



MESSI LIVES DREAM TO LIFT WORLD CUP

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
DOHA, DEC 18

Superstar Lionel Messi lived his dream to lift the elusive World Cup trophy after Argentina edged France 4-2 in penalty shoot-out in the final of the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 at the Lusail Stadium on

Sunday night. In the shoot-out, Messi, Paulo Dybala, Leandro Paredes and Gonzalo Montiel all scored from four kicks for Argentina. Mbappe and Randal Kolo Muani scored for the defending champions but Kingsley Coman and Aurelien Tchouameni missed it out to hand Argentina their third World

Cup trophy. The match turned out to be a Lionel Messi vs Kylian Mbappe show after finishing 3-3 at the extra-time into the penalties. Argentine star Messi tapped into the France net in the 109th minute as Argentina went ahead 3-2. The joy was short lived as France got a penalty two minutes later. France star Mbappe

netted his hat-trick of the match as he coolly slotted home their third goal to make it a dramatic 3-3 score. At full-time the match finished 2-2 after France made a late comeback to restore parity as Argentina were cruising along with a 2-0 cushion till the last 10 minutes. France returned a goal in the 80th minute when

star striker Kylian Mbappe converted a penalty and two minutes later the PSG forward sensationally scored another with a brilliant left-footer to put scores level at 2-2. Marcus Thuram got a yellow in the 86th minute for a penalty appeal after falling down in the Argentina penalty box. **FULL REPORT ON P14**

MUSCAT
HM GREETES EMIR OF QATAR
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar on his country's National Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to Shaikh Tamim. His Majesty also prayed to the Almighty Allah for the return of this occasion while the people of Qatar realise aspirations of further progress and prosperity. — ONA

INSIDE



STREETS DESERTED IN CHINA'S CITIES

P5

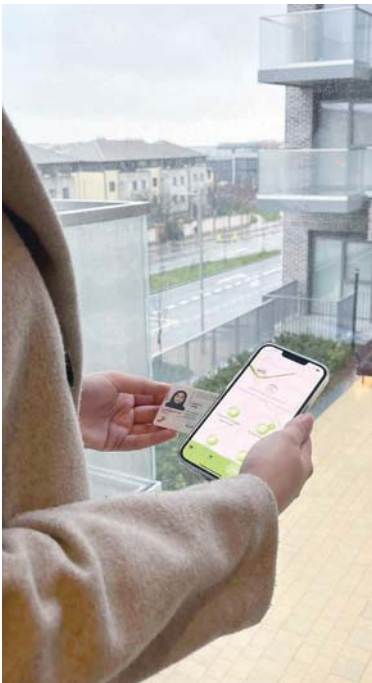
Winter Solstice in Oman on Dec 22

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will experience winter solstice from Thursday, considered the first day of winter season in the northern hemisphere. The phenomenon begins at 1:48 pm, Oman time, and it is thus the longest night and the shortest day of the year. **SHORTEST DAY** Speaking about the phenomenon, Rayan bint Said al Ruwaisdiyah, a member of Oman Astronomical Society, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that Thursday, being the shortest day of the year, and the night is the longest night in the calendar. “The sun will rise in Muscat at 06:44 am and set at 05:25 pm Oman time. The day will be just 10 hours and 41 minutes long

and it will be the first day of the winter season, which lasts 88 days, 23 hours and 36 minutes,” she added. **DAY AND NIGHT EQUAL** Upon the outset of the winter solstice, it will be observed that as if the sun rises from one point in the south of the sky for a few days before it begins its apparent path towards the north again as a result of the Earth's movement in its orbit around the sun. The phenomenon will continue for several days, and then daylight hours begin to extend until their duration becomes equal to those of the night. Later, the vernal equinox (the start of transition into Spring season) will occur on March 21, 2023. — ONA

Citizens abroad vote for municipal council polls

MUSCAT: Omani citizens abroad who are taking part in elections of municipal councils, third term, voted via the smart phone application “Intakhib” on Sunday. The election process, which began at 8 am, will continued till 7 pm. The Ministry of Interior dedicated December 18 to Omani citizens voting from abroad and December 25 for those voting within Oman. As many as 731,767 voters, including 347,965 women, are casting ballots to elect members who will represent them at municipal councils, from a total of 696 candidates, among them 27 women, who are contesting the elections. It is the first time that Municipal council elections are conducted via the new app “Intakhib” (Elect), which was launched by the Ministry of Interior recently. The app constitutes a shift forward in the elections practice as it keeps pace with global technical developments. It provides ease



and integrity, besides saving time and effort. “Intakhib” app is designed in accordance with standard security criteria and ensures the secrecy of information. Its use requires a smart phone configured to

operate NFC protocols, an internet connection and a valid identity card. It also requires that the voter's name be listed in the Electoral Register. The process begins with the voter's loading the app in the smart phone from online stores of IOS or Android phones equipped with dual cameras. Then, the voter snaps a photo of his/her identity card, using the “Intakhib” app, which will read the data via the NFC protocol and relays the information to the candidates' lists and then the voter selects the nominated candidate. Ahmed bin Hassan al Hadabi, Head of the Supervisory Committee of the Municipal Councils' Third Term Election System, said that the committee checked the efficiency of the related systems prior to the start of the electoral process, conducted via smart phones. **SEE ALSO P2**



Main panel for MC polls take stock



MUSCAT: The main committee for the elections of members of municipal councils for the third term held a meeting on Sunday chaired by Eng Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Interior and Chairman of the Committee, in the presence of the members, at the General Court of the Ministry of Interior. The committee followed up the process of voting for voters outside the Sultanate of Oman, and was briefed on the work and roles of the working committees to conduct the voting process. — ONA

Omani citizens hail easiness of voting

MUSCAT: Omani citizens residing in the GCC and other countries said the voting to elect the members of the municipal council through Intakhib mobile application went smoothly. The voters, interviewed by ONA, said that the modern technologies utilised in the electoral process have resolved the problems of time and place and enable citizens to exercise their right to elect their representatives at the municipal councils. Haitham bin Salim al Araimi, an Omani national studying in Egypt said, “The voting process took a few minutes and went seamlessly thanks to the utilisation of technology which enables wide participation of voters. Ali bin Salim al Neseiri and Ammar bin Yasser al Maamari who study in Jordan said that they were able to vote and choose their

representatives easily through the mobile app. Suhail bin Mubarak al Kathiri, an Omani living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) said: “Voting through Intakhib mobile application gave us, we Omanis residing abroad, the opportunity to vote and take part in the municipal council elections. The whole process took a short time and the easiness with which the voting goes encourages a lot of people to vote.” Sulaiman bin Saif al Manei, an Omani living in Saudi Arabia, expressed his thanks and appreciation to the Ministry of Interior for the efforts it is making to keep pace with modern technology which enabled us, we Omanis living abroad, to exercise our voting right easily through Intakhib mobile application.

Technical panel ensures proper functioning of app

MUSCAT: The Technical Committee of Municipal Council’s Third Term Elections has said that all precautionary measures are in place to ensure the proper functioning of ‘Antakhib’ app used in the election process. Today, the 18th of December, is Election Day for Omanis voting from abroad to select the members who will represent them at municipal councils in the wilayats of Oman.



Dr Ali bin Amer Al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, Head of the Technical Committee, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that technical teams have been deployed to detect and address any challenges that might arise during the electoral process. He hoped that the electronic election process, applied for the first time in the region via smart phones, would be a success. Eng Ahmed bin Hassan al Hadabi, Head of the Supervisory Committee of the Municipal Councils’ Third Term Election System, told ONA that the committee checked the efficiency of the related systems prior to the start of the electoral process, conducted via smart phones. Al Hadabi pointed out that the electoral process runs electronically via ‘Antakhib’ app, without human intervention till the announcement of the results. “It is a leading experience par excellence in the region,” he added. Eng Badr bin Sulaiman Awlad Thani, Head of the Online Voting Committee, said that voters’ keenness to elect their desired candidates from abroad reflects social awareness about the importance of the electoral process, which is made unique this time through the use of smart phones. — ONA

International arabic language day celebrated



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education, celebrated on Sunday the International Arabic Language Day, which falls on December 18 of each year. This year’s celebration comes under the slogan “The contribution of the Arabic language to human civilisation and culture.” Darwish bin Muslim al Kiyumi, Director of the Supervision Department of Human Sciences at the Ministry of Education, in his speech said, the impact of the Arabic language on human civilisation was profound and influential and this was conveyed in the language of sciences of philosophy, medicine, engineering, mathematics and arts of all kinds. Al Wusta educational schools celebrated the International Day of the Arabic Language, with the aim of instilling its importance and scientific status among the students. — ONA

Oman at Camel and World Cup 2022

MUSCAT: Oman took part at the Camel and World Cup 2022 activities, organised by the Arab Union for Camel Races (Mahari) in Al Sheehaniya, as part of Fifa World Cup 2022 in Qatar, which concluded on December 18. The camel chariots from Qatar and Royal Camels from the Sultanate of Oman attended the opening ceremony. The second day started with the presentations of the Royal Camels, as well as the first and second matches of the first international championship ‘camel handball’. On the third day of the event, a camel race was held with a human rider, and later the Camel handball match determined the third and fourth positions. On the fourth and final day, the final match of the first international championship ‘camel handball’ was held.





Badr receives UAE foreign minister



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received His Highness Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), on Sunday. — ONA

MSX releases names of Sharia-compliant firms

MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) has announced a list of Sharia-compliant companies for the third quarter of 2022.

The list includes 23 joint-stock companies listed on MSX whose business and financial conduct conformed with the requirements of Islamic Sharia, according to the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions.

The index sample, which includes the topmost 15 companies that comply with Sharia standards for four consecutive quarters of any full fiscal year, will be affected



by this disclosure, notably with Oman Fisheries Company existing and Oman Packaging Company entering the list. — ONA

State Council at meeting with European Parliament



RIYADH: The State Council took part in the joint meeting between the chairperson of the European Parliament delegation with the female members of the parliaments of the GCC countries, held at the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on Sunday.

The State Council was represented by the Honourable Sariyah bint Khalfan bin al Hadiyah. She reviewed the march of Omani women in the State Council and their efforts in boosting national, legislative and political work.

The meeting discussed the role of female members of the legislative councils of the GCC countries and enhancing their participation alongside the male members.

‘Kahateen’ moves to rehabilitate orphans

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Under ‘Kahateen’ initiative, several initiatives to support orphans in the country are under way. ‘Kahateen’ is an orphan rehabilitation programme that supports the beneficiaries financially, according to the Department of Funds for Orphans and Minors under the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

In its eighth session, the Kahateen programme aims to rehabilitate 63 orphans from various governorates, besides focusing on a set of necessary foundations to manage money, such as increasing income and reducing risks.

Speaking to the Observer, Ali Hawaishel al Hatali from the

Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs said the eighth edition of the Kahateen initiative aims to raise awareness of the importance of preserving the funds of orphans and minors to contribute to their future financial investments.

“The project also aims to secure their future through financial security for a better life and to encourage community cooperation that guarantees solidarity and support to the orphans in society,” Al Hatali said.

The ‘Orphan Enlightenment Programme’ was divided into three main programmes, such as the ‘personal finance programme’, the second programme is centred on the ‘personal economy programme’ and included five key aspects, including ‘how to earn money and spend it wisely’, and

‘work to protect personal funds.’

Many external learning methods have also been referred to the participants through these sessions to reinforce their ideas.

The programme also aims to enhance the concepts of personal money management, understand the basic rules of saving, manage financial crises, and other aspects of managing money in a proper way, know the types of income and the bank card details and how not to fall prey to financial offences.

Kahateen is an initiative of the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs for orphans registered with the Ministry between the age of 13 and 18 years. The programme is supported by Al-Ezz Islamic Bank, in agreement with the Injaz Oman Foundation and the Supreme Judicial Council.

Forum on constructive dialogue, tolerance begins



MUSCAT: The regional forum on enhancing principles of constructive dialogue and values of tolerance among youth, through social media platforms, kicked off here on Sunday.

The event is organised by the Ministry of Education, represented by the National Commission for Education, Science and Culture, in cooperation with the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) Civilizational Dialogue Centre.

