

More Ukraine grain sets sail

Four more ships loaded with grain set off from Ukrainian ports on Sunday, as Moscow and Kyiv blamed each other for a new strike at a nuclear plant. "The second convoy of Ukrainian supplies has just left... three from Chornomorsk and one from Odessa," Kyiv's infrastructure ministry wrote on Telegram. It said the Mustafa Necati, the Star Helena, the Glory and the Riva Wind were carrying "around 170,000 tonnes of agriculture-related merchandise." **DETAILS ON P7**



P10

RAWAN AL BALUSHI CROWNED WCM IN JUNIOR DIVISION CHESS OLYMPIAD



P15

SOHAR PORT, FICCI HOST JOINT WEBINAR ON LOGISTICS



P20

A SCHOOL LIBRARY IN HONOUR OF A DECEASED STUDENT



MUSCAT

TOURISM SECTOR LOST RO 1.3 BN

The two years of the Covid-19 pandemic had a serious impact on the tourism sector as it was evident from the figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information in its annual bulletin. The Minister of Heritage and Tourism has recently said that the pandemic has badly affected the tourism sector and nearly 20,000 job opportunities were lost in the process. He said the sector's losses amount to nearly RO 1.3 billion during this period. **DETAILS ON P2**

ZIPLINE, COTTAGES ATTRACT VISITORS

Omani youths' adventure and leisure projects have been the talk of the town in Dhofar. They were established, organised, and managed for the first time in khareef history by Omani youth. Dhofar Adventure Team's zipline in Wadi Darbat as well as in Awqad Natural Park is attracting visitors. Abdulhakim al Maashani, founder of the zipline project, said: "Zipline is not a new idea. We have installed it previously in different places in Oman accompanied with other activities. However, the idea is the first of its kind in Salalah this year." **DETAILS ON P3**



State Budget posts RO 784m surplus by end of first half

MUSCAT: Total revenues collected by the end of the first half of 2022 amounted to RO 6.724 billion, comprising a rise by 54.2 per cent compared to RO 4.361 billion registered over the same period in 2021. The collected revenues accounted for 63.6 per cent of total revenues estimated in the 2022 Budget which were RO 10.580 million. This increase is attributed to net oil revenues going up by the end of the first half of 2022 by 40.1 per cent to reach RO 3.187 billion compared to the same period in 2021. This is as a result of a rise in average oil price to \$87 per barrel compared to \$53 per barrel achieved over the same period in 2021 as well as a rise in average oil production to 1,037,000 barrels per day compared to 952,000 barrels per day registered over the same period in 2021. Gas revenues by the end of the first half of 2022 hit RO 1.729 billion, comprising a surge by 137.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. This is a result of higher gas prices and production. At the end of the first half of 2022, current revenues amounted to RO 1.796 billion, up by 34.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. Tax and fees revenues amounted to RO 1.125 billion, growing by 71.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. At the end of the first half of 2022, corporate income tax stood at RO 424 million, increasing by 23.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. **DETAILS ON P13**

PALESTINIANS SAY CEASEFIRE TALKS UNDER WAY

Oman denounces Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip

MUSCAT/GAZA CITY: Through a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday expressed its condemnation and denunciation of the attacks staged by Israeli occupation forces against Gaza Strip. Oman urged the international community to shoulder its responsibilities, halt the escalation and support the Palestinian people's legitimate rights by ending the occupation and establishing fair and comprehensive peace. Meanwhile, the UN Security Council is to discuss Israel's airstrikes on Gaza in a closed doors session in New York on Monday, as the death toll continued to rise, with 31 people confirmed dead and 275 injured, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. The UN's most powerful body agreed to address the attacks



A Palestinian man carries his daughter after evacuating his home during an Israeli air strike in Gaza City on Sunday. – AFP

following requests for it to do so made by the United Arab Emirates, Ireland, France, Norway and China on Saturday, according to diplomatic sources. Israel on Sunday agreed to an Egyptian proposed truce with Palestinians after three days of

intense conflict, an Egyptian source said, as Islamic Jihad reported talks towards a ceasefire were under way. The negotiations raise hopes that Egypt could help broker a deal to end the worst fighting in Gaza since an 11-day war last year devastated the impoverished coastal territory, home to some 2.3 million Palestinians. Since last Friday, Israel has carried out heavy aerial and artillery bombardment of positions in Gaza, with the activists firing hundreds of rockets in retaliation. At least 31 Palestinians have been killed including six children, and 275 people have been wounded since Friday, health authorities said in the enclave where several buildings were reduced to rubble. **SEE ALSO P6**

Now Omani barcode for local products



AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUG 7

Oman Barcoding Centre has obtained the membership of the Global Barcoding Organisation (GS1), which is responsible for setting the international numbering system (barcode) for goods and products with coding (607). The application of GS1 standards for products according to a global numbering system is considered an identification card for a manufacturing unit, and for the product locally and internationally. It increases the added value of the product, whether in local or international markets, especially that most countries require "barcodes." **TURN TO P2**

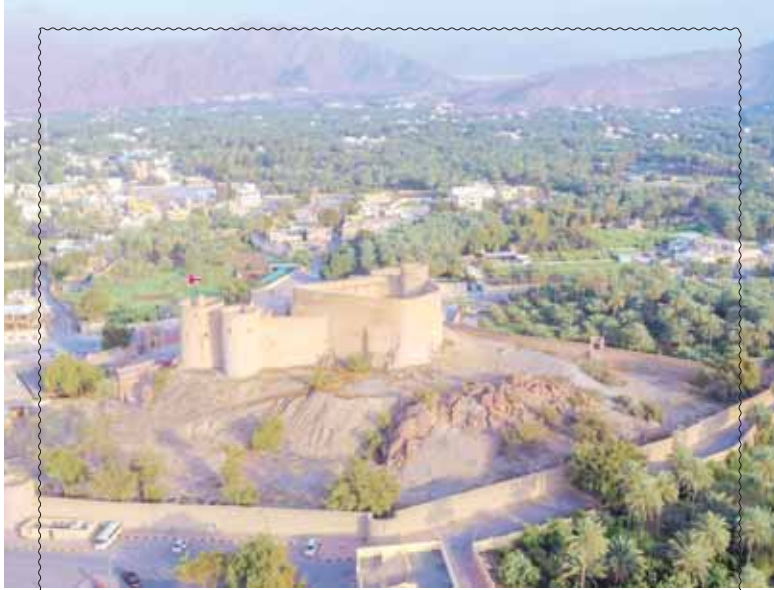
Nasa's Perseverance rover grabs 12th rock sample on Mars

WASHINGTON: Nasa's Perseverance rover has grabbed one more sample from Mars, taking the total number of collection to 12. The car-sized Perseverance drilled out and sealed up its 12th rock sample this week, mission team members announced via Twitter. "Call them the 'dusty dozen'. I've now got 12 rock core samples on board, collected while #SamplingMars at these different sites around Jezero Crater," the team wrote. It is the fourth such operation in less than a month. In February 2021, Perseverance landed with Nasa's tiny Ingenuity helicopter on the floor of the 28-mile-wide (45 km) Jezero



Crater, which harboured a big lake and a river delta billions of years ago. The six-wheeled rover is

hunting for signs of ancient Mars life and bagging up dozens of samples for future return to the Earth, among other tasks. According to the mission team's sample log, the first eight rock samples that Perseverance collected — from September 2021 to March of this year — were volcanic in origin, Space.com reported. But the last four, which were gathered between July 7 and August 3 — all come from sedimentary rocks. As that change suggests, Perseverance is now exploring a remnant of the delta, examining rock formations that built up over time as silt fell out of Jezero's ancient river. — **Agencies**



OMAN RANKS TOP SEVENTH DESTINATION FOR TOURISTS

The Australian 'Lonely Planet' travel website has ranked the Sultanate of Oman seventh in its list of top travel destinations for 2022. The website said in a report that the Sultanate of Oman got this status due to its deserts, tall mountains, sparkling beaches and vibrant cities which make it an essential destination for anyone who wants to visit a country with a well-established culture and civilisation. **DETAILS ON P2**



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

No	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SIPC 2022/069	Supply of Carrier Chiller Compound Unit's Compressor and its Ancillaries	26.250
2	SIPC 2022/075	Hiring Coaching Services (Leadership, Employee Behavioral Capability, and Project Management) at SOHAR Port and Freezone	26.250

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Monday, 08/08/2022 until 4:00 pm on Sunday 21/08/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIFT	OMABOMRXXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
spc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents by email.

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons.
- All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents.
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:
spc_procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

It all starts here

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National Museum concludes summer programme

MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre, concluded activities of the summer programme for students of schools, universities and colleges, which lasted during June and July 2022.

The programme included art workshops inspired by the artefacts of the National Museum.

The programme included 35 activities with an average of 20 participants for each event. It was implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, the Scientific College of Design and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

The students were distributed in stages according to age groups and the targeted programme for each stage. The implementation of the programme is part of a series of training courses organised by the centre at the National Museum, with the support of BP Oman, to achieve its educational, cultural and humanitarian mission.

Amina al Abri, Head of the Learning Centre Unit at the National Museum, emphasised the role played by the centre in supporting the curricula approved in the Sultanate of Oman by extending bridges between the various aspects of those curricula



and the study activities centred around the National Museums' artefacts.

This programme is implemented annually to provide the opportunity for students of different age groups to join the guided tours and art workshops inspired by the collections of the National Museum, in order to enhance the

importance of learning about the Omani cultural heritage and other museum collections.

This year, the programme focused on the Sultani artefacts inspired by the pavilion of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said (the Dearest and Purest of Men). The National Museum is the first museum in the Sultanate of

Oman that includes a learning centre, equipped as per the highest international standards. It offers various educational programmes aimed at raising public awareness about the importance of the Omani cultural heritage, thus creating more interest among all categories of visitors about the ancient history of Oman. — ONA

MoH marks World Breastfeeding Week

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

As part of the World Breastfeeding Week, which is marked from between August 1 and 7 annually, the Gynecology & Obstetric Department in the Royal Hospital, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health's Nutrition Department and World Health Organization Office in the Sultanate of Oman, organised an awareness event titled 'Step Up for Breastfeeding...Educate & Support'.

The event was held under the auspices of Her Highness Dr Khawla bint Al Julanda al Said.

A number of health institutions, along with other

related authorities, have participated in this event.

The event aimed to spread awareness of breastfeeding and the importance of women and child health, close the mother and child relationship after delivery, protect children from incidence of certain infections, increase mental development and intelligence rates, as well as promote exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months.

It is worth mentioning that the National Nutrition Survey in 2017 showed a decrease in the exclusive breastfeeding rate in the Sultanate of Oman, amounting to 23 per cent, which calls for further efforts to raise the health awareness in this field.



Omani youths' zipline, cottages attract Khareef visitors

RAWAN AL NADABI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

Omani youths' adventure and leisure projects have been the talk of the town in Dhofar. They were established, organised, and managed for the first time in Khareef history by Omani youths. Dhofar Adventure Team's zipline in Wadi Darbat as well as in Awqad Natural Park is attracting visitors. Abdul Hakim al Ma'ashani, founder of the zipline project, said: "Zipline is not a new idea. We have installed it previously in different places in Oman accompanied with other activities. However, the idea is the first of its kind in Salalah this year."

Talking to the Observer, he mentioned that it took him around two months to obtain necessary permits and to import the equipment. In Wadi Darbat, there are two ziplines; 60m long one for children and 120m for adults. The 120m zipline is set up across the Wadi stream.

Wadi Darbat was also an attraction for another Omani project; Darbat cottages. Al Ma'ashani, founder of the project,



said, "This is my first business project. Since I have been to about 28 countries, I have been introduced to different ideas and cultures. Therefore, I thought that the cottage idea may be applicable in a beautiful place like Darbat and decided to set it up here."

He said that the path towards success was not a bed of roses. "The weather when we started building the cottage was rainy. We needed to work 25 days and nights to build the cottages as planned. Eventually, we ended up with three wooden cottages

at the bank of the Wadi with a view of green mountains crowned with clouds. Breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided on request".

The two Omani projects attracted large number of Khareef visitors. The zipline founder confirmed that around 300 visitors use it daily, while Darbat cottages have been fully reserved since the beginning of Khareef. Those projects also provide part-time jobs for Omani job seekers as three Omanis are employed at Darbat cottages and four for the zipline.





TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank seeks tenders for the following services from reputed vendors which specialized in providing HP IT equipments:

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
21/22	Purchase the HP IT equipments	150 RO Non-Refundable	15/08/2022	23/08/2022

- Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Ground Floor) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion on any working day (Sunday to Thursday) between 8 AM and 2 PM on payment of non-refundable tender fee. Vendors should enclose scan copy of bank guarantee submitted.
- The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to IT Department, Oman Development Bank SAOC, should be submitted to the reception at Grand Floor by 2:00 PM on or before 23/08/2022.
- Interested vendors should remit the stated tenders fees as per as the below bank details.

Bank Name: Oman Development Bank
Bank Account: 000-10121129300-45
Bank Name: Bank Muscat
Corporate Branch
Swift Code: BMUSOMRXXXX

Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee's decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726991 o.zeidi@odb.om odb.om



KABEER YOUSUF
@KABEERYOUSEF

It is the right of a newborn to be breastfed for the first six months and denying the same can have lifelong impact.

The National Nutrition Survey conducted in 2017 showed a decrease in the exclusive breastfeeding rate in the Sultanate of Oman, amounting to 23 per cent, which calls for further efforts to raise awareness in this field.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said breastfeeding is one of the most effective ways to ensure her child's health and survival. Nonetheless, the world over, nearly two out of three infants are not exclusively breastfed for the recommended 6 months, which is a rate that has not improved in 2 decades.

Doctors advocate breast milk as the ideal food for infants. It is safe, clean and contains antibodies, which help protect against many common childhood illnesses.

"Breastmilk is the best food for a newborn for the first few months of his or her life as it provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs in the initial months," says a senior Consultant from the MoH.

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"Breastfeeding provides up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs during the second half of the first year, and up to one third during the second year of life," she added.

Scientific studies have proven that breastfed children perform better on intelligence tests and are less likely to be overweight or obese and less prone to diabetes later in life. Women who breastfeed also have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

It also aims at enhancing closer relationships between the mother and child during working time, to protect children from the incidence of certain infections, to increase mental development and intelligence rates, and to promote exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months.

The number of exclusively breastfeeding mothers has been further decreased by the inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes, which continues to undermine efforts to improve breastfeeding rates and duration.

Compulsory breastfeeding of the newborn for the first 6 months is a shared responsibility for the care of children and parents and further awareness among health workers to increase their knowledge of child and maternal nutrition

issues need to be carried out, according to medical practitioners. Mothers have been urged to follow the national breastfeeding policy, according to the Department of Nutrition at the Ministry of Health.

"Infants can be protected against many known diseases as it contains antibodies if they are breastfed for the first six months up till 2 years and is safe and clean food for babies. It can also provide all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first 6 months of life and later," said Dr Salima al Mamary, Director of the Nutrition Department.

The study, titled 'National Nutrition Survey' conducted by the Nutrition Department in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Al Jisr Foundation further calls all mothers of children under 6 months old that it is necessary to take actions to adhere to the importance of exclusive breastfeeding.

