

Queen Elizabeth begins celebrations to mark 70 years on throne

Britain's Queen Elizabeth kicked off celebrations for the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne by inviting local community groups on Saturday to her Sandringham residence in the east of England. Sunday will mark the queen's platinum jubilee, a first for a British monarch. **DETAILS ON P6**



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OMAN RACING'S ALMS SEASON RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS LAUNCH AT EXPO 2020



P13

DUQM PORT STRONGLY POSITIONED AS REGIONAL HUB



P20

JEWELS FROM MIND TO PAPER TO GOLD



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO NEW ZEALAND

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Cindy Kiro, Governor-General of New Zealand on the occasion of her country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to the governor-general and the friendly people of New Zealand more progress and prosperity. — ONA

ANTI-FRAUD CAMPAIGN TO BEGIN FROM TODAY

The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) will launch a campaign from Sunday against commercial fraud entitled 'Stick to Genuine Products'. The campaign targets to increase awareness about the unified GCC Anti-Commercial Fraud Law, acquainting consumers with the commercial practices that are considered commercial fraud and acquainting the suppliers and traders with the legal punishment for commercial fraud. The campaign comes in accordance with a media plan concerned with both parties of the consumer process in order to enhance consumer awareness of the risks of fraud. **DETAILS ON P3**

GREEN MINDS

BEING MINDFUL



INSIDE



FIRST US REINFORCEMENT TROOPS ARRIVE IN POLAND **P6**



TENACIOUS STORM NOW HAS NORTHEAST IN ITS SIGHTS **P7**

HM GREETINGS CONVEYED TO SAN MARINO



The Captains Regent of the Republic of San Marino, Francesco Mussoni and Giacomo Simoncini, received credentials of Ambassador Dr Ahmed bin Salim Baomar, as non-resident Ambassador accredited of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of San Marino at the presidential palace, on Friday. The ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and wishes of good health and happiness to the Captains Regent and the friendly people of San Marino more progress and prosperity. — ONA

Oman-Hungary bilateral relations set to scale new heights: Péter Szijjártó

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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A high-level visit by a Hungarian delegation to the Sultanate of Oman ended on an upbeat note last week with Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, voicing strong optimism for significantly improved bilateral relations between the two countries, spanning trade, investment, tourism, higher education, hydrocarbons and green energy, among other areas. During his one-day visit, accompanied by a business delegation representing around 24 leading Hungarian firms, Szijjártó held talks with a number of senior Omani ministers and government officials. Those exchanges will help pave the way for enhanced and mutually beneficial ties between the two countries, he noted. Speaking exclusively to the



Péter Szijjártó

Observer, the Hungarian guest underlined the importance of a key agreement on the Protection and Promotion of Mutual Investments that was signed by the two sides during the visit. “This agreement is important because it provides the legal basis for the investments Hungarian companies are willing to make in the Sultanate of Oman to be

secure and safe. This agreement is also very important for the business community here in the Sultanate of Oman”, said Szijjártó, adding that the talks will have a positive bearing on trade and investment ties between the two countries. Another important highlight of the visit, he said, was the signing of an agreement between a Hungarian company and an Omani firm for the establishment of a solar power plant in the Sultanate of Oman at cost of around 10 million euro. “This is the first Hungarian investment of this kind in the Gulf region”, said Szijjártó in this regard. “We consider this region as very attractive from the perspective of its transformation in the energy industry. We are now ready to move to the new renewable, green sustainable stage of the energy industry.” **TURN TO P2**

ID card must for all gold buys

SAMUEL KUTTY
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The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion reiterated that all commercial institutions including jewellers in the Sultanate of Oman should ensure that customers show their personal identity while purchasing gold, precious metals and stones.

A circular issued by the ministry stated, “We would like to point out to all commercial institutions and companies the necessity of ensuring that the personal identity of customers is shown when making any transaction for buying or selling gold, jewellery, precious metals and valuable stones.” **TURN TO P2**

Joint panel to study minimum salary

VINOD NAIR
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A joint committee is studying matters related to the revision of minimum wages. This was stated by the government last week. Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour, said in an interview with Oman TV, that there was no link between working in the private sector and the opportunity to compete for jobs in the government sector. “The ministry is currently working in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to identify some specialisations that will cater to the needs of the job market.” The minister added that the number of male and female job-seekers are almost the same as per the data available. “Women have been taking up jobs, but there are some factors that may control the presence of women in the market, including the nature of work, supply and demand.” He said that the ministry is focusing on specialised, technical, intermediate and higher professions that have been preferred by youngsters. “We are currently working in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to qualify some specialisations to enter the labour market in the educational field.” The Ministry of Labour has also been working on the new

The ministry is currently working in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to identify some specialisations that will cater to the needs of the job market

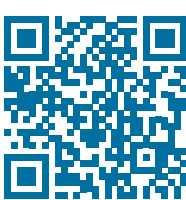
DR MAHAD BIN SAID BIN ALI BAOWAIN
Minister of Labour

labour laws, one for the civil service and another for the private sector. The Public Employment Law relates to the employees in the government sector, while the Labour Law regulates the relationship between the workers and employers in the private sector. However, there are common points between the two laws that serve all employees in both sectors. The civil service law is expected to be balanced, flexible, and positive in favour of the employee. It consists of only 40 articles, denying that there will be an increase in working hours and the link between spouses' bonuses in government employment.

RACE TO SAVE MOROCCAN BOY



Rescuers are working to reach a five-year-old boy trapped in a well in the northern hill town of Chefchaouen, Morocco, in still image from a video on Saturday. Rescuers dug to within a metre of a young boy, a delicate and dangerous operation constantly delayed by rocks and imperilled by the threat of landslides. **DETAILS ON P6**



Oman-Hungary ties set to scale new heights

FROM P1

INVESTMENTS

Aside from the green energy space, Oman's special economic zones (SEZs) and free zones are making attractive investment destinations for Hungarian businesses, said the minister. He noted in this regard that the potential Hungarian investments in the Sultanate of Oman were a sign of the growing strength of the Hungarian economy and its diversification.

He explained: "The Hungarian national economy is on the edge of a shifting dimension. We have broken three records last year: The record of FDI inflows into Hungary, the record of employment and the record of exports. Now, the further success of our national economy depends on whether competitive Hungarian companies will be strong enough to invest outside of the country from where they profit better than invest in the national economy."

One attractive destination for such investments is free zones in the Gulf region, including those in the Sultanate of Oman, said the Hungarian official. To enable Hungarian businesses to invest overseas, the government has introduced a programme that allows such investments to be financed from the budget — up to the extent of 50 per cent, Szijjártó said, adding: "We have already got some signals from companies that they are considering investments in the Sultanate of Oman."

PROMISING AREAS

Other promising areas for potential cooperation include



the renewable energy field, construction, digital education, security and water management, said the minister, noting that Hungary is well-placed to provide effective solutions to the Sultanate of Oman, and globally as well, in technologically oriented industries.

Importantly, Omani investment in Hungary is also a matter of pride for Budapest with efforts under way to strengthen Omani business ties with Hungary, he said. Omani Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, owns one of Budapest's finest hotels, said Szijjártó.

"I spoke to Omani Investment Authority to put further consideration into such investments. For the energy industry, there will be a business delegation coming to Hungary

this week, led by a member of the deputy of the finance committee in the Omani Majlis to explore opportunities to invest in food as well as in the oil industry."

Turning to the issue of air-connectivity between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary, Szijjártó said Budapest was "absolutely ready and open" to flights between the countries' capital, but lamented that Hungary lacks a national carrier at present.

He added however: "We have the agreement that once Oman Air is ready to fly, we will give them all permissions. Besides, the pandemic makes travelling very complicated. We still can simplify it. I have initiated an agreement with the Omani Minister of Economy, and he gave a very positive response that in case we make an agreement to reciprocally recognise our

vaccination certificate. Then, we will allow Omani citizens to travel freely to Hungary without a (PCR) test and without quarantine. Similarly, Oman will allow the already vaccinated Hungarian citizens to enter the Sultanate of Oman smoothly. Hopefully the agreement in this regard will be given green light soon."

STRONG TIES

In the interview, Szijjártó also hailed growing ties between the two countries. "We have put a lot of emphasis on strengthening the relationship between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary. The two governments have ensured the five preconditions of a good relationship: First, physical presence: We have an embassy here opened two years ago. Second, people to people contact: We have enrolled Omanis into our scholarship programme starting this September and every year, 50 Omani students will join Hungarian universities. Third, legal circumstances: The agreement of avoiding double taxation has already been in place and we signed, during this visit, the agreement for mutual protection of investments. Fourth, financial aspects: Hungary EXIM Bank has opened a credit line of \$56 million to finance Hungarian and Omani companies. The fifth precondition is the legal aspect: We have no disagreements, we support each other in international agreements. We mutually support membership of each other in the Executive Council of Unesco, and we don't interfere in the domestic issues of



each other."

The Hungarian minister had warm praise for the Sultanate of Oman's quiet diplomacy and advocacy of peace and reconciliation in resolving regional disputes. Without mediation, the fallout of any conflict in the region would likely have an impact on countries far removed from the Middle East, he warned.

"The Sultanate of Oman's role in the region is characterised by diplomacy and dialogue," said Szijjártó.

"Although we seem to be geographically remote, when it comes to security, everything that happens here in this region has direct impacts on the sense of barriers. So, whatever happens in the Gulf or Middle East region, it definitely has an impact on security situations in Europe. Because the least security situation in these regions, the more illegal immigrants will come," he commented.

DIPLOMACY AND MEDIATION

Szijjártó went on to emphasise the importance of dialogue in cooling tensions, settling conflicts and even pacifying armed disputes — an imperative that could also ease tensions globally.

"That's why we urge Russia and our Western allies to discuss instead of going through suffering that no one wants. We always respect the role of countries which put their emphasis on facilitating dialogue and diplomacy.

The Sultanate of Oman is a front runner in this regard. We really

value and respect the balanced and unbiased approach of the Sultanate of Oman to regional issues. As long as we have such countries, we have hope that even the most heated tensions can be solved."

Szijjártó also strongly defends Hungary's stance on immigration, arguing that its policies are based on international law.

"It says that if anyone is forced to flee (their homeland), then he or she is entitled to stay temporarily in the territory of the first safe country. The one escaping from his/her home for any reason can't go through any country to end up anywhere he/she wants. Since these immigrants come to us through Serbia, Croatia and Romania and these are all safe countries, there is no legal or humanitarian reason to allow these people to violate the border between peaceful countries."

He further added: "Secondly, it is a sovereign right of the country to make a decision with whom you are ready to live together. And just because a nation says that it would like to stay as it has been over the last couple hundreds of years, this nation should not be considered better or worse than another. Thirdly, we are human beings and feel the responsibility to help. We have a programme called 'Hungary Helps', which is to help communities in need on the spot. For example, rebuilding houses, churches, schools, hospitals and covering their operational costs. In other words, making circumstances for people to stay there and bring help where it is needed."

1ST ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

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Theme: Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses

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Submission Deadline: Feb 21, 2022

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The conference is inspired from the economic and sustainability critical challenges facing the world after Covid pandemic, and therefore the aim of the conference is to share the information and knowledge related to economic transformation and sustainability and various emerging businesses to support world economic growth in a global context.

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- To initiate a dialogue and discussion on sustainability and development.
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With an exciting theme (Economic Development, Sustainability and Emerging Businesses) and clearly defined objectives for the upcoming 1st Economic Transformation and Sustainability international conference, the tentative sub-themes/tracks are but not limited to:

Track 1: Sustainable Economic Development

Track 2: Agriculture, Food Management & its impact on Economy

Track 3: Water Management

Track 4: Entrepreneurial interventions and innovation

Track 5: Emerging Business Practices

Track 6: Digital transformation in financial services

Track 7: Digital Media and Communication

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

- Full Paper Submission: Feb 21, 2022
- Paper Acceptance Notification: Mar 07, 2022
- Final Paper Submission: Mar 14, 2022
- Conference Presentation: Mar 28 - Mar 30, 2022

REGISTRATION FEES

- Category 1: USD 55 for all Participants
- Category 2: USD 40 for Students, Staff, members from Collaborating Institutions, life members of IEA and OXERT

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Authors are invited to submit through conference submission system, please check www.etsiconf.com

For more information

Contact us via the following emails:
For General information: info@etsiconf.com
For authors inquires: author@etsiconf.com

ID card must for all gold buys

FROM P1

The move, said the ministry, comes as part of its supervisory role of applying the Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Law, which aims to confirm that commercial institutions maintain customer due diligence.

When checked with jewellers in the capital city, they said both sales and purchase are made only after verifying the identity of the customers in accordance with the guidelines from the ministry.

"All transactions, mainly high-net sales and purchases, are made only after verifying the personal identity of the customers," said floor manager of a leading jewellery shop in Ruwi.

They also confirmed that officials collect details of the purchases on regular intervals from

the shops.

The National Centre for Financial Information is the authorised entity entrusted with the task of analysing suspicious activity reports which are received from various entities and disseminate the information to the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the public prosecution for further action, in accordance with its requirements.

According to experts, most of the anti-money laundering violations are due to the inadequate Know Your Customer (KYC) follow ups.

"KYC helps manage risks and helps to understand customer behaviours. When the entity is looking into the customer identity, it is important to look into the real beneficial owner of a particular transaction," says Jose Chacko,

Partner-Forensic Technology Services, Crowe Oman.

As per Financial Action Task Force, an inter-governmental policy making body that sets anti money laundering standards and counter terrorist financing measures, entities should perform customer due diligence throughout the relations with the customer.

"Even though method and the periodicity may differ as per jurisdictions, customer due diligence procedures must be initiated along with a customer beginning a business relation with the entity," points out Jose Chacko.

"First thing is to determine a customer's identity. This may be finding the customer's name, any family name and identity of the customer from individually verifiable documents, together with the beneficial owner," he adds.



Urban areas more vulnerable to extreme climate events



A view of a completely flooded parking lot outside a shopping centre in Muscat recently. – AFP

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Urban planners in the Sultanate of Oman will have to consider the impact of heavy rainfall that usually follows the low-pressure systems developed in the sea, especially the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

According to the National Strategy for Adaptation and Mitigation to Climate Change for the Sultanate of Oman (2020-2040) of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), urban areas characterised by a high concentration of people, infrastructure, business, and industry will be vulnerable to extreme climate events in the absence of adequate planning and governance.

“Extreme rainfall can lead to flash floods, which can adversely affect business sectors such as telecommunications, insurance, and banking among others.”

Not to forget the amount of investment that will be needed to rebuild the infrastructure as was evident during the recent cyclone.

The report warned that with climate change, the Sultanate of Oman’s low-lying areas along the coast will be vulnerable to flooding from the combined impact of sea-level rise and storm surge associated with extreme weather events.

