

Conserving Egypt's exotic wealth

Staff report

FROM whale fossils to exotic birds, medicinal plants to mangroves, desert wadis to Nile islands, Egypt's protectorates are home to a wealth of terrestrial and aquatic treasures.

The country's 30 protected areas cover more than 15 per cent of its land mass and also extend into the Red Sea. They are under threat from factors such as pollution, urbanisation, industry, and agriculture. Often what makes these ecosystems special also makes them difficult to protect – many of them are vast and remote by nature, with limited resources and few rangers to patrol them.

Local communities play a vital role in preserving the biodiversity and cultural heritage of these areas. Ancestors of the Jabaleyya tribe in Sinai were brought from Macedonia in the sixth century to build and protect Saint Catherine's Monastery.

Now, seven different Bedouin tribes act as



SAINT Catherine's Monastery

community guards and guides in the surrounding protectorate. The Ababda in Wadi el-Gemal have a tribal prohibition on cutting live trees, which has allowed Acacias to flourish in the southern Red Sea area.

A panel session by the 39th Cairo Climate Talks is today to explore ways of conserving and sustainably developing these habitats, to provide opportunities for education, tourism and the flourishing of local communities.

Public and private sector experts will tackle conservation challenges including pollution, security issues, ranger resources and what is being done to make the protectorates financially sustainable and attractive to Egyptian tourists, in light of the decline in international tourism.

German Ambassador in Cairo Julius Georg Luy, Egyptian Minister of the Environment Khaled Fahmy and Tourism Minister Mohamed Yehia Rashed will open the discussion.

Panelists include Dr Moustafa Fouada, an advisor to the minister of the Environment; Amr Elezaby, an Advisor to the Tourism minister; Amr Ali, the managing director of the Haghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association; Mohamed Sameh, the deputy manager and a geologist at Wadi el-Hitan; and Dr Kohar Garo, the director of the Environment Communication Centre at Cairo University and a Nature Conservation Egypt member.

The event will be moderated by Lindsey Parietti, the Cairo Climate Talks coordinator.

It is due to start at 6:30pm, at the German Science Centre (DWZ), 11 El-Saleh Ayoub Street, Zamalek.

Singapore death penalty film stirs emotions at Cannes

CANNES (News agencies) – Before he made his new film about the death penalty, Boo Junfeng sat down to tea with some of Singapore's retired hangmen.

He also talked to the priests and imams who helped condemned prisoners make their last walk to the gallows.

And most difficult of all, the young filmmaker spent years trying to reach through the curtain of shame to families who had lost fathers and sons to the hangman's rope.

But it was only after Boo, whose film premieres at the Cannes film festival today, met one particularly 'humane' executioner that he had an epiphany.

He realised that no movie has ever dealt

with the whole horrible business from the perspective of the man who pulls the lever.

"I had already started to write (the film) but after I met the first hangman, I couldn't write for three months. What completely threw me was how much I enjoyed his company," said Boo.

"He was not like I thought. He was likeable, charismatic, grandfatherly joocular and open about what he did. He took pride in the almost caring way he looked after the prisoners trying to make it as humane as he could, and I realised how difficult that was.

"He really shook up my ideas and forced me to rethink everything."

So, Boo took his film – which he toiled over for five years – one step further.

For Apprentice has a shocking twist. It is the story of a young man who ended up learning the executioner's trade from the man

who opened the trapdoor on his own father.

More surprising still is the intensity of the almost father-son relationship that develops between the young prison guard and the hangman.

"He is in some ways searching for his father," Boo said. "And in doing that he finds this man. What I was going for was human truth. I didn't want to make it an activist film."

The death penalty is nevertheless a hot political issue in Singapore and in neighbouring Indonesia, particularly when foreigners have fallen foul of strict anti-drug smuggling laws.

The execution of seven foreigners in Bali last year-including two Australians and a mentally ill Brazilian – sparked an international outcry, and several others, including a British woman and a Frenchman,

are still on death row there.

Boo said he began his research with the book *Once a Jolly Hangman* which features Darshan Singh, Singapore's chief executioner for nearly 50 years who once executed 18 men in one day.

Its British Author Alan Shadrake was arrested the morning after the book's Singapore launch in 2010 and was held for a month in Changi prison for insulting the country's judiciary.

He had criticised the way he claimed the death penalty was disproportionately applied to the poor, while well-connected criminals and wealthy foreigners escaped the noose.

Boo shot the prison scenes in disused prisons in Australia to avoid controversy in the tiny city state, where an estimated 95 per cent of the population still support the death penalty.

