

Omantel showcases latest tech

Omantel showcased latest tech products during a media tour at its headquarters in Airport Heights in Muscat on Wednesday. The tour covered Omantel Innovation Labs, Omantel Museum, Innovation Oasis and Smart Store. The focus was on technical innovation and creativity as parts of Omantel's culture of entrepreneurship and creative environment. **SEE PAGE 3**



P12

OMAN INTERNATIONAL RALLY BEGINS TODAY



P13

UNIFIED E-PORTAL FOR GOVT SERVICES



P20

BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING OF SPORTS



MUSCAT

NEW FUEL STATIONS TO OPEN SOON

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said steps are underway to get some integrated service stations working fully along Al Batinah Expressway. The scheduled operation begins with four sites in North Al Batinah Governorate, with two in Al Hoor, one in the Al Rowdha area and another in the Wilayat of Liwa. **SEE P5**

PROJECT'S WORTH OVER RO 15 M GET NOD

The Tender Board today approved RO 15,913,132 worth tenders during its first meeting this year. The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Chairman of the Tender Board. Among the most important works was rehabilitating and furnishing the building of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. **SEE P2**

READ IN

OPINION

SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

KHALID AL HURAIBI

P8



DID WE MISS BIDEN'S MOST IMPORTANT REMARK ABOUT RUSSIA?

THOMAS L. FRIEDMAN

P9

INSIDE



INDIA SHOWCASES MILITARY MIGHT IN REPUBLIC DAY

P6



US 'DESTRUCTIVE' SANCTIONS ON PUTIN

P7

Electricity spot market launched; tariffs capped

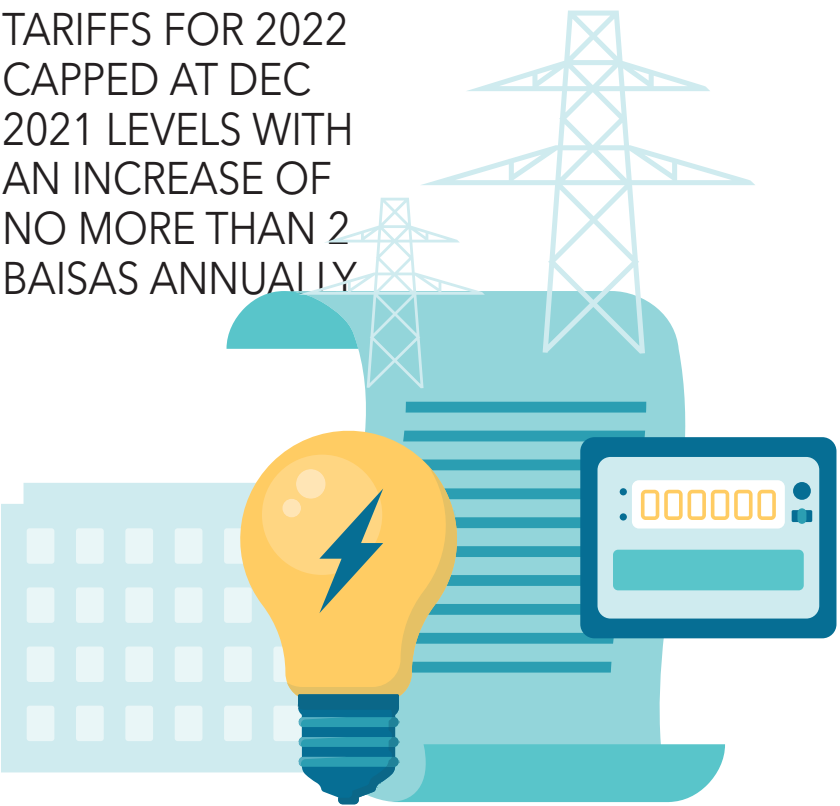
STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The Sultanate of Oman has formally launched an electricity spot market, the first in the Middle East, to increase the efficiency of power procurement as part of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, ONA said on Wednesday. The spot market will enable licensed generators for the first time to offer their surplus capacity at the most competitive rate.

It has also extended the timeframe of a planned redirecting of electricity subsidies for residential consumers to 10 years from 5 years, and capped power tariffs for the same category throughout 2022 at December 2021 levels with an increase of no more than 2 baisas annually.

The Oman Investment Authority merged Muscat Electricity Distribution Company, Mazoon Electricity Company, Majan Electricity Company, and Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) in a bid

TARIFFS FOR 2022 CAPPED AT DEC 2021 LEVELS WITH AN INCREASE OF NO MORE THAN 2 BAISAS ANNUALLY



MUSCAT ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY, MAZOOON ELECTRICITY COMPANY, MAJAN ELECTRICITY COMPANY, AND TANWEER MERGED

COST REFLECTIVE TARIFF HAS BEEN CANCELLED FOR AGRICULTURE SECTOR. INSTEAD A NEW TARIFF WILL BE APPLIED

THE SPOT MARKET WILL ENABLE LICENSED GENERATORS FOR THE FIRST TIME TO OFFER THEIR SURPLUS CAPACITY AT THE MOST COMPETITIVE RATE

to restructure the distribution and supply companies in the electricity sector. The merger will not involve Dhofar Integrated Services Company.

It was also agreed to unify all accounts of the residential category so that the value of power consumption tariff in 2022 could fall in two classes: The first

class/category pertains to the original account's tariff (for two or less accounts), and this comprises three segments.

TURN TO P4

Expats above 60 can renew work visa

KABEER YOUSUF
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In a major policy decision that will impact many expatriates in the Sultanate of Oman, a circular issued by the Ministry of Labour stated that expatriate employees who attained superannuation at 60, but still willing to work in the country, can renew work visa.

Accordingly, expatriate retirees could avail a five-year renewable visa if they were 60 or above. The condition here is proof of work in the Sultanate of Oman for not less than two years and a six-month bank statement in Oman showing monthly income of at least RO 4,000.

Renee Johnson, a travel and tourism expert, said the new decisions visa can help support the ailing tourism sector.

The new circular from the ministry says it cancels its earlier decision that does not allow the renewal of the resident cards of expats who attained 60 years of age. "The ministry has communicated the decision to authorities concerned for appropriate action," the circular said.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a spokesperson from the ministry said the decision aims to attract foreigners to choose Oman beyond their retirement age and continue living here as a measure to support the economy in the wake of the pandemic.

"The decision to allow expatriate workers to continue beyond 60 years of age is a mutual understanding between both the parties. It aims to retain experienced hands in the country," he said.

"All the under-secretaries have been advised to take appropriate steps to implement the same," he said. **TURN TO P4**

SOHAR BAZAAR OPENS



Sohar Bazaar located in Al Hajra area was officially launched under the auspices of Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar Al Malik al Shihi, Governor of North Al Batinah, on Wednesday.

'Omicron stays on skin for a day, on plastic over a week'

TOKYO: The Omicron variant of coronavirus can remain alive on skin for over 21 hours, and more than eight days on plastic surfaces, which may be contributing to its faster spread compared to other strains, a study claims.

The researchers from Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine in Japan analysed the differences in viral environmental stability between the SARS-CoV-2 Wuhan strain and all variants of concern (VOCs).

The study, posted recently on the preprint repository BioRxiv,



found that the Alpha, Beta, Delta and Omicron variants exhibited more than two-fold

All variants on the skin surface were completely inactivated by 15-second exposure to 35 per cent ethanol, the study said, asserting that sanitising hands frequently is highly recommended

surfaces, average survival times of the original strain and the Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta variants

were 56 hours, 191.3 hours, 156.6 hours, 59.3 hours, and 114 hours. That compared to 193.5 hours for the Omicron variant, according to the researchers.

The findings also include the effectiveness of ethanol on all variants. Although Alpha, Beta, Delta, and Omicron variants showed a slight increase in ethanol resistance in response to increased environmental stability, all VOCs on the skin surface were completely inactivated by 15-second exposure to 35 per cent ethanol, it said. — **Agencies**



■ THEYAZIN RECEIVES GERMAN AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, received here Wednesday Thomas Friedrich Schneider, Ambassador of Germany to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. They also reviewed the bilateral relations and aspects of cooperation in cultural, sports and youth fields, in addition to exchanging views on means of promoting them to serve the joint interests. — ONA

Projects worth over RO 15m awarded

MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Wednesday approved RO 15,913,132 worth tenders during its first meeting this year.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, Chairman of the Tender Board.

Among the most important works assigned and approved by the board was rehabilitating and furnishing the building of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, besides adding some facilities to it.

Another was the renewal of the temporary lease contract

for the Institute of Public Administration building for one year (from 1/7/2021 to 30/6/2022) and the additional works on the tender for the dualisation of Izz-Adam road project in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, among others.

— ONA

State Council Office discusses proposals, agenda for session

MUSCAT: The Office of the State Council on Wednesday held its second meeting of the third annual sitting of the 7th Term under the auspices of Sheikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council. The meeting studied proposals submitted by the council's committees and some members.

Two proposals made by the Technology and Innovation Committee were taken up at the outset of the meeting. The first proposal dealt with a study on the Cyber Defence Centre's system promulgated by Royal Decree No 64/2020 and the second one looked into a study on the regulatory and legislative frameworks of artificial intelligence.

The State Council Office hosted Dr Maryam bint Abdullah al Awadiyah, Chairperson of



the Technology and Innovation Committee and the panel's rapporteurs — Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed al Lamki and Dr Mahmood bin Abdullah al Kindi. After the discussions, the Office decided to refer the two proposals to the General Assembly, along with the views of the chairperson and rapporteurs, for further elaboration.

Then, the Office studied a proposal from the Economic Committee on enhancing the basics

of legal and regulatory systems governing real estate funding, financial leasing and consumer financing. It also studied the panel's proposal on studying the agricultural sector's economic returns and competitive capacity.

For comment on the two proposals, the State Council Office hosted Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthy, Chairman of the Economic Committee and Hamad bin Sulaiman al Ghraibi, Rapporteur of the Committee.

Arab meet on olive quick decline syndrome

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources took part in the high level regional online meeting on Olive quick decline syndrome (OQDS). The ministry's delegation was chaired by Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture. The meeting saw the participation of several

ministers and under-secretaries of agriculture from a number of Arab countries, as well as officials and experts from different parts of the world.

Olive quick decline syndrome (OQDS) is caused by a bacteria named "Xylella fastidiosa" which infects various types of grapes, olives and citrus plants, causing economic losses to farmers in times of its spread. — ONA



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ROP marks International Customs Day



MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Wednesday marked the International Customs Day under the theme 'Enhancing digital transformation of customs by embracing a data culture and building a data ecosystem'.

A celebration was held on the occasion under the auspices of Colonel Said bin Khamis al Ghaithi, Director-General of Customs, at the headquarters of the Directorate-General of Customs, on Wednesday.

At the beginning of the ceremony the director-general of customs delivered a speech in which he explained that the Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by the Directorate-General of Customs, moves on with the process of development and modernisation of various customs-related areas. He added that the DG of customs activated a number of measures over the past period in an effort to facilitate customs procedures and ease the flow of goods in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on the movement of trade exchange.

Al Ghaithi pointed to several initiatives launched by the DG of Customs, most notably the launch of the remote clearance service, the acceptance of documents copies of when the original documents are missing, acceptance of the written guarantee as an alternative to the financial guarantee, approving the labelling on goods in case it is not possible to provide the certificate of origin, the launch of the electronic Air Waybill (AWB) and the launch of the safe customs passage initiative between sea and air ports, free



zones and customs warehouses. Besides, ROP has modernised the system of automatic inspection devices at various customs ports.

The ceremony witnessed the inauguration of a manual for goods fragmentation and the transferring of the cargo declaration. The aim is to organise and facilitate customs procedures related to the import and export of goods owned by more than one person. The system allows the conversion of the main cargo data into separate shipping documents to divide the goods to their owners.

At the end of the ceremony, a number of excellent customs officers, non-commissioned officers and personnel were honoured with the certificate of proficiency from the World Customs Organization (WCO.) The Al Wajajah Port was also honoured as the best customs port for the year 2021.

The best customs clearance company, the best customs clearance agents and the best government agency electronically linked with the Bayan system, and some companies, were also honoured at the ceremony. — ONA

■ OMAN, BAHRAIN REVIEW BILATERAL TIES



MUSCAT: Foreign Minister, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy received Shaikh Dr Abdullah Ahmed al Khalifa, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Political Affairs in the Kingdom of Bahrain on Wednesday. The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and ways of enhancing them to meet the aspirations of the two countries' peoples. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

Artisans need to upgrade marketing skills

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

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Crafts carry unique value in the Sultanate of Oman due to people's love for tradition even in the millennium. In the Sultanate of Oman there are many crafts on which the artisans work and come out with beautiful handmade or semi-handmade products.

They have wide range to work on. From daggers to swords, leather, textiles, carpets, weaving, pottery, incense making, palm leaves products, copper and silver crafts can easily be found in markets done by the local artisans.

They also have expertise in making incense burners, rose water distillation and frankincense harvesting.

The list can go on, but the fact is there are dedicated men and women who have been practising craft-making from generation to generation. Today their primary exposure to the public is mainly through exhibitions.

Earlier, the artisans were producing those products on a very small scale, may be for the consumption of a village or a tribe. Then they were not quality conscious as well. Today crafts mak-



ing industry has taken proper shape with due support from authorities.

Credit goes to Mona Ritchie founded the Omani Heritage Gallery way back in 1995. "Believing in the craft industry of the Sultanate of Oman and the support the artisans and craftsmen needed, and to promote and find a market of Omani crafts that are made by Omani hands."

"The venture started through Marcia Dorr and Neil Richardson, who were commissioned to do studies on the handicraft industry in Oman", said Mona.

She thought of venturing into Omani crafts. In her comments to *Observer*, she said: "I perceived lack of cohesive sustainability for

the crafts of Oman. Some organisations were selling them with no idea of quality control or even what the market needed. Most importantly, there was no feedback to the artisans."

She was successful in networking for the craftspeople and worked on it for several years.

She strongly feels that the craftspeople should become proper entrepreneurs and suggests "the craftsmen need some exposure of training and market even though they are selling their products through social media tools."

She advocates for a proper marketing channel for the craftsmen in the Sultanate of Oman as well outside the country through export channels.

Omantel showcases latest tech products and services

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JAN 26

Omantel showcased latest tech products during a media tour at its headquarters in Airport Heights in Muscat on Wednesday. The tour covered Omantel Innovation Labs, Omantel Museum, Innovation Oasis and Smart Store.

During the tour the Sultanate of Oman's major telecom services provider, put stress on technical innovation and creativity as parts of Omantel's culture of entrepreneurship and creative environment. It seeks to encourage its employees to evolve and gain new heights. "Omantel's role is not limited to enriching the social and economic fabric of the country through its day-to-day operations, it also promotes digital inclusion, entrepreneurship, and pushes the boundaries of global innovation", a statement from Omantel said.

Omantel Innovation Labs mainly focuses on developing entrepreneurship skills among young people and accelerating

the growth of emerging technology companies in the country across five technology areas: 5G technology, Internet of things, cybersecurity, subscriber experience concept and big data. The innovation labs, which are located on a large area of 1,100 square metres at Omantel's head office in Muscat, will organise, participate and host many activities to achieve the company's vision, goals and ambitions related to innovation.

Commenting on the inauguration of these laboratories, Talal bin Saeed al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "In the company, we seek to support and benefit from new ideas and technologies, maintain leadership and stimulate innovation in the local market. Therefore, we need to utilise our resources optimally and create an environment in which our goals are compatible with national goals related to digital transformation. Omantel Innovation Labs are designed to perfectly fit in with the national system to reach



the desired goal that Omantel is always at the forefront in spreading entrepreneurship, exchanging knowledge, cooperation and promoting economic development through digital transformation."

The guests were acquainted with six companies running their businesses from the innovations labs.

