

20 plots offered for investment

As many as 20 land plots, spread across a total area of around 24,000 sq metres, will be auctioned for industrial and economic investment at Misfah in the Wilayat of Bausher in Muscat Governorate. According to an official of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the lands will be offered to successful bidders under the 'usufruct' land use model. Interested eligible bidders can submit their bids electronically via the Tatweer portal of the ministry. **DETAILS ON P13**



P12

SWIATEK CLINCHES FRENCH OPEN



P13

OMAN TO HARNESS WASTE FLARE GAS TO POWER DATA CENTRES



P20

CHECK OUT THESE FIVE INTERESTING CAVES TO VISIT WHEN IN OMAN



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO DENMARK QUEEN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Queen Margrethe II of the Kingdom of Denmark, on the occasion of her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings to Queen Margrethe II, wishing her good health and happiness and the friendly Danish people further progress and prosperity. — ONA

Oman-Iran gas pipeline project back on track

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The gas pipeline project between Oman and Iran, which was first initiated in 2013, is now back on the track following the recent visit of Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad

al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, has said that that MoUs have been signed by two countries for the two gas pipeline projects and the development of the Hengam oilfield.

He said the offshore oilfield is crucial as the Iranian side seeks to benefit from the gas pipeline project vis re-exports.

The two sides have agreed to form a technical team to review the gas pipeline project, and it may be noted that the agreement first signed in 2013 was supposed to have a length of 400 sqm.

“It is expected to pump about 28 million cubic metres of gas for a period of 15 years from Iran to Oman.”

He added that the two sides are seeking to develop the Hengam oil field in concession Area 8 located in Musandam Governorate on the maritime border between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran, stressing that the two countries agreed upon developing the field so that both

sides will mutually benefit from oil extraction and reducing any damages.

Dr Rumhy said the new oil discoveries by companies operating in Oman will contribute to increasing production by between 50,000 and 100,000 barrels over the next two or three years. **SEE ALSO P13**

SYMPOSIUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The symposium on “The Role of National Mechanisms in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights” kicks off on Monday. It is organised by the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in cooperation with the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions. More than 100 participants representing governments, private institutions, as well as civil society agencies, will take part in the event. There will be nine papers delivered, divided into three sessions, for a period of two days. **DETAILS ON P5**



LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

The Sultanate of Oman represented by the Environment Authority, celebrates 'World Environment Day' on Sunday under the slogan “We only have one land”, which aims to bring about transformative changes in policies and choices to enable living in harmony with nature in a cleaner, more environment-friendly and sustainable manner. — ONA

Search on for missing Omani in Turkey

ANKARA: The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Turkey affirmed that the search is still on for an Omani national who fell into a river in the city of Ayder north of Turkey, and that it is following up with the Turkish authorities for updates.

In comments to Oman News Agency, Dr Qasim

bin Mohammed al Salhi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Turkey, said that the Turkish authorities on Saturday prepared a new plan by searching through small waterfalls of the river and using ropes to go down the river since it is probable that the missing person may have fallen between

the rocks.

Ayder is a summer resort in Rize Province, Turkey, and the most attractive feature is its dense forest and several waterfalls.

Meanwhile, the ambassador called on citizens to follow safety instructions pertaining to tourism in Turkey to avoid such accidents. — ONA

IFJ Congress ends with a tribute to history of Omani media

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Journalists across the world are inter-connected and governments should initiate action to protect their lives and freedom, and collective action should be initiated for media personnel across the world, according to Dominique Badali, President of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

“The world took a closer look at Omani society, where peace reigns and intellectual endeavours are stimulated”, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said, adding that



the presence of journalists from all over the world reflects the appreciation of the Omani media internationally.

“The conference was also a

tribute to the history of Omani media over the past 50 years, during which it played an essential role in raising national awareness and guiding society.

The conference provided an opportunity to introduce the Sultanate of Oman and its economic, natural, historical and cultural elements to the

world”, he added.

Speaking to the media during the closing ceremony of the 4-day-long 31st International Conference of the International Federation of Journalists (Congress), hosted by the Oman Journalists Association (OJA) at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, she expressed her thanks and appreciation to the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the OJA, for hosting the conference, for the good organisation and events, she said that this conference is a historic convergence of media people from across the globe.

TURN TO P4

INSIDE



BRITAIN TO HOLD PARTY FOR QUEEN'S JUBILEE

P6



UKRAINE WILL BUILD BACK BETTER

P9

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

Life — inspired

FINANCIAL

+3.5bn USD

TOTAL DEVELOPMENT COST

884mn USD

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT



Total assets

2006 - 2020

744mn USD

TOTAL AMOUNT PAID IN TAX
31mn
UNITED STATES DOLLARS

777%

ASSET GROWTH SINCE 2006

12mn USD



176 CSR INITIATIVES

*Corporate Social Responsibility

PROGRESS

75%

CONSTRUCTION COMPLETE

OVER 8,000 PEOPLE FROM 85 COUNTRIES CALL THIS HOME

Key community achievements to date



2,500 properties delivered



400-berth marina operational



Multi award winning Al Mouj Golf



Community centre and Masjid



9 parks with 8 kids play areas



Marsa Plaza leisure and entertainment

SME DEVELOPMENT

150 SMEs operate at Al Mouj Muscat

HOTELS & TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

2 Kempinski mysk

Operational today



Kempinski Hotel Muscat ★★★★★
Mysk by Shaza ★★★★★

387 keys
195 keys

2 St Regis Rotana

Opening phase



St Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort ★★★★★
Al Mouj Rayhaan by Rotana ★★★★★

440 keys
251 keys

3

More planned



2,000 + keys post completion

RETAIL & DINING

85+



Retail & culinary experiences

95%



Retail occupancy



4mn



Visitors each year

20k



sqm of vibrant urban retail



JOB CREATION

2,200

Current permanent jobs created

5,500

Permanent jobs on project completion

Current Omanisation rate

71%

Women in leadership positions

40%

SPORTS TOURISM

Athletics

Al Mouj Muscat Marathon

Cycling

Tour of Oman

Golf

European Challenge Tour Oman Open

Sailing

America's Cup World Series
Extreme Sailing Series
Tour of Arabia

ENVIRONMENT

40,000 sqm

Artificial coral reef



District cooling plant

The power saved prevented the release of:

14,781 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide

=

3,138 total emissions from vehicles

50%

Over 265k sqm of green spaces



173 species of birds spotted



Over 3,000 trees planted

AWARDS



impact.almouj.com #AlMoujImpact

الموج
almouj
مسقط muscat

Al Mouj Muscat Impact

A recognition of Al Mouj Muscat's significant contribution to socio-economic impact for the Sultanate of Oman as the first Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) a multi-faceted business and partnership model that has proved itself to be a blueprint and benchmark for future projects. This inspiring destination has delivered unrivalled benefits to stakeholders and here we detail how this has been achieved.

Long-term growth through long-term partnership

Al Mouj Muscat was established in 2006 and its success has been the result of partnership committed to delivering the aims of Oman's vision. A joint venture between OMRAN, Tanmia and Majid Al Futtaim, a company that has invested in Oman since 2001, Al Mouj brought together the public sector's long-term strategic direction with the private sector's expertise in retail, leisure, hospitality and communities. This combination of clear purpose and proficiency in delivery ensured that Al Mouj Muscat redefined urban living as an engine for growth.

Over the next sixteen years, it created a remarkable property portfolio, luxury hotels, golf course, marina, 20,000sqm of retail and office space, world-class amenities, and landscaping that protect and enhance the environment. With \$3.5 billion in total development costs, the majority of which has been invested in local companies and supply chains, it has generated 777% asset growth, as well as attracting \$884 million in foreign direct investment, and is home to residents from 85 nationalities. This has put Al Mouj Muscat on the global map as a residential location and destination for visitors.

This mix of assets has generated significant growth and opportunities as Nasser bin Masoud Al Sheibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, explains: "Our commitment towards creating a 'positive socio-economic impact' that is fully aligned with the country's national directives and priorities has been embedded in the Masterplan for Al Mouj Muscat since inception. Guided by our sustainability framework we laid the foundation to deliver and to continue delivering long-term returns to stakeholders and the future generation who will live, work and enjoy what Al Mouj Muscat has to offer."

Driving tourism growth

By creating Oman's premier lifestyle and leisure destination, Al Mouj Muscat has accelerated growth in the tourism sector. Record numbers of visitors are drawn to this oceanfront community, with the annual figure of 3.9 million set to grow.

Undoubtedly, travellers value Al Mouj Muscat's commitment to creating memorable experiences. By investing in outstanding amenities, such as its 400-berth Gold Anchor Marina and its award-winning 18-hole golf course, Al Mouj attracts visitors who spend more time and money at the destination.

These achievements have led leading hotel operators to invest in Al Mouj Muscat because of quality, its proximity to the International Airport, and its business potential. The Kempinski Muscat and Mysk by Shaza currently offer 582 rooms. The 5-star St Regis Resort is in opening phase and will offer 440 rooms, along with the Rotana which will have 251 rooms. Three further luxury hotels are in planning phase, which will bring the total number of keys to over 2,000. By carefully curating a mix of cultural, adventure, leisure and luxury experiences, Al Mouj will

continue to attract discerning local, regional and international tourists to the Sultanate.

Carsten Wiegandt, General Manager of the five-star Kempinski Hotel Muscat, explains why the destination is optimal for prestigious brands: "The entire philosophy of Al Mouj is key. Its focus on excellence and its intelligent blend of amenities cleverly serves recreational travellers, residents and our business model.

"Travellers have told us that Al Mouj Muscat has created the perfect balance of authentic culture, natural beauty, unique leisure opportunities and a true sense of community. This is an active strategy that allows our sector to be confident that we can partner in growth."

Driving employment and ongoing opportunity

As all economies and communities benefit from diverse job creation, Al Mouj is committed to boosting employment, along with Omanisation and its impact on both counts is significant. Currently, it has created over 2,200 jobs and is on track to secure permanent roles for 5,500 on project completion.

Its determination to support the Sultanate's Omanisation targets is clear as 71% of Al Mouj Muscat's employees are Omani, significantly higher than 45% mandated for the real estate sector. With 40% of leadership positions filled by women, it also has an ongoing training programme designed to upgrade the skills and capacities of its Omani workforce. As it invests in future leaders, its impact will continue to benefit the nation.

Harwa Al Lawati, Head of Customer Experience at Al Mouj Muscat, says: "Al Mouj Muscat is committed to our national interests at every level. We promised to not only create jobs but also opportunities for employees to develop their abilities.

"We have incredibly talented individuals working across highly diverse roles and our management systems support us to measure and improve performance. It is a holistic approach to creating efficiencies and opportunities to advance that will continue to have an impact far beyond our own organisation.

"We can be confident this generation will go on to use their impressive skills to lead organisations and champion future prosperity for Oman."

Partnering with SMEs

The government has put in place policies designed to stimulate the growth of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) as they play a critical role in robust and expansive economies. With 57% of Omanis expecting to set up a business in the next three years, creating the optimal conditions for growth is an area that Al Mouj has focused on, and its impact is evident.

Each day, visitor expenditure in its 85 retail outlets, cafés and restaurants drive opportunities for local business and stimulate job growth. Al Mouj's success at generating footfall, combined with its support for the retail sector through specific marketing initiatives, has resulted in a 95% occupancy rates, despite the challenges of Covid-19.

In total, 150 SMEs are now connected to Al Mouj and benefit from its multiple features. First, location. With 3.9 million visitors and 8,000 residents, there are high number of customers spending on products and services. Its location

offers businesses access to regional and international markets as well as cross-border trade, which has facilitated the operations of 30 SMEs within Al Mouj. A further 120 SMEs utilise its trading platforms, hugely benefitting from events hosted by the community such as Souq Es Sabt. Adding to the eco-system of support is access to investment and training, such as in customer service and booking systems for sea tour operators.

Aisha Al Kharusi, owner of fashion brand Junoon Kanga, recognises the impact of an organisation that understands enterprise: "Al Mouj has put in place everything that entrepreneurs need to succeed. First, its wide-ranging lifestyle, retail and leisure offering drives considerable footfall.

"Add to that its determination to support enterprise, whether through training or by providing a platform through its own marketing or a year-round calendar of events. Al Mouj's strategy has been to unlock opportunities for enterprise, and it is an approach that will continue to fuel growth."

Securing inward investment

All economies seek inward investment. It provides capital for expansion and further raises the profile of a nation on the world stage. As an ITC, Al Mouj Muscat provides non-Omanis the option to purchase a freehold for a property and the destination's superb lifestyle has attracted residents from 85 nations and secured \$884 million in foreign direct investment.

Ahmed Al Massan, CFO of Al Mouj Muscat, comments: "We have a long-term commitment to delivering lasting value to our community and to the Sultanate. Along with remarkable asset growth, and \$31 million in tax contributions, our growth strategy has yielded sustainable returns that have attracted significant foreign direct investment. Whether in residential or commercial real estate, we are a business-enabling environment, here to create durable partnerships that secure sustainable prosperity for Oman."

Development that delivers

Setting the standard for its reputation as an unrivalled location is Al Mouj Muscat's diverse portfolio of properties, from chic marina-side apartments to ultra-premium oceanside villas. With 2,500 properties delivered and 75% of the project complete, the project has reached a critical mass, achieving the aims it was set in 2006.

Quality has become synonymous with Al Mouj, an essential component in establishing the destination's global reputation and appeal. Badriya Al Suqri, Construction Engineer at Al Mouj, is part of the team committed to excellence in the design and build of every property: "Al Mouj is passionate about achieving the highest standards. We take responsibility for every aspect of our homes, from initial soil investigations through to final landscaping. Our attention to detail matters as beyond creating a strong aesthetic appeal, our homes have a direct impact on wellbeing and harmonious living.

"I am involved on site every day, managing contractors and working with consultants. Each home has a distinct character, knowing that we are creating dream homes is what drives us. It is why people from all over the world have invested in homes at Al Mouj and why I am so proud to work here."

Discover more about Al Mouj Muscat and its impact on Oman at impact.almouj.com



Warehouses in residential areas pose health risks

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Warehouses and workshops in residential neighbourhoods is a health hazard to the people, and their construction is in violation of the civic law.

“These facilities, in addition to being illegal, are a potential threat to the health of people in the area,” said Amal al Saltiyah, researcher at the community partnership unit in Muscat Municipality.

According to Article 11 of the Muscat Municipality order 23/92 on the organisation of buildings, it is not permissible to establish workshops, factories and crushers in residential areas as these activities could pose a serious risk to public health and cause nuisance to nearby inhabitants.

The properties must be used for the purpose for which they have been registered under the building permit, stipulates the law.

“Warehouses in the middle of residential neighbourhoods harm residents. As their construction is illegal, they do not have proper safety measures. They are prone to fire as there are no regular safety checks by the civil defence officials due to lack of proper registration,” Amal said.

In addition, they also host rodents and insects which can create health problems. Owners of such warehouses tend to bring in heavy trucks to transport their goods, which hinders traffic within the neighbourhoods, she said.

These truck are very noisy, and they pollute by emitting small toxic particles, and could damage the lives in the residential areas.

According to a statement posted on its website, the municipality said that the civic authorities in cooperation with other ministries and authorities have launched a

campaign targeting workshops and warehouses in different residential areas in the capital.

The inspection campaigns come as part of the municipality’s efforts to regulate commercial activities and to ensure compliance with laws and regulations governing commercial activities in a bid to uncover and crack down on violations.

“Thanks to the efforts of field follow-up teams and urban inspection, the number of complaints received in the first five months in the current year has seen a significant drop,” the statement said.

While urging all merchants to comply with applicable laws and regulations governing commercial activities, the municipality stressed that it will not tolerate any violations of obligations stipulated in the law and will intensify its inspection campaigns to crack down on such practices.

Students’ celebrations kick up row, ministry issues warning

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The government has warned educational institutions to be mindful of Omani culture and traditions while marking celebrations or observing special occasions.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation on Thursday issued a statement following a celebration ceremony held in one of its affiliated institutions that went viral and controversial.

“Following the principles of the Sharia, Omani values, customs and norms, the ministry will prevent any such criminal abuses and has issued a number of circulars that emphasised the importance of the commitment of all higher education institutions to the Omani religious values, culture and customs,” the official

statement said. The ministry added that it got in touch with the institution that committed the violation for further clarification and felt the need to conduct an urgent investigation on the matter by the competent authorities for legal procedures.

