

TELL ME WHY
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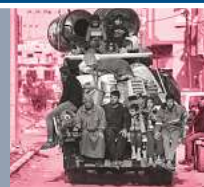
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Potholes may decide UK polls

Poor condition of roads is symptomatic of crumbling state of infrastructure across the country

LONDON

Dotting the asphalt, they come in various shapes and sizes, costing drivers a fortune in vehicle repairs and even lives. In Britain, potholes are increasingly a scourge and an obsession. So much so that they will be among the five biggest issues in the UK general election expected this year.

For starters, potholes across the UK are thought to number more than one million, according to vehicle-breakdown company RAC, owing to a widely-perceived lack of government investment for long-lasting repairs.

For some, the poor state of Britain's roads is symptomatic of the crumbling state of infrastructure across the country, including Victorian-era hospitals, schools and sewers.

"Our roads are in a horrendous state because of lack of investment over decades by successive governments and authorities," lamented Mark Morrell, an ardent 63-year-old activist, dubbed "Mr Pothole".

"The UK road network is like the blood supply to the UK economy and it's been neglected," he told AFP.

Morrell's eye-catching social media content includes floating rubber ducks in a pothole, filling another with instant noodles and riding a bright orange tank to parliament in London.

Potholes have also caught the



DANGER AHEAD

Cars drive past a pothole in a damaged road in Liverpool, north west England. Above: Rod Stewart filling a pothole with gravel near his home.

AFP

23

cyclists have died in pothole accidents in the last decade

attention of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose Conservative party is trailing badly behind the main opposition Labour in polls.

Sunak in November pledged to tackle "the scourge of pot-

holes" with an "unprecedented" £8.3 billion (\$10.5 billion) of funding over 11 years for road repairs in England.

Hard road for Ferraris

In 2022, renowned singer

Rod Stewart was filmed filling a pothole with gravel near his plush home close to London. The performer, who released *Hard Road* in 1974, said at the time: "My Ferrari can't go through here at all."

Morrell is meanwhile not alone in harnessing his creative side to highlight the UK's pothole plague. Across the country, people spray paint around the damage, hoping it will force local councils to act quickly.

Repair techniques may soon be transformed, however. The University of Liverpool is helping to develop a pothole-filling robot powered by artificial intelligence.

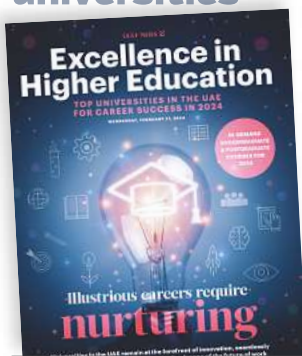
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'An ode to expats living in Dubai'

Book aims to clear preconceived notions of what life is like in the emirate

DUBAI

BY ANJANA KUMAR
 Senior Reporter

Two expat friends wanted to share their experiences of living in Dubai and clear preconceived perceptions of what life is like in the city.

And what better way to tell the world than through a book, agreed the Italian-French duo Marie-Jeanne Acquaviva and Olivia Froudline. They co-authored *Dubai is My Home*, which includes 40 stories and pictures of other residents.

Acquaviva describes the book as "an ode to expats living in Dubai and in the UAE, who have made their life here just like us".

From henna design to construction, a mix of professional and personal backgrounds come to the fore in the book. "Their voices are so distinct yet so intertwined in their shared humanity," said Acquaviva.

Froudline added: "So many of us have found happiness here. The book is a tribute to the UAE's leaders, citizens and expats who have contributed to the growing economy of UAE and made a life here."

The co-authors themselves are an example of the multicultural character of Dubai. They met at a lunch, invited by a common friend of theirs and became friends.

As the two swapped stories of living in Dubai – Acquaviva has lived here for nine years, while Froudline has been around for 12 years – they realised despite the "distinct" narratives of individuals that call Dubai home, the stories are "intertwined in their shared humanity."

FULL STORY ON P2

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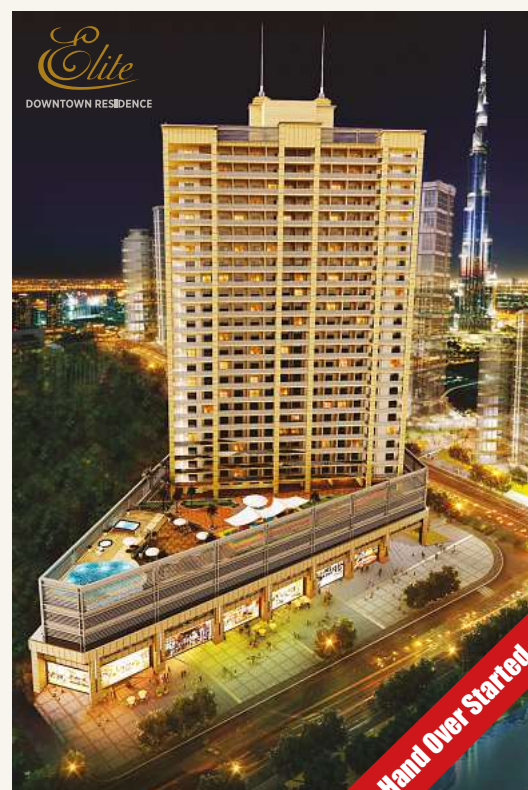
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