

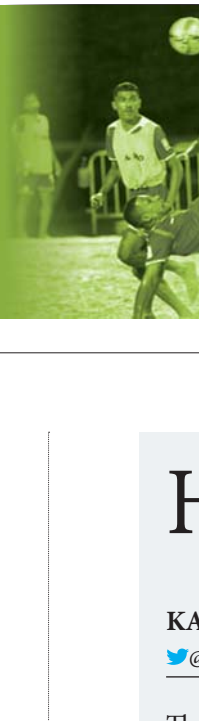
HM condolences to Cuba President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Miguel Díaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba on the death of victims of the explosion at a hotel in Havana, the capital city of Cuba. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Miguel Díaz-Canel, families of the departed and the people of Cuba, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA



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OMAN ALL SET FOR WAFF BEACH SOCCER



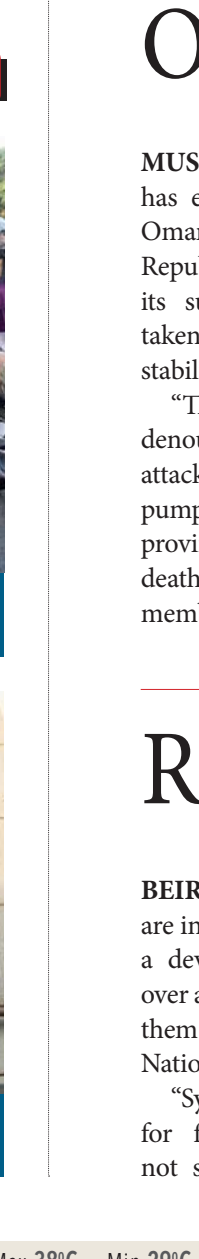
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MUSANDAM'S FIRST INDUSTRIAL CITY PREPPED FOR NEW INVESTMENT



P20

MURALS BRING 'JOY' TO BAGHDAD CONCRETE JUNGLE



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SAUDI AND JAPAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of Princess Lolwah bint Fahd bin Abdulaziz al Saud. In his cable, King Salman expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments and prayers. He also prayed for Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty against all harm. His Majesty has also received a cable of thanks from Emperor Naruhito of Japan in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of his Birthday Anniversary. In his cable, Emperor Naruhito expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments, wishing His Majesty good health and happiness. He also wished the Omani people further progress and growth. — ONA

HM THANKED BY HUNGARY, ZAMBIA

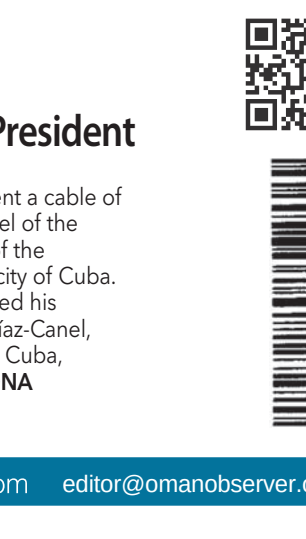
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Katalin Novák of the Republic of Hungary in reply to His Majesty's congratulations cable on the occasion of being elected as her country's president. In her cable, President Novák expressed her sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments and best wishes. His Majesty has also received a cable of thanks from President Hakainde Hichilema of the Republic of Zambia in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on the death of the former Zambian president, Rupiah Banda. In his cable, President Hichilema expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies, wishing His Majesty continuous good health. He also wished the Omani people further development and growth. — ONA

INSIDE



SECURITY FORCES ON ALERT AHEAD OF PHILIPPINE POLLS

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SHOULD EUROPE STOP PAYING FOR PUTIN'S WAR?

P9

Haj e-registration begins today as 6,338 to visit holy sites

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs has announced that the e-registration of citizens and residents for Haj 1443 AH will open on Monday and will last till May 14.

Registration can be made through the electronic system (www.hajj.om). The ministry added that the registration can be through the ID number or ID card or mobile number.

As for the conditions for Haj registration through the electronic system, the ministry

added that the applicant must be at least 18 years old and under 65 years old. The ministry pointed out that the applicant must meet the conditions and controls of the target group for Haj, and who has completed taking the doses of approved vaccines for coronavirus (Covid-19), with a

certificate endorsed by the health authorities in the Sultanate of Oman, and submitting a negative PCR result taken within (72) hours prior to travel time to Saudi Arabia.

The quota of the Sultanate of Oman for this year is 6,338 pilgrims, reducing the number

by 45 per cent due to the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year's Haj will begin on July 7 and will end on July 12.

Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam, and all able-bodied Muslims are required to perform it once in their lifetime. [TURN TO P5](#)

SOLAR POWER FOR SCHOOLS IN BURAIMI



The solar power project in the Governorate of Al Buraimi is one of the most important renewable energy projects. The project is implemented by the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate School for Girls and the Sultan Qaboos School for Boys. Asim bin Abdullah al Alawi from the department of projects at the Ministry of Education, said a total of 246 photovoltaic panels at car parks with a production capacity of 106 kilowatts at the Sultanate School. A total of 300 photovoltaic panels were installed at Sultan Qaboos School that are capable of producing 120 kilowatts. [SEE P2](#)

Oman condemns attack in Egypt

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry has expressed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the Arab Republic of Egypt and extended its support for the measures taken to maintain security and stability.

"The Sultanate of Oman denounces and condemns the attack that targeted a water pumping station in western Sinai province, which resulted in the death and injury of a number of members of the Egyptian armed

forces, and expressed sincere condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims and wishes for a speedy recovery for the injured", a statement said.

Eleven Egyptian soldiers were killed on Saturday while attempting to thwart a "terrorist" attack on the Suez Canal zone abutting the Sinai peninsula, the army said. It was the heaviest loss of life the army had suffered in years in its long-running campaign in and around the

Sinai against militants.

Meanwhile, Washington condemned the "terrorist attack in the Sinai targeting members of the Egyptian military" and expressed its condolences to the victims' families.

"For decades, the United States has been and remains Egypt's strong partner in confronting terrorism in the region," State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

— Agencies

Ancient rock from Oman to help in search for life

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttvvp

An ancient rock in the Sultanate of Oman is the backdrop for a new study with consequences of the search for life elsewhere.

A report based on the study 'Energetically Informed Niche Models of Hydrogenotrophs Detected in Sediments of Serpentinised Fluids of the Samail Ophiolite of Oman' suggests that water reacts with this rock to produce hydrogen, which could be an energy source for bacteria.

The report suggests that the study on Samail Ophiolite can help inform instrument and mission design and provide a valuable context in interpreting results from missions to Europa and elsewhere.

Ocean moons like Europa might be the best bet for finding life elsewhere. That's why Nasa is developing the Europa Clipper mission and the European Space Agency (ESA) is developing the Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer mission.

But detecting life in Europa's ocean — or the conditions for life

When the rock from the upper mantle is reduced, which means there's a lack of oxygen in the rock. There are more ionic sites in the rock that could react with oxygen if it were available

REPORT

— requires specific methods and instruments because the ocean is buried under kilometres of ice.

The Samail Ophiolite is a well-known geological feature in the Arabian Peninsula. It's the largest and best-preserved ophiolite in the world, and it formed during Earth's Late Cretaceous Period, which spanned from about 65 to 100 million years ago.

It's commercially valuable because of its copper ore, but it's also scientifically valuable for what it tells scientists about Earth's geological history. [TURN TO P5](#)

Record 9.3 million Syrian children need aid, says UN

BEIRUT: More Syrian children are in need than at any time since a devastating civil war erupted over a decade ago, but funding for them is "dwindling", the United Nations warned on Sunday.

"Syria's children have suffered for far too long and should not suffer any longer," the UN

children's agency said in a statement.

A total of 9.3 million Syrian children are in need of aid both inside the country and in the wider region where they have fled, Unicef spokesperson said.

"More than 6.5 million children in Syria are in need of



assistance, the highest number recorded since the beginning of the crisis, more than 11 years ago," the agency statement added.

"Children's needs, both inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, are growing," said Adele Khodr, Unicef's Middle East chief. "Many families struggle to make

ends meet. Prices of basic supplies including food are skyrocketing."

In neighbouring countries, 2.8 million Syrian refugee children depend on assistance.

Syria's war is estimated to have killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions since it began in 2011. — AFP



2 schools get solar power projects in Al Buraimi

AL BURAIMI: The solar power project in the Governorate of Al Buraimi is one of the most important renewable energy projects. The project is implemented by the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate School for girls and the Sultan Qaboos School for boys.

Asim bin Abdullah al Alawi from the department of projects at the Ministry of Education, said a total of 246 photovoltaic panels at car parks with a production capacity of 106 kilowatts at the Sultanate School. A total of 300 photovoltaic panels were installed at Sultan Qaboos School that are capable of producing 120 kilowatts.

The solar power projects in schools have contributed to reducing the cost of the electricity bill by 40 per cent and also raised students' awareness of renewable energy and created business opportunities for entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, Al Alawi said.



He explained that the solar power projects executed by the Ministry of Education are a true translation of the Omani government's strategy

towards renewable energy and diversifying the sources of clean energy as well as raising the effectiveness of public spending in collaboration with

the companies supporting the clean energy initiatives. There are currently 27 solar power projects in schools across the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**



DGSG participates in Arab scout associations meeting

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Directorate-General of Scouts and Guides (DGSG) at the Ministry of Education, is taking part in the meeting of the heads of Arab scout associations, which began today and continues until May 12 in the State of Kuwait.

The participation comes on the sidelines of the Arab Scouts Forum organised by Kuwait Scouts Association in collaboration with the Arab Scout organisation and the Scout Federation of Arab parliamentarians.

The Omani delegation comprises Dr Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Nadabi, Director-General of DGSG and Mohammed bin Abdullah al Hinai, Assistant Director-General of DGSG,

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Mijaini and Atheer bint Darweesh al Ismailiyah.

Dr Yaqoub bin Khalfan al Nadabi, Director-General of DGSG, said the first day will be divided into two periods and starts with the Extraordinary Conference of Pioneers and the General Assembly of the Scout Union of Arab Parliamentarians. The evening period will see the meeting of the secretaries-general of the GCC countries as well as the preparatory session for the selection of the Pioneers Authority. The second day will see the opening of the Youth Scout Forum Tamkeen, the meeting of the Arab Scout Committee and the meeting of the Higher Committee of the Arab Scout Fund. — **ONA**

First dates of the season



MUSCAT: The palm tree fruiting season has begun in the Wilayat of Nizwa in the Al Turath neighbourhood of the village of Farq.

Farmer Salem bin Saleh al Kindi said that the palm trees type of "Qash Qantara and Qash manoma" on his farm are considered early-starting date palms, due to the high air temperatures and the advanced "pollination" of the palm, which was sown last December."

Al Kindi added that farmers in the Sultanate of Oman pay great attention to the date palm because of the multiple benefits they get from it and good economic returns.

The price of fresh dates at the beginning of its season is high and there is a great demand for it in the local markets. — **ONA**



Oman Tourism Forum in Dubai on May 10

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will launch the 'Oman Tourism Forum 2022' on May 10, 2022, at the Dubai World Trade Centre during the Arabian Travel Market.

The event is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the China Forum for International Investment in partnership with China Travel Online.

The event will be chaired by Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, in the presence of speakers from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Omran, Rotana Hotels Group, Oman Airports, and others.

The ministry said that Oman is ranked 18th in global foreign direct investment in 2021, and according to the World Economic Forum, Oman is considered one of the safest countries in the Middle East.

Saada bint Abdullah al Harthiyah, director of Business Development, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said: "We are pleased to launch the Oman Tourism Forum 2022, as this first-of-



Saada bint Abdullah al Harthiyah

its-kind forum, in partnership with China, aims to empower sector officials with best practices, communicate with experts and learn the latest trends in the industry. While this step will enhance cooperation between Oman and China, we are optimistic that this partnership will pave the way for more in the future."

She added. "The forum aims to bring together industry leaders to explore tourism and partnership opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman and will be attended by more than 150 delegates from China, Europe, the Middle East and Asia."

Oman Tourism Forum 2022 will present working papers and visual presentations while a memorandum of cooperation will be signed between the Sultanate of Oman and a number of major Chinese travel and tourism companies.





Month of Mental Health raises awareness of loneliness

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@LAKSHMIOMAN

This year's Not Alone campaign has urged everyone to write a letter to someone who needs to know that they are not alone to mark May, the Month of Mental Health.

It calls for writing to people irrespective of their location in the world.

"We are extremely happy that we are collaborating with Oman Post," said the founder of the Not Alone campaign, HH Sayyida Basma al Said, at a function held at the Oman National Museum on Sunday.

Observing its eighth edition, the theme of this year's Mental Health Month is loneliness. The team associated with it has taken many initiatives to spread awareness on various aspects of mental health over the past years.

"Even if there are people around us, we can still feel lonely. Especially after the pandemic, we have lost a lot of people, family members and friends.

So basically, it is about pushing awareness creatively where everybody would want to be part of it," she said.

The event's highlight was the introduction of the Diana Awards, Sayyida Basma being the first Arab judge.

"I have already finished judging for this year, and we are now looking at next year.



The theme of this year's Mental Health Month is loneliness. The team associated with it has taken many initiatives to spread awareness on various aspects of mental health over the past years



Diana always believed that young people have the power to change. So the Award is looking for young people who show signs of greatness.

"We want to nurture that greatness. We want to invest in these young people because ultimately we want to build incredible young leaders globally," she pointed out.

The Award is global for individuals from 9 years of age to 25. They can be eligible to receive their Award for their social action or humanitarian work.

According to the organisation, Diana Awardees are given access to a unique development programme which aims to further increase their already proven capacity for innovation, leadership and social change through access to the resources, opportunities and training, both face to face and online.

through their selfless action.

"We are looking for young people who display empathy, compassion, selflessness -- young people who often go where the pain is, like Princess Diana. She is an iconic figure worldwide, and people know her compassion. So we are looking for young people globally," Ojo explained.

According to her, Princess

It is a responsibility, and there have also been emotions. It is rewarding youth with projects that have been going on," she pointed out.

The Chief Executive Officer of Diana Awards, Tessy Ojo CBE, said Diana Awards is the official legacy of Princess Diana and the Award itself looks out for young people who continue her legacy

ROHM to present various performances this month

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present four significant productions this month demonstrating the notable strengths of the opera house to enhance global collaboration and cultural enrichment across nations and generations.

May opens with a concert of musical excellence featuring the young virtuoso pianist, Alexander Malofeev, playing alongside the celebrated Tatarstan National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alexander Sladkovsky. The concert presents a programme of the classical composers: Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Borodin, to be staged on May 12.

During the same weekend on May 14, the opera house presents the resounding annual Pipe Organ Concert. Each year this concert gives centre stage to the most magnificent instrument in the world, the majestic pipe organ. Traditionally, the concert is presented with the finest organists of the world playing classical pipe organ music swelling the auditorium with incredible sound. This year the opera house presents a crowning concert: with participation from the Münchner Knabenchor, a German boys' choir renowned for excellence throughout the world; Hansjörg Albrecht, conductor, composer, and world-famous organist; Rashid Salim al Rashidy, Oman's celebrated organist; and, the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Alessandro Cadario. The

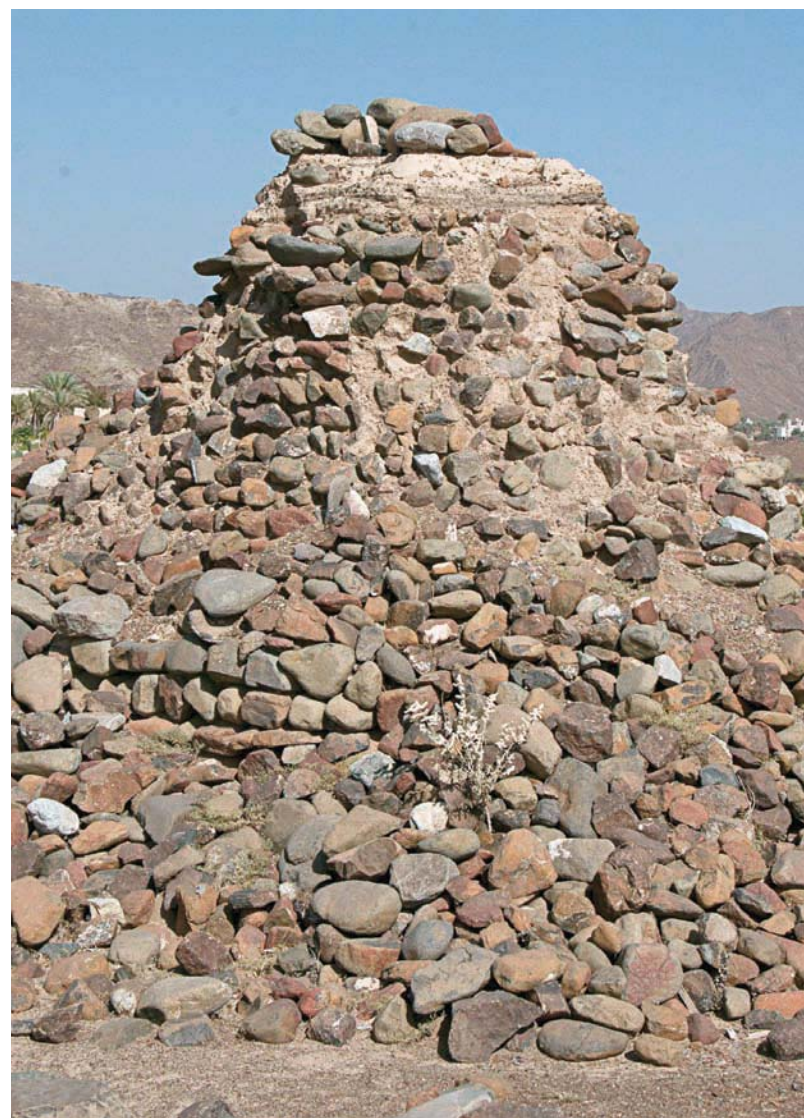
programme includes a world premiere of the piece, The Dreaming Lion, composed by Marcus Tutino, written for Oman and for the pipe organ at the Royal Opera House Muscat. In the 10th anniversary season of ROHM, this is a landmark concert.