Emphasising the importance of the institution’s keenness not to repeat any similar abuses, the ministry will take the necessary action to prevent such irresponsible infringements of the regulations and legislation in force in the Sultanate of Oman, it added.

Meanwhile, the institution in question said that it organises hundreds of events, cultural, scientific, religious, sports and promotional activities for its students, which is aimed at refining their talents, knowledge and perceptions.

The college handles student

activities with great interest so that it will have a positive impact on their career and their personalities, it said.

“While we realise that some of the scenes that appeared on social media are not appropriate or in line with the values of the Omani society, we make it clear that some of our student activities are organised by the students themselves, including an annual international day to learn about cultures and the civilisations of their countries. Due to the organisational nature of some of these events, they attract visitors from outside the college community.”

The college will take the necessary measures to avoid such irresponsible behaviour, whether by members of the college community or the visitors attending any of the student events.

SalamAir to launch 5 new destinations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Budget airline SalamAir will launch five new stations in the second half of this month, including some of the key tourist destinations.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed, the CEO of SalamAir, said the airline will start, on June 15, its first direct three flights per week to Bursa in Turkey.

He said the company will operate direct flights to Phuket in Thailand and Baku in Azerbaijan, and there is an intention to operate direct flights to Prague

in the Czech Republic and the Chinese city of Taishan in the winter schedule from October.

During the summer, SalamAir will operate direct flights from Suhar Airport to Salalah, Shiraz and Trabzon.

It also started operating direct flights from Salalah Airport to Kozhikode in the Indian state of Kerala.

Consultations were held with the authorities to accommodate larger numbers of passengers through Suhar Airport, the company said. The company will receive two new planes, bringing the number of the company’s fleet

to 10 aircraft.

Captain Mohamed Ahmed said that the company has passed the pre-Covid 19 levels in passenger traffic and was able to transport 1 million passengers in 2021, and it is expected to transport about 2 million passengers in 2022.

The company will increase its flights to Salalah Airport to four daily flights from Muscat International Airport, with the possibility of increasing them if there is a large turnout of travellers wishing to go to the governorate. It will also operate five flights per week from Suhar Airport to Salalah.

■ FROM P1

IFJ Congress ends with a tribute to history of Omani media

“The triennial media conference of the IFJ held in Muscat is a historic conference which saw high-level communication and exchange of ideas between journalists during the conference which would contribute in networking and exchanging of ideas between continents”, Badali said.

She reiterated that governments of various nations across the world should initiate measures to protect journalists and to respect their freedoms and she dedicated her victory to the top position of the international body of journalists to the spirit of journalist martyr Shereen Abu Aqleh and to journalists whose lives are at risk in the field of work.

“We journalists are an interconnected chain and

complement each other. There is an urgent need for collective action for journalists.”

She noted the progress made by women journalists in obtaining the presidential seat in the elections of the International Federation of Journalists, the largest gatherings of journalists in the world.

“Women have made gigantic strides in the filed of journalism just as they excelled in any other area of life. A women to rise to the top most position in the IFJ is an example that women can conquer even greater heights”, the newly elected president of IFJ added.

During the concluding ceremony, Omani Women’s Association dazzled the audience with the activities of Omani Night Programme titled ‘Oman

Authenticity’, which won the admiration of one and all.

“Journalistic work in the Sultanate of Oman has made great strides, both through the government sector and private journalistic institutions”, said Najat bint Saad, head of the media committee of the association.

Her speech was followed by a fashion show by Omani designer Muhammad al Subhi, then a show of traditional costumes by an Omani designer Faiza al Balushi, and a show of modern fashion by Omani designer Omaira Hammoud and Amal. A wide spread of authentic Omani hospitality, an exhibition of fine arts, Omani food and many other heritage events were organised as part of the ‘Omani Night.’

488.3 per cent jump in visitors’ arrival

“The Omani outbound visitors reached 60.4 per cent from the total of visitors during March 2022”, the report reveals.

The number of incoming and outgoing domestic flights from Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Duqm airports witnessed an increase of 25.3 per cent to 2,914, compared to 2,326 flights during the same period in 2021.

International air traffic through Muscat International Airport saw an increase in the number of flights by 74.4 per cent in March 2022, and the total number of international flights passengers including arrival, departure and transfer of flights increased 79.1 per

cent, from 707,03 passengers to 1,266,551 passengers compared to the same period in of March 2021.

Salalah Airport recorded an increase in the number of flights by 52 per cent, bringing the number of incoming and outgoing international flights through the airport to 724 by the end of March, an increase of 138.2 per cent.

The number of domestic flights through the airport increased 18.2 per cent to 915 flights, compared to 774 flights during the same period in 2021. The number of domestic — both incoming and outgoing — passengers increased 41 per cent at the end of March 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

Nama Group SPONSOR A three-day oman energy conference IEEE power talks.



IEEE PowerTalks

Oman's Power and Energy Forum

06 - 08 June 2022

Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre

Timing: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm



Register now



As part of its efforts to support Omani engineers in the energy field, Nama Group will sponsor a three-day conference at Oman Convention and Exhibition Center starting from June 6 to 8.

The conference, which will present ten papers by Nama group, aims to create an effective platform that contributes to building national cadres and competencies and exchanging technical expertise. The conference also aims to help young Omani professionals and engineers interested in the energy sector to be constantly informed of the latest developments in the energy and renewable energy sector.

In addition, the conference will provide the

opportunity to communicate with the most prominent expertise in the field of electricity and energy locally and globally.

It is worth mentioning that the conference will highlight the effective role of the electricity sector in the Sultanate and sustainable plans in the production, transmission and distribution of electricity.

It will also shed light on accelerating the development of a sustainable environment and the demand for energy and water in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the conference, a number of experts will present working papers that include the latest technologies in the field of production, distribution and transmission of electricity, renewable energy, energy efficiency, smart networks and its applications and asset management.

On the sideline of the conference, there will be an exhibition displaying the latest and best methods used in the field of energy and renewable energy, which contributes to the exchange of expertise and the promotion of the company among the relevant authorities in order to achieve the vision of Oman 2040.





TODAY IS CANCER SURVIVORS DAY

SURVIVING THE MALADY WITH FAITH AND TREATMENT

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The first Sunday of June is observed as the Cancer Survivors Day, an international event to raise awareness about cancer, sufferers and survivors.

This year the day falls on June 5 and the day is also an occasion for celebration of what survivors have gone through while fighting the disease.

For many, who hesitate to even talk about it, there are also survivors who want to share their story to educate and at the same time provide strength for others who are going through what they had experienced.

Oman Cancer Association takes the lead in the country in

providing a platform for cancer survivors while being there for cancer patients.

A young man who was diagnosed with testicular cancer found that one of the best ways to tackle cancer is to go by the instinct, get diagnosis and then take treatment.

Saud al Junaidi, speaking at Oman Observer Podcast on Cancer Survivors Day, said: "I am very grateful to God that I went by my instinct that something was wrong and went on to seek medical attention. The diagnosis was a relief because it was early and now I know what was wrong with me and could move on to the next level and that is treatment."

Early diagnosis is the key factor. This also meant learning



It was an honour to be part of gatherings with Oman Cancer Association and fellow cancer survivors, says Saud al Junaidi.

more about the particular cancer. Saud had studied Bachelors in Economics and took Masters in Business from Australia. It was in 2020 amidst the fear of Covid-19 throughout the world when Saud

received the diagnosis. There was no option to travel abroad either.

With the moral support of the family and step by step explanations from Oman Cancer Association, Saud moved onto treatment at

Sultan Qaboos Hospital.

The pandemic period turned out to be the healing time for Saud. But he also learnt to reach out. He started his Instagram account named @ones.path where he posted matters of development and knowledge.

A post on his Instagram page stated, "Testicular cancer is the most common cancer in males 15-34 years old. One male is diagnosed every hour and one male dies every day from it. When detected early, 99 per cent of men diagnosed survive."

What amazed him was the support and followers he got.

"Support is also important. I was blessed with the backing I received from complete strangers through social media," he pointed out.

"It was an honour to be part of gatherings with Oman Cancer Association and fellow cancer survivors. It was a great platform to exchange stories and ideas as well as emphasise the support system to those who are battling cancer, May God cure them."

For Saud, it was a combination of faith, hope and trust that took him through the journey. And he made it a point to share his journey. Motor biking through Sifah Mountain he posted on his Instagram page - "Sometimes you need to live while you are alive."

That is not all, in fact after overcoming the cancer, Saud put his efforts together to start the tourism company Infinite.

"I am proud of my country and all its potential," he said.

Human rights symposium begins tomorrow

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

The symposium on "The Role of National Mechanisms in the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights" begins here on Monday. It is organised by the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) in cooperation with the Arab Network of National Human Rights Institutions.

The event will be attended by Mariam bint Abdullah al Attiyah, President of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, and President of The Arab Network for National Human Rights Institutions, and Chairperson of the National Human Rights Committee in Qatar.

More than 100 participants representing governments, private institutions, as well as civil society agencies, will take part in the event. Nine papers

Over 100 participants representing governments, private institutions, as well as civil society agencies, will attend the event

will be presented in three sessions during the two-day conference.

The symposium aims to introduce the national mechanisms concerned with the protection and promotion of human rights, enhance cooperation and partnership between the OHRC and various relevant authorities, highlight the role of the OHRC with governmental and non-governmental organisations, clarify contractual and non-contractual human rights mechanisms, and clarify the role of government agencies and civil society institutions in this

regard.

It will also look into raising the efficiency of participants to implement policies and practices to achieve the objectives of protecting and promoting human rights, reviewing efforts, exchanging best practices to overcome challenges, ensuring optimal implementation of the contents of regional and international instruments and strengthening cooperation mechanisms at the national and international levels.

The symposium also aims to contribute to the implementation of the goals of Oman Vision 2040, reviewing successful experiences and exchanging experiences between the participating bodies, in addition to shedding light on the common role between the OHRC and the various media outlets in following up on human rights issues.

New guidelines issued for women's beauty saloons

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Hairdressing activities and women's beauty centres are restricted to the first and ground floors of commercial/residential buildings or commercial buildings.

These are some of the many guidelines issued by Muscat Municipality as regulatory decision No 28/2022 with regard to the use of buildings for women's beauty saloons.

Accordingly, the issuance of licences for such establishments will be limited to projects that meet the requirements and transfer of licences for currently existing activities is not permitted.

"These regulations are in view of the health requirements for the specifications of the building and its facilities, and the requirements of its workers in terms of health and occupation, as well as defining their permitted and prohibited services within Administrative Resolution No 219/2019 that regulates the



issuance of regulation of health requirements for activities related to public health," a spokesperson from Muscat Municipality said.

The resolution further indicates that new licences for such activities or renewal of licences will not be granted if they are located on the upper floors of buildings meant for commercial or residential use.

The municipality calls on all beneficiaries of these activities and those who are about to open similar activities to abide by the new regulations.

"This decision comes from the premises of preserving the privacy of residents in residential and commercial buildings, in a manner that does not cause inconvenience to the residents of those buildings, as it leads to disturbance of public comfort and congestion of vehicles and parking," the spokesperson said.

Additionally, the staff working for hairdressing saloons or beauty parlours shouldn't be accommodated in the same commercial house or to carry out any devices such as lasers in the shop unless authorised by the competent authority.

Also, saloons and beauty parlours are not permitted to display, sell or use unauthorised or expired chemicals and materials that do not carry details on the product. It is also prohibited to carry out any operations or procedures that require medical intervention or supervision, and other requirements specified by the regulations governing the activity.

Educational forum debates creativity and advancement

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, Humanities Sciences Supervision Department, has organised the Second Scientific Forum for the academic year 2021-2022, on the theme 'Creativity and advancement'.

The forum took place virtually on Microsoft Teams programme on Thursday under the auspices of Dr Masooma al Ajmiyah, Councillor to the Minister for Linguistic Performance Development, and attended by Dr Suleiman al Jamudi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision in the Ministry, and Darwish



al Kiyumi, Director of the Humanities Sciences Supervision Department in the Directorate.

The virtual scientific forum targeted 200 participants from the first supervisors and supervisors, and the first teachers in the first field education.

The forum's goals included updating the participants on

the latest global developments in teaching reading and writing skills, and empowering them with recent experiences in these two skills.

Dr Masooma al Ajmiyah stressed the importance of holding this forum, and the experiences that were applied in the educational field on how to detect weaknesses in the reading and writing skills of some students and the methodological approaches that were followed, and the use of Al Manar story series as a tool for diagnosing these weaknesses in the two skills.

Al Ajmiyah also pointed out the importance of benefiting from these experiences and Al Manar story series in raising the level of reading and writing skill among students, especially in the first cycle of basic education, as this series was

written, drawn and designed by a number of educators in the educational field.

Khalfan al Owaisi, supervisor, welcomed the gathering.

Four papers were presented at the forum on empowering students in grades 1-4 with reading and writing skills and benefiting from the scientific experiments. The first paper titled "Reading skill and teaching it in first cycle: Prospects and challenges" was presented by Prof Antoine Sayah, a professor at the Higher Doctoral Institute in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences in Lebanon. Writer and novelist Prof Antoine Abu Zeid, professor at the University of Lebanon, presented a second paper entitled: "The writing skill in the first cycle: Reality and hope".



Ministry of
Higher Education,
Research &
Innovation

ANNOUNCEMENT

The General Directorate of Private Training Institutes is pleased to announce the start of accepting licensing requests for the Vocational Diploma Program during the period from 01/06/2022 until 15/06/2022 under the following conditions:

1. The institute's licensing must be valid while applying.
2. The private training institute should be classified in the first category.
3. The institute must abide by the provisions, terms and requirements of the regulations governing the licensing of the Vocational Diploma Program in Private Training Institutes that is issued by the Ministerial Resolution No. (157/2018), and its amendments by the Ministerial Resolution No. (39/2021).
4. The approved application form must be filled out.
5. Applications are sent to the head of the Vocational Diploma Program Licensing Committee in Private Training Institutes.
6. Paying the fees prescribed in the Ministerial Resolution (48/2021).

Accepted applications will be informed through the Ministry's website.

For more inquiries, please contact the number – (24340477), or e-mail: oscd@mohe.gov.om

www.mohe.gov.om





UN expert demands probe into Sudan post-coup killings

KHARTOUM: A UN human rights expert on Sudan called on Saturday for accelerated investigations into killings of protesters and other atrocities, as the death toll since last year's coup nears 100.

Sudan has been rocked by deepening unrest and a violent crackdown against near-weekly mass protests since army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan's power grab on October 25 derailed a fragile transition to civilian rule.

"It is simply unacceptable that 99 people have been killed and more than 5,000 injured as a result of excessive use of force by the joint security forces," Adama Dieng told reporters, quoting a toll provided by pro-democracy medics.

He called on authorities "to expedite" investigations into the killings of protesters.

On what is his second visit to Sudan since last year's coup, Dieng has raised concerns during talks with senior officials over arbitrary and mass arrests of activists, sexual and gender-based violence, and "acts of torture and ill-treatment" during detentions.

He said a probe set up by Sudanese authorities has confirmed "four cases of sexual violence" during the protests.

The UN expert also pointed to an intensification of an existing economic crisis since the coup, which has seen Western



Adama Dieng, United Nations designated expert on human rights in Sudan, speaks at a press conference in Khartoum. — AFP

donors return to the sidelines, after brief engagement with a civilian-military power-sharing government established in the wake of Omar al Bashir's ouster in 2019.

Spiralling prices and a poor harvest are "forecast to dramatically increase the number of people living in poverty," he noted.

On Friday, thousands of protesters took to the streets across Sudan to mark the third anniversary of a crackdown that medics say killed 128 people in June 2019, when armed men in military fatigues violently dispersed a weeks-long sit-in outside army headquarters.

A protester was killed during Friday's demonstrations despite calls by Dieng, echoed by Western diplomats, for security forces to "refrain from excessive violence against protesters." — AFP

Ukraine 'pushes back' Russians amidst fierce fighting in key city

KYIV: Ukraine said on Saturday its forces were managing to push back against Russian troops in fierce fighting in Severodonetsk despite Russia "throwing all its power" into capturing the strategic eastern city.

Lugansk regional governor Serhiy Gaiday said in an interview posted on his official social media that the invading forces had captured most of the city "but now our military have moved them".

"The Russian army, as we understand, is throwing all its power, all its reserves in this direction," said Gaiday, who on Friday claimed that Ukrainian troops had won back a fifth of the city.