The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage.

The event aims to increase the awareness of youth regarding the principles of constructive dialogue and values of tolerance. It also introduces legislations and legal aspects related to constructive dialogue on social media platforms.

— ONA



Temperatures drop sharply in Oman

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Jabal Shams recorded the lowest temperature in the Sultanate of Oman at less than 3.9 degrees Celsius on Saturday night, according to Oman Meteorology.

Saiq (7 degrees Celsius), Thamrait (12 degrees Celsius), Al Mazyouna (12.4 degrees Celsius) and Yanqul (13.6 degrees Celsius) also recorded low temperatures during the same period.

Night temperatures in Muscat, Suhar, and Sur are expected to drop to under the 20s in the coming days.

With moderate to active northern winds blowing over the mountains and coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate, the temperatures in the various governorates have witnessed a sharp drop.

Oman said the sea waves (coinciding with the northeastern winds) on the western coasts of Musandam Governorate and parts of the coasts of the Sea of Oman rose to an average of 2m this evening and will continue on Monday and Tuesday.

The sea waves will continue to rise on the coasts of the Arabian Sea to an average height of 2.5m,” the Meteorology Department said.

The Sultanate of Oman will also witness next Thursday the phenomenon of the winter solstice, which coincides with the first day of the astronomical winter season in the northern hemisphere, and thus the longest night and the shortest day of the other days of the year.



MoCIIP warns of action against e-payments



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) found 140 violations regarding the non-availability of electronic payment services at commercial establishments.

A decision was made at the beginning of 2022 that commercial institutions and companies dealing in foodstuff, gold and silverware, restaurants and cafes, vegetables and fruits, electronics, building materials, tobacco, all activities in industrial areas, commercial complexes, and gift markets need to have electronic payment services. In case of non-compliance with the decision, the MoCIIP gives a warning with 20 days time to install the payment service along with an administrative fine of RO 100.

The decision, made in Oman Vision 2040, was a joint action of the MoCIIP and Central Bank of Oman, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Protection Authority, and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology to achieve comprehensive digital transformation.

The decision was meant to avoid the security risks in dealing with cash and expediting buying and selling, customer service management, financial management, inventory management, and reducing the risks of theft, internal fraud, and false invoices.

The ministry confirmed the consumer's choice to pay digitally or in cash.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has coordinated with banks and payment service providers to provide a point-of-sale device or any payment service for merchants without installation fees or monthly or annual fees for private sector institutions. Also, it asked to adhere only to the fees for merchant transactions specified by the CBO, so that they do not exceed 1.5 per cent and a maximum of RO 10 for payment via direct debit cards, and not more than 0.75 per cent for mobile payment via QR code. This is to facilitate the process of providing this service to the owners of the targeted activities.

Many applications support and facilitate the online payment process on which electronic payment is relied on and through which electronic payment is made in the Sultanate of Oman.

These applications allow customers to pay financial dues, and some may enable purchase invoices to be sent to the customer without needing to go to the store.

According to statistics, the dependence of Omani citizens on this method of payment increased by 34 per cent at the beginning of 2020, and this percentage is expected to reach more than 50 per cent by the end of 2025.

Electronic payment has been adopted in the Sultanate of Oman to serve the citizens and meet their needs, focusing on the importance of this method and the necessity of its continuous development.

Funding agreement signed for Hay al Mina Health Centre

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Health Endowment Foundation signed a funding agreement on Sunday to purchase medical equipment for Hay al Mina Health Center in Muttrah worth RO 45,000 funded by Sohar International Bank.

The agreement was signed by MoH's Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs Dr Fatima bint Mohammed al Ajmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International Bank Ahmed Musalmi, and Taqwa al Lawati, Executive Manager of Health Endowment Foundation (ATHAR).

MoH's Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial, and Planning Affairs affirmed the significance of the partnership among public sector and other sectors in the Sultanate of Oman for serving public interests, commending the initiative of Sohar International Bank to



finance such vital projects.

Dr Al Ajmi added that the signing of the agreement arose from the strategic partnership to achieve community common good and promote the public welfare services and development projects across the Sultanate of Oman.

Commenting on this, Ahmed Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International Bank, said: "Health and well-being

have always been a key pillar of Sohar International's social responsibility initiatives, and we are keen to explore how we, as a socially responsible financial institution, can make a difference in our communities. At Sohar International, we complement the government's efforts in this direction by providing support through supplying equipment and tools to operate a specialised dental and physiotherapy centre

in Muscat Governorate. Such support enables us to meaningfully contribute to the nation's broad objectives of ensuring health and better living for all and also establish a closer bond with the overall society we operate in."

The signing of the agreement aims at supplying and modernising the specialised medical equipment needed for Hay al Mina Health Centre, and thus improving the provided health services for all.

MoC signed with NEP for training, job creation

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 18

Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, met with the technical team of National Employment Programme (NEP) in his office last week.

During the meeting, a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) was signed between Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and the National Employment Programme, marked by Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, and Eng Azhar bin Ahmed al Kindi, Technical Director of the NEP.

The memorandum aimed to qualify, train and create job



opportunities for the people of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate in several economic, tourism, agricultural wealth, food security, and information technology fields.

The meeting was part of the communication plan implemented by NEP with local administrations in the governorates to enhance the joint work in the training and employment fields.

During the meeting, an introduction to the National Employment Programme and the efforts made by the programme to develop the employment system in the Sultanate of Oman was presented through the creation of various partnerships with various government and private agencies.

The national initiatives

implemented by the programme, which train and qualify Omani cadres and source job opportunities for them in all economic sectors of the country, were also presented.

It was made by analysing all supply chains and value-added in various sectors in line with modern technologies and the communications revolution that the world is witnessing.

The meeting also presented the demographic statistics of the governorate and the available opportunities for training and qualifying the governorate's people and finding job opportunities to serve the governorate's future directions.

ROHM to host acrobatic extravaganza 'Carousel'



MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) announced three nights of spectacular dance in Carousel, from the international ambassadors of Italian culture, the Kataklo Athletic Dance Theatre.

Following on from their performance of Play that closed the Spring 2022 season, ROHM is offering another acrobatic extravaganza to audiences in Oman.

Carousel takes moments from life and transforms them into a dance, drawing out the emotional and physical connections which make them special.

Giulia Staccioli, founder and artistic director of Kataklo Athletic Dance Theatre, creates the Grand Italian Hotel on stage, where a cross section of society, from the VIP guest to the humblest hotel worker,

welcomes in the new year with a big celebration.

Carousel is a captivating show, inspiring joy and energy, through the creativity and elegance for which Giulia Staccioli's company and signature are known all over the world.

Carousel will take place at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts on December 22-23, 2022.

MoHT to uncover new heritage sites

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has been working on various missions to uncover new heritage and civilisations sites.

It may be noted that the Sultanate of Oman takes great care in the preservation and conservation of its heritage sites.

MoHT, in cooperation with an archaeological mission from the National Center for Scientific Research, is currently carrying out a survey and excavation work under a project called the 'Exploration of the Omani Empty Quarter' in the Wilayat of Al Mazayouna in the Dhofar Governorate, which dates back to prehistoric times.

The artefacts found from the Middle Stone Age (4,500-6,500 BC) include grinding

stones, arrowheads, and stone tools, decorative shells, which indicate that there were strong links between the people on the coast, which was 300 km from the site.

MoHT is also working at the archaeological site of Daba in Musandam Governorate.

The mission involved examining one-of-a-kind graves in terms of architectural construction and funeral furniture contents, which will provide important information about the area's history and civil activities. The excavations resulted in the registration of more than five thousand artifacts at the site.

The ministry is making attempts to certify the site as a tourist shrine by establishing a visitor centre, which will house an exhibition, an artifact store, and a restoration factory.



omanobserver.com/podcast

world

OMANDAILYOBSERVER

MONDAY | DECEMBER 19 | 2022

5

In brief

■ KATHMANDU



DEADLINE TO FORM NEW NEPAL GOVT

Nepal's president Bidhya Devi Bhandari on Sunday called on the country's political parties to try to form the new government within a week after last month's inconclusive national election.

The ruling alliance, led by the Nepali Congress party of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, and the main opposition Nepal Communist Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party need the support of smaller groups to form a new government.

Nepal, a country of 30 million people that is squeezed between China and India, has seen ten government changes since the abolition of 239-year-old monarchy in 2008.

■ KAMPALA



UGANDA LIFTS LOCKDOWN IN EBOLA EPICENTRE

Uganda on Saturday lifted a two-month lockdown on two districts at the epicentre of the country's Ebola epidemic.

Since authorities declared an Ebola outbreak on September 20, the East African nation has registered 142 confirmed cases and 56 deaths, with the disease spreading to the capital Kampala. The two central districts at the heart of the outbreak were placed under lockdown by President Yoweri Museveni on October 15.

But on Saturday, Vice President Jessica Alupo said the government was "lifting all restrictions and curfew in Mubende and Kassanda districts with immediate effect".

■ HONG KONG



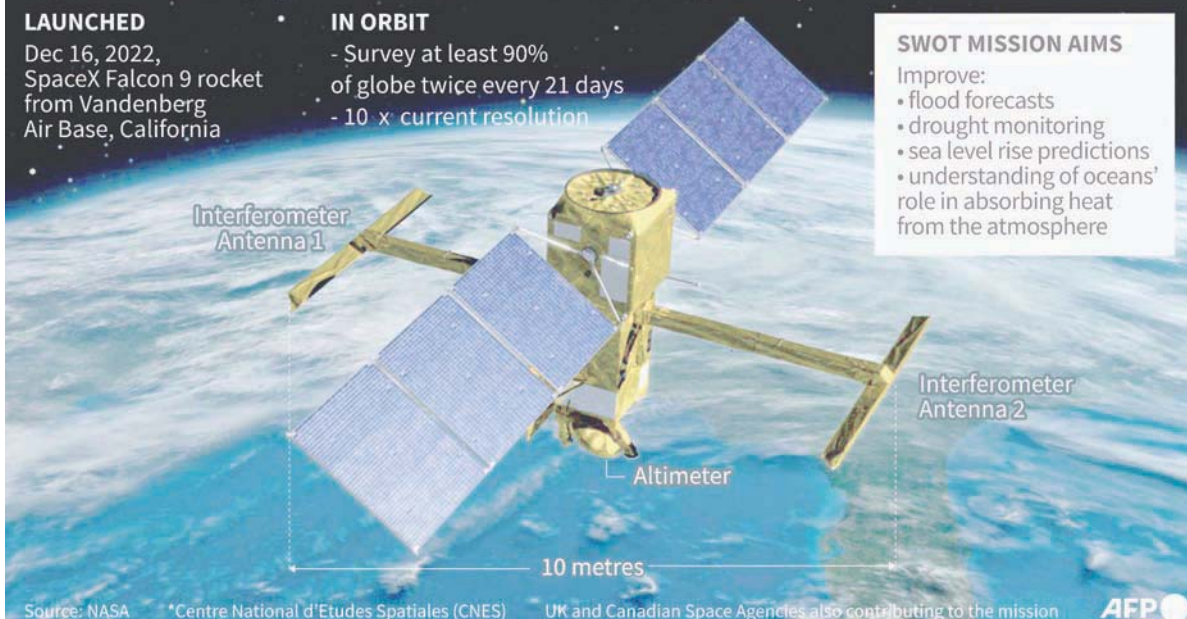
HONG KONG AUTHOR XI XI DIES AGED 85

Hong Kong author Xi Xi, whose whimsical tales became a defining portrait of a city transitioning away from British rule, died on Sunday, according to a publisher she co-founded. She was 85. One of the most beloved names in Sinophone literature, she published more than 30 books of fiction, poetry, non-fiction and screenplays in a career spanning six decades. She was often credited with putting Hong Kong on the map in the literary world.

Xi Xi died of heart failure at a Hong Kong hospital on Sunday morning surrounded by family and friends, publisher Plain Leaves Workshop said.

