

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, at the 15th regular meeting to be held on Sunday. This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He added that the Majlis will discuss five key axes namely the general policies of housing and urban planning, the study on the reality of land development in the Sultanate of Oman, the ministry's objectives for the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), activating the ministry's role in the projects and programmes of vital sectors within the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan and partnership with the private sector. **DETAILS ON P5**



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OMAN PRIMED TO BE GREEN HYDROGEN PRODUCTION AND EXPORT HUB



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WAJMA IS A YEAR-LONG ATTRACTION FOR TOURISTS



MUSCAT

OMAN, INDONESIA INK AIR TRANSPORT PACT

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), signed an air transport agreement with the government of the Republic of Indonesia. The agreement aims to regulate operational and technical aspects to boost aviation movement between the airports of the two countries. The agreement includes 22 items and an annex on the air routes between the two countries. **DETAILS ON P2**

UN chief thanks HM for supporting stability in Yemen

NEW YORK: Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), expressed his utmost thanks for His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Omani government in supporting the efforts of spreading security and stability in the Republic of Yemen, as well as His Majesty's efforts in extending the truce. This was stated during an official consultations session held at the headquarters of Oman's permanent delegation in New York. Present at the session were Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN, and Hans Grundberg, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Yemen. Grundberg expressed his optimism for the gradual return of normal life in Yemen in line with reopening Sanaa International Airport and resuming air transport between Yemen and other countries. He also said that the UN and the international community are looking forward to reaching a comprehensive agreement for ceasefire and ending battles in Yemen to allow the Yemeni people to practice a normal life in safer and more stable conditions. — ONA

OIA ANNOUNCES DIVERSIFICATION PLAN

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the start of the initial stage of its exit plan for six of its national investments in diverse sectors. This plan reflects OIA's role in implementing the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040, aiming to achieve economic diversification, decrease dependence on oil and realise the government's approach to empower the private sector in leading the national economy and enhancing its role in driving national development. **DETAILS ON P13**

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SAYYID FAHD RECEIVES GCC CHAMBER OFFICIALS



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Wednesday received Ajlan bin Abdulaziz al Ajlan, President of the Federation of GCC Chambers (FGCCC), and Dr Saud bin Abdulaziz al Mashari, FGCCC Secretary-General. The meeting comes within the context of the 58th meeting of the FGCCC being hosted by the Sultanate of Oman. HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed experience of the private sector in Oman spanning over half a century through providing conducive milieu, as well as the GCC experience and the progress made in many fields to serve future of successive generations. **DETAILS ON P2**
PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

Nasa and ESA discuss sending first European to Moon

PARIS: The European Space Agency and Nasa on Wednesday talked up the prospect of putting the first European on the Moon, as they signed a deal strengthening collaboration for future lunar exploration. The space agencies had already agreed that three European astronauts would fly on the Orion spacecraft to Nasa's Gateway, a space station that will orbit the Moon as part of the Artemis programme. Now it seems one of those astronauts will go a step further. "We look forward to having an ESA astronaut join us on the surface of the Moon and continuing to build on our longstanding, critical partnership," Nasa Administrator Bill Nelson said after attending an ESA council meeting in the Netherlands. "Nasa is counting on cooperation with ESA to propel exploration of the Moon through the Artemis programme," Nelson said in a statement, adding that "the European Service Module is the powerhouse of the Orion spacecraft". — AFP



Nasa's Artemis I Moon rocket sits at Launch Pad Complex 39B at Kennedy Space Center, in Cape Canaveral, Florida. — AFP

Over 11,000 citizens benefit from Job Security Fund

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Active beneficiaries from the Job Security Fund reached 11,539, while the total number of entitled, including those who did not apply, reached more than 13,000, according to the latest statistics from the Public Authority for Social Insurance. As per recent Royal directives, the disbursement of job security benefit will extend until the end of December 2022 for those citizens whose services were terminated in the Sultanate of Oman. It will be disbursed to the former beneficiaries until the end of the year, exceptionally, starting from July. Those benefiting from the fund include all the insured whose services were terminated for reasons beyond their control. Such cases are in three categories. The first are the recipients of the benefit during the previous period. They will continue receiving it until the end of the year, noting that the law stipulates the benefit to be disbursed for only six months. The second category of beneficiaries are those who did not apply for the benefit, and their entitlement passed 90 days or more. Applications for this remain open till the end of June. Under the third category are the beneficiaries whose entitlement did not reach 90 days or those eligible during the coming period, provided that the request is submitted within 90 days of the end of the service. Khalifa bin Salem al Ghufaili, Director of the Legal Department at the Public Authority for Social Insurance, head of the Follow-up and Supervision Committee for the Implementation of the

The number of beneficiaries stood at 11,539 until the end of May. Among this 8,468 are men, while 3,071 are women

KHALIFA BIN SALEM AL GHUFAILI
Director of Legal Department

Job Security System, said the number of beneficiaries reached 11,539 until the end of May. Male beneficiaries are 8,468, while 3,071 are females. The average age for both groups is 34 years, and the average benefit value amounted to approximately RO 292. However, disbursement of previously given subsidies (self-employed workers; workers abroad and the like; and workers in the insurance protection extension system) will be suspended exceptionally from the system, according to the recent directives. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik had issued Royal Decree No 82/2020 approving the job security system in August 2020, with directives to take necessary measures to establish the Job Security Fund and finance it with RO 10 million from His Majesty as a start for its establishment in March 2020. **TURN TO P5**



Sayyid Fahd appreciates efforts of FGCCC

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received here on Wednesday Ajlan bin Abdulaziz al Ajlan, President of the Federation of GCC Chambers (FGCCC), and Dr Saud bin Abdulaziz al Mashari, FGCCC Secretary-General.

The meeting comes within the context of the 58th meeting of the FGCCC being hosted by the Sultanate of Oman.

HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed experience of the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman spanning over half a century through providing conducive milieu, as well as the GCC experience and the progress made in many fields to serve future of successive generations.

He expressed appreciation

The meeting comes within the context of the 58th meeting of the Federation of GCC Chambers being hosted by the Sultanate of Oman

of the Sultanate of Oman for the efforts exerted by the FGCCC to push the march of joint economic action and enhance the private sector's role in establishing projects and supporting GCC investments.

Means of tackling global economic crises related-challenges and their repercussions on all countries were also reviewed during the

meeting.

On their turn, the FGCCC President, Secretary-General and members expressed their thanks to Oman for hosting the meeting, as well as for the good preparations that contributed to reaching many positive outcomes.

They also valued Oman's constant support to the GCC march. They hailed various achievements made at all levels in Oman.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). — ONA

More rains over Al Hajar forecast

MUSCAT: The Meteorology Department on Wednesday said thundershowers with active downward winds were expected in the afternoon over Al Hajar Mountains and areas adjoining it. Scattered thunderstorms and active downward winds associated with cumulus clouds were expected over Al Hajar Mountains and desert areas from Al Dakhiliyah and Al Dhahirah, the weather office said in a statement. The Met also predicted partly cloudy skies with isolated rain along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains with chance of isolated rain.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL

His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Dr Nayeef Falah al Hajraf, Secretary-General of the GCC. The two sides exchanged views on matters related to supporting the march of the GCC. They also discussed several matters of common interest. — ONA



Military ties with UK reviewed

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Maj Gen Joi Martin Simpson, Senior Defence Adviser of the United Kingdom (UK) for the Middle East Affairs.

The two sides reviewed areas of military cooperation between the two countries and means of enhancing them. They also discussed several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by the Ambassador of the UK to Oman and the Defence Attache at the British Embassy in Muscat.

Separately, Air Commodore Zahran bin Nasser Ambosaidi, Acting Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO), received Maj Gen Joi Martin Simpson at the RAFO Command.

They exchanged cordial talks and discussed matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by the Defence Attache at the British Embassy in Muscat.

Also on Wednesday, Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, Acting Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received at the RNO Command in Muaskar Al Murtafaa here Maj Gen Joi Martin Simpson. The two sides exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by the Defence Attache at the British Embassy in Muscat.

— ONA



Oman, Indonesia ink air transport pact



MUSCAT: The government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), signed an air transport agreement with the government of the Republic of Indonesia.

The agreement aims to regulate operational and technical aspects to boost aviation movement between the airports of the two countries.

The agreement was signed by Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the CAA, and Mohammed Arzan Johan, Ambassador of Indonesia to Oman.

The agreement includes 22 items and an annex on the air routes between the two countries. The items also cover economic provisions, in addition to provisions of organisational and operational cooperation to allow the specified air carriers from the two countries to operate seven flights for passengers and

The agreement includes 22 items and an annex on the air routes between the two countries

cargo to any airport in Oman and Indonesia. Those air carriers can strike cooperation agreements for mutual code-sharing.

Meanwhile, the CAA, in cooperation with government units concerned and establishments from the aviation sector in Oman, is keen to increase the number of air transport agreements in the upcoming period. Those agreements will enable economic and social activities with the countries worldwide as this will contribute to boosting the activity of the aviation sector by increasing operations and attracting international airline companies. — ONA

ZAINAB AL NASSERI

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The sub-committee studying 'electric cars' at the State Council discussed on Wednesday the issue of integration of electric cars on the road. Adel bin Ahmed al Lawati headed the meeting in the presence of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and a number of authority officials to enrich the study with views of specialists and other interested parties.

The committee discussed the adequacy of electric energy sources to cover the needs of charging electric vehicles in future, the authority's plans, and its coordination with the Royal Oman Police (General Traffic Department) to equip gas stations with electric charging equipment and other necessary specifications.

It also discussed the

The sub-committee studying 'electric cars' at the State Council discussed the adequacy of electric energy sources to cover the needs of charging electric vehicles in future

specifications that the roads need, modifications, if required, and other specifications to match the integration of electric vehicles, and the plans and perceptions of the authority for the relevant authorities to change from traditional cars to electric cars.

It also reviewed methods of dealing with cancelled and expired vehicles, specifications of the infrastructure required to support electric vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman, the future



and time vision of the authority towards the inevitable dates for approving the suspension of traditional vehicles, and the motives and reasons for the world's tendency to stop these vehicles.

The study aims to review the current legislation related to electric cars, propose regulatory and legislative frameworks, monitor the readiness of the relevant authorities in the Sultanate of Oman to keep pace

and adapt to this type of cars, and to identify environmental, operational, technical, operational, legal and regulatory challenges and economic repercussions under the switch to use electric cars.

It is also concerned with studying educational plans to prepare a specialised and aware generation through coordination with academic and rehabilitation authorities in the government and private sectors regarding special trends in electric cars.

The committee also explored the possibility of benefiting from these trends as supportive equipment and logistics in industrial sites and smart cities in the governorates, dialogues and meetings to incubate job-seekers in various disciplines and locations resulting from the merger and the expected positive results in addition to proposing methods for dealing with expired traditional vehicles.



New Tender Board structure to upgrade government projects and procurements

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik recently issued Royal Decree No 32/2022 amending some provisions of Royal Decree No 84/2020 regarding the restructuring of the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board and introducing new administrative divisions with the aim of upgrading the efficiency of government projects and purchases and enhancing related local content.

The new divisions are as follows: the Directorate-General of Tenders, Follow-up Office of Government Projects, the Directorate-General of Government Purchases, the Directorate-General of the Local Content. The aim is to set up an integrated coherent system that would enhance the efficiency of government spending related to government purchases and achieving value-added as well as improving national cadres, domestic companies and the local market in general with a view to achieving sustainable economic benefits.

Engineer Bader bin Salim al Mamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, stated that the roles entrusted to the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board constitute a pivotal role in creating an integrated system for raising the efficiency of the government spending related to public projects

and procurement and maximising spending in local content through these projects and procurement.

Over the upcoming period, the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board will be working in an integrated manner along with the relevant authorities on the development of the government's procurements and improving the efficiency of the government's tenders and devising programmes that guarantee speedy implementation of government projects and reducing change orders while committing to the approved financial allocations in accordance to efficient approaches and frameworks. The Secretariat-General of the Tender Board will closely follow up, along with the competent authorities, the projects from the planning stage until completion.

In addition, it will upgrade procurement policies and procedures by devising strategies for managing frequent purchases as per quantum economics. This is in addition to collecting and analysing future procurement needs and determining appropriate contracting strategies in line with local content programmes based on the holistic approach adopted by the Secretariat-General in order to achieve the best service and value of goods and services for all concerned parties. In addition, the Secretariat-General

Royal Decree No 32/2022 amends some provisions of Royal Decree No 84/2020 regarding the restructuring of the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board

To improve national cadres, domestic companies and the local market in general to achieve sustainable economic benefits

of the Tender Board will work on developing effective procedures to ensure achieving the highest local added-value from spending on government projects and procurement, the official said.

Secretariat-General of the Tender Board affirmed that the restructuring and the establishment of the new divisions is in line with the goals of the Oman Vision 2040 pertaining to improving the government spending in projects and procurements. The most important functions of the new restructure are: to lead efforts to raise the efficiency of government spending, enhance local content

The government tenders platform was founded to regulate the procedures and is considered as a unified portal for the management of government tenders and procurement. The Directorate intends to develop a new vision for the platform and develop the existing procedures so that the electronic tendering system would include all stages from the beginning of approvals to the stages of closing the contract and developing a database of classified and registered companies. The platform also seeks to enhance the process of evaluating suppliers, contractors and to serve as a reference for the government system.

The Implementation Follow-up Office has been established under the umbrella of the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board. The founding team of Office said that it aims to upgrade the efficiency of the government projects and ensure quality and speedy implementation and minimise change orders in project implementation.

The decision to establish the Directorate for Unified Government Procurements aims to provide unified procurement services. The Directorate seeks to raise the efficiency of spending by providing the best service and value of goods. In addition to enhancing local content and

uplifting the capabilities of human cadres working in procurement departments at the government departments.

The Directorate for Unified Government Procurements applies the principle of quantum economics by electronically collecting data related to procurements of similar nature required by the government's civil departments. The Directorate's purviews include activating the unified procurement operations and minimising the volume of current expenditure related to the government's procurements. For the time being, the Directorate will work on laying down the legalisations and framework required during the foundation stage.

The decision on setting up the Directorate-General of Local Content aims to achieve the maximum value-added from the government spending on public projects and procurements, stimulate the national economy and enable the government departments to apply the best practices in terms of creating job opportunities for citizens. The Directorate also seeks to enhance the benefit of small and medium enterprises from government spending, develop local suppliers, promote overseas investments and augment the benefits from local products and services.

Museum digitises works of Alia

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Omani artist Alia al Farsi has collaborated with the Khaleeji Art Museum, the first digital museum dedicated to the art and photography of the Arab Gulf States, to digitise over 200 of her life's works. The collaboration was marked by an exclusive launch event that was held in Al Farsi's art gallery, Alia Gallery, in Al Rusayl on Monday. The launch event was attended by officials and members of Oman's art community.

The accomplished artist, whose works have been exhibited internationally in more than 20 events and who has held 10 solo exhibitions in cities such as Paris, Tokyo, Dubai and Brussels, has spent decades creating art pieces that depict Omani culture and society, especially Omani women.

"For me, art has always been a medium to preserve my identity, express my thoughts and celebrate the culture and nature of my homeland, Oman," says Al Farsi. "I was born in Muttrah, a centre of marine trade in Oman with a rich heritage. This city left a long impact on my life, hence my art. I am continuously inspired by the colours of Oman; the colours of the female traditional dresses and I always make it a point to include elements of Omani heritage in my works."

The artist has earned a reputation for creating larger than



life works and for using diverse materials such as Cambodian textiles, motor vehicles and furniture pieces as her canvases. A number of these artworks are available for viewers to walk in and see at Alia Gallery.

However, the collaboration

with the Khaleeji Art Museum, through which Al Farsi's works are permanently exhibited in a digital gallery that is open to art lovers around the world, unveils works that have been previously unseen by the general public. Included is a new series of 10

mixed media works by Al Farsi. Entitled Faces and Destinies, the series focuses on the human face and expressions.

"The inspiration behind this series is the post-Covid era, as people can now connect with each other more freely, unveiling genuine smiles, concerns and other emotions," says Al Farsi in reference to the recent relaxation of mask-wearing restrictions in numerous countries across the world, including Oman. "Friendship, love and other sorts of human relationships are often taken at face value. Our facial expressions, no matter how minimal they look, are manifestations of our principles and persona. In a way or another, our looks have an impact on the way we carry ourselves, and in this series, I convey how characters connect with their surroundings and views of the world."