Severodonetsk is the largest city still in Ukrainian hands in the Lugansk region, where Russian forces have been making gradual advances in recent weeks.

Thousands of people have been killed, millions sent fleeing and towns turned into rubble since President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops into Ukraine 101 days ago.

The advance of Russian forces has been slowed by stiff Ukrainian resistance, repelling them from around the capital Kyiv and forcing Moscow to focus on capturing the east.

The press service of Ukraine's presidential office on Saturday said Russian attacks killed four civilians in the Lugansk region as a whole.



An elderly woman sits inside her damaged house after a missile strike in the city of Soledar, in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

The situation in Lysychansk -- Severodonetsk's twin city, which sits just across a river -- looked increasingly dire.

About 60 per cent of infrastructure and housing had been destroyed, while Internet, mobile networks and gas services had been knocked out, said its mayor Oleksandr Zaika.

In the city of Sloviansk, about 80 kilometres from Severodonetsk, the mayor has urged residents to evacuate in the face of intense bombardment, with water and

electricity cut off.

Ukraine also reported two victims from a missile strike on the port of Odessa in the southwest, without specifying if they were dead or injured.

Russia's defence ministry said it had struck a "deployment point for foreign mercenaries" in the village of Dachne in the Odessa region.

It also claimed a missile strike in the northeastern Sumy region in a place where it said Ukrainian soldiers were receiving training from foreign instructors on using

howitzers.

Russian troops now occupy a fifth of Ukraine's territory and Moscow has imposed a blockade on its Black Sea ports.

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was defiant on Friday. "Victory will be ours," he said in a video speech marking the 100th day of the war.

Later, in his nightly address, he dismissed the Russian army as being reduced to "war crimes, shame and hatred" after failing military objectives. — AFP

Britain holds star-studded party for queen's jubilee

LONDON: Britain geared up on Saturday for a "party at the palace" concert starring Diana Ross and Andrea Bocelli, watched by millions to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's 70 years on the throne.

The concert is the highlight of the third day of public events to mark the 96-year-old monarch's record-breaking Platinum Jubilee with 22,000 people set to attend in person outside Buckingham Palace.

Motown legend Ross, performing for the first time in Britain in 15 years, is a star attraction at the event, to be held on a purpose-built 360-degree stage outside the queen's central London residence.

Rockers Queen + Adam Lambert will open the concert, with Italian opera star Bocelli and James Bond composer Hans



Britain's Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex attend the National Service of Thanksgiving for The Queen's reign at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London as part of Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee celebrations. — AFP

Zimmer also featuring in the line-up.

Other performers include Alicia Keys, Craig David and Rod Stewart, George Ezra and Eurovision 2022 runner-up Sam

Ryder. Elton John has recorded a tribute.

The queen — the longest-reigning monarch in British history — is not expected to attend the two-and-a-half-hour



People wearing the British national colours take part in street party in Northern Ireland as part of the Queen Elizabeth II's platinum jubilee celebrations. — AFP

event in person but will instead watch on television at Windsor Castle. Her heir Prince Charles, 73, and his eldest son, Prince William, 39, will be in attendance.

On Thursday, the first day of

celebrations, the queen made two public appearances to huge crowds from the Buckingham Palace balcony, and then travelled to Windsor to attend a beacon-lighting ceremony.

The effort, after months battling difficulties walking and standing, left her in "some discomfort", Buckingham Palace said.

On Friday, she withdrew from a church service of thanksgiving and also pulled out of attending the Epsom racecourse for the flat-racing showcase The Derby.

Her no-show at The Derby on Saturday is only the fourth time the keen horseracing fan, rider and breeder has missed the race since 1952.

She did not attend in 2020 as spectators were banned due to Covid. Saturday's concert will be broadcast live by the BBC on radio, television and online from 1900 GMT. As an open-air event, all eyes will be on the skies and the fickle British weather to see if it can be spared downpours forecast later in the evening.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

BURGRAIN

German train crash toll rises to five

The death toll from a German train derailment near a Bavarian Alpine resort climbed to five as a further body was recovered from the wreckage, police said. Investigators were combing the overturned carriages for victims and clues as to the cause of accident near Garmisch-Partenkirchen.

"At the moment we do not believe there were further victims, but I cannot yet say for sure," regional deputy police chief Frank Hellwig said. He said four of the dead were women, with an-



other 44 people injured, some of them children. The accident occurred just after midday as school holidays were starting in the two southern German regions Baden-Wuerttemberg and Bavaria. — AFP

RIYADH

Saudi Arabia receives first foreign haj pilgrims

Saudi Arabia welcomed its first batch of haj pilgrims since before the coronavirus pandemic, which prompted authorities to sharply restrict the annual ritual. The group from Indonesia landed in Medina and was set to travel south to the holy city of Mecca in the coming weeks to prepare for the haj next month.

"Today we received the first group of this year's pilgrims from Indonesia, and the flights will continue from Malaysia and India," Mohammed al Bijawi of the coun-



try's Haj Ministry told the state-run Al Ekhbariya channel. "Today we are happy to receive the guests of God from outside the kingdom, after a two-year interruption due to the pandemic," he added. — AFP

SEOUL

Japanese yachtsman completes solo Pacific crossing

An 83-year-old Japanese man has completed a solo voyage by sailboat across the Pacific without stopping, according to Japanese media.

The attempt reportedly makes him the oldest person to achieve the feat. It is in fact a second such honour for Kenichi Horie, who 60 years ago became the youngest person in the world at the time to cover the same distance alone in a sailing boat.

The adventurer has made other landmark journeys, including



around the world and on a wave-powered boat.

"I'm very happy that I was able to return home without major problems," he said, according to the Mainichi daily. — dpa

Making art on top of the world



PATRICIA LEIGH BROWN

KINNGAIT, Nunavut: Just 125 miles shy of the Arctic Circle, in a hamlet etched into an icescape of rock and snow, a tiny figure clutching worn coloured pencils sprawls atop a huge drawing, her frame half the size of the paper. Shuvinai Ashoona is putting the finishing touches on her latest work, a calendar populated by fellow Inuits, an Indigenous people of Arctic Canada. Some in parkas are communing with a walrus, some are chewing bubble gum.

The artist, whose enchanting and enigmatic drawings recently won special mention at the Venice Biennale, is ensconced in her warm corner of Kinngait Studios, where she works alongside printmakers and lithographers in one of the most influential and challenging art-making spaces in the world: An improbable studio-that-could that has nurtured five generations of acclaimed Inuit artists, many of them Ashoona’s relatives.

To reach the striking, corrugated blue metal building that houses Kinngait, simply dodge the snowmobiles buzzing with hornet intensity down the street. Try not to think about the day’s high temperature — 1 degrees Fahrenheit in April. Bushwhack up a steep incline through thigh-high snow. And heed the local advice: “Be careful. There’s a polar bear around town.”

The geographic isolation of Kinngait can be difficult to fathom. It is 1,300 miles north of Ottawa, on the tip of Baffin Island, jutting into the frigid Arctic Ocean. The town is part of the vast, largely Inuit territory of Nunavut, which has no roads linking other towns — specks on the tundra hundreds of miles apart. Kinngait is reachable by prop plane flights (at Gulfstream prices) that may or may not show up. Formerly called Cape Dorset, the town reverted three years ago to its traditional name, which means “high mountains” in the Inuktitut language.

That a place of significant challenges, from poverty to suicide, has evolved into a “Florence of the North” is a proud fact of life here.

Artists comprise roughly one-quarter of the community and largely learn by observation, mentored by elders and family members.

Though the Biennale’s air-kissing and clinking glasses of prosecco don’t exactly jibe with sealskin mittens and Mukluks, the selection of Ashoona’s drawings for “The Milk of Dreams”, the Biennale’s central exhibition, was a milestone for her and for contemporary art.

She is part of a small group of third and fourth generation artists breaking through overly-romanticised notions of the Arctic that have defined Inuit art in the eyes of Westerners.

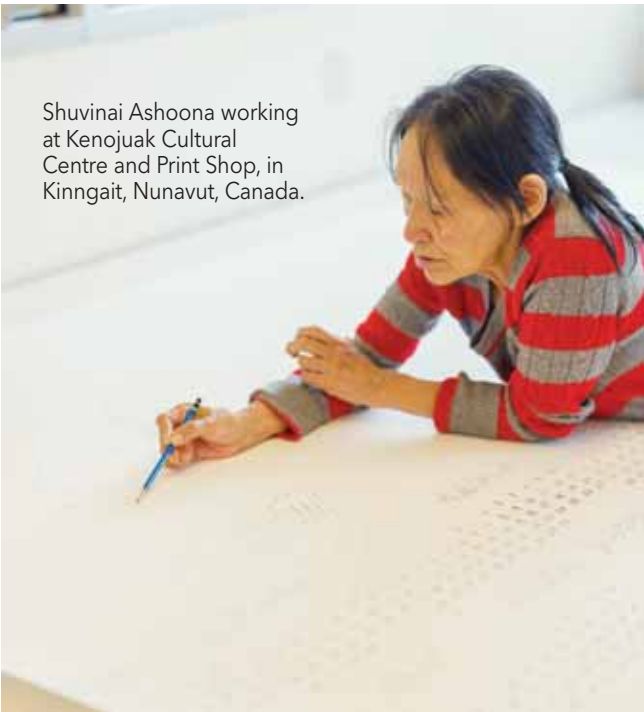
“Shuvinai is pushing the limits on what Inuit art was assumed to look like”, said Nancy Campbell, a Toronto-based curator who has exhibited and written extensively about her. “Her bold, fantastical and often inexplicable images bridge the Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the traditional and contemporary, the mythical and historical.”

“And it is capturing the attention of the global art world”, she added, “at a time when locale and nationality have opened viewers up to seeing art practices that exist outside the art world norm.”

Ashoona’s drawings, which the artist describes as “a kingdom with another kingdom under that”, are in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Canada;



Qavavau Manumie holds his drawing “Fish and Ulu,” at the Kenojuak Cultural Centre and Print Shop, in Kinngait, Nunavut, Canada.



Shuvinai Ashoona working at Kenojuak Cultural Centre and Print Shop, in Kinngait, Nunavut, Canada.

Qaumajuq, the new Inuit museum at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of the American Indian.

Her richly detailed artistic universe, while rooted in her home terrain, ventures far beyond it, merging the spirit world and the pop culture worlds. In her singular imaginings, mermaids swim up to watch TV news about their planet, ships play tag with giant squid and humans get up close and personal with a purple narwhal with blue wings.

In a 2021 drawing now in Venice, a bright orange octopus stretches its tentacles in yogalike fashion and a perky three-headed monster holds hands with an Inuit family. (“They

didn’t mention where they were going”, Ashoona said jokingly).

“Surrealism” is a term used to describe her works “because that’s what makes sense in a non-Native world”, said Wanda Nanibush, an Anishabee curator of Indigenous art at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

Now 60, Ashoona is the eldest of 14 children, three of whom died at birth. Her unconventional upbringing embraced television and horror films in Kinngait but also the traditional life “on the land.”

During her early 20s, she and her family spent a decade in a remote outpost camp, a still-vivid interlude that informs her work. She placed rock traps in rivers to “grab fish with knitted mitts”, she says, and gathered wild mushrooms and blueberries in the mountains. The family ate what are known as “country foods” that are hunted, fished or foraged.

In high school, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, Mary, with whom she is close. At around age 30, Ashoona experienced a physical and mental health crisis, in an era when counseling and other support services were rare. She struggled with painful headaches, whispering to them to “get out from the person you’re in.” Her conversations can sometimes be difficult to track, leaping from chocolate to escalators to the fate of the “Big I-Pod”, as she calls the Earth. “I believe what she sees in her mind, she puts on paper”, said Chris Pudlat, Sr, who worked with her at Kinngait Studios.

Goota Ashoona, a renowned sculptor now living in Winnipeg, was deeply worried about her beloved older sister and suggested that art might help Shuvinai be independent and support her yen for soda and cigarettes. The structure and camaraderie of the studio have been a safe haven. “The pencil and paper make me think better a lot”, Shuvinai Ashoona observed in a 2010 short documentary “Ghost Noise.” “It probably helps me, like aspirin.”

Spelling Bee contest sees pressure akin to penalty kicks



MARIA CRAMER

Harini Logan won the Scripps National Spelling Bee on Thursday, claiming victory in a blistering, first-of-its-kind spell-off that capped a marathon duel of one arcane term after another.

Harini, 14, an eighth grader from San Antonio, beat Vikram Raju, 12, a seventh grader from Denver, after she rattled off word after word in a 90-second speed round. Both students spelled so fast that the judges had to go to video to determine a winner: Harini spelled 21 words correctly, compared with 15 for Vikram.

It was a tense victory that came after she was briefly eliminated and then reinstated earlier in the finals, when the judges decided that a definition she had given for the word pullulation was acceptable.

Harini, who was making her fourth and final eligible appearance in the bee, said winning felt “so surreal.” “This is just such a dream”, she said, holding the trophy on national television.

Vikram stood nearby with his family, visibly trembling and his head bowed with the high emotions of the three-hour contest.

But when the bee’s host, LeVar Burton, asked Vikram if he would return to the bee next year, in what would be his own last eligible year, the boy, shaking but sounding

resolute, gave a decisive “yes.”

It was the first time the bee has used a spell-off since the national contest’s inception, in 1925, and it came after Harini and Vikram took turns spelling a series of words incorrectly, meaning a winner could not be crowned. To viewers, the pressure of the moment felt akin to penalty kicks in a high-stakes soccer tournament.

“Watching that spell-off, you got a real sense of the actual work of preparing for the bee”, said Kory Stamper, a lexicographer and author of “Word by Word: The Secret Life of Dictionaries.” The spellers, she said, had spent months with “rapid-fire spelling over the dinner table, during car pool, after school. You could really get a sense of the daily work. So impressive.”

Harini managed to spell more words than more than 200 other competitors at the national level, including 12 other finalists. Words in the final rounds included scyllarian, pyrrolidone, Otukian and Senijextee, reflecting how, over nearly a century of national spelling bees, the words have become increasingly esoteric.

But students have kept pace with terms out of botany, medicine, folk art and other specialist realms, so much so that, in 2019, eight students were crowned co-champions. In turn, contest organisers have created new rules in recent years, including a component to test word meaning and the spell-off, a potential “lightning” tiebreaker round.

Those rounds left Harini and Vikram as the final two spellers on the stage, where 13 finalists had started off the



‘Watching that spell-off, you got a real sense of the actual work of preparing for the bee’
KORY STAMPER,
A LEXICographer AND
AUTHOR

night. They dominated every round until tripping up at the very end, each missing half a dozen words between them.

“The fact that Harini and Vikram are misspelling these words is a testament to how tough these words are”, said Zaila Avant-garde, last year’s winner. Harini and Vikram “are the absolute best of the best”, she said.

Zaila, now 15, made history as the first Black American to win the National Spelling Bee.

This year’s contest was the first fully in-person bee since 2019, and the first in years not to be broadcast on ESPN.

“The bee is back”, Burton proclaimed, starting off the final round of a contest that after nearly 100 years remains a nerve-racking exhibition of intellectual vigour and stamina.

Scripps has had to evolve as spellers have become more adept and a cottage industry of personal coaches and computer spelling programmes has helped contestants prepare much more effectively.

This year organisers brought back the word meaning round, which claimed five spellers, including Kirsten Santos, 11, of Texas, one of the youngest finalists and a speller competing at Scripps for the first time. It nearly knocked out Harini, as well.

“Harini getting out was horrible and unexpected”, said Zaila, who watched the finals live at the bee and was in the so-called Losers’ Lounge with the eliminated spellers. “Everybody literally screamed when that bell rung.”

Let’s talk digital well-being



Dr Hamed al Sinawi @alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

If I ask you how many hours do you use your smartphone or iPad in a typical day you may hesitate then give me a number that is less than you actually do. If you are interested to know then your own smartphone will be able to provide you with an accurate figure. All you need to do is to activate a small feature in every phone called digital well-being designed to address smartphone addiction. There is no doubt that smartphones, iPads and apps are essential parts of our daily lives. Most of us start their day by opening their smartphones, checking WhatsApp messages or exploring social media platforms. Throughout the day we use smartphones for several other

activities such as communicating with others, reading news, updating documents or passively scrolling down different websites while having our coffee break. Some of us have that habit of being on our device while having a conversation with others, something I personally used to hate but gradually learnt to accept and sometimes catch myself doing it. This is why experts are calling for us to evaluate our relationship with these devices. Are they helping us do more of what matters most to us? Or are they distracting us from achieving our goals? The term digital well-being was recently introduced to explore the relationship that we have with digital technology and how it’s impacting our lives. Recent studies showed that awareness of digital well-being

DIGITAL WELL-BEING AIMS TO EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH OUR MOBILE DEVICES AND HOW CAN WE MAKE IT LESS HARMFUL

is helping people change their behaviours. These studies suggest that one in four people have made changes to their technology to gain a greater sense of digital well-being by deleting certain apps on their smartphone, and changing device notifications to receive fewer unwanted notifications. The study also showed that four in five people who took steps to improve their digital well-being reported a positive impact on their overall well-being.