Following on from a concert offering a genre based in European heritage, the opera house welcomes Melhem Zain, whose repertoire is deeply rooted in the heritage of Arab music. He is an acclaimed singer with a voice that has been described as dazzling and 'mountainous'. He sings in a style inspired by the great Arab artists Wadiah El Safi, Mohammed Abdel Wahab and Nazem al Ghazali. Enjoy a concert celebrating classics of the Arabic music world on May 19 and 20.

Finishing the month and the season with a family show on May 26-27 which draws popular sports and elite competition into performing arts, don't miss the show Play, presented by the Kataklo Athletic Dance Theatre. Ethereal, athletic, and balletic, Play is a mesmerising show capturing the talent, emotion and tension of elite sport while also acknowledging the beauty and heritage of athletic endeavours.

All performances will take place under the guidelines issued by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee. Safety measures are in place throughout the opera house to ensure everyone's comfort and safety. — ONA

Muqaniyat stores vital evidences of Omani civilisation



TEXT& PHOTOS
BY YAHYA AL SALMANI

Archaeological sites represent the identity and heritage of the nation, as they continue to bear witness to its history over the years and express its achievements. Each archaeological site indicates an event or a story, which is passed from generation to generation. Antiquities can also give us an idea of the ancient historical periods, their form and nature,

and the nature of the lives of the generations that once lived in them.

Historical monuments are also important in linking the past with the present and the future, as man's knowledge of his past and present enables him to formulate his future and the future of future generations. Among the most prominent aspects of historical monuments is the urban heritage; Which forms a link between the past and the present, and

contributes to introducing people to the civilisation of their ancestors and their history, which creates a strong bond between the homeland and the citizen, and contributes to introducing all citizens to their history and preserving it through its transmission between generations.

The town of Muqaniyat, located in the northeast of Wilayat Ibbi in the Al Dhahirah Governorate, preserves unique ancient history. This village is famous for

agricultural oases and flowing water throughout the year. It is also famous for its archaeological sites that tell the stories of Omani history.

Standing on the valley banks one can see the walls and the old houses built of mud and stones. With their exceptional designs, these walls and houses draw the visitor's attention because they are located on the high banks of the valley. These banks are locally called "Al Janah and Al Hajar".

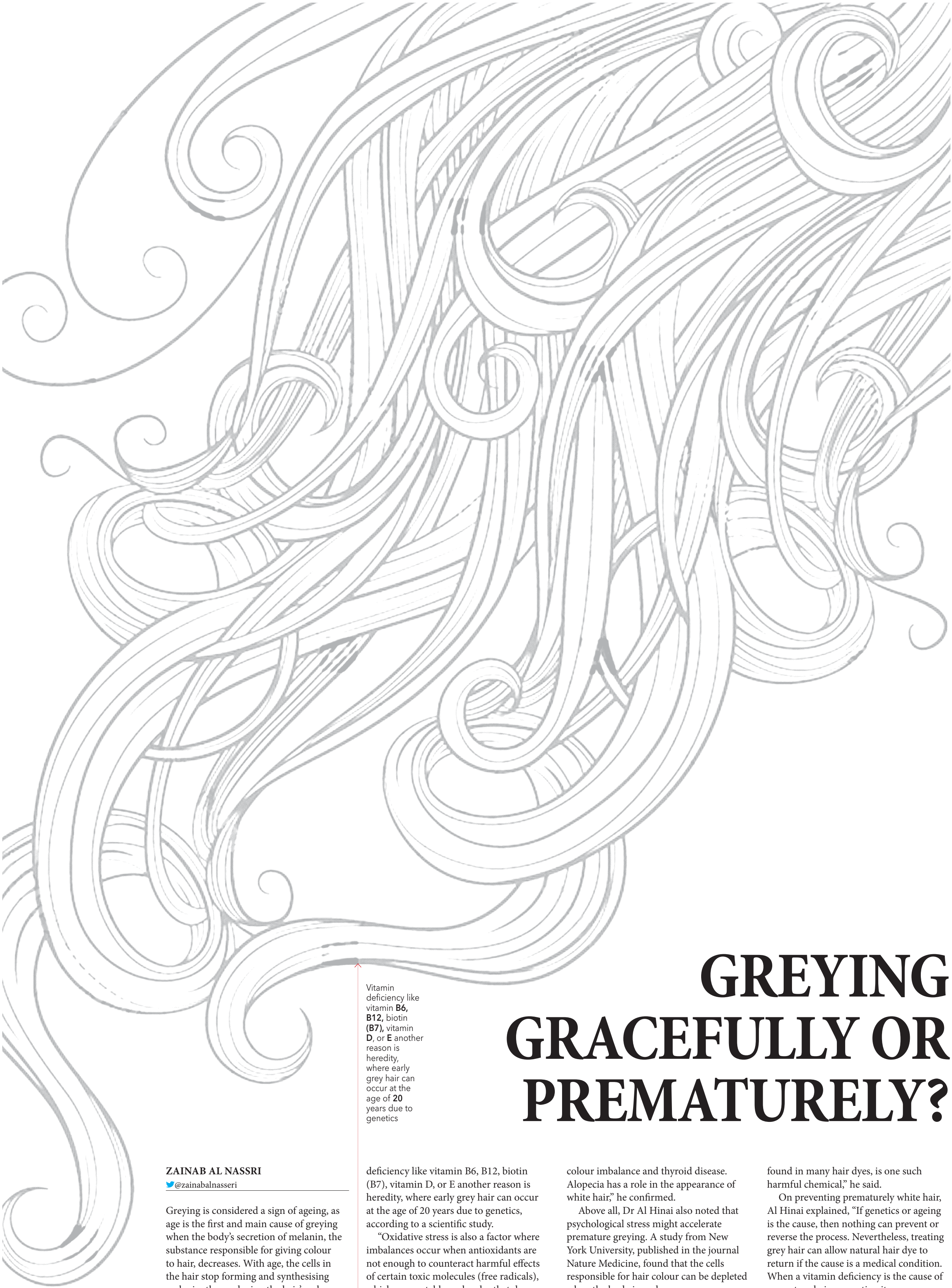
The old tower, which the village people used as defensive barriers, still exists on one of the mountain hills.

There are many archaeological sites in the village of Muqaniyat, such as castles, towers, and ancient burials. Among the most important forts is the 'Al-Aswad Castle', which overlooks the village balconies with its grandeur and prestige.

The citizens of this village are proud of the sites that stand

as a witness to their ancestors' struggles. The villagers call for proper documentation of the historical facts, which, according to them, are neglected.

"These sites showcase local history and tell about the vibrant Omani civilisation. Their neglect, lack of maintenance, and delayed restoration will inevitably lead to extinction or perhaps disappearance of a vital historical clue about the area," some locals said.



GREYING GRACEFULLY OR PREMATURELY?

Vitamin deficiency like vitamin **B6**, **B12**, biotin (**B7**), vitamin **D**, or **E** another reason is heredity, where early grey hair can occur at the age of **20** years due to genetics

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnasseri](#)

Greying is considered a sign of ageing, as age is the first and main cause of greying when the body's secretion of melanin, the substance responsible for giving colour to hair, decreases. With age, the cells in the hair stop forming and synthesising melanin, thus reducing the hair's colour, which finally becomes white.

However, many suffer from grey hair at an early age, wondering why and whether normal colour can be retrieved.

Dr Saleh bin Saif al Hinai, Senior Consultant of Family Medicine and founder of the Dr Saleh Health Platform, cited several reasons for **premature greying of hair**. One of them is vitamin

deficiency like vitamin B6, B12, biotin (B7), vitamin D, or E another reason is heredity, where early grey hair can occur at the age of 20 years due to genetics, according to a scientific study.

"Oxidative stress is also a factor where imbalances occur when antioxidants are not enough to counteract harmful effects of certain toxic molecules (free radicals), which are unstable molecules that damage cells and contribute to ageing and disease. Too much oxidative stress can promote the development of diseases, including vitiligo," according to the doctor.

In addition, Al Hinai explained that certain medical conditions, including autoimmune diseases, may increase a person's risk of ageing early. "Scientific studies have shown a link between hair

colour imbalance and thyroid disease. Alopecia has a role in the appearance of white hair," he confirmed.

Above all, Dr Al Hinai also noted that psychological stress might accelerate premature greying. A study from New York University, published in the journal Nature Medicine, found that the cells responsible for hair colour can be depleted when the body is under pressure.

On the other hand, colouring hair to get rid of grey hair may not always be the right decision, according to the doctor.

"Chemical hair dyes and hair products, even shampoo, can contribute to premature greying of hair. In addition, many of these products contain harmful ingredients that reduce melanin. For example, hydrogen peroxide, which is

found in many hair dyes, is one such harmful chemical," he said.

On preventing prematurely white hair, Al Hinai explained, "If genetics or ageing is the cause, then nothing can prevent or reverse the process. Nevertheless, treating grey hair can allow natural hair dye to return if the cause is a medical condition. When a vitamin deficiency is the cause of premature hair, correcting it may reverse the problem or stop it from getting worse".

Regarding ways to slow down greying, Dr Al Hinai said, "Sometimes a diet rich in antioxidants reduces oxidative stress, slowing down grey hair. That could be like fresh fruits and vegetables, Green tea, Olive oil, fish treating vitamin deficiencies by eating more foods rich in these vitamins".



Qatari defence delegation visits Maritime Security Centre



MUSCAT: A delegation from Joaan bin Jassim Academy for Defence and Security Studies (Joint Command and Staff College), headed by Col Abdul Hadi al

Dossari, on Sunday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the MSC by Commodore Mohammed bin

Hamoud al Zadjali, Head of the MSC. Members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in the safety of the

maritime environment. They also toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies used in carrying out its national duties. — ONA

EXCELLING STUDENTS HOUNOURED



NIZWA: The Directorate-General of Education in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate honoured 34 excelling students of the general education diploma (GED), at the Nizwa Cultural Centre, on Sunday. The honouring ceremony included discussion sessions that focused on the integrated role between the school and a student's house, visual displays and poetry reading. — ONA

Haj registration begins today as 6,338 to visit holy sites

FROM P1
Registration for women to perform Haj can be made after registering the mahrams (the legal companion). The registration will be based on the civil number recorded on the personal card, provided that it is valid. Also, the applicant must use his mobile phone number during the registration process to receive text messages from the system or personal e-mail, which is the considered means for communicating with any procedures or notifications and their consequences. Performing Haj on behalf of those who fall under the 'beneficiaries of social security' category can do so in coordination

with the ministry. "Registration for availing the aid from the Haj Committee for people under the beneficiaries of social security category is possible. One needs to coordinate with the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development", the spokesperson from the ministry said. The ministry has set up a hotline for technical support and inquiries through 80008008 during official working hours or submitting a report via the notification screen in the electronic system for registering pilgrims of the Sultanate of Oman via the link www.hajj.om/ contact.

New organisational structure of MoI

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Based on the Royal Decree No 18 of 2022 issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which amended Royal Decree 95 of 2020, the Ministry of Information (MoI) has announced its new organisational structure. The Royal Decrees had defined the functions of the MoI and accordingly as per the new structure, Minister of Information, Minister's Office, Government Communications, Oman News Agency, Media Training Centre, and Directorate General of External Media form one branch of the structure. It may be noted that Royal Decree 19/2022 had appointed Mohammed bin Said bin

Mohammed al Balushi as Under-Secretary for the Ministry of Information, along with his existing grade and financial allocations. The Under-Secretary for Ministry of Information, Directorate General of Printing and Publication, Directorate General of Press, Publication and Advertising, Directorate General of Electronic Media, Directorate General of Radio and Directorate General of Television, Directorate of Engineering form another branch of the structure. The other branches formed as per the restructuring are the Directorate General of Information in Dhofar Governorate and Directorate General of Administration and Financial Affairs.



Commercial logistics agreement signed

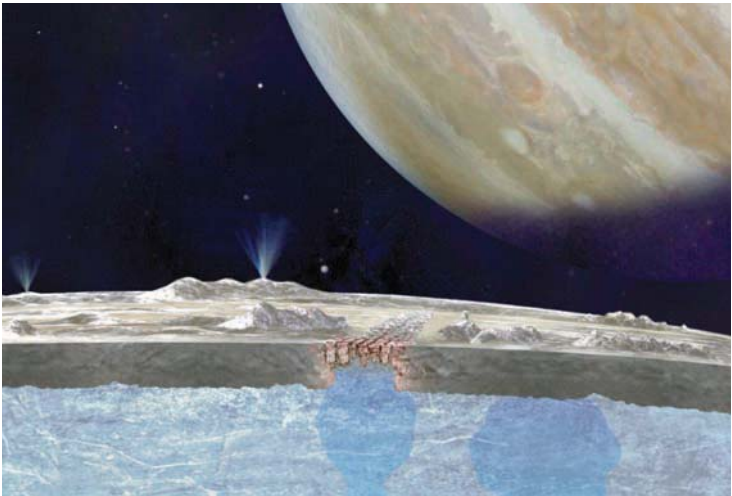
MUSCAT: In pursuance of the close strategic bilateral relations and strong historical ties of friendship between the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of India, a commercial agreement was signed at the Port of Duqm Company headquarters

in Duqm between Emdad Logistics Company and the Indian government. The agreement will deepen the existing close relations between both countries and contribute to the realisation of their shared vision of a prosperous region. — ONA

Ancient rock from Oman to help in search for life elsewhere!

FROM P1
The Samail Ophiolite is important in the research because of the portion of the upper mantle rock it contains, says the report published in the 'Universe Today'. "When the rock from the upper mantle is reduced, which means there's a lack of oxygen in the rock. There are more ionic sites in the rock that could react with oxygen if it were available", it says. For example, there's more ferrous iron than ferric iron because there's not enough oxygen to bond with all of the iron. This results in a mass of rock basically "waiting" for oxygen to fill all of its ionic sites. "This is what's happening with the Samail Ophiolite. It reacts with water in a process called serpentinisation", the study argues.

ENERGY SOURCE
The serpentinisation produces H₂, which is molecular hydrogen. The H₂ is food for microbes called hydrogenotrophs, which can metabolise it using oxygen and use it as an energy source.



An ophiolite is a section of the Earth's oceanic crust and a piece of the underlying upper mantle. It's an ophiolite when it's lifted above sea level and exposed. Ophiolites often become embedded in the continental crust. "It is believed that processes like serpentinisation may exist throughout the universe, and evidence has been found that it may occur on Jupiter's moon Europa and Saturn's moon Enceladus", lead author Alta Howells, now at Nasa's Ames Research Center, said in a statement. The results also touch on the

energy needed for life and how that plays into our efforts on Europa. At the Samail Ophiolite, the methanogens living in the serpentinised fluids need more energy than methanogens found in fresh water and marine sediments. Europa has a rocky core surrounded by an ocean, capped off with ice up to 30 km thick. Scientists know that there's oxygen on Europa's surface, though not much of it. It comes from charged particles in Jupiter's atmosphere that irradiate the icy moon's surface. **SOURCE OF LIFE** If oxygen makes its way

through the ice somehow and into the ocean, it could contact the rocky core. But the rock has to be reduced to react with the oxygen to produce hydrogen as an energy source for life. "As the Samail Ophiolite shows us, only rock low in oxygen, or reduced, can serpentinise to produce hydrogen. On Europa, radiogenic decay of the rock might expose reduced rock to oxygen. If the rock expands thermally, then microfractures might provide an opportunity for the oxygen in the water to contact the reduced rock", the statement said. Nasa's Europa Clipper is scheduled to launch in October 2024. But it'll take until April 2030 to arrive at Jupiter and enter into an orbit. A separate lander mission might launch in 2025 if approved, so by around 2031, data could be gathered from the icy ocean moon's surface. ESA's Jupiter Icy Moons Explorer (JUICE) is scheduled for launch in 2023 and should arrive at Jupiter in 2031.

OMAN AIR (S.A.O.C.)

Muscat International Airport, P.O. Box 58, P.C. 111, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

TENDER NOTICE NO. SCM/2022/4200

Sewage and Chemical Waste Removal at Oman Air Premises

Oman Air is looking for a qualified and experienced contractor to execute the above project.

Interested parties are requested to complete the online vendor registration through the Oman Air website (<http://www.omanair.com>) → Useful links → **E-procurement** or through URL (<https://e-procurement.omanair.com/Pages/LoginPage.aspx>).

Please note that you should complete the online vendor registration to receive the tender documents and submit your proposal online. Alternatively, the bidder may submit the proposal to the email **SCM.Proposals@omanair.com**. The last day for submitting proposals is 15th May 2022, before 12:00 pm.

For any query, please send an email to: **Khamis.Albahri@omanair.com** or call **Tel. No.: 24259729**.



Enraged crowd loot a truck transporting cooking gas cylinders in Colombo who had been waiting in line overnight for supplies. – AFP

Crowds jeer Sri Lankan premier on rare outing

COLOMBO: Boos and heckles greeted Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa on Sunday on his first public outing since nationwide protests erupted demanding his ruling family resign over the worsening economic crisis.

Months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and medicines have caused widespread suffering across the South Asian island in its worst economic downturn since independence in 1948.

On Sunday, the premier visited one of the holiest Buddhist temples -- housing a reputedly 2,300-year-old tree -- in Anuradhapura.

But dozens of people carried hand-written placards and chanted slogans demanding that “thieves” be banned from the sacred city, 200 kilometres north of Colombo.

“We will worship you if you stand down (as Prime Minister) and leave,” one man shouted.

Heavily armed Special Task Force (STF) commandos were deployed while police moved to clear the road for Rajapaksa’s convoy of six vehicles. Officials said the premier returned to the capital by helicopter. Several major roads in the country are blocked by people protesting the lack of cooking gas, petrol and diesel.

