

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was re-elected on Tuesday for a second five-year term as head of the World Health Organization, following a secret ballot. An overwhelming majority of the WHO's 194 member states voted for Tedros to continue as the UN health agency's director-general. There were no challengers to the 57-year-old Tedros, a former Ethiopian government minister and the first WHO head from Africa. On taking office in 2017, Tedros campaigned for affordable health services. **DETAILS ON P7**



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OFA LAUNCHES OMAN WOMEN'S FUTSAL TEAM



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THAWANI HIGHLIGHTS FINTECH POTENTIAL AT COMEX 2022



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HIS LOVE FOR PAPER PLANE LED TO HIS PASSION FOR PARAGLIDING



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO JORDAN KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Abdallah II of Jordan on his country's 76th Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to King Abdallah, wishing him good health, happiness and long life. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions on King Abdallah while the people of Jordan realise further aspirations of progress and prosperity.

— ONA

Oman Vision 2040 Unit implements 34 business initiatives

MUSCAT: Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, in cooperation with the government agencies, managed to develop and follow up the implementation of 34 initiatives and projects in 2021.

This drive came as part of activating the priorities of Oman Vision 2040, which are related to the economic and development axis, within three programmes to improve the business environment with the aim to make the business environment in Oman an attractive and stimulating to attract the different national and foreign investments, taking into consideration all legislative and procedural aspects.

Mohamed bin Said al Masrouri, General Supervisor of Business Environment Sector at Oman Vision 2040 Unit, said that the three business environment improvement programmes are related to the two priorities of (the private sector, investment and international cooperation) and (the judiciary, legislation and supervision).

He added that the business environment improvement programmes are: planning and developing investment tools and opening markets, simplifying and digitising government services, legislation, judiciary and supervision.

Regarding planning and developing investment tools, he indicated that during 2021 work was done with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to develop and follow up the implementation of 8 initiatives, which comes under the framework of this programme and pertaining to empowering the investment sector in Oman and motivating different investors.

HM GREETINGS TO ARGENTINIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Alberto Fernández of the Argentine Republic on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President Fernández, wishing him good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Argentina further progress and prosperity.

— ONA

EXPLORING THEMES OF COMPETITION



The Royal Opera House Muscat announced its upcoming production titled 'Play', an inspiring show perfect for audiences of all ages. This dynamic presentation is a fitting event to conclude the 2022 Royal Opera House Muscat season. 'Play' takes the art of elite sport and creates a mesmerising show exploring themes of competition, spectating, emotional connections and the fantastical in a production which is both sophisticated and personal. The audience can enjoy this thrilling production for the whole family at the opera house from May 26-28.

Oman-Saudi partnership to invest \$3 bn

Bahwan Services and Trading LLC (BST), an affiliate of Shaikh Ahmed bin Suhail Bahwan's group of companies (Sultanate of Oman), and Ajan & Brothers Holding Group (Abilitii), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have signed a collaboration agreement to establish joint investments in both countries by announcing a new era of partnerships for key sectors in line with respective countries' Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040.

BST and Abilitii, both privately owned business conglomerates, met in Muscat on Tuesday to sign economic, commercial and technical collaboration agreements.

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OMAN OBSERVER

FIRST DEDICATED ENGLISH NEWS APP IN OMAN



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QUAD NATIONS WARN AGAINST 'CHANGE BY FORCE' | P6



SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY LEFT IN LIMBO | P9

Teenage pilot on solo round-world flight to arrive in Muscat

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Civil Aviation Authority on Tuesday issued approval for the arrival of the flight by the youngest pilot in the world, Mack Rutherford.

The 16-year-old is expected to arrive at Muscat International Airport on May 31, as part of his tour to break the record as the youngest pilot to fly solo around the world.

The schoolboy who is on a quest to become the youngest person to fly around the world solo, landed his small plane in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, on May 19. Mack Rutherford, who has British and Belgian nationality, started his journey near the Bulgarian capital Sofia in March and is looking to clinch a Guinness World Record currently held by compatriot Travis Ludlow, who was 18 when he completed a circumnavigation last year.

"I'm hoping, with this journey, to inspire young people to follow their dreams," Rutherford said after clambering out of his two-seater single prop ultralight aircraft, at Wilson Airport.

"Mack is no doubt a skilled pilot. However, we do not feel comfortable pushing the age limit to the lowest possible point for journeys where a certain level of risk cannot be avoided," the company said on its website.



No cases of monkeypox detected so far in Oman

MINISTRY IS REGULARLY MONITORING THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SITUATION

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

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No suspected or confirmed cases of monkeypox have been detected in the country so far, the Ministry of Health (MoH) assured.

A statement issued by the Ministry of Health on Tuesday said that Oman is regularly monitoring the epidemiological situation, locally and abroad and is closely following the global epidemiological situation and daily reports related to the disease.

It called on citizens and residents to take necessary preventive measures to avoid transmission of the disease by avoiding direct contact with anyone who shows respiratory symptoms or skin rashes.

The ministry also underlined the need to wear face masks and maintain hand hygiene, once a suspected case is detected in the social surroundings. Members of the public are advised to get information and updates from official sources and avoid following rumours or wrong information.

Citizens and residents urged to take necessary preventive measures to avoid transmission of the disease by avoiding direct contact with anyone who shows respiratory symptoms or skin rashes

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

RAISES CONCERNS

With monkeypox appearing in the open, it raises concerns while remembering the severe psychological, economic and social effects that Covid-19 caused for the past two years.

On Tuesday, the World Health Organization had announced the registration of 131 confirmed cases and 106 suspected cases of monkeypox virus in 19 countries around the world, stressing that there is possibility of containing the disease, by discussing and supporting member states in dealing with it, according to media reports.

OMAN'S TRUSTED ICT PARTNER

Muscat: May 24: Omantel's service delivery approach integrated with convenience through innovation is making daily lives and business operations better.

Omantel signed key agreements that underscore the trust which entities serving national interests and driving economic diversification and growth place in the Company.

The entities with whom Omantel has entered pacts are the Ministry of Higher Education Research and Innovation (MoHERI), Energy Development Oman (EDO), Oman Airports and Oman.

Under these projects, which are expansive in their application scale and important for respective sectors, Omantel will provide unified communications, comprehensive technology solutions, equipment and hardware support among a host of other services. The signing of these agreements reflects Omantel commitment to driving Digital Transformation objectives and building a knowledge-based society as outlined in Oman Vision 2040.

"Omantel is proud to be the platform for their growth through digitalisation. We are partnering organisations that are driving the nation's growth in major sectors. We are delighted with the partnerships that we created with global technology providers and our success in connecting local tech start-ups with the global companies, giving the Omani tech start-ups the opportunity to participate in the implementation of Omantel digital transformation projects. As far as automation is concerned, delivering high value to our customers through operational excellence is vital to us. Some of the opportunities lie in accelerated digitization of products and services as we transition towards the future," said Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel.



Talal bin Said Al Mamari,
CEO, Omantel.

He further added, "The value of these projects will pass down to the people of Oman, a country which is moving rapidly on the digital highway and is seeing economic diversification through new investment, world-class education, growth in tourism and a renewed vigour in the energy sector. Our scalable solutions will make our clients' operations more efficient and enhance user experience."

The Company has proved time and again that it has remained future-ready and hence, the most preferred digitally enabling partner for organisations.



Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhil,
Chief Commercial Officer, Omantel.

By choosing Omantel for their ICT solutions, Enterprise customers are benefitting from economy of scale principles and receiving better value and cost-effective commercial models.

Omantel believes in product innovation, having consistently been investing in the newest technologies like Data Centres, Cloud, IT Services, IOT, SDWAN, Blockchain, Big Data & Analytics, Cyber Security and Collaboration Services. The Company has always stayed ahead of the services and solutions curve by implementing beforehand what global ICT trends forecast in terms of spending, solutions, reach and access.



By responding rapidly to new emerging market demands, Omantel has outperformed other players and shrunk the time an ICT innovation takes to reach its practical application for individuals as well as enterprises.

Eng Aladdin Bait Fadhil, Chief Commercial Officer, Omantel said, "We are continuously investing in infrastructure to support Oman's vision of a knowledge-based society and Digital Transformation. As the country grows, its telecom and ICT needs will diversify and evolve rapidly. Omantel, as an enabler, must be prepared for that. Omantel has positioned itself as a one-stop-shop offering telecom and ICT solutions under one umbrella, saving enterprises from the hassle of dealing with several different providers as well as additional manpower to manage their operations."

He added, "We at Omantel are proud to have earned their continued trust. The agreement with MoHERI is one such example. We thank these entities for making Omantel a part of their journey and sharing their great responsibility of nation-building with Omantel. I am confident that these partnerships will soon deliver results that will reflect positively on the people of Oman and its overall growth and its digital future."

MoHERI inks partnership agreement with Omantel for operating and maintaining 'OMREN'

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) have inked a contract with Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) for operating and maintaining 'Omren'. The agreement was signed by HE Dr. Rahma bint Ibrahim Al Mahrooqi, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel.

Under this contract, Omantel will continue to extend the network's services to higher education organizations, research centres, and other educational institutions in Oman.

Commenting on the agreement, Warda bint Sarhan Al Habsi, Acting OMREN Director, said, "We are delighted to continue our partnership with Omantel, and we feel that it will enable us to create the aspired connectivity and access between the local academic institutions on one hand and with their overseas counterparts and research networks globally on the other hand. OMREN has become an integral part of MoHERI's strategy toward achieving Oman Vision 2040 goals that are related to the development of scientific research in Oman."

OMREN has come to be a central part of a sustainable infrastructure that contributes to the emergence of an effective national innovation ecosystem. It provides the research and education community in Oman with a common network and collaboration infrastructure adapted to their needs. Omantel is enabling OMREN to provide its members with point-to-point link to international gateways to connect the research community with international organizations such as Internet2, GEANT, APAN and ASREN.



To enrich and promote collaboration between members, OMREN further offers added value services such as video conferencing, SSL certification, federated access as a single sign-on facility, scientific publications, Masader for International scientific publications, Shuaa as Oman Research Repository, eduRoam for WIFI roaming, Mirsal for large files exchange, membership of eduGain, extra broadband links, bulk SMSes, and more.

The first term of this partnership saw more than 50 members join the OMREN network. Collectively, the parties have so far achieved 90% connected universities, 93% connected researchers, 85% connected students, and 100% targeted international connectivity.

Innovative App puts Airport cab rides at your fingertips

When it comes to projects of national importance that involve the convenience, ease of work and business and security of people, Omantel becomes the first choice because of its great track record, superior services, state of the art infrastructure and robust security.

Omantel has been chosen by Oman Airports as the one-stop technology service provider to deploy comprehensive end-to-end fully managed solution including mobile connectivity. The agreement to this effect was signed by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, and Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed Al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, on the sidelines of COMEX 2022.

Among the solutions will be the convenient seamless app for booking airport taxis. As a leading company committed to enabling economic diversification and boosting ICV, the Company has brought on board a local software SME which has partnered with Streamax, a technology service provider from China, known for deploying one of the best AI-powered surveillance solutions.

Omantel and Streamax's solutions will soon enable Oman Airports to manage Muscat International Airport's fleet of 154 taxis and equip its drivers to enhance passenger experience and provide real-time information and data through an App. Streamax is successfully running this solution in airports of countries like China, Turkey, Thailand, Ecuador, Macau, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. This taxi management solution can be integrated into Oman Airport's existing mobile application and website



for passengers and be used as a separate app for taxi drivers. The intuitive system will offer passengers a seamless experience for booking a ride from the airport. This solution will gradually be replicated in other airports managed by Oman Airport.

Commenting on this agreement, Sheikh Aimen bin Ahmed Al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports said, "The scale, agility and security of the solutions that Oman Airports requires to roll out at all airports across the nation could only be provided by Omantel. These are very important digitalization projects that require efficient and innovative solutions as they are directed as enhancing the passenger experience and boosting Oman's image."

Omantel, OMRAN sign MoU on enhanced ICT cooperation, sustainability and knowledge exchange

Omantel has entered into a partnership with Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group) through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to explore opportunities for cooperation in the areas of developing ICT, IT infrastructure, systems and technologies, IoT solutions and mobile communications solutions for the Group's businesses, marketing, sustainability programs and sharing experiences and knowledge.

The MoU was signed at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel and Hashel bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group, and in the presence of a number of officials.

The MoU also covers exploring collaboration opportunities to provide ICT and smart city services at OMRAN Group's various projects, enhancing digital structure and exchange of knowledge and experience between the two companies through opportunities for rotation and on-the-job training. Under the MoU, the two companies will boost cooperation in areas related to marketing, promotion, social responsibility and institutional sustainability.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO, Omantel, said: "Through this MoU, we seek to take our existing cooperation further and explore greater opportunities in providing ICT solutions and services. As part of its strategy and responsibility to enable Oman's digital transformation, Sultanate, Omantel adopts the best international practices and shapes frontier technologies like Internet of Things (IoT), artificial intelligence, integrating them with applications to create smart solutions and services that help the government and



the people as per objectives of Oman Vision 2040."

On his part, Hashel bin Obaid Al Mahrouqi, CEO of OMRAN Group said: "This agreement reflects OMRAN Group's vision, which seeks to keep pace with technical development and implement the best innovative digital solutions in the tourism sector. The MoU is in line with the Sultanate's shift towards digital transformation. The OMRAN Group is committed to exploring opportunities to expand business and launch more projects across the Sultanate."

OMRAN Group is implementing plans to expand the tourism sector and achieve sustainable growth through strategic initiatives and partnerships. It also seeks to create more growth opportunities for SMEs and lead to the development of local communities.

Omantel and EDO sign agreement for communication services and advanced ICT solutions

Omantel, the Sultanate's first and leading telecom and ICT solutions provider signed an agreement with Energy Development Oman to provide unified communication services to EDO. The agreement was signed by Aladdin Abdullah CCO at Omantel and Sultan bin Ali Al Mamari Chief Financial Officer at EDO.

As the first step, Omantel has facilitated unified communication solutions, besides setting up modern video conferencing rooms and providing ubiquitous connectivity across the EDO head office.

Omantel will scale up the range of services provided enabling EDO to cater for its future needs and will be leveraging its suite of service solutions to meet EDO ever requirements as its marks its growing presence across the sultanate.

Sultan bin Ali Al Mamari Chief Financial Officer at EDO said, "Advanced ICT solutions are essential for the success of any business as they make the functioning of organizations easier and on a secure platform. We are pleased at EDO to partner with Omantel for our unified communications services for the head office."

Omantel is the Sultanate's first and leading



integrated telecommunications and technology services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While striving to ensure optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of the Omani society.



Symposium on atheism and the reality of monotheism begins

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 24

A two-day symposium titled 'Atheism and the Truth of Monotheism, Method, Vision and Practical Interpretation' kicked off at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Tuesday.

The symposium, co-organized by Jabir Bin Zaid Waqf Foundation and Dar Al Kalima Attayiba, focuses on the vision of monotheism and its scholarly interpretation. Lecturers and researchers from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad are participating in the symposium with a view to instilling awareness about monotheism and laying the foundation for a scholarly model that enables dialogue and refutes atheist claims.

The symposium was opened by Shaikh Nasser Hilal al Ma'awali, Chairman of the State Audit Institution (SAI).



His Eminence Shaikh Ahmed bin Hamad al Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, gave a speech on the role of science in defining the existence of God Almighty.

His Eminence pointed out the need for institutions to pay attention to righteous upbringing and upbringing that do not conflict with the nature that God created people with, saying: "Scientific institutions should

take great care in education and nurture people with this faith that connects them to God Almighty."

