Palenqueras represent an incredible feat of human resistance," added Rasha, who captured the image using a Canon AE1 - 35mm Analog camera. "These women

are respected; courageous, hard-working mothers that are still thriving full of Afro-Caribbean heritage.

"I feel really blessed to be doing what I do for a living and inspiring others with the stories I share from my travels and experiences."

Her aim is to continue travelling and to document more beautiful cultures. As of this year, she had snapped her 112th country, having seen most of Europe and Asia, almost all of north and east Africa and all of north and central America.

Rasha's images have been spotted in various magazines and exhibitions, contributing to the likes of *CN China*, *Brownbook*, *Alef* and *GOOD* magazine.

She has participated at different exhibitions and locations in Bahrain and the region such as at Alwan photography



COLOURFUL: Colombia's Palenqueras



MOSAIC INSTALLATION: Mustafa's photo at the subway

exhibition in Riyadh and the Food is Culture art exhibition at Bahrain National Museum in 2016.

She was also featured in the Documenting Muharraq photography exhibition at the Bin Matar House in 2011.

Her biggest photographic achievement is being shortlisted in the *National Geographic Abu Dhabi* photography competition in 2012 and winning fourth place in a six-episode photography reality TV programme called *I'm a Nat Geo Photographer* that aired on *National Geographic Abu Dhabi* in 2014.

Meanwhile, Mustafa, a 30-year-old from Bani Jamra, who also went on to

become a founding member of the Bahrain Photographic Society, had his photographs featured internationally too and his work has appeared in *National Geographic*, as well as leading UK publications including *The Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph*.

His proudest moment, however, is seeing an image that he took with his Canon 5D mark iii in Bahrain, being displayed in New York City. The photo was taken in 2018 in Manama, during an iftar gathering during the holy month of Ramadan.

Other photographers are also encouraged to join the MCP which is a Webby Award-winning participatory

social media initiative launched in May 2021 to engage with photography themes from anywhere in the world, inspired by exhibitions at MoMA, artists, artworks, art movements and more.

The MCP challenge that Rasha and Mustafa participated in was inspired by MoMA's exhibition entitled #Ourselves: Photographs by Women Artists from Helen Kornblum. To join future challenges, share your photos by hashtagging #MoMAPhotoClub on Instagram.

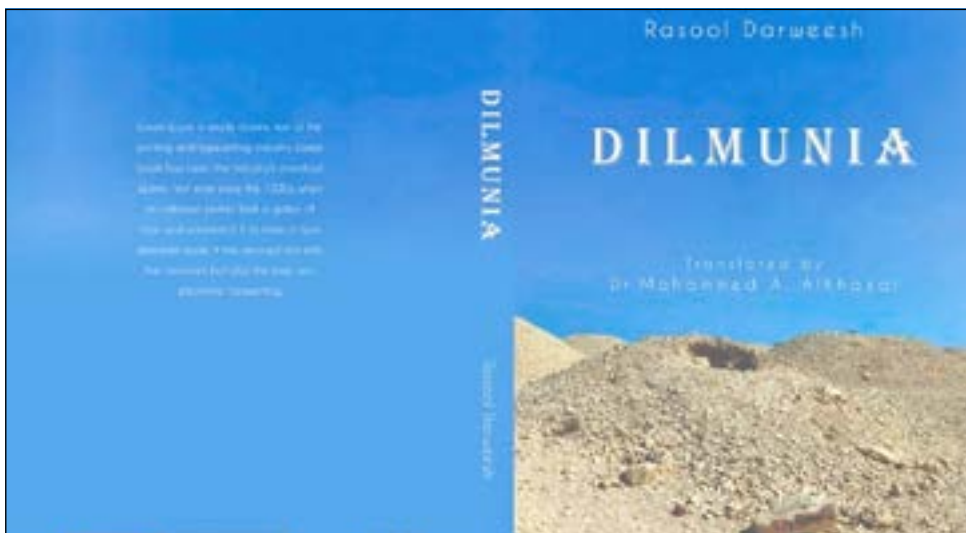
Follow @mustafaa7 and @rshrho on Instagram for more examples of their work.