In the capital, a truck transporting cooking gas was looted on Sunday by crowds who had been waiting in line overnight for supplies.

Outnumbered police watched helplessly as men climbed onto the truck and got away with 84 cylinders of gas, officials said.

The government imposed a state of emergency granting the military sweeping powers to arrest and detain people on Friday, after trade unions brought the country to a virtual standstill in a bid to pressure President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down. — AFP

Lebanese abroad cast votes in parliamentary election

BEIRUT: Lebanese expatriates in 48 countries including France and the UAE voted on Sunday ahead of the May 15 parliamentary elections, state media reported.

The critical election comes amid an unprecedented financial crisis that has spurred a mass population exodus, with opposition figures pinning their hopes for a change on the diaspora vote and experts saying the political status quo is expected to remain.

The vote is the first since the onset of the economic crisis in 2019 and the devastating Beirut port explosion a year later, with many accusing the political elite of rampant corruption and mismanagement.

“I voted for change,” said Abed Saad, who cast a ballot in Dubai, where people queued for up to three hours.

“If we don’t vote, others will win, and we don’t want them to win,” the 27-year-old said, referring to established parties.

More than 194,000 people in 48 countries are registered to vote on Sunday, according to the official National News Agency.

In Paris, long lines were reported outside the embassy.

“I have a great feeling of hope and satisfaction because I saw that there were a lot of young people and first-time voters,” Lebanon’s ambassador to Paris Rami Adwan said, adding that turnout rates



Electoral staff look on as Lebanese expats arrive to vote for the May 15 legislative election at Lebanon's Consulate in Dubai. – AFP

by noon had already surpassed those of 2018. That year Lebanese citizens living abroad were able to vote for the first time ever for their 128 members of parliament.

Voting also got under way in the United States -- home to the largest community of registered voters -- and Canada.

On Friday, early voting for expatriates began in nine Arab countries and Iran, where more than 18,000 Lebanese cast their ballots with voter turnout reaching 59 per cent -- a slight increase of two per cent from

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2018 polls.

Although there are no official figures, Lebanon’s diaspora is estimated to be more than double the size of its domestic population

of over four million.

But voter registration, while on the rise, remains relatively low among the millions of Lebanese who live abroad.

Since 2019, the Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value and poverty rates have soared to cover more than 80 per cent of the population.

The World Bank has labelled the economic crisis as one of the worst since the mid-19th century. Authorities have repeatedly failed to chart a path out of the crisis.

— AFP

Security forces on alert ahead of Philippine polls

MANILA: More than 60,000 security forces in the Philippines were on alert on Sunday to safeguard ballots and polling stations on the eve of the presidential election, after police reported four people killed in an outbreak of violence.

Elections are a traditionally volatile time in a country with lax gun laws and a violent political culture, but the national police said this season has been comparatively peaceful.

In one of the worst incidents, four people were killed on Saturday in a gun battle between armed supporters of mayoral rivals in Magsingal town in the northern province of Ilocos Sur, said police spokesman Brigadier-General Roderick Alba. Another four were wounded.

Police in the northern province

of Nueva Ecija also arrested two dozen people and seized weapons, including five M-16 rifles, a 12-gauge shotgun and 15 handguns, following a shoot-out between bodyguards of two candidates running for mayor of General Tinio.

Five people were wounded in the incident, which also left the same number of sports utility vehicles riddled with bullets, Alba said.

More than 18,000 posts, from president to town councillor, are up for grabs in the elections.

The son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos looks set to win the presidential vote by a landslide, returning the clan to the pinnacle of political power.

Rights groups, Catholic church leaders and opponents see the elections as a make-or-



Police officers check documents of motorists at a check point along a road in Manila City, a day before the May 9 presidential election. - AFP

break moment for the country’s democracy, amid fears Marcos Junior could rule with a heavy fist. Personnel from the police,

armed forces and coast guard have fanned out across the archipelago to help secure polling stations and ballots, escort election officials

and guard checkpoints.

The security deployment involves around 48,000 soldiers and 16,000 police, officials said.

“Based on our planning... we are confident that we’ll have a secure and orderly election,” said armed forces spokesman Colonel Ramon Zagala. There have been 16 “validated election-related incidents” since January 9, including four shootings and a “slight illegal detention”, Alba said. That compares with 133 incidents during the 2016 presidential elections and 60 in the 2019 mid-term polls.

Police spokeswoman Colonel Jean Fajardo attributed the sharp drop to a heightened security presence, as well as military and police operations targeting “loose firearms” and private armed groups.

The election commission largely prohibits the carrying of weapons during the election period that lasts until June 8.

Experts say the explosion of social media, which has made it easier to report incidents, and the growing domination of political dynasties, which smother electoral competition, have helped tamp down election violence.

In the country’s deadliest single incident of political violence on record, 58 people were massacred in 2009 as gunmen allegedly belonging to a local warlord in the southern Philippines attacked a group of people to stop a rival filing his election candidacy.

Thirty-two of the victims were journalists covering the contest, making the attack also the deadliest on record against media professionals. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

RIYADH

Saudi King enters hospital for ‘examinations’

Saudi Arabia’s King Salman has been admitted to hospital for unspecified tests, state media reported. He entered King Faisal Specialist Hospital in the coastal city of Jeddah on Saturday “to conduct some medical examinations”, according to an official report, citing a royal court statement.

“May God preserve the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques and may he enjoy health and wellness,” the statement said. King Salman underwent surgery



to remove his gall bladder in 2020. He was most recently hospitalised in March, for what state media described as “successful medical tests” and to change the battery of his pacemaker. — AFP

JUBA

First cholera outbreak since 2017 kills 1 in S Sudan

Cholera has killed one child and infected 30 people in South Sudan, the first resurgence of the illness in nearly five years, health officials said. “The Ministry of Health would like to inform the public that the cholera outbreak has been declared in Rubkona county, Unity State,” the ministry said in a statement.

“To date, a total of 31 cases including one death have been reported from Rubkona town and Bentiu IDP camp” and health officials are investigating whether



there are any others, it said. The fatality was a seven-year-old child who died on March 25. All others infected have been treated and released from hospital, it said. — AFP

TEHRAN

Assad meets Iran’s supreme leader, president

Syrian President Bashar al Assad met with Iran’s supreme leader Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi during a brief visit to Tehran on Sunday, Iranian state television said. “Assad has left Iran for Damascus after meeting separately with the supreme leader” and the president, the report said.

The relationship between Tehran and Damascus are “vital for both countries and we should not let it weaken,” Khamenei said, according to a statement on his



website. “We should strengthen it as much as possible.”

Assad’s last reported visit to Iran was in February 2019 -- and that was the first one since the start of the war. — AFP



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In brief

■ HONG KONG



EX-SECURITY CHIEF ANOINTED HONG KONG'S NEXT LEADER

A former security chief who oversaw the crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy movement was anointed the business hub's new leader by a small committee of Beijing loyalists. John Lee, 64, was the only candidate in the Beijing-backed race to succeed outgoing leader Carrie Lam. The elevation of Lee places a security official in the top job for the first time after a tumultuous few years for a city battered by political unrest and debilitating pandemic controls. Despite the city's mini-constitution promising universal suffrage, Hong Kong has never been a democracy, the source of years of public frustration and protests since the 1997 handover to China. — AFP

■ MOSCOW



PRISONERS HELP EXTINGUISH FOREST FIRES IN SIBERIA

Prisoners and guards from the local prison in the village of Gromadsk, in the Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk, have been called out to extinguish forest fires. Their help was necessary because fire brigade was overwhelmed, the TV station NTW reported. According to official reports, a total of about 1,000 hectares of forest and steppe were on fire in Krasnoyarsk, eastern Russia. Several villages have already been destroyed, while seven people have been reported dead in the region so far. More and more regions in Siberia are reporting the spread of severe forest fires. — dpa

■ KANO



GUNMEN KILL 48 IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA ATTACKS

Gunmen killed at least 48 people in attacks on three villages in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, a local official and residents said. Northwest and central Nigeria have been terrorised for years by criminal gangs known as bandits who raid and loot villages, steal cattle and carry out mass abductions of residents for ransom. "A total of 48 people were killed by the bandits in the three villages (Damri, Sabon Garin and Kalahe) attacked on Friday afternoon", said Aminu Suleiman, administrative head of Bakura district where the villages are. — AFP

Ukraine battles to hold eastern bastions

SEVERODONETSK: Ukrainian forces braced on Sunday to defend their final bastion in the devastated port city of Mariupol, desperate to deny Russia a symbolic win on the eve of Moscow's Victory Day celebrations.

Kyiv's allies lent their support, with US First Lady Jill Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau making unannounced visits to Ukraine, and G7 leaders due to join President Volodymyr Zelensky on a video call.

But fierce fighting continued on the ground. Shelling and missile strikes have intensified in the build up to the World War II anniversary, and rescuers are searching for 60 Ukrainian civilians feared killed in the bombing of a village school.

Zelensky marked a day commemorating the end of the 1939-1945 war by comparing Ukraine's battle for national survival to the region's war of resistance against its former Nazi occupiers.

"Decades after World War II, darkness has returned to Ukraine, and it has become black and white again," Zelensky said, in a monochrome social media video shot against the backdrop of a bombed out apartment block.

"Evil has returned, in a different uniform, under different slogans, but for the same purpose," he warned, trying to turn Russia leader President Vladimir Putin's "anti-Nazi" rhetoric back on itself.



US First lady Jill Biden offers flowers to Ukraine President wife Olena Zelenska, during an unannounced visit on the sidelines of an official trip in nearby Slovakia. — AFP

Russia, meanwhile, was gearing up for a Victory Day parade designed to associate the invasion of its neighbour with the national pride felt over the Soviet Union's defeat of Germany.

"Today, our soldiers, as their ancestors, are fighting side by side to liberate their native land from the Nazi filth with the confidence that, as in 1945, victory will be ours," Putin said.

Zelensky was also to meet G7 leaders via video conference to

US First Lady and Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau make unannounced visits to Ukraine

discuss the crisis, and European diplomats will meet again next week to hammer out the details of their latest sanctions package against Moscow.

The US first lady met her Ukrainian counterpart Olena

Zelenska at a school sheltering civilians, including children displaced by the conflict, near Ukraine's border with Slovakia.

"I wanted to come on Mother's Day," Biden told reporters.

"I thought it was important to show the Ukrainian people that this war has to stop and this war has been brutal and that the people of the United States stand with the people of Ukraine." Separately, Canadian leader Trudeau visited Irpin, a suburb on the northwest

edge of Kyiv that was the scene of heavy fighting in the early weeks of the conflict.

Local mayor Oleksandr Markushyn, posted pictures on social media and said Trudeau "came to Irpin to see with his own eyes all the horror that the Russian occupiers had done to our city." On the ground, the key battles were being fought in Ukraine's east.

Civilians have now been evacuated from Mariupol's Azovstal steelworks, leaving a small force of defenders holed up in its sprawling network of underground tunnels and bunkers.

The complex -- the final pocket of Ukrainian resistance in the port city -- has taken on a symbolic value.

"We, all of the military personnel in the garrison of Mariupol, we have witnessed the war crimes performed by Russia, by the Russian army. We are witnesses," said Ilya Samoilenko, an intelligence officer with the far-right Azov regiment, which is defending the steelworks.

"Surrender is not an option because Russia is not interested in our lives," he said.

Taking full control of Mariupol would also allow Moscow to create a land bridge between the Crimean peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and regions run by pro-Russian separatists in the east. — AFP

Economist sworn in as Costa Rica president

SAN JOSE: Economist and former finance minister Rodrigo Chaves was sworn in Sunday as Costa Rica's president for a four-year mandate focused on reinvigorating one of Latin America's most stable economies.

The former World Bank executive, who resigned from the global lender amid a harassment scandal, has vowed to tackle Costa Rica's severe economic problems: rising foreign debt -- about 70 per cent of GDP -- a poverty rate of 23 per cent, unemployment of 14 per cent and public sector corruption.

Tourism, one of the country's main economic drivers, was hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, and the country of 5.2 million people experienced an increase in unemployment equalled in the region only by Peru.

"It is fundamental for the country that Chaves improves the economy," Adrian Aguiluz, a 35-year-old resident of the capital, said ahead of the inauguration.

"This new government has an opportunity to do something different."

Chaves, who served six months as finance minister in the outgoing government, won a runoff election over former president Jose Maria Figueres -- himself tainted by a corruption scandal.

The 60-year-old Chaves had been a surprise qualifier for the April 3 runoff, having polled fourth ahead of February's first round.

While he was a senior official at the World Bank, where he worked for 30 years, he was investigated over harassment complaints brought by multiple



Rodrigo Chaves

women. He was demoted, and later resigned to take on the role of finance minister in President Carlos Alvarado's government.

Last month, Chaves offered "sincere apologies" to two accusers, young subordinates, having previously said the alleged harassment amounted to mere "jokes" that were "misinterpreted due to cultural differences."

This week, Chaves said his government would not ratify the Escazu Agreement that establishes protection for environmentalists, arguing it was unnecessary and would harm the economy.

Costa Rica, a regional leader in environmental protection, had hosted the signing of the agreement in 2018.

The new president has also vowed to improve Costa Rica's deal with the IMF for a loan of more than \$1.7 billion.

Spanish King Felipe VI is set to attend the ceremony in San Jose, along with delegations from nearly 100 countries. — AFP

Northern Ireland in limbo after Sinn Fein triumphs

BELFAST: Northern Ireland's feuding leaders came under international pressure on Sunday to unite in a new government, after the Irish nationalist party Sinn Fein secured an unprecedented election win.

Once the political wing of the paramilitary IRA, Sinn Fein won enough seats in the devolved legislature to nominate its Northern Ireland leader Michelle O'Neill as first minister.

The result from Thursday's election for the Stormont assembly marked a potentially seismic shift, a century after Northern Ireland was carved out as a Protestant fiefdom under British rule. With all 90 seats filled from Thursday's proportional voting, Sinn Fein won 27 seats, ahead of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) on 25 and the cross-community Alliance party on 17.

The result 'ushers in a new era' for the divided territory, and Sinn Fein says it wanted a referendum on reuniting Ireland within five years

At the imposing Stormont legislative building, formerly a bastion of unionist monopoly power, disaffected DUP voter Jordan Black said: "I feel like a lot of them are stuck in the past really."

"Change might be for the better," the 26-year-old mechanic said. "If they (Sinn Fein) start doing stuff that helps people and helps everybody, then more power to them, 100 per cent," he said.

O'Neill said the result "ushers in a new era" for the divided territory, and Sinn Fein said it wanted a referendum on reuniting Ireland within five years. But only the UK government can grant a referendum and Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis noted that a majority of voters overall still backed the constitutional status quo. Ahead of convening party leaders for talks in Belfast on Monday, Lewis recognised nevertheless that Sinn Fein's triumph was a "significant moment for Northern Ireland".

"I think it is an important moment to show that everybody can work together, regardless of who is first and deputy first minister," he told BBC television.

Lewis urged the leaders to "work with each other to find a way to come back into Stormont (and) form the executive". — AFP



Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, Michelle O'Neill reacts with party Leader Mary Lou McDonald, after the count at the Magherafelt Meadowbank sports centre in Londonderry. — AFP

All change is hard at first



Hyesha Barrett
coach.hyesha@gmail.com

The writer is a certified Master Life Coach and NLP Practitioner based in Muscat

Habits are a collection of single moment decisions that eventually become more repetitive and familiar over time. It's only when we look back that we see our habits being formed; they are the result of our constant choices to do the same thing over and over again.

We all possess positive and negative habits. They are always producing results, it's whether we like them or not which change the way we perceive them.

When the pain of changing the habit becomes greater than the pain of not changing, that's when the switch will be flipped. That can happen in an instant. The moment you decide the new thing which will replace the habit is of equal

worth, then you will have more leverage to change it.

A habit is hard to break dependent on several factors namely on how long you've had it, the social need it fulfils, the physical or emotional reward it provides and how strongly you would like to change it.

Improving habits are about finding the reason to change, it's not your ability to change. When the reason is big enough, then you will move anything and everything in your way to make it happen.

Changing habits are about getting progressively better. They are hardwired from an early age and it will take conscious, mindful effort and intentional focus to

COMMITMENT, DEEP DESIRE AND UNDIVIDED ATTENTION WILL ENSURE YOU HAVE CONTINUOUS MOMENTUM CREATING THE RIGHT BALANCE OF HABITS THAT SUPPORT YOU IN YOUR LIFE

change them. It won't happen in a day.

From here on forth, what habits can you do that support you becoming the person you want to become? Remember inside the process, there is progress. There is no demand for perfection, it's all about learning, growing, adapting and trying again.

Here are 12 tips on how to create permanent change:

- 1.Reflect and introspect on the habit you want to change. Get crystal clear on your reasons.
- 2.Set goals of what you want to achieve and create a timeline of deadlines.
- 3.Start small and remain consistent. Consistency is key.
- 4.Commit to 60 days. It takes this amount of time for the shift to occur from the conscios to the unconscious.
- 5.Make it fun and incorporate it into your daily routine.
- 6.Have an accountability partner. We can often let ourselves off the hook but rarely like to let others down.

- 7.Foresee obstacles and challenges that might set you back.
- 8.It's fine if you lose focus one day, resume the next.
- 9.Track your progress. Collected data gives you the proof you need to know you are moving forward.
- 10.Celebrate the wins.
- 11.Remove temptations and distractions.
- 12.Do it for yourself not for others.

All change is hard at first, messy in the middle and fantastic at the end. Commitment, deep desire, focus and undivided attention will ensure you have continuous momentum to creating the right balance of habits that support you in your life.

Villagers decry UK plan to house 1,500 asylum seekers

VALENTINE GRAVELEAU

The village of Linton - on - Ouse is usually a sleepy place, but its residents are up in arms at a UK government plan to house up to 1,500 asylum seekers, whose numbers will dwarf local residents.