The media team was also introduced to Omantel Museum which has ancient

Omantel seeks to advance the retail sector's virtual reality orientation by expanding its services that help enable the digital economy by deploying smart technologies and improving subscriber experiences

telecommunication devices used in the country and the region. They were briefed about the smart store which is equipped with in-store cameras that capture the movements of shoppers in the aisles, while smart sensors on the shelves will track the products that shoppers put in their baskets. The items selected by shoppers will be added to their virtual shopping cart through an application developed by Omantel and the

value of these purchases will be deducted from the customers' mobile wallet when they leave the store and the payment receipt is sent to them electronically.

Omantel seeks to advance the retail sector's virtual reality orientation by expanding its services that help enable the digital economy by deploying smart technologies and improving subscriber experiences. This project, which takes advantage of Omantel's digital technologies and capabilities, underscores Oman Oil's values of innovation, customer focus and mutual support and reflects the company's commitment to providing high quality services and products to all its customer base.

This move also demonstrates the efforts of Oman Oil Company to provide a safe shopping experience from one place in addition to building long-term partnerships with various major companies in support of the economic diversification efforts undertaken by the government.

2022 power tariffs capped at December 2021 levels

FROM PAGE 1

Consumption in the first segment ranges from zero to 4,000 kilowatt/hour at a rate of 14 baisas a kw/h; the second from 4,001 to 6,000 kw at a rate of 17 baisas for each kw/h and the third begins from more than 6,000 kw onwards at a rate of 30 baisas for each kw/h.

The additional account's tariff (for more than two accounts) comprises three segments: the first for consumption from zero to 4,000 kw at a rate of 20 baisas for each kw/h; the second for 4,001 to 6,000 kw consumption at a rate of 25 baisas for each kw/h and the third for consumption of more than 6,000 kw at a rate of 30 baisas for each kw/h.

The electricity tariff for the residential category will be calculated as of January 1, 2022. The system of national subsidy granted to entitled categories continues to be applied as prescribed. A subscriber from the

exempted categories has a right to select one account for which "additional subsidy" will apply.

The consumption of the first category ranges from zero to 4,000 kw at a rate of 10 baisas for each kw/h; the second 4,001-6,000 kw at a rate of 13 baisas for each kw/h and the third from 6,000 kw onwards at a rate of 20 baisas for each kw/h.

As for the agricultural sector, the Cost Reflective Tariff has been cancelled (the non-subsidised tariff) for all subscribers. Instead a new tariff will be applied as follows:

The first category ranges from zero to 3,000 kw/h at a rate of 12 baisas for each kw/h; the second from 3,001 to 6,000 kw at a rate of 16 baisas a kw/h and the third from 6,000 kw onwards at a rate of 24 baisas a kw/h.

The Cost Reflective Tariff has been reviewed in 2022 in support for economic recovery efforts and in consolidation of the national economy's performance.

The general policies of the electricity sector seek to implement a programme for rechanneling the power subsidy to the deserving segments, which is part of the Medium Term Fiscal Balance Plan (2020-2024).

The overall objective of the merger of three companies is to augment operational efficiency, minimize costs, and expedite the rate of power connectivity in rural areas via the basic grid. This contributes to the reduction of carbon emissions, minimizes dependence on diesel stations and makes ideal use of the expertise of the companies, while at the same time opening scopes for competition in the sector of supply and power connection services in different parts of the Sultanate.

The arrangements also made it possible to implement the smart meter readers, which upgrades the level of the service and the efficiency of electricity distribution.



Expats above 60 can renew work visa

FROM PAGE 1

Oman had earlier introduced an expatriate retirement scheme that offered eligible expatriates residence visas to stay in the country beyond their working period to support tourism in Q4, 2021.

"The introduction of new visa options is important for tourism promotion. As a travel and tourism expert, I'm convinced

that these new steps will initiate new resources in the tourism sector that is under stress due to the pandemic. In due course, these steps will make the country a more attractive destination among tourists," Renee Johnson said.

According to a recent estimate, nearly 35 million expatriate workers live and work in the GCC countries.

Figures released by the National Centre for Statistics

and Information (NCSI) in 2021 indicate that 30 per cent of Oman's population, roughly 1,500,000, are foreigners.

However, more than 220,000 expat workers have left Oman between March 2020 and December 2021. Expats employed in the government sector accordingly fell from 53,332 to 49,898, while in the private sector, expat worker figures dropped from 1,608,781, to 1,403,287.

73RD REPUBLIC DAY OF INDIA CELEBRATION



The Indian Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday hosted a reception to mark the 73rd anniversary of the Republic Day. The event was attended by senior officials, heads of diplomatic missions and officials at the foreign ministry. – Pictures by Khalfan al Ruzaiqi

Museum displays shared Oman, India heritage

MUSCAT: Two special exhibits showcasing the shared heritage of Oman and India are currently on display in the National Museum.

The first of these exhibits is a lithograph dating from late Nineteenth century called the 'Tarikh-i-Kesari' or "The History of the Caesars" which describes a brief into the history of Oman and Zanzibar. The book has been loaned from the National Museum, New Delhi Republic of India.

The other special exhibit is a painting of Al Mirani Fort of Muscat loaned from the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

The display of the special exhibits in Oman coincides with the celebration of the Republic of India on its 73rd Republic Day. The display of the collections will continue for three months.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said: "The National Museum is honoured with the participation of the Republic of India in its celebrations of the Republic Day by displaying loaned artefacts from the National Museum in New Delhi (Republic of India) and National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi in the Omani and Indian Relations Corner in the Sultanate of Oman and the World gallery available to visitors.

"The loaned artefacts embody the ancient bilateral relations between the two countries. This cooperation comes within the framework of strengthening the bonds of international museum cooperation with the leading and prestigious international cultural institutions and museums, especially in the museum and cultural fields, in a way that contributes to achieving museum leadership for both."

On his turn, Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman Amit Narang said: "Oman and India share thousands of years of shared heritage and rich bonds of people-to-people contacts. The special exhibits obtained on loan from India showcase this shared



India), and announced during the "Delhi Darbar"(the Court Assembly in Delhi).

The publication contains biographies of Sultans, Kings and Princes, including Sultan Thuwaini bin Said al Busaidy (reign: 1273 - 82 AH/1856 - 66 CE) and Sultan Barghash bin Said al Busaidy (reign: 1870-88 CE), including two unique miniature paintings of the two Sultans and listing their exploits and formal titles.

It also briefly describes Muscat and Zanzibar and their geographical locations, income's sources of the two States and information about their armies.

It's worth mentioning that the British Raj had assigned (21) cannon-shots as a regard and welcome-gesture to Sultan of Muscat and Oman and Sultan of Zanzibar, as they are independent rulers of two fully sovereign states. According to what was stated in this book, Sultan Thuwaini bin Said al Busaidy is the only ruler in the Arabian Peninsula who has enjoyed this ceremony alone, which confirms the ancient history of the Omani political entity in its two parts. The oil painting depicts a view of Al Mirani Fort of Muscat by the British artist Thomas Daniel, which dates back to the period of Al Busaid dynasty (1229 AH/1814 CE). This painting is on loan from the National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, Republic of India. — ONA

RECALL CAMPAIGN
FOR CHEVROLET SILVERADO AND GMC SIERRA MODEL VEHICLES

Date of Recall: 27/01/2022
Campaign Type: Safety
Recall Segment: Airbags
Product Description: Chevrolet Silverado LD 2015 / GMC Sierra LD 2015

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2015	Chevrolet	Silverado	1GC0K9EG9FZ546160 to 1GCNK9EC8FZ415577 3GCUK9EC0FG437603 to 3GCUK9EJ5FG442746	1
2015	GMC	Sierra	1GT229EG6FZ547016 to 1GTV29EC4FZ378995 3GTU29EC0FG444633 to 3GTU29EJ7FG455580	6

DESCRIPTION:
In these vehicles, the roof-rail airbag ("RRAB") inflators, which are located on the left and right-side roof rails above the headliner, may contain a manufacturing defect that can cause the inflator end cap to detach from the inflator vessel. If the end cap separates from the inflator, the compressed gas will escape from the RRAB inflator and the end cap can be propelled into the vehicle.

PROCEDURE:
Dealers are to replace left and right front and rear row seat Roof-rail airbag modules.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC for Chevrolet and Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for GMC.

CONTACT DETAILS:
For OTE Toll free No 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.30pm
Toll free number for MARH 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am to 2.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.30pm.



Batinah Expressway to get new fuel stations

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on Wednesday announced that steps are under way to get some integrated service stations working fully along Al Batinah Expressway within the course

of this year. The scheduled operation begins with four sites (15,000 sqm to 30,000 sqm) in North Al Batinah Governorate, with two of the sites in the area of Al Hoor in the Wilayat of Al

Suwaïq, one in the Wilayat of Saham's Al Rowdha area and one in the New Liwa area, Wilayat of Liwa. The integrated service sites comprise, each, a fuel filling station, a public utility building

(with restaurants, multiservice trade outlets, a hotel suite, a park, prayer areas for men and women, parking lots and other services that will activate tourism and economic activities. — ONA

MoE to benefit from ‘Shuaa’

MUSCAT: An executive programme was signed here on Wednesday between the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the executive committee of the Oman Research Repository project codenamed “Shuaa”. The project will allow the Ministry of Economy to benefit from the research stored in the repository. The ministry will have the capacity of uploading its intellectual productions, reports and research in the Shuaa database, which will directly benefit researchers and interested people. The agreement was signed by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Director of Development Research and Studies in the Ministry of Economy and Dr Nabhan bin Harith al Harasi, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Shuaa. — ONA



Sultanate of Oman
The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary
Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to re-submit the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
07/2022	Maintenance Works at Samail Court Complex	10/02/2022	03/03/2022	Fourth	RO. 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:

Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Oman hosts GCC meet to develop sustainable date palm production

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, on Wednesday hosted an annual meeting on technical coordination about a project to develop sustainable date palm production systems in Gulf Cooperation Council(GCC) countries.

Held in cooperation with the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the January 26-30 meeting was opened by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

Dr Hamdan bin Salim al Wahaibi, Director-General of Agricultural and Livestock Research, said that the project's implementation stems from the significance of the date palm sector which, he said, constitutes a historical and economic heritage.

The project, he added, caps GCC states' collaboration to spur the growth of the date palm sector and augment its contribution to food security in the region.

Al Wahaibi affirmed that the agenda includes discussing accomplishments made during 2021, devising an executive plan for 2022 and revising the project's priorities in a manner that serves the policies of GCC states in the forthcoming period. — ONA



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre
Announcement for Supplier Registration

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center announces the opening of supplier registration for companies and institutions in the Sultanate. The registration compromises of three main groups which are listed below:

Supply Group No. 1:

- Medications and drugs.
- Medical and Surgical supplies.
- Laboratory items and consumables.
- Physiotherapy and rehabilitation equipment and instruments supplies.
- Radiology and radiotherapy materials and consumables.
- Medical Equipment.

The annual registration fees is 100 OMR for each item in this group (period from 1st of January to 31st of December 2022).

For SMEs annual registration fees is 30 OMR for each item in this group

Supply Group No. 2:

- Mattress, covers, and linens.
- Computers' equipment and accessories.
- Furniture for office and housing.
- Travel agencies.

The annual registration fees is 50 OMR for each item in this group (period from 1st of January to 31st of December 2022).

For SMEs annual registration fees is 15 OMR for each item in this group

Supply Group No. 3:

- Stationeries and printing.

The annual registration fees is 25 OMR for each item in this group (period from 1st of January to 31st of December 2022).

For SMEs annual registration fees is 5 OMR for each item in this group

Documents Required:

- Commercial Registration.
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry Certificate.
- Authorized Signatory Sheet.

Interested companies in the Sultanate shall submit their applications to:
Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Center, Purchase Department.



Sultan Qaboos University
TENDER NOTICE

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to invite companies to submit their quotations for:

S/N	Type of Business	Shop Location	Duration of Contract in Years	Date of Site Visit	Class	Tender #
1	Coffee Shop	Female Student Accommodation Complex 1	1	1/2/2022 09:00 am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 1/22
2	Coffee Shop	Female Student Accommodation Complex 4	1	1/2/2022 10:00 am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 2/22
3	Coffee Shop	Female Student Accommodation Complex 5	1	1/2/2022 11:00 am	All classes	SQU.IRD. 3/22

- The priority will be for the Small and Medium Establishments (SME), which fulfils the quality requirements.
- Tenderers who wish to participate in this Tender may collect Tender Documents from The Section of Revenue And Expenditures at the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University, during the working hours for an amount of OR.25 for each tender document (non-refundable). The last date for collecting the Document is 14/02/2022.
- The Site Visit for the selected shop is necessary. It will be on the above mentioned date and time. The assembly point will be at the Investment & Revenue Department.
- The last date for submission of the quotations: 23/02/2022. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of the Investment & Revenue Department, Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 10:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.
- The Tenderer should submit (enclose) with his tender a Bank Guarantee Document for sum of 1% of the total Duration of contract rental value quoted by the Tenderer and valid for 120 (One hundred and Twenty) days from the date specified for submission of Tender. Tender documents submitted after the deadline or without a Bank Guarantee will be excluded.
- The Tenderer should prepare the outlet in accordance with the health requirements of Muscat Municipality and the requirements of civil defense in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- Sultan Qaboos University reserves the right to reject any quotation not fulfilling the requirements and does not bid itself to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.

The Investment & Revenue Department
P.O BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Tel: 24142691 - 24142682 Fax: 24142688

Shura to host ministers of higher education, economy on Monday

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura is going to host Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, at a public session to be held on Monday.

The meeting will be dedicated to discussing the topic of unemployed graduates based on a request presented by a group of the Majlis Ash'shura's members.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura. He added that the Majlis Ash'shura will convene its 6th and 7th regular meetings of the third annual session (2021-2022) on Monday January 31 and Tuesday February 1.

Al Nadabi stated that the seventh regular session, which will be held on Tuesday February 1, will be dedicated to discussing and approving the report of the joint committee between the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura on the articles of disagreement between the two councils regarding the draft Securities Law and the draft amendment of some provisions of the Records and Archives Law promulgated by Royal Decree 60/2007.

During the meeting, a number of follow-up tools submitted by members of Majlis Ash'shura as well as government responses, will be reviewed. The meeting will also discuss the reports of the standing committees on a number of issues referred from the Office of Majlis Ash'shura.



MINISTRY OF INFORMATION
TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
2/2022	General Cleaning Services for Ministry of Information Properties	Excellent	10/2/2022	6/3/2022	25/-
3/2022	Rent Cars for Ministry of Information	Companies and Offices Specialized in Rental Cars	10/2/2022	6/3/2022	25/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tenders shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicated above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
2. Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to the Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenderers which do not meet the required bond shall not accept. Note that the last date for accepting bids as mentioned above is before 10:00 am. Any bid received after the time and date mentioned in the submission date will be rejected automatically.

Note: The original bank guarantee should be submitted to the General Directorate Of Administrative And Financial Affairs, Project Department building at Ministry of Information, if it **Requested**.

- 3. The Ministry has the right to:
- 1) Add or Cancell some works in the tender if necessary.
- 2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943093, 24943785, Email id: (projects@part.gov.om)



Sudanese rally against UN bid to resolve post-coup crisis

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese pro-military protesters rallied on Wednesday against a UN bid to resolve a political crisis in the country three months after a coup, an AFP correspondent reported.

The demonstrators gathered outside the Khartoum office of the UN Transition Assistance Mission Sudan, or UNITAMS, which had launched talks with Sudanese factions this month.

They held up banners that read “Down, down UN” and others urging UN special representative Volker Perthes to “Go back home”. “We don’t want external intervention in our country”, protester Hamed al Bashir said outside the UN office.

On January 10, Perthes said the consultations aimed “to support the Sudanese to reach an agreement on a way out of the current crisis”.

But he also noted that “the UN is not coming up with any project, draft or vision for a solution”.