New satellite to provide crucial data on Earth's surface water

Surface Water and Ocean Topography (SWOT) satellite, developed by NASA and French space agency*, to survey for the first time nearly all Earth's surface water and measure height of oceans, lakes and rivers



Covid fear empties out streets in China's cities

BEIJING: Streets in major Chinese cities were eerily quiet on Sunday as people stayed home to protect themselves from a surge in Covid-19 cases that has hit urban centres from north to south.

China is in the first of an expected three waves of Covid cases this winter, according to the country's chief epidemiologist, Wu Zunyou. Further waves will come as people follow the tradition of returning en masse to their home areas for the Lunar New Year holiday next month, he said.

China has not reported any Covid deaths since December 7, when it abruptly ended most restrictions key to a zero-Covid tolerance policy following unprecedented public protests. The strategy had been championed by President Xi Jinping.

As part of the easing of the zero-Covid curbs, mass testing for the virus has ended, casting doubt on whether official case numbers can capture the full scale of the outbreak. China reported some 2,097 new symptomatic Covid infections on Dec. 17.

In Beijing, the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant has already hit services from catering to parcel deliveries.

Funeral homes and crematoriums across the city of 22 million are also struggling to keep up with demand amid staff



A health worker wearing protective equipment (PPE) stands at the entrance of a fever clinic of a hospital in Shanghai on Sunday. — AFP

shortages as workers and drivers call in sick.

At Beijing's largest funeral parlour in Babaoshan, also known for handling the bodies of top Chinese officials and leaders, several hearses a minute could be seen entering on Sunday, while the parking area for private cars was also full.

"Right now it is difficult to book a hearse so many relatives transport the body with their own vehicles," said an employee on condition of anonymity.

Smoke billowed out of crematoriums, where groups of people were gathered to collect the ashes of the deceased. It was

not immediately clear to what extent a rise in Covid-related deaths was responsible.

Social media posts also showed empty subways in the city of Xian in China's northwest, while in Shanghai, the country's commercial hub, there was none of the usual bustle in the run up to the New Year.

"Festive vibes are missing," said a resident who gave her name as Alice.

In Chengdu, streets were deserted but food delivery times were improving, said a resident surnamed Zhang, after services began to adapt to the recent surge in cases. — Reuters

Tunisia opposition calls for president to resign after polls

TUNIS: The leader of Tunisia's main opposition alliance said on Sunday that President Kais Saied should "leave immediately", a day after voters overwhelmingly snubbed elections for a neutered parliament.

The electoral board said 8.8 per cent of the nine-million-strong electorate had turned out for Saturday's polls, the culmination of a power grab by Saied in the only democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring.

An abstention rate of more than 91 per cent "shows that very, very few Tunisians support Kais Saied's approach", Ahmed Nejib Chebbi, president of the National Salvation Front, said.

He said the result showed "great popular disavowal" of the process that began when Saied, elected in 2019, seized executive powers last year.

The president in July 2021 sacked the government, froze parliament and surrounded it with military vehicles, following months of political deadlock and economic crisis exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Saied, a former law professor, followed up by seizing control of the judiciary and pushing through a constitution that consolidates his near-absolute power in a widely boycotted referendum in July.

His moves, a decade after the ouster of dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, have sparked fears of a return to autocracy.

The National Salvation Front, which includes Saied's nemesis the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, boycotted Saturday's election, saying it was part of a "coup" against Tunisia's democracy.

The ballot for the new 161-seat assembly followed three weeks of barely noticeable campaigning, with few posters in the streets and no serious debate among a public preoccupied with day-to-day economic survival.

Saied's moves were initially supported by some Tunisians tired of the messy and sometimes corrupt democratic system installed after the revolution.

But almost a year and half on, the country's economic woes have gone from bad to worse and inflation is higher than Saturday's voter turnout.

The previous legislature, dominated by Ennahdha, had far-reaching powers in the mixed presidential-parliamentary system enshrined in Tunisia's post-revolution constitution.

But the new chamber "won't be able to appoint a government or censure it, except under draconian conditions that are almost impossible to meet," according to political scientist Hamadi Redissi. — AFP



Officials count ballots at a polling station in Tunis. — AFP

Israel deports Palestinian lawyer to France

JERUSALEM: Israel deported French-Palestinian human rights lawyer Salah Hamouri on Sunday, accusing him of security offences against the state of Israel, the Israeli interior ministry said in a statement.

Hamouri was escorted to the airport early on Sunday morning where he boarded a flight to France with his campaign saying there was no legal recourse for him to take. Hamouri, 37, a Jerusalem resident without Israeli citizenship, had his residency status revoked on Dec. 1 on charges that he was active in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, classified by Israel and its Western allies as a terror group. "During his life he organised, inspired and planned to commit terror attacks on his own and for the organisation against citizens and well-known Israelis," a statement from the



French-Palestinian lawyer Salah Hamouri (C) arrives at the Parisian airport of Roissy, after he was expelled from Israel, on Sunday. — AFP

interior ministry said.

A statement from the Hamouri campaign called the deportation a "war crime" and said it constitutes a breach of international law.

Hamouri was most recently detained by Israel under administrative detention without charge on March 7 until Dec. 1 when Israel revoked his residency and stated he would be deported.

He was previously detained by Israel between 2005 and 2011 after being accused of attempting to assassinate Sephardi rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the founder of the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, but has always maintained his innocence.

Hamouri was released in December 2011 as part of an exchange of Palestinian prisoners for Gilad Shalit, the Israeli soldier released in October 2011 after five years in captivity in the Gaza Strip at the hands of Hamas. — AFP

Watch out business fraudsters

Setting up a business is not everyone's cup of tea of course. Confidence and know-how are the key ingredients.

No one will trust you if you do not trust yourself. Of course, customers prefer to do business with professionals who appear competent and secure in their abilities. This is possible only for those who can play the win and lose game. Such gamble is expected, especially at the initial stages of setting up any business until it gets in operation. Afterward, it would be just a matter of time till revenue is generated out of the business.

The norm of any business, regardless of its size, should be clear as the mission and vision of each real business in the world. Every business is focused on a specific field and this should not contradict with people's interests, ethics and values. What is really significant is that personal relations should not be sacrificed for the sake of business. Relations are meant to last forever and not to be spoiled by fraudulent deals. Hypocrisy and dishonesty don't go along with a real business.

When in business, people always think mainly of profit making, so they might lose their customers and the business eventually. What they need to do is considering the long-term investment opportunities and sustaining their relations with major corporate entities and individual customers too.

They need to think wisely on how to run the business and make realistic profit out of it. Besides, taking advantage of people is neither an honourable nor a right way of making a business.

Cheating people for the sake of making a living or getting a high profit is inhumane. Though, it is happening a lot with many so-called businesspersons or owners of small and medium enterprises or start-ups, some of whom are immature enough to run a business while others are dishonest.



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

Unfortunately, some are intentionally deceiving and taking advantage of people. Disappointingly, the market is full of fake business deals being made everyday and poor customers are becoming the scapegoats.

Speaking out of real experiences some of which I witnessed or others have come across, many young Omanis start or get involved in businesses without basic know-how. Due to lack of sufficient experience coupled with their desire to gain quick money, they land up in trouble. Often, they are forced to end the business due to losses suffered either for mismanagement or deceit by partners. Some people engage in lucrative businesses, so they do clandestine deals without proper documents. On the other hand, many young immature people start a business and end up being overloaded with loans due to the ill-management of their projects. Some are doing fake deals with landlords, partners or customers, so they end up getting in trouble too.

Accordingly, all these types of pretentious entrepreneurs are ruining the reputation of Omani business people. They are also losing the confidence of customers and corporates who could be a possible support to Omani entrepreneurs and local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). It is unfair to the hardworking Omanis who are real models of outstanding and professional businessmen and businesswomen. Out of concern, one should be very careful when dealing with business start-ups and the insufficiently established businesses. In contrast, we need to support local enterprises and young Omanis, so they can succeed in managing their own businesses.

All should remember the advice of Charlie Chaplin, an English comic actor and filmmaker, who said "My pain may be the reason for somebody's laugh, but my laugh must never be the reason for someone's pain".

WHAT IS REALLY SIGNIFICANT IS THAT PERSONAL RELATIONS SHOULD NOT BE SACRIFICED FOR THE SAKE OF BUSINESS.

SANTA ON A BOAT



People dressed as Santa Claus row during a Christmas regatta along the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy, on Sunday. – Reuters

Europe's Russia sanctions shot to the foot

It seems obvious that sanctions – an increasingly important tool of Western foreign policy – should inflict significant pain on the target without exacting unsustainably high costs from the country imposing them. But the European Union's sanctions on Russia – intended to punish the country for its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine – do not meet this condition.

At the centre of the EU's plan to punish Russia is an effort to eliminate its dependence on the cheap Russian energy that long powered its growth, including by increasing its reliance on liquefied natural gas imported from the United States and elsewhere. But LNG has long been an overpriced (and carbon-intensive) alternative to piped gas: before Russia invaded Ukraine, it was 4-5 times more expensive than natural gas. Now, it is even more exorbitantly priced: since the war began, the cost of LNG has more than doubled.

But with the Kremlin slashing gas flows to Europe, in order to ensure that it – not the EU – dictates the timetable for phasing out Russian supplies, European countries have had little choice but to rely increasingly on LNG imports. This is creating serious challenges for Europe's manufacturing base, to the point that some European



Brahma Chellaney

Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research and Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy in Berlin

SOME EUROPEAN FIRMS CONSIDERING SHIFTING PRODUCTION TO THE US, WHICH OFFERS NOT ONLY CHEAPER FUEL, BUT ALSO MASSIVE SUBSIDIES AND TAX CREDITS

firms are now considering shifting production to the US, which offers not only cheaper fuel, but also massive subsidies and tax credits under its new Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

Already, Europe's decision to turn its back on Russian gas has increased the likelihood of a deep recession. Skyrocketing gas prices – which are a staggering 14 times higher than two years ago – have fuelled inflation and destabilised eurozone financial markets. So, just when Europe's economies are on the brink of contraction, the cost of living is spiking – and the threat of rolling power outages looms.

European policymakers' adoption of desperate measures like price caps and regulated tariffs could well exacerbate the situation. To conserve gas, some European governments have even turned to coal. Moreover, European leaders like French President Emmanuel Macron have pleaded with US President Joe Biden to ease pressure on their economies by adjusting some controversial IRA provisions. Months after an agreement to strengthen and expand Nato, transatlantic

relations are beginning to fray. The one thing the EU appears unwilling to consider is changing course on sanctions. This month alone, it has imposed an embargo on imports of Russian crude and joined its G7 partners in introducing a \$60-per-barrel price cap. Europe's sanctions recall America's 1930 Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, which substantially raised import duties on more than 20,000 goods. Far from protecting US industry, the tariffs prompted other countries to retaliate, deepening the Great Depression and contributing to the rise of political extremism, especially in Europe.

Today, too, many European countries' politics are lurching rightward. Italy's current governing party traces its roots to Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement; likewise, the Sweden Democrats has neo-Nazi roots. In Poland and Hungary, right-wing governments show increasing authoritarian tendencies. If soaring energy prices and runaway inflation worsen economic conditions – a likely scenario in the short term – far-right forces could gain further ground across the continent.

One might be able to argue that the sanctions' large costs were worth shouldering if they were significantly hampering Russia's war effort. But while Russia has certainly suffered, and Ukraine has achieved some high-profile military victories, nearly one-fifth of Ukrainian territory remains under Russian occupation. If the EU is enduring so much pain, while Russia's aggression proceeds apace, sanctions become tantamount to self-flagellation. This is why moral outrage, however justified, should never drive policy.

To be sure, the EU's international image has long rested on its reputation as a force for democracy, human rights, and a rules-based order, which strengthens the case for a bold, if costly, response to Russian aggression. But, had cooler heads prevailed, it would have been obvious that a rapid transition away from Russian energy supplies would undermine the EU's global standing by denting its sustainability credentials – the turn to coal is a case in point – and causing a global energy crisis, which is hurting poorer countries. Given that the EU

accounts for 11 per cent of global energy consumption, its quest to secure replacement supplies was bound to disrupt the entire global economy. After all, the alternative supplies the EU secured were not idle. International oil and LNG supplies were already tight, and there was inadequate production capacity to compensate for the loss of Russian supplies.