BEAUTIFUL CULTURE: Rasha in Peru



Spreading the word



BAHRAINI LITERATURE: Rasool proud of Dilmunia in English

PEOPLE all over the world can now enjoy reading Rasool Darweesh's Arabic *Dilmunia* book in English, with translations in other languages to come. The Bahraini novelist from Karzakan is delighted to be able to share his 400-page book about Adam, an intrepid adventurer, with more readers, and aims to translate his work in German and French as well to cover more shelves and countries too.

"I want to spread Bahraini literature to the world," explained Rasool, who is also a critic and translator. "*Dilmunia* was first published in 2016, while the second edition was in 2021 and the English edition by Olympia Publisher was in UK in 2021. Dr Mohammed Al Khozai, thankfully, translated *Dilmunia* for me into English. I want my novel to be internationally known. It is being translated into German and French by a professor from Bahrain University as well."

According to the synopsis, *Dilmunia* is set in the mid-18th century, within the rich landscapes of the Arabian Gulf and the tale is told from several perspectives. However, it mostly focuses on Adam who sets out to chronicle the history of the mysterious burial mounds of Dilmunia, an ancient island



THE AUTHOR: Rasool



BOOK REPORT

By MAI AL-KHATIB CAMILLE
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off the coast of Bahrain.

During Adam's travels, he witnesses the destructive force of greed in humans. He then becomes entangled with the beautiful Khowla, whose father falls victim to the plans of a power-hungry merchant. Adam then balances between his love for Khowla and a duty to save her father, and his desire to know the nature of the human soul through his travels.

"This story is an epic, often tragic tale, interwoven with the teachings of the *Quran* and its insightful reflections on the essence of what it is to be human," said Rasool, who graduated from University of Bahrain (UoB) with a bachelors in English literature and a diploma in education.

He has been teaching English since 1993 and worked as a trainer for a motoring company for four years, as well as a lecturer at the College of Health

Sciences and many other educational institutes. He also worked as a journalist, a translator and an editor of international political news.

While he is proud of this novel, it isn't his first, as he first started writing them in 2009.

"I've written seven Arabic novels," he said. "I translated two of them *Shahnamah* and *The Soul of The King* which are being published currently in the UK. I also wrote two critical books called *The Booker Prize* and *The Identities* in co-operation with UoB lecturer Dr Mai Al Sadah. Moreover, I translated 15 international poems in *Love and Peace*, a book published last May."

He just finished writing another called *Victim 69*.

"In the near future I aim to translate into English and publish all the novels that I have written over the last decade," he added. "I would like to thank my closest friends, especially Dr Mohamed and Dr Mai for their co-operation and supporting me. Also, I'm deeply grateful to Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (Baca) president Shaikha Mai bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, Culture and Arts director general Shaikha Hala bint Mohammed Al Khalifa, as well as Noora Al Khalifa and Aysha Al Sadah who have all helped on my literary adventure."

Follow @rasool_darweesh on Instagram.



Love for a

MUSICIANS, poets and environmental experts gathered over the weekend in East Riffa to express their love in melodic form for the historic Wadi Al Buhair, a 45-million-year-old natural landmark that may make way for another new mall.

Over the past few weeks, the valley has been making headlines with people rallying to preserve it by staging artistic events...such as Saturday's Melodies from Buhair, held at The View Mall.

"This habitat attracts glorious migratory birds and other flora and fauna," one of the artists said. "Having so many come together to share their poetry and perform different musical pieces from the heart was beautiful to see and shows that people care. Many people, especially those living in Riffa, are really attached to the valley."

The event was organised by Ahmed Almutawa who launched the #SaveWadiAlBuhair. He also organised the recent 'Wading through Wadi Al Buhair' walk through the valley, along with University of Bahrain geology professor Dr

COMMUNITY REPORT
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Mubarak Al Noaimi and other colleagues.

The event comes as part of a series of initiatives, including the 'Wadi x Art' paint, photograph and draw Saturday session for supporters concerned about the valley's future. The Melodies from Buhair was the fifth event in the series, conceptualised around oud player and poet Salman Amin, 25, from Muharraq, who composed and penned 'Buhair the Musical'.

Salman narrated the valley's story and what is happening to it in a 15-minute long performance using oud and vocals. "It's like a kid's musical about how the valley once was, how it is now and how it could be," said Salman, who referenced a steel-like beast in his song that symbolises a bulldozer.

"The environment helps our mental health and we don't have many places in Bahrain where people can still go and sit with nature. It's a pattern from the sea, the valley... it's all over-developed in my opinion."