“The magnitude of flash floods and frequency could increase in the future from heavy rainfall. Plans for urban areas and infrastructure development should be re-evaluated to account for these risks.”

It quotes that Al Batinah is said to be the most vulnerable area in Oman with 98.5 per cent of its areas classified as very high-risk zone while Musandam is the least vulnerable with only 21.1 per cent of the coastal area being very high-risk zones.

The magnitude of flash floods and frequency could increase in the future from heavy rainfall. Plans for urban areas and infrastructure development should be re-evaluated to account for these risks

REPORT

Total inundated land from sea level rise ranges from about 386km² with sea-level rise under 0.5m to over 500km² under sea level of 1 metre.

Since 2007, the Sultanate of Oman has been affected by tropical storms of varying degrees, including cyclones.

Gonu was extremely powerful that went to the strongest cyclone on record in the Arabian Sea.

Mekunu was the strongest storm to strike the Dhofar Governorate since 1959. It developed out of a low-pressure area on May 21, 2018. It gradually intensified, passing east of Socotra on May 23 as a very intense tropical cyclone. On May 25, Mekunu reached its peak of intensity.

Phet hit the eastern coast in 2010 with winds reaching up to 120km per hour. Less destructive compared to Gonu, Phet damaged bridges, roads, desalination plants, electricity, and water pipes across the country.

The Budget 2022 said that the government will allocate RO 200 million to repair damage caused by Cyclone Shaheen that hit the country in October last year.

Most of the destruction was in Musannah, Al Suwaiq, Saham, Al Khabourah and Suhar.

Panel to follow up climate change issues

SAMUEL KUTTY
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Efforts by the Sultanate of Oman in dealing with climate change issues are set to get pace and scale with the formation of a national committee to implement policies and action plans.

The National Committee for Climate Change and the Protection of the Ozone Layer, comprising 31 members, will be headed by Eng Nayef bin Ali bin Hamad al Abri, Chairman of Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

In a statement posted on its Twitter handle, the Authority said, “The committee will follow up issues relating to climate change, take efforts to mitigate its impact and protect the ozone layer”.

The committee is part of the efforts to keep abreast of local and global developments in the field of climate change, to protect the ozone layer and to achieve joint cooperation between all relevant authorities, it said.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the most vulnerable countries in the Middle East to the adverse impacts of climate change and has a heightened degree of awareness and concern about global warming and its adverse impacts.

In recent years, the country has stepped up its efforts in advancing its expertise and methodologies to better manage the climate change risks over the past five years.

It has embarked on serious structural reforms and transformative policies

to lay the groundwork for a low carbon economy and shift to low-emission sustainable development pathways over the last five years.

Climate change is at the forefront of public and government consciousness due to the accelerated pace of changing climatic patterns being experienced in the country.

The Climate Change Strategy, adopted by the Omani government in October 2019, seeks to support a gradual transition to a low carbon economy and an energy matrix significantly lower in carbon emissions.

Through the strategy, national stakeholders have already begun to identify climate-resilient opportunities within a set of key vulnerable sectors, namely water resources, marine biodiversity, and fisheries; agriculture; urban areas; tourism and infrastructure; and public health.

According to the statement from CAA, the formation of the committee will help to define the Sultanate of Oman’s position on international issues related to climate change and the protection of the ozone layer.

“The committee will implement policies and national action plans which will gradually reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to the negative impacts resulting from climate change and protect the ozone layer in accordance with Oman Vision 2040”, it added.

CPA launches anti-fraud campaign today

MUSCAT: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) will launch a campaign on Sunday against commercial fraud entitled ‘Stick to Genuine Products’.

The campaign targets to increase awareness about the unified GCC Anti-Commercial Fraud Law, acquainting consumers with the commercial practices that are considered commercial fraud and acquainting the suppliers and traders with the legal punishment for commercial fraud.

The campaign comes in accordance with an innovative media plan concerned with both parties of the consumer process in order to enhance consumer awareness on the risks of commercial fraud and to enable the supplier to stay away from any practices that could be considered commercial fraud.

The Consumer Protection Authority issued 1,444 commercial violations until the end of last year. The CPA carried out 53 seizures related to adulterated goods and services. The authority received 250 complaints and



627 reports related to commercial fraud by the end of 2021, according to statistics issued by the CPA.

Khalid bin Ali al Rashidi, Director of Communications and Media Department at CPA, said that the department mainly focuses on the idea that consumer awareness is the first line of defence for his consumer rights. Hence the department has paid great attention to raising awareness about the dangers of commercial fraud by organising this campaign and other coming campaigns that will follow, all of which deal with commercial

fraud and other practices that endanger the health and safety of the consumers.

The campaign also includes organising awareness seminars and workshops in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, producing awareness materials broadcast on all media, preparing pages and brochures, and conducting radio and television interviews. This is in addition to holding events with the participation of specialists and influencers to raise awareness of commercial fraud and its negative effects on the consumers, the official said.



Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company

Diam Haya

Member of Nama Group

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following Tenders:

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/01/OWWSC/2022	Construction of Water Distribution Network and House Connection in Ras Al Hadd 3 in Sur Wilayat in South Ash Sharqiyah Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and have sufficient experience in the works mentioned.	50/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable	17/02/2022	21/03/2022
T/02/OWWSC/2022	Construction of Long-Term Improvements of Al Seeb Wilayat Water Networks in Muscat Governorate	Local Companies registered with Government Tender Board and International Companies have sufficient experience in the works mentioned.	2500/- (Plus 5% VAT) Non-refundable (VAT is not applicable for International Companies)	24/02/2022	18/04/2022

Interested Companies may obtain a soft copy of the tender documents through an online shared link (One drive) against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of documents. The Tenders may be collected on any working days between 07:00 am – 3:00 pm hours.

The tender fee shall be accepted through online bank transfer for the account details provided below

- Account Number 0423 01092 130 0017
- Account holder's name: Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company
- Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG
- Branch : Corporate Branch
- Place : Ruwi
- Country : Sultanate of Oman
- SWIFT CODE : BMUSOMRXXXX

- All applicants who have paid the tender fee can obtain a soft copy of the tender documents through an online shared link (One drive).
- Both Technical and Commercial Proposals along with required documents shall be submitted in hardcopy in a sealed envelope & soft copy (CD) bearing the project name, Tender number and address of Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company at Head Office building near Panorama Mall not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above.
- The Tenderer should enclose a Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value and addressed to the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Duly filled Form of Tender and Bid Bond shall be submitted in a sealed envelope bearing the project name, Tender number and address of Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company shall be placed in Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company not later than 2:00 pm on the date specified above.
- Preference shall be given to the Companies, which comprise the required percentage of Omanization and possible purchase of Omani National Products.
- For more details refer to Tender Page of our website <https://owwsc.nama.om> or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om

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THE COUNTRY
AIMS TO SECURE
AT LEAST 10 PER
CENT OF THE
COUNTRY'S
ELECTRICITY
REQUIREMENTS
FROM RENEWABLE
ENERGY
RESOURCES
BY 2025

THE COUNTRY'S
ELECTRICITY
REQUIREMENTS
FROM RENEWABLE
ENERGY RESOURCES
WILL RISE FROM 35 PER
CENT TO 39 PER CENT
BY 2040

35%-39%
BY 2040

10%
BY 2025

As the government
regards renewables as an important part
of the non-oil economic engine of the country,
the sector can create thousands of jobs by
building local production of solar panels
and aluminium frames

RENEWABLES SHINE BRIGHT

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samuelkutyyp

With the launch of several major projects, the Sultanate of Oman is on target to achieve the ambitious goal of covering its electricity demand with renewable energy.

Thanks to its cost effective benefits, the government aims to develop its nascent renewable energy sector and cover a major portion of domestic electricity demand with energy from sun, waste energy and wind power.

The recent opening of the Ibri Solar Project, the largest renewable energy facility of its kind in the country, is expected to peak in productivity through the generation of power sufficient for supplying 50,000 homes with electricity and cutting down CO2 emissions by 340,000 tonnes a year.

The 500 megawatt utility, which cost

RO 155 million, figures among Oman Vision 2040 major projects aimed at optimising available investment opportunities and protecting natural resources. It is the second such grid-connected renewable-based power scheme to produce carbon-free electricity in the Sultanate of Oman.

One of the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and the National Energy Strategy is to derive at least 30 per cent of electricity from renewables by 2030.

Since the government regards renewables as an important part of the non-oil economic engine of the country, the sector can create thousands of jobs by building local production of solar panels and aluminium frames.

In the era of declining costs of renewable energy technologies, namely, solar photovoltaic (PV) panels and wind turbines, the country's embrace of solar

The Ibri Solar Project, the largest renewable energy facility of its kind in the country, is expected to peak in productivity through the generation of power sufficient for supplying

50,000 homes with electricity and cutting down CO2 emissions by 340,000 tonnes a year

and wind energy is as auspicious and timely as it is necessary.

According to the strategy, over the period 2021-2027, the renewable energy plan aims to secure at least 2,660 MW. The plan relies mainly on solar PV with 79 per cent and wind of about 21 per cent.

While solar photovoltaic is the technology of choice for the majority of projects, the country is looking to promote investment in large-scale wind projects by gathering more comprehensive data on the country's resources.

In hopes of building its renewable energy capacity not only from top down, but also from bottom up, the Authority for Electricity Regulation Oman, is encouraging the growth of rooftop solar panels for homeowners and allowing them to sell excess electricity back to the central grid.

Although renewables still constitute a

tiny portion of Oman's overall energy mix, the percentage is slowly growing.

The country aims to secure at least 10 per cent of the country's electricity requirements from renewable energy resources by 2025, rising from 35 per cent to 39 per cent by 2040. The next major solar-powered scheme — Manah 1 and 2 — with a combined capacity of up to 1,000 MW, is expected to be revived for procurement via a competitive tendering process by end of 2022.

"Oman's demand for energy is expected to rise in the coming decades. Strong domestic demand is already forcing this nation, along with others in the Gulf, to import natural gas. Without tapping its renewable energy potential, it is bound to import more of its energy from abroad as well as fail to reduce its emissions", says a report by Inside Arabia in an online news analysis magazine.



Sri Lanka aims to enhance bilateral relations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 5

Impressed by the time-tested foreign policy of the Sultanate of Oman, Sri Lanka said it has ambitious plans to enhance bilateral relations between the two seafaring nations.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the eve of the 74th Independence Day of Sri Lanka, Omar Lebbe Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman, said the bilateral relations have been highly solidified on people-to-people relations, besides other diplomatic bonds.

“The relations between Sri Lanka and the Sultanate of Oman are bound by long-standing historical relations underpinned by a vibrant tradition of people-to-people contacts and mutual respect. Both countries commemorated the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of Diplomatic Relations on February 17, 2021 by organising a special event at the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman,” he said.

Additionally, a memorial logo on this significant occasion was also jointly issued by both countries. The Foreign Ministers of the two countries exchanged congratulatory messages to mark this milestone in the history of bilateral relations by demonstrating their commitment to further consolidate the relations between the two friendly countries with renewed visions and vigour.

A number of initiatives in key areas of mutual interest, including direct maritime connectivity, were taken during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to him, all these steps have helped laying a strong foundation for the future cooperation between the two countries with a view to achieving another milestone in the bilateral relations in the future.

“The Sultanate of Oman and Sri Lanka implemented mutual visa exemption for diplomats, officials, service people and other special passport holders of both countries in order to facilitate smooth exchange of bilateral visits between the two countries. This arrangement has facilitated the exchange of bilateral political, diplomatic, economic, defence and other official level visits and engagements between the two countries.”

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) was virtually signed with a view to enhancing interactions between the private sector business communities in both countries. A virtual business forum with the participation of key government ministries and agencies of both countries as well as private sector B2B sessions were also organised with the participation of around 100 private companies from both countries.

Khosl brings some cheer to girls fighting cancer



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Ever felt sorry for a girl who has lost her hair due to chemo sessions during her battle with cancer and wished if one could share hair with the girl?

There is good news! A group of women is collecting hair from those who want to donate hair to support such girls globally and bring smile on their faces.

‘Khosl’, a voluntary group of women from various wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman, is working on the project by exhorting donors to contact and make a difference in someone’s life. The collected stuff would go to different countries.

“We started this initiative after seeing many girls after witnessing the sufferings of girls who undergo the chemo process,” says Widyana al Shibli, the point of contact at Khosl.

It all began to happen when Al Shibli got

A voluntary group of women named ‘Khosl’ is collecting hair from those who want to donate hair to support the girls who have lost their hair due to chemo sessions

a large portion of her hair cut but felt it was wrong on her part to throw the same while many are dreaming of a wig after they lost hair due to some reason.

“I began to search for any organisation to donate the hair but couldn’t find any. However, after long search, I was able to get some NGOs abroad that collected hair from individuals and made wigs for the deserving girls, with the state support,” Widyana said.

She got in touch with some women who thought alike and it was in 2018 that they

began to help the girls by sending collected hair with a view to bringing a smile on their faces.

“Besides helping individuals to donate their hair, we are also coordinating with organisations that make wigs for people battling cancer around the world,” adds Widyana.

One can reach out to the group and give time to get the hair collected. The Khosl volunteers would come and collect.

“We have both Omani and expat women volunteers on collection teams in different wilayats. They collect, pack and deliver to the US where the state-supported initiative collects and distributes wigs suitable for each girl’s head,” adds Widyana.

People from all walks of life, salons and other NGOs are supporting Khosl initiative and some beauty parlours and salons support the group by reducing the fee for haircuts, in order to encourage more women to donate.

Taban launches Suhar flight



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 5

Suhar Airport received on Friday evening, with the conventional water spray salute, the first flight of the Iranian airline Taban on a direct route between Suhar and Shiraz. This route will be joining the list of global airlines which operate their flights to Suhar Airport, Northern Gate of Oman Airports.

Taban will operate the flight on a weekly basis on

Fridays between Suhar and Shiraz.

The launch of Taban Airlines flights to Suhar Airport will rise up the number of the carriers which operate their flights to Suhar Airport up to 5 international airlines; namely, Fly Dubai, Air Arabia, Qasham Air, and SalamAir.

Launching this direct route is part of Oman Airports’ initiatives to continue promoting air traffic in the Sultanate of

Oman’s civil airports which are under its supervision after lifting the restrictions of Covid-19 imposed last year where Suhar Airport implemented new travel protocols adopted across the airports in the country for arrivals and departures alike that is in an alignment with the national efforts.

Oman Airports expressed its satisfaction by greeting the first flight of Taban Airline coming from Shiraz in a direct route that is hoped to

serve the passengers of the two friendly countries, boost the commercial and tourism traffic in both North and South Al Batinah Governorate.