Sudan has been rocked by deadly protests calling for civilian rule since an October 25 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

The military takeover derailed a power-sharing transition between the military and civilians that had



Sudanese pro-military protesters demonstrate against a UN bid to resolve a political crisis outside the office of UN Transition Assistance Mission Sudan in Khartoum. — AFP

been painstakingly negotiated after the 2019 ouster of longtime autocrat Omar al Bashir.

The ruling Sovereign Council — formed by Burhan after the coup with himself as chairman — has welcomed the UN-led dialogue, as have the United States, Britain, neighbouring Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

The Forces for Freedom and Change, Sudan’s main civilian

bloc, has also said it would join consultations “to restore the democratic transition”.

“Our role at this stage of consultations for a political process for #Sudan is to hear Sudanese stakeholders; ensure we actively listen to their views, document their visions & suggestions”, Stephanie Khoury, UNITAMS Director of Political Affairs Office, said on Wednesday on Twitter.

Sudan has been rocked by deadly protests calling for civilian rule since an Oct 25 military coup led by General Abdel Fattah al Burhan

On Wednesday, an 18-year-old protester died after suffering from bullet wound to the head during protests last month, according to Central Committee of Sudan Doctors.

His death brought the number of people killed in the crackdown on anti-coup demonstrations to 77, it said.

Sudan’s authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition against demonstrators, and insist scores of security personnel have been wounded during the protests.

A police general was stabbed to death during the unrest this month.

Meanwhile, shops and stores were largely shuttered and streets were empty in the city of Wad Madani, south of Khartoum, according to witnesses.

Sport clubs in the city had also suspended all activists until further notice “in tribute to the martyrs killed”. — AFP

1m coronavirus vaccine arrive in Gaza from UAE

RAFAH, Palestinian Territories: One million doses of coronavirus vaccine arrived in Gaza from the United Arab Emirates on Wednesday, the latest donation facilitated by an exiled rival of Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas.

Mohammed Dahlan, a Gaza native now based in the UAE capital Abu Dhabi, was once a top Palestinian Authority official who served as Abbas’s security chief in the territory before its takeover by the Hamas movement in 2007.

Gaza Health Ministry spokesman Mahmud Ham-mad told journalists that the consignment of one million doses of the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine marked the largest single shipment of Covid vaccines to the Israeli-blockaded territory.

The vaccines were delivered through Gaza’s Rafah crossing with Egypt, the only one not controlled by Israel.

The same route was used for previous shipments organised by Dahlan, who has increasingly sought to position himself as a benefactor for the Palestinian people.

Dahlan had been expected to emerge as a key player from Palestinian elections scheduled for last year but the polls



were postponed indefinitely by Abbas in a move that also infuriated Hamas.

The ministry’s head of preventive medicine, Magdy Du-hair, warned that Gaza’s health system was under increased strain due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

While Gaza’s beleaguered medical system has struggled at times during the pandemic, coronavirus transmission has been limited by the tight controls Israel and Egypt enforce on travel in and out of the coastal enclave.

Gaza, which has a population of roughly 2.3 million, has recorded 196,578 Covid cases and 1,744 deaths.

So far, 578,000 residents have received two doses of a vaccine. — AFP

India showcases military might in Republic Day parade

NEW DELHI: Lumbering tanks and the deafening roar of fighter planes echoed through New Delhi on Wednesday as India’s military showcased its might on Republic Day.

The annual January 26 event marks the adoption of India’s constitution with missile launchers, jet flyovers, motorcycle stunts and the brass band of the camel-mounted Border Security Force.

Military and police battalions marched down a boulevard past Prime Minister Narendra Modi but without the customary foreign dignitary guests of honour, as India battles a resurgence of Covid-19 infections.

Audience numbers along the usually crowded sidelines of the procession were capped at 4,000 people and eminent spectators sat spaced far apart, with authorities announcing overnight that India had surpassed 40 million coronavirus cases since



An Indian soldier salutes during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi. — Reuters

the pandemic began.

Wednesday’s ceremony also featured mobile parade floats highlighting the country’s history and cultural diversity alongside traditional dancers.

India is preparing to commemorate 75 years since the end of British colonial rule and several of the displays dramatised events from the nation’s long independence struggle in the first half of the 20th century.

Modi’s government announced it would posthumously award former defence chief General Bipin Rawat with India’s second-highest civilian honour, the Padma Vibhushan.

Rawat was seen as close to the Hindu nationalist prime minister and supportive of his political agenda but died in a helicopter accident in November.

Modi also paid tribute to fallen soldiers before the parade began, just days after his government

provoked a minor storm by extinguishing the nearby “eternal flame” that served to commemorate Indians who died on the battlefield.

The flame had been burning for 50 years but has now been merged with a new war memorial, inaugurated in 2019.

Modi’s government has embarked on an extensive remodelling of key sites in New Delhi and has been accused of seeking to stamp its own identity on the city.

A heavy security presence ringed Wednesday’s official programme after the government was embarrassed on last year’s Republic Day by chaotic protests in the capital.

Farmers protesting agricultural reform bills, since abandoned by the government, ran riot on tractors through the city’s streets and hoisted a flag at the historic Red Fort, while hundreds of police officers were injured. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraq upholds re-election of parliament speaker

Iraq’s top court confirmed the re-election of Mohammed al Halbussi as parliament speaker, following appeals against its conduct, paving the way towards the formation of a new government.

Hours later, rockets fell some 500 metres from Halbussi’s home in the Gurma district of Anbar province, in what a security source said was an attack that sought to target him.

Two children were hurt and taken to hospital, police said. Two lawmakers had appealed



Halbussi’s re-election as speaker, a position historically reserved for Iraq’s minority, during parliament’s opening session earlier in January which was overshadowed by disputes between rival blocs from the majority.

BEIRUT

Lebanon signs power deal with Jordan, Syria

Power-starved Lebanon signed an agreement to import electricity from Jordan via Syria with the aim of reducing chronic outages and heeding international calls for reform.

The agreement signed by Energy Minister Walid Fayad with his Jordanian and Syrian counterparts is expected to give Lebanon two extra hours of mains electricity a day, doubling the supply currently provided by the cash-strapped government which has struggled to afford fuel



imports for its power plants.

“This is an important, historic moment for Lebanon... not because of its impact but because of its symbolism”, Fayad told a news conference.

DUBAI

UAE discussing defence upgrade after attacks

The United Arab Emirates may upgrade its defensive capabilities after missile attacks by Yemen’s Ansar Allah group, while continuing diplomacy with Tehran to reduce regional tensions, a senior UAE diplomat said.

The Emirati envoy to the United Nations, Lana Nusseibeh (pictured), told CNN on Tuesday that UAE intelligence showed the two assaults — the first on the regional commercial and tourism hub — had originated from Yemen, and there was also a need to stem



illicit flows of weapons and funds to the group. Monday’s strike, aimed at a base in Abu Dhabi hosting US forces, was thwarted by American-built Patriot interceptors, after a deadly attack a week earlier on the capital.



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THURSDAY | JANUARY 27 | 2022

7

In brief

■ COPENHAGEN



DENMARK PLANS TO LIFT COVID CURBS ON FEB 1

Denmark plans to lift its Covid restrictions on February 1 despite record infections, as its high vaccination rate is deemed sufficient against the milder Omicron variant, the health ministry said. If a parliamentary commission approves the government's proposal later on Wednesday, Denmark would become the first European Union country to lift curbs despite the Omicron wave sweeping the continent, according to a survey.

"I would like... Covid-19 to no longer be categorised as a disease dangerous to society as of February 1", Health Minister Magnus Heunicke wrote in a letter to lawmakers.

■ ROME



ITALY FAILS TO ELECT NEW PRESIDENT AT THIRD ATTEMPT

A third round of voting for Italy's new president failed to produce a winner on Wednesday, with the centre-right and centre-left blocks apparently no closer to agreeing on a mutually acceptable candidate. A successful candidate needs a two-thirds majority in any of the first three rounds of voting. From the fourth vote, which will be held on Thursday, an absolute majority will be enough.

On Wednesday, a large number of lawmakers continued to cast blank ballots. However, a growing number put down the name of the outgoing head of state, Sergio Mattarella, who has ruled out accepting a second term.

■ STOCKHOLM



SWEDEN SETS NEW DAILY COVID CASE RECORD

Sweden set a new daily record for Covid-19 cases, registering 44,944 cases on January 25, health agency data showed as a fourth wave of the virus mounted across the country. The daily infection figures are typically revised somewhat as any delayed records of additional cases are added to the national total for a given day. The previous record of 43,723 cases was set on January 20.

Sweden's government announced new restrictions this month as the more contagious omicron variant has spread rapidly, putting strain on the country's healthcare system.

Russia flays US, warns against 'destructive' sanctions on Putin

MOSCOW: Russia hit back on Wednesday at US threats of direct sanctions against President Vladimir Putin, saying moves against the Russian leader would be ineffective and hurt efforts to lower tensions over Ukraine.

Officials from France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine met for talks in Paris in the latest bid to ease a crisis sparked by fears that Moscow is preparing an invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

The West has warned Russia of severe consequences if it does invade, and on Tuesday, Washington said there could be sanctions personally targeting Putin.

Reacting to the news, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov dismissed the threats as worthless because senior Russian officials are barred from holding assets abroad.

But such a move, he said, would do serious damage to diplomatic attempts to ease ratcheting tensions over Ukraine.

"Politically, it's not painful, it's destructive," Peskov told reporters.

The Kremlin has previously said any US sanctions personally targeting Putin would be akin to crossing a red line, warning the move could result in a rupture of bilateral ties.

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that any Russian military attack on Ukraine would trigger "enormous consequences" and could even "change the world".



The Russian Navy's frigate Admiral Essen takes part in the drills in the Black Sea, Russia. — Reuters

Echoing Biden's message, a senior US official described potential economic sanctions "with massive consequences" that would go far beyond measures implemented in 2014 after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimea region.

The official said new measures would include restrictions on exports of high-tech US equipment in the artificial intelligence, quantum computing and aerospace sectors.

Cutting Russia off from these technologies would hit Putin's "strategic ambitions to

The Kremlin has previously said any US sanctions personally targeting Putin would be akin to crossing a red line

industrialise his economy quite hard", the official said.

The speaker of Russia's lower house said on Wednesday that Washington's threat against Putin showed the US "wants a loyal Russian president that it can

control".

"The United States is not happy that under President Vladimir Putin, the Russian Federation has become strong and independent," Vyacheslav Volodin wrote on social media. A senior Russian lawmaker meanwhile called on the Kremlin to arm pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine saying "the Kyiv regime must be stopped."

Andrei Turchak, an official in Putin's United Russia party, said Russia "must provide" weapons to "deter military aggression clearly

being prepared by Kyiv."

During weeks of talks between Russian, US and European diplomats, Western leaders have repeatedly warned of far-reaching economic measures against Moscow in the event of an attack.

The talks in Paris on Wednesday are bringing together one of Russia's deputy prime ministers and a senior aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, as well as diplomatic advisors to French President Emmanuel Macron and German leader Olaf Scholz. — AFP

UK's Johnson defiant as 'partygate' report looms

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday defended his government's record, vowing to fight on as he braced for a potentially damning report into lockdown-breaching parties.

The final report from an investigation by senior civil servant Sue Gray has not yet been submitted to Downing Street, the government said.

The dramatic confirmation that London's Metropolitan Police force has now started its own investigation could complicate the release of Gray's report, but opposition parties insisted on its publication in full.

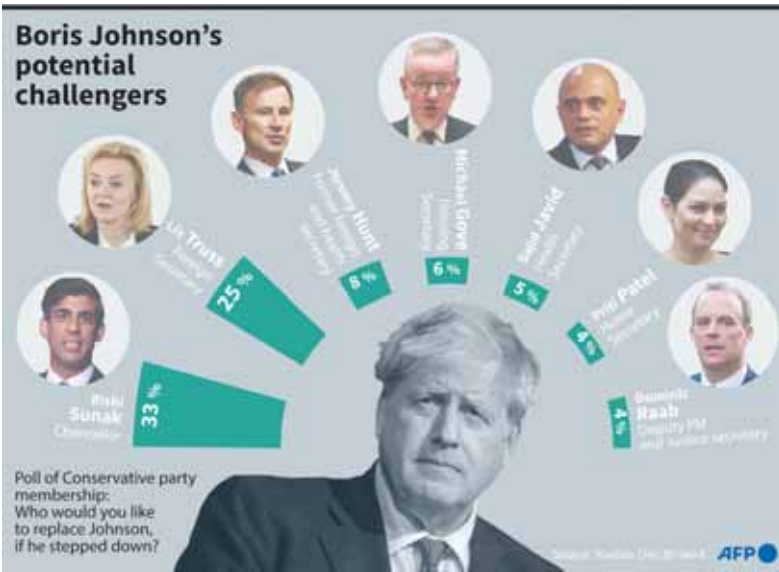
Johnson, in a heated session of weekly questions in parliament, said he could not comment further on the "partygate" revelations pending the investigations.

But he said the government — from its pandemic response to economic recovery, and "bringing the West together" against Russia's threats to Ukraine — was not going anywhere.

"We've taken the tough decisions, we've got the big calls right, and we — and in particular I — are getting on with the job," the prime minister said.

Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said Gray's report was "fairly imminent", and the opposition Labour party anticipated that Johnson would give a statement in response later on Wednesday or Thursday.

But regardless of its findings,



Labour leader Keir Starmer said Johnson had already "shown nothing but contempt for the decency, honesty and respect that define this country", and called anew for his resignation.

Gray, described as an iron-willed enforcer of probity in government, has been investigating revelations that Downing Street staff held parties over the past two years while the rest of the country was in lockdown.

Johnson's spokesman, fending off Labour charges that a "cover-up" was in the works, said Downing Street still intended to publish the report "as received" from Gray, but could not say when.

Johnson — the populist architect of Britain's Brexit split from the European Union — has faced public outrage over the

parties.

He attended several events, including a crowded gathering held for his birthday in June 2020 at a time when indoor socialising was banned.

Many people have highlighted how they missed significant life events themselves in compliance with the government's rules, and were unable to comfort sick and dying loved ones struck down with Covid. A tweet from Johnson re-emerged from March 2020 in which he told a seven-year-old girl that she was setting a "great example to us all", after she cancelled her own birthday party.

At least seven backbench Conservative MPs have called publicly for Johnson's resignation. A total of 54 letters are required to trigger a party vote of no confidence. — AFP

Relief efforts ramp up in Tonga, more aid arrives

NUKU'ALOFA: Humanitarian aid to Tonga is ramping up after the airport was cleared of ash, making it safe for planes to land, the Red Cross said on Wednesday, days after a volcanic eruption and tsunami devastated the South Pacific archipelago.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said that with the extra supplies, its staff and volunteers are stepping up deliveries of drinking water and setting up shelters across the country's many islands.

"This disaster has shaken the people of Tonga like nothing we have seen in our lifetime," Sione Taumoeofau, secretary general of Tonga Red Cross, said in a statement. "The tsunami has wiped out homes and villages, but we are already rebuilding amid the ashes."

The US Agency for International Development (USAID), said the United States is providing an additional \$2.5 million in humanitarian assistance and the guided-

missile destroyer USS Sampson, part of a multinational effort, arrived this week to support the efforts in Tonga. The Australian government said on Wednesday it will provide an additional \$1.43 million in humanitarian funding to Tonga, bringing Australia's commitment to date to \$3 million.

It also said that Australia is widening its support, including through the restoration of power and communications, and the storage and delivery of relief supplies. An Australian warship arrived to coronavirus-free Tonga on Wednesday evening, delivering aid without human contact after about two dozen cases of Covid-19 have been recorded among the crew.

"The ship is undertaking an entirely contactless delivery of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief supplies," Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Defence Minister Peter Dutton and Minister for International Development and the Pacific Zed Seselja said in a joint statement.

— AFP



People prepare humanitarian aid as the HMAS Adelaide sails into the port of Nuku'alofa, Tonga, after a volcanic eruption and tsunami devastated the South Pacific archipelago. — Reuters

Sustainable ways of investing in our future



KHALID ALSAFI AL HURAIBI
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

As the saying goes “the more things change the more they stay the same”. This is true when we look at the history of how societies evolve over time.