Though abstract, Al Farsi admits that she derived inspiration from the people of her community for this series. "I think that every cell and muscle in our bodies radiate what we feel. Our faces reflect these feelings and emotions strongly," she explains. "Through a glimpse at one's eyes, it is easy to tell if they are going through enjoyable or rough times. Our hairlines, eyebrows, cheeks, lips and eyes speak louder than words, hence comes my fascination with the miracle of creating a human's face... I hope that these faces will help people explore and discover themselves better. To leave with a more sophisticated and thorough understanding of their emotions."



Breathing apparatus for social security patients

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Ministry of Health (MoH) signed on Wednesday an agreement with Oman India Fertilizer Company SAOC (OMIFCO) to supply breathing apparatus for low-income and social security patients, worth RO 50,000.

The agreement was signed by Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH's Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs, and OMIFCO's manager of Corporate Sustainability and Communication Eng Khalid al Araimi.

Dr Al Ajmi emphasised the significance of public and private sector partnerships for the general interest, praising OMIFCO initiative in funding the purchase of home-care ventilators for low-income and social security patients.

OMIFCO representative Al Araimi stressed the company's commitment to activating

partnership and cooperation with government institutions as part of Corporate Social Responsibility at OMIFCO to serve the development of the country, including with regard to health services provided to citizens in the Sultanate of Oman.

In this regard, Eng Al Araimi pointed out that health and safety are among OMIFCO's community investments strategy programme to effectively support initiatives that have positive impact on the Omani society.

He added that home ventilators represent an addition to the health services provided by the MoH's Respiratory Care section of the Directorate-General of Specialised Medical Care.

The initiative induces a positive impact by reducing patients' long stay in the hospitals and reserving the intensive or critical care unit beds. Additionally, these devices can reduce likelihood of infections transmission in hospitals among admitted patients.



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The mood shift is like a swinging pendulum, going from one extreme to another. This psychological condition is called bipolar disorder. However, there is more to it than just a mood swing.

“My relative was always pleasant, but we did not realise the extent of her suffering until it was too late,” said Pamela Vaz.

Then again, in another person, the symptoms only showed up when she was in her 70s.

“Bipolar is a form of mental illness that usually affects younger people. They experience mood swings. At a time, they feel very excited, they can get into too many thoughts, and some of their projects are undoable or too complicated,” Dr Hamed al Sinawi, senior psychiatrist, explained.

People suffering from bipolar disorder tend to feel full energy, and they do not feel the need to sleep.

According to Dr Hamed, another issue with them is that they are too talkative. They tend to speak a lot alerting others that there might be something wrong; they might eat less; may not necessarily be happy but sometimes they become irritable and get into conflicts because they can be very aggressive.

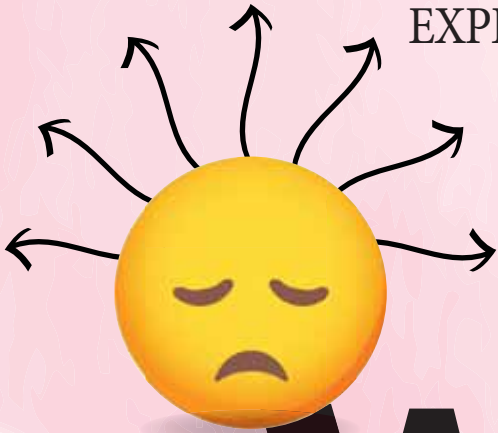
Badr was 38 years old when his bipolar disorder symptoms emerged. Today he wants people to be aware of this disorder.

He remembered the early days, “During that week, I was going through a lot of changes. It came as a shock. I had lost job. I had a big fight with my business partner. At the same time, I had been reading various religious books. All of it together left me confused,” he remembered.

“I was talking continuously. I was talking about the judgement day and that I was an awakened one. I would even say things like if people wanted to survive, they would have to come to my house. It was shocking to my whole family. They eventually called an

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PEOPLE WITH THE DISORDER
EXPERIENCE MOOD SWINGS



WITH

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BIPOLAR

MEDICATION, PSYCHOTHERAPY AND
FAMILY SUPPORT NEEDED



DISORDER

ambulance and took me to the hospital. It took me a while to accept that I have bipolar disorder,” he said.

It was the acceptance that made the difference, but there were more elements.

“I accepted the treatment eventually. I also read a lot about bipolar disorder. I was tired throughout the day, and very slowly, I accepted it,” he noted.

So finally, what helped the most - medication or psychotherapy?

“I think it is a combination of counselling and medication as well as understanding the disorder.”

Was it easy for Badr to bounce back after the treatment, or did he have to face stigma?

He replied, “Actually my family kept it to themselves and handled it well. I had a lot of support from my wife, my mother, and my brothers and sisters. So the family support helped in a major way.”

According to Badr, it is more of a mindset and changing it helped. He has been guided to practise physical exercises and take long walks, making him feel good.

“I now work for a company that is aware of my condition. They have accepted me,” said a content Badr who has moved on in life.

Dr Hamed pointed out that it is important to highlight personal experiences, and Badr is brave to share his experience because it lets others know and realise that people can live well even if they are diagnosed with bipolar disorder because of medication, psychotherapy, and family support all help. They assist the patients in regaining their confidence to continue living.

On the other hand, many people do not know they have bipolar because the symptoms are mild.

“Sometimes people think the reason is something else as magic or ‘hassad’ (evil eye) or other cultural definitions. But in my opinion, many people with bipolar can live a quality life. The key is getting the right diagnosis, being medication compliant and following up with the therapy.”



Sohar International signs MoU with MoE

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Strongly aligned with Oman Vision 2040 and the national strategy for innovation to place the Sultanate of Oman among the top 20 countries in the Global Innovation Index, Sohar International recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to extend support to the 3rd Oman Science Festival (OSF) as Gold Sponsors.

The MoU was signed on June 9 at the Ministry of Education's headquarters under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, and the presence of Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International. The MoU was signed by Dr Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary for Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Ministry of Education, with Sohar International represented by Khalil bin Salim al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer of

Sohar International, and Abdul Wahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer.

Commenting on the signing of the MoU, Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer, Sohar International, said, "Science, innovation and research are powerful tools that have the capacity to create transformational change in any economy, and the ones capable of driving that change are the youth. We at Sohar International truly believe in the value of knowledge sharing and the opportunities it opens up for aspiring today's youth. With that belief, such platforms like Oman Science Festival augments the bank's confidence in creating value for the people of Oman and the economy as a whole and underlines an important aspect of what is defined in Oman Vision 2040 as innovation and digitalisation."

The Oman Science Festival aims at introducing knowledge development programme in science, mathematics and environmental geography concepts.

Over 11,000 benefit from Job Security Fund

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The fund was officially launched on November 1, 2020, as the benefits were disbursed to terminated employees through the generous support of His Majesty the Sultan as well as donations received from companies and individuals.

The system is supervised by the Ministry of Labour and the Authority, which helps laid-off workers during the current period, and it is hoped to include

job-seekers within three years of its initiation.

In order to enhance the principle of social solidarity, the fund is meant for all employees working in the Sultanate of Oman, whether they are in the government or private sector.

To make the fund sustainable, every government employee is supposed to contribute 1 per cent of his/her salary per month to the fund, while his employer, whether government or private, pays another 1 per cent.

Majlis to host housing minister

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura will host Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, at the 15th regular meeting to be held on Sunday.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He added that the Majlis will discuss five key axes namely the general policies of housing and urban planning, the study on the reality of land development in the Sultanate of Oman, the ministry's objectives for the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025), activating the ministry's role in the projects and programmes of vital sectors within the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan and partnership with the private sector.

The statement of the minister of housing and urban planning will be the final one for the third annual session (2021-2022).

Majlis Ash'shura will also convene its 16th regular meeting on Monday during which the Majlis will discuss the report of the Health and Environment Committee on handling of environmental damages resulting from adverse weather conditions.



"The Majlis will also discuss the Media and Culture Committee's report on the establishment of an interactive digital cultural platform and the establishment of children's libraries in the governorates and the digitalisation of the existing ones," Al Nadabi said.

The secretary-general of

Majlis Ash'shura noted that the meeting will discuss the vision of the Services and Social Development Committee on the draft agreement with the Federative Republic of Brazil for regulating air transport services. It will also discuss an expressed desire to amend the mechanism of funding employment-related

programmes in light of the vision submitted by the Youth and Human Resources Committee.

Both meetings will be open to media and citizens after submitting a request for attendance on the council's website and social media platforms, the secretary-general noted.

Clinical trials and research ethics under scanner

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The World Health Organization (WHO) Office in Muscat, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health (MoH), Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, organised on Wednesday a workshop on the clinical trials and medical research ethics.

The workshop was attended by Dr Muna al Saadoon, Dean, College of Medicine and Health Sciences, SQU, Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative to Oman, as well as Dr Halima al Hinai, Director-General for Planning and Studies.

The workshop, the first of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean region, targeted researchers, physicians and paramedical groups specialised in scientific research. Experts from the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office



participated in the workshop.

The workshop shared and discussed concepts and applications of study designs, as well as focused on experimental designs.

In addition, the workshop aimed to identify the key aspects relevant to the research ethics of a new clinical trial application, review informed consent forms for clinical trials of all phases and determine the data protection guidelines at the national and

international levels. Furthermore, the workshop highlighted the methodology for monitoring clinical trials, including data safety and monitoring boards, as well as data ownership's legal and ethical aspects.

The workshop touched upon several issues such as the randomised controlled trials (RCTs), the ethics of RCTs, the foundations of data collection, and Oman's perspectives on research ethics.

Dr Jean Jabbour praised the efforts and coordination between the WHO, Ministry of Health and SQU in the field of research, emphasising the ambition towards improving and promoting knowledge that supports studies at the national, regional and international levels.

Dr Halima al Hinai pointed out that the Ministry of Health gives particular importance to refining the knowledge of healthcare providers and developing their research skills in the health sector, which will help to achieve one component of health research directed to identified priorities for medical and pharmaceutical advancements.

She added that this workshop, with its advanced topic, will enable the participants to understand the fundamentals of designing clinical trials, the foundations of ethics of RCTs, and good clinical and ethical practices in Oman.

MoE brings together first supervisors of Applied Sciences

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, organised a meeting for 45 of the first supervisors in the Applied Sciences Department on Wednesday. The meeting was held in the presence of Dr Mutasim al Balushi, Assistant Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, Dr Khadija al Balushi, Assistant Director of the Applied Science Supervision Department. The meeting took place in Khasab Hall at the Ministry's Headquarters.

In her welcome speech, Dr Khadija al Balushi, Assistant Director of the Applied Science Supervision Department, said: "This scientific meeting brings together the elite in



the Department of Applied Sciences supervision units, and such a meeting offers great scientific benefits and exchange of experiences. This meeting includes two main aspects, namely: the virtual aspect which represents development, empowerment and the exchange of ideas, and the internal aspect which is represented by appreciation and pride in what

has been achieved."

Dr Al Balushi stressed the importance of holding such scientific meetings, saying: "These meetings will overcome many of the challenges that face the supervision units in the Department of Applied Science through reviewing the reality of the work of these units, the challenges, and difficulties they faced, and giving free rein to all



their employees to provide more achievements and development in the next stages. This is done by presenting each unit of its achievements during the current academic year 2021-2022, and its developmental visions of renewal and innovation in supervisory work in the coming stages for the benefit to prevail among all units, and the exchange of experiences among employees."

Proposing a vote of thanks, Dr Mutasim al Balushi, Assistant Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision at the Ministry, said: "It's an honour to be present in this scientific meeting, and to stand on their achievement in order to benefit and exchange experiences, ideas and opinions in the supervisory work. There is no doubt that the process of

change and development is a basic requirement, whether it is at the level of the personal or institutional component, and it is also a desire that comes from within the person, or the institution, when analysing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and achievements that exist as well as analysing the internal and external factors in general."



UN urged to renew Syria cross-border aid resolution

BEIRUT: Dozens of aid groups on Tuesday urged the United Nations Security Council to renew a resolution allowing aid deliveries to millions in war-torn Syria via Turkey, ahead of its expiry next month.

The Bab al Hawa crossing on the border between northern Syria and southern Turkey is the only one through which UN relief can be brought into the fighter-held Idlib region without navigating areas controlled by the Syrian government.

But many fear the crossing will close to UN trucks from July 10, because Russia, an ally of the government in Damascus, has threatened to use its Security Council veto power to block the resolution's renewal.

The resolution was last extended in January for six months.

"The magnitude of the crisis demands the reauthorisation of cross-border assistance for a minimum of 12 months," an open letter to the Security Council signed by aid groups including the International Rescue Committee, Norwegian Refugee Council and Save the Children said.

"Anything less would signal to Syrians that the Council is willing to accept unnecessary suffering



People gather at the scene of a car bomb explosion in the Syrian city of Al Bab in the eastern countryside of Aleppo province. — AFP

and loss of life," the letter added.

Observers say Russia is using the threat of closure of the aid entry point as a bargaining chip in the face of punishing EU and US sanctions over Moscow's war of Ukraine.

Russia has argued aid can instead transit via Damascus-

controlled parts of the country across conflict lines. But aid groups have been reluctant to shift their massive operations to go through areas held by the government of President Bashar al Assad, itself subject to sanctions.

Nearly 10,000 trucks loaded with humanitarian aid passed

through the Bab al Hawa crossing last year bound for the Idlib region, the last activist bastion in Syria and home to around three million people.

Should aid cease, more parents will be "forced to choose between skipping meals or sending their children to work; more girls forced

The magnitude of the crisis demands the reauthorisation of cross-border assistance

into early marriage to provide income for food; and more children forced out of school," the letter said.

Eleven years into Syria's civil war, three million people live under the rule of fighters and allied activists in the Idlib region.

Half of them have been uprooted from their homes in other parts of the country and rely heavily on international aid. Meanwhile, eleven people were killed and dozens wounded when their pick-up truck ran over a landmine near Syria's southern city of Daraa, a war monitor said.

"Eleven people, including five children under 16 and three women, were killed and around 34 people were injured" in the explosion, said the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, adding that some were in critical condition.

Most of the victims were labourers harvesting wheat, Syria's official SANA news agency said.

The latest toll brings to 124 the total number of people killed by explosive remnants since the beginning of 2022, according to the Britain-based Observatory, which relies on a wide network of sources in Syria.

Explosives left by all sides in fields, along roads or even in buildings in Syria's decade-long conflict, have wounded thousands of civilians and killed hundreds of others.

Across the country, about half the population is estimated to be living in areas contaminated by unexploded ordnance, according to the United Nations.

In 2020, Syria overtook Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of recorded casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war, with 2,729 people killed or wounded, according to the Landmine Monitor.

In 2021, 241 civilians were killed and 128 wounded by explosive remnants across Syria, the Observatory said.

Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions more since it began with a brutal crackdown of anti-government protests in 2011. — AFP

Most Gaza kids suffer 'distress' after years of blockade: NGO

GAZA CITY: Four out of five children in Gaza suffer from emotional distress, Save the Children said on Wednesday, 15 years after Israel slapped a strict blockade on the Palestinian territory.

Israel imposed the measure in June 2007, as fighters of Hamas movement took control of the densely populated enclave.

Israel, and Egypt, continue to severely restrict the flow of people and materials in and out.

In a report called "Trapped", Britain-based Save the Children said the mental health of Gazan children has continued to deteriorate.

Since 2018, the number reporting symptoms of "depression, grief and fear," had risen from 55 per cent to 80 per cent, the report said.

Save the Children's director for the occupied Palestinian territories, Jason Lee said: "The children we spoke to for this report described living in a perpetual state of fear, worry, sadness and grief, waiting for the next round



Palestinians receive their monthly food rations from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency warehouse in Khan Younis in southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

of violence to erupt, and feeling unable to sleep or concentrate."

"The physical evidence of their distress — bedwetting, loss of ability to speak or to complete basic tasks — is shocking and should serve as a wakeup call to the international community," he added.

The physical evidence of their distress is shocking and should serve as a wakeup call to the international community

JASON LEE,
Save the Children's director, Palestinian territories

Children make up nearly half of Gaza's population of 2.1 million. Around 800,000 young people in the territory have "never known life without the blockade," Save the Children said.

Israel insists the blockade is necessary to protect its citizens from Hamas, a group listed as an organisation by much of the West.

Israel has fought four wars with Hamas since 2007, most recently in May 2021.

Over the past 12 months, Israel has granted more work permits

for Gazans seeking better paid jobs inside the Jewish state.

It has also relaxed some restrictions on the flow of goods in and out of the territory.