As a result, when the EU rejected Russian energy, the world suddenly faced energy scarcity, with countries in Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere losing access to some supplies on which they had previously depended. In fact, soaring European gas prices have encouraged some shippers to divert LNG cargoes from Asia to Europe.

For far too long, the EU believed that economic and trade relations could be managed without regard for foreign-policy and security considerations. The Ukraine war made this approach untenable. But this should have prompted a more considered debate about what should come next, rather than an abrupt transition away from Russian energy supplies.

©Project Syndicate, 2022



An ode to farming: Oman's Harvest Festival 2023

KABEER YOUSUF

IT IS A MESSY AFFAIR, was the young boy's reply when he was asked why he didn't follow his father's path who is a farmer not just for a livelihood but for his passionate love for the job and pursued all his nearly seventy years of life.

For him, it is all the water, dust, mud and the pains of getting up in the morning and being attentive all the time about the seeds, crops and fertilisers and so on and so forth that dissuaded him from becoming a farmer and it is no wonder that many youth finds it difficult to mud their feet in the farms.

Keeping in mind the challenges that the modern generation is facing in falling in love with nature, a group of youth is sparing no stones unturned in inculcating the values of growing the fruits and vegetables that one needed in their backyard.

'The Oman Krishikkootam', which is translated as a 'group

of passionate farmers' has been relentlessly working towards this goal and has announced a 'Harvest Festival' to be held on Friday, February 3 at Halban Farm in Barka, a true manifestation of months long hard work and falling in love with the soil.

To be held from 8 am to 6 pm, scores of members of the 'Oman Krishikkootam' spread across different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman will be given a platform to display their cultivation of the season.

Those who present the best yields will be given away 'The Model Farmer' awards as an encouragement to work more towards the common cause.

'Oman Krishikkottam' is a body of people to promote and educate about organic farming. Formed with just 10 members who shared similar affection towards agriculture a few years ago, is today a large group on Facebook with more than 3, 500



families to date.

WhatsApp groups are bifurcated into four different governorates in Oman to give precise instructions on sprouting, sowing, adding nutrients and protecting plants from pests which ensures highest yield possible.

"We received a big pat on our back when Sunil Kumar, Former Agriculture Minister of the State of Kerala who supported us by providing high quality seeds and an expert panel of agriculture officers who timely enlighten the members on various innovative farming techniques. We were able to meet him during his visit to Oman and was overwhelmed with the activities of the group," Vinod, an active member of the Group said.

During the harvest season, the members will participate in a 'Mathruka Karshaka/Karshakan Competition' a contest to choose the best agriculturist. Winners will be chosen from a lengthy and labyrinth

competition which lasts for three month and is categorised into 3 governorates of Oman — Muscat, Sohar and Al Buraimi.

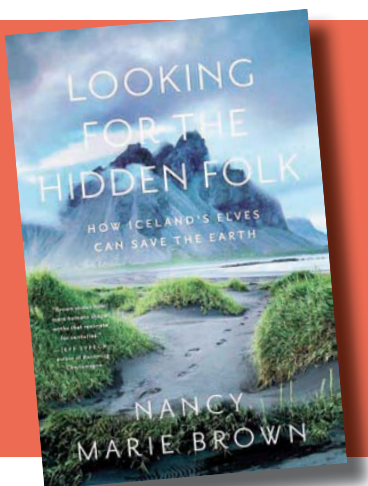
As part of imparting the culture of agriculture to the next generation, Indian School Buraimi (ISB) has initiated on creating a region for farming under the supervision of the Oman Krishikkootam. In 2018, Indian School Darsait (ISD) also created a vegetable garden in their school premise under the guidance of experts from Oman Krishikkootam. As of this year Oman Krishikkootam has initiated a competition called "Little Green Fingers" where children are trained to grow vegetables such as tomato, eggplant and chilly plants provided by the Oman Krishikkootam. Little winners will be chosen from their crops that they produce from the seeds provided by the Group cultivated on their land and will receive prizes for their work on the soil.

READ

LOOKING FOR THE HIDDEN FOLK

BY NANCY MARIE BROWN

It explores how Icelanders interact with nature—and their idea that elves live among us



ART

Using blood taken from his own veins, Philippine artist Elito Circa produces canvas paintings that have drawn both praise and criticism because of his unusual choice of medium. — Reuters



CINEMA

The action game 'Death Stranding' will be adapted for the silver screen, according to its Japanese creator Hideo Kojima, who will co-produce the film through his company. — AFP





INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS

_ibbu_hatela_
Jabal shams, grand Canyon, oman

Follow

sachinorthodoc16
Al Wusta Governorate

Follow

krishnaraj_jayaram
Thattakkad Forest

Follow

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use **#OmanObserver** and **#BeAnObserver**.

AROUND THE WORLD

ENVIRONMENT

Robot plant grows, wilts on fate of UN nature talks



IT'S NOT ALWAYS easy to make sense of the complex environmental diplomacy taking place at a UN summit billed as humanity's last hope to save nature.

That's why a scientist and artist have teamed up to build a large, data-driven robotic plant that withers or flourishes depending on countries' policy commitments: a tangible demonstration of how human actions will impact the world's threatened species.

Called "ECONARIO," the 5.5-metre (18-foot) tall artwork took a year to build from recycled steel and is currently on display in Montreal Convention Centre, keeping policymakers at the COP15 meeting on their toes as they attempt to hammer out a deal to protect ecosystems.

Its creator, Dutch artist Thijs Biersteker, told AFP the idea behind it is simple: "If the research does not reach us, then how can the research teach us?"

"Art reflects the time we're in, and it should reflect these important issues."

The plant feeds on data from the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII) — an estimated percentage of the original number of species that remain, and their abundance in any given area, despite human impacts.

Data scientist Adriana De Palma of London's Natural History Museum, who serves as research lead for the BII, said, it is based on a robust, peer-reviewed and open access methodology.

As negotiations happen, the team behind BII input, for example, how many countries have committed to implement a cornerstone pledge of protecting 30 per cent of lands and oceans by 2030.

"We can then predict what that is going to mean for biodiversity in 20, 50 or 100 years," she said.

ROOTING FOR SUCCESS

New funding pledges by wealthy countries to assist lower income nations in protecting their biodiversity have helped to nudge up slightly the predicted global average of BII to 70.7 per cent by 2050 — meaning the average ecosystem will have that percentage of its natural ecological community left.

The current figure is 68.5 per cent, set to drop to 66.4 per cent if "business as usual" continues but rise to 76.4 per cent in case of "real action" which the UN summit was meant to deliver.

For now, ECONARIO is cycling between the pessimistic and optimistic scenarios in order to show what could be possible — but if policymakers fail to achieve an ambitious target, that will be reflected in a very sorry looking robotic plant.

"We shouldn't shy away from the hard numbers, it's not time to sugarcoat anymore," said Biersteker.

De Palma added they were in talks with North American museums to loan the artwork out after the UN summit concludes, and it will eventually return to Europe.

"Using a piece of art like this to really connect with people so they see the damage that individual choices, company choices and government choices are having on the world, is incredibly valuable," she said.

— AFP

ANCIENT

Back from underworld: Greek city's cultural rebirth



IT WAS THE GREEK city where the ancients flocked in the hope of learning the secret of life after death.

Now Eleusis — known to Greeks as Elefsina — aims to resurrect its flagging fortunes by becoming European capital of culture next year.

Roman emperors including Marcus Aurelius and his son Commodus — of "Gladiator" fame — were among the glitterati of antiquity who came to be initiated into its secret death-defying cult based around Persephone, the queen of the netherworld.

But Eleusis long ago lost its glamour.

Its grim factories, steelmills, refineries and ship and breaker yards drew thousands fleeing the poverty of rural Greece over the last century.

Choked by smog and pollution, its bay a vast ships' graveyard, for decades it resembled a modern version of the underworld from which Persephone escaped.

Her rebirth each year with the spring was recreated in the secret ancient rites of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

Local leaders hope becoming a European city of culture will do the same trick for the post-industrial city half an hour northwest of Athens.

Eleusis 2023 CEO Nana Spyropoulou said they had faith that a small "but historically significant city can draw the international and European cultural

spotlight.

"Our goal is to make use of Elefsina's cultural wealth, and to leave a legacy for the future," she told reporters.

Dance, concerts, street art, films and exhibitions will draw on the city's fabled history and its long experience with unemployment, immigration and environmental degradation.

Ancient 'psychotherapy'

Many locals are descended from ethnic Greeks forced from their homes in Turkey in the wake of the disastrous Greek invasion of Asia Minor after World War I.

The refugee legacy continues still, with a large camp there sheltering Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion.

Several derelict buildings have been repurposed for the 25-million euro (\$26.5-million) event, including a former olive oil mill which is becoming an archaeological museum, and an old bowling alley a conference hall.

Thanks to being a capital of culture, Elefsina has gained use of "infrastructure it never had before", said mayor Argris Economou.

"(This is) a great legacy and an opportunity to upgrade the city," Economou said.

For some 12 centuries Eleusis was one of the most important religious centres of both the ancient Greek and Roman worlds.

The birthplace of ancient

Greek tragedian Aeschylus, its mysterious rites centred on Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, and her daughter, Persephone, wife of Hades and queen of the underworld.

In a large hall that could seat up to 3,000 people, participants at nocturnal torchlit ceremonies were told of the endless cycle of life and death, and attended a re-enactment of the myth of Persephone, archaeologists say.

"It was kind of a psychotherapy to deal with the fear of death," Efi Anesti, an archaeologist at the sprawling Greco-Roman sanctuary where the mysteries took place, told AFP.

To enforce secrecy, "anyone who revealed the details was supposed to suffer the wrath of the gods," she said.

But the city went into a long decline following the abolition of the sanctuary by the Byzantines in the fourth century.

Elefsina shares the 2023 city of culture title with Timisoara in Romania and Veszprem in Hungary.

A Belgian artist collective called TimeCircus has already embarked on a 3,000-kilometre pilgrimage on foot that will connect the three cities.

Since 1985 more than 60 European cities including Istanbul have hosted the initiative, which aims to regenerate cities, highlight cultural diversity and boost tourism. — AFP

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

Fathers and sons

FATHERS AND SONS is a novel by Russian author Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883) that was published in Moscow in 1862. The novel is set in 19th century Russia, where two friends Arkady Kirsanov and Yevgeny Bazarov are returning to Arkady's modest estate — called Marino — in one of the provinces. Arkady had just graduated from the University of Petersburg while Bazarov is still a pre-med student. In the estate they are welcomed by Arkady's father, Nikolay, and his uncle — Nikolay's elder brother — Pavel. The two elder men are not really impressed by the younger ones' radical views and their constant talk of nihilism, a new school of thought that Bazarov was following and a zealous advocate of.

The two friends stay for some time in the estate where they get a glimpse of how badly the place is run by Nikolay and its dire need of transformation through new and revolutionised management approaches, which Arkady's education could help to bring in place. While Bazarov is critical and sarcastic at times when dealing with the two brothers for not catching up with modern times, Arkady is more sympathetic — especially with his father. He even encourages him to legitimise his relationship with Fenechka, the mother of his second child. The friends then get to meet Madam Anna Odinstova — a young, rich widow — and her sister Katya who live in an estate in another province. Both men fall in love with Anna and Bazarov decides to distract himself by visiting his parents who stay in a manor-house that had seen better days. Nevertheless, Bazarov's parents are keeping up the appearances by having servants dressed up shabbily and serving food to the guest that's beyond their means. Arkady is touched by Bazarov's parents' love and devotion to their only son and is surprised by his friend's apathy towards it. The rift between the two — that started at Madam Odinstova's place — increases and Arkady leaves to see the sisters again. Bazarov goes back to Marino where things

get complicated between him and Pavel. Soon after returning to his house, Bazarov decides to stay and help his father — a retired military doctor — in his clinic. The two friends never meet again, yet Bazarov's short presence in every character's life changes it unexpectedly.

