

HM greetings to Saudi King

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the success of medical examinations he had undergone. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to King Salman wishing him good health, long life and well-being and the brotherly Saudi people more progress and prosperity under his wise leadership. — ONA



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SEEB, AL RUSTAQ TO LOCK HORNS FOR HM CUP HONOURS



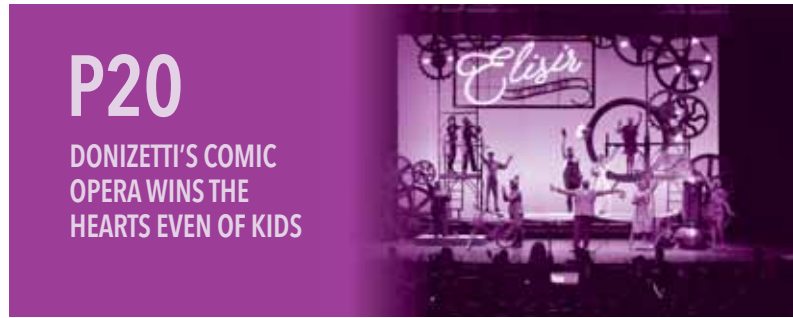
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ASYAD GROUP WINS PLAUDITS FOR DECARBONISATION



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DONIZETTI'S COMIC OPERA WINS THE HEARTS EVEN OF KIDS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO IRELAND PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Michael Daniel Higgins of Ireland on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Higgins and the Irish people further progress and growth. — ONA

HM THANKED BY CUBA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba, in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable to him on his country's National Day. President Diaz-Canel expressed his sincere thanks and appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's greetings and best wishes to him and to the friendly people of Cuba. The President of Cuba also stressed his keenness to promote the relations between the two countries. — ONA

READ IN OPINION



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A WAR OF SURPRISES IN UKRAINE, BOTH TRAGIC AND INSPIRING
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HIS MAJESTY VISITS DEFENCE MINISTRY, SAF HEADQUARTERS

ROYAL VISIT AFFIRMS HM'S STRONG FAITH IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND SAF

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, went on a Royal tour of the Ministry of Defence and the headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday.

A guard of honour gave the military salute to His Majesty the Sultan as he arrived.

His Majesty the Sultan was received at the premises of the Ministry of Defence by HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs and Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence.

On the occasion of this Royal visit, His Majesty the Sultan accepted a symbolic gift presented by HH Sayyid Shihab. His Majesty the Sultan also posed for commemorative photos with top officials and senior commanders at the Ministry of Defence and the SAF.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan listened to a briefing about the Ministry of Defence, delivered by Dr Mohammed al Za'abi and another briefing about the SAF, delivered by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the SAF.

Similar briefings were presented before His Majesty the Sultan by Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of



the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman

(Rafo) and Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO). Later, His Majesty the Sultan

visited the Joint Operations Centre (JOC) at SAF headquarters. Upon his arrival there, His Majesty the Sultan received the military salute

from a guard of honour and listened to a briefing about the facilities and capabilities of the JOC, as well as the tasks entrusted to it. The briefing was delivered by Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Mantheri, Assistant Chief of Staff of the SAF for Operations and Planning.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan listened to a briefing about Maritime Security Centre (MSC) and the tasks and roles entrusted to it. The briefing was delivered before His Majesty the Sultan by Commodore Mohammed bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Commander of the MSC.

During his visits to the JOC and MSC, His Majesty the Sultan posed for commemorative photos with senior officers of the headquarters, divisions of the SAF and other administrations at the Ministry of Defence.

The Royal visit reflects the attention accorded to personnel of the Ministry of Defence and the SAF by His Majesty the Sultan. It also affirms the Supreme Commander's strong faith in the significant roles of the Ministry of Defence and the SAF in safeguarding the gains of the homeland, as well as their role in fostering domestic development alongside other government institutions. — ONA

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SHIELDING POOR FROM LOOMING FOOD CRISIS | P9

World far short of goals in cutting emissions

WASHINGTON: Climate action promised by countries would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 9 per cent in this decade - far short of the global goal of cutting emissions by nearly half by 2030, a new analysis shows.

Failing to meet the 2030 emissions target risks pushing the world toward irreversible climate impacts, even if a second goal of net-zero emissions by 2050 is met, scientists say.

For the analysis, Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy tallied countries' climate plans — known as Nationally Determined Contributions, or NDCs. The result "highlights the gap in the ambition of NDCs and the trajectory necessary to meet net-zero emissions by 2050," the report says.

The report says territories such as the United States and European Union pledging net-zero emissions by 2050 are on track to reduce emissions from 2015 levels by only 27 per cent by 2030. Countries like China and India pledging to reach net-zero after 2050 would actually see emissions rise by 10 per cent through this decade.

The net reduction of 9 per cent reflects only what nations aim to deliver, without considering whether those aims are supported by policy or law. In fact, the report finds that few countries are turning their pledges into clear action. Of the 65 per cent of around 100 countries with net-zero or carbon neutrality targets before 2050, only 14 have signed net-zero targets into law.

— Reuters

IN IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROYAL ORDERS Released British citizens arrive

MUSCAT: In implementation of the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to maintain endeavours with all countries and following His Majesty the Sultan's blessing to honour a request from the Government of the United Kingdom, competent authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in cooperation and coordination with the Sultanate of Oman and the UK, has released two British citizens who were taken in custody in Iran.

Both persons — Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori — arrived in Muscat on Wednesday on board a flight operated by the Royal Air Force of Oman in preparation for their repatriation to the UK.

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss hailed the efforts made by the



Sultanate of Oman to secure the return of British nationals from Iran. The UK Foreign Secretary said that she met Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign

Minister, last December to secure the Sultanate of Oman's diplomatic assistance for the release of the British nationals in custody in Iran. — ONA



HM TOURS MUASKAR AL MURTAFAA





Over 200 people receive investor residency cards

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), issued 217 investor residency cards for various nationalities, since the launch of the Investor Residency Programme (IRP) in October 2021.

As many as 142 cards were issued for the 10-year category, 73 cards for the 5-year category and 2 cards for the retirees' category. The IRP grants foreign investors and retirees a long residency in the Sultanate of Oman. The move aims at facilitating the granting of residency to investors wishing to invest in the Sultanate of Oman. The residency period reaches 5 or 10 years, subject to renewal. It also aims to support integrated efforts to enhance the investment environment, promote economic diversification and attract quality investments according to clear and specific controls.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that to obtain an investor residency card, a request should be submitted through the investment services centre in the ministry's website that links all authorities concerned.

The plan aims to attract and retain investments and business entities and generate more job opportunities. Accordingly, any investor who is willing to



or has already invested a minimum sum of RO 250,000 in the country can avail a residency permit for five years. An investor with RO 500,000 can hold a residency permit of 10 years. Long-term residency permits have many other benefits associated with them.

The new Investor Residency Programme offers foreign investors and retirees the right to long-term stay in the Sultanate of Oman. An investor is entitled to a residency status for up to 10 years if he has an investment of at least RO 500,000 in a limited liability company, closed joint-stock company or government bonds, or has established, or will be establishing a company which

employs at least 50 Omanis without specifying the capital.

To avail resident card for a retiree, he must provide proof of his work in the Sultanate of Oman (work contract) for at least 2 years, and submit a personal bank statement from one of the banks or commercial entities in the country of at least 6 months to prove that his monthly income is not less than RO 4,000, and to submit a house title deed, or a residential lease contract in the name of the applicant, and to attach with the application an integrated biodata. The ministry sources further said that all the details, applicable terms and conditions and other criteria are there on the ministry website. — ONA

Three labour courts to work in evenings

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

As part of the efforts to resolve labour-related disputes in the shortest possible time, a few measures were announced on Wednesday. In a statement, the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary issued a decision to form three evening labour courts in the Governorate of Muscat as part of initiatives to improve the labour judicial system.

The evening services will be set up in the primary courts of Muscat, Amerat, and Seeb.

"The decision is based on the priority given to legislation and judiciary, in cooperation and partnership with the Ministry of Labour and the Follow-Up Unit for the Implementation of Vision 2040."

The objectives of the new decision include supporting policies related to the work environment, increasing the rate of resolving labour disputes, shortening time and procedures involved to settle cases, reducing the visit of litigants to courts and improving the system of following up on labour disputes.

As for the procedures, the first step will be to register the dispute, investigate the complaints, study settlement requests, in case of disagreements, the case will be referred to labour courts, while in case of agreements, the settlement will be executive.

It may be noted that the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, in cooperation with various

The evening services will be set up in the primary courts of Muscat, Amerat and Seeb to settle labour disputes faster and shorten procedures

stakeholders, especially the Ministry of Labour, has been working on several new initiatives, including mobile courts as per Oman Vision 2040.

Earlier in a statement, Dr Yusuf bin Salem al Falaiti, head of the General Department for Planning at the Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary, had said that mobile courts initiative will enable and assist in resolving and expediting labour cases and disputes.

He added that the Judicial Affairs Council evening courts will probe labour disputes. "Labour issues are two-fold issues, the first relating to the penal aspect and the second aspect relating to disputes. The law for some disputes is currently being simplified to reduce the time for procedures for hearing cases."

In 2019, the Ministry of Labour set up a dedicated committee with legislative powers to settle complaints of employees with the matter being referred to the court.

In November 2020, a decree was issued with the aim of simplifying the litigation process in certain dispute areas through the introduction of a summary trial process to streamline the resolution of cases and avoid prolonged, expensive court processes.

Tiny tots show Holy Quran recital skills

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

As many as 72 enthusiastic young reciters from 6 eminent schools of Muscat participated in the Kindergarten Quran Recitation Competition held on Tuesday.

Organised by Al Injaz Private School, these children represented diverse backgrounds and origins but united in their efforts in learning the holy book and presented their skills in front of a packed audience.

Amira Fawzy Abdel Moneim Musa, Walid bin Hamoud al Amri and Ashraf Mohammed al Hourani were the judges appointed to ensure a fair judgment of the skills of these tiny tots.

"We believe in honing the skills of our learners and providing them opportunities for overall development in all facets of life," said Amita Sharma, Director, Al Injaz Private School.



She thanked the principal, staff and parents of Omani society for the care of Holy Quran, Kindergarten Future Builders, Al Qari Al Mudbie



School, Ajyal Ghala School and Afkari Private Kindergarten for their active participation in making the Holy Quran recitation event a grand success.

Muttrah Fort to host Oman-UK art expo

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Muttrah Fort premises will play host to an exhibition bringing together artists from the Sultanate of Oman and the UK on Friday.

Named Ahlam al Asr, the event is born out of a collaboration between Zawraq Collective, a duo of creative Omani women who reimagine Muscat's art scene as belonging to its youth and their explosive talents; Sekka, a London-based independent magazine and integrated creative platform that is dedicated to art, culture, literature and opinions from the Arab world; and Teepee, an Omani pop-up glamping experience that creates one of a kind experiences that encourage cultural immersion, reconnecting with nature and ignite a sense of adventure.

"Set in the historic Muttrah Fort, Ahlam al Asr is a nostalgic and surreal pop-up where

visitors will walk through Muttrah Fort and explore a maze of illusive installations created by contemporary Omani artists," say Zaima al Adawi and Noor al Mahrouqi, the founders of Zawraq Collective, and the event's art curators.

They said it took several months of planning before the Ahlam al Asr was born.

"We all yearn for a rose-tinted past that only exists in our imagination and in this space, you will travel through cultures of the past and the present; we are sure you will wake up from reality and be here and now."

Earlier this year, Sekka published a special print issue titled "The Creative Giants" dedicated entirely to Oman's creative scene that was sold across the world, from London to New York.

"As part of our continued activation of the issue, which generated a lot of international interest in Oman's blossoming art scene, we collaborated with the incredibly creative

women behind Zawraq Collective and Teepee Oman to organise an art experience that will feature some of Oman's most talented young artists in a special setting, where visitors will be able to see and discuss Omani art," says Manar al Hinai, Sekka's founder and editor-in-chief.

Ahlam al Asr is a commonly used term in Arabic that refers to a kind of psychedelic daydream that is both strange and entertaining. It has a double entendre that could also mean "the dreams of the generation" which fits perfectly with this experience.

"Muttrah Fort played a major part in country history defending the sovereignty of our nation and today, it will play the role of inspiring our young generations through our history and unity. It will be a blend of history and culture," said Hilal al Busaidi, Chairman of Muttrah Fort Tourism LLC, which is the main sponsor of the event and who is providing the venue for the expo.

Notice and Invitation to Attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of OMAN FISHERIES (the "Company") has the pleasure to invite the shareholders to attend the Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting General Meeting, which will be held on **Wednesday at 07:00 PM on 30/03/2022**, via the electronic platform to hold Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting general meetings which can be assessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (The Board of Directors of Oman Fisheries Company (SAOG) is pleased to extend its invitation to the shareholder to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and Annual General Meeting (AGM) on **Wednesday, 30th March 2022** at 7 pm through Muscat Clearing & Depository's AGM/EGM electronic platform (www.mcd.gov.om) or by attendance in **Hormouz Grand Hotel - Airport Heights - Al Seeb**. In the event that a quorum is not achieved, the meeting will take place on **Thursday 31st March 2022** at 5 pm in the company's **head office in Ghala**). If the quorum requirement for holding the Annual General Meeting is not fulfilled, a second Extra Ordinary General Meeting & Annual General Meeting General Meeting shall be held on **Thursday at 05:00 PM on 31/03/2022**, via the electronic platform which can be assessed through the website of Muscat Clearing & Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) and will be held in this location (The Board of Directors of Oman Fisheries Company (SAOG) is pleased to extend its invitation to the shareholder to attend the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) and Annual General Meeting (AGM) on **Wednesday, 30th March 2022** at 7 pm through Muscat Clearing & Depository's AGM/EGM electronic platform (www.mcd.gov.om) or by attendance in **Hormouz Grand Hotel - Airport Heights - Al Seeb**. In the event that a quorum is not achieved, the meeting will take place on **Thursday 31st March 2022** at 5 pm in the company's **head office in Ghala**) to discuss the following agenda:

Extra Ordinary General Meeting Agendas:

- To consider and approve of the sale of Al Ameen Stores & Refrigeration LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Oman Fisheries Company (SAOG), to ASAYD Group for an agreed valuation of RO 3.1 million (as per attached annex).

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agendas :

- To consider and approve the Board Of Directors report for the year ended 31st December 2021 (appendix).
- To consider and approve the Corporate Governance Report for the year ended 31st December 2021 (appendix).
- To consider the Auditor's Report and to approve the Financial Statements (Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Account) of the Company for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To approve the sitting fees for the Board of Directors and its Committees meetings for the year ended 31st December 2021 and decide sitting fees for 2022 (appendix 1).
- To notify shareholders of the transactions which the company had entered into with related parties in the course of the Company's normal and ongoing business during the year ended 31st December 2021 (appendix 2).
- To consider and approve of the transactions which the company intends to enter into with related parties in the course of the Company's normal and ongoing business for the upcoming year ending 31st December 2022 (appendix 2).
- To consider the amounts allocated and spent for the company's social responsibilities for the year ended on 31/12/2021 (as per the Annexure).
- To discuss and approve the proposed allocation of RO 40000 to fulfill the Company's Corporate Social responsibilities for the year ending on 31 December 2022.
- To appoint External Auditors for the year ending 31st December 2022 and approve their fees (appendix 4).

According to the Company's Articles of Association and the controls for holding General Meetings using modern technology issued by the capital market authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Legal person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

For further information please contact on **Telephone No 99317115** or email: khalil@omanfisheries.net

Chairman

Legal Advisor

External Auditor

OMAN FISHERIES



In brief

NEW YORK



OMAN TAKES PART IN UN MEET ON WOMEN

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development, is taking part in the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, being held at the UN Headquarters in New York. The Sultanate of Oman's delegation in headed by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development. Dr Laila she highlighted the vital and prominent role of the Omani women in the national development and instilling values of tolerance. The 66th session discusses women's empowerment and participation in policies pertaining to climate change, environment and disaster reduction.

MUSCAT



MINISTRY, OMIFCO SIGN COOPERATION PACT

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Oman-India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) on Wednesday signed a cooperation agreement. According to the agreement, OMIFCO will finance a number of bachelor scholarships for the graduates of general education diploma (GED) through the Higher Education Admission Centre (HEAC). The agreement was signed by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Ahmed bin Said al Marhoubi, CEO of OMIFCO.

MUSCAT



OMAN, MOROCCO SIGN MOU ON INSURANCE

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) and the Supervisory Authority of Insurance and Social Welfare (ACAPS) in the Kingdom of Morocco signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in supervision and auditing of insurance sector. The MoU will contribute in enhancing cooperation between the two sides in insurance, information and experience exchange to develop legislative and technical systems. The MoU seeks exchange expertise in of natural disasters, insurance risks and technical systems used in auditing and insurance companies. It also aims at enhancing coordination in combating money laundering and terror financing.

CAS Nizwa celebrates graduation of 2021 batch



AMAL AL RIYAMI NIZWA, MARCH 16

University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa (CAS Nizwa) celebrated the graduation of a 2021 at Nizwa Hall in the college on Wednesday.

The graduation ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Juma al Kharousi, Dean of the College, in the presence of teachers and officials .

A total of 165 men and women graduated in three main programmes: mass communication (55); business administration (70); and design (40).

During the ceremony, Dr Al Kharousi, Dean of the College, gave a speech in which he said: "It is a source of joy for us to gather today to celebrate the graduation of the 2021 batch. We feel proud that an academic and supportive administration body that possesses scientific and

practical qualifications enabled it to develop the graduates' specialised knowledge and scientific capabilities. They gave them proper planning and simple implementation of many student activities, events and training programmes inside and outside Oman to hone practical and technical skills.

Dr Al Kharousi urged the graduates to develop their abilities and skills to preserve their Omani identity with authentic Islamic values and tolerant principles. Moreover, all should strive to contribute to serving our homeland Oman, each in his/her field and according to ability. He concluded his speech by thanking everyone who contributed to developing the talents and skills of graduates.

Saba bint Nasser al Kharousiyah spoke on behalf of graduates. "Year after Year, we were looking forward to this day when we will reap the fruits. The mother will



rejoice at those who persevere and be patient and the father will be proud of those who have won and triumphed. It is the university's joy when students bid farewell to prepare to face life with its challenges and joy. Let us all contribute to the march of this great country, under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik."

The Dean honoured the top graduates and then handed over certificates to graduates in mass communication, design and business administration programmes.

The ceremony concluded with chanting "The Sun's Owner" performed by Mohammed al Matroushi and Khalid al Siyabi.

The graduates expressed their joy on this occasion. Rayan al Shibli, from the journalism major, said: "it was a long journey between stumbling and getting up, but in the end, I did it. Very proud of myself and my friends."

SQU students design wheelchair with AI

AFRAH AL BALUSHI MUSCAT, MARCH 16

A team of Omani youths from Sultan Qaboos University's College of Engineering developed a prototype of a wheelchair with Artificial Intelligence technology to enable better mobility for people with movement disabilities.