But the blockade remains broadly unchanged, with Palestinians generally barred from leaving Gaza through the Erez crossing to Israel.

Gazans also face huge obstacles exiting through the Rafah crossing to Egypt.

In a statement marking the anniversary of the blockade, Human Rights Watch said that "Israel, with Egypt's help, has turned Gaza into an open-air prison".

HRW's director for Israel and Palestine, Omar Shakir, said: "Young people face the brunt of (the blockade) because they don't know of a Gaza before the closure."

"Their horizons are forcibly narrowed to a 40 by 11 kilometre strip of land and that prevents them from the chance to interact and engage with the world," Shakir said. — AFP

Minister urges Pakistanis to cut back on 'tea'

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani minister has caused a storm in a teacup by urging citizens to cut back on drinking "chai" (tea) as a way to preserve foreign currency that pays to import the leaves used in brewing the popular beverage. Pakistan is the world's biggest importer of tea — known locally as "chai" — with the latest government figures showing it pays over \$515 million a year to bring in the commodity, mostly from Kenya.

The country is suffering a long-brewing economic crisis, however, with dwindling foreign reserves used to pay crippling debt.

"I would also appeal to the nation to cut down one or two cups of tea because the tea we import is also imported on credit," Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Planning and Development, said on Tuesday.

Pakistanis drink tea in many forms — black, green, hot, cold, sweet, salted and spiced — but the most popular is



An employee pours tea cups for customers at a restaurant in Islamabad. — AFP

made by brewing the leaves in boiled sweetened milk. Iqbal's comments prompted outrage on Wednesday on social media and in tea rooms across the country.

"Why should we reduce the use of tea... we drink at our own expense, we don't drink with government money," said Jan Muhammad, 45, a truck driver who says he drinks between 15 to 20 cups a day. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

EU seals pact with Egypt, Israel on gas supplies

The European Union signed a deal with Egypt and Israel for the exporting of liquefied natural gas to Europe, as Brussels tries to reduce the bloc's dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Egyptian Petroleum Minister Tarek al Molla, Israeli Energy Minister Karine El harrar and EU Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson signed a declaration of intent in Cairo in the presence of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Under the deal, Israel will deliver



gas to neighbouring Egypt where it will be liquefied and exported to Europe. The agreement comes at a "very difficult time" for the EU - during a "war on European soil," said von der Leyen. — dpa

COLOMBO

Lankan navy stops Australia-bound migrant boat

Sri Lanka's navy said it stopped a fishing trawler transporting dozens of migrants to Australia, the fifth such attempt to be blocked in the last month. The boat, crewed by five members, was detected near Trincomalee on the island nation's east coast with 50 men, 11 women and three children aboard as passengers, navy spokesman said. "The boat had just left from somewhere along the Trincomalee coast when it was detected by a navy craft," he said. "The suspects will



be handed over to the police for further probe." Four other boats aiming to ferry passengers to Australia had attempted to embark from Sri Lanka in the past month, he said. — AFP

TOKYO

Japan to attend Nato summit for first time

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he will attend this month's Nato summit in Madrid, becoming the country's first leader to join a top meeting of the transatlantic alliance. The June 28-30 gathering is seen as a crunch moment for the 30 Nato allies, four months into Russia's war in Ukraine. Sweden and Finland, which have applied to join Nato, are sending delegations to the summit, and South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol will also be the



first leader from his country to attend. Japan, has delivered defensive supplies to Ukraine and imposed tough sanctions on Russia in tandem with the other G7 countries. — AFP



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In brief

■ GENEVA



FLIGHTS RESUME AFTER GLITCH SHUTS SWISS AIRSPACE

Swiss airspace reopened after a computer glitch grounded flights across the Alpine nation for several hours, officials said. “Swiss airspace is now open again,” Swiss air traffic control service Skyguide said in a tweet, adding “the technical malfunction at Skyguide has been resolved”.

It did not say what had caused the problem that shut Swiss airspace for hours on Wednesday morning, but said that “air traffic over Switzerland and operations at the national airports of Geneva and Zurich are resuming”.

Those airports too announced that flights had begun taking off. — AFP

■ MADRID



FOUR AI PIONEERS WIN TOP SPANISH SCIENCE PRIZE

Four scientists, including two Britons, considered pioneers in the field of artificial intelligence were awarded Spain's prestigious Princess of Asturias prize for scientific research. The jury honoured Britain's Geoffrey Hinton and Demis Hassabis along with France's Yann LeCun and Canada's Yoshua Bengio for their “contributions to the advancement of artificial intelligence and its full integration in society.”

“Their contributions to the development of ‘deep learning’ have led to major advances in techniques as diverse as speech recognition... object perception, machine translation, strategy optimisation, the analysis of protein structure, medical diagnosis and many others,” it said. — AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMANY IN NEW COVID WAVE: HEALTH MINISTER

Germany is experiencing a new wave of coronavirus infections, Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said, urging the most vulnerable to quickly get their fourth vaccination jabs. “The announced summer wave has unfortunately become reality,” he told Rheinische Post daily. After weeks of falling new infections, the numbers of cases in Europe's biggest economy are seeing an uptick again. “Because the current virus variant is very easily transmitted and because almost all precautionary measures have expired, the effect of the summer” in calming a surge in infections was not as effective, he said. — AFP



A British police officer stands guard on the beach of Dungeness, on the southeast coast of England, as Royal National Lifeboat Institution's (RNLI) members of staff help migrants to disembark from one of their lifeboat to cross the English Channel. — AFP

Rwanda vows to pursue asylum deal after blow

KIGALI: Rwanda insisted on Wednesday it was still ready to take in asylum-seekers being deported by the UK under a controversial deal after a first flight was cancelled following a court injunction.

“We are not deterred by these developments. Rwanda remains fully committed to making this partnership work” government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo said, echoing comments by Britain's Home Secretary Priti Patel.

“Rwanda stands ready to receive the migrants when they do arrive and offer them safety and opportunity in our country,” Makolo said.

“The current situation of people making dangerous journeys cannot continue as it is causing untold suffering to so many.”

A first flight was due to take off from Britain for the East African country late on Tuesday despite a flurry of legal challenges but was cancelled after a last-minute order by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

The UK's policy of expelling asylum-seekers to a country thousands of kilometres away has been branded “immoral” by church leaders in England and heavily criticised by the UN refugee agency and rights groups.

But the government in Kigali, which is frequently accused of rights abuses, has rejected criticism that Rwanda is not a safe country for migrants.

“We don't think it is immoral to offer a home to people,” Makolo told a press conference on Tuesday, saying Rwanda was ready to welcome thousands of

migrants. “We do not consider living in Rwanda a punishment.”

The deal was to be funded by the UK to the tune of up to \$145 million, with observers seeing it as a way of bolstering Rwanda's image and deflecting concern over its human rights record.

On the streets of Kigali, some Rwandans were concerned that if the migrants did not come, it would be a lost opportunity for the tiny country of 13 million people in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

“The fact that these migrants have not come is a loss to the country and the general public because their livelihoods would have benefited us and we would have been working together, and now it is obvious that this is a loss,” businessman Emmanuel Hakizimana said. — AFP

Zelensky presses Europe for more help

PRAGUE: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Wednesday recalled the 1968 Soviet war of Czechoslovakia as he pressed Europe for further help in responding to Russia's war in Ukraine.

“We're with you, be with us,” Zelensky told Czech lawmakers in Prague, quoting an appeal made by a Czechoslovak Radio presenter in 1968 as the occupants tried to cut the radio off.

“Now when the Ukrainian people are fighting for freedom against Russia's cruel war, we are using these words to address all nations of Europe and the democratic world,” he added.

“Ukraine should get everything necessary to achieve a victory.” The 1968 war of Czechoslovakia by five Soviet-led armies crushed the so-called Prague Spring, a democratic movement during the communist spell of 1948-1989.

Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. Zelensky said he believed the Russian attack on Ukraine, which began on February 24, was only the first step in a Moscow

plot to retake its former satellites.

“A tyrant who... wants everything will never stop,” said Zelensky.

“Czech people are very well aware of what happens when you make compromises with tyrants,” he added, also recalling the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Zelensky thanked Prague for welcoming more than 300,000 Ukrainian refugees and sending over weapons worth over 3.5 billion koruna (\$148 million).

He urged the Czech Republic to help accelerate the next package of sanctions against Russia as it takes the rotating six-month presidency of the European Union in July.

Prague said it would prioritise Ukraine during its EU presidency, vowing to promote the country's bid to join the bloc and to help rebuild it after the war.

“Be active so that all European leaders agree that defending and strengthening Europe is our common goal,” Zelensky said.

“Russian soldiers know that they are up against European values.” — AFP



Lawmakers applaud after Ukrainian President Zelensky addressed members of both houses of the Czech Parliament via video conference in Prague. — AFP

Spain swelters as France braces for heatwave

MADRID/PARIS: An unusually early heatwave in Spain, which has been sizzling residents since the weekend, spread to the centre and north-east of the country on Wednesday.

For the capital Madrid, the national weather service AEMET warned of 39 to 40 degrees Celsius, in Zaragoza it could even reach 45 degrees on Saturday. The forecast for the popular holiday island of Mallorca was 36 degrees.

At the same time, temperatures in the south, which had been particularly affected so far, dropped only slightly: In Seville, 39 degrees was expected, in Córdoba 41 degrees. In the past few days, temperatures in Andalusia had even risen to 43 degrees.

The authorities advised people to drink plenty of water, to eat only light meals, to stay out of the sun for long periods of time, to avoid physical exertion and to consult a doctor at the first sign of heatstroke. The heatwave could subside at the weekend, but that is not certain, AEMET stressed.

Combined with severe drought, the heat also increases the risk of forest and bush fires. Since the beginning of the year, more than 19,000 hectares of forest have burned. That is about twice as much as the average for the same period from 2006 to 2021, the state television station RTVE reported,



A worker drinks water at a construction site during a hot day in Merignac, outside Bordeaux, southwestern France, as a heatwave hits France. — AFP

citing data from the European Earth observation system Copernicus.

According to a report in the newspaper El Pais, hot spells are on the rise in Spain. They start earlier in the year, are longer, the temperatures are higher and affect more and more parts of the country at the same time.

Already in May, the south of Spain suffered from an early

heatwave with up to 41 degrees. “Summer eats spring,” the newspaper headlined at the time.

The absolute record was measured last August in Montoro in Andalusia: 47.4 degrees. Experts attribute this to man-made climate change.

France is also facing a heat wave with temperatures of up to 40 degrees locally, after which severe weather threatens parts of

the country at the weekend.

According to the weather service Météo France on Wednesday, the highest temperatures are expected between Thursday and Saturday, when it will be over 20 degrees even at night. In Paris, temperatures of 38 degrees were expected for Saturday.

As in Spain, the authorities called on the population to protect themselves and drink plenty of

Combined with severe drought, the heat also increases the risk of forest and bush fires

fluids. There were announcements in the suburban train stations in Paris to carry enough water to drink and also to watch out for fellow passengers.

Fires continued to break out in the south of France, with the prefecture of Lozère announcing on Wednesday that 120 firefighters continued to tackle a fire that had broken out the day before in the area of Mas-Saint-Chély. A country road was closed, and 70 hectares of forest was destroyed by the flames.

Although the firefighters brought the fire under control in the meantime, the danger of a new outbreak is great, they said.

BFMTV reported that several fire-fighting planes were used. The fire brigade was able to protect five houses in one village that were threatened by the flames.

During the heatwave, many residents in Paris have to deal with a strike by rubbish collectors. In 10 city districts, the bins have remained unemptied since Monday and hundreds of tons of rubbish have piled up on the pavements. — dpa

Businesses hire teenagers to fill labour shortage



GENEVIEVE NORMAND

The writer is a Calgary-based network reporter with Radio-Canada

Sofia-Rose Adams skilfully scoops ice cream onto cones and manages the cash register at Les Gourmandes cafe and ice cream parlour in Canada’s Montreal region. The 13-year-old, who wears a blue cap and round glasses, is one of an increasing number of teens who have decided to work after school, helping to address the country’s labour shortage.

“I wanted a part-time job, work hours here and there, to earn some pocket money,” said Adams.

For the teenager, who is into music and improvisational theatre, it is “normal to start working” at her age.

In Canada’s francophone province of Quebec, there is no minimum age to work — only parental authorisation is required for those under 14 years old. There is also no limit on the number of hours worked as long as it is not during school hours or at night for

those who are under 16.

In Les Gourmandes’ kitchen, other teenage girls prepare soups. Seven of the eight employees of the small business are under 18 years old.

“After the pandemic, we found ourselves with major hiring problems,” said owner Marie-Eve Guertin, who had to turn to employees under 15 this year for the first time in almost a decade of operating the restaurant.

“For full-time jobs, it’s very difficult. I haven’t received any resumes,” Guertin said, so she turned to teenagers to keep her business afloat. “You want to grow a business, you don’t want to restrict it,” she said, wanting to avoid reducing opening hours as many other restaurants have done.

In Quebec, the latest unemployment rate is 3.9 per cent, while the country wide figure is 5.1 per cent. The lack of workers

THE LACK OF WORKERS IN ALMOST EVERY SECTOR HAS FORCED BUSINESSES TO BE CREATIVE TO MEET THEIR NEEDS

in almost every sector has forced businesses to be creative to meet their needs. For some, that has meant hiring teenagers, and in some cases, pre-teens.

While there is no data available on the number of children under 14 in the labour market, statistics show that half of Quebecers aged 15 to 19 have jobs.

“I started working at 14,” said Philippe Marcil, now 17 and an employee of a men’s clothing store in a Montreal suburb.

“I understood from a young age that it was important to gain experience in the labour market, so I wanted to experiment with that,” said the young man, who

previously worked for two years as a supervisor at a fast food chain.

The avid hockey player and runner, who wants to become a lawyer, said he manages to find a balance between social life, work and studies by making “pretty precise schedules,” which he tries to stick to as much as possible.

Marcil, who is also very invested in school, has imposed a limit of 15 hours of paid work per week on himself, so his professional life does not encroach on his studies.

Charles Fleury, a sociologist and industrial relations professor at Laval University in Quebec City, said child labour “has always been somewhat present in Quebec, especially if we compare to European countries.”

“Whether you are a child from a privileged or disadvantaged family, there is really this kind of validation of work as a demonstration of autonomy,” he said. But what is new

is that with the labour shortage, the type of jobs are changing. Today, teenagers are no longer content with babysitting, delivering newspapers or picking fruit on a farm.

And this is beginning to stir concerns: Quebec Minister of Labour Jean Boulet recently commented that he did not find it “normal” for 11-year-old children to be working and suggested that Quebec was considering legislation to better regulate the work of most youth.

Elsewhere in Canada, minors are also allowed to work, but the minimum age and parental permissions required vary from province to province.

Even if these teenagers decide on their own to enter the labour market, “there is still a risk of encouraging school failure and dropping out,” Fleury warned.

— AFP

As climate impacts grow, so do calls for ‘loss and damage’ funds

KELLY MACNAMARA

From crop-wilting drought to the creeping devastation of rising seas, climate change is already bringing death, destruction and hefty costs to vulnerable nations, spurring growing calls for richer countries to help them cope in a warming world.

The contentious issue of “loss and damage” has been a major focus of an ongoing United Nations climate talks in Germany tasked with laying the groundwork for the COP27 summit later this year.

“The impacts of climate change are borderless,” out-going UN climate change chief Patricia Espinosa told delegates last week.

“They continue to particularly affect the most vulnerable people, communities and countries disproportionately.”

While climate negotiators met in Germany, the Horn of Africa was gripped by a record drought, raising fears of famine for tens of millions of people.

“These kinds of impacts make the clear case for loss and damage funding,” Mohamed Adow, of the think tank Power Shift Africa, said. “Those rich countries blocking progress on loss and damage will increasingly have the blood of these climate victims on their hands.”

Developing nations want a specific funding “facility” to help poorer nations least responsible for climate change to cope with its impacts.

But that call has been rejected by wealthy nations, particularly the United States, who have said funding can be channelled through a network of existing humanitarian, development and climate organisations.

As a compromise, the UN’s COP26 conference in Glasgow set up a formal dialogue, which is set to run until 2024.

It has no target outcome, leading to fears that it could become just a “talking shop”.

“We wanted a facility, but we were given a process that has no clear focus or vision,” Michai Robertson, a representative for the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), said.

