

Education Ministry inks 6 MoUs
with pvt sector for Science Festival

The Ministry of Education signed six memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with a number of private sector institutions that support Oman Science Festival 2022, under the auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, at the ministry's headquarters on Thursday. **DETAILS ON P3**



P12

MCILROY CHARGES BUT CLARK CLINGS TO CANADIAN OPEN LEAD



P13

HELIOS TOWERS OMAN AGREES MINORITY STAKE WITH RAKIZA



P20

WHAT NOT TO MISS WHEN EXPLORING RUSTAQ



MUSCAT

HM SENDS GREETINGS TO VLADIMIR PUTIN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Russia. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to President Putin wishing the friendly Russian people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREET'S PHILIPPINES PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik sent a cable of greetings to President Rodrigo Duterte of the Republic of the Philippines on his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Duterte and the friendly people of the Philippines. — ONA



UK OFFICIALS VISIT 'SHABAB OMAN II'



The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel 'Shabab Oman II' received senior UK navy officials while anchored at West India Docks in the United Kingdom as part of her sixth international voyage 'Oman, Land of Peace' in the European continent. **SEE ALSO P5**

Projects worth RO 480 million lined up for renewable energy and water

MUSCAT: Oman Power and Water Purchase Company (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is lining up new investments totalling in excess of RO 480 million (\$1.250 million) towards renewable energy and water desalination projects in the near future.

Yaqoub bin Said al Kiyumi, CEO, said that OPWP is currently procuring two solar

PV projects of a total capacity of 1,000 MW in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Private investments in these solar schemes total around \$600 million, he said. In addition, wind power projects totalling \$300 million in investment are planned in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate and Wilayat of Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate. **SEE ALSO P13**

Oman, Tanzania eye strong economic ties



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the United Republic of Tanzania have established a distinctive relationship through various events witnessed by the Indian Ocean since thousands of years of cultural history and joint trade exchange.

The meeting between His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and President Samia Suluhu Hassan of the United Republic of Tanzania at Al Alam Palace in Muscat on Sunday is expected to play a crucial role in bolstering relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Tanzania particularly in the area of economy.

Statistics on trade exchange between the

Sultanate of Oman and the United Republic of Tanzania indicate that the trade balance in 2021 stood at RO 30.6 million and was in favour of the Sultanate of Oman.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the volume of Omani exports to Tanzania in 2021 reached almost RO 40.1 million with the most important commodities exported to Tanzania being plastic industries, oil derivatives, electrical devices and home appliances and foodstuffs. The volume of Omani imports from Tanzania amounted to RO 9.5 million including foodstuffs, meat and various commodities. **TURN TO P2**

Al Mouj Muscat has delivered significant sustainable socio-economic impact for the Sultanate of Oman

Life — inspired

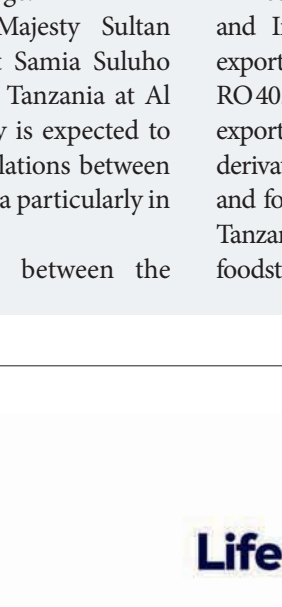
We are committed to the goals of Oman Vision 2040

Nasser Al Sheibani drives this



We have directly created 2,200 permanent jobs

Hawra Al Lawati has one of them



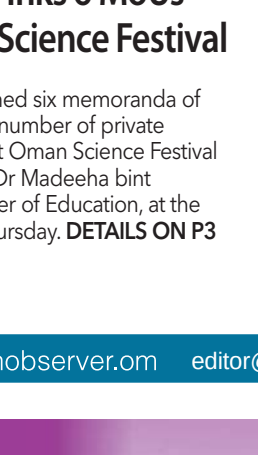
We have attracted 844mn USD in Foreign Direct Investment

Ahmed Al Massan oversees this



There are already 2,550 homes at Al Mouj Muscat

Badriya Al Suqri helped build these



Home to 2,000 hotel rooms, Al Mouj Muscat drives tourism growth

Carsten Wiegandt oversees some of them



150 SMEs operate at Al Mouj Muscat

Aisha Al Kharousi owns one of them



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OMAN, TANZANIA EYE STRONG ECONOMIC TIES

FROM P1
The establishment of the Oman-Tanzania Businessmen Council in 2021 has contributed to strengthening economic relations between the two friendly countries. In March 2013, the two countries signed an agreement for mutual protection and encouragement of investments underpinned by an agreement signed in February 1992 for the avoidance of double taxation on air transport revenues.

Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is playing a tangible role in investing in East Africa in general following the opening of the OIA office in Tanzania in 2015 thus opening new prospects for investments in Tanzania including investing in Mangapwani Port in Zanzibar the procedural phase of which has been finalised. Besides, a memorandum of understanding for the development and rehabilitation of Malindi Port and adjoining areas, was signed.

Last May, the Sultanate of Oman and Tanzania signed a memorandum of understanding in the field of fisheries and marine exploration beside investing in a fish farm in Zanzibar which has a production capacity of 1,000 tonnes per year in the first phase, and 3,000 tonnes per year and 6,000 tonnes per year in the second and the third phase, respectively.

This June, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Asyad Group and Tanzania Posts in the field of e-commerce services and logistics solutions. It is hoped that the MoU will increase the volume of e-commerce activities between the two countries, online shopping from African markets and receiving purchases directly in the Sultanate of Oman.

Omran Group, a subsidiary of OIA, is holding talks that aim to benefit



from the Tanzanian experience in the field of tourism and management of historic landmarks.

During a visit to the Sultanate of Oman last February, Tanzanian businesspersons were introduced to the investment opportunities available in the fields of industry, agriculture, fisheries, mining, logistics, tourism, health, education, renewable energy, information technology, infrastructure, ports and free zones delegation to the Sultanate of Oman. They were briefed about investment-related legislation to and investment incentives provided by the government including a tax exemption of up to 5 years, extendable to 10 years and tax exemptions on equipment for establishing and expanding industrial projects and on production inputs.

The Sultanate of Oman and the United Republic of Tanzania have maintained good relations at the political level by holding annual talk sessions, the last of which was held last March in Tanzania. During the talks session the two countries reiterated their support for dialogue and peaceful means for resolving issues and conflicts in order to stabilise and sustain international peace and security. They emphasised the importance of exchanging views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern.

The Sultanate of Oman's initiative to renovate Beit al Ajaib (House of Wonders) affirms the depth of the relationship between the two friendly countries. The Sultanate of Oman is striving to document various historical events in visual, audio and documentary programmes, in addition to scientific studies and literary writings such as a historical series titled Carnation, which features the Omani Empire period in Zanzibar during the era of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy. — ONA

BUSINESS PACTS AT A GLANCE



OMAN-TANZANIA
TRADE BALANCE AT
RO 30.6m



OMANI EXPORTS TO
TANZANIA IN 2021
AMOUNTED TO ABOUT

Plastic, oil derivatives,
electrical and household
materials, and foodstuff

RO 40.1m

OMANI IMPORTS FROM
TANZANIA AMOUNTED
TO ABOUT

Foodstuff, meat
and others

RO 9.5m



1992

Agreement to avoid
double taxation on
air transport



2012

Omani-Tanzania
Business Council
set up to strengthen
economic relations
between the two
countries



2013

Pact for mutual
protection
and support of
investments



2015

Oman Investment
Authority opens
office in Tanzania



2019

**OMAN TO
RENOVATE
ZANZIBAR'S
HOUSE OF
WONDERS**

Oman signed an
agreement on
October 19 for the
restoration of House
of Wonders (Bait Al
Ajaib) in Zanzibar.
The renovation of
Bait Al Ajaib, which
dates back to 1883,
will be implemented
in response to the
Royal order of His
Majesty at a cost of
RO 5,931,770



2021

**PACT TO
DEVELOP
MAJOR PORTS**

Oman and
Tanzania sign pact
to develop ports.
Tanzania and the
Oman Investment
Authority signed a
MoU on February
24, 2021 to develop
major ports in
the coastal areas
of Mangapwani
and Bumbwini
in the Zanzibar
archipelago



2022

Oman Investment
Authority (OIA)
signed MoU with
Tanzania for deep-
sea exploration and
fishing on May 14.

Asyad Group,
represented by Oman
Post and Asyad
Express, signed
MoU with Tanzania
Posts Corporation
(TPC) to promote
last-mile services
and e-commerce
solutions between
the two countries on
June 5





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STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

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Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, said: "We were pleased to sign 6 memoranda of understanding with the institutions supporting Oman Science Festival, which believed in the power of the idea, its richness, its importance and its benefit not only to education and science, but also to the economy in general, and to the private sector itself, stressing that the support provided is to implement the third edition of the Oman Science Festival, which will be held in October 2022. It will contribute significantly to motivating students in schools, colleges, and universities to pay more attention to science, innovation, and creativity in general, as the festival targets all segments of society, especially school and university students, with the aim of spreading science to everyone. Today, science and technology are the engine and developer of societies."

Dr Ambusaidi signed three



MoUs, and the first agreement was with Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel). Eng Alaa Eddin bin Abdullah Beit Fadel, Commercial Chief Executive Officer, signed for the company in the presence of CEO Shaikh Talal bin Saeed al Maamari.

The second agreement was signed with Petroleum Development Oman. The agreement was signed by Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed al Gharibi, Director of External Affairs and Communications at the company, in the presence of its representative, Eng Abdul Amir bin Abdul-Hussein al Ajmi, Executive Director of Foreign Affairs and Added Value.

The third agreement was signed with Khimji Ramdas Corporation (Eshraqa Corporation). The agreement was signed by Mahmoud bin Khalifa al Sagri, General Manager of the Group's Social Responsibility, in the presence of the company's representative Shaikh Anil Khimji Ramdas, member of the Board of Directors of Khimji Ramdas.

Subsequently, Majid bin Saeed al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for

Administrative and Financial Affairs, signed three MoUs. The first was signed with the Oman Liquefied Natural Gas Company Development Corporation. The agreement was signed by Eng Ismail bin Suleiman al Sawafi, Director-General of Social Responsibility and Public Relations, in the presence of its representative, Dr Amer bin Nasser al Mataani, CEO of the Corporation.

The second agreement was signed with Bank Sohar. The agreement was signed by Abdul Wahed bin Muhammad al Murshidi, head of the Islamic banking group at the bank, and in the presence of the bank's representative, Ahmed bin Jaafar al Musalmi, CEO of Bank Sohar.

The third agreement was signed with both Oman Shell Development Company and Shell Marketing Company. The agreement was signed by Barir al Lawati, Director of External Affairs from Shell Marketing, and Guy Dekort from Shell Development Company, in the presence of company representative Saeed al Rawahi, Director of Government Relations from Shell Development.

Al Atm, a source of life in Jabal al Akhdhar

TEXT & PHOTO BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Once you reach the heights of Jabal al Akhdhar you are drawn to green areas where many types of plants and trees native to Oman mix. Among the most important of these species is the Al Atm tree (*Olea Europaea*), which is classified as one of the perennial trees in the country, with a lifespan of more than 400 years, according to the latest environmental studies specialised in plant sciences.

The Al Atm tree is distinguished by its dense leaves. It has gained importance among the local population along the heights of the Al Hajar Mountains, especially those located within the range of Jabal al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams. People in these areas depend on it because it provides many daily life requirements for hundreds of years.

The residents benefit from this tree in several ways, including the manufacture of pillars for roofs for houses built of stone, as it is characterised by the strength and rigidity of its trunks. It is heavy and does not splinter easily, making it useful in the construction and manufacture of wooden tools. The trees are also used as a remedy for animal diseases etc.

The tree also gives "tar oil" or wood oil, which is used in painting boats, veterinary treatments, and the finest 'Miswak' to clean teeth.

Those interested in beekeeping spend most of their time on the mountain peaks and valleys, looking for the best places to place their apiary houses to get the best honey, as the tree is rich in flowers to feed the bees.

Thus, the Al Atm honey, produced in the high mountains, is classified as the best honey. Beekeepers are interested in Al Atm honey, as there is good pasture for bees and good food rich in nutrients.

Environmentally,



the Al Atm tree helps keep temperatures moderated by absorbing sunlight and releasing water vapour into the air. It increases the humidity in the atmosphere. This tree helps prevent water pollution, as the roots of trees absorb and filter groundwater and prevent rainwater from sweeping pollutants into the waters of the seas and oceans. It also contributes

to incubating several species of Omani birds and butterflies.

"We welcome everyone to enjoy the climate of Jabal al Akhdhar, especially during the summer. There are tourists who visit this area, but some of them, unfortunately, do barbecue and throw waste that affects the trees adversely. We call upon visitors to adhere to best tourist practices," some locals told the Observer.

INVITATION TO TENDER



Sohar Aluminium LLC (SA), PO Box 80, PC- 327, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman hereby invites qualified Suppliers/Contractors for the following tender:

Tender No.	: 2022-ENG-SOW-0014
Tender Title	: Port Main Pipe Conveyor - Fire Protection
Scope	: Supplier to do design, supply, installation & commissioning of upgraded fire protection system – SA Port Main Pipe Conveyor.
Tender No.	: PR 10215134
Tender Title	: Corporate Video for Sohar Aluminium 2022
Scope	: Produce a corporate video highlighting Sohar Aluminium Vision, Value and business objectives. Services as specified in technical Specifications.
Tender No.	: 22-011
Tender Title	: Provision of Integrated Medical Services
Scope	: Provide Integrated Medical team who is required to work in shifts or in general shifts at Sohar Aluminium Health Center, as per business requirements and under the directions of Chief Medical Officer/Medical Principal Services as specified in technical Specifications.

Kindly send your email and company profile to: tender@sohar-aluminium.com
For list of active tenders visit: <https://www.sohar-aluminium.com/en/content/tender-listing>



DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF EYE CARE IN SUMMER

THE INTENSITY
OF ULTRAVIOLET RAYS IS EXTREMELY
HIGH DURING SUMMER.
IT CAN INCREASE THE RISK OF CATARACTS
AND RETINAL DAMAGE AND CAUSE MANY
OTHER EYE-RELATED ISSUES IF PROPER CARE
IS NOT TAKEN DURING
THE SEASON



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

The human eye is one of the most vulnerable body parts that need proper care all the time. However, summer is when eyes need more care due to the scorching heat, sunlight and heatwave associated with them. Combined, they pose a significant risk of affecting the eyes adversely and beyond redemption, in some cases.

The intensity of ultraviolet rays is extremely high during the summer. It can increase the risk of cataracts and retinal damage and cause many other eye-related issues if proper care is not taken during the season.