This unique wheel chair has an embedded AI device that reads brain signals of the user, analyses them and sends the requests to the computer via Bluetooth to fulfil the needs. This offers better advantages over electric or power wheelchair.

Some of the people with complex movement disorders may not be able to use these wheelchairs because they can't use a joystick for control.

Even the wheelchair mounted with a camera also has its own downsides from over straining of eyes as the

user must look at the camera all the time to carry out commands.

The AI wheelchair overcomes these problems as brain signals are converted into commands without the need to use hands or other's help. The controls are not operated by hand, but by the head and/or feet. The AI software sees to it that involuntary movements of the user are recognised.

These students incorporated artificial intelligence into wheelchairs after studying special needs to be self-reliant and independent by automating tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as speech and voice recognition, visual perception, predictive text functionality, decision-making and performance of a variety of other tasks,

The students are planning to work on the project and make it more user friendly.

CBO signs MoU with be'ah on sustainability

MUSCAT: The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah), at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Wednesday.

Signed by Tahir Salim Al Amri, CBO's Executive President, and Tarik Ali Al Amri, be'ah's Chief Executive Officer (CEO), this MoU opens new horizons for cooperation and exchange of expertise in the fields of sustainability and circular economy.

The MoU includes cooperation in the field of green finance, investments in environmental, social, and governance fields (ESGs), supporting financial technology (FinTech) focused SMEs through platforms such as be'ah's hosted Eco-Innovate Oman as well as other related matters in circular economy.

The agreement also includes conducting awareness sessions



and professional development programs through be'ah Academy, the capacity building arm of the Center for Sustainability and Circular Economy as well as initiating collaborations between both parties in the fields of green finance and other educational and professional courses presented by the Centre to CBO and the financial institutions under its supervision.

This MoU was signed on the sidelines of CBO's participation in the Oman Sustainability Week being held from March 13 to 17.

— ONA

Nutcracker to be staged at ROHM on March 17, 18

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will present the Nutcracker show to be performed by the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theatre on March 17 and 18, 2022. The Nutcracker is a ballet for families and children, revealing a fairy-tale world, which has enriched cultural experiences for all age groups, over many generations. Celebrating all the classical features of the original ballet, this production is performed by the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theatre with choreography from Nina Ananiashvili and Alexey Fedeechev.

The wonderful story of the



Nutcracker doll rallying forces and defeating the Mouse King and his army is unchanged, with the famous dances of the Sugar Plum Fairy playing a key role in the enchanting narrative. In this production, the setting is a house in Georgia and a park where the children spend days playing around a huge ancient tree, which becomes the Land of Sweets. The staging is inspired by children's folklore of Georgia, with delicious confectionary inspired backdrops and vibrant costumes. It features live music with the Tbilisi State Orchestra conducted by Alevtina Ioffe.

— ONA



Better wastewater tech for artificial wetlands

MUSCAT: A research project titled 'Operational modifications of a full-scale experimental vertical flow constructed wetland with effluent recirculation to optimise total nitrogen removal' by principal investigator Dr Buthaina al Wahaibi was among the 13 winning projects at the 8th National Research Award.

The award was organised by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. The project won in the category of Environmental and Biological Resources field.

Dr Buthaina al Wahaibi from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) said that adequate water and wastewater management is essential for

human health, protecting water sources and the environment from pollution. Hence, the treated water to be utilised in water-scarce arid regions as an unconventional source in order to reduce the stress on the consumption of potable water and subsequently contribute to economic growth.

She elaborated that wastewater management strategies can be categorised as centralised or decentralised. Centralised wastewater collection and treatment techniques are costly to build and operate, specifically in areas with low population densities and dispersed communities.

On the other hand, the decentralised approach to wastewater treatment employing



a combination of on-site and/or cluster systems is gaining more attention. The decentralised system offers advantages both in terms of operational simplicity and cost effectiveness without the central collection network. The key principles of the decentralised

system assumed to be flexible treatment technologies, minimal solids handling, and disposal and/or reuse the treated water locally.

The objective of this study, according to Dr Buthaina, was to evaluate the performance of a two-stage vertical flow constructed

wetland (VFCW) for wastewater treatment to be considered as a sustainable, environmental and economic decentralised solution.

Dr Buthaina and her team designed, built and operated a full-scale VFCW to provide a sustainable wastewater treatment solution within the Middle Eastern context. The VFCW had two stages (vertical flow 1 and 2; called VF1 and VF2, respectively) with a total treatment area of 995 m2 and was planted with common reeds (Phragmites australis), while the treated effluent was recirculated to an anoxic tank.

Dr Buthaina explained that the study was divided into two phases: the first phase (Baseline) aimed at evaluating the treatment

performance, and the second phase (Modification) aimed at testing different operational modifications to optimise the total nitrogen removal and deal with the nitrified treated effluent.

Samples were collected at the inlet buffer tank and VF2 outlet daily during the first phase and weekly during the second phase. Overall, high removal rates obtained for total suspended solids (TSS) (99.6 per cent), biological oxygen demand (BOD) (98.7 per cent), chemical oxygen demand (COD) (97.8 per cent), ammonia nitrogen (NH3-N) (99.5 per cent), total phosphorus (TP) (97.2 per cent), and pathogens (FC) (99.9 per cent) complied with the Oman Irrigation Standard A. — ONA



شركة الملفات الصناعية المرنة (ش.م.ع.م)
Flexible Industrial Packages Co. (SAOC)

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agenda

The Board of Directors of **Flexible Industrial Packaging Company SAOC** is pleased to invite all Shareholders to attend the company's Annual Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Monday 28/03/2022 at 10:00am, in the head quarter of Mohammed Al Barwani Company in Al Azaiba. If the quorum not satisfied a second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held on Thursday 31/03/2022, in the same place and at the same time to discuss the following Agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended December 31, 2021.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2021.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board meetings paid to the Board members for previous financial year ending on 31/12/2021, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year ending on 31/12/2022 (As per Attachment).
- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2022, and determine their fee.

Shareholder would have access to reports, documents and statements relating to the agenda items of the Annual General Meeting during the official business hours at the Company's head office, according to the Company's Articles of Association, each shareholder is entitled to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and to vote on his/her behalf on the decisions of the general meeting

The shareholders are requested to arrive a half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For further information please contact
Mr. Ahmed Sulaiman Al Amri on Telephone No. 24446121

Chairman

Auditor

Legal Adviser

Photography expo begins at National Museum



'Beyond the Form' exhibition by Reem al Shaikh

MUSCAT: Within the framework of Art and Culture support, the National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre, on Tuesday inaugurated 'Beyond the Form' exhibition by Reem al Shaikh. The exhibition will be open to all visitors starting from today till March 31.

In this photographic series, the artist employed a special imaging technique to produce images contrary to what is customary in photography techniques; an image that is not clear and borders are blurred. This unique technique of photography is made by manipulating the time period for capturing the scene in the camera, and waiting for the movement of the body when it comes out of its frame with every movement that is unpredictable or repetitive.

This technique inspires Reem's imagination to record the shot, and erase clear body frames to remove the boundaries of the human body; allowing the form to be created. The artist created this form of art to transcend societal norms and rules, and to get out of her reality and travel to another world of her imagination. The artist specialises in the art of abstract painting, where her work discusses identity and societal traditions.

The National Museum is the first museum in the Sultanate of Oman that includes a learning centre, equipped according to the highest international standards. The centre offers various educational programmes aimed at raising public awareness about the importance of the Omani cultural heritage, thus creating more interest among all categories of visitors in the ancient history of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

National Biotechnology Committee meets

MUSCAT: The National Biotechnology Committee (NBC) on Wednesday held its first meeting for 2022 under the chairmanship of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation. The meeting reviewed all current legislations and regulations in the Sultanate of Oman regarding the governing of biotechnology use and its products and protecting genetic data, as well as proposing the necessary regulations or required amendments on the existing systems.

The committee also discussed tasks required for qualifying the national cadres in the field of biotechnology, besides forming specialised groups to study topics of biotechnology in coordination with the competent authorities.

The NBC comprises members from the Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. — ONA



الخزائن
KHAZAIN
شركة الخزائن للخدمات النفطية ش.م.ع.م
AL KHAZAIN OILFIELD SERVICES

إعلان الدعوة لاجتماعي الجمعية العامة غير العادية والعامية السنوية للسنة المالية المنتهية في ٢٠٢١/١٢/٣١

يسر رئيس وأعضاء مجلس إدارة شركة الخزائن للخدمات النفطية (ش.م.ع.م) دعوة المساهمين الكرام لعقد اجتماعي الجمعية العامة غير العادية والعامية السنوية للسنة المالية المنتهية في: ٢٠٢١/١٢/٣١، المقرر عقدهما في تمام الساعة العاشرة من (صباح) يوم الخميس، الموافق: ٢٠٢٢/٠٣/٣١، عبر المنصة الإلكترونية لانعقاد الجمعيات العامة غير العادية والعامية والتي يمكنكم الدخول إليها عبر موقع شركة مسقط للمقاصة والإيداع (www.med.gov.om)، وإذا لم يكتمل النصاب القانوني لانعقاد اجتماع هذه الجمعية، سيتم عقد الاجتماع الثاني في تمام الساعة العاشرة من (صباح) يوم السبت الموافق: ٢٠٢٢/٠٤/٠٢، لمناقشة جدول الأعمال التالي:

أولاً، جدول أعمال الجمعية العامة غير العادية، -

١- الموافقة على تعديل مواد النظام الأساسي للشركة حسب الآتي:
المعدلة: (٤، ٢٣، ٢٤، ٢٥، ٢٦، ٢٧، ٢٨، ٢٩، ٣٠، ٣١، ٣٢، ٣٣، ٣٤، ٣٥، ٣٦، ٣٧، ٣٨، ٣٩، ٤٠، ٤١، ٤٢، ٤٣، ٤٤، ٤٥، ٤٦، ٤٧، ٤٨، ٤٩، ٥٠، ٥١، ٥٢، ٥٣، ٥٤، ٥٥، ٥٦، ٥٧، ٥٨، ٥٩، ٦٠، ٦١، ٦٢، ٦٣، ٦٤، ٦٥، ٦٦، ٦٧، ٦٨، ٦٩، ٧٠، ٧١، ٧٢، ٧٣، ٧٤، ٧٥، ٧٦، ٧٧، ٧٨، ٧٩، ٨٠، ٨١، ٨٢، ٨٣، ٨٤، ٨٥، ٨٦، ٨٧، ٨٨، ٨٩، ٩٠، ٩١، ٩٢، ٩٣، ٩٤، ٩٥، ٩٦، ٩٧، ٩٨، ٩٩، ١٠٠، ١٠١، ١٠٢، ١٠٣، ١٠٤، ١٠٥، ١٠٦، ١٠٧، ١٠٨، ١٠٩، ١١٠، ١١١، ١١٢، ١١٣، ١١٤، ١١٥، ١١٦، ١١٧، ١١٨، ١١٩، ١٢٠، ١٢١، ١٢٢، ١٢٣، ١٢٤، ١٢٥، ١٢٦، ١٢٧، ١٢٨، ١٢٩، ١٣٠، ١٣١، ١٣٢، ١٣٣، ١٣٤، ١٣٥، ١٣٦، ١٣٧، ١٣٨، ١٣٩، ١٤٠، ١٤١، ١٤٢، ١٤٣، ١٤٤، ١٤٥، ١٤٦، ١٤٧، ١٤٨، ١٤٩، ١٥٠، ١٥١، ١٥٢، ١٥٣، ١٥٤، ١٥٥، ١٥٦، ١٥٧، ١٥٨، ١٥٩، ١٦٠، ١٦١، ١٦٢، ١٦٣، ١٦٤، ١٦٥، ١٦٦، ١٦٧، ١٦٨، ١٦٩، ١٧٠، ١٧١، ١٧٢، ١٧٣، ١٧٤، ١٧٥، ١٧٦، ١٧٧، ١٧٨، ١٧٩، ١٨٠، ١٨١، ١٨٢، ١٨٣، ١٨٤، ١٨٥، ١٨٦، ١٨٧، ١٨٨، ١٨٩، ١٩٠، ١٩١، ١٩٢، ١٩٣، ١٩٤، ١٩٥، ١٩٦، ١٩٧، ١٩٨، ١٩٩، ٢٠٠، ٢٠١، ٢٠٢، ٢٠٣، ٢٠٤، ٢٠٥، ٢٠٦، ٢٠٧، ٢٠٨، ٢٠٩، ٢١٠، ٢١١، ٢١٢، ٢١٣، ٢١٤، ٢١٥، ٢١٦، ٢١٧، ٢١٨، ٢١٩، ٢٢٠، ٢٢١، ٢٢٢، ٢٢٣، ٢٢٤، ٢٢٥، ٢٢٦، ٢٢٧، ٢٢٨، ٢٢٩، ٢٣٠، ٢٣١، ٢٣٢، ٢٣٣، ٢٣٤، ٢٣٥، ٢٣٦، ٢٣٧، ٢٣٨، ٢٣٩، ٢٤٠، ٢٤١، ٢٤٢، ٢٤٣، ٢٤٤، ٢٤٥، ٢٤٦، ٢٤٧، ٢٤٨، ٢٤٩، ٢٥٠، ٢٥١، ٢٥٢، ٢٥٣، ٢٥٤، ٢٥٥، ٢٥٦، ٢٥٧، ٢٥٨، ٢٥٩، ٢٦٠، ٢٦١، ٢٦٢، ٢٦٣، ٢٦٤، ٢٦٥، ٢٦٦، ٢٦٧، ٢٦٨، ٢٦٩، ٢٧٠، ٢٧١، ٢٧٢، ٢٧٣، ٢٧٤، ٢٧٥، ٢٧٦، ٢٧٧، ٢٧٨، ٢٧٩، ٢٨٠، ٢٨١، ٢٨٢، ٢٨٣، ٢٨٤، ٢٨٥، ٢٨٦، ٢٨٧، ٢٨٨، ٢٨٩، ٢٩٠، ٢٩١، ٢٩٢، ٢٩٣، ٢٩٤، ٢٩٥، ٢٩٦، ٢٩٧، ٢٩٨، ٢٩٩، ٣٠٠، ٣٠١، ٣٠٢، ٣٠٣، ٣٠٤، ٣٠٥، ٣٠٦، ٣٠٧، ٣٠٨، ٣٠٩، ٣١٠، ٣١١، ٣١٢، ٣١٣، ٣١٤، ٣١٥، ٣١٦، ٣١٧، ٣١٨، ٣١٩، ٣٢٠، ٣٢١، ٣٢٢، ٣٢٣، ٣٢٤، ٣٢٥، ٣٢٦، ٣٢٧، ٣٢٨، ٣٢٩، ٣٣٠، ٣٣١، ٣٣٢، ٣٣٣، ٣٣٤، ٣٣٥، ٣٣٦، ٣٣٧، ٣٣٨، ٣٣٩، ٣٤٠، ٣٤١، ٣٤٢، ٣٤٣، ٣٤٤، ٣٤٥، ٣٤٦، ٣٤٧، ٣٤٨، ٣٤٩، ٣٥٠، ٣٥١، ٣٥٢، ٣٥٣، ٣٥٤، ٣٥٥، ٣٥٦، ٣٥٧، ٣٥٨، ٣٥٩، ٣٦٠، ٣٦١، ٣٦٢، ٣٦٣، ٣٦٤، ٣٦٥، ٣٦٦، ٣٦٧، ٣٦٨، ٣٦٩، ٣٧٠، ٣٧١، ٣٧٢، ٣٧٣، ٣٧٤، ٣٧٥، ٣٧٦، ٣٧٧، ٣٧٨، ٣٧٩، ٣٨٠، ٣٨١، ٣٨٢، ٣٨٣، ٣٨٤، ٣٨٥، ٣٨٦، ٣٨٧، ٣٨٨، ٣٨٩، ٣٩٠، ٣٩١، ٣٩٢، ٣٩٣، ٣٩٤، ٣٩٥، ٣٩٦، ٣٩٧، ٣٩٨، ٣٩٩، ٤٠٠، ٤٠١، ٤٠٢، ٤٠٣، ٤٠٤، ٤٠٥، ٤٠٦، ٤٠٧، ٤٠٨، ٤٠٩، ٤١٠، ٤١١، ٤١٢، ٤١٣، ٤١٤، ٤١٥، ٤١٦، ٤١٧، ٤١٨، ٤١٩، ٤٢٠، ٤٢١، ٤٢٢، ٤٢٣، ٤٢٤، ٤٢٥، ٤٢٦، ٤٢٧، ٤٢٨، ٤٢٩، ٤٣٠، ٤٣١، ٤٣٢، ٤٣٣، ٤٣٤، ٤٣٥، 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Suspected N Korea missile ‘explodes in mid-air’

SEOUL: North Korea launched a suspected missile that appeared to explode shortly after liftoff in the skies over Pyongyang on Wednesday, South Korea’s military said, amid reports that the nuclear-armed North was seeking to test-fire its largest missile yet.

The United States and South Korea have warned that North Korea may be preparing to launch an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) at full range for the first time since 2017, in violation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

The projectile was fired from the international airport in Sunan, outside the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, South Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.

“It is presumed that it failed immediately after launch,” the statement said. It was presumed to be a ballistic missile and seemed to explode in mid-air while still in its booster phase, at an altitude below 20 kilometres, a JCS official said.

A US Department of State spokesperson said it was a “ballistic missile launch” and condemned it as a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, but declined to comment when asked about the reported failure.

Debris fell in or near Pyongyang after the failed test, Seoul-based NK News reported, citing unnamed witnesses and a photograph of the test showing a red-tinted ball of smoke at the end of a zig-zagging plume that traced the rocket’s launch trajectory in the sky above the city. The failed launch underscored the



People watch a TV screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul. — AFP

danger behind North Korea’s decision to use an airport so close to heavily populated civilian areas as a site for test firing large missiles, analysts said.

In 2017, an intermediate-range ballistic missile launched from another location in North Korea failed shortly after liftoff and crashed into an industrial or agriculture complex in the city of Tokchon.

The Sunan airport has been the site of several recent launches, including on February 27 and March 5. North Korea said those tests were for developing components of a reconnaissance satellite and did not identify what rocket it used, but Seoul and Washington said they were tests of a new ICBM system.

Reclusive North Korea has fired

missiles at an unprecedented frequency this year, conducting its ninth weapons test on March 5, drawing condemnation from the United States, South Korea and Japan.

The USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier led military exercises in the Yellow Sea, and air defence artillery at Osan air base in South Korea intensified drills in

Suspected missile launched from Pyongyang airport as US condemns launch

response to the increased North Korean missile activity, US forces in Asia said on Tuesday.

South Korean Defence Minister Suh Wook and US Forces Korea (USFK) Commander Gen Paul LaCamera called for maintaining strong defence posture during Suh’s visit to Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek, the largest US overseas military base. “Our combined military forces provide a credible military deterrence to any adversary or threat who oppose us,” LaCamera said, according to a statement released by USFK.

North Korea’s newest and largest ICBM system, the Hwasong-17, was first unveiled at a military parade in 2020 and reappeared at a defence exhibition in October 2021.