It pointed out that the company has taken all health and safety measures across its facilities in Suhar Airport with a view to offering a safe travel experience with the hope that its working teams will play their roles to introduce the tourism and entertaining offerings of Suhar city to its guests.

وزارة الإعلام
Ministry of Information

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee in Ministry of Information announces the following Tender:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Class & Grade	Last Date For Collection	Submission Date	Purchase Fees (R.O.)
1/2022	The Technical Fitout and Interior Decoration Works for MOI Auditorium.	Excellent	10/2/2022	6/3/2022	150/-

1. All specialized companies in the field of the tender shown above and are registered with the Tender Board to the degree indicate above, may obtain tender documents, against non-refundable fees, from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.

2. Bidder shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with electronic copy of the a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Ministry of Information. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for (90) days. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not accepted.

Note: The original bank guarantee should be submitted to the General Directorate Of Administrative And Financial Affairs, Project Department Building at Ministry of Information, if it **Requested**.

3. The Ministry has the right to:

1) Add or Cancel some works in the tender if necessary.

2) Cancellation of the tender without giving reasons.

For clarifications you may contact via:
Telephone : 24943093, 24943785, Email id: (projects@part.gov.om)



Employees examine the coronavirus PCR gargle tests in the LifeBrain laboratory in Vienna. — AFP

Covid vaccination compulsory in Austria, in EU first

VIENNA: Austrians over the age of 18 must be vaccinated against Covid-19 from Saturday or face the possibility of a heavy fine, an unprecedented measure in the European Union. The new measure, adopted on January 20 by Parliament, came into force on Saturday, the culmination of a process that began in November in the face of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant.

The government decided to pursue its new, tougher approach despite criticism within the country.

“No other country in Europe is following us on compulsory vaccines,” said Manuel Krautgartner, who has campaigned against the new approach.

In neighbouring Germany, a similar proposal championed by the new Social Democrat Chancellor Olaf Scholz was debated last month in the lower house of parliament but many MPs still oppose the idea.

Despite the threat of such a

drastic measure, the vaccination rate in Austria has still failed to take off, languishing below the levels seen in France or Spain. The humanitarian association Arbeiter Samariter Bund, which oversees some vaccination sites in the capital Vienna, said there had an uptick in turnout this week.

“We recorded a small increase of around nine per cent compared to last week,” the organisation’s manager, Michael Hausmann, said.

From the average of around 7,000 injections administered every day in the capital, only 10 per cent are a first dose, he said.

Erika Viskancove, a 33-year-old accountant, said she came to a vaccination centre situated next to an Art Deco swimming pool to receive her third booster dose.

“I sincerely believe that the law is the best way” to defeat the pandemic, she said, calling on other countries to follow Austria’s lead. — AFP

US TROOP REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE IN POLAND

RZESZOW, Poland: The first US troops reinforcing Nato allies in Eastern Europe amid a Russian military build-up on Ukraine’s border arrived on Saturday at Rzeszow military base in southeastern Poland.

A small plane carrying what a Polish military source said were US chain of command personnel landed in the morning at Rzeszow-Jasionka airport as preparations continued at the base, which is near Poland’s border with Ukraine.

TV footage showed temporary accommodation being prepared at the G2A Arena in the nearby town of Jasionka, while workers could be seen building a fence around the venue. “As announced, the first elements of the brigade battle group from the 82nd Airborne Division of the United States Army have arrived in Poland,” a Polish military spokesman said.

On Wednesday, US President Joe Biden ordered nearly 3,000



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau at the US Department of State in Washington, DC. — AFP

extra troops to Poland and Romania to shield Eastern Europe from a potential spillover from the Ukraine crisis. About 1,700 service members, mainly paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, will deploy from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Poland “over the next

days,” US Army sources have said. According to the Pentagon, a Stryker squadron of around 1,000 US service members based in the German town of Vilseck will be sent to Romania. The first additional US troops arrived in Germany on Friday.

Russia has denied plans to invade Ukraine but has deployed more than 100,000 troops near Ukraine’s borders and says it could take unspecified military measures if its demands are not met, including a promise by Nato never to admit Kyiv. — Reuters



A US Air Force Lockheed C-130J-30 Hercules transport aircraft lands at Jasionka Airport near Rzeszow, Poland. — Reuters

Moroccan rescuers dig towards child trapped in well

RABAT: Rescuers on Saturday dug to within a few metres of reaching a young boy who has been trapped for five days in a well in northern Morocco, a delicate and dangerous operation constantly delayed by rocks and imperilled by the threat of landslides.

Workers with mechanical diggers have been trying round the clock to rescue the 5-year-old child, Rayan Awram, after he fell into a 32-metre deep well in the hills near Chefchaouen on Tuesday.

“We have two metres more to dig to reach Rayan and we hope

we will not encounter rocks,” lead rescuer Thamrani Abdelhadi told reporters at the site on Saturday afternoon. He said it was difficult to determine the child’s health condition because a camera that has been dropped down the well shows him lying on his side, but he added “we hope we will rescue him alive”.

It was also unclear how long the digging will take due to difficulties relating to rocks and the danger of landslides, he said.

Pictures on Moroccan media have shown Rayan huddled at the



bottom of the disused well, which narrows as it descends from 45 cm wide at the top, preventing rescuers from descending. Workers in helmets and high-visibility vests carried stretchers, ropes, tackle and other equipment down into a pit they have dug parallel to the well.

On Friday they began carefully excavating a horizontal tunnel towards the child, sometimes being ordered out to stabilise the earth. The work grew more difficult as they encountered rocks between the trench and the well, a

witness said. The rescuers are placing concrete and steel pipes into the horizontal tunnel as they dig to allow them to pull Rayan to safety.

“People who love us are sparing no effort to save my child,” said the child’s father in a tired, barely audible voice, as he stood watching rescue efforts on Friday night, wearing a traditional hooded woollen robe against the cold.

“We pray this will be the day of his rescue,” he said.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

TORONTO

Canadian cities brace for more anti-vaccine protests

Canadian cities, including the financial hub Toronto, are bracing for disruptions this weekend as protests against vaccine mandates spread from the capital of Ottawa. The so-called “Freedom Convoy” began as a movement against a vaccine requirement for cross-border truckers, but has turned into a rallying point against public health measures.

Protesters have shut down downtown Ottawa for the past eight days, with some participants



waving Confederate or Nazi flags and some saying they wanted to dissolve Canada’s government. Toronto Police said they would have a ramped up presence in the city over the weekend due to anticipated protests. — Reuters

ANTANANARIVO

Madagascar braces for cyclone Batsirai

Madagascar braced for cyclone Batsirai to make landfall, with forecasters warning the storm could bring further devastation to the island nation just two weeks after another cyclone killed at least 55 people. A local weather bulletin said the storm system was about 163 kilometres off the Indian Ocean island’s eastern coast on Saturday afternoon and that landfall was expected at about 6 pm.

Batsirai is packing wind speeds of 165 kilometres per hour, the



bulletin added. “Significant and widespread damage is therefore to be feared. Batsirai will then cross the country from east to west, remaining generally at a dangerous stage,” the bulletin said. — Reuters

LONDON

Celebrations to mark 70 years on throne begins

Britain’s Queen Elizabeth kicked off celebrations for the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne by inviting local community groups to her Sandringham residence in the east of England. Sunday will mark the queen’s platinum jubilee, a first for a British monarch. Elizabeth, 95, became the queen of Britain and more than a dozen other realms including Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the death of her father King George VI on February 6, 1952.



Tenacious storm now has Northeast in its sights



Ashley Perez, left, and Paula Orlowski, help Shawna Lauby get her car free from a small snow bank in Buffalo, NY.

Texas had fewer than 15,000 outages last week, bringing relief to residents scarred by the memory of an eight-day freeze nearly a year ago, when a widespread failure of the electrical grid plunged the state into darkness and claimed the lives of over 240 people

JESUS JIMENEZ & SOPHIE KASAKOVE

A tenacious winter storm that stranded travellers, closed schools and snarled roadways as it swept from New Mexico to New England last week continued to bring hazardous weather, dumping a mix of snow, sleet and ice on parts of the Northeast.

Heavy snow of more than a foot was projected in northern parts of New York and New England, with ice the primary concern farther south, said Rich Otto, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service’s prediction centre.

In places already hit by the storm, problems lingered last week. Schools and colleges in several states cancelled classes and drivers in Texas found themselves stuck in frigid temperatures overnight after an 18-wheeler truck jackknifed on Interstate 10 in Kerrville, about 60 miles northwest of San Antonio.

At least two people suffered serious injuries, and many others were stranded for about 10 hours, said Sgt Jonathan Lamb of the Kerrville Police Department. Authorities were able to clear the busy highway by Friday afternoon. “It was just too sleek and too icy”, Lamb said.

Gov Greg Abbott called the storm “one of the most significant icing events that we’ve had in the state of Texas in

at least several decades.”

Some 3-5 inches of snow had fallen on some areas north and west of Fort Worth by Friday, and roads in Central and North Texas were “very hazardous”, according to the weather service.

Continuing cold temperatures over the coming days will keep roads and runways icy. More than 3,300 US flights had been cancelled on Friday, with the highest number of cancellations at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport, Boston Logan International Airport and LaGuardia Airport in New York, according to FlightAware, a tracking website. That followed thousands of flights cancelled earlier in the week, filling airports and nearby hotels with stranded travellers. Up to 1 inch of sleet was expected to accumulate in parts of northern Connecticut, southeastern Massachusetts and northern Rhode Island, while Portland, Maine, could receive up to 2 inches. In the Boston area and across southern New England, rain will turn into freezing rain, and then sleet, resulting in icy road conditions.

“That sleet is going to be a bit more difficult to clean up, because we’re not going to get much help from warm temperatures”, said Sarah Thunberg, a meteorologist with the weather service in Portland.

Western New York state and northern Vermont could

see snow accumulation of up to 14 inches, according to the weather service, with 6-12 inches expected across central New Hampshire. New York City is unlikely to see snow, Otto said, but may receive some ice mixed with rain.

“It looks like they’ll be spared the worst of it”, he said.

By Friday afternoon, the storm had knocked out power to more than 300,000 homes and businesses, primarily in Tennessee, Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania.

Texas had fewer than 15,000 outages by Friday afternoon, bringing relief to residents scarred by the memory of an eight-day freeze nearly a year ago, when a widespread failure of the electrical grid plunged the state into darkness and claimed the lives of more than 240 people.

The impact of this week’s hazardous weather was also felt in Alabama, where a tornado killed one person near Sawyerville, south of Tuscaloosa, according to Russell Weeden, Director of Emergency Management for Hale County. He told local reporters that eight people had been injured, including three critically.

In Memphis, Tennessee, ice began accumulating from a continuous freezing rain on Thursday, leading to traffic crashes, downed trees and power outages. Ice storm warnings were issued farther east, including in parts of western Tennessee and Kentucky.

A conductor in demand, and in control

JOSHUA BARONE

MUNICH: Let’s get this out of the way: Don’t expect Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla to be the music director of a major American orchestra any time soon. “At the moment, I will be much more content to be a simple freelancer”, Gražinytė-Tyla, 35, said in a recent interview at the Bavarian State Opera here, where she was preparing a new production of Janacek’s “The Cunning Little Vixen.”

It’s an unusual statement coming from a young conductor in demand, especially one whose current appointment — as music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Britain — concludes this spring.

Even more unusual since Gražinytė-Tyla, along with the likes of Susanna Mälkki, is often mentioned as a leading contender to fill vacancies on the horizon at top American orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic.

But as administrators search for a conductor of her stature, as well as for someone to tip the scale of gender balance in the United States — where there won’t be any female music directors among the country’s 25 largest orchestras until Nathalie Stutzmann starts with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra next season — Gražinytė-Tyla is a defiant rarity: An anti-careerist who has resisted industry pressure in favour of artistic and personal fulfilment.

Her star might be on the rise, but she is keeping it on a short leash. Gražinytė-Tyla designed her calendar this season so that it was dominated by “The Cunning Little Vixen” — both in concert, as in Birmingham, England and staged, as in Munich. She has retained a remarkable amount of control over her schedule, ensuring time for family: Her partner and two sons in Salzburg, Austria, with a third child on the way.

“She’s very in tune with herself”, said Barrie Kosky, who directed the new “Vixen”, which runs through February 15.

“She’s very sure her decisions are the right decisions for her. She couldn’t care less about all the tra-la-la.”

Born to a family of professional musicians in Lithuania, and finding early success with the baton, Gražinytė-Tyla was teed up for the typical life of a conductor: Jet-setting hustle and steppingstone appointments — leading, perhaps, to a prestige podium.

But she also long had a streak of independence. She began to study music formally at 11 against the wishes of her parents, who wanted to spare her the difficulties of an artistic life. Although experienced as a singer, she wasn’t a trained instrumentalist, so she joined the only school program that was available: Conducting. She was a natural and, at 16, took first prize at a Lithuanian competition.

“I remember thinking, Oh no, what am I going to do now?” Gražinytė-Tyla said. “There was this pressure, and I knew it would be so hard to maintain that level. It was a huge challenge, but also a mix of joy and responsibility.”

The pressure didn’t end there. Completing her studies, adding Tyla to her professional name, and winning the Salzburg Young Conductors Award, she was then given a fellowship with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where she would go on to serve as an assistant, then associate, conductor. She first appeared with the CBSO in summer 2015, and by the following January had been appointed its music director.

The speed of all that, Gražinytė-Tyla said, “puts you into shape and can give you a good kick to do something fast.” But, she added, it also made her value an introspective pause. “I think it is incredibly important to stay very aware of what is happening inside, because a person shouldn’t be a machine, and shouldn’t be a little part of this big mechanism that says, ‘You go this way and this way.’”

“People are different”, she continued. “But I think I need time where I am not studying or conducting or traveling or

‘There was this pressure, and I knew it would be so hard to maintain that level. It was a huge challenge, but also a mix of joy and responsibility’

GRAŽINYTĖ-TYLA
A Lithuanian conductor and musical director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

rehearsing to just be a whole human being.”

A breakthrough came during a conversation with violinist Gidon Kremer. She recalled him telling her that her career would always feel like it had two different doors. Behind one would be record labels, managers, festivals and a variety of conflicting demands; behind the other, “all your dreams are there, and your imagination, and the things you can go for and explore.”

She has opened both doors. Insistently private, she speaks strategically, at times even euphemistically, about her home life. Her partner hasn’t been publicly identified beyond having a job with the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg; in the interview, she referred to family time as “human relations.”

Yet she did take the job in Birmingham, which has a high profile and a reputation as a star-maker, with such recent music directors as Simon Rattle and Andris Nelsons. A recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon followed her appointment. In both cases, she was a first: as a woman on the Birmingham podium and as a female conductor with that storied label. Those milestones were noted publicly, Gražinytė-Tyla said, but only in passing.