Dr Mukund R Nayak, a Senior Ophthalmologist, calls for essential care to avoid common eye problems during summer. Eye allergy (allergic conjunctivitis), dryness of the eye, eye fatigue, irritation, frequent redness etc., are very common during the season, while children are prone to getting allergic conjunctivitis in which both eyes usually become red, itchy and sometimes associated with white discharge. “Children usually rub their eyes, which makes the redness worse. Allergy is more common if the child is exposed to the dust in summer.”

Another common eye condition during summer, according to Dr Nayak, is dry eye syndrome, an eye disease in which tear film evaporation is high due to increased external temperature. The patient’s eyes dry out and become inflamed.

Eyes have a tendency to produce tears all the time, not just when people cry or experience a sudden rush of emotion. Healthy eyes are covered with fluid all the time, which is designed to remain stable between each blink. A stable tear film prevents the eye from becoming dry and keeps the eyes clear and with comfortable vision.

Common symptoms of dry eye syndrome are: A stinging sensation in the eyes, burning and gritty sensation, feeling dryness in the eyes, watering, discomfort when wearing contact lenses, blurring of vision etc.

The treatment for dryness includes wearing good quality sunglasses, reducing sun exposure and consulting an ophthalmologist who will prescribe artificial tears after properly examining the patient.

“Another important effect of prolonged sun exposure is the formation of cataracts earlier than the normal. The incidence of cataracts is high in people who are exposed to sunlight for a long time. Hence, cataract is seen at an early stage in tropical countries.

The chances of Macular Degeneration (Macula is an important place in the retina of the eye where an image is being formed) are also high in people who work outdoor. This is a gradual process taking many years of exposure to sunlight to develop. In this case, central vision is gradually affected.

Dr Nayak calls for eye precautions during the summer. “It is essential to use sunglasses to prevent the majority of the conditions. Sunglasses prevent ultraviolet rays from entering the eye, and hence the eyes remain healthy for a long time. Especially in a country like the Sultanate of Oman, where temperatures rise to 50 degrees in summer, wearing sunglasses is essential.”

He suggests frequent washing of the eyes with clean water at least 3-4 times a day. Water removes all the dust particles and allergens from the eye, and most of eye symptoms can be reduced.

HOME TIPS

Dr Nayak advises not to take any chance with the eyes. “There are no special home tips to keep the eyes cool during summer. Frequent washing of the eyes is the best method. **Some people use tea bags to cool the eyes, which is not at all a good practice.**”

There is no need to use any kind of soothing eye drops unless the doctor advises. It is not only a waste of money but also unnecessary. He says that a normal person will have enough tears in his eyes, which keep the eyes healthy and moisturised.

DOS AND DON'TS

If any symptoms of eye problem persist despite taking usual precautions, consultation with an ophthalmologist is necessary.

It is advisable not to use any eye drops that are available at home or without a doctor’s prescription. Some medicines contain steroids, which are harmful to the eyes if used for a long time.



SHABAB OMAN II RECEIVES BRITISH OFFICIALS



LONDON: The Royal Navy of Oman's vessel Shabab Oman II received senior guests while anchored at West India Docks in the United Kingdom as part of her sixth international voyage 'Oman, Land of Peace' in the European continent.

Among the visitors to the ship was Air Marshal Martin (Sammy) Sampson, UK Chief of Defence Staff's Senior Adviser to the Middle East and North Africa and the Commandant of the Royal College of Defence Studies (RCDS) and a number of senior officers.

Shabab Oman II also held a reception which was attended by a number of dignitaries and military attaches of foreign embassies in London. — ONA



Climate Scout to address pressing environment issues

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a global cultural agency has come out with the idea of Climate Scout to create awareness about the pressing challenges of protecting and enhancing key environmental resources and addressing climate change in the Sultanate of Oman.

The solutions being offered by the cultural agency CRTKL are mainly in the areas of architecture, planning and design that call for balanced social, economic and environmental sustainability.

The idea of the move is to inform about the radical solutions to Oman's most



pressing challenges in the environment sector by involving Climate Scout, a new and first-of-its-kind, open-source platform that helps users design buildings that uniquely respond to a site by providing climate-specific design advice at the building scale. It pairs the Köppen-Geiger climate classification

and building design strategies from Architecture 2030's Palette with Climate Scout and Fast Company's World Changing Ideas for 2022.

Wladimir Köppen, a German botanist and climatologist, first floated the climate classification that categorised climate zones throughout the world based on

local vegetation. The Climate classification, however, has been enhanced and modified several times since it was first published.

The Climate Scout aims to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Oman through the means that are based on broader goals like conserving and enhancing environmental resources and addressing climate change issues.

It calls for efficient use of natural resources, adoption of sustainable patterns of development to ensure minimal involvement of travel and reliance on vehicles.

It is also part of supporting high levels of economic growth in a way that can benefit all, building on the strengths of each region.

Omantel Demo Day showcases innovative tech start-ups

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

Omantel hosted its inaugural virtual Demo Day to honour the graduation of five technology start-ups from their first Omantel Innovation Lab Accelerator Programme.

The 6-month Omantel Accelerator was established in 2021, as part of the Omantel Innovation Labs, to leverage Omantel's expertise, partnerships, reach and access to technology to contribute to Oman Vision 2040 and promote innovation and entrepreneurship in new and emerging technology.

Developed in collaboration with Oman Technology Fund and Brinc, the programme offers complete support to selected entrepreneurs in order to ensure their scalability and stimulate technical growth in Oman. The Demo Day is a platform that allows entrepreneurs to showcase their solutions and engage



with corporates, government organisations, and regional and global investors in order to expedite the adoption and expansion of their sustainable innovations on a local and regional scale.

The five start-ups that were showcased during the Demo Day were: Autoplant: An AI and IoT solution for the farming industry to improve agricultural decision-making; Lamma: Oman's first super app, a unified communication platform with

payment integration; Mamun: An embedded credit, payments and insurance platform; Kushk: A subscription-based tool that allows sellers in the GCC to easily set up digital stores and sell their products online; and Remedy: A platform that connects patients with clinics and therapists.

Senior Manager of Omantel Innovation Labs, Sayyidah Ghada bint Jaifar al Said, said: "We are excited to introduce our first cohort of the Omantel Accelerator, which brings together a diverse set of innovative Omani start-ups with huge ambitions. Their dedication to their solutions has been exemplary and we are so proud to have been part of their journey so far. We look forward to seeing their continued progress and success. We will continue our work in this area, as we seek to maximise our contribution to Oman Vision 2040 and promote innovation and technology entrepreneurship in the Sultanate of Oman."

THE ROYAL GUARD OF OMAN Tender Advertisement

The Royal Guard of Oman, invites proposals for the following :-

Tender Reference	Subject	Tender Document Value	Bid Submission Date
01/2022	Cleaning and Pest Control Services for various RGO locations	R.O. 1,200/- non-refundable	18 th July 2022

Specialised Companies registered with Govt. Tender Board, having First Grade and above can collect the tender document from the office of the Tender Committee Secretariat, The Royal Guard of Oman, Seeb during working hours from **Sunday 12th June to Thursday 16th June 2022.**

Wax-sealed bids addressed to the Chairman - Tender Committee should be submitted to RGO before 12.00 hours on the above mentioned submission date along with a Tender Bond/Certified Cheque in the name of the Royal Guard of Oman, equivalent to 1% (One Percent) of the value of the bid from any registered Bank in the Sultanate of Oman, valid for a period of 120 days from the bid submission. The tenderer shall not reveal his identity other than the tender title and the address mentioned below.

No Tender will be accepted after the submission date and the Royal Guard of Oman reserves the right to accept or reject any Tender without giving reasons.

Tender Committee
P.O Box 381, C.P.O, Postal Code 111

SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF HEALTH SERVICES AL DHAHIRA GOVERNORATE

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health - Directorate General of Health Service AL Dhahira Governorate of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
1274/2022	Provision of Loading and Unloading Services for Medical and Non-Medical Items for Various Healthy Facilities at Al Dhahira Governorate	Monday 27/Jun/2022	Before 9 am on Sunday 17/Jul/2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25/= Per set

Notes:-

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to the Tender Committee in the DGHS before one day of date submission.
- The DGHS is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om



Joe Biden leads Americas pledge on migration

LOS ANGELES: US President Joe Biden on Friday led a pledge by 20 nations in the Americas to work together on migration, seeking to step up action on a growing political priority at a summit beset by disputes.

The weeklong Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles wound down with promises by Biden to do more, and a joint declaration on migration that largely formalised existing arrangements rather than setting new policy.

The declaration called for “safety and dignity of all migrants” but also greater cooperation by law enforcement.

Biden — who has promised a more humane approach than his predecessor Donald Trump — announced a \$65 million effort to support documented seasonal work on US farms.

“But we need to halt the dangerous and unlawful ways people are migrating,” Biden said with regional leaders by his side.

“Unlawful migration is not acceptable and we will secure our borders including through innovative, coordinated actions with our regional partners.”

The effort was met by praise by



US President Joe Biden flanked by Colombia's President Ivan Duque (L), Chile's President Gabriel Boric, Paraguay's President Mario Abdo Benitez during a family photo during the 9th Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles. — AFP

the top diplomat of Mexico, the critical US partner on migration due to the 3,145-kilometre shared border, even though Mexico's president conspicuously boycotted the summit.

Foreign Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said the summit's results were “very positive,” including Biden's calls for economic cooperation and the “regional approach on migration.”

Extreme poverty, rising violence and natural disasters worsened by climate change have triggered a sharp rise in Central Americans and Haitians seeking to enter the US.

Biden announced a \$65 million effort to support documented seasonal work on US farms

Trump's Republican Party has seized on the issue ahead of congressional elections, denouncing migrants from developing countries and accusing Biden of failing to act effectively.

The State Department announced that the US would resettle 20,000 verified refugees from the Americas over the next two years — a threefold increase but a far cry from the 100,000 Ukrainian refugees that Biden, mostly with Republican support, has pledged to take in.

The United States also announced \$314 million in new funding to support some of the more than six million Venezuelans who have fled their country, whose economy has been in freefall.

Biden called the summit in the face of rising Chinese influence in a region that the US has long considered its home turf.

The summit was marked from

the start by discord, largely over Biden's refusal to invite the leftist leaders of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela on the grounds that they are authoritarians.

The row was why Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador refused to attend and several leaders directly challenged Biden.

The prime minister of tiny Belize also pointedly questioned if Biden would follow up on lofty promises, noting the \$40 billion package from the United States to support Ukraine in its war.

“We know that money is not the problem,” Prime Minister John Briceno told him on Thursday.

At a concluding news conference, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the summit — which also discussed cooperation on healthcare, climate change and job creation — addressed the “practical needs” of the hemisphere.

“It's hard to do that with governments that reject the basic principle that they're accountable to their people and repress their citizens' rights to speak up about the challenges they face,” Blinken said. — AFP

Australia agrees payout, ending France submarine spat

SYDNEY: Australia unveiled a substantial compensation deal with French submarine maker Naval Group on Saturday, ending a contract dispute that soured relations between Canberra and Paris for almost a year.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese (pictured) said the French firm had agreed to a “fair and an equitable settlement” of € 555 million for Australia ending a decade-old multi-billion-dollar submarine contract.

The agreement drew a line under a spat that caused leader-level recriminations and threatened to torpedo talks on an EU-Australia trade agreement. “It permits us to turn a page in our bilateral relations with Australia and look to the future,” said French Defence Minister Sebastien Lecornu.

Albanese said he would travel to France soon to “reset” a relationship beset by “pretty obvious” tensions.

The tussle began in September 2021, when Australia's then-prime minister Scott Morrison



abruptly ripped up a long-standing contact with the French state-backed Naval to build a dozen diesel-powered submarines.

He also stunned Paris by revealing secret talks to buy US or British nuclear-powered submarines, a major shift for a country with little domestic nuclear capability.

The decision drew fury from French President Emmanuel Macron, who publicly accused Morrison of lying and recalled his ambassador from Australia in protest. — AFP

Ukraine to get word on EU hopes soon

KYIV: Ukraine's bid to become a candidate to join the EU will get a clear signal this week, the bloc's chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Saturday on a surprise visit to Kyiv. Von der Leyen said talks she held with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky “will enable us to finalise our assessment by the end of this week.”

It was the first time the EU has publicly given timing on when the commission will deliver its opinion. The bloc's 27 member countries need to decide whether to allow Ukraine to start accession negotiations.

Shortly after Russia's February invasion, Zelensky started pushing for Ukraine's rapid admission into the European Union and has demanded an answer on its candidacy before the end of this month.

But officials and leaders in the bloc caution that, even with candidacy status, actual EU membership could take years or even decades.

Ukraine sees the prospect of joining the EU as a way of reducing its geopolitical vulnerability, which has been exposed by Russia's war inside its borders.

Von der Leyen, appearing



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen makes a statement following talks with Ukrainian President in Kyiv. — AFP



alongside Zelensky for a brief declaration to media, did not hold out any promises.

“You have done a lot in strengthening the rule of law, but there still need to be reforms implemented, to fight corruption for example or to modernise this well-functioning administration, to help attract investors,” she noted.

Instead she focused more on the future reconstruction of Ukraine, once the war has ended.

That, von der Leyen said, “should be a process that is

fully owned by Ukraine”, with the EU standing by to help and to contribute to a roadmap “to support Ukraine in pursuing its European path”.

There are expectations that Ukraine's EU candidacy status will be green lit at an EU leaders' summit taking place on June 23-24 -- though with stern conditions attached.

Several EU countries, including Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, are reluctant to give their nod and Germany has not set out its position.

Some have concerns with Ukraine's problem with corruption documented before the war, and the fact that other countries such as North Macedonia and Albania are already further along the EU candidacy path.

EU officials will pore over Ukraine's bid next week, with von der Leyen and her commissioners getting together on Friday to unveil their opinion ahead of the summit a week later.

Von der Leyen's trip to Kyiv was her second since the Russian invasion in late February. — AFP

ISTANBUL

Erdogan to run in 2023 presidential election

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he would run in next year's presidential vote and brushed aside rumours of a snap poll in the economically-battered nation. It was the first time that the strongman, who has been in power since 2003, officially announced his widely-expected candidacy. “Let me say it here. Tayyip Erdogan is the candidate of the People's Alliance”, Erdogan told a party rally in the western city of Izmir, referring to an alliance between his ruling conservative AKP party and



the right-wing MHP party. The opposition CHP party, the second largest in parliament, has not yet fielded a candidate and Erdogan tossed a challenge to its leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu. — AFP

SEOUL

N Korea appoints first female foreign minister

North Korea has appointed veteran diplomat Choe Son-hui as its first female foreign minister, state media reported, as Pyongyang pushes ahead with a blitz of sanctions-busting weapons tests and ignores US calls for talks. Choe, who formerly served as the North's vice foreign minister, was tapped to lead the foreign ministry at a ruling party meeting overseen by leader Kim Jong Un, the state media KCNA reported.