British Royals launch campaign to tackle stigma of mental health

LONDON (Reuters) – Prince William, his wife Kate and brother Harry urged Britons yesterday to ditch their prejudices about mental health in what is being billed as the biggest joint project the three young royals have taken on.

In the 'Heads Together' campaign they launched in London, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry will work with charities "to change the national conversation on mental wellbeing", a note from the couple's Kensington Palace residence said.

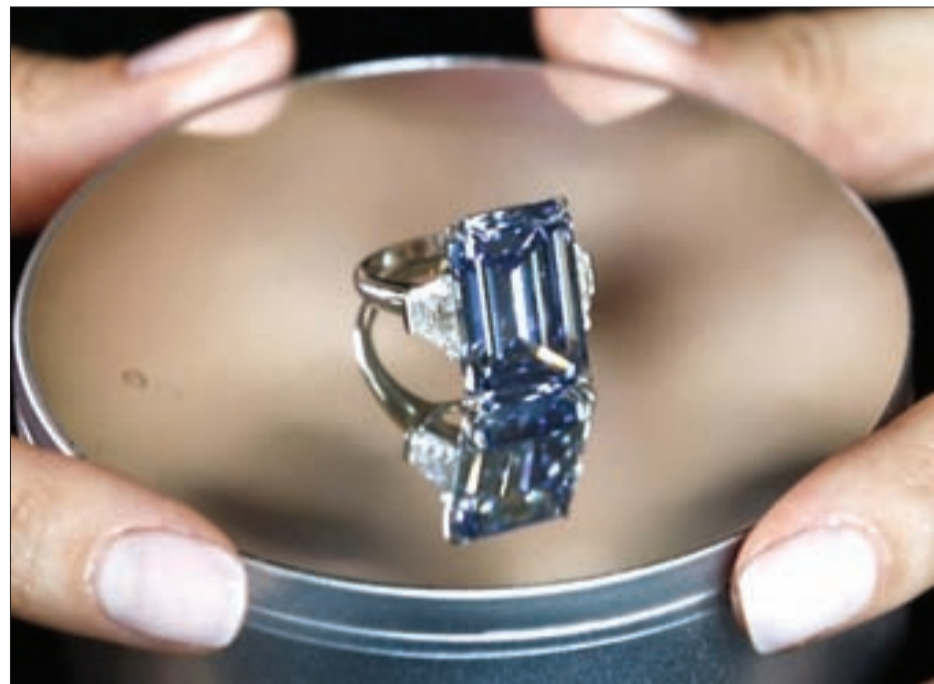
"We have seen time and time again that unresolved mental health problems lie at the

heart of some of our greatest social challenges," William said in a joint speech with Kate and Harry.

"... Heads Together wants to get people talking. The more we talk about mental health, the more normal the topic becomes, and the more we feel able to open up and seek support."

Harry played block-stacking game jenga, which is used by some mental healthcare professionals as a therapeutic tool, while Kate and William tried some boxing moves to illustrate the role exercise is thought to play in promoting mental wellbeing.

Kate has been vocal about mental health issues in the past. In February, she used a guest editor slot at the Huffington Post UK news website to commission articles on mental health issues affecting children.



THE 12.03-carat Sotheby's diamond was bought for \$48.4 million by Hong Kong billionaire Joseph Lau.

Diamond magnate's rare stone goes under the hammer in Geneva

GENEVA (News agencies) – A 14.62-carat blue diamond owned by an architect of the modern diamond industry could fetch a record price at this week's Magnificent Jewels auctions in Geneva.

The dazzling rock previously belonged to the late Philip Oppenheimer, scion of the family that controlled the De Beers diamond mining company.

As chairman of a powerful cartel called the Central Selling Organisation, Oppenheimer – who died in 1995 – tightly controlled the international diamond trade and helped make it extremely lucrative.

His success will be on full display tomorrow when Christie's puts "The Oppenheimer Blue" under the hammer at the ultra-luxurious Four Seasons des Bergues hotel overlooking Lake Geneva.

Christie's has valued the Oppenheimer stone at between \$38 million and \$45 million, giving it an outside shot of breaking a record set by rival auction house Sotheby's in November.

The 12.03-carat Sotheby's diamond was bought for \$48.4 million by Hong Kong billionaire Joseph Lau, who a day earlier scooped up a 16.08-carat pink diamond for a

comparatively modest \$28.5 million. The property tycoon, who was convicted of bribery in Macau last year, named both stones after his daughter Josephine.

Christie's jewel expert Jean-Marc Lunel told AFP that The Oppenheimer Blue's price could top what Lau paid for "The Blue Moon of Josephine".

"It's a fabulous diamond, the most beautiful I have even seen and it could set a record price," he said.