She further said that creating a supportive community for breastfeeding and supporting working mothers and ensuring compliance with the provisions of the 'Omani Code of Breastfeeding' to regulate the marketing of breast milk substitutes in all health institutions in the governorates is also currently under way for a healthy society.



Take care of joints during rains

DR SACHIN SINGH



Khareef in Salalah is in full swing now, when greenery returns to the fields and mountains, leaves begin to sprout, frogs croak , and crickets shatter the night's silence. As a specialist orthopaedic surgeon, the number of out-patients I used to see in other seasons has been increased to two to three fold in khareef weather, specially lower back pain and joint pains.

However, khareef is not good news for those who have bone disorders, especially in the joints.

People aged 60 and above are prone to this, but young adults can also be affected. There is a saying that people who have arthritis and related joint problems can sense rainy weather approaching when their joint pains aggravate. Yes, it has been proven that during the rainy season, joint aches and other related problems increase more than usual.

How weather may affect Joints?

Barometric pressure or the pressure of the air can affect joints, but humidity, precipitation, and temperature also play important role. People with joint pain, especially arthritis, may be sensitive to changes in barometric pressure. How? It could be that when the cartilage that cushions the bones inside a joint is

There is a saying that people who have arthritis and related joint problems can sense rainy weather approaching when their joint pains aggravate. Yes, it has been proven that during the rainy season, joint aches and other related problems increase more than usual

worn away, nerves in the exposed bones might pick up on changes in pressure.

Changes in barometric pressure may make your tendons, muscles, and any scar tissue expand and contract, and that can create pain in joints affected by arthritis. Low temperatures can also make the fluid inside joints thicker, so they feel stiffer.

What kind of weather?

In one survey of 200 people with knee osteoarthritis, researchers found that every 10-degree drop in temperature — as well as low barometric pressure — corresponded to a rise in arthritis pain. More recently, however, a Dutch study of 222 people with hip osteoarthritis found that over 2 years, people said their pain and stiffness got worse with rising barometric pressure and humidity.

How to ease weather-related joint pain?

You don't have to pick up and move to a different climate.

There's plenty you can do at home to relieve joint pain.

When temperatures drop, try to keep yourself warm. Take warm

showers or baths, dress in layers during the day (including gloves and warm socks), use an electric blanket at night, or crank up the heat inside your home.

Try a paraffin bath. It's a small machine that melts paraffin wax. You dip your hands and feet in, and then you let the wax harden on your skin. Your body absorbs the heat, which may soothe the achy joints. You can also use a heating pad on sore spots.

Ask your doctor about pain medications like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).

Keep a healthy body weight and stay active. Try gentle exercises on the joints, like yoga or swimming. That will help you build up muscle and bone strength. If you go outside to exercise, limber up first with some gentle stretches.

Make sure you take care of your health in general, like with good nutrition and getting enough sleep.

Tips to prevent slips and injuries during khareef.

Khareef is pleasing but not when there are accidental falls, slips, or trips. These things are more frequent during the rainy season, in darkness, or while walking on wet and uneven surfaces. One may suffer from

serious fractures, sprains, or bruises owing to the notorious falls. Hence, it is the need of the hour to prevent falls and improve the quality of life.

Types of injuries caused owing to falls Breaking of the bones can occur mostly in the elderly due to falls. Thus, wrist, hand, and hip fractures are common occurrences. Sprained ankles and wrists, knee damage, shoulder dislocation, muscle strain, cuts and bruises, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and abrasions.

How to keep falls at bay during khareef?

- ♦ Use handrails when walking on stairs.
 - ♦ Use well-lit pathways or carry a flashlight for use in dark places.
 - ♦ Wear comfortable, slip-resistant shoes.
 - ♦ Use a cart and take the elevator when carrying large items.
 - ♦ Stay focused and alert.
 - ♦ Put your cell phone away when you're on the move.
 - ♦ Use walkways and pedestrian paths.
 - ♦ Wipe your feet on a mat when entering a building during wet weather.
 - ♦ Store your wet clothes and umbrella away from walkways
- If you are deficient in Vitamin D that causes low bone-mineral density, then take vitamin D supplements as prescribed by the doctor.

The author is a Salalah-based ortho surgeon

Sultan Qaboos Quran competition begins on Aug 22, final in Nov



MUSCAT: The 30th Sultan Qaboos competition for the Holy Quran will resume after it was stopped for two consecutive years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The preliminary qualifiers for the competition in its 30th session, organised by the Sultan Qaboos Higher Center for Culture and Science and the Diwan of Royal Court, will begin on August 22.

Around 2,881 male and female competitors participating in the competition's preliminary qualifiers, 8 of whom will qualify for the final.

The competition's will be held in 25 centres in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

In its current version, the competition includes 7 levels: the first level (memorising the entire Holy Quran), the second level (memorising twenty-four consecutive parts), the third level (memorising eighteen consecutive parts), the fourth level (memorising twelve consecutive parts), and the fifth level (memorising twelve consecutive parts) sixth level (memorising six consecutive parts for those who are born after 2007 or above, and seventh level (memorising two consecutive parts for those born in 2014 or above).

The registration for the competition began on March 16 and continued until August 6. The final qualifiers will take place in the month of November, during which prizes will be awarded to the top three from each level of the competition and 134 consolation prizes. — ONA

Avoid mosquito bites during khareef season

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

Khareef marks the peak time of mosquito breeding as days are mildly hot and nights are pleasantly cooler.

If one is in Dhofar, one must take steps to avoid mosquito bites. Dr Haifa bint Ahmed al Juma, a dermatologist, told Oman Radio, that the khareef weather in Dhofar is favourable for mosquitoes. One must choose appropriate clothing and use skin creams. If the bites cause severe rashes, one must consult doctors.

Experts also recommend using mosquito repellents such as a spray that contains eucalyptus and



lemongrass extracts.

Mosquitoes are also carriers of many infectious diseases like malaria, dengue, Japanese encephalitis, chikungunya, Zika, yellow fever and West Nile fever. Mosquito bites can also cause skin irritation, itching, and even allergic reactions. Therefore, it is

necessary to wear clothing that covers all parts of the body as much as possible. Light coloured clothing, long-sleeved shirts and shoes are ideal.

As Khareef reaches its peak with heavy rains in Dhofar, visitors from Oman and abroad are flocking to the governorate.

During khareef, from June 21 to mid-September of each year, the Governorate of Dhofar attracts visitors and tourists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman to enjoy the beauty of the nature of its mountains, beaches and plains away from the summer heat, as Salalah is one of the most important tourist resorts in the region.

Private schools reopen with full attendance

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman is in a 'back to school' mood as almost all schools, both public and private schools, announced their intent to resume 100 per cent physical classes starting this academic year.

While government schools for the Omani children are to resume classes early September, international schools and private, community and other schools have announced their re-opening dates as well as schedules for all classes in full strength.

While Indian School Muscat (ISM), the largest community expat school is to begin regular classes from Monday, the CBSE school of Indian School Wadi Kabir (ISWK) began classes on August 3 while the Cambridge School and Bangladesh School resumed

classes on Sunday.

Indian School Al Ghubra (ISG) has already begun its regular classes on August 2. "It's a happy sad moment when schools begin in full capacity," says Prathiksha Shinon, a class-8 student of a private school. "Happy for seeing all my friends in school uniforms and resuming our playground, whereas I'm sad because I will be missing the actions at home," Prathiksha, second child of her parents said.

The Ministry of Education announced stoppage of classes at all schools in March 2020 as a preventive measure against the pandemic and asked all schools to stop regular classes. Online classes were started after a few days since the closure which continued for two years. In early 2022, Oman withdrew restrictions on Covid-19 in several stages, schools began

functioning partially.

According to the statistics received from the Ministry of Education, the number of public schools has increased and there are 1,130 government schools in the country catering to nearly 600,000 students. Private schools and international schools too saw a 10 per cent increase and there are around 640 schools catering to 148,464 students.

There are 748,464 students currently enrolled in all schools in the Sultanate of Oman and nearly 66,000 teachers in private and public schools too, according to the report. The present teacher-student ratio in public schools is 1 teacher for every 10.2 students, while the ratio in private schools stands at 1 teacher for every 11 students.

The report further says that girls accounted for 60.8 per cent of the total number of students last year.



اس ام ان باور القابضة ش.م.ع.ع
SMN POWER HOLDING SAOG

Tender Announcement Sale of Diesel Fuel Oil Al Rusail Power Plant

Al Rusail Power Company SAOC is offering for sale of approximately 16,000,000 litres of diesel fuel at two of its storage tanks located at its Plant Site, as part of winding down its business operations in the Sultanate of Oman. The entire diesel fuel oil supply will be sold on an "as is where is" basis to the highest bidder and the Company invites interested companies to purchase the entire supply of 16,000,000 litres.

The diesel fuel oil has been recently tested and these test results will be made available to potential bidders. Test results indicate that the diesel fuel oil being stored is acceptable for use. Bidders may wish to either rely on these results in determining the price they are willing to pay or undertake their own tests, at their cost. Interested bidders are encouraged to arrange a Plant Site visit to familiarize themselves with the diesel fuel oil system, diesel fuel oil removal and transporting logistics. Details regarding arrangements for a site visit are described in the tender document.

Bids must be submitted on or before close of business (05 pm GST) on **7th September, 2022**.

Tender documents which include further detailed information and data about the diesel fuel oil system can be obtained by downloading the Tender Document from the Company's website at: <https://www.smnpower.com/tenders.php>

The bid price for the diesel fuel oil shall be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to:

Al Rusail Power Company SAOC
Qurum Building, Building No.1022, 1st Floor, Office No.15, Way No.1013,
Al Qurum - Muscat, Sultanate of Oman



Two Diesel Fuel Oil Storage Tanks at Al Rusail Power Plant Site



Israeli air strike flattened a residential building in Rafah. — AFP



Israel agrees to Gaza truce after days of air strikes

GAZA CITY: Israel on Sunday agreed to an Egyptian proposed truce with Palestinian armed group in Gaza after three days of intense conflict, an Egyptian source said, as the group reported talks towards a ceasefire were under way.

The negotiations raise hopes that Egypt could help broker a deal to end the worst fighting in Gaza since an 11-day war last year devastated the coastal territory, home to some 2.3 million Palestinians.

Since Friday, Israel has carried out heavy aerial and artillery bombardment of the group's positions in Gaza, with the gunmen firing hundreds of rockets in retaliation.

At least 31 Palestinians have

been killed including six children, and 275 people have been wounded since Friday, health authorities said in the enclave where several buildings were reduced to rubble.

Two Israelis have been wounded by shrapnel, and others forced to shelter from a barrage of rockets fired from Gaza.

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al Sisi has said officials were talking with both sides "around the clock" to ease the violence.

A security source in Cairo said that Israel "has accepted" a ceasefire, adding that Cairo was waiting for the Palestinian response.

A source from the group said that "discussions are under way at the highest levels towards calm",

but warned that "the resistance will not stop if the occupation's (Israel) aggression and crimes do not stop".

On Sunday, the gunmen extended their barrage to fire two rockets targeting Jerusalem, but they were shot down by the army.

The Israeli army has said the entire "senior leadership of the military wing of the group in Gaza has been neutralised".

Muhammad Abu Salmiya, director general of the Shifa hospital in Gaza City, said medics were treating wounded people in a "very bad condition", warning of dire shortages of drugs and fuel to run power generators.

"Every minute we receive injured people," he said, earlier on Sunday.

TORN APART

In Gaza, run by the Hamas, the health ministry said 31 people had been killed.

But Israel said it had "irrefutable" evidence that a stray rocket fired by gunman was responsible for the deaths of several children in Gaza's northern Jabalia area on Saturday.

It was not immediately clear how many children were killed there, but the witnesses said they saw six dead bodies at the local hospital including three minors.

"We came running to the place and found body parts lying on the ground... they were torn-apart children," said Muhammad Abu Sadaa, describing the devastation in Jabalia.

The army said it had struck 139 positions of the groups, with the gunmen firing over 600 rockets and mortars, but with more than a hundred of those projectiles falling short inside Gaza.

Amid the high tensions, Jews in Israel-annexed east Jerusalem marked the Tisha Be'av fasting day on Sunday at the Al Aqsa mosque compound, known in Judaism as the Temple Mount.

Israel has said it was necessary to launch a "pre-emptive" operation on Friday against the group, which it said was planning an imminent attack.

The army has killed senior leaders of the group in Gaza, including Taysir al Jabari in Gaza City and Khaled Mansour in Rafah in the south.

KILLING AND WOUNDING

Daily life in the Gaza Strip has come to a standstill, with the sole power station shut down due to a lack of fuel after Israel closed its border crossings.

The United Nations humanitarian agency OCHA has warned of the "severe risk" to the "continuation of basic essential services".

"Each day we wake up to child and women martyrs... there is killing and wounding and people displaced," said Gaza City resident Abu Mohammed al Madhoun, 56. "We hope that Israeli aggression will end".

In southern and central Israel, civilians were forced into air raid shelters. — **AFP/Reuters**

Syria announces 130% fuel price hike

DAMASCUS: Syria's internal commerce ministry has announced a petrol price hike of around 130 per cent in the war-torn country facing fuel shortages and extended power cuts.

The cost of a litre of subsidised fuel will rise to 2,500 Syrian pounds, from 1,100 previously, a rise of 127 per cent, the ministry said in a statement quoted by the official SANA news agency late on Saturday.

The cost of non-subsidised petrol will rise from 3,500 to 4,000 Syrian pounds, the ministry added.

The increases represent the third time this year that authorities have increased the price of fuel, as the Syrian pound continues to depreciate.

Syria's currency is trading at around 4,250 to the dollar on the



The cost of a litre of subsidised fuel will rise to 2,500 Syrian pounds, from 1,100 previously, the ministry said. — AFP

black market, compared to an official rate of 2,814.

"This measure will hit everyone," said Raed al Saadi, a warehouse worker. "Our salary is now only enough

to get us to the workplace, and not even enough to get us home again."

"Life has become very difficult and I don't know where this situation will lead us," the 48-year-

old added.

Since the outbreak of war in 2011, Syria's oil and gas sector has suffered losses amounting to tens of billions of dollars.

The economy has been hit hard by both the long-running war and sanctions imposed against Damascus.

A UN commission in March called for a review of sanctions against President Bashar al Assad's regime because of concerns that the measures were hitting ordinary people too hard.

The conflict in Syria started in 2011 with the brutal repression of peaceful protests and escalated to pull in foreign powers and global militants.

It has killed around 500,000 people and displaced around half of the country's pre-war population. — **AFP**

Ten Sri Lankans vanish from C'wealth Games

COLOMBO: Ten members of crisis-hit Sri Lanka's Commonwealth Games contingent in Birmingham have disappeared in a suspected attempt to remain in Britain, a top sports official from the island nation said on Sunday.

The nine athletes and a manager vanished after completing their events, the official said, requesting anonymity.

Three of them — Judoka Chamila Dilani, her manager Asela de Silva, and wrestler Shanith Chathuranga — had disappeared last week.

That prompted a police complaint by the Sri Lankan officials.

"Since then, another seven have vanished," the official said,

without identifying them. "We suspect they want to remain in the UK, possibly to get employment."