In mid-April, 43-year-old Steve says he was walking his dog in the village in North Yorkshire when he learnt of the proposal from visiting reporters.

They “asked what I thought of what was going on” Steve tells.

It was then he found out that ministers want to open a centre for male asylum seekers in the heart of the village, in northern England.

The project is based on a similar one in Greece, which has seen a wave of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea land on its islands.

It aims to help reduce the number of migrants crossing the Channel from northern France in small boats, which has soared to record highs in recent years despite government promises to tackle the issue post-Brexit.

According to the interior ministry the existing accommodation on a former Royal Air Force base which closed in 2020 “will help end the government's reliance on expensive hotels” where tens of thousands of asylum seekers live at a cost to taxpayers of £4.7 million (\$5.8 million) per day.

“1,500 people in a village of 700 seems to have an absence of proportionality”, argues Olga Matthias, another local.

While they say they back the idea of housing refugees in their village, Steve and Olga say they cannot understand why the Home Office chose to send such a large number to Linton-on-Ouse.

“There is nothing to do here”, says Matthias, glancing down the deserted street with immaculate front gardens. The juice shop closed a long time ago and the only shop does not sell much except newspapers.

There is a bus four times a day that goes to York, the nearest large city about 16 kilometres away, but the price of a return ticket at £6.50 is more than an asylum seeker's daily allowance of £5.66.

“It's a lose-lose scenario”, says Steve.

“They have a right for a peaceful life especially after the countries these people are coming from, so they have the right to be here.” He argues the village does not have the facilities to allow its population to more than triple.

The sewage system is already failing, there is no high-speed internet nor police presence, he lists.

One local, 19-year-old Mya Aston, says that for her, the prospect of 1,500 more men walking in the streets was “daunting”.

— AFP

The war is getting more dangerous for America, and Biden knows it



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is a US political commentator and author

If you just followed news reports on Ukraine, you might think that the war has settled into a long, grinding and somewhat boring slog. You would be wrong.

Things are actually getting more dangerous by the day.

For starters, the longer this war goes on, the more opportunity for catastrophic miscalculations — and the raw material for that is piling up fast and furious. Take the two high-profile leaks from American officials this past week about US involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war.

First, *The New York Times* disclosed that “the United States has provided intelligence about Russian units that has allowed Ukrainians to target and kill many of the Russian generals who have died in action in the Ukraine war, according to senior American officials.”

Second, the Times, following a report by NBC News and citing US officials, reported that America has “provided intelligence that helped Ukrainian forces locate and strike” the Moskva, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet.

This targeting assistance “contributed to the eventual sinking” of the Moskva by two Ukrainian cruise missiles.

As a journalist, I love a good leak story, and the reporters who broke those stories did powerful digging. At the same time, from everything I have been able to glean from senior US officials, who spoke to me on condition of anonymity, the leaks were not part of any thought-out strategy and President Joe Biden was livid about them. I'm told

PUTIN SURELY HAS NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT HOW MUCH THE US AND NATO ARE ARMING UKRAINE WITH MATERIAL AND INTELLIGENCE

that he called the director of national intelligence, the director of the CIA and the secretary of defence to make clear in the strongest and most colourful language that this kind of loose talk is reckless and has got to stop immediately — before we end up in an unintended war with Russia.

The staggering takeaway from these leaks is that they suggest we are no longer in an indirect war with Russia but rather edging toward ‘a direct war’ — and no one has prepared the American people or Congress for that.

Vladimir Putin surely has no illusions about how much the US and Nato are arming Ukraine with material and intelligence, but when American officials start to brag in public about playing a role in killing Russian generals and sinking the Russian flagship, killing many sailors, we could be creating an opening for Putin to respond in ways that could dangerously widen this conflict — and drag the US in deeper than it wants to be.

It is doubly dangerous, senior US officials say, because it is increasingly

obvious to them that Putin's behaviour is not as predictable as it has been in the past. And Putin is running out of options for some kind of face-saving success on the ground — or even a face-saving off-ramp.

It is hard to exaggerate what a catastrophe this war has been for Putin so far. Indeed,

Biden also pointed out to his team that Putin was trying to push back on Nato expansion, and he's ended up laying the groundwork for the expansion of Nato.

Both Finland and Sweden are now taking steps toward joining an alliance they've stayed out of for seven decades.

But that is why US officials are quite concerned about what Putin might do or announce at the Victory Day celebration in Moscow on Monday, which marks the anniversary of the Soviet Union's defeat of Nazi Germany.

It is traditionally a day of military parades and celebration of the prowess of the Russian army. Putin could mobilise even more soldiers, make some other provocation or do nothing at all. But no one knows.

Alas, we have to be alive to the fact that it's not only the Russians who would like to involve us more deeply. Have no illusions:

President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine has been trying to do the same thing from the start — to make Ukraine an immediate member of Nato or get Washington to forge a bilateral security pact with Kyiv. I am in awe of Zelensky's heroism and leadership. If I were him, I'd be trying to get the US as enmeshed on my side as he is.

But I'm an American citizen, and I want us to be careful. Ukraine was and still is a country marbled with corruption. That doesn't mean we should not be helping it. I am glad we are. I insist we do.

But my sense is that the Biden team is walking much more of a tightrope with Zelensky than it would appear to the eye — wanting to do everything possible to make sure he wins this war but doing so in a way that still keeps some distance between us and Ukraine's leadership. That's why Kyiv is not calling the shots and so we'll not be embarrassed by messy Ukrainian politics in the war's aftermath.

— The New York Times



A museum employee touches the sculpture of Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorri Skovoroda, removed from the destroyed building of the Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary Memorial Museum in the village of Skovorodnyivka, in Kharkiv Region. — AFP

White or blue-collar — all are valued



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
aljahdhami22@gmail.com

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

As the saying goes, without workers, nothing prospers! Yes, that is right; it is the workers or in other words staff are the ones behind achieving every single milestone and success of an organisation. They stand as the backbone for any organisation and their employers rely on them to accomplish the business objectives and mission. Employees mark the valuable asset of any business and if they are well-invested, the returns will be reflected on their performance and deliverables of course. This simple formula that works here is treating people as you want to be treated! Once employees are fairly and respectfully treated and sufficiently paid, they will devote responsibly to the organisation and give back to the business. Scratch my back, I scratch your's could be applicable here too! Hence, employees shall be regarded as real partners and key stakeholders of a business. A little respect, value, confidence and a motivating and stress-free workplace are all that mostly matters to employees regardless of what they do as individuals.

ONCE EMPLOYEES ARE FAIRLY AND RESPECTABLY TREATED AND SUFFICIENTLY PAID, THEY WILL DEVOTE RESPONSIBLY TO THE ORGANISATION AND GIVE BACK TO THE BUSINESS

each one plays a different role and strives to achieve a separate objective and mission in what he does as a profession. In fact, people have been created by the Almighty Allah to fit various positions in life and similarly in corporate world, in particular.

Out of belief in the significance of different roles and tasks being played by citizens in the nation-building march, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stated: "Our full gratitude and appreciation for every hand that participates in building Oman". In view of that, everyone's assignment and responsibilities are of value to nation and humanity. Otherwise, there would be no value of creating a certain human being or even hire him for a particular job!

Regardless how simple is the role or an impact of a certain job, it should not be undervalued; human beings complement one another in life and at work too. Being involved in a highly or low-paid profession has nothing to do with the value one's role in life. As this is indicated in the Holy Quran, "It is We who portion out between them their livelihood in the life of this world; and We raise some of them above others in rank, so that some may command work from others".

Probably, the ones working in handy labour works are even more valued and honoured in terms of the effort and time they dedicate to their professions.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was asked what type of earning was best, and he replied:

"A man's work with his hands and every lawful business transaction".

Therefore, nobody's profession or work shall be undervalued no matter who they are or what they do! We are all workers, but each one is minding his own specialty and area of business.

In this respect, nations, governments, societies and corporates must always accord high importance to value and acknowledge individuals' devotion, achievements and deliverables.

Likewise, employers shall spare no effort to value, reward and recognise performance and hard work of their employees.

One's dignity is not always valued and appreciated by wages they get at the end of each month only; rather to feel a little of respect, gratitude and emotions, which counts even more.

In fact, this will undoubtedly mark a dose of encouragement to employees and a push to open up their minds towards creativity to aim high.

As well, it urges them to believe in work as not a man's punishment, but a reward, source of strength and a pleasure of course. As Aristotle said: "Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work".



Should Europe stop paying for Putin's war?



Peter Singer

The writer is a Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, is Founder of the nonprofit

Is it right for European countries to continue to pay Russia €1 billion (\$1.1 billion) a day for energy when they know that they are funding Russia's war on Ukraine?

Last month, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that European countries prospering from Russian energy are "earning their money in other people's blood." Russia did not need to take peace talks seriously, he suggested, because of the billions it receives for its oil and gas exports. Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the former CEO of the Russian oil company Yukos, now in exile, told the BBC that an embargo on Russian oil and gas would be a serious blow to President Vladimir Putin, causing him "to lose over half his revenue."

Yet no immediate cut-off is being considered. European Union Economic Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said only that the EU would reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas by two-thirds by the end of the year, and to zero by 2027. And while Germany, the biggest European purchaser of Russian energy, has moved up its initial end-of-year timeline for halting oil imports to the end of this summer, with gas imports continuing, that may still be too late to help Ukraine.

In Poland, where almost three million Ukrainians, mostly women and children, are finding shelter at the moment, the government waffled, initially calling for a European embargo on Russian oil and gas, and then voting against it. They were saved from hypocrisy only by Russia

FOR CITIZENS OF STATES THAT ARE MEMBERS OF NATO, TAKING ALL POSSIBLE STEPS, SHORT OF ALL-OUT WAR, TO ENSURE THAT RUSSIA DOES NOT CONQUER UKRAINE IS NOT AN ALTRUISTIC SACRIFICE

"unfriendly" and refused to pay for the gas in roubles. These countries now have the chance to show the rest of Europe that life can continue without Russian gas.

How much pain should Europeans be willing to accept? The Wall Street Journal recently quoted Giovanni Staunovo, a commodity analyst at UBS Group AG: "The European Union fully sanctioning Russian oil would be like saying tomorrow you cut your salary by 40 per cent and you need to continue to live as if nothing has happened."

But why should Europeans continue to live as if nothing has happened? Russia invaded Ukraine, causing 11 million people to leave their homes, including five million who have fled to other countries. As many as a half-million Ukrainians may have been forcibly deported to Russia. Mariupol, not long ago a peaceful city with a population of more than 400,000, has been totally destroyed, and many other cities have been severely damaged. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of people, both civilians and members of the Ukrainian armed forces defending their country, have been killed and many more wounded. European countries might

war on Russia and using their own armed forces to assist Ukraine in its resistance. Instead, they took the less risky course of imposing economic sanctions and sending weapons to Ukraine. Viewing the sanctions as an alternative to military action puts into perspective the sacrifices that it is reasonable to expect from those paying Russia for the energy they are using. If ceasing to use Russian energy will mean economic hardship, is that really too much to ask?

Moreover, the sacrifice would not be a purely altruistic one. The war in Ukraine is not only about Ukraine. A Russian military commander recently said that, "Control over the south of Ukraine is another way out to Transnistria, where there are also facts of oppression of the Russian-speaking population." Transnistria is a separatist region of Moldova. Such supposed "facts of oppression" of Russian-speaking people were, of course, the pretext for Russian war on Ukraine. They could be alleged in several other countries that were once part of the Soviet Union and have Russian speakers among their population. Ukraine is therefore the frontline of resistance to Putin's aim of re-establishing Russian dominance over regions dominated by the Soviet Union and, before that, the Russian czars.

If the Ukrainians had simply laid down their arms in the face of the apparently overwhelming Russian forces, as Putin seems to have expected, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland would have had to fear for their own security. And because all are members of Nato, the burden of their defence would have fallen on all members of the alliance. For citizens of states that are members of Nato, taking all possible steps, short of all-out war, to ensure that Russia does not conquer Ukraine is not even an altruistic sacrifice.

It is a long-term investment, for themselves and their children, in freedom, democracy, and the international rule of law.

The moral imperative to cease paying blood money to Russia is also an opportunity for European countries to fulfil their commitments, made in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, to prevent dangerous anthropogenic climate change.

Lesia Vasylenko, head of the Ukrainian parliament's climate sub-committee, has suggested that Ukraine's devastated industries should be rebuilt with new technology to run on clean energy.

The EU now has an additional reason to accelerate the timetable for reaching its goal of making Europe the first climate-neutral continent.

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A communal worker cleans shattered glass and debris in front of a residential building in southern Ukrainian city of Odessa on Sunday. — AFP

unilaterally cutting off the supply to both Poland and Bulgaria, because they are

have responded to Russia's clear breach of the United Nations Charter by declaring

sport

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Oman all set for WAFF beach soccer

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Oman beach soccer team is all set for the West Asian Federation Championship which will be held in Saudi Arabia from May 15 to 21.

Seven teams will take part in the WAFF event and they distributed into two groups.

Oman are grouped with the UAE, Kuwait and Lebanon in Group A, while hosts Saudi Arabia are leading Group B besides Bahrain and Palestine.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals. The beach soccer competition will be organised under an umbrella of West Asian Football Federations (WAFF) and Beach Soccer Worldwide.

Nabil al Balushi, Oman team manager, said the team will travel to Jazan city, Saudi Arabia on May 14. “The team is undergoing a preparatory domestic camp under supervision of head coach Talib Hilal. We are having daily two sessions of training including



NABIL AL BALUSHI
Oman team manager

morning and evening sessions. We were supposed to meet Kuwait team in a warm-up game during this camp but they pulled out later,” he added in his remarks to Oman Daily Observer.

“The team is in good shape after the first long internal camp which took place during Ramadhan and featured three friendlies games against Bahrain. The national team emerged superior in all the preparatory games, winning all of them by good margin. Those

matches were very essential as the head coach could test the player’s performances specially by the new faces ahead of the West Asian Federation Championship assignment,” he said.

FIRST EDITION

In the first edition of the West Asian Federation Championship, which was organised in 2013, Oman had finished as runners-up while hosts Iran had clinched the title. Seven teams took part in the event during that time including Qatar, Palestine, Bahrain, Iraq and Lebanon, Iran and Oman.

Al Balushi affirmed that the squad of national beach soccer team had changed a lot from the team’s appearance at the 2021 Fifa Beach Soccer World Cup in Russia.

“Seven new young players have joined the national team squad and there are five more in the waiting list to join shortly in the coming period. It is quite risky to do complete change of the squad as we need some experienced members in the team. There are seven experienced players besides

the same number of new potential faces. The majority of the newly selected players were from the first edition of the beach soccer league which ended in last March,” he explained. Meanwhile, the Oman Football Association (OFA) is gearing up to organise the second edition of the national beach soccer league. “The plan is to have the league in November as the weather will get cooler. There were 13 teams in the inaugural edition and we are expecting much more teams in the forthcoming edition. The league will definitely assist in boosting beach soccer in the Sultanate of Oman and provide new potential members for the national squad,” he ended.

OMAN SQUAD: Mundher al Oraiimi, Mashal al Oraiimi, Salim al Oraiimi, Khalid al Mukhaini, Amjad al Hamdani, Nouh al Zadjali, Ahmed al Owaisi, Younis al Owaisi, Sami al Balushi, Abdullah al Buraiki, Yahya al Buraiki, Abdulrahman al Fazari, Sameer Jameel, Mohammed al Maawali, Nouh al Battashi and Abdullah al Souti.



Atalanta beat Spezia to continue Europa League football push

MILAN: Atalanta kept up their bid for European football next season with a 3-1 win at Spezia which meant that the home side are not yet safe from relegation.

Goals from Luis Muriel, Berat Djimsiti and Mario Pasalic took the three points for Atalanta on the Italian Riviera, moving Gian Piero Gasperini’s side up to seventh and in with a shout of Europa League football.

STRAIGHT SEASONS

After three straight seasons of Champions League action the best Atalanta can hope for is Europe’s second-tier competition as they sit 10 points behind fourth-placed Juventus with two matches to play.

Juve and league leaders Inter

Milan contesting the Italian Cup final on Wednesday means that two Europa League spots can be earned through league placings.

Atalanta are level on points with Roma, who sit sixth and in the second Europa League berth ahead of their match at eighth-placed Fiorentina on Monday night.

Spezia meanwhile remain five points ahead of Cagliari who sit just inside the bottom three and face 17th-placed Salernitana later on Sunday.

Daniele Verdi’s well-taken leveller on the half-hour mark wasn’t enough for Thiago Motta’s side, who can still be caught by both Cagliari and a Genoa team level on 28 points with the Sardinians. — AFP

Heritage camel festival concludes in Shinas

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 8

The heritage camel racing festival concluded in the Wilayat of Shinas on Saturday. As many as 250 participants took part in the first ever heritage event under support of the local community and with donations exceeding RO 10,000 for the event. Hamid bin Hamdan al Busaidy, Deputy Wali of Shinas, was the chief guest for the concluding ceremony in presence of officials and invitees.

On the first day of the event on Friday, there were eight rounds for ‘Fatamean’ category for one-year-old camels for a distance of 1,200 metres. The top five winners received cash prizes.

The opening round was won by ‘Braqah’ for Yasir bin Gareab al Washahi covering the race distance in 1 minute 42 seconds.

In the second round, ‘Hamlool’ owned by Said bin Abdullah al Washahi came first a timing of



1:48. In the third round, ‘Gram’ owned by Naif bin Ghanim al Khamisi, won the top award.

In the fourth round, ‘Shahean’, owned by Ali bin Sulaiman al Badi, finished first. In the following round, Takream’ owned by Younis bin Abdullah al Sibli snatched the first prize. In the sixth round, ‘Mayas’ owned by Abdullah bin Suliman al Rushadi, won the top award, while Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Sadi claimed the seventh round through ‘Ostorah’. The last round was claimed by ‘Almalyoon’ owned

by Ali bin Hasen al Sadi.