Since the beginning of time, history favours the prepared societies that invest in their future. Our world is no exception, or the past 100 years our region in general and the Arabian Gulf countries in particular witnessed an existential paradigm shift.

Since the 1920s our societies witnessed a transformation from pre-industrial revolutions ways of living, including depending on agriculture, fisheries, animal herding and pearl diving, to embracing the current 4IR in this decade.

In this series of articles, I invite you to explore with me how we can invest better in responding to global paradigm shifts through investing our Environment, Social,

and Governance assets, or the ESG and Impact Investing.

What are the three ways in which societies respond to paradigm shifts?

Societies handle these inevitable life cycles and paradigm shifts in three main different approaches, according to their cultures. A number of societies merely respond re-actively to global and local governance, economic, social and environmental changes, whereas other societies choose to proactively prepare and harness these changes to stay ahead of the curve.

The third approach is for societies that freeze in the face of global changes and these societies tend to weather away with time. I would argue that here lies the significance of “impact investing” as the most suitable strategic intent for a society to be proactive and fulfil its destiny to offer a safe,

THE MORE OUR SOCIETIES BECAME COMPLEX THE MORE WE NEED TO INNOVATE NEW WAYS TO STIMULATE SUSTAINABLE WAYS OF INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

decent and sustainable life to its people.

What is impact investing?

Impact Investing or II as its sometimes called means “investments made into companies, organisations and funds with the intention to generate a measurable, beneficial social or environmental impact alongside a financial return,” according the Global Impact Investing Network - GIIN.

By linking sustainability to financial return impact investing offers a reasonable to manage the ever on-going debate between

focusing on the profit or the planet by calling for a balance between both and adding investing in people to the equation.

Where did impact investing come from?

Humans have always been investing in themselves to varying degrees, however as societies the long-term collective, sustainable investment took a back seat.

Leaders and historians alike focused on power and “tangible” resource-gains and rarely documented how societies invested in its own governance, environment and people.

Islam, along with major faiths, made the struggle to invest in ESG a virtue and a priority. Thanks to this influence we see today the fruits of endowments, science and principles that were stimulated by the faith-linked patronage to arts and sciences. However, the more our societies became complex the

more we need to innovate new ways to stimulate sustainable ways of investing in our future.

What could be a roadmap forward?

As humanity struggles to get back on its feet and “build back better,” we realise that the causes are rooted in a deeper struggle, namely in our chronic struggle to deduce the right lessons from history that we see clearly today in the cycles of economic, health and climate change crises.

To decisively plant the seeds of the intent to embrace impact investing we must start today by being role models for future generations that will learn more from who we are and what we do, than from what we say.

Starting from investing our time in understanding notions of good governance and not ending with investing all types of capital in a safe and thriving planet.

At Spain border, migrants’ holy grail is France

THOMAS PERROTEAU

“Guys, we’ve got to get out of here!” urges Junior, a 20-year-old migrant from Ivory Coast, breaking the tense silence inside the train crossing the Spanish border into France. Crossing from Irun in Spain to the French border town of Hendaye is the last obstacle for young migrants desperate to reach France, their desired destination whatever the cost.

Many come from former French colonies in West Africa where French is widely spoken and want to join family members living and working in France.

But at the station in Hendaye, French police are on patrol. With Junior are five other migrants from Mali, Guinea and Ivory Coast. But only he dares get off the train. “You don’t have a visa, you can’t come here,” one of the police officers tells him after glancing through his passport.

When they think the coast is clear, the other five quickly drop down onto the tracks. “Stay where you are!” bellows a policeman, prompting one of the young migrants to race for a two-metre fence which he scrambles over, disappearing off into the streets.

But the others freeze as the police approach and give them forms marked “entry refused”. They are then put back on the train to the Spanish border town of Irun, a correspondent said.

To get here, many of these migrants have already made the perilous journey between the African coast and Spain’s Canary Islands, braving the Atlantic in barely seaworthy ramshackle boats.

Last year, 13,164 people were turned away at the French-Spanish border in the Pyrenees-Atlantiques region of France, which Hendaye is part of, more than twice that of 2020, French interior ministry figures show. The figures are higher due to increased vigilance and more migrants travelling given the easing of Covid travel restrictions put in place at the start of the pandemic.

With increased patrols on both sides of the border, migrants are taking ever more risks, according to researchers, NGOs and local officials.

Last year, two Ivorians and a Guinean migrant drowned while trying to swim the Bidassoa River which marks the border. And in October, three Algerians who managed to cross into France died after being hit by a train.

On Santiago Bridge, which crosses the Bidassoa, French police carry out periodic checks on vehicles, while the adjacent pedestrian bridge has been closed off with huge metal fences nearly three metres high. — AFP

Kazakhstan’s longtime leader is gone, but still seemingly everywhere



VALERIE HOPKINS
The writer is Moscow Correspondent at *The New York Times*

For three decades, Nursultan Nazarbayev was seemingly everywhere in Kazakhstan, the country he ruled with an autocrat’s clenched fist. The capital’s airport was named after him, as were the city’s best university, a group of elite high schools throughout the country, well-endowed foundations and wide boulevards.

Nazarbayev designed a futuristic white steel tower in the centre of the city, with a gold orb on top. Inside, visitors can place their hands in a giant gold relief of Nazarbayev’s own hand, his fingers pointing out the plate-glass windows to his presidential palace in the distance. He stepped down as president in 2019 after 28 years but retained power and influence as the official “Leader of the Nation.” His rubber-stamp Parliament renamed the capital city in his honour.

It was an open secret that he was the one still calling the shots.

Now the man who was everywhere and who controlled everything has all but vanished after violent protests this month that spread like wildfire and marked the country’s greatest political upheaval since it became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Political power now rests with Nazarbayev’s hand-picked successor, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who stripped his longtime boss and mentor of his title and his last remaining footholds of power. Except for making a brief video statement, the former leader has receded, the speed of his fall from power almost as stunning as the length of his reign.

In the days after the protests, Kazakhstan was closed to many outsiders. A visit to Nur-Sultan soon after it reopened revealed that life in the bureaucratic city, populated by many civil servants, had mostly returned to normal. On a recent weekend, shoppers braving the risks of the coronavirus perused the Khan Shatyr mall, designed by British architect Norman Foster in the shape of a large tent, with visitors searching for post-holiday sales.

The calm stood in contrast to

the nation’s largest city, Almaty, where violence and looting and brutal police crackdowns have traumatised residents, some of whom are still searching for relatives who disappeared. Almaty’s monumental City Hall was vandalised during the unrest and burned for three days, leaving a gutted, blackened shell.

Kazakhstan, a former Soviet republic with a population of 19 million, faces an uncertain future. Nazarbayev had maintained a fragile independence from Vladimir Putin’s Russia, but Tokayev was forced to call for Russian-led military support to help quell the violence this month, raising the question of whether he is beholden to the Russian leader for helping to assure his political survival. As Putin squares off against the West in a standoff over Ukraine, the Russian president has made clear his intention to maintain influence over neighbouring countries.

Internally, Tokayev has promised overhauls to address the country’s ballooning inequality — the reason that spawned the protests in the first place.

Nazarbayev grew up in a rural town near Almaty, the former capital. He was a steelworker before joining the Communist Party, rising through the ranks to regional party secretary. In 1984, he became prime minister

of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev became the first president of Kazakhstan in 1990, and the next year, just weeks before the collapse of Soviet Union, Kazakhstan declared its independence. It was the only newly independent former Soviet state where its titular people — Kazakhs — were not the ethnic majority.

At the time, President Boris Yeltsin of Russia was speaking openly about wanting to expand his country’s borders to include Abkhazia, a region of Georgia that Russia eventually invaded in 2008; and Crimea, the Ukrainian peninsula that Russia annexed in 2014. He also coveted Donbas, the eastern part of Ukraine where Russian-backed separatists have been fighting since the annexation.

Northern Kazakhstan was the fourth region in Yeltsin’s sights, but Russian forces never showed up uninvited, and today it is the only region of the four that is not contested.

In part, that’s because even his toughest critics acknowledge that Nazarbayev handled thorny relations with Moscow in a savvy manner. When he moved the capital from Almaty to a windy, grassland site in the north, it was not a pure vanity project; he was effectively planting a flag.

— *The New York Times*



Visitors place their hands in a giant gold relief of Nursultan Nazarbayev's hand inside a steel tower in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan.

Turning a challenge into an opportunity



Ali Al Matani
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Ahmad al Hashmi did not surrender to the circumstances after his dismissal from one of the oil companies in which he was working with a salary of RO 1,800 per month. He did not care about the uncertainty even though he had certain family obligations for which such a job was important. He decided to launch a catering business with the help of his family and drew from his father’s experience. Gradually, Al Hashmi’s delicious buffet for weddings and parties became a resounding hit in the Wilayat of Jaalan.

This is a successful model of self-employment for youths in the country. Al Hashmi’s model also shows us how to overcome challenges of the labour market and how to achieve self-reliance. This is how the youth of the country can showcase their capabilities and talent.

We must encourage these youth by all available means to take up entrepreneurship and self-employment, either by supporting them to set up their own enterprise or buy their products and services. This helping hand should be extended to them both by the government organisations and the civil society. This is the only way to make entrepreneurship popular in

society and the most effective method to get rid of rampant unemployment. This is the guaranteed path towards a brighter future of the country.

Al Hashmi, now in his thirties, works from early morning till midnight to meet the demands of his customers — individuals and families — as well as for parties and functions. His customers know his quality and

prefer him. This is the logic of the market and spirit of competition.

What he has achieved is not in vacuum. He did it all utilising the experience of his father who is supporting his son’s efforts. His mother was already an expert in cooking a variety of food items. His brother Salim took care of logistics. His graduate sisters find it a pride to cooperate with their brother. His and his brother’s wives also stood with him by doing online marketing for the enterprise. It was better than running from pillar to post to get a government or private job. The benefit is that they are earning a little more than what they could in a job. They also enjoy freedom. They are doing all this from the comforts of their home.

Imagine each of Al Hashmi family members is drawing an average salary of RO 1,000 in a public sector job, that cost RO 96,000 per year for the government. If we multiply this for 30 years, that is RO 2.8 million. By taking up self employment, the family saved more than RO 2.8 million for the government in salary and pension.

Therefore, we must think carefully about extending support to such ambitious individuals and families. Instead of depending on the job market for their livelihood, they not only created their own source of income, but also created jobs for others.

Self-employment and entrepreneurship are the solutions for the problem of joblessness. This must get due importance in policy making. The government when focusing on creating jobs should also think about creating entrepreneurs who may have the potential of becoming employers. A little more innovative thinking in the society and a pinch of government support can do wonders in the country.



STAGE IS SET

An illuminated installation is pictured ahead of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing on Wednesday. — Reuters

Did we miss Biden’s most important remark about Russia?



Thomas L Friedman

Pretty much every crucial line in President Joe Biden’s recent marathon news conference has been dissected by now — except one, the one that may turn out to be the most prescient. You had to be listening closely because it went by fast. It was when Biden told President Vladimir Putin that Russia has something much more important to worry about than whether Ukraine looks East or West — namely, “a burning tundra that will not freeze again naturally”

My translation: Yo, Vladimir, while you’ve been busy putting your “little green men” into Ukraine — all those masked Russian soldiers in green uniforms without insignia — little green shoots have been popping up in your warming tundra. Siberia had a totally freakish, hyper-extreme weather event — a forest fire that firefighters had to stomp out with their boots because the local water sources were all frozen.

I’m pretty sure this was the first time a US president ever tried to persuade a Russian leader to get out of his neighbour’s front yard and focus instead on saving his own backyard — because as Siberia is affected by climate change, it will threaten Russia’s stability a lot more than anything that happens in Ukraine.

Alas, Putin is part of a generation of world leaders who know how to build their popularity only on the strength of their resistance to enemies abroad and at home. But we are now at the start of a transition, I predict, where more and more leaders will try to build — or need to build — their stature by generating resilience for their people and neighbours in a warming and water-stressed world.

This excerpt from a *Moscow Times* story in November explains why — and what Biden was referring to. It’s dystopian: “An unseasonably rare forest fire has engulfed the Russian tundra as the country faces significant changes from climate change, Interfax reported.” Some 900 acres “are burning despite below-zero temperatures in the Magadan region some 10,000 kilometers east of Moscow. ‘The tundra is usually covered with snow at this time of year, so such fires occur extremely rarely,’ Interfax quoted an unnamed source as saying. Firefighters’ efforts to extinguish the flames are hampered by frozen water reservoirs, Interfax reported. Video posted online shows firefighters working to stamp out the fire with their feet and with tree branches.”

And no wonder: Russia’s territory is warming 2.5 times faster than the planet on average, and the situation there is going to get only worse. On June 20, 2020, the Siberian town of Verkhoyansk, about



I’M PRETTY SURE THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME A US PRESIDENT EVER TRIED TO PERSUADE A RUSSIAN LEADER TO GET OUT OF HIS NEIGHBOUR’S FRONT YARD AND FOCUS INSTEAD ON SAVING HIS OWN BACKYARD — BECAUSE AS SIBERIA IS AFFECTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, IT WILL THREATEN RUSSIA’S STABILITY A LOT MORE THAN ANYTHING THAT HAPPENS IN UKRAINE

70 miles north of the Arctic Circle, hit 100.4 degrees — the highest temperature ever recorded north of the Arctic Circle.

I have zero illusions that Putin noticed Biden suggesting Russia is much more vulnerable to climate change expansion than Nato expansion — or would be deterred if he did. He doesn’t strike me as a guy much interested in the climate. But the climate is interested in him.

Putin may choose to ignore that. His successor won’t have that option.

“Roughly 65 per cent of Russia’s territory is covered in permafrost”, The *Moscow Times* explained in another report. “As air temperatures have risen in recent decades, this soil that has been frozen for millennia has begun to thaw.” If this melting accelerates, it is “expected to cause significant damage to human settlements and key energy and transportation infrastructure. And as permafrost melts, it releases long-

stored greenhouse gases like methane, triggering an accelerating feedback loop of warming.”

Sure, one day some of this tundra may become rich farmland. But getting from here to there — watch out: “As earth’s climate zones shift from the Equator to the poles, previously forested lands are turning into deserts”, The *Moscow Times* added. The republic of Dagestan, some 930 miles south of Moscow, is near Russia’s agricultural heartland, “and experts worry that desertification could spread to these regions and impact the country’s food supply.”

But it gets better. Now this struggle between resistance leaders and resilience leaders is moving inside countries as well.

EcoPeace Middle East is an alliance of Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian environmentalists that has been pushing for a regional strategy called a Green Blue Deal. It would build on the Jordan-Israel-UAE accord but also include the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza and extend to both freshwater and electricity. Two EcoPeace leaders, Gidon Bromberg from Israel and Nada Majdalani from the Palestinian Authority, were invited last week to present their ideas to the UN Security Council.

Unfortunately, the Palestinian UN representative showed little interest in their proposal in his own remarks to the Security Council. And the Israeli UN ambassador, Gilad Erdan — a right-wing holdover from former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s era — used his time to score points with right-wingers at home, by bashing the Palestinian Authority for being unresponsive to Israeli overtures to collaborate on the environment.

This prompted Israel’s current Environmental Protection Minister, Tamar Zandberg, to issue a public rebuke of Erdan for putting out information “incompatible with the truth and in a style that does not represent the minister’s position.”

Zandberg said she and her Palestinian counterpart have already launched joint projects in the fields of “environment and waste” and their “work is progressing well in a different atmosphere than before... based on the understanding that climate change has no borders and that the two peoples will benefit from this collaboration.”

This is just the beginning of a whole new kind of power struggle within and between countries based on who is leading with resistance and who is leading with resilience.

Let the games begin.
— The New York Times

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JAPAN OVERCOME CHINA TO ENTER FINAL

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 26

South Korea edged out a fighting India 3-2 in the first semifinal of the Women's Asia Cup 2022 hockey championship at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Wednesday.