The 160-strong Sri Lankan contingent's management possessed the passports of all members to ensure they returned home.

That failed to deter some from leaving.

British police located the first three that disappeared, but as they had not violated local laws and held visas valid for six months, no action was taken, the Sri Lankan official said.

"In fact, the police got us to return the passports that we were holding as a deterrent against defections," the official said.

"The police have not told us about their whereabouts." — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

More than 250 migrants 'rescued'

Tunisian coastguards "rescued" more than 250 migrants who were attempting to cross the Mediterranean to Italy, the North African country's National Guard said on Sunday.

Maritime authorities "were able... to rescue 255 would-be migrants, including 170 people of various African nationalities, with the remainder Tunisians," the National Guard said.

The attempted crossings — 17 in total — took place on the night of Friday to Saturday from the



east of Tunisia.

The statement did not indicate whether any vessels had got into difficulty or sunk, but did note that an unspecified sum of cash was seized during the operations.

ABIDJAN

Ouattara pardons predecessor Gbagbo

Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara has announced that he had pardoned his predecessor, Laurent Gbagbo, who faced a 20-year jail term for a 2018 conviction over political unrest.

"In the interests of strengthening social cohesion, I have signed a decree granting a presidential pardon," Ouattara said in a speech to mark the 62nd anniversary of the country's independence.

The president said he had asked that Gbagbo's bank



accounts be unfrozen and that his life annuity be paid.

Ouattara also said he had signed a decree for the conditional release of two of Gbagbo's closest associates.

BEIJING

Ban on international flights eased

China on Sunday shortened its suspension period for inbound international flights carrying Covid-positive passengers, signalling that Beijing could soon ease its strict border controls.

Incoming flights carrying five positive Covid-19 cases, or four per cent of the total passengers, will now face a reduced one-week suspension, the Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC) said in a statement. Previously, if a plane brought in five infected passengers, all flights operated



by the responsible airline along the same route were suspended for two weeks. Flights logging an eight per cent passengers positivity rate will be barred for two weeks, CAAC said.



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In brief

■ RENNES



'LITTLE HOPE' OF SAVING STRANDED BELUGA WHALE

Hopes of saving a malnourished beluga whale that has swum up the Seine river were receding on Sunday, but rescuers said they have ruled out "euthanasia" for now. The whale was first spotted on Tuesday in the river that runs through Paris to the English Channel. Since Friday it has been between two locks some 70 kilometres north of the French capital. But leaving it in the warm stagnant water between the lock gates is no longer an option. "He has to be moved in the coming 24-48 hours, these conditions are not good for him," Sea Shepherd France head Lamya Essemli said.

■ HAVANA



GOVT SEEKS HELP TO CONTAIN DEPOT FIRE

Cuba has asked for help to contain a massive fire at a fuel depot that has left at least one person dead, 121 people injured and 17 firefighters missing. Some 1,900 people have been evacuated from the affected area, according to officials from the western Matanzas province, where lightning struck a fuel tank, triggering an explosion. Provincial health official Luis Armando Wong told a press conference on Saturday evening a first body had been recovered at the site. Five people were critically injured, according to an update by the Cuban presidency on Twitter, with three others in a very serious condition in hospital.

■ BOGOTA



FIRST-EVER LEFTIST PRESIDENT SWORN IN

Ex-guerrilla and former mayor Gustavo Petro will be sworn in on Sunday as Colombia's first-ever leftist president, with plans for profound reforms in a country beset by economic inequality and drug violence. The former senator, 62, takes over from the deeply unpopular Ivan Duque for a four-year term during which he will enjoy support from a left-leaning majority in Congress. Petro's hard-fought victory in June elections brought Colombia into an expanding left-wing fold in Latin America that could be consolidated in October with a likely victory for Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brazil.

More Ukraine grain ships set sail as new shelling hits nuclear plant



Malta-flagged bulk carrier M/V Rojen carrying tonnes of grain from Ukraine sails along the Bosphorus Strait in Istanbul on Sunday. — AFP

KYIV: Four more ships carrying around 170,000 tonnes of grain set off from the Black Sea ports of Odessa and Chornomorsk on Sunday, Ukrainian authorities said, as Moscow accused Kyiv of carrying out a new strike against a Russian-occupied nuclear plant. "The second convoy of Ukrainian supplies has just left... three from Chornomorsk and one from Odessa," Kyiv's infrastructure ministry wrote on Telegram. It said that the ships — which it named as the Mustafa Necati, the Star Helena, the Glory and the Riva Wind — were carrying "around 170,000 tonnes of agriculture-related merchandise," without specifying further. Meanwhile, in Russia, Moscow accused Kyiv's forces of again shelling the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in the south of Ukraine, which it took control of shortly after invading its pro-Western neighbour. The Ukrainian army "carried out a strike with a cluster bomb

fired from a Ouragan multiple rocket launcher," the occupying authorities in Energodar, the town where the plant is situated, were quoted by the Russian state news agency TASS as saying. "The shrapnel and the rocket engine fell 400 metres from a working reactor," "damaged" administrative buildings and hit "a used nuclear fuel storage area," the authorities said. On Saturday, the plant's operator, Energoatom, had already said that parts of the facility had been "seriously damaged" by military strikes and one of its reactors was forced to shut down. Both Ukraine and Russia accuse each other of attacking the plant. Because Zaporizhzhia is Europe's biggest nuclear plant, the prospect of it being seriously damaged in the fighting is setting alarm bells ringing, not least at the UN's nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The strikes underline "the very real risk of a nuclear disaster", the IAEA's director general, Rafael Grossi, said on Saturday. "Any military firepower directed at or from the facility would amount to playing with fire, with potentially catastrophic consequences," Grossi said. And the European Union's top diplomat Josep Borrell condemned the attack as "a serious and irresponsible breach of nuclear safety rules and another example of Russia's disregard for international norms".

SIGN OF HOPE

The renewed shipments of Ukrainian grain to help ease global food shortages and bring down prices nevertheless offer a small glimmer of hope as the war enters its sixth month. Ukraine, one of the world's largest grain exporters, had been forced to halt almost all deliveries in the wake of Russia's attack on February 24, sending global food prices soaring and making

imports prohibitively expensive for some of the world's poorest nations. In Rome on Sunday, Pope Francis welcomed the resumption of grain exports as "a sign of hope" that showed dialogue was possible to end the war. "This step shows that it is possible to dialogue and achieve concrete results, which benefit everyone," the pontiff said in his weekly Angelus prayer. "Therefore, this event can be seen as a sign of hope, and I sincerely hope that, following this path, we can put an end to the fighting and arrive at a just and lasting peace." The joint coordination centre in Istanbul that monitors the shipments under a UN-backed deal had said on Saturday that five grain ships would be leaving Ukraine on Sunday. But Kyiv has only announced four. A bulk carrier had arrived in Chornomorsk on Saturday to be loaded with grain for the first time since Moscow's attack.—AFP

Biden out of isolation after testing negative for Covid

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden was out of isolation on Sunday, after testing negative for Covid for a second day in a row, the first time he was able to leave the White House since July 20. Biden, 79, had tested positive for Covid and returned to isolation on July 30, in a result doctors attributed to "rebound" positivity from his earlier bout of the illness. "I'm feeling good," the smiling president told pool reporters at the White House as he boarded a helicopter which then flew him to his beach home in Delaware. He was also optimistic about a sweeping climate and health care bill that was being debated in the Senate overnight on Sunday, telling reporters: "I think it's going to pass." The president "will safely return to public engagement and presidential travel," his physician Kevin O'Connor said in a statement announcing the negative test. According to Biden's official schedule he is set to travel to the southern state of Kentucky, the scene of devastating floods, on Monday. — AFP



US President Joe Biden gives a thumbs up while walking to Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House on Sunday. — AFP

Blinken in Africa to counter Russian influence

JOHANNESBURG: US Secretary of State Antony Blinken landed in South Africa on Sunday, kicking off a three-nation African visit as Washington scales up diplomacy to counter Russian influence on the continent. His visit comes after an extensive tour of Africa by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov late last month. South Africa, a leader in the developing world, has remained neutral in the Ukraine war, refusing to join Western calls to condemn Moscow, which had opposed apartheid before the end of white minority rule in 1994. Blinken will hold talks on Monday with South African counterpart Naledi Pandor and also make a policy announcement on the US government's new Africa strategy, Pretoria said in a statement. The two will "discuss ongoing and recent developments relating to the global geopolitical situation," it said. The US State Department last



Blinken lays a wreath at the Hector Pieterse Memorial in Soweto. — AFP

month said African countries were "geostrategic players and critical partners on the most pressing issues of our day, from promoting an open and stable international system, to tackling the effects of climate change, food insecurity and global pandemics". The African powerhouse, which wields great diplomatic

influence beyond the continent, belongs to a group of emerging economies called BRICS. In June, Russian President Vladimir Putin urged BRICS countries —Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — to cooperate in the face of "selfish actions" from the West. For Fonteh Akum, head of

the Pretoria-based think-tank Institute for Security Studies, Blinken's visit will help the US understand the southern African country's position. It will also aim "to bring South Africa further into the Western fold", Akum said. The US wants to "engage differently and... move towards understanding Africa's agency in international relations and therefore the growth in diplomatic engagements," the expert said. Blinken's trip follows a visit by French President Emmanuel Macron to Benin, Cameroon and Guinea-Bissau late last month. Lavrov's Africa trip took him to Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Ethiopia and Uganda. That Blinken is coming after Lavrov and Macron, "basically shows that Africa is entering a phase within which there is another bout of great power competition over the continent," said Akum. It is Blinken's second trip to Africa since his appointment early

US State Department last month said African countries were "geostrategic players and critical partners on the most pressing issues of our day, from promoting an open and stable international system, to tackling the effects of climate change, food insecurity and global pandemics"

last year. He will visit the Democratic Republic of Congo later this week, with the aim of boosting support for sub-Saharan Africa's biggest country as it battles to turn the page on decades of conflict. Blinken's tour will then wind up in Rwanda, which has seen a flare-up in tensions with DR Congo after it accused Rwanda of backing M23 rebels, a charge Kigali denies. — AFP

Summer is a great time to reskill



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature, Sultan Qaboos University

The World Economic Forum stated in a report of 2021 that 25 per cent of all employed will have to reskill by 2025 to be suited for emerging technologies and automation. This means that the training received in schools and colleges are not enough. The summer break is the best time to pause and think of what skills one could develop.

It is not only about developing one's resume. Simply put, the jobs that existed the last few decades simply will not exist in the few years.

What can one do in such a situation at a personal level?

Today's mantra is reskill and upskill. That could mean many things. At first, it means trying to understand why reskilling is

important, leading to the steps to take in order to reskill and finally, finding a place to implement the new skills.

The why should not be difficult to answer. The market requires skills, both hard and soft. Hard skills are knowledge and ability. Soft skills are linked to personal attributes like cooperation and time management.

The how needs a broader strategy. Knowing and listing available resources is a great first step. There are various universities and open source education centres which provide free courses which can be upgraded into a paid one for certification and retention of material.

Open universities worldwide

THERE ARE SKILLS WAITING TO BE LEARNT IN EVERY CORNER OF THE INTERNET AND THERE ARE ALSO PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES TO TEST OUT NEW SKILLS

provide course free of charge. Then there are digital education platforms which provide hundreds of courses to suit the early or mid-stage learners. Their courses are often hosted by distinguished faculty and have modules which can be taken up at one's own speed. The courses found online

suit everybody's needs and interests. From coding to hospital management, from art appreciation to gardening technologies, there is something for everybody.

What is more, these courses use a variety of teaching strategies – videos, audio content, pop quizzes, discussion boards and end of course summative tests – but only if you want certification.

You Tube is another great resource for learning and reskilling. There is almost nothing that cannot be learnt on this platform – from playing the piano to creating a custom made car, there are how-to videos on any topic, given by experts and novices.

If you have a passion, there is a talk or a lesson on it available

online.

Having chosen an area to work on, the last step is how to put the new skill to good use. This includes finding a way to underline the achievement in one's resume, practice the skill to perfection by offering it to friends and family, creating a portfolio of sorts.

The summer break is the ideal time to work on these skills.

Lack of opportunities is no longer an excuse for access to knowledge. There are skills waiting to be learnt in every corner of the Internet. There are also plenty of opportunities to test out new skills.

How to use the available resources to one's advantage will only be determined by imagination and commitment.

Scientists race to reveal melting glaciers' secrets

DENISE HRUBY

Jumping from rock to rock to rock over a creek formed off Austria's Jamtal glacier, scientist Andrea Fischer worries that precious scientific data will be irreversibly lost as the snow and ice melt faster than ever.

"I couldn't have imagined that it would ever melt as dramatically as this summer... Our 'archive' is melting away," says the glaciologist.

Fischer — vice director of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Mountain Research at the Austrian Academy of Sciences — has spent more than 20 years surveying Jamtal and four other Alpine glaciers across Austria's highest peaks for the oldest areas of ice.

For scientists looking to reconstruct the Earth's climate in the distant past, such ice formations are a unique time capsule stretching back thousands of years.

The glaciers contain an invaluable treasure trove of data — as they grew, the ice encapsulated twigs and leaves, which can now be carbon-dated, Fischer explains.

And based on the age of such material and the depth where it was found, scientists can infer when ice grew during colder periods, or when warmer conditions caused it to melt.

But now the glaciers are melting rapidly — including the one in the remote and narrow Jamtal valley, not far from where tourists found the stunningly preserved 5,300-year-old mummy of Oetzi, the Iceman, in the 1990s.

Temperatures in Europe's highest mountains have risen by nearly two degrees Celsius in the past 120 years — almost double the global average, according to the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA).

The Alps' roughly 4,000 glaciers have since become one of the starkest signs of global warming.

The Jamtal glacier has been losing about one metre (three feet) from its surface annually, but this year it has already lost more than a metre, Fischer says. "And we've got at least two months of summer left... where the glacier is entirely exposed to the sun," she warns.

Snow usually protects most of the glacial ice from the sun until September, but the little snow that fell last winter had already melted by early July.

"This year is outrageous compared to the average of the past 6,000 years," says Fischer.

"If this continues, in five years, Jamtal glacier won't be a glacier anymore." By the end of the summer, Fischer fears that about seven metres of depth will have melted off the surface — or about 300 years of climate "archives".— AFP



Megan Specia

The writer is an international correspondent at NYT

New mothers worry for their children's futures

The heat in a Lviv maternity hospital was overwhelming last month as Khrystyna Mnykh rocked her newborn daughter, Roksolana, in her arms and described her birth story.

An alarm had rung out days earlier as Mnykh, 28, was in labour, signalling the threat of a Russian strike on the western Ukrainian city.

"I had to go to the shelter, but I couldn't because I had an epidural and couldn't walk," she said.

"But I was on one of the lower floors, so it was OK."

Luckily, there were no missile strikes in the area that day, but the blaring siren that marked her daughter's entrance to this world was a reminder of the new stresses facing women giving birth in a country at war.

Mothers, some of them from Lviv, but many of them displaced from elsewhere in the country, have come to this maternity hospital to give birth in the relative safety of this city.

But even here, they cannot escape the war.