She replaces Ri Son Gwon, a



hardline former military official who previously led talks with the South. — AFP

ROME

5 bodies, missing copter located in Italian mountain

Rescue workers in Italy found a missing helicopter in the Apennine mountain range in the Emilia-Romagna region on Saturday, with five bodies of passengers located and two still unaccounted for. “We had coordinates and flew to the site - we found everything burnt,” an air force soldier said in a video tweeted by the military. The wreck on the Monte Cusna mountain was in a difficult-to-access area and rescue workers would have to get there on foot,



he said. The helicopter had seven people in total on board - the Italian pilot, along with four Turkish and two Lebanese nationals. — dpa

Nasa plans to join UFO research efforts



KENNETH CHANG

UFOs almost certainly are not alien visitors buzzing Earth’s skies, but Nasa is nonetheless financing

a study that will look at unexplained sightings with an open mind.

During a presentation last week to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, Thomas Zurbuchen, Nasa’s associate administrator for science, said the study would try to scientifically examine what the federal government calls unidentified aerial phenomena or UAPs.

The study, which is to cost less than \$100,000 and begin in the fall, “will focus on identifying available data, how to best collect future data and how Nasa can use these data to move the scientific understanding of UAPs forward”, Zurbuchen said during a telephone news conference.

Zurbuchen said that examining UFO reports could be “high-risk, high-impact kind of research”, possibly uncovering some entirely new scientific phenomenon — or possibly coming up with nothing new or interesting at all.

For years a military intelligence official, Luis Elizondo, ran a little-noticed group within the Pentagon called the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Programme. The Pentagon has said the programme was shut down in 2012, but backers of the programme said its work continued. In 2021, the Pentagon announced it would form a new task force to look at the issue, after a congressionally-mandated report found there was insufficient data for many incidents that had been observed.

At a House subcommittee hearing last month, Pentagon officials testified about military reports of unexplained phenomena, including a reflective spherical object speeding past a fighter jet. The officials said there was no evidence that these phenomena were extraterrestrial in nature.

Nasa’s effort will be independent of the Pentagon’s and will be led by David Spergel, an astrophysicist who is currently president of the Simons Foundation in New York, which finances fundamental research work in mathematics and the sciences. Nasa has not yet chosen the other scientists who will participate on the study.

The Nasa study will also consider other explanations like natural phenomena or unknown advanced technology developed by Russia, China or other countries. “Frankly, I think there’s new science to be discovered”, Zurbuchen said.

At the end of the nine-month study period, Zurbuchen did not expect definitive answers. But he said the effort would help catalog the available data and ask what other data should be gathered.

“It’s for a research programme that we can then implement”, he said. While many scientists might consider UFO research as “not actual science,” tackling controversial questions is important, Zurbuchen said.



Scott Bray, the Deputy Director of naval intelligence, appears at a House intelligence subcommittee hearing on unidentified aerial phenomena in Washington.

Nasa now has a robust programme in astrobiology — looking at life elsewhere in the solar system and galaxy — but does almost no work on the possibility of intelligent civilizations sharing our universe.

The vacuum reflects decades of congressional scepticism.

In 1978, Sen William Proxmire of Wisconsin bestowed one of his “Golden Fleece” awards on Nasa’s modest SETI programme, highlighting what he called a waste of taxpayer money. In 1992, Nasa started a radio astronomy programme to search for radio signals from alien civilisations, but Congress canceled that effort the following year.

Since then, systematic searches for alien civilisations have been mostly privately financed efforts like those conducted by the SETI Institute in California and by Breakthrough Listen. That initiative at Berkeley SETI Research Center is financed by Yuri Milner, a Russian-born billionaire technology

investor who lives in the United States.

During the news conference, Zurbuchen pointed to Nasa research that is trying to identify potential “technosignatures” — signs of a technological civilisation — in astronomical observations. Such signs could include air pollution in the atmospheres of distant planets.

“We’ve deliberately included that into our research portfolio”, Zurbuchen said.

However, Seth Shostak, an astronomer at the SETI Institute, said he doubted that Nasa would again spend millions of dollars on SETI, given the 1993 cancellation of its last programme.

“Nasa has stayed out of the SETI game ever since simply because it believes it doesn’t have room in its budget for a programme that was often viewed as a metal duck at a shooting gallery”, Shostak said in an email.

Nasa has a robust programme in astrobiology – looking at life elsewhere in the solar system and galaxy

Monkeypox can be airborne, too



APOORVA MANDAVILLI

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention updated

its guidance for travellers wishing to protect themselves against monkeypox. This was one of its recommendations: “Wear a mask. Wearing a mask can help protect you from many diseases, including monkeypox.”

Late last week, that recommendation was deleted.

“CDC removed the mask recommendation from the monkeypox travel health notice because it caused confusion”, the agency said in a statement.

However, the agency still says that in countries where monkeypox is spreading, “household contacts and healthcare workers” should consider wearing masks. That guideline also applies to “other people who may be in close contact with a person who has been confirmed with monkeypox.”

The turnabout hints at a little-discussed aspect of the current monkeypox outbreak: The virus can be airborne, at least over short distances. While airborne transmission is only a small factor in the overall spread, experts said in interviews, there are no firm estimates regarding how much it contributes.

Since May 13, when the first case in the outbreak was reported, more than 1,000 people in 31 countries have been diagnosed with the virus, and at least another thousand cases are being investigated. As of Tuesday, the United States had recorded 31 cases in 12 states and the District of Columbia.

In previous outbreaks, a majority of cases were reported in those who had close contact with an infected patient or animal. But in some instances, airborne transmission was the only explanation for the infections.

Elsewhere on its website, the CDC still urges monkeypox patients to wear a surgical mask, “especially those who have respiratory symptoms.” It also asks other household members to “consider wearing a surgical mask” when they are in the presence of the person with monkeypox.

Monkeypox is assumed to behave much like its viral cousin, smallpox. In a 2012 review of smallpox transmission, Dr Donald Milton, an expert on viruses at the University of Maryland, described several instances of airborne transmission.

It was the only plausible explanation during a 1947 outbreak of smallpox in New York, he wrote, when one patient apparently infected another seven floors away in a hospital. Then, in 1970, a single patient infected several others on three floors of a hospital in Meschede, Germany, aided by air currents in the building.

And scientists studying a 2017 outbreak of monkeypox in Nigeria observed cases of transmission within a prison and recorded infections in two health care workers who had no direct contact with patients.

At a scientific conference last week organised by the World Health Organization, several researchers discussed the many unknowns about monkeypox, including its primary mode of transmission.

“It’s very ambiguous what the true or dominant route of transmission is, and some of that can be



While airborne transmission is only a small factor in the overall spread, experts say, there are no firm estimates regarding how much it contributes

addressed in animal models”, Nancy Sullivan, a researcher at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said at the conference. “Probably that needs to take a front seat for some of the laboratory research.”

But in briefings with the press and with the general public, health officials have not explicitly addressed the possibility of airborne transmission or the use of masks for protection.

And in interviews, they emphasised the role of large respiratory droplets that are expelled from infected patients and drift onto objects or people. Monkeypox infection requires “really close sustained contact”, said Andrea McCollum, the CDC’s leading expert on the virus.

“This is not a virus that was transmitted over several metres”, she said. “That’s why we have to be really careful how to frame this.”

When asked whether health officials should make the possibility of airborne transmission more widely known, McCollum said. “It’s a fair point to make, and it’s something we certainly should consider moving forward.”

The CDC’s swift about-face on masks for travellers concerned about monkeypox was reminiscent of its early denials that the coronavirus was airborne. In September 2020, the agency published guidance on airborne transmission of the virus and then abruptly withdrew it just days later.

It was not until May 2021 that the agency acknowledged that the coronavirus could “remain suspended in the air for minutes to hours.”

How to say ‘no’ and mean it



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

WHAT better time than June to review one’s New Year’s resolution. It’s the middle of the year and very warm outside and people are either talking about the holiday they’ve been to or the one they are planning.

One of my New Year resolutions is to say “No” when I don’t and can’t say “Yes”. No to people asking for favours or a consultation while I am away on leave. No to students making their deadline and putting pressure on me to review their research presentation the night before their exam.

A junior employee once told me that he is sick and tired of doing jobs for his seniors while they sit

and sip coffee and chat. When I suggested he file a complaint, smiled and said he fears retaliation when it’s time for his appraisal.

This story is not uncommon as more young people try to keep their jobs and impress their supervisors regardless of what it could that cost them in terms of time outside working hours that could be spent socialising with others or enjoying a hobby.

When I suggested that employee complain he replied “it’s not worth getting into trouble, let me spend my allocated time in that team and move on.” But little he knows that such an attitude would follow him in other teams.

Saying “No” is not only difficult

AS HUMAN BEINGS, MOST OF US TEND TO BE NICE TO EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE ARE NICE BY NATURE OR BECAUSE WE ARE SEEKING OTHERS APPROVAL. THAT IS WHY WE TEND TO DO THINGS FOR OTHERS EVEN IF IT TAKES US EXTRA EFFORTS

at the workplace, we often find ourselves in similar situations in our social life as well, not just from friends or workmates but from our own family members, people whom we rely on for support and sometimes approval. Most of the time we are not aware of our

tendency to please them or feel it’s our duty to do so, and once you decide to say no they accuse you of being selfish or a snob, or any other form of emotional bullying.

According to a psychologist, saying “No” is all about setting your boundaries. People react to you based on the responses that you give them. When somebody answers your questions, you can gauge their interest in doing something, likes, dislikes, or general attitude.

Contrary to popular belief, most people don’t get subtle hints or gestures especially when communicating through texting or e-mailing where many passive responses and answers are taken literally, compared to face-to-face

communication where the other person can sense your reluctance to do what they are asking. Therefore it’s important to stay clear and firm.

Sometimes, you’d like to say “Yes” but the timing is not suitable for you. In that case you may wish to offer an alternative that you’re comfortable with. We often say “Yes” because we are conditioned that saying “No” makes us selfish which is not true when in fact the other person who is asking us to work late or during our holidays is the one being selfish. Remember it’s not selfish to look after your own values and well-being. Finally, learning to say “No” is not easy so give yourself time to learn how to say it and smart practice.

Probe skewers Trump but faces battle to sway voters

FRANKIE TAGGART

Americans were served up an engrossing night of television as a congressional panel laid out damning evidence of Donald Trump’s culpability in last year’s US Capitol insurrection.

Yet 17 months after the mayhem, the biggest challenge for the House of Representatives committee investigating the riot could be ensuring the brutal images of violence it played in prime time will pack the intended political punch.

Thursday’s presentation was devastating for Trump, who has been characterised as an ongoing threat to US democracy -- bidding to carry a campaign to steal the last election into the next.

“It’s important the American people understand what truly happened, and to understand that the same forces that led to January 6 remain at work today,” President Joe Biden said as he was discussing the hearing — a reference in part, at least, to Trump’s transgressions.

The committee’s footage of hand-to-hand combat between police and the mob Trump sent to the Capitol to stop the 2020 vote being certified in Biden’s favour, made for gut-wrenching viewing.

Capitol Police officer Caroline Edwards was shown being knocked unconscious and gave evidence in person about “slipping in people’s blood” as the assault turned to “carnage.”

The hearing concluded with video of several members of the mob saying they marched on the Capitol simply because Trump had asked them to.

Liz Cheney -- a rising Republican star until she refused to accept Trump’s false claims of a stolen election -- carefully filleted every aspect of the former president’s so-called “Big Lie.”

She repeatedly referred to the “illegality” of his “sophisticated seven-point plan” to overturn the election.

Testimony from Trump’s closest allies — including his attorney general Bill Barr and daughter Ivanka -- underscored that he had been made aware again and again how dangerous his conspiracy theories were.

The night got progressively worse for Trump, who didn’t lift a finger for hours to help quell the insurrection, according to the committee. And there were gasps in the room when Cheney quoted a witness claiming that Trump had said vice-president Mike Pence deserved to be hanged by the mob storming the Capitol. — AFP

Shortage of artillery ammo saps Ukrainian frontline morale

THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF,
ANDREW E KRAMER
AND NATALIA YERMAK

Nearly four months after Russia attacked, the Ukrainian military is running low on ammunition for its Soviet-era artillery and has not received enough supplies from its allies to keep the Russians at bay, Ukrainian officials and artillery officers in the field say.

The shortage has put Ukrainian troops at a growing disadvantage in the artillery-driven war of attrition in the country’s east, with Russia’s batteries now firing several times as many rounds as Ukraine’s. Although the West is sending in weapons, they are not arriving fast enough or in sufficient numbers to make up for Ukraine’s dwindling arsenal.

The Western weapons — heavy, long-range artillery pieces and multiple-launch rocket systems — are more accurate and highly mobile, but it takes time to deploy them and train soldiers to use them. In the meantime, Ukraine is running out of ammunition for the older weapons.

On the front lines in Donbas, Ukrainian soldiers are being forced to conserve shells and are often unable to return fire one for one.

At one Ukrainian artillery position, several Russian shells had just sailed overhead, landing in a field with methodic thuds, when the gun’s crew was told to get ready to fire. Their drones had spotted a group of Russian howitzers a few miles away.

The soldiers scrambled, pulling branches from their 122 mm self-propelled gun camouflaged on the edge of a wooded area. The barrel angled skyward before firing only two shots, sending dirt and leaves into the air.

A few weeks ago, the gun would have been firing constantly, its crew said. Now, instead of blanketing Russian positions with ordnance, they can engage only specific targets, such as the Russian howitzers.

“We’re running out of shells,” said Oleg, one of the soldiers in the crew, clad in dirty trousers and skateboard sneakers. “They are not supplied fast enough since we fire too often.”



A Ukrainian tank firing at Russian positions in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

Mariana Bezugla, a member of Ukraine’s parliament who is the deputy head of the National Security, Defence and Intelligence Committee, said similar shortages of ammunition for Soviet-era weapons were occurring throughout the eastern theatre, where Ukrainian forces have been battling to

its new Nato artillery pieces, it still does not have enough of those weapons to replace the older equipment. “We have munitions of the new type, but we still lack guns” to fire them, she said.

Pentagon officials say they have exhausted all efforts to scrounge up available Soviet and Russian weaponry and munitions for Ukrainian troops to use, after months of horse-trading with allies who were still using the old systems. A senior American military official acknowledged that the well had run dry and said that Ukraine would probably need to depend on Western munitions systems to defend against Russia in the East.

But that means speeding up training of Ukrainian troops on the new systems, the official said, which can take some time. Pentagon officials have sharply condensed the time for Ukrainian troops to train, compared with what American troops spend before being declared proficient on some of the weapons systems.