In the second semifinal at the same venue, Japan overcame the challenge of China 2-1 to book the title showdown with South Korea.

The defending champions scored first in the match when Neha struck after a move that came off a penalty corner in the 28th minute.

Though India had netted in the 12th minute of the match when Lalremsiami scored after a long pass from Navjot Kauar, it was disallowed and none of the teams could score in the first quarter.

India led the half-time 1-0. South Korea, who are unbeaten in the tournament, came back strong in the third quarter when Eunbi Cheon cashed on a defensive lapse from India goalkeeper Savita Punia.

A move that came off a penalty corner, Savita fell after blocking a strike from a Korean player and Cheon put the ball inside Indian net in the ensuing scramble to equalize score at 1-1.

Then after South Korea controlled the match with some purposeful attacks and Seung Ju Lee put them in lead in the opening minute of the last quarter.

Two minutes later, Hyejin Cho found the target after a well-constructed move as South Korea cushioned their lead to 3-1.

Indian women, stunned by the two quick goals, recuperated to organise attacks.

India's Ishika Choudary received a yellow card in the 50th minute.

Lalremsiami tapped in a high ball bounce in front of the South Korean goalkeeper Hyeona Hwang to reduce the deficit to 3-2 with six minutes remaining.

South Korea then kept possession for most of the time as Indian players failed to grab the ball in search of the equaliser.

South Korean defence and goalkeeper stood strong in the final minutes to deny any equaliser for India as they ensured the final on Friday.

In another close encounter, Japan overcame the challenge of China 2-1 later.

TIGHT TUSSLE

In the second semifinal, it was a tight tussle in the first quarter as both teams were tight in defence.

China struck first when Shumin Wang found the target through a brilliant field goal in the 18th minute.

Japan, however regrouped to find the equaliser in the 24th minute as Amiru Shimada scored after a well-organised move.

The third quarter also remained goalless as Japan defended some series of penalty corners by China.

Japan is coached by former Indian player Jude Menezes, while Hong Chen is the China coach.

In the last quarter, Japan started off with some strong attacks and five minutes later Kaho Tanaka broke the Chinese defence to put her team in lead.

Japan put the ball inside Chinese net from a penalty corner later but it was disallowed as the score remained 2-1.

In the last minutes, Chinese women failed to go past the Japan goalkeeper and strong defence as Japan went through to the final on Friday.

SOUTH KOREA EDGE FIGHTING INDIA

TSITSIPAS ROMPS INTO SEMIS

MELBOURNE: Men's title favourite Daniil Medvedev fought back from the brink of a shock exit on Wednesday to reach the Australian Open semifinal and keep his dream of a second Grand Slam crown alive.

Medvedev, the world number two, looked down and out as he lost the opening two sets to Canadian 21-year-old sensation Felix Auger-Aliassime before mounting a remarkable turnaround.

The Russian saved a match point at 4-5, 30-40 in the fourth set before completing an astonishing revival to beat the ninth seed 6-7 (4/7), 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 7-5, 6-4 in a marathon 4hr 42min quarterfinal that finished well after midnight on Rod Laver Arena.

Asked how he managed to win, the US Open champions Medvedev admitted: "I have no idea.

"I just fought to the last point and manage to raise my level."

It sets up a repeat of last year's semifinal against Stefanos Tsitsipas, which Medvedev won in straight sets before going on to lose to Novak Djokovic in the championship match.

The Greek fourth seed Tsitsipas was earlier in rampant form as he destroyed Italian world number 10 Jannik Sinner 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

By contrast to Medvedev's struggles, Tsitsipas made serene progress in a two-hour afternoon romp halted only by rain, which caused a brief delay for the Rod

MEDVEDEV MOUNTS ASTONISHING COMEBACK



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas reacts during his quarterfinal match against Italy's Jannik Sinner. — Reuters

Laver Arena roof to be shut and the court to be mopped dry.

The change in conditions made no difference to a dominant, flawless performance from the world number four who grasped control of the quarterfinal with a break in Sinner's opening service game and did not relinquish his firm grip.

"My humility helped a lot today, I knew I was going out

on the court to face a very good player," Tsitsipas said.

"I just focused on my very best shots and it paid off better than I thought."

COLINS, SWIATEK IN LAST FOUR

The women's semifinal line-up was completed by Danielle Collins and Iga Swiatek who enjoyed vastly contrasting wins in the last eight on Wednesday.



Danielle Collins of the US celebrates winning her quarterfinal match against France's Alize Cornet. — Reuters

Collins swept past unseeded Alize Cornet in just 88 minutes to match her run to the last four in 2019 and shatter the French veteran's dream of making a first Grand Slam semifinal.

But seventh seed Swiatek had to fight back from a set and a break down against unseeded Estonian Kaia Kanepi.

The 20-year-old Swiatek proved too dogged as she outlasted

Kanepi, who is 16 years her senior, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 after a marathon 3hr 1min encounter in energy-sapping heat.

"I had so many break points (nine) in the first set that I felt like I missed my chances," said Swiatek, the 2020 French Open champion.

"I was pretty annoyed and I should have been focused on the next point. And that's what I did

in the second set."

As temperatures nudged 35 Celsius (95 Fahrenheit), the American 27th seed Collins came through against the tenacious Cornet 7-5, 6-1 to continue her resurgence after serious medical problems last year.

"It feels incredible, especially after some of the health challenges that I have had," said Collins, 28, who had "scary" surgery for endometriosis in April last year and then tore her abdomen at the French Open.

"To be able to get back to this level and be able to compete the way I have and be as physical as I have has been so rewarding."

Collins won her maiden WTA titles at San Jose and Palermo after recuperating and has now matched her 2019 run at Melbourne Park to reach her second Slam semifinal.

Top seed Ashleigh Barty will face unseeded American Madison Keys in the other last-four clash on Thursday for a place in Saturday's final. — AFP

AUSTRALIAN OPEN RESULTS	
Men (quarterfinals)	
Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x4) bt Jannik Sinner (ITA x11) 6-3, 6-4, 6-2	
Daniil Medvedev (RUS x2) bt Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x9) 6-7 (4/7), 3-6, 7-6 (7/2), 7-5, 6-4	
Women (quarterfinals)	
Danielle Collins (USA x27) bt Alize Cornet (FRA) 7-5, 6-1	
Iga Swiatek (POL x7) bt Kaia Kanepi (EST) 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3	

ISM, ISG, ISWK win Under-16 games

MCCC YELLOW, ISM BOOK U-13 VICTORIES



MUSCAT: Outstanding all-round show by Loya Devansh powered Indian School Muscat (ISM) to a thumping 186-run win over MCCC Blue in a Junior Division Under-16 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Wednesday.

ISM had a great day in the park, its batters making merry and bowlers ripping MCCC Blue apart in no time for a wonderful victory. Hashir Hussain (60), Potrick Hamza (57) and Loya (51) were ISM's main scorers as it posted 272 for 8 on the board. Patel Dhyana and Basharat Abyan bagged two wickets each.

MCCC Blue failed to make a match of it, folding up for a disappointing 86 in 16.1 overs due to brilliant bowling by Loya who picked up 4 for 19. Dinesh Gaurav topscored with 27.

BRIEF SCORES Junior Division U16

ISM 272 for 8 in 30 overs (Hashir Hussain 60 – 7x4, Potrick Hamza 57

– 7x4, Loya Devansh 51 – 5x4, Patel Dhyana 2-37, Basharat Abyan 2-29) beat MCCC BLUE 86 all out in 16.1 overs (Dinesh Gaurav 27 – 2x4, Loya Devansh 4-19) by 186 runs.

ISG 188 for 5 in 28 overs (Rishab Shivadas 83 – 8x4, Hegde Aditya 2-28) beat MCCC Blue 108 all out in 22.4 overs (Jagan Sreekanth 42 – 5x4, Ayush Karthiyl 3-22, Vaibhav Srikant 2-17, Madhav Manish 2-11) by 80 runs.

ISWK B 166 for 9 in 28 overs (Shetty Ayush 35 – 2x4, Noronha Nikhil 34 – 3x4, Rahildaniyal Habibulla 4-22, Ahmed al Zadjali 2-21, Tredoux Christo 2-26) beat OCA 158 all out in 25.4 runs (Aaryan Punja 58 – 11x4, Shamsheeri Mohamamed 2-16, Maheshwari Pushkar 2-30, Shaikh Izaan 2-45) by 8 runs.

Junior Division U13
MCCC Purple 94 for 5 in 20 overs (Kale Swastik 21, Rana Arnav 20 – 2x4, Hruday Shivaprakash 2-19) lost to ISM 95 for 1 in 9.3 overs (Hruday Shivaprakash 30 – 5x4, Hafiz Mohamed 27 – 4x4) by 9 wickets.

ISWK A 151 for 6 in 20 overs (Arsh Javed 35 – 3x4, Vasudev Ram 33 – 4x4, Akilesh Sai 26 – 5x4) Anirudh Para 3-18, Shravan Sharat 2-19) lost to MCCC Yellow 152 for 4 in 19.3 overs (Mathew Samuel 45 – 5x4, Vihaan Sanjay 26. Arsh Javed 2-23) by 6 wickets.

Mane ends goal drought for Senegal

HAKIMI FREE-KICK SENDS MOROCCO THROUGH

BAFOUSSAM, Cameroon: Liverpool star Sadio Mane ended a 243-minute Senegal goal drought by scoring in a 2-0 win over nine-man Cape Verde in a fiery Africa Cup of Nations last-16 clash in Bafoussam on Tuesday. Morocco also reached quarters later with Achraf Hakimi netting the winner in the 2-1 win over Malawi.

The goal came on 63 minutes after the islanders had goalkeeper Josimar 'Vozinha' Dias and midfielder Patrick Andrade sent off.

Mane was forced to leave the field soon after breaking the deadlock as his face was swollen following a collision with Vozinha, which led to the second red card.

Bamba Dieng, who replaced Mane, added a second goal two minutes into added time after a breakaway left a single Cape Verde defender facing two Senegalese attackers.

Senegal, seeking to win the flagship African competition for the first time after twice finishing runners-up, will meet Mali or Equatorial Guinea on Sunday in the quarterfinals.

"We expected Cape Verde to be very defensive and that is what transpired," said Senegal coach and former star Aliou Cisse.

"I told my players to be extremely patient and they followed instructions perfectly. Even when Cape Verde had 11 players, we dominated the match."

Before the kick-off, the teams and match officials stood still



Senegal's Sadio Mane scores their first goal against Cape Verde. — Reuters

and silent in memory of the eight people who died in a crush at Olembe Stadium in Yaounde on Monday before Cameroon defeated the Comoros.

Cape Verde welcomed back head coach Pedro 'Bubista' Brito, who had to watch the group stage in the island nation as he recovered from coronavirus.

In the opposite dugout was Cisse, a Cup of Nations runner-up as a player in 2002 and as a coach in 2019.

Having failed to score in their last two group matches against Guinea and Malawi, Senegal almost took the lead 40 seconds into the match through Mane.

MAJOR BLOW

Cape Verde suffered a major blow on 21 minutes when Andrade was sent off for stamping on the leg of Pape Gueye.

The Algerian referee initially produced a yellow card, then upgraded it to a red after watching replays of the incident on the touchline VAR monitor.

As if facing one of the tournament title favourites with 10 men was not sufficiently difficult, Cape Verde were reduced to nine men when Vozinha was sent off 12 minutes into the second half.

The goalkeeper and Mane collided as they chased a long pass and after going to the monitor again, the referee brandished his red card to the goalkeeper, who had left the field suffering from concussion.

Marcio da Rosa, who plays in the Portuguese third division, took over as goalkeeper with forward Garry Rodrigues taken off. Senegal were quick to take advantage of having two extra outfield players as Mane scored with a superbly placed shot into the roof of the net when a corner was only partially cleared by Nuno Borges.

HAKIMI GUIDES MOROCCO

In Yaounde, Achraf Hakimi scored a brilliant free-kick to send Morocco through to the quarterfinals after a 2-1 win over



Morocco's Achraf Hakimi celebrates their win against Malawi. — AFP

Malawi later on Tuesday.

Gabardino Mhangho gave outsiders Malawi, playing their first ever knockout game at the tournament, a shock early lead with a stunning goal from 40 metres at Ahmadou Ahidjo stadium.

But Youssef En-Nesyri headed Morocco level in first-half stoppage time before Hakimi drilled in the winner on 70 minutes to set up a meeting with Egypt or Ivory Coast in the last eight. "When you win you get respect," said Morocco coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

"Malawi scored a fantastic goal. I think we played really well in the first half, unfortunately we lacked efficiency. We had around 10 chances you can't miss." — AFP
AFRICA CUP OF NATIONS LAST-16 RESULTS
In Bafoussam
Senegal 2 (Mane 63, Dieng 90+2) Cape Verde 0
In Yaounde
Morocco 2 (En-Nesyri 45+2, Hakimi 70) Malawi 1 (Mhangho 7)

OMAN INTERNATIONAL RALLY BEGINS TODAY



Hamed al Wahaibi



Alba Sanchez Gonzalez

**SUPER SPECIAL STAGE INTRODUCED, CEREMONIAL START MOVED TO NAKHL
SPANISH FEMALE CO-DRIVER ALBA SANCHEZ JOINS AL ATTIAH**



2022 OMAN RALLY SOHAR INTERNATIONAL – LEADING ENTRIES

1. Nasser Saleh al Attiyah (QAT)/Alba Sanchez Gonzalez (ESP) Volkswagen Polo GTI R5	5. Petr Kacirek (CZE)/Vaclav Kopacek (CZE) Skoda Fabia R5	10. Ihab al Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX	21. Ghaith al Qassimi (OMN)/TBA Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
2. Abdullah al Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al Hmoud (JOR) Skoda Fabia R5	6. Zakariya al Aamri (OMN)/Mohammed al Aamri (OMN) Subaru Impreza	12. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX	22. Haitham al Hadidi (OMN)/Saif al Hinali (OMN) Toyota Yaris
3. Hamed al Wahaibi (OMN)/Tony Sircombe (NZL) Skoda Fabia R5	7. Faisal al Rashdi (OMN)/Waleed al Rashdi (OMN) Subaru Impreza	2022 OMAN NATIONAL SOHAR RALLY – LEADING ENTRIES:	
4. Nasser Khalifa al Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5	8. Jarah al Touqi (OMN)/Issa al Wardi (OMN) Subaru Impreza	20. Haitham Soomar (OMN)/Wael al Shabani (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII	23. Musab Soomar (OMN)/Bassam al Qassimi (OMN) Kia Rio
			24. Alain Nawfal (LEB)/Bashar al Qassimi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R

MUSCAT: The cream of the Middle East's special stage rally drivers will take the start of Oman Rally Sohar International 2022 on Thursday afternoon.

The Oman Automobile Association have made a couple of late changes to the itinerary for the opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC). Most notably, the pre-event press conference and ceremonial start venue have moved from Al Mouj to Nakhl and will start at the earlier time of 14.15 hrs and 15.00 hrs, respectively.

Event officials have also introduced a timed 3.90 km super special stage at Nakhl, with the first car in action from 16.00 hrs.

Qatar's Dakar sensation and multiple regional champion, Nasser Saleh al Attiyah, tops the entry in his Autotek Volkswagen Polo GTI and is bidding for a seventh win in Oman. His regular French co-driver Mathieu Baumel should have been trying to earn a third win in Oman, but was unable to make the trip for personal reasons.

His place alongside Al Attiyah has been taken by 29-year-old Spanish female co-driver Alba Sanchez Gonzalez, who is a regular navigator on the Spanish national and international rallying scene.

Last year, she partnered Surhayen Pernia in a Hyundai Motor Espana-supported i20 R5, with the crew finishing seventh overall in the ERC Rally Islas Canarias and claiming outright victory at the Rallye La Nucia-Mediterraneo and Rallye Valles Pasiegos. Oman will be Alba's first rally in the GCC region, although she did sit alongside England's Catie Munnings to take 40th overall in the 2018 Cyprus Rally in a Peugeot 208 R2.