This is a synopsis and my first attempt to read Russian literature as an adult after reading Anna Karenina during teenagehood. I found the nicknames of the characters a bit confusing and why everyone was calling everyone with their full names amusing. The conversations were dragging at times and the reaction of the characters was abrupt at others — especially at love and hate confession scenes. However, I was impressed by the representation of high-society female characters as they were well educated and cultured whether in music or in speaking foreign languages, as well as being abreast with the scientific advancement published in European journals. This starkly contradicted with the serf class that struggled in everyway and saw no future, even with Bazarov's promise for them of being in charge and owning the land someday. The narrative is smooth and a few characters such as Bazarov's parents are likable and easy to sympathise with. Fathers and Sons is one of the most acclaimed Russian novels of the 19th century. It mainly highlights the eternal conflict between different generations: the older generation who refuses reforms and the new generation of nihilists represented by Bazarov who was hailed as "the first Bolshevik." Unfortunately, the novel wasn't received well and Turgenev had to leave Russia and wrote less. Even so, Fathers and Sons is a timeless classic that is worth reading.

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: The World According to Bahja. rashabooks@yahoo.com



Follow us on
omanobserver.om/business



Travel anywhere for any purpose
with our Travel Finance

2477 5777 | www.maisarah-oman.com

[/MaisarahOman](#) [@MaisarahIslamic](#) [@Maisarah.Islamic](#)

Terms & Conditions Apply

To know more



#MAISARAHWORLD



MAISARAH
Islamic Finance Solutions

New Duqm fisheries hub targets annual throughput of 200,000 tonnes of fish

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 18

A major fisheries port planned for development at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm will seek to anchor the Sultanate of Oman's leading position among world-scale hubs in the Indian Ocean.

In addition to attracting commercial vessels for fish processing and trading at Duqm, the hub also has ambitions to lure investments across the fisheries value chain, and offer facilities for R&D and digitalisation, according to a key project official.

"We want the port to be green, to be efficient and to become a hub for fisheries exportation from Oman to all the world. And as part of that, there will be the creation of a lot of highly skilled positions, including those who will be involved in the digitisation of the commercial process," said Lionel Rabin, founder and managing director of Haltiqa Consulting, the project manager of Duqm Fisheries Port.



Last week, Marsa Al Duqm Investment — a consortium of Omani and international firms — signed agreements with Omani authorities to invest in the infrastructure and commercial facilities to attract investors into the proposed fisheries hub.

Speaking to the Observer, on the margins of the signing ceremony, Rabin said Duqm's reach as a fisheries processing and trading hub will be ambitious.

"So the fish will be landed in Duqm, it will be graded, sorted,

traded electronically and people will be able to buy the fish from all over the world, including Europe. In addition to that, the capacity of the port will enable trades of around 100,000 tonnes of fish through the fish market inside the port.

But we aim for twice that volume to transit through the port — about 200,000 tonnes per year — some of it will be traded in the port or it will be exported or traded elsewhere." A major processing centre on a hilltop

We want the port to be green, to be efficient and to become a hub for fisheries exportation from Oman to all the world.

LIONEL RABIN
Founder and managing director,
Haltiqa Consulting

overlooking the port will targets investments in processing fish, freezing, even cooking, preparing ready meals, and canning tuna and sardines – activities that will make Duqm a food hub as well as for export, said Rabin.

Also given Duqm's strategic location, the hub will attract all kinds of fishing boats, including very large commercial fishing vessels from the northern Indian Ocean, he said.

"These big boats will come

and discharge their fish, but they will also come for maintenance. So we'll have a maintenance and repair hub which will create a lot of employment as people come to repair their boats.

They'll come from the Seychelles, they'll come from Mauritius and Pakistan, and from all over the place, creating value in Oman."

Additionally, as part of the configuration of the port, an innovation, research and development and training centre will be integrated into the hub, the Project Manager said. "We'll be training the young generation people to become fishermen, to become engineers, to become all the supporting jobs that are needed for the fishing industry.

We, as Marsa Al Duqm Investment, will be managing all those aspects, maintenance, training, innovation and so on. We will enhance value by extracting ingredients from fish – from the skin and from the bones to serve the cosmetic and pharmaceutical industry."

New marine bunker terminal inaugurated at Port of Duqm



HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 18

Oman Oil Marketing Company Marine (OOMCO) inaugurated its Duqm maritime fuel station yesterday under the auspices of SEZAD Deputy Chairman Ahmed bin Hassan al Dheeb.

"The launch of this new terminal in Duqm serves to fulfil the growing demand for high-quality marine fuel in the port of Duqm," shared OOMCO Chairman, Hilal al Kharousi in his keynote speech at the inauguration ceremony.

"This integrated station will include tanks with a capacity of 30,000 cubic metres. In addition to providing high specification marine fuel according to ISO standards," he added.

The station will provide very-low sulphur fuel oil (VLSFO), low-sulphur marine gasoil (LSMGO), and high sulphur fuel oil (HSFO) compliant to ISO 8217 specifications. The station's provision of low-sulphur fuels lies in accordance with the International Maritime Organisation's (IMO) decarbonisation goals.

"At OOMCO we draw inspiration from Oman's Vision 2040 that aims to develop a sustainable economy in terms of economic and environmental well-being, and we have applied that while designing and implementing the project," shared OOMCO CEO, Tarik al Junaidi.

Vessels will be able to receive bunkers through a bunker barge or through road trucks at a pumping rate of up to 1,000 m³ / hour. In addition, vessels will be able to utilise various services at the port such as freshwater supply, pilotage, ship handling, crew change, and dry dock services.

CEO, Tarik al Junaidi, shared some insight into the company's future plans.

"We are looking forward to expanding our bunkering services not only in Oman but in the rest of the world. We are looking at the UAE, and Singapore hopefully which happens to be the biggest bunkering hubs of the world."

Mega GEO project to account for 20% of Oman's total hydrogen output in 2050

GEO – one of several so-called 'legacy initiatives' – is backed by an international consortium comprising Intercontinental Energy (the world's largest green energy developer), OQ Group of Oman, and Kuwait-based Enertech Holding.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 18

Green Energy Oman (GEO) — a mega-scale project currently ranked among the world's largest green hydrogen ventures — will contribute around a fifth of the Sultanate of Oman's targeted production of 8 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen in 2050.

According to key officials behind the mammoth venture, which will be powered by a world-beating 25 gigawatts (GW) of renewable capacity, initial groundwork on the project continues to make headway.

In a joint presentation during the recent Green Hydrogen Summit Oman 2022 (GHSO) forum, Ahmed al Rawas, Project Lead of OQ – the integrated



energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, and Jonathan O'Toole – Project Manager at Worley, said the giant scheme will be developed in four stages over a span of 10 years. At full capacity, the project will target the production of two million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen and 10 million tonnes per annum of green hydrogen.

GEO – one of several so-called 'legacy initiatives' that were announced before the formal unveiling of Oman's

National Hydrogen Strategy in October this year – is backed by an international consortium comprising Intercontinental Energy (the world's largest green energy developer), OQ Group of Oman, and Kuwait-based Enertech Holding. The GEO project will make a sizable contribution to Oman's total green hydrogen output, said Ahmed al Rawas of OQ.

"Taking into consideration Oman's new ambitious target to produce 8 million tonnes of green

hydrogen by 2050, the GEO plan that we have here is to produce 2 million tonnes of hydrogen, thereby contributing around 20 per cent of total (domestic production)." A number of local and international consultants are making steady progress in preparing the groundwork for the massive venture, Al Rawas said.

"We have more than two years of wind data and we have already conducted since last year our Concept Feasibility Study by Worley. Also, we are almost done

with the Energy Assessment by DNV, while the Environmental & Social Impact Assessment Study by HMR is still ongoing. At the same time, we are engaging with many stakeholders, including the Environmental Authority of Oman."

The upstream components, comprising a mix of solar and wind elements, will be developed across large swathes around Duqm in Al Wusta Governorate, spilling into parts of Dhofar Governorate as well, he said.

Outlining next milestones in the development of the project, Worley's Jonathan O'Toole said: "So the next stage is for the project is to get into the pre-FEED and FEED, which is required as part of the FID (Final Investment Decision).

So once the approvals and land permits and other permits are in place, hopefully the project will move smoothly into that phase."

He further added: "Immediately after the FID, the plan is to launch those long-lead items, to get those big contracts signed and get things moving on the ground in Duqm.

The first phase should be online and producing hopefully by 2030, with the subsequent phases aimed for full capacity by 2036."

Omantel scoops two awards for marketing campaigns



MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication and technology services in the Sultanate of Oman, has scooped two awards for its marketing campaigns at the MENA Effie Awards presented in Dubai recently, attended by the marketing Who's Who in the region.

The 13th edition of MENA Effie Awards honoured Omantel for its campaign "The Future Shapers" in the Branded Content and Entertainment category, and for the 'From Imagination to Reality' campaign in the Internet and Telecom category.

Both were animated films that focused on storytelling through the eyes of children.

Usama al Kiyumi, Manager of Marketing Campaigns Home & Enterprise at Omantel, said, "As the Effie Awards represent the pinnacle of glory in the world of marketing, we are ecstatic that two of our campaigns were recognised for their excellence.

The recognition is a tribute to Omantel's focus on creating campaigns that not only effectively market its solutions, but also contribute to boosting the brand's reputation in the region. What is even more remarkable is that besides winning in two categories, we made it to the shortlist in seven categories, which is a testament to Omantel's continuous strive towards excellence."

"The Future Shapers" was designed to connect and create a stronger bond with the future generation of Omanis, the youth. The animated film which communicates the history of Oman in an entertaining way was launched on the National Day, and screened in cinemas, schools and online.

Bank Muscat wins Best Corporate/ Institutional Digital Bank in Oman award

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman has won the prestigious Best Corporate / Institutional Digital Bank (Oman) award from Global Finance. The award was received on behalf of the bank by Mohammed bin Sultan al Habsi, Chief Representative, UAE Representative Office, Bank Muscat, at the Middle East Digital Bank and Innovators Awards 2022 held in Dubai.

Winners were selected based on a number of criteria, including their strategy for attracting and servicing digital customers, success in getting clients to use digital offerings, growth of digital customers, breadth of product offerings, evidence of tangible benefits gained from digital initiatives, and site design and functionality.

Speaking on the occasion, Ilham bint Murtadha al Hamaid, General Manager — Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We take this opportunity to thank Global Finance for recognising the bank's innovative digital banking services and products, which have been greatly benefitting our customers.

Bank Muscat offers the latest digital financial services and solutions to its corporate and public sector customers. With



emphasis on multiple channels and new products that cater to different sectors, the bank is focused on maintaining its leadership through innovative products and services including electronic payment and online services. We would like to thank all our customers for their continued patronage and strong confidence in Bank Muscat."

Digitalisation is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 and will further enhance financial inclusion in Oman. The bank's customers are benefiting

immensely from the latest devices, solutions and technological advances made available to them through the implementation of cutting-edge technology. As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 174 branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and other devices.

Corporates also have access to dedicated Corporate Banking branches at business hubs like Ruwi, Ghala, Suhar and Salalah apart from the other conventional

banking branches of the bank.

Digitalisation is helping corporates to speed up transactions, optimise the efficiency of their employees, minimise data-entry related risks in payment processes and improve security. Digitalisation addresses the entire value chain of corporates by providing sophisticated analysis of data sets, real-time insights to ensure transparency and greater control for corporate customers to make better-informed decisions. With state-of-the-art solutions

and services like the recently launched Trade Portal, Liquidity Management solution, Business-to-Business (B2B) Connect platform, Corporate Online Banking platform, Direct Debit solutions and Remote Deposit Capture, Bank Muscat's Corporate Banking offers secure 'best-in-class' digital solutions and services, which are based on customer feedback and needs as well as global trends.

The bank's customer-centric vision and the adoption of global best practices have resulted in numerous accolades in the past. Earlier in 2022, Bank Muscat was recognised as one of the Top 100 Companies as well as one of the Top 30 banks in the region by Forbes Middle East.