Mnykh said that weeks earlier, while she was still at home and heavily pregnant, an air defence system had intercepted a missile near her home, cracking its windows.

She can hear rifles firing at the military cemetery across the street that pays tribute to the fallen soldiers buried there daily.

Liliya Myronovych, who has spent three decades as chief of the neonatal department at one of the city's maternity hospitals, said they were still seeing many pregnant women coming from Ukraine's besieged east to give birth.

"We have some women who lost their husbands during this war, some babies who will never meet their fathers," she said.

"We try to give them all of the warmth of our hearts, but it is not what they expected.

They expected there to be peace."

"When this war started, it was very difficult for me, because all of my life I have spent creating life, helping babies," said Myronovych, 64.

"I couldn't understand how men could destroy everything, in one moment, without any reason."



Newborns at a maternity hospital in Lviv, Ukraine.

THE BLARING SIREN THAT MARKED A UKRAINIAN DAUGHTER'S ENTRANCE TO THIS WORLD WAS A REMINDER OF THE NEW STRESSES FACING WOMEN GIVING BIRTH IN A COUNTRY AT WAR

Dariia Moskalenko, 24, who was recovering in a room across the hall after giving birth to a daughter a day earlier, is originally from the country's eastern Donetsk region, the site of fighting since 2014, but moved to Kharkiv, in the north, seven years ago when she met her husband.

When the full-scale Russian attack began in February, she left him behind as she fled to Lviv.

He joined her there just in time to be present at their daughter's birth. While they are eager to return to Kharkiv, that city has been ravaged by shelling. She said that for their daughter's sake they would stay in Lviv.

For now, her thoughts are consumed by fears for her child's future. She hopes that her daughter will never have to know the reality of this war — that by the time the fighting is over, she will still be too young to remember the hardship of it all.

Like other mothers, though, the happiness of seeing her newborn can momentarily eclipse the anxiety.

"When I look at my sweet baby," Moskalenko said, "I stop thinking about everything else."

— New York Times

Refuel your business and courage alike



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

Nobody can undervalue the significant role that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play in promoting the national economy. Usually, SMEs tend to reflect a country's new and fast-growing industries, especially when such enterprises are run by young enthusiastic leaders.

Through the SMEs, youth present their responsibility and interest to partake in the nation-building process through their outstanding projects, businesses or enterprises.

One of the significant characteristics of a flourishing and growing economy is having a thriving and prospering small and medium enterprises sector. They play a major role in most economies, particularly in developing countries. SMEs account for the majority of businesses worldwide and are important contributors to job creation and global economic development. Therefore, SMEs are seen as a key element in achieving the "growth" and "employment" targets.

Generally, SMEs are associated with enthusiasm, passion and courage. Economies which discourage SMEs are therefore likely to weaken some new dynamic industries from putting down their roots and enable them to prosper. To some people, SMEs seem to be risky and non-beneficial business; however they

highly contribute to the development of the various spheres of economy. SMEs contribute to the economic development in several ways, either by offering employment opportunities for the growing labour force or providing appropriate sustainability and innovation in the economy.

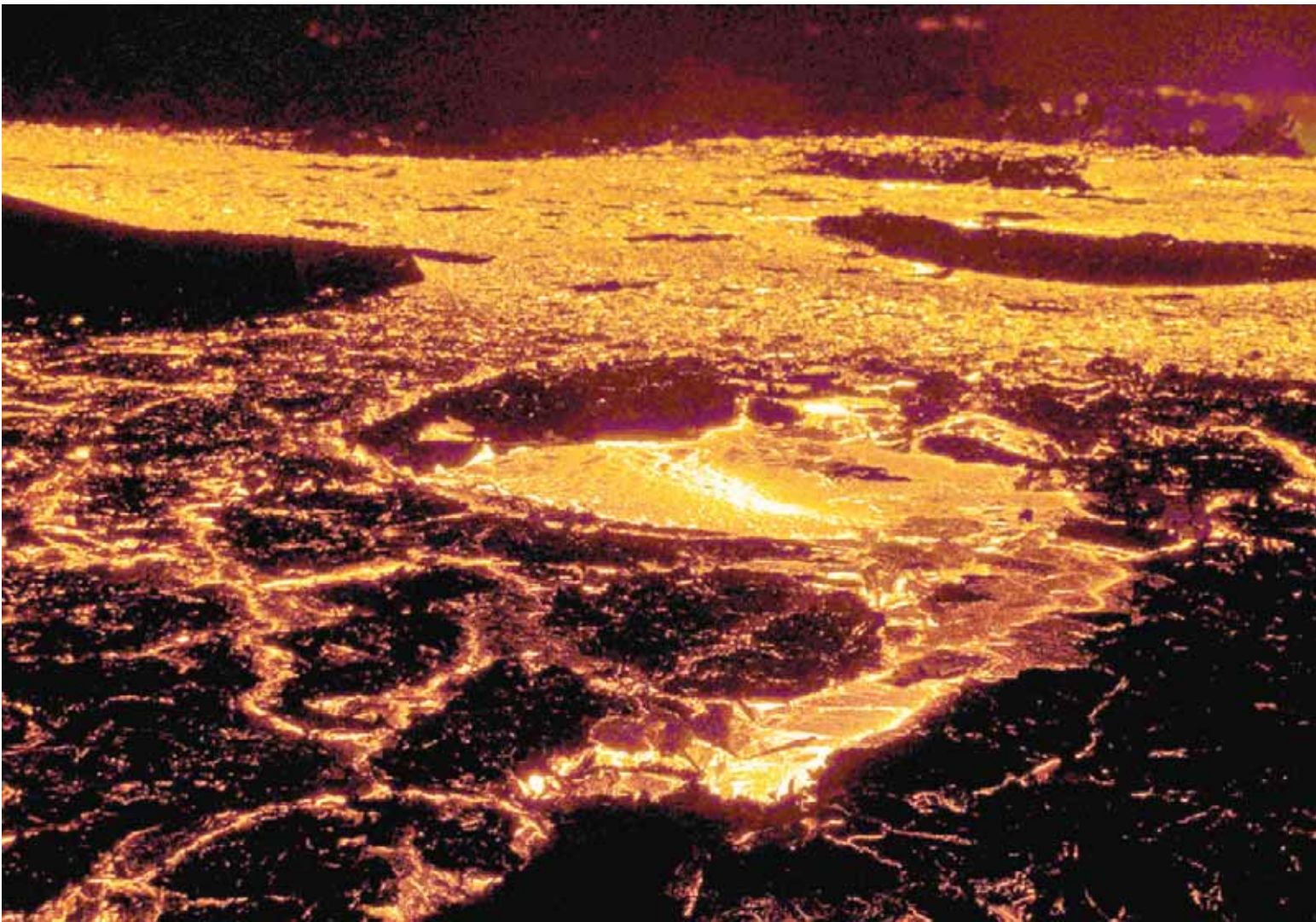
On the local front, many people rely on these SMEs directly or indirectly as a source of income for them. Most SMEs are a kind of personal initiatives run by individuals supported by different funding institutions in the country.

OMANI YOUTH SHOULD GRAB EVERY POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY WITH BOTH HANDS ESPECIALLY THOSE INTERESTED IN SETTING UP THEIR OWN BUSINESS. IT IS ONLY THOSE WHO CAN RISK GOING TOO FAR CAN POSSIBLY FIND OUT HOW FAR THEY CAN GO

Significantly, as long as people pursue their personal interests and dreams, one day they will certainly bring their business ideas to reality and become flourishing firms. All they have to do is to work hard to effectively run such businesses or start-ups all the way from the very beginning until successfully completing them. However, this requires hard work, patience and persistence like taking the way to achieve all other dreams and objectives. The way to success is always accompanied by different challenges and obstacles, so some, if not most, enterprises come across difficulties that might discourage entrepreneurs to proceed, rather it might urge them to give up. In fact, it is true as the saying goes that it is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare, so they are difficult".

Therefore, enterprises should be backed with courage and commitment in order to achieve its objectives and keep it last for long. Entrepreneurs sometimes should take risk and do not give up when things go the opposite way or they face any particular challenge. Many entrepreneurs stop their business just post experiencing the first failure or problem. Hence, they do not dare to try one more time and refuel their energy. Probably, such entrepreneurs need to believe in and recall the "No Pain, no gain" principle every time they are on a slump!

In a bid to encourage SMEs in Oman, the government along with some private bodies accorded a special attention to the development of the sector. These collective efforts are aimed at helping the SMEs sector to play its key role in the country's economic development. Financial loans to fund SMEs and necessary business consultations are offered to provide effective solutions to key challenges faced by SMEs. Most of those establishments initiated special funding programmes dedicated to fund and support such enterprises. In this regard, Omani youth should grab every possible opportunity with both hands especially those interested in setting up their own business. It is only those who can risk going too far can possibly find out how far they can go. Entrepreneurs have to remember in order to win you have to take risk. Thus, they shall never say die to their dream business, which might come true someday. Wherever you see a successful business, it is the result of someone once made a courageous decision.



VOLCANO ERUPTS

A photo taken on Sunday shows lava flowing from the volcano in Fagradalsfjall, Iceland, around 40 km from the capital Reykjavik, following an eruption that has been ongoing since last Wednesday. A volcano erupted in Iceland near the capital Reykjavik on August 3, the Icelandic Meteorological Office said as live images on local media showed lava spewing out of a fissure in the ground. — AFP

Kenya election campaign ends but disinformation battle drags on

MARY KULUNDU AND JAMES OKONG'O

The campaign for Kenya's presidential election has officially closed but the relentless — and dangerous — flow of disinformation continues online, as keyboard warriors battle to discredit rivals by sharing fake rigging claims, experts say.

Campaigners for the frontrunners, Deputy President William Ruto and veteran politician Raila Odinga, are circulating dozens of posts claiming that their opponent is engaged in "vote rigging plots", said Benedict Manzin, a sub-Saharan Africa analyst at UK-based intelligence firm Sibylline.

"We are increasingly seeing false information which seeks to delegitimise the results of the election with widespread claims that the opposing side would only win through fraud and that they are attempting to steal the election," Manzin said.

In one case, a strategist for Ruto's campaign accused Odinga's team of trying to rig Tuesday's poll because the 77-year-old urged the election commission to use a manual voter register instead of a digital one.

Meanwhile a pro-Odinga blogger tweeted that Ruto was attempting to steal the election, sharing a link to an unrelated video — since taken down — of a politician discussing an old scandal.

Mary Blankenship, a disinformation researcher at the University of Nevada, said the circulation of baseless fraud claims could cause real harm, especially in a country where past polls have been followed by an eruption of violence.

"It creates an avenue for either of the candidates to discredit the outcome of the polls, which could lead to unrest," Blankenship said. She likened the situation to the 2020 US election when former president Donald Trump's fraud claims culminated in an attack on the US Capitol by his supporters.

More than 1,100 people died in politically motivated inter-ethnic clashes in Kenya following the bitterly disputed 2007 elections. A decade later, dozens died during a police crackdown on protests after the 2017 presidential poll which was later annulled by the Supreme Court due to "irregularities and illegalities".

Fact-checking organisations — including AFP Fact Check — have debunked hundreds of false and misleading claims about the Kenyan elections. Both sides have sought to cast aspersions on their opponent's educational qualifications, claiming that Odinga lied about studying engineering in Germany and that Ruto falsified his

CAMPAIGNERS FOR THE FRONTRUNNERS, DEPUTY PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO AND VETERAN POLITICIAN RAILA ODINGA, ARE CIRCULATING DOZENS OF POSTS CLAIMING THAT THEIR OPPONENT IS ENGAGED IN 'VOTE RIGGING PLOTS'

university grades. These claims were debunked by fact-checkers but trended on Twitter for days.

Mainstream media organisations have also been dragged into the fray, with impostor websites and social media pages mimicking genuine outlets used to spread falsehoods about candidates.

"We are constantly having to issue alerts to say this did not originate from our company," said Citizen TV editor Waihiga Mwaura.

Fraudulent opinion polls have emerged as a major trend, with campaigners falsely attributing them to legitimate sources such as survey company GeoPoll and The Daily Nation newspaper.

There are "efforts to make different leaders look even more popular than they are, to create the impression they are winning the elections," said Nic Cheeseman, a political scientist with the University of Birmingham.

"The main misinformation and disinformation we have seen in 2022 is quite similar to the 2017 elections," Cheeseman said, referring to "negative

ethnic stereotyping" among other tactics.

An undercover expose by UK media revealed that British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica used the personal data of millions of Facebook users to target political ads — including some that preyed on ethnic fears — during President Uhuru Kenyatta's successful campaigns in 2013 and 2017.

Kenyan civil society groups and a state watchdog have warned that the barrage of disinformation poses a risk to democracy and called on social media platforms to act.

The authorities have also set up a special division to handle "election and hate speech-related offences".

"Part of what this misinformation and disinformation does is that it plays into the stereotypes, preconceived notions and the emotional aspect of voters," said Mark Kaigwa, team leader at StopReflectVerify.com, a Kenyan organisation analysing disinformation.

"It is a way to energise people and rally them emotionally."

While platforms like Facebook and TikTok say they are committed to rooting out disinformation and hate speech, observers are sceptical, not least because election influencers rely on codewords to amplify their messages.

"There is a lot of coded language... being used to mask or ensure that these social media platforms don't identify such type of hate speech," said Allan Cheboi, a senior investigator at Code for Africa, a data journalism and civic technology initiative. For instance, some campaigners use the Swahili word "madoadoa" ("blemish") to attack members of various communities in Kenya, Cheboi said. "Incitement starts online then results (in) violence in offline spaces," he said.

— AFP



Presidential election ballot boxes and electoral materials are placed at the tallying centre in Kilgoris, Kenya. — AFP

sport

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Rawan al Balushi crowned WCM in junior division at 2022 Chess Olympiad

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

Young Omani chess players came out with impressive performance at the 44th Chess Olympiad 2022 which is currently underway in Chennai, India. Oman's Rawan al Balushi was crowned as WCM in the junior category. The woman candidate master or WCM is one of the official titles awarded by the International Chess Federation

(FIDE) exclusively to women chess players. The accomplishment registered by Rawan is classified as the first title for Oman at the womens' players level. She clinched this title after capturing five points from seven rounds in her debut at the Chess Olympiad event. Rawan received one point in the opener against Burundi player Kelly Karelle Kaze. In the following clash against Mateja

Popovic from Montenegro, she got 0.5 points and then bounced back strongly to clinch one point from her opponent Afiwa Kponsou from Togo. Later, she got 0.5 points in her following game against Naya Bofround from Syria and captured one point from Guyanese Nellisha Johnson. Then, she suffered a loss against Patience Tsuses from Vietnam. The national chess men team managed to win in the second round of the tournament as they



Rawan Al Balushi

defeated Burundi team 4-0 and recorded another victory over Jordan team 3-1.

Oman mens' team comprised Amer al Maashani, Salim al Amri, Ali Shamas and Manaa al Kathiri. In the third round, the national team registered another triumph against New Zealand with a score of 2.5:1.5. The men's team suffered to a loss against Albania team and another defeat from Uganda team. Oman ladies team comprised from Al Anoud al Ghafri, Rawan al Balushi, Mariya al Balushi and Afra al Balushi. The ladies team

clinched a 4-0 win over Togo in a thrilling game while they tasted a defeat from Dominican Republic. On the other hand, Oman's umpires also marked their presence at the Chess Olympiad 2022. The international umpire Musallam al Wadhahi is attending in this Olympiad for second consecutive time. He officiated many games in the top chess event till now and will have some games in the remaining days of the Olympiad.