Shaikh Khalil bin Ahmed al Khalili, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Imam Jaber bin Zaid Endowment Foundation, said, "There is no doubt that the youth's insight into the matter of their religion and taking in their own hands to face these challenges is a great responsibility and a great trust."

Shaikh Kahlan bin Nabhan al Kharousi, the Assistant Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, also gave an address in his opening speech on dealing with atheism.

Dr Amr Sharif touched on the causes of atheism, which are religious suspicions, the clash between science and religion, moral and civilisational backwardness and multiplicity of religions.

Oman Vision 2040 Unit implements 34 business initiatives

FROM P1

Among these initiatives is granting the permanent residence to the investors, as more than 200 cards have been granted to the investors. This indicates to the foreign investors' desire to benefit from this feature and push them to stay in Oman and follow up their investments.

Inspired by the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik in this regard, efforts will continue during the current year to complete what has been worked on during the past year and develop new initiatives and projects that will contribute to achieve qualitative leap in improving business and investment environment.

Al Masrouri also said that within the framework of the fast track initiative, which was 100 per cent completed, the technical committee moved forward to

exceed a number of projects that were resolved during 2021.

He added that the target was to complete 9 projects, but the number of the completed projects during the year reached 25. There is a plan to develop the initiative, during the current year, to include setting standards, a clear path and a systematic mechanism for those projects facing challenges, as well as following up their implementation. In addition, some initiatives have witnessed a significant progress, including the unified national investment strategy, which aims to identify the economic sectors targeted for investment and propose appropriate incentives for them, as well as identifying the international partners in those sectors and its implementation mechanism, and enabling various government agencies to implement it in a systematic manner and with clear targets.

Shura Office reviews ministerial responses

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura reviewed a ministerial response provided by the minister of education regarding the ministry's measures to redress educational losses during the Covid-19 period.

This happened during the Office's 14th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022) held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, on Tuesday.

The Office also discussed the report submitted by the Youth and Human Resources Committee regarding an expressed desire to amend the regulations and criteria required to apply for job vacancies in the public and private sectors. The report included the committee's findings and recommendations.



The Office decided to refer a number of briefing requests to the relevant authorities. They included a briefing request directed to the minister of education regarding the Royal directives to construct 76 public schools in several governorates.

The request included briefing Majlis Ash'shura of the terms of the investment agreement for establishing 42 public schools and economic feasibility of the agreement. The Office decided to refer the request to the minister of education. The Office approved a

briefing request to the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) regarding the reasons behind the high prices of domestic flight tickets and the fees and taxes owed to the government for each domestic flight.

It also approved a briefing request directed to the CEO of the Central Bank of Oman on guarantee on bank loan in case of dismissal from job.

The Office of Majlis Ash'shura reviewed a number of reports submitted by the council's standing committees including from the Health and Environment Committee on an expressed desire regarding evaluating the quality of primary health institutions in addition to another report by the same committee regarding the establishment of food and drug authority.

■ RAFO RESCUES SEAFARER



A Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) helicopter carried out a rescue operation for a seafarer who suffered foot fracture on board an Indian ship, 40 nautical miles off Raysut Port. The sailor was transferred to the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Salalah to receive medical care. – ONA

No cases of monkeypox in Oman

FROM P1

TRANSMISSION

Monkeypox is a disease caused by the 'monkeypox virus', and it is a zoonotic viral disease. This means it can be transmitted from animals to humans and can also spread between people. The disease got its name – monkeypox -- because it was first identified in monkey colonies preserved for research in 1958 while discovered in humans in 1970.

Monkeypox is most commonly found in central and western Africa, where there are tropical rainforests and where animals that may carry the virus usually live. People with monkeypox are sometimes identified in other countries outside Central and West Africa, after travelling from areas where monkeypox is endemic.

Common symptoms are fever, severe headache, muscle aches, back pain, swollen lymph nodes, and rash that usually begins within 1 to 3 days of the onset of fever. The rash can be flat or slightly bumpy, filled with a clear or yellowish fluid. Symptoms usually last 2-4 weeks and go away on their own without treatment.

Severe cases of monkeypox

are caused by skin infections, pneumonia, confusion and eye infections that can lead to vision loss. About 3-6 per cent of reported cases resulted in death in recently endemic countries, according to WHO.

Monkeypox can be transmitted to people when they encounter an infected animal. The risk of catching monkeypox from animals can be reduced by avoiding unprotected contact with wild animals, especially sick or dead ones (including meat and blood) in endemic countries.

Most importantly, people with monkeypox are contagious while they develop symptoms (usually for two to four weeks). One can get monkeypox through contact with someone who has symptoms like rashes, body fluids (such as fluid, pus, or blood from skin lesions), and crusts.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

Risks can be reduced by limiting contact with people who have suspected or confirmed monkeypox, encouraging the infected persons to isolate themselves, covering any skin lesion and wearing a medical mask, avoiding skin contact with disposable gloves, washing the person's clothes, bedding and eating utensils with warm water and detergent.

Studies suggest that children are usually more likely to have severe symptoms than teens and adults. The virus can also be passed to a fetus or newborn through childbirth or early physical contact.

Lupus Oman kick starts awareness

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The Omani Lupus Awareness and Support Group will be holding its first public event aimed at creating awareness about this silent killer. The event, a gathering of the survivors of Lupus disease, will happen in cooperation with the National University of Science and Technology - College of Pharmacy.

Titled 'Life with Lupus', in celebration of Lupus Awareness Day, which falls on May 10, the event will include several working papers dealing with Lupus erythematosus and its effects.

Systemic Lupus erythematosus is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks its own tissues, causing widespread inflammation and tissue damage in the affected organs.

Shaima al Quraishi, co-founder (event planner and a lupus patient), Hasna al Harthi (football player and a lupus patient) and Basma al Saadi, representing the National University, were also present at the press briefing. Lupus Oman is the initiative of many young Omani



women including Mazzan al Farsi and Wadha al Busaidi.

Speaking to the Observer, Mazzan al Farsi, one of the survivors of Lupus, said that the event will also highlight the latest used and available treatments and talk about health practices for a better life, presented by several specialised doctors, namely Dr Ali al Shirawi, consultant rheumatologist, Dr Aseelah al Harthi, consultant dermatologist, and Noura al Akhzmi, psychiatrist. The event will also include sharing experiences and stories from the lives of SLE patients in the Sultanate of Oman.

"Symptoms of Lupus are totally different from one another, and many of the symptoms are considered to be put to the hallucination that the patients often are subjected to psychiatric procedures before they are diagnosed to be Lupus patients. What makes it all the more complicated is that Lupus is diagnosed several years after the first symptoms are shown, 7 to 8 years in many cases," said Mazzan.

She developed symptoms like feeling high temperature, loss of weight, bloating abdomen and massive hair loss at the age of

four and was not in a position to consume solid or liquid as it wouldn't last for a few minutes before her body rejected it.

Inflammation caused by Lupus can affect many different body systems — including the joints, skin, kidneys, blood cells, brain, heart and lungs. Lupus can be difficult to diagnose because its signs and symptoms often mimic those of other ailments. The most distinctive sign of Lupus — a facial rash that resembles the wings of a butterfly unfolding across both cheeks — occurs in many but not all cases of Lupus. Some people are born with a tendency towards developing Lupus, which may be triggered by infections, certain drugs or even sunlight. While there's no cure for Lupus, treatments can help control symptoms.

There are nearly 100 members in the group, but there must be many more who are silently suffering from the disease, according to the organisers. Nine patients out of 10 are women, but the number of men who have Lupus is also on the rise.



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‘Shellebrating’ the Turtle Day

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

EVERY YEAR, May 23 is celebrated as World Turtle Day to recognise the value of these species and raise awareness about helping them survive and thrive in their natural habitat. Founded in the year 1990 by an American husband and wife team Susan Tellem and Marshall Thompson, an animal rescue organisation based American Tortoise Rescue (ATR), World Turtle Day this year has the theme “Shellebrate” and urges “Everyone to Love and Save Turtles.” The objective is also to educate people about the things that they can do to protect the habitats of turtles as well as tortoises, which reportedly, belong to one of the oldest reptile groups across the globe.

People celebrate World Turtle Day all over the world in different ways. People organise various events and activities for the preservation of turtles. Some people also try to rescue and return them to their natural habitats on this day.

In the Sultanate of Oman, the celebrations for World Turtle Day, which is home to five species of turtles, World Turtle Day is of special importance to the country and it comes just a day after World Biodiversity Day, which falls on May 22 each year.

These include the Green Turtle, found on most Omani beaches and plentiful in Ras Al Hadd, Ras Al Jinz, Masirah Island and Daymaniyat Islands, and the Loggerhead Turtle that nest on Masirah Island, the shores of Dhofar and Daymaniyat Islands.

In Oman, with its pristine beaches and balmy waters, it offers the ideal home for sea turtles. The species include the Green Turtle, found on most Omani beaches and plentiful in Ras Al Hadd, Ras Al Jinz, Masirah Island and Daymaniyat Islands, and the Loggerhead Turtle that nest on Masirah Island, the shores of Dhofar and Daymaniyat Islands.

As part of Oman’s celebration of World Turtle Day, the Environment Authority has underscored the great attention accorded to marine life and noted that Omani beaches serve as a safe haven for sea turtles, particularly the species of Rimani, Al Hamsa and Al Sharfah.

The Authority, which is entrusted with the task of setting policies and procedures directed at conserving the natural resources in the country, has signed an agreement with Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the United States Federal Government, to draft a strategy for the conservation and protection of sea turtles in Oman.

Oman took keen interest in surveying and enumerating the types of turtles nesting on its beaches, and it drafted a long-term plan for protecting sea turtles. Following the agreement, the species will

be studied and tracked by satellite, within the context of a five-year plan to group Al Rimani turtles in the Wilayat of Masirah.

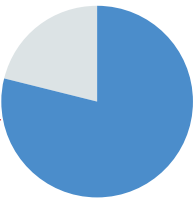
Still pollution and climate change are negatively impacting the sea turtles habitat and ecosystem. Each of the four species found in Oman now listed as threatened with either vulnerable or in some cases critically endangered, on the IUCN Red List.

Both land-based disturbances like coastal development and beach driving, and sea-based disturbances such as turtles being caught in fishing nets by mistake (by catch), ghost fishing, plastic pollution and climate change, cause major threats that impact both the habitat and population numbers.

In 2020, researchers published the disheartening finding that there has been a 79 per cent decline in the nesting population of Loggerhead turtles on the island of Masirah, a traditional stronghold over the past few decades.

The Environment Society of Oman in collaboration with the Environment Authority has spearheaded a range of activities including dedicated net clean-ups, awareness videos, community outreach programmes and several publications.

Among its efforts to protect sea turtles is an annual net removal campaign, which take place ahead of turtle nesting seasons to mitigate the threat of entanglement and ingestion during nesting and hatching seasons.



IN 2020
THERE HAS
BEEN A
79%
DECLINE IN
THE NESTING
POPULATION
OF
LOGGERHEAD
TURTLES ON
THE ISLAND
OF MASIRAH



Oman, Austria hold political consultations session

MUSCAT: The first round of political consultation sessions was held here on Tuesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Austria.

The Omani side in the session was headed by Shaikh bin Khalifa al Harthy, the Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Austrian side was headed by Gregor Koessler, Political Director of the Federal Ministry for



European and International Affairs of Austria. The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and

affirmed the two countries' keenness in developing those relations in various fields.

They also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of mutual interest.

The session also saw the participation of Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of Austria to Oman, and several officials from the foreign ministries of the two countries.

— ONA



Oman, Brazil explore areas of food security cooperation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Federative Republic of Brazil explored areas of cooperation in the field of food security and ways of developing relations. They also exchanged expertise in areas of agriculture, fisheries and water resources.

This came when Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, received Admiral Flávio Augusto Viana Rocha, Special Secretary for Strategic Affairs of the Brazilian president. — ONA

IFJ Congress: Oman won 98pc vote to be the host

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@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman has secured 98 per cent of the IFJ (International Federation of Journalists) members' confidence in welcoming home the 31st Journalists Congress, a milestone that the nation can be proud of.

"Oman, represented by the Oman Journalists Association (OJA), is hosting the media congress for the first time and is the second country in the region to have played host to such an elite conference of world media," Salim al Jahwari, Deputy Head of OJA, said.

The world's largest organisation of journalists and other media persons represents



Salim al Jahwari, Deputy Head of OJA

600,000 media professionals from 187 trade unions and associations in more than 140 countries and is the organisation that speaks for journalists within the United Nations system and within the international trade union movement.

"Having got the trust of more than 98 per cent of the members, Oman having selected to be the host is a great milestone in the history of media here," he added.

IFJ was first established as the Fédération Internationale des Journalistes (FIJ) in Paris inn 1926, but was relaunched as the International Organisation of Journalists (IOJ) in 1946, and later renamed International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Brussels in 1952.

Younis Mujahid, President of the IFJ, confirmed that the Sultanate of Oman's hosting of the 31st International Federation of Journalists' Congress and its meetings from May 31 to June 3 is an occasion to discuss journalists' issues, press freedom

and what is happening at the global level. In addition to that, it will be an important station for the election of the Board of Directors of the International Federation for the next session.

"The convening of the 31st International Conference of the International Federation of Journalists in the Sultanate of Oman is an important milestone," said Moussa Moeen, Head of the General Union of Syrian Journalists.

He further said that it is a historic conference for two important reasons. The first reason is the convening of the conference in a sister Arab country, and the other reason is that the Muscat conference will witness the birth of an Asian press union.

MoU inked to boost digital transformation projects

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology signed here on Monday a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Microsoft company to boost digital transformation projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

The MoU was signed in

the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on the sidelines of the Comex 2022 technology exhibition.

The MoU aims to develop initiatives that contribute to grooming the abilities of students, academic institutions, small and medium enterprises, start-ups and government employees

by providing them with needed skills in digitisation and artificial intelligence (AI).

Microsoft will support the ministry in developing AI tools and ensure their practical effectiveness in various government units.

It will also back the government's efforts in adopting the latest

technologies to realise Oman's goals of building a sustainable knowledge-based economy.

The Government AI Readiness Index issued by Oxford Insights positioned Oman at the 47th rank internationally and 6th on the Middle East in terms of readiness in utilising AI tools.

— ONA

Programme for grooming executives launched



OXFORD: The Royal Academy for Administration implemented the first phase of the national programme for grooming government and private executives (known as the Educational Unit). The programme seeks to build the capacities of a comprehensive society of leaders in the two sectors.

The programme takes care of promising talents and provides

them with the latest expertise in the fields of leadership, economy, innovation and applications of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).

The design and implementation of the Educational Unit has been achieved in partnership with Oxford University. The two-week programme was attended by 40 participants, who had an opportunity to explore

experiences linked to various concepts of the new economy and its competitive features.

The programme, which included field visits to government institutions and private enterprises in the United Kingdom, also touched on common practices in the fields of partnership between the two sectors, innovation, digital transformation and ways to localise those practices.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (14/2022)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/21/064	2021/MM/ QS-21- Re call - 1	Maintenance Works for Fish market building in A'Seeb (Re tender) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	15/06/2022	07/07/2022	First
PRE/21/103	2022/MM/ QS-21	Maintenance of Traffic Signal in Muscat Governorate (E- Tender)	Rial 25	15/06/2022	07/07/2022	Specialist
PRE/22/009	2022/MM/ QS-23	Preparation Works at Umq Rubakh - Wisal - at Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 25	15/06/2022	07/07/2022	First
PRE/22/045	2022/MM/ QS-22	Slope Protection Works at Qurm Al Sarooj Beach (E- Tender)	Rial 60	02/06/2022	09/06/2022	Excellent

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1 %) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission.Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Original Tender Bond envelope should be sealed with red wax and entitled to His Excellency/ Head of Intrnal Tender Committee and to be placed in the Tender Box at Muscat Municipality HQ, Third Floor, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ita.gov.om) or call (+968 24166670).