According to Christie's, the Oppenheimer diamond is the largest ever sold at auction in the exclusive Fancy Vivid Blue category, which groups rare gems of exceptional colour and clarity.

But, there is always a chance that the jewel will not even meet its estimated floor price.

That happened last month when a 9.54-carat blue diamond ring once owned by American child star Shirley Temple failed to sell at auction in New York after bidding closed at \$22 million, below the reserve price.

Christie's has valued its total of 280 lots up for auction tomorrow at \$113 million. The collection includes 46 pieces from German-born princess Gabriela zu Leiningen, who was married to the Aga Khan.

Sotheby's kicks off Geneva's Magnificent Jewels week tomorrow with a 495-lot offer valued at \$140 million, the highlight of which is a 15.38-carat pink diamond.



Reuters

Samba, colourful floats at Berlin Carnival of Cultures: Tens of thousands of revelers defied wind and rain to attend Berlin's annual Carnival of Cultures street parade at the weekend, lining the streets of the German capital to watch the colourful festivities. The four-day event celebrates cultural diversity and features a massive parade where musicians and dancers from various backgrounds entertain crowds with their moves and floats amid a party-like atmosphere. At Sunday's parade, crowds – young and old – partied to a wide range of entertainment including traditional live music and Samba dancers.

A diplomat's notes

By: Paolo Sabbatini



The Chinese translation of Dante's Inferno

ALMOST as soon as I arrived in Beijing in 1985 as a UN Officer, I was told of the activities of the Dante Alighieri Society and its relentless Dante lovers. One of them, I was told, was an old, an extremely old, scholar at Beijing University, Professor T.D.W., famous for having graduated in Florence in the 20's with a thesis on the Italian Renaissance poet Poliziano.

Then he returned to China and taught Italian Literature at Beijing University for many years. In the 60's he shared the fate of fellow intellectuals who had to do manual labour.

With the advent of Deng Xiao Ping, an enlightened leader, many intellectuals were rehabilitated. I had the chance to witness an historic moment, when China opened up once again, to the rest of the world and restored its international relations.

I didn't know how to find that old Professor, all trace of whom had been lost. Every day, I used to walk through Beijing from my home in the diplomatic district "San Li Tun", all the way along the great Chang An Road, once crowded with bicycles.

One late afternoon I reached the Forbidden City; it had been a nice walk, taking almost one hour. I didn't buy the entrance ticket, because the place was likely to be closed at that time.

Then, outside the walls, an old man with a mysterious and touching smile approached me. He wore what I now regard as old-fashioned clothes, yet at the time almost everyone was still wearing the Mao Tse Tung tunic. His was a bit patched-up but he still looked very dignified.

He immediately said to me in my language "Good evening, you are Italian, aren't you?"

I looked at him with surprise and said, "Yes, I am. How are you? How did you know I was Italian?" And he said, "After so many years studying your culture, I know you at first glance. I studied a lot in my life, especially the Italian language and I know Dante Alighieri."

As I looked at him, I started feeling a lot of sympathy for him. His glasses were old and dusty, with a faded yellow frame made of fake turtle leather. The bridge, clearly broken, was patched up with a bandage that had blackened. The lenses were big and cloudy. He was myopic. He had the appearance of a sprite or an alchemist who had temporarily left his cave where he turned lead into gold. I was sure he was Professor T.D.W.

I didn't ask that explicitly; instead I asked him "Have you read the Inferno?" The old Professor took out of his worn-out pocket a roll of soft paper, the kind used for cyclostyling. I remember the paper well because in my high school, in the region of Marche, we took turns using the cyclostyle machine, to print our Greek and Latin classwork. The paper was soft enough to absorb ink and alcohol. I remember the unmistakable odour that pervaded our classroom during our tests.

So, he gave me these papers cyclostyled in Chinese which looked very much like small propaganda posters. The back of these papers was flooded with very small and fine Chinese ideographs splendidly ordered but with some deletions.

According to the great Chinese traditional style, they were artistic masterpieces.

The good man looked at me with a smile and said, "There it is, the Inferno. I could translate it only because I lived it. I, Professor of Italian Language at Beijing University, had to look after the toilets of the Forbidden City. I had no choice; I saved my life with my immediate obedience. There I was inspired by the circles of Dante's Hell. I knew and still know the whole Divine Comedy by heart. While I was there I went through each verse, as if I were telling the beads of a rosary. Each time I found the best translation, I would write it down on the back of a poster."

Dr. Paolo Sabbatini, the Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Egypt, is a well-known intellectual and Academician, with a 35 years – long career at the UN and the Italian Government, giving him an insight in international relations and cultural affairs.

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