On the second day, on Saturday, there were 10 rounds for ‘Fatamean’ category (one-year-old camels) with a distance of 1,500 metres.

In the first round, ‘Takream’ owned by Ali al Wahibi won the top honours. In the second round ‘Alnaif’ for Turki al Muqbali was the champion while ‘Qarar’ owned by Harib al Mahrooqi snatched the third round title. In the following round, Hamlool’ for Haza al Burtumani claimed the award while ‘Anood’ owned by Hamed

al Ghafi, claimed the fourth round prize. In the seventh round, Nagoom’ for Ahmed al Maamari, lifted the title while in the eighth round, Sarab’ owned by Adil al Busaidy snatched the award. In the ninth round, ‘Sulymanyah’ owned by Henad al Rushadi came top while in the concluding round ‘Shahin’ owned by Majed al Malki finished on top.

Also on the same day, there were three traditional rounds for Humar riders for a distance of 1,200 metres. In the first round, ‘Aldabi’ owned by Nwaaf al Jahwari was the champion while in the second round ‘Samha’ owned by Muhammed al Serahi won the top prize. In the third round, ‘Atagee’ owned by Ahmed al Sadi claimed the prize.

A running race for 2km was conducted during the festival. Abdullah bin Salim al Qurani bagged the top prize and Khalifa bin Mohammed al Balushi ended as runner-up.

Nantes beat Nice to win French Cup final

PARIS: Nantes won the French Cup for the first time in 22 years on Saturday, beating Nice 1-0 in the final at the Stade de France.

Ludovic Blas drilled home a penalty at the start of the second half to bring Nantes the club's first major trophy since winning the Ligue 1 title in 2001.

"Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would coach Nantes and win a trophy," said Antoine Kombouare, an ex-Nantes player who was the first coach sacked by Paris Saint-Germain following the Qatari takeover.

"We came from nowhere. We could have finished in Ligue 2 last year. Now we're going to play in the Europa League and the Champions Trophy, it's hard to believe.

"It's incredible, almost a miracle."

Nantes, who only avoided relegation in a play-off last season, lifted the French Cup for the fourth time and qualified for Europe for the first time in two decades.

For much of the season, Nice, owned by Ineos, the group chaired by Monaco-based British petrochemicals billionaire Jim Ratcliffe, looked certain to qualify for the Champions League but after a recent stumble could miss out on Europe altogether.

"It's disappointing. When you get to the final and have this magnificent trophy, you do everything to try and win it," said Nice coach Christophe Galtier.

After the two finals played in an almost entirely empty stadium due to the pandemic, a sell-out crowd of around 80,000 packed the Stade de France — roughly two-thirds



Nantes' French midfielder Ludovic Blas (C) celebrates during the trophy ceremony at the end of the French Cup final football match between OGC Nice and FC Nantes at the Stade de France, in Saint-Denis, on the outskirts of Paris. — AFP

Nantes supporters.

Nice knocked out PSG and Marseille en route to a first final since 1997, but struggled to create chances with Amine Gouiri and Kasper Dolberg both without a goal in the league since January.

Nice goalkeeper Marcin Bulka, the PSG loanee who helped dump out his parent club on penalties in the last 16, smothered well as Blas darted into the box, with Gouiri

then having a shot deflected wide in a gritty first half. A first final without PSG since 2014 burst into life 15 seconds after half-time when Hicham Boudaoui was harshly penalised for a handball by Stephanie Frappart, the first woman to referee a French Cup final.

Blas hammered the resulting spot-kick straight down the middle past Bulka, sparking euphoric celebrations from the

Nantes players and fans.

Pedro Chirivella nearly grabbed a second as he blasted just wide following a corner, with Jordan Lotomba making a crucial block to deny Moses Simon from Randal Kolo Muani's cutback.

Nice's best opportunity came with 20 minutes to play as Alban Lafont palmed away from Gouiri before Nantes defender Andrei Gireto produced a superb goal-

line clearance to thwart Andy Delort.

Having departed Lille after leading them to the Ligue 1 crown last season, Galtier's first season in charge of Nice risks ending with a whimper.

"We didn't play very well in the final but we have the possibility to get a European place in the league. We're going to do everything for it," said Galtier.

Mumbai Indians out of IPL

MUMBAI: Indian Premier League giants Mumbai Indians on Saturday became the first team to bow out of the play-off race after Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings in the first match of the day.

Royals' victory meant Mumbai, who are bottom of the 10-team table with eight losses from 10 matches, have no chance of making the final four this season. Rohit Sharma's Mumbai, the richest and most successful side in IPL history with five titles, remained winless in their first eight matches this season.

They bounced back with two wins, including a last-over thriller on Friday when Australian fast bowler Daniel Sams defended nine off the final over against high-flying Gujarat Titans who have eight wins from 11 matches.

But the victories come too late as the heavyweights can now only muster a maximum of 12 points which will not be enough to get into the top four.

They next play two-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders on Monday. — AFP



A countdown clock and mascots of the 2022 Asian Games are seen in Hangzhou, in China's eastern Zhejiang province. — AFP

Covid curbs push China off global sporting map

BEIJING: China's ambitions to be a global sporting hub took a heavy blow as the postponement of this year's Asian Games further isolated a country already cut off by its hardline zero-Covid strategy.

The ruling Communist Party burnished its global image with an array of dazzling spectacles such as Beijing's 2008 Summer and 2022 Winter Olympics, tennis and golf tournaments featuring all the world's leading stars, and a showpiece annual Formula One Grand Prix.

The country also wants to host football's World Cup.

But with the exception of this year's Winter Olympics -- held in a virus-secure, closed-loop Beijing bubble in February -- the world's most populous nation has

cancelled or postponed almost all events since Covid emerged in Wuhan in late 2019.

The Olympic-sized Asian Games became the latest and biggest casualty on Friday as organisers decided to delay the multi-sports extravaganza "after carefully considering the pandemic situation and the size of the Games".

No new dates have yet been given for the continental showpiece, originally scheduled for September 10 to 25 in the eastern city of Hangzhou with around 10,000 athletes due to compete across 40 sports.

The World University Games due to begin next month in Chengdu were also postponed for a second time citing "continued uncertainty over conditions".

They were part of a blitz of announcements on Friday as the Asian Youth Games were also cancelled, having been delayed once already, and two prestigious Diamond League athletics meetings later this year in Shanghai and Shenzhen were shelved.

China's costly and labour-intensive Winter Olympics bubble -- when participants took daily Covid tests and were not allowed to mix with the public -- now appears to have been the exception rather than the rule, experts said.

Sport in limbo

The Winter Olympic Games "were a huge political priority and nothing was going to stop them", said Mark Dreyer, author of "Sporting Superpower: An Insider's View on China's Quest to Be the Best". — AFP

Lucknow crush Kolkata to top IPL table

PUNE: Fast bowler Avesh Khan helped Lucknow Super Giants hammer Kolkata Knight Riders by 75 runs on Saturday to go top of the IPL table as teams jostle to secure a play-off spot.

Lucknow bundled out Kolkata, who were chasing 177 for victory, for 101 to replace fellow newcomers Gujarat Titans at the summit, with the Twenty20 tournament moving towards its business end.

In the first match of the day, Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings by six wickets to improve their chances of making the final four.

The result meant five-time winners Mumbai Indians crashed out of the play-off race after eight losses in 10 matches.

Quinton de Kock, who made a 29-ball 50, and Deepak Hooda, who hit 41 off 27 deliveries, put on 71 runs to lay the foundation of Lucknow's 176 for seven after being put in to bat first in Pune.

Kolkata were never in the chase after they lost their top four including skipper Shreyas Iyer, for six, and Aaron Finch, for 14, early. They fell to 25-4.

"Having skill is good, but bowling well under pressure and being brave, trusting the best ball on the wicket without being worried about who's playing makes our bowling unit commendable," sai Lucknow skipper KL Rahul.

"I can't think of any game



where we've had a complete performance, and no team will find the perfect performance. We are sticking to our plans and winning which is great."

West Indies power

West Indies big-hitter Andre Russell gave them some hope during his 19-ball 45 but the innings fell apart after his departure.

Russell attempted to turn the tide with three fours and five sixes

but was caught at third-man off Avesh who finished with figures of 3-19.

West Indies' Jason Holder wrapped up the Kolkata innings with two successive wickets and a run out.

The left-right batting pair of De Kock and Hooda set up victory after they took the attack to the opposition bowlers following Rahul's run out for nought in the first over. — AFP

Alba strikes late as Barca secure top-four spot with Betis win

MADRID: Barcelona secured qualification for next season's Champions League on Saturday as Jordi Alba's 94th-minute winner against Real Betis guaranteed the Catalans' place in the top four of La Liga.

Alba's stinging injury-time volley snatched a 2-1 victory for Barca at the Benito Villamarin to ensure they will play in the Champions League next term, an achievement likely to be crucial to the club's hopes of financial recovery.

When Xavi Hernandez took over as coach in November, Barcelona lay ninth in La Liga, with genuine concerns about their chances of closing the gap.

But, Xavi's team surged up the table and can now look forward to rejoining their rivals Real Madrid in Europe's premier tournament next season.

"We have saved the situation", said Xavi. "This team believes until the end, it has a competitive edge that we didn't have in November."

The difference between Champions League and Europa League football could be worth more than 50 million euros (\$52.7 million) to Barcelona, who began the season with debts of more than a billion euros, and were forced to let Lionel Messi leave for free last summer.

While a trophyless season can never count as a success for Barca, finishing in the top four is an impressive achievement for Xavi and a huge relief for the club.

"We are Barca, so this is the minimum requirement, but in November we were ninth", added Xavi. "We've had a very good second half of the season and now we look forward to next year, to improve enough to win titles."

Victory leaves Barcelona second in the table, 11 points clear of Betis in fifth. Both teams have three games left to play. Barca should now be confident of clinching second place too, with a five-point edge over Sevilla, who play at Villarreal on Sunday.

— AFP



Barcelona's Dutch midfielder Frenkie De Jong (R) vies with Real Betis' Mexican midfielder Andres Guardado during the Spanish League football between Real Betis and FC Barcelona at the Benito Villamarin Stadium in Seville. — AFP



Liverpool's title hopes fade after Spurs stalemate

LIVERPOOL: Jurgen Klopp said Liverpool cannot give up hope in the Premier League title race after a 1-1 draw against Tottenham despite admitting he cannot see Manchester City slipping up.

Klopp's side edged ahead of City on goal difference after dropping points at Anfield for the first time since February.

But the English champions can now afford to draw one of their remaining four games and still retain their title.

Pep Guardiola's men can retake top spot and open up a three-point lead when they host Newcastle on Sunday.

"It is an important point but we all know the situation", said

Klopp.

"We are now top of the table and if we and City lose all the rest of our games then great, but we all know that will not happen."

"I would love to sit here and say yes City will drop points, the problem is I can't see it."

A share of the spoils took Tottenham to within a point of fourth-placed Arsenal, but their chance of a top-four finish now also rely on the Gunners dropping points in two of their final four games.

Son Heung-Min rounded off a brilliant team move to put Spurs in front on 56 minutes.

Luis Diaz's deflected shot levelled 16 minutes from time, but

Liverpool failed to find a winner.

"It is not easy to play in this moment against an amazing team in an amazing atmosphere", said Tottenham boss Antonio Conte.

"The have a lot of energy despite playing every three days, it is incredible. They are deserving of everything they are reaching this season."

"To have a good result is positive but we have to be disappointed because we had the chances to win the game."

Twenty-one points separate the sides, but Spurs have made a habit of saving their best for the big occasion.

Conte's men are unbeaten in all four meetings with City and

Liverpool this season.

Liverpool did not start like a side fatigued by reaching the Champions League final in their 57th game of the season against Villarreal in midweek, as the intense press from the home side penned Tottenham in.

But their best effort came from a corner as Virgil van Dijk hit the crossbar.

Spurs also hit the woodwork in the first-half when Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg took aim from long range.

The second-half followed the same pattern, with Liverpool camped in the Tottenham half, but this time Spurs did pick them off on the counter-attack. — AFP

Ons Jabeur sharpens quest to inspire more Arab women to take up tennis

PARIS: Ons Jabeur's long-stated goal is that her historic exploits on court lead to more Arab women taking up tennis — becoming the first Arab player to win a Grand Slam in next month's French Open final would do wonders to achieve that.

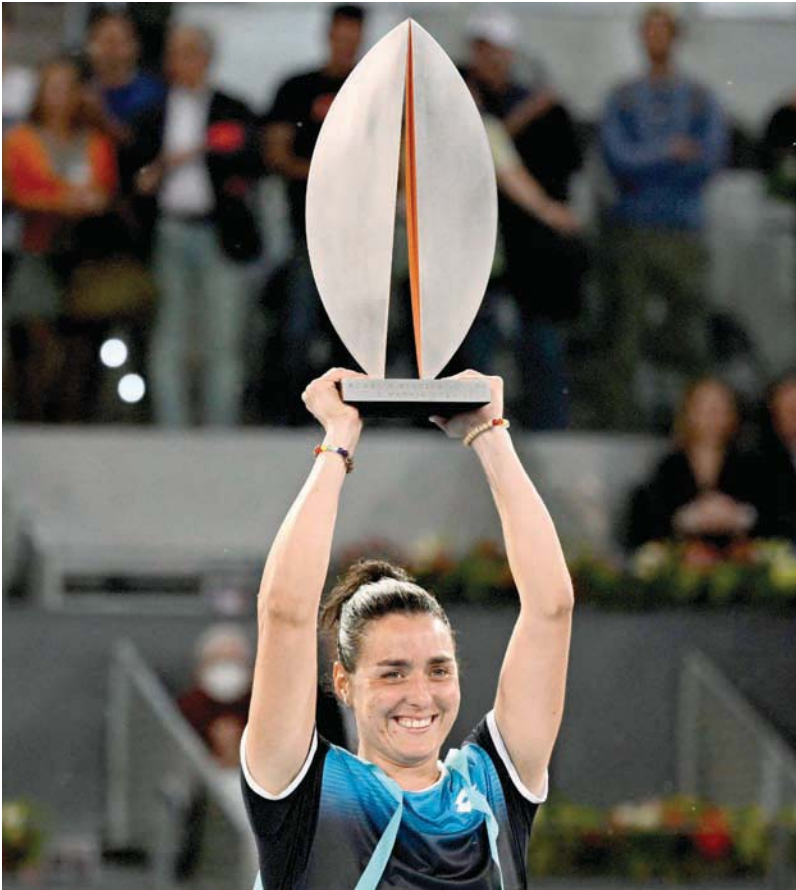
The 27-year-old Tunisian became a front-rank contender for tennis's greatest prize on clay with her gutsy three-set victory over American Jessica Pegula in the Madrid on Saturday.

In doing so the engaging and highly expressive Jabeur wrote another piece of tennis history.

Her 7-5, 0-6, 6-2 victory made her the first Arab or African woman to win a WTA 1000 title.

Her title in Birmingham last year was the first for an Arab woman player on the circuit and she is the first Arab player — man or woman — to crack the top 10.

Indeed she will return to her



previous highest ranking of seven on Monday. With a tour-leading 12 victories on clay so far this season — and with Australia's world number one Ashleigh Barty having retired — the omens seem positive for her.

However, she has another glass ceiling to crack in reaching the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time — so she has two quarterfinals to her credit in Australia in 2020 and Wimbledon last year.

Jabeur — the junior champion at Roland Garros in 2011 — is, though, armed with a powerful weapon apart from her strokeplay.

"Definitely all those matches I've won on clay will give me a lot of confidence", she said as she absorbed her Madrid victory.

"When you're confident like that and you win a lot of matches, I think I should take this opportunity to go, like, really forward and win."

— AFP



MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz believes the sky is the limit after becoming the first player to beat Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic at the same tournament on clay as he stormed into the Madrid Open final on Saturday.

The 19-year-old Spaniard reached his second ATP Masters final in five weeks and claimed his first win over a reigning world number one, overcoming Djokovic 6-7 (5/7), 7-5, 7-6 (7/5) in front of a sell-out home crowd at the Caja Magica.

Alcaraz has a tour-leading seven wins against top-10 players this season. He enters Sunday's final against defending champion

Alexander Zverev carrying a nine-match winning streak, having triumphed in Barcelona a couple of weeks ago.

He is the youngest player to beat a world number one in 17 years.

Asked if he sees a limit to what he can achieve, Alcaraz said: "I don't think so. Tomorrow I will go for the final as I did in Miami. I'm really happy to be able to play a second Masters 1000 final."

"I would say that I feel ready to compete against them (the top players) in every single tournament, in every single surface", added the Miami champion. — AFP



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BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Led by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf (pictured), Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, a topflight Omani trade and investment delegation will head for India on Tuesday to participate at the 10th Oman — India Joint Commission Meeting in New Delhi.

This annual gathering aims to further develop trade and investment links between the Sultanate of Oman and India. The official visit programme of high-level meetings and events will commence with Al Yousuf addressing an Oman-India B2B networking session May 11 at the Leela Palace Hotel in New Delhi.

Joining the New Delhi delegation include senior representatives from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), Public Authority for Special Economic Zones & Free Zones and Oman Chamber of Commerce & Industry as well as Omani companies from the construction, manufacturing, retail, automotive, renewable energy, pharmaceutical and tourism sectors.

Speaking ahead of departure, Al Yousuf emphasised the importance of trade and investment missions such as this in promoting the Sultanate of Oman's world-class goods and services in international markets as well as the many investment



opportunities open to foreign investors in Oman.

He continued: "On this visit we look forward, in particular, to sharing the potential of the pro-business and investment environment flourishing in Oman under the guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the possibilities that have already opened up in the Sultanate of Oman as a result of Oman Vision 2040, our framework for development and growth."