جامعة الشرقية

A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, north of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:

ASU's Tender Committee has the pleasure to invite the companies to submit their proposals for the following tender:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees
ASU/03/2022	Facilities Management Services for A'Sharqiyah University	02/06/2022	06/06/2022 10:00am	16/06/2022	100 OMR

- The participated companies of this tender should be of Grade 1 and above.
- The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days from 8:00 am to 02:00 pm.
- Bids have to be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.
- The submitting of the main envelope should contain the following:
 - Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
 - Separate sealed envelope contains tender bond.
- ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids.
http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf
- ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.
- For more details, please don't hesitate to contact us on: (+968) 25401115 / 25401112.



Quad nations warn against ‘change by force’

TOKYO: Leaders of Japan, India, Australia and the United States warned Tuesday against attempts to “change the status quo by force.”

A joint statement by the so-called Quad bloc avoided any direct mention of any country in the region, but left little doubt about where its concerns lie.

The carefully worded document also made reference to the conflict in Ukraine, but without offering any joint position on the Russian war, which India has pointedly declined to condemn.

The Quad’s other members have been less coy about their view that a strong response to Russia’s war is needed, one that would deter other countries.

“As Russia’s war on Ukraine is shaking the fundamental principles of the international order... (we) confirmed that unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force will never be tolerated anywhere, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region,” Japan’s Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said, using another term for the Asia-Pacific.

The group’s statement made no mention of any country, but inveighed against a range of activities that has regularly brought tension in the region.

“We strongly oppose any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change



Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi prior to the Quad meeting in Tokyo. — AFP

the status quo and increase tensions in the area, such as the militarisation of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia and efforts to disrupt other countries’ offshore resource exploitation activities,” it said.

Hours after the summit, Japan said Chinese and Russian military

planes had flown jointly over the Sea of Japan and East China Sea as the leaders met, in a move the country’s defence minister called “provocative”.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN
“As the international community responds to Russia’s war against Ukraine, the fact that China took such action in

collaboration with Russia, is cause for concern. It cannot be overlooked,” Nobuo Kishi told reporters.

Beijing confirmed the flights, saying they were in line with the Chinese and Russian “annual military cooperation plan”.

The Quad nations unveiled plans to invest at least \$50 billion

The leaders unveiled plans to invest at least \$50 bn into regional infrastructure projects over the next five years

into regional infrastructure projects over the next five years, and a maritime monitoring initiative seen as intended to bolster surveillance.

The moves come with worries over recent efforts by China to build ties with Pacific nations including the Solomon Islands, which signed a security pact with Beijing last month.

China’s foreign minister will this week kick off a visit to a host of Pacific nations including the Solomons, Papua New Guinea, Fiji and Kiribati as well as holding video calls with Micronesia and the Cook Islands, Beijing confirmed on Tuesday.

Kishida urged Quad members to “listen carefully” to regional neighbours, including the Pacific islands, while Australia’s newly elected Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the bloc needed to “push our shared values in the region at a time when China was clearly seeking to exert more influence”.

If Biden was keen to avoid

being seen as changing policy on Tuesday, he left little doubt about where the Quad’s focus lies.

“This is about democracies versus autocracies, and we have to make sure we deliver,” Biden said as the summit began.

HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS
Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has sent a congratulatory note to newly elected Australian leader Anthony Albanese, easing a years-long freeze in high-level contacts between the two countries.

Relations between China and Australia have been shattered by a string of rows over espionage and the origins of Covid-19.

But Li’s letter signalled a willingness to improve relations after Albanese’s election, in what is the most significant high-level contact between Beijing and Canberra in at least two years.

“The Chinese side is ready to work with the Australian side to review the past, look into the future... to promote the sound and steady growth of their comprehensive strategic partnership,” Li said, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency late on Monday.

Albanese said the letter was “welcome” and said he would “respond appropriately” when he returns from a summit of quad leaders in Tokyo. —Agencies

\$50m settlement in case against B’desh Nobel laureate

DHAKA: Disgruntled employees have dropped lawsuits against Bangladeshi Nobel laureate and microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunus after a telecoms firm he chairs agreed to a \$50 million settlement, lawyers said on Tuesday.

Grameen Telecom (GT) and its senior managers were sued by workers who claimed the company had unfairly deprived them of profit shares guaranteed under the South Asian nation’s labour laws.

Lawyers for GT proposed the settlement after workers lodged an application to dissolve the company in the country’s High Court, Yosuf Ali, a lawyer representing 176 workers, said.

More than 100 lawsuits had been filed against GT by workers, along with three contempt-of-court charges against Yunus and another manager.

“Under the deal GT will pay the workers 437 crore taka (\$50

million),” another lawyer for the employees said, on condition of anonymity. Mustafizur Rahman Khan, a lawyer for Yunus and the firm, confirmed that the workers “have withdrawn all their cases”.

Yunus has been credited with helping eradicate extreme poverty in Bangladesh by offering microfinance loans to tens of millions of rural women through Grameen Bank, which he founded in the 1980s.

Yunus was awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his work promoting economic development.

But despite his status as a globe-trotting celebrity speaker, Yunus has faced a series of troubles at home in recent years.

He was forced from his position as Grameen Bank’s managing director in 2011 in a move his supporters blamed on conflict with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

— AFP

5G, a milestone for India’s telecom tech

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

With much needed push to the digital sector, India is aiming high and wanting to achieve greater heights. Within a span of 15 years, the country is aiming \$450 billion of contribution to the economy through its indigenous 5G technology.

The launch of indigenous 5G testbed will make way for a completely made-in-India 5G network, a significant milestone in deployment of the next-generation telecom technology in the country, according to Indian Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

During an event at the IIT Madras, the minister made a successful 5G test call and termed the achievement realisation of Indian prime minister’s dreams.

“His vision is to have our own 4G, 5G technology stacks developed in India, made-in-India, made for the world. We have to win the world with this entire technology stack.”

On May 17, Indian Prime



‘5G will contribute \$450 billion to the Indian economy during the next 15 years and the launch of indigenous 5G testbed will be a milestone towards Aatma Nirbhar Bharat’

Minister Narendra Modi had launched the 5G testbed for telecom companies to test their 5G equipment in India.

The 5G test call was a follow up by the Minister of Railways, Communications, Electronics & Information Technology.

The 5G testbed is a multi-institute collaborative project, which has participation from IITs Madras, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bombay, Kanpur, and IISc

Bangalore. Other institutions taking part in the project are Society for Applied Microwave Electronics Engineering & Research (SAMEER) and Centre of Excellence in Wireless Technology (CEWIT).

At another event Piyush Goyal, Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry, said the country is evolving transparent and effective governance and has moved transparently from 2G/3G to 4G and now 5G.

“5G will contribute \$450 billion to the Indian economy during the next 15 years and the launch of indigenous 5G testbed will be a milestone towards Aatma Nirbhar Bharat (Self-reliant India) in telecom,” he said.

According to him, nearly 400 comprehensive GIS-based maps have already been prepared under PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

“It will help in digitising the economy, boosting startup ecosystem, improving governance, ease of living and ease of doing business in the country,” the minister said.

ISLAMABAD

Crackdown on supporters of ex-Pakistan PM

Pakistani police have arrested hundreds of workers from the party of defiant ex-premier Imran Khan in a crackdown that is seen as a blatant attempt to thwart their planned protest aimed at toppling the new government.

“(The police) raided the houses of over 1,100 party workers and leaders after midnight,” Fawad Chaudhry, Khan’s close aide and former information minister, said.

Chaudhry said that the



crackdown was still going on and that party’s senior leadership was “safe.”

More than 400 workers and leaders have been arrested, he said. — dpa

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka imposes third fuel price increase

Cash-strapped Sri Lanka has imposed the third fuel price increase in two months as a campaign demanding that President Gotabaya Rajapaksa step down continued, officials said.

A sharp price increase in petrol and diesel was put into effect triggering off a chain reaction, including a rise in public transport fares. Minister of Power and Energy Kanchana Wijesekara said the price of octane 92 petrol has been



increased by 82 rupees per litre bringing the price to 420 rupees, while diesel has been increased by 111 rupees per litre to 400 rupees.

— dpa

KABUL

Pact on running Afghan airports signed

The Taliban signed an agreement with a company based in the UAE for the ground handling of three airports in Afghanistan.

With the new agreement, the new officials in Kabul and the representative of the UAE-founded company hope that all international commercial airlines can resume their flights to the country.

“International airlines, which have been away from this country for the past few months, we are hoping that they come back to



us,” the chief of UAE’s GAAC Company, told journalists. Qatar and Turkey have been holding talks with Taliban officials for the past couple of months to run the country’s airports. — dpa



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In brief

■ DAVOS



SWEDEN, FINLAND TO ATTEND MADRID NATO SUMMIT

Sweden and Finland, which have applied to join Nato, will attend the transatlantic alliance's summit in Madrid next month. "Of course," Sanchez replied, when asked at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, if the two nations would send delegations to the June 28-30 gathering. "They are big democracies, very well established and consolidated democracies, and I think it is also very important for Nato and the European Union to have them on board as Nato allies," he added. Spain will speed up its parliamentary procedure to give its backing for the entry of the two nations in the alliance, the prime minister said. —AFP

■ ATHENS



GREECE STOPS 150 MIGRANTS FROM ENTERING ITS WATERS

Greece said it stopped 150 migrants from entering its waters from neighbouring Turkey, a day after holding back another 600 in the largest attempted entry this year. "As part of our daily patrols, four separate operations took place early on Tuesday morning off the islands of Chios, Samos and Lesbos" in the north-eastern Aegean, a Greek coastguard official said. "Four inflatable dinghies were spotted with around 150 migrants aboard on the Greek maritime border and the patrol boats deterred them from entering by using sound and light signals and notifying the Turkish authorities" to retrieve them, the official said.

—AFP

■ BUDAPEST



HUNGARY'S ORBAN GAINS NEW POWERS TO RULE BY DECREE

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's government pushed through a constitutional amendment that will effectively allow rule by decree if a neighbouring country is hit by armed conflict or a humanitarian catastrophe. The measure, backed in Parliament by the 136 members of Orban's right-wing nationalist Fidesz party, will allow a state of emergency to be called, on the basis of the war in Ukraine. A health emergency currently in force to contain the coronavirus pandemic is due to expire at the end of this month. This allows laws to be suspended and restrictive measures imposed by decree. — dpa

WAR ENTERS FOURTH MONTH

Russia intensifies Donbas offensive



Smoke and dirt ascends after a strike at a factory in Soledar at the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

KYIV: Russian forces on Tuesday stepped up their offensive on the last pocket of resistance around Donbas region, as the conflict entered its fourth month.

Since Moscow's war in late February, Western support has helped Ukraine hold off its neighbour's advances in many areas, including the capital Kyiv. Russia is now focused on securing and expanding its gains in Donbas and the southern coast. "The

coming weeks of the war will be difficult, and we must be aware of that," Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address on Monday after regional leaders and residents reported heavy bombardments.

"The most difficult fighting situation today is in Donbas," Zelensky said, singling out the worst-hit towns of Bakhmut, Popasna and Severodonetsk.

Ukraine's armed forces said Russian troops were conducting

non-stop "offensive operations" in the region. The governor of Lugansk said Russia had sent thousands of troops to capture his entire region and that Severodonetsk was under attack.

He warned an estimated 15,000 civilians still in the city that it was too late to leave. "At this point I will not say: get out, evacuate," Sergiy Gaidai said on Telegram.

"Now I will say: stay in a shelter, because such a density of shelling will not allow us to calmly gather



People evacuate the city of Bakhmut, in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

people and come for them." The Ukrainian presidency said on Tuesday that four people in one house had been killed and four others wounded in the shelling of Severodonetsk, while another three people were killed and six hurt in Donetsk region. Residents of Bakhmut, a crucial junction that serves as a command centre for much of the Ukrainian war effort, said of the aerial onslaught they had suffered. "I looked up from my prayers and heard a

frightening sound," 82-year-old Maria Mayashlapak said next to the splintered remains of her home.

More than six million people have fled Ukraine and eight million have been internally displaced since the war broke out, according to the UN. Zelensky said in his address that Russia had carried out nearly 1,500 missile strikes and more than 3,000 air strikes against Ukraine in the first three months of the war. —AFP

Tedros re-elected as WHO chief

GENEVA: Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the first African to head the World Health Organization, was re-elected on Tuesday with overwhelming support after running unopposed for a second term.

The director-general had received more than two-thirds of secret-ballot votes cast, as needed to be appointed, but the UN health agency did not provide a precise breakdown. Sources in the room said he had received 155 of the 160 votes cast.

"I am really, really overwhelmed by the support," Tedros told the assembly after his re-election was announced to thundering applause.

"This recognition is not only for me. I really believe this is recognition for the whole WHO family. I am really proud to be WHO."

Tedros has become a familiar face as he spearheads the global response to the coronavirus pandemic -- an issue that remains front and centre at the WHO's annual assembly taking place in Geneva this week.

The Ethiopian former minister of health and of foreign affairs has also increasingly been sounding the alarm over the heavy toll that conflicts like the war in Ukraine are taking on global health.

"More even than pandemics, war shakes and shatters the foundations on which previously stable societies stood," the 57-year-old malaria expert said on the first day of the World Health Assembly on Sunday. "And it leaves psychological scars that can take years or decades to heal," he said, stressing his first-hand experiences. "I am a child of war," he said, the emotion palpable in his voice.

In 1998, when war returned to Ethiopia, "I felt the same fear as a parent myself... and my children had to hide in a bunker to shelter from the bombardment."

And, he said, "I feel the same pain and loss again now," with the conflict that has been raging in his home region of Tigray since late 2020.

"Not only a child of war, but following me throughout," said Tedros. — AFP



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

London's long-delayed commuter rail link opens

LONDON: Long delayed and over budget, the Elizabeth line rail link finally opened in London on Tuesday, with hopes that the speeded up journey times will provide a much-needed economic boost.

Hundreds of people queued outside Paddington station in west London to be on the first train, which departed to cheers at 6:33 am (0533 GMT).

By 10 am, there had been some 130,000 journeys, operator Transport for London (TfL) said.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan was one of those on board, and said that the line was a "game-changer for our country and our city".

Khan's predecessor as mayor, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, said the project is forecast to boost the UK economy by £42 billion (\$52 billion).

Only one of the line's three branches has opened so far, from Paddington to Abbey Wood in southeast London.

There, commuters wanted to reap the benefits of the new line from a sprawling hinterland ill-served with fast transport links.

"I'm excited just to see how quick it actually is," said Niyana Saratatt, 45, who works in central London.

"At the moment I need to take a train, a bus and a Tube. This will cut my journey in half. Everyone's happy," she added, predicting a rise in local house prices.

David, in his 60s, was on one of the first trains arriving at Abbey Wood having returned from his night shift as a security guard in Farringdon, central London. "It's a big change, it saves me 50 per cent of my time. I was very eager



The line, named after Queen Elizabeth II, is projected to carry up to 200 million passengers a year

to get it," he said. "It's going to increase activities, socialising, friends coming to visit you." The usual bleary-eyed rush hour was replaced — for one day at least — by wide-eyed excitement, as commuters and hordes of train enthusiasts packed the early services.