On Friday, Ukraine’s deputy head of military intelligence, Vadym Skibitsky, told The Guardian newspaper that Ukraine was losing the artillery battle with Russia on the front lines because of the shortage of artillery shells for its older guns. He said Ukraine was firing 5,000 to 6,000 artillery rounds a day and had “almost used up all of our ammunition.” — *New York Times*

ALTHOUGH UKRAINE HAS RECEIVED PLENTY OF AMMUNITION FOR ITS NEW NATO ARTILLERY PIECES, IT STILL DOES NOT HAVE ENOUGH OF THOSE WEAPONS TO REPLACE THE OLDER EQUIPMENT

hold the resource-rich Donbas, which comprises the Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

“They have a lot of resources, a lot of ammunition,” Bezugla said of the Russians. “It is not comparable with ours.”

Bezugla said that although Ukraine has received plenty of ammunition for

A crowning glory: Elizabeth II sets the standard



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Great Britain's Queen Elizabeth II has celebrated an astonishing 70 years as the nation's ruling monarch during recent days, demonstrating an incomparable class, composure, and resilience, befitting her extended reign. It is, in fact, forgotten by many, that the young Elizabeth had barely settled into her reign when Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya,

all renounced her sovereignty in the early 1960s, which foreshadowed the demise of the British Commonwealth, however, as wits such as Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) proclaimed, "such sentiments have thus far proven exaggerated and premature."

Why do you think she has achieved this pinnacle of dignity and elegance when other global leaders have commonly faced reversals of fortune culminating in the ignominy of a reign cut short, often in dramatic circumstances? Most notably, and briefly in the matter of Michael II, Emperor of Russia, who ruled for only one day in 1917, the victim of an unclear accession. Others to have fallen by the wayside since the turn of the 19th Century include Prince William of Albania who fled his home at the outbreak of World War I, fearing himself the next target for assassination in 1914.

Emperor Hongxian of China was crowned Emperor on January 1, 1916, however his empirical role was abolished less than three months later with the restoration of the monarchy

and the formation of the Republic of China. What's in a name huh? Two years later King Frederick Charles of Finland was crowned 'in absentia,' but renounced the throne a mere 66 days later without having even entering his home country. How bad was that? King Mindaugas of Lithuania accepted the crown, but was, after 3 months, uncrowned when it became a republic of the USSR.

The 'twenties' saw chaos in the Middle East, heralded as King Faisal of Syria was forced into exile in Iraq. However, that

was tame by comparison to Afghanistan, which saw Habibullah Kalakani crowned as the Emir in 1929. He was in turn challenged by Ali Ahmed Khan, who was crowned and beheaded within 15 days, only to himself be dethroned by King Amanullah Khan, who was then replaced by his brother Inayatullah Khan, only to have Kalyani return, only to be ousted again by Kalikani during the same year.

These musical chairs saw Inayatullah return to the throne and execute Kalakani, thus, he thought, ending the game. King Fuad of Egypt lasted 11 months of 1952, before the monarchy was abolished bringing a temporary halt to Middle Eastern instability.

The British sovereignty was postmarked by Edward VIII's abdication during December 1936, while King Umberto of Italy reigned for only two weeks until his monarchy was given a short shrift. King Mohammed Al Badr of Yemen, Sultan Jamshid Abdullah of Zanzibar, and King Ntare V of Burundi, all were dethroned by monarchists, while King Dipendra of Nepal shot himself after only 3 days. To be fair, he had shot his father dead to get the throne, so he wasn't going to last long anyway. King Saad Abdullah Al Sabah of Kuwait though was ignominiously removed from the throne due to 'ill-health.

Finally in this century of mayhem, Pope John Paul I, although not really on a throne, died after a month as the spiritual icon of the Catholic church.

Elizabeth's monarchy has been defined by her deliberation, and Solomon-like wisdom, and by the love of her people, almost certainly assisted by the fact that her reign is not of governance, and therefore sets itself apart from the minutiae of politics.



WEDDING BELLS

A groom takes part in a procession during a traditional wedding in Banda Aceh on Saturday. – AFP

The virus is still winning



William A. Haseltine

The author is a scientist, biotech entrepreneur, and infectious disease expert

Once again, Covid-19 is rampaging unchecked through the US population, because there are no longer any public-health measures in place to protect adequately against infection.

Given that infection by SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes Covid-19, has now become almost inevitable for most people, the least we could do is develop drug treatments to alleviate disease symptoms and prevent death and long-term consequences. But we have not done so. Pharmaceutical companies designed and manufactured Covid-19 vaccines on an unprecedentedly accelerated timeline, but drug development has not proceeded apace.

There are three main treatment options for those who develop Covid-19 and are at risk for long-term effects and disability. All three have limitations that prevent wider use. The first is remdesivir, which requires an IV-administered infusion and is thus available only in clinical settings. The second is Evusheld, which its developer, AstraZeneca, claims is effective at preventing infection from the latest Omicron subvariants. However, in my case at least, the treatment failed to work as it should.

The third is Paxlovid, an antiviral drug developed by Pfizer that targets the SARS-CoV-2 protease. Paxlovid gained popularity as a Covid-19 treatment when studies showed that it reduced the risk of serious illness and death by up to 90 per cent. But research into its prophylactic potential has turned up empty, and new evidence suggests that some who take it experience rebound infections, meaning they might unwittingly transmit the virus to others.

What is to be done? Since the start of the pandemic, I have argued that vaccination alone will not be sufficient to prevent repeated Covid-19 infections. The literature on cold-causing coronaviruses demonstrates that they can reappear like clockwork. And with SARS-CoV-2, waves of infection occur not annually, as I would have expected based on previous data, but rather at much shorter intervals — every four to six months.

In addition to recognising the limitations of vaccination as a form of

pandemic control, we are becoming more aware of the seriousness of "long Covid," which describes a broad range of symptoms — respiratory, gastrointestinal, neurological — that persist after an initial Covid-19 infection has cleared.

While more than one-third of Covid-19 patients will develop long-term symptoms of some kind, 2-4 per cent will experience consequences severe enough to be disabling for many months, if not years. These include intense fatigue, persistent pain, and damage to vital

UNLESS WE FIND POWERFUL WAYS TO ELIMINATE THE SARS-COV-2 VIRUS, IT WILL REMAIN A SCOURGE. SOME STRAINS ARE ONLY A MUTATION OR TWO AWAY FROM A LEAP IN LETHALITY. TO PREVENT THAT, WE MUST LEARN FROM PANDEMICS PAST

organs, such as the heart, lungs, pancreas, and possibly others. Millions of people around the world have long Covid, and millions more will end up with it. Recent data suggest that the vaccines reduce its impact by a mere 15 per cent.

While our path out of the pandemic is not as straightforward as when I was working as an HIV researcher, the overarching direction of travel is still clear. We must develop strong antiviral drugs targeted at SARS-CoV-2 specifically. Though only six drugs targeting HIV have been identified, we have several treatments that are effective at clearing the virus.

Given the technological advances made in the last 30-35 years, and the speed with which these advances led to a Covid-19 vaccine, I had expected that we would have numerous antivirals

for Covid-19 by now. And yet, of the treatments that have been approved, all are retreads or drugs developed for other viruses, not SARS-CoV-2.

What we need now is to repeat the approach that worked during the HIV/AIDS epidemic. That effort involved a multiyear drug-development programme to guide government- and industry-sponsored research. As a member of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Council, I proposed an intensive, cooperative programme whereby universities with industrial partners would receive large grants to fund basic research and practical drug development. The potential for a payoff attracted the interest of large pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies and spurred the formation of several public-private partnerships.

The programme was a resounding success, but it didn't come cheap. Each year, the National Institutes of Health set aside \$2-3 billion in a special HIV/AIDS research budget. The same level of investment is needed again. My colleagues around the world who have the skills required for intensive Covid-19 research are desperate for additional funding.

To its credit, the NIH recently awarded \$108 million in grants to the Metropolitan AntiViral Drug Accelerator, a collaborative initiative by world-class research institutions in New Jersey and New York that will investigate the potential for small-molecule drugs to treat and prevent coronaviruses. Combinations of small-molecule antiviral drugs have proved effective at preventing and treating HIV, and can be manufactured and sold cost-effectively. A year's treatment with HIV drugs now costs well under \$100 in many places around the world. A protocol to prevent and treat Covid-19, lasting two to three weeks at most, should cost far less.

Unless we find powerful ways to eliminate the SARS-CoV-2 virus, it will remain a scourge. Some strains are only a mutation or two away from a leap in lethality. To prevent that, we must learn from pandemics past.

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Ecuador still in World Cup as Fifa rejects Chile complaint

SANTIAGO: Ecuador kept their place in the Qatar World Cup after football governing body Fifa on Friday closed an inquiry sought by non-qualifying Chile into the eligibility of a key player.

The Fifa disciplinary committee said in a statement it had decided to “close the proceedings” against the Ecuador Football Federation (FEF) after Chile disputed the nationality of full-back Byron Castillo.

If Chile had been successful, they would have leapfrogged Ecuador into direct World Cup qualification. The Chilean football federation (FFCh) said it would appeal the decision all the way to the Court of Arbitration for Sport if need be.

“The eloquent and substantiated evidence we showed was not enough. Surprisingly the ruling was not in our favour”, FFCh President Pablo Milad told reporters in Santiago.

“We are 1-0 down, but there is still the second half.”

The FFCh last month lodged a complaint with Fifa against

Ecuador over what it claimed was the “use of a fake birth certificate, false declaration of age and false nationality” in the case of Castillo.

It claims to have evidence that the player is actually Colombian.

Under Fifa rules, a player cannot represent a country of which they do not hold nationality.

Castillo, 23, played in both Ecuador’s World Cup qualifying matches against Chile: A 2-0 victory in Quito in September 2021 and a 0-0 draw in November.

Chile finished seventh in the single South American World Cup qualification table, seven points behind Ecuador in the fourth and final automatic berth for Qatar.

FEF President Francisco Egas said Chile’s allegations had “hurt us a lot” and did not rule out legal action.

“This is a subject to be analysed by our lawyers”, he told reporters.

Ecuador are in Group A with Qatar, the Netherlands and Senegal at the World Cup finals later this year. — AFP



Kylian Mbappe salvages draw for France in Austria

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe came off the bench to score a late equaliser as France settled for a 1-1 draw with Austria in their Nations League encounter in Vienna on Friday. Mbappe appeared as a second-half replacement for Antoine Griezmann at the Ernst-Happel Stadium and burst through in characteristic fashion to smash in the 83rd-minute leveller, cancelling out Andreas Weimann’s opener.

The result leaves France, who won last year’s edition of the Nations League, still without a win three games into the new campaign.

They are bottom of League A, Group 1 with two points after

losing 2-1 at home to Denmark last weekend and then drawing 1-1 in Croatia on Monday.

The Danes remain top of the group despite losing 1-0 at home to Croatia in Copenhagen on Friday, with Mario Pasalic scoring the only goal of the game midway through the second half.

France will play their final match of the June international break at home to Croatia on Monday before the group campaign concludes in September.

“There is never any need to worry. We should always be proud and just try to improve”, Mbappe told broadcaster TF1 before admitting that he had still not fully recovered from the injury that

forced him off against Denmark.

“No but if the coach needs me I will be there. There is just one game left before the holidays so I can force it a little bit”

The match in Vienna went ahead despite concern about a huge hole that opened up on the same pitch during Austria’s 2-1 loss to Denmark on Monday.

Playing their third game under new coach Ralf Rangnick, Austria took the lead eight minutes before half-time when Konrad Laimer’s low ball in from the right was converted by the Bristol City forward Weimann.

France coach Didier Deschamps sent on Mbappe for Griezmann in the 63rd minute and RB Leipzig’s

Christopher Nkunku came on for Kingsley Coman 11 minutes from time as they stepped up their search for the leveller. Mbappe had not played against Croatia after coming off with a knee knock at half-time against Denmark, and he was fresh enough to make the difference for the visitors.

A quick exchange of passes with Nkunku led to the Paris Saint-Germain star breaking through to fire past goalkeeper Patrick Pentz and score his 10th goal for his country this season.

Mbappe could then have won the game three minutes from the end, but this time his shot from close range was turned onto the crossbar by the goalkeeper. — AFP



Shihab delivers FIVB coaching course in Kuwait

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

Oman’s Dr Shihab bin Aldin bin Ahmed al Riyami delivered FIVB Coaches course level 1 which was held in Kuwait since June 5 and concluded on Thursday.

As many as 29 participants took part at the international course including those from Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. The course took place at the Leaders Training Centre in Saad Sobah Sports Complex in Kuwait.

Dr Shihab, FIVB International volleyball coach instructor for nine years, said that the coaching course level 1 featured different parts of fundamental and core subjects in volleyball. “Thanks

for FIVB especially Technical and Development committee and Kuwait Volleyball Federation for this opportunity to deliver this international course.

QUALIFIED COACHES

Kuwait Volleyball Federation is looking to increase the number of National qualified coaches & building up coaches knowledge through FIVB Coaches Courses and FIVB Development programme.

“This course contributed a lot of updating knowledge for coaches and improving their coaching skills. Definitely this kind of courses will help in improving coaches’ understanding of the sport while building on the fundamentals of volleyball in Gulf countries and Asian countries as

well”, he added

Course Director Dr Shihab delivered a theoretical and practical sessions during the four days of the course.

“This course included different practical sessions which presented many modern training methods of skills fundamental and core subjects in volleyball, coaching skills, physical conditioning, the advanced tactical plan of volleyball and updates on training information. Moreover, course lessons highlighted on the updating knowledge and theory of training principles which upgrade coaches knowledge in coaching field. A special thanks for FIVB especially Technical and Development committee & Kuwait Federation in conducting

Coaches Course physically and virtually,” he ended

Bader Al Koos, Chairman of Technical and development committee at Kuwait Volleyball Federation and Member of AVC Coaches Committee, said. “Thanks to FIVB Development department for great cooperation in conducting coaches course and highly appreciated to FIVB efforts in developing coaches knowledge via Development department program,” he said.

“Special thanks to Dr Shihab, course director, who has great experience in training and coaching field to be in Kuwait again since 2008. I hope all participants received the required knowledge and learned a lot from this course,”





Tchouameni joins Madrid on a six-year deal

MADRID: France midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni has joined Real Madrid from Monaco, both clubs announced on Saturday.

According to sources the 22-year-old has cost the Champions League and La Liga holders more than 80 million euros (\$84 million) as well as an additional 20 million euros in bonuses.

The former Bordeaux playmaker has won 10 caps since making his Les Bleus debut in September.

"Real Madrid and Monaco have agreed on the transfer of

the player Aurelien Tchouameni, who will be linked to the club for the next six seasons," they said.

"Next Tuesday, June 14, at 12:00 at Real Madrid City, the presentation ceremony for Aurelien Tchouameni as a new Real Madrid player will take place after the corresponding medical examination," they added.