The bank has also won a number of awards from prestigious international publications like Euromoney, The Banker and EMEA Finance for its different lines of business in the past even as it continues to play a key role in transforming the Omani banking sector.

Going ahead, Bank Muscat will continue to support corporates and government entities to make the best use of technology and processes to transform and supercharge their business environment.

Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions wins Luxury Bath & Sanitaryware Solutions Brand of the Year award

MUSCAT: A brand committed to business excellence, sustainability initiatives and customer-centricity, Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions (KRBS) has been bringing the best of global brands to Oman. Honouring its continued efforts, the company was recently conferred the 'Luxury Bath & Sanitaryware Solutions Brand of the Year' title at the Signature Luxury 100 event, which was held at the Crowne Plaza, Qurum on December 7, 2022.

The evening welcomed HH Sayyid Muadh bin Dheyab al Said as the esteemed Chief Guest, alongside HH Sayyida Dr Taghreed Turki Mahmoud al Said, Sayidda Basma al Said, Shaikh Issa bin Salim al Mashani and Shaikh Dr Hamdan bin Saba



al Saadi as the Guests of Honour. It also witnessed the presence of C-suite executives from leading brands, industry experts and key delegates.

Commenting on the award, Varun Khimji, Director —

Khimji Ramdas said, "KRBS, which is a part of Khimji Ramdas Group, a leading conglomerate that was established as early as 1870, mirrors the same level of dedication to quality as its parent company. This award

further attests to Khimji Ramdas Bath Solutions' keen focus on revolutionising the sanitaryware market with solutions from innovative, design-oriented and sustainability-focused international brands."

Ravi Dhulipala, Chief Operating Officer — KR Infrastructure Cluster said, "We are indeed delighted to have earned this prestigious award. With consumers becoming more sustainability-focused and aesthetically conscious, there has been a rising demand for reliable, high quality and personalised bathroom solutions. With its years of expertise in the industry, KRBS has developed the ability to anticipate and evolve according to the needs of its discerning

customers and offer meaningful inputs and expert advice whilst assisting in the selection of the right products and services."

Meanwhile, Ranjit Ravindran, General Manager — KRBS said, "Customer satisfaction, hassle-free processes and unparalleled quality delivered through world-class products are what makes us different. Adopting a more holistic approach to business, we offer end-to-end services in an endeavour to assist our elite clients in every step of their journey.

We match products and solutions that are customised according to our customer's expectations with exceptional services that encompass everything from installation, service and maintenance."

Own the Lexus LX with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Lexus enthusiasts looking forward to owning the LX can benefit with service 5 years / 50,000 kms (Whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration. Campaign is valid up to December 21, 2022 (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

The flagship LX has set the standard for capability and luxury. The LX has earned its place as a preferred luxury SUV for those who love to go beyond on every journey. The LX is available with a choice of two powertrain options, including two newly developed V6 twin-turbo engines. The V6 twin-turbo 3.5-litre petrol engine achieves class-leading performance that surpasses that of

a conventional V8, producing 409 hp and up to 66.28 Kg.m torque.

Meanwhile, the V6 twin-turbo engine 3.3-litre diesel variant is capable of 302 hp and up to 71.38 Kg.m torque. Both versions are mated to a 10-speed automatic transmission.

The LX's updated Tazuna cockpit organises the principal controls and information displays within the driver's immediate sight-line for easy, intuitive operation.

Its slim instrument panel creates a sense of balance, particularly in off-road driving, giving the cabin a wide and open feel.

The cabin offers a range of advanced features such as dual-



centre displays, which include an upper 12.3-inch Multimedia touchscreen display that is compatible with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, and a lower 7-inch display for navigation,

audio, and climate controls as well as other driver support function.

It features a colour head-up display, an 8-inch colour Multi-information Display (MID) in the cluster gauge, wireless charging

for smartphones, and a 4-zone automatic climate control system with rear control switches.

Owners also benefit from enhanced security with Lexus' first fingerprint-authentication push-button start switch. Additional features include a 25-speaker Mark Levinson sound system with Quantum Logic Immersion QLI, Clari-Fi & PurePlay technology for precise, lossless audio and amazing 3-D surround sound experience. As with any Lexus vehicle, safety is a top priority for the all-new Lexus LX.

Drivers can enjoy complete peace of mind thanks to the Lexus Safety System+, an advanced

safety and driver assistance system that includes a Pre-Collision System (PCS) with new features and expanded detection range.

The system also includes Full-Speed Dynamic Radar Cruise Control (DRCC) with Curve Speed Reduction (RSR) that suppresses vehicle speed when entering a curve to offer additional acceleration upon exit.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/. For further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Lexus Showroom.



WJ Towell Group Company

- Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
- Choose from a wide range of brands & models
- PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
- Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
 Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325

www.orbit-oman.com



**أوربيت
ORBIT**

Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

الأسيل
مجموعة أسيا سولوشنز

شوبينجفٹ

Shoppinggift®

GET
FREE
SHOPPING
VOUCHER

with every purchase of
TallyPrime single user

TALLY
GOLD
PARTNER

TALLY ✓ FOR
VAT

Contact: Guruprasad +968 79248644, 98753781
Email: guru.prasad@asiasolutions.net

<https://www.asiasolutions.net>

MONDAY

DECEMBER 19, 2022 JUMADA AL ULA 25, 1444 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

Driving School

Special offers for those wishing to learn driving in
(Aziba - Khwair
Qurum - Ruwi
Al Amirat)

Contact No: 99074072

A close-up of a hand on a black steering wheel. In the background, a white car with red and black stripes is visible.A large QR code is centered on the page, used for quick access to the WhatsApp channel. The background is a light gray with a subtle grid pattern.

**Now get news
on the go**

The WhatsApp logo, a green speech bubble with a white telephone handset, is centered below the headline.

To receive news updates
from **OMAN OBSERVER**,

WhatsApp
<your name> to
96473232

manobserver.om f t @ u r y @omanobserver.om

SIT. WANTED

ARCHITECTURAL
Engineer looking for a job
opportunity in Salalah.
97602926.

DRIVER, looking for job, six years driving experience in Muscat, speak; English, Arabic and Hindi. Contact: 97987643.

GENERAL manager with
16+ years experience
in Oman, MBA — BE,
seeks suitable placement.
Contact: 94008034.

PLANNING engineer,
INDIAN female (M
Tech Civil Structural
Engineering) having
7 years experience as
Quantity Surveyor
cum Quality Control
Engineer, looking for
suitable position. Contact:
96154505.

INDIAN male graduate
Executive Secretary/
Stenography/ Oman DL
and Muscat experience
available. Contact:
79256679.

PMP, Indian male Civil
Eng. Around 10 years
experience in construction
projects. Softwares:
Primavera P6, MS Office,
ERP, having Oman driving
licence. Ready to join,
email: engineer4planning@
gmail.com, Call: 78002582.

SITUATION WANTED
Well experienced Indian Finance Manager. M.com with 20 years experience
in Finance, Accounts, Tax Matters and Reports. Noc and DL available.
GSM : +968 95392251

An advertisement for property rental services. It features a 3D orange figure holding a blue megaphone. The text "HAVE A PROPERTY" is in a grey box, "FOR RENT?" is in a red banner, and "Advertise with us." is in black text. At the bottom, a red box contains the text "Contact us on: 99639264".

OMAN OBSERVER |

To advertise on our social media platforms and website

Please Contact our Team
95210257

www.omanobserver.om [f](#) [t](#) [@](#) [v](#) [y](#) [@omanobserver](#)

**AUDIT,
ACCOUNTING,
VAT, TAXATION**

Contact:
**97239696
95355638**

**Gulf Center
Consultancy & Audit**
Muscat, Sohar, Salalah, Sur

RENT A CAR

**Buttercup
Rent A Car**

AMAZING OFFERS

- Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
- Rent for one month and get 5 days free.

All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts.

☎ 972944490.

LUXURIOUS
Toyota bus 2016,
air-conditioned,
30 passengers,
offered for daily/
monthly/annually,
Muscat. Contact:
98080609,
96316269.

BUILDING of
1.500 sqm 3 stories,
accommodation,
store and office at
Misfa. ☎99432177,
99010964.

SIT. VACANT

PHARMACIST
(Omani)
A well established pharmaceutical firm in Muscat is urgently seeking an MoH registered Pharmacist, to join immediately. Candidates with prior experience in handling regulatory affairs will be given preference. If interested, please e-mail your update professional CV to needpharmacists@gmail.com or send by WhatsApp to 99146583. NB: for Omani nationals only.

FOR RENT

AL SUMRI AC
maintenance. We are
ready to repair and
install all types of Air-
Conditioner within
Muscat Governorate.
94301888.

Flats 2bhk and 1 bhk
in Mumtaz. Contact
99341138 and 90991079.

SERVICES

Autocad/revit
arch MEP, part/
full- time. Contact
WhatsApp:
97103168.



OMAN **عُضَائِد** DAILY

Observer

FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2020

DHUL QAADA 18,

For Advertisements

Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Ali Al Maashari
99639264
wadiameeh@yahoo.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com





@omanobserver

www.omanobserver.om

IEA: Global coal consumption to reach all-time high



A man works at a coal mine from the state-owned Longmay Group on the outskirts of Jixi, in Heilongjiang province, China. – Reuters

LONDON: Global coal consumption is set to rise to an all-time high in 2022 and remain at similar levels in the next few years if stronger efforts are not made to move to a low-carbon economy, a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

High gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and consequent disruptions to supply have led some countries to turn to relatively cheaper coal this year. Heatwaves and droughts in some regions have also driven up electricity demand and reduced hydropower, while nuclear generation has also been very weak, especially in Europe, where France had to shut down nuclear reactors for maintenance.

The IEA's annual report on coal forecasts global coal use is set to rise by 1.2% this year, exceeding 8 billion tonnes in a single year for the first time and a previous record set in 2013. It also predicts that coal consumption will remain flat at that level to 2025 as falls in mature markets are offset by continued strong demand in emerging Asian economies. This means coal will continue to be the global energy system's largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions by far.

The largest increase in coal demand is expected to be in India at 7%, followed by the European Union at 6% and China at 0.4%. "The world is close to a peak in fossil fuel use, with coal set to be the first to decline, but we are not there yet," said Keisuke Sadamori, the IEA's director of energy markets and security.

Europe's coal demand has risen due to more switching from gas to coal due to high gas prices and as Russian gas has reduced to a trickle. However, by 2025 European coal demand is expected to decline below 2022 levels, the report said.

Global coal-fired power generation is set to rise to a new record of around 10.3 terawatt hours this year, while coal production is forecast to rise by 5.4% to around 8.3 billion tonnes, also an all-time high.

Production is expected to reach a peak next year but by 2025 should fall to below 2022 levels. The three largest coal producers — China, India and Indonesia — will all hit production records this year but despite high prices and comfortable margins for coal producers, there is no sign of surging investment in export-driven coal projects.

This reflects caution among investors and mining companies about the medium- and longer-term prospects for coal, the report said. — Reuters

GCC's total merchandise trade value reached \$1.146 trillion in 2021

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 18

The Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) total merchandise value reached \$1.146 trillion in 2021, compared to \$840.7 billion in 2020, an increase of 36.4 per cent. GCC's exports to its major trading partners recovered in 2021, after falling significantly in 2020.

The GCC's total merchandise exports in 2021 amounted to \$668.6 billion, an increase of 52.5 per cent compared to 2020. National exports originating from GCC countries amounted to \$564.4 billion, an increase of 57.2 per cent compared to a year before.

Meanwhile, the value of re-exported goods was \$104.2 billion, while the total merchandise exports reached \$478 billion, an increase of 18.8 per cent. According to data released by GCC Statistical Centre, the GCC's merchandise balance surplus in 2021 reached \$190.6 billion, an increase of 423.9 per cent compared to 2020 with \$36.4 billion.

As for merchandise exports, oil and its products accounted for the lion's share of GCC exports with 73.7 per cent amounting to \$415.9 billion in 2021 compared to \$252.2 billion in 2020, a growth rate of 64.9 per cent. Other commodity exports from the GCC include plastics and its products (5.9 per cent), gold and precious stones (5.4 per cent), organic chemical products (3.2 per cent) and aluminium and its products (2.9 per cent).