After several days of discussion on the topic wrapped up in Bonn, developing countries are now calling for the official inclusion of loss and damage on the agenda at COP27 summit in Egypt, set for November. — AFP

Floods, heat waves jolt India’s food supply

MUJIB MASHAL & HARI KUMAR

When the unseasonably heavy rains flooded the fields, and then the equally unseasonable heat shrivelled the seeds, it did not just slash Ranjit Singh’s wheat harvest by nearly half.

It put him, and nearly all the other households in his village in northern India, that much further from financial stability in a country where a majority of people scratch out a living on farms. Like many Indian farmers, Singh is saddled with enormous debt and wondering how he will repay it, as a warming world makes farming ever more precarious.

For India and other South Asian nations, home to hundreds of millions of humanity’s most vulnerable, a seemingly bottomless well of challenges — poverty, food security, health, governance — has only deepened as the region bakes on the front lines of climate change.

Global warming is no longer a distant prospect that officials with short electoral mandates can choose to look away from. The increasing volatility in weather patterns means a greater risk of disasters and severe economic damage for countries already straining to increase growth and development, and to move past the pandemic’s devastation to lives and livelihoods.

In Pakistan, which is grappling with an economic crisis and a political meltdown, a cholera outbreak in the southwest sent the local government scrambling, just as it was trying to quell massive forest fires.

In Bangladesh, floods that came before the monsoons stranded millions of people, complicating long-standing efforts to improve the country’s response to chronic flooding. In Nepal, officials are trying to drain about-to-burst glacial lakes before they wash away Himalayan villages facing a new phenomenon: too much rain, too little drinking water.

And in India, which is the region’s biggest grain supplier and provides hundreds of millions of its own citizens with food rations, the reduced wheat harvest has resurfaced long-standing



A farmer holds seeds ruined by flooding in Dima Hasao, India.

concerns about food security and curbed the government’s ambitions to feed the world. South Asia has always been hot, the monsoons always drenching. And it is far from alone in contending with new weather patterns. But this region, with nearly one-quarter of the world’s population, is experiencing such climatic extremes, from untimely heavy rain and floods to scorching temperatures and extended heat waves, that they are increasingly becoming the norm, not the exception.

Such a heat wave is 30 times as likely now as before the industrial age, estimates Krishna AchutaRao, a climate researcher at the Indian Institute of Technology. He said that if the globe warms to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures, from the current 1.2 degrees, such extreme patterns will come much more often — perhaps once every 50 years, or even every five.

As its intensity became clear, the Indian government suddenly reversed a decision to expand wheat exports, with global supplies already reduced by the war in Ukraine. Officials cited rising international prices and the challenges of food security at home.

Malancha Chakrabarty, a researcher at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi who studies climate

change and development, said India was “extremely vulnerable” to food security threats not just because of drops in production but also because much of the population could struggle to afford food as prices rise.

“We are looking at a huge population which is on the borders of being extremely poor,” Chakrabarty said. Despite significant progress in reducing extreme poverty, she said, many people are merely surviving and “wouldn’t be able to take a shock.”

The damage to the wheat crop has sent yet another tremor through India’s underperforming agriculture sector. In many places, traditional crops are particularly vulnerable to the depletion of groundwater and erratic monsoons.

Farmers and the government do not agree on how far to go in opening agriculture markets.

Deep in debt, farmers are committing suicide in growing numbers.

The agrarian crisis has pushed many to the cities in search of other work. But India’s economic growth, focused largely at the top, is not expanding employment opportunities.

And much of the urban work is outdoor labour, which this year’s extreme heat has made dangerous.

— *New York Times*

Leadership in AI context



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The writer is a journalist, academic, researcher in media studies

Should we replace our lawmakers with robots? Should we vote for an artificial intelligence candidate over a human candidate? When these questions came across my path, I found them amusing. Then, I realised that there was so much to think about within these considerations that they deserved more attention.

Younger generations may be more supportive of replacing legislators and heads of state with artificial intelligence (AI), whereas older generations may be less so. Some young people believe that artificial intelligence will be less manipulative. After all, computers and AI technologies have yet to be taught to be argumentative. Politicians and others in positions of public leadership are experts at dodging questions. They are good at twisting narratives to achieve predetermined objectives or benefits. The use of technology to shape public discourse, whether positive or negative, is not new and there are plenty of studies and literature indicating that artificial intelligence has been widely used to manipulate citizens in general election campaigns.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, used a hologram of himself to hold virtual rallies in multiple locations at the same time, each with a different message for a different group of people. In the 2008 Russian elections, there was a virtual presidential candidate named 'Alice'. Another example of effective use of technology is Queen Elizabeth's hologram in the golden carriage for the Platinum Jubilee celebration.

SOME YOUNG PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WILL BE LESS MANIPULATIVE. AFTER ALL, COMPUTERS AND AI TECHNOLOGIES HAVE YET TO BE TAUGHT TO BE ARGUMENTATIVE

The American writer Joshua Dave, who wrote the article 'Let's Elect an AI President' published in May 2017, debated on the topic around rapid decision, proper and accountable responses to citizens' needs, and the elimination of corruption from the political process. So, contextualising the political implications of automated structures and positive or negative results would influence state-society relations, but could also tilt towards governments exploring and exploiting automated structures for dominance. There is the possibility that society would sleep-walk into a state of alienation. Well, that already can happen with or without AI in any political system.

Based on data from users' behaviours on social media, individuals create their unique communication and psycho-graphic profile on the Internet, showcasing their emotional triggers to different messages. Psychologists are compiling a large body of knowledge on human-computer interaction in order to assist machines in becoming more social and pleasant. As a result, the problem is how people use technology because those who develop AI software and technologies attach their beliefs, morals, and assumptions to AI models of function. The programming constraints, whether they are intentional or not, come from humans. There are algorithms, bots, trolls, and other types of predictive analytics that do a fantastic job of presenting data.

AI has been used to replace humans in many aspects of life, from assisted surgeries to self-driving cars, and research robots are being used in paralegal fields, surveillance, bomb squads, and so on. Police forces all over the world are using artificial intelligence to predict where crimes will occur and who will commit them. AI software can also collect biased information and produce questionable results. Whether virtual politicians and lawmakers can do better in their jobs is open for debate. There are numerous and contradictory discussions about complex issues such as climate change, equality, human rights, fake news, and, sadly, the global decline in journalism. The use of AI in politics — and social media platforms- will not go away; rather, it will expand and be reframed for individual and group purposes. AI is too valuable to ignore; the deeper question is about its dangers and possibilities. No nation would want or allow a non-human to be its leader — I guess. The technological and scientific breakthroughs since the initial research project on AI in 1956 have been remarkable. The future of technology combined with human psychology is still producing unimaginable possibilities.



Eight lessons from the Ukraine war



Joseph S Nye, Jr

The writer is a professor at Harvard University and author of Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump (Oxford University Press, 2020)

When Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered war on Ukraine on February 24, he envisaged a quick seizure of Kyiv and a change of government analogous to Soviet interventions in Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968. But it wasn't to be. The war is still raging, and no one knows when or how it will end.

While some observers have urged an early ceasefire, others have emphasised the importance of punishing Russian war. Ultimately, though, the outcome will be determined by facts on the ground. Since it is too early to guess even when the war will end, some conclusions are obviously premature. For example, arguments that the era of tank warfare is over have been refuted as the battle has moved from Kyiv's northern suburbs to the eastern plains of the Donbas.

But even at this early stage, there are at least eight lessons — some old, some new — that the world is learning (or re-learning) from the war in Ukraine.

First, nuclear deterrence works, but it depends on relative stakes more than on capabilities. The West has been deterred, but only up to a point. Putin's threats have prevented Western governments from sending troops (though not equipment) to Ukraine. This outcome does not reflect any superior Russian nuclear capability; rather, it reflects the gap between Putin's definition of Ukraine as a vital national interest and the West's definition of Ukraine as an important but less vital interest. Second, economic interdependence does not prevent war. While this lesson used to be widely recognised — particularly after World War I broke out among the world's leading trade partners — it was ignored by German policymakers such as former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. His government increased Germany's imports of, and dependence on, Russian oil and gas, perhaps hoping that breaking trade ties would be too costly for either side. But while economic interdependence can raise the costs of war, it clearly does not prevent it.

Third, uneven economic interdependence can be weaponised by the less dependent party, but when the stakes are symmetrical, there is little power in interdependence. Russia depends on revenue from its energy exports to finance its war, but Europe is too dependent on Russian energy to cut it off completely. The energy interdependence is roughly symmetrical. (On the other hand, in the world of finance, Russia is more vulnerable to Western sanctions, which may hurt more over time.)

Fourth, while sanctions can raise the costs for aggressors, they do not determine outcomes in the short term. CIA director William Burns (a former US ambassador to Russia) reportedly met with Putin last November and warned, to no avail,

ALTHOUGH IT IS TOO EARLY TO GUESS WHEN RUSSIAN WAR WILL END, IT IS NOT TOO EARLY TO START LEARNING FROM THE CONFLICT. DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE HAVE ALREADY FORCED US TO QUESTION SOME OF OUR ASSUMPTIONS AND REACQUAINT OURSELVES WITH OLDER TRUTHS

that a war would trigger sanctions. Putin may have doubted that the West could maintain unity on sanctions. (On the other hand, Chinese President Xi Jinping has offered only limited support to Putin despite having proclaimed a "no limits" friendship with Russia, perhaps owing to his concerns about China becoming entangled in US secondary sanctions.)

Fifth, information warfare makes a difference. As RAND's John Arquilla pointed out two decades ago, the outcomes of modern warfare depend not only on whose army wins, but also on "whose story wins." America's careful disclosure of intelligence about Russia's military plans proved quite effective in "pre-debunking" Putin's narratives in Europe, and it contributed greatly to Western solidarity when the attack occurred as predicted.

Sixth, both hard and soft power matter. While coercion trumps persuasion in the near term, soft power can make a difference over time. Smart power is the ability to combine hard and soft power so that they reinforce rather than contradict each other. Putin failed to do that. Russia's war in Ukraine created such revulsion that Germany decided finally to suspend the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline — an outcome that US pressure over several years had failed to achieve. By contrast, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, a former actor,

used his professionally honed dramatic skills to present an attractive portrait of his country, securing not just sympathy but also the military equipment that is essential to hard power.

Seventh, cyber capability is not a silver bullet. Russia had used cyber weapons to intervene in Ukraine's power grid since at least 2015, and many analysts predicted a cyber blitz against the country's infrastructure and government at the start of the invasion. Yet while there have reportedly been many cyberattacks during the war, none has determined broader outcomes. When the Viasat satellite network was hacked, Zelensky continued to communicate with world audiences through the many small satellites provided by Starlink.

Moreover, with training and experience, Ukrainian cyber defences have improved. Once the war had begun, kinetic weapons provided greater timeliness, precision, and damage assessment for commanders than cyber weapons did. With cyber weapons, you do not always know if an attack has succeeded or been patched. But with explosives, you can see the impact and assess the damage more easily.

Finally, the most important lesson is also one of the oldest: war is unpredictable. As Shakespeare wrote more than four centuries ago, it is dangerous for a leader to "cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war." The promise of a short war is perilously seductive. In August 1914, European leaders famously expected the troops to "be home by Christmas." Instead, they unleashed four years of war, and four of those leaders lost their thrones. Immediately following America's 2003 invasion of Iraq, many in Washington predicted a cakewalk ("Mission Accomplished" read the warship banner that May), but the effort bogged down for years.

Now it is Putin who has let slip the dogs of war. They may yet turn on him.

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Ukrainian servicemen fire with a French self-propelled 155 mm/52-calibre gun Caesar towards Russian positions at a front line in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas on Wednesday. – AFP

sport

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French Open finalist Ruud crashes out of Queen's



Britain's Ryan Peniston shakes hands with Norway's Casper Ruud. – AFP

LONDON: French Open finalist Casper Ruud crashed out of the Queen's grass-court tournament on Tuesday, beaten by British unknown Ryan Peniston in straight sets.

The 26-year-old Peniston, playing in his first ATP Tour main draw, won two tie-breaks to beat the world number five 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2).

Norwegian Ruud, a clay-court specialist, struggled with his timing throughout and also needed treatment on a hip after taking a tumble on the baseline.

Peniston, ranked 180th in the world, won five points in a row on his way to taking the first-set tie-break, not long after Ruud had slipped on set point.

Ruud took another tumble early in the second set but broke Peniston for the first time for 4-3, only for the home hope to hit straight back before completing the job in another tie-break.

Peniston, who has a Wimbledon wildcard, survived cancer as a baby before going on to join the professional tennis ranks after learning his trade in France and at the University of Memphis.

"I can't really believe it, it feels like a dream," he said. I didn't get

“
I can't really believe it, it feels like a dream. I didn't get much sleep last night, it doesn't feel real. I've been playing well. Obviously Casper is an unreal player, he did so well at the French Open so I knew it was a tough ask, but you have to step on the court knowing you've got a chance to win. So, that's what I did

RYAN PENISTON
British player

much sleep last night, it doesn't feel real.

"I've been playing well. Obviously Casper is an unreal player, he did so well at the French Open so I knew it was a tough ask, but you have to step



Britain's Ryan Peniston celebrates after winning against Norway's Casper Ruud at the end of their men's singles match. – AFP

on the court knowing you've got a chance to win. So, that's what I did."

When he was just one year old, Peniston was diagnosed with rhabdomyosarcoma, a soft-tissue cancer, and needed surgery and chemotherapy as well as regular check-ups for years afterwards.

"It was definitely a difficult start to my life," he said. "I don't remember much. But for my parents and my brothers, I think it must have been a pretty, pretty tough time.

"But I had the amazing, amazing doctors and amazing nurses who helped me through that — and my family, huge, huge thanks to them.

"And yeah, standing here today, that was pretty good."

Defending champion Matteo Berrettini beat Britain's Dan Evans 6-3, 6-3, restoring order after all four of the other top five seeds fell victim to first-round upsets.

The Italian, fresh from winning his sixth ATP Tour title in Stuttgart, claimed the 2021 Queen's Club title before reaching the Wimbledon final, finishing the grass season with an 11-1 record.

"I love to play on grass," he said. "I love to play here. I got a (hand) surgery a few months ago and I didn't know if I was able to play this grass season so I'm really thankful to be here."

Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka celebrated the news he has been handed a wildcard to Wimbledon with a 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (6/8), 7-6 (7/5) win over American Frances Tiafoe.

Wawrinka has not played at the All England Club for three years as he battles back from two foot surgeries.

Earlier, US player Sam Querrey beat fifth-seeded Argentine Diego Schwartzman 6-1, 6-4. — AFP



3RD WEST ASIAN WOMEN'S HALLS CHAMPIONSHIP

The third West Asian Women's Halls Championship will kick off today, hosted by the Saudi Arabia Football Association, in Jeddah, from June 16-24. It will open with two matches, Bahrain and Palestine in group A, then Kuwait and Saudi Arabia in group B. Oman national team will play the first match in the tournament on Saturday against Kuwait. On the other hand, the two referees, Maryam al Hadrami and Aisha al Saeedi, will officiate in the matches in the championship.

Oman to participate at Islamic Solidarity Games

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The Oman Olympic Committee decided to participate in the fifth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games, to be hosted by Turkey in the city of "Konya" during the period from August 9-18, 2022 with the participation of nearly 6,000 athletes representing 58 countries.

The five sports that Oman will take part in are athletics, shooting, weightlifting, cycling and swimming, under the supervision of the Sports Federation of Islamic Solidarity Games.

The Islamic Solidarity Games tournament includes numbers of sports like 3x3 basketball, aerobic gymnastics, artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, football, table tennis, archery, bicycles, track bikes, wrestling, fencing, weightlifting, judo,



karate, swimming, taekwondo, handball, kickboxing, bocce, traditional Turkish archery and volleyball.

The Islamic Solidarity Games are considered a very major sporting event on the lines of the Olympic Games, in which 6,000 multinational athletes from 58 countries participate, organised by the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation, which was established on May 6, 1985 in Riyadh, under

the auspices of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

OOO RESTRUCTURING

As part of the new restructuring of the Oman Olympic Committee, Khalifa al Esai was appointed as the executive director of the committee.

Mohammed al Rahbi as assistant to the executive director, and Khaled al Hasani as technical adviser.