Madrid have also signed Chelsea centre-back Antonio Ruediger ahead of the new season but missed out on Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe last month as he decided to stay in the French capital. — AFP



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam (2nd R) shakes hands with West Indies' player Anderson Phillip (R) after their victory on the second one-day international (ODI) cricket match between Pakistan and West Indies at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan. — AFP

Azam, Haq, Nawaz star in Pakistan's 10th series win over West Indies

MULTAN, PAKISTAN: Skipper Babar Azam and opener Imam-ul-Haq hit steady half centuries before spinner Mohammad Nawaz recorded his best figures as Pakistan beat the West Indies by 120 runs in the second day-night international in Multan on Friday.

Azam scored a 93-ball 77 and Haq a run-a-ball 72 -- both hitting their sixth consecutive half-centuries in successive one-day internationals -- as Pakistan made 275-8 in their 50 overs.

Left-arm spinner Nawaz then achieved career best bowling figures of 4-19 as the visitors were shot out for 155 in 32.2 overs.

The win gives Pakistan an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series and their 10th consecutive ODI series win over the West Indies.

Pakistan's last ODI series defeat to the West Indies was back in 1991. The two wins give

Pakistan 20 valuable points in the ODI Super League, a qualification round for 2023 World Cup in India.

Chasing 276, West Indies lost first-match century maker Shai Hope for just four in the first over to Shaheen Shah Afridi but Shamarh Brooks (42) and Kyle Mayers (33) added a brisk 67 for the second wicket.

Once Mayers, who hit four fours and two sixes off 25 balls, was bowled by pacer Mohammad Wasim, the innings fell away.

Nawaz dismissed Brandon King (nought), Brooks, Rovman Powell (10) and Nicholas Pooran (25) as West Indies lost five wickets for just 48 runs, including four off just 18.

Brooks hit four boundaries and a six as he faced 56 balls.

Nawaz's previous best figures of 4-42 were against the same opponents in Sharjah six years ago. — AFP

Ronaldo to miss Portugal Nations League trip to Switzerland

LISBON: Cristiano Ronaldo, Joao Moutinho and Raphael Guerreiro will all miss Portugal's Nations League match against Switzerland this weekend, coach Fernando Santos announced on Saturday.

The trio have been excused the journey to Geneva on "management" grounds rather than injury.

"It's not about physical problems, it's a question of management," said Santos during a press conference in Lisbon.

"It wouldn't make sense to travel to Switzerland with 26 players, when we can only have 23 on the bench," he added without further details.

Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon d'Or winner, did not take part in the final training session before the squad took off for Geneva.

Portugal face Switzerland on Sunday to stay top of Group 2 in League A of the Nations League.

After a 1-1 draw in Seville with Spain and two wins in Lisbon over Switzerland, in which Ronaldo scored twice, and the Czech Republic, Portugal have seven points, two ahead of the Spanish. —AFP



New Zealand take command against England in second Test

NOTTINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM: Daryl Mitchell led the New Zealand charge as the tourists powered to 318-4 against England by close of play on the first day of the second Test on Friday.

Mitchell's aggressive 81 not out and an unbeaten 67 from Tom Blundell made England captain Ben Stokes pay for his decision to bowl first on a flat pitch at Trent Bridge.

England's wounds were mostly self-inflicted, with three dropped catches as the bowling and fielding flaws that plagued them in recent months returned with a vengeance.

World Test champions New Zealand, who lost a gripping first Test at Lord's, were without Covid-hit Kane Williamson after the skipper was ruled out on Thursday evening.

Despite Williamson's absence, the Kiwis punished some wayward England bowling, with Mitchell and Blundell amassing an undefeated 149-run partnership after Tom Latham and Will Young put on 84 for the first wicket.

Stokes dismissed Young for 47 and, the very next ball, stand-in skipper Latham fell to James Anderson for 26.

But New Zealand stayed positive, continuing to find the boundaries regularly as Devon Conway (46) and Tom Nicholls (30) kept the visitors on top.

Nicholls eventually edged Stokes to wicketkeeper Ben Foakes, who also took the catch when Conway nicked one behind



soon afterwards off Anderson.

Latham admitted he would also have bowled first given the chance, but said he might be reconsidering that verdict after his team seized control in emphatic fashion.

"We certainly would have taken that. We were quite keen to bowl first as well this morning but, after losing the toss, we thought putting on 300 in a day on a wicket like that is actually a very good effort," Conway said.

"The pitch played a lot better than it looked. There was a little bit of swing for the bowlers at times but it was a pretty true, good surface."

Mitchell hit nine fours and two sixes in his unbeaten 81.

He went on the attack against

spinner Jack Leach after tea, reverse-sweeping a four, then launching a towering six that splash-landed in a fan's pint of beer in the stands.

The soaked woman's predicament drew a comical reaction from England's Matthew Potts, who was seen trying to act out the incident for the benefit of his team-mates moments later.

Potts did not find it so funny when he was on the receiving end of some punishment from Mitchell and Blundell, who both hammered fours off the seamer in one over.

MITCHELL SPARKLES

Mitchell had just three runs when he was dropped by Joe Root off

Stokes. He took full advantage, following the century he bagged at Lord's with another crucial innings. New Zealand were scoring at nearly four runs an over, a rapid rate that served to underline England's frustration at the injuries to quicks Jofra Archer and Mark Wood.

Stuart Broad tried a barrage of short balls to Mitchell but the batsman fought fire with fire and hooked for six to complete the hundred partnership.

Root's brilliant century inspired England's first Test win, but he was doing more damage to his own side's cause this time and he dropped another catch, this one a tricky chance when Blundell edged Leach on 47. — AFP

McILROY CHARGES BUT CLARK CLINGS TO CANADIAN OPEN LEAD

TORONTO, Canada: Rory McIlroy charged into contention but American Wyndham Clark fired a level par 70 to maintain a one-stroke lead after Friday's second round of the US PGA Tour's Canadian Open.

World number 293 Clark, who led by one stroke after day one, made bogeys on two of the last four holes to stand on seven-under 133 after 36 holes at St George's Golf and Country Club in suburban Toronto.

"Overall I played really good. I felt really confident with my game," Clark said. "I had some little mishaps coming in, but other than that I played some great golf for 36 holes. If I do that again, I'll have a great chance come Sunday."

Northern Ireland's eighth-ranked McIlroy -- the 2019 winner and defending champion after Covid-19 caused a two-year hiatus -- birdied two of the last four holes to shoot 68 and share second on 134 with England's Matthew Fitzpatrick and Americans Keith Mitchell, Jim Knous and Alex Smalley.

Four-time major winner McIlroy sank an eight-foot birdie putt at the par-5 15th and rolled in a 23-foot birdie putt at 17 before parring the last with a clutch four-foot putt.

"Overall it was a good score," McIlroy said. "I scrambled well when I needed to. I didn't really



take advantage of how well I hit it off the tee. But overall I felt a couple under was a fair reflection of how the day went."

Fitzpatrick, ranked 17th, led by two but made double bogey at the

14th and bogeys on the last three holes.

"Just didn't hole the putts I needed to on the last three," Fitzpatrick said. "Just pathetic. Yeah, just pathetic finish really

with the putter.

"Disappointing finish, but definitely not out of it."

The seven-time DP World Tour winner seeks her first PGA victory after sharing fifth at last month's PGA Championship for his best major finish.

Clark, 28, chases his first US PGA victory as well, his best finish a runner-up effort at the 2020 Bermuda Championship.

Clark hit only eight greens in regulation, but backed his "great" short game and putting.

'PRETTY AWESOME' FINISH

Fitzpatrick reeled off three birdies in a row thanks to five-foot putts at the par-5 ninth and par-5 11th sandwiched around a 15-footer at the par-4 10th, reaching 10-under par.

But Fitzpatrick needed four shots to reach the fringe at the par-4 14th on the way to a double bogey, then followed an 11-foot birdie putt at the par-5 15th with three bogeys.

His troubles left the lead to Clark, who made birdie putts from just inside five feet at the par-3 eighth and 11, but missed the green at 12 and made his first bogey of the week.

Clark knocked in a nine-footer from the fringe to birdie the par-4 14th, but then fell back with back-to-back bogeys, sinking a nine-foot bogey putt at 15 but missing a par putt half as long at the par-3 16th.

At 18, Clark had a "semi-plugged" bunker lie but popped out to four feet and saved par to keep the lead.

"I would love to say I was trying to do what I did," Clark said. "It was definitely the best save I've had of the year. It was pretty awesome." — AFP



Berrettini fights through to Stuttgart final

STUTTGART, Germany: Matteo Berrettini reached his fourth career final on grass on Saturday as he overcame German Oscar Otte 7-6 (9/7), 7-6(7/5) at the ATP Stuttgart tournament.

The Italian, runner up at Wimbledon last year and competing for the first time since March after undergoing hand surgery, will be seeking his first title since winning Queen's in London last June.

Berrettini will play for the trophy on Sunday against the winner from Andy Murray and Nick Kyrgios, who meet later

on Saturday.

The world number 10 improved to 27-6 on grass and maintained a perfect 8-0 record in Stuttgart after winning the 2019 edition at the Weissenhof Club.

Berrettini and Otte duelled for nearly an hour in the first set before the second seed broke the deadlock by winning a tiebreaker.

The second set was much the same, with world number 61 Otte saving two match points before going down in just over an hour and three quarters in another decider. — AFP

Perez has Verstappen's measure in Baku final practice

BAKU: Sergio Perez outshone his world champion team-mate Max Verstappen again in third and final practice for the Azerbaijan Grand Prix on Saturday.

The Mexican, nominally the number two in the Red Bull garage, is enjoying a golden moment in his career and coaxed his car around this complex street circuit to top the timesheets ahead of qualifying for Sunday's race.

Winner here in 2021 and in Monaco last time out Perez clocked a fastest lap of 1min 43.170, with Charles Leclerc's Ferrari 0.070s adrift.

Verstappen complained volubly over the team radio after being held up by traffic on his last throw of the third practice dice.

"It's unbelievable man, there are cars everywhere," he grumbled as he finished 0.279s away with the other Ferrari of Carlos Sainz (0.426) and Lando Norris's McLaren (1.248) completing the top five.



Mechanics work on the car of Red Bull's Mexican driver Sergio Perez during the third practice session ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on Saturday. — AFP

In an encouraging upturn in fortune Daniel Ricciardo, the 2017 winner in Azerbaijan, had the second McLaren in sixth ahead of Pierre Gasly, enjoying himself in the Alpha Tauri at the track he took a podium place last year.

On another trying day for struggling Mercedes, George Russell managed eighth but seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton was only 12th.

Verstappen leads Leclerc by nine points in the drivers' title race ahead of this eighth round of the season, with Perez only a further six points behind. — AFP





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He also stressed that, given the rapidly changing developments in the green energy space globally, Oman's energy transition policy will also be "agile" enough to adapt to these changes. "The policies will be there, but it's more of setting the right direction for the country," he stated. The ministry is also collaborating with the government, including the ministries of Housing and Urban Planning, Environment Authority, Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) and Oman Investment Authority, "to come up with the right formula on how we move forward with hydrogen projects," he added.

Toyota Gazoo Racing shines at Rally de Portugal



MUSCAT: The Gazoo Racing (GR) World Rally Team (WRT) recently celebrated a fantastic one-two finish for the GR Yaris Rally 1 vehicle on its gravel debut at the Rally de Portugal, the round four of the 2022 FIA World Rally Championship (WRC). Kalle Rovannerä scored his third win in a row just ahead of team-mate Elfyn Evans, with Toyota extending its lead for the Manufacturers’ Championship by 59 points.

In the first test of the new generation of hybrid electric-powered vehicles on gravel roads, the GR Yaris Rally 1 was the vehicle to beat, winning 15 of the 19 stages across the rally. The first day proved thrilling with an intense battle between Evans in the No 33 Toyota GR Yaris Rally 1 and Rovannerä who doubled up as championship leader for the first time in his career in the No 69 Toyota GR Yaris Rally 1.

The pair were in a league of their own through the second

day, and the lead moved into Rovannerä’s hands in difficult mixed weather conditions during the afternoon.

But Rovannerä and co-driver Jonne Halttunen went on to win the penultimate stage as well as the rally-ending Power Stage, ensuring another maximum points haul to increase their championship lead to 46 points after wins in three of the first four events.

Evans and co-driver Scott Martin finished 15.2 seconds away from the victory as they returned to the podium for the first time this season.

Akio Toyoda, President, and CEO of Toyota Motor Corporation, commented: “Kalle, Jonne, congratulations! It is amazing to achieve three consecutive victories, especially as it was done on snow, asphalt, and gravel rallies. I truly thank them for proving that the GR Yaris Rally 1 is the vehicle that can win on any type of road.”

Bank Muscat extends special offer on Sayyarati auto financing

MUSCAT: Taking into consideration excellent customer feedback and the high demand for its Sayyarati auto financing, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced an extension of its special offer, which features attractive interest rates starting at just 3.5 per cent for the purchase of new and pre-owned cars.

The bank has announced that customers can take advantage of the special rates till August 31, 2022. The extension of the offer is in line with the bank’s customer-centric strategy and commitment to continuously develop new services that meet current and future customer needs.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said: “We are delighted with the wonderful customer response to Sayyarati auto finance and its various benefits and features.

“As part of our strategy to partner with various auto dealerships and improve road safety by making ownership of some of the best and safest vehicles in the world easy, the special Sayyarati offer has been extended



This will ensure that the maximum number of customers can benefit from the most competitive rates in the market, and are able to buy the vehicle of their choice

ABDULLAH BIN TAMMAN AL MASHANI

General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat

until the end of August 2022. This will ensure that the maximum number of customers can benefit from the most competitive rates in the market, and are able to buy the vehicle of their choice.

“We thank all our customers



and partners for their continued confidence in Bank Muscat’s products and services, and promise that we will continue to enhance customer experience in the future.”

Sayyarati auto finance is the easiest path to financing one’s dream car, and the ongoing offer includes a special discounted short-term rate that starts at just 3.5 per cent for both new and used cars.

Highly competitive rates are also available for up to 10 years along with free third-party insurance for financing used cars. Omani nationals working in government and semi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 and Tier 2 companies are eligible for financing up to RO 60,000.

Expatriates working in government and semi-

government organisations as well as Tier 1 companies can also make use of the attractive interest rates in the offer.

It must be noted that Sayyarati enhances banking convenience as no postpaid cheques are needed, and instalments are automatically deducted from the customer’s account once the mandate to do so is provided.

Applications may be submitted at Sayyarati centres in Wattayah or Salalah or at the nearest Bank Muscat branch. Documents needed to ensure prompt processing of the application include copies of customer ID and driving licence, a salary transfer letter, valuation of the vehicle and seller’s ID copy (for pre-owned cars).