“This is something that our generation has to be incredibly grateful for”, she said, referring to the struggles of female conductors. “There have been a lot of painful memories for our colleagues in the past, and I have had some small experiences myself, but nothing in the amount that someone in Susanna Mälkki’s generation had to go through.”

Gražinytė-Tyla was warmly received by the players in Birmingham, said Oliver Janes, a clarinetist with the ensemble. “She has this rehearsal technique where you forget you’ve ever played a piece before”, he added. “And once you’ve completely forgotten how it goes, you feel like you’re starting again.”

Importance of knowledge about mental illness



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

In the summer of 2018, 11 people between the ages of fifteen and eighty years from three generations were found hanging from the ceiling inside their home in the Indian city of Delhi. They were handcuffed, mouths gagged and blindfolded.

The police were confused as there was no sign of break in. It wasn't until they found a diary of one of the sons, in which he mentioned that the middle brother 'Lalit' told the family that he saw in his dreams their dead grandfather telling him that he 'the dead grandfather' will come back to life and reincarnate Lalit's body and that everyone should obey him and follow his orders.

Lalit began to speak in the grandfather's voice and call his grandmother in her first name as if he was her husband, and he began to dictate to them some rituals and

prayers, which they had to follow to purify their souls.

The family began carrying out the rituals for seven days that ended with the hanging. Apparently 'Lalit' convinced them that the grandfather would come back to life, untie them and save them from death.

The police concluded that the family members died voluntarily without the slightest resistance while watching 'Lalit' hanging them who then hanged himself. This incident indicates the importance of knowledge of mental illness which can impact the person and those around him or her.

Families are the people we are brought up with and with whom we share many values and experiences that shape our perceptions of ourselves and the world around us. As there are good families that empower their members and

FAMILIES ARE THE PEOPLE WE SHARE OUR VALUES, BELIEVES AND EARLY EXPERIENCES WHICH EVENTUALLY SHAPE THE WAYS WE PERCEIVE OURSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND US

instil in them good values, there are families that are fueled with envy, neglect and lack of appreciation.

Families are often united against the outside world, sometimes to keep their identities and values or because of their belief that others are bad or not trustworthy.

What happened to the family from India mentioned before is an example how family belief can have

dangerous consequences.

According to Indian psychiatrist who analysed the case, the brother 'Lalit' had a mental health condition called delusional disorder, where he was convinced that the dead grandfather would come back from the dead to untie the 11 members of the family and free them in the last minute.

Because of other shared values in that family such as they believe that they should obey the dead grandfather who has taken over the body of 'Lalit' without questioning, they accepted his deadly behaviour without any struggle.

In modern psychology, the term 'dysfunctional family describes a family with multiple conflicts such as sibling rivalries, parent-child conflicts, domestic violence, addiction to alcohol or drug abuse. People in such families have inappropriate boundaries when

dealing with each other, sometimes placing extremely high and unobtainable expectation which eventually leads to frustration, low self-esteem and sometimes alcohol and drug abuse.

So, how can you survive such family?

Psychologist advice that the first step is to acknowledge that dealing with the situation would not be easy so learn to set boundaries and use assertive communication where you tell the other person that you do not like their interference or destructive comments.

Keep calm and remember that sometimes you will not be able to change your family's behaviour especially when they refuse to admit their destructive nature. Remember that you cannot please everybody so whatever you do, think before you speak and be civil and polite.

UK's Johnson fights for political survival

ELIZABETH PIPER

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised to shake up operations in his 10 Downing Street office to try to survive his gravest crisis yet over events held at the heart of power during Covid-19 lockdowns.

Key to the organisational changes is a promise he made last week to lawmakers from his Conservative Party at a meeting in parliament to turn to Lynton Crosby, an Australian political strategist who has helped him before and is respected by many Conservative lawmakers, as an ad hoc "strategic adviser".

Johnson then reaffirmed his commitment to one of the promises that got him elected in 2019 — "levelling up" Britain to reduce chronic inequality between the affluent south of England and the more deprived north, which was welcomed more widely than expected.

Johnson has sent a clear signal: he is betting on a change of style targeting his administration rather than a change of substance to get through the scandal over alleged staff parties at No 10 while the country was under lockdown to help curb the spread of Covid-19.

"He needs to start delivering so people start feeling the benefit," one veteran Conservative said on condition of anonymity. "Just get stuff done."

Another who attended the meeting said: "The penny has dropped." They said Johnson seemed to have finally understood that for many lawmakers, Downing Street felt remote, handing down orders without listening to other opinions in the party.

Since becoming prime minister in July 2019, Johnson has taken Britain out of the European Union and led it through the Covid-19 pandemic. He has also proved gaffe-prone and is now facing calls to resign, including from some Conservatives.

He is not out of the woods. After a failed rebellion by newer lawmakers fizzled out last month, he is now seeing a steady stream of more senior Conservatives announcing they are calling for him to go.

After the release of an initial report into the lockdown events by senior civil servant Sue Gray that cited "serious failures of leadership", and London police launched their own investigation into the reported parties, Johnson addressed worried Conservative lawmakers packed into a room in parliament. — **Reuters**

How Facebook is morphing into Meta

SHEERA FRENKEL,
MIKE ISAAC & RYAN MAC

The Instagram engineer had already packed his bags for a December vacation when his boss pulled him into a virtual meeting to talk about job goals for 2022.

Their conversation soon took an unexpected turn. Forget the goals, his boss told him. To succeed at Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, his boss said, he should instead apply to a new position in the burgeoning augmented reality and virtual reality teams. That's where the company needed people, he said.

The engineer, who had worked at Instagram for more than three years and who declined to be identified for fear of retaliation, was taken aback by essentially having to reapply for a job. He said he hadn't decided what to do.

Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of the company formerly known as Facebook, has upended his company ever since he announced in October that he was betting on the so-called metaverse. Under this idea, his company — renamed Meta — would introduce people to shared virtual worlds and experiences across different software and hardware platforms.

Since then, Meta has pursued a sweeping transformation, current and former employees said. It has created thousands of new jobs in the labs that make hardware and software for the metaverse. Managers have urged employees who worked on social networking products to apply for those augmented reality and virtual reality roles. The company has poached metaverse engineers from rivals including Microsoft and Apple. And it has officially rebranded some products, like its Oculus virtual-reality headsets, with the Meta name.

The moves amount to some of the most drastic changes at the Silicon Valley Company since 2012, when Zuckerberg announced that Facebook had to shift its social network away from desktop computers and towards mobile devices. The company restructured, focusing its energy and resources on making mobile-friendly versions of its products. The makeover was hugely successful, leading to years



New signage for Meta, the parent company of Facebook, in Menlo Park, Calif on November 4, 2021. (Jim Wilson/The New York Times)

of growth.

But changing the company's course now is far more challenging. Meta has more than 68,000 employees, more than 14 times its size in 2012. Its market value has risen by more than eight times over that period to \$840 billion. Its business is entrenched in online advertising and social networking. And while the shift may give Meta a head start on the Internet's next phase, the metaverse remains a largely theoretical concept — unlike the 2012 move to mobile when smartphones were already widely used.

The result has been internal disruption, according to nine current and former Meta employees who were not authorised to speak publicly. While some workers were excited about Meta's pivot, others questioned whether the company was hurtling into a new product without fixing issues such as misinformation and extremism on its social platforms. Workers were expected to adopt a positive attitude towards innovation or leave, one employee said, and some who disagreed with the new mission have departed.

What the metaverse focus means for the company's existing social networking products like Facebook and Instagram remains in flux, two employees said. At Facebook and Instagram, some teams have shrunk over the last four months, they said, adding that they expected their budgets for the second half of 2022 to be smaller than in previous years.

A spokesperson for Meta, which reports quarterly earnings, said building for the metaverse was not the company's only priority. He added that there hadn't been significant job cuts to existing teams because of the new direction.

Facebook's pivot to the metaverse started in its top ranks. In September, Mike Schroepfer, the long-serving chief technology officer, said he would step down by the end of 2022. In his place, Zuckerberg appointed Andrew Bosworth, known as "Boz," who has for the past few years led development on products like the Oculus headsets and Ray Ban Stories smart glasses.

Bosworth's ascendancy was a sign to insiders that Zuckerberg was taking virtual reality and the metaverse seriously. The two had met at Harvard in an artificial intelligence class, when Zuckerberg was a student and Bosworth was a teacher's assistant. They kept in touch after Zuckerberg dropped out of the university. Eventually, Bosworth moved to Silicon Valley to work for Zuckerberg.

Zuckerberg has since turned to Bosworth for major initiatives. In 2012, Bosworth was given the task of building out Facebook's mobile advertising products. After management issues at the Oculus virtual reality division, Zuckerberg dispatched Bosworth in August 2017 to take over the initiative. The virtual reality business was later rebranded Reality Labs.

— *The New York Times*

The best mistakes I’ve ever made...



Ray Petersen
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In a genuinely healthy way, music drives my day. I find myself lifted by music, motivated, impassioned, and energised, and from music can often find inspiration in the lyrics and often homespun philosophies it contains.

Making an early start the other morning I heard an introduction to a new song, and was drawn to it by the cello, that most elemental of string instruments, that visceral beauty that counters the fragility of the violin so beautifully. Then the male vocalist came on with a nasal sound, “Oh my God,” I thought, “this is a car crash,” as to describe the sound as organic was probably the description only a loving mother could give.

Then the melody, and the lyrics settled over me, on the back of a simple, stunning, arrangement to offer a true life experience, and one of the best pieces of music you are ever likely to hear. A group I have never heard of, but who I have since learned have a depth of musicality compared to the raw beauty of Queen in their prime, and a vocalist with thirty years of musical credits have combined as ‘The Divine Comedy,’ to produce ‘The Best Mistakes,’ and boy... is it worth a listen!

FROM MUSIC CAN OFTEN FIND INSPIRATION IN THE LYRICS AND OFTEN HOMESPUN PHILOSOPHIES IT CONTAINS

Actually, I say they, but Neil Hannon is the only constant member of the group, that enlists session musicians, but Hannon often plays all instruments except the drums in his chosen musical genre of ‘chamber-pop,’ and does all the vocals to boot! The lyrics in this

one are possibly the most profound since John Legend’s ‘All Of Me,’ offered a depth of love we could all understand, and this one is about living life without regrets, in the most human of ways.

Hearing Hannon sing of thumbing the dog-eared pages of his life, re-reading confusing passages that never worked out right, and of the muddles and miscommunications that landed him there, of fights, arguments, late night conversations, and wasted tears, would make us all stop and think anyway, but with the music reeling us further and further in... it is stunning!

Then the chorus kicks in... “Well I have made my fair share of mistakes, I’m not an angel, but then again I’m not a fake, and I don’t regret a single day... they were the best mistakes I’ve ever made.” Now who can’t relate to that? He tries to throw his past out, to shed his skin, but finds time flying as he recalls being, literally, a poet, a preacher, a fool, and a wastrel, but one who doesn’t regret any of it, concluding that if he had to choose his time again he wouldn’t change a thing!

It’s powerful, clear, and delivered in such a way, with such honesty. It offers a life lesson that regrets can be experienced, and learned from, but are wasted! And by extension I guess, what you cannot change, it’s no use worrying about. No regrets then, for as Nouman Ali Khan writes, “Regret itself is a form of punishment.” It would be a shame if we felt we were defined by what we had done, or not, in the past, it’s happened, move on, get over it.

Mark Twain also wrote of the humanist notion of wasted regrets and pining over past mistakes writing that twenty years from now we will be more disappointed by the things we did and didn’t do, exhorting us to, basically, get busy now, that life is too short for regrets. We do tend, don’t we, to look back and think “What if...” Maybe instead we should do as Hannon suggests, and be comfortable with our mistakes... which we will make, and simply treat them as part of the experience of growing up, of life, and of living life in, and for... the future. Check out “The Best Mistakes!”



STOP FOOD WASTE

A view of a glue and sign as “Letzte Generation” (Last Generation) activists block a highway to protest against food waste and for an agricultural change to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, in Berlin, Germany, on Saturday. The sign reads: “Stop Glued On!” — Reuters

IS raid gives Biden a foreign policy win as Ukraine looms

JEFF MASON

The US raid in Syria that led to the death of IS leader is a much-needed national security win for President Joe Biden after the messy withdrawal from Afghanistan while he tries to project an image of strength in a standoff with Russia over Ukraine, analysts said.

IS leader Abu Ibrahim al Hashemi al Quraishi, blew himself up as US forces approached. The raid on the terror leader came after months of planning and was authorised by Biden last week.

As well as dealing a blow to IS, the raid came at a good time for Biden, who is locked in a tense strategic tussle with Russia over Ukraine. John Bolton, a former national security adviser to President Donald Trump, said the successful operation could show strength to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“It can’t hurt in the sense that it was a clear win,” he acknowledged. “A lot of people should take notice of that,” said Bolton, a former US ambassador to the United Nations under President George W Bush.

US prestige suffered from the chaotic pullout from Afghanistan last August after 20 years of war. Even though his predecessor Trump also favoured a withdrawal and agreed a deal with the Taliban, Biden’s poll numbers dived after the messy withdrawal.

David Gergen, a former aide to Democratic and Republican presidents, said the Afghanistan chaos still hangs over Biden’s foreign policy record despite the success against IS.

“I think the trouble he faces in the international scene is stickier than it looks. It’s going to be hard to reverse public opinion,” Gergen said.

Bolton, one of the main foreign policy hawks in the former Bush administration, said going after Quraishi in northwestern Syria was “the right thing to do.” But the legacy of Afghanistan still weighs heavily on Biden despite the raid, he said.

“I don’t think it can repair the damage that was done to his credibility and America’s credibility by withdrawing from Afghanistan.”

Another stern test for Biden is the standoff with Russia over Ukraine. The United States and other Western nations say Russia’s massing of some 100,000 troops along the Ukraine border could be a prelude for an invasion.

“I think the overall question is going to be how this gets resolved with the Russians,” Gergen said. “He’s going to be tested on toughness. But he’s also going to be tested on competence.”



US President Joe Biden speaks at the Ironworkers Local 5 Union in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, on Friday. — AFP

At home, Biden is stuck in a months-long slump in the polls, reflecting Americans’ frustration over the Covid-19 pandemic and inflation-plagued economy. That worries Democrats ahead of November’s midterm elections.

While the midterms are months away and foreign policy is not a main priority

Biden travelled to New York last Thursday to meet with the city’s mayor, Eric Adams, a former police officer, and called for greater investments in local police departments and social services. Republicans have suggested Biden is weak on crime and tried to tie him to calls by some Democrats to “defund” the police. Biden has rejected the “defund” push.