The launches did not demonstrate the missile’s full range, and analysts said the North might have used only one stage of the missile or adjusted its fuel volume to fly at lower altitudes.

North Korea has not tested an ICBM or nuclear bomb since 2017, but has said that it could resume such testing because denuclearisation talks with the United States are stalled. The government also appears to be restoring some tunnels at its shuttered nuclear test site, US and South Korean officials said last week. — Reuters

UN warns of risks from Libya crisis

TRIPOLI: The crisis over control of executive power in Libya could lead to instability and parallel governments, the UN political affairs chief told the Security Council on Wednesday.

“Libya is now facing a new phase of political polarisation, which risks dividing its institutions once again and reversing the gains achieved over the past two years,” Rosemary DiCarlo said.

Libya’s political crisis has escalated since the collapse of a scheduled election in December that was planned as part of a peace process to reunify the country after years of chaos and war following a 2011 Nato-backed uprising.

The parliament declared the interim unity government that was meant to oversee the run-up to elections as expired, and appointed Fathi Bashagha as the new prime minister this month.

The unity government’s prime minister Abdulhamid al Dbeibah has refused to cede



Libyan PM Abdulhamid al Dbeibah

power, however, and armed factions supporting each side have mobilised in and around the capital.

The United Nations is seeking to resolve the crisis by pushing for new elections soon and has asked political bodies to join a committee to resolve constitutional and legal disputes that helped torpedo December’s planned vote.

“We have observed increasingly threatening rhetoric, growing political tensions and divided loyalties among the armed groups in western Libya,” DiCarlo said. — Reuters

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Indian cinema has emerged as a soft ambassador of Indian music, art and culture. It has travelled worldwide, showcasing India’s culture and heritage.

Films are being shot in many countries and there is a strong element of assimilation of cultures in the Indian movies. The Indian films have made a global impact, created curiosity among foreign viewers, and worked as ‘teasers’ to visit India. No doubt that the Indian film industry called ‘Bollywood’ has been promoting Indian tourism in its own way.

There has been a representation of generations in Indian cinema, and its journey has been preserved at the National Museum of Indian Cinema in Mumbai, which is as expansive as the country’s film industry.

The Museum has generated a lot of national and international interest with an accurate depiction of Indian cinema’s journey from silent films of the olden days to special effects of today. Spread over 20,118 square feet with four levels, including a section dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, the museum has sections like a kids’ studio, technology, and a sizable collection of cinematic artefacts on display.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the National Museum on January 19, 2019



Image Source: National Museum of Indian Cinema

The National Museum of Indian Cinema depicts the journey for Indian cinema from the earlier silent films to special effects of today

and it is first of its kind in many ways. It is housed in Gulshan Mahal, a 19th-century heritage building, stores memories of 100 years of Indian cinema.

The building that houses Museum generates huge interest among the visitors due to its original occupants and their journey from

Kutch in Gujarat to Mumbai. As the story goes, Peerbhoy Khalakdina built Gulshan Mahal in 1800s. He came to Mumbai with his wife Rehmabai and son, Jairazbhoy, and built this sprawling mansion overlooking the Arabian Sea.

“Its collection consists of several documents, posters, models/dioramas, multimedia kiosks and artefacts. Spread across two floors, the nine sections include The Origin of Cinema, Cinema Comes to India, Indian Silent Film, Advent of Sound, The Studio Era, The Impact of World War II, Creative Resonance, New Wave and Beyond and Regional Cinema,” says a source material from the National Museum of Indian Cinema.

The children’s film studio is a must-visit for young audiences and school groups as they provide children with an immersive experience, using interactive elements like a stop-motion animation studio, a sound effects and mixing studio, a photo studio and more. Instead of a tour guide, the Museum has digital kiosks with old telephone receivers for certain exhibits. One can pick up and listen to in three different languages. There are also timelines, wherever necessary, that place India on the world map.”

Visitors recommend it as a must-see place while in Mumbai as the Museum’s timeline with key dates and information takes them in a flashback of the history of Indian cinema.

SHORT TAKES

GENEVA

UN launches \$4.3 bn aid appeal for Yemen

The United Nations launched a \$4.3-billion appeal for donations to Yemen, where seven years of war have left the country scarred by destruction, hunger and economic collapse. The UN fears other crises are being pushed to the background by the war in Ukraine.

So far, there is no sign of governments diverting funds, but money for Yemen is dwindling, said UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths. A virtual pledging conference



will feature addresses by UN Secretary-General António Guterres and Hollywood star Angelina Jolie.

In 2021, \$2.35 billion was raised for Yemen. — dpa

TOKYO

Japan issues tsunami warning after earthquake

A strong earthquake shook the Japanese region of Fukushima, prompting the Meteorological Agency to issue a tsunami warning for Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures.

It was not initially known whether there was damage at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, where a tsunami in 2011 caused the greatest nuclear accident of this century.

The strong and long-lasting quake, which the US Geological Survey measured at magnitude



7.3 just after 11:36 pm and located 57 kilometres east-north-east of the town of Namie in Fukushima prefecture, was also felt in Tokyo, some 300 kilometres away. — dpa

UNITED NATIONS

UN extends S Sudan peacekeeping mission

The UN Security Council voted to prolong its peacekeeping mission in South Sudan for one more year, after Russia and China chose to abstain. The Council’s 13 other members all voted in favour of the resolution, which extends the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) until March 15, 2023 at its current level of deployment.

The maximum number of UN peacekeeping soldiers for UNMISS is set at 17,000 with an additional 2,100 police officers.



The operation is one of the most expensive for the UN, with an annual budget surpassing \$1 billion.

China indicated that it was in favour of the extension. — AFP



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Zelensky appeals for no-fly zone over Ukraine

WASHINGTON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky appealed to US lawmakers for a no-fly zone to be imposed over his war-torn country or, barring that, for Washington to send fighter jets. “Russia has turned the Ukrainian sky into a source of death for thousands of people,” he said in a live-streamed address to the

US Congress from Kiev. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s nearly three-week bombardment of the country “is a terror Europe has not seen for 80 years,” he said.

Zelensky said that if a no-fly zone was “too much to ask for,” then the United States should send him fighter jets “to defend our people.”

“The destiny of our country is

being decided,” he told senators and representatives in the speech, which referenced Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, 9/11, Martin Luther King, Jr, and Mount Rushmore.

The United States and other Nato powers have repeatedly rejected the suggestion of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, arguing it could lead to a wider war with Russia.

Zelenskiy received a standing ovation before and after his remarks, with House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi introducing him with Ukrainian words meaning “glory to Ukraine.” At the conclusion of his remarks, Zelenskiy waved over the video feed and put his hand on his chest in thanks for the reception.

— Reuters



Ukrainian President Zelenskiy delivers a video address to senators and members of the House of Representatives at the US Capitol in Washington. – Reuters

OMAN CHLORINE S.A.O.G. عمان كلورين ش.م.ع.م.

ص.ب: ١٩٣، الرمز البريدي: ١٣٤، مسقط، سلطنة عمان، هاتف: ٢٤٦٩٥٨٣٩، فاكس: ٢٤٦٩٥٧٦٨



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2021

Dear Shareholders,

After greetings,

On behalf of the Company’s Board of Directors, I am pleased to present the annual report for the year 2021 representing the 21st year of the company’s commercial operations. Despite uncertain global economic circumstances and the pandemic situation, the year 2021 has ended on positive note with higher turnover by parent as well as subsidiaries companies.

1. Performance Overview of Parent Company:

The summarized performance of the parent company – ‘Oman Chlorine SAOG’ for the year ended December 31, 2021 is below;

Amount in RO ‘000				
Details	2021	2020	Change	YOY % change
Net sales	9,672	7,190	2,482	35%
Operating profit	2,124	1,574	550	35%
Profit before tax	2,170	1,716	454	26%
Tax	-340	-257	-83	32%
Profit after tax	1,830	1,459	371	25%

The following are the salient features of operations of 2021 (viz.),

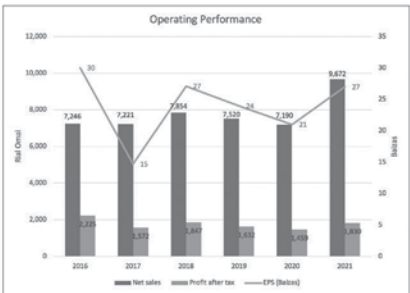
- The company commenced the commercial operations of our brownfield expansion for Caustic Soda Plant (30 MTD) from November 2021.
- The company consistently maintained the capacity utilization of the plant at high level and the company achieved over 96.3% capacity utilization during 2021 from the existing plant mainly due to connecting the new plant with existing plant and 103.49% from brownfield expansion plant for last two months of 2021. The combined capacity of the plant now is 75 DMT.
- The higher capacity utilization enabled to optimize the selling price to key customers wherever possible also the increased capacity utilization is likely to lead higher customer retention and improved billing in the coming years especially after commencement of commercial operations of our brownfield expansion.
- The overall sales volume increased during 2021 over 40% owing to improved demand for our products..
- The export sales volume was higher and this is partly on account of reaching new areas in MENA, East Africa and some European regions.
- In 2021, Selling prices were higher for Caustic Soda Flakes while the other products realized marginally lower prices.
- A leading oil and gas entity has awarded a long-term contract in the year 2021 for one product for three years till July 2024 and leading government entity has awarded a long term contract for multi products for five years till Oct 2026

Taking into the account the competitive environment, COVID-19 outbreak and the profitability of the parent company to be considered exceptional

The operating performance of the parent company for the period 2015 to 2021 is as under:

The stable quality of the company’s products and its solid HSE and reliability track record have enabled the company to maintain its position to a great extent despite higher competition and pressure on selling prices.

Your company continues to supply major multinational and local clients under mid and long-term contracts.



Note: The Corporate tax rate was increased from 2017 from 12% to 15%.

2. Performance overview of Subsidiaries

2.1 Union Chlorine LLC (UAE)

For the year ended 31st December 2021, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 1,156,885 (2020 RO. 1,308,735). After interest and depreciation of RO 2,035,350 the net loss was RO 878,465. The plant operated at capacity utilization of 101% this coupled with the higher international price of caustic flakes has led to higher margins at the later part of the year.

Amount RO (‘000)			
Particulars	2021	2020	YOY (%) Change
Revenue	6,272	5,966	5.12%
EBITDA	1,157	1,309	(11.61%)
Loss after Tax	(878)	(949)	(7.48%)

Loss of the company has been reduced by 7.5% in year ended on 31st December 2021 as compared to similar period of 2020. The parent company’s share of loss including its 100% subsidiary is RO. 526,200.

Management is taking all measures to enhance sales to end-users as well increase value added products. The end-user contribution approach was positively reflected in the last year performance on top of the continuous improvement in the cost of production due to the adopted cost cutting measures taken by the management and the continuous reduction of electricity tariff among all.

The company is mainly focusing on long term supplies to the government entities and private companies while capitalizing on value added services. Union Chlorine margins improved substantially due to market price movements and the management has capitalized this by increasing the selling prices in 2021 with the aim to boost the margins further henceforth being a key factor for generating positive returns and healthy inflow.

During the year Oman Chlorine along-with its 100% subsidiary OIDC has contributed a subordinated loan of RO 1.65 Million to Union Chlorine to meet its financial commitments.

2.2. Gulf Chlorine LLC (Qatar)

For the year ended 31st December 2021, the company posted a positive EBITDA of RO 601,155. After interest, depreciation, and Joint venture share of loss of RO 647,615 the net loss was RO 3,030,267. The parent company’s share of loss is RO 1,545,436.

Amount in RO’000			
Particulars	2021	2020	YOY % Change
Revenue	4,690	3,243	44.62%
EBITDA	601	1,381	-56.48%
Loss after tax	(3,030)	(1,495)	-102.68%

The company has further strengthened its long-term agreements and position with the major players in Qatar and targeting more governmental bodies and leading entities in the market for a sustainable products supply. The company managed in 2021 to further widen its export market in the region and will continue to do the same.

The company and with its alliances, is and will further form a solid step to sustain a healthy share in the market and capitalize on the foreseeable opportunities.

The expected improvement in the operating level of the main plant will be a key factor for the company to post positive returns. Part of the cost cutting measures adopted by the company, is the lookout to improve its production cost by seeking subsidized utility rates.

During the year Oman Chlorine has contributed its share of cash call raised by Gulf Chlorine amounting to RO 0.809 Million.

2.3. Oman Industrial Development Company SAOC

Oman Industrial Development Company is fully owned by Oman Chlorine and the company holds an 11.1% economic interest in Union Chlorine LLC – Abu Dhabi. Posted loss of RO 4,923/- for 2021 (RO. 3,279/-for 2020).

3. Performance overview of Consolidated

The summarized operating result of the consolidated operation for the year 2021 is as under;

Details	Group		Variance	
	2021	2020	Amount	Variance %
Revenue	19,663	15,597	4,066	26.07%
Operating expenses	-18,329	-10,616	-7,713	72.65%
Profit before interest, tax and depreciation	4,459	4,981	-522	-10.48%
Interest	-2,710	-3,004	294	-9.79%
Depreciation	-2,806	-2,749	-57	2.07%
Profit / (Loss) before tax	-1,705	-772	-933	120.85%
Tax	-340	-257	-83	32.30%
Profit / (Loss) after tax	-2,045	-1,029	-1,016	98.74%
Profit / (Loss) attributable to parent company	-258	104	-362	-348.08%

The EPS of the parent company was higher by 25.7 % and group was lower by 340% as compared to 2020.

4. Competitive position and degree of reliance on suppliers/customers:

The Group enjoys strong competitive position in GCC markets with excellent track record in safety and reliability.

The domestic market contributed 88.4% of the turnover of the Group (84.5% during 2020) and the balance 11.6% is contributed by export market (15.5% during 2020). GCC region contributed to significant portion of export revenue.

Three customers in each group company individually contributed to over 30% of the turnover and utilities payment to government entities in each group company constituted more than 34.9% of the total production costs during the year under review.

5. Dividend:

Your company’s dividend policy is based on the availability of funds and the future requirements of the company for capital investments which may require all or part of the profits. The dividend policy is structured to enhance the shareholder value on continuous basis.

The following table of the parent company shows the dividend declared during the last five years.

Amount in RO ‘000					
Details	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Net profit after tax	1,572	1,847	1,632	1,459	1,830
Share capital	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810	6,810
EPS (in Bzs)	23.1	27.1	24.0	21.4	26.8
Cash dividend (%)	15	15	10	12.5	17.5

@ Earning per share (EPS) is computed on the face value of Bzs. 100.

Your Board is proposing cash dividend of Bzs. 17.5 per share for the year 2021. The proposed dividend is subject to the approval of the AGM.

6. Omanization:

Due to the continued efforts of the Board and the Management to enhance the Omani staff, the organization reached at 53.26% as on December 31, 2021.



Management continues to strive to increase the Omanization percentage.

7. Outlook:

a. Parent:

- The parent company awarded the contract for the brownfield expansion of the existing Chloro Alkali plant from 45 TPD to 75 TPD which is now fully operational and for new Calcium Chloride plant with the capacity of 85 TPD in 2019, which will become operational in Q2 2022.

The required project finance has been provided by a leading Islamic bank based on long-term loan of 65% and the balance 35% is equity contribution from internal accruals. The commercial production of the project commenced for Chloro Alkali Plant in November 2021 where as Calcium Chloride plant is scheduled to commence during Q2-2022.

The above expansion will lead to cost optimization and enable the parent company to cater local demand and compete effectively with imports in the local market and also enable to offer better price to export customers.

- The commissioning of leading industrial ventures in Oman will improve the demand for the products and the impact will be fully reflected in the profitability once the proposed expansion goes on stream.
- We are cautiously optimistic about product demand and stable price during 2022.

8. Subsidiaries

Union Chlorine LLC

Management is taking all measures to enhance sales to end users as well increase value added products. The recent reduction of electricity tariff from July 2021 will reflect positively on the cost of production.

The company has finalized the order for supply of one product to a government entity and under discussion to enter medium to long term contracts with several end users for supply of various products.

Management is also expecting an improvement in selling prices of products during 2022 which is a key factor for generating positive returns.

Gulf Chlorine WLL

With the Calcium Chloride Plant commissioned fully by United Chemicals, Gulf Chlorine will be able to run the existing plant at higher capacity which will enable the company to post improved operating performance.

The company is under discussion to enter medium to long term contract with several end users leading entities for supply of various products. With the lifting of GCC Embargo, the company is in a position to cater new markets in the region. Discussion is going on with several customers (local and regional) and the contracts are under pipeline.

The expected improvement in the operating level of the main plant will be a key factor for the company to post positive returns.

Oman Industrial Development Co. SAOC (OIDC)

The improved operating performance of Union Chlorine LLC will result in improved operating performance of OIDC.

Group

The operating performance of the Group is expected to improve once the effect of optimal capacity utilization is reflected in the operating performance. The group is exploring all possible measures including optimising the cost, enhancing the synergies to improve future profitability.

9. Corporate Social Responsibility

The company continues to contribute as part of the Corporate Social Responsibility in Oman which are in line with Government efforts and strategies to improve the community and the standard of living. Our contribution focus on the following areas;

- Education and on job training;
- Sport activities;
- Health;
- Environment
- Cultural activities

2021 was an extraordinary year due to the ongoing COVID 19, the company in line with the government

efforts to control pandemic had contributed to Ministry of Health an amount of RO 5,000, also it procured COVID-19 vaccines for their staff through Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the company donated additional RO 15,000 to the affected citizens due to Cyclone Shaheen.

10. Corporate Governance:

I am pleased to inform that your company conducts the business with diligence, transparency and accountability. We undertake to go a step further and equip stakeholders with the knowledge and information appropriate to make informed decision.

We will adhere to the stringent corporate governance measures whereby disclosures and accountability have paramount importance. The company’s philosophy of corporate governance and a detailed report on the implementation of corporate governance appear separately in the Annual Report since 2014.

11. On record

On behalf of the Board of Directors and Management, I wish to express our loyalty and thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik May God protect Him and guide him for the benefit of Oman and its People.

The Board records its sincere appreciation to Government Authorities for their support and encouragement in particular the Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion, the Capital Market Authority as well as all the employees of the company and management for their sincere efforts, leading to the continued success of the company.

Above all, we pay tribute to the visionary leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq as he leads Oman into 2040 vision and vow to support all his endeavors to take Oman to greater heights of prosperity and development.