"I've been interested in the Tube for a long time," said software developer Kirk Northrop, 37. "Something like this, that's been 35 years in the planning and 15 years in the making, it's nice to finally see it come to realisation."

"It's not often you can celebrate a massive engineering feat."

Commuters snapped on their camera phones inside the vast new stations, marked by curving walls and spacious ticket halls.

"It's a great moment for the city,

very exciting," said Italian student Salvatore Ingenito, 20, who got up at 5 am to see the first train depart.

"Paddington is absolutely ravishing." Disability rights campaigner Brendan Taylor, 18, said the stations' step-free access would also be a "game changer" for those, like himself, in wheelchairs.

"Say I wanted to go from Paddington to Westminster, because the Tube is so inaccessible... it would take me about an hour and a half," he explained. "When Bond Street opens, it will take me about 15 minutes."

Sections from Shenfield, east of London to Liverpool Street and Heathrow Airport and Reading, west of the capital, to Paddington will open by May next year. Trains are currently scheduled to run from 6:30 am to 11 pm from Monday to Saturday, with a Sunday service expected to start later this year.

The line, named after Queen Elizabeth II, is projected to carry up to 200 million passengers a year, adding 10 per cent more capacity to London's transport network. — AFP

Where our focus goes, our energy flows



Hyesha Barrett
@coach_hyesha

Hyesha is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat. She is affiliated with the Whispers of Serenity Clinic

Imagine if all the millions of bits of information that was thrown at us, at every second of everyday were unfiltered and duly processed. This would be impossible for the brain to decipher without, literally exploding. We often think we act on impulse, yet this is far removed from the truth.

We are only able to process around 50 bits of information per second. Our brains make calculated moves depending on the exterior factors at play; all of which have a massive compounding effect on our overall well-being.

Even though we don't like to admit it, nor even quite understand it, our subconscious mind is hardwired and driven by

past experiences. Our memories both good and bad, attitude, values, identity and beliefs play a massive role in how we perceive the world. This is referred to as our 'internal representation' that adapts according to any external event.

POWERFUL FILTERING

Everyone is living their life according to their own filters and depiction of the world. Our brain uses three powerful filtering mechanisms namely deletion, distortion or generalisation to ensure we remain on a par with our thoughts.

Our brilliant brain detects what you pay attention to, what you like, what your patterns of behaviour

WE LEARN BEST WHEN WE REMAIN FLEXIBLE IN OUR GENERALISATIONS AS WHEN MORE EXPERIENCES ARE GAINED AND FINER DISTINCTIONS MADE

are and will then bring more of those things into your life.

This works for the positive and the negative. Depending on where our focus goes, our energy flows.

Deletion is the survival mechanism that budgets precious and limited attention to those things that will help us live longer, safer and better. Distortions are a way of filtering our senses so that

things fit in with what we expect or believe. Generalisations are a process that allow us to categorise the world in terms of how things are alike or different.

We learn best when we remain flexible in our generalisations as when more experiences are gained and finer distinctions are made. This allows us to have a looser grip on the first impression and be more malleable to change.

Our filtering systems are instrumental to our progression. Without them, we are mindlessly following and blindly being subjected to outside influences beyond our control or sphere of interest. With the filtering mechanisms at play, we are more zoned into honing our specific

skill-set in order to enhance our overall quality of life. Being aware that the choices we make and the decisions we take are the consequences of the unconscious filtering our brain does to protect us, will allow us to consciously make a bigger effort to enhance the mechanisms to our benefit.

When we follow the path of understanding oneself, coupled with the desire to learn, the incentive to be and do better, I guarantee you that when you let go of the things that no longer serve you and focus more on the things that you know are good for you, the filtering mechanisms will work exponentially more in your favour and bring about more of what you want in your life.

Mechanics, hairdressers... Ukraine recruits train for attack

CHARLOTTE PLANTIVE

"Hold on to the rope, look at me," the instructor says, coaxing 28-year-old lawyer Iryna Gorobiyovska who is nervously about to abseil down a building. Brimming with motivation but lacking experience, the Ukrainian, whose nom de guerre is Bunny, ends up sliding, somewhat awkwardly, to the ground.

Like thousands of others, she signed up to the territorial defence unit, a support force to the regular Ukrainian army, immediately after Russia attacked. Open to all nationals, the only requirement is being aged between 18 and 60.

Some members already have military experience acquired after Moscow's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and in the conflict with pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine that began the same year.

They immediately deployed to the war effort, but many others, like Gorobiyovska, did not know how to handle a weapon or apply a tourniquet. While the capital Kyiv was under siege by Russian forces earlier in the war, they mostly helped build barricades or hand out humanitarian aid.

Russian soldiers are now focused on the south and eastern regions of Ukraine, but — anticipating a drawn-out conflict — Kyiv has stepped up the training of its new recruits so they are ready to face the enemy if and when needed.

Training sessions have been held every week since March, says Mykhailo Shcherbina, deputy director of defence affairs for the Department of Municipal Security at Kyiv City State Administration. He says that between 8,000 and 10,000 people have been trained since March.

"It's a crime to send people who aren't prepared to a frontline. Everyone has to be trained even (to a) minimum," he tells.

It's all the more crucial now, he adds, as after largely defensive operations, Ukrainian forces have begun going more on the offensive, such as in the area around the northern city of Kharkiv. "And we have to teach people how to attack, how to liberate the cities," he says.

Deep in the forest, away from the capital, an old hut formerly used by the Pioneers, the Soviet version of the Scouts, is now a training ground.

Over five days, mechanics, construction workers, hairdressers and the likes are put through their paces, learning how to navigate a minefield, evacuate the wounded under fire, shoot an automatic weapon — or escape through the window of a multi-storey building.

— AFP

War in Ukraine is exacerbating global hunger crisis, says UN officials



Farnaz Fassihi

The writer is an Iranian-American journalist

A "perfect storm," created by the war in Ukraine combined with the effects of climate change and the pandemic, has driven global hunger levels to a new high, United Nations officials said last week.

At least 276 million people now face acute food insecurity, up from 135 million before the pandemic, and 49 million people in 43 countries are at the brink of famine, officials said during two days of events at the United Nations this week on the theme of global food security.

"We truly are in an unprecedented crisis. Food pricing is our No 1 problem right now, as a result of all this perfect storm for 2022. But in 2023 it very well will be a food availability problem," David Beasley, the executive director of the UN's World Food Programme, said at a Security Council meeting last week.

Ukraine and Russia together produced 30 per cent of the world's wheat supplies before the war, and Russia and Belarus were major exporters of fertilisers, according to the UN. The war has disrupted supply chains, and fuel prices have increased as a result of the fighting and sanctions targeting Russia's energy and banking sectors.

Rising prices for basic food items have sparked political unrest in many countries in the past few weeks, including in Sri Lanka Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Peru. Africa remains extremely vulnerable to food insecurity, according to the UN, and hunger looms in eastern African countries suffering from drought, such as Ethiopia, Somalia and Kenya.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken led last week's events. On Wednesday, Blinken presided over a "call to action" meeting, attended by ministers from 30 countries, to discuss current food needs and plans.

On Thursday last week, Blinken led a Security Council meeting on food insecurity and conflict, with the impact of the war in Ukraine dominating the debate. The United States holds the presidency of the council for the month of May.

Blinken accused Russia of using "food as a weapon" to break the spirit of

“I am negotiating for a ‘package deal’ under which Ukraine would export food via the Black Sea and Russia could sell fertiliser and food products to the global market

ANTÓNIO GUTERRES

UN Secretary-General

Ukrainians. There are some 20 million tons of grains sitting in Ukraine's silos, Blinken said and Russian attacks have affected the production of food and blocked its transportation by land and sea. "The food supply for millions of Ukrainians, and millions more around the world, has quite literally been held hostage by the Russian military," Blinken told the Security Council.

Russia denied that it had any role in the current food crisis. The country's UN ambassador, Vasily Nebenzya, called the allegations "barefaced lying and fabricating." Nebenzya said Western nations were engaging in what he called a proxy war with Russia and blamed the West for "taking hostage the whole of the developing world and pushing it toward hunger."

Diplomats and UN officials also

discussed ideas to relieve the food crisis.

Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Mélanie Joly, said that her country would offer logistical support to Ukraine, such as sending cargo ships, experts and food inspectors to facilitate the transport of grain. She said that Canada would also look into increasing its own export of grain, weather permitting, and would try to help countries purchase its grain at reasonable prices.

"We know food insecurity is creating chaos and conflict, and this is exactly what Putin wants, and we can't let this happen," Joly said.

Pakistan's foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, said at a news briefing that his country was facing food insecurity because it relied heavily on wheat and fertilisers imported from Ukraine. He called for negotiations and a peace deal to end the conflict.

Zardari said the war could distract from the impact of climate change on agriculture, which he called the "existential threat of our time,"

UN Secretary-General António Guterres said he was negotiating for a "package deal" under which Ukraine would export food via the Black Sea and Russia could sell fertiliser and food products to the global market. He also called for restrictions on food exports to be lifted to ease distribution and urged countries to release food reserves and send the surplus to countries in need.

— The New York Times



Egyptian farmers harvest wheat in Bamha village near Al Ayyat town in Giza province, some 60km south of the capital. — AFP

After all, pandemics need to end!



Samuel Kutty @samkuttyvp

The writer is a journalist and author declaring that the country’s health crisis is officially over. On the other hand it urged citizens and residents to isolate if they experience symptoms of Covid-19 and to take a booster shot if they hadn’t already and continue with precautions.

Yet the decision, like in many countries of the world, paves way for people to come out fully of two dramatic years plagued with the lethal pandemic outcome like shock, anxiety, chaos, outrage, fatigue and the financial chaos which upended our daily lives.

So this is the kind of a transition that all people have been impatiently waiting and wishing for since the decrease in the number of infection cases, especially after the latest Omicron started waning. Now people can go on holidays to any destination or even for a shopping trip or anything of the like without the traumatic test results, vaccine certificate or other Covid paperwork!

COVID-19 OR ITS OMICRON VARIANT, ACCORDING TO REPORTS, HAS NOW BECOME PERVASIVE THROUGHOUT MOST COUNTRIES, AND POPULATION IMMUNITY IS AT SUCH LEVELS THAT THE RISK OF HOSPITALISATION OR DEATH HAS DRAMATICALLY REDUCED

It’s official that all legal Covid-19 restrictions have gone! The Sultanate of Oman too joined on Sunday among the last group of countries with zero Covid-19 restrictions. The Supreme Committee on Covid-19 said all precautionary measures at all places and outlets were lifted as figures show that the virus has gradually declined. But the announcement came with a note of caution by not

declaring that the country’s health crisis is officially over. On the other hand it urged citizens and residents to isolate if they experience symptoms of Covid-19 and to take a booster shot if they hadn’t already and continue with precautions.

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Covid-19 or its Omicron variant, according to reports, has now become pervasive throughout most countries, and population immunity is at such levels that the risk of hospitalisation or death has dramatically reduced, especially for vaccinated people. Now people started walking freely, most of them even without masks, indicating that the pandemic is winding down, if not over.

But still what worries is that the transition was very often hijacked by the emergence of new and increasingly contagious virus variants and the subsequent re-

establishment of lockdown or other precautionary measures. According to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Head of the World Health Organization, it is not time yet for any country to lower its guard despite the fact that there has been a significant decline in the Covid-19 infection cases and deaths. Although in many countries all restrictions have been lifted and life looks much like it did before the pandemic, reported cases are increasing in almost 70 countries in all regions, he informed health ministers from different countries on Sunday last.

“This virus has surprised us at every turn — a storm that has torn through communities again and again, and we still can’t predict its path, or its intensity”, he adds. So the pandemic is not over? “No, it’s most certainly not over. It’s not over anywhere until it’s over everywhere...”, he told the ministers. So the question now is when we can say that the pandemic is over! According to experts, the Covid-causing virus, Sars-CoV-2, is likely to always circulate at some level, though not all, the pandemic’s acute phase is subsiding.

“I believe that pandemics end partially because humans declare them at an end”, says Marion Dorsey, an associate professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, who studies past pandemics, was quoted in the ‘American Scientific’ journal.

Of course, she notes, there is an epidemiological component, characterised by the point at which a disease still circulates but is no longer causing major peaks in severe illness or death. This is sometimes referred to as the transition from a pandemic disease to an endemic one. But for practical purposes, the question of when this transition occurs largely comes down to human behaviour.

John M Barry, Author and historian, who wrote one of the most definitive chronicles of the 1918 pandemic — The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History — has come to a similar conclusion, says the journal. A pandemic ends “when people stop paying attention to it”, he says. The rest of the matter is a combination of the virus’s virulence, and the availability of vaccines and therapeutics. “We’re almost at that point” with Covid, Barry says. After all, all pandemics need to end!



Syrian refugees in Turkey left in limbo...



Fulya OZERKAN

Samira hears the same message from Turkish politicians on the television day and night: Syrian refugees like her must return home. But her home near Damascus is still not safe, she says.

The 44-year-old from Ghouta is one of the hundreds of thousands of refugees in Turkey’s Sanliurfa province, which shares a long border with Syria.

Civil war in Samira’s homeland is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions since it began with a crackdown of protests in 2011.

Turkey has fervently opposed Syrian President Bashar al Assad, backing rebels calling for opening its doors to refugees. But a new wave of economic turbulence, which has seen inflation spike and the value of the lira drop, has put Turkey’s 3.7 million Syrian population under enormous strain.

Samira said she has never felt so much pressure since she fled to Turkey in 2019.

“I don’t think about going back, they destroyed our house. The situation is bad over there”, she said from her modest ground floor flat in the city of Sanliurfa, which is home to around half a million Syrian refugees — a quarter of the province’s population. Refugees fear they will be used as a scapegoat for Turkey’s problems in the 2023 electoral campaign, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan faces rising public anger over their presence.

The main opposition, the Republican People’s Party (CHP), has promised to send them back to Syria, while the leader of the far-right Victory Party has admitted funding a viral social media video aimed at scaring Turks about a “silent invasion” of migrants.

Earlier this month, Erdogan said Ankara was aiming to encourage a million Syrian refugees to return to “safe zones” on the Turkey-Syria border by building them housing and local infrastructure.

“Send Syrians back, send Syrians back! This is what we hear on television from morning to evening”, said Samira, sitting on a cushion on the floor and unwilling to give her full name.

“Why don’t they like us? We try to build a life here, we try to stand on our own feet. Politicians use us as an election campaign material”, she said.

Despite pressure from opposition parties, Erdogan has pledged that Turkey will not force Syrian refugees back and “will not throw them into the lap of murderers”. But his assurances are not allaying their fears.

A few metres from Samira’s house, 43-year-old Umm Mohamed, who runs a grocery store selling Syrian bread, fava and olives, cannot understand the turn of

DESPITE PRESSURE FROM OPPOSITION PARTIES, PRESIDENT RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN HAS PLEDGED THAT TURKEY WILL NOT FORCE SYRIAN REFUGEES BACK AND “WILL NOT THROW THEM INTO LAP OF MURDERERS”. BUT HIS ASSURANCES ARE NOT ALLAYING THEIR FEARS

the tide in society. “We are very scared”, she said, standing behind the counter, her eyes looking timid beneath a black veil.

“We feel the pressure. As a foreigner, we have to be polite all the time.”

Mohamed’s husband defected from Assad’s army. “We can’t go back”, she said. “They would kill us.”

Fatima Ibrahim, in her early 30s, married a Syrian refugee after fleeing to Turkey nine years ago. The economic fallout is hitting them just as hard as the Turks, she said.