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Biscuits
24 x 40 gms



24 Pcs
SAVE | 21.000%
RIAL **0.790**
Oasis Drinking Water
24 x 500 ml



SAVE | 46.564%
RIAL **1.400**
Almond 27 / 30, 500 gms



2 Pcs
SAVE | 33.445%
RIAL **1.990**
Al Fajr Chicken
Burger 2 x 1 kg



SAVE | 25.126%
RIAL **1.490**
Eastco Peeled Shrimps
Extra Large 500 gms



RIAL **2.690**
Dana Brown \ White Egg
Tray Medium 2 x 30's



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Assorted per Box



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Wings 48 Pads



4 Pcs
SAVE | 27.225%
RIAL **1.390**
Crest Toothpaste
Extreme Mint 4 x 125 ml



2 Pcs
SAVE | 21.245%
RIAL **2.150**
Clear Shampoo
for Men 2 x 400 ml



1.4 Ltrs
SAVE | 32.234%
RIAL **0.925**
Bahar Premium Dishwash
Liquid 1.4 Ltrs



5 Kgs
SAVE | 28.616%
RIAL **4.490**
Ariel Washing Powder
5 kgs Assorted



SAVE | 33.095%
RIAL **3.750**
Dettol Liquid 2 Ltrs
+ 500 ml



6 Pcs
RIAL **0.980**
Awatif Facial Tissue
6 x 140's



6 Pcs
SAVE | 39.683%
RIAL **0.950**
Crystal Drops Glass Mug
6 pc Set Assorted



3 pc Set
SAVE | 25.316%
RIAL **5.900**
Cheflin Plastic Hot Pot
3 pc Set Assorted
(1200/1800/2600) ml



SAVE | 24.623%
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BAIRSTOW

FIRES ENGLAND TO SERIES VICTORY OVER NEW ZEALAND

It was the highest final-innings run chase in a Test at Trent Bridge, surpassing the previous record of 284 set by England against New Zealand in 2004

NOTTINGHAM, UK: Jonny Bairstow blasted England to a five-wicket win over New Zealand on the final day of the second Test at Trent Bridge on Tuesday as the home side won a series for the first time since January 2021.

England chased down 299 thanks to an all-time great display of raw power from Bairstow, who took just 77 balls to reach the ninth Test century of his career.

Bairstow narrowly missed hitting England's fastest Test hundred, taking one more delivery than Gilbert Jessop, who scored a 76-ball ton against Australia in 1902.

While Bairstow could not earn a place in the history books, that will be a footnote for the 32-year-old, whose display will be remembered forever by all those who witnessed it.

A capacity crowd at Trent Bridge was treated to a remarkable array of brutal boundaries from Bairstow, who hit 14 fours and seven sixes to leave New Zealand bewildered in his 92-ball masterclass.

After chasing down 277 to win the first Test at Lord's by five wickets thanks to Joe Root's 115 not out, Bairstow ensured England enjoyed another successful final-day chase.

At tea, all four results were possible, with England needing



Johnny Bairstow

another 160 runs with six wickets left.

But the sensational Bairstow, supported by skipper Ben Stokes, with an unbeaten 75, demolished of the Test world champions.

It was the highest final-innings run chase in a Test at Trent Bridge, surpassing the previous record of 284 set by England against New Zealand in 2004.

England, who had won just one match in 17 before this series, are gathering momentum under new skipper Stokes and new coach Brendon McCullum.

Their desire for relentlessly positive and aggressive cricket has been embraced by England and they will seek to sweep the series in the final Test at Headingley from June 23.

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand first innings: 553	
England first Innings: 539	
New Zealand second innings (0/n: 224-7):	
T Latham b Anderson	4
W Young (run out)	56
D Conway c Bairstow b Leach	52
H Nicholls c Lees b Potts	3
D Mitchell (not out)	62
T Blundell c Stokes b Broad	24
M Bracewell c Broad b Potts	25
T Southee (run out)	0
M Henry c Foakes b Broad	18
K Jamieson c Foakes b Broad	1
T Boult c Stokes b Anderson	17
Extras (B-9, LB-5, NB-6, W-2)	22
Total (all out, 84.4 overs)	284
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-104, 3-115, 4-131, 5-176, 6-204, 7-213, 8-245, 9-249	
Bowling: Anderson 8.4-1-20-2, Broad 20-4-70-3, Potts 15-6-32-2, Leach 24-5-86-1, Stokes 17-3-62-0	
England second innings	
A Lees c Blundell b Southee	44
Z Crawley c Southee b Boult	0
O Pope ct Blundell b Henry	18
J Root c & b Boult	3
J Bairstow c Blundell b Boult	136
B Stokes (not out)	75
B Foakes (not out)	12
Extras (B-5, LB-6)	11
Total (for 5 wks, 50 overs)	299
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-53, 3-56, 4-93, 5-272	
Bowling: Southee 11-0-67-1, Boult 16-1-94-3, Henry 15-3-67-1, Bracewell 8-0-60-0	

This victory was even more eye-catching because New Zealand, inspired by Daryl Mitchell's 190, scored 553 in the first innings after Stokes opted to bowl first.

BAIRSTOW ONSLAUGHT

That could have been a series-defining decision by Stokes, but England bailed out their captain by scoring 539 in their first innings, with Root making 176 and Ollie Pope 145.

A New Zealand second-innings collapse late on the fourth day gave England renewed incentive to chase the win.

They seized the chance in stunning style after bowling out the Kiwis for 284 in the first session of the final day.

With the match seemingly on a knife-edge heading into the final session, Bairstow took matters into his own hands. — AFP



Australia's Glenn Maxwell plays a shot during the first ODI against Sri Lanka at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy. — AFP

Maxwell propels Australia past Lanka

PALLEKELE, Sri Lanka: Glenn Maxwell's unbeaten 80 helped Australia chase down a rain-revised target of 282 runs and beat hosts Sri Lanka by two wickets on Tuesday.

The visitors started out chasing a total of 301 in 50 overs but a 90-minute rain break reduced the innings to 44 overs with the visitors requiring 282 under DLS at Pallekele.

Maxwell smashed six fours and six sixes to score 80 not out off 51 balls after the visitors stuttered against the bowling of spinner Wanindu Hasaranga who bagged four wickets.

Australia lost opener David Warner for a duck in the second over, leg before wicket to Maheesh Theekshana.

Fellow opener Aaron Finch scored 44 off 41 balls before he was caught behind by Kusal Mendis off Hasaranga.

When rain halted play, the visitors were 73 for two with Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne at the crease.

After play resumed, Labuschagne fell for 24. Marcus Stoinis scored 44 off 31 balls. Smith made 53 before he was clean bowled by Duniath Wellalage.

Alex Carey scored a quick 21 off 22 balls and Pat Cummins, playing his first ODI after 18 months with an injury, fell for a duck.

But Maxwell saw his team home, ending the match with two consecutive sixes.

"I tried to be there as long as I could. I thought it was a good

opportunity to get the run rate down against the young spinner," Maxwell said.

Sri Lankan skipper Dusan Shanaka bemoaned too many short balls and full tosses.

"300 is a winning total on this ground, but our bowling cost us the game," Shanaka said.

Earlier in the day, the hosts began their innings with solid batting performances by openers Danushka Gunathilaka and Pathum Nissanka, who scored half centuries in their opening stand of 115. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka	
D Gunathilaka (run out)	55
P Nissanka c Finch b Agar	56
K Mendis (not out)	86
D de Silva c Finch b J Richardson	7
C Asalanka c Warner b Agar	37
D Shanaka c Warner b Labuschagne	6
C Karunaratne c Carey b Labuschagne	7
W Hasaranga c Richardson b Hazelwood	37
Extras (B-1, LB-2, W-6)	9
Total (For 7 wks, 50 overs)	300
Fall of wickets: 1-115, 2-118, 3-134, 4-211, 5-240, 6-258, 7-300	
Bowling: Hazlewood 10-0-54-1, Maxwell 10-0-60-0, Cummins 8-1-48-0, J Richardson 8-0-64-1, Agar 10-0-49-2, Stoinis 1-0-3-0, Labuschagne 3-0-19-2	
Australia	
D Warner lbw Theekshana	0
A Finch c Mendis b Hasaranga	44
S Smith b Wellalage	53
M Labuschagne c Wellalage b Shanaka	24
M Stoinis b Hasaranga	44
A Carey lbw Hasaranga	21
G Maxwell (not out)	80
P Cummins b Hasaranga	0
A Agar lbw Wellalage	3
J Richardson (not out)	1
Extras (B-6, LB-1, W-5)	12
Total (For 8 wks, 42.3 overs)	282
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-72, 3-126, 4-141, 5-189, 6-228, 7-228, 8-254	
Bowling: D Chameera 7.3-0-60-0, M Theekshana 8-0-51-1, C Karunaratne 4-0-16-0, W Hasaranga 9-0-58-4, D Wellalage 7-0-49-2, D de Silva 3-0-14-0, D Shanaka 4-0-27-1	

Harshal, Chahal help India thrash South Africa

VISAKHAPATNAM, India: Bowlers Harshal Patel and Yuzvendra Chahal helped India stay alive in the Twenty20 international series against South Africa with a crushing 48-run win in the third match on Tuesday.

After the hosts were invited to bat first in Visakhapatnam, openers Ruturaj Gaikwad (57) and the Ishan Kishan (54) put on 97 for the first wicket to guide them to 179 for five.

Then, Harshal, who returned his T20 best figures of 4-25, and Chahal shared seven wickets to bowl out South Africa for 131, as India bounced back from their opening two losses.

Gaikwad started cautiously before exploding as he hit four boundaries off fast bowler Anrich Nortje in a 20-run fifth over to give the team a blazing start.

He reached his maiden fifty off 30 balls in his sixth T20 for India



before left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj finally broke the stand and sent back the batsman with a caught-and-bowled effort.

Kishan changed gears and took on Maharaj with two fours and a six to bring up his fifty in 31 balls.

The bowlers hit back with two

wickets including Kishan falling to fast bowler Pretorius.

David Miller and Rassie van der Dussen dropped outfield catches to

allow Hardik Pandya and skipper Rishabh Pant a life each. But Pant was soon caught by skipper Temba Bavuma for six.

Pandya hit an unbeaten 21-ball 31 to boost the Indian total after Proteas bowlers had attempted to check the scoring at the back end.

In reply, South Africa lost Bavuma for eight and kept losing wickets including Reeza Hendricks, for 23, and Pretorius, for 20, at regular intervals.

Chahal got Rassie van der Dussen and Pretorius with his leg spin and soon Harshal sent back the in-form David Miller, for three.

Heinrich Klaasen, who hit 81 in his team's second win, attempted to turn things around with a few boundaries but his departure off Chahal further dimmed South Africa's hopes. He made 29.

Harshal returned to wrap up the tail in 19.1 overs. The fourth match is on Friday in Rajkot. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

India	
R Gaikwad c and b Maharaj	57
I Kishan c Hendricks b Pretorius	54
S Iyer c Nortje b Shamsi	14
R Pant c Bavuma b Pretorius	6
H Pandya (not out)	31
D Karthik c Parnell b Rabada	6
A Patel (not out)	5
Extras (LB-4, W-2)	6
Total (For 5 wks, 20 overs)	179
Fall of wickets: 1-97, 2-128, 3-131, 4-143, 5-158, 6-100, 7-113, 8-126, 9-131	
Bowling: Rabada 4-0-31-1, Parnell 4-0-32-0, Nortje 2-0-23-0, Pretorius 4-0-29-2, Shamsi 4-0-36-1, Maharaj 2-0-24-1	
South Africa	
T Bavuma c Avesh b A Patel	8
R Hendricks c Chahal b H Patel	23
D Pretorius c Pant b Chahal	20
R van der Dussen c Pant b Chahal	1
H Klaasen c AR Patel b Chahal	29
D Miller c Gaikwad b H Patel	3
W Parnell (not out)	22
K Rabada c Chahal b H Patel	9
K Maharaj c Karthik b Kumar	11
N Nortje (run out)	0
T Shamsi c Avesh b H Patel	0
Extras (B-1, LB-1, W-3)	5
Total (ALL OUT, 19.1 overs)	131
Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-38, 3-40, 4-57, 5-71, 6-100, 7-113, 8-126, 9-131	
Bowling: Kumar 4-0-21-1, Avesh 4-0-35-0, A Patel 4-0-28-1, Chahal 4-0-20-3, H Patel 3-1-0-25-4	

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OIA unveils plan to exit from 6 national investments

LANDMARK MOVE: Targeted for divestment through Initial Public Offerings are MSX, a manufacturing project owned by OIA directly and two OQ projects; additionally, OIA will partially and fully exit two Asyad Group projects and fully exit several OMRAN hotels and resorts

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the start of the initial stage of its exit plan for six of its national investments in diverse sectors.

This plan reflects OIA's role in implementing the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040, aiming to achieve economic diversification, decrease dependence on oil and realise the government's approach to



empower the private sector in leading the national economy and enhancing its role in driving national development. Nasser bin Sulaiman al Harthy, OIA's Acting Chairman for Operations said: "Since its inception, OIA has taken it upon

itself to empower and enable the private sector and to avoid competing with it to the best of its ability.

On that note, OIA conducted workshops and programmes to devise an exit plan within a 5-year timeframe between 2021 and 2025

to exit more than 30 assets."

He also added that "exiting is a gradual international practice, which is beneficial to multiple parties, and leads to the main objective which is handing over economic ropes to the private sector."

Through this exit plan, OIA aims to generate revenues for the state's general budget, utilise the acquired revenues in financing capital expenditure and operational expenses, invest in promising sectors after handing over current investments to the private sector, recycle capital from mature assets to investments that are still in their early stages, create partnerships with private investors who include local and international investors and expand Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) through initial and secondary public offerings.

The plan focuses on exiting investments in sectors contributing to economic diversification, like manufacturing, mining, tourism, and logistics.

Each company presents its exit plan for the next five years. After getting approval from OIA, the company presents a detailed plan which includes exit procedures, main planned stages and any advisory appointments to complete the exit.

Companies then execute

the plan in collaboration with a team from OIA. This plan begins execution with six investments in the sectors of energy, manufacturing, tourism and logistics.

It will start with preparing three of its assets to be considered for initial public offerings in MSX; a manufacturing project owned by OIA directly and two OQ projects.

Additionally, OIA will partially and fully exit two Asyad Group projects and fully exit several OMRAN hotels and resorts. OIA's Rawabet project, launched to maintain a link between OIA and its companies, came up with several policies including the 'Exit' policy.

This policy aims to create a framework adhering to values of transparency, fairness, and utmost integrity. The policy seeks to guide companies in developing and implementing exit policies. The board of directors of each OIA company presents an initial 5-year exit plan to OIA for its approval, then updates the plan annually.

— ONA

Multibillion dollar Robotics Park sets up project office



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

The promoters of a world-scale Robotics Park planned in the Sultanate of Oman launched their project office at Al Rusayl Industrial City on Wednesday.

Sandy Valley Robotics Park is proposed to be established on a 3.2 million sq metre site within Al Rusayl Industrial City.

Earlier this month, the project's promoters signed an agreement for the lease of land for the landmark project. Billed as the largest robotics park of its kind in the Middle East, the venture will be implemented in several stages with an initial investment of around \$2 billion.

The Robotics Park, which will generate around 15,000 job opportunities, will comprise workshops for manufacturing robots of all kinds including medical, commercial and industrial types.

The park will also feature Research and Development Centre for Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, robotics-themed shopping stores, training institute in the fields of robotics and AI technologies, in addition to a five-star hotel and an amusement park.

The Robotics Park will open its doors to youth inventions, robotics entrepreneurs, and future technologies of robotics and artificial intelligence.

TURN TO PAGE 15

SOHAR Port signs pact to expand capacity of General Cargo Terminal

Growing demand: C Steinweg Oman LLC (CSO), operator of General Cargo Terminal, to add 27 hectares to storage area

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

SOHAR Port and Freezone has signed an agreement with C Steinweg Oman LLC (CSO) which will see the General Cargo Terminal Operator expand its storage area with 27 hectares (270,000 m2), in order to anticipate further growth, amongst others to facilitate the growing demand for minerals.

The expansion agreement represents a further investment in SOHAR Port and Freezone by the C. Steinweg Group and further strengthens SOHAR's position as the leading export facility for minerals.

The signing ceremony was held at SOHAR Port and Freezone and attended by C Steinweg Group CEO, Ulf Boll; C Steinweg – Handelsveem BV CEO Peter Pesselse; C Steinweg Middle East & India, Managing Director Christophe van Loon and CSO CEO Hendrik van Mierop, as well as SOHAR Port CEO, Mark Geilenkirchen and senior management.

The new storage facilities are



expected to be completed in four months and fully operational in Q4 2022.

Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of SOHAR Port and Freezone, said, "This agreement adds to our capacity to meet growing demand for minerals across the region and solidifies SOHAR's position as a major global cargo terminal.

In 2021, SOHAR exported more than 37 million tonnes of dry bulk cargo. With demand continuing to soar, C Steinweg Oman and SOHAR will be in a prime position to serve the needs of the market, as well as Oman's ongoing diversification and the development of mega projects across the region.

The continuous expansion of SOHAR Port and Freezone

has created new opportunities for more throughput within the 27-hectare site, along with more employment and additional investment in the complex as we progress towards becoming the leading industrial hub in the region."

Hendrik van Mierop, CEO of C Steinweg Oman LLC, added, "Adding 27 hectares of additional storage space to our facility at SOHAR Port and Freezone shows the growth potential of Oman, while serving more and more markets around the world. Situated between key markets in the East and the West, SOHAR offers a unique strategic advantage which is of global significance to the entire C Steinweg Group.

We are very pleased to expand

our premises within SOHAR Port and build on the success we have enjoyed since handling the very first vessel to visit SOHAR Port in 2004. At C Steinweg Oman, we have continuously focused on increasing our efficiency, by investing in equipment, training our people and improving processes.

This has always resulted in cost-effective logistics solutions for our clients. Since our start, we have grown alongside SOHAR Port and Freezone, expanding in berth capacity, storage space and handling equipment. Adding this additional storage capacity, allows us to facilitate further growth for the clients, as well as for our company, for SOHAR Port and for Oman in general."

Total banking sector credit climbs to RO 28.2 bn: CBO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Total outstanding credit of licensed conventional and Islamic banks in the Sultanate of Oman – collectively known as Other Depository Corporations (ODCs) — grew by 3.9 per cent to RO 28.2 billion at the end of April 2022, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) stated in its monthly report on banking and financial sector developments.

Of this total, credit to the private sector demonstrated a slight increase of 1.2 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.6 billion, the report noted.

Non-financial corporations received the highest share of the total private sector credit, at approximately 45.6 per cent at end-April 2022, followed by the household sector (45.3 per cent).

The share of financial corporations was 5.4 per cent while other sectors received the remaining 3.7 per cent of total private sector credit as of end-April 2022.

Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 3.3



per cent to reach RO 25.8 billion at the end of April 2022. Total private sector deposits decreased by 0.2 per cent to RO 17.2 billion.

In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution is from household deposits at 53 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations (29.2 per cent), financial corporations (14.9 per

cent) and other sectors (0.8 per cent).

The combined balance sheet of conventional banks showed a Y-o-Y growth of 2.7 per cent in total outstanding credit as of end-April 2022. Credit to the private sector increased by 0.2 per cent to reach RO 19.1 billion while their overall investments in securities went up by 10 per cent to RO 5.3

billion at the end of April 2022.

Investments in Government Development Bonds decreased by 2.5 per cent compared to the same period last year to RO 2.1 billion, while their investments in foreign securities declined by 1.5 per cent to RO 0.87 billion at the end of April 2022.

On the liabilities side, aggregate deposits held with the conventional

banks increased by 1.7 per cent Y-o-Y to RO 21.2 billion at end-April 2022. Government deposits with conventional banks witnessed an increase of 13.6 per cent at RO 5 billion, and deposits of public enterprises increased by 11.7 per cent to RO 1.4 billion.

Private sector deposits, which accounted for 67.6 per cent of total deposits with conventional banks, decreased by 2.7 per cent as of April 2022 to reach RO 14.4 billion.

The total assets of Islamic Banks and Windows increased by 11.2 per cent on a Y-o-Y basis to RO 6.1 billion and constituted about 15.6 per cent of the banking system's assets as at end- April 2022.

Islamic banking entities provided financing of RO 5 billion at the end of April 2022, recording a growth of 9.9 per cent over that a year ago. Total deposits held with Islamic banks and windows increased by 11.8 per cent to RO 4.5 billion. Among the indicators of monetary aggregates, broad money supply M2 at end- April 2022 increased by 1.7 per cent to reach RO 20.4 billion.

Despite the decline in narrow money (M1) by 1.5 per cent, the increase in M2 is attributed to the 3.0 per cent increase in quasi-money (Rial Omani saving and time deposits, certificates of deposit issued by banks, margin deposits and foreign currency denominated deposits).

Looking at components of narrow money (M1) during the same period, currency with the public increased by 2.6 per cent, while demand deposit fell by 2.8 per cent.

The weighted average interest rate on RO deposits with conventional banks witnessed a marginal decrease from 1.976 per cent at end April 2021 to 1.891 per cent at end-April 2022, while the weighted average RO lending rate decreased from 5.498 per cent to 5.469 per cent over the same period. Meanwhile, the overnight Rial Omani domestic inter-bank lending rate rose to 0.630 per cent in April 2022 from 0.394 per cent a year ago. The average Repo rate for liquidity injection by the CBO at end- April 2022 witnessed an increase, for the first time since March 2020, to 0.717 from 0.5.

Buy your dream car through NBO's auto financing offers



MUSCAT: Giving its customers the chance to drive their dream car today, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has extended its special offer for auto finance. Valid until July 31, 2022, customers can buy a new or pre-owned car with rates starting from just 4.75 per cent p.a. on reducing balance. With easy processing and repayment tenure up to 10 years, as well as a host of exclusive deals courtesy of its partnerships with dealers across the country, NBO's new car loans are the ideal way to get on the road.

Extended to salary and non-salary transfer customers, Omani nationals and residents, NBO's car finance is part of the bank's commitment to delivering hassle-free, competitive financial solutions to fit all. Processed quickly and efficiently, the bank also provides customers a host of benefits including flexible payment terms, additional financing, and much more.

Meanwhile, NBO continues to enhance its suite of products and services, which are designed to support its customers to plan and manage their financial lives, while providing them with extra value and a superior customer experience.

Enjoy heightened luxury in the powerful Lexus GX

MUSCAT: The Lexus GX takes luxury to even greater levels with its impressive ability to conquer terrains and move you places without a worry. The luxury SUV always stands out at making a statement wherever you go.

Powering your journeys, the Lexus GX is equipped with a powerful 292-horsepower, 4.6-litre V8 producing 44.7 Kg.M of peak torque. Making the GX an ideal luxury SUV to tackle varies demands.

The Lexus GX is built using the Kinetic Dynamic Suspension System (KDSS), which makes handling and ride comfort a breeze both on and off-road conditions.

When the GX encounters an



uneven surface, one compressed cylinder causes fluid to flow to the other cylinder, helping the vehicle to keep all four wheels on the ground. This unique system surprisingly works without any

intervention by the driver. Thanks to an Off-Road Package featuring Multi-Terrain Select, tackling tough terrain is equally as easy.

A TORSEN torque-sensing limited slip centre differential

distributes power under most driving conditions and changes the ratio as needed based on wheel slip. The four-wheel drive system offers a low range for slow speed off-road driving.

With Downhill Assist Control (DAC), Hill-start Assist Control (HAC), Active Traction Control (A-TRAC), Vehicle Stability Control (VSC) and available Crawl Control, the GX can roam unpaved roads, trails, and steep inclines with confidence.

Multi-Terrain Select offers the advantage of choosing from multiple surfaces such as loose rocks, mud and sand, moguls, and more to optimise drivability.

Activated with the press of a button, the available Crawl

Control system is designed to automatically maintain an optimal slow and steady pace over demanding landscapes.

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 www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/.

For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Lexus Showroom.

Takaful Oman raises capital by RO 6 million

MUSCAT: Oman's only indigenous Islamic insurer, Takaful Oman has announced the successful completion of its RO 6 million rights issue. Earlier, the company had offered 150 million additional shares at a price of baisas 41 per share (with a share price of baisa 40 plus issue expenses of baisa 1 per share).

The issue was fully subscribed, therefore, increasing the company's capital from RO 10 million to RO 16 million. A bell-ringing ceremony was held at the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) to mark the occasion of listing of additional capital on MSX on June 14, 2022 which was attended by senior officials of the CMA, MSX and the company.

Speaking on the occasion, Mohammed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman of Takaful Oman said, "This marks an important milestone in the journey of Takaful Oman which is still a relatively young player in the Omani insurance and takaful sector. The rights issue is in line with Takaful Oman's long-term



growth strategy and will meet the company's solvency requirements. Through the proceeds of its rights issue, the company also seeks to positively impact the Islamic insurance industry, aid in wealth creation, and drive sustainable

economic growth.

Keen to leverage opportunities in the growing Islamic finance industry, Takaful Oman will use the new capital to further strengthen its operations, develop innovative and embedded

products, and focus on the evolving needs of its growing customer base of 200K."

Commenting on the occasion, Sulaiman al Harthy, deputy chairman of Takaful Oman said, "Congratulations to the entire

team that has been part of the rights issue. It is not only a time to celebrate but also to commit ourselves to continue to perform and deliver strong results and create value for all our stakeholders including the policyholders and the shareholders."

Neelmani Bhardwaj, acting CEO of Takaful Oman further added, "I would like to specially thank our regulators the CMA for their continued guidance and support throughout this process. I would also like to express our gratitude to all the subscribers and shareholders for their unfaltering support, faith, and confidence in the future of this company and we will do our utmost to live up to their expectations. The team at Takaful Oman is also grateful to all its customers for their continued faith in the company." Takaful Oman offers an entire bouquet of Shari'ah compliant insurance products which includes General, Health, and Family Takaful, and has a well-unified network of branches and agencies across the Sultanate of Oman.

OMAN PRIMED TO BE GREEN HYDROGEN PRODUCTION AND EXPORT HUB

VALUE PROPOSITION: THE SULTANATE OF OMAN SEEKS TO BE IN THE RANKS OF THE WORLD'S COUNTRIES FOR PRODUCING GREEN HYDROGEN, THANKS TO THE PRESENCE OF KEY POTENTIALS FOR ITS PRODUCTION REPRESENTED IN SOLAR ENERGY, WIND ENERGY AND EXTENDED LANDS, IN ADDITION TO OMAN'S EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN ENERGY PRODUCTION AND EXPORT, POSITIONING ITSELF IN THE CENTRALITY TO MARKETS, GLOBAL TRADE ROUTES AND ITS RELATIONS WORLDWIDE.

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has set basic goals for the development of hydrogen economy, foremost of which is focusing on the security of energy supplies, whether at the local or global levels, promoting economic diversification programmes and maximising in-country value (ICV) of these national resources, which will have a positive impact on fulfilling commitments to agreements to reduce carbon emissions.

The Sultanate of Oman seeks to be in the ranks of the world's countries for producing green hydrogen, thanks to the presence of key potentials for its production represented in solar energy, wind energy and extended lands, in addition to Oman's extensive experience in energy production and export, positioning itself in the centrality to markets, global trade routes and its relations worldwide.

The move will contribute to being an important hub in the production and export of green hydrogen.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman realises that partnership is necessary to achieve this goal.

In August 2021, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals established a national alliance for green hydrogen (branded as Hy-Fly) to place Oman on the map for the development and deployment of clear hydrogen.

The alliance included 13 major institutions from the public and private sectors that will join hand to support and facilitate the local production, transportation, utilisation and export of hydrogen in line with the energy diversification plans of Oman Vision 2040.

On March 13, 2022, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued instructions, when presiding over the Council of Ministers' meeting, for accelerating the procedures for regulation of the green hydrogen sector, developing the necessary legal frameworks and policies for the growth of this sector, allocation of technical sites, conducting the



The ministry is in the process of appointing a specialised house of expertise to assess and study the existing legislations related to the sector, its investment and its adequacy and suitability in a bid to start developing opportunities in the sector and work in parallel to determine the need for more legislations and the extent of the need for a special law.

ENG ABDULAZIZ BIN SAID AL SHIDHANI
*Director General,
Renewable Energy and Hydrogen*

necessary studies for the same and establishing a directorate concerned with clean energy and hydrogen energy within the organisational structure of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, as well as the establishment of a company to develop this sector.

Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani (pictured), Director General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of



Energy and Minerals, said that the ministry is in the process of appointing a specialised house of expertise to assess and study the existing legislations related to the sector, its investment and its adequacy and suitability in a bid to start developing opportunities in the sector and work in parallel to determine the need for more legislations and the extent of the need for a special law.

Al Shidhani told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the Government is seeking to attract foreign direct investments (FDI) to the green hydrogen sector, and there is a good demand for investment.

He explained that the ministry is working during the current stage to unify efforts with other parties concerned with investment and develop appropriate policies, legal and regulatory frameworks and basic studies for this sector.

He hoped that the existing projects in the Sultanate of Oman in this field which are currently in various stages of development would be crowned with success and achieve their goals and bear fruit soon.

Among the important projects

in the Sultanate of Oman at the present time is Hyport Duqm project to produce green hydrogen. It is one of the strategic projects being developed in partnership between the OQ group and the Belgian DEME Group.

The Hyport Duqm project is scheduled to be built in the site allocated for the alternative energy within the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) on an area of about 150 square kilometres where a wind power plant and a solar power plant will be established with a joint capacity of 1.3 GW to be implemented in expandable phases.

The Hyport Duqm project has currently completed the installation and operation of 4 wind masts for meteorology and 2 solar meteorological stations on site. The step aims to ensure the promising and distinct potentials of Duqm throughout the year in the field of solar and wind energy generation, and then start establishing a plant to produce green hydrogen and green ammonia.

The project comes as part of Oman's strategy to develop Al Wusta Governorate in general and the Special Economic Zone

at Duqm (SEZAD) in particular, in addition to contributing to achieving renewable energy aspirations and objectives of "Oman Vision 2040".

The project will play a major role in augmenting the pace of projects and investments in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and encouraging many institutions to switch to environmentally friendly energy.

In the first phase of the project, a green hydrogen production plant with a water electrolysis technology with a capacity of 500 megawatts will be established in Duqm zone. This plant will generate 330,000 tons of green ammonia annually. The project expected to be operational by 2027 will meet the global demand of green hydrogen.

During the following phases of the project, the value chain will be developed and expanded so that the Duqm zone will become a hub for green hydrogen production in the Sultanate of Oman and the region.

Oman Investment Authority, ACWA Power Saudi Arabia and Air Products also signed an agreement for the joint development of the Oman Hydrogen Project to

establish a plant for the production of ammonia using green hydrogen in the Sultanate of Oman.

The parties agreed to establish the joint investment project at Salalah Free Zone and providing it with the latest technologies recognised in this field and integration of innovative renewable energy from solar, wind, storage and hydrogen production by using electrolysis process, nitrogen production through air separation and green ammonia production.

An OQ Group official said that the Sultanate of Oman has the potential and natural capabilities of solar and wind energy to be one of the most important countries in the world that attract green hydrogen projects and lead green industries, in addition to the presence of specialised Omani cadres, local companies and high technologies capable of localising these projects.

He explained that the use of green hydrogen in the industrial, logistical and infrastructure sectors is crucial and key enabler for investments. He added that there are strategic investments in the Sultanate of Oman in this sector.

— ONA-FANA

200,000 phishing attacks targeting crypto detected

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 15

Since the beginning of 2022, well-known cybersecurity services firm Kaspersky detected and prevented almost 200,000 attempts to steal users' digital currencies and credentials to their wallets via phishing.

The number of such attempts almost reached 50,000 in April, which is half of the indicators for the first quarter of 2022. Crypto wallets are the primary target for scamming and malicious activity.

With the boom in digital currencies observed over the past five years, Kaspersky experts have seen various cybercriminal tactics used to steal cryptocurrency – from luring victims with gifts sent by crypto exchanges to distributing Trojanized DeFi wallets. Crypto wallets are the primary target for scammers



because they are the initial place of storage for cryptocurrency and deal with large amounts of virtual money.

In 2022, Kaspersky have recorded 193,125 phishing attempts aimed at potential crypto investors or users interested in cryptocurrency mining.

Throughout the first quarter of this year, experts discovered about

107,000 attempts. Then in April alone there were nearly 50,000 attempts – that is nearly half of the previous quarter in a single month.

Fraudsters mimic the original crypto wallets' websites and lure victims to enter a personal seed-phrase, a secret phrase of 12 or 24 words that ensures the security of the wallet, along with a password

and private key.

Once the user shares their secret phrase, they're redirected to the real website, however, their account and all of their savings are now in the scammer's hands.

In fact, crypto wallets have become the target of numerous malicious and scamming activities, including not only phishing pages disguised as the most popular wallets but also malware distributed in their names.