Chairman

Audited Statement of financial position As at 31 December 2021

	Parent 2021 RO	2020 RO	Consolidated 2021 RO	2020 RO
ASSETS				
Non-current assets				
Property, plant and equipment	15,858,608	12,207,975	77,518,638	75,452,403
Goodwill	-	-	-	73,651
Investment in subsidiaries	13,544,092	12,808,681	-	-
Loan to a subsidiary	2,301,716	767,592	-	-
Investment in joint venture	-	-	1,295,492	2,920,378
Right of use assets	830,874	643,330	2,556,308	2,274,184
Total non-current assets	32,535,290	26,427,578	81,370,438	80,720,616
Current assets				
Inventories and consumables	1,178,421	909,674	2,850,199	2,515,377
Trade and other receivables	3,540,159	3,018,369	7,487,490	5,513,952
Cash and cash equivalent	1,473,427	2,553,443	2,712,483	3,657,253
Total current assets	6,192,007	6,481,486	13,050,172	11,686,583
TOTAL ASSETS	38,727,297	32,909,064	94,420,610	92,407,199
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES				
Equity				
Share capital	6,810,366	6,810,366	6,810,366	6,810,366
Statutory reserve	2,848,394	2,848,394	2,848,423	2,848,423
General reserve	850,000	800,000	850,000	800,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	(269,833)	(169,833)
Retained earnings	17,669,360	16,740,452	10,937,093	12,096,441
Equity attributable to the Parent Company's shareholders	28,178,120	27,199,212	21,176,049	22,385,397
Non-controlling interest	-	-	5,399,764	6,429,694
Total equity	28,178,120	27,199,212	26,575,813	28,815,091
Non-current liabilities				
Bank borrowings	4,601,113	1,433,425	46,719,479	43,929,289
End of service benefits	156,588	141,196	301,820	253,709
Lease liabilities	829,999	630,406	2,568,773	2,207,260
Cash flow hedge	-	-	355,976	183,494
Deferred tax liability	742,194	640,517	742,194	640,517
Total non-current liabilities	6,329,894	2,845,544	50,688,242	47,214,269
Current liabilities				
Trade and other payables	3,633,312	2,217,360	9,431,727	6,392,849
Lease liabilities	72,580	58,375	113,769	99,551
Retentions due to contractors	-	-	-	1,493,894
Bank borrowings	217,872	244,778	3,442,925	5,820,947
Short term borrowings	-	-	3,778,007	2,126,653
Cash flow hedge	-	-	94,608	100,150
Income tax payable	295,519	343,795	295,519	343,795
Total current liabilities	4,219,283	2,864,308	17,156,555	16,377,839
Total liabilities	10,549,177	5,709,852	67,844,797	63,592,108
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	38,727,297	32,909,064	94,420,610	92,407,199
Net asset per share	0.414	0.399	0.310	0.329

Audited Statement of comprehensive income For the year ended 31 December 2021

	Parent		Consolidated	
	2021 RO	2020 RO	2021 RO	2020 RO
Revenue	9,671,876	7,190,431	19,663,444	15,597,163
Cost of sales	(5,503,916)	(3,989,361)	(14,192,871)	(10,352,989)
Gross profit	4,167,960	3,201,070	5,470,573	5,244,174
Selling and distribution expenses				
	(1,046,179)	(809,971)	(2,307,285)	(1,526,698)
General and administrative expenses	(998,126)	(817,092)	(1,829,187)	(1,592,263)
Operating profit	2,123,655	1,574,007	1,334,101	2,125,213
Impairment of investments / goodwill	(73,651)	-	(73,651)	-
Finance charges	(82,089)	(62,517)	(2,710,399)	(3,003,997)
Other income	202,166	204,392	391,822	369,791
Share of results of a joint venture	-	-	(647,615)	(263,029)
Profit / (loss) before taxation	2,170,081	1,715,882	(1,705,742)	(772,022)
Income tax	(339,877)	(257,137)	(339,877)	(257,137)
Profit / (loss) for the year	1,830,204	1,458,745	(2,045,619)	(1,029,159)
Other comprehensive expense:				
Items that are or to profit or loss (net of tax) may be reclassified				
Net changes in cash flow hedge reserve	-	-	(166,945)	89,440
Total comprehensive income / (loss) for the year	1,830,204	1,458,745	(2,212,564)	(939,719)
Profit / (loss) for the year attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	1,830,204	1,458,745	(258,052)	104,381
Non-controlling interests	-	-	(1,787,567)	(1,133,540)
	1,830,204	1,458,745	(2,045,619)	(1,029,159)
Total comprehensive income/(expense) attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent Company	1,830,204	1,458,745	(327,062)	158,024
Non-controlling interests	-	-	(1,885,502)	(1,097,743)
	1,830,204	1,458,745	(2,212,564)	(939,719)
Earnings / (expense) per share on profit / (loss) attributable to the Equity holders of the Parent Company – Basic and diluted	0.0269	0.0214	(0.0038)	0.0015

The rise of cooking as therapy



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

As Ramadhan approaches and preparations begin in households to mark the holy month with religious observances, there is also excitement around new recipes - browsing the Internet for the latest fusion dishes is the rage.

There are aspiring chefs in almost all houses now and the profession is no longer scoffed at.

Such are the benefits of cooking that culinary therapists are now engaged to work with clients to find ways to cope with specific stress areas. Today, cooking is recommended for people with a variety of mental health conditions ranging from depression, ADHD and eating disorders.

How has cooking, once seen as a dreary routine of everyday life,

suddenly become an aspirational goal, a career and even a way to heal?

For one, cooking is seen to be a welcome distraction from the disturbing news that is always around us – climate change, the economy, politics – there is almost never a dull moment in the news cycle.

With its repeated and predictable outcomes, cooking stabilises the mind and creates a comforting rhythm of peeling, chopping, boiling and so on. That the result will be a guaranteed appetising meal is another plus.

Being in the kitchen gives us a sense of power and control, and provides a limited, doable challenge. As the result is

COOKING CAN BE AN
ULTIMATE SELFCARE
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immediately tangible, it keeps motivation going. The tasks of measuring ingredients, adjusting heat and planning service, all help in concentration and focus.

Cooking helps us to feel we are a part of something bigger. Creating and sharing a meal, to some praise, is a satisfying end in itself. It serves the altruistic side that makes us

want to be a part of a community, something larger than ourselves. On top of that, we are also in control, knowing what is going into every dish and finding ways to make meals healthier.

Are there any preferred types of cooking? Therapists have found that baking makes people happy – it has a calming effect. This links to ‘behavioural activation’ that increases “goal oriented behaviour and curbing procrastination”, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Dishes inspire, but they also nudge us to create. The layering, colouring, arranging and serving all combine to produce that perfect dish that is the product of multiple skills, from planning to execution.

Creative, calming, taking the mind off temporary distractions – cooking can be the ultimate selfcare routine. That there is a beautiful dish at the end of it makes it more welcoming.

Most of all, cooking comes with stories. We remember dishes as moments in our past, through our grandparents’ stories, the links that connect us to our families, our communities and remind us that our happiest times are those spent around food.

So the next time you are feeling slightly blue and low, go to the kitchen instead of the couch. Lose yourself in the world of spices and herbs, watching them miraculously turn into a dish that reminds you of happier, more calming times.

Africa feels economic fallout from Ukraine crisis

PATRICK MARKEY &
JOEL OLATUNDE AGOI

From airlines in Nigeria to shoppers in Malawi, Africans are feeling the impact of the Ukraine crisis in wrenching increases in the price of fuel, grain and fertiliser.

Global oil prices scaled decade-long highs of more than \$100 a barrel shortly after Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, inflicting a hefty blow to many businesses south of the Sahara.

Both Ukraine and Russia are also major suppliers of wheat and other cereals to Africa, while Russia is a key producer of fertiliser.

The impact of the war and the West’s sanctions against the Kremlin are already starting to translate into higher prices for farm inputs and imported grain, AFP bureaus in Africa report.

For Lagos baker Julius Adewale, the crisis is a perfect storm. Nigeria’s fragile power grid had recently been supplying just a few hours of electricity per day, forcing Adewale to turn to diesel-fuelled generators for power -- the cost of which has now soared.

“There is no light since yesterday and we’ve been running on gen since yesterday”, Adewale said this week, as workers stacked piles of loaves in his bakery. “(The) cost of production has increased immensely.”

Nigeria is Africa’s largest oil producer and biggest economy, but it has little refining capacity.

The government subsidises the cost of petrol, but diesel and aviation fuel are sold at market price.

Several local airlines warned this month they were forced to cancel flights due to aviation fuel scarcities.

Diesel used to sell in Nigeria at around 300 naira (0.72 cents) a litre but now goes for 730 (\$1.75) a litre.

“I don’t know how we are going to cope because 70 per cent of industries are running on diesel”, Lanre Popoola, a regional chairman of Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), told local media. “Other businesses are also running limited hours on diesel as they cannot afford to use generators all day.”

If the crisis is sustained, said Eurasia Group analyst Amaka Anku, African countries which are big importers of fuel and grain will rank among the losers, although exporters of those commodities may be among the winners.

There are also countries that are heavily indebted, such as Ghana, which will struggle with higher borrowing costs as investor risk appetite lowers, she said.

— AFP

A war of surprises in Ukraine, both tragic and inspiring



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

Every war brings surprises, but what is most striking about Vladimir Putin’s war against Ukraine — and indirectly against the whole democratic West — is how many of the bad surprises, so far, have been for Putin and how many of the good surprises have been for Ukraine and its allies around the world.

How so? Well, I am pretty sure that when Putin was plotting this war, he was assuming that by three weeks into it, he’d be giving a victory speech at the Ukrainian Parliament, welcoming it back into the bosom of Mother Russia.

He probably also assumed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy would be in exile in a Polish Airbnb, Russian troops would still be removing all the flowers from their tanks thrown by welcoming Ukrainians, and Putin and China’s President Xi Jinping would be high-fiving each other for having shown Nato and Sleepy Joe who’s going to set the rules of the international system going forward.

Instead, Ukrainians have given Russians a tutorial on fighting and dying for freedom and self-determination. Putin appears locked into his own germ-free isolation chamber, probably worrying that any Russian military officer who comes near may pull a gun on him.

Zelenskyy will be addressing the US Congress virtually. And rather than globalisation being over, individuals all over the world are using global networks to monitor and influence the war in totally unexpected ways. With a few clicks they’re sending money to support Ukrainians and with a few more keystrokes telling everyone from McDonald’s to Goldman Sachs that they must withdraw from Russia until Russian soldiers withdraw from Ukraine.

Here’s another surprise few saw coming — especially China and Russia. China relied on its own vaccines to fight Covid-19, along with a policy of zero tolerance and immediate quarantine to prevent spread of the coronavirus. The Chinese vaccines seem to be less effective than other Covid vaccines. And because China’s quarantine strategy has left it with little immunity from prior infections, the virus is now

WARS ALSO REVEAL
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spreading like wildfire there.

As The New York Times reported, “Tens of millions of residents in Chinese provinces and cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen are under lockdown amid an outbreak of the omicron variant of the coronavirus. Travel has been cut off between cities, production lines have stopped, and malls have been closed.”

What is that doing? It’s killing demand for and tanking the price of crude oil — which, after approaching \$130 a barrel because of the war in Ukraine, fell below \$100 on Tuesday. And what country desperately needs high oil prices because it has so little else to sell to the world to fund its war? Putin’s Russia. So China’s Covid strategy is hampering Putin’s oil price strategy — probably hurting him as

much as anything the US is doing. We’re all still a lot more connected than we might think.

I never had any illusions that once Putin launched this war, he’d stop short of doing anything to make sure that he could claim to be the “winner.”

Nevertheless, it is stunning to watch how quickly he has tied himself into knots. In the space of three weeks, Putin has gone from saying that he came to liberate Ukraine from its “Nazi” leadership and bring Kyiv back to its natural home with Russia to crushing its cities and indiscriminately shelling its civilians to break their resistance to his will.

How does a leader go from one day saying Ukraine and its people are integral parts of the soul and fabric of Russia — with shared languages, culture and religion — to, when rebuffed, immediately pivoting toward turning the place to rubble without any explanation to Ukrainians, the world or his own people?

It’s the kind of vicious madness that you see from a spurned lover or in an “honour killing.” And it’s shocking and petrifying to see it manifested by the leader of a superpower with some 6,000 nuclear warheads. There is something about this guy that portends more ominous surprises. And finally, wars also reveal extraordinary acts of kindness. In this war, some came spontaneously and by leveraging a platform in ways that no one expected — room-sharing site Airbnb.

— The New York Times



A Ukrainian serviceman stands guard at a military check point in the centre of Kyiv. – AFP

South Africa’s ANC confronts apartheid’s legacy

TIM COCKS

South Africa’s ruling party is being forced to confront a problem that has bedevilled the country since apartheid ended 28 years ago: How to reduce record gross inequality and poverty that hurts the Black majority more than the white minority. While the issue has never gone away, it has come to a head after the Covid-19 pandemic destroyed jobs and livelihoods.

Unemployment hit a record of nearly 35 per cent last year and anger at the worsening economy has spilled into violent protests and rioting, including last summer when more than 300 people were killed and hundreds of businesses destroyed in the unrest.

The African National Congress (ANC) party is increasingly alarmed at its waning popularity among voters, and a leadership contest is only months away, adding to pressure on President Cyril Ramaphosa to improve the lives of ordinary South Africans.

His preference is to give more free money to the poor. The government introduced a social relief grant in 2020 to support those worst hit by the pandemic, and is debating whether to increase handouts and make them permanent.

Ramaphosa’s stance pits him against sceptics including his own finance minister, Enoch Godongwana, who fear that a proposed permanent basic income grant could be ruinously costly.

Opponents of more generous handouts also say they act as a disincentive to people looking for work and divert resources from basic services like electricity, water and schools.

For some South Africans, the small social relief grant of 350 rands (\$23.20) a month offered to those who were unemployed and did not receive any other form of grant was a godsend, even if it could not solve their problems longer term.

Sunnyboy Moseboa, 53, lives in Diepkloof, one of the poorer parts of the Johannesburg township of Soweto. He set up a stall selling grilled cow feet, using the grant to cover expenses like power to keep his product fresh.

Unmarried and without children, he had been dependent on handouts from his family. Now, his business nets him on average 2,000 rands a month, after years of failed job searches and enterprises.

“It’s small, but the 350 (rands) helped”, he said outside his house assembled from discarded wooden planks, glass panels and iron sheets. “Sometimes I have cash flow problems. There are times when there’s no food for me to eat.”

Having extended the grant another year in his February state of the nation address, at a cost of 44 billion rands, Ramaphosa is considering making it permanent and increasing it for 10 million beneficiaries — a sixth of the country.

Inequality campaigners see it as a global test case, as robots replace jobs and some countries look into providing unearned income as a solution. Many economists are unconvinced.

“We face a real danger of... limit(ing)... job creation potential by increasing the system of social grants”, some of Ramaphosa’s advisers wrote in a leaked February report, seen by Reuters.

After apartheid ended in 1994, the ANC introduced policies aimed at job creation and private sector growth that they hoped would reassure white nationals and international investors and prevent them flooding out of the country. But it also spent heavily on improving benefits for people who were discriminated against under white rule, including building millions of subsidised homes for the poor.

Despite the huge spend — at 3.3 per cent South Africa spends nearly three times the global median on social assistance as a share of its GDP, according to the World Bank — unemployment is at a record and, on some measures, inequality has got worse.

Economic growth slowed over the last decade as the country struggled with policy uncertainty, political turmoil, an energy crisis and allegations of state corruption under former president Jacob Zuma — who has denied any wrongdoing.

This has piled more pressure on Ramaphosa, both within the ANC and on the streets, where hundreds have protested in recent months to demand the government limit the number of foreign workers in the country and safeguard jobs for South Africa. — Reuters



FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

A schoolgirl plays with coloured powder ahead of Holi, outside a school in Allahabad, India, on Wednesday. — AFP

Shielding poor children from the looming food crisis



Biniam Bedasso

The author is a senior research associate at the Center for Global Development

Russia’s war on Ukraine threatens to cause more disruption to the global food system by dramatically increasing the cost of staple foods and the energy required to transport them. The Black Sea region is responsible for the export of at least 12 per cent of global food calories, so cutting off access to it will have far-reaching effects.

Food prices already were soaring as a result of post-pandemic market imbalances and supply-chain pressures, together with climate-related output losses. By the end of last year, the crunch in the global market for wheat and maize had driven up food inflation in Sub-Saharan Africa by 11 per cent. Now, poor countries face another shock at a time when they have little room to accommodate it.

Even before the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, vulnerable households in developing countries committed a large share of their budgets to food. Additional increases in the cost of food could lead children in these households to suffer significant and irreversible nutritional losses. They could go to school hungry or even drop out to help supplement their families’ income. Given the massive learning losses children in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) suffered due to pandemic-related school closures, any additional disruption could have devastating consequences.

Fortunately, most countries have a tried-and-tested tool to protect their most vulnerable children in these circumstances. School-meals programmes are considered the largest social safety net in the world. Before the pandemic, such programmes reached 388 million children in 161 countries.

There is extensive evidence that provision of school meals is an important tool to keep poor and vulnerable children in the classroom in food-insecure areas. This is true even during systemic shocks such as droughts that may affect overall food supplies. Many developing countries recognised the value of school-based meals as a social-protection instrument when global food prices soared in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Over the past decade, a growing number of LMICs have incorporated school meals into their national budgets as a cost-effective way to enhance schoolchildren’s health and education outcomes.

In the context of rising food and fuel prices, the bulk purchase of food and preparation of meals at a school can potentially generate economies of scale and efficiency that contribute to overall cost reductions. A recent study based on

the National School Lunch Programme in the United States shows that school-based nutrition programmes contribute to lower prices at grocery outlets by reducing private purchase of food items.

Countries exposed to the negative effects of the current turmoil in food and energy markets must work to strengthen such programmes. But delivering nutritious school meals to a significant portion of the student population consistently can nonetheless be prohibitively expensive for countries with limited resources. A rough calculation based on data from the Global Child Nutrition Foundation indicates that to

THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS CAUSING FURTHER DISRUPTION TO THE GLOBAL FOOD SUPPLY AND MAKING IT HARDER FOR THE WORLD’S POOREST HOUSEHOLDS TO AFFORD ADEQUATE NUTRITION. FOR THE WORLD’S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN, SCHOOL-BASED MEALS ARE A VITAL SOCIAL-PROTECTION TOOL THAT NOW NEED TO BE EXPANDED

broaden the coverage of school-meals programmes in LMICs to the current global median level could require the equivalent of 5 per cent of a country’s overall education budget.

One of the first actions countries can

take to stabilise and potentially expand school-meals programmes is to improve efficiency and ensure accountability in existing schemes. Developing countries have experienced many noble public-sector initiatives that began with great promise, only to succumb eventually to mismanagement and eroded public trust.

School-meals programmes involve extensive public procurement, an area in which many developing countries have substantial weaknesses. To help maintain organisational and financial integrity, therefore, officials should commit to subjecting such programmes to routine independent audits.

Effective targeting is also crucial, particularly at a time when global prices are high and the gains from optimising existing resources can be limited. Poorly targeted interventions can leave a programme’s intended beneficiaries even further behind. Moreover, attempts to expand school-meals programmes too quickly can end up straining financial and organisational capabilities, undermining existing operations.

Encouraging governments to improve their school-meals programmes should be matched with support from development partners to provide financial relief, especially in light of the looming debt crisis threatening a number of countries. Currently, many LMICs’ national budgets are burdened by debt-service payments, which in some cases consume close to half of total government revenues. In these circumstances, programmes such as school-meals often are the first to be eliminated or downsized. For example, mounting debt recently forced Ghana to suspend a planned expansion of its school-meals programme.