Noting that this year marks India's 75 years of independence, a period in which the country has become a global business leader and a \$3 trillion plus economy, the Minister expressed his delight to be visiting New Delhi at this time to congratulate the Indian people in person and to engage with government and business officials on growing economic ties.

Al Yusef went on to share that non-oil exports to India, is a key priority for trade and investment of the Omani government and businesses community, reached

There are great complementarities between India's needs and Oman's offer, particularly in logistics, mining, tourism, manufacturing and renewables. These are all areas ripe for Oman-India collaboration

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSUF
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

\$1.2 billion in 2021 a jump of 172 per cent on 2020, while imports from India hit \$2 billion, a 94 per cent increase on 2020.

He continued: "Holding this Joint Commission Meeting at this time presents a real opportunity to support and strengthen the long-standing trade partnerships that connect us — helping both sides fully embrace the opportunities on offer. I fully expect to see further growth in Oman-India trade as both countries emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic."

From an investment perspective, Al Yousuf commented: "India is already

a large inward investor into Oman, but there are significant opportunities to increase this even further. In fact, there are great complementarities between India's needs and Oman's offer, particularly in logistics, mining, tourism, manufacturing and renewables. These are all areas ripe for Oman-India collaboration."

Like many economies around the world, India has suffered due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but now looks set to be one of the best emerging market recovery stories of 2022 with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry predicting GDP growth at 7.4 per cent for the financial year 2022-23.

The Omani economy is also on an optimistic growth trajectory with S&P Global revising the Sultanate of Oman's rating in April to BB- with a stable outlook. The first upgrade since 2015. While the IMF World Economic Outlook Report projects 5.6 per cent GDP growth for the Sultanate of Oman in 2022, making it the third fastest growing economy in the GCC.

"The benefits of improved Oman-India trade and investment relations cannot be denied, bringing with it increased people-to-people ties, innovation, entrepreneurship, job creation and greater prosperity for both countries. We look forward to more of Oman in India and more of India in Oman," concluded Al Yousuf.

Omantel Group net climbs to RO 62.5m in Q1 of 2022



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 8

Majority state-owned telecom operator Omantel posted a net profit (after tax) for the group of RO 62.5 million for the quarter ended March 31, 2022, which was up 11.6 per cent from net earnings of RO 56.0 million recorded for Q1 2021.

After adjusting for minority interest, the net profit for the period was RO 18.5 million, compared to RO 16.9 million in Q1 2021, an increase of 9.5 per cent, the company stated in the Chairman's Report for the quarter. Group revenue for the period ended March 2022 reached RO 634.8 million compared to RO 602.7 million for the corresponding period of 2021.

The Group revenue includes acquired business of Zain Group, which contributed revenues of RO 504.2 million. The Group's total operating

expenses increased to RO 535.6 million compared to RO 505.4 million for the corresponding period of 2021, an increase of 6.0 per cent.

On the domestic front, Omantel revenues reached RO 133.3 million compared to RO 131.4 million for the corresponding period 2021. Revenues growth was mainly achieved in Mobile Post-paid and Fixed Broadband revenues. Net Profit for the three months ended March 2022 stood at RO 19.5 million compared to RO 19.1 million in the previous period.

"Increase in net profit is predominantly on account of revenue growth in Post-paid Mobile revenue (11.6pc) Fixed Broad band revenue (2.1pc), cost optimisation measures, reduction in depreciation and impairment provision against receivables (contributed by healthy collections)", the report stated.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Musandam's first industrial city prepped for new investment

STRONG GROWTH: Contract for basic infrastructure and road network awarded

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The first industrial city in Musandam Governorate has begun welcoming investors eager to capitalise on its proximity to key regional markets to ignite the growth of a manufacturing hub in this strategically important part of the Sultanate of Oman.

Mahas Industrial City — the latest addition to the expanding chain of national industrial parks administered by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) — is coming up in the Wilayat of Khasab. An area of around 1.44 million sq metres has been earmarked for the new facility, primarily for small and mid-scale manufacturing



ventures.

According to Mubarak bin Salem al Ghailani, Acting Director General of the new industrial hub, a local contractor has been awarded a contract valued at around RO 5 million for the development of basic infrastructure for the project.

An area of around 1 million sq metres, representing about two-thirds of the original land earmarked for the industrial city, will be covered by this contract, he noted.

Significantly, since its establishment was announced last year, Mahas Industrial City has been attracting a flurry of new investors. As of the end of the first quarter of this year, as many as 11 investors had registered to set up operations in the Industrial City. Development of the hub in Musandam received new impetus last year, following Royal Directives by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the implementation of a slate of key projects aimed at fuelling the governorate's socioeconomic development.

It includes a proposal for the upgrade of Port Khasab into a maritime hub for shipping, logistics and cruise tourism. Mahas, an area well-known for quarrying activities, is proposed to be redeveloped into dedicated tourism and economic zones incorporating Mahas Industrial City.

Also envisaged is a new

university and strategic reserves for essential foodstuff and medicines.

As the governorate's first industrial city, the project will add a manufacturing component to Musandam's economic base, which is currently limited to primarily fishing, livestock farming, tourism and hospitality, local handicrafts and quarrying.

Given the importance of manufacturing and industry to the Sultanate of Oman's GDP growth targets, a string of new industrial cities are planned elsewhere around the country.

Currently under development are industrial parks in Ibri, Thamrait, Shinas and Al Mudhaibi, taking the total number currently under operation or initial development to 14 to date.

Madayn's goal is to add a further 26 industries cities to this growing network over the next two decades with the aim of reaching a target of 40 national hubs by 2040.

Toyota’s Biggest Excitement campaign ending soon

MUSCAT: Own a Toyota and get a chance to benefit with Toyota’s Biggest Excitement campaign before it ends on May 19, 2022. Get service from 2 years/20,000 kms up to 8 years/80,000 kms (whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 125 to RO 450, grand raffle Toyota Supra. Customers also get a chance to scratch and win laptop, iPhone 13, fuel card, Apple Watch Series 5. Additionally customer can get a chance to walk-in and win Apple Airpod 2 and Apple Watch Series 5.

(Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.) Toyota’s range in Oman is very popular and exciting. The range includes the Yaris

which delivers a dynamic driving experience. The Yaris sedan and Yaris Hatchback is equipped with 1.5L engine. The 1.5-Litre four-cylinder engine 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 Toyota Corolla — the popular choice of people around the world has been developed from a driver and passengers’ point of view first. The Corolla is also available in a Hybrid option.

The sleek and stylish Toyota Camry has been one of the best-sellers. Equipped with a range of exciting features, technology and more, the Camry is also available in a 2.5L, 3.5L and Hybrid options.

The Toyota Avalon is a statement of luxury. It is equipped with 3.5L V6 Engine, LED Headlamps



with Adaptive Cornering Lamps, Premium Leather Seat Material, 9” Navigation System with 14 JBL Speakers, Head Up Display, Toyota Safety Sense and more.

In the SUV range customers can choose from the C-HR. The C-HR, represents a leap forward in design, manufacturing and engineering for Toyota. The C-HR offers impressive fuel economy with 23.9 kms/L as per GSO Conformity Certificate and carries a Hybrid battery warranty of 8

years/160,000 kms.

The Highlander offers an impressive fuel economy of 20 kms/L (GLE Grade) & 19.3 kms/L (LTD Grade) as per GSO Conformity Certificate and comes with 8 years/160,000 kms Hybrid battery warranty.

The sporty and stylish RAV4 ticks all the boxes when it comes to enjoying extraordinary moments. The RAV4 includes features like 19” Alloy Wheels, LED Headlamps & DRL, Power

Back Door, Wide Moonroof, 7” TFT Multi Information Display, Wireless Charger (Qi Enabled) and more.

The Fortuner is equipped with 4.0L, V6 Engine, 18” Alloy Wheels, LED Projector Headlamps with DRL, Navigation System, Power & Ventilated Driver & Front Passenger Seats, Power Back Door and more.

The powerful and capable Prado includes 4.0L, V6 Engine, LED Headlamps & Fog Lamp, 9” Navigation System, Ventilated Front Seats, Moonroof, Airbags: Driver + Front Passenger + Curtain + Side (Front) + Knee (Driver) and more.

The pride of the land — the Land Cruiser is a symbol of strength, durability and reliability. Rugged yet luxurious, the Land Cruiser delivers high-end performance and advanced off-

roading capabilities and safety features.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade. Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/.

For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota showroom.

OAB launches financial literacy series to promote financial well-being

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently launched a unique ‘Financial Literacy’ series across all its social media platforms to promote financial well-being among Omani youth.

The series of videos address major financial decisions, such as buying a house, buying a car, getting married, saving, and running a business. This initiative by OAB is aligned with one of the bank’s sustainability pillars: Financial Inclusion.

Commenting on the series, Leen al Atassi, Head of Corporate Communications at OAB said, “Financial inclusion is vital for our economy to flourish and is key to the success of Oman Vision 2040. Through our research, we have found that one of the biggest obstacles to financial inclusion amongst youth is a lack of understanding of the financial sector and the various services they have at their disposal.

Through this series, our objective is to offer Oman’s



youth guidance and direction on how to manage their finances responsibly.”

She added, “What makes this series unique is that it addresses real challenges that people face in their day-to-day lives, and it is a testament to our commitment to putting customers at the heart of our business.” The episodes were developed with the youth in mind; the content is simple, fun, easy to understand, and locally relevant.

Al Atassi added, “At the

beginning of their career, people often resort to indulgent spending and borrowing to finance their dream car or house.

This often leads to a cycle of debt that the borrower may find challenging to settle. Through this financial literacy series, we aim to help individuals plan and define their short and long-term goals to ensure financial well-being.”

The Financial Literacy series will be broadcast across the bank’s social media channels and the OABistidama website.

NBO offers customers chance to win Fifa World Cup tickets

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering Visa credit card customers the chance to win an all expenses paid trip to a Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 quarterfinal match, courtesy of Visa. From May 8 to August 20, 2022, customers will receive one free entry to a prize draw for every purchase of RO 20 or more using the Visa Credit Card. The prize includes two match tickets, return flights to Doha, accommodation and much more.

Maha al Raisi, Head of Product at NBO Retail Banking, said, “In partnership with Visa, the Official Payment Services partner of Fifa, we are pleased to offer the trip of a lifetime. NBO customers can experience the biggest sporting event of the year in person just by using their NBO Visa Credit Card. NBO is committed to providing value, convenience and flexibility, as



well as inspiring customers to do more with their payment products and we frequently add extra value by offering a wide range of exclusive value-added lifestyle benefits and exclusive prizes just for being an NBO Visa cardholder.”

To be eligible for the prize draw, customers must spend RO 20 or more in one transaction on their eligible Visa credit cards. The draw will take place two weeks after the closing date and

winners will be published on social media and contacted by the bank with details about how to claim the prize.

To apply for a NBO Visa Credit Card, please SMS ‘CCS’ to 90303, or please visit one of over 60 branches conveniently located across Oman, or visit the NBO website at www.nbo.om or call NBO’s Contact Centre on 24770000 where a specialist customer adviser will be available to assist.

Maisarah continues to offer competitive finance profit rates

MUSCAT: Since the launch of its discounted profit rates on select finance products, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services has witnessed a remarkable response from customers across the Sultanate of Oman applying for auto finance, home finance and personal finance to meet their specific needs.

The discounted profit rates have attracted existing and new customers to open accounts with BankDhofar’s Sharia compliant window, according to Mohammed bin Ahmed al Maashani (pictured) — Head of Distribution Network at Maisarah.

“As we continue to enhance our customer-centric banking solutions with diverse offerings and attractive finance products, we are very pleased with the generated response of the campaign that attracted more new customers to open accounts with



Maisarah throughout our branch network in all parts of Oman,” he noted.

“These revised profit rates on auto finance, personal finance and home finance come with flexible payment plans, fast approvals and easy documentation in order to make it easier for our customers to acquire financing for personal use, build or purchase the house

of their dreams, and own the automobile of their choice,” added Al Maashani.

As per terms and conditions of Maisarah’s finance profit rates, the starting profit rate for auto finance is 3.45% and it is applicable to new auto finance requests, valid through May 31, 2022.

Meanwhile, 4.95% is the starting profit rate for home finance that is applicable for all new, additional and take-over of home finances from other banks.

Additionally, personal finance profit rate starts at 4.99% and it is applicable for all new, additional and take-over of finances from other banks. Both home & personal finance offers are valid through December 31, 2022.

Moreover, Maisarah’s customers can also utilise goods finance that covers up to 100% of basic goods cost with a flexible payment plan of up to 10 years,

allowing customers to furnish their homes, purchase gadgets and electronic appliances, meet their basic needs and enjoy a convenient and contemporary lifestyle of their choice. Customers can also pay for their children’s education with a flexible finance period of up to 10 years via the education finance option that covers education fees, cost of books, etc.

The Islamic window also offers a property finance bundle with a flexible payment tenure of up to 25 years, covering up to 80% of the property value.

Property finance is available for purchase of ready-to-use, under-construction properties, as well as the cost of property renovation. What adds exclusive value to this package is that customers can own the share in the property equal to the contribution they make on a monthly basis.

Ooredoo’s Goodwill Journey brings the spirit of Eid to families

MUSCAT: With excitement and happiness in the air, Ooredoo volunteers celebrated Eid al Fitr by spreading compassion and kindness to underprivileged families in Samayil and Bausher in Al Misfah as part of this year’s Goodwill Journey. Working together with the Nidaa Charity Team and local branches of the Omani Women’s Associations, the team distributed shopping coupons, gifts and toys to over 175 families in the area ensuring everyone enjoyed the Eid festivities with their loved ones.

Now in its 18th year, the Ooredoo Goodwill Journey is the cornerstone of activities designed to support the community, bring joy and create new opportunities for sustainable social development.

Each year, volunteers from Ooredoo travel the length and breadth of the country to assist



charitable associations with their programmes and provide much-needed supplies to empower families in need. This year, the Goodwill Journey focused on supporting the elderly, the youth, people with disabilities and launched a women’s incubator which will create new opportunities for small businesses to grow in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan.

Omantel Group net climbs to RO 62.5m in Q1 of 2022

FROM PAGE 13

The total domestic subscriber base as of March 2022 (including mobile and fixed businesses) was 3.170 million (excluding Mobile Resellers) compared to 3.244 million of the corresponding period of the previous year, a decline of 2.3 per cent over the last period. Total subscriber base with mobile resellers reached 3.665 million.

Zain Group revenues reached RO 504.2 million as of March 2022 compared to the corresponding period revenues of RO 473.3 million, an increase by 6 per cent.

EBITDA stood at RO 189.8 million, compared to the corresponding period EBITDA of RO 195.9 million, recording a decline of 3.1 per cent. Net profit grew by 7 per cent to RO 64.2 million, compared to RO 59.5 million for of the previous period.

Total customer base of Zain Group increased by 4.8 per cent to 51 million compared to 49 million of the previous period.

Between searing drought and Ukraine war, Iraq watchful over wheat

JALIHA: Iraqi farmer Kamel Hamed looks at the golden ears of wheat waving in the wind, unable to hide his anguish over the baking heat that is decimating his harvest. “The drought is unbelievable”, said the 53-year-old in a white dishdasha robe and keffiyeh head covering at his farm in Jaliha village of central Diwaniya province.

“Even the well water can’t be used, it’s salt water.” Searing heat and a lack of rain were already threatening his harvest. Then came Russia’s war on Ukraine in February, driving up the cost of fuel, seeds and fertiliser.

Like all farmers in Iraq, Hamed must follow the instructions of the state authorities who are the main grain buyers. They determine the areas to be planted and the level of irrigation, depending on rain and water reserves. This year, due to water shortages, Iraq has reduced the area under cultivation by half.

As a result, Hamed has planted just one quarter of his 100 donums (10 hectares), where the combine harvester was now throwing grain into a truck bed.

“This year we didn’t even get



A farmer works on harvesting wheat at his farm in Jaliha village in the central Diwaniya province. – AFP

500 kilogrammes (1,100 pounds) of wheat from one donum” — less than half the usual harvest — he said.

The war in Ukraine has “pushed up the price of motor oil and of high-yield seeds”, he added — yet “another financial burden for farmers”. “I don’t know how to support my

family. No salary, no job, where can I go?”

After decades of war and insurgency, Iraq faces another huge challenge: severe water scarcity driven by climate change. It is highly sensitive issue for Iraq and its 41 million people, who feel the impacts on a daily basis, from depleted rivers to rapid

desertification and more intense sandstorms.

Iraq’s big rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, and their tributaries originate in Turkey and Syria as well as Iran, which dam them upstream, reducing the flow as they enter Iraq. Irrigated by the Euphrates, Diwaniya province, where Jaliha

is located, normally receives 180 cubic metres of water per second.

This year the volume has been at least halved to “80 to 90 cubic metres”, said Hani Shaer, who heads a farmers’ collective responsible for distributing the water.

The result can be seen in the stagnant water in the main irrigation canal, which serves the 200,000 donums of surrounding land, with some gullies now completely dry. Shaer denounced a lack of support from authorities, charging that the agriculture ministry provided just five kilos of fertiliser this season, down from 40 kilos in previous years. “The farmer will leave, abandon the land and head to the city to look for any kind of work”, he said.

Agriculture ministry spokesman Hamid al Nayef said the state was helping by raising the purchase price in order to pay producers around \$500 per tonne of wheat. In 2019 and 2020, wheat harvests had reached five million tonnes, enough to guarantee “self-sufficiency” for Iraq, he said.

— AFP

Nigerian airlines suspend flights over high fuel prices



Passengers disembark from a chartered plane after landing at the Nnamdi Azikwe Airport in Abuja. – AFP

ABUJA: Nigerian airlines are to suspend all flights from Monday over rising jet fuel prices, an umbrella organisation of operators said on Saturday. The cost of fuel has soared worldwide since Russia invaded its neighbour Ukraine in February and the West responded by slapping sanctions on Moscow.