Howard King, Supreme Council for the Environment



consultant, also gave 'An apology to future generations' speech to attendees and Dr Hanadi Al Jowder, vice-chair of the Environment Friends Society also spoke about the valley's importance.



NATURAL LANDMARK:
Buhair Valley



MELODIC EXPRESSION:
Salman performing his
piece. Pictures: ABDULLA AL
AMEERI



an iconic landmark

ATTRACTIVE HABITAT:
Howard looking upon
the valley



SHOW OF
SUPPORT:
The group at
the event



“Buhair is our national heritage,” she said. “If the environment suffers, the entirety of humanity suffers. We have directed a call to the authorities to halt the works here, and we are always

hopeful that there will be a positive response, especially that there are now many passionate voices concerned about the topic.”
Ali Al Jamri’s poetry ‘Comes the Sea’ was also shared by Eman Al Jamri and another from Abdulla Al Ameer called ‘The World that Was’.
Campaigners will continue to meet in Buhair every Saturday and others are welcome to join in,
A performance piece is

currently in the works with details to be disclosed later. Also, the group has discussed creating a documentary about Buhair and those that would like to join the discussion or contribute with any artistic pieces or footage can follow @map_bh on Instagram.
There is also a petition on change.org called ‘Save Wadi Al Buhair’, launched by Bahraini geologist Nadine Al Araifi. It has garnered 3,843 signatures.

The Works, Municipalities Affairs and Urban Planning Ministry has been approached for comment. Southern Municipal Council services and public utilities committee chairman and area councillor Abdulla Abdullatif said assurances have been given that work is currently being halted, pending a decision by the authorities, as reported by *GulfWeekly’s* sister daily newspaper, the *GDN*.



ALL EARS: Dr Hanadi speaking to attendees

Time Out



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crossword break

1		2		3		4	5		6		7	
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12					13							
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	16		17		18			19				
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22												
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24												

Solutions in next week's issue.

ACROSS

- 4. Pardon (7)
- 8. Lie in wait (6)
- 9. Pertinent (7)
- 10. Clandestine (6)
- 11. Eatable (6)
- 12. Desperado (8)
- 18. Vegetation (8)
- 20. Join (6)
- 21. Stop (6)
- 22. Discernment (7)
- 23. Snub (6)
- 24. First (7)

DOWN

- 1. Knead (7)
- 2. Vulgar (7)
- 3. Evaluate (6)
- 5. Maintain (8)
- 6. Clear (6)
- 7. Mild (6)
- 13. In harmony (8)
- 14. Winding (7)
- 15. Nonplus (7)
- 16. Angle (6)
- 17. Average (6)
- 19. Team (6)

who, what, where, when

- WHO...was the first Hanoverian king of Great Britain?
- WHAT...would you do with a bombardon - eat it, play it or travel in it?
- WHERE...in Europe would you spend a kuna?
- WHEN...was the Battle of the Boyne?
- WHO...was the UK's Conservative Home Secretary from 1970-72?
- WHAT...is former England cricketer Ian Botham's middle name?
- WHERE...is Pietermaritzburg?
- WHEN...did John Gielgud receive his Best Supporting Actor Oscar for the film *Arthur*?

just so

THE ROTTWEILER

JAP MISS AN

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MISS

darn tough sudoku

So you think you're good enough at Sudoku to crack this baby? Remember, we were the first in the Gulf to bring you this bit of Japanese mayhem...so we don't kid around

Last week's sudoku

4	7	2	6	9	3	1	8	5
5	1	9	4	2	8	3	7	6
6	3	8	1	5	7	9	4	2
9	5	1	8	6	2	4	3	7
8	6	3	7	1	4	2	5	9
7	2	4	9	3	5	8	6	1
1	9	7	3	8	6	5	2	4
3	4	5	2	7	1	6	9	8
2	8	6	5	4	9	7	1	3

4	5	7	1	3	2	6	9	8
6	8	3	9	5	7	4	2	1
1	9	2	6	4	8	3	5	7
8	6	1	5	2	4	9	7	3
2	3	5	7	1	9	8	4	6
9	7	4	3	8	6	5	1	2
3	4	8	2	9	1	7	6	5
5	2	6	4	7	3	1	8	9
7	1	9	8	6	5	2	3	4

darn tough sudoku

5	8	7	4	2	3	9	6	1
3	4	2	6	1	9	5	8	7
9	1	6	5	8	7	4	2	3
6	3	5	1	4	2	8	7	9
8	2	9	3	7	5	6	1	4
1	7	4	9	6	8	2	3	5
4	6	8	7	5	1	3	9	2
7	5	3	2	9	6	1	4	8
2	9	1	8	3	4	7	5	6