Please go to <https://bm.click/SayyaratiEN> for more details about Sayyarati auto finance.

ahlibank’s Wafra cashback campaign is a win-win for customers

MUSCAT: Consistent in its endeavour to create a superlative customer-centric service, ahlibank continues its special offering that comes with a one-time cashback of 1 per cent for its new Omani and expatriate customers.

The Wafra cashback campaign, which will run until end of June 2022, is a win-win for new customers of ahlibank. This fabulous 1 per cent cashback offer is for customers who maintain a minimum average deposit of RO 5,000 in their Wafra account for at least a three-month period and will be credited cashback into their account within six weeks after the completion of the three-month deposit date.

Expressing his satisfaction on the success of this new campaign, Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution, said, “The customer is at the core of everything ahlibank does. The Wafra cashback campaign is reflective of our commitment to enhancing customer services by offering them tangible rewards for banking with us.

“This one-time cashback reward is an incentive that communicates our dedication to customers. Our customers not only get to enjoy the rewards, but they also learn to cultivate long-term financial habits that



will hold them in good stead and secure their future. It is a win-win opportunity for everyone.”

As one of Oman’s fastest growing banks, ahlibank understands that as customer preferences and needs are rapidly evolving and to meet them, financial institutions need to ensure outstanding customer experiences.

By introducing value-added schemes and services, ahlibank continues to use its innovative platforms to augment its offerings and at the same time enrich its customers with rewards, services and products that in turn ensue that customer satisfaction is always high.

Bank Nizwa hosts client gathering to highlight Shariah-compliant solutions

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, Oman’s premier and fastest-growing Islamic bank, recently organised Islamic finance customer gathering for the wholesale banking clients at Suhar.

The client gathering was hosted to highlight the opportunities available within the Islamic finance sector for corporate clients’ business opportunities and further strengthen the relationship with the bank. The event further underscored the bank’s plans to utilise the latest innovations and explore untapped prospects in the local wholesale banking market segment.

Since the beginning of this financial year, the Wholesale Banking Division of the bank has done similar client interaction programmes starting from Muscat in January 2022, followed



by such client gatherings at key locations like Suhar, Salalah and Duqm.

Suhar is one of the most important hubs for corporate clients as it is backed by excellent infrastructures including the port, free zone and industrial area with superior facilities, thereby enabling a business environment for conducive growth.

Besides, Suhar has diversified business profiles such as steel,

cement, logistics, edible oil refinery, flour mills and so on.

“Over the years, we have seen a rising interest in Islamic banking and Shariah-compliant products and services. We believe that as the leading Islamic bank in Oman, it is our undertaking to inform individuals and businesses about Islamic banking and the benefits it offers,” said Khalid al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa.

KR Eshraqa provides financial assistance to AEIC

MUSCAT: Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas’ Social Development Arm, will be supporting the construction of a new vocational centre of for the Association of Early Intervention for Children with Special Needs (AEIC).

An agreement was signed by Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas, and Sabah al Bahlani, CEO, AEIC. The AEIC’s vocational centre will be dedicated to providing children of determination with training and rehabilitation equipment and facilities that will ensure their integration into society; and help them and their families lead a better quality of life.

Highlighting the importance of

integrating special needs children to society within the framework of Oman Vision 2040, Nailesh Khimji mentioned: “Eshraqa strives to play a role in ensuring inclusive and quality education for all in Oman. We aim to promote lifelong learning, by supporting programmes in early childhood development, as well as access to technical and vocational education and training for the youth.

“Our commitment to the Association of Early Intervention is in line with the same vision. Through our assistance, we hope to enable generations of special needs children to reach their full potential and take part in shaping



their own future and in turn that of the nation.”

Speaking on the sidelines of the signing ceremony which was held at the Avani Muscat Hotel,

Sabah al Bahlani said: “We need to leverage private and public partners in new, innovative ways to finance and scale infrastructure that will help in bridging the

inclusion divide for children with special needs.

“I would like to thank the KR Group for their philanthropic efforts and support in this regard. The vocational centre will offer special needs children access to boundless beneficial activities and facilitate new ways of interactive learning, while enriching their life’s experiences through meaningful exchanges.” Mahmood al Sagri, Head of Eshraqa, Khimji Ramdas’ Social Development Arm, added, “Eshraqa has been working towards providing children with access to quality education and learning resources through the design of special programmes that

are both impactful and sustainable. Our assistance to the AEIC is a step in the same direction. We will continue to empower, inspire and nurture children from all walks of life, the leaders of tomorrow.”

Khimji Ramdas’ Eshraqa has been established on the premise that the private sector has a responsibility towards the development of local communities and empowering talented individuals in Oman. By working towards nation-building at the grassroots, Eshraqa aspires to contribute meaningfully to the education sector by building infrastructure that will lead to the enhancement of knowledge, skills and capabilities in society.

Nama Group-backed IEEE Power Talks conference concludes

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The IEEE Power Talks Oman Conference, organised with the support of Nama Group as Strategic Partner, concluded on Wednesday, June 8, 2022. Held under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the three-day conference had been organised by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in cooperation with Raya Services Company and Al Nimr Expo.

The conference began on June 6 under the auspices of Dr Ali bin Amer al Shidhani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, and in the presence of many executive leaders of the sector.

On its first day, the conference discussed the future of the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman, renewable energy technologies and storage solutions, in addition to the future of the electricity transmission network considering the current changes.

The second day's proceedings focused on asset management and its performance improvement, in addition to energy management solutions.



The third day included three workshops, the first presented by SEL, which dealt with the mechanism of linking renewable energy projects with the transport network, while the second workshop was presented by Siemens and dealt with energy efficiency technologies, and the third workshop was presented by Wood, which dealt with the economics of hydrogen projects.

More than 50 speakers from electricity and energy experts from around the world participated in the conference and presented many distinguished papers. The conference also witnessed major interest from local development institutions.

A number of prominent energy experts in Oman participated in the conference including Eng Abdulaziz al Shidhani, Director-General of Renewable Energy

and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Eng Yaqoub al Kiyumi, CEO of the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, Eng Ibrahim al Harthi, Director-General of Technical Regulations at the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), Eng Faiza al Harthiyah, Director of Energy Sector, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation and Follow-up Unit, Eng Yahya al Rawahi, CEO of Shams al Dhahirah Electricity Generating Company, Dr Salem al Hudhaili, CEO of Solar Wadi, and Dr Adel al Busaidi, Head of Energy Systems at Daleel Petroleum.

The conference was attended by more than 350 participants from various stakeholders in Oman, including representatives from various Nama Group companies, in addition to specialists from Petroleum Development Oman

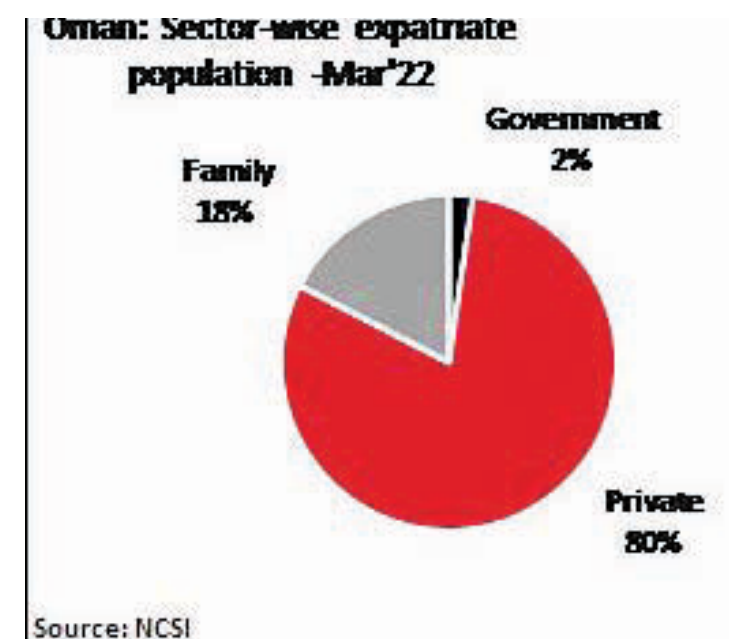
and OQ, as well as electrical engineers from the Royal Oman Police and several ministries such as the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Health, and many others.

The conference included an exhibition in parallel, in which Nama Group and a number of companies operating in the sector participated, to display and share their experiences and present the latest energy technologies and solutions.

Nama Group emphasises the importance of the foundations of renewable energy to enable the development of the electricity sector, based on the group's commitment to raise the percentage of contribution of various renewable energy projects to 30 per cent of total generation by 2030.

Nama Group is moving forward according to a specific and approved timetable for the implementation of renewable energy projects to generate electric power in the various governorates. The group seeks to be a tributary to diversify the economy, provide job opportunities and attract new investments, as well as localise modern technologies and open new horizons for knowledge and professional development.

MSX closes the week marginally higher



MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.07 per cent. The Services Index ended the week higher by 0.29 per cent. The Industrial Index and Financial Index closed lower by 1.21 per cent and 0.05 per cent respectively.

The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 0.70 per cent. Barka Water and Power company informed the Capital Market Authority, the Muscat Stock Exchange, and the shareholders that the Company and its lenders have been working on re-scheduling the Company's loan repayments as a result of the expiry of the Company's Power and Water Purchase Agreement.

Following these discussions, the Company, the Facility and Security Agent and the Lenders are in the process of finalising documents amendments and approvals in respect of the Loan rescheduling, and to amend the repayment and insurance schedules (the "Loan Agreement Amendments").

As a continuation to the disclosure published on May 10, 2022 and in context of the discussions surrounding the Loan Agreement Amendments, the Company and the Lenders have agreed to defer payment of outstanding amounts until June 23, 2022.

The Company will continue to provide further updates in this regard.

In accordance with the banks strategic objects of achieving long term sustainable value, operational efficiency and business growth, both local and international; Bank Muscat

disclosed that it intends to gradually reduce the operations of its branch in Kuwait with the aim of complete closure of the branch by 2025.

Bank Muscat Kuwait branch constitutes only about 0.5 per cent of the bank total assets of RO 13 billion. The bank will keep the market informed in the future of any material developments in this regard.

Total expatriate worker numbers rose 2 per cent MoM and 5 per cent YoY in April 2022. Private sector expatriates rose by 5 per cent YoY in April 2022, while family expatriates also rose 4 per cent YoY.

Government expatriates continue to decline (fell 14 per cent YoY). The total number of expatriates stood at 1.51 million at end-April 2022, forming 32 per cent of Oman's population and 82 per cent of total expatriate population.

The value of landed fish in Oman in February 2022 increased by 6 per cent MoM to RO 41.507 million and Total Traditional Fishery Production also increased by 13 per cent MoM to 59.746k. On YoY basis, the value increased by 23 per cent, and production number declined by 22 per cent. Oman recorded net foreign outflows of \$7 million in the month of May 2022.

Oman's highest positive inflow YoY came in the month of June 2021 when net inflows during the month were recorded at \$75 million. The total foreign outflow since the start of the year till end of May reached \$24.8 million.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Asia House hosts Oman LNG delegation to explore sustainability and energy trends

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UK-based think-tank Asia House recently hosted a delegation from Oman LNG – a leading Omani producer and exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) – to discuss sustainability and key energy sector trends with senior industry figures.

Thought leaders from Arup, the Centre for Climate Finance & Investment, ESG Book, HSBC, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, Standard Chartered, Vitol, and WTW met with the delegation to discuss a range of issues across the energy space.

The London-based advisory services organisation convened two roundtable discussions for the delegation exploring the role of LNG in the global energy mix and



the international transition to low carbon economies. The sessions covered a range of issues, including the sustainable finance gap and solutions to help close it; the need to de-risk sustainable investments and develop better ESG data and standards; and the technologies that will drive the energy transition.

The discussions also covered broader sustainability targets and climate engagement at the international policy level; the impact

of geopolitical issues on countries' energy transitions; and how oil and gas companies are approaching the shift to renewables.

Freddie Neve, Middle East Associate at Asia House, said: "As a leading think tank driving engagement between Asia, the Middle East and Europe, we were pleased to convene these sessions for Oman LNG as they seek to engage with industry figures and develop their international strategy. "The energy transition and its implications for business are issues we monitor closely at Asia House, and this was a key opportunity to explore these important topics with our corporate network."

Asia House regularly convenes leading figures at the centre of global trade, investment and policy for high-level discussions that make an impact.

Omanis, Koreans join in festive cultural exchange

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 11

Young Omanis and Koreans took part in a cultural celebration held at the Korean Embassy in Muscat on June 9, 2022. It was organised with the support of OK Nuri, a voluntary group of Omani fans of Korean culture.

At the event, Korean students donned Omani dishdasha and sirwal outfits provided by members of OK Nuri. Omani participants, in turn, wore the hanbok, the traditional Korean costume. Both sides appreciated the beauty and traditional elegance embodied in the design of Omani and Korean costumes.

Another highlight of the event was the opportunity to study the intricacies of each other's



traditional handicrafts, including those created on the spot.

In a statement, Kim Kiejoo, Korean Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman, said he highly valued the voluntary cultural exchange activities organised at

the grassroots level which, he noted, contributes substantially to mutual understanding, exchanges and support in other parts of the bilateral relationship.

Ambassador Kim emphasised that "promoting knowledge about



the respective traditions and cultures is a great privilege for the Koreans and Omanis as the two countries are endowed with a rich history and cultural heritage".

The Korean Embassy, he

stressed, would "continue to work together with the Omani and Korean friends to promote people-to-people exchanges."

Members of the OK Nuri Group voiced their keenness to

continue their work as a 'cultural bridge' to link the Omani and Korean people. They also pledged to contribute to the "already strong bonds of friendship" between the two peoples and countries.

Rising prices may turn Fed into reluctant villain

The nice-guy central banker has no place in a world of high inflation. Consumer prices in the United States jumped by a forecast-busting 8.6% in May, year-over-year. Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell now has little choice but to go bigger on rate hikes, inflicting more pain on people already struggling with high food and gas prices. Doing so is long-term rational and short-term villainous.

Friday's inflation numbers punctured the theory that prices had steadied in May. Instead, they jumped to their highest level since 1981. Grocery costs rose even more than the headline number with a nearly 12% year-on-year increase, the Labour Department said.

Gas, the life-blood of the US economy, was up almost 49% from a year ago.

Powell's only option is to hurt Americans more. Last month, he essentially ruled out rate increases of more than 0.5 percentage points at a time. With inflation surging rather than receding, he may have to consider larger hikes — say, three-quarters of a percentage point — that will make credit-card balances and mortgages more expensive, and possibly tip the economy into a recession.

Consumers were already in distress. An index that measures mortgage-application volumes fell to its lowest level in 22 years because of higher borrowing rates, the Mortgage Bankers Association said.

Households are spending an extra \$341 a month to purchase the same goods and services as they did a year ago, according to Moody's Analytics.