The Airline Operators of Nigeria said the price of jet fuel had jumped from 190 to 700 Nigerian naira per litre (from \$0.45 to almost \$1.70).

“No airline in the world can absorb this kind of sudden shock from such an astronomical rise over a short period”, the AON said.

The group said it would now cost a customer 120,000 naira (\$289) for a one-hour flight, a sum unaffordable for Nigerians “already experiencing a lot of difficulties”.

The AON therefore wished “to regrettably inform the general public that member airlines

The price of jet fuel had jumped from 190 to 700 Nigerian naira per litre (from \$0.45 to almost \$1.70).

will discontinue operations nationwide with effect from Monday May 9, 2022 until further notice”, it said.

The aviation ministry responded by urging airlines to “consider the multiplier effect of shutting down operations, on Nigerians and global travellers”.

The Nigerian consumer protection agency also implored “domestic airlines to consider the effect of the proposed shutdown on passengers and the magnitude of difficulties and hardship associated with such an action”.

It added it was “concerned with rising consumer feedback that airlines have continued to sell tickets beyond the date announced for the proposed

service shutdown.”

Social media users made fun of the airlines suggesting customers find alternative means of travel.

“Airlines in Nigeria will shut down their services to passengers from Monday”, one tweeted to more than 110,000 followers.

“I hope you can trek from Lagos to Abuja?” they wrote, of the journey of more than 700 kilometres (more than 400 miles) by road between the country’s largest city and its capital — one that normally takes just over an hour on an airplane.

“If you use the roads, I hope you have your ransom money?” they added, making light of abductions in other parts of the oil-rich country.

Nigeria produces 1.4 million barrels of crude a day, but it refines little. It relies almost completely on fuel imports, making the local market vulnerable to disruptions. The rising price of fuel has caused prolonged power blackouts in recent weeks. — AFP

Blooming shame: Pandemic, Ukraine war hurts Thai orchid industry

NAKHON PATHOM: Thailand’s orchid growers, already weary after two years of being battered by the pandemic, are bracing for fresh blows to their livelihood as the war in Ukraine and changing weather patterns further cloud their futures.

Once considered a popular pastime among the elite in Thailand, orchid growing has developed into a multi-million dollar industry, and the kingdom is the world’s biggest producer and exporter of cut orchids.

But the pandemic has seen one in five farms shut recently, according to the Thai Orchid Exporter Association.

“No one has the heart to buy flowers, and transportation is very complicated”, said Somchai Lerdrungwitayachai as he stares in despair at the sea of purple at his orchid farm west of Bangkok.

He grows Dendrobium Sonia orchids — a hybrid variety with delicate white and purple petals. Popular in Japan, China and the United States, they are used for anything from religious ceremonies to college graduations.

At his 20-hectare property, workers treat the cut flowers with a special solution before trimming the stems and fitting them with a small vial, containing vitamins and nutrients, to preserve their fresh appearance for up to two weeks.

But times are tough: Somchai has been dipping into his savings for two years to keep paying his 50-odd employees. Covid-19 and Russia’s war on Ukraine have sent the price of fertilisers and pesticides up by 30 per cent, he said.

Adding to his woes are dramatically falling sales: Pre-



Workers process orchids to be exported for wholesale at an orchid farm in the central Thai province of Nakhon Pathom. – AFP



Air-freight costs have tripled or quadrupled in recent months, depending on the destination.

WUTHICHAI PIPATMANOMAI

Vice-president of the Thai Orchid Exporter Association

pandemic China bought 270 million orchid stems annually from Thailand — a figure that dropped to 170 million last year.

Once accounting for 80 per cent of Somchai’s export income, China has been hit with coronavirus lockdowns in a number of cities, including its biggest: Shanghai.

Transporting orchids to the key market by road used to take up to three days, but the same journey can now take between eight and 10 days.

In the flower business, time is money and wilted orchids

are frequently discarded before they can ever reach a Shanghai customer’s home to be admired. While Somchai delivers his produce directly overseas, the majority of orchid growers in Thailand use large exporters based in Bangkok.

Air-freight costs have tripled or quadrupled in recent months, depending on the destination, said Wuthichai Pipatmanomai, vice-president of the Thai Orchid Exporter Association and co-owner of Sun International Flower, a major exporter. Before the pandemic, the company was delivering 3.6 million orchids a month to China, Japan, Vietnam and the United States.

Now, only 1.2 million flowers leave the warehouse, and he has had to let go of half of his staff. “We have asked the authorities for financial support, but we have not received anything”, Wuthichai said. “Time is running out.”

Increasing his selling price by 20 per cent has resulted in several importers dropping him to concentrate on more local flowers.

— AFP

Xi warms up China's economy, but virus narrows options

President Xi Jinping has offered state backing for tech, infrastructure and jobs to revive China's economy, but analysts warn growth will continue to wilt until Beijing drops its rigid virus controls. Two and a half years since the coronavirus first emerged in Wuhan, China is the last major economy still closed off to the world, despite its relatively low death toll.

Lockdowns across dozens of cities — from the manufacturing hubs of Shenzhen and Shanghai to the breadbasket of Jilin — have wreaked havoc on supply chains over recent months, crushing small businesses and trapping consumers at home.

That has imperilled Beijing's full-year growth target of about 5.5 per cent, with forecasters anticipating that around one percentage point may be shaved off that figure.

"We remain deeply concerned about growth," Nomura analysts said this week. "We believe the Omicron variant and zero-Covid strategy represent the dominant challenges to growth stability." Yet China's leadership insisted that the country will stick "unswervingly" to zero-Covid, with a meeting chaired by Xi declaring that "persistence is victory".

To curtail the growing economic damage, Beijing has offered words of respite to the tech sector from rolling regulatory crackdowns and promised to pump prime the economy with an "all-out" infrastructure campaign.

But observers say rallies may be temporary as long as the state's reflex remains to hammer down the virus caseload at all costs.

"(The measures are) all very welcome... but how many more bridges and how many more sports stadiums are going to help us in creating an environment of predictable growth?" European Chamber president Joerg Wuttke said.

While many cities have bounced back after short, targeted lockdowns, other areas such as agricultural base Jilin province have been slow to recover from waves of restrictions.

"That precedent (Jilin) could mean a longer-lasting impact from Shanghai's highly disruptive lockdown", said Ernan Cui of Gavekal Dragonomics in a report on Friday.

Analysts are waiting for details of the delivery behind sweeping promises of support from Beijing's policymakers. China's tech firms have been under the state's microscope on concerns over data misuse and monopoly.

But shares of major tech firms soared as the government called for "healthy development" of the sector and shifted its language on completing its "rectification". — AFP

We believe the Omicron variant and zero-Covid strategy represent the dominant challenges to growth stability.

NOMURA ANALYSTS



LINING UP FOR GAS

Consumers in long lines to buy cooking gas use their empty cylinders to block a main intersection road in Colombo, after a local store ran out of supplies. Protests have spread across the country against worsening paucity of gas, fuel, food and medicines as the country faces an unprecedented economic crisis of foreign exchange to finance essential imports. — AFP

Europe's gas conundrum



DANIEL GROS

The writer is a member of the board and a distinguished fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies

GAS IS DIFFERENT. EUROPE NEEDS NATURAL GAS TO PROVIDE HEAT IN WINTER AND TO SERVE AS FEEDSTOCK FOR THE WORLD'S LARGEST CHEMICAL INDUSTRY, WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR A SIGNIFICANT SHARE OF EU EXPORTS

In a matter of months, the European Union (EU) has reduced its dependence on Russian oil so much that it is now ready to impose an embargo. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has announced a plan to ban Russian crude oil imports to most of the EU in the next six months, and refined oil products by the end of the year.

But to have a meaningful impact on Russia's budget, Europe must also end its dependency on Russian gas. This will prove much more difficult to achieve.

Europe has managed to reduce its need for Russian oil quickly for a couple of reasons.

Oil can easily be delivered by tanker, not just pipelines, and it is relatively easy to find new supplies on the world market. The problem is that it is also relatively easy to find enough new buyers — and Russia has plenty — to offset a large part of the losses from an EU embargo.

Gas is different. Europe needs natural gas to provide heat in winter and to serve as feedstock for the world's largest chemical industry, which accounts for a significant share of EU exports.

And certain features of the natural-gas market will make it far more difficult and costlier to find alternatives to Russian supplies than it has been for oil.

For starters, because most natural-gas producers operate on long-term contracts with buyers, there is little spare production capacity outside Russia. While there are spot markets, where one can buy or sell limited quantities of gas, their purpose is to redistribute existing supply or demand across regions, as needed, not to provide additional supply.

Nervous European energy ministers have visited various global gas producers, in the hope of convincing them to increase production. And major gas producers are happy to oblige. But they warn that it takes up to four years to launch new projects, and doing so makes commercial sense only if the customer is willing to sign a 20-year contract.

All of this means that, in the short run, the natural-gas supply is close to fixed. So, the only way to make up for a shortfall of Russian gas is through a combination of energy savings and increased imports.

Here, Europe will confront another challenge. Natural gas is costly to transport and difficult to store. Liquefied natural gas (LNG), which can be shipped, offers the main alternative to piped Russian gas, though it raises challenges of its own.

Once gas has been liquefied and loaded onto a special tanker, a few thousand extra miles of travel make little difference.

This is the principal reason why the Asian and European LNG markets are integrated, with prices on the two continents usually moving closely together. Gas spot prices reached very high levels already last autumn, months before Russia invaded Ukraine, because a strong recovery in Asia drove up demand.

Before the war in Ukraine began, Europe was already importing almost as much LNG as piped gas. But if Europe wants to end its dependence on Russian gas, it must vastly increase these LNG imports. This will be costly because it means diverting shipments originally directed to Asia towards Europe.

Luckily this will be technically possible owing to a profound asymmetry in LNG trade: It takes far longer to construct

liquefaction facilities than to arrange for regasification.

When LNG arrives, importing countries merely have to heat up the liquid in the tankers. Energy specialists frequently point out that many countries do not have enough fixed LNG facilities to increase imports. But floating LNG terminals are also an option, and countries like Germany, France and Italy are already taking advantage of it, ensuring that they can offload LNG when it arrives.

These flexible gasification facilities, together with a dense network of pipelines connecting most of the EU providers, offer some protection against Russian attempts to pick off individual countries. Europe has already shown solidarity on the issue.

When the Russian energy giant Gazprom recently stopped gas deliveries to Poland and Bulgaria, pipelines from Germany and Greece ensured that the two countries got what they needed. The question is whether Europe will show the same resolve when all countries are under pressure.

Liquefaction facilities, on the other hand, are far more difficult to come by and take much longer to construct, because they require giant refrigerators that cool the gas to -160°C. This has two politically important consequences.

Some hope that the US can provide much-needed LNG to Europe. But the US is currently running its existing liquefaction plants at full capacity, and it would take several years to construct new facilities. As long as America's export capacity is constrained, redirecting US deliveries from Asia to Europe will do nothing to reduce the excess demand in the combined EU-Asia LNG market.

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Fed officials are on the defensive as high inflation lingers



JEANNA SMIALEK

The author writes about the Federal Reserve and the economy for The New York Times

Christopher Waller, a Federal Reserve governor, faced an uncomfortable task on Friday night: He delivered remarks at a conference packed with leading academic economists titled, suggestively, "How Monetary Policy Got Behind the Curve and How to Get Back."

Fed officials — who set US monetary policy — have found themselves on the defensive in Washington, on Wall Street and within the economics profession as inflation has run at its fastest rate

in 40 years.

The event, at Stanford University's Hoover Institute, was the clearest expression yet of the growing sense of scepticism around the Fed's recent policy approach.

The Fed is raising interest rates, and lifted them by the largest increment since 2000. But prominent economists on Friday blasted central bankers for being slow to realise that inflation was going to run meaningfully higher in 2021 as big government spending goosed consumer demand.

They criticised the Fed for

taking monetary policy support away from the economy too haltingly once it began to react. Some suggested that it was still moving tentatively when more decisive action was warranted.

Waller defended and explained the decisions the Fed made last year. Many inflation forecasters failed to predict the 2021 price burst, he noted, pointing out that the Fed pivoted toward removing policy support starting as early as September, when it became clear that inflation was a problem.

"The Fed was not alone in

underestimating the strength of inflation that revealed itself in late 2021", said Waller, who expected inflation to be slightly higher than many of his colleagues.

He noted that the Fed's policy-setting committee had to coalesce around policy moves, which can take time given its size: It has 12 regional presidents and up to seven governors in Washington.

"This process may lead to more gradual changes in policy as members have to compromise in order to reach a consensus", Waller said.

Such explanations have done little to shield the Fed so far. Larry Summers, a former Harvard president and Treasury secretary, suggested earlier on Friday that an economic overheating was predictable last year as the government spent heavily and that "it was reasonable to expect that the bathtub would overflow."

Kevin Warsh, a former Fed governor, called inflation "a clear and present danger to the American people", and declared the Fed's reaction "slow."

— The New York Times

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How to protect your skin from the scorching summer heat

By Samuel Kutty

With the bizarre changes happening in the climate more care should be given to protect the skin. The scorching heat during the summer season can dull the skin's natural glow, leaving it greasy and tired.

As skin is exposed to the environment, it is especially vulnerable to increased heat and humidity. So, it's best to be prepared beforehand to protect the skin from the sun in summer.

It's not just the heat itself that's the problem, though—it's how we behave in the heat that can increase risks to the skin. People tend to spend more time outdoors with less protective clothing in warmer months.

"Every skin type is different and hence they have their own unique intricacies. Skincare is something we all take lightly. Long working hours and responsibilities often mean zero time for treating your skin right", says Dr Shibu Muhammed, well-known dermatology consultant.

With pollution levels increasing alarmingly, dust and smoke are filling

up in the atmosphere and climate is shifting between heat, cold and rain.

"While we might take the flu or internal infections seriously and rush to a hospital, we don't share the same concern for skin and hair", he says.

The major consequence of the pollution on the skin, according to Dr Shibu, is ageing. It can damage the DNA of skin cells and cause mutation.

Air pollutants are filled with solar ultraviolet radiation (UVR), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), nitrogen oxides (NOx), particulate matter and smoke from cigarettes and exhausts. These oxidise the skin and makes it unhealthy.

"There used to be very few cases of skin cancer among the brown-skinned population as we are naturally protected against it, but we are seeing a spike in the numbers in the recent time," Dr Shibu, who is currently Dermatology Consultant at Badr al Samaa Group of Hospitals.

Ultraviolet rays damage the collagen in the dermis of the skin, due to which it may rebuild incorrectly, causing wrinkles and fine lines on your skin,



and upon prolonged exposure, it causes pigmentation that can be hard to treat.

"The heat in our atmosphere can trigger tropical acne, a condition that is particular to a hot and humid climate", says Dr Shibu, who is also the Managing Director of Fascia Health Care, Kochi India.

Another skin condition that is common in polluted areas is dryness. Epidermal lipids, a soft layer which provides a barrier against the movement of water and electrolytes as well as infections are broken down by the pollutants in the air.

They, in turn, leave the skin inflammation, dry and oxidised. Heat and sweat may also cause a condition called Miliaria, or heat rash, and aggravate existing acne by blocking sweat pores.

"The best way out is to avoid exposure to pollutants and the sun. Always wear sunscreen while going out or even if you are indoors. Cover your face and neck when you are going out. Also, wash up before bed and apply a moisturiser. These are simple skincare routines that could make a

huge difference," stresses Dr Shibu.

"If you see a rash or inflammation, it is best to consult a doctor", he adds.

For those with sensitive skin types, always make it a point to consult a dermatologist before using new products. If your skin is oily, its best to avoid facial or oil-based creams during this weather. According to Dr Shibu, When you apply facial, it forces your pores to secrete more oil, adding to the problems. "Clean, tone and moisturise—are the golden words to having great skin," he says.

A good diet is as important to maintain good skin health. "Try your best to include colourful fruits and vegetables in your diet. They are filled with antioxidants and can help improve your general health and fight diseases," he says.

Fatty fish contains Omega 3 fatty acids that help keep skin thick, supple and moisturised. Avocados, nuts like walnuts and almonds are a great addition too. Adding a side of broccoli to your salad would fetch the vitamins and zinc you need in your diet.

Tomatoes, green leafy vegetables, cucumbers, pineapples and carrots are commonly available diet options for great-looking skin.

READ

THE PALACE PAPERS

BY TINA BROWN

This follow-up to "The Diana Chronicles" details how the royal family reinvented itself after the death of Princess Diana.