Sudoku

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		2	7			1	8	
7				1	2			4
	8			9		2	7	
9		5			7	8		6
	3	7		5			9	
	7			6				2
6		3	2		4	5		
			1	9	7		3	

Sudoku

9		8	2					3
	6			3			5	4
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	5	9	7					
2				9	3	5		8
		4			8	7	1	
		1		7				
4	8			5			3	
7				4				6

Last Week's Leisure Solutions

CROSSWORD BREAK:

- Across:** 6 Javelin; 7 Board; 9 Cloak; 10 Connive; 12 Indifferent; 14 Sentimental; 18 Ecstasy; 19 Stand; 21 Sever; 22 Laconic.
- Down:** 1 Cable; 2 Detain; 3 Rip; 4 Corner; 5 Prevent; 8 Confine; 11 Dismiss; 13 Teacher; 15 Titter; 16 Action; 17 Antic; 20 Vat.
- JUST SO:** For old times sake, Have it both ways, High summer, High tea.
- WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN:** John Case; Kingston; Canada; 1945; John Higgins; 4 million; Norfolk; 1972.

Darn Tough Sudoku

			7				9	5
	5		6		3	2		
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Your work pad space ...

MotoringWeekly

The top motoring and motorsport news

Merchants of speed

THE four-day Goodwood Festival of Speed featured several show-stopping vehicles, from race cars to wheels of the future, including Ford's innovative TFZ-P1.

The model originally started as a virtual creation, designed in collaboration between gamers Codemasters and Ford's designers. Three months later, it was unveiled as a full-scale, real-life model before evolving into a unique gaming simulator.

"We've now come full circle," said Boris Ferko, Ford Europe's design manager. "What started as a promise has now been realised by giving the TFZ-P1 race car back into the hands of gamers. On top of that, we're also creating the ultimate experience of driving the TFZ-P1 race car in GRID Legends while sitting in the actual race car itself."



DRIVING EXPERIENCE:
GRID Legends game at
Goodwood

The Team Fordzilla P1 racer (TFZ-P1) can be driven in Codemasters GRID Legends game and to celebrate the milestone, ITS full-scale model was unveiled at the Goodwood Festival of Speed with the same in-game livery.

Visitors had the chance to sit in the TFZ-P1 cockpit, where they were able to utilise its simulator abilities and experience both the physical and virtual vehicle at the same time. An in-game event also accompanied the debut of the car, allowing players to

compete to achieve the fastest lap time until July 29.

The TFZ-P1 race car journey had started in March 2020, when gamers were

asked to vote on the package and features of the car on Twitter, including seating configuration, engine position and cockpit definition.

Nearly a quarter of a million fan votes were submitted throughout the polling process and then Ford designers submitted designs based on those features, with an exterior designed by Arturo Ariño and an interior that was the vision of Robert Engelmann chosen as the winner. A full-scale model of the vehicle was then unveiled at gamescom 2020 followed by becoming a racing simulator.

"You really have to experience the drive to see how cool this actually is," added Ferko. "With Season 1 of the TFZ-P1 project we've only started to scratch the surface of what's possible and we'll continue to further blur the boundaries between digital and real worlds in the future."

Madrid has eye on F1



RACING TO VICTORY: Red Bull's Max Verstappen crosses the line to win the race in Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya

MADRID has officially expressed an interest in hosting a Formula One race, the city's regional government has announced.

Although there are no Formula One-grade tracks in Madrid and Spain already hosts a race in Barcelona, which has a contract until 2026, the Spanish capital believes it can open talks with Formula One organisers, Liberty Media, about hosting a race.

"I would like to confirm

our commitment to you and to this project, as well as our willingness to sign the appropriate agreements to promote the race and offer a great sporting and entertainment spectacle," local government cabinet minister Enrique Lopez wrote in a letter to F1 chief executive officer Stefano Domenicali.

Further details about the bid were not disclosed. Formula One organisers declined to comment.

Madrid hosted the F1 Grand Prix between 1968 and 1981 at the Jarama Circuit, which

is outdated and would need a major upgrade to be able to host a race again.