Ronaldo on the bench for Ten Hag's bow as Man Utd boss

MANCHESTER: Cristiano Ronaldo was left on the bench for Erik ten Hag's first competitive game as Manchester United manager against Brighton on Sunday.

Ronaldo is reportedly keen to leave the Red Devils in the search for Champions League football. The five-time Ballon d'Or winner missed United's pre-season tour of Asia and Australia, with the club giving him leave for family reasons. Ronaldo did make his return last weekend for the first-half of a 1-1 friendly draw with Rayo Vallecano, but left Old Trafford before full-time.

Ten Hag described a number of players' decision not to stay until the end of the Rayo game as "unacceptable", but said there would be no further punishment. Marcus Rashford looks set to step into Ronaldo's shoes up front against Brighton with Anthony Martial also ruled out by injury.



Lisandro Martinez and Christian Eriksen are handed their United debuts from the start with another new signing Tyrell Malacia on the bench.

— AFP

WALEED AL JAHWARI
KONYA, AUGUST 7

Oman participated in the General Assembly of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation, which was held on Sunday in the Turkish city of Konya. The Oman delegation was headed by Saifbin Sebaa al Rashidi and Abdullah bin Mohammed Ba makhalf, members of the Oman Olympic Committee. The General Assembly was held in the presence of Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al Faisal, President of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation. The meeting reviewed the financial and administrative report of the Board of Directors for the period 2020-2021. They also discussed the latest preparations of the Konya to host the fifth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games from August 9 to 18. The attendees listened to the speech of Prince Abdulaziz bin



Turki al Faisaa, chairman of the Federation, followed by the speech of Muhammad Muharram

Kassab, Minister of Sports, Youth and Turkish Athlete, Chairman of the Organizing Committee of

konya. Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will open the fifth edition Islamic Solidarity Games in Konya on Tuesday, where nearly 5,000 athletes, representing 55 countries, will compete in 24 events. The championship includes basketball, aerobic gymnastics, artistic gymnastics, rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, football, table tennis, shooting, cycling, wrestling, fencing, weightlifting, judo, karate, swimming, taekwondo, boxing, bocce, archery and volleyball.



Samukonga, Williams win historic golds in Commonwealth Games

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Zambian teenager Muzala Samukonga won his nation's first-ever Commonwealth Games 400m title on Sunday as Sada Williams gave Barbados their first gold in the women's event on the final day of athletics in Birmingham.

Samukonga, 19, who timed 44.66sec, exited the stadium in a wheelchair after tripping over a low advertising hoarding as he ran to collect his national flag.

England's Matthew Hudson-Smith, who won bronze in the event at last month's world championships, was forced to

settle for silver.

The 27-year-old had set his hopes on gold but was sanguine after admitting recently that he had attempted suicide last year.

"It's not the colour I wanted but you have to take the good with the bad," he said. "If you asked me a year ago would I be able to do this I would have said 'no'."

The English athlete, seeing Samukonga crying on the podium during the medals ceremony, put his hand on his shoulder.

Williams outclassed Victoria Ohuruogu, who missed out on emulating her elder sister, 2008 Olympic gold medalist Christine,

who won Commonwealth gold in 2006.

Williams, 24, who won bronze at the recent world championships, set a new Games record of 49.90sec, with Ohuruogu taking silver.

"It's amazing (to be part of the Barbados team)," said Williams. "I am so proud of Jonathan (Jones who won bronze in the men's 400m).

"I can't begin to imagine (the reaction back home). Everybody's probably going crazy right now."

India also celebrated a historic gold, which adds gloss to a highly successful athletics competition

for them in Birmingham.

Eldhose Paul hopped, skipped and jumped into Indian athletics folklore as he delivered their first triple jump title with a best mark of 17.03 metres while team-mate Abdulla Aboobacker Narangolintevida won silver.

India also won bronze in the men's 10,000m walk. Sandeep Kumar finished third behind Canada's Evan Dunfee (38min 36.37sec).

"The sporting culture in India is changing," said the triumphant Paul, who added that athletes were getting more support from sports authorities in the country. — AFP

Australia takes gold in the women's javelin

BIRMINGHAM: Recently crowned world champion Kelsey-Lee Barber won with her final throw (64.43m), dashing the dreams of her compatriot Mackenzie Little, with India Annu Rani taking bronze.

World champion and world record holder Tobi Amusan won the women's 100m hurdles, breaking a 16-year-old Games record as she timed 12.30sec.

The 25-year-old defending champion was trailing behind Jamaica's Olympic bronze medalist Megan Tapper but the Nigerian powered past her to ease home. "To get the win and defend my title means everything to me," said Amusan, who added even her father had accepted she made the right decision in focusing on her athletics.

"I was more into doing

track," she said. "He got really upset in the end. But he is an amazing man. He is proud of me."

Devyne Charlton of the Bahamas took silver and England's Cindy Sember won bronze while Tapper and her compatriot, 2015 world champion Danielle Williams, missed out on medals

The England 4x100m relay teams gave the home crowds something to cheer, winning the men's race and finishing second behind Nigeria in the women's event.

Scotland's Eilish McColgan will be seeking to add 5,000m gold to her 10,000 title in the final session on Sunday evening. Her team-mate, Laura Muir, bids to win gold in her favourite 1,500m event after taking bronze in Saturday's 800m. — AFP



Thompson-Herah, Kiplimo celebrate golden doubles

BIRMINGHAM: Jamaican sprint great Elaine Thompson-Herah and distance runner Jacob Kiplimo of Uganda sealed Commonwealth Games doubles by winning the 200 metres and 5,000m on Saturday.

Thompson-Herah has made sprint doubles her specialty — she is a two-time dual Olympic champion — and she did it in style in Birmingham by setting a new Games record of 22.02sec.

"I was going for a Games record in the 100 and it didn't work so I said, 'I must get it in the 200'," said the Jamaican star.

"I must say I'm just grateful to claim that gold today, the day we celebrate Independence Day in Jamaica."

Kiplimo emulated compatriot Joshua Cheptegei in 2018 in achieving the distance double, timing 13min 08.08sec.

As he danced over to his team in the stands and did a lap of honour, the loudest roars were heard for Solomon Islands athlete Rosefelo Siosi as he completed his race more than four minutes after Kiplimo had finished. "It was a wonderful performance for me," said Kiplimo. "I have two (gold medals) and I'm so happy about it"



Oliver Hoare earlier became the first Australian to win the 1500m title, timing 3min 30.12sec to break Filbert Bay's Games record, which had stood since 1974.

The 25-year-old produced a perfectly timed run down the finishing straight to breeze past first world champion Jake Wightman and Kenya's Timothy Cheruiyot, the world champion in 2019.

Trinidad and Tobago's Jereem Richards lit up the evening session as he successfully defended his 200m title, timing 19.80sec to eclipse the great Frankie Fredericks' 1994 mark of 19.97.

Hoare's win was one of three Australian golds.

Kurtis Marschall retained his pole vault title after the event eventually got under way after some of the competitors' poles were late being delivered to the track.

Jemima Montag added the women's 10,000m walk to her 20km title in 2018 wiping tears from her eyes as she revealed her late grandmother Judith, a Holocaust survivor who died last year, was her inspiration.

"She teaches me to take one step at a time and it also puts things into perspective," she said. — AFP



MEDVEDEV

THE MAN TO BEAT IN MONTREAL

MONTREAL: Daniil Medvedev will get the chance to further solidify his fragile world number one ranking as the ATP Montreal Masters begins on Monday.

The Russian, who was banned along with his compatriots and Belarus players from Wimbledon due to the invasion of Ukraine, secured his first ATP title of the season on Saturday at Los Cabos, Mexico over Britain's Cameron Norrie.

"The good thing about tennis is that in one week you can turn around your season," Medvedev said in Mexico. "Coming here I had lost five finals in a row. That's not nice. I wanted to do better."

In Montreal, the 26-year-old will be missing his two major rivals.

Spain's Rafael Nadal withdrew as he re-injured an existing abdominal muscle injury during training while Serbian Novak Djokovic cannot enter Canada due to his

lack of Covid-19 vaccinations.

But after a first-round bye, Medvedev could face a massive test with Wimbledon finalist Nick Kyrgios his possible opponent. The No. 63 Australian can get there by winning his opening match against Argentine Sebastian Baez.

With his mind now firmly fixed on his game, Kyrgios has emerged as a danger-man to the rest of the field.

"I'm very proud of the work

done and it shows the changes I've been developing in these six months," he said.

Teen Carlos Alcaraz takes the second seeding behind Medvedev as he makes his tournament debut.

The 19-year-old Spaniard already owns two Masters titles from Miami and Madrid this season and will make his start after a bye against the winner from American Tommy Paul and Canada's Vasek Pospisil.

The youngster will be seeking his fifth trophy of 2022 and will be the focus of Spanish fans with five-time tournament champion Nadal missing.

Third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas will be competing for the first time in more than a month after last playing in a Wimbledon third-round loss to Kyrgios.

The Greek is followed by fourth seed Casper Ruud, last month's Gstaad clay winner who reached

the Canadian quarter-finals last season.

Russian Andrey Rublev is seeded fifth ahead of popular Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime and number seven Jannik Sinner. Poland's Hubert Hurkacz closes out the top eight seeds.

Former number one Andy Murray, a three-time champion in Canada, enters on a wild card and will start against US 10th seed Taylor Fritz. — AFP

Webber hails former F1 team-mate Vettel after 'pretty tense' time

MUNICH: Mark Webber has praised his former Formula One team-mate Sebastian Vettel after the German's decision to retire from the sport at the end of the season despite previous conflicts when the pair were at Red Bull together.

Webber, 45, told the F1 homepage that the four-time world champion had an "incredible career" and was "untouchable in the years" 2010-2013 when Vettel won his titles — sometimes at the Australian's expense. "It was obviously pretty tense when you're fighting for championships at the front together," he said.

"It always gets a bit strained — it's easier to be team-mates when you're fighting for points but obviously, championships and wins is a bit more challenging, which is obviously well-advertised in lots of different



scenarios throughout the sport. We weren't alone in that sense."

The duo famously crashed into each other in Turkey in 2010 and three years later Vettel ignored team orders to rob Webber of victory in Malaysia.

Saying they were "fine" now, Webber said the 35-year-old Vettel had a lot to look forward to post-racing, having expressed

great concern about climate change.

"Now, obviously he's changed his whole position, hasn't he?," he said. "As his career's gone on, especially in the last year or so, his whole position has changed in terms of what he's motivated by and looking forward to in the next phase of his life, and fair play." — dpa

South Korea's Im clings to PGA lead in stormy Greensboro

WASHINGTON: South Korea's Im Sung-jae clung to a one-stroke lead over American John Huh after Sunday's completion of the storm-interrupted third round of the US PGA Tour's Wyndham Championship.

Both closed with bogeys to leave Im atop the leaderboard on 13-under par 197 and Huh on 198 after 54 holes at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Im missed an eight-foot par putt at the 18th hole to stumble at the end of a five-under par 65 third round while Huh went way left off the 18th tee and chipped inches from the cup to set up a tap-in bogey for a 66.

American rookie Brandon Wu and South Korean Kim Joo-Hyung were third, two shots off the lead, as the round was finished on Sunday morning following storms that shut down play early on Saturday.



South Korea Im in golf-File Photo

Im made three birdies on the front nine and began a birdie run with a five-foot putt at the 11th just before storms halted play on Saturday to seize a share of the lead.

He returned on Sunday morning and added a five-foot birdie putt at the par-3 12th and a 15-footer at the 13th before making a bogey at the 14th, then answered with a birdie putt from

just outside three feet at the par-5 15th. The most recent of Im's two PGA Tour titles came at the Shriners' Children's Open last October.

Huh, who fired a career-low 61 to lead the first round, closed on Saturday with back-to-back birdies at 10 and 11 and on Sunday added a birdie putt at 12 from just inside 10 feet then drove the 15th green in two for a tap-in birdie before his closing bogey.

Wu holed out for an eagle from 147 yards at the par-4 11th to share the lead with Im at 12-under through 11 holes when play was halted on Saturday.

But Wu made bogeys at 13 and 14 and even with a four-foot birdie putt at 15 was two adrift entering the final round.

Kim finished his final eight holes on Sunday but stayed on 11-under with a bogey at the 14th and a birdie at the par-3 16th.

— AFP



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State budget posts RO 784m surplus by end of H1 2022

MUSCAT: The total revenues collected by the end of the first half of 2022 amounted to RO 6.724 billion, comprising a rise by 54.2 per cent compared to RO 4.361 billion registered over the same period in 2021.

The collected revenues accounted for 63.6 per cent of total revenues estimated in the 2022 Budget which were RO 10.580 million. This increase is attributed to net oil revenues going up by the end of the first half of 2022 by 40.1 per cent to reach RO 3.187 billion compared to the same period in 2021.

This is as a result of a rise in average oil price to 87 US Dollars per barrel compared to 53 US Dollars per barrel achieved over the same period in 2021 as well as a rise in average oil production to 1,037,000 barrels per day compared to 952,000 barrels per day registered over the same period in 2021. Gas revenues by the end of the first half of 2022 hit RO 1.729 billion, comprising a surge by 137.8 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

This is a result of higher gas prices and production.

At the end of the first half of 2022, current revenues amounted to RO 1.796 billion, up by 34.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

Tax and fees revenues amounted to RO 1.125 billion, growing by 71.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. At the end of the first half of 2022, corporate income tax stood at RO 424 million, increasing by 23.3 per cent compared to the same period



in 2021. Moreover, excise tax and VAT revenues amounted to RO 48 million and RO 345 million respectively by the end of the first half of 2022.

Further, other revenues amounted to RO 671 million, including RO 392 million of dividends received from Oman Investment Authority (OIA) at the end of the first half of 2022.

Public spending by the end of the first half of 2022 reached RO 5.941 billion, rising by 8.6 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. Public spending amounted for 48.9 per cent of the 2022

Budget estimates of RO 12.130 billion. Development expenditure

amounted to RO 413 million, up by 38.1 per cent compared to RO 299 million reported over the same period in 2021. Current expenditure at the end of the first half of 2022 amounted to RO 4.550 billion, increasing by 13.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. This is driven by an increase by 154.6% in gas purchase and transport expenditure to reach RO 639 million and a rise by 31.7 per cent in public debt service to RO 521 million.

Total contributions and other expenses by the end of the first half of 2022 reached RO 863 million, going up by 88 per cent compared to the same period

The increase is attributed to net oil revenues going up by the end of the first half of 2022 by 40.1 per cent to reach RO 3.187 billion compared to the same period in 2021

in 2021. This is due to a rise in oil products subsidy to RO 314 million and an allocated RO 100 million for future debt obligations budget-item which aims to repay part of future loans.

At the end of the first half of 2022, the budget posted a surplus

of RO 784 million compared to a deficit of RO 1.108 billion over the same period in 2021. During the first half of 2022, the Ministry of Finance paid the private sector's dues received via the fiscal system which completed the documentary cycle and stood at RO 504 million.