Gergen said the Democratic president seems to be making an effort to project strength. “I do think Biden is trying to toughen up in the public eye,” he said.

Biden beat Trump in the 2020 election in part by arguing he would bring competence to the job, and he enjoyed approval ratings close to 60 per cent during his first few months in office. They fell to the lowest level of his presidency this week according to a Reuters/Ipsos opinion poll, which found 41 per cent of US adults approved of his performance in office and 56 per cent disapproved.

The combination of the Syria raid and the New York visit could offset some Republican criticism, said Mo Elleithe, executive director of Georgetown University’s Institute of Politics and Public Service.

“It’s hard to argue someone is weak on fighting terror... after they’ve taken out, you know, one of the world’s top terrorists,” Elleithe said. “He was able to show results — important results — in national security, and I think you see him appearing like the grown-up in the room on crime.” — Reuters

THE US RAID IN SYRIA THAT LED TO THE DEATH OF IS LEADER IS A MUCH-NEEDED NATIONAL SECURITY WIN FOR JOE BIDEN

for voters, demonstrating command in the raid on Quraishi and standing up to Putin can be helpful to Biden’s position with US voters, said David Axelrod, a former adviser to President Barack Obama.

“One of his problems right now is that the world seems out of control — everyday events in people’s lives. They’re looking for Biden to show command, so any opportunity to do that is valuable,” Axelrod said. “These things are valuable from a political standpoint. Shows of strength are valuable.”

sport

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Oman Racing’s ALMS season receives prestigious launch at Expo 2020

MUSCAT: Expo 2020 in Dubai provided the glittering venue this week for the official launch of Oman Racing’s Asian Le Mans Series programme — with driver Ahmad al Harthy unveiling the team’s Aston Martin Vantage GT3 car to the world at the Oman Pavilion.

Joined by dignitaries from his key sponsors Omantel, OQ and MHD-ITICS, Oman’s most successful international racing driver had the honour of revealing Oman Racing’s new motorsport livery as well as detailing his upcoming involvement in this month’s Middle East-based ALMS.

Also in attendance at the prestigious event on Wednesday evening were Shaikh Salim al Katheeri, Chairman of the Sultanate of Oman Commercial Office in Dubai and Brigadier Jamal al Tai, Deputy Chairman of Oman Automobile Association.

Proudly flying the flag for Oman, as he has been so successfully doing since beginning his car racing career well over 15 years ago, multiple motor racing champion Al Harthy will head into the hugely competitive ALMS determined to challenge for honours alongside British team-mates Sam De Haan and Aston Martin factory driver Charlie Eastwood.

The trio will share the No

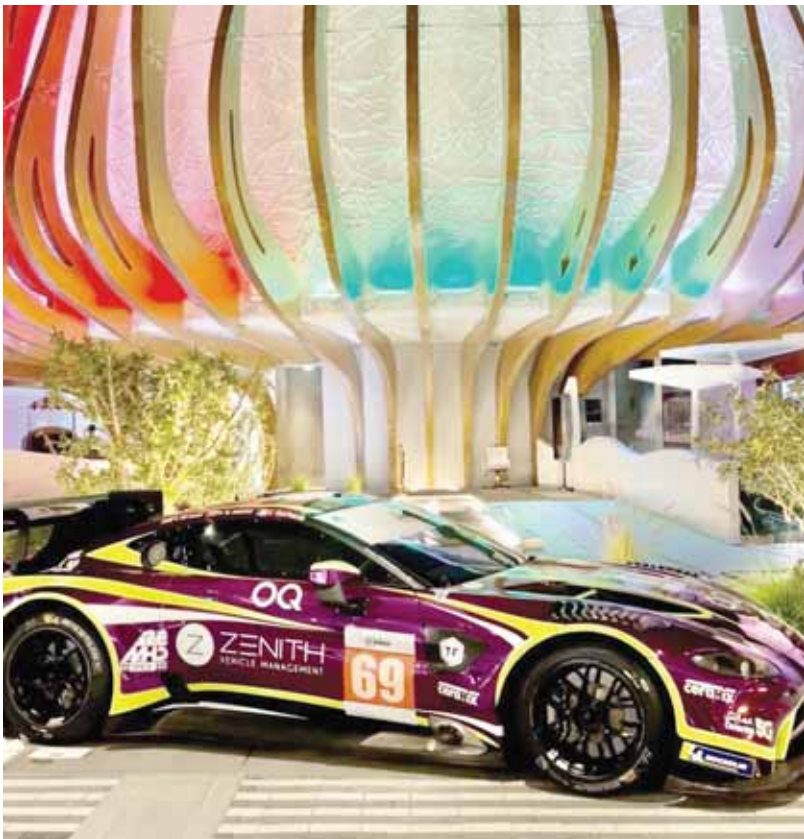
69 Oman Racing Aston Martin Vantage GT3 which will once again be prepared and engineered by Tom Ferrier’s TF Sport squad, the UK-based team which has partnered so fruitfully with Oman Racing since 2017.

At Expo 2020 on Wednesday, specially invited guests and partners were able to tour the Oman Pavilion before watching a video package of highlights centred around Al Harthy’s superb racing career and his many achievements — not least in promoting Oman on a world stage.

Following comments from key partners and a wider introduction and welcome from Al Harthy himself, where he outlined his Asian Le Mans Series plans, the guests headed outside the Pavilion to watch the official unveiling of the race car.

Since moving to the Middle East last year due to the ongoing Covid-19 travel restrictions in the Far East, the ALMS has gone from strength to strength and the already prestigious endurance racing championship is expecting to feature a combined grid of at least 34 cars across all classes.

Beginning at Dubai Autodrome with round one taking place on Saturday, February 12, and round two following on Sunday, February 13, the championship will then move to Yas Marina



Proudly flying the flag for Oman, as he has been so successfully doing since beginning his car racing career well over 15 years ago, multiple motor racing champion Al Harthy will head into the hugely competitive ALMS determined to challenge for honours alongside British team-mates Sam De Haan and Aston Martin factory driver Charlie Eastwood

Circuit in Abu Dhabi for round three on Saturday, February 19, and round four on Sunday, February 20.

World Expo is, of course, one of the longest standing and biggest global events with Expo 2020 having opened in Dubai back in October and reaching its conclusion at the end of March. The event was postponed from its intended 2020 launch due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

AHMAD AL HARTHY
“What an amazing honour it has been to launch Oman Racing’s

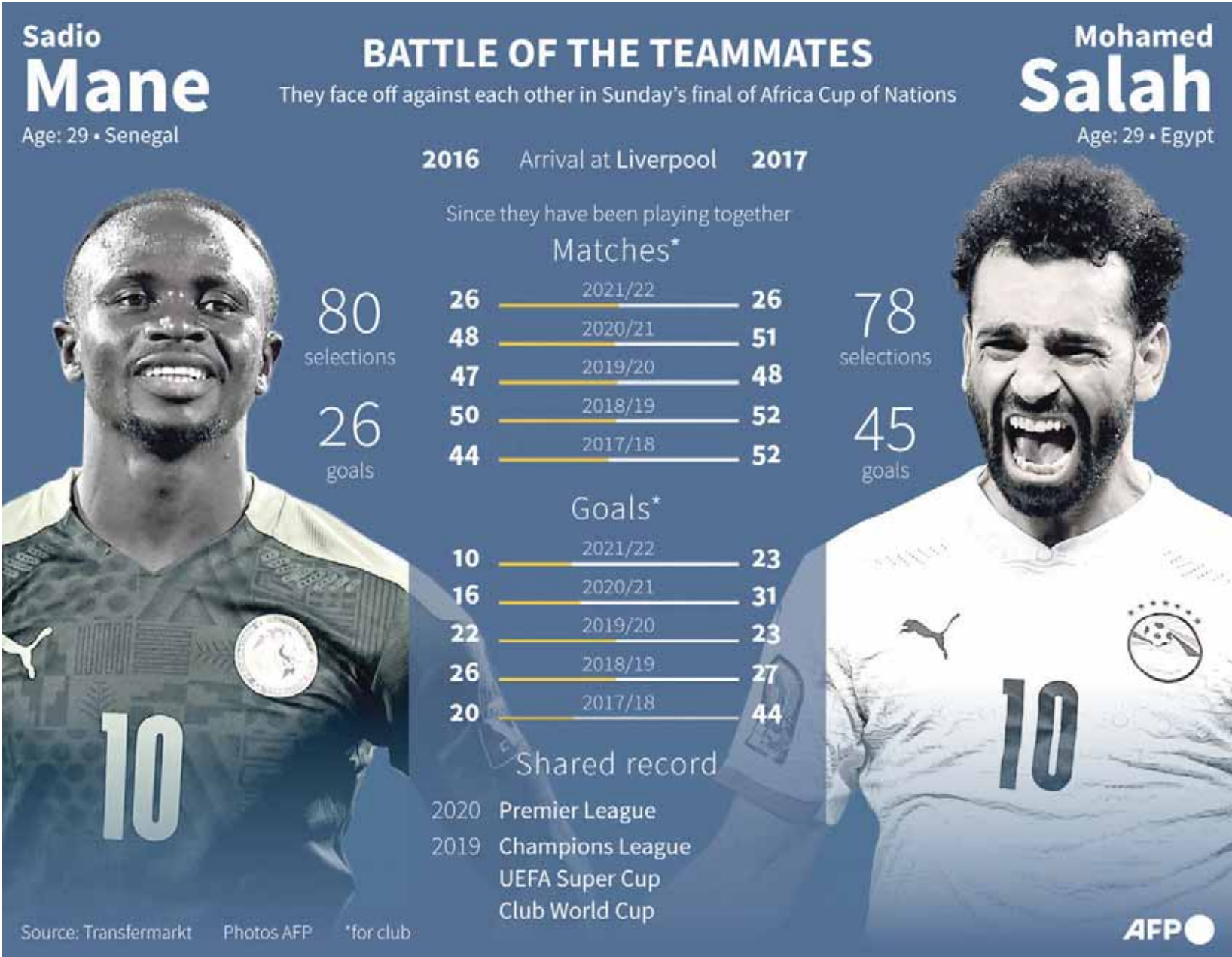
Asian Le Mans Series programme at Expo 2020, especially at the Oman Pavilion. I must say the biggest thank you to Oman’s General Commissioner and the Head of Oman Pavilion, Mohsin al Balushi, and also to my incredible partners Omantel, OQ and MHD-ITICS who have made the coming season possible.

“We are all so proud to be representing Oman in the ALMS, racing in Dubai and Abu Dhabi over the next few weeks, and on behalf of the whole team I can say we are as determined as ever to deliver the very best performances possible. It’s an extremely important and high-profile championship in GT endurance racing, providing the perfect opportunity to fly the flag for Oman.”

Mohsin al Balushi — Sultanate of Oman’s General Commissioner at Expo 2020:

“Ahmad is a wonderful ambassador for Oman and it has been our absolute pleasure to facilitate the launch of his and Oman Racing’s Asian Le Mans Series programme here at Expo 2020. His success on the international stage, over many years, is something of great pride to the Omani people. On behalf of all involved with the Oman Pavilion we are delighted to have supported the launch.

MANE AND SALAH CLASH IN CUP OF NATIONS FINAL



YAOUNDE: One of world football's most exciting attacking duos will face-off against each other in Sunday's Africa Cup of Nations final as Mohamed Salah leads Egypt against a Senegal side spearheaded by Sadio Mane.

The Liverpool pair, a combined force at club level, will be taking on talismanic roles at opposite ends for their respective countries as Egypt seek to extend their record number of Cup of Nations triumphs to eight while Senegal look to win it for the first time.

The match is being played at Yaounde's Olembe Stadium, where eight people were killed in a stadium crush last week and that tragedy has overshadowed the tournament in Cameroon.

Salah has made no secret of his burning desire to win a major trophy with Egypt, which has so far evaded him, while Mane beamed with joy and giggled with delight at the post-match press conference after his team won their semifinal on Wednesday.

Senegal, who are Africa's top

The Liverpool pair, a combined force at club level, will be taking on talismanic roles at opposite ends for their respective countries as Egypt seek to extend their record number of Cup of Nations triumphs to eight while Senegal look to win it for the first time

ranked team, were among the favourites and overcame a languid start to reach the final for the third time.

They scored only one goal during the opening round but still finished top of their group and have looked efficient in overcoming their opponents in the knockout stage.

"We suffered so much with a lot of Covid cases and several injuries too. We had a very difficult time but with our experience we kept calm until we recovered the whole group," said Mane.

Senegal were without captain Kalidou Koulibaly and goalkeeper

Edouard Mendy at the start of the tournament as they recovered from Covid-19 infections.

But their road to the final proved a lot easier than Egypt, who lost their opening group game to Nigeria and drew heavy criticism from home fans for their early performances.

But they have gained momentum, edging the Ivory Coast in a penalty shootout in the round of 16; Morocco 2-1 after extra time in the quarterfinal and hosts Cameroon on penalties again in Thursday's semifinal.

"We played amid very hard circumstances but we managed

to overcome all difficulties," said Mahmoud Trezeguet.

"We played 120 minutes for three straight games but we remained fully focused on getting the job done. We will play against Senegal with a big determination as we learned from the loss to Cameroon in 2017," he added.

Egypt were runners-up in the 2017 final — where Salah and Trezeguet both featured — and won the last of their record seven titles in 2010.

They will play Sunday's final without coach Carlos Queiroz on the bench after he was sent off for persistent touchline bickering in Thursday's semifinal. His assistant Roger de Sa was already forced to sit in the stands after a four-match ban for fighting in the tunnel after the quarterfinal victory over Morocco.

Sunday's final will also provide the winners with a major boost before the countries meet again over two legs in March to decide a place at the World Cup finals in Qatar. — Reuters

Langer turns down short-term extension, resigns as Australia coach

ADELAIDE: Justin Langer resigned as coach of Australia on Saturday, just weeks after leading the side to a 4-0 Ashes series win over England, with Cricket Australia saying he had rejected a short-term extension to his contract.

Langer's departure came after he held contract discussions with Cricket Australia on Friday, with his deal set to expire in June.

Australia also won last year's Twenty20 World Cup for the first time under Langer but there have been reports of player discontent over his coaching style.

Langer was reported to have reacted angrily during a recent meeting with Cricket Australia over his contract and had been asked to reapply for the role.

His management company, Dynamic Sports & Entertainment Group (DSEG), said his resignation was effective immediately.

"DSEG confirms that our client Justin Langer has this morning tendered his resignation as coach of the Australian men's cricket team," the company tweeted.

Cricket Australia Chief Executive Officer Nick Hockley said Langer had been offered the opportunity to lead the team's defence of the Twenty20 World Cup title on home soil later this year but had chosen not to accept.