Paul Volcker's example might offer some solace for Powell. Central bank chief from 1979 to 1987, Volcker took on inflation that had hit 13.5% the year after he was appointed and doubled interest rates to nearly 20% in just six months.

Back-to-back recessions ensued; the unemployment rate hit almost 11% in 1982. Some lawmakers proposed impeaching Volcker. But a year later, inflation was down to 3.2%, and the economy boomed thereafter.

Powell likely won't have to make as big of a move on rates, but hiking them in larger increments will still harm average Americans. And it's unclear how much influence monetary policy will have given the surge in food and gas prices is largely due to war in Ukraine.

As with Volcker, history may deem Powell a hero — but he is on course to make plenty of enemies in the meantime.

Gas, the life-blood of the US economy, was up almost 49% from a year ago



BIDEN ON DECK

US President Joe Biden speaks about the economy and inflation from the deck of the 'USS Iowa' at the Port of Los Angeles on Friday. US inflation surged to a new four-decade high in May, defying hopes that price pressures had peaked and deepening President Joe Biden's political troubles as Americans struggle to meet the cost of essentials like food and gas. — AFP

How ESG could improve performance



STEFANO VIRGILLI stefano@virgilli.com

The writer is a member of the International Press Association

AND ON THE GROWING WAVE OF ESG, A MULTITUDE OF START-UPS HAVE BEGUN ROLLING OUT PRODUCTS ABLE TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUALS AND COMPANIES OPEN TO THE IDEA OF A NEW TYPE OF CAPITALISM

Is all publicity, good publicity? No sorry. It does not work that way any longer. We live in the era of social media, and when things turn out to be negative, often stay that way. As I dig deeper in the economy model advocated by think-tank at the Davos forum, where the shareholder capitalism makes room for the stakeholder economy, I appreciate the importance of ESG metrics.

Let us break it down into digestible bites. First of all, capitalism is based on profit. Companies are supposed to return profits to the shareholder. It is true for small businesses and equally true for publicly listed companies.

However, over the decades, some cracks appeared on the wall of capitalism. Such cracks being pollution in industrial production, workforce exploitation or general malpractices in management. Thus, parts of the general population — stakeholders — were affected negatively, while the shareholders were profiting handsomely.

A movement emerged demanding for greater company accountability when it comes to reporting on Environmental, Social, and Governance matters.

This movement is today represented by ESG, and translated in measurable steps for companies to become more sustainable in the long run. From the profit perspective

it is debatable whether the ESG compliant companies perform better.

On the other hand, studies show that were ESG measures put into place throughout the past decade, many business related scandals could have been prevented.

And on the growing wave of ESG, a multitude of start-ups have begun rolling out products able to support individuals and companies open to the idea of a new type of capitalism.

A company called Blind come up with an anonymous platform that allows employees to openly discuss about issues and malpractices happening within their workplace.

Launched in 2015, Blind raised a \$37 million Series C funding round led by South Korean venture firm Mainstreet Investment along with Cisco Investments and Pavilion Capital, a subsidiary of Singapore sovereign wealth fund Temasek.

After onboarding thousands of employees in major corporations, Blind helped uncovering a case of sexual discrimination occurring at Uber.

The conversation on the platform increased the magnitude of the scandal affecting CEO Travis Kalanick and Uber's CTO Thuan Pham. Uber even attempted to prevent access to Blind in order to damage control, but resulting in the opposite outcome. Bad publicity for Uber. Great

publicity for Blind.

Another start-up called Loominate is taking the success of Blind and combining it with the power of blockchain to bring radical transparency and crowdsourced transformation into the workplace.

Loominate is a pseudonymous platform where employees connect, collaborate and undertake grassroots initiatives with their co-workers.

“Not only to raise concerns but be rewarded for contributing to bottom up change and culture building” is the goal according to the co-founder Jamie Choo.

What is brewing in the stakeholder economy are some powerful trend and inflection points. Gen Z online pseudo communities such as Reddit and Discord, Gen Z purpose based workplaces such as new drive for unionisation and being heard in general, Diversity & Inclusion, Mental health, social empowerment movements, tokenised rewards via blockchain, web3 bottom-up innovation, etc.

ESG is contributing to the overall well being of teams and employees. Often, being heard, opens up to the realisation of not being alone.

Several researches have shown that when employees feel safe to share openly, tend to perform better. So, while ESG is not a guaranteed success, it is already contributing to global business transformation.

Central banks are still far behind inflation curve



WILLEM H BUTIER

The author is an adjunct professor at Columbia University and a former member of the BoE's Monetary Policy Committee and chief economist at Citigroup

Major central banks have lost the plot when it comes to fulfilling their price stability mandates. In April, the 12-month US consumer price index (CPI) inflation was at 8.3%, down slightly from 8.5% in March, and the US Federal Reserve's preferred inflation gauge, the core personal consumption expenditures price index (which excludes food and energy), was at 4.9%, down from 5.2% in March.

But what the Fed should be doing is the opposite of what it actually is doing.

After increasing the target zone for the federal funds rate by 50 basis points (bp) to 0.75% to 1%, at its May meeting, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) indicated that it will stick with 50bps hikes at its June and July

meetings.

According to the May meeting minutes, all participants agreed that the US economy was very strong, the labour market was extremely tight, and inflation was well above target. Yet they decided that the FOMC “should expeditiously move the stance of monetary policy towards a neutral posture” (emphasis ours).

There are two problems with this. First, the Fed's monetary policy stance should be restrictive, not neutral. Instead, the FOMC merely noted “that a restrictive stance of policy may well become appropriate depending on the evolving economic outlook and the risks to the outlook.”

Second, there is nothing expeditious about two additional 50bp increases. The policy rate's upper bound will still be only 2%, below the consensus estimate of

a 2.5% neutral rate (the sum of a neutral real rate of 0.5% and the 2% inflation target).

The Fed's balance-sheet tightening is also minimal. Starting in June, its holdings will shrink by \$47.5 billion each month for three months, followed by an open-ended sequence of monthly \$95 billion reductions (\$60 billion in treasuries and \$35 billion in agency debt and mortgage-backed securities).

That sounds like a lot of unwinding. But it is worth remembering that the Fed's balance sheet had ballooned to nearly \$9 trillion by the end of March 2021. At the current pace of reduction, returning the balance sheet to where it was in early March 2020 (about \$4.2 trillion) will take more than four years. And it will take more than seven years to reach the level in early September 2008 (\$900

billion), before the Fed erected its Great Wall of Liquidity around financial markets.

The Fed is not the only major central bank remaining behind the curve. The policy rate of the Bank of England (BoE) is currently 1%. That is up from an all-time low of 0.1% in March 2020, but the BoE has limited its rate hikes to increments of 25 bps or less. At the May meeting of its Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), only three members (out of nine) voted for a 50bp increase.

In the MPC's May projections, the market-implied bank rate reaches about 2.5% by mid-2023, before falling back to 2% in 2025.

This policy rate projection appears way too low. The United Kingdom's headline CPI inflation rose from 7% in March to 9% in April and is expected to peak at slightly over 10% later in 2022.

The BoE projects that a significant slowdown in economic growth will bring inflation to its target in 2024; but while that outcome is certainly possible, we regard it as unlikely without significant additional monetary tightening.

The policy approach is similarly inexplicable in the eurozone, where headline CPI inflation was 8.1% in May, up from 7.4% in April.

Nonetheless, the interest rate of the European Central Bank on its main refinancing operations remains zero, and its deposit rate is -0.5%.

In an interview on May 25, ECB Chief Economist Philip R Lane indicated that, following the end of net asset purchases in July, the MPC will set a benchmark pace with 25bp hikes at the July and September meetings.

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What not to miss when exploring Rustaq

Located on the western side of the Hajar Mountains, it is a city teeming with farms fed by constantly flowing falaj. It is the best place to witness the amalgamation of the old and the new and home to some of the sites that are currently on the Unesco Tentative list. Here are five things not to miss when visiting Rustaq... **P20**



Rare albino Galapagos giant tortoise born in Swiss zoo

VISITORS TO A Swiss zoo caught a glimpse on Friday of a rare albino Galapagos giant tortoise born in May. The baby tortoise may be a unique sight to behold with fair skin and red eyes. It weighs around 50 grammes (1.7 ounces), and fits in the palm of one's hand. Albinism is a genetic condition that results in little or no production

of the pigment melanin, which determines the colour of the skin, hair and eyes. In animals, it can be accompanied by loss of sight and hearing. The condition has never been observed in the tortoise species whose skin and shell are usually black, both in captivity and the wild. "We are blessed by the gods," said Philippe Morel, owner of



Tropiquarium zoo in Servion village, western Switzerland. He said the creature was of "incredible zoological interest" as a small group of schoolchildren mar-

velled at the baby in front of a glass window. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the Galapagos giant tortoises, which

can live up to 200 years, as endangered. Around 23,000 tortoises are believed to live on the archipelago. The park's owner said he believed the albino tortoise's lifespan would be limited to a few weeks in the wild but is hopeful the creature, whose sex is still unknown, will live a long life. "It's crazy how much it climbs," Morel said. "It's more active than the other," said his son, Thomas Morel, who is in charge of the animals at the zoo, while showing another tortoise — the usual black — born in early May. The birth is also exceptional because the tortoises have difficulty reproducing due to their size — they can reach up to 200 kilogrammes (440 pounds). The rate of successful births is only around two per cent. So far there have been new tortoise arrivals in only three zoos worldwide, including two in Switzerland. — AFP

READ

GIRL IN PIECES

BY KATHLEEN GLASGOW

Parents need to know that *Girl in Pieces* is an intense look at the life of a teen who self-harms, her road to recovery, and the people she meets along the way.



ART SCENE

People visit the exhibition on the ongoing war "Ukraine - Crucifixion" at the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War in Kyiv. Ukrainians flock to the capital to observe helmets, food rations and missiles left behind by the Russian army following its military redeployment and displayed in an exhibition created in real time. Named "Ukraine - Crucifixion", this initiative of the Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War brings together authentic objects, collected between April 4 and May 5, in particular in the "liberated" region of northern Kyiv. — AFP



FOOD TRIP

A traditional Indonesian food made from fermented soybeans. About three weeks after Russian troops attacked Ukraine, Indonesian housewife Liesye Setiana was forced to close her banana chip business as cooking oil supplies dried up across the country. — AFP





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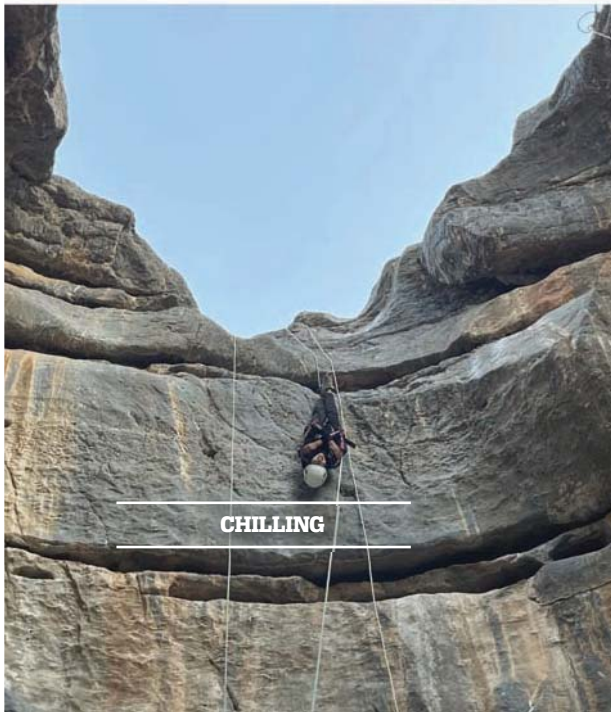


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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Artistes group stages three plays



By Kabeer Yousuf

THEY ARE DRIVEN by sheer, undying passion for stage art.

They knew no rest for several weeks and days and nights were all under the spotlight of the stage preparing the male and female artistes for the first-of-its-kind stage fest in the Sultanate of Oman.

At the recently held 2-day stage play competition, a group of 16 artistes and like-minded art aficionados staged three dramas each one a mirror juxtaposed against the realities of the society where they hail from.

Namma Kasargod, meaning 'The Goodness' of the people from the district on the Kerala-Karnataka border, prepared three stage performances on two consecutive days which evoked a standing ovation from the near-packed crowd who witnessed 11 dramas at the Al Falaj hotel.

In a drama competition, the first of its kind during the post-Covid era organised by Talent Space and Theatre Oman, the Namma Kasargod bagged five awards in different categories.

The best drama was Nam (which means us) a script by Sunil Guruvayurappan which portrayed the sharp reflections of our society, while Sreejith who donned the garbs of a man with under-grown brains in 'Naam' was the best actor and Shyma Dinesh from the same play the best actress. It also bagged the best director accolade. Praveen Kumar, who directed the Ananthapuriyilekkulla Theevandi, the second in the series received profound acclaim while Ashritha Renjith in the play 'Chairs' was selected by the special jury for 'most promising actress'.

"This achievement can be marked as the greatest milestone in our journey yet in the field of art and cultural activities in Oman by Namma Kasargod," members of the gathering that focuses on philanthropic initiatives along with art and cultural activities, said.

Namma Kasargod is a gathering of like-minded people which promotes the rich heritage and culture of India through various socio-cultural activities. In addition, they take an active role in meeting social responsibilities with their charity works.

GASTRONOMY

In Astoria's Little Egypt, Making a Case for Tagines From Morocco



MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with a real Moroccan tagine was 30 years ago in the home of a taxi driver who had invited me to dinner with his family in Fez, Morocco.

We sat in a circle on the floor around a chicken his mother had simmered with onions, as the aroma of cinnamon and saffron filled the small room. She fished from the pot what looked like the bent length of drainpipe found under a sink and, with the proud smile of a host presenting the most sought-after portion to a guest, laid it on my plate. It was the entire neck of the chicken. My polite smile became a real one after I began to pull the tender strands of dark meat from the bones and eat them with torn patches of whole-grain khobz, a low-rising bread that is the perfect thing for drinking up the juices of a tagine.

In two weeks travelling through Morocco, I never ate anything more delicious than that chicken neck, although it was equaled a few nights later by a lamb and quince tagine cooked by the same woman. Neither tagine, though, was prepared in an actual tagine, a two-piece clay vessel that shares its name with the fragrant spiced stews that are its main product. If my hosts owned one of those, I never saw it. When tagine was on the menu, it was made in a wide aluminium pot.

Ever since, I haven't much cared what my tagines are cooked in. I do appreciate the look of the traditional ceramic vessels, whether their lids are shaped like inverted funnels, severe and geometric, or molded in the more modern style, tall with sloping sides that make them look like cooling towers at a nuclear power plant. I'm more interested in what's underneath, the fruits and meats and harmonies of spice that carry over into the steam that billows up when the lids are raised.