The government benefited from the additional revenues during 2022 by accelerating economic recovery through increasing development expenditure to RO 1.100 billion compared to previous figures, up by RO 200 million to be allocated for priority projects and economic and social impact.

As of the end of June 2022, development expenditure amounted to RO 413 million, increasing by 38.1 per cent compared to RO 299 million reported over the same period in 2021. RO 650 million were allocated for implementing additional development projects to be added to the projects list of the 10th Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025).

Such projects would be implemented across various health, education, housing, transport, tourism and municipal sectors. In light of the current global geopolitical situations, which led to a rise in oil prices and price of basic food commodities, the government revised the subsidies to mitigate the implications. By the end of the first half of 2022, government subsidy amounted to RO 314 million allocated for oil products subsidy (fuel prices were fixed in November 2021) and RO 11 million allocated for basic food subsidy.

Oman's liability management exercise reduces public debt by buying-back some of the sovereign bonds for less than its nominal value, repayment of high cost loans and issuance of government Sukuk in Muscat Stock Exchange at preferable rates.

This contributed to declining total public debt which amounted to RO 18.6 billion by the end of July 2022. Debt servicing cost achieved a saving of RO 127 million, in addition to enhancing investor's confidence and improving Oman's credit ratings. — ONA

Omantel Group's H1 revenue climbs to RO 1.294 billion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

Majority state-owned Omantel's Group Revenue for the period ended June 2022 has reached RO 1,294.6 million compared to RO 1,194.1 million for the corresponding period 2021. The Group revenue includes the acquired business of Zain Group, which contributed revenues of RO 1,022m.

The Group's total Operating expenses increased to RO 1,083.2m compared to RO 1,007.6m for the corresponding period 2021, an increase of 7.5 per cent. The Group's Net Profit after tax has grown by 18.4 per cent touching RO 128.6m compared to RO 108.6m in 2021. After adjusting for minority interest the net profit for the period is RO 34.6m compared to RO 32.4m in 2021, an increase of 6.8 per cent.



On the domestic front, Omantel revenues reached RO 276.8 million compared to RO 265.7 million for the corresponding period 2021. Revenues growth mainly achieved in Mobile Postpaid and Fixed Broadband revenues.

Net Profit for the six months ended June 2022 stands at RO 37.3m compared to RO 36.1m in the previous period. Increase in Net profit is predominantly on account of sustainable revenue growth in Postpaid Mobile

revenue (11.7 per cent) and Fixed Broad band revenue (2.1 per cent), cost optimisation measures, reduction in impairment provision against receivables (contributed by healthy collections) and depreciation.

The total domestic subscriber base as of June 2022 (including mobile and fixed businesses) was 3.166m (excluding Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.215m of the corresponding period of the previous year, a decline of 1.5 per cent over the last period.

Total subscriber base with mobile resellers reached 3.719m compared to 3.8m last year.

Subsidiary company Zain Group revenues reached RO 1,022.4m as of June 2022 compared to the corresponding period revenues of RO 932.4m. EBITDA stands at RO 394.5m, compared to the corresponding period EBITDA of RO 385.4m recording a decline of 2.3 per cent. Net profit stands at RO 135.4m compared to RO 115.3m of the previous period. The total customer base of Zain Group increased by 7 per cent to 52m compared to 48m of the previous period.

Omantel's Mobile market share (including Mobile Resellers) is 50.4 per cent with a revenue share of 58.6 per cent. The Fixed Telephone (post & pre-paid) market share is 71.1 per cent with a revenue market share of 80.3 per cent.

Madayn takes over operation of Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates "Madayn" is now offering its services to investors in Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City following the completion of groundworks for the management and operation of the industrial city, informed Eng Badr al Abri (pictured), Director of Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City Project.

Investors in the industrial blocks of Madayn in Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City namely (142, 144, 146, 154, 158) can now complete their procedures through Masar Service Centre at the Administration Building



Badr al Abri

of Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City, located close to Nesto Hypermarket in Al Wadi Al Kabir. Investors can also process their procedures, complete transactions and pay related fees online through Madayn's official website: www.madayn.om.

Al Abri added that Madayn has recently floated consultancy services' tender for the rehabilitation of Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City. This includes developing and rehabilitating the existing infrastructure facilities and detailed masterplan for Al Wadi Al Kabir Industrial City, evaluating the available services in the industrial city, in addition to exploring engineering solutions for water, sewage and road networks.



Muriya partners with TriMe to bring Ironman Triathlon to Salalah

MUSCAT: Muriya, Oman's largest and most diversified developer, signed a partnership with local event organiser, TriMe Oman, to bring the world-famous event IRONMAN 70.3 Triathlon to Hawana Salalah.

The flagship development will be transforming for an epic three-day event in September 2022 that will see athletes go against one another in a trio of long-distance races that includes swimming, cycling and running. The competition is expected to attract athletes from far and wide for what is considered one of the world's most exciting triathlons.

"We are thrilled to be hosting one of Oman's largest sports events, attracting visitors and sports enthusiasts from all over the world. As well as promoting sports participation, it's an important part of our efforts to collaborate with initiatives that further enhance Oman's position as a leading tourism destination," said Karim Boushra, Area Destinations Director of Muriya.

"Hawana Salalah is an ideal hub for sports and leisure events and provides the perfect surroundings for visitors to take in the beauty of Oman's sea and mountains amidst an array of five-star amenities."

Mohamed Obaidani, Chief Executive Officer of TriMe, said, "We are honoured and delighted to be able to partner with Muriya to bring this iconic race to Hawana Salalah. This is the ideal venue with so many world-class amenities near the racecourse to help the athletes prepare and relax, and their families and friends enjoy the incredible

atmosphere and breath-taking scenery the destination offers. This event is many years in the making, and we are proud of what we accomplished to extend our hospitality to all athletes from around the world and add a new triathlon experience to Oman's growing sports and adventure tourism sector."

Muriya, the developer of Hawana Salalah, is a partnership between Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) and Orascom Development Holding (ODH). Hawana Salalah provides the perfect setting for participants whilst offering plenty of world-class accommodation options, including the 577-room Fanar Hotel and Residences, the luxurious 422-room Salalah Rotana Resort.

The perfect place to explore all that Dhofar has to offer, Hawana Salalah sits proudly alongside majestic mountains, rolling desert, archaeological sites, and turquoise waters - an unmatched destination to be enjoyed for any occasion.

Created in 1978 in the US, the IRONMAN, and IRONMAN 70.3 Triathlon Series has become the world's premier full-distance and half-distance triathlon series consisting of over 150 qualifying races in 50+ countries, regions, and territories across the world.

Registration is now open. Details can be found at <https://www.ironman.com/im703-salah-register>. Participants and spectators can also book their room at Fanar Hotel & Residences at Hawana Salalah on: <https://bit.ly/3LEjOFA>.

NBO's Hassan represents national parasailing team at European meet

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Hassan al Lawati represented Oman in the recently completed three world-class international championships in Europe. Hassan represented Oman as part of the ten-member National Parasailing Team in the Belgian Sailability Cup for the disabled, France Hansa Class Championship and 2022 Hansa UK National Championships.

The team were selected from the 'Sail Free' programme, which was launched in December 2019 by Oman Sail and Oman Paralympic Committee in partnership with BP, with the aim of introducing people with disabilities to the sport of sailing. Now as Customer Experience Specialist, Hassan has been with the bank for the last seven years.

NBO's long-standing commitment to Oman's young people is demonstrated by a number of initiatives that it organises and supports, including its partnerships with the Ministry



of Labour to offer a supplementary course for graduates of the National Leadership Development Programme, Etimad and Outward Bound Oman which will see 600 young people develop their skills.

Through these initiatives, NBO is empowering young Omanis to

take their place as future business leaders and supporting the government's ambitions for socio-economic development.

To date, NBO has welcomed more than 250 interns in 2022 in the internship programme which is designed to upskill Omani

graduates and enhance their banking and financial experience.

This will help them make their way through the bank's different divisions and branches and, ultimately, equip them with the professional and social skills to confidently enter the job market.

Alizz Bank expands instant finance services

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has expanded its IFIN instant finance services to several car dealerships, furniture and electronics stores. Through this service, customers can choose their desired vehicle or goods and finance them immediately within just 10 minutes.

Customers can currently avail instant auto finance at Nissan, Infiniti, Toyota, and Mazda for their car of their dreams. The auto finance application is made on the spot and in less than 10 minutes.

The dealership will then be able to fetch all the required information through a flexible electronic system, verify finance eligibility, and finally move on with the process easily.

Additionally, customers can receive instant finance for goods such as furniture, accessories, electronics, etc. through showrooms of Danube Home, Enza Home, Mustafa Sultan

Electronics, SofaLand, and Fahmy Furniture. Alizz Islamic Bank customers can receive instant finance at the store for up to 120 months without the need to visit any of the bank branches. The finance process has been made easier to take up to only 10 minutes at the cashier counter.

Customers will get verified through an OTP sent to their registered phone number, and then asked to sign the finance contract after obtaining immediate approval. Afterward, Alizz Islamic Bank will buy the

customer's desired goods from the authorised dealer and sell them to the customer at a pre-agreed price to be paid in installments. This type of finance features full transparency; the customer is aware of the bank's margin and the installment plan at the time of contract signing, which gives him immediate ownership of the goods.

The IFIN Instant Finance Service comes as part of Alizz Islamic Bank's plans to provide a wide range of quick and meticulously designed banking

solutions to meet the needs of all customers while completing their banking transactions.

Alizz Islamic Bank is one of the leading banks to provide flexible digital transactions for its customers, especially with the growing reliance on digital technology in banking. Alizz Islamic Bank believes strongly on the importance of adopting digital strategies that meet the needs of customers and provides higher levels of transparency.

IFIN is the world's first company to offer Shariah-compliant FinTech solutions among the various Islamic FinTech institutions, products, and channels.

The company also provides instant Islamic finance facilities at retail stores. This solution has been designed to change the way Islamic finance is provided, which makes it safe, fast, and easy to process.



Toyota passenger cars now with exclusive summer thrills benefits

MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning their favourite Toyota passenger cars can now take advantage of the Summer Thrills benefits. The passenger car range is now available with Service 2 Years/20,000 kms and 3 Years/30,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1 Year Insurance Or Cash Gift in Lieu of Insurance RO 125 to RO 275. The campaign is valid until September 15.

The Summer Thrills offer is available on sedans like the Yaris, Corolla and Camry. The Yaris Sedan has a Smart Exterior and an Interior Design. Delivering a Dynamic Driving Experience, the Yaris sedan is equipped with a 1.5-Litre Four-Cylinder Engine which can churn out a Maximum Output of 106 hp and 14.3 kg-m of Torque and is mated to the CVT Transmission to offer a smooth shifting experience with excellent fuel efficiency.

The Corolla's striking look is complemented by an exciting



drive personality imbued by three powertrain options. It includes a newly developed 2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 HP and

20.39 Kg-m of torque which is mated to a new Direct Shift CVT transmission and a 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque,

which is paired with a CVT transmission.

The stylish Camry is available in two engine options. The 2.5 Litre engine delivers 204 HP &

24.8 Kg-m torque & 3.5L engine delivers 298 HP & 36.3 Kg-m torque. Camry is also available in the 3.5L sports edition that adds to the thrill.

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Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms and conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.



OQ awareness campaign focuses on safety of its gas networks

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

OQ Group launched an awareness campaign to ensure and protect the safety and well-being of residents and tourists against any risks associated with gas pipelines in Dhofar Governorate during the Khareef season.

The Campaign was launched under the patronage of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsen al Ghassani, Chairman of Dhofar Municipality, in the presence of a number of key officials in the governorate.

In his speech, Ahmed bin Said al Azkawi, CEO Upstream at OQ stated, “OQ — the Global Integrated Energy Group — with its diversified investments in the fields of oil and gas exploration and production, refineries, petrochemical plants, and alternative energy, pays special attention to the health, safety and environment of all aspects related to its operations.”

“This interest comes as part of the Group’s commitment to comply with local and international standards and legislations as OQ abides by the strictest health, safety and environmental regulations across its plants and locations.



The Group also mandates its employees and contractors to comply with all health, safety and environmental requirements and incorporate such compliance as one of the basic conditions for working with the group.”

Al Azkawi also added that “The launch of this awareness campaign in Dhofar Governorate is part of the commitment made by the Group to enhance safety and security in neighbourhoods and villages where there is an extension of gas pipelines.”

It’s noteworthy that the pipelines of more than 4,000km

that belong to OQ Gas Network supply gas to power plants, factories, and economic zones in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to supplying homes with cooking gas.

For his part, Eng Mansour bin Ali al Abdali, Acting CEO of OQ Gas Networks, stated that the Campaign aims to raise awareness on the importance of natural gas pipelines and its associated assets. In addition, it will be used as a platform to confirm the readiness of the Group’s emergency plans during Khareef season.

The campaign, which

runs from August until next September, targets all local and foreign visitors and tourists.

Al Abdali pointed out that the most prominent challenges during the Khareef Dhofar season included camping, setting up temporary sheds and yards, barbecue parties and parking within the easement areas of gas pipelines, in addition to establishing family gatherings within such easement areas.

He also confirmed that the gas pipelines are protected under the Royal Decree No. 8/2011 of the Oil and Gas Law.

SOHAR Port, FICCI host joint webinar on logistics

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

SOHAR Port and Freezone hosted the fifth and final webinar in its series with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and the Federation of Indian Export Organizations (FIEO), called “Trade and Logistics Solutions via SOHAR Port and Freezone to Maximise Your Market Reach”.

The series, which commenced in 2021, has covered a range of topics including metals, food, and logistics highlighting the potential avenues for further bilateral trade between Oman and India.

SOHAR Port and Freezone offers a number of strategic advantages for Indian businesses, including strong logistics connections, promotions in trade licenses, and flexible warehousing solutions, as proven by the many Indian companies who have already achieved success at SOHAR.

The webinar featured presentations from Robert Bartstra, Executive Commercial Manager at SOHAR Port and Freezone, Mohammed al Kindi, Commercial Officer at SOHAR Port and Freezone, and Rajesh Vaidyanathan Iyer, General Manager at Khimji Ramdas Shipping. There was also a panel discussion on Indian Exports in SOHAR with speakers from Lalan Middle East, Matrix Prime Logistics, Radiant Freight and Logistics, and DHL Global Forwarding, all based at SOHAR.

“Providing a thriving gateway

to new markets, as well as the best in terms of services, infrastructure and connections, SOHAR is the ultimate link in the supply chain. We have a multi-purpose port operated by world renowned companies, which is connected to the Freezone via a bonded corridor, and we offer direct shipping lines to India as well as access to the GCC, including a new road to Saudi Arabia. Plus, with Oman’s Ports ranked the fastest in the world for container handling according to the UNCTAD index, it presents extremely competitive customs processes.”

“These webinars address all of this, increasing visibility in the Indian market and highlighting the many opportunities that are presented for companies,” said Omar al Mahrizi, SOHAR Freezone Chief Executive Officer.