Her husband lost his job as a blacksmith during the Covid pandemic.

Two weeks ago he found a job as a farmer in central Konya province — 700 km from Sanliurfa.

“Employers pay us less, so locals are annoyed, blaming us for accepting a wage less than theirs”, she said, sitting next to her three young sons.

“Sometimes we hear from the locals that we should go back, that we have caused them to lose their jobs”, she said.

“Some people tell us, ‘Syria is better now, why don’t you go back? Everything gets so expensive because of you.’ That makes me feel so bad.”

But returning to Syria is not a possibility for Ibrahim. “I will never go back. I will either stay here or flee to Europe. There’s no third option”, she said.

Ibrahim said she maintains a low profile in public to avoid trouble, keeping contact with locals to a minimum.

“I don’t visit my neighbours, and they don’t visit my home. We don’t mingle”, she said.

Haifa, a 39-year-old English teacher from Aleppo, has fluent Turkish after nine years here, and avoids speaking Arabic in public so as not to attract attention.

“I want to keep myself safe”, she said, after she was exposed to verbal assaults on the street.

“Political issues affect us more than the economy”, she said.

Haifa said: “Some people tell us ‘go back to your country, you’re having fun while our soldiers are dying there’.”

“You think it is easy to leave everything behind you? Your memories, your house, everything. You cannot even visit your mother or father’s grave.” — AFP



Fatima Ibrahim, who came from Kobane, poses with her children, in Sanliurfa. — AFP

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Oman finish runners-up in WAFF beach soccer

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oman settled for the runners-up position at the West Asian Federation (WAFF) Beach Soccer Championship after they lost narrowly by 3-2 against the UAE in the final late on Monday. Oman ended on the same place in the first edition of the championship in Iran in 2013 as they had defeated by the hosts Iran in the final.

In the Saudi Arabian city of Jizan, Bahrain ended the championship in third place after thrashing Palestine 5-2 in the third and fourth play-off. Hosts Saudi Arabia came in sixth after beating Lebanon 5-3.

In the final, Oman took the lead through Yahya al Muraiki but the opponents replied quickly through Waleed Basheer.

In the following period, the

UAE strikers pressed hard towards Oman's goalie Younis al Owaisi and they managed to score second goal by Hisham Muntaser. Later, Talib Hilal's men bounced back to find the equaliser to make it 2-2. Oman players joy did not last for long as UAE striker Waleed Basheer hit the winner to power his team to title.

Oman began their campaign at WAFF Championship in Group A with a 4-2 win against eventual champions UAE. Oman thumped Kuwait 3-1 in the second game before going down 4-3 to Lebanon in the last group match. In semifinal, Talib Hilal's men defeated Palestine 6-3 to move into the final match.

Oman's goalkeeper Younis al Owaisi was named as the best goalkeeper of the tournament. UAE player Waleed Basheer won the best player award of the tournament while his team-mate



Rashid Eid claimed the top-scorer prize as he scored four goals.

Oman coach Talib Hilal hailed the players for the top efforts.

"The team showed a top performance during the championship. We have played five strong fixtures despite long absence since our team's last appearance at the 2021 Fifa World Beach Soccer Championship. The team had prepared for this championship within 24 days only," he said after the match.

"The new young faces were brilliant including Yahya al Muraiki who netted three goals besides Nohu al Battashi. Thanks to all the players for their top show. The team played five top games within short period of six days only. Advancing to the concluding game with half of the new faces in the squad is a good accomplishment for the team," he ended.

Ivankovic picks 26 players for Doha training camp



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

As many as 26 players were called up by Oman's Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic for the overseas camp in Qatar beginning on May 26 until June 10.

Fahad Adil from Al Nasr club is a new young face in the squad. The selection of the Salalah-based team player came after the top show during the 2021-22 Omantel League season.

The squad also saw the return of the professional players including those who play at Iranian League including Fayeze al Rushaidi and Zaher al Aghbari besides Qatar's league players including Salah al Yahyaie, Juma al Habsi, Jameel al Yahmadi and Harib al Saadi.

Bahrain's Al Muharraq player Khalid al Hajri and Saudi's Al Akhdood player Essam al Subhi were also selected.

Among the 26 selected players, six are from Seeb club who claimed the HM Cup and Omantel League honours this season. Four players have been selected from Al Suwaiq, three each from Al Nasr and Dhofar.

During the 14-day preparatory camp in Doha city, no international friendlies have been announced yet. However, according to sources there is a plan for the national football team to have another aboard camp in Malta in June.

That camp may feature two warm-up fixtures against Malta and Estonia.

The above preparatory plan

of Red Warriors is part of the team's actual preparations for the forthcoming Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq, Basra city, and 2023 AFC Asian Cup.

OMAN SQUAD
Mohammed al Musalami, Arshad al Alawi, Amjad al Harthi, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Rawahi, Mohsin al Gahssani, Fahmi Said, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fahad Adil, Ahmed al Khamisi, Omar al Fazari, Mahmood al Mushafri, Ayman Dhah, Omar al Malki, Mutaz Saleh, Yazeed al Mashani, Mohsin Jawher, Ahmed al Kaabi, Fayeze al Rushaidi, Zaher al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Salah al Yahyaie, Juma al Habsi, Harib al Habsi, Khalid al Hajri and Essam al Subhi.



Karunaratne, Oshada fifties lead Lankan fightback in second Test

DHAKA: Openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Oshada Fernando each hit a fifty as Sri Lanka gave Bangladesh a fitting reply in the second Test in Dhaka on Tuesday. Both men took the crease after Kasun Rajitha claimed his maiden five-wicket haul, dispatching the hosts for 365, and helped guide the tourists to 143-2 at stumps on the second day.

Oshada was out for 57 runs while Karunaratne remained unbeaten on 70, as Sri Lanka trail Bangladesh by 222 overnight.

Karunaratne lived dangerously as Mahmudul Hasan dropped him on 37 at short-leg off Taijul Islam, moments after Bangladesh held back from reviewing an appeal which would have seen him out lbw off Ebadot Hossain.

Ebadot soon got his reward for good bowling as he dismissed Oshada, who gave a catch to Najmul Hossain at slip.

Shakib Al Hasan removed Kusal Mendis for 11, with nightwatchman Rajitha to begin his spell at the crease in the morning.

Mushfiquur Rahim finished the Bangladesh innings unbeaten on 175 when last man Ebadot was run out for a duck shortly after lunch.

Ebadot's was the sixth duck of the Bangladesh innings, the joint highest in Test history.

Asitha Fernando's 4-93 was overshadowed by Rajitha's maiden five-for off 64 runs.

Rajitha struck twice in the eighth over of the day and broke Liton Das' 272-run sixth-wicket stand with Mushfiquur, after the pair rescued Bangladesh from a perilous 24-5 on the first morning.

Kusal Mendis, who had been taken to hospital on the opening day under extreme heat, took the catch at second slip as Liton departed after hitting 16 fours and a six in his 246-ball innings.

Rajitha took his fifth wicket three balls later, forcing Mosaddek Hossain to edge behind for a duck



SCOREBOARD

Bangladesh first innings
Mahmudul Joy b Rajitha0
Tamim c Jayawickrama b Fernando0
Najmul Hossain b Rajitha8
Mominul c Dickwella b Fernando9
Mushfiquur not out175
Shakib lbw Rajitha0
Liton c Mendis b Rajitha141
Mosaddek c Dickwella b Rajitha0
Taijul c Dickwella b Fernando15
Khalid c Dickwella b Fernando0
Ebadot run out0
Extras (b9, lb3, nb2, w3)17
Total (all out; 116.2 overs)365
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-6, 3-16, 4-24, 5-24, 6-296, 7-296, 8-345, 9-349
Bowling: Rajitha 28.2-7-64-5, Fernando 26-3-93-4, Jayawickrama 38-9-108-0, Mendis 14-0-53-0, Dhananjaya 6-0-27-0, Karunaratne 4-1-8-0

Sri Lanka first innings
Fernando c Najmul b Hossain57
Karunaratne not out70
K Mendis lbw b Shakib11
K Rajitha not out0
Extras (lb3, nb2)5
Total (two wickets; 46 overs)143
Fall of wickets: 1-95, 2-139
Bowling: Khaled 9-1-27-0, Ebadot 9-0-31-1, Shakib 9-3-19-1, Mosaddek 2-0-14-0, Taijul 17-1-49-0

Oman U-17 team in tough group for AFC qualifiers

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The draw for the AFC U-17 Championship qualifiers on Tuesday placed Oman junior national team in Group C along with Qatar, Iraq, Bahrain and Lebanon.

Sultanate of Oman will host the Group C qualifiers in Muscat.

The Group A included defending champions Japan, Jordan, Syria, Philippines and Turkmenistan. Group B consists Indonesia, Malaysia, Palestine, Guam and the UAE.

On the other hand, the Saudi team came in Group D along with India, Myanmar, Maldives and Kuwait. Group E features Yemen, Bangladesh, Singapore and Bhutan and Group F included Thailand, Vietnam, Chinese Taipei and Nepal.

China, champions of the 1992 and 2004 editions, play in Group G along with Australia, Cambodia and the Northern Mariana Islands.

Group H includes Tajikistan, Afghanistan, East Timor and Mongolia.

Iran, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan and Laos play in Group I.

Two-time winners South Korea came in Group J facing Brunei, 2012 champions Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka.

In AFC qualifiers, 44 teams are participating, divided into 10 groups, so that six groups included four teams, and qualifiers will be held during the period from October 1 to 9.

The first placed team in each group will qualify for the finals, along with the five best second-placed teams.

OFA launches Oman women's futsal team

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Oman Football Association (OFA) launched the Oman women's futsal team here on Tuesday.

The launch ceremony was held at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel in Muscat under the auspices of Lujaina bint Mohsen Haider Darwish, OFA board member and chairperson of the Women's Football Committee. Also present were members of OFA Board of Directors, the national team players and the technical and administrative staff of OFA.

During the ceremony, the team members were unveiled.

A video presentation on the formation of the Oman women's futsal team was next which talked about the plans and goals of the squad.

Lujaina al Zaabi expressed her thanks to the national team's supporters, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the clubs that cooperated in organising and participating in the Women's Football League organised by the

Oman Football Association.

As many as 193 women players are registered with the OFA. The Sultanate of Oman soccer body involves 43 female administrators, 45 female referees and 20 administrative observers.

The Oman women's futsal squad was selected after thorough process from the existing players pool. The team will participate in many upcoming continental and international tournaments.

Nasra bint Mansour al Amriyah, 15 years old, one of the players of the national team, said: "I started playing football since I was a child. I played football at home with my brothers and with the encouragement of my father and grandfather, I joined one local team to play for four years. Then, I was selected to the national team a month ago."

Another player Ziana bint Salim al Riyamiyah, 18 years old, said she started playing football at school.

"I started my sports career in school, where I was one of the outstanding players. So then I moved to play in Muscat Club before joining the national team."



Oman women's futsal team with the chief guest and officials during the launch ceremony at Al Bustan Palace Hotel.

MEDVEDEV EASES THROUGH

R U N E T O P P L E S S H A P O V A L O V T O S T R I K E T E E N B L O W



Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko celebrates her win.



Holger Rune of Denmark with Canada's Denis Shapovalov after the match.



Russia's Daniil Medvedev serves to Argentina's Facundo Bagnis on day three of the Roland-Garros Open tournament at the Court Suzanne-Lenglen in Paris. – AFP

PARIS: World number two Daniil Medvedev eased into the French Open second round on Tuesday as Denmark's Holger Rune reminded Roland Garros that Carlos Alcaraz is not the only teenager dreaming of the title.

Medvedev, who came into Paris with just one match on clay this year following hernia surgery, routed Argentina's 103rd-ranked Facundo Bagnis 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 on the back of 35 winners and eight breaks of serve.

"I love Roland Garros, especially since last year," said Medvedev, who had lost in the opening round on his first four trips to Paris before reaching the quarterfinals in 2021. "I hope this year I can go further."

Rune, 19 and just a week older than the highly-rated Alcaraz, marked his main draw debut with a 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) dismissal of 14th-seeded Canadian Denis Shapovalov.

Rune, the boys champion in 2019 and a former world junior number one, entered Paris at a

career-high 40 having started 2021 outside of the top 400.

In the current clay season, he won his first title in Munich, beating world number three Alexander Zverev on the way.

Shapovalov committed 53 unforced errors in a tie played at breakneck speed.

"I didn't really show up today but Holger played great tennis," said Shapovalov, a Wimbledon semifinalist in 2021.

Later on Tuesday, fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who lost last year's final to Novak Djokovic after leading two sets to love, has a dangerous assignment against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti in the night session on Court Philippe Chatrier.

The 20-year-old, ranked 66, also led Djokovic by two sets in the last 16 in 2021 before injury curtailed his challenge.

This year on clay he made the quarterfinals in Marrakech and third round at Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Madrid where he was forced to retire against world

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN (FIRST ROUND)

Sebastian Korda (USA x27) bt John Millman (AUS) 6-1, 7-5, 7-6 (8/6); Richard Gasquet (FRA) bt Lloyd Harris (RSA) 6-1, 6-3, 6-4; Emil Ruusuvuori (FIN) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA) 6-2, 2-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2; Joao Sousa (POR) bt Jason Tseng (TAI) 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 4-6, 6-1, 6-4; Holger Rune (DEN) bt Denis Shapovalov (CAN x14) 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4); Henri Laaksonen (SUI) bt Pedro Martinez (ESP) 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (7/1); Ilya Ivashka bt Benoit Paire (FRA) 6-3, 7-5, 1-6, 7-5; Alexander Bublik (KAZ) bt Arthur Rinderknech (FRA) 6-2, 6-4, 6-4; Laslo Djere (SRB) bt Ricardas Berankis (LTU) 6-4, 6-4, 6-4; Daniil Medvedev (x2) bt Facundo Bagnis (ARG) 6-2, 6-2, 6-2

WOMEN (FIRST ROUND)

Alize Cornet (FRA) bt Misaki Doi (JPN) 6-2, 6-0; Jelena Ostapenko (LAT x13) bt Lucia Bronzetti (ITA) 6-1, 6-4; Ekaterina Alexandrova (x30) bt Greet Minnen (BEL) 7-5, 6-3; Karolina Pliskova (CZE x8) bt Tessah Andrianjafitrimo (FRA) 2-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-1; Aleksandra Krunic (SRB) bt Kamilla Rakhimova 6-4, 6-3; Katie Volynets (USA) bt Viktorija Golubic (SUI) 6-2, 2-6, 6-1; Elena Rybakina (KAZ x16) bt Arantxa Rus (NED) 6-1, 5-7, 6-2; Danielle Collins (USA x9) bt Viktoriya Tomova (BUL) 6-0, 6-4

number three Alexander Zverev.

However, Tsitsipas is enjoying an impressive clay court season in which he has successfully

defended his Monte Carlo title, was runner-up in Rome and made the semifinals in Madrid.

The Greek also enjoys a season-

leading 31 wins on the tour this year.

OSTAPENKO CASTS WIMBLEDON DOUBT

Two former women's champions were also in action.

Simona Halep, the 2018 champion, who is working with Serena Williams's coach Patrick Mouratoglou, faces Nastasja Schunk, an 18-year-old lucky loser from qualifying, ranked at 165 in the world.

Jelena Ostapenko, who was a shock Roland Garros winner in 2017, defeated Italy's Lucia Bronzetti 6-1, 6-4 to end a five-match losing streak having started the year winning 14 of 18.