So I wasn't bothered very much when I came to suspect that the tagines at Dar Yemma, a bright, glossy new Moroccan res-

taurant in Queens, are not cooked in the glazed clay pots they're served in, or not entirely. The sesame seeds and toasted almonds scattered over the lamb shank tagine, for instance, were clearly last-minute additions. I also wondered about the rosewater-scented prunes and dried apricots around the lamb. With rosewater, a few extra drops can take a dish from charming to bossy. This fruit wore just enough perfume to be noticed, without any spilling over into the lamb or its rich sauce. These small details and others made this a tagine that captured the seductive nuance of the Moroccan kitchen in ways that I have rarely found in New York.

Dar Yemma opened in February on the strip of North



African businesses on Steinway Street in Astoria. Although the area is often called Little Egypt, a strong competing claim could be made for calling it Little Morocco. This happens to be the name of another Moroccan restaurant in the area that is near a Moroccan travel agency, which is close to a Moroccan sandwich shop, which is in the vicinity of a Moroccan grocery where you can buy yourself a painted and glazed ceramic tagine.

The menu at Dar Yemma goes on at some length. One page is given to appetisers wrapped in papery layers of phyllo. There is a bastilla the size of a teacup, filled with chopped almonds and dry chicken. Better than that are the flaky, cigar-shaped briouates; one is filled with fresh cheese and cilantro, another with lightly spiced lamb and vermicelli, which gives the stuffing a jaunty little

bounce that plays well against the fragile sheets of phyllo.

But long passages of the menu can be ignored. The best of the salads is clearly zaalouk, a heap of eggplant cooked with tomatoes and red peppers in olive oil until it surrenders. The zaalouk is a very good dip for torn pieces of khobz; it's even good with what is probably supposed to be French bread but which will strike most New Yorkers as a cut-up hero roll.

The cucumber-tomato salad needs more herbs and lemon juice. I don't know of anything that would fix the terrible carrot and beet salads.

There is not much joy in the watery and unconvincing harira. From the grill, the kebabs of tough beef and the crumbly, purplish, almost flavourless merguez should be left alone.

Dar Yemma is a tagine specialist, whether the menu knows it or not. Some of the other offerings can be haphazard, but the tagines are wonderful.

There is chicken with green olives and preserved lemons, that classic of the tagine repertory. The olives are more tart than the lemons, which have a fragrance that is more floral than fruity.

Fat, pink shrimp arrive in a bright-red tomato sauce that is very lightly seasoned, apart from fresh cilantro. For cubes of beef liver, the kitchen makes an entirely different tomato sauce, a thick gravy dark with the funk of offal. The spices in it are so closely integrated that you can only guess at their identities. Cinnamon? Paprika? Not everyone likes liver cooked so thoroughly, but if liver is going to be firm and chewy, this is the right kind of sauce for it.

The pastry display case in the front window may be loaded with European-style desserts like tiramisu and chocolate tart, or with baklava, almond cigars and other Moroccan sweets. On the other hand, it may be empty. Either way, there is an argument to be made for ending with hot mint tea, and another argument, a more persuasive one, I think, for ordering mint tea right at the beginning and drinking it all night long. — **NYT**

ART

Ukraine war already gets its own museum show



THE DUST HAS hardly settled. Not long ago Russian troops were bearing down on Ukraine's capital — now the story of this chapter of the invasion is already being told in a museum.

Even as the war rages elsewhere in the country, Ukrainians are flocking to a new exhibition in Kyiv displaying artefacts recovered after the Russian army was forced to withdraw from areas it occupied around the capital.

Missiles, food rations, helmets and other objects abandoned in the region north of Kyiv are being shown in an exhibition at a World War II museum — known as the "Great Patriotic War" in Ukraine.

Glass cases display personal notes and the credit cards of Russian soldiers killed on the front line in a vital early record of the bloodshed.

Their passports reveal how young they were. A smashed Siberian licence plate proves some came from far away.

There are also jars of halal borscht soup supplied to Muslim Chechen fighters enlisted by their leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a fierce Vladimir Putin loyalist.

Curator Yuriy Savchuk said he wanted "to respond to Russian propaganda", adding that Moscow has set up its own show "on the so-called fascism that should be fought in Ukraine."

"You can see and touch the war with your fingertips here," he added.

"That's also the point: to shock people into realising what's going on."

It might seem strange that Ukrainians should want a reminder of a war they are still living through. But not everyone in Ukraine witnessed the fighting first-hand — and many want to understand

what took place.

"It's actually really hard to look at this," said 26-year-old visitor Zoya Didok.

"It's a good thing I didn't live in one of those villages when the Russians were there."

CHILLING TESTIMONY

In the museum's cellars, there's a reconstruction of a makeshift shelter from the town of Hostomel, close to Kyiv's airport. The original housed dozens of people for 37 days — among them children and a six-month-old baby. Two people died in the humid, unsanitary conditions.

On a screen on the wall, the baby's mother gives chilling video testimony.

On the first floor, a church gate ripped open by shrapnel opens to reveal a room displaying artwork inspired by the conflict.

Ukrainian artists have also reused material from Russia's invasion to express their pain.

Burnt-out candles beneath a war-torn painting of Christ pay tribute to the dead, as well as to Ukraine's damaged religious heritage.

A grenade hidden under a toy in a sandpit recalls that the childhoods millions of young Ukrainians have lost.

There is also a broken World War II memorial from Hostomel, drawing a powerful parallel between the two conflicts. Today's invaders are the descendants of yesterday's heroes.

The exhibition, titled "Ukraine — Crucifixion", is housed in the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War.

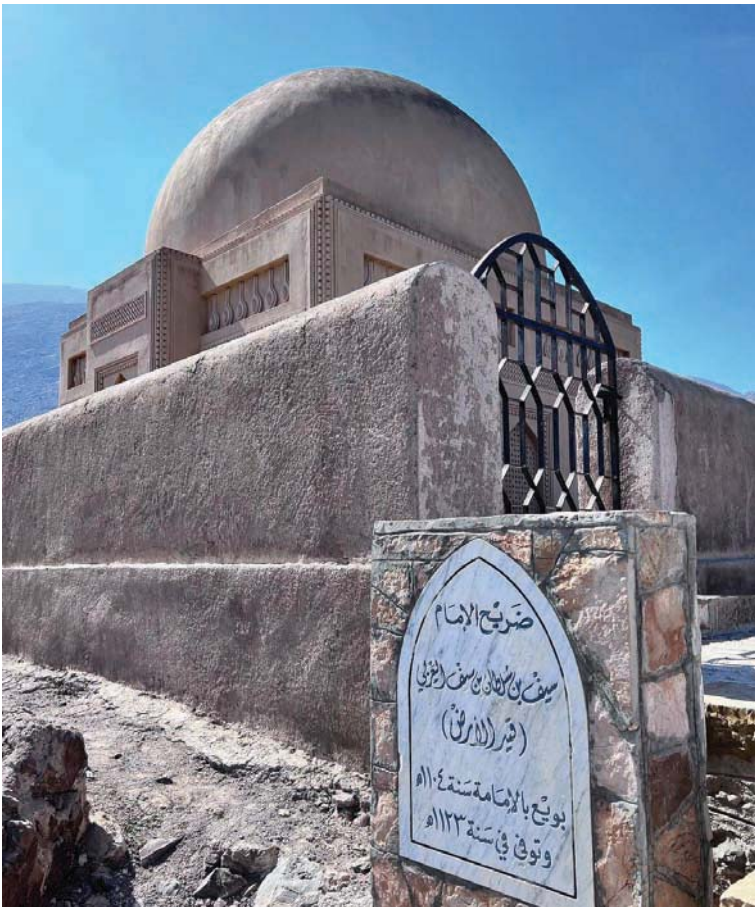
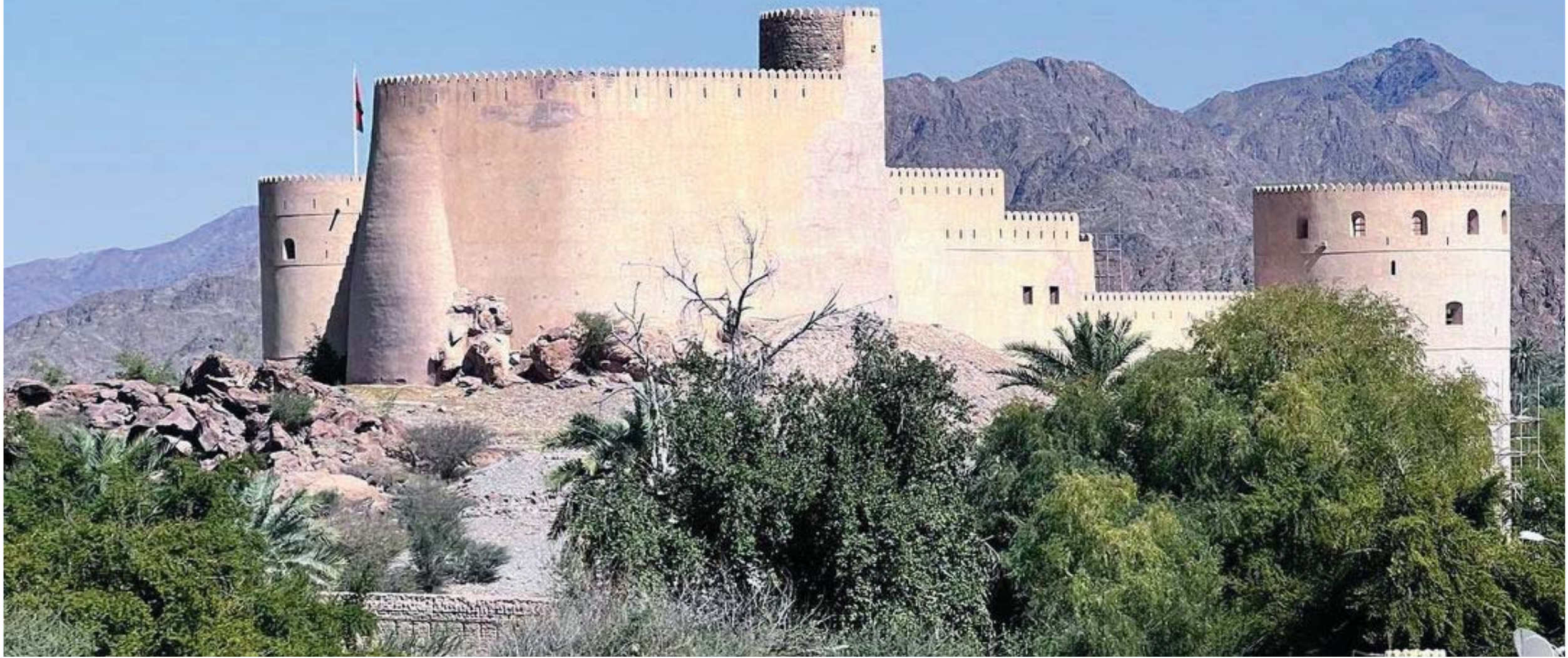
The artefacts were collected between April 4 and May 5 — and the show's rapid opening on May 8 came with help from the Ukrainian army and government. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

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Photos by Ali al Lawati

What not to miss when exploring Rustaq

By Yeru Ebuén
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go. Here are five things to not miss when visiting Rustaq.

Rustaq as a city has maintained its old-world charm. Once the capital of Oman, it is full of historically significant forts and villages that visiting it earns one a profound insight into the changes that had swept the country. Located on the western side of the Hajar Mountains, it is a city teeming with farms fed by constantly flowing falaj. It is the best place to witness the amalgamation of the old and the new and home to some of the sites that are currently on the Unesco Tentative list.

If you're looking for a place to explore that combines historical attractions and a great outdoor setting, this is definitely the place to

THE AL RAMAHI HERITAGE SHOP

While this is a personal collection of the owner Hilal bin Mohammed al Ramahi, this heritage shop is breathtaking with all the unique items included in the collection. From old guns some of which are owned by renowned personalities in the GCC to hundred-year-old coins, trinkets and household items, Hilal can take you on an exciting journey behind each of the history of the items. The very accommodating Hilal will also regale you with his stories of how he started as a fruit seller to ultimately becoming a collector of ancient artefacts.

Located in Rustaq's old market known as Abu Thamania, even the surrounding markets are fascinating to explore. If you are lucky, you'd get invited to Al Ramahi's majlis in his house and will have an even better look at his pots of ancient coins and a more intimate look at his most prized collections.

THE OLD HOUSE TURNED MUSEUM

Bait al Garbi is a 200-year-old family home destined to be demolished but an entrepreneurial family member, Zakiaa bint Nasser al Lamki thought that she cannot allow all the family's history to go to waste that she went full-throttle to restore the house to its original glory and filled it with historical heirlooms.

With 14 rooms containing precious objects — from old books, swords, ancient coins and potteries, guests will also have an inclusive look into the family's collection of aged perfumes, incense, bags and trinkets. If you want to understand how the old Omanis live, this is one of the best places to start.

THE HOT SPRING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CITY

People from far and wide come to Rustaq for the healing quality of Ain al Kasfa. Located in the centre of the city, the hot spring is said to have therapeutic benefits and has been curing people for years now of different diseases.

Although it is forbidden to swim at the main source of the spring — a pool of different hues of green — bathing areas are provided so people can enjoy its water in total privacy. Ain al Kasfa is a real tourist trap during the winter season so be prepared for the influx of other tourists during the colder months.

OF CASTLES AND FORTS

Rustaq is synonymous with two of its impressive and historically significant landmarks — Rustaq Fort and Al Hazm Castle. A trip to Rustaq will not be complete without visiting these sites.

Both are included in the Tentative List of the Unesco World Heritage Sites, they reveal a lot of things regarding the area and the dangerous and thriving time they were in.

Built by Imam Sultan bin Saif II in 1711 AD, Al Hazm Castle is a picture of intricacy — its wooden door, a real work of art and its halls and alleys filled with details of that era — an outstanding example of Omani Islamic architecture of the 18th century.

The massive Rustaq Fort, dated to having been built in the 13th century, offers an amazing 360 view of the area. With its many rooms all serving a specific purpose, don't miss the chance to find out how the water is circulated within the fort. Be warned that exploration requires a lot of walking so come prepared.

WADIS, FARMS AND MANY MORE

Home to Wadi Bani Aouf, Wadi Bani Ghaffir and Wadi al Sahtan, Rustaq cannot be fully explored in one day. There are scenic farms scattered all over the city and if you are visiting here during the honey harvesting season, you can watch the beekeeping process as well as honey extraction being done by the locals.

On our trip, one of our interesting finds is the tomb said to be that of the Al Saidi Estate — the grandfather of the late Sultan Qaboos. Surrounded by a small, ancient mosque with a still working falaj flowing underneath it and planked by crumbling houses all around, we got encouraged to do more research to learn more about who was buried in the said tomb — proof that there is still more to discover about Rustaq.