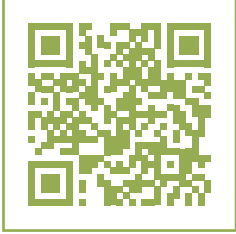
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A farmer shows rice grains after harvesting them from a field in the province of Al Sharkia, northeast of Cairo, Egypt. — Reuters file photo

Sport

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Seeb, Al Rustaq to lock horns for HM Cup honours

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Three-time champions Seeb will lock horns with Al Rustaq in the summit clash of the 2021-22 season His Majesty's Cup football championship on Thursday.

The final will start at 7:00 pm at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher under the auspices of HE Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, in presence of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth and top dignitaries and officials.

The concluding encounter of the coveted cup promises to be an exciting affair as both teams will eye the prestigious title. After an absence of 17 years, Seeb will target their fourth title in this edition.

Abdulaziz al Maqbali and his team-mates will work hard in today night's game to bring the glory after 24 years from the last title for Seeb in His Majesty's Cup football championship in 1998.

The battalion of coach Boris Bunjak is upbeat despite their defeat in the last round of Omantel League against Al Nahdha.

The Seeb team announced the injury of Abdulaziz al Ghailani and he will not take part in the final match. Coach Boris will depend on many key players in the team including Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Arshad al Alawi, Mohsin al Ghassani, Eid al Farsi, Marwan Taeb and others.

On the other hand, Al Rustaq's players are very keen to not miss the golden opportunity of snatching the first historic title of the HM Cup.

The Southern Al Batinah team started their warm-up sessions ahead of the concluding game at the training centre in Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex under watchful eyes of Romanian coach Catalin Mihai.

There are many top players in Al Rustaq who will be under the focus of coach Mihai during the



Al Rustaq players during a practice session. – AbdulWahid al Hamadani



Al Rustaq coach Catalin Mihai



Seeb coach Boris Bunjak



Seeb players during a practice session. – AbdulWahid al Hamadani

final match including: Mohammed al Ghafri, Hatim al Roushdi, Yassen al Shiyadi, Junior Tijadi, Abas al Hashami and other players.

The Oman Football Association (OFA) in coordination with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth arranged different surprises for the audience who will attend the final match of the coveted cup.

The gates will open at 3:00 pm

and many side events will take place including: Paragliding, Magic games, Skateboarding, roaming teams, food court and other activities.

OFA has announced the umpiring team who will officiate the concluding encounter. International referee Ahmed al Kaaf will be the main referee of the match while AbuBaker al Amri and

Hamed al Ghafri will assist him.

Mohammed al Othmani is assigned as fourth referee while Naif al Balushi as the first additional referee and Yahya al Balushi as second additional referee.

Full readiness

The head coach of Seeb club, Boris Bunjak, voiced confidently in the press meet and said that it is fourth time for him as a coach

to reach into the final. "I am very satisfied with the team and looking forward for another triumph. The HM Cup matches are different than other competitions as every game you play is considered as the final game. I know all the Seeb fans are awaiting for the title since 24 years ago from the last title," he added.

"Mental preparation and psychological is more important

than physical preparations. We have some players who will play first time in the full stadium. On the other side, we have experienced players as well and this is a good advantage. The support from fans can be considered as big pressure and big assistance in the same time. However, we will work to convert it into the support side. The players are aware and have clear minds and will not be impacted with the pressure of the fans," he ended.

The former national team and Seeb star Eid al Farsi said the match is expected to be tough for both teams. "Our target is to win the encounter. We will enter the match with full focus as it is the main item to end the game on a winning note," he concluded.

STRONG MATCH

Coach Catalin Mihai, head coach of Al Rustaq club, said that the team arrived to the final after strong math in semis.

"I am sure today's game will be strong and everyone knows the importance of this match. The team managed to reach the finals but the focus now is how to win the final match. Seeb is favourite due to history and the quality of players they have. However, our players are ready to fight for the fans and their families. We are ready to give everything in the game," he added.

Responding to the pressure under the team to clinch the first title: "My players are not under pressure. They believe that football is a sport and they play to enjoy. The team managed to secure slot in the final after playing well in semis. The most essential part in the match is to monitor the game," he ended.

The player of Al Rustaq Ahmed al Ghafri said that all the players are ready for the historic match. "We are ready to show top match and will enjoy the game first and then we aim to register positive result. Seeb is tough opponent and we know all the players very well as we met them in league," he concluded.

Atletico blunt Man Utd to make Champions League quarters

MANCHESTER, United Kingdom: Atletico Madrid drove the final nail in the coffin of a miserable season for Manchester United as Renan Lodi's header sent the Spanish champions into the Champions League quarterfinals with a 1-0 win at Old Trafford to progress 2-1 on aggregate.

The Brazilian full-back headed in unmarked at the back post four minutes before half-time to end United's last chance of silverware this season as their drought without a trophy since 2017 goes on.

United now face an uphill task just to get back into the Champions League next season as an under-performing squad filled with star names sits fifth in the Premier League.

Atletico's own struggles to break into La Liga's top four this season have shown up their limitations.

But the experience of Diego Simeone's men in the Champions League knockouts shone through as they comfortably saw the game



Atletico Madrid's players celebrate on the pitch after the Uefa Champions League round of 16 second leg match. – AFP

out to reach the last eight for the sixth time in the last nine seasons.

"We were fully aware that

against this team you need to score the first goal yourself," said United interim boss Ralf Rangnick.

BENFICA STUN AJAX

Darwin Nunez headed home in the 77th minute as Benfica stunned

Champions League 2021 - 2022 Top goal scorers		
		Goals
	Robert Lewandowski (Bayern Munich)	12
	Sebastien Haller (Ajax)	11
	Karim Benzema (Real Madrid)	8
	Mohamed Salah (Liverpool)	8
	Christopher Nkunku (RB Leipzig)	7
	Cristiano Ronaldo (Manchester United)	6
	Riyad Mahrez (Manchester City)	6
	Kylian Mbappe (Paris SG)	6
	Leroy Sane (Bayern Munich)	6
	Lionel Messi (Paris SG)	5
	Arnaut Danjuma (Villarreal)	4
	Pedro Goncalves (Sporting)	4
	Antoine Griezmann (Atletico Madrid)	4
	Thomas Muller (Bayern Munich)	4
	Darwin Nunez (Benfica)	4

Source: UEFA

Ajax to reach the Champions League quarterfinals on Tuesday, winning the second leg of their last-16 tie 1-0 in Amsterdam to advance 3-2 on aggregate.

The Portuguese side had not managed a single attempt on target until Uruguayan striker Nunez beat goalkeeper Andre Onana to Alex Grimaldo's free-kick and headed in to silence the Johan Cruyff Arena. Ajax, who had dominated the first half, could not recover from that blow and go out while two-time European Cup winners Benfica look forward to Friday's draw for the quarterfinals. Having sent Barcelona packing in the group stage, they will now appear in the last eight for the first time since 2016.

— AFP

RESULTS:

In Amsterdam: Ajax (NED) 0 Benfica (POR) 1 (Nunez 77)

Benfica win 3-2 on aggregate

In Manchester, England: Manchester United (ENG) 0 Atletico Madrid (ESP) 1 (Lodi 41)

Atletico Madrid win 2-1 on aggregate



Azam, Rizwan foil Australia in drawn second Test

KARACHI: Pakistan skipper Babar Azam smashed 196 and Mohammad Rizwan 104 not out to deny Australia victory on Wednesday and force a dramatic draw in the second Test in Karachi.

The Pakistan pair put the home team well on course for a draw, but spinner Nathan Lyon turned the match on its head by dismissing Azam and Faheem Ashraf with successive deliveries.

Lyon came on to bowl the third of the 15 mandatory remaining overs of the match, and with his fourth delivery had Azam glove a catch to Marnus Labuschagne at forward short-leg.

Next ball Lyon had Ashraf caught at slip to raise hopes of an Australian win.

The late-hour drama also saw Usman Khawaja drop Rizwan on 91 off luckless spinner Mitchell Swepson with 18 balls left in the match.

The pugnacious Rizwan, in company of tailender Nauman Ali (nought), batted out 46 balls during their 29-run stand for the eighth wicket to keep the three-match series tied at 0-0.

The first Test also ended in a draw in Rawalpindi, while the third and final Test will start in Lahore from Monday.

Azam's score becomes the best-ever fourth innings by a captain, surpassing Mike Atherton's 185 for England against South Africa in 1995.

His score is also the highest fourth-innings individual total by a Pakistani, erasing the 171 not out Younis Khan made against Sri Lanka in Pallekele in 2015.

The Pakistan skipper added an invaluable 228 runs for the third wicket with Abdullah Shafique (96) and another 115 for the fifth with Rizwan, keeping Australia's



Pakistan's captain Babar Azam plays a shot during the fifth and last day of the second Test in Karachi. — AFP

spin-cum-pace attack at bay.

Rizwan hit 11 boundaries and a six.

With Pakistan falling 63 short of the 506-run target, the record for the highest chase in all Test cricket remains with the West Indies who scored 418 against Australia at Antigua in 2003.

Azam's knock frustrated Australia and their skipper Pat Cummins who dismissed Shafique and Fawad Alam (nine) in the first two sessions to raise hopes of a win.

But Australia were themselves to blame for not dislodging Azam as Travis Head and then Labuschagne dropped sharp catches off Swepson off successive deliveries with the batsman on 161.

Azam also survived a confident leg-before appeal against spinner Lyon when on 157, but it turned

out to be umpire Aleem Dar's call on review.

Lyon was the best Australian bowler with 4-112 off a marathon 55 overs.

Earlier, Cummins struck eight minutes before lunch to end an epic third-wicket stand with the score on 249.

Shafique, who hit 136 not out in the first Test, drove Cummins for a boundary to reach 96.

But in his next over the Australian fast bowler drew the right-hander into another drive which this time found the edge.

Smith held a sharp catch in the slips, making amends for dropping the same batsman, on 20, from a more straightforward chance at slip off Cummins the day before.

— AFP

SCOREBOARD

Australia first innings: 556/9 dec
Pakistan first innings: 148
Australia second innings: 97-2 dec
Pakistan second innings (O/n: 192/2):
A Shafique c Smith b Cummins96
Imam-ul-Haq lbw Lyon1
A Ali lbw Green6
B Azam c Labuschagne b Lyon196
F Alam c Carey b Cummins9
M Rizwan (not out)104
F Ashraf c Smith b Lyon0
S Khan c Smith b Lyon9
N Ali (not out)0
Extras (B-8, LB-2, NB-5, W-7)22
Total (for 7 wks, 171.4 overs)443
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-21, 3-249, 4-277, 5-392, 6-392, 7-414
Bowling: Starc 21-6-58-0, Cummins 26-6-75-2, Swepson 53-4-8-156-0, Lyon 55-20-112-4, Green 15-4-32-1, Labuschagne 1-1-0-0

Giants, Rangers, Thunders and Royals register D10 victories

MUSCAT: In the first match of Day 2 of the D10 League held at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground, the Ghubrah Giants clinched a comfortable 8-wicket victory against the Khuwair Warriors.

Put to bat first, the Warriors managed to put a competitive 80-5 on the board. Danish Mohammad top-scored with 32 runs. Kashif Ali and Moshin Qureshi were both excellent with the ball for the Giants and picked up 2 wickets apiece.

But the Al Khuwair team's total proved nowhere near enough, thanks to Kashif Ali's swashbuckling knock. His 20-ball 44 effectively settled the contest and alongside double figure contributions from Pranav Mehta and Dean Foxcroft took the Giants home with 17 balls to spare.

In the second game, D20 Champions Ruwi Rangers got off to a winning start. They beat the Bousher Busters by 26 runs.

The Busters elected to field first after winning the toss but were met with a Rangers' top order in frightening form. Opener



(From left) Sanuth Ebrahim of Ruwi Rangers, Arsalan Bashir of Azaiba XI and Pratik Athavle of Amerat Royals with their man of the match awards.

Sanuth Ebrahim looked brilliant for his 29-ball 44. On the other end, Khalid Kail made his way to the first half-century of the D10 league. He finished on 51 and the Rangers finished on 107-2 after 10 overs.

In response, the Busters lost wickets at regular intervals and fell well short in the end. Asif Khan and Mahmood Sufyan were the only batters to cross 20 runs. Sanuth Ebrahim continued his memorable day on the field with a hat-trick in the second innings. Jitenkumar Ramanandi was

also superb with the ball for the Rangers and ended the day with figures of 2-19.

The Qurum Thunders beat the Darsait Titans by 7 runs in the day's thrilling third tie.

Electing to bat first, the Thunders finished on a symmetric 88-8 after 10 overs. There were valuable contributions around the 18-run mark from multiple batsmen. Pranav Athawale top-scored with a 15-ball 20. For the Titans, Mohammed Ayoob was phenomenal with the ball. He picked up 3 wickets in his 2 overs

while giving away just 7 runs.

AMERAT ROYALS PREVAIL

The Amerat Royals ended the day's proceedings with a comprehensive 58-run victory over the Azaiba XI.

BRIEF SCORES:

Khuwair Warriors 80-5 in 10 overs (Danish Mohammad 32 (21b, 1x4, 2x6); Kashif Ali 2-10 Moshin Qureshi 2-13) lost to Ghubrah Giants 81-2 in 7.1overs (Kashif Ali 44 (20b, 5x4, 3x6); Aamir Kaleem 1-6) by 8 wickets.

Ruwi Rangers 107-2 in 10 overs (Khalid Kail 51 (26b, 4x4, 3x6) Sanuth Ebrahim 44 (29b, 6x4, 1x6); Bilal Muhammad 1-16) beat Bousher Busters 81-7 in 10 overs (Asif Khan 26 (17b, 2x4, 2x6); Sanuth Ebrahim 3-12, Jitenkumar Ramanandi 2-19) by 26 runs.

Qurum Thunders 88-8 in 10 overs (Pranav Athawale 20 (15b, 1x4, 1x6; Mohammed Ayoob 3-7, Amanpreet Singh 2-12) beat Darsait Titans 81-4 in 10 overs (Khurram Khan 36 (26b, 3x4, 1x6; Samay Shrivastava 1-8) by 7 runs.

Amerat Royals 139-3 in 10 overs (Akshaykumar Patel 57 (26b, 2x4, 6x6), Pratik Athawale 30 (12b, 6x4), Rafi Ullah 28 (12b, 1x4, 3x6; Waseem Akhtar 1-20) beat Azaiba XI 81-6 in 10 overs (Arsalan Bashir 62 (37b, 7x4, 2x6; Hemalkumar Tandel 2-11)

England beat India to keep World Cup hopes alive

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, New Zealand: England skittled India to keep their faltering Women's Cricket World Cup defence alive on Wednesday, but not before a brittle batting display chasing a small target produced some nervous moments.

In a must-win match after three successive defeats, England dismissed India for 134 in 36.2 overs at Mount Maunganui as spinner Charlie Dean took a career-best 4-23.

The four-time champions made a poor start to the run chase and were two wickets down with just four runs on the board before overhauling their 135 target with more than 18 overs to spare.

"It's a relief to be honest, we just needed that," said captain Heather Knight, who top scored for her side with an unbeaten 53 in England's 136-6 in 31.2 overs.

"It was a bit scrappy in the end, a few more wickets than we'd like, but hopefully it's the start of a momentum shift."

England's campaign remains on a knife-edge and they must win their remaining pool games against New Zealand, Pakistan and Bangladesh to avoid an early exit. India have two wins from four matches, putting them level with New Zealand and the West Indies on points in the race for the semifinals. England's decision to bowl after winning the toss paid



England's Charlie Dean celebrates the wicket of India's Meghna Singh during the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup match against India at the Bay Oval in Tauranga. — AFP

dividends when Anya Shrubsole sent Yastika Bhatia on her way for eight and Mithali Raj for one.

Raj's dismissal involved a sharply taken catch from Sophia Dunkley, lifting the spirits of an England team that has been plagued by poor fielding at this year's tournament.

There was a further bonus for England when Deepti Sharma was run out for a duck attempting a reckless single, leaving India at 28-3 after eight overs.

That brought together Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur, who both scored centuries and forged a record-breaking 184-run partnership. — AFP

Fide Open chess tournament on March 23

MUSCAT: The first Design Group International Fide Open chess tournament will be held at the Panorama Mall from March 23 to 26. The international Fide-rated tournament will be held under the auspices of Oman Chess Committee.

The registration for the tournament is open until March 22 at 9 pm.

All players with Fide ID can participate in the tournament with a registration fee of RO 10. Players with Fide titles are exempted from the registration fee.

The tournament will be played according to Swiss system in seven rounds.

Each player will have 90 minutes with the increment of 30 seconds per move starting from the first move. Default time is 30 minutes.

The final ranking order of the players is determined by the number of points scored. If at the end of the tournament two or more players are tied for ranking or any prize, tie shall be broken as in accordance with the following: a. Direct encounter b. Buchholz c. Buchholz Cut 1 d. Greater number of victories (variable) (only with black, inclusive forfeits).

The player with highest number of points will get RO 300 and the champions trophy. The second-placed player gets RO 200 and a



trophy and third-placed player will get RO 150 and a trophy.

The fourth-placed player will earn RO 100 and a trophy, while the fifth placed gets RO 75 and a trophy.

Cash awards and trophies are also available for sixth to tenth (RO 30) and 11th to 15th (RO 20) places. Medals will be presented for the winner in general age category, Omani category and girls for under-11, under-14 and under-16 sections. The best veteran, best unrated and youngest players will also get medals.

For details interested players can contact Divakar on 71549460. Registration Form: <https://forms.gle/id/FooS1noUrSGACA>

ITPF to hold series of meetings in Muscat



MUSCAT: The International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF) headquarters based in Sultanate of Oman, will hold several meetings in Muscat during March 18 to 20.

Haitham Mohammed al Lawati, Secretary-General of ITPF, said that the meetings will discuss several topics including all the technical details related to the 2023 ITPF World championship in South Africa. "On Sunday, March 20, the Annual General assembly Meeting will take place in presence of all the members while there is a meeting that will be held ahead on Saturday and it is for the ITPF board directors. The meeting will be chaired by Mohammed Issa al Fairuz, the chairman of ITPF," he said.

THEYAZIN CROWNS TOP WINNERS

OMAN CAMEL RACING FEDERATION SWORD FESTIVAL CONCLUDES



PICTURES BY THANI AL SIYABI

WALEED AL JAHWARI
BARKA, MARCH 16

The Oman Camel Racing Federation concluded the OCRF Sword festival for season 2022 on Wednesday at the Royal Camel Corps Track in Barka under the auspices of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth in presence of top dignitaries and officials.

On the last day, there were four rounds for 8 km. The first round was for ‘Thanaya’ category, five years old, allocated for enterprises, saw 13 participants in action for the top prize of SUV car and the icon.

The second round for ‘Thanaya’ category, five years old (general), 22 participants were in action for icon and SUV car. The third round was for ‘Alhool’ category, above five years old (general), saw 18 camels compete for silver sword and SUV car. The last round was for ‘Alhool’ category, above five years old for enterprises saw 24 camels compete for is golden sword and SUV car.