"Mathieu was not able to come to Oman, so Alba has stepped in at the 11th hour", said Autotek Motorsport's Ken Skidmore. "We met her in Spain, where she co-drives as part of the official Hyundai team."

OMANI CHALLENGE

Standing in Al Attiyah's way are the formidable Omani duo of Abdullah al Rawahi and Hamed al Wahaibi in a pair of Skoda Fabia Evos, the Qatari's cousin Nasser Khalifa al Atya (Ford Fiesta) and the Czech dark horse and Merc debutant Petr Kacirek in a third Skoda Fabia.

"The stages are quite technical", said Al Rawahi, after Tuesday's recce session. "We made sure that our notes are quite precise and as detailed as possible. We have done these stages before, so we are quite ready for the first day of the rally. Day two is quite different from the first day. I think we are happy. Hopefully this weekend we will come strong and try and give our best."

Al Wahaibi carried out three days of pre-event testing before the rally and is relishing the start after an impressive performance that saw him finish fourth overall and take a class win at the Oregon Trail Rally in America in early November.

"The new Evo is brilliant and easier to drive", said Al Wahaibi. "We've spent three days getting the driving style working. We spent some time with the diffs and the suspension and it all went well. We tested in the Hatat region where my ancestors are from. We tested in three different villages and one of them is where I am from. So we had lots of spectators in the mountains and some family and tribes from our region."

"The first day of recce went very well. The stages are really good. They need a bit more cleaning, a few rocks, but really good. Some roughness, but it is a Middle East rally and has to have that. That's the character. I'm excited and looking forward to a good rally."

With the quintet of R5 cars sure to dominate over the fast and flowing gravel special stages that have drawn praise across the world, there will be a separate tussle for honours in the Merc2 category for showroom production-type machines.

Four Omani and two Jordanian drivers will take part: Zakariya al Aamri, Faisal al Rashdi and Jarah al Touqi lead the way for the host nation in a trio of Subaru Imprezas. Joining them on the entry are the Jordanian duo of Ihab al Shorafa and Issa Abu Jamous in Mitsubishi Lancers.

Five crews will also tackle a national status event behind the main FIA rally.

The bulk of the competitive action takes place over 12 timed special stages on Friday and Saturday before the ceremonial finish and post-event press conference also move to Nakhl from 15.25 hrs onwards on Saturday afternoon.

Oman face Saudi in must-win World Cup qualifier



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Oman will face a crucial fixture in the Asian qualifiers — Road to Qatar 2022 for Group B as they will take on Saudi Arabia on Thursday at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium at Al Jawhara in Jeddah. The match kicks off at 9.15 pm, Oman time.

Hosts Saudi Arabia lead the standings with 16 points from six matches while Oman have seven points with two wins, one draw and three defeats.

In the other Group B matches, second placed Japan will meet China at home while third-placed Australia will host Vietnam in Sydney.

Coach Branko Ivankovic's men are aware that the team needs a victory in today's match to revive their chances of

a better position in Group B. Clinching the three points in the forthcoming encounters will be the target for the national team to fight on the direct and in-direct spots for the World Cup.

Saudi's game will be followed with another challenging fixture against Australia on Tuesday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. The Red Warriors had some training sessions in Jeddah and the last warm-up session was at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium ahead of the tough match. Different technical and tactical sessions took place during the training period.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia will aim for a victory to assure their presence in the World Cup. Saudi, who are unbeaten in the group, registered five victories and one draw. Coach Herve Renard's men will get

an advantage of home support as the Saudi Sports Ministry has allowed full capacity attendance in the stadium.

Oman coach Branko will miss services of Abdulaziz al Mukhaini, Juma al Habsi, Ahmed al Kaabi, Khalid al Buraiki and Essam al Subhi after the players tested Covid-19 positive. And Salah al Yahyai will sit out due to an injury. However, the Croatian coach is confident that the players will deliver top show and register positive result in the game.

Oman will start with Fayeze al Rushaidi as goalkeeper, Amjad al Harthi, Ahmed al Khamisi in defence.

Experienced Harib al Saadi will monitor the midfield besides Abdullah Fawaz, Arshad al Alawi and Jameel al Yahmadi.

Mohsin al Ghasani and Al Mundher al Alawi will be the attackers.

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Sultanate of Oman inks pact to support deep space exploration in 2024

HISTORIC AGREEMENT: Goal to launch SatRevolution CubeSat satellite aboard a Virgin Orbit rocket that will conduct scientific research and capture imagery of deep space

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 26

Under the auspices of Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of the Sultanate of Oman, International Emerging Technologies Company (ETCO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Wednesday for the Sultanate of Oman's first mission to explore deep space with innovative space companies — Virgin Orbit, SatRevolution and Tuatara. As part of the historic mission for the Sultanate of Oman, scheduled in the third quarter of 2024, the group plans to launch a SatRevolution CubeSat satellite aboard a Virgin Orbit rocket that will conduct scientific research and capture imagery of deep space.

The agreement was ratified by Abdulaziz Jaafar, Chief Executive Officer of International Emerging Technologies Company (ETCO), and Steve Eisele, Vice-President Business & Strategy of Virgin Orbit.

Emphasising the significance of the project for the Sultanate of Oman, the signing ceremony was held in the presence of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Sec-



retary for Communications and Information Technology at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Dr Mohammad bin Said al Maamari, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, and Ambassador Leslie M Tsou, United States Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

This partnership is the follow-on to the Memorandum of Understanding signed during the International Astronautical Congress held in October 2021 in Dubai, which established the co-operation of the parties to design, manufacture and launch the first Omani satellite, manufactured by Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator SatRevolution, on-

board Virgin Orbit's Launcher-One in the first ever launch from the United Kingdom's Spaceport Cornwall in 2022.

Under the agreement, the project will initially deliver a nanosatellite that will enable groundbreaking scientific research and capture high-resolution images of deep space.

"Despite many technical advances to date, only a few organisations have been bold enough to successfully launch deep space projects," said Virgin Orbit, CEO, Dan Hart.

"We are proud to have been entrusted by the Sultanate of Oman as their launch partner in helping to fulfil their ambitious goals to help bring sustainable space solu-

tions to the country."

"This partnership is a major step in helping us to enrich the Sultanate of Oman's space industry with the latest technologies and know-how, while adding overall economic value according to Oman Vision 2040," Tariq al Balushi, ETCO Vice-President, said. "With this milestone project, we provide further opportunities in a sector of high potential for both local and international investors."

Tuatara, as advanced artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics specialist, in strategic partnership with ETCO, will collect data and images, both from the Low Earth Orbit and deep space missions, which will be further digitally analysed using computer vision (CV),

machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI) solutions. It will be possible to detect hidden patterns, identify trends and predict changes caused, for example, by the climate or by natural disasters.

Both Low Earth Orbit and deep space projects will contribute to the near-term goals of the Sultanate of Oman.

This exciting mission will also provide investment and research opportunities, with a number of universities' Academic Exchange Programmes, to unlock new horizons for the next generation of world space explorers and innovators whilst investing in national talent that will build a promising future for the Omani people.



Oman crude soars to \$87.30/b

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 26

The price of Oman crude (for March 2022 delivery) jumped to \$87.30 a barrel in trend with other international benchmarks as oil markets responded to rising tensions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

The Oman crude Futures Contract gained \$2.02 a barrel on Wednesday in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME), rising to levels last seen in 2014. The average price of Omani crude (for January 2022 delivery) stabilised at \$80.26 a barrel, which was lower by \$1.32 per barrel compared with the corresponding figure for December 2021 delivery.

Oil rose to around \$89 a barrel on Wednesday, within sight of a seven-year high, supported by tight supply and geopolitical tensions in Europe and the Middle East that raise concerns about further disruption, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

Brent crude rose 73 cents, or 0.8 per cent, to \$88.93 at 1200 GMT.

Unified e-portal for Omani government services on anvil

DIGITAL ECONOMY: Adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Advanced Technologies key to creating sustainable economy in Sultanate of Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

The Omani government's Digital Transformation Programme will culminate in the establishment of a unified electronic portal serving as a one-stop shop for the delivery of services encompassing different government ministries and entities.

According to a key official of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Government Digital Transformation Programme

(2021-2025) calls for the reengineering and automation of government services to enhance the "digital experience" of users. This is sought to be achieved by integrating the systems of different government entities, while providing government services through a unified e-portal.

"The vision of the programme starts from the principle of enabling the public sector to achieve outstanding innovative performance and provide smart services, proactive procedures, and a rewarding digital experience. It strives for excellence in government performance, open-source data, and e-community participation, all of which will contribute effectively to boost the business sector and attract an increased and wider spread of investments



across different fields," said Ahmed al Balushi of the Ministry's Digital Competitiveness Team.

Writing in the latest newsletter of the Oman British Business Council (OBBC), an affiliate of The Anglo-Omani Society, Al

Balushi noted that the Digital Transformation Programme is also key to securing a coveted place for the Sultanate of Oman among the Top 10 countries in the UN eGovernment Development Index — a key objective of Oman

Vision 2040 strategy.

"The programme is expected to empower start-ups and SMEs to provide innovative solutions to help develop a government work environment, enable agility, planning and predictability of future plans to enhance the performance of the state's administrative apparatus whilst ensuring transparency, accountability and community engagement," the author stated in the article titled: 'Oman's Tech Ecosystem: Why is the Sultanate becoming a technology destination of choice?'

The Government Digital Transformation Programme, Ahmed explained, is one of several pillars that together constitute the National Digital Economy initiatives, which was approved by the Omani government recently. Other

pillars include E-Commerce, Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies, Space and Digital industry, he said.

In particular, significant emphasis is being given to the adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Advanced Technologies, he said, noting that early adopters are likely to gain global leadership positions in all future industries.

"The Sultanate of Oman is working to lay the essential pillars of AI applications in order to create a sustainable economy whilst also benefiting in its daily operations. These can be achieved through enhancing the productivity in sectors targeted for economic diversification through a coordinated application of smart technologies that develop the existing human talents and capabilities in this domain," he added.

Oman International Hospital launches Med Academy

MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital, the multi-super specialty hospital in Oman, is proud to announce the launch of “Med Academy” at its premises.

The Med Academy, established with support from Siemens Healthineers, will be the first of its kind in the private healthcare sector in Oman dedicating an exclusive centre for medical training, research and development of new clinical practices and approaches.

Oman International Hospital soft-opened in May 2021 and officially inaugurated by His Excellency Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health on January 6, 2022 has already achieved several milestones.

The establishment of ‘Med Academy’ comes close on the heels of the hospital accredited with the prestigious EFQM Certification two weeks ago.

Dr José Alexandre Cunha, Board Member of Oman International Hospital and Chairman of IGHS Group that



manages the hospital said, “Its indeed a proud moment as we embark on yet another ambitious goal of establishing Med Academy. IGHS believes strongly in investing in research and development and training of doctors and health professionals, especially as we face greater health challenges in the form of pandemics, epidemics and outbreaks.

Research and development can lead to new discoveries while training will improve our existing practices resulting in contributing to the overall health of a population. We will be working in tandem with the Ministry of Health, who have been very supportive ever since we stepped into this beautiful country.”

João Seabra, Head of Global

Enterprise Services of Siemens Healthineers said, “We are very happy to be associated with the great work done at the multi-super specialty Oman International Hospital.

With the dedicated Centres of Excellence and state-of-the-art equipment and modern facilities as well as a great team of doctors from Oman and across the globe,

FIRST PRIVATE
SECTOR HOSPITAL
IN OMAN
DEDICATING AN
EXCLUSIVE CENTRE
FOR MEDICAL
RESEARCH AND
TRAINING

all guests are guaranteed high quality treatment.

Going one step ahead, we are very thrilled to collaborate with Oman International Hospital in establishing the ‘Med Academy’ through which we will enrich young medical students and also support various research and development projects.”

The Med Academy, established in the OIH premises, will have dedicated teams of R&D experts working on various disciplines while welcoming senior students and sophomores from various universities in Oman as well as abroad to stay and get firsthand

training by working along with OIH doctors. OIH has already welcomed final year students from the University of Porto and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Coimbra.

The sprawling 42,000 sq mtrs hospital is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and cutting-edge technological solutions from across the world and is the home to five Excellence Centres- Women and Childrens Centre, Heart and Vascular Centre, Ortho and Spine Centre, Oman Vision Centre and Derma and Cosmetic Centre, a hybrid operation theatre and several other cutting-edge features and facilities.

The expert doctors, nurses and para-medical staff of the hospital are drawn from Oman and across the globe and are highly experienced. Strategically located in the centre of capital Muscat’s Al Ghubra area, just across the road from the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Oman International Hospital is easily accessible from any part of the city.

ahli Islamic offers mortgage-free auto finance

MUSCAT: ahli Islamic has been building on the success of its innovative product offerings and has announced launch of a new Sharia compliant auto finance facility under its it’s Islamic finance umbrella.

ahli Islamic’s new offer allows customers to opt for auto finance without having to mortgage the vehicle, therefore giving customers the flexibility to sell or transfer mulkiya of the vehicle as per their convenience. By opting for mortgage-free auto finance, customers reserve the liberty to use the vehicle as per their discretion.



“At ahli Islamic, we believe in making finances hassle-free and convenient for customers. While our auto financing product has always been well-received in the market, we wanted to enhance the convenience for our customers by putting more power in their hands.

By removing the mortgage requirement, we give our customers the freedom to manage the sale of their vehicle without any restriction, thereby giving them more control over how they choose to handle their assets”, said Yousuf al Rawahi — DGM, Head of ahli Islamic.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds: Oman’s most trusted brand 5th time in a row

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 280 outlets spread across 10 countries, has won ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ award in the jewellery category for the fifth time in a row.

The award was handed over by Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals to Najeeb. K, Regional Head — Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds in the presence of Nicholas Nithin Abraham, Senior Executive — Marketing, Malabar Gold & Diamonds and Saleh Zakwani — Executive Chairman, Apex Media.

The award is instituted by Apex Media, one of Oman’s premier publishing houses involved in a host of publishing and digital activities. Apex takes fame throughout Oman and internationally for its high-quality title productions involving a team of highly professional journalists and designers.

Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledges brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting process, which is also an opportunity for customers to prove their loyalty towards their favourite brands.

‘This award brings us a lot of happiness since it is an



affirmation of our customers’ trust in the brand and winning it 5 years in a row makes it even more special. We dedicate this inspiring triumph to our millions of satisfied customers, team members and investors, without whose wholehearted support, this exceptional accomplishment would not have been possible”, said Najeeb K, Regional Head — Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds on the occasion.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds has always kept customer-first as the principal attitude in all its steps taken and take efforts at satisfying the discerning needs of its multinational and multicultural customers by incorporating the diverse tastes in the splendid jewellery designs that they

showcase.

The brand had recently announced its global expansion plans for 2022 in which it will open 22 new showrooms in India and abroad in January, as part of which, 2 new showrooms will be opened in Oman, in Al Khoudh Street and Mall of Oman.

The Group will invest another \$107.5 million for this new phase of expansion this year. As part of its commitment, Malabar Gold & Diamonds safeguards the purchases of customers through a set of policies named ‘Malabar Promise’:

1. Complete Transparency — Totally transparent and detailed invoice and price tag.
2. Tested and Certified Diamonds — Every diamond

passes through 28 internal quality tests and is also certified by international labs

3. Guaranteed Buyback — Best buyback value for gold and diamond jewellery
4. Zero deduction gold exchange — Full value, without any deductions on exchange of 22KT gold
5. 916 Hallmarked pure gold — All jewellery hold 916 hallmark certification, a guarantee of purity
6. Assured Lifetime Maintenance — at over 250 stores across 10 countries
7. Responsibly sourced — Sourced in a responsible manner to protect the environment and stakeholders, for the jewellery to be truly auspicious
8. Fair labour practices — Fair wages, benefits and working conditions for karigars
9. Fair price policy — Reasonable making charges for all jewellery which assures best value for purchase

The Malabar Group commits a fixed percentage of its profit to support socially responsible purposes both in India and abroad, since its inception in 1993. Education, health, women empowerment, affordable housing and environmental protection are the focus areas for the Group.