Those who didn’t see a positive impact attributed it to “difficulty sticking with the change”. This is a very interesting finding as it highlights the importance of adapting to the new situation after deciding to cut down on use of digital devices and replace it with a new behaviour like reading a book or changing to people face-to-face or simply having a walk without mobile phone. I was curious to try digital well-being, so I activated the service on my mobile and on that evening my phone went blank as I was scrolling down Instagram and a message appeared on the screen saying ‘you have exceeded your daily use of Instagram. I felt like my smartphone is my parent enforcing digital lockdown, the screen also gave me the option of asking for

a 15 minutes extra time “just as a caring parent would do.” I selected that but remained conscious that my 15 minutes would soon end and I would get that warning again. I found that a good boost to my willpower so the following day I managed to keep my phone down before getting the ‘digital lockdown’ screen. The service can also provide you with a breakdown of what you have been browsing each day, but I did not dare to use it again after seeing that, on a particular weekend, the time I spent watching movies was more that’s used on productive work. Maybe I am not ready yet for that form of strict digital policing from my own phone. So my dear readers, would you be interested to try out digital well-being on your phone?

Port’s rooftop walk shows post climate future

JULIE CAPELLE

As one of the world’s most densely populated countries grapples with climate change, the Dutch are taking to their rooftops. An organisation in the port city of Rotterdam has built a skywalk linking the roofs of the downtown shopping area to show what the future might look like. From a village to food cultivation and rainwater storage areas, the “Rooftop Days” association is showing how to unlock the unused space of Europe’s biggest port. “We want people to experience how great it is to be on a rooftop and what space we have there above the city,” Rooftop Days director Leon van Geest said. “We are only using three per cent of the full potential of the flat rooftops that we have here in our city.” The bright orange skywalk runs for some 1,969 feet, with a heart-stopping “airbridge” section linking the city’s World Trade Centre to a department store, at 29.5 metres above street level. The walk, which is open until June 24, also features wind turbines, solar panels, art galleries and a drone landing pad. If the city authorities give approval for a full-scale rooftop village in future, it is expected to include crops and tiny houses built of sustainable materials. With around a third of its land lying below a sea level that creeps higher each year, the Netherlands has become a world leader in adapting to climate change. The urgency is even greater for the Dutch given that the nation’s 17 million inhabitants are squeezed into Europe’s most densely populated country after tiny Monaco, the Vatican City, Malta and San Marino. Known for its architectural daring in the decades after it was flattened during World War II, Rotterdam itself is something of a pioneer for the Netherlands, which only uses some 1.8 per cent of its roof space. Transforming the city could take decades but van Geest says he is “convinced that this will become a reality”. As the Dutch population becomes increasingly urban, “space is becoming a rare commodity in the city, so we will have to exploit the roof”, he added. Rotterdammers are enjoying the change of perspective. “It is a unique opportunity to see Rotterdam from a higher distance,” approved 69-year-old resident Harry Schouten. The “Rooftop Days” have been going on for six years and the latest highlights some of the most successful ideas for a climate-adapted future. These include the “Rooftop Field”, a 1,000-square-metre area on the sixth floor of a building which grows vegetables, fruit and edible flowers. — AFP

As war rages into its 100th day, Russia now controls a fifth of Ukraine

MARC SANTORA, MATTHEW MPOKE BIGG AND MICHAEL LEVENSON

As the war in Ukraine approaches its 100th day, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that Russian forces now control one-fifth of the country, a blunt acknowledgment of the slow but substantial gains that Moscow has made in recent weeks. Though battered, depleted and repulsed from their initial drive to capture the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, Russian troops have used their superior artillery power to grind closer to their goal of taking over the eastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, known collectively as the Donbas, where Kremlin-backed separatists have been fighting Ukrainian troops since 2014. Zelenskyy said Russia had expanded its control of Ukrainian territory from an area roughly the size of the Netherlands before the war began on February 24 to an area now greater than the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg combined.

Seizing that swath of land could give Russian President Vladimir Putin huge leverage in any future talks to end the war, as well as a base of operations to launch further attacks inside Ukraine. Yet momentum in the war can shift quickly and unpredictably. As Russia has pounded targets in the east, Ukrainian forces have regained control

THE ARRIVAL OF MORE SOPHISTICATED AND POWERFUL WEAPONS FROM WESTERN NATIONS COULD ALTER THE DYNAMIC ON THE BATTLEFIELD

of 20 small towns and villages in a counteroffensive in the south of the country, a regional official, Hennadiy Lahuta, said on national television. Fighting was raging, Zelenskyy said, along a roughly 620-mile-long, crescent-shaped front that stretches from around the northeastern city of Kharkiv to the outskirts of Mykolaiv,

near the Black Sea, in the south. “If you look at the entire front line, and it is, of course, not straight, this line is more than a thousand kilometres,” Zelenskyy said in a video address to the parliament of Luxembourg. “Just imagine! Constant fighting, which stretched along the front line for more than a thousand kilometres.” Amid intense battles and heavy losses suffered by both the Russian and Ukrainian armies, the arrival of more sophisticated and powerful weapons from Western nations could alter the dynamic on the battlefield. US President Joe Biden last week promised to send Ukraine advanced rocket systems that can target enemy positions from nearly 50 miles away, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz pledged to ship a sophisticated air defence system and a tracking radar capable of pinpointing Russian artillery. For now, Moscow’s main military target is Sievierodonetsk, the last major city in the Luhansk region that is not in Russian hands. — New York Times



A man plants Ukrainian flags bearing names of people killed during the Russian war at Independence Square in Kyiv. — AFP

Dysania, or not getting out of bed. Really?



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

What gets you up in the morning? Is it a genuine enthusiasm for the day ahead, an eagerness to meet whatever life will throw at you that day? Or is it that if you stay in bed, you don't get paid, and you can't have all the trappings of the consumer society we live in?

And does anyone ever actually ask themselves that question, or anything like it, anymore? And is it worth risking all you have, your job, your career, your future, for just a few extra minutes of pillow bliss? Well, sleeper's in would have us know that Sir Isaac Newton's First Law is that "A body at rest wants to stay at rest." Or maybe it's the challenge of waking up the two hundred plus bones, the six hundred and some muscles, the seven trillion nerves, or the forty trillion cells in the human body? But let's not hide behind the science ay?

There are a million reasons to get out of bed, and a million and one reasons not to I suppose, for all of us to get up and about... maybe you just could not ignore the call of the bathroom any longer and seeing you were up, decided to get showered and dressed. Or maybe the cat was meowing, wanting fed, so you got up, fed it, and thought "Oh, what the heck, I'm up, I may as well get dressed. Or

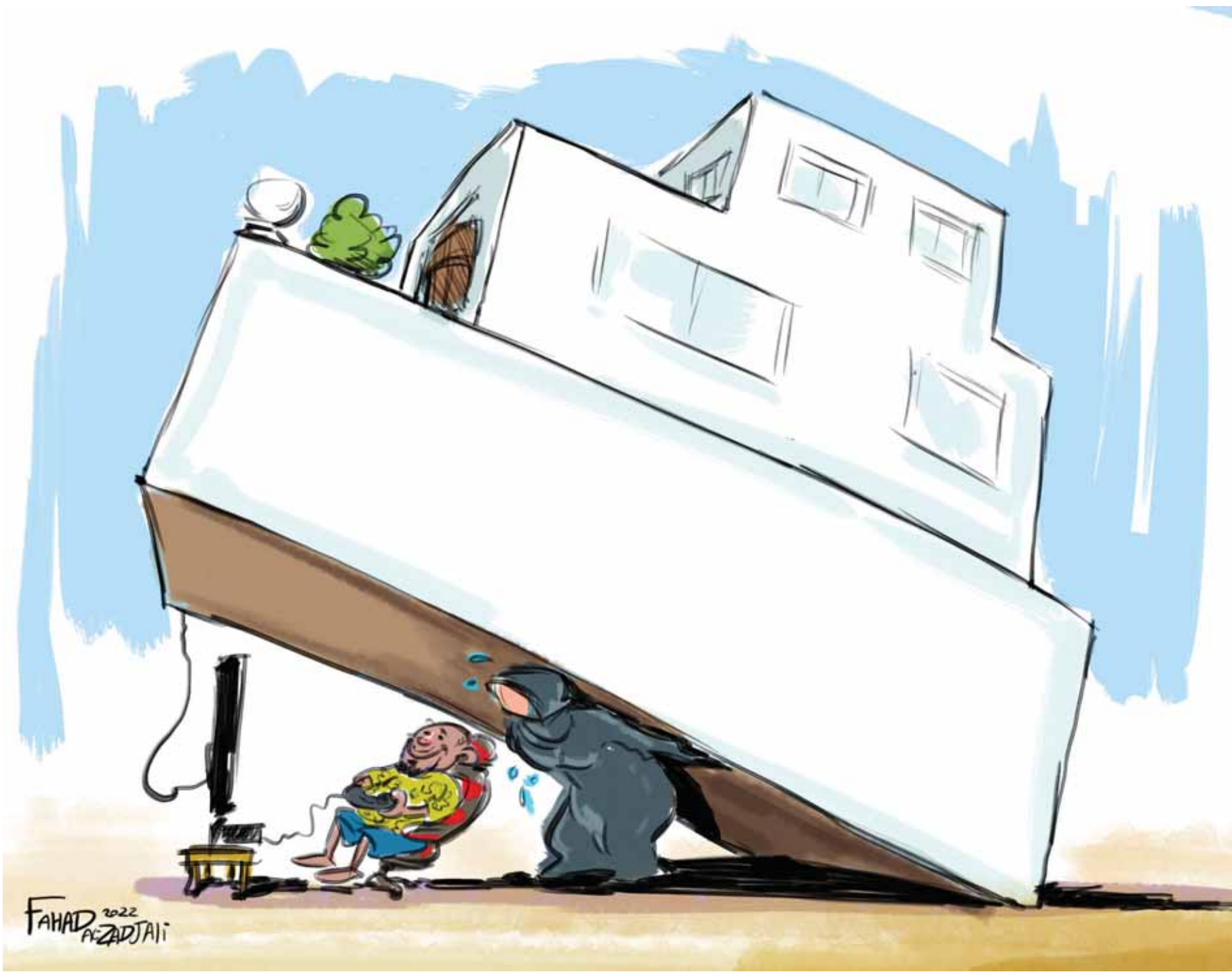
THERE ARE A MILLION REASONS TO GET OUT OF BED, AND A MILLION AND ONE REASONS NOT TO I SUPPOSE, FOR ALL OF US TO GET UP AND ABOUT... MAYBE YOU JUST COULD NOT IGNORE THE CALL OF THE BATHROOM ANY LONGER AND SEEING YOU WERE UP, DECIDED TO GET SHOWERED AND DRESSED

maybe it was the kids fighting, a hungry tummy, a need for coffee... they all happen, everywhere, every day. But these are reasons to get up and out... what about motivations? Aren't any of you motivated to get up and out, to get up and 'do the business'? Whatever your motivations or reasons for getting up, anxiety can make staying under the duvet rather more tempting than the alternatives, but that's not a temptation we should 'roll over' for, and unless you are in traumatic recovery, it's always best to get those feet on the floor!

When you have woken up, or been awakened by that persistent alarm clock, and are lying there making sense of weird dreams, and a dry mouth, the prospect of all you need to get done during the day ahead can feel, well... daunting, sometimes to the point of unmanageable. Deadlines, contracts, meetings, hirings, firings, sales targets, budgets, all scramble what we want to be an orderly life, and that doesn't consider the family, friend, and social obligations we all have, of some description or another. It's enough to make you want to just put that blanket over you, curl up, and hide, isn't it?

But do you know what? You are the lucky ones! You don't have genuine stress, anxiety disorders, or depression at the seat of your 'discomfort', bullying or harassment fears lying in wait at work or school. In fact, it's probably not rocket science to understand that when good things are happening in our lives we sleep well. Like when we are in love, getting good exam marks, or work is going well. Conversely, when work preys on our minds, when relationships go bad, and when your report card is all 'F's' it's hard to get a good night's sleep.

Why is that? Stress is not a place we 'go'! Stress is the body's very natural physiological reaction to distasteful stimuli and occurs when the body releases an over-supply of the stress hormone called cortisol which is the same hormone that wakes you up. Most of us regain our physiological balance quickly and carry on, but for many the cortisol awakening response, CAR, or dysania, does not pass, and the result is acute stress, clinical anxiety, or depression. We all have the potential to be affected by anxiety and depression, so don't go laughing it off as a lame excuse not to get out of bed or go to work. They are real issues for today's societies.



Paul Grod
The writer is President of the Ukrainian World Congress

Ukraine will build back better

After 100 days of intense fighting, it is difficult to begin thinking about rebuilding Ukraine when Russian bombs are still raining down on innocent civilians. But it is precisely during times of crisis and disaster that we must consider what comes next. Above all, leading Western powers need to play a central role in supporting the country's reconstruction.

To that end, the European Commission recently proposed establishing a "Rebuild Ukraine" facility to channel grants and loans to the country. But Ukraine's large financial needs will require the European Union to identify new funding sources, which should include the Russian central bank's frozen foreign-exchange reserves, as well as funds previously confiscated from Russian state enterprises and assets seized from sanctioned Russian oligarchs. Reconstruction experts recommend looking at the rebuilding task through the lens of a natural disaster such as an earthquake or a flood. In the initial triage phase of the response, the government needs to stop the bleeding – as Ukraine is doing. That means fighting back and ejecting the Russians from the entire country, including the occupied Donbas region and Crimea.

It is becoming clearer by the day that Ukraine's defenders – whether from the volunteer territorial defence forces or the military itself – have the bravery, resolve, and moral fortitude to win this war. Unfortunately, Ukraine has so far not received enough military assistance or humanitarian aid to tip the balance decisively in its favour. The EU announced its reconstruction plan on the same day as some 1,000 Ukrainian fighters were evacuated from the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol – an economically vital centre of Ukraine's metals production after defending it for over 80 days.

Since Russia launched its war on February 24, Ukraine has been fighting this war on Europe's front line with one hand tied behind its back. Many of Ukraine's allies have made grand pronouncements of support, and condemned Russia, but either have not sent or have been inexcusably slow in delivering the weapons Ukraine needs. Ukrainians are fighting Europe's war by defending the continent's values and holding back Russia. Unfortunately, many European states act as if their own security is not also threatened.

Even as Ukrainians fight the Russians, those in liberated areas, such as the towns

and villages north of Kyiv, have begun rebuilding their homes and their lives. But they cannot do it alone.

We are grateful for the estimated €4.1 billion (\$4.4 billion) of EU assistance to date, and we welcome the additional €9 billion in macro-financial support recently proposed by the Commission. But this war is costing Ukraine hundreds of millions of dollars a day. The EU estimates that, by the time the conflict is over, the repair bill for physical infrastructure alone could run to at least €100 billion.

When Ukraine is free again, its industrial hubs, ports, and cities will need to be rebuilt. The country will need a Marshall Plan-style postwar stimulus

ALTHOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT TO BEGIN THINKING ABOUT REBUILDING A COUNTRY STILL AT WAR, WESTERN POWERS WILL NEED TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN SUPPORTING UKRAINE'S RECONSTRUCTION. COMMITTING TO A MARSHALL PLAN WILL BE THE BEST WAY TO SHOW RUSSIA THAT THIS WAR WILL NOT BE REWARDED

package that provides an immediate cash injection to jump-start its economy, as well as jobs for Ukrainians and contracts for European, US, and Canadian firms. But Ukrainians will not just rebuild what the Russians have destroyed. They will build back better.

Our eventual victory in this war will be an opportunity to turn a disastrous moment in the country's history into an epic vision of a free, modern, European Ukraine. By fighting this war, Ukraine has shown that it will be a strong and reliable member of the EU and Nato. When Ukrainians rebuild their country, they will do so in a way that aligns with the European project. Ukraine will be a lasting demonstration of a tolerant and open society, a country committed to defending its people and values.