"Justin has done a fantastic job... but when we sat down and looked at the needs of the team going forward we felt that the team has evolved, the team's needs or the requirements of the head coach had evolved," said Hockley in a video conference

call. "So we were very clear that we were looking at a short-term extension.

"We felt the team had evolved, we were ready for a period of transition and we felt Justin had earned the right to defend the Twenty20 World Cup on home soil and that worked in with that transition."

With a test tour of Pakistan just weeks away, Andrew McDonald will act as interim coach. Hockley stressed it was not Cricket Australia's intention to appoint separate head coaches for the various formats of the game.

'LEGACY ASSURED'

Langer took over as head coach in the wake of the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in 2018 and Hockley said he had been "outstanding" in the role.

"He has restored the trust in the team and his legacy is assured," Hockley added in a Cricket Australia statement.

Despite Australia's success, there had been speculation in recent months that Langer did not enjoy the full support of the dressing room.

Senior players and Cricket Australia managers met last year amid reports Langer's intense coaching style had rubbed players the wrong way.

Australia test captain Pat Cummins recently praised Langer for doing a "fantastic" job but said it was only fair for Cricket Australia to conduct an evaluation process before making a decision on renewing his contract.

— Reuters



Man Utd suffer shock FA Cup shoot-out exit against Middlesbrough

MANCHESTER, UK: Manchester United suffered a shock FA Cup fourth round exit as Championship club Middlesbrough won 8-7 on penalties after a 1-1 draw at Old Trafford on Friday.

Ralf Rangnick's side crashed out after Anthony Elanga blazed his spot-kick over the bar in a nerve-jangling shoot-out.

Swedish teenager Elanga was the only player from either team to miss in the shoot-out, leaving the forward holding his head in disbelief as Middlesbrough celebrated their stunning victory.

Jadon Sancho had put United ahead in the first half, but Matt

Crooks grabbed a controversial equaliser after the interval to set the stage for Middlesbrough's memorable upset.

Crooks' goal was allowed to stand despite Duncan Watmore controlling the ball with his hand before providing the assist.

Cristiano Ronaldo had missed a first half spot-kick for United, who have now lost seven of their last eight penalty shoot-outs, including last season's Europa League final against Villarreal.

United had 30 shots in total but lacked the composure and cutting edge required to kill off supposedly inferior opponents.



Manchester United's Anthony Elanga is consoled by team-mates after missing his penalty during the shoot-out. — Reuters

United are without a major trophy in five years and their hopes of ending that drought are dwindling given their Premier League struggles and a tricky Champions League last 16 tie against Atletico Madrid.

The FA Cup embarrassment is the latest hammer blow for United at the end of a painful week that saw their England forward Mason Greenwood arrested over the alleged rape and assault of a young woman. While still in custody, the 20-year-old was further arrested on Tuesday on suspicion of sexual assault and threats to kill.

Greenwood, who was released

on bail on Wednesday, has been suspended from all football activities at United since the arrest that sent shockwaves through Old Trafford. Middlesbrough boss Chris Wilder masterminded a shock 2-1 win on his last visit to Old Trafford with Sheffield United.

Initially, it seemed there was little chance of a repeat as Sancho hit the bar after Middlesbrough made a hash of clearing in the second minute.

CHANCES SPURNED

Paul Pogba was making his first United start since November 2 after recovering from a thigh injury. — AFP

Sohar clinch victory against Oman club



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 5

Sohar claimed three crucial points as they registered a 3-0 win over Oman club. At Sohar Sports Complex, the northern Batinah team players managed to reach 18th points in the 12th week of Omantel League.

With three successive wins against Nizwa, Muscat and Oman, they enhanced their position in the middle of table order and overcome Oman club by two points as the latter have 16 points. The hosts struck the visitors with a goal in the 37th minute through Saud al Maqbali. Arhero Karter's goal doubled the lead for

Sohar in the first half by 2-0. Nathaneel Movima netted the third goal before the interval ended by 15 minutes. Sohar will meet Al Rustaq in the forthcoming round on 15th February while Oman club will meet Al Ittihad. **SEEB, AL MUSANNAH DRAW** Seeb and Al Musannah's clash

ended in a goalless draw at Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The draw did not benefit both teams as they were seeking the victory to move forward in the table order. With the draw result, Seeb added one point to their tally by 25 points while Al Musannah at 20 points. Both teams recorded triumphs in the previous round as

Seeb managed to record significant win against Al Nasr while Al Musannah defeated Al Suwaiq. Seeb club's board members announced the signing contract with new players including Mohammed al Musallami and Syrian Hameed Mido. Seeb equipped the team with new players to cover the absence of

Juma al Habsi/Harib al Saadi who went to Qatar's Al Khor club while Salah al Yahyaie moved to Qatar's club. Seeb's next assignment is to have a tight clash as they will meet Sur in the second leg of HM Cup on Thursday. The first leg match at Sur Sports Complex ended in a goalless draw.



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Rohit plots steady course for India-Windies series

NEW DELHI: India captain Rohit Sharma on Saturday ruled out drastic team changes in the wake of Virat Kohli's departure as skipper ahead of the hosts' 1,000th one-day international against the West Indies.

Rohit begins his tenure as full-time ODI captain in Ahmedabad on Sunday for the first of three matches after replacing Kohli.

A hamstring injury ruled out the 34-year-old from India's recent tour of South Africa, where they lost the Test series 2-1 and were whitewashed 3-0 in ODIs.

"We have played good ODI cricket over the course of few years, more than four years actually, so suddenly a loss of series doesn't mean that there is panic," Rohit told reporters.

"South Africa series was a great learning (experience) for us as to what we didn't do collectively as a team," he added.

"What is important for us, moving forward, is the role clarity of certain individuals in the squad."

While Kohli was known for aggression in his seven-year term as captain across formats, Rohit, who has led the Mumbai Indians to five IPL titles, is known to lead with calm.

Rohit, called "Hitman" for his flamboyant batting and big hitting, said he will not tinker with the template that Kohli created.

"When Virat was captaining, I was the vice-captain so we pretty much went about the team in a similar fashion," said Rohit.

"I just have to take it from where he left. The team pretty much knows what is expected out of them. And we want to continue the same template," he added.

"There is nothing that I need to come in and change drastically." Covid and spin duo India's squad has been hit



by Covid-19 with four players including Shikhar Dhawan and Shreyas Iyer testing positive ahead of the limited-overs series.

Rohit said Ishan Kishan remains the only opening choice in the first ODI, when India will become the first international team to have played 1,000 50-over matches.

The opening batsman said he wants to bring the spin combine of Yuzvendra Chahal and Kuldeep Yadav back into the fold.

Chahal, a leg-spinner, played the ODI series in South Africa but injury-plagued Yadav, a left-arm wrist-spinner, last played an international for India in July.

"These two guys have been great performers for us in the past and they have certainly created an impact in those years whenever they have played together," said Rohit.

"In the middle they were left out because of the combination we wanted to get... but it's certainly on my mind to get them back together, Kuldeep especially," he added.

"But we want to get him in slowly. We don't want him to rush into things."

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Duqm Port strongly positioned as regional hub

KEY STRENGTHS: Leading business figures highlight Duqm Port’s potential to drive economic activity around industry, mining and mineral processing, logistics, container transshipment, and tourism and hospitality

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 5

The potential for the Port of Duqm, which was formally inaugurated on Friday, to be a powerful growth engine for the Sultanate of Oman was stressed by a number of leading business personalities.

In comments to Oman News Agency (ONA), they pointed to the maritime gateway’s ability to drive economic activity around industry, mining and mineral processing, logistics, container transshipment, and tourism and hospitality. Further, given its strategic location, the port can also serve as a transit hub for maritime cargoes moving between the East and West, they noted.

Dr Salem bin Salim al Junaibi, Vice President of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), and Chairman of OCCI’s Al Wusta branch,

said Duqm Port and its special economic zone abuts major international shipping lanes connecting the markets of East Asia, Africa and the Gulf region.

As a multipurpose port, that includes dedicated quays for government, commercial and liquid cargoes, Duqm is also equipped to handle the largest container ships, as well as major cargo vessels, oil tankers and petrochemicals — capabilities that make it a strategic transit point for goods moving between the East and West.

This advantageous location makes Duqm attractive for all kinds of investments, particularly in the logistics sector, he stated. “In the next phase of its development, Port of Duqm will emerge as an integrated logistics hub in the Sultanate of

Oman, a major global investment destination for logistics and a strategic transit point for international shipping lines. This outcome is in line with the objectives of Oman’s 2040 Vision.”

Looking back on the SEZ growth over the past 10 years, Dr Al Junaibi pointed out that Duqm already boasts a major airport, ship repair yard, modern multipurpose maritime port, oil refinery, cement plant, bus assembly yard and other international investments, besides a range of hotels and residential complexes, a network of integrated roads and services, and other infrastructure.

Haitham bin Nasser al Taie, Chief Operating Officer of Asyad Dry Dock, said the ship repair yard continues to benefit from

Duqm is also equipped to handle the largest container ships, as well as major cargo vessels, oil tankers and petrochemicals — capabilities that make it a strategic transit point for goods moving between the East and West

its presence within the Port of Duqm.

“Business at the dry dock has been growing at a steady pace

year after year, and 2021 was good in terms of operational activities despite the global pandemic related challenges. We were able to handle a total of over 210 vessels calling for repairs and maintenance last year,” Al Taie said.

Ali bin Abdullah al Zadjali, CEO of Duqm Quarries, said Duqm Port’s dedicated quay for dry bulk cargoes will boost the exploitation and export of the vast mineral resources in Al Wusta Governorate.

The current quay can handle up to 5 million tonnes of dry bulk cargoes annually. However,

capacity can be increased if required, he said.

Duqm Quarries, he said, is working on an integrated plan, supported by experts, to capitalise on the opportunities offered by the Duqm Port’s well-equipped Dry Bulk Terminal.

Nailesh Khimji, Director of Khimji Ramdas Group, said the company plans to invest in Duqm Port and benefit from the incentives and services provided by the government to investors. He also underlined the potential for developing tourism activities at the port with the goal of attracting cruise ships.

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PO BOX 78, QURUM CITY CENTRE, PC 102, SULTANATE OF OMAN			
Group’s Unaudited Financial Results for the six months ended 31 December 2021			
Chairman’s Report		Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income	
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am pleased to present to you the report on the activities and unaudited financial results of the company for the 2nd quarter ended 31 December 2021.			
		GROUP	PARENT
1. Operating Results		31.12.2021 RO.	31.12.2020 RO.
The Group’s total revenue for the six months period ended 31 December 2021 was RO 8.822 million as against the previous year’s revenue of RO. 9.484.		8,822,490 (7,286,086)	9,484,442 (8,246,698)
The Parent Company made RO 0.299 Million profit after taxation compared to RO 0.312 million for the same period in the last financial year.		725,654	840,044
The Group recorded a consolidated profit after taxation of RO 0.076 million for the six months period ended 31 December 2021 against the net loss of RO 0.281 million in the same period of the previous year.		299,818	311,765
2. Operations		31.12.2021 RO.	31.12.2020 RO.
Compared to the previous year, the Group revenue decreased by 7% on account of a slowdown in the market due to COVID-19 lockdowns and travel restrictions during the major part of the reporting period. We were also under severe pressure from the delayed projects due to the COVID-19 impact. The Pandemic also contributed to the long-overdue situation that restricted us from taking up projects in order not to increase exposure in the Market. The Covid restriction is slowly being eased worldwide and we are confident that your company will achieve better results in the coming period.		357,953 (280,013)	249,470 (527,095)
The drilling and blasting industry in Fujairah (UAE) is continuing their good performance that helps the Group to achieve a reasonable result at this difficult period.		77,940 (1,963)	352,406 (52,588)
Explosives supply from Geodynamics is continuing with limited storage facility available and work on phase 2 of the Explosives facility is delayed due to increase of COVID-19 on account of new Omicron variant. We hope that after the completion of Phase 2 and the resultant additional storage facility, the volume will increase in the upcoming months will help to improve the revenue and profitability of the Group.		177,256 511,659	162,215 462,006
3. Health, Safety and the Environment		20,084,106	19,212,509
Your Company is operated in a safe and efficient manner in strict compliance with the highest safety standards and in accordance with the prevailing Royal Oman Police Explosives Rules and Regulations.		59,137,932	57,666,619
We had a very unfortunate fatal incident where one of our employees met with an accident while returning from the worksite and passed away. No other accidents or environmental incidents were reported during the period ended 31 December 2021.		11,174,154 21,980,824	10,067,105 22,056,291
Your Company was in compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance and other applicable rules and regulations during the 6 months ended 31 December 2021.		33,154,978	32,123,396
5. Future Outlook		25,982,954	25,543,223
We would like to update the esteemed shareholders that construction work on Phase 2 of the proposed explosives facility in the UAE is in progress albeit with delays due to the Pandemic restrictions and once this is completed, the additional storage facility will help to increase volume in the coming months. We are confident that this would enhance the overall profitability of the Group.		4,933,025 1,466,206 579,717 13,550,576 5,453,430	4,933,025 1,422,184 579,717 13,550,576 5,057,721
The current increase of COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant resulted in further delay in the start of full-fledged production of the Gypsum mine. The situation is expected to improve in the coming months considering the low impact of Omicron and Vaccination drive. We will achieve targeted production once the world market fully opens up, which will add value to Group.		25,982,954	26,529,575
Ahjaar Mining started commercial production in the Quarry where your company has 30% shareholding. Your company has an off-take agreement for aggregate produced in this Quarry. We have signed a back-to-back agreement for the supply of this material to the Qatar market that will add value to the Group.		25,543,223	26,089,347
All new ventures are delayed until the world market situation improves post COVID-19.		4,933,025 1,370,050 579,717 13,550,576 6,096,207	4,933,025 1,326,028 579,717 13,550,576 5,700,001
6. Acknowledgements		25,982,954	26,089,347
The Members of the Board wish to record their gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haithem bin Tariq bin Taimur and the Government of Oman for the successful efforts made to improve development and prosperity within the Country.		25,543,223	26,089,347
The Directors also wish to thank the Royal Oman Police, other Government bodies, our valued customers and Banker for their cooperation and support.		4,933,025 1,370,050 579,717 13,550,576 6,096,207	4,933,025 1,326,028 579,717 13,550,576 5,700,001
Haythem Mahmood Abd Al-Nabi Macki Chairman		25,982,954	26,089,347
Note		25,543,223	26,089,347
The complete accounts shall be delivered to any shareholder or beneficiary upon request, in Arabic or English, within 7 days from receiving the application.		4,933,025 1,370,050 579,717 13,550,576 6,096,207	4,933,025 1,326,028 579,717 13,550,576 5,700,001

Bank Nizwa hosts ‘What is happening in Nizwa’, promotes tourism in the region

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman’s leading Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa, has been at the forefront of conceptualising innovative campaigns to support the economic diversification goals of the Sultanate of Oman. With the tourism sector being one of the key focus areas under Oman Vision 2040, the bank has remained steadfast in its commitment to contribute to the growth of the sector and has undertaken several initiatives in partnership with government entities.