Last year, the local government of Morata de Tajuna, 36km south of Madrid, confirmed that it was seeking to build an FIA Grade 1 circuit with the ambition of hosting F1 and MotoGP races in the future.

There are a record 23 Formula One races scheduled this year and while organisers are keen to expand the sport's geographical reach, they have looked primarily at adding venues in Africa and the US.



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LIGHTER MOMENT: Patrick visiting with children



HOP ON:
A child in
Gaza

A FORMER Bahrain resident is rallying riders from around the world to cycle for a cause that is near-and-dear to his heart.

American Patrick O'Neill, who is currently living in the San Francisco Bay area, aims to hop on his bike with 100 other cyclists to Ride for Palestine on July 17 in a bid to raise funds for the non-profit, humanitarian aid organisation, Middle East Children's Alliance's (MECA) which supports children and families in Palestine, Iraq and Lebanon.

The Ride for Palestine will be taking place at MECA headquarters in Berkeley, California. It will consist of an 11-mile (17.7km) ride up and down the coastal trails of the San Francisco Bay, followed by a celebration featuring live Arabic music, dabkeh (the Palestinian traditional dance), games and lots of delicious food! This is the organisation's first ride with hopes of making this fundraising event an annual affair.

"We have several people from around the world who will be joining virtually and organising their own mini Rides for Palestine," said the organisation's office manager/bookkeeper. "Our main goal is to provide a space for individuals to show solidarity with the children of Palestine.

Rallying riders for a just cause



SPORT REPORT

By MAI AL-KHATIB CAMILLE
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"We hope to recruit at least 100 riders and to collectively raise around \$50,000 (BD19,000). It's an inspiring thing to see the solidarity people around the world have for this important cause."

Aside from joining the actual event, O'Neill, 37, also added his own fundraising effort to reach a goal of \$500 to donate to his organisation.

"Growing up in the 'expatriate' community of Saudi Arabia during the 1990s, there was very limited awareness and discussion about the struggles that Palestinians had been facing for decades," said O'Neill, who has lived in the Gulf for close to 23 years, split evenly between Saudi and Bahrain.

"It wasn't until I was in high school, when visiting the home of a dear friend, that I was given a deeper

understanding of exactly what had been going on," he added. "My friend and her mother explained not only the recent history of Palestine, but also the US's complicity in the ongoing occupation.

"Since then, I have stood firmly in solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Contributions support MECA's programmes and every little bit can make a huge impact on the lives of children living in Palestine and Lebanon."

O'Neill originally planned to return to the US after completing his degree in international studies at AMA University in Bahrain, but he fell in love with the island and ended up staying for many years.

He worked for several years as an English teacher at various schools and institutes in Bahrain and then joined the non-profit sector upon

returning to the US.

"When I first moved back to the US, it was important for me to remain connected to the Arab world so that I could pay tribute to the decades of hospitality and friendship I had experienced there," he said.

"There are so many



misconceptions about Palestine and the MENA region in general that it often feels like an uphill battle, but it's a mission I'm proud to take on. So many of my friends, colleagues and mentors over the years have been members of the

Palestinian diaspora and it is important that their voices are heard. If I can do anything to amplify those voices, then I make it my duty to do so."

All funds will benefit MECA's programmes for children, including water filtration systems for schools in Gaza, psychological support for children, university scholarships, food programmes to address childhood hunger and so much more.

O'Neill is delighted to have hit his target of \$500 in less than 24 hours and upped his goal to \$1,000 to raise in 21 days until the event. He currently has collected \$650 and is thankful to everyone's support.

"The most important thing you can do to support this cause is to show up in whatever capacity you are able to," he said. "The

simplest way could be to contribute to the fundraising efforts of one of our riders.

"If you would like to participate virtually, you can sign up and start a fundraiser of your own. If you can't Ride for Palestine, then maybe you can walk, swim, dance, read, bake, or sleep for Palestine! The possibilities are endless. If that's still more than you can do then a like, follow and share on our social media pages will go a long way in helping us spread the word.

"We are hoping to make this ride an annual event so if anyone, anywhere in the world, is interested in collaborating, please reach out and let's make this thing big!"

Visit tinyurl.com/RideforPalestine to help O'Neill reach his target and for further details, email info@rideforpalestine.com or follow @RideforPalestine or @MECAforPeace on Instagram.