Al Mahrizi added, “SOHAR Port and Freezone offers an advantageous base for logistics operators with an impressive 65,000,000 m² of land set aside for trade and logistics, manufacturing, as well as distribution. With direct shipping lines to India and six services per week, our strategic location makes it the perfect place to start warehousing and logistics operations for a wide range of products and commodities, either for transit through Oman, or for distribution into the region. Plus, with no corporate taxes/VAT, import/export tax free means that overall operational costs are up to 50 per cent less than elsewhere in the region, posing significant economic as well as strategic advantages.”



CCED bolsters CSR with three MoUs

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUGUST 7

Continuing with a strong community involvement, CC Energy Development (CCED), along with its partners in Blocks 3 & 4, Mitsui E&P Middle East BV and Tethys Oil Block 3 & 4 Limited, has signed Memoranda of Understanding with three organisations — Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS), Outward Bound Oman, and the Oman Diabetes Association — for a range of health, social development, and educational activities.

These agreements are part of the energy company’s active Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, which aims to invest in the communities it works in while supporting Oman’s Vision 2040 for socio-economic development.

Walter Simpson, Managing



Director at CCED said, “We are delighted to be providing our support to three projects that are aligned to our commitment to the communities we serve, and to contributing to the objectives of Oman’s Vision 2040

. As a partner in the country’s remarkable development, we feel it is our responsibility to share the economic benefits of our activities and these social projects are part of our long-term commitment to CSR.”

CCED is supporting ASAAS, who, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, will launch its second Qaderoon Forum and Exhibition aiming to integrate people with disabilities into the labour market. The first forum of its kind in the Middle East, the latest edition will fund a number of projects that will provide the appropriate training for participants to turn their skills into sustainable start-up businesses and in turn, help them secure a decent life and contribute to community development.

CCED has also pledged to support a series of courses run by Outward Bound Oman for Omani students aged 15-17. The courses

include its renowned Skills for Life (SfL), which includes skill-building for job readiness, creative thinking and communication, problem solving, resilience, and responsibility, all taught in an outdoor adventure setting. The results see the students build their core skills, values and qualities that will enable them to thrive in their home, work and school life, and meet Oman’s future social and economic needs.

Through the MoU with the Oman Diabetes Association CCED will support the association’s ‘We are with You’ campaign. It was created under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Development to support underprivileged members of society who suffer from diabetes, providing them with critical life-saving medical devices. The tools will limit their time spent in hospitals and help them cope with the disease and lead normal lives.

Rate hikes are not the right answer to ‘Wage-Price Persistence’



JAMES K GALBRAITH

The write is Professor of Government and Chair in Government/Business Relations at the University of Texas at Austin

It is a bit jarring when a secure and comfortable professor writes that others must lose their jobs so that inflation can be contained. And it is even worse if he explains that “the only solution ... is to restrain demand” through higher interest rates — a very good solution for those with cash on hand. But let me reply on the merits to Jason Furman’s recent call for this “solution.”

Furman writes that in the United States, “Aside from food and energy price increases, the bulk of the inflation was originally caused by demand.” The words “aside from” are key. Over the 12 months through June 2022, energy prices are up 40 per cent — with gasoline up 60 per cent and fuel oil up almost 100 per cent — and food prices have risen 10

per cent.

Prices of everything else have risen just 5.9 per cent, and one must allow that energy prices affect the price of everything else. Furman’s claim recalls the old gag: “Aside from that, Mrs Lincoln, how was the play?”

There is no actual evidence that demand, rather than cost, caused the non-energy, non-food price increases — and there are good reasons to be sceptical. Costs are wages and raw materials plus profits; they are paid for by sales, also known as demand. Thus demand and cost are nearly inseparable; they are opposite sides of the same economic accounts. Furman himself has written that “the exact combination ... is unknowable.”

Shifting his ground from demand to cost, Furman writes that

HIGHER INTEREST RATES
INITIALLY JUST ENRICH
PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS
HOLDING SUPPLIES OF
READY CASH. FOR BUSINESS
BORROWERS, INTEREST
IS ANOTHER COST THAT
WILL BE PASSED ALONG TO
CONSUMERS IN THE FORM
OF HIGHER PRICES

“businesses will most likely continue to pass along the costs of higher wages to consumers.” He barely mentions profits. Yet profits are very high, and high profits come partly from high profit margins — meaning prices. Furman focuses on the dynamic of a “wage-price spiral” (renamed “wage-

price persistence”); he is silent about profiteering. Has he not heard of market power, monopoly power, or the predatory corporation?

And what do higher interest rates have to do with “wage-price persistence”? The answer is: absolutely nothing, at least in the short run. Higher interest rates initially just enrich people and institutions (like banks or Harvard University) holding supplies of ready cash. For business borrowers, interest is another cost that will be passed along to consumers in the form of higher prices.

Only when the US Federal Reserve pursues truly extreme measures will prices start to fall, as happened when Fed Chair Paul Volcker pushed short-term interest rates to 20 per cent in

the early 1980s. But this mechanism works by slashing growth and driving up joblessness, bankruptcies, foreclosures, suicides, and crime. That, sad to say, is what Furman urges the current Fed chair, Jerome Powell, to do.

But high interest rates are not “the only solution.” Jamaal Bowman, a Democratic member of the House of Representatives from New York, has just proposed a bill with better ideas — democratic ideas of the kind that helped America triumph in World War II and get through the Korean war. Simply put, Bowman’s proposed strategy is to stabilise prices by producing more, rather than less, while taking steps to prevent price gouging and unjust enrichment.

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#Living_with_COVID19

A school library in honour of a deceased student

The memories of Sneha Iyer, daughter of Arjindar Kaur and Ananth Naryanan will be enlivened for many generations to come, once the renovated library at the Indian School Muscat (ISM) is dedicated to her fellow students by the Indian Ambassador this week... **P20**

Pompeii discoveries shed light on middle class life

ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAVE discovered four new rooms in a house in Pompeii filled with plates, amphoras and other everyday objects, giving a snapshot of middle class life at the moment Mount Vesuvius's eruption buried the Roman city in AD 79.

The remains of bowls, a hastily emptied trunk, a bed and a crib-shaped terra-cotta perfume burner were found on two floors of a previously-excavated building, the Pompeii archaeological park authority said on Saturday.

Some were more valuable than others — vessels made of

bronze or glass next to everyday tools.

"A large slice of the population in the Roman Empire were people who sweated for their daily bread but were also anxious to raise their social status," the park's director, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, said.

Archaeologists took plaster casts to reproduce some of the objects from the site in Pompeii, one of Italy's main tourist attractions near the modern city of Naples.

The rest of the structure, excavated in 2018, includes a courtyard decorated in frescoes of plants, birds and hunt-

ing scenes. A niche hosting the household guardian gods, or Lares, gave the "Larario house" its popular name.

"The owners of the Larario house in Pompeii had been able to decorate the courtyard hosting the Lares site and a well with outstanding paintings, but evidently they didn't have enough money for all of the rooms," Zuchtriegel added.

"We don't know who lived here but the pleasurable life depicted in the courtyard was probably more of an aspiration than their everyday reality." — **Reuters**



READ

THE LAST CUENTISTA

BY DONNA BARBA HIGUERA

Petra is one of the last people who have memories of the planet Earth.



THREE YEARS AFTER

Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris is on track to reopen to worshippers and the public in 2024, Culture Minister Rima Abdul Malak said on Thursday, more than three years after its roof was destroyed in a massive blaze. She said the clean-up phase of the restoration project had ended, allowing rebuilding work to get under way at the end of the summer. — **Reuters**



OSCARS' NEW PRESIDENT

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences elected film producer Janet Yang as its new president, the group behind the Oscars announced on Tuesday. Yang, best known for hits including "The Joy Luck Club" and "The People vs. Larry Flynt," becomes the fourth woman elected to run Hollywood's most elite group of film-makers, and the first of Asian origin. — **AFP**





A Gothic Rock Cottage Fit for a Bat Out of Hell

JIM STEINMAN, who died last year at 73, left behind one of the most distinctive catalogues of music in history, filled with chart-topping hits written for the likes of Meat Loaf, Bonnie Tyler and Celine Dion. With songs ranging from the restless ("All Revved Up With No Place To Go") to the wrenching ("For Crying Out Loud"), Steinman spent decades establishing himself as a sophisticated songwriter with the spirit of a teenager.

"As far as Jim was concerned, life was about being forever young, and lusting after this and yearning after that," said David Sonenberg, Steinman's longtime friend, manager and now executor of his estate. "He was going to be 17 forever, and in some ways he was."

But perhaps nothing evokes Steinman's legacy like the Connecticut house where he lived alone for about 20 years — a majestic museum of the self, attached to a quaint cottage in the woods of Ridgefield. He spent years expanding and re-imagining the house, transforming it into an embodiment of his own eccentric, complicated personality.

"The house — it's a trip, it's extraordinary, it's one of a kind," Sonenberg said. "People would walk in and their heads would spin."

Steinman, a lifelong bachelor who had been in declining health for years, left no instructions about what he wanted done with the house after his death. Now his longtime friends are putting the property up for sale — with a provision: It is being sold "as-is," which in real estate lingo normally means "in terrible condition." In this case, it means that the sale includes nearly all of Steinman's personal belongings, which remain in the house: the gothic furniture, spooky artwork, wall-mounted records, grand piano, even closets full of clothing.

"We are going to try to keep Jim's vision and legacy intact," said Jacqueline Dillon, Steinman's longtime creative assistant and close friend. "Jim has been a pop-culture fixture for 50 years."

Their hope is to sell the house — which, despite its 6,000-odd square feet, has just two bedrooms — to a musician, artist or writer, or some-

one seeking a creative retreat or performance space. The asking price is \$5,555,569 — the \$69 is a tribute to Steinman's beloved Amherst College, where he graduated with the class of 1969 — and the annual property taxes are around \$32,000.



jimsteinman.com, to connect with fans and to monitor press mentions. She is now helping to oversee the house sale. "This is not a sale where there is a comparable," she said. As with many of Steinman's grand-est achievements, the house almost

never happened. It was Sonenberg who found it nearly 30 years ago. Driving through Ridgefield, he spotted the home on a secluded lot of about 1.5 acres and thought it would be perfect for his friend.

"The house was so charming," said Sonenberg, whose own artistic dreams were dashed after he met Steinman in the 1970s. "I wrote a song called 'Pear Tree in the Shade,'" he said. "Jim wrote a song called 'Total Eclipse of the Heart.'"

Steinman, who started writing musicals for Joseph Papp at the Public Theater before conquering the pop charts with songs for Meat Loaf's 1977 smash album "Bat Out of Hell," was seeking a place to hide away and work. After years of delays, he and Meat Loaf (born Marvin Lee Aday) were completing production on "Bat Out of Hell II: Back Into Hell," which (to no one's expectation but their own) would become one of the bestselling albums of the 1990s.

Sonenberg suggested that Steinman buy the Ridgefield house: "I said, 'It's perfect — you're by yourself, you never have any guests.' And he said no, it was too small."

Around that time, while Steinman was working with Andrew Lloyd Webber on the musical "Whistle Down the Wind," he visited Lloyd Webber's manor house, Sydmon Court, in Hampshire, England, and "was just blown away," Sonenberg said.

So Steinman decided to buy the Ridgefield cottage, paying about \$425,000, and convert it into a soaring sanctuary, a creation as epic as his music.

"It is really special, almost otherworldly," said Laura Freed Ancona, the listing agent, of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty. "Yes, it was a roof over Jim's head. But it was also a creative space for him." — **NYT**



Dillon described Steinman — by all accounts a reclusive, nocturnal introvert — as "super-shy, but always so kind, and with a lightning-quick wit." She met him three decades ago at a concert, she said, and was soon recruited to launch his website,

ENTERTAINMENT

Purrfection: how video game 'Stray' transfixed cats



CAT-LOVER ENZO Yaksic was instantly taken by the recently released video game "Stray" which allowed him to explore a bright, kaleidoscopic underground world of puzzles as a feline avatar.

He was surprised to find that his own cat was just as fascinated.

"My cat, Hobbes, was taken by 'Stray' from the minute I loaded it on the screen. He watches every move the cat makes," Yaksic said.

Thousands of cat owners have taken to social media to post videos of their pets reacting to the game, and the Twitter account "Cats Watching Stray" now has more than 37,000 followers.

The phenomenon has delighted the developers, who say they had no idea it

platform for downloading games, and enjoys an 83/100 rating on Metacritic.

Some critics have marked it down for its simplistic adventure, but most praise the graphics, the dreamlike atmosphere and the feeling of freedom afforded by the feline protagonist.

And feline reviewers seem to be universally approving.

"Every time I play, the silhouette of his two ears blocks the bottom of the screen," says Curtis Amrein, from Houston in the US, of his shorthaired companion, 17-year-old Bebe.

Yaksic, a researcher from the US city of Boston, says that eight-year-old Hobbes reacts to the danger and hides from the bad guys, just like his computer coun-



would spark the craze.

"When the cats in the studio started to react to what was happening on our screens, we thought we were going in the right direction," Swann Martin-Raget, of the French studio BlueTwelve, said.

"But we never imagined that so many cats would try to jump into the TV."

"Stray" is far from the only game to feature an animal as its central figure.

From "Dog's Life" and "Goat Simulator" to the wild wolf in "Okami", there are plenty of examples.

But cats have rarely featured — and "Stray" is proving to be the surprise hit of the year.

REAL PASSION

The game's feline protagonist was modelled on Murtaugh, a stray cat adopted by BlueTwelve co-founders, and Oscar, beloved pet of another member of the team.

Many team members own cats, including Martin-Raget whose two housemates are known as Tao and Litchi.

He says creating a realistic animal was a huge challenge, but the team managed to get the computer cat to purr, miaow on demand, curl up for a nap and of course take enormous pleasure in defacing furniture.

"We couldn't make a cat game without also making a couch for it to scratch its claws," says Martin-Raget.

"We made this game with a real passion for our companions."

It is the best-reviewed game of the year on Steam, a

terpart.

"I do wonder if I am stressing Hobbes out as he does tend to look around thinking there is another cat in the house before he sees the cat from 'Stray' on the screen," he said.

VERY NATURAL

Animal behaviourist JoAnna Puzzo from the British shelter Battersea Dogs and Cats Home told US website GameSpot the realism of the animated cat was key to sparking reactions among real-world cats.

"They really picked up on a lot of very natural cat behaviours," she said of the developers, flagging the grooming, squeaking and scratching habits of the virtual animal.

"They've also included some nice subtle behaviours like the pupils dilating when he's quite vigilant, those ears turning and the defensive posturing."

Another sign of the enthusiasm for "Stray" is that fans have created "mods" — modifications that allow players to change the appearance of the main character.

For a laid-back approach, players can choose to be lasagne-munching cartoon ginger "Garfield".