Ostapenko became the latest player to cast doubt on her appearance at Wimbledon after the tournament was stripped of ranking points in response to its banning of Russian and Belarusian players.

"If there are no points, I'm not really sure what I'm going to," said the Latvian.

"I think maybe they are going to change their mind. I'm not sure about points. But I think a lot of things may happen within the next week or two weeks."

Spain's world number four Paula Badosa, a quarterfinalist in 2021, takes on France's Fiona Ferro.

Before that match on Court Philippe Chatrier, French fans will possibly bid farewell to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, the former world number five who will retire once his French Open campaign ends.

Tsonga, unseeded, lost the 2008 Australian Open final to Djokovic as the Serb claimed the first of his 20 Grand Slam titles.

He made it to the semifinals twice at both the French Open and Wimbledon and finished runner-up to Roger Federer at the ATP Finals in 2011.

"It's a moment which I am sure will be full of emotion," said the 37-year-old who takes on eighth seed Casper Ruud, the champion in Geneva at the weekend.

— AFP

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First hybrid power plant for research unveiled at SQU



MUSCAT: The Sustainable Energy Research Centre (SERC) of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) formally unveiled on Tuesday, May 24, 2022, the first hybrid power plant for research purposes.

The unveiling came on the sidelines of a forum on 'Green Hydrogen Prospects', which was opened by His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of SQU. The event was co-organised by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and SQU represented by SERC.

It deals with the prospects of green energy in the Arab region and the Sultanate of Oman. The forum targets enhancing constructive cooperation between various establishments in the renewable energy sector, increasing societal awareness on green hydrogen and discussing the prospects of green hydrogen in Oman, the region and the world.

It also aims to explore mechanisms to benefit from regional and international experiences in this field.

— ONA

Oman-Saudi partnership to invest \$3 bn in EV batteries, energy storage, food security

JOMAR MENDOZA
[@JmObserver](#)

Bahwan Services and Trading LLC (BST), an affiliate of Shaikh Ahmed bin Suhail Bahwan's group of companies (Sultanate of Oman) and Ajlan & Brothers Holding Group (Abilitii), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have signed a collaboration agreement to establish joint investments in both countries by announcing a new era of partnerships for key sectors in line with respective countries' Saudi Vision 2030 and Oman Vision 2040.

BST and Abilitii, both privately owned business conglomerates met in Muscat on Tuesday, May 24, 2022, to sign an economic, commercial and technical collaboration agreements. The various projects of mutual interests come under the field of industrial manufacturing of lithium-ion batteries for electric vehicles and stationary energy storage, renewable energy, healthcare and food security initiatives in both countries and joint investments within and outside the GCC.

Shaikh Mohammed Abdulaziz al Ajlan, Vice Chairman of Abilitii along with Eng Ali al Hazmi, Group CEO and senior management team of Abilitii are currently on a three-day visit



BOTH GROUPS WILL CO-OPERATE AND WORK TOGETHER IN THE FIELDS OF TRADE, INVESTMENT, KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND FACILITATE JOINT ECONOMIC EFFORTS DURING THE NEXT STAGE, THEREBY PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BOTH COUNTRIES.

Both groups will co-operate and work together in the fields of trade, investment, knowledge exchange and facilitate joint economic efforts during the next stage, thereby promoting sustainable economic development in both countries.

During the ceremony, Shaikh Ahmed bin Suhail Bahwan emphasised that this agreement will pave the way for a joint economic co-operation between the two countries in line with

respective countries visions for future growth.

This partnership with Abilitii is being built on the principles of flexibility, openness, and international economic collaboration in various vital sectors for self-sustainability, new technologies and to invest together in future economic growth sectors.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Suhail Bahwan's group of companies have been operational in automobile sector in Saudi Arabia for more than 12 years and now aspiring to expand into other business along with its trusted partner — Abilitii.

Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Ajlan said: "Led by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz and the Crown Prince, His Royal Highness Prince Mohammad bin Salman, Saudi economy reported huge growth at all aspects, in addition to the true vision of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the economy of Sultanate of Oman is strongly placed to grow at rapid rate, as per IMF's latest prediction highest in GCC at 5.6 per cent in 2022.

We believe, the Sultanate of Oman is a prominent economic destination for investments and an important trade partner of the Kingdom in the GCC.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Multi-sectoral panel to draft Oman's hydrogen-centric energy policy

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

A broad roadmap has been chalked out for the development of a new energy policy, underpinned by an effective regulatory framework, to help drive the growth of a future hydrogen economy in the Sultanate of Oman, a key official disclosed here on Tuesday.

Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani, who was recently appointed to head the newly established Directorate General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, said the landmark exercise involves multiple government ministries and energy sector stakeholders.

Addressing a forum on 'Green Hydrogen Prospects', jointly organised by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and the Sustainable Energy Research Centre (SERC) at Sultan Qaboos University, Al Shidhani said a high-level Steering Committee will shortly be set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to oversee the effort.



Also collaborating in this endeavour are the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, he stated. Significantly, a National Energy Transition Master plan is currently nearing completion, the Director General said.

Enshrined in the master plan are seven key goals: Enhancing energy efficiency, Growing Renewable Energies, Promoting integrated new energy solutions, Focusing on carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS) as a decarbonisation solution, Developing international markets for hydrogen, Advancing local hydrogen utilization opportunities, and Optimising gas monetisation.

A number of key energy sector stakeholder institutions have also been contributing to the effort to formulate a new hydrogen-centric energy policy for the Sultanate of Oman, said Al Shidhani.

Led by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, this effort has also involved APSR, the power sector,



We will need to have an overarching Energy Transition Policy which will then be cascaded down to the following four specific energy policies: Energy Efficiency Policy, Renewable Energy Policy, Hydrogen Policy and Carbon Capture Utilisation & Storage (CCUS) Policy.

ABDULAZIZ BIN SAID AL SHIDHANI
Head, Directorate General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen

specific energy policies: Energy Efficiency Policy, Renewable Energy Policy, Hydrogen Policy and Carbon Capture Utilisation & Storage (CCUS) Policy. We will also need to make sure that cross-cutting policies that capture

In-Country Value (ICV), R&D, capacity building and innovation are also embedded within these four policies", the official stated.

Part of the new Steering Committee's mandate, said Al Shidhani, is to enable speedy decision-making and facilitate seamless cross-sector collaboration.

Its primarily remit will cover six key objectives: Formulating relevant laws, regulations, policies and strategies, Investment evaluation, Renewable Energy concessions and urban master-planning, Studies group, Establishment of Hydrogen Development Oman as a government-owned company and the Creation of a new national database for new energies, he added.

Yesterday's symposium was held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University. Also present were Shaikh Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman — APSR, representatives of the National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly), and a number of green energy experts.

Bank Muscat showcases latest digital solutions at Comex 2022

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman is participating in the Comex 2022 Expo, being held from 23rd – 25th May 2022 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre – OCEC.

Comex is the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation show in the Sultanate of Oman and offers exhibitors and visitors a comprehensive and highly specialised platform for industry leading discussions, knowledge-sharing and B2B meetings and the bank's participation and support are in line with its role in strengthening national development and digitalisation of the economy as part of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and was attended by dignitaries and business leaders from the Sultanate of Oman and the region.

Comex is celebrating its 31st anniversary this year and will feature an Exhibition, an Artificial Intelligence (AI) Conference, Workshops, Seminars, Certified Training Programmes, Gaming,



Business to Business Meetings and Attractions.

Through its strong presence at the 3-day long exhibition, Bank Muscat is showcasing some of its cutting-edge, customer-centric services and features. Bank customers will be able to apply (through self-service) and receive replacement / new debit cards on the spot by using the all new Multifunction Kiosk.

The bank is also highlighting its recently-launched SmartPay Payment Gateway platform that accepts local/international debit/credit cards making the transaction experience much more efficient for the bank's merchant partners and their customers.

The bank also takes the opportunity to demonstrate its secure QR code e-payments solution, which is very helpful for small and micro businesses in meeting the latest regulations on providing e-payment options to their customers. Members from the bank's Saeed team were also

available at the bank's stall to help existing clients applying for loans /credit cards and non-customers to apply for a new account from the site. Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Hamood al Jufaili, Assistant General Manager, Digital Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "In close alignment to the goals of the landmark Oman Vision 2040, Bank Muscat is delighted to extend strong support to Comex, which is the premier technology, innovation and digital transformation show in Oman.

Bank Nizwa supports Comex 2022



MUSCAT: As a firm believer in technological innovation in the banking sector, Bank Nizwa, the leading and most trusted Islamic bank in the Sultanate of Oman, extended its support to Comex 2022, Oman's official technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation show, as the main Islamic Banking sponsor.

The 31st Annual Hybrid Event, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, as well as through Virtual Support Platforms. The event included exhibitions, conferences, awards, workshops, seminars, certified training programmes, gaming, B2B meetings and other attractions.

With Bank Nizwa being at the forefront of Banking and Fintech and being deemed as the 'Most Innovative Islamic Bank', it has always directed its focus on digitalisation and the introduction of dynamic

Shari'a-compliant products and services.

Exhibiting at the Comex 2022, the bank showcased its digital banking offerings to visitors, which included a Digital Onboarding section that enabled visitors to open an account with Bank Nizwa digitally via the use of a QR code.

Digital onboarding has allowed the bank to reach bring Islamic Banking closer to a larger audience and simplify the account opening process for prospective customers. Also displayed was a prototype of an Interactive ATM and a Self-Service Card Issuance/Printing Machine.

Visitors could use the machines in real-time to understand their mechanism and received token cards that allowed them to enter the raffle draw to win exciting prizes, exclusive for Comex visitors.

Environmental initiative O! Millionaire holds first draw

MUSCAT: Environmental initiative O! Millionaire's first draw got off to a great start with it picking 61 winners and one winner who won a guaranteed sum of RO 10,000. The show was aired live on O! Millionaire's social media pages (Instagram, YouTube channel, Facebook and Twitter) and website.

The draw will be held every Thursday on these media platforms every week. To take part in the draw, participants have to visit <https://omillionaire.com/> website and purchase a green certificate worth RO 2.5. The green certificate will entitle them to an entry for a draw which can win them prizes up to RO 5 million. The certificate gives participants two chances to win, one is the raffle that



pays out one winner RO 10,000 every week and the draw that can win them prizes up to RO 5 million.

A spokesperson for Millionaire Investment LLC said, "For just RO 2.5 participants can win different amount of cash prizes every week. If a grand prize winner is not picked in a draw, every week a sum of RO 50,000 will be added to the prize sum.

We won't have a mega winner till it reaches RO 10,000,000 or someone wins it. We are pleased with the response we received at the first O! Millionaire draw. Those purchasing green certificates worth RO 2.5 can participate in the draw which will be held every Thursday."

NBO showcases next generation of banking and finance technology

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) participates in this year's Comex 2022 as Gold sponsors that was inaugurated by Dr Khamis bin Saif bin Hamoud al Jabri, Chairman of the Oman Vision 2040.

The Sultanate of Oman's official technology, communications, innovation and digital transformation exhibition, demonstrates the advances in financial technology and the bank's capabilities to drive Oman towards a digitally-enabled future.

Held at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) from 23-25 May, Comex 2022 – the 31st annual staging of the event – includes a public exhibition, workshops and seminars, as well as deep dive specialist events throughout the year. In addition to exhibiting the measures the bank has implemented to fulfil



the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, NBO is proud to be one of the main contributors to Banking & Finance (fintech) Technology Week, presented by the Central Bank of Oman.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail & Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, "Comex 2022 is the ideal platform for the bank to showcase the next step in the digital transformation of Oman's financial sector. Banking & Finance Technology Week gives

us the opportunity to gain insight into global trends, understand customer needs and continue to build on our reputation as a first mover to adopt the latest technology and develop innovative products and services to empower customers and make their banking needs more convenient."

NBO was the first local bank in Oman and since its inception 50 years ago it has introduced many market firsts to the country.

Own a Lexus with exclusive benefits before campaign ends

MUSCAT: Lexus enthusiasts have a good opportunity to own their favourite Lexus and benefit with service 5 years / 50,000 kms (Whichever is earlier), and 1 year free registration. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

Owning a Lexus is one of the finest experiences. Customers can choose from a wide range that includes luxury SUVs, sedans and coupes too. The all-new NX is equipped two powertrain options. A newly developed inline 4-cylinder, 2.4 L turbocharged engine that

produces 275 hp and 430 nm of torque and is mated to a new 8-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission (8AT).

Meanwhile, the new hybrid-electric system combines two power sources consisting of a 2.5-liter petrol engine and two electric motors producing 240 hp. The hybrid-electric system is also mated to a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT).

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine,



which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT).

The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-liter V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row 7-seater option.

Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version featuring a 3.5-liter Atkinson-cycle engine.

The Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving,

comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week. The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance.

In Oman, every Lexus vehicle comes with special benefits and privileges such as Manufacturer's Warranty of 4 years/100,000 Kms (whichever is earlier) and 24 hours on-road assistance from AAA. For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel "Lexus Oman", or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Oman. Lexus on Instagram.



OQ inks pacts with Trend Micro, Hussam Technology

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

OQ, the Sultanate of Oman's very own global energy group, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Trend Micro, a world-renowned company in the field of cybersecurity on the sidelines of the 31st session of the COMEX Technology Exhibition 2022 which opened at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

The second agreement was signed with Huawei & Hussam Technology Company to enhance network bandwidth between OQ and its locations within Oman to transmit data.

The agreement was signed by Maryam al Shaibani, Vice-President for Information Digital Solution, while Trend Micro was represented by Asaad Orabi, the company's regional director in the Gulf. This initiative is considered



one of the most important strategic projects in the field of cyber security in the Sultanate of Oman for the year 2022.

Under this agreement, Trend Micro Incorporation will contribute to laying a solid

foundation for protecting the entire digital infrastructure of OQ, as well as enhancing its capabilities in the Oil & Gas sector by promoting and enabling innovations and helping to provide them with industry-

leading solutions.

Trend Micro will work to ensure the security and protection of nine business units within the OQ framework, utilising best practices, advanced cybersecurity technology and established

THE MOU ALSO REFLECTS OQ'S ONGOING EFFORTS TO PROVIDE ITS CUSTOMERS WITH ADVANCED, UNIQUE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS AND SERVICES IN THE ENERGY SECTOR, AND REINFORCE ITS FIRM COMMITMENT TO SUPPORT TOWARDS THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND THE GOALS OF VISION 2040.

strategies, especially since the group has built a strong presence in 17 countries globally.

OQ's operations and activities cover the entire value chain in the energy sector, from exploration and production to marketing and distribution of finished products for fuels and chemicals to more than 60 countries around the world.

The agreement with Trend Micro marks the start of a new digital era that takes advantage of the latest cybersecurity solutions and experiences that achieve growth for the group within a secure system.

The MoU also reflects OQ's ongoing efforts to provide its customers with advanced, unique sustainable solutions and services in the energy sector, and reinforce its firm commitment to support towards the national economy and the goals of Vision 2040.

The partnership is a part of previous partnerships that brought OQ and Trend Micro together previously, to complete the successful march in securing all units of the Group against complex cyberattacks. This agreement is considered the largest in the field of cybersecurity technology in the Sultanate of Oman.

Oxy Oman sponsors Awtad 3D Printing Educational Programme



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

Oxy Oman representatives recently attended the closing ceremony event for the company's exclusively — sponsored "Awtad" 3D Printing Educational Programme and competition.

Awtad has trained teachers and 10th grade students in 3D printing technology, to help develop their skills in the field. The programme is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, and organised by InnoTech, an Omani SME in the 3D printing and technology field.