Bank Nizwa voted ‘Best Islamic Bank in Oman’ in IFN poll



MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa has been voted the ‘Best Islamic Bank in Oman’ for the third year in a row, according to Islamic Finance News’ recognised survey and poll, cementing its status as Oman’s most trusted and leading Islamic bank. Bank Nizwa was given the title after a public vote.

With 27,500 votes, the bank took first place, demonstrating its high levels of customer and stakeholder trust, as well as its role as a change leader with new Islamic finance products, and digital banking services.

The IFN Best Banks Poll 2021 honours the best in the Islamic financial industry around the world, awarding institutions in a variety of categories from a variety of nations.

On receiving the award, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, “This award honours Bank Nizwa’s dedication to creating new strategies, implementing cutting-edge technology, and prioritising digitalisation. We are thrilled to announce that we have been named the best Islamic bank in Oman for the third time by Islamic Finance News. We will continue to strengthen our Sharia-compliant product and service range, as well as meet

client expectations with new banking solutions, allowing the bank to strengthen its position with dedication and commitment.

Without a question, we want to continue to be in the forefront of raising awareness, and innovation, defining a qualitative leap in the Islamic finance sector.”

The bank’s strategy has been drawn keeping in mind the next phase of growth and expansion, aligned to the overall objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

Not only did the bank show great resiliency during the pandemic, but it also exhibited it with a consistent financial performance that outperformed market expectations.

With Islamic banking becoming more popular, Bank Nizwa is devoted to providing a wide range of Sharia-compliant financing solutions to meet the diverse needs of its clientele.

Bank Nizwa has established itself as a robust, innovative, and customer-centric Islamic banking institution, infusing innovation into all of its operations and creating a digital ecosystem to make Sharia-compliant solutions available throughout the Sultanate of Oman.



KCA Deutag Energy wins \$550m PDO drilling contract

ICV COMPONENT: Four new drilling rigs to be built in Sultanate of Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
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Leading international drilling, engineering and technology firm KCA Deutag Energy says it has won a 10-year contract from Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) for the provision of drilling services with four new highly automated rigs that will be built in the Sultanate of Oman.

The ten-year contract comes with options to extend for a further two years and, with those options included, has a total value around \$550m.

The innovative rigs will be constructed by International Drilling Technology Co (IDTEC) in the Sultanate of Oman. IDTEC, majority owned by the KCA Deutag Group, is the group's local rig manufacturing and servicing company, which has already acquired the necessary expertise and certifications for rig construction. The technologically advanced rigs will be the first of their kind to be constructed in the Sultanate of Oman, marking a step change in the rig building capabilities in country.

KCA Deutag Energy LLC will invest approximately \$100m to build the new rigs in the Sultanate of Oman and expects to commence operations in the second half of 2023. Around 40 per cent of this value will be spent with Omani suppliers, including local small and medium enterprise



(SME) companies.

The project has high In-Country Value (ICV) and will provide many benefits to the local economy and community including:

- ★ Securing employment for existing and additional resources at IDTEC across the 18-month build period.
- ★ Subcontracting of significant work including machining, construction and commissioning to Omani SMEs.
- ★ Establishment of IDTEC as an American Petroleum Institute (API) licensed manufacturer for rig structures in the Sultanate of Oman, with long-term opportunities for skilled jobs to support this and future projects.
- ★ Training and upskilling of Omani personnel during the construction phase. This includes building skills of, and transfer of knowledge to, Omani personnel — focusing on engineering, operation and maintenance of mechanised and automated rigs to achieve

100 per cent Omani crews after four years of operation.

The ICV benefits will continue throughout the life of the contract, securing employment for approximately 190 jobs. The rig design and all key components will be provided by KCA Deutag's new business unit, Kenera, through its Bentec engineering and manufacturing centre. The modern rigs will be highly automated, fast-moving units designed for safe and efficient drilling operations in well-established Omani fields and will benefit from the latest technologies from KCA Deutag's Well of Innovation.

Mohammed al Rashdi, PDO Well Engineering Director, said: "Awarding this contract to KCA Deutag Energy LLC is a key step in establishing local rig manufacturing capabilities, especially for mechanised rigs capitalising on PDO journey to modernise its rigs fleet. This will also come with an opportunity to train and develop local Omanis in the design and manufacture of mechanised

rigs, in addition, to supporting Omani SMEs and providing job opportunities for Omanis. It is a step change in the country to have locally manufactured light rigs for PDO."

Simon Drew, President of KCA Deutag's Land Operation, said: "KCA Deutag has been operating in Sultanate of Oman and working for PDO for almost 60 years and we are delighted to have been awarded this opportunity to continue this long-standing relationship."

This investment demonstrates our commitment to PDO and the Sultanate of Oman to deliver outstanding In-Country Value with the first four rigs constructed locally. It is also validation of our excellent safety record, incident-free operations and technological performance — as well as an opportunity to deliver energy-efficient rigs that benefit from our fuel optimisation technology and are capable of adopting grid and hybrid technologies in the future."



Khazaen signs deals to host animal feed, veterinary medicine projects

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MUSCAT, JAN 26

Under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Khazaen Economic City signed a pair of agreements for the establishment of projects specialising in the production of animal feed and veterinary medicines.

The first agreement was signed with the Omani Bio-Products Company for the construction of a plant for the production of animal feed and fish meal on a total area of 45,000 sq metres.

In the first phase, the project will produce 48,000 of animal fodder by processing around 40,000 tons of agricultural residues into nutritionally fortified animal fodder along with about 8,000 tonnes of dates

The plant will produce more than 10 types of liquid veterinary medicines, with a capacity of about 5,000 boxes per day

per annum.

The second agreement was signed the Gulf Agricultural and Veterinary Company to establish a factory for veterinary medicines and animal food, at a total cost of about RO 3 million.

The plant will produce more than 10 types of liquid veterinary medicines, with a capacity of about 5,000 boxes per day.

A further 20 types of veterinary medicines will be produced, together with special feed in powder form for livestock and poultry.

IMF cuts world growth forecasts amid Omicron hit

WASHINGTON: The International Monetary Fund lowered its economic forecasts for the United States, China and the global economy, and said uncertainty about the pandemic, inflation, supply disruptions and US monetary tightening posed further risks.

"We project global growth this year at 4.4 per cent, 0.5 percentage point lower than previously forecast, mainly because of downgrades for the United States and China," Gita Gopinath, the IMF's No 2 official, wrote in a blog on the latest update of the World Economic Outlook.

The IMF said the rapid spread of the Omicron variant had led to renewed mobility restrictions in many countries and increased labour shortages, while supply disruptions were fueling inflation.

Omicron was expected to weigh on economic activity in the first quarter, but ease up thereafter, given that it was associated with less severe illness, the IMF said.

Global growth is expected to slow to 3.8 per cent in 2023, a 0.2 percentage-point uptick from the previous forecast in October, the IMF said, but it said the increase was largely mechanical after current drags on growth dissipate in the second half of 2022.

Overall, the pandemic was now projected to result in cumulative



Lines of trucks are seen at a container terminal of Ningbo Zhoushan port in Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

economic losses of \$13.8 trillion through 2024, compared to the previous forecast of \$12.5 trillion, Gopinath, who previously served as the IMF's chief economist, wrote.

The IMF cut its forecast for US growth by 1.2 percentage points given the failure of US President Joe Biden to pass a massive social

and climate spending package, earlier tightening of US monetary policy and continued supply shortages.

The US economy is now forecast to grow by 4 per cent in 2022 after expanding 5.6 per cent in 2021, with growth seen easing further to 2.6 per cent in 2023, the IMF said.

It downgraded China's forecast by 0.8 percentage point to 4.8 per cent in 2022 after 8.1 per cent growth in 2021, with growth to edge higher again to 5.2 per cent in 2023.

Pandemic-induced disruptions related to China's zero-tolerance Covid-19 policy and protracted financial stress among property

developers prompted the downgrade, the IMF said.

The IMF also cut its forecast for the Euro area by 0.4 percentage point to 3.9 per cent in 2022, and said growth there would slow to 2.5 per cent in 2023.

The Fund cut by 1.2 percentage points each its 2022 growth forecast for Brazil and Mexico, Latin America's largest economies. Brazil is now seen growing 0.3 per cent this year and Mexico 2.8 per cent, while the region is expected to grow 2.4 per cent, 0.6 percentage point below the previous forecast.

India and Japan saw their forecasts upgraded somewhat.

The IMF cautioned that the emergence of new Covid-19 variants could prolong the pandemic and induce renewed economic disruptions, while supply chain disruptions, energy price volatility, and localised wage pressures posed further risks.

It revised up its 2022 inflation forecasts for both advanced and developing economies, and said elevated price pressures were likely to persist longer than previously forecast given ongoing supply chain disruptions and high energy prices.

It said inflation was expected to average 3.9 per cent in advanced economies and 5.9 per cent in emerging market and

developing economies in 2022 before subsiding in 2023, aided by moderated growth in fuel and food prices over that period.

While economies were continuing to recover from the shock of the pandemic, the pace of the recoveries was diverging widely between rich and poorer countries, the IMF said.

While advanced economies are projected to return to pre-pandemic trend this year, several emerging markets and developing economies face sizeable output losses, the IMF said.

Seventy million more people were living in extreme poverty after the pandemic, setting back the progress in poverty reduction by several years, Gopinath said.

The IMF said it was critical to ensure worldwide access to vaccines, tests, and treatments to reduce the risk of further dangerous Covid-19 variants, while many countries would need to raise interest rates to curb inflation pressures.

Gopinath noted that 60 per cent of low-income countries were already in or at high risk of debt distress, and urged the Group of 20 to speed up debt restructuring processes and suspend debt service payments while the restructurings are being negotiated.

— Reuters

Wall Street awaits Fed's next moves on inflation

BY CHRIS STEIN

The Federal Reserve's first policy meeting of the year hasn't even concluded but Wall Street already is unhappy, wary of what central bank chief Jerome Powell might say about his inflation-fighting plans.

At the conclusion of the two-day meeting, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is expected to further signal how it will act to stifle the wave of price increases hitting country's families and businesses.

In the run-up to the announcement, major New York stock indices have seen days of tumultuous trading and big losses.

The trend was confirmed when Wall Street closed lower again, further proof that investors are dreading the likely end to the central bank's easy money policies, including zero interest rates and the massive bond-buying program which helped the economy survive the pandemic.

The bond purchases are scheduled to end in March and Powell and other officials have strongly suggested they will raise rates then, and potentially twice more this year as the Fed looks to ensure the seven per cent surge in consumer prices that occurred in 2021 — the highest in nearly four decades — does not repeat.

"The Fed has done everything but bash investors over the head with a sledgehammer to warn them that rate hikes are coming", economist Joel Naroff said.

"That suddenly everyone is worried about rate hikes proves another of my favourite sayings: 'Markets may be efficient, but that doesn't mean they are rational.'"

The Fed is the world's most influential central bank, and its policies have implications for lending globally.

Top IMF official Gita Gopinath praised the Fed's signalling of its policy change, but warned, "This is going to be a challenge for central bankers this year to be able to communicate the transition to tighter monetary policy, and they should handle that with care." — AFP

The Fed has done everything but bash investors over the head with a sledgehammer to warn them that rate hikes are coming

JOEL NAROFF
Economist



VALVE CHECK

A man checks equipment at the Dashava underground gas storage facility near Striy, outside Lviv, Ukraine. The US and its European allies are scouring global markets for alternative energy sources to mitigate fallout from any conflict with major energy exporter Russia over Ukraine, a senior US official said on Wednesday. — AFP

Qatar: A reliable source of gas



HAIDER AL LAWATI

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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the Central Bank of Oman and Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

The experience of Qatar in the field of extracting and marketing natural gas is firmly established in the world. This is also evident from the Gulf state's success in signing contracts with a number of industrialised countries for the expansion of gas production and the utilisation of this energy resource.

As Qatar holds huge reserves of natural gas, it has the ability to undertake major industrial and commercial projects for decades to come.

The Sultanate of Oman is among a number of countries importing Qatari gas through the Dolphin network. Qatar supplies gas to other Arab countries as well.

In 2021, Qatar signed a number of agreements to sell natural gas to various countries, especially Asian industrial nations, including China, which has seen its industry return to pre-pandemic levels after two years of difficulties attributable to the spread of the coronavirus.

Qatar began to deliver LNG shipments to several countries in 1999. China has remained the largest market, followed by other Asian countries, including Taiwan,

Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Korea and others.

The Qatari government is currently evaluating commercial offers to double the production capacities of its LNG plants. The gas sector has provided many job opportunities for its citizens and expatriates who are flocking in large numbers to the Gulf state.

Doha pumps huge investments not only in the field of gas, but also in various other economic projects. What

distinguishes the gas projects in Qatar from other sectors is the special emphasis on environmental safety.

It has invested in carbon sequestration, which will help raise gas production during the current decade by 2030.

During the past year, the State of Qatar was able to sign a number of agreements to sell its gas to markets around the world.

This further affirms its commitment to meet the growing energy needs of various countries. Some of the countries importing Qatari LNG have today become major strategic partners with Doha in the field of energy.

Other countries are adopting advanced environmental policies to meet the challenges resulting from continuing the process of production, export, transport and discharging LNG.

These giant projects ensure great economic and financial returns for Qatar in the future. It is also working to attract more local and foreign investments into the country, which has expanded its economy significantly during the past three decades. Qatar is indeed a reliable source of energy for the entire region.

THE GAS SECTOR HAS PROVIDED MANY JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS CITIZENS AND EXPATRIATES WHO ARE FLOCKING IN LARGE NUMBERS TO THE GULF STATE

India Insight: Narendra Modi's sale of the century

BY UNA GALANI

Anchor, kitchen sink, fire engine, shock absorber, mop, buyer of last resort. These are just some of the unflattering descriptors used by Mumbai financiers to describe state-owned Life Insurance Corporation of India, its \$500 billion of assets and the unusual government-directed role it plays in the country's capital markets.

Just exactly how, and whether, that will change after its blockbuster initial public offering is one of the big questions for both New Delhi and new investors alike. LIC is quite literally everywhere. It boasts some 290 million policyholders, roughly equal to the number of households across the country. An army of 1.3 million sales agents live in big cities, small towns and far-flung mountain villages.

They're often the first port of call for any Indian who scrapes

together a bit of money to park somewhere. LIC insures everyone from fund managers to domestic helpers.

The brand became powerful thanks to a 40-year-plus monopoly, until the life insurance market was opened to private competition at the turn of the century. LIC has since ceded a big slug of its share, but it retains a 64% hold on gross written premiums.

Executives, regulators and bankers from 10 firms, including Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, Bank of America and JPMorgan, are preparing LIC's gigantic share sale.

It might seek to raise some \$10 billion assuming its sole owner, the government, offloads 5% at the upper end of a widely anticipated \$200 billion market value.

That would be four times the record set by Paytm-owner One 97 Communications in November, which has traded abysmally since.

Large investments from global sovereign wealth funds should help get the LIC deal done,

possibly in multiple tranches, but that is likely to leave smaller pools of capital available for any IPOs that follow in the coming months.

In terms of national significance, however, the transaction is on a par with the listings of oil giant Saudi Aramco to the Gulf kingdom in late 2019 and British Telecom to the United Kingdom in 1984.

Selling a chunk of the insurer is Prime Minister Narendra Modi's high-stakes move to tap the government's largest store of wealth beyond the Reserve Bank of India's so-called capital surplus, which bureaucrats occasionally raid.

Although the tea-seller turned politician successfully struck a deal last year to offload debt-laden national carrier Air India to the Tata group, New Delhi routinely undershoots its budgeted target to raise money from asset sales.