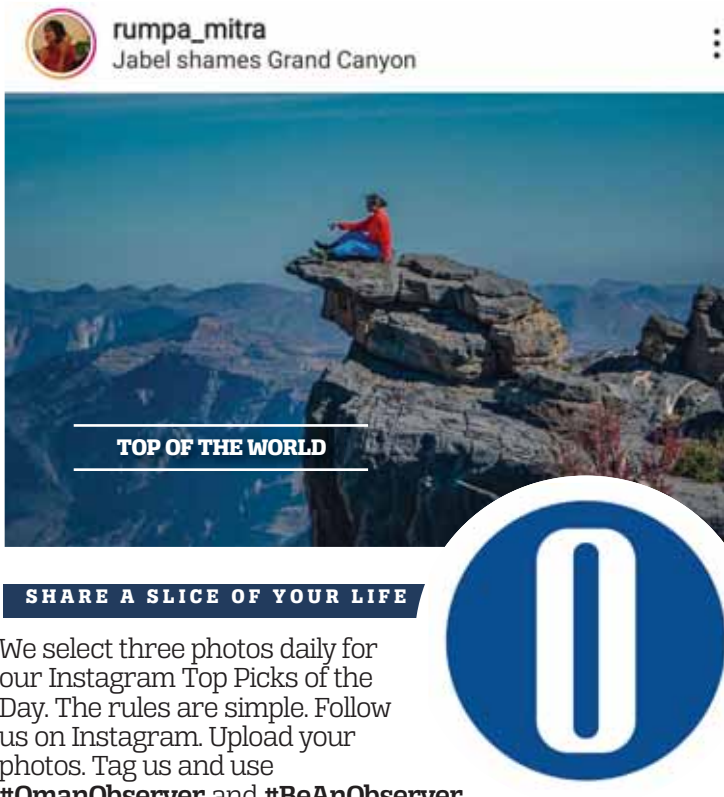
For those seeking maximum sugary sweetness, Marie, the grey-white kitten from Disney's "Aristocats", is also available.

More controversially, enthusiasts have strayed where felines famously fear to tread: the world of dogs, with canine lovers able to transform their avatar into a cute puppy. —**AFP**



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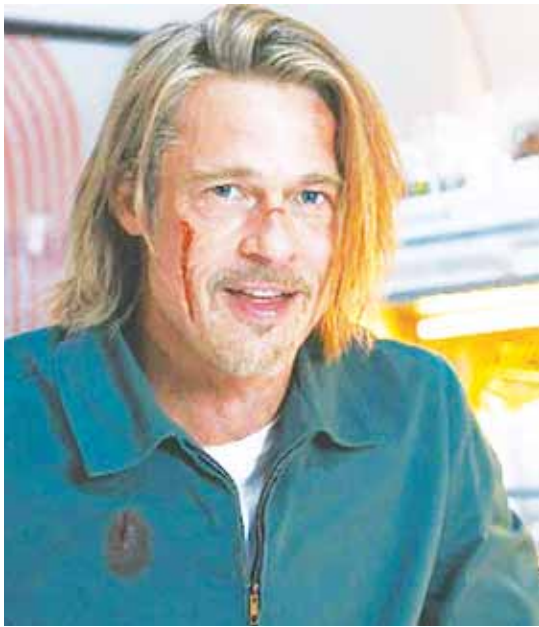
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Brad Pitt action movie 'Bullet Train' speeds into theaters



ACTION MOVIE "Bullet Train" starring Brad Pitt is pulling into its final stop — cinemas — starting on Wednesday. The film sees Pitt's hitman character, Ladybug, seemingly taking on his easiest job as he is asked to locate a suitcase on a high-speed train and then disembark. Unbeknownst to him, he is not the only assassin looking for the case, or for revenge. The other assassins travelling with intent include Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry), Tangerine (Aaron Taylor Johnson), Prince (Joey King), Hornet (Zazie Beetz) and Wolf (Bad Bunny). Pitt said he read the script while under lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic and found himself laughing.



"It's just like the salve for what we needed," Pitt said at the movie's red-carpet premiere in Hollywood. "Now it's summer, we can be out and release it, and it just feels fun." The movie, directed by "Deadpool 2" film-maker David Leitch, was filmed while pandemic lockdowns and extensive Covid prevention protocols were still in place. "We had the outer circle and people could only be on the train from the inner circle," Pitt said in an interview. "We had to get off the train for the outer circle to come on. It was just like a bit of a Keystone Cop situation." The film sees Pitt's character go toe-to-toe with the other assassins in high octane and often humorous fight scenes. Henry, who speaks with a Cockney accent in the film, said the fight sequences with Pitt were "the most therapeutic thing that ever happened." "I think that the consensus is everyone left a little bit better after slapping the shit out of Brad, so it was a lot of fun," Henry said. — Reuters

TRAVEL TALES

'Tito tour' in Croatian capital delves into strongman's legacy



WITH NO STREET or statue to remember Yugoslavia's late strongman Josip Broz Tito, a new tour in the Croatian capital Zagreb is hoping to trace the leader's complicated legacy in a city where he remains divisive. Adored by some and hated by others, Tito remains a polarising figure four decades after his death across the former Yugoslav republics, including Croatia, where he helped usher in prosperity and authoritarianism alike. The tour's curator Danijela Matijevic said the idea for the project came in 2017, after authorities in Zagreb stripped Tito's name from a prominent square. The move was the latest in a string of measures over the years aimed at ridding the country of its Yugoslav past, removing plaques and monuments along with renaming streets and squares. But for Matijevic, history still matters. "Tito was definitely one of the 20th century's political giants," Matijevic said.

WALK WITH TITO The "Walk with Tito" tour, launched last year, takes people to eight sites in downtown Zagreb linked to the Croatian-born leader and the anti-fascist movement he founded at the start of World War II, commonly known as the Partisans. It stops at the square once named after Tito, the main railway station where Croatia's pro-Nazi regime deported people to concentration camps, and a passage named after two sisters who were resistance heroes. The tour does not indulge in sugar-coating the past as it explores Tito's successes along with his share of failures. The late leader is known for charting a middle road for the socialist federation he founded,

siding neither with the United States nor the Soviet Union during the Cold War. "Tito had good relations with the West but did not neglect good ties with the East either, positioning Yugoslavia somewhere between and benefiting from both," said Zagreb-based historian Hrvoje Klasic. The move kept Yugoslavia out of the Cold War's chaos and made it the most prosperous communist country. But there was also repression and simmering nationalism that

century history," Matijevic said.

'OUR HISTORY'

The guide's attempt to delve into Croatia's past has not been entirely smooth. Since starting the tours, Matijevic has been targeted with abuse on social media and has also been threatened with outright violence, in a case being investigated by authorities. In December, right-wing politician Igor Peternel also slammed the Zagreb tourist board for



exploded after his death, leading to the bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia which sparked a series of wars and killed around 130,000 people in the 1990s. Following the conflicts and Croatia's independence, Tito and Yugoslavia have been largely disregarded, deemed an aberration in the country's past. But for Matijevic, Tito and his legacy are also personal — two of her grandparents fought with his Partisans during World War II. During a two-year stint in Germany, Matijevic was inspired by how the country had grappled with its past, and this helped lay the groundwork for the Tito tour project. "It was amazed how Germans handled their turbulent 20th

including information about the tour in its brochures, lambasting the body for "promoting Tito and Yugoslavia". "It is absolutely unacceptable... an ideological provocation and shame," said Peternel, a member of the capital's city council. But many who have taken the tour found it worthwhile. Economist Vedrana Basic said she was pleased "to learn something new", adding that it was rare to "hear much about Tito in Zagreb" these days. Tanja Simic, a retired journalist from the capital, agreed. "We should capitalise on our history in a touristic sense regardless what one may think about some of its parts", Simic said. — AFP

ANIMAL PLANET

France races to rescue beluga whale stranded in Seine river



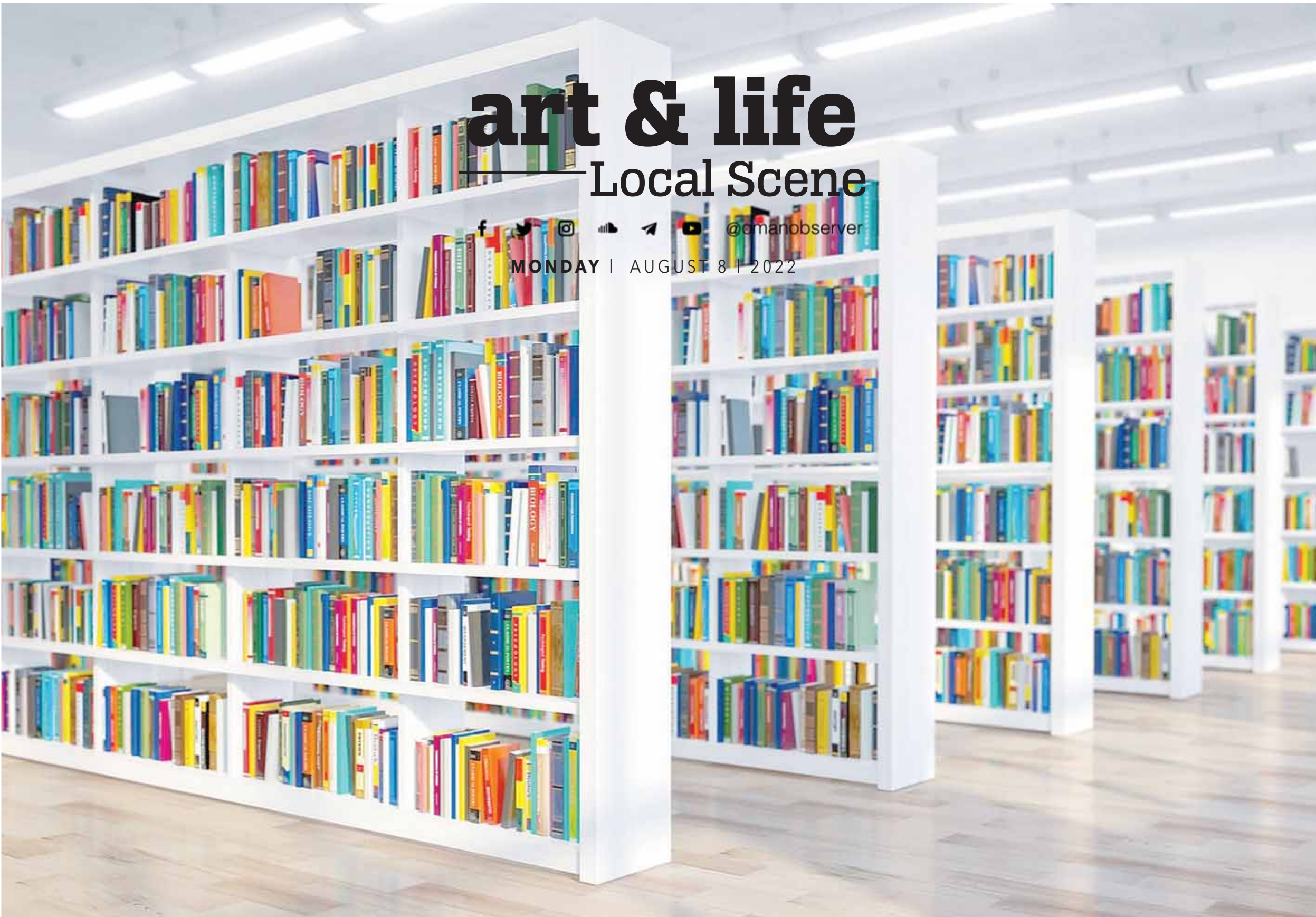
FRENCH AUTHORITIES and NGOs pursued their efforts on Friday to rescue a beluga whale that swam dozens of kilometres inland up the Seine river, a rare occurrence that threatens the life of the protected species. The whale was first seen on Tuesday in the river that flows through Paris to the English Channel, separated from its pod and apparently underweight, regional officials say. It was spotted again on Friday between the locks at

ga's size, but an adult can reach up to four metres (13 feet) in length. Contacted by AFP, officials in the Eure department of Normandy, which are supervising the rescue attempts, declined to outline their plans on Friday. "We think a DNA test needs to be done quickly so we can determine where it came from and repatriate it," said Lamya Essemli, president of the Sea Shepherd NGO. "The most urgent thing is to feed it with dead fish, probably



Poses and Saint-Pierre-la-Garenne, around 100 kilometres (60 miles) inland from the port city of Le Havre and nearly halfway up the waterway to the French capital. Despite being a notably sociable mammal, "it is behaving the same as yesterday, it seems very skittish. It rises to the surface only briefly, followed by long dives," Gerard Mauger of the GECC marine conversation society told. He noted that based on sonar recordings it was also emitting very few of the chirps and quicks the whales are known for, raising further concerns about the animal's health. Belugas are normally found only in cold Arctic waters, and while they migrate south in the autumn to feed as ice forms, they rarely venture so far. Authorities have not released details on the belu-

frozen herring, to keep it from exhaustion because this is not the ideal environment for it," she told. It is only the second recorded sighting of a beluga stranded in the Seine and was later found dead between Le Havre and Rouen in late May. An autopsy found that the animal, more than four metres long, had likely suffered exhaustion after being unable to feed, though officials said they had also discovered a bullet lodged in the base of its skull — though it was far from clear that the wound played a role in its death. — AFP



art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | AUGUST 8 | 2022

A school library in honour of a deceased student

By Kabeer Yousuf

A library that boasts of nearly 16,200 books from a cross-spectrum of topics will be named after the memories of a student of class 8, who loved books and reading during her lifetime.

The memories of Sneha Iyer, daughter of Arjindar Kaur and Ananth Naryanan will be enlivened for many generations to come, once the renovated library at the Indian School Muscat (ISM) is dedicated to her fellow students by the Indian Ambassador this week.

The chirpy, jovial Sneha Iyer had a fall from the 9th floor of her residence in Ruwi on February 3 this year before the medics proclaimed her dead on the spot exactly a week after her 13th birthday. Her sister Kavya Iyer, a class 5 student of the same school was with her when she slipped off from the terrace.

"Sneha had been a voracious reader and loved any topic printed in black and white. She loved books to the extent that she'd let all toys, pastime hobbies that her friends used to share, go for the sake of reading," her

parents cherished the memories with the Observer.

She attended her last class on January 3 after the Covid preventive lockdowns slowly lifted and schools started in hybrid.

"She told me that day was the happiest day and the most unforgettable day in her life because she was able to meet with her friends dressed in school uniform after long online classes. And more importantly, she was able to walk along the corridor leading to the library and sat inside the library for some time," her mother, who was a PE teacher in the same school, adds.

She loved travelling and her last trip was to Switzerland where she celebrated Christmas and New Year in the engulfing snow with her family, a month before the tragic incident happened.

"She loved the word 'funny' and underlining her liking, she was so light-hearted and empathised with her co-students."

When she was in class 5 or 6, she had to break the assembly for removing a pin that posed danger on the ground and she went out of the assem-

bly lines just to remove the same, despite her teacher's reprimanding.

"She was worried if smaller children would step onto the pin on the ground. Her teachers appreciated her for the deed and her Hindi teacher Jyothi Ganesh took her to the vice principal who showered her with praises," her mother shared the incident that made her proud.

"We are glad to be dedicating the library renovated by Sneha's parents in her name to keep her memories mostly entwined with reading, alive for the fellow students," said Rajeev Chauhan, Principal of the School.

"I always call up Sneha for any support in the library, be it arranging them or for any clarification, because she was so through with the books that we have," adds Sayeda Hussaini, librarian at the school.

Sneha was a child so attached to the school and the repertoire of books that the school library has.

"Has she had done with all the books in the library that she'd look for newer titles in the unseen world?" her friends asked.