The closing event was held at the Ministry of Education under the auspices of Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs, and with the attendance of Said al Balushi, Senior Vice-President Technical at Oxy Oman, along with senior representatives of the company.

The closing event celebrated the winning 3D projects created by the participating students as part of Awtad's final 3D Printing Competition.

Awtad held a series of practical workshops to engage over 230 students, as well as teachers from across the country in designing and creating 3D printed products and objects.

The programme aims to create high level awareness

AWTAD HAS TRAINED TEACHERS AND 10TH GRADE STUDENTS IN 3D PRINTING TECHNOLOGY, TO HELP DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS IN THE FIELD.

of 3D printing across schools in the Sultanate, as well as its uses and benefits.

"We're happy to celebrate these students and teachers for their creative 3D projects as a successful completion of the Awtad programme. The programme is in-line with Oxy Oman's Social Responsibility objectives of supporting cutting-edge technological innovation and education.

We're proud to exclusively sponsor Awtad through our continuous collaboration with the Ministry of Education, to advance creativity and educational excellence across the Sultanate of Oman", said Stephen Kelly, President and General Manager at Oxy Oman.

This sponsorship falls under Oxy Oman's endeavor and long-term commitment to support programmes that enhance innovation and creativity, and is part of Oxy Oman's endeavour and long-term commitment to support programmes that enhance economic growth and sustainable development and that yield positive impacts in the neighbouring communities.

Thawani highlights fintech potential at Comex 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

Building on its efforts to accelerate Oman's digital transformation, digital payments platform Thawani Technologies is participating in Comex 2022, held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Thawani is presenting its innovative products and services that utilise the latest fintech solutions while participating in a workshop focusing on "The Role of Emerging Technology Companies in Developing the Banking Sector", under the umbrella of the Central Bank of Oman's (CBO) Banking and Financial Technology Department.

"The rapid technological advancements have been developing the financial sector in an unprecedented manner, while also

making people's lives easier. That's why, through our participation at Comex this

year, we aim to reach a wider segment of the public and familiarise them with FinTech solutions and highlight the role it plays in the development of the banking sector", said Eng Majid al Amri, Founder and CEO of Thawani Technologies.

"In addition, we will also showcase our diverse portfolio and latest products and services, as well as an application update to enhance customers' experience ensuring maximum security, reliability and convenience offering users new billing services and electricity recharge options. Further, using NFC technology, we will showcase a "touch" feature developed by Thawani that would enable customers to pay in stores with any bank card.



Joint ROP-Bank Muscat anti-fraud campaign enters third year

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAY 24

The Royal Oman Police and Bank Muscat have announced that they will continue to cooperate closely and partner in implementing their joint anti-fraud campaign for the third consecutive year.

This announcement comes after the great success of the campaign in previous years as well as the excellent feedback from the general public regarding enhanced awareness of various types of fraud and preventing them.

With digital payments building momentum over the past, criminals from across the globe have increased efforts to defraud the general public, including new ways to cheat people through fake business deals, products and services.

The awareness campaign is being carried out as part of social responsibility using various



media channels including Oman TV, radio, print, online media and social media.

The jointly-run campaign

advises the public to always verify who they are dealing with before conducting any transaction, and also follow 'best practices' for

their digital safety.

The campaign provides examples of how fraudsters are perpetrating fraud and the consequences of blindly trusting people, especially when making purchases through the Internet without being sure of the seller's credentials.

The messages of the 2022 campaign provide examples of how fraudsters are perpetrating fraud and the consequences of sharing personal or banking data with others. This is especially true when conducting transactions online.

A number of informational videos and messages are being broadcast to the general public through both traditional and digital media, which emphasises the prevention of fraud that targets children and youth as well as their parents through online games that steal banking data, phishing emails that target businesses and individuals etc.

Oman-Saudi partnership to invest \$3 billion in EV batteries, energy storage, food security

FROM PAGE 13

Abilitii is eager to be part of this growth story and commit itself to partner with the well-respected BSTL. Abilitii by teaming with a local trustworthy partner wants to collaborate on various identified projects with an investment potential of about \$3 billion in near future.

The signing of this new collaboration agreement is a milestone in the economic relations between the two countries. We will continue this collaboration and our efforts in future to achieve shared goals of both the organisations, in line with the economic development aspirations of both the countries to create local employment and self-subsistentiality in key sectors."

Both groups have agreed to place industrial manufacturing, renewable energy, future technologies, innovation, modern agriculture, digital economy, education, healthcare and food security, as the top priority sectors of mutual interests in line the visions for 2030 (of Saudi Arabia) and 2040 (of Oman).

To use rather than collect, the second coming of NFTs

NFTs have been called everything from fads to outright scams, but early adopters see a future for them as uniquely useful tools for business, health and the arts that goes beyond mere digital collecting.

The non-fungible token (NFT) craze, just over a year old, has given the world works that have sold for millions and includes collections from the “Bored Ape Yacht Club” to an image of a naked Donald Trump following his 2020 election defeat.

This booming world of digital assets has opened up a new market into which tens of billions of dollars have been poured, while also provoking discussions about how they could be useful in the real world.

“NFTs are very rudimentary right now,” said Sandy Khaund, founder of start-up Credenza, which helps companies adopt new technologies based on blockchain, which underlies cryptocurrencies and NFTs.

Beyond the art world, “they don’t have a lot of functionality. They don’t have a lot of utility,” Khaund added. “Most of them are just monkeys or apes or whatever that do nothing,” agreed Juan Otero, CEO of Traval, an online travel site, in reference to the famous “Bored Apes”.

Yet there is a class of the digital assets bridging the real and virtual worlds.

Starbucks, which will soon launch its own NFTs, sees them as a “programmable, brandable digital asset, that also doubles as an access pass.” Owning one of the coffee giant’s NFTs, will open access to “unique experiences,” as well as to a “community,” a new vision of a loyalty programme, based on the blockchain.

This technology, on which cryptocurrencies and NFTs are based, allows the same token to be used for different applications.

On the institutional side, the tiny republic of San Marino, nestled within Italy, launched a coronavirus vaccine passport in July that incorporates NFT technology.

While the European digital Covid certificate was designed for the EU, this passport was intended to be able to be verified anywhere, without requiring a dedicated mobile application.

NFTs are very rudimentary right now. Beyond the art world, they don’t have a lot of functionality. They don’t have a lot of utility.

SANDY KHAUND
Founder, Credenza



UKRAINE PRESIDENT ADDRESSES THE WEF

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appears on a giant screen during his address by video conference as part of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos. The World Economic Forum (WEF) is back in the Swiss ski resort after a two-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, it had to hold its traditional annual meeting online. And the Omicron variant has forced it to be postponed again this year from January to May.

– AFP

Firms encouraging equality, diversity



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

WORKING-CLASS GRADUATES WERE FOUND TO LACK THE ‘POLISH’ REQUIRED FOR MANY FRONT OFFICE ROLES

Finance and law firms, in particular, are stepping up their drive for gender equality and diversity particularly in the UK and US. Investment bank, Morgan Stanley has enlisted 300 of its mid-ranking bankers for a new programme intended to increase the number of ethnic minorities from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in the financial sector.

The investment bank has rolled out a new scheme called Advancing Futures, in which 300 of its vice-presidents in London will mentor UK students from less well-off backgrounds on how to move their career ambitions forward.

Morgan Stanley’s head of diversity and inclusion for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, Gabrielle Lyse Brown said in a statement: “It is a critical priority for us as a firm to reduce barriers to entry and address inequitable career opportunities for young people from underserved communities.”

Investment banks face pressure to increase ethnic diversity within their UK operations, particularly in the wake of the revival of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020.

The socioeconomic background of potential candidates has long been a sticking point in the sector in the UK, with those from working-class backgrounds largely locked out of highly-competitive

and lucrative banking roles.

In September Morgan Stanley unveiled a new recruitment programme to hire 10 Black or female candidates who have had no prior experience of the industry for its London trading floor.

It has also launched a £1m-plus a year programme to provide funding for 25 UK students from ethnic minority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds during university and an internship at the bank.

Standard Chartered, meanwhile, has launched an apprenticeship on its trading floor that does not require any academic qualifications, in a bid to increase socioeconomic and ethnic diversity in its key roles. JPMorgan also offered a route into a high-paying investment banking job for a select group of school-leavers through a new apprenticeship scheme in 2020.

An investigation found that working-class graduates from the UK were still largely locked out of investment banking jobs, despite many specific programmes in place to try to bolster the number of recruits from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Working-class graduates were found to lack the ‘polish’ required for many front office roles.

With equality and diversity in mind, corporate law firm, Linklaters has promoted 41 lawyers to its partnership, including 17 in its London office. The Magic Circle firm

has increased the size of its partnership round from the previous year, when it promoted 35 lawyers to partner.

Women make up 41 per cent of the new partner cohort, meaning the firm met its target of promoting at least 40 per cent female partners each year. The promotions took effect on 1 May.

Finance is the division with the most of the new partners with 24, followed by corporate with 16. Only one partner was promoted in dispute resolution.

Mainland Europe saw 15 new partners promoted. Asia and the Americas had four new partners apiece, and one partner was promoted in the Middle East.

Linklaters senior partner, Aedamar Comiskey, said in a statement: “Each promotion is a hugely deserved recognition of top talent, hard work and dedication to delivering strategic excellence.”

Linklaters had a strong 2021 amid a global M&A boom, posting a 10 per cent jump in profit per equity partner to £1.77m, with revenue up 2 per cent to £1.6bn. Last month, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer also promoted 27 lawyers to partner, including seven from its London office. Fellow Magic Circle firm, Slaughter and May, said in March it was promoting eight lawyers to its partnership. With diversity as an aim, it all amounts to a move in the right direction.

Will the war in Ukraine revive the WTO?



ANNE O KRUEGER

The author, a former World Bank chief economist and former first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, is Senior Research Professor of International Economics at the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, and Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Development, Stanford University.

After continuing Donald Trump’s destructive trade policies for more than a year, US President Joe Biden’s administration finally appears to have recognised the importance of strong trade relations.

The United States is holding consultations with the European Union to expand cooperation on trade and technology, and with others on issues such as agriculture.

A big opportunity to reverse Trump’s legacy comes in June, when trade ministers from 164 member states and 25 observer countries will meet in Geneva for the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The meeting cannot come soon enough.

The world economy desperately needs the WTO to be restored so it can play the valuable role that it did before the Trump presidency.

It is thanks to the WTO and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, that the open multilateral trading system was so successful for 70 years after World War 2.

To its great credit, the US led the world in creating the institution and supporting its development. Member states agreed to subject their trade policies to the rule of law, which in turn allowed traders to engage in international exchange with confidence.

The essential WTO principles are threefold. Countries should not discriminate among other WTO members in administering their trade policies. Governments should treat foreign nationals and

entities within their jurisdiction the same as domestic firms. And all member states should maintain open trade policies, except in special circumstances.

The WTO has adopted important additional protocols on such matters as trade in information technology products, agricultural trade, standardisation of customs forms and so forth.

Equally important, it long served as the forum for settling trade disputes between countries. If an exporter claimed that its treatment in an importing country violated WTO rules, the WTO had procedures to address the charge.

In fact, the WTO’s dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) was widely regarded as one of its most successful functions.

In the event of a complaint, the WTO would notify the

complainant’s trading partner and set a timeframe for direct negotiations. If there was no satisfactory resolution, a panel was appointed to hear the case and present its findings.

If the defending country was found to have violated WTO rules, it could either alter its behaviour or appeal to the Appellate Body, whose seven members were nominated by the WTO membership by unanimous consent for four-year terms. The Appellate Body’s ruling was then binding on the parties.

But things changed when the Trump administration assumed office early in 2017.

In addition to imposing tariffs on steel, aluminium and other goods (many on dubious national security grounds), demanding a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement

and other trade agreements, and instigating a trade war with China, the US refused to approve any new appointments to the Appellate Body.

As a result, the DSM — the “jewel in the crown” of the WTO — now has no members and is defunct. In its absence, a group of 25 WTO member states and the WTO leadership agreed to a Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement, which will follow a process very much like the DSM.

If the Biden administration is serious about correcting its predecessor’s mistakes, it could use the June ministerial meeting to join the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement agreement and start negotiating a new statement of fundamental principles.

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His love for paper plane led to his passion for paragliding

Since he was a child, Abdulaziz al Dhuhli had been passionate about conquering the air. At a young age, flying paper kites had fascinated him and from the archaic paper planes, he would eventually move to electronic kites until he is old enough to pursue paragliding.. **P20**



Queen's pet passions to take centre stage in Jubilee parade

CORGI DOGS, HORSES and swans are all being put through their paces in a historic warehouse in Coventry ahead of their starring roles in a parade to mark Queen Elizabeth II's 70-year reign.

One of the procession's tableaux, entitled "The Queen's Favourites", has been commissioned from Imagineer, an outdoor events company based in the English West Midlands city.

Director Jane Hytch said the royal commission came as a "total surprise", but that the job was a "huge honour".

The parade, touching on more personal aspects of the 96-year-old queen's

life, will wind through central London to Buckingham Palace on June 5.

"When we were given the queen's favourites... we thought about what does she love outside of all her duties?" said artistic director Kathi Leahy.

Dogs and horses were the obvious choices.

In particular, Leahy focused on the queen's most famous canine companions, the short-legged, big-eared corgis.

A pack of 20 corgi puppets, mounted on wheels, will be stars of the show. The lead puppet is named Susan, after the first corgi given to Princess Elizabeth by



her parents for her 18th birthday.

Each one has its own expression. One, with full brown eyebrows, has been nicknamed Groucho Marx.

LADY GODIVA

To make the puppets as lifelike as possible, each of the young handlers was asked during rehearsals at "Corgi train-

ing camp" to "really look at their dogs and think about the character".

"Are they mischievous? Are they young? Are they old?" explained Leahy.

The parade also has a special place for horses, another of the queen's great passions.

It will bring to life 10 of her most beloved companions: from Peggy, the Shetland pony given to her by father King

George V when she was four, to Burmese, the mare she rode several times during annual "Trooping of The Colour" ceremonies to mark her birthday.

Some of the horses are depicted with gears, in a tribute to Coventry's rich industrial past.

It was on the site of Imagineer's workshop that the first British motor car was built, at the end of the 19th century.

To celebrate the city's heritage, a giant Lady Godiva puppet, created for the 2012 London Olympics, will also take part in the parade.

It pays tribute to the 11th century figure who, according to legend, rode naked through the city on horseback to persuade her husband the Earl of Mercia to lower taxes.

The procession, bringing together 140 cast members, will also evoke the annual counting of swans on the Thames. By ancient tradition, all swans in England belong to the crown.

It will also use boats dear to Prince Philip, in a tribute to the queen's husband, a former naval commander who died in April 2021 at the age of 99.

Hytch noted that with a global television audience watching the pageant, "there'll be a lot of adrenaline, a lot of excitement" for the Imagineer crew.