Moreover, Ukraine's reconstruction will adhere to a vision of environmental sustainability. Part of the country's European future will include ending its dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Ukraine has already begun to integrate its power grid with Europe's. As rebuilding gathers pace, policymakers intend to integrate the country's energy infrastructure fully with European networks, diversify imports, and boost renewables. In fact, Ukraine will become a clean-energy powerhouse fully in the spirit of the EU's European Green Deal.

It is encouraging to see that the EU is considering how to help Ukraine rebuild. Committing to a Marshall Plan for the country will be the best way to show Russian President Vladimir Putin that his war will not be rewarded. I hope that our European and Nato friends realise that supporting Ukraine's freedom and recovery will benefit global peace, security, and prosperity. Thwarting Russia's ambitions and rebuilding Ukraine is a challenge the Ukrainian people must not face alone.

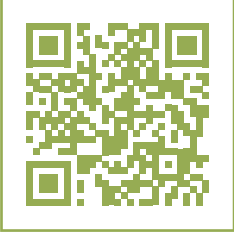
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Zoya Potapova examines her destroyed house in Horenka, north of Kyiv on Friday. – AFP

sport

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Oman edge Nepal in friendly, gear up for New Zealand fixture

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

Oman national football team edged Nepal team 2-0 in a friendly game on Friday as apart of the overseas camp in Doha city, Qatar. The ‘Red Warriors’ goals were netted by Omar al Malki ahead of the completion of first half while Issam al Subhi doubled the result from penalty shoot out in the dying minutes. The ongoing external warm up camp is part of the team’s actual preparations for the forthcoming Arabian Gulf Cup in Iraq, Basra city, and 2023 AFC Asian Cup. Oman’s chief coach Branko Ivankovic began the match with a starting line up that featured Faye al Rushaidi as the goalkeeper while Juma al Habsi led the defending line beside Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Kaabi and Mahmood al Mushefari.

Harib al Saadi monitored the middle of the green field and he was accompanied by Arshad al Alawi, Yazeed al Mashani and Mohsin al Jahwari. Mohsin al Ghassani and Omar al Malki were the both strikers in the forwarding line. Coach Ivankovic maximised the output of the friendly fixture and he tested different faces who were opted by him in the squad. The squad changed in the second half and comprised the following: Ahmed al Rawahi as a goalkeeper. In the backside, Mohammed al Musalami positioned defended alongside Ahmed al Khamisi, Fahmi Dorbeen and Mahmood al Mushefari.

In the centre line, Omar al Fazari was placed beside Ayman al Buraiki, Salah al Yahyaei and Jameel al Yahmadi. Zahr al Aghbari and Issam al Subhi led the striking line. Oman team will conclude Qatar’s camp with a tight preparatory game against New Zealand on Thursday. In previous comments raised



The ‘Red Warriors’ goals were netted by Omar al Malki ahead of the completion of first half while Issam al Subhi doubled the result from penalty shoot out in the dying minutes



by team manager Maqbool al Balushi, he said that the national team will take part in an international friendly tournament in Jordan in September. The confirmed teams in the

tournament till now are Oman, hosts Jordan, Iraq and a fourth team will be finalised and announced soon. Also, he pointed out that Serbia will play against Oman ahead of their participation at the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 in November. Serbia will face World No 1 ranked team Brazil in Group G at the World Cup besides Switzerland and Cameroon.

OMAN SQUAD: Mohammed al Musalami, Arshad al Alawi, Amjad al Harthi, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Rawahi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Fahmi Dorbeen , Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fahad Adil, Ahmed al Khamisi, Omar al Fazari, Mahmood al Mushefari, Ayman Dhai, Omar al Malki, Mutaz Saleh, Yazeed al Mashani, Mohsin al Jahwari, Ahmed al Kaabi, Faye al Rushaidi, Zahr al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Salah al Yahyaei, Juma al Habsi, Harib al Habsi, Khalid al Hajri and Essam al Subhi.

Oman’s national parasailing team to compete in Europe

MUSCAT: In partnership with bp Oman, Oman Sail and Oman Paralympic Committee has prepared the Oman national parasailing team to compete in three upcoming international championships in Europe. Through extensive training in line with safety standards, 10 Omani sailors have been selected to compete from the ‘SailFree’ programme. This achievement is a result of the ‘SailFree’ programme — launched in December 2019 — with the aim of introducing people with disabilities (specially with physical impairment) to the sport of sailing. The team will compete in the Belgian Sailability Cup, France Hansa Class Championship

and 2022 Hansa UK National Championships, representing Oman, with the aim of achieving high rankings as well as gain vital development, skills and experience for their future athletic career. The team members include Ali al Ghasaini, Zahr al Atbi, Ghalya al Jabri, Raiyan al Mujaini, Hassan al Lawati, Sami al Sulaimi, Adil al Siyabi, Muayad al Sheriyani, Sultan al Wahaibi and Hamad al Subhi. **UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY** Shamsa al Rawahi, bp Oman social investment manager, commented: “In line with our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion agenda, the ‘SailFree’ programme has offered the unique opportunity for people with disabilities to



SailFree Team participating in Hansa Class Championship in France

compete in local, regional and international championships. I’ve seen the programme develop them beyond the skills of sailing. The programme has instilled confidence and capacity building skills to overcome challenges, chase their dream and work together as one team. We wish the team the best of luck and look forward to continue supporting this unique initiative.” Dr Khamis al Jabri, CEO of Oman Sail, said: “The progress of the SailFree team has been consistently excellent so far. The opportunity to compete at three major championships this summer is vital to the ongoing development of the sailors. We have tailored our coaching scheme ahead of these events to prepare our sailors, and

it’s time to put it to the test. We are very proud of our sailors for continuing to grow as athletes and as inspiring individuals, and we have high hopes for the future of SailFree as well as Oman’s ongoing participation in parasailing.” Dr Mansoor al Tauqi, President of the Oman Paralympic Committee, added: “Over the years, the SailFree programme has introduced over 200 participants aged from 16 to 30 from communities across the country to the sports of sailing. Our partnership with bp and Oman Sail has helped equip sailors with athletic skills, resilience and problem-solving skills, laying the foundation for truly believing themselves in all aspects of their life and their sports career”

SQU claim 3x3 basketball championship title



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth represented by the Department of Specific Activities, organised the first 3x3 basketball tournament for higher education institutions.

The competition was held at Al Amal Club with the participation of 10 teams from various government and private universities and colleges in Oman including Sultan Qaboos University, the International College of Engineering and Technology, the Military Technical College, the Vocational College in Buraimi, the Gulf College, the Middle East College, the University of Buraimi, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Ibri, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa, and the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Muscat.

The Sultan Qaboos University team was crowned with the first place, the University of Technology and Applied Sciences Nizwa team came in the second place, while the Gulf College

team won the third place.

The closing ceremony of the championship was held under the patronage of Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Basketball Association, in the presence of Mohammed bin Ahmed al Ameri, Director General of Sports Activities at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and a number of officials in the ministry and general public.

According to the Department of Specific Activities in the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, this is the first edition of the 3x3 basketball tournament to organise tournaments and competitions for colleges and universities in Oman.

The initiative was brought about for inculcating sports culture among the students. They indicated that there was a great turnout and a real desire of the students to participate in this type of sports tournaments. The department aims to expand the tournament base for women to participation, as well as to add some games, including football, handball and volleyball in next edition.

Denmark recover from Benzema strike to beat France in Nations League

PARIS: Substitute Andreas Cornelius scored twice as Denmark recovered from conceding to a brilliant Karim Benzema goal to beat France 2-1 on Friday in the UEFA Nations League at the Stade de France, the first match at the venue since the chaos that marred last weekend's Champions League final.

Benzema's stunning strike put World Cup holders France in front six minutes after half-time, only for Trabzonspor striker Cornelius to turn in Denmark's equaliser midway through the second half and then smash in an 88th-minute winner.

That meant it was a disappointing night for France who also saw both Kylian Mbappe and Raphael Varane come off with knocks. There was a near-full house of 75,833 inside the Stade de France, including 1,400 Danish supporters, but the atmosphere outside the ground



Denmark's forward Andreas Cornelius celebrates with teammates after winning the UEFA Nations League. — AFP

ahead of kick-off was calm.

That was in stark contrast to the scenes six days earlier, when serious organisational problems led to fans being unable to get into the stadium while many

peaceful supporters were tear-gassed ahead of Real Madrid's 1-0 win over Liverpool in the Champions League final.

European football's governing body UEFA on Friday issued an apology to those spectators for what it admitted was a "frightening and distressing" experience for those involved.

Because of the pandemic, Friday's match was the first France national football team game at the stadium without crowd restrictions since November 2019.

Home supporters were hoping to see Les Bleus start with a victory as they defend the Nations League title they won last year by beating Spain in the final.

This was the first of four matches they will play this month in League A, Group 1 before their players can depart on holiday, and the game did not really come to life in the first half. — AFP

New Zealand sniff victory against England

ANDY JALIL AT LORD'S

LONDON: England were having to battle hard after New Zealand came back strongly on the third day having set England a target of 277 with two days and two sessions remaining after being dismissed for 285.

It wasn't by any means a daunting target for England even with batting in the fourth innings but New Zealand's disciplined opening attack saw both opening batsmen back in the pavilion with just 32 on the scoreboard.

Kyle Jamieson had claimed both wickets. Trent Boult then produced a great angled ball which seamed away after pitching to hit the off stump of Ollie Pope for 10 and that was 46 for three.

On 69 England lost the fourth wicket when Jonny Bairstow was bowled by Jamieson in the 20th over leaving the new England captain Ben Stokes and his predecessor Joe Root to repair the damage.

Shortly before tea England were 89 for four, with Root on 21 and Stokes on 12 with their team trailing by 188. A mammoth task lies ahead for England.

Earlier, after the morning drizzle had delayed start of play by half-an-hour, it turned out to be an extraordinary early session of play.

New Zealand resumed their second innings on 236 for four, an overall lead of 227. The priority for the two overnight batsmen, Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell was to bring up their hundred.

Mitchell on 97 reached three figures on the fifth ball of the day with a drive to long-on for three off Stuart Broad, having faced 189 balls.

Then within four overs New Zealand lost three wickets. In a remarkable fifth over, Broad had Mitchell edge behind on 108 after a five-hour stay at the wicket during which, he had combined with Blundell for a marvellous



SCOREBOARD

New Zealand first Innings: 132		6-251, 7-251, 8-265, 9-281
England first Innings: 141		Bowling: Anderson 21-7-57-2, Broad 26-7-76-3, Potts 20-3-55-3, Stokes 8-1-43-0, Parkinson 15-3-0-47-1, Root 1-0-2-0
New Zealand second Innings (O/n: 236-4):		
T Latham c Foakes b Potts.....	14	
W Young c Foakes b Anderson.....	1	
K Williamson c Bairstow b Potts.....	15	
D Conway c Foakes b Broad.....	13	
D Mitchell c Foakes b Broad.....	108	
T Blundell lbw b Anderson.....	96	
C de Grandhomme (run out).....	0	
K Jamieson b Broad.....	0	
T Southee c Root b Parkinson.....	21	
A Patel lbw Potts.....	4	
T Boult (not out).....	4	
Extras (B-1, LB-4, NB-3, W-1).....	9	
Total (all out, 91.3 overs).....	285	
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-30, 3-35, 4-56, 5-251,		

fifth wicket record partnership, against England, which was broken just five short of a double century. It had lifted New Zealand from a precarious 56 for four to a position of some strength on 251 for five.

However, the situation changed rapidly thereafter. The next ball brought the dismissal of Colin De Grandhomme who looked confused as to where the ball went after he played it and set off for a run and Ollie Pope had no difficulty in running him out with an excellent throw.

The tourists were suddenly 251 for seven with the next ball as Broad bowled Jamieson with an excellent delivery. He brought the ball into the batsman, between bat and pad, to hit the off stump and

three wickets had gone in three consecutive balls.

Blundell had, meanwhile, added six to his overnight score of 90 and with New Zealand on 265 for eight, he was trapped lbw by James Anderson. He had missed out on what would have been a very valuable hundred. He had faced 198 balls and had been at the crease just 20 minutes short of five hours and deserved as much credit as Mitchell in that brilliant fifth wicket stand.

The last two wickets added twenty to boost the New Zealand total to 285. Broad and Matt Potts had three wickets each. Broad had an excellent spell this third morning while Potts' fine effort with the ball made it a memorable Test debut.

■ RAO FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP TO CONCLUDE TODAY



The Royal Army of Oman 2022 football championship concluded today under the patronage of Major General Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman. In the final, Parachute Team will clash with the Sultan's Armed Forces Engineering Team and the competition will be held at the Military Sports Complex of the Royal Army of Oman at Muaskar Al Murtafaa.



Poland's Iga Swiatek poses with the trophy after winning against US' Coco Gauff. – AFP

Iga Swiatek clinches second French Open crown

PARIS: Iga Swiatek cruised to her second French Open title by dominating teenager Coco Gauff in the final on Saturday, as the world number one claimed her 35th successive victory.

The 21-year-old Pole stormed to a 6-1, 6-3 win in only 68 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier, equalling Venus Williams' record for the longest winning run by a woman in the 21st century.

Swiatek celebrated her sixth straight title this year in the players' box with her friends and family.

A disconsolate Gauff was left sitting on her seat in tears after a nervous performance, punctuated by 23 unforced errors and three double faults.

The 18-year-old American came up short in her bid to become the youngest Grand Slam singles champion since Maria Sharapova won Wimbledon in 2004.

Swiatek, only the 10th woman to win multiple French Opens in the Open era, lost just one set in the tournament — against China's Zheng Qinwen in the fourth round. She has now won all three of her career meetings with Gauff, who was playing in her first major final.

Gauff will now turn her attentions to Sunday's doubles final, where she will face home favourites Caroline Garcia and Kristina Mladenovic alongside compatriot Jessica Pegula.

Swiatek improved her

remarkable record in finals, having won her last nine on the WTA Tour.

Gauff looked nervous in the opening exchanges and a flurry of unforced errors handed Swiatek a break in the very first game.

The 18th seed found herself 3-0 and a double break down just 16 minutes into the match, as Swiatek's powerful backhand helped her win a lengthy third game on her fifth break point.

Gauff finally got on the board with a scrappy hold to the delight of the crowd, but she had dropped a set for the first time in the tournament just minutes later.

Swiatek was not playing her best, but a cross-court backhand winner brought up two set points and she took the second opportunity when Gauff fired wide.

The Pole gifted her opponent a potential route back into the match, making four unforced errors to throw away her serve in the first game of the second set.

Swiatek recomposed herself though as the mistakes continued to come from Gauff, breaking back to level at 2-2.

She made it five straight games to move within one of the title, losing only five points in the process. Gauff dug deep to force Swiatek to serve for the trophy.

But the top seed did just that on her first match point, dropping to the red clay in celebration as Gauff sent a return flying long. — AFP

Nadal, Ruud into French Open final

PARIS: Rafael Nadal reached his 14th French Open final on Friday when Alexander Zverev was forced to quit their last-four clash after suffering a sickening right ankle injury on a day of drama at Roland Garros.

On Sunday, Nadal will play in his 30th Grand Slam final when he tackles Casper Ruud, the first Norwegian man to make a championship match at the majors.

Nadal was 7-6 (10/8), 6-6 ahead when Zverev was forced to quit while Ruud saw off Marin Cilic 3-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 in his semifinal which was held up when an environmental protester ran onto the court and tied herself to the net.

Zverev turned his ankle as he chased down the ball in front of the players' boxes on Court Philippe Chatrier where his shocked team and family were sitting.

As his piercing screams of pain echoed around the 15,000-seater court, a tearful Zverev was taken off the court in a wheelchair as a concerned Nadal looked on.

Minutes later, the 25-year-old returned on crutches and conceded the match, with Nadal embracing his heartbroken opponent.

"If you are human, you feel sorry for a colleague," said 13-time



French Open champion Nadal. "It's very tough and very sad for him. He was playing an unbelievable tournament and he's a very good colleague on the tour.

"I know how much he's fighting to win a Grand Slam. For the moment, he was very unlucky. I'm sure he'll win not one, but much more than one. I wish him all the best."

CRYING

He added: "For me, to be in the final of Roland Garros is a dream, without a doubt, but at the same time, for it to finish that way... I have been there in the small room with Sascha and to see him crying like that..." Zverev later said he had

"suffered a very serious injury".