In line with the same, Bank Nizwa recently hosted a creative two-day event titled ‘What is happening in Nizwa’. The event brought together 12 credible social media influencers in Nizwa and also welcomed a number of individuals from the local community as guests.

The social media influencers, who were selected based on the values they exhibit and their

skills in the field of videography, were divided into four groups to allow them to compete on conceptualising unique video ideas to promote Nizwa.

The teams were then given a map highlighting the main attractions in Nizwa that included popular historical and tourist sites like Nizwa Fort, Nizwa Souq, amongst many others.

Apart from social media influencers, each team also had a tour guide to further assist the team members. Commenting on the event, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa, said, “Bank Nizwa had organised a similar event in 2019 which was well-received by the community and had garnered immense praise.

“Hence, we decided to organise another event that would once again give us an opportunity to engage with the community in Nizwa. ‘What is happening in Nizwa’ is a one-of-a-kind event



that portrays the abundant beauty of Nizwa through the eyes of creative videographers and social media influencers who also mirror the same vision, values and ethics that the bank takes great pride in upholding.

“This will not only give a boost to the tourism sector, but will also support national talents

by giving them a platform to showcase their expertise. At Bank Nizwa, we will continue to align ourselves with the national goals through meaningful endeavours that are creative, engaging and add value to the community.” With an allotted time of 24 hours to explore, document and create videos of the selected destinations,

the campaign ended with a number of stunning videos that were uploaded on Bank Nizwa’s account and made available for public voting. By adopting this unique approach, the bank ensured maximum reach and engagement with not just the local community but with its extensive list of followers from all over the country.

“We also commend the work done by the social media influencers who have truly demonstrated their creativity in producing striking videos. With the help of Bank Nizwa’s extensive social media platforms, these videos will certainly contribute to inculcating interest in the minds of people and cement Nizwa’s position as a key tourist site. The Wilayat of Nizwa is the city where the bank derives its name from and the event also played tribute to the link between the bank and this flourishing city,” added Al Kayed.

OBA Board discusses current plans, future goals



MUSCAT: Oman Banks Association (OBA) held its Board of Directors meeting on February 2, 2022. Chaired by Abdul Hakeem al Ojaili (pictured), Chairman of OBA, the Board discussed and deliberated on the development and enhancing banking excellence.

The OBA Board of Directors comprises of 12 members, representing member banks. They meet every quarter and minutes of the meetings are circulated to member banks, the Central Bank of Oman and the Ministry of Social Development.

With a comprehensive agenda ranging from several important current plans and future goals, the Board met and engaged in strategic deliberations. The Board also approved 2021 audited financial results and reviewed and discussed the audit report. Since its formation, the OBA has committed itself and drawn plans of action to provide ongoing support to the banking sector through its various stages of growth.

The Board thanked the Central Bank of Oman, the Capital Market Authority and the Ministry of Social Development for their continuous support and guidance.

Oman Banks Association is a non-profit professional association created to represent the banking sector, to promote Omani banking activities, co-ordinate with the regulators on matters of policy and strategy and to support banking excellence in the Sultanate of Oman.

OIH makes strong presence at Arab Health 2022

MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital (OIH), along with its operator Idealmed GHS, Portugal, made a strong presence at the Arab Health 2022 held recently in Dubai, UAE.

At the custom-built pavilion, OIH showcased its state-of-the-art facilities and unique features such as the five centres of excellence, hybrid operation theatre, medical spa, hi-tech Cath lab and other unique features, while Idealmed GHS demonstrated its global know-how and capabilities in the conception, development, delivery and deployment of turn-key solutions as well as day-to-day operational management and administration of hospitals and healthcare projects across the world.



Marcelo Pereira, CEO of Oman International Hospital said, “Oman International Hospital, Muscat, officially opened earlier this month, is a world-class, comprehensive healthcare institution providing 3,600 healthcare solutions of highest international standards to the people of the Sultanate of

Oman and the region. Our multi-specialty hospital is home to five centres of excellence, a unique hybrid operation theatre, a medical spa, and several other cutting-edge features and facilities. The expert doctors, nurses and para-medical staff of the hospital are drawn from the Sultanate of Oman and across

the globe.”

Dr Jose Alexandre, Chairman of Idealmed Global Healthcare Services, Portugal, said, “At Idealmed GHS, we assume an unconventional vision for hospitals, leading innovative projects and maximising their sustainability and profitability, enhancing the comfort and well-being of its users and surpassing their superlative expectations. Our decades of experience in designing, and managing large scale hospital projects and healthcare solutions across the world, stands testimony to our standing.”

He added, “In all our projects, we integrate local culture with science, safety with comfort, and aesthetics with functionality. Using the most innovative

layouts and engineering concepts and leading-edge equipment solutions, we combine technological sophistication with the know-how of the most skilled and trained human resources.”

Senior executives from Siemens Healthineers, Portugal and MENA, one of the long-term associates of Idealmed GHS and a sponsor of the newly established Med Academy at Oman International Hospital, were also present at the pavilion. During the event, several medical manufacturers, distributors, health institutions, medical innovators, pharmaceutical manufacturers and representatives from other related business sectors met with OIH and Idealmed GHS officials and held discussions.

Minara wins Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards 2021

MUSCAT: As a testament to its ever-growing popularity and trustworthiness, Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives (AVOD) has won ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Award 2021’ in Food Products category for the 4th consecutive time, and this time for its flagship brand “Minara”.

Under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, as the guest of honour, the ceremony was held at the Al Bustan Palace.

Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards is a validation of the public trust in a brand and every year this prestigious award is presented to the most trusted brands in the country based on what the consumers perceive about the brands they trust the most.

Eng Salem bin Nasser al Bortmany, CEO, Areej Vegetable Oils & Derivatives, said, “To



emerge victorious every year continuously for four years in a row for our brands is a huge honour for us and this reflects the impeccable quality, indomitable trust and the position that our brands hold in the hearts and minds of the customers.

Minara, our flagship brand, has been voted Oman’s Most Trusted Brand for 2021 and it has acquired the Superbrands status along with three of our other brands Sohar, Areej and Khafeef for four years in a row in the past.”

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 280 outlets spread across 10 countries, has launched a special collection of diamond and 18K gold jewellery named ‘Heart to Heart’ to celebrate the season of love.

‘Heart to Heart’ jewellery collection showcases exclusive heart-shaped jewellery that will cater to the increasing demand for such jewellery during this period. With over 100 designs symbolising love in various ways, this unique jewellery collection serves as a perfect gift to express love to dear ones.

With prices starting from just RO 100, there is something to fit everyone’s budget. Apart from pendants in diamonds and 18K, customers can also choose heart-shaped beautifully crafted bangles, bracelets and rings to gift their loved ones.



Additionally, the brand has also launched necklace sets with double-sided pendants and earrings, in addition to rings and pendants that can be opened or

closed.

Customers can also opt for personalised name rings in 18K, which can be specifically curated for loved ones in their name.

This offer will be available across all outlets of Malabar Gold & Diamonds until February 14, 2022. Customers can also buy this unique collection online through www.malabargoldanddiamonds.com.

“It is the season of love and hence the season of gifting too. Jewellery is the most thoughtful gift that can be given to your loved ones, as the charm of jewellery lasts for a lifetime, with its value appreciating each day. We believe that ‘Heart to Heart’ collection, our exclusive range of jewellery launched specifically for this season, will be the perfect gift for your loved ones,” said Najeeb K, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Apart from these, Malabar Gold & Diamonds also showcases an incredible collection of unique designs in gold and diamond jewellery to suit the tastes and budget of its different customers.



Uptick in output of refined products

MUSCAT: Refineries and petrochemical plants operated by OQ, the integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, reported 5.7 per cent in output of refined petroleum products and petrochemicals in 2021.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), production of premium petrol (M95) increased 3 per cent to 13.182 million barrels in 2021, up from 12.805 million barrels a year earlier. Sales of M95 fuel were also up 9 per cent to 12.610 million barrels, up from 11.535 million barrels a year earlier. Around 1.422 million barrels were exported as well.

Production of regular automotive fuel (M91) surged 37 per cent to 13.163 million barrels in 2021, up from 9.597 million barrels a year earlier.

Sales of M91 were also up 16 per cent to 9.104 million barrels last year, up from 7.831 million barrels in 2020. Exports of M91 climbed 29 per cent to 3.973 million barrels last year.

Gas oil (diesel) production rose around 1 per cent, 34.287 million barrels last year, up from 33.967 million barrels a year earlier.

Diesel sales totalled 13.346 million barrels, while around 20.851 million barrels were exported in 2021. Jet fuel output declined 16 per cent to 5.877 million barrels, down from 6.980 million barrels in 2020.

Sales also declined 4 per cent to 1.616 million barrels compared to 1.683 million barrels in 2020. Exports amounted to 4.221 million barrels. — ONA

Oman Investment Authority sells stake in Spanish tech firm

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Spanish technology firm Escribano Mechanical & Engineering (EM&E) has announced that it has repurchased a minority stake held in the company by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Madrid-based firm, a leading technology provider for the international aerospace, defence and security sectors, said the reacquisition of the 32.2-per cent stake held by the Omani sovereign wealth fund fulfils its vision to become a 100-per cent private, Spanish-owned business.

EM&E specialises in providing integral solutions in engineering, high-precision machining and



production of complex optical communications systems, in addition to electronics, stabilisation and control systems.

The State General Reserve Fund

(SGRF), as the Oman Investment Authority was known then, acquired the 32.2-per cent stake in the family-owned Escribano M&E in 2016 — a move that helped spur

the growth of the Spanish firm in niche markets within and outside Spain.

With the repurchase of OIA's stake, all 100 per cent of the company's capital passes into the hands of its President and CEO. Since its restructuring and transformation by Royal Decree in June 2020, Oman Investment Authority has been playing a major role in, among other things, spearheading the country's post-pandemic economic recovery and supporting the government's fiscal sustainability strategy.

Its primary mandate is to achieve the best possible returns on investments made locally and internationally in line with the government's strategy to diversify the economy and open up new income streams for the state.

MSX closes week lower, led by financial index

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week down by 1.04 per cent. All Sectors ended in red. The Financial Index ended the lowest and was down by 1.23 per cent. Services Index and Industrial Index was lower by 1.03 per cent and 0.97 per cent, respectively. The MSX Shariah Index closed down by 1.82 per cent.

Latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) revealed that the total number of guests in 3-5 star hotels in the Sultanate of Oman till the end of December 2021 stood at 1,219,303 compared to 851,757 guests by December 2020, comprising a rise of 43 per cent. The total revenues of 3-5 star hotels grew by 19.2 per cent by December 2021 to reach RO 101.668 million compared to RO 85.292 million by the same period in 2020. Hotels occupancy rates went up by 44.9 per cent from 26.5 per cent by the end of December 2020 to 38.3 per cent by the end of December 2021.

More than 69,000 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have registered with the SMEs Development Authority until December 2021 in the Sultanate of Oman.

An official from the SMEs Development Authority confirmed that more than 69,000 Omanis have worked in small and medium enterprises that registered within the Authority until December 2021.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, stated that statistics show a significant drop in the number of job-seekers which reflects the ministry's efforts in this regard.

A total of 63,080 job-seekers were appointed in 2021, the minister said, explaining some challenges facing the ministry in terms of aligning education outputs to the requirements of the labour market including the lack of a transitional programme from study to the labour market.

To encourage investment



and to achieve the economic diversification objectives of the Sultanate of Oman, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) launched the Quick Maser service for investors residency requests in the special economic zones and free zones which will be available through the services of the One-Stop-Shop system with an easy procedure, to process requests promptly upon registering in OPAZ commercial registration and to obtain the investment licence on the same day, through direct coordination between OPAZ and the Royal Oman Police.

CBO's latest statistics show that Oman banking sector's total credit stood at RO 27.77 billion (flat MoM and +5.4 per cent YoY) as at the end of November 2021. Total deposits stood at RO 25.36 billion (+0.3 per cent MoM and +5.7 per cent YoY) as at the end of November 2021. Loan-to-deposit ratio dropped to 109.5 per cent in November 2021 compared to 109.7 per cent in December 2020.

Conventional credit growth picked up pace from May 2021 to +4.0 per cent YoY in November 2021. Total conventional credit reached RO 22.97 billion (-RO 24.5 million on MoM basis or -0.1 per cent MoM). Conventional credit contracted on MoM basis largely on account of a 0.1-per cent MoM, or RO 22.5 million worth of credit contraction in the private sector.

Government and non-resident credit registered

growth of RO 7.5 million during November 2021.

Credit to public enterprises also contracted by 0.3 per cent MoM or RO 9.5 million. Conventional deposits grew by +3.6 per cent YoY to reach RO 21.0 billion. Deposits are up 2.2 per cent on YTD basis. Conventional deposits increased slightly by 0.3 per cent on MoM basis on account of a rise in private sector and government deposits which grew by 0.9 per cent or RO 44 million, and 1.0 per cent or RO 140 million, respectively.

The share of government and public enterprises deposits, which had dropped to the lowest value in our records at 26.6 per cent in June 2021, has once again risen to 28.3 per cent as at the end of November 2021. Loan-to-deposit (LTD) ratio rose to 109.4 per cent as compared to 108.8 per cent as at the end of December 2020.

Islamic banking financing (Banks & Islamic Windows) reached RO 4.79 billion (+0.5 per cent MoM and +14.3 per cent YoY). Islamic deposits reached RO 4.36 billion (+0.3 per cent MoM and +16.8 per cent YoY).

Islamic financing stands at 17.3 per cent of total Oman banking credit, and Islamic deposits form 17.2 per cent of total bank deposits. Islamic financing-to-deposit ratio dropped to 110 per cent as of November 2021 compared to 115 per cent in December 2020.

Courtesy: U-Capital

Syniverse to enable Vodafone Oman's 5G mobile roaming services

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 5

US-based telecom technology firm Syniverse has announced that it is working with Vodafone Oman to enable 5G roaming services in the Sultanate of Oman.

Syniverse is a premier global technology provider of mission-critical mobile platforms for carriers and enterprises.

Vodafone Oman will benefit from Syniverse's Clearing and Settlement solution to drive efficiencies by using a robust set of cloud applications designed to automate and optimise all workflows needed by Vodafone Oman to address its 5G roaming business.