In the concluding ceremony, Sayyid Theyazin handed over the awards to the top winners.

In the first round for ‘Thanaya’ category (enterprises) for 8 km,



– ONA

‘Alreaf’ won the first place and ‘Al Asma’ won the third place, both owned by Al Bashayer Stables under coach Jasim bin Qubaili al Maharbi. ‘Alreaf’ finished in 13m:27sec. In the second place was ‘Elaj’ for Al Bashayer Stables, trained by Mohammed bin Humaid al Wahibi.

In the second round for ‘Thanaya’ category (general) ‘Najoom’ owned by Sami bin Mohammed al Wahibi claimed the SUV car and the icon in 13:38. The second place was won by ‘Mahaba’ for Ali bin Rashid al Amri. ‘Tomoh’



owned for Saeed bin Hamed al Jenaibi finished third.

The third round which was for ‘Alhool’ category for general, ‘Nakoah’ snatched the silver sword in 13 minutes and 25 seconds, owned by Hamed bin Mohammed al Wahibi. The same camel had won the silver sword in Al Bashayer festival recently. ‘Tayara’ for Sultan bin Humood al Ghafi was second and ‘Mayasa’ for Hamed bin Muhammed al Wahibi claimed third.

The last round was for ‘Alhool’ category (enterprises), where ‘Makhail’ was the champion for RCC under coach Subyeh bin Mohammed al Wahibi after covering 8km in 13:31. ‘Mayasa’ was second for RCC trained by Saif bin Abdullah al Habsi. In the third place was ‘Aldhabi’ for Al Bashayer Stables trained by Obed bin Mohammed al Wahibi.

Sami bin Mohammed bin Ali al Wahibi, owner of ‘Najoom’ which won the first round, told the Observer: “It’s a great achievement to receive the prize from HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said.

The competition was very strong and we faced the challenge with the race time in the evening as the camel’s performance was below than the morning.

Abdullah al Rawahi set for Kuwait Rally challenge

YOUNG OMANI HOLDS SECOND PLACE IN FIA MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

KUWAIT CITY: Oman’s Abdullah al Rawahi resumes his challenge for honours in the 2022 FIA Middle East Rally Championship at this weekend’s 26th Kuwait International Rally.

The third round of the regional series gets underway at Kuwait Motor Town on Thursday evening, before 14 teams and competitors from eight nations tackle 10 gravel special stages in the southern Kuwaiti deserts on Friday and Saturday.

Al Rawahi arrived in the State of Kuwait lying in a strong second position in the Drivers’ Championship, 24 points behind Qatari legend Nasser Saleh al Attiyah and 15 points clear of Jordan’s Ihab al Shorafa.

The Omani’s Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud holds a 15-point advantage over a three-way tie for second place in the Co-Drivers’ Championship, with Mathieu Baumel, Alba Sanchez Gonzalez and Yousef Juma all on 39 points after two rounds of the series in Oman and Qatar.

Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud were able to test their new Skoda Fabia R2 evo on Tuesday morning, iron out any issues and make some



Abdullah al Rawahi

minor set-up changes before they carried out a full reconnaissance of the special stages on Wednesday.

“The team has been working really hard to get the car ready and we tested on Tuesday,” said Al Rawahi. “We changed a few things to make it suitable for these conditions. Kuwait Rally is really fast, quite similar to Qatar but less rough. We are expecting the same strategy as Qatar. Hopefully we can achieve a good result here as well. It has been a while since we have been here in Kuwait. I think we are ready. Hopefully we can do



Abdullah al Rawahi tests his Skoda in Kuwait on Tuesday.

a great job.”

The talented young Omani has made a strong start to his challenge for regional honours this season. Despite first day technical issues in Oman – an event he won for the first time in

late 2021 – Al Rawahi recovered to finish sixth overall and score points as the fourth registered driver behind Al Attiyah, Nasser Khalifa al Atya and Ihab al Shorafa.

But it was at last month’s Qatar

International Rally where Al Rawahi excelled against fierce competition from two of the fastest drivers in the world. He avoided becoming embroiled in the frantic battle for honours being waged between Al

Attiyah, Kris Meeke and Mads Ostberg and was able to stay clear of major issues to finish in a sensational second overall. That result gave the Omani 30 valuable championship points to put him in an excellent position to challenge for honours this weekend.

Al Rawahi and Al Hmoud finished seventh overall and fifth in Merc2 the last time they attended the Kuwait event in 2018.

The Kuwait International Rally has attracted six drivers of RC2 machines and a further eight entered in the Merc2 category. In addition to title rival Al Attiyah, Al Rawahi faces competition from local driver Meshari al Thefiri, Al Atya and the talented Qatari duo of Abdulaziz al Kuwari and Khaled al Suwaidi in the RC2 section.

The rally is being organised by the Kuwait International Motorsport Club (KIMC) in cooperation with the Kuwait International Automobile Club (KIAC). It is being held under the patronage of Ali Husain Ali al Mousa, Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Youth Affairs.

business

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Asyad Group wins plaudits for decarbonisation



STRATEGIC GOALS: Duqm Port is positioning itself as the country's leading hub for handling and exporting of green hydrogen

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Asyad Group has scooped the Gold Award at the Oman Sustainability Week pre-awards ceremony in recognition of its relentless efforts to achieve growth and business continuity while keeping sustainability high on its agenda.

The Award that saw Asyad Group reaping the fruits of its labour and clear focus on selected United Nations Sustainability Development Goals that address climate change, translates its strategic synergies with its partners Salalah Port, Sohar Port and Freezone, Port of Duqm, Asyad Shipping and Drydock aimed at reinforcing the logistics sector's competitiveness, meeting sustainability goals and going green.

Commenting on the event, Essam bin Nasser al Shaibani, Vice-President of QHSSE at Asyad Group said: "OSW serves as an excellent platform for Asyad, joining forces with its partners, and showcase its leading experience in meeting sustainability requirements, going green and relying on clean energy and set a new benchmark in Asyad Group's sustainability journey."

"The sustainability goals that Asyad Group clearly focuses on go hand in hand with the rapid progress that the logistics sector is witnessing and our crucial role in promoting connectivity, trade and economic growth in the Sultanate of Oman. We have remained vigilant of our carbon footprints and have deployed several strategic initiatives in line with Oman's sustainable development goals."

Sohar Port and Freezone has already developed sustainability frameworks in its operation by multiple programmes such promoting green shipping, environmental ship index incentives and energy optimisation enhancement projects. The leading Port and Freezone in the region are also dedicated in energy conservation having allocated 13 per cent of its freezone land for solar power generation that targets the reduction of 300,000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions per year.

Meanwhile, Salalah Port has demonstrated its commitment to energy conservation by optimising 40 per cent of energy in container terminal lighting, offsetting 50 per cent carbon footprint of container terminal's electrical power consumption and has joined hands with its partner, Maersk, to bring down CO₂ emissions to 20 per cent by end of year 2022 and set the bar at net zero emissions by 2050.

Port of Duqm is positioning itself as the country's leading hub for handling and exporting of green hydrogen. Foremost, amongst the green initiatives

in Duqm is the Hyport Duqm Project, targeting large scale production of green hydrogen (from renewable energy) as 'fuel of the future', its derivatives and export of these products via Port of Duqm. The project is

fully aligned with the strategy adopted by PODC to work on green initiatives from inception, ensuring its place in the fast-evolving hydrogen-economy, as the world gradually moves away from fossil fuels.

Asyad Shipping is aligning its efforts to meet the IMO requirements to reduce CO₂ by 40 per cent in 2030 and 70 per cent by 2050 and support Oman Vision 2040 and the resultant sustainability drive.

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT 2021

On behalf of the Board of Directors of National Bank of Oman SAOG, I am pleased to present the 2021 Annual Report for the period ended 31st December 2021.

Oman's Economy

On the occasion of his accession day, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave a speech in which he stressed that the primary aim at the current stage is to sustain Oman's ability to meet its financial obligations, while confirming that Oman's economic and fiscal performance has improved fairly well. This has been further consolidated by the expansion in economic stimulus policies and the establishment of a social protection scheme catering to the welfare of citizens, guided by the Oman Vision 2040.

The Sultanate of Oman commenced 2021 by continuing to drive diversification of the economy with the aim to increase investment in the financial services, tourism, and port activity sectors. According to the outlook of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Oman's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 7.4% in 2022 against 1.8% in 2021. It also forecasts that non-oil gross domestic product will grow by 1.5% this year and could improve to 4.0% by 2026 if fiscal measures continue to be successfully implemented. The recently announced approved 2022 budget will focus on narrowing the deficit, which is expected to reach 5.0% of GDP in 2022, well within the limits of last year's medium-term fiscal plan. Revenues of the state for the fiscal year 2022 have been estimated at RO 10.6 billion, an increase of approximately 6.0% over 2021.

Paving the way for a new era of economic cooperation, Oman has recently signed agreements with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the State of Qatar to boost bilateral trade and create investment opportunities. The new 725km road linking Oman with Saudi is one of the first steps in these efforts.

NBO's Operating Performance

Given this backdrop, the bank's net profit for the year 2021, stood at OMR 30.3 million, compared to OMR 18.1 million for the same period last year, showing an increase of 66.8%.

Net interest income for the year 2021 is OMR 91.6 million, showing an increase of 0.7% last year. This is due to strong growth in loan volumes, offset by compression in margins.

Fee income for the year 2021 is OMR 31.8 million, compared to OMR 26.1 million last year, a strong growth of 21.9%. This is due to robust performance across various fee lines.

Operating expenses for the year 2021 was RO 63.5 million, compared to RO 63.8 million for the last year, a decrease of 0.5%, despite the continuing investments made for growth. The reduction year on year is due to various efficiency initiatives undertaken across the bank.

Operating Profit, as a result, grew strongly 12.6%, year on year.

Net Impairment for the year 2021 was RO 24.0 million, compared to RO 31.3 million for the last year, a decrease of 23.4%. The reduction is on account of the conservative provisioning approach undertaken at the start of the pandemic.

Gross loans and advances as at 31st December 2021 are at OMR 3.2 billion, with a growth of 6.4% over last year, as the bank continued to support the borrowing needs of its customers. Customer deposits correspondingly are at OMR 2.9 billion, showing a growth of 15.5% over last year. The bank continues to maintain a very healthy Current Account Saving Account mix.

The bank's core equity and total capital Adequacy Ratio as at December 2021 stands at 11.8% and 15.8% respectively.

Overall, we have been pleased with the bank's financial performance. Our core business remains strong and we have further diversified revenue streams as well as maintained a strong balance sheet. We believe it is a sign of our agility on the one hand, and our growing global reputation as a safe investment, on the other.

Organizational Updates

If the year 2020 was about perseverance, the year 2021 has been about forging ahead. For NBO it's been about building on the accomplishments we've made and using what we have learnt to scale to new heights.

Early in the year, we appointed Nabil Al Mahrouqi as our newest Board Member. We also hand picked a highly qualified leadership team. These include: Tariq Atiq, General Manager – Chief Retail and Digital Banking, Sulaiman Al Lamki, General Manager – Chief Risk Officer, Girdhar Varadachari, General Manager – Chief Financial Officer, Salah Al Sharji, Deputy General Manager - Chief Internal Auditor, Abdullah Al Jabri, Deputy General Manager - Head of Asset Quality Management, and Ali Al Lawati, Assistant General Manager - Head of Private Banking.

Continuing to introduce changes in the Bank's organizational structure, appointing young Omanis in leading positions and providing more career opportunities, we have promoted Mohammed Al Jabri - Head of Global Transaction Banking and Maha Al Raisi - Head of Products to Assistant General Manager grade.

Key Achievements

We centralized our efforts towards promoting our brand positioning, realising our financial targets, reducing cost to income ratio and most importantly implementing the five year strategy (2021-2025) we rolled out to achieve our goal of Return to Prominence. In 2021, we continued to put our customers at the heart of what we do, and have always placed digital innovation at the top of our priorities, understanding its importance in helping us adapt to shifting customer preferences, increased competition from fintech and big tech entrants, and stay up to date with new technologies.

Continuing to develop our contactless capabilities, in 2021 we launched a number of first-of-their-kind services and solutions. These included our first multi-purpose banking kiosk, which enables customers to interact directly with us and utilize our services 24/7, without having to visit a branch. The new Merchant App also came online, falling in line with the government's requirement for commercial outlets to switch to electronic channels as part of its cashless payment scheme. Most recently, we launched our new digital onboarding service, allowing customers to digitally open a new account through the NBO mobile banking app.

Corporate Banking was instrumental in advising and structuring financial assistance to projects of significant economic importance in 2021. This included participation in the medium term debt raising exercise by Government of Oman through the Ministry of Finance valuing USD 50 million, and supporting Energy Development Oman (EDO) amounting to USD 200 million, a new over-arching sovereign owned entity to unlock growth in the Oil & Gas sector. Apart from this, there were transactions supporting an integrated tourism facility and long term facilities to various local holding companies.

Community Values

As an integral part of the community, in 2021 we have continued to work closely with our teams, partners, and the government so that we can channel our support where it is most needed. We have concentrated our efforts towards responding to crisis, youth empowerment, social and economic development, and education.

From the start of the pandemic, the bank donated over OMR 1.5 million in the last two years to support the Government's efforts to combat the pandemic. We remained committed and put its resources, people and infrastructure behind the Ministry of Health. A vaccine roll-out program for staff and their spouses, the provision of a fleet of ambulances in Muscat and Dhofar Governorates and the purchase of medical equipment for the most strained hospitals in the Governorate of Dhofar. It was one of a string of measures the bank has activated since the beginning of last year, lending vital support to the country's healthcare services as they continued to work to control the spread of the virus.

When cyclone Shaheen hit the shorelines of Oman, we quickly implemented a wide-reaching relief program that included providing vital funding recovery efforts. The bank also allocated an additional OMR 10 million in loans with no interest and three months loan deferment for our directly impacted customers. We also partnered with leading retailers including to offer NBO customers a discount of up to 50% on essential household appliances to help replace items lost to water damage.

We welcomed Shahr II Atta'a Ramadan differently this year, working with MarketEx and Dalilee, and the local community, whereby in just 48 hours we raised sufficient funds to deliver food hampers for over 1,000 low income families.

Creating opportunities and empowering talented Omani youth, NBO's Scholarship programme continues to support students from low income families. Until today, NBO offered a two-year employment contract with the bank to 6 out of 10 students, who attended top universities in the United Kingdom as part of its commitment to to develop their capabilities and grow their careers as future leaders.

Meanwhile, with initiatives like the new Innovation Incubator, we continue to find new and exciting ways to equip the young market with sustainable skillsets, while supporting the advancement of Oman's wider finance sector. In collaboration with the SME Development Authority, Oman Academy for SMEs, and Paradigm Consulting, the programme taught thirty young IT graduates how to design their own start-up FinTechs. Three of the participants emerged as winners, and have the opportunity to pitch their ideas to potential investors.

People and Learning

At NBO, we truly believe that our people are our most important asset and we actively support them by providing them with an empowering environment that enables them to excel. In 2021, three promising individuals from our bank's IT, Brand Division and Investment Banking departments were chosen for the latest batch of the government's national leadership development programme, Etimad.

We also launched our new employee-focused HiPotential Identification program. The first phase of evaluations under the program has been completed through an assessment centre, where employees from our entire branch network, including Muzn, were taken through a series of online assessments and interviews. Out of their results, a pool of 'Hi-Potential' 60 candidates has been identified (31 from the Head Office and 29 from the branch network), who will then be provided with customised development plans that will chart out their ongoing progression and upskill them for professional growth.

All of these serve to optimise the huge pool of talent we have and strengthen our position as a future-ready, world-class bank.

Local and Global Recognition

As a testament of our efforts to strive for excellence, this year we were recognised with multiple awards. As well as being ranked among the 'Top 50 Banks in The Middle East' by Forbes Middle East, we received awards from International Business Magazine, the Global Business Outlook Awards 2021, the World Business Outlook Awards, Oman Economic Review and Global Private Banking Innovation Award, the Banker, Islamic Finance News, Cambridge IFAs WOMANI Awards and Apex Media.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to thank our customers, shareholders, directors, executive management, and all staff of NBO for their support and efforts in implementing the Banks strategy and in achieving its goals and objectives.

We would also like to express our appreciation to our regulators, the Central Bank of Oman, the Central Bank of the UAE and the Capital Market Authority for their constant support and dedicated efforts to develop Oman's financial industry, especially the banking sector.

We pay tribute to His Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Al Said, for his visionary leadership and under whose wise guidance Oman steadfastly continues on towards sustainable economic and social development.

Above all, stay safe and healthy.

Amal Suhail Bahwan
Chairperson

nbo.om

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION As at 31st December 2021

	2021 RO"000"	2020 RO"000"
ASSETS	40,875	38,921
Cash	266,495	153,036
Balances with CBO	500	500
Capital Deposit With CBO	300,676	281,911
Govt. & Other Securities	107,000	20,000
T. Bills & Othe Bills eligible for rediscount	603	15,603
Balance due from branches, principal shareholders & affiliates Abroad	-	-
Due from Banks	-	8,390
a) Placements (Local)	103,083	55,987
b) Placements (Overseas)	10,999	14,736
c) Loans & Advances (net of provisions)	-	-
Other Money Market placements	39,502	40,292
Investments Securities	3,088,646	2,887,862
Loans & Advances (Net of loan loss provisions & reserve interest)	59,892	62,568
Tangible Fixed Assets	62,796	52,845
Other Assets	4,081,067	3,632,651
TOTAL ASSETS	4,081,067	3,632,651
LIABILITIES		
Deposits (including Government)		
a) Demand	1,301,202	862,055
b) Savings	640,518	636,437
c) Time	976,012	1,028,687
Balance due to branches, principal shareholders & affiliates Abroad	260	201
Due to Banks		
a) Placements	297,469	288,522
Capital /Assigned capital	162,595	162,595
Subordinated Funds	-	-
Reserves	93,997	90,227
Proposed cash Dividend *	6,016	-
Profits carried forward	177,347	161,911
Euro medium term notes	192,500	192,500
Tier 1 Perpetual Bond	115,500	115,500
Other Liabilities	117,651	94,016
TOTAL LIABILITIES	4,081,067	3,632,651
Note 1: LOANS & ADVANCES	RO"000"	RO"000"
Gross Loans	3,239,889	3,043,754
Less Loan loss Provision and Reserved Interest	(151,243)	(155,892)
Loans & Advances (Net of provision for bad and doubtful debts)	3,088,646	2,887,862

* Proposed cash dividend is subject to the approval of the shareholders at the AGM planned in March 2022.