"It was a very difficult moment on the court. It looks like a very serious injury but the medical team are still checking it and I will keep you updated," he said.

"But congratulations to Rafa, it's an amazing achievement to be in the final for the 14th time.

"I hope he goes all the way and makes more history."

IDOL' NADAL

Nadal has made the final despite his own doubts over his long-term future in the sport.

A chronic left foot injury has forced him to admit that any match may be the last of his record-

breaking French Open career.

He needed over four hours to see off Felix Auger-Aliassime in five sets in the last-16 and then required another four hours to defeat Djokovic in four sets.

Ruud became the first Norwegian man to reach a Slam final and hailed Nadal as his "idol".

World number eight Ruud fired 16 aces and 41 winners past 2014 US Open champion Cilic.

However, there was a worrying security breach in the third set when a female protester ran onto the court and tied herself by the neck to the net.

She wore a shirt which bore the slogan: "We have 1028 days left" before being eventually cut free by security staff. The match resumed after a 15-minute delay.

"It was a great match from my side, I didn't start the greatest but Marin played a very good first set," said 23-year-old Ruud.

"I look up to Rafa. He's the perfect example of how to behave on the court, never gives up and never complains. He's been my idol all my life." Ruud described the protest as a "tricky and difficult situation".

"I only saw her back, I didn't know if she was holding anything or what was around her neck." — AFP



Germany's Alexander Zverev (R) walks with crutches on the court after being injured during his men's semifinal singles match against Spain's Rafael Nadal. – AFP



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New discoveries to add up to 100,000 bpd to Oman's oil output in 2-3 years: Al Rumhy



Fresh opportunities: Oman-Iran oilfield, gas pipeline projects to make headway

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

New hydrocarbon discoveries by energy companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman will help boost the country's output by 50,000 – 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) over the next 2 – 3 years, according to Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy (pictured), Minister of Energy and Minerals.

Speaking to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Al Rumhy (pictured) said the Ministry continues to support exploration efforts aimed at sustaining crude oil and condensate production



to help meet demand growth.

A slew of projects currently underway in support of gas exploration and development will also contribute to oil production, Dr Al Rumhy said.

It includes projects aimed at unlocking the gas potential of the Greater Barik area, including Block 10 by Shell, Block 12 by TotalEnergies, and Block 77 by Italian firm ENI.

The Minister also voiced optimism about prospects for

the gas sector in the coming years, noting that gas reserves currently stand at about 24 trillion cubic feet (TCF). Crudeoilreservesarecurrently estimated at 5.2 billion barrels. Commenting on the MoU signed by the Sultanate of Oman with Iran recently, Dr Al Rumhy explained that the pacts pertain to the construction of a gas pipeline linking the two countries, alongside the development of the Henjam oilfield straddling their maritime borders.

The Iranian side, he said, is eager to make the most of the planned gas pipeline to re-export its gas volumes with a view to diversification its utilization.

The two sides, he said, have agreed to form a technical team to review the gas pipeline project

first agreed in 2013. Covering a total length of 400 kilometres, the pipeline will pump 28 million cubic metres of Iranian gas per day to the Sultanate of Oman for a period of 15 years. Additionally, the two countries are exploring efforts to develop the Henjam oilfield located off Musandam Governorate along the maritime border between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Both sides have stressed the need for a common blueprint to develop the field without damaging the reservoir.

Commenting on international oil price trends, Dr Al Rumhy said prices are expected to remain at elevated levels at least until the end of this year because of the Russia-Ukraine war and other factors.



Oman to harness waste flare gas to power data centres

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

A key agreement signed by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) with US-based Crusoe Energy Systems Inc will enable the Sultanate of Oman to utilise flare gas for high-performance cloud computing and other digital technology based innovations thereby mitigating the planet-warming impacts of gas flaring as well.

Denver-based Crusoe announced that, following an investment from Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Mubadala Investment Company (Mubadala), it is now expanding its Digital Flare Mitigation technology to the Middle East to help reduce flaring in the region.

This investment will power Crusoe's efforts to expand internationally as it works to align the future of computing with the future of the climate. The financing was part of Crusoe's \$350m Series C round of funding that was led by climate technology investors G2 Venture Partners.

This funding propels the expansion of Digital Flare Mitigation internationally and accelerates the launch of CrusoeCloud, the company's High-Performance Computing (HPC) cloud offering powered by carbon-reducing energy sources.

To complement its investment

OIA also signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Crusoe to further advance sustainability opportunities for Oman by cooperating on new Digital Flare Mitigation technologies.

Collectively, the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region accounted for over 38 per cent of the global flaring in 2020, the Sultanate of Oman accounted for approximately 1.8 per cent or 2,517 million m3, while the UAE accounted for approximately 0.7 per cent or 955 million cubic metres (m3) of gas.

With its track record of large-scale Digital Flare Mitigation deployments in the US, Crusoe's technology can mitigate waste from flaring in the MENA region to reduce the environmental impact from traditional energy providers.

Crusoe's 98 Digital Flare Mitigation data centres have prevented an estimated 2.5 billion cubic feet of flaring and achieved up to 99.89 per cent elimination of methane emissions, whereas flares typically emit a significant amount of uncombusted methane.

Their deployed fleet of flare-eliminating data centres have a capacity to reduce CO₂-equivalent emissions estimated at 650,000 metric tonnes per year, comparable to removing approximately 140,000 cars from the road.

20 plots offered for investment via public auction in Misfah

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JUNE 4

As many as 20 land plots, spread across a total area of around 24,000 sq metres, will be auctioned off for industrial and economic investment at Misfah in the Wilayat of Bausher in Muscat Governorate.

According to an official of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, the lands will be offered to successful bidders under the 'usufruct' land use model. Interested eligible bidders can submit their bids electronically via the Tatweer portal of the Ministry.

Speaking to the *Observer*, the

official said the public auction has multiple objectives — all of which are aligned with the broad goals of Oman Vision 2040.

“In addition to the primary objective of offering government land for economic investment and development, this public and transparent auction process — led by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning — also aims to support GDP growth, boost economic output through manufacturing, commercial and other industrial activities, fuel socioeconomic development and support the strategic goals of Oman Vision 2040.”



An underlying objection is to put real estate to productive use by offering available land for suitable commercial and industrial investment, thereby igniting the growth of thriving urban communities underpinned by the requisite infrastructure and services, the official said.

A big beneficiary will be property and real estate in the vicinity, which would see values rise and thereby contribute to economic development in those areas.

To participate in the auction, interested bidders must register on the Tatweer platform operated

by the Ministry's Real Estate Development Department in cooperation with other stakeholder government agencies. Bidders can obtain further specifics on the plots on offer.

The winner will be notified of the outcome of the auction via a text message, following which, they must present themselves at the Ministry within 10 working days to complete the procedures and sign the usufruct agreement.

The initial agreement is for a period of two years, renewable every five years thereafter for a total period not exceeding 50 years.

National Finance ranked best non-banking financial corporation

MUSCAT: With a keen focus on customer experience and innovation, National Finance, the leading finance company in Oman, was ranked as the 'Best Non-Banking Financial Corporation (NBFC)' at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards, held under the seventh edition of the New Age Banking Summit.

The coveted title was awarded in the basis of the Best Banks and NBFC Survey in Oman. As one of the most sought-after awards in the industry, the survey follows stringent guidelines, thorough analysis of different factors, and require NBFCs to adhere to a host of distinct criteria.

The event was conducted at the Al Bustan Palace - A Ritz - Carlton Hotel and welcomed as its chief guest and keynote speaker, Tahir al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman. The event was hosted by Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani and supported by Oman Banks Association. The summit witnessed the participation of senior-to-mid level bankers, FinTech experts, finance and investment professionals, insurance specialists and business consultants.

As one of the key events in



business, it was attended by over 150 select industry leaders. On behalf of National Finance, Hilal al Abri, Head of Branches at National Finance, received the award.

Commenting on the event, Al Abri said, "This award attests our ability to continuously develop and deliver innovative solutions that address the needs of our customers and set new benchmarks in the industry."

"One of our strategy component is that we place

immense importance on swift, convenient, and seamless access to financial solutions. Our continued growth and accolades such as the 'Best NBFC' are an indication that our efforts are geared in the right direction. We usually capitalise on such opportunities and use it as a motivation to keep excelling."

Committed to playing a vital role in spearheading transformational change in the sector, fuelling growth and advocating innovative practices, programmes and projects in the

market, National Finance seeks to provide safe, efficient and transparent financial solutions for corporates, SMEs and individuals alike.

At the same time, it also seeks to enable individuals to take advantage of emerging economic opportunities, therefore, encouraging entrepreneurship in the country. Through its dedicated efforts, National Finance has been consistently contributing to the overall socio-economic development of the country.

ahli islamic opens new branch in Maabala

MUSCAT: With a keen vision to continue to strengthen its network in the Sultanate of Oman in an endeavour to better reach its growing customer base, ahli islamic announced the opening of its new branch in Maabala in Al Seeb.

As part of its ambitious growth strategy, the bank, with its steadily increasing number of branches in different governorates, seeks to provide personalised sharia-compliant banking solutions that meet the banking needs of different segments of society.

Speaking about the opening of the new branch, Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, DGM - Head of ahli islamic, said, "At ahli islamic, we always strive to be close to our customers. We will remain committed to enhancing the banking experience for our customers by facilitating easy access to all our services. Expanding our branch network is one of the bank's key strategies to meet its customers' needs and exceed their expectations."

"As a customer-centric bank, this also helps us strengthen our relationships with our existing customers. The opening of a new branch is in line with our vision to expand our market presence, meet our growth objectives and spread awareness about Sharia-



compliant finance solutions."

"While we remain committed to our goal of being the leading Islamic bank in Oman, we also ensure that we continue to deliver the highest standards of service which are based on the principle of 'partnership' with our customers," he added.

Like all ahli islamic branches, the new branch in Maabala is also characterised by state-of-the-art design, advanced infrastructure, elements that reflect the brand value and a team of highly qualified employees eager to meet the varying banking needs of all its customers.

It also has a well-spaced waiting area. Customers can also access the best banking services through this branch, including opening various types of accounts, as well as bank card product and financing solutions for individuals, companies and SMEs, in addition to other banking services and products.

Muzn named Islamic bank of the year 2022

MUSCAT: Muzn, National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Islamic banking window, has been named Islamic Bank of the Year 2022 by *The Banker Magazine*. Having won the award for the second year in a row, the achievement highlights Muzn's strong performance and growth over the last year.

Strengthening its customer-centric approach, Muzn has rolled out several new product launches and invested in new technology to achieve even greater customer satisfaction.

Salima al Marzouqi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer, said, "At Muzn, we are at the forefront of providing end to end Sharia-compliant banking solutions. By embracing innovation, we remain highly attuned to the needs



of our customers and able to provide a distinguished banking experience that not only aligns with their values but meets their diverse financial requirements.

"We're humbled to win this award, which we see as a testament of our efforts as well as motivation to continue to contribute in Islamic banking in Oman." Muzn has continued to upgrade its mobile app and Corporate Internet Banking platform to provide a seamless banking experience.

OETC joins 31st IEEE international symposium

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company OETC participated in the 31st International Symposium organised by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE ISIE). The symposium was held in the US on June 1 to 3 and talks about industrial electronics.

The annual IEEE ISIE gathers researchers, academics, industry experts and practitioners from more than 100 countries to share their ideas and experiences surrounding frontier technologies, breakthroughs, innovative solutions, research results, as well as initiatives related to renewable energy, the results of academic research, as well as initiatives related to clean energy and its applications, and the development of solutions and the best technologies that



will contribute to maintaining the stability and resilience of electricity transmission networks.

OETC participated in a paper presented by Abdullah bin Ali al Habsi, network planning engineer, about the impact of renewable sources on the system inertia and the rate of frequency change of Dhofar transmission system.

With the urgent need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, renewable energy sources become the attractive and optimal solution for different countries and the process of decarbonisation takes place.

The increase of RES will lead to reducing the system inertia and increasing the rate of change of frequency in the system.

The paper will discuss the

method used to indicate the system inertia with different renewable penetration and synchronous rotating generators.

It is worth mentioning that OETC will also participate in the annual conference for the development of national competencies organised by Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) on June 6-8, 2022, which aims to create an effective platform that contributes to building national cadres and competencies and assisting Omani professionals and engineers to be constantly informed of the latest developments in the electricity sector, additionally in providing the opportunity for engineers to communicate with the most prominent experts and academics in the field of energy locally and internationally.

Reach new heights with the powerful Toyota Hilux

MUSCAT: Toyota Hilux is an iconic symbol of strength, power, capability and dependability. For many years the Hilux has proven its might on all terrains both as a workhorse and a regular pick-up.

Customers in Oman, interested in making the most of this popular pick-up, have two options to choose from. The rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A-Deck. The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is powered to get your pulse racing.

The Toyota Hilux rises above expectations, to deliver some of the finest on-road and off-road experiences ever. The Hilux really is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends,

thanks to added comforts and safety features. Indeed the Hilux models are stunning in design and features.

Their performance and safety parameters are amongst the best and the strong frame and suspension impart toughness for any demanding task.

Apart from this, high-quality materials are used to ensure a high durability. The distinctive Toyota grille renders the Hilux instantly recognisable. Tough deck protects cargo and increases carrying capabilities, while wheels are fitted with wide tyres for a better grip.

The Toyota Hilux Adventure packs the legendary Hilux ruggedness! Every Toyota Hilux Adventure comes with high-end features that start with the mighty



4.0 Litre V6 Engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going.

Equal importance has been provided to the technical

superiority and safety features of the Hilux 4x4. The noteworthy features include a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6 Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The Hilux is not only a tough vehicle, but also an advanced pick-up with stylish cues hitherto found only on SUVs. The front of the Hilux gives a sense that the vehicle is wider than it is. This is achieved by the horizontal Bars that make up the Grille and Sleek Headlamps that wrap around the front of the Fenders. The Hilux sports a thick, chunky Front Bumper sculpted like an SUV, Front Fog lamps, Alloy Wheels, apart from Side Stripes that adorn the vehicle.

The Hilux's interior continues the concept of "Tough and Emotional", and reflects the same attention to detail as the exterior with SUV vehicle styling, accents and ornaments. The key features that keep you comfortable

are the Auto Air conditioner, Multi-Information Display (MID), 8" Navigation and many more.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions and fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and www.instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



Oman's CMA targets further 10 per cent capital market, insurance sector growth in 2022

Steady performance: The total size of the capital market grew 9.14pc to reach a value of RO 22.09 billion last year, up from RO 20.24 billion in 2020

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) of the Sultanate of Oman has set its sights on achieving growth of at least 10 per cent in the capital market and insurance segments of its regulatory portfolio in 2022, building on healthy year-on-year growth witnessed by the two vital sectors of the Omani economy. Additionally, the Authority has pledged to ramp up awareness of the importance of the two sectors among the local population in line with its goal to boost financial inclusion.

"The CMA will continue during the year 2022 to realise its objectives and indicators in line with the Oman Vision 2040 through its executive plan for the year 2022, which includes executive programmes and initiatives that endeavour to continue working in order to achieve the overall strategic objectives of the CMA, enhancing the level of financial sustainability, achieving a 10 per



cent growth in the capital market and insurance sectors' indicators, and raising the level of awareness in the two sectors among the population to 25 per cent of the total population by 2025."

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi (pictured), CMA Executive President stated in the 2021 Annual Report of the Authority. The new targets are set to further bolster improvements in key performance indicators witnessed

across both sectors in 2021. Notable is the growth of the capital market, which expanded 9.14 per cent to reach a value of RO 22.09 billion last year, up from RO 20.24 billion in 2020.

Furthermore, a total of nine issuances (shares, bonds and Sukuk) were approved during the course of the year, amounting to RO 268.99 million after allotment and listing on Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX). These issuances led to an

increase in the capital of public joint stock companies, enabling them to finance their investment needs, the Authority said. Also during 2021, a new Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) fund was successfully floated on the stock market. Oman Real Estate Fund was established via an IPO of 261.903 million units at an issue price of 102 Baisas per unit.

At the end of the year, the total value of real estate assets

managed by Oman Real Estate Fund, Aman Real Estate Fund and Izdihar Real Estate fund amounted to RO 133 million, it stated.