Kaspersky experts took a close look into the malicious files that are distributed using the names of 20 of the most popular cryptocurrency wallets.

As a result, they found that within the first five months of 2022, Kaspersky products had prevented more than 1100 users from downloading more than 1400 different variants of malicious files spread under the analysed crypto wallet names.

Multibillion dollar Robotics Park sets up project office

FROM PAGE 13

Present at Wednesday's project office launch were Eng Mohsin bin Zahran al Hinai, CEO of Al Rusayl Industrial City Company; and Dr Tibor Szatmari, Ambassador of Hungary to the Sultanate of Oman.

In an earlier statement to local media, Dr Biju John, Chairman and Managing Director of Sandy Valley Robotics, noted: "The park will be the pride of Oman. The first phase is scheduled to be established in Rusayl Industrial City, and the first

phase will span 864 acres of land on scenic hills. The park will open its doors to young inventors, innovators and entrepreneurs in robotics, while encouraging startups in Oman."

Later phases of the Robotics Park will a five-star hotel, theme park, cable car system, a robotics-themed shopping mall, and other facilities that will promote innovation in robotics. The overall venture will also support Omanization providing training to young people in artificial intelligence and robotics.

ECB calls surprise meeting as borrowing costs rise

European Central Bank policymakers called an emergency meeting on Wednesday, as more indebted eurozone states have come under pressure from rising borrowing costs.

A week after a regular gathering, the governing council will hold an “ad-hoc meeting” to discuss “current market conditions.”

The ECB drew a line under years of ultra-loose monetary policy at last week’s meeting, calling an end to its massive bond-buying stimulus programme at the beginning of July.

Under pressure from soaring inflation in the eurozone, the ECB also announced its first planned interest rate hike in over a decade for the same month. Consumer prices rose at an 8.1-per cent pace in May, an all-time high for the currency club and well above the ECB’s own two-per cent target.

The switch in the central bank’s policy has raised the spectre of “fragmentation” in the eurozone, where the borrowing costs for some, more indebted members rise faster than for others.

Following the meeting last week, the so-called spread between the yields for 10-year Italian bonds and those of Germany — seen as a benchmark for stability — climbed even further, reaching levels not seen since the very start of the pandemic in 2020.

Yields on Italian 10-year bonds fell following the announcement of the ECB meeting, reducing the spread with German government debt.

Eurozone stock markets also rose after falling this week ahead of a regular US Federal Reserve meeting where policymakers could hike rates even higher than expected to combat decades-high inflation.

ECB executive board member Isabel Schnabel said the bank would “not tolerate” unwarranted increases in borrowing costs that would “undermine” the bank’s policy. — AFP

The switch in the central bank’s policy has raised the spectre of “fragmentation” in the eurozone, where the borrowing costs for some, more indebted members rise faster than for others.



PEOPLE BEFORE PROFITS

Demonstrators gather in front of the Marriner S Eccles Federal Reserve building in Washington, DC. According to the group, they gathered during the Federal Reserve’s June Federal Open Market Committee meeting, to call on them to focus on long-term full employment policy, rather than overreact to inflation. — AFP

Developing competencies and capacities is key to sound governance



HAIDER AL LAWATI haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCL.

If individuals have the requisite capabilities to accomplish the tasks assigned to them, then governments are capable of carrying out their responsibilities to the general population by capitalising on the competencies of their administrative resources.

A recent report by PricewaterhouseCoopers has stressed the need for governments to take essential measures to build and adopt a package of six pivotal capabilities.

These could make a qualitative shift in the methodology of government work, which qualifies them to launch towards the horizons of transformation, development, and achieving a real and sustainable social and economic impact.

In the Middle East, for example, several governments, including the Sultanate of Oman, have developed national strategies which set a 2040 Vision to achieve a number of ambitious goals, including economic diversification and the efficient exploitation of national wealth.

Specialists work to achieve these strategies for every important economic resource to have very positive impact on the ground. These policies can bring about a qualitative transformation not only at the economic level, but also at the social and technological level, and provide more job opportunities for citizens.

The Sultanate of Oman has today a population of about 4.6 million people, of whom more than 2.6 million are Omani citizens and the rest are expatriates.

This requires continuing to work efficiently to reach the end point, and achieve the desired goals that depend on its ability to take appropriate measures that guarantee effective formulation and implementation.

The sound implementation of the executive plans necessitates the establishment of a new type of institution, namely the “Ministry of the Future”, as advised by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC).

The Ministry of the Future, according to PwC, is characterised by a focus on beneficiaries, reliance on facts and data,

and orientation towards achieving results.

It is also characterised by the fact that its operations are digitally supported, and that it has two elements: cooperation and participation, underpinned by flexibility, effectiveness and innovative capabilities that are based on the latest technologies to provide services that others need.

The proposed Ministry of the Future must rely on achieving six pivotal capabilities to reach the desired goals on the basis of sound governance. While all of the six pillars are adopted by governments in many Arab countries, the absence of transparency and accountability increases the potential for corruption and manipulation in government institutions.

Also, this happens due to the bureaucracy practiced by these institutions that leads to the decline of the business environment and hampers the ability of government institutions to provide more job opportunities for citizens. This factors should be taken in account before contemplating the institution of the Ministry of the Future model.

Germany races to stockpile gas before winter

JEAN-PHILIPPE LACOUR

SO FAR, BERLIN HAS MANAGED TO REDUCE THE SHARE OF ITS NATURAL GAS SUPPLIED BY RUSSIA FROM 55 PER CENT BEFORE THE ATTACK, TO 35 PER CENT NOW THANKS TO INCREASED DELIVERIES FROM COUNTRIES LIKE NORWAY AND THE NETHERLANDS, AND THROUGH LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS CONTRACTS (LNG).

Germany’s race to wean itself off Russian energy and stockpile enough gas before winter is playing out largely hidden from view, some 1,600 metres (one mile) below ground in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps.

Surrounded by rolling farmland near the banks of the river Inn, the former Bierwang natural gas field in Unterreit serves as one of Germany’s largest underground gas storage facilities.

Run by German operator Uniper, Bierwang can hold more than 800 million cubic metres of gas — enough to power the nearby city of Munich for eight months.

Like other storage sites, Bierwang replenishes its stocks between winters, to keep homes heated and Germany’s energy-hungry industry humming during the cold months when demand is highest.

But this year, the stakes are higher than ever. With the war in Ukraine raging and Moscow increasingly seen as an unreliable supplier, governments across Europe are scrambling to store supplies before Moscow decides to reduce the flow of gas, or close the taps altogether.

“The security of supply this winter will depend on two factors: how full the storage facilities are and how much new gas keeps arriving” from abroad, said Sebastian Herold, a professor of energy economics at the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences.

Russian deliveries will play a “decisive role” in this, Herold said.

Efforts by successive German governments to build closer economic ties with Moscow have left the country hooked on Russian energy imports, a policy now widely seen as misguided.

INJECTED INTO ROCK

Fears that a sudden shortage of Russian gas could bring Europe’s

biggest economy to its knees recently prompted the German government to adopt legislation requiring all of the nation’s gas reservoirs to be 90 per cent full by November.

Altogether, the above and underground sites have enough capacity to cover 25 per cent of Germany’s natural gas consumption. They act as a kind of buffer in times of strain on the gas market or if demand spikes during unusually cold weather.

As part of Western sanctions against Moscow, Germany has already agreed to phase out Russian oil and coal. But becoming independent of Russian gas will take longer — and it won’t come cheap as the war in Ukraine sends energy prices soaring.

So far, Berlin has managed to reduce the share of its natural gas supplied by Russia from 55 per cent before the attack, to 35 per cent now thanks to increased deliveries from countries like Norway and the

Netherlands, and through liquefied natural gas contracts (LNG).

In Bierwang, a network of long-distance pipelines delivers gas to the storage facility. The gas is then compressed before being injected into porous sandstone and stored in natural reservoirs deep below ground.

This method allows vast quantities of natural gas to be stockpiled, but the filling and emptying takes longer than with a second type of underground storage that relies on large caverns in rock salt formations, more commonly found in northern Germany.

“We’re on a good way to hopefully deliver the security supply this winter,” said Doug Waters, managing director of Uniper Energy Storage, which operates nine storage facilities in Germany.

EX-GAZPROM UNIT

Germany’s gas storage sites were 55 per cent full on Tuesday, according to the German Federal Network Agency, which

posts daily updates online. The current fill rate is “better than in previous years, but still not sufficient,” said the agency’s head, Klaus Mueller.

Complicating Germany’s challenge to get ready for winter is the situation at the crucial Rehden gas storage facility in the north, the largest in the country.

The German state temporarily took control of the site’s owner, Gazprom Germania, in April, a move Berlin said was necessary to ensure energy security as ties with Russia worsened.

Berlin suspects that the unit’s former owner, Russia’s state-owned Gazprom, deliberately kept supplies low before the attack on Ukraine to give it leverage over Germany.

Russia last month cut off supplies to Gazprom Germania in retaliation for Berlin’s move.

The Rehden facility, with a gas storage capacity of four billion cubic metres, was just 7.95 per cent full on Tuesday. — AFP

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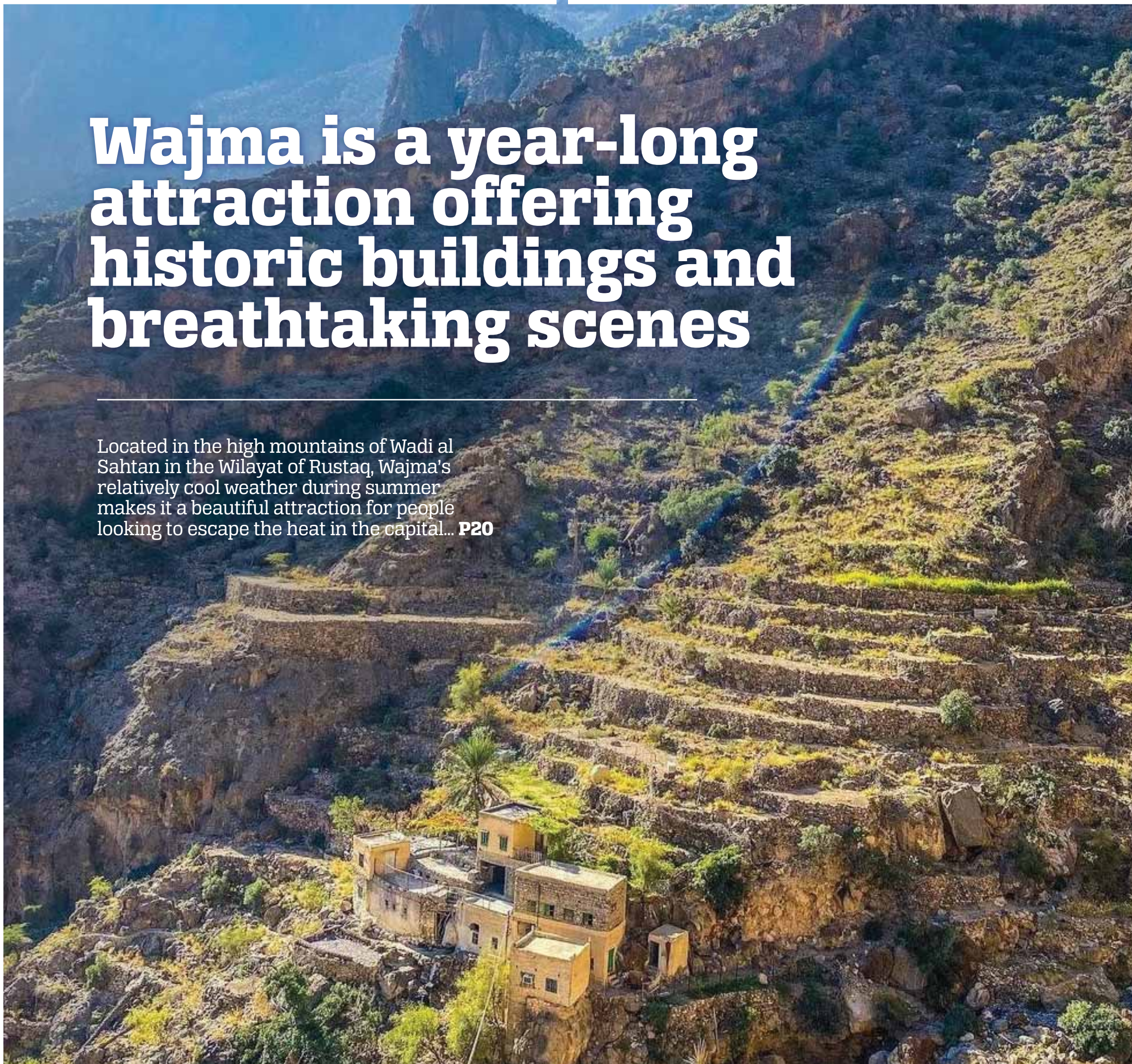
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Wajma is a year-long attraction offering historic buildings and breathtaking scenes

Located in the high mountains of Wadi al Sahtan in the Wilayat of Rustaq, Wajma's relatively cool weather during summer makes it a beautiful attraction for people looking to escape the heat in the capital... **P20**



'Best birthday present ever!' says Spanish diver after saving trapped whale

IN A GRIPPING underwater rescue, Spanish divers have freed a 12-metre long humpback whale entangled in an illegal drift net off the Balearic island of Mallorca. One of the divers, 32-year-old marine biologist Gigi Torras, said last Friday's rescue and a little gesture of appreciation from the giant mammal were also a birthday present for her - the 'best ever' in her words.

"It was like out of this world, it was incredible, just incredible," she said on Tuesday. It was only the third time that a humpback has been seen around the Balearic Islands. The weakened whale had been spotted by a ship about three miles (4.83 km) off the eastern coast of Mallorca, prompting Palma de Mallorca's Aquarium marine rescue centre into action.



They discovered the whale completely trapped in the red fishnet so it could not even open its mouth. After initial attempts to cut the

net from a boat failed, divers from Albatros and Skualo diving centres joined the effort and plunged into the sea to remove the mesh with their knives in a

daring 45-minute operation. "The first ten seconds she got a bit nervous, you know, like bubbles everywhere, but then I don't know, call me crazy but I think she knew we were there to help her and she just relaxed and we started working from the front of her mouth backwards," said Albatros owner Torras. "We kept cutting and cutting and she kind of gave a little wiggle to get herself out of it," Torras said, adding that the mammal then stayed for a bit to regain her strength in the company of the four divers and even gave what looked like "a little thank you sign" before swimming off. Nicknamed "walls of death" for the quantity of other sea life they catch in addition to the fish they are set for, drift nets were banned by the United Nations 30 years ago. — Reuters

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DISCOVERY

A giant crocodile-faced dinosaur, discovered on the Isle of Wight by one of Britain's best fossil hunters, was probably the largest predator ever to stalk Europe, scientists said on Thursday. — AFP



WHAT AN HONOUR

A Medal of Freedom awarded to a notorious mobster by then-US President Harry S. Truman is set to go under the hammer in California. The honor — a forerunner to the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom — was bestowed by Truman on Meyer "The Little Man" Lansky in a secret 1945 ceremony. — AFP