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME For the year ended 31st December 2021

	2021 RO"000"	2020 RO"000"
PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT	175,316	172,126
Gross interest income	(83,734)	(81,222)
Interest expense	91,582	90,904
Net Interest Income	1,249	1,612
Other Operating Income	18,861	12,940
Dividend Income	6,200	6,542
Net Fee & Commission Income	5,459	4,965
Net Foreign Exchange Income (income less expense)	123,351	116,963
Other Income	(57,354)	(57,353)
Gross Income	(6,144)	(6,473)
General Administrative expenses	(63,498)	(63,826)
Depreciation	59,853	53,137
Total Operating Costs	(24,065)	(35,078)
Net Operating Profit (profit on ordinary activities before provisions)	(155)	189
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Loans & Advances	1	384
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Investments	234	3,176
ECL Allowance (net) charged for Placements	35,868	21,808
ECL Allowance charged (net) for Off-balance sheet items	(5,591)	(3,660)
Profit for the year after loan loss provision	30,277	18,148
Taxation		
Net Profit / (loss) after taxation		
Other Comprehensive Income for the year		
Revaluation gains/(losses) on equity instruments at fair value through other comprehensive income	4,098	(3,425)
Debt Instruments at fair value through other comprehensive Income	130	(43)
Tax effect of net movement on available for sale financial investments	(458)	277
Other comprehensive expense for the year	3,770	(3,191)
Total Comprehensive Income for the year	34,047	14,957

البنك الوطني العماني
NBO

NBO transforms corporate payments with new direct debit service

MUSCAT: Continuing to transform Oman's payments' landscape, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has launched its new direct debit service for corporate clients. Under the guidance of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) and for the first time in Oman, companies can now automate their monthly payments, eliminating the need for cheques.

To apply for the service, customers simply need to fill in the direct debit mandate and submit it at any NBO branch or via their assigned relationship manager for a secure, reliable and efficient payments' experience.

Meanwhile, in line with the bank's digital strategy, it is also gearing up to introduce the service digitally, through its Corporate Internet Banking platform.

Mohammed bin Yahya al Jabri, AGM - Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO, said, "Direct debit is a game changing solution for businesses. Working the same way as personal direct debit for monthly bills, it ensures that payments will be made automatically on a set date, removing the need to wait around for authorisation.



Through it, we are helping our clients monitor, control and manage all their payments with greater operational efficiency and ease, so they never miss another bill payment." NBO's direct debit service is

available through CBO's fully dedicated system, which connects all of the banks in Oman, and offers a range of benefits for both large companies and SME's in a variety of industries including real estate,

automotive, trading, finance and many more. With a quick and simple registration process, immediate auto debit/ credit and predictable planned payments that can be easily tracked, managed and controlled, customers are empowered to operate the functionality with ease and at their convenience, along with a comprehensive dashboard of their transactions.

NBO's corporate banking suite offers a range of innovative solutions that cater to its customer's day-to-day banking needs, backed up with the support of experienced and dedicated relationship managers.

Using cutting-edge technology and leading security features, its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB) platform empowers companies and government entities to make instant transactions, payments and transfers, access account balances, make on-the-spot enquiries, access non-financial services and complete transaction histories on all of the their accounts.

Available free and accessible 24/7, the frequently-updated digital service is enhanced by the bank's best-in-class expertise and superior customer experience.

National Finance launches customer service on WhatsApp

MUSCAT: Oman's leading finance company, National Finance, recently introduced an automated WhatsApp service to cater to its clients' various requirements. The enhanced service comes in line with the company's vision towards adopting digital transformation and improving customer experience.

To avail the service, customers need to add the WhatsApp number to their contact list. Once added to the contact database, the customer can chat and get an immediate response. The service will be available 24*7, it will allow customers to send inquiries and request details on certain services. The inquiries will be answered automatically in a timely manner.

Speaking on this enhanced service feature, Tariq al Farsi, Chief Executive Officer of National Finance said: "WhatsApp platform is considered one of the fastest-growing and most popular network channels among all segments due to its speed, ease and security. While the company has remained steadfast in its mission to boost the interaction with clients and surpass their expectations, it also seeks to keep up with the latest developments in the market by harnessing technology in its operations in order to deliver fast, easy and flexible solutions." National Finance completes 35 years, has managed to build its reputation as the market leader trusted by thousands of customers across the Sultanate of Oman.

National Finance offers a wide range of products targeting individual customers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through its 20 branches across the Sultanate of Oman.



ahlibank implements 'outstanding customer service' programme



MUSCAT: Continuing its efforts to strengthen relations with its customers and enhance their banking experience, ahlbank has launched the 'Outstanding Customer Service' programme to train select front line personal bankers across the bank's branch network in the Sultanate. The on-the-job training programme, which has begun with 100 employees of ahlbank and ahli Islamic.

The programme aims to enhance their understanding of excellent customer service, communication skills and emotional intelligence quotient. It also looks towards developing their problem solving skills and innovation, for achieving greater customer satisfaction.

Each day the bank's employees will participate in workshops that focus on developing employees' skills in customer service and care essentials, customer needs and expectations, the programme's vision, policy and practices; service recovery as well as customer service excellence and ongoing development.

"At ahlbank, we continue to invest in programmes and initiatives that improve the skills and capabilities of our human resources, recognising them as active ambassadors of the bank.

Through the 'Outstanding Customer Service' programme, the bank seeks to further strengthen its relationships with various client categories, employ appropriate techniques to manage communication with current and potential customers, analyse their needs, reach a deeper understanding of target customer behaviours, and therefore make meaningful decisions in order to meet any requirements more quickly and effectively. With this programme, ahlbank aims to redefine customer service and set new benchmarks in employee skills enhancement that are necessary for them as well as for the bank", said Ruqaiya al Lawati, Head of Change Management at ahlbank.

Bank Muscat branches enhance financial inclusion

MUSCAT: In line with its vision "To serve you better, everyday", Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, is continuing to expand its range of services and features available for customers.

For about 40 years Bank Muscat has been studying with great attention the needs of its different customer segments and coming up with an expansion strategy that aims to provide banking services and financial inclusion across all parts of the country.

Today, the bank is proud to have the largest branch network spread across all governorates in Oman, offering customers easy banking accessibility close to their places of residence or

work. Speaking about the importance of the bank's branches, Taya Eid Bait Sabeea (pictured), Deputy General Manager - Interior Regions, Bank Muscat, said: "Since the bank's inception in 1982, Bank Muscat has been keenly implementing a strategic expansion plan that enhances the ease of banking and accessibility to its large family of customers, according to their varying needs.

The bank's 146 retail banking branches, including those in remote areas, ensure that customers can easily access the bank's services and facilities. They play an active role in promoting financial inclusion across Oman from Musandam



to Dhofar. We would like to thank all our esteemed customers for their deep confidence in the bank and promise to continue enhancing our services and facilities in line with our customer-centric vision." The bank's expanding branch network are in areas where developmental activities are gaining momentum,

highlighting Bank Muscat's focus to remain the nation's bank of first choice.

They feature 'best in class' security practices and state-of-the-art facilities for the convenience and comfort of customers.

Branches are staffed by well qualified and experienced Omani employees and offer an easy way to customers to access the full range of world-class banking products and services from Bank Muscat.

The bank continuously launches new services and facilities according to customer feedback and global banking trends.

In 2020, Bank Muscat launched two bus-based Mobile Banking Units which are able

to easily travel to and operate in remote locations to enhance financial inclusion.

Through its branches, Bank Muscat customers access different services including opening different accounts, getting different financing products like housing, personal and cars, attaining cards and many more.

Bank Muscat has also distinguished itself by providing the largest e-channel network for the benefit of its customers, with over 800 ATMs and CDMs installed across the country.

The bank has said that it will continue to invest in new state-of-the-art technology in order to further speed up access to banking services and improve the quality of services provided.

Ford Bronco SUV: Welcome powerful and thrilling experiences

MUSCAT: Ford's Bronco has made a comeback. Sporting a tough build, powerful performance and a willingness to take you places. The all-new Bronco is available as a Bronco two-door, first-ever Bronco four-door model and all-new rugged, small SUV, Bronco Sport – the only domestic brand of SUVs with standard 4x4.

Every Bronco model is engineered to deliver thrilling and confident off-road experiences that build on the DNA of the original 1966 Bronco and its racing heritage. With ingenious new updatable technologies and adventure-ready attributes created for today's outdoor enthusiasts.

The all-4x4 Bronco brand is Built Wild and ready to deliver thrilling experiences with its heritage inspired style, engineering and smart off-road technology, plus innovative features to help outdoor enthusiasts create adventures



in the most remote corners of the world. Just like the first-generation Bronco, the all-new Bronco delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence.

Bronco incorporates off-road mapping and drive technologies to give novice adventurers as much fun as hard-core off-road experts, while its Built Wild durability makes for lasting performance in the

harshest of conditions for generations to come.

Bronco's advanced four-wheel-drive technology is at the core of its off-road capabilities, and at the heart of it all is Bronco's exclusive Terrain Management System with G.O.A.T. Modes that is designed to help drivers better navigate any type of terrain. Up to seven driver-selectable modes are offered including Normal, Eco, Sport, Slippery and Sand, with Baja, Mud/Ruts and Rock Crawl for off-road driving.

Those interested in experiencing the Ford Bronco can visit their nearest Ford showroom. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC. Please log on to www.fordoman.com, or www.facebook.com/FordOman or www.youtube.com/FordOmanChannel or www.instagram.com/ford_oman for the latest news, test drive requests and the latest press releases.



Salalah Free Zone positioned as global platform for petrochemical and processing industries

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 16

Salalah Free Zone (SFZ), a member of Asyad Group, continues to consolidate its logistics role in supporting the petrochemical and natural materials processing sectors and to make headway in attracting international investments and contributing to the diversification of the Sultanate of Oman's revenue streams.

Given its prime location, SFZ serves as a gateway to global markets and international trade that all petrochemical and materials processing companies can easily tap into the large local and international supply and source raw materials and commodities.

Aside from its strategic location and easy access to global markets, SFZ capitalises on its proximity to Salalah Port that enables



companies operating the free zone to draw on its critical logistics offering.

A key service provided by the port is the central service

corridor that streamlines the transportation of hydrocarbons and petrochemicals from SFZ to Salalah Port, offering a quick and efficient supply line.

In addition, Salalah Port offers a variety of crucial services including 24/7 container loading and shipping, container maintenance and repair services, and a host of

vessel support services such as fueling, storage and support for self-steering sailboats.

With this impressive service lineup, SFZ is showing its clear and strong resolve to become a leading global hub for the petrochemical and processing industries.

Along with such diverse services, SFZ provides companies operating in the field of chemical industries and materials processing with a massive space of approximately 2.6 million square metres, an area that hosts major players of the petrochemical sector such as OQ for Methanol, OQ for LPG, OCTAL, and many other companies boasting outstanding technical capabilities.

SFZ has become today home to leading suppliers and manufacturers of a range of vital products such as methanol, ammonia, PET, APET and LPG.

Moreover, SFZ hosts other

renowned materials processing companies such as Global Gypsum Board Company LLC, Carmeuse Majan, Associated Industries, USG Boral and many other companies and manufacturers of gypsum board, limestone and construction material.

Leveraging its proximity to gypsum and limestone quarrying locations and its unique strategic location on key maritime routes, SFZ has grown into a coveted base of operations for exporters across the globe offering fast shipping and access to most international and regional markets within no later than two weeks.

It also offers many economic incentives such as exemptions from various taxes, VAT and custom duties, as well as 100 per cent foreign ownership and many more incentive packages to ensure the sustainable success of this critical sector.

Sohar Port showcases environmental successes at OSW 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 16

SOHAR Port and Freezone took part in Oman Sustainability Week (OSW 2022) alongside the ASYAD Group to share the success of environmentally conscious practices introduced throughout the complex and prove its commitment to sustainability.

As industries move towards cleaner forms of energy, SOHAR has developed strategic programmes to improve health and education, create jobs, reduce inequality and spur economic growth.

SOHAR has dedicated resources to creating a solid foundation for sustainable development in the fields of Health Safety Security Environment (HSSE), circular



economy, clean energy and energy conservation, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and clean shipping, all while tackling climate change challenges to protect the

planet for the future generations which will be an added value for Oman's sustainable development.

Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of SOHAR Port said, "Sohar Port

and Freezone has always strived to deliver on its commitment to sustainability.

This is clear in our efforts to tie up with industries within the complex to move towards sustainable forms of energy and set up projects in line with this concept.

In addition, we presented our Integrated Environmental Management System (IEMS), which is used in the Port and Freezone to ensure an ideal balance between industrial development and environmental protection.

Oman Sustainability Week is an opportunity to share success stories, ideas and learn from each other by taking a more sustainable approach to the country's ongoing economic development."

SOHAR also offers incentives

to ships and international shipping companies that express a commitment to reducing air emissions under the Global Ports Climate Initiative and following the standards set by the International Maritime Organization.

Measurements of the environmental footprint of ships visiting SOHAR are checked by the Environmental Ship Index (ESI) with the port offering 5 per cent discount on port fees to shipping companies that have made added investments in their ships and crew to improve environmental performance, safety and quality. SOHAR rewarded 252 ships in 2021, 239 ships in 2020 and 148 ships in 2019, illustrating an ongoing commitment to reducing the environmental impact of ships docking at the port.

CMA signs MOU with Morocco's SAISW



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 16

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) and the Supervisory Authority of Insurance and Social Welfare (SAISW) of the Kingdom of Morocco signed on Wednesday a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to support cooperation in the field of insurance regulation, enhancing ties between the two insurance sector regulators, and exchanging information and expertise to develop the legislative and technological systems in the two countries.

The MoU was signed by Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President - CMA and Othman Khalil al Elmi, Acting President for SAISW. Also present at the signing was Tariq al Hassisin, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco accredited to the Sultanate of Oman.

Shaikh Al Salmi said: "We are keen to enhance such cooperation to enable us to keep track of developments in regional and global markets to meet the insurance needs of individuals and organisations and provide a safe investment environment for institutions, given the importance of insurance as a tool for achieving the national priorities of the Oman Vision 2040."

Othman Khalil al Elmi of SAISW said the MOU will help develop the insurance sector in the two countries through the exchange of regulatory information and sharing of expertise, assistance in carrying out research and studies and advisory services all the fields related to insurance.

India-Oman Business Meet focuses on prospects in Building & Construction sector

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

MUSCAT, MARCH 16

A 23-member delegation of exporters from India, who are exhibiting at the Oman Design & Build Week (ODBW) and Oman Real Estate Exhibition (OREX), also participated in an India-Oman Business Meet on the Building and Construction sector on Tuesday.

The Business Meet was jointly inaugurated by Eng Ridha al Saleh, Chairman, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Indian Ambassador Amit Narang.

Speaking on the occasion, Ridha al Saleh said trade between the Sultanate of Oman and India is currently worth around \$5 billion. "There is good investment between both countries, so I believe there is space for us to expand further, especially in the sectors of tourism, logistics, mining, industries and food security, in addition to other areas such as medical tourism, education, renewable energy —



especially solar — and of course, Information Technology," he stated, noting that currently there are more than 4,000 companies that are operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

Rajeev MC, Representative of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), said that Oman and India have good trade relations. "Many items are

exported to Oman but now there are also value added products in the field of construction industries that hold huge potential to be exported to Oman."

Ambassador Narang said the timing of the B2B meeting was apt as both the Sultanate of Oman and India are currently showing strong signs of an economic rebound. "India is the fastest G20 economy.

The country's GDP is expected to grow in double digits for at least for one decade. That strong growth and dynamism is coming back. In Oman we have seen the recent economic decisions of the government that are pointing towards a direction of strong economic growth," the Indian Ambassador said.

During the event, participants

shared their experiences and discussed business opportunities available to both sides in these sectors.

From the Omani side, representatives of more than 30 companies and business houses representing the Construction and Infrastructure sector attended the event for B2B interactions with the Indian companies.

Nickel’s return may leave everyone underwhelmed

Nickel is back. A week after the London Metal Exchange sensationally suspended transactions in the commodity, trading is set to reopen on Wednesday.

Unfortunately, the LME’s attempts to contain the damage from a surge in nickel prices may increase the number of unhappy market participants.

As things stand, the angry parties are mainly hedge funds and other financial investors.

Those betting that nickel prices had further to rise after they soared through all-time highs of \$50,000 a tonne on March 7 were expecting a windfall when the price hit \$100,000 a tonne.

But then the LME suspended transactions and cancelled trades estimated to have neared \$4 billion.

Hedge fund managers like Cliff Asness of AQR Capital Management have criticised the bourse for intervening in a supposedly free market.

The big winner from the emergency stop was Xiang Guangda, head of Chinese nickel miner Tsingshan, whose short position of 150,000 tonnes left him facing epic margin calls and a potential \$8 billion loss.

The banks that financed Tsingshan have now agreed to provide a facility to keep financing its margin calls, which are still significant even though nickel will resume trading on the LME at the less elevated price of \$48,000 a tonne.

Xiang’s predicament has distracted attention from the LME’s 100-odd members, some of whom still bellow face-to-face orders at each other on behalf of producers like Tsingshan. These players also benefited from the suspension: Four or five of them could have gone bust if the LME had not halted trading.

Last week’s near-death experience may have prompted some to reconsider. But there’s still a risk that some members will join the LME’s financial participants and vote with their feet.

— Reuters

As things stand, the angry parties are mainly hedge funds and other financial investors



ROBOT BATTERY MAKER

People are seen next to robotic arms for a second battery tray assembly line at the opening of a Mercedes-Benz electric vehicle Battery Factory, marking one of only seven locations producing batteries for their fully electric Mercedes-EQ models, in Woodstock, Alabama. — Reuters

Empowering women with finance



HAIDER AL LAWATI
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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI

Women play a vital role in society. In addition to their responsibilities to the family and, taking care of the children in particular, they also oversee all home affairs and provide comfort to members of the family. Such tasks are valued before the Almighty, society and country.

But because of her need for income to suitably support the family and provide a happier and comfortable lifestyle for her children, over and above the contribution made by her the head of the family, she makes some time to run a small business from home.

But such enterprising women do need a bit of initial funding support, which is available in many developing societies. In emerging economies, women entrepreneurs are assisted by cooperatives that provide financial products and services to them.

For example, in Peru, a Latin American country whose capital is Lima, only 14 per cent of the local population (54 per cent of them being women) have access to financial products. This disparity can perhaps be also found in Gulf societies, where many women have the ability to be entrepreneurs but face challenges in securing their funding needs, particularly in the form of bank financing.

Today, in the post-pandemic era, members of the same family find themselves in need of funding support to revive their collapsed businesses at a time when jobs are difficult to come by.

It has become more important than ever to promote the financial inclusion of the single family by empowering women who seek a better life for themselves and their families in the community through entrepreneurship.

Opportunities should be given to women homemakers looking to generate a new income stream by pursuing an entrepreneurial activity from home.

Financial institutions should be forthcoming in providing funding support for such women at minimal interest. Indeed, corporates should look at channelling part of their CSR allocations towards this category of women.

Today, there are several institutions in the world that assist vulnerable women and men to enable them to be productive members of society. These initiatives promote growth and innovation, reduce poverty, unemployment and close gender gaps.

Financial institutions should be encouraged to provide advisory services to female entrepreneurs as part of their empowerment. Such institutions should look at the experience of international financial bodies that operate in many countries of the world, especially in Latin America and Africa, with the goal of promoting entrepreneurship among women in low-income sections of the community.