Meanwhile, machinery and electrical appliances accounted for



24 per cent of re-exported products from GCC in 2021 amounting to \$25 billion compared to \$20 billion in 2020. Other re-export products from the GCC include gold and precious stones (25 per cent), machinery and mechanical equipment (11.8 per cent), vehicles and vehicle parts (10.2 per cent) and oil and its products (4.8 per cent).

Gold and precious stones top the list of merchandise imports in GCC in 2021 amounting to \$77.2 billion, an increase of 46 per cent compared to 2020. Other import products include machinery and electrical appliances (13.2 per cent), machines

and automated equipment (11.6 per cent), vehicles and vehicle parts (9 per cent) and pharmaceutical products (3.4 per cent).

China ranked first as GCC's top trading partner in 2021 in terms of total merchandise exports accounting to 19.5 per cent. Last year, GCC's exports to China reached \$130.6 billion, an increase of 83.9 per cent compared to 2020 with \$71 billion.

India placed second as GCC's top export partner with 13.9 per cent, followed by Japan (11.5 per cent) and South Korea (4.5 per cent). These countries are the largest

importers of crude oil and natural gas from the GCC.

The GCC's top trading partner in terms of total merchandise imports is China accounting for 20.6 per cent of the GCC's total merchandise imports from global markets.

In 2021, the GCC imports \$98.3 billion worth of products from China, an increase of 27.3 per cent compared to 2020 with \$77.2 billion. Completing the list for GCC's top trading partner in terms of total merchandise imports include the US (8.6 per cent), India (7.5 per cent), Japan (4.6 per cent) and Germany (4.2 per cent).

Philippines extends tariff cuts on imported rice

MANILA: Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has approved the recommendation of the economic ministry to extend up to the end of next year lower tariff rates on rice and other food items to help combat inflation, his office said

The modified rates approved in 2021 were due to expire at the end of this year, but an inflation rate running at 14-year highs warranted an extension of the tariff reprieve until Dec 31, 2023. That means the tariff rate for imported rice will stay at 35%, while the import levies on corn and



meat products will remain at 5%-15% and 15%-25% respectively.

The tariff for coal imports, a key fuel in power generation, will remain at zero beyond the end of next year, but will be reviewed regularly. "Through this policy, we shall augment our domestic food supplies, diversify our sources of food staples, and temper inflationary pressures arising from supply constraints and rising international prices of production inputs," Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan said. — Reuters

EU reaches agreement on major carbon market reform

BRUSSELS: EU member states and parliamentarians on Sunday announced an agreement for a major reform to the bloc's carbon market, the central plank of its ambitions to reduce emissions and invest in climate-friendly technologies.

The deal aims to accelerate emissions cuts, phase out free allowances to industries and targets fuel emissions from the building and road transport sectors, according to a European Parliament statement. The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) allows electricity producers and industries with high energy demands such as steel and cement to purchase "free allowances" to cover their carbon emissions under a "polluter pays" principle.

The quotas are designed to decrease over time to encourage them to emit less and invest in greener technologies as part of the European Union's ultimate aim

of achieving carbon neutrality. Negotiators representing member states and the parliament had spent more than 24 hours in intense talks before reaching an agreement on Saturday night that widens the scope of the carbon market.

The deal means emissions in the ETS sectors are to be cut by 62 per cent by 2030 based on 2005 levels, up from a previous goal of 43 per cent. Concerned industries must cut their emissions by that amount.

The agreement also seeks to accelerate the timetable for phasing out the free allowances, with 48.5 per cent phased out by 2030 and a complete removal by 2034, a schedule at the centre of fierce debates between MEPs and member states.

The carbon market will be progressively extended to the maritime sector and intra-European flights.



The opencast lignite mine Nochten and the coal-fired power Boxberg Power Station is pictured in Nochten, Germany. – Reuters

Waste incineration sites will be included from 2028, depending on a favourable report by the commission.

Climate Action Network, a coalition of NGOs, criticised the agreement, saying it would allow major polluters to continue to receive billions of euros in free quotas for another decade while

households would receive little.

French MEP Pascal Canfin, president of the European Parliament's environment committee, said the carbon price for industries affected by the ETS would be around 100 euros per tonne. "No other continent has such an ambitious carbon price," he

tweeted.

A "carbon border tax", which imposes environmental standards on imports into the bloc based on the carbon emissions linked to their production, will offset the reduction of free allowances and allow industries to compete with more polluting non-EU rivals. The agreement also aims to make households pay for emissions linked to fuel and gas heating from 2027, but the price will be capped until 2030.

The European Commission had proposed a second carbon market targeting building heating and road fuels, but the plan raised concerns as households grapple with soaring energy prices exacerbated by Russia's attack of Ukraine.

The second carbon market would have obliged suppliers of fuel and gas to buy quotas to cover their emissions, but MEPs argued the measure should be limited

to offices and large vehicles. If energy prices continue to spiral, the application of this part of the agreement will be delayed by a year.

Funds from this second market will go to a "Social Climate Fund" designed to help vulnerable households and businesses weather the energy price crisis. "This deal will provide a huge contribution towards fighting climate change at low costs," European Parliament rapporteur Peter Liese said in the statement.

"It will give breathing space for citizens and industry in difficult times and provide a clear signal to European industry that it pays off to invest in green technologies."

The conservative German MEP added the bloc would have until 2026 to invest in green sources and energy efficiency, after which it would be "the moment of truth: we must reduce our emissions by then, or pay dear". — AFP



MONDAY | DECEMBER 19 | 2022 | JUMADA AL ULA 25 | 1444 AH



MESSI TAPPED INTO THE FRANCE NET IN THE 109TH MINUTE AS ARGENTINA WENT AHEAD 3-2



Argentina edge France 4-2 in penalty shoot-out thriller

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
DOHA, DEC 18

Superstar Lionel Messi lived his dream to lift the elusive World Cup trophy after Argentina edged France 4-2 in penalty shoot-out in the final of the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 at the Lusail Stadium on Sunday night.

In the shoot-out, Messi, Paulo Dybala, Leandro Paredes and Gonzalo Montiel all scored from four kicks for Argentina.

Mbappe and Randal Kualomni scored for the defending champions but Kingsley Coman and Aurelien Tchouamani missed it out to hand Argentina their third World Cup trophy.

The match turned out to be a Lionel Messi vs Kylian Mbappe show after finishing 3-3 at the extra-time into the penalties.

Argentine star Messi tapped into the France net in the 109th minute as Argentina went ahead 3-2. The joy was short lived as France got a penalty two minutes later. France star Mbappe netted his hat-trick of the match as he coolly slotted home their third goal to make it a dramatic 3-3 score.

At full-time the match finished 2-2 after France made a late comeback

to restore parity as Argentina were cruising along with a 2-0 cushion till the last 10 minutes.

France returned a goal in the 80th minute when star striker Kylian Mbappe converted a penalty and two minutes later the PSG forward sensationally scored another with a brilliant left-footer to put scores level at 2-2.

Marcus Thuram got a yellow in the 86th minute for a penalty appeal after falling down in the Argentina penalty box.

An additional time of eight minutes was given as injury time.

Argentina survived some close attempts by France during the period.

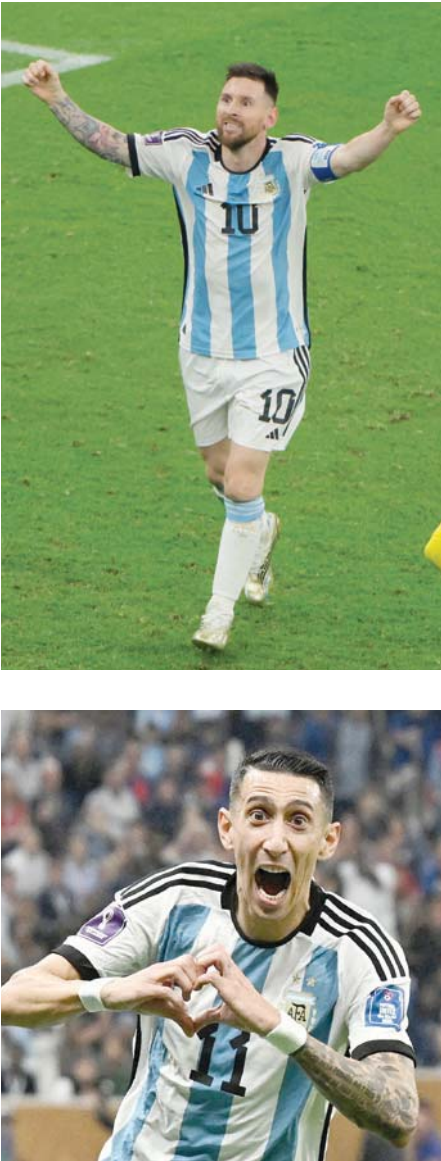
Messi's strong shot from just outside the box was put out by keeper Hugo Lloris in the next minute.

In the extra-time, Argentina substituted defender Molina with Montiel.

France replaced Rabiot with Fofana.

Earlier, captain Messi put 'Albie Celesto' ahead in the 23rd minute of the match after French defender Ousmane Dembele brought an advancing Angel Di Maria to the left corner of the penalty box.

Messi seized the opportunity from the spot kick as his left-footed shot was perfectly placed into the right corner



of the French net giving no chance to France goalkeeper Hugo Lloris who dived to the left.

In the 36th minute, Di Maria's moment of the World Cup arrived.

The move started with a nice intervention by Messi in the middle.

Mac Allister got the ball and crossed nicely to Di Maria on the left side who made an accurate finish past France captain Lloris.

Stunned by the two goals, France manager Didier Deschamps made a double substitution in the 42nd minute. Forward Oliver Giroud and defender Ousmane Dembele were replaced by Marcus Thuram and Kolomuani.

The match started with Argentina pressing hard for an opener and several shots came straight to Lloris. They earned the first corner in the eighth minute.

In the 17th minute, Di Maria hit a shot over the bar after receiving a flick from Messi.

In the next minute, France got a free kick near the left-side of Argentina's penalty box. Antoine Griezmann's free kick was just above the bar after a brilliant header by Giroud.

France had another free kick in front of the Argentina penalty box in the 26th minute after a foul on Giroud. Griezmann took the kick again but

France couldn't take advantage of the chance.

In the second half, Mac Allister made a good connection to a well-directed cross after a good Argentina build-up but went straight to Lloris in the 48th minute.

In the 51st minute, France got a corner but Argentina goalkeeper Emilio Martinez rose high to grab the ball.

Next minute, Argentina earned a corner and was headed away by Griezmann.

France's Adrien Rabiot received a yellow for a foul.

In the 65th minute, Argentina head coach Lionel Scaloni recalled goal-scorer Di Maria for Marcus Acuna to consolidate their defence.

France tried hard for a goal and earned a corner next but Thuram's header was off target.

Star French striker Kylian Mbappe tried a solo effort from outside after dribbling past some Argentine defenders but his shot went over by some margin in the 68th minute.

France made a double change in the 70th minute.

Theo Hernandez was replaced by midfielder Camavinka and Griezmann was substituted by Coman. A capacity turnout of 88,966 was recorded for the final at the stadium.



ARGENTINA KEEPER MARTINEZ: ‘I DREAMED A LOT ABOUT THIS DAY’

QATAR: Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez said his said suffered to win a “hard-fought” game against France and clinch the World Cup title in Qatar.