"We've rehearsed and rehearsed, so I think we will do a great job." —AFP

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BY NICHOLE NORDEMAN

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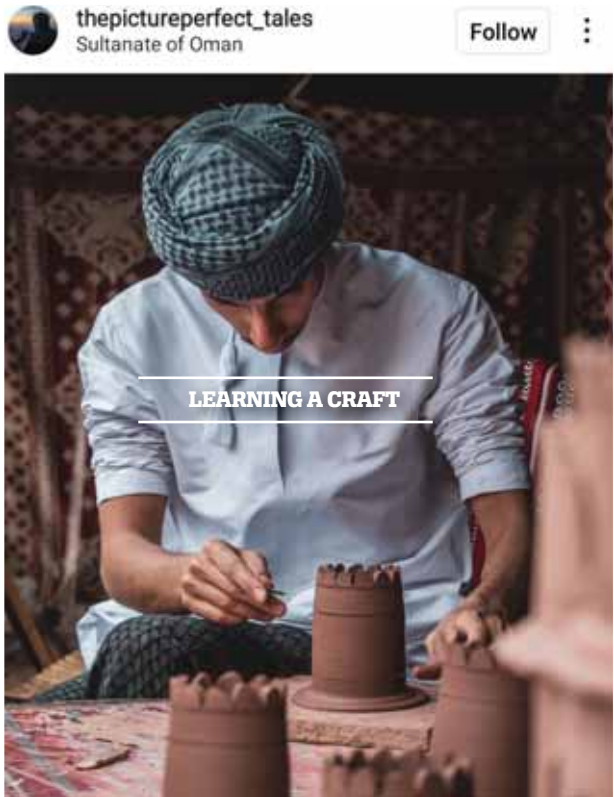
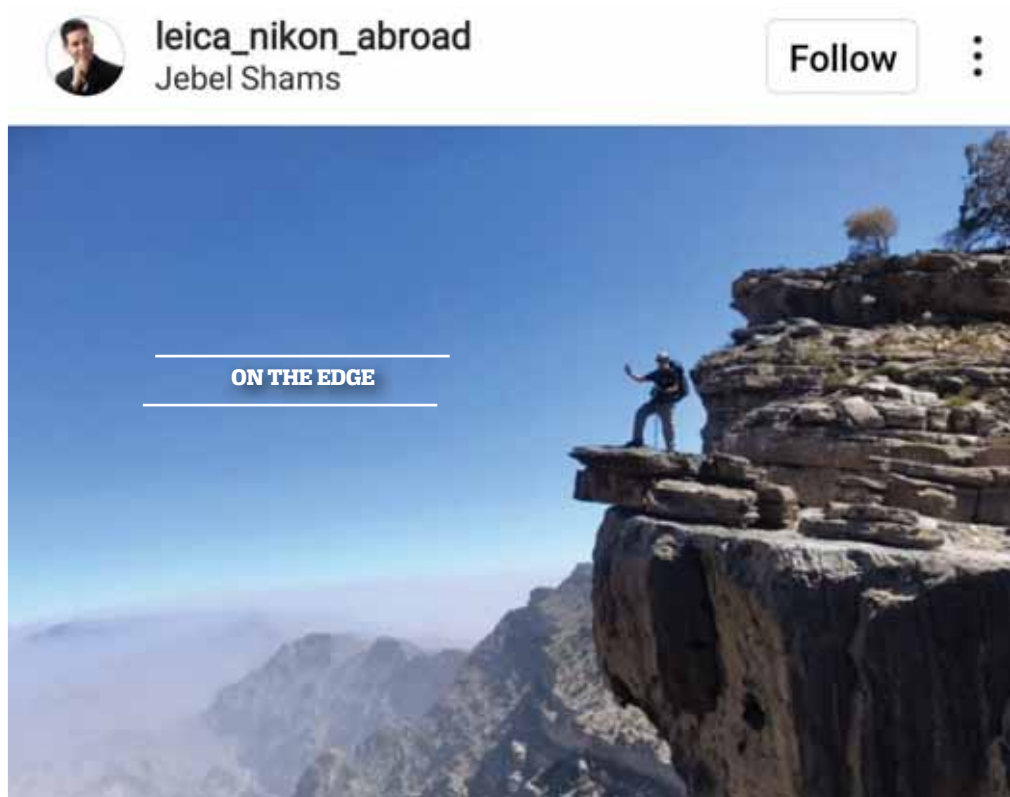
People sit during the auction of a recently rediscovered drawing by Michelangelo, the artist's first known non-clothe art, that was adjudicated 20 millions euros (\$21,054,000), at the Christie's auction house in Paris on May 18, 2022. The unpublished sketch in pen and brown ink is coming to the market for the first time in more than a century after it recently resurfaced in a private French collection. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

Prehistoric faeces reveals parasites from feasting near Stonehenge



ANCIENT FAECES found at a settlement thought to have housed builders of Stonehenge suggests parasites were consumed via badly cooked cow offal during epic winter feasts.

An analysis of the faeces found at the site of a prehistoric village near the monument has uncovered evidence of the eggs of parasitic worms.

This suggests the inhabitants feasted on the internal organs of cattle and fed leftovers to their dogs, the scientists say.

Durrington Walls was a Neolithic settlement just 2.8 km from Stonehenge, and dating from around 2500 BC, when much of the famous site was constructed.

A team of archaeologists led by the University of Cambridge investigated 19 pieces of ancient faeces, or coprolite, found at the settlement and preserved for more than 4,500 years.

Five of the coprolites (26%) Daymaniyat Islands one human and four dogs — contained the eggs of parasitic worms.

The researchers suggest this is the earliest evidence for intestinal parasites in the UK where the host species that produced the faeces has also been identified.

Lead author Dr Piers Mitchell, from Cambridge's Department of Archaeology, said: "This is the first time intestinal parasites have been recovered from Neolithic Britain, and to find them in the environment of Stonehenge is really something.

"The type of parasites we find are compatible with previous evidence for winter feasting on animals during the building of Stonehenge."

Four of the coprolites, including the human one, contained the eggs of capillariid worms.

While the parasites infect a wide range of animals, on the rare occasion that a European species infects humans the eggs get lodged in the liver and do not appear in stool.

The scientists say evidence of them in human faeces indicates the person had eaten the raw or undercooked lungs or liver from an already infected animal, resulting in the parasite's eggs passing straight through the body.

"As capillariid worms can infect cattle and other ruminants, it seems that cows may have been the most likely source of the parasite eggs", Dr Mitchell explained.

Previous analyses of cow teeth from Durrington Walls suggest some cattle were herded almost 100 km from Devon or Wales to the site for large-scale feasting.

Co-author Evlana Anastasiou, who assisted with the research while at Cambridge, said: "Finding the eggs of capillariid worms in both human and dog coprolites indicates that the people had been eating the internal organs of infected animals, and also fed the leftovers to their dogs."

Professor Mike Parker Pearson, from UCL's Institute of Archaeology, who excavated Durrington Walls between 2005 and 2007, added: "This new evidence tells us something new about the people who came here for winter feasts during the construction of Stonehenge.

"Pork and beef were spit-roasted or boiled in clay pots but it looks as if the offal wasn't always so well cooked.

"The population weren't eating freshwater fish at Durrington Walls, so they must have picked up the tape-worms at their home settlements. "The findings are published in the journal 'Parasitology'. — dpa

CINEMA

'Men' brings blood-soaked toxic masculinity to Cannes



RISING STAR Jessie Buckley admits she is no horror film junkie, but was happy to take on the wild, gore-splattered "Men" thanks to its provocative look at issues around toxic masculinity.

"Men", which follows Buckley's Oscar-nominated turn in Netflix hit "The Lost Daughter", is the latest from British director Alex Garland.

His back catalogue includes inventive sci-fi dramas such as "Ex Machina", "Annihilation" and "Devs", as well as writing credits on "The Beach" and "28 Days Later".

But his new film, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on Sunday, may be his strangest concoction yet.

It sees Buckley trapped in a remote English village, trying to recover from a traumatic relationship only to find herself under siege from several extremely creepy guys — all played by British actor Rory Kinnear.

This was not Buckley's comfort zone.

"I'm very squeamish. The last horror film I saw was 'The Texas Chainsaw Massacre' when I was about 10 and that was it for me", the 32-year-old said in Cannes.

"It wasn't so much the film, it was the fact that it was a Halloween party and my dad stopped the film midway and drove us all out to the woods. We were terrified!" she said, laughing.

Garland's film, however, uses horror film tropes in an innovative way to talk about emotional manipulation, male violence and challenges to the patriarchy.

"Alex provoked some very blunt, honest questions that we could investigate together", Buckley said.

"He's an intelligent and provocative film-maker and I

felt safe exploring this with him."

VERY MESSY Kinnear faced a special acting challenge, having to play a wide variety of strange characters.

memorable as the insane imagery that was produced.

"There was a lot of being outdoors and baying at the moon. I woke up the local livestock", Kinnear said.

"It's true," said Buckley, jumping in. "At one point the



But nothing could prepare him for the final sequence which — without giving away any spoilers — is one of the strangest and goriest conclusions ever put on screen.

"The last week of filming was very messy", Kinnear said.

"There was lots of squashed banana and fake blood", added a delighted Buckley.

Garland tried to keep the actor sweet as the demands of the scene became increasingly disgusting with goodies, Kinnear said.

"I tried to hide my discomfort — I didn't want to be a moaner.

"But the treats I was being offered were getting more and more elaborate and delicious, and every time I was offered another chocolate-covered fancy, I knew it was just a lump of guilt that was being handed to me."

Filming sounds almost as

sheep started responding. You can hear them in the film if you listen carefully."

Kinnear is a celebrated theatre actor, also known for supporting roles in recent James Bond films and shows like "Penny Dreadful".

Buckley is considered one of the most exciting new talents in cinema.

Her breakout role as a fiery, working-class single mother in 2018's "Wild Rose" earned her a BAFTA nomination and her Oscar-nominated role in "The Lost Daughter" means she is now highly in demand.

She also won an Olivier Award last month after starring in a West End revival of "Cabaret" in London in 2021.

Her character in "Men", Harper, "is someone who was always going to choose life", she said.

"Even if that meant facing the most fearful things", she added. — AFP

DISCOVERY

Child's tooth could offer clues to ancient human relative



A CHILD'S TOOTH at least 130,000 years old found in a Laos cave could help scientists uncover more information about an early human cousin, a study said on Tuesday.

Researchers believe the discovery proves that Denisovans — a now-extinct branch of humanity — lived in the warm tropics of southeast Asia.

Very little is known about the Denisovans, a cousin of Neanderthals.

Scientists first discovered them while working in a Siberian cave in 2010 and finding a finger bone of a girl belonging to a previously unidentified group of humans.

Using only a finger and a wisdom tooth found in the Denisova Cave, they extracted an entire genome of the group.

Researchers then found a jawbone in 2019 on the Tibetan Plateau, proving that part of the species lived in China as well.

Aside from these rare fossils, the Denisova man left little trace before disappearing — except in the genes of human DNA today.

Through interbreeding with Homo sapiens, Denisovan remnants can be found in current populations in southeast Asia and Oceania.

Aboriginal Australians and people in Papua New Guinea have up to five per cent of the ancient species' DNA.

appeared to have a "typically human" shape, explained Zanolli.

The study said, based on ancient proteins, the tooth belonged to a child, likely female, aged between 3.5 and 8.5 years old.

But the tooth is too old for carbon-dating, and the DNA has been badly preserved because of heat and humidity, said palaeoanthropologist and study co-author Fabrice Demeter.

After analysing the shape of the tooth, scientists reckon it was most likely a Denisovan who lived between 164,000 to 131,000 years ago.

NEANDERTHAL COUSIN

They then studied the tooth's interior through different methods including analysing proteins and a 3D X-ray reconstruction.

The tooth's internal structure was similar to that of the molars found in the Tibetan Denisova specimen. It was clearly distinguishable from modern humans and other ancient species that lived in Indonesia and the Philippines.

"The proteins allowed us to identify the sex — female — and confirm its relation to the Homo species", said Demeter, a researcher at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark, where the tooth is temporarily based. The tooth's structure had common characteristics with Neanderthals, who were genetically close to Denisovans. The two species are thought to have diverged around 350,000 years ago.

But Zanolli explained that the researchers concluded it was a Denisova specimen because no Neanderthal traces have been found so far east.

For Demeter, the discovery shows that Denisovans occupied this part of Asia and adapted to a wide range of environments, from cold altitudes to tropical climates, whereas their Neanderthal cousins seemed more "specialised" in cold western regions.

The last Denisovans could have therefore met and interbred with modern humans, who passed on their genetic heritage to southeast Asia's modern populations, in the Pleistocene epoch. — AFP

COBRA CAVE DISCOVERY

Scientists concluded "these populations' modern ancestors were 'mixed' with Denisovans in southeast Asia", said Clement Zanolli, a paleoanthropologist and co-author of the study published Tuesday in 'Nature Communications'.

But there was no "physical proof" of their presence in this part of the Asian continent, far from the freezing mountains of Siberia or Tibet, the researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research told AFP.

This was the case until the group of scientists began searching in the Cobra Cave in northeast Laos. Cave specialists discovered the area in a mountain in 2018 next to Tam Pa Ling Cave, where the remains of ancient humans have already been found.

The tooth immediately

His love for paper plane led to his passion for paragliding

By Baraah al Mujaini

Paragliding is a sport that has recently gained considerable popularity in Oman. Oman's naturally beautiful landscape has contributed to this growth as the air, creates a stimulus that makes one enjoy the sport and the scene.

Since he was a child, Abdulaziz al Dhuhi had been passionate about conquering the air. At a young age, flying paper kites had fascinated him and from the archaic paper planes, he would eventually move to electronic kites.

"The first serious step towards paragliding was made in late 2015", he shared. "I heard about someone who is experienced in paragliding and the interest and curiosity was pique", he added.

Abdulaziz would eventually do his research to get connected with the person who was into paragliding. They hit it off immediately and the interaction prompted him to begin his first training.

"I have noticed the progress in my performance remarkably, and I gained an invaluable experience", Abdulaziz said. While he is gaining actual experience, he also continued his research about the sport to practise it safely.

"In the beginning, it was just passion and curiosity. But that later progressed to become a favourite leisure activity", he said.

In the near future, Abdulaziz, is planning to harness his knowledge and experience in this sport to start his own business.

"From my perspective, based on the strong inclination of people to experience new activities, I think this sport will gain more and more popularity and reputation in the coming years. Especially, due to the promotion of this sport by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, by including this sport under the Omani Committee for Aerial Sport", he said.

Paragliding has played its part to promote tourism in Oman.

"I am keen on documenting and recording every single adventure I experience, for a couple of reasons; first to inspect my progress and second to post them on my different social platforms to depict the mesmerising Omani landscape", Abdulaziz said.

The best mechanism you have to follow when you want to try paragliding is to have an overview of the destination and assure that it is suitable for this kind of sport. Besides, trying to read visitors' reviews about it.

"The most critical requirement to experience this activity is fitness. As long as you are fit and brave enough to experience adrenalin-pumping activity, you are ready to try it", Abdulaziz said.

The best destination Abdulaziz has experienced paragliding in so far is Al Suninah sands (Al Safa), which is full of breathtaking scenes that he had never seen before. Besides, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams, are characterised by low temperatures, particularly in summer.

This sport has a significant impact on Abdulaziz, as it has sharpened his skills and shaped his character.

"It has helped me tremendously in breaking my fear barriers, building my self-esteem and confidence, and being cautious as well", he added.

The major impediments Abdulaziz is dealing with are financial support, and time balancing between this sport and family. However, Abdulaziz tries his best to consume his time wisely and dedicate a suitable time for everything in his routine.

"The most difficult time I had been through was when the engine stopped while I was flying in the sky, thankfully, I dealt with it smoothly and landed safely", Abdulaziz said.

Abdulaziz aspires to have his own academy for paragliding, he also appeals to stakeholders for support to achieve his goal.

Oman is a spectacular environment for experiencing new activities, all you need is to be careful and enjoy!

"Our country is characterised by many attractive destinations, whether in deserts, seas, mountains and so on. Just pick your favourite place, experience new activity, and live the moment!", Abdulaziz added.