Global economy sinks deeper into turmoil



ANA SWANSON

The author writes about trade and international economics for the New York Times. She previously covered the economy, trade and the Federal Reserve for The Washington Post

When Federal Reserve officials raise interest rates, they will do so amid an unfortunate economic reality: Many of the inflationary pressures they had long assumed would dissipate have instead lingered, and some are getting worse.

Central bankers have consistently underestimated how high inflation would rise and how long it would last as the economy has surged back from pandemic shutdowns. They will release a fresh set of quarterly economic projections on Wednesday in which they are likely to raise their inflation forecasts for the fifth time in a row.

Like many private-sector forecasters, the Fed misjudged how strong US demand would be for goods and how long that demand would help to keep global supply chains running behind schedule, forces that have combined to push up consumer prices.

Officials spent much of the past year expecting a relatively quick return to some pandemic-infused version of normality, but backlogged factories, crowded ports and overburdened trucking companies are still failing to catch

up. Repeated waves of the virus have exacerbated the problems, which along with rising wages and services prices have sent inflation higher. Consumer price gains hit a new 40-year high in February, pushed up by rising prices for food, rent and gas.

Now, as Fed officials prepare to begin a series of interest rate increases to try to bring inflation under control, they once again appear to be aiming at a moving target. Supply chains that showed signs of improvement in January and February are being thrown further into disarray by the Russian attack on Ukraine and sweeping lockdowns in China, developments that promise to lengthen delivery times and add to prices.

The war, at the nexus of Europe and Asia, has scrambled flights and ocean shipments; threatened supplies of palladium, nickel and wheat; and sent energy prices soaring, further fuelling inflation. Automakers have shuttered factories because of a shortage of parts, and Russia has answered back to sweeping sanctions imposed by the West by announcing its own plans for export controls.

In recent days, Chinese cities and provinces have imposed extensive lockdowns to try to stop the spread of the omicron variant.

Shenzhen, a hub of electronics manufacturing and a vital port that is home to 17 million people, announced a lockdown on Sunday night for seven days. Foxconn, a Taiwanese electronics firm that supplies Apple from factories there, said it would suspend operations.

Further restrictions in China, home to more than one-quarter of global manufacturing, are likely to reverberate through already tangled supply chains and exacerbate inflation. “The question is whether this is going to be bad or very bad”, Phil Levy, Chief Economist at the logistics company FlexPort, said of the Chinese shutdowns in particular. He noted that this disruption came at a time when shipping delays were already extreme.

“If things get gummed up there, it will reverberate through the whole system”, he said, adding that it matters how long and how sweeping the shutdown proves. “These problems just build.”

Fed officials have held interest rates near zero since March 2020 and are expected to raise them for the first time since 2018 on Wednesday. By making money more expensive to borrow and spend, the Fed is hoping to cool down demand and beat back

inflation — helping conditions to even out at a time when a return to “normal” has been painfully and consistently elusive.

Fed policymakers and Wall Street researchers alike thought that prices would fade as consumers began shifting their spending from imported goods back to movies, vacations and restaurants. That shift would help factories and shipping routes catch up with surging demand and would come as used car prices — which spiked last year — moderated. Those trends either have not happened, or they have been cancelled out by increases in the prices of other products and services.

Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University, said many forecasters had been doing what investors sometimes refer to as “pricing to perfection”: Assuming that everything is going to go well, even if that is not the most likely outcome.

“You can look at the individual items: There’s been a lot of, ‘What if inflation in X, Y, Z goes down?’” he said. “And not, ‘What if inflation in A, B, C goes up?’”

In many ways, the events of the past few years have been so unusual that few, if any, forecasters correctly predicted all of them. And Fed officials have acknowledged

that they misjudged inflation last year, partly because they expected supply chains to recover more quickly. They are now striking a more wary tone. Jerome Powell, the Fed chair, told Congress earlier this month that the war in Ukraine was “not going to help at all with supply chains.”

“We haven’t seen much relief on the supply side”, he noted, explaining that he and his colleagues had been waiting for the strains to ease.

Powell predicted that as the Fed raises interest rates this year, it will help to cool off demand for car loans and mortgages, weakening spending in the economy and giving companies some room to catch up with demand. Central bankers are hoping that at the same time, the economy is “going back to normal” in terms of supply chains and the breakdown between goods and services, he said.

Even so, he acknowledged that the Fed stands ready to act more aggressively if that does not happen. “We hope we’re getting help on the inflation front from a bunch of things”, Powell said.

“In any case, we do have the responsibility to generate price stability, and we will use our tools to do that, over time.”

— The New York Times

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

US HEADS CHARGE SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

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Donizetti's comic opera wins the hearts even of kids

Donizetti's comic opera, L'Elisir d'Amore, is a love story that unfolds in a factory where workers are desperately trying to save the business from failure. Giving children an opportunity to interact and participate, it was one of the must-try experiences the parents must treat their children with as it not only teaches them about a beautiful story but also emphasises the power of imagination and clean fun...**P20**

ART

READ



MY FAIR JUNKIE
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AMY DRESNER

MY FAIR JUNKIE
BY AMY DRESNER

Amy Dresner's *My Fair Junkie* is an insightful, darkly funny, and shamelessly honest memoir of one woman's battle with all forms of addiction, hitting rock bottom, and forging a path to a life worth living.

All of van Gogh's 'Olive Groves' on show together for the first time

AFTER MORE THAN 130 years, all 15 of Vincent van Gogh's olive grove paintings are on display together in one exhibition for the first time.

"This is unique", Van Gogh Museum Director Emilie Gordenker said on Wednesday in Amsterdam. "These wonderful paintings show van Gogh's love for nature and his belief in consolation through art."

The painter himself counted these works among the best and most important from his time in southern France.

The Dutch artist (1853-90) painted the olive groves during his stay in the psychiatric hospital in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in 1889. He suffered from depression and was probably in a severe psychosis.



"During this difficult time for him, he found comfort and support in nature", said curator Nienke Bakker. Olive trees were also a symbol of

resilience for him.

There were many olive trees around the hospital. The painter was fascinated by their bony trunks, their

colours, and the effect of the sunlight on the blue-grey leaves. "Olive trees are very characteristic and I make every effort to get a grip on them", he wrote to his brother Theo.

Van Gogh painted the trees from different perspectives, at different times of the year and day. Some were done in the studio, many in the field. He experimented with colours, shapes and techniques.

The olive grove paintings first came into the possession of his brother Theo after the painter's death. Today they are in 11 collections, mainly in Europe and the US. According to the museum, they are rarely or never loaned out.

They are scheduled to be on show in Amsterdam from March 11 to June 12. — **dpa**

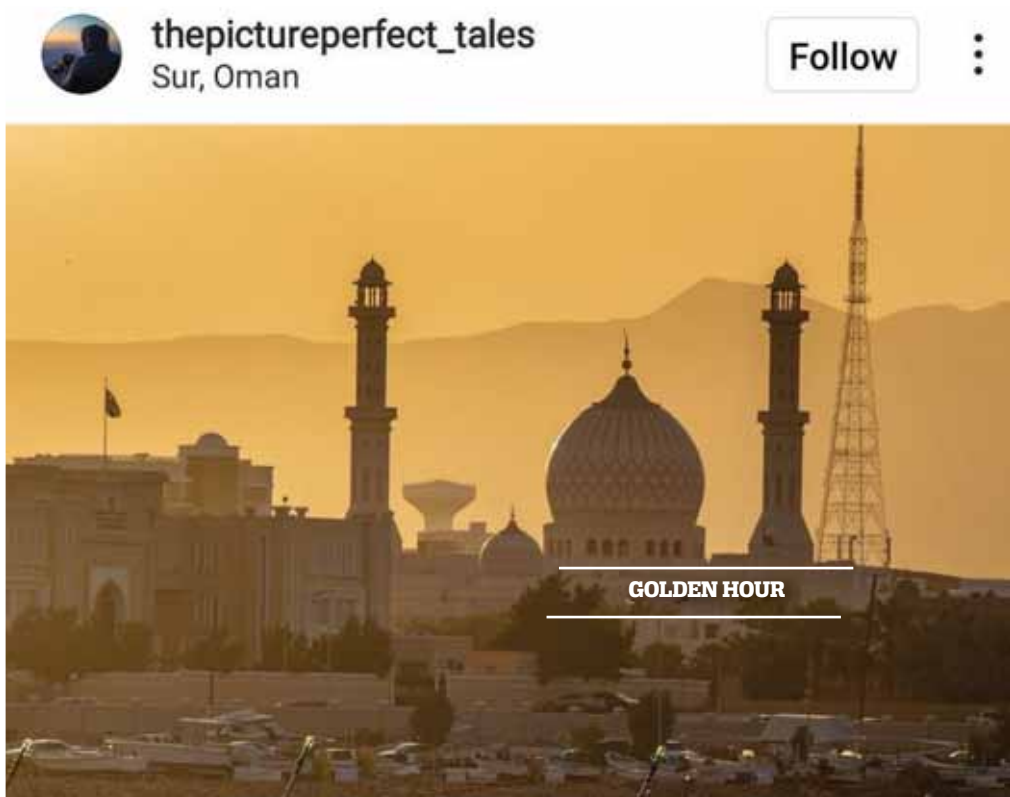


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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

The Gangs of Fashion



IT WAS 9:30 P.M. on a Friday and the crowd in the Fourth Arrondissement was a pulsating mass of bodies, crushed together and shoving forward, on the edge of out of control. Security guards were yelling and trying to shut a pair of ornate iron gates to limit entry, and guests desperate to get in were yelling right back.

Not for a rock concert, or a club. For a fashion show.

But then, for many, Marine Serre is a lot more. One of the first designers to take on climate change and elevate upcycling to a wearable art, she is a sort of evangelist prophet, sitting in the glowing center where value systems, clothes and identity meet. And she has spawned her own obsessive, fashion-centric group of acolytes.

For them, her work isn't just nice stuff to wear. It's an expression of who they are (or want to be); a passport to a society of the like-minded. Increasingly, more and more people want in. As the scrum at the door demonstrated.

It's just too bad the moment outside was so ugly. Because inside the gallery where her show was held, audience glued willy-nilly against the walls, the clothes themselves were terrific.

Serre has, in the past, been given to a sort of dystopian doom (understandable, given her subject matter), but this time around she had lightened up, in a way that made the social and ecological underpinnings of her work even more compelling.

Increasingly sophisticated amalgamations of old tartan scarves and houndstooth, of cheerful fair isle and argyle knits, were given post-punk life as chic pencil skirt suits and sweater dresses, as if former punks had cocked an amused eyebrow in the mirror and decided to go to the ball. One trailing gown was made from a pastiche of grunge-era T-shirts. There were camo-damask corsets mixed up with household linens, and anoraks quilted out of regenerated toile de Jouy.

They were awfully pretty. But it's the fact that they are mostly made from the detritus of the wasted world — that they tell a story of reinvention, and possibility — that gives them their gravitational pull. That has created a dedicated band of followers.

It happens, in fashion, every once in awhile, when a designer succeeds in rewriting the status quo. Even now, when corporate demands and quarterly results have become part of the culture, and market research has penetrated deep into the design mind.

It's the sort of passionate infatuation that not so long ago attached itself to Vetements, the anti-fashion fashion brand started by Demna and Guram Gvasalia that disrupted the big brands of Paris back around 2015, drawing its own bands of dedicated fans to grunge venues in far-flung parts of the city and launching Demna into the style stratosphere as designer of Balenciaga. —**NYT**

COMMUNITY EVENT

Muscat to get splashed with colours for the International Colour Festival on March 18



By Rumpa Mitra
Insta: @rumpa_mitra

MUSCAT WILL BE covered in wild array of colours as the country celebrates the International Colour Festival taking place on Friday on March 18.

Social media has already been feverish with anticipation as different event organisers announce what is waiting for those who would attend.

Around three big festivities are expected to gather crowds all over Muscat. The event concept is based on the famous festival called "Holi" from India. This fun-packed festival has always had a great potential to capture the heart of attendees and over the years, had seen the warm welcome of even children.

One of the highly anticipated this year is "The Biggest Festival of Colours by Axis Events" which will be conducted at the Al Mouj Golf GCM Lawns with bookings available either through 97798111 or their Instagram account @axis_events.

Introducing the festival back in 2017, Axis Events had packaged the event to be relevant to Omanis and non-Omanis alike. Before Covid-19, the event is one of the most-talked-about celebrations gaining fans across different communities and nationalities.

For this year's celebration, the events are taking place in open-air areas and can run from early in the morning until late evening and usually include coloured powder, water, water guns, DJ music, and food booths.

From 2017 to 2019, thousands of people had been taking part in the fun during Axis Events' celebration. This year they have come up with a very meaningful message "Whenever you splash colours on someone, you give them a promise of being truthful towards them



always, maintaining a lifelong brotherhood and showering them with all the possible love."

Nithin R Nair, the CEO of Axis Events shared that just like the previous celebrations, they are hosting the event at a premium venue in Al Mouj Golf GCM lawn where the site can handle the swell of visitors with ample parking for different vehicles.

An expert in bringing the fun, he also mentioned that available on the venue will be "organic coloured powder, rain dance, fire dance, kid's entertainment area along with the international music with various food stalls".

In the same spirit, Al Falaj Hotel will also have their own version of celebration to be conducted at their pool-side with a Bollywood theme and comes with colours and food stalls.

For Holi Dhamal by Al Falaj Hotel bookings, people can visit their Instagram @alfalajmuscat or contact 97986443.

The Indian Social Club on the other hand will follow the traditional Holi Festival and has announced that they will hold their event in Barka farmhouse where attendees will be treated to different games and access to pools. Reservation for this can be made through their contact number 92975544 / 99064960.

Participants are usually encouraged to attend celebrations in plain white t-shirts or dresses to get the full effect of the colours. If it's your first time to join the celebration, be ready to be splashed with coloured powder at any time. The spirit of the celebration is in the surprise of the burst of colours coming your way.

DISCOVERY

Ancient tombs unearthed at Paris' Notre-Dame cathedral



SEVERAL TOMBS and a leaden sarcophagus likely dating from the 14th century have been uncovered by archaeologists at Notre-Dame cathedral in Paris following its devastating 2019 fire.

The burial sites "of remarkable scientific quality" were unearthed during preparatory work for rebuilding the ancient church's spire at the central spot where the transept crosses the nave, the culture ministry announced late on Monday.

Among the tombs was the "completely preserved,

used a mini endoscopic camera to peek inside the sarcophagus, which appeared to be warped by the weight of the earth and stones.

"You can glimpse pieces of fabric, hair and above all a pillow of leaves on top of the head, a well-known phenomenon when religious leaders were buried," said Christophe Besnier, the lead archaeologist.

"The fact that these plant elements are still inside means the body is in a very good state of conservation," he added.

Its discovery will help



human-shaped sarcophagus made of lead".

It is thought the coffin was made for a senior dignitary in the 1300s — the century following the cathedral's construction.

As well as the tombs, elements of painted sculptures were found just beneath the current floor level of the cathedral, identified as parts of the original 13th-century rood screen — an architectural element separating the altar area from the nave.

During a visit by AFP on Tuesday, archaeologists were delicately cleaning and excavating the sculptures emerging from the ground, including a pair of carved hands.

The bust of a bearded man and some sculpted vegetables, with traces of paint still visible, had been removed.

The team has already

improve our understanding of funeral practices in the Middle Ages, added Dominique Garcia of the National Institute of Archaeological Research.

The discoveries were made as reconstruction teams prepared to install huge scaffolding to rebuild the spire, and needed to check the stability of the ground.

In the process, they discovered an underground heating system from the 19th century, with the sarcophagus lying among its brick pipes.

Despite the excitement of the find, the clock is ticking for the archaeologists.

They have been given until March 25 to finish their work before the reconstruction project resumes — in order to keep to a planned reopening of the cathedral in 2024. — **AFP**



Donizetti's comic opera wins the hearts even of kids

By Rumpa Mitra
Photos by Khalid al Busaidi, ROHM

As a parent, last week's Royal Opera House Muscat presentation would have been a great breather and escape for your kids. Only showing for two days, L'Elisir d'Amore – The Factory of Ideas managed to capture the hearts not just of the parents but surprisingly even the kids and while I originally thought that Opera shows will be too complicated for them to understand, it was heartwarming to see that the message wasn't lost on those who attended.

Donizetti's comic opera, L'Elisir d'Amore, is a love story that unfolds in a factory where workers are trying desperately to save the business from failure. With the factory of Ideas, Teatro Sociale di Como – As.Li.Co. has created an engaging interpretation for audiences to access comic opera. What makes last weekend's performance more interesting is that children were actually encouraged to sing along and interact. This cleverly customised production directed by Manuel Renga, offered a platform for the audiences and especially the children to play an active role in the opera.

L'Elisir d'Amore was the most often performed opera in Italy between 1838 and 1848 and has remained so continually in the international opera repertoire. Today it is one of the most frequently performed of all Donizetti's operas appearing as number 13 on the Operabase list of the most-performed operas worldwide in the five seasons between 2008 and 2013. Watching the show as an audience member, it was easy to pick up the inspiration behind the show combining the vibrance of Charlie Chaplin's famous film Modern Times and the beloved Mel Stuart's Willy Wonka and The Chocolate Factory.

The show was opened by the young talented conductor, Azzurra Steri, who made her debut in October 2015 with L'Elisir d'Amore. She gave the audience an overview of what the show is all about promising to take the attendees on a journey towards the 75 minutes engaging opera.

The Elixir of Love is set in a factory producing (without success) cough syrup, where Adina is the cunning daughter of the owner, and Nemorino is

a simple worker in love with her. Everybody in the factory is sad as the factory is failing and the cough medicine is not selling. If they don't find a recipe for the cough medicine that works, the factory will have to close and everyone will lose their jobs.

As earlier noted, the audience were encouraged to participate in singing famous arias from the opera. The screens behind the seats giving them an idea of what's the lyrics to the music being played.

The story revolved around Nemorino's countless challenges and despite the obstacle, was an optimistic story of persistence and how this characteristic will eventually led to him succeeding in gaining Adina's love.

Half of the audience were children and once the performance was finished, it was amazing to see the reaction of the overjoyed children. Not only were the children allowed to interact with the characters during their performance, the performers also took photos with the children.

Overall, the performance was crisp and engaging which was why both parents and children fell in love with the characters. Although everyone gave their best, I was quite impressed to see the talent of Nico Franchini who was performing as Nemorino. In spite of Nemorino's unimpressive character, he was still able to express his deep love and own the heart of the audience.

Azzurra Steri, the conductor of the show, deserved an accolade as well as she gave out a very impressive performance and her confidence tied the whole show together.

Surprisingly, the team working on the set design also needs to be commended. While targeted for children, the backdrop all the way to set direction, the costumes and the characters really did take the beautiful story back to Italy's 18th century.

In summary, it was an amazing show, one I hoped will have multiple performances so that other children are allowed to witness it as well. But just as any ROHM performance goes, it was only here for a weekend and it was worth spending an evening with such a great cast.

Follow the writer on Instagram:
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