Commenting on the growing importance of real estate funds to local investors, the Executive President noted: "The CMA endeavours to transform the capital market into attractive environment for real estate funds, as this investment provides multiple options for investors,



The CMA endeavours to transform the capital market into attractive environment for real estate funds

SHAIKH ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SALMI
Executive President, CMA

including allowing companies and individuals to invest in real estate and own investment units, in addition to allowing foreign investors to own investment units in the fund, which is an opportunity to attract foreign capital that contributes to supporting and invigorating the wheels of the economy."

Significantly, investment funds saw their aggregate net profit surging 654 per cent to RO 44 million in 2021, reflecting the "recovery of the performance and profitability of investment funds after being affected by the pandemic", the Authority said.

The insurance sector, also regulated by the CMA, registered positive growth as well in 2021. Al Salmi stated: "The sector's contribution to the GDP was 1.45 per cent, and the gross direct premiums of insurance companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 3 per cent to RO 479.857 million coupled with a clear increase in the gross direct premiums of the health insurance class by 5.6 per cent to RO 163.866 million. The financial statements also indicated an increase in the number of insurance policies issued in general, life / family and health insurance by 8.6 per cent," he added.

New Thales handbook shares insights into dramatically changing cyberthreat landscape

Compelling account: In 2021, 32 per cent of the organisations targeted by a cyberattack agreed to pay a ransom to the hackers, compared with 26 per cent in 2020, according to the Thales Cyberthreat Handbook 2022

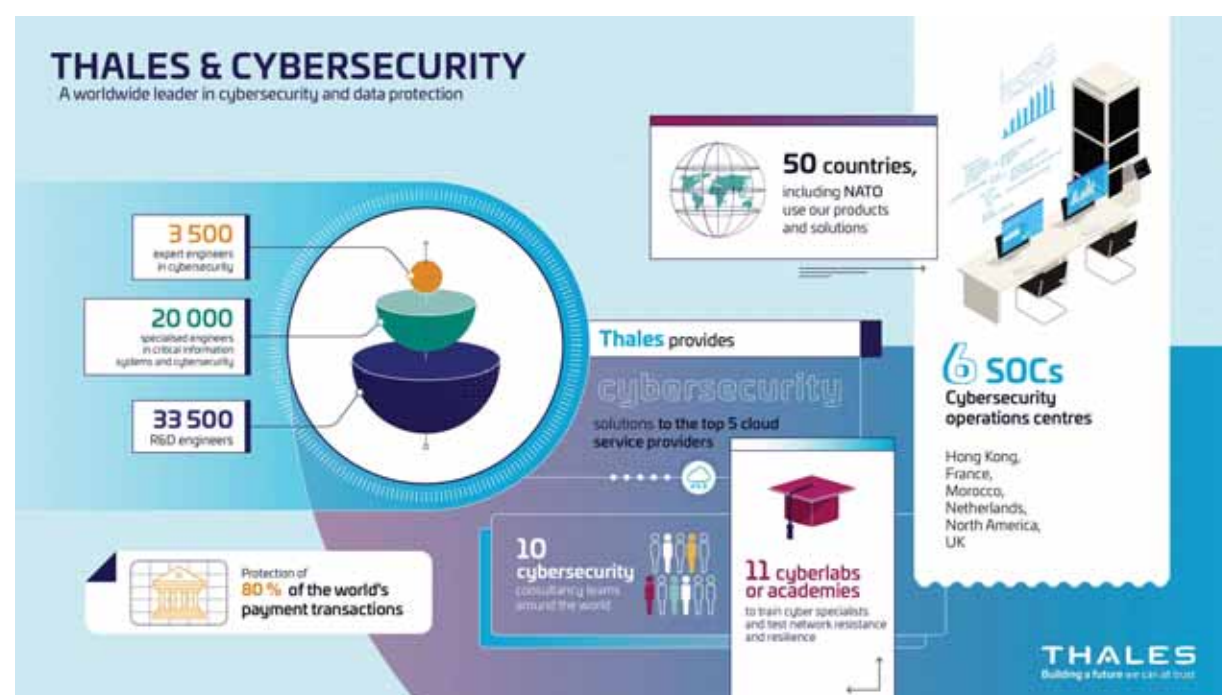


As part of this effort, Thales's Cyber Threat Intelligence (CTI) unit gathers, analyses, filters and correlates data on each type of attack, the hackers behind them and the techniques, tactics and procedures they use, in order to improve the ability of organisations to detect cyberattacks and fight against them.

The Thales CTI unit has just published the 2022 edition of its Thales Cyberthreat Handbook on the Internet, with details about the extent of these attacks and the ways in which hacker groups are organised.

Over the last five years, experts from Thales's CTI unit have analysed more than 20,000 attacks in nine geographic areas and 16 sectors of activity. These cyberattacks point to an impressive level of organisation within the hacker community as well as the emergence of new types of advanced persistent threats and new hybrid relationships between the public sector and private operators. To expand their activities and boost profitability, hacker groups have gradually organised and structured their operations along the same lines as small or medium-sized businesses.

Their new organisations include R&D departments to improve the



effectiveness of cyberattacks and constantly develop innovative techniques and attack profiles, human resources departments to recruit new hacker profiles, and legal departments to negotiate financial arrangements with attack victims.

"Since the pandemic began, our societies have witnessed a major surge in malicious cyber activity," comments Patrice Caine (pictured), Chairman & CEO — Thales Group.

"We may not always be immediately aware of this vulnerability, but it represents a real risk to our economies, our democracies and our daily lives. The increase in cyberattacks is almost directly proportional to the speed of our digital transformation. The more connected the world becomes, the greater its surface of attack will be."

Caine further adds: "For greater speed and efficiency, a growing number of companies are connecting their suppliers to their enterprise IT systems, potentially offering cybercriminals new ways to breach their data by finding weak links in the supply chain and gaining access to the information systems of major companies and State institutions."

According to the 2022 Thales Cyberthreat Handbook, the increasing number of organisations that agree to pay a ransom to retrieve their data after an attack suggests that these legal departments play a crucial role in guaranteeing the lucrative nature of malicious cyber activity.

In 2021, 32 per cent of the organisations targeted by a cyberattack agreed to pay a ransom to the hackers, compared with 26 per cent in 2020.

One hacker group even managed to extort 180 million euros from the victims of a single cyberattack. In their constant quest for profitability, many hackers conduct cost/benefit analyses to identify the industries and countries that are the most open to digitalisation of their business models.

The Thales Cyberthreat Handbook reveals that 72 per cent of the 20,000 attacks analysed targeted the defence sector and public administrations, and 62 per cent targeted the telecommunications sector. North America accounted for 72 per cent of the attacks, and Europe accounted for 66 per cent.

The 2022 Thales Cyberthreat Handbook also reports a rise in the number of state-sponsored attacks over the last five years, in particular linked to the growing

use of "dormant" malware.

In this type of attack, the hackers install a virus on the organisation's IT system to gain access to the data on its networks and can then conduct long-term espionage operations, which are more dangerous by definition. Dormant malware can remain undetected on an organisation's systems for anything from two years to more than a decade.

This kind of attack is becoming more prevalent as private enterprises work more closely with government agencies to counter cyberthreats, and as hackers become better organised and more professional.

Today, more and more governments outsource their cyber activity and have become increasingly reliant on outside hacker groups.

Thales serves 130 major customers worldwide, including governments, critical national infrastructure providers and public administrations. The Group provides cybersecurity for 19 of the world's 20 largest banks, nine of the 10 Internet giants, as well as thousands of businesses of all sizes.

The Thales value proposition is based on three major product families: Cybels, a complete platform of cybersecurity services including risk assessment, training and simulation, and cyberattack detection and response; Sovereign products including encryptors and sensors to protect critical information systems; and a digital platform for data protection, cloud security and access control.

EU seeks to unblock stalled trade deals

The EU is set to intensify efforts to finalise trade negotiations with Australia, New Zealand and Chile all while making sure adequate environmental norms are met, a top official said.

Following a meeting of trade ministers of the 27 member states, EU trade commissioner Valdis Dombrovskis said there “was a very broad consensus” that the bloc needed to “intensify and... accelerate the work on concluding, signing and ratifying trade agreements”.

Clinching trade deals with partners across the globe had long been the major priority of the European Commission, the EU’s executive arm that handles trade policy for EU countries.

Spooked by the highly protectionist turn taken by the United States under former president Donald Trump, as well as the reluctance of China to open its economy, the EU pivoted to a more defensive trade policy.

This was encouraged by France which currently holds the EU’s six-month presidency and has asked for a more cautious approach on trade deals, especially one with Mercosur, the South American trade bloc that has been agreed but yet to be ratified.

The Czech Republic and Sweden, which take over the EU’s next two presidencies, are lobbying for the return of a more liberal trade stance, with free trade deals at their centre.

“When it comes to a free trade agenda I think the EU needs to do much more and (be) much quicker”, said Swedish Trade Minister Anna Hallberg before the talks in Luxembourg.

“We need to be relevant trading partners, an attractive trading partner and we have a number of trade deals on the table. We need to conclude them now”, she added.

Sweden takes over the EU presidency in January 2023 and will put pressure on the EU to conclude several deals, if they haven’t crossed the finish line already.

The most ambitious hopes are that the European Commission will conclude negotiations with Chile, New Zealand and Australia by the end of this year. The commission would also like to ratify agreements already struck with Mexico and Mercosur, but these are stuck in a legal limbo.

— AFP

When it comes to a free trade agenda I think the EU needs to do much more and (be) much quicker

ANNA HALLBERG
Swedish Trade Minister



IT’S A FISHY DAY!
An aerial view shows a worker standing among dry fishes at a factory in Penghu islands in Taiwan.
— AFP

Investors strongly believe in web3



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The writer is a member of the International Press Association

WHILE THE NFT MARKET CRASHED AND METAVERSES ARE SEEN AS AN ODDITY IN THE MARKET, SURELY SOMETHING IS BUILDING UP

Finally I can say that — at least in my work routine — things seem to be back to normal. I was in fact I was on a conference’s stage as a panellist for the first time in years.

Except for wearing a face mask before and after the session, everything felt like the good old days. I was on stage with other investors and venture capital firms to debate the state of blockchain and crypto investment.

It appeared clear that the new buzz word is and will continue to be ‘web3’, but what it actually means, is still a matter of definition. In general we could say that web3 gives the ability to own pieces of the Internet and interoperate with them. For example, you can buy a fancy (virtual) hat in an online game, and thanks to blockchain being able to wear it in a multitude of metaverses.

It is for sure an overly simplified explanation, but the big firms in investment are definitely pushing towards that direction. Andreessen Horowitz made some significant moves the past month, with 20 deals closed. Despite Andreessen Horowitz being notoriously focused on US

only investments, with few of them outside the Silicon Valley, the capital allocation and the field chosen for investment clearly show that web3 is here to stay.

When in 2019 all ICOs collapsed and blockchain was widely ridiculed for being slow and inefficient, the Decentralised Finance (DeFi) building blocks were being laid.

Similarly, while the NFT market crashed and metaverses are seen as an oddity in the market, surely something is building up. Andreessen Horowitz just invested \$40m on a Series A for Wyoming-based Irreverent Labs, which is developing artificially intelligent games with blockchain technology, as well as \$24 million in a Series

A for San Francisco-based Metatheory, which focuses on building Web3 games and virtual worlds. Also, as part of their 20 monthly investments, Andreessen Horowitz led a \$15 million Series A for a blockchain-based developer of collectable combat role-playing games.

The overall sentiment for investment is still strong. Tiger Global signed 16 deals last month, including a \$20 million health-tech

deal. Y-Combinator, Gaingels and Accel closed 11 deal each. Insight Partners closed 10 deals, including the leading position in a \$150 million Series E for San Francisco based logistic startup Motive.

So despite the stock market and the crypto market being suffering, large investors see this as a great opportunity to shop around for investment bargains. However I believe that investment in startups and technology needs accountability more than ever.

The crypto market has been plagued with scams. The 2021 NFT craze seems to have come to an end — for now — due to many reasons, including perhaps the countless scams and other security vulnerabilities. We have seen this before: Initial hypes, followed by a sudden crash. However, this pattern seldom spelled the end for tech enhancements.

Generally it is just a moment to reflect, patch what did not work, and get back to full steam with new ideas and renewed energy. When the market collapses and create a valley in the chart, large investors look for the next big thing, hoping to fund for the next Google or Amazon able to survive when the bubble bursts.

Will US consumers keep spending?



JASOR FURMAN

The author, a former chair of president Barack Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers, is professor of the Practice of Economic Policy at Harvard University’s John F Kennedy School of Government and senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics

Some analysts predict that the US economy is heading into a recession. But if that is indeed the case, someone forgot to tell consumers. Although consumer confidence plummeted in August 2021 and has been falling ever since, putting it in the same territory as it was during the 2008 financial crisis, household spending is much higher than it was then.

When consumers speak to pollsters, they register a dour mood; but, whether shopping online or in person, they are still buying at an increasing pace. Second-quarter consumer spending is on track to have grown at more than a 4% annualised rate, which would make it among the best quarters in recent decades. The big question, then, is whether the spending boom will last.

After all, consumers have good reason to feel gloomy. Inflation is

running at a 40-year high, and real (inflation-adjusted) wage growth is at a corresponding 40-year low. Real disposable personal income per capita fell for five straight months before levelling off in April, leaving it 2.1% below where it was in September.

At the same time, consumer spending increased 2% since September, roughly twice its normal annualised rate.

How did consumers spend more while earning less? The answer is that they started to spend down savings.

The personal saving rate fell from above average (with households accumulating assets) to below average as consumers dipped into their savings to smooth out their consumption over time.

Consumers should be able to keep this up for a while. Between March 2020 and December 2021, households received an additional \$1.6 trillion in disposable personal

income above and beyond the previous trend, owing mostly to government transfers like stimulus checks and unemployment insurance.

At the same time, in response to the pandemic, consumers curtailed their consumption by \$800 billion relative to what would have been expected. That means consumers entered 2022 with \$2.4 trillion in excess savings; and that figure doesn’t even account for the huge run-up in asset markets through the end of 2021.

These extra savings show up directly in the form of higher balances in checking accounts, which are regularly reported by the JPMorgan Chase Institute. But checking-account balances are only the tip of the iceberg, reflecting about one-tenth of the excess savings.

Households also used their pandemic windfalls to repay debt (resulting in lower credit-card

balances) and to accumulate other assets. All told, the past four months of below-average savings represent only about a \$100 billion reduction in households’ additional reserves, leaving another \$2.3 trillion. That is a lot of fuel for consumers to be able to spend. And, again, if asset markets were counted, the number would be even higher, because the market declines in 2022 have yet to come close to offsetting the huge increases over the previous two years.

But just because consumers can increase their spending does not necessarily mean that they will. Any predictions about future consumer behaviour must be viewed with caution. Normally, consumer spending is closely linked to the growth of real disposable income, which is represented as a flow.

Yet over the last three years, consumer spending has largely been determined by a combination of attitudes towards Covid-19 and

the desire to keep spending on a smooth path.

Remember, after spending fell by much more than it needed to for purely budgetary reasons in 2020 (as consumers avoided face-to-face services), it then failed to increase by as much as would have been expected from the extraordinary income growth in 2021.

Consumers thus were able to avoid cutting back amid the recent rapid declines in income. It is anyone’s guess whether this smoothing behaviour will continue; but I expect that it will, at least by enough to keep consumer spending growing at a roughly 2% annualised rate in the second half of the year.

Consumer spending represents about two-thirds of the US economy. If it stays strong, that will prevent overall growth from turning negative and the economy from slipping into recession.

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Check out these five interesting caves to visit when in Oman

Since the nearly daily 40 degrees Celsius temperature is a real challenge, why not opt for caving instead? Caves in Oman are of varying types and lengths, sizes and geographic formations, and annually attract large numbers of Speleologists. Check out these five caves to inspire your next trip... **P20**



Photo | Instagram | @orcus_9

Largest known plant on earth discovered in Western Australia

RESEARCHERS HAVE discovered what they believe to be the largest plant in the world — a seagrass stretching across some 180 kilometres off Western Australia's coast.

Researchers from The University of Western Australia (UWA) and Flinders University discovered the "clone" of the seagrass *Posidonia australis* in the shallow waters of Shark Bay in Western Australia, according to a study published in Proceedings of the

Royal Society *Bon* on Wednesday.

The researchers said they were investigating how many different plants were growing in seagrass meadows in Shark Bay, 831 kilometres north of Perth, when genetic testing revealed it was a single plant, estimated to be at least 4,500 years old.