Such shortfalls were disappointing before the pandemic struck, more so during the subsequent equity market bull

run.

Now it represents a growing risk to the government's creditworthiness. The health crisis crimped revenue and forced additional spending.

General government gross debt topped 90% of gross domestic product in 2021, per International Monetary Fund estimates.

Trimming borrowing would help keep a lid on the bond yields that determine how much the country pays on its dues as the US Federal Reserve plots interest rate hikes and funds flow out of emerging markets.

That would shore up India's financial credibility as it woos foreign manufacturers and more. Politically speaking, shoring up the country's finances also could help Modi lay the groundwork for any spending uptick ahead of national elections, expected in 2024.

Even so, it will be a slog to get the LIC deal across the finish line. Valuing the company and its hodgepodge of holdings is a

gargantuan task for the appointed adviser.

It's the largest investor in the local stock market, owning 6% of Mukesh Ambani's \$225 billion Reliance Industries and 4% of \$190 billion IT giant Tata Consultancy Services. It also has large stakes in India's lenders, including IDBI Bank, after LIC stepped up in 2018 to help with a bailout.

While the government will keep one eye on pocketing needed proceeds, it also knows it will have to leave enough value behind so that LIC's shares can have a steady performance in secondary trading.

The task is even more important than usual because individual policyholders will be allocated a portion of the deal, a bold move that will bring millions of new investors to India's stock market.

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— Reuters

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features



Breaking the glass ceiling of sports as a fencing referee

When sports student Amal al Mahrooqi announced on Twitter that she became the first Omani woman to become a fencing referee, she didn't expect that it will be warmly welcomed by the community and will go viral as it did. Amal shared a few things about her journey hoping it will also inspire others... **P20**

READ

HOW MUSIC WORKS
DAVID BYRNE

HOW MUSIC WORKS
BY DAVID BYRNE

Byrne concentrates on his own experience, from a teenage geek splicing layers of guitar feedback on his father's tape recorder, to arty if neo-primitive rock star with the early Talking Heads at CBGB to increasingly sophisticated, globe-wandering art-rockers, happily collaborating with all manner of world musicians and pop-technological innovators.

FASHION

Paris Fashion Week opens in mourning for Mugler

THE HAUTE COUTURE week in Paris opened under a new cloud of mourning on Monday following the death of French designer Thierry



Mugler, the latest in a string of big-name fashion industry deaths. The industry was still processing the loss of Louis Vuitton designer Virgil Abloh, who died in November aged just 41 after a private battle with cancer. His final

collection was presented during the menswear shows last week. This Sunday will see a memorial show to Pierre Cardin, who died at 98 in December 2020, just as the last fashion week in October paid tribute to Israeli designer Alber

Elbaz, lost to Covid in April. Other notable deaths include those of Italy's Nino Cerruti, who passed away last week, and Japan's Kenzo Takada who died in October 2020. Mugler died suddenly on Sunday from "natural causes" at 73, according to his Facebook page. He was a central figure when the fashion industry was in full pomp in the 1980s and 1990s, surrounded by celebrities and supermodels, and bringing wild extravagance to the catwalk — from full-body robotic armour to the Venus oyster gown that was recently resurrected by Cardi B. His bold silhouettes helped define the power-dressing look of the 1980s, with the inverted triangle of wide shoulders and tight hips exemplified by pop icons like Grace Jones and David Bowie.

CONTINUING WITH COVID The show must go on, however, and many couture labels have

been determined to return to the runway this week despite surging Covid cases in France, which just last Tuesday had a record of nearly 465,000 infections over a 24-hour period. More than half the brands — 15 of 29 — are holding live shows, according to the official calendar, including big names like Dior, Chanel and Jean-Paul Gaultier, up from just a handful last year. There were some half-hearted efforts at social-distancing during the menswear shows last week — and vaccine passes are required throughout. But some labels remain nervous. Couture brand Julien Fournie had initially planned to hold a traditional runway show on Tuesday but replaced it with a digital presentation at the last minute. "I feel caught in the crossfire", its Director Jean Paul Cauvin said, fearing that a live show would create "an haute couture cluster". — AFP



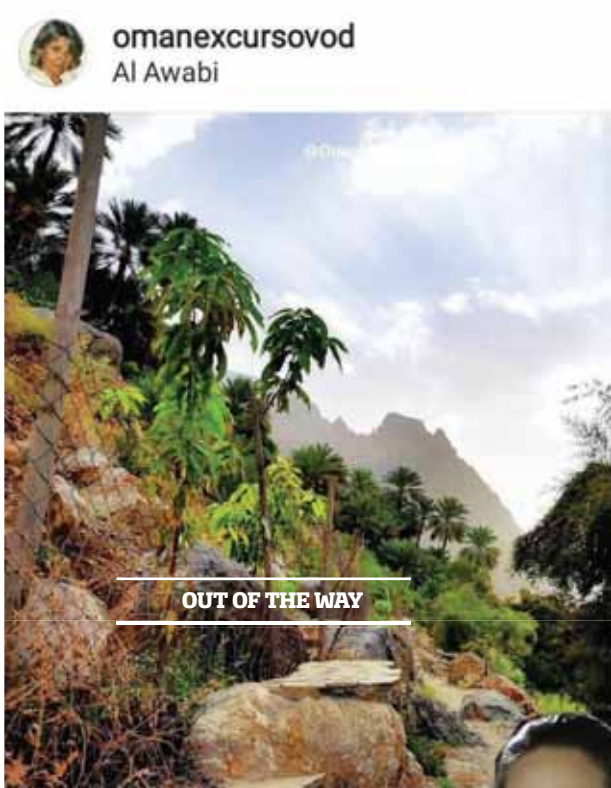
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AROUND THE WORLD

GASTRONOMY

Gaza's first health food store offers sweet alternative for diabetics



DIABETICS AND THE calorie-conscious can get pleasure from a richer food plan at Gaza's first well being meals retailer, the place cookies, sweets and different meals are ready with a sugar substitute.

Hana Al Wakeel opened her "Wholesome House" store two months in the past, after the 32-year-old optometrist shifted her focus from eye care to cooking after figuring out a spot available in the market for diabetics and people in search of more healthy meals.

As an alternative of sugar, she makes use of stevia, a sweetener derived from the leaves of the stevia plant. It is among the sugar substitutes authorised by the US Meals and Drug Administration to be used by diabetics, who should carefully monitor their blood sugar ranges.

"(My prospects) are individuals on a food plan, individuals with diabetes and individuals who shun white sugar... individuals who eat healthily and don't love fat and oils," Wakeel said.

Shopping for muffins and cookies within the store, Emme Moataz, 22, mentioned: "I've been following a wholesome fashion for some time and eventually I discovered a spot making this stuff. I take my stuff from them now."

Wakeel mentioned mother and father with diabetic kids are amongst her prime prospects. "Many kids have diabetes and it feels good to listen to moms and dads say they let their kids decide what they need with no worries," she mentioned, mixing low-fat chocolate to arrange pancakes.

Palestinian well being officers mentioned about 100,000 individuals undergo from diabetes within the Gaza Strip.

"It makes me completely happy that there are individuals who care about this class of individuals. It makes it attainable to come back to a assured retailer, with out having to assume the place to go," mentioned Mahmoud Abu Al Ouf, a diabetes affected person. — Reuters

FASHION

Stéphane Rolland returns to Paris catwalk with bold silhouettes

FRENCH LABEL Stéphane Rolland returned to the runway on Tuesday for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began, offering an array of feminine draped dresses and billowing cloud-like gowns at Paris Fashion Week.

After almost two years, the designer Stéphane Rolland said he felt it was time to get back to an in-person show for his new couture collection.

"We designed the collection to be displayed on a runway — if there were any last minute problems, we could always change course," the French designer said before the show.

Held in the Palais de Chaillot, at a stone's throw from the Eiffel Tower, the spring-summer 2022 presentation opened to the beat of Aretha Franklin and a series of fluid kaftans made of satin crepe in black and ivory tones.

Rolland's muse, the Spanish model Nieves Alvarez, strode down the catwalk in a hooded golden metallic blazer paired with wide pants in white wool.

The label, known for its sculptural outfits, slightly refined its designs but silhouettes remained bold and striking.

"I have the impression that with what we have gone

through, it was necessary to turn a page — without turning my back on what I had done before," Rolland said.

"I want to highlight the body of a free woman differently — to project a desirable look, and play with transparency in a subtle manner, rather than a slightly vulgar style. It's about sensuality, not sexuality."

Tailored dresses, a long brown tunic, draped gowns plunging in the back or front alternated on the catwalk while other models paraded in transparent chiffon dresses.

Alvarez closed the show in a black velvet and satin ballgown and a huge emerald necklace.

Before the presentation, Rolland paid homage to Thierry Mugler with a recorded message honouring the designer who died on Sunday.

— Reuters

ART

Futuristic mushroom? All-glass House of Music blooms in Budapest park



WITH ITS SERRATED glass walls and perforated roof that allows natural light to permeate its halls, Budapest's futuristic new concert hall aims to create harmony between nature and music, giving visitors an uplifting experience.

Designed by Japanese architect Sou Fujimoto, the House of Music, Hungary opened its doors to visitors on Sunday with concerts by musicians of the Liszt Ferenc Music Academy.

It is part of the ruling nationalist government's huge project of transform-

where, its designers say.

"The glass walls are not placed in a parallel way but it is a zig-zag surface where the sound is broken," said operations director Marton Horn.

"Behind the concert stage a glass surface was created which can be adjusted. There are about one metre large glass panels which can be individually adjusted, and with this the sound can be channelled up towards the ceiling where the sound is absorbed."

The building houses a



ing Budapest's City Park into a showcase of Hungarian culture, which was entangled in political controversy due to its hefty costs and the loss of some green areas.

The building, some say, resembles a giant mushroom with its perforated roof which channels light to all its levels via 100 so-called "light wells", or large holes.

It has a 12-metre (39.4 ft) high continuous glass wall that consists of 94 pieces in a zig-zag arrangement that reflects back sound, creating homogeneous acoustics with the sound quality the same every-

concert hall, several music venues, interactive exhibitions, and a library. Its huge glass surfaces blend the borders between indoors and out, between the natural and the built environment.

"I like the building... Many buildings were built amid controversy, why there and why in that way. But I do like it," said Daniel, one of the first visitors.

The House of Music recently won the "Best Use of Music in Property Development" at the Music Cities Awards. It features on Time Out's list of best new things in the world in 2022. — Reuters

Horse struts catwalk at Chanel's Paris Haute Couture show

FRENCH FASHION house Chanel shook up conventions by sending a horse out onto the catwalk at its Haute Couture show in Paris on Tuesday.

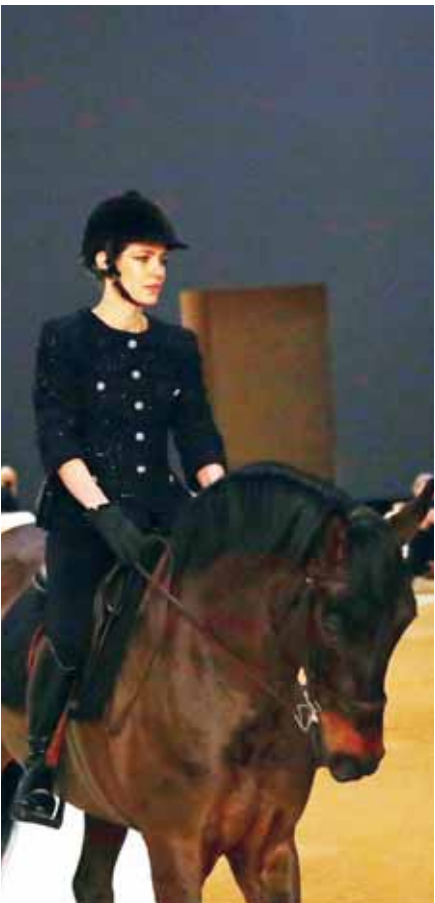
The animal was ridden by Charlotte Casiraghi, a niece of Prince Albert of Monaco and a competitive show-jumper who is also a Chanel brand ambassador.

Wearing a Chanel jacket made of black tweed and decorated with sequins, Casiraghi rode out at the start of

the show, cantering several times around a catwalk designed to resemble a horse training ring.

The rest of the models — this time on foot — came out onto the catwalk afterwards.

The show, at the Grand Palais Ephemere, an exhibition and performance space in Paris, was conceived by Virginie Viard, who became Chanel's creative director in 2019 following the death of haute couture icon Karl Lagerfeld. — Reuters





Breaking the glass ceiling of sports as a fencing referee

By Baraah al Mujaini

Fencing has always been a male-dominated sport. The selection of Amal al Mahrooqi, a student specialising in Physical Education and Sport Sciences, as the first Omani woman referee is definitely a great accomplishment that gives hope to other women hoping to break into the sports scene.

Asked how she developed a passion for fencing, Amal shared that her enthusiasm for the sport and refereeing became obvious after experiencing a sequence of activities in different domains and sectors, and after participating in numerous workshops. Amal sensed something special about fencing so she decided to pursue the sport passionately.

Amal started her journey into the world of fencing in September 2019 when she joined a training course for refereeing in fencing organised by the Omani Committee for Fencing.

After joining the training sessions, she realised that it is a novel sport that holds a lot of promise for the Sultanate of Oman and when it dawned on her that she has the potential to be also a referee, it became an even better prospect.

The decision was not a hard one to make as she is already studying physical education and sport sciences. From her early introduction into the sport, she invested her time wisely increasing her knowledge about the sport and venturing into territories that allowed her knowledge and techniques to expand.

As the Sultanate of Oman has willingly and aggressively welcomed the sport into the country, Amal was one of the early students who were given access into the finals of the game having witnessed three fencing championships organised by the Sultanate of Oman.

"It was a well-organised championship that reflects how the Committee was capable to lead such great fencing matches," Amal said.

"I was so glad that my colleagues were also well-experienced and highly qualified to act as a referee for the event. That knowledge and foresight contributed to the event's smooth-flowing progression," she said.

Pursuing being a referee was prodded by Amal's inner drive to contribute

to different sports. She worked tirelessly to earn her referee badge. Being a referee enabled Amal to master different sport types rather than being restricted to one kind of sport.

"I can be a referee to more than three sports, so I do not have to restrict myself to a certain game," Amal explained.

Omani Committee for Fencing.

"I am a risk-taker who likes to experience new adventures, and this had helped me significantly to eliminate any concerns and fears that might crop up when I decided to be part of this scene," she said.

Being a referee for fencing has



The road to becoming a referee was not an easy journey. Since 2019 when she decided to pursue earning the badge, she has had to go through different rigorous training classes that happened on a daily basis. The hard training became even harder as she has to balance it out with her academic programmes.

"When the trainers saw that I was progressing quickly in my training courses, there were days that I was not required to attend. That allowed me to work on my academic stuff," Amal shared.

When Amal finally qualified as a professional referee, it was a big celebration for women in sports as it open more doors for women.

Amal said that such achievement was not possible without community support. The first person who Amal wants to thank is Abdulraheem al Darooshi who was instrumental in pushing her to be more involved in the referee committee. She also acknowledges the significant contribution and support she got from her family and most especially the

impacted Amal's life considerably, as she learned how to be a more productive person.

Asked what special characteristics a referee must have, Amal said, "The fencing referee must be decisive, confident, and extremely attentive, and I said 'extremely' since fencing moves are very fast that requires full concentration from the referees."

Since her announcement on Twitter, Amal has been getting recognition and accolades from the community who also show their support by words of encouragement.

"When I tweeted that I was the first Omani woman who qualified as a referee, I did not expect that it will become viral in a short time. I had mixed emotions about it but mostly happy and proud. I wish everybody feel that great feeling once they accomplish their ambitions," Amal said. Amal said that her dreams don't stop in just becoming a referee. She also hopes to gain international approval as a referee in fencing and all these while she's working hard to complete her bachelor's degree.