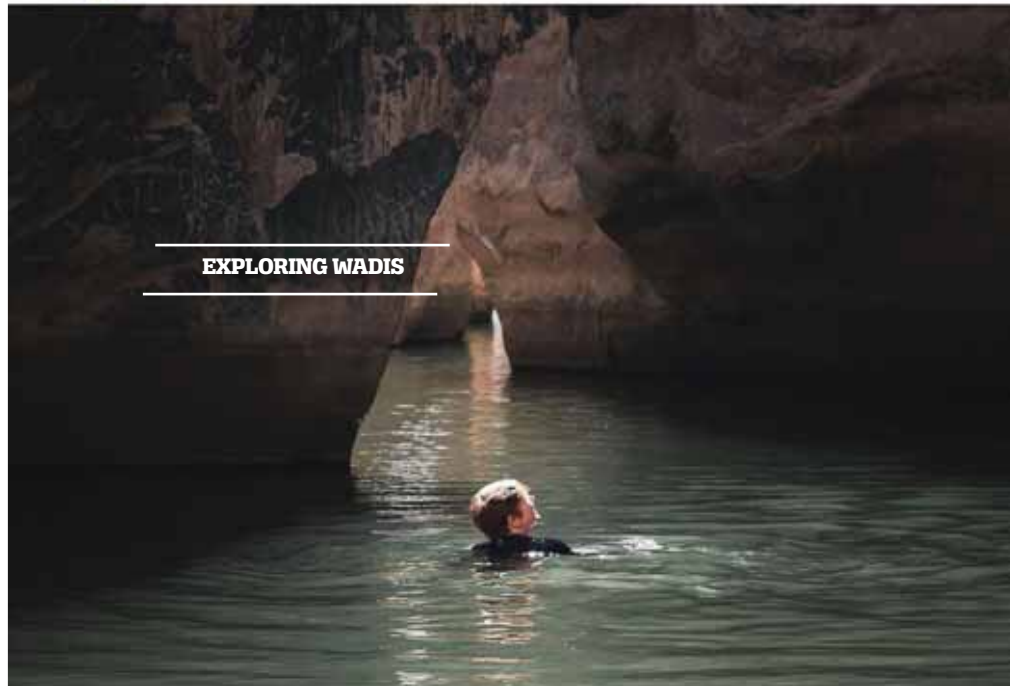


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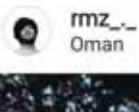
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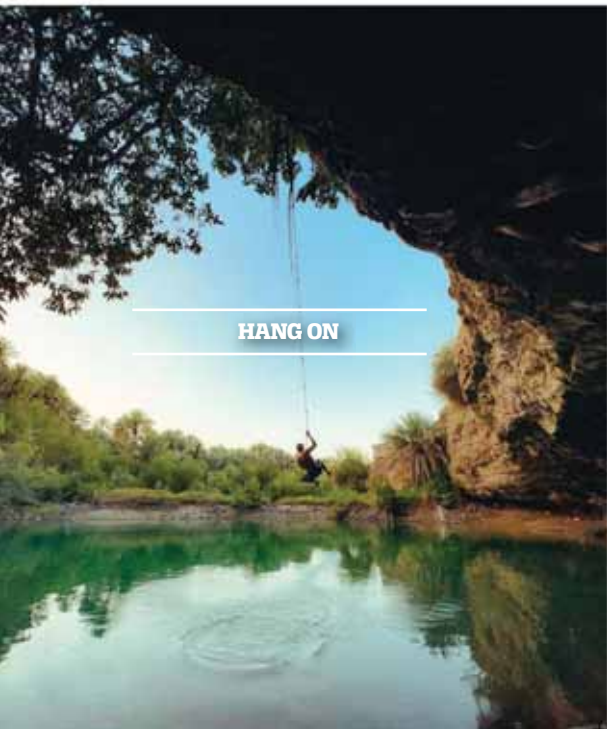
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AROUND THE WORLD

ART

Against Type: Russian print artist makes posters for peace



BEFORE THE LAUNCH of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, printer Sergei Besov was part of a burgeoning art scene based out of a converted factory in northern Moscow.

Using an old printing press with hefty wooden Cyrillic type and vintage red ink, Besov created nostalgia-tinted posters with updated Soviet-style slogans.

More than three months after Russian forces moved into Ukraine in late February, Besov is still working, but these days his posters are about more than witty catch-phrases.

"Everyone Needs Peace," reads one of his latest creations, hanging over the entrance to his Partisan Press poster workshop.

Besov, 45, gained instant attention when, in the early days of Russia's military offensive he started printing "No to War" posters in the shop.

One video of a poster being made garnered 3.6 million views on Instagram.

"It was unclear whether martial law was going to be introduced... Everyone was in a panic," he says.

Besov stopped making the "No to War" posters after Russia introduced strict new censorship laws, making it illegal to refer to the intervention as a war and setting jail terms for those found guilty of discrediting Russia's military.

He began printing the "Everyone Needs Peace" posters instead but the police still turned up at this shop in early March and detained two of his employees.

"They talk about fear"

"They were very nervous," he says. The two women are now waiting to know whether they will face any charges.

The workshop took a few weeks off in March "simply out of fear", Besov says, but is now up and running again.

On one recent spring day, Besov was out in the streets of Moscow in sunglasses and a black T-shirt, using a paint brush to slather glue on one of his posters in front of a brick wall covered with graffiti.

Once the glue was applied, he stuck up the poster reading: "If there are dreams, there will be journeys."

Tens of thousands of Russians have decided to take one-way journeys since the start of the conflict, fleeing the country with no plans to return.

But Besov says he plans to stay.

"Today the posters are about what happens to us. They talk about fear. 'Fear is no reason not to act' was the first poster we printed after our break," he says.

The posters' slogans are vague and eerie, loaded with the words that cannot be said: "The wave will sweep everything away", "The main thing is not to lose yourself", "Every wall has a door".

One reads simply "Cognitive Dissonance" — a reference, Besov says, to how many in Moscow are living their normal lives while "our friends over there (in Ukraine) are suffering".

"And even worse, we understand that everyone is getting used to it."

Despite his passion for his work, Besov is not sure how long he can keep his shops running or printing the posters.

His main business is printing high-end stationery and business cards at another nearby workshop under the imprint Demon Press. But under Western sanctions, the fine paper he uses for the business will soon be impossible to find in Moscow.

And the vintage red ink he uses for his posters — made in the Soviet-dominated Hungarian People's Republic in 1989 — will also soon run dry. — **AFP**

GASTRONOMY

Famed Hong Kong floating restaurant towed away after half a century



Hong Kong's Jumbo Floating Restaurant, a famed but ageing tourist attraction that featured in multiple Cantonese and Hollywood films, was towed out of the city on Tuesday after years of revitalisation efforts went nowhere.

The buoyant behemoth, which at 76 metres long could house 2,300 diners, set out shortly before noon from the southern Hong Kong Island typhoon shelter where it has sat for nearly half a century.

Designed like a Chinese imperial palace and once considered a must-see landmark, the restaurant drew visitors from Queen Elizabeth II to Tom Cruise, and featured in several films — including Steven Soderbergh's "Contagion", about a deadly global pandemic.

The lavish restaurant's operators cited the Covid-19 pandemic as the reason for finally closing its doors in March 2020, after around a decade of financial woes.

Restaurant owner Melco International Development announced last month that ahead of its licence expiration in June, Jumbo would leave Hong Kong and await a new operator at an undisclosed location.

Under overcast skies, a

scattered group of onlookers gathered on the Aberdeen waterfront to see it be dragged away.

Watching the restaurant's ponderous progress across the shelter waters was Mr Wong, a 60-year-old man who said he had come specially to see its departure.

"The exterior was for many years a symbol of Hong Kong," he said, adding he had eaten there once 20 years ago.

"I believe it will come back and I look forward to it."

Opened in 1976 by the late casino tycoon Stanley Ho, the Jumbo Floating Restaurant embodied the height of luxury, reportedly costing over HK\$30 million (\$3.8 million) to build.

It featured a "dragon throne" in the style of the Ming dynasty as well as an opulent mural, according to the South China Morning Post.

The restaurant's berth in Aberdeen harbour was traditionally a hotspot for seafood eateries — and fierce competition for customers only cooled when Jumbo's operators acquired its biggest competitor, Tai Pak Floating Restaurant, in the 1980s.

The restaurant was kept afloat by Hong Kong's boom-

ing tourism industry but its popularity had dimmed in recent years even before the coronavirus hit.

Restaurant operator Melco said last month the business had not been profitable since 2013 and cumulative losses had exceeded HK\$100 million (\$12.7 million).

It was still costing millions in maintenance fees every year and around a dozen businesses and organisations had declined an invitation to take it over at no charge, Melco added.

In her 2020 policy address, Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam announced plans to turn the restaurant over to local theme park Ocean Park for revitalisation, but the project fell through after the park said it could not find a suitable operator.

The ailing restaurant's fate was sealed just days before Lam is set to leave office.

In a sign of its dilapidation, on June 1, Jumbo's kitchen boat listed into the water after a suspected hull breach, tilting almost 90 degrees.

The derelict kitchen boat will be left behind, according to local media.—Famed Hong Kong floating restaurant towed away after half a century. — **AFP**



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Corona and its negativity tests!

IN THE LAST months of the Corona pandemic and with the emergence of the Omicron variant, many people may have recently recorded a series of negative tests in a row, sometimes up to three tests. No one can yet say how common these early negatives are, or who is most at risk.

However, if the coronavirus is rewriting the rules of the game for early infection, that could make it scary! You cannot test and get a negative result and already know that you are negative. The truth about these false negatives can speed up the spread of the virus; they can even delay treatments based on a positive test result! It may even contradict the idea of the Coronavirus (Covid-19), which says: Test as soon as you feel sick! It is assumed that the few days approaching the onset of symptoms when the virus inside you will be more detectable and transmissible, especially since it has been adopted, as we all remember, with a complete idea of testing and isolation on this basis.

Here, we may ask ourselves, what is the reason for the late positives of the Coronavirus tests? Is it possible that population immunity, viral mutations and human behaviour have some role? Regardless, the virus could certainly behave differently from a symptom perspective.

Undoubtedly, there may be several phenomena that can lead to confusion in the testing schedule. Among them, the immunity hypothesis, as seen by many researchers, may precede the test-positive symptoms, less because the virus peaked late and more because the disease arrives early. Thanks to the quick reactions of people's immune systems. Sometimes, the disease is direct damage by the virus. But a runny nose, muscle and joint aches, chills, fever and fatigue — common in many respiratory infec-

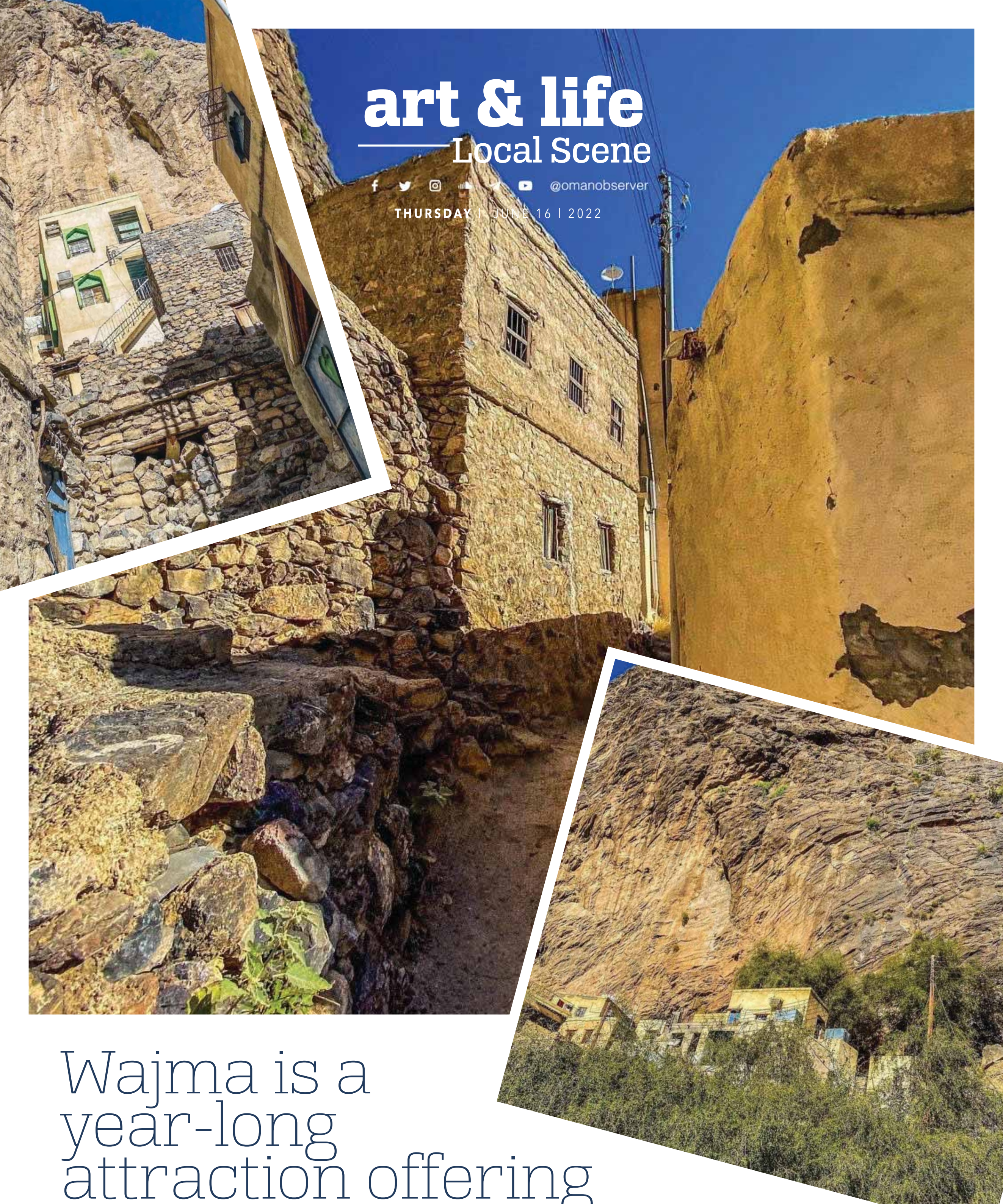
tions — can also be signs of an overactive immune system.

Interestingly, when the pandemic started, infection occurred exclusively in people who had never encountered the coronavirus before. The illness took several days to appear, as the virus turned into a frenzy and the immune system struggled to catch up. Most importantly, once people are vaccinated, their immune systems start working immediately, especially since previous infections also have an effect. However, some people who are not immunised may have experienced early negativity also in their tests and many people who have tested positive for corona still before they get sick.

On the other hand, symptoms and test accuracy are also subject to human bias. People can't always remember when they started feeling sick. And user error can obfuscate the diagnosis. Hence, do people really do 15 seconds in each nostril and really clean every time? Even ultra-sensitive tests will lose the virus some time. So don't you see with me that a large part of samples taken from patients in medical settings come back negative for everything?!

In the end, this takes us to say that you probably cannot fully trust a negative early-onset rapid test. Especially since negative results cannot rule out infection. So this means that our guidance and our perceptions about the virus may need to be adjusted soon — probably not for the last time, especially if the pandemic is still serving plot twists. Can a series of negative tests for Corona and its variants still portend positivity everyday?!

Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.



art & life

Local Scene

f t i y u @omanobserver

THURSDAY | JUNE 16 | 2022

Wajma is a year-long attraction offering historic buildings and breathtaking scenes

By Arwa Al Hashimi
Photos by Riyadh Al Hinaï

With its distinct location and surrounded by tall mountains and scenic landscapes, Wajma, with its ancient buildings dating back hundred years, is standing out as one of the most beautiful villages in the country today.

Located in the high mountains of Wadi Al Sahtan in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, its relatively cool weather during summer makes it a beautiful attraction for people looking to escape the heat in the capital.

Its beautiful weather actually runs the whole year through becoming

even cooler in the winter and this better temperature makes Wajma a year-long attraction.

This gives a very good chance for visitors to explore the village at any time of the year or even enjoy their stay in it.

Like many other Omani villages, Wajma is known to have a very rich history that can be traced through its archaeological buildings.

Upon entering the mountain area where the village is located, one will automatically be welcomed by agricultural scenes that made life possible in this remote place.

It's breathtaking to see how the locals manage to create houses right at the edges of cliffs using some of the best available spots and intercon-

necting alleys among houses to create a village that looks well put out architecturally.

It also has ancient monuments – the mosques and a decaying old tower that are filled with inscriptions and drawings giving insight into the villagers' belief system. Not far from the main village is the tombstone areas which date back to about a hundred years.

A quick exploration of the village would lead one to discover a beautiful dripping waterfall located at the far end of the village. The water flows the whole year through but lesser in the summer and this actually is a source of drinking water for the villagers.

What is stunning about this place is how the villagers put pots to collect

this dripping water.

One of the village's focal points is also the big cistern where the water is collected. This pool has served as a swimming hole for the locals and with a wonderful view overlooking cliffs and canyons, it is definitely one of the best falaj pools in Oman.

The villagers of Wajma raise livestock that produces meat, milk, cheese and local ghee and due to the existence of natural pastures of Sidr and Samar, they are also famous for breeding honey bees. All of this makes their food fresh and healthy at all times.

Due to some challenges, nearly all of Wajma's former inhabitants had abandoned the village visiting it only during specific harvest seasons

including the much-awaited dates harvests.

The farms here continue to operate with many families employing foreign workers to manage their farms.

Walking around the village when the families are away to their newer homes is like walking through a town forgotten by time. Some residents shared that the primary reason for moving out is because of accessibility to schools and hospitals including modern comfort like air conditioning and vehicles.

As for its name, locals believe that Wajma came from "stones piled on top of each other" which is exactly what the village with its ancient houses looks like.