Lead author Jane Edgeloe, an UWA student researcher, said the team sampled seagrass shoots from across the bay's variable environments and generated a



"fingerprint" using 18,000 genetic markers.

"Just one plant has expanded over 180 km in Shark Bay, making it the largest known plant on Earth," Edgeloe said. "The answer blew us away."

"The existing 200 km of ribbon weed meadows appear to have

expanded from a single, colonising seedling," Edgeloe went on.

"This single plant may in fact be sterile; it doesn't have sex," co-author Martin Breed from Flinders University said.

"How it's survived and thrived for so long is really puzzling. Plants that don't have sex tend to

also have reduced genetic diversity, which they normally need when dealing with environmental change," Breed said, adding that the seagrass would have experienced conditions that are typically highly stressful for plants.

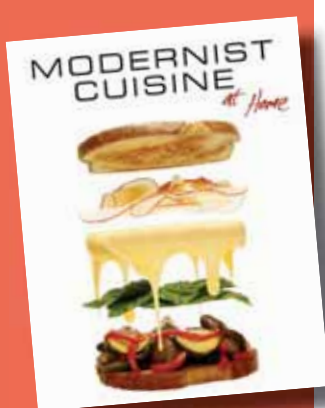
"Yet, it appears to keep on going," he said. — **dpa**

READ

MODERNIST CUISINE AT HOME

BY NATHAN MYHRVOLD

Modernist Cuisine at Home opens up a new world of culinary possibility for passionate and curious home cooks. Drawing on the same commitment to perfection that produced Modernist Cuisine,



ENTERTAINMENT

Star Bollywood singer Krishnakumar Kunnath, popularly known as KK, died of a heart attack at age 53 after a concert, officials said on Wednesday, prompting a flood of tributes. "His songs reflected a wide range of emotions (and) struck a chord with people of all age groups," Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter.



A DAY IN THE LIFE

A girl paints on a plastic sheet at a park on International Children's Day in Haian, China's eastern Jiangsu province. — **AFP**





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AROUND THE WORLD

GASTRONOMY

Order to remove Mexican street food signs leaves bitter taste



THE ERASURE OF colourful pictures of tacos and other mouth-watering street food from stands in the heart of Mexico City has dismayed fans of the signs, considered part of the capital's identity.

The mayor's office in the district of Cuauhtemoc, which includes the city's historic centre and several other traditional neighbourhoods, ordered the removal of the images that adorned hundreds of food kiosks.

They have been replaced by a nondescript government sign declaring that Cuauhtemoc — one of 16 districts in the sprawling capital — "is your home."

It is a matter of "order and discipline" to improve the city's image, said the district's mayor, Sandra Cuevas, who snatched the position from the ruling left-wing party in last year's elections.

It may seem like a minor matter in a city of nine million people plagued by heavy traffic, pollution and the risk of deadly earthquakes — but the metal stands, where thousands gather to eat, and their signs are part of the city's DNA, according to a citizen group opposed to the move.

"It's an attack on the identity of the city and of all Chilangos (residents of the capital)," Aldo Solano, a 35-year-old art historian, told AFP.

"They erased many signs that are popular art, part of the traditional image" of the city, he added.

DECADES-OLD TRADITION

The signs themselves represent the menu of the street food stalls, which number in the thousands across the capital.

Drawings of steaming tacos or a smiling pig in a saucepan leave no doubt that here you can savour the famous Mexican tortilla-based dish, or pork "carnitas" fried in lard.

The illustrations date back to the beginning of the 20th century when Mexico had high rates of illiteracy.

"That's why an iconography was used. Now it's not the case, but the tradition has been preserved," Solano said.

The goal of competing food vendors is to be easily noticed by hungry customers in a crowded public space.

"It's a basic marketing tool," said Tamara de Anda, 28, a member of a group that is building a digital archive of city signs with input from citizens.

Vendors fear customers will now find it harder to know what each stall sells, but they dare not protest due to fears of getting in trouble.

"They told us 'take it away or take it away,'" said a fruit juice vendor who did not want to be named. — AFP

TRAVEL TALES

From Italy to Croatia on Two Wheels

A BIKE RIDE from Trieste, Italy, through Slovenia, to the ancient city of Pula, Croatia, starts from the Adriatic coast's 90-degree bend on the sea's northern coast and rolls down its eastern shore to the tip of the Istria peninsula. The 150-mile leisurely journey brims with ancient traditions, sublime food and perched-village photo ops. History here is measured in millenniums and empires: Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, Napoleonic, Austro-Hungarian.

THE ROUTE

The ride follows two routes: the EuroVelo 8 and the Parenzana Cycle Trail. The trails overlap for much of the itinerary before separating and then reuniting on Croatia's Istrian coast. The six-stage ride covers between 22 and 30 easy-to-moderate miles per day, with occasional challenging ascents. Cyclists pedal enough to see loads of culture while earning their seafood, pasta and wine — but not so much that they'll be exhausted.

You'll start in Trieste by hopping on the 4,700-mile EuroVelo 8 (EV8), which extends from Cádiz, Spain, to Cyprus. The EV8 is part of the EuroVelo network, which began 25 years ago with 12 routes crisscrossing the continent. Today, the network connects 42 countries on 17 routes, covering more than 50,000 miles. The most recent trail, running from Austria to Hungary, was added in 2020.

"The fact that more people are taking up cycling is great for all of us," EuroVelo's director, Ed Lancaster, recently told me. "Cycling supports local economies," he said, noting that it also "reduces tourism's environmental footprint."

South of Trieste, in Muggia, Italy, the EV8 overlaps with the Parenzana Trail through Slovenia. The routes diverge in Croatia, where you'll take the Parenzana, which follows the path of the former Parenzana railroad. Built by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1902, the train connected 33 stations over 76 miles from Trieste to the Croatian town of Poreč, on the Istrian coast. Today it provides a cycling corridor through communities known for truffles, olive oil and wine.

Both the EV8 and the Parenzana roll across multiple surfaces: bike paths removed from traffic; roads and byways, often with little traffic; and gravel trails through vineyards and forests.

Among the reasons I suggest this ride: The stages are short, signage is regular and the path is packed with villages and services. On a recent trip, I stayed at bike-friendly hotels and guesthouses, and set off each morning around 8 am, giving myself plenty of time to explore.

DAY 1: TRIESTE TO PIRAN, SLOVENIA

30 miles on mostly flat, occasionally rolling, paths



After arriving in Trieste from Ljubljana, where I live, I started my journey with a two-cup morning in the home of the Illy coffee company and, arguably, Italy's coffee capital. The first stop was the Illy Ponterosso cafe at the mouth of Canal Grande, whose outdoor tables overlook the canal flowing into the Gulf of Trieste. As I sipped an espresso, I inspected my gravel bike (a hybrid with road-bicycle geometry and off-road sturdiness). It was loaded with bags for clothes, tools, maps and notebooks. Behind me, the statue of James Joyce, who lived and wrote in Trieste, seemed to prod me to my next cup on the Piazza Unità d'Italia, said to be Europe's largest sea-facing square, where I sat at the Caffè degli Specchi amid Hapsburgian architectural pomp. By the time I finished my coffee, I was ready to hit the trail.

From the piazza, I jumped directly onto the EuroVelo 8 and rode for nearly 9 miles of two-lane roads and bike paths to the fishing village of Muggia, where the Parenzana Trail begins and the two routes merge. I crossed into Slovenia, which immediately lived up to its reputation for

cycle-based travel. For most of the country, the asphalt path — often running parallel to traffic as it passes towns and runs through occasional stretches of forests — is flat, dedicated to bicyclists.

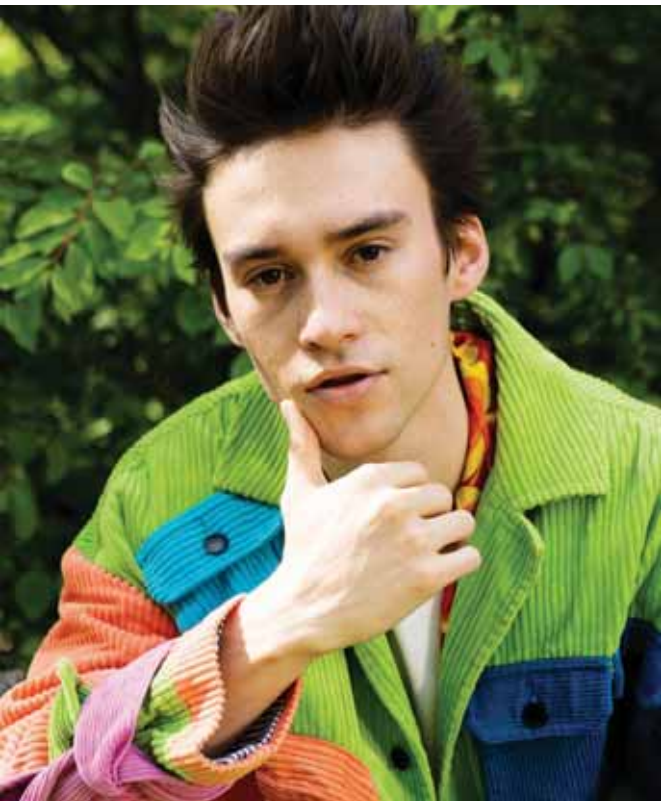
My first stop — at a pekarna (bakery) for a chocolate croissant — was in Koper: Slovenia's only shipping port feels industrial until you reach its medieval, Venetian Republic-era centre. I pushed my bike across cobbled streets leading to Tito Square, home to the 13th-century Praetorian Palace and the 177-foot City Tower, with views down the coast.

The path hugged the shore to Izola, with its laid-back marina filled with sailboats and fishing skiffs, and climbed into the forested countryside. Soon I entered the first of several old stone tunnels along the Parenzana Trail. On the other side of the 600-yard Valeta Tunnel, the trail descended into farms and vineyards.

The seaside resort of Portorož came into view and, beyond it, Piran, another town with ancient roots and Venetian landmarks. Here I took a local bike path from Portorož to Piran, which sat on the tip of a finger-shaped peninsula pointing at Italy. — NYT

MOVIES

The Colourful Mozart of Gen Z



JACOB COLLIER was about to cross Fifth Avenue when a stranger stopped him to take a picture of his outfit. A Grammy-winning musician with millions of followers across YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, Collier is used to requests for pictures, but it was a nice change of pace to be asked because someone liked what he was wearing — a colour-blocked jacket, acid-green patterned pants and tie-dyed Crocs — rather than because the person recognised him from the Internet.

"I was always curious how someone would perceive me from a fashion perspective because I've never really perceived myself that way," he said later from his perch on a rock in Central Park, where he spent a sunny afternoon between shows on his "Djesse" world tour. "I've never overly contrived it. I've gone for things I like that are comfortable and expressive, and that's about it."

Following his artistic instincts has served the 27-year-old Briton well, turning him into an Internet-age success story. As a teenager, his videos of multi-instrumental covers of classic songs went viral on YouTube, earning him professional representation. Since then, Collier has won five Grammys and been nominated for four more. He is commonly described as a genius by fellow musicians, and the list of his admirers is long: Coldplay and Lizzo are fans; Hans Zimmer called Collier his "hero"; and SZA said she "stalked" him on Instagram until she convinced him to collaborate with her.

That Collier attracts admirers from across so many genres is a testament

to the uncategorisable nature of his music, which contains elements from jazz, folk, R&B and classical. His songs often comprise hundreds of tracks layered over one another, in which he plays and sings every sound. He recently attempted to translate this enjoyment of complexity into the visual realm by using the music software Logic to colour-code the hundreds of tracks that went into his arrangement of "The Christmas Song (Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire)." He printed the resulting pattern on a pair of pants in collaboration with the brand Skidz.

"I find myself gravitating towards things that are highly patterned, because I'm quite highly pattern-minded," he said. "Musically, I enjoy that exploration, and visually I think it follows suit." Through it all, Collier's look has remained remarkably homegrown. That's not to say it's tame: His wardrobe is wild and high-energy, full of crayon colours, power-clashing patterns and the occasional alligator onesie, paralleling the eclecticism of his whimsical and energetic soundscapes. But whereas many of his peers present a version of themselves to the world that has been polished by a team of professional image-makers, Collier has, for the better part of 10 years in the public eye, done his own thing. Until a few months ago, he'd never worked with a stylist. His biggest red carpet moment — when he wore a hot pink Stella McCartney suit to the 2021 Grammys (and promptly spilled ketchup on it, he divulged) — was a result of the brand reaching out to him directly. — NYT

art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | JUNE 5 | 2022

Too hot for outdoor adventure?

Check out these five interesting caves to visit when in Oman

By Yeru Ebuon

The current temperature in Oman makes it almost impossible to do any outdoor adventure, especially from late morning till late in the afternoon. But fret not, it doesn't mean the end of any worthwhile adventures to embark on. Since the nearly daily 40 degrees Celsius temperature is a real challenge, why not opt for caving instead?

Caves in Oman are of varying types and lengths, sizes and geographic formations, and annually attract large numbers of Speleologists – those that study caves and other karst features, their make-up, structure, physical properties, history, life forms and the processes by which they form and change over time.

In former times, residents of the mountainous areas used the caves as places of abode and safe havens from the vagaries of weather and nature. Here are five of the most popular caves in Oman that you definitely have to visit at least once.

AL HOOTA CAVE

Probably one of the most popular tourist destinations of the Sultanate of Oman, it lies in the southern part of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar (Green Mountain), specifically near Wilayat Al Hamra in

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. A two-hour drive from Muscat and half an hour from Nizwa, Al Hoota Cave was discovered by residents hundreds of years ago, and its name derives from the village where it is located. The cave extends for 5 kilometres underground, but it may only be accessed for a distance of 860 metres, ending at Cave Lake.

The Al Hoota Cave Lake is located at the end of a footpath. It is 20 metres deep, but there are many parts whose depth surpasses that. The lake contains several species of blind fish: Some are without eyes but have long bristles to sense their food, while others have very small eyes. A certain rare type of fish that can also be found in this lake is a unique pink fish that is so translucent that its skeleton and internal organs are visible to the naked eye.

ABU HABBAN CAVE

This cave is located in the Wilayat of Dima W'attayeen in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, at a distance of 10 kilometres from the centre of the district to the east. While locals have their memorable anecdotes about this cave, a quick tour inside offers one insight as to what makes Al Sharqiyah unique. The cave is mainly characterised by the presence of many rock formations in a diverse variety of colours. If

you are into spelunking or studying rocks, then you'd find a lot of enjoyable sections to satisfy your rock curiosity.

AL MARNIF CAVE

This cave is located in the Shatti Al Mughsayl area about 40 kilometres from Salalah in the Governorate of Dhofar. Overlooking the Arabian Sea and Al Mughsayl fountains (blow-holes), which are a natural phenomenon resulting from the momentum of the water surging into the cavities of rock that lie mostly under water. In monsoon, when sea levels rise and water currents become more active, the running water rips through the rock cavities, resulting in the surge of the water fountain, noted for its outstanding beauty. The sound of the gushing water lends the place a unique ambience of its own.

MAJLIS AL JINN

Out of sight in the heart of brown hills located at the foothills of the eastern Al Hajar Mountains hides one of the greatest and most beautiful natural wonders of the Sultanate of Oman, the Majlis Al Jinn Cave, or Salma Plateau as it is commonly known, and is considered one of the largest underground caves in the world. The area of this enormous cave is 58 thousand square metres and its capacity is 4 million cubic metres. It is 310 metres in length and its width is a whop-

ping 225 metres. A dome-shaped ceiling tops the cave at a height of 120 metres.

Despite the enormity of this cave, it is difficult to detect it from the outside in this vast area, as the only evidence of its existence is a scant three openings that seem of no importance to the viewer. Majlis Al Jinn Cave is located at the northern limit of Salma Plateau near the village of Fins in Wilayat Qurayat in the Governorate of Muscat. Reaching the Cave opening requires strenuous physical effort since you must traverse a distance of 1,300 metres to reach the cave opening through rugged mountain terrain. This trip takes about five hours. The only way to descend into the cave is by ropes, the cave is considered a repository of natural life treasures.

MUQAL CAVE

This cave is located in Wadi Bani Khalid in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, near the famous water pools of Muqal. Upon entering the cave, the roar of underground water flowing through its hard rocks will assail your senses. Your eyes will be captivated by the beautiful rock formations, and you're sure to be mesmerised by the water pools and streams flowing along Wadi Muqal Road.

(with earlier compilation report from Titash Chakraborty)