DESERT CHALLENGES

Iraqi farmer Kamel Hamed works on harvesting wheat at his farm in Jaliha village in the central Diwaniya province, on April 26, 2022. After decades of war and insurgency, Iraq faces another huge challenge: severe water scarcity driven by climate change, whose impacts are felt on a daily basis, from depleted rivers to rapid desertification and more intense sandstorms. Then came Russia's attack on Ukraine in February, driving up the cost of fuel, seeds and fertiliser. — AFP



AUCTION

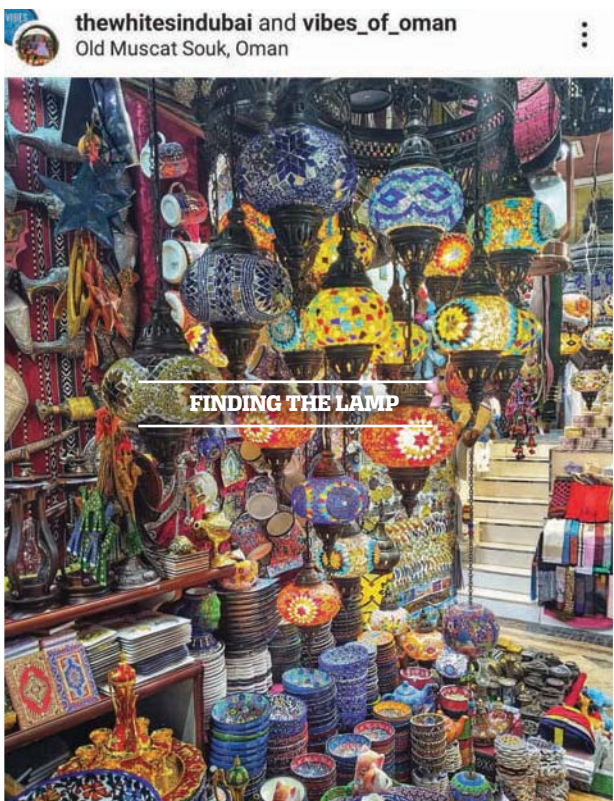
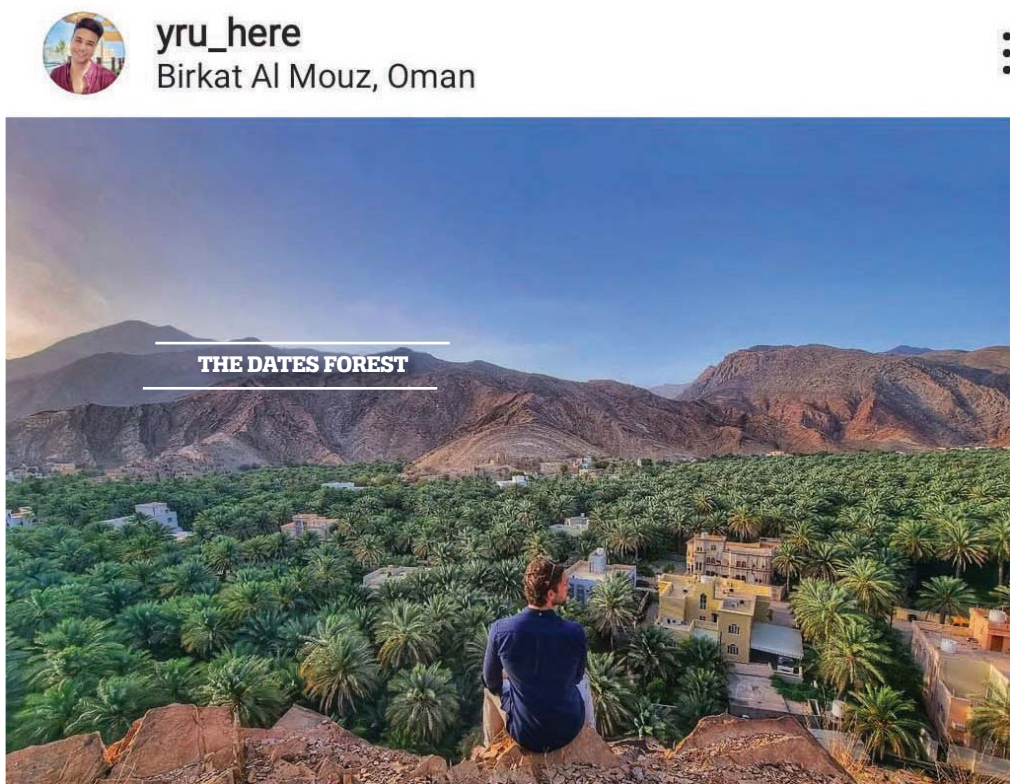
"The Furstenberg Tiara" (estimate: Euro 383900-575800), a pearl and diamond tiara bearing the mark of the famous Austrian jeweller Gustav Flach, will be offered for sale on May 11, 2022 in Geneva by Christie auction house. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

AUCTION

'The Rock' diamond dazzles in Geneva



THE BIGGEST white diamond ever to be sold at auction, dubbed "The Rock", will go under the hammer in Geneva on Wednesday and could fetch up to \$30 million — or more.

The 228.31-carat stone is up for grabs alongside a historic intense yellow diamond associated for more than a century with the Red Cross, which will receive some of the profits from its sale.

The Rock is "a truly exceptional pear-shaped diamond", said Max Fawcett, head of the jewels department at Christie's auction house in Geneva.

It is "the largest white diamond ever to be offered at auction", he told AFP at a preview on Friday.

The Rock is currently in the hands of an unnamed owner from North America.

It could even break records when it goes under the hammer.

"It's perfectly symmetrical and is estimated at \$20 to \$30 million — and I expect there be fireworks on Wednesday," Fawcett said.

The equivalent in euros is 19 to 28 million.

The expert said that there were only a handful of diamonds of similar size and quality to The Rock. The Christie's record for a similar white diamond is \$33.7 million, fetched in Geneva in 2017 for a 163.41-carat gem.

Larger than a golf ball, The Rock was extracted from a mine in South Africa in the early 2000s. It has been shown in Dubai, Taipei and New York ahead of the sale in Geneva.

RED CROSS GEM

Bidders will also be vying for The Red Cross Diamond, a cushion-shaped, 205.07-carat canary yellow jewel, which has a price estimate of seven to 10 million Swiss francs (\$7.09 to \$10.13 million).

"I expect that it will achieve much more on the day of sale," said Fawcett.

A large chunk of the proceeds will be donated to the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is headquartered in Geneva.

The original rough stone was found in 1901 in a De Beers company mine in South Africa and is said to have weighed around 375 carats.

As well as ranking among the largest diamonds in the world, a striking feature is its pavilion, which naturally bears the shape of a Maltese cross.

The stone was first put up for sale on April 10, 1918 at Christie's in London. It was offered by the Diamond Syndicate in aid of the British Red Cross Society and the Order of St John.

The Red Cross Diamond fetched £10,000 — approximately £600,000 (\$740,000) in today's money. It was bought by the London jewellers S J Phillips.

It was sold again by Christie's in Geneva in 1973, fetching 18 million Swiss francs, and is now being offered by the auction house for a third time.

"For nearly half a century, our family has had the privilege of safeguarding The Red Cross Diamond," the gem's anonymous private owner said in a statement. — AFP

ART

An Artist Shines Light on the Black Aristocracy

DURING A VISIT to a villa in Naples, Italy, Glory Samjolly cajoled her sister and a friend to engage in a witty form of cosplay. Posing regally in a period pastiche of men's brocade vests, neck ruffs, knee breeches and lavishly embroidered frock coats, they were captured by

ceived as a retort to the dearth of Black nobles in historical European portraiture, she said from her home in London. It has been and still is "such a rarity to find Afro Europeans who aren't slaves or shown as servants in the background of a painting, or featured as decoration," said

in oils against a period background, pressing her floridly ornamental effects onto the canvas through a process called oil transfer. (She sells prints of her paintings through her website.)

Strategically in tune with the times, she soon began scouring the Internet for historical works to serve as inspiration. She posted them on her Instagram account, "Blackaristocratart," replete with lofty Afro European figures of stature and nobility customarily overlooked by art historians.

"I want to bring to the forefront these characters who were footnotes in history," she said of her posts, adding: "They are one way of reconstructing the way that Black and ethnic people view themselves."

Her Instagram gallery — she is planning to find a physical space to house blowups of those images — includes Dmitry Levitzky's late-1700s portrait of Ivan Gannibal, an eminent military leader and the great-uncle of Russian poet Alexander Pushkin, and a portrait of Pushkin himself, who is thought by some scholars to be of African descent.

Alessandro de' Medici, ruler of Florence in the mid-1500s, appears, as does Dido Elizabeth Belle, daughter of a British naval captain and a slave, who grew up alongside her white cousin, Lady Elizabeth Murray, in the lavish surroundings of Kenwood House in Hampstead.

Her Instagram posts, which focus on contemporary figures as well, did not arise in a pop culture vacuum. In "Sanditon," a Jane Austen adaptation streaming on PBS, Crystal Clarke portrays an Antiguan heiress of mixed descent. The cast of "Bridgerton" is led by Golda Rosheuvel as Queen Charlotte, a character based on a historical noble believed to be of mixed heritage. (A planned prequel will focus on Queen Charlotte's coming-of-age.) And there is "The Gilded Age," the HBO series, with Denée Benton as Peggy Scott as an aspiring writer whose well-to-do parents live with servants of their own. — NYT



Samjolly in a group portrait, with a playfully subversive title, "The Honorable Women of Slavery in Their Study."

For all its pomp and vibrancy, the painting might have gone unnoticed, except that the artist and her other two subjects were Black.

The piece is provocative, but for Samjolly, a 24-year-old figurative artist and self-professed feminist, provocation is the point.

Her paintings were con-

Samjolly, who studied fine arts at the University of the Arts London. "I asked myself, 'Hang on, where is the rest of this work?'"

Hard pressed to find it, she decided to create her own oil portraits of contemporary artists, business owners, writers and intellectuals in costumes and settings evocative of the European Masters. Some, though not all, are friends willing to sit for Samjolly who paints them

ENTERTAINMENT

Emma Stone in new silent film by Greek director Lanthimos



AMERICAN ACTRESS

Emma Stone and Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos have teamed up once again for a new short, silent film shot on a Greek island in black and white.

Tackling loss, necrophilia and rugged Greek landscapes, "Bleat" is the pair's first collaboration since their 2019 brush with the Oscars for "The Favourite".

The new 30-minute short film, also starring French actor Damien Bonnard, premieres in Athens on Friday and was shot on the hilltops of the Greek island of Tinos.

Goats feature prominently, though despite the film's title, no bleating is actually heard.

"There were a lot of goats... I find them fascinating animals," Lanthimos told AFP.

"The landscape itself and the atmosphere there was the first inspiration," he said.

The sombre black-and-white short that mostly takes place in a traditional Greek house is also silent, which Stone said she truly appreciated.

"It was a dream," she told a news conference on Thursday. "If I could only work silently, that would be a delight."

Lanthimos also said he found the experience liberating.

"I generally think that restrictions can help in creating something. When you have too many means at your disposal, you can easi-

ly get lost," he said.

Most of the people appearing in the movie are Tinos locals with no acting experience.

"We went round the island, met people and cast them... non-professional actors can be really incredible," Lanthimos said.

Organisers did not reveal the film's budget but noted that Stone took no salary to participate because of her friendship with the director.

She starred for Lanthimos in the 18th-century black comedy "The Favourite", which earned them respectively best supporting actress and best director nominations at the 2019 Academy Awards.

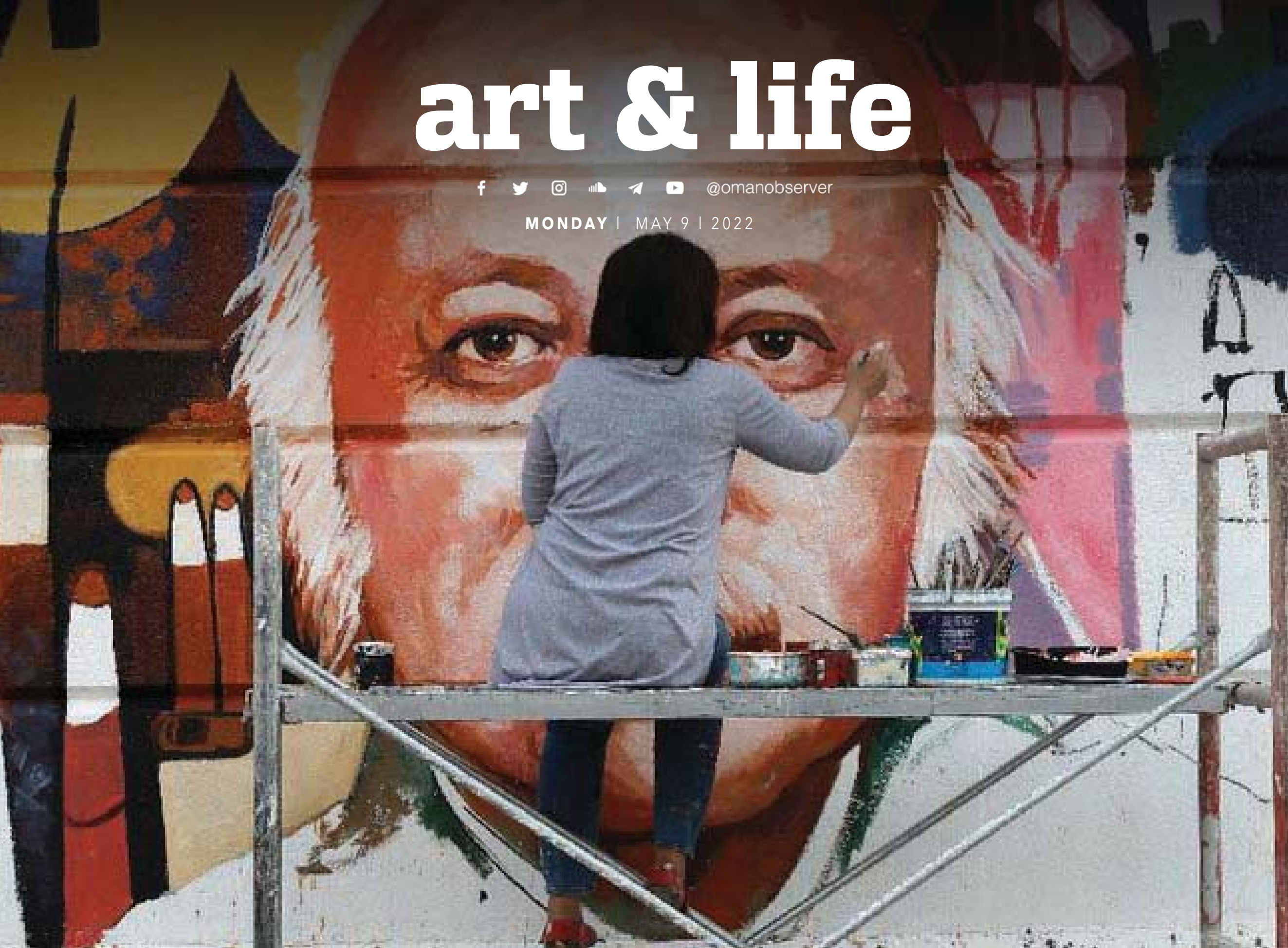
"I feel very safe with him, and challenged by him," Stone said.

"What is the point continuing to do this, no offence but, kind of stupid job of acting if you're not gonna keep pushing and growing and being challenged?"

"Bleat" will be screened at the Greek National Opera on May 6 to 8 with music played by a live orchestra.

The 48-year-old Lanthimos has earned accolades for his absurdist movies that emerged in a so-called "weird wave" that rose around the time of Greece's 2010 brush with bankruptcy.

His film "Dogtooth" was nominated for best foreign film at the 2011 Oscars, while his first English language feature film, "The Lobster" was nominated for best original screenplay at the 2017 Oscars. — AFP



Murals bring 'joy' to Baghdad concrete jungle



IRAQI ARTIST Wijdan al Majed is transforming Baghdad's concrete jungle into a colour-filled city with murals depicting well-known figures from the war-scarred country and abroad.

Perched on a scaffold at a busy intersection, the 49-year-old artist and instructor at the Baghdad College of Fine Arts is adding final touches to a mural dedicated to celebrated Iraqi poet Muzaffar al Nawab.

Peasant women in traditional dress adorn the background of the mural, commissioned by Baghdad Mayor Alaa Maan.

He launched the initiative nine months ago in a bid to "bring beauty to the city and move art to the streets to get rid of the grey and dusty colours" that hang over Baghdad.

Majed, an artist more accustomed to exhibiting her work in the cosy and reflective settings of galleries, at first had helpers to create the street art.

But she has turned to working alone, undaunted by the "huge challenges" she faces as a woman in a largely conservative, male-dominated society.

"Sometimes I work late into the night", said Majed, wearing jeans and shoes splattered with paint.

"The street is scary at night, and it's not easy for a woman to be out so late", she said.

Motorists and passers-by often slow down or stop to watch the woman on her scaffold, paintbrush in hand and hard at work.

IRAQIS ACCEPTED ME

Disparaging comments are sometimes fired her way.

"I learn to live with it and ignore them", she said.

"People have become used to seeing a woman paint. Iraqi society has accepted me."

Many Iraqis are happily surprised by the transformation of their capital.

"This is the most beautiful Muzaffar", a motorist shouted as he drove past Majed while she touched up the poet's mural.

Nicknamed the "revolutionary poet", Muzaffar al Nawab, who spent years in jail for writing about successive repressive regimes in Iraq, holds a special place in the hearts of many Iraqis.

At least 16 murals have

been painted across Baghdad, with one devoted to Jawad Salim, considered the father of Iraqi modern art and a celebrated sculptor, and another to the late, world-famous Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid.

German sociologist Max Weber and Catholic saint Mother Teresa are among the foreigners celebrated on Baghdad's new murals.

Maan, the mayor and an architect by profession, chooses the subjects which Majed paints in vivid colours – a jarring contrast with the rest of the city.

BRINGING JOY TO THE CITY

Baghdad's infrastructure was laid to waste by a 13-year international embargo against the regime of late dictator Saddam Hussein, the 2003 US-led invasion that toppled him and the subsequent years of sectarian violence, culminating in the rise and fall of the militant group.

Maan acknowledges that much needs to be done to rehabilitate the city, which once stood as a beacon of Arab culture but now struggles like most of Iraq with corruption and mismanagement.

"The city is the first victim: Any problem elsewhere in the country is reflected here", Maan said.

"When unemployment soars, you will see street vendors... and when the housing crisis flares, slums emerge."

Graffiti covers many buildings and facades in Baghdad – including political messages dating back to bloody anti-government protests that rocked the country for months from late 2019.

Cables from private electricity generators – desperately needed to make up for chronic power cuts – add to the disfigurement of the capital.

For Majed, painting murals "brings joy" across the city of nine million people.

In the teeming Al-Sadriya neighbourhood, known for its popular market, a mural depicting two men selling watermelons has won hearts.

"This is a slice of Baghdad's heritage", said textile merchant Fadel Abu Ali, 63.

The mural is a reproduction of a work by late artist Hafidh al Droubi, who often portrayed Baghdad daily life.

— AFP