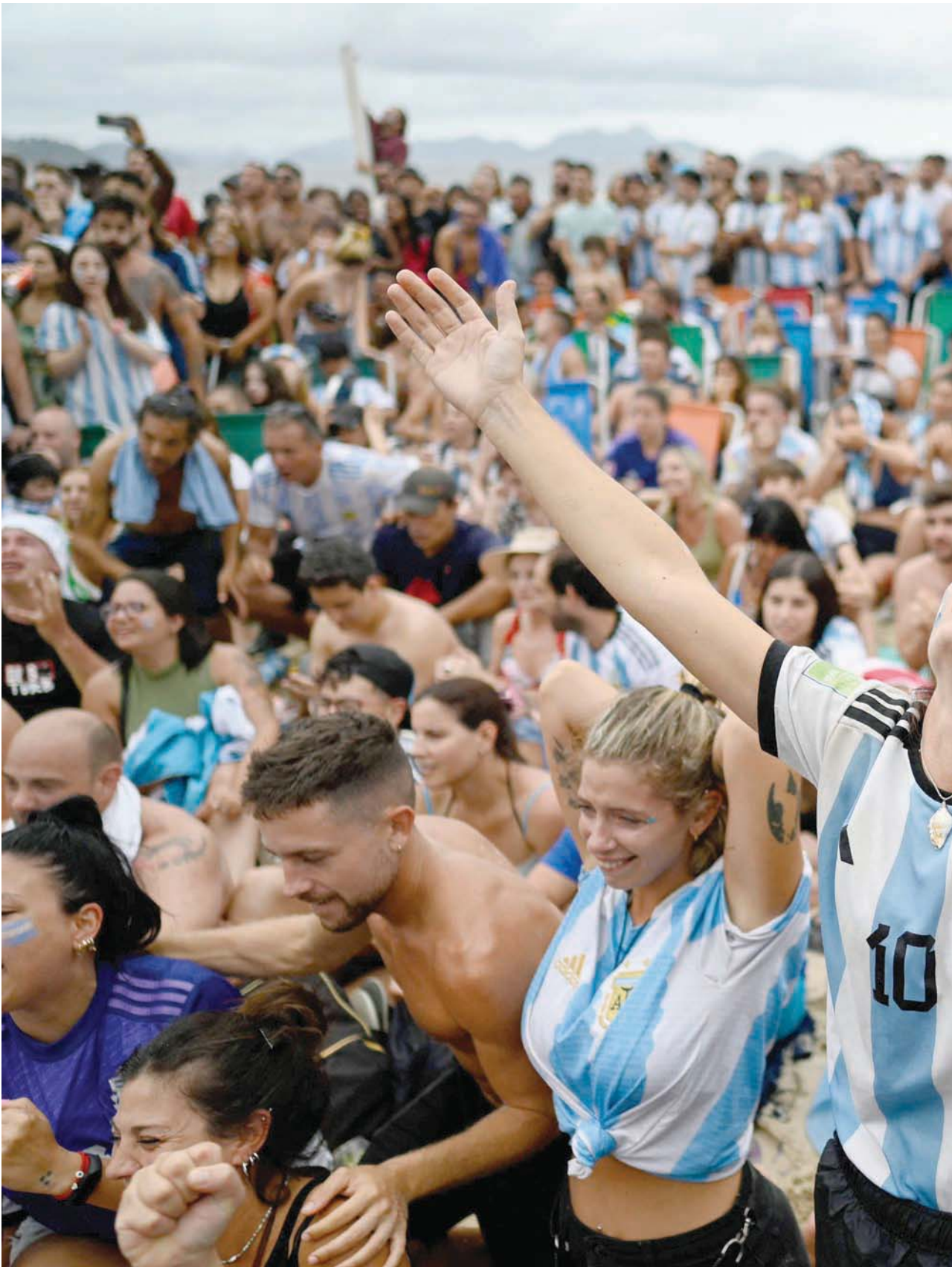
“It was a very hard-fought game, we knew it was going to be like that. Thank God we did it. I dreamed a lot about this day,” he said.

Martinez made a crucial save in extra-time to deny France a possible winner and also denied Kingsley Coman from the spot in the shoot-out as Argentina lifted the trophy for a third time.

Asked how he felt during the shoot-out, he said he was “calm” and dedicated the title to his family. “I come from a very humble place. This one goes out to my family,” Martinez said.

Argentina won 4-2 on penalties after a 3-3 deadlock from 120 minutes. — dpa

F A N



Z O N E



5 Omanis take part in Thailand ultra-marathon



Hamed al Harthi with the participating runners

MUSCAT: Omani ultra-trail runners Hamed al Harthi, Hamdan al Khatri, Mohammed al Shizawi, Issa al Abri and Dr Yaqoob al Nadabi all took part in and completed Thailand by UTMB set within the Doi Inthanon National Park near to Chiang Mai in the country's north.

Fresh from a successful race at the Himam Trail Run Race, all five travelled to Thailand to gain more experience and acquire the Running Stones credits needed to qualify for the big one: UTMB Chamonix 2023, taking place at the end of August next year.

Hamdan al Khatri finished second in the Al Hajar Range Challenge 100km race in Birkat al Mouz, just seven minutes behind legendary nine-time Marathon des Sables champion Rachid El Morabity of Morocco. He continued his good form by finishing the Summit 160km race in 31 hours, 36 minutes and 51 seconds, finishing 43rd out of 287 finishers.

He said, "I really enjoyed the race. At times it was difficult, but I trained well, and the Himam Trail Run was great preparation. I feel I am running really well in all conditions and will look to continue



Dr Yaqoob arrivign to the finish line



Hamdan al Khatri during the race



Issa al Abri arriving to the finish line

this form as we get close to UTMB Chamonix 2023 in August and September. It really was amazing to see the landscape and turning the corner to see the mountain tops and rice fields gave all of us, I think, the inspiration to keep going."

As one of Oman's most experienced ultra-trail runners, Hamed al Harthi has completed races all around the world. This time out he also took on the Summit 160km race, completing the course in 45 hours, 56 minutes and 23 seconds. At 64 years old he

was one of the oldest competitors in this year's race and finished 2nd in the 60-64 age category.

Fellow Omani Mohammed al Shizawi finished 155th overall in the Summit 160km race, crossing the line after 42 hours, 32 minutes and 25 seconds.

Speaking after the race, Hamed said, "Switching from the dry heat of Oman to the humidity of Thailand takes time to acclimatise to and adds a new challenge to the race. I am pleased with

my performance to have completed the course. Aside from the conditions, the climb to over 2,000 metres is difficult but the views from the top are worthwhile. I am thankful to the local people for their kindness in welcoming all of the runners to their region; it really shows that we are all one community."

Dr Yaqoob completed the 100km Al Hajar Range Challenge at the Himam Trail Run Race in 27th place – crossing the line with a time of 26 hours, 23 minutes and 41

seconds. Issa raced The Adventure 55km route in Birkat al Mouz, finishing 7th overall in a time of seven hours, 16 minutes and 49 seconds. The pair took on the Pagoda 50km race in Thailand with Issa making it home first out, in 77th place overall out of 1,061 runners and completing the course in eight hours 51 minutes and 49 seconds. Dr Yaqoob was just over two hours behind, finishing in 273rd place with a time of 11 hours, five minutes and 18 seconds.

Each route took runners on an incredible immersive journey through native forest, taking them up a gradual climb from 400 to 2,100 metres above sea level. The race routes gave all four a close look at the local culture as they pass through ancestral lands of the Hmong, Pga-Gan-Yaw and Karenic tribes, allowing them to experience the peaceful ways of life as well as enjoying awe-inspiring views of the terraced rice paddy fields and cool temperatures in beautiful, tropical, humid forests.

Training will resume in January as each runner looks to build endurance and cover a variety of distances in preparation for a busy calendar of races in Oman and around the world.

OCA bamboozle Muscat

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket Academy bagged 98 run victory against Muscat Women registering their 1st won for the Oman Cricket Women's League Season 2022-23 powered by TM Done.

Electing to bat first, Skipper Vaishali Jesrani and Nitya Joshi opened the batting for OCA Women. Both openers looked in sublime form and tandem as they tonk the Muscat Women for 57 runs in the powerplay. Nitya Joshi took up the charge and continued charging onto the bowling with Vaishali getting out scoring 39 of 37 balls stitching a 122 run opening partnership. In at No.3, Nayan Anil joined hands with Nitya Joshi to take OCA Women to 232 runs.

Nitya Joshi remained not out jotting 62 runs. This was a record for the highest total of OCA Women in a T20 match. In response, Muscat Women got off to a steady start by openers Nikithaa Jagadish and Amanda Dcosta. The Muscat Women could not race up to the required run rate with Amanda Dcosta scoring 56 of 48 balls and Muscat Women falling short of 98 runs. Brief Scores: OCA Women 232/2 in 20 overs (Nitya Joshi 62(81) 5x4, Vaishali Jesrani 39(37) 6x4;



Nikithaa Jagadish 47(1) beat (Amanda Dcosta 56(48) 7x4; Muscat Women 134/1 in 20 overs Nitya Joshi 30(1) by 98 runs.

HCC CHAMPIONS OF AL YAM APL SEASON 2

MUSCAT: Indian Social Club Oman Awadhi Wing conducted second edition of APL (Awadh Premier League) on December 16 and 17, 2022 at Al Hail Cricket Ground. The first edition was a grand success which was held in 2019. Due to pandemic the second edition could not take place for last two years. This year there were two categories first Challenger's cup where eight teams fought for the title, in another category a match was played between Indian Embassy and Indian Social Club Oman.

HCC and AKCT Muscat reached to the finals where HCC won the second edition of APL and the trophy and cash prize RO 250 was handed over to the HCC captain by Dr Sheby Siju from Wassan Speciality Dental Center. The Runner up trophy and prize money RO 100 was handed over by Mr Praveen Kumar, Head of Chancery Embassy of India.

Man of the series award went to Somu of HCC, Best batman of the tournament was given to Bilal of AKCT and Best Bowler award went to Akshay of 1983 CT. All these awards were handed over by Mr Roobesh Venkatraman Vice



President of Bahwan Automobiles Trading.

Arun Pandey Convenor of Awadhi Wing and Managing Director of Al Yam Enterprises LLC said Awadhi wing has always provided great platform to the community to showcase their talent whether its sports or any other activity. Cricket is a game which is very popular in Oman

and it is played with great passion. I am happy that we have concluded the second edition successfully and appreciate the work done by Committee members Maanas Kapoor, Seema Chaudhery, Shital Kumar, D N Mishra, Prabhas Pandey, Vikas Saxena and Sanjit Kanojia

Sponsors for the event were Al Yam Enterprises LLC, Wassan Speciality Dental Center, Oman Daily Observer, Sunshine International SPC, Sai Trading and Contracting, Oman Oasis, Image Muscat International LLC, Owais International LLC, GCTC, Bahwan Automobiles & Trading LLC, Cleopatra, WJ Towell, Nabil and Arms Computers.

MBAPPE
BECOMES
YOUNGEST
PLAYER TO
REACH 10
WORLD CUP
GOALS

BERLIN: Kylian Mbappe became the youngest player to score 10 World Cup goals on the way to dragging France level with Argentina in Sunday's Qatar 2022 final.

The forward gave Les Bleus hope from the penalty spot in the 80th minute, before a stunning volley squared things up just 97 second later at Lusail Stadium, where Lionel Messi's spot-kick and a goal from Angel Di Maria had seemingly put Argentina in control.

Taking his World Cup tally to 11 goals, Mbappe is the youngest player to reach double figures at the finals - aged 23 years 363 days- surpassing Gerd Muller's record (24 years, 226 days).

The Paris Saint-Germain star also became the fifth player to score three times in a World Cup final, having also netted against Croatia in the 2018 showpiece, along with Vava, Geoff Hurst, Pele and Zinedine Zidane. — dpa





Messi wins Golden Ball for best player at World Cup

DOHA: Lionel Messi on Sunday won the Golden Ball for the best player at this year's World Cup after leading Argentina to victory in the final against France.

Messi scored twice in the final in Doha, taking his tally of goals at the tournament to seven, and also scored in the shoot-out as Argentina beat France 4-2 on penalties following a 3-3 draw after extra time.

Kylian Mbappe came second to Messi for that award but did win the Golden Boot for the tournament's top scorer with eight goals, one ahead of the Argentine skipper.

Luka Modric came third in the running for the best player after helping Croatia finish third.

Meanwhile, Argentina's Emiliano Martinez took the Golden Glove for the World Cup's best goalkeeper, while his compatriot Enzo Fernandez, 21, was named the best young player.

Argentina's victory over France saw them claim the World Cup for the third time following their triumphs in 1978 and 1986. — AFP