Vodafone Oman will also benefit from Syniverse's Roaming Fraud Protection and Syniverse's Universal Commerce for BCE solutions to monetise wholesale roaming traffic using the GSMA's Billing and Charging Evolution (BCE) industry standard.



Universal Commerce for BCE is an industry-leading blockchain based solution which enables new 5G enabled monetisation models such as network slicing, and monetisation of new 5G enabled use cases such as the Internet of Things (IoT). Universal Commerce for BCE also permits reports between Vodafone Oman and mobile operators to be exchanged upon previously agreed bilateral agreements for use in support of wholesale invoicing and settlement.

By implementing these new methods for monetising wholesale roaming, Syniverse allows for more accurate and efficient reconciliation of network

usage between Vodafone Oman and its roaming partners, the US firm said in a press statement.

Sami Saber, Sales Director of Middle East Africa, Syniverse, said: "Syniverse adds value by offering Vodafone Oman streamlined workflow management tools that underpin the support of their 5G roaming services, thus making it more efficient and profitable for them to grow their business. We are excited to help Vodafone Oman prosper as the newest mobile operator in the Sultanate of Oman. Syniverse continues to invest in Middle East and Africa region as a strategic growth area with our strong market presence."

Seham al Amri, Roaming Manager, Vodafone Oman, added: "Vodafone Oman is committed to ensuring connectivity for a better future for all through the implementation of next-generation 5G network and advancing digital progress, wherever possible."



Al Kawthar and Tathmeer announce cash dividends as performance continues to rise..

Mutual Funds under TANMIA's management continued their outstanding and recorded a positive performance for the year ended 2021. TANMIA GCC Diversified Fund "Tathmeer" achieved a return of 32.9% in 2021 while Al Kawthar Shariah Compliant Fund yielded a return of 27.3% for the same period. TANMIA continues to carry out their influential role through structuring investment strategies that ensure sustainable positive returns for unit-holders, in addition to protecting the funds from market volatility and implications arising from economic and health developments locally and worldwide.

In light of the positive performance, the funds' management decided to distribute cash dividends of 6% for Tathmeer unit-holders and 5% for Al Kawthar unit-holders. Investors of the two Funds as on 17 February 2022 shall be eligible for the declared dividend.

To invest in the funds, please visit TANMIA's official website or contact the management on the numbers below.



Khalid Al Balushi
Chief Executive Officer - TANMIA



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ECB shows words matter more than actions

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde has sprung a surprise worthy of her UK counterpart, Andrew Bailey. The Frenchwoman left interest rates unchanged on Thursday whereas the Briton raised them. Yet she was the one that made the bigger splash with a change of tune on inflation prospects that suggested the ECB might join its global peers this year in raising interest rates. Lagarde dropped the central bank equivalent of a bombshell by saying that euro zone inflation, which hit a record high of 5.1% in January, was likely to stay elevated for longer than previously anticipated and that risks were now tilted to the upside.

This was a big admission for a central bank tasked with ensuring price stability, and a shift from Lagarde's previous stance that high inflation was less of a risk in the euro zone than in other major economies. Traders therefore jumped to the conclusion that Lagarde was gearing up to raise rates, even though she had previously said such a move was unlikely this year. Granted, money markets were already implying a 30 basis point increase in the ECB's key policy rate by December 2022. But by the time Lagarde had finished speaking, they were assigning a probability of more than 90% to a June hike. Nor were they the only market to gyrate in response to Lagarde's comments. The euro shot up more than 1% from the lows it had set against sterling after the Bank of England raised interest rates by a quarter percentage point to 0.5%. And government bond yields rose across the euro zone.

Lagarde declined to clarify how close the ECB was to ticking all the boxes needed to raise interest rates and said rate-setters would have new staff forecasts to guide them at their March meeting. Traders and investors have, however, already made their minds up about what the central bank is going to do, whether or not this was her intention. Lagarde has, hopefully, learnt the lesson from others' experiences and sent the message she actually wanted to convey. — Reuters

Lagarde dropped the central bank equivalent of a bombshell by saying that euro zone inflation, which hit a record high of 5.1% in January, was likely to stay elevated for longer than previously anticipated



BIDEN'S JOBS
US President Joe Biden speaks about the January jobs report from the State Dining Room of the White House in Washington, DC. Biden on Friday hailed government data showing surprisingly robust hiring in January. "America is back to work", the president said, cheering the "extraordinary resilience and grit" of US workers after the Labour Department said companies added 467,000 jobs last month, against expectations for weak or even negative hiring. — AFP

Is TikTok killing Facebook?



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ANOTHER MAJOR ISSUE LINKED TO THE EVER CHANGING PRIVACY POLICY UNDERMINED META'S PROJECTED REVENUE

Meta — the holding company controlling Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Oculus — lost a tremendous amount of value last week. The stock of Mark Zuckerberg's company tanked 23 per cent during the trading session on Wednesday, ending below \$250. The stock plunge was directly associated with the underwhelming quarterly results report presented earlier on. The massive drop cut nearly \$200 billion in market value from Meta, sending its total market capitalisation from \$900 billion all the way down to around \$700 billion. For the first time in a decade, Wall Street showed some serious doubts, and begun seeing some worrying vulnerabilities in what Meta is doing. The rise of TikTok is seen as the number one threat to Zuckerberg's strategy. Experts such as Jon Swartz, a Senior Reporter at MarketWatch, highlight how Facebook has lost major traction in the young audience, which migrated in flocks to the more engaging video-focused social networking service owned by Chinese company ByteDance Ltd. When Facebook was launched in 2004,

the target audience was mostly consisting of young college students. But as the time went by, the average age increased significantly. Older Facebook users also mean higher vulnerability to scams and hacks, which in turn builds up more resistance against the platforms. For the first time, the net balance of Facebook users went down, instead of growing. Another major issue linked to the ever changing privacy policy undermined Meta's projected revenue. Apple implemented some recent changes that had a cascade effect on Facebook appeal for advertisers. According to Meta's CFO, David Wehner, the change might cost the company a loss of income of about \$10 billion in 2022. The rivalry between Apple and Facebook is known in the industry. While Apple can generate income from multiple segments, including the very profitable sales of devices, Facebook's income is 99 per cent generated by advertisement. As advertisers increasingly encounter more restrictions on how far they can track customers, slowly migrate to other possible avenues. Google being the number one

alternative of choice. I found myself considering the option of dropping Facebook as a way to login into my music website, which I keep as a hobby, with no income generated whatsoever. Yet, in the past two months Facebook asked me to change my privacy policy 3 times. But the elephant in the room is the large loss currently generated by the metaverse segment of Facebook, currently summing up to \$3.3 billion. Having invested over \$4 billion in this direction, as well as the rebranding to heavily emphasise the clear direction in which the company is planning to move in the future, placed a magnifying glass on the fact that the metaverse division might be in a loss for a very long time. In one of the recent columns on the *Oman Daily Observer* I have shared the story of a friend of mine, which uses the metaverse to hang out with friends. What I did not mention is that my friend is in her 40s, and work in a 6 digits job. For her, buying an Oculus device to join the metaverse is a trivial expenditure. But let us look at the market in general, joining TikTok to sing and dance is free of charge on any smart phone. Is Meta going to lose the social media battle?

Net zero must mean business



MADS NIPPER
The author is CEO of Ørsted

The world is awash in net-zero emissions targets. A growing number of countries, regions, cities and companies have announced that they will adjust their growth strategies to align with the Paris climate agreement's goal of keeping global temperatures within 1.5 degrees Celsius of pre-industrial levels. By the end of 2021, roughly 90 per cent of global GDP was covered by some type of net-zero pledge, including those made by more than 680 of the world's largest corporations. Yet despite this boom in new commitments, real action from businesses is lagging, because we have long lacked a common, science-based understanding of what a corporate net-zero strategy entails. Far too many corporate net-zero pledges fail to account properly for all the relevant greenhouse gases

(GHGs). Many also lack a clear mid-century target date, do not encompass their products' full value chain, and do not reflect the urgency of cutting emissions significantly by 2030. Worse, many rely far too heavily on offsetting their emissions by purchasing credits generated from carbon-abatement and -removal projects elsewhere. No wonder UN Secretary-General António Guterres thinks there is "a deficit of credibility and a surplus of confusion over emissions reductions and net-zero targets." Fortunately, with the recent launch of the Science Based Targets initiative's (SBTi) Corporate Net-Zero Standard, we now have a framework to show companies how to align their climate plans with the science. The new standard shows that there are no shortcuts. Credible

net-zero targets must include all relevant GHGs and cover a company's full value chain. They also must aim to cut emissions in half by 2030 in order to reach net zero by 2050 or earlier. Most importantly, a company's plan must reduce emissions by 90-95 per cent before using offsets to "net" itself the rest of the way to zero. Closing the corporate credibility gap means moving past the era when many companies could simply counterbalance their emissions with offsets to prolong their ability to pollute. The private sector now has an opportunity and an obligation to align itself with science. Recognising this, we at Ørsted piloted a long-term decarbonisation plan under the SBTi's new standard last year and became the world's first energy company with a validated, science-based net-zero target.

We have already learned valuable lessons from this process, including the need to map the full set of emissions across energy generation and operations, purchased electricity, and the upstream supply chain and downstream use of products sold. Only with proper mapping could we identify and address emissions hotspots across our value chain. Listening to our strategic suppliers has also proven critical. Now that we know about their own decarbonisation pain points, we can work together to alleviate them. Another important lesson is that companies must develop and draw on the right skills from within their own ranks. Given the wide-ranging impact of the net-zero transition on different business areas, managing it properly requires a diverse range of knowledge and skills. And while we know the direction and destination of our

decarbonisation trajectory, we have learned to accept that we don't yet know every step required to complete it. In piloting a decarbonisation pathway, we have found the SBTi's guidance and criteria to be crucial. These lessons may not be applicable to all companies, but the foundation of credible corporate climate action remains largely the same: green energy solutions. With over 70 per cent of all GHG emissions stemming from the energy sector, a rapid transition to renewable energy is the key to decarbonisation globally. As major energy consumers, corporations can make a significant contribution by deploying or purchasing green energy, including through renewable-power purchase agreements. They can also take direct action to reduce emissions within all their own operations and across their supply chains. © Project Syndicate, 2022.

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features

OMAN OBSERVER f t i y t u e s s www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om



Jewels from mind to paper to gold

When Areej al Saleh founded OUSHK, a contemporary jewellery brand that offers beautiful and delicate designs, she didn't anticipate that the pandemic will be something she has to wrestle with. Regardless of the different challenges, she persisted and she's ready to offer rare beauties to the world... **P20**

READ

STARVED TO OBESITY
BY EMILY BOLLER

Starved to Obesity is a poignant autobiography that walks the reader through Emily's struggle with food addiction and other very difficult trials in her life. I have eaten a nutritarian diet for the past 10 years and have been long time follower of Emily's story on the Dr Fuhrman member centre.

FASHION

Elie Saab brings vibrant looks to Paris catwalk on return

LEBANESE FASHION DESIGNER Elie Saab returned to the Paris catwalk after nearly two years, turning the page on a troubled period marked by the Beirut port blast and Covid-19, with a collection of vibrant, red carpet-ready looks. Saab sensed a need for release, he said in an interview ahead of the show. "I felt my clients are looking for release, they want things that are

flashy, with colours, lively things — I see that this period has affected a lot of people," he said. Drawing on the influence of the Mediterranean region's colours and civilisations, the designer worked bright hues into his collection. Models wound around the room in tulle ball gowns and capes covered in bright Bougainvillea flowers, which contrasted in texture and colour with shimmery blue-toned dresses covered in



embroidery. Saab's previous runway show in the French capital took place in February 2020, just before the novel coronavirus swept across the globe, halting travel and prompting lockdowns. Weddings and awards ceremonies — key events that send clients to Saab — were cancelled for months. Then, in August, Beirut was

rocked by the explosion that killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands and laid waste to entire neighbourhoods. The offices of Saab's namesake label were badly damaged, as was his home, its arches and marbled columns covered with dust and rubble. "Thank God, no one died — we were blessed," Saab said, noting they were able to quickly return to the offices in the weeks that followed. Work continued on his home, however. "There's still my house — that was destroyed as well — we are still finishing the works," said the designer, who founded his label in 1982, at the height of the country's 1975-1990 civil war. "We, Lebanese, when we go through difficult times — each time we experience difficult times, we transform the challenge into something better. There's no other country that has had so many problems," he said. — **Reuters**



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AROUND THE WORLD

GASTRONOMY

'Heartbreaking': Belgians forced to fork out more for their cherished fries



BELGIANS ARE HAVING to fork out more for their favourite snack — fries, or fried potato sticks — because of rising energy, commodity and labour costs.

Belgium is the world's largest exporter of fries and other frozen potato products, with 5.3 million tonnes of potatoes processed per year and sent to customers in more than 160 countries.

"Fries being such an important product for Belgium, of course, emotionally when you have an increase of 10 or 20 cents a portion it's heartbreaking, much more than a washing machine or a pair of shoes," Bernard Lefevre, president of the national union of makers of potato fries, told Reuters TV.

As well as higher energy prices, which are affecting families and businesses almost everywhere, Belgians are having to contend with a ban on single-use plastic forks and plates traditionally used when eating fries.

"We need gas to make fries... But you can't fry fries with a candle," said Lefevre, who expects prices to rise by about 10% in the coming months, after two years of little change.

The coronavirus pandemic has also caused shortages of sauces including mayonnaise, seen by Belgians as a must when eating their fries.

For Bertrand Balasi, who serves fries from his kiosk in an old tram in Brussels, the price rises are inevitable.

"There are increases in prices of lots of things — be it of fat, of potatoes, energy. So even though we know the price of fries is symbolic we might have to raise them to be able to keep selling a quality product," Balasi told Reuters TV. — **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

After 2017 boycott, Iranian director Farhadi ready for awards season



IF HIS SHORTLISTED film "A Hero" wins the Golden Globe, Asghar Farhadi is prepared to get his awards season this time around.

Farhadi won in 2017 the Oscar for Best Foreign-language film "The Salesman," but was boycotted due to the prohibition on travelling to the United States from seven major Muslim nations, including Iran.

Farhadi claims that if he is nominated again, these Oscars will be different.

"It makes me very happy that as an Iranian I'm going through this path," he said.

"I know that for some

Iranian youth, this can create hope... and this creates this satisfaction feeling inside me. It gives these young people some hope so they can continue this path and bring some awards and prizes to Iran." Rahim Rahim, a prisoner who has made a plan to sell a bag of gold coins that she has found to pay off his debts so he can be released from jail.

The young man who draws in the people around him has been hailed as a hero.

"This contradiction that exists in this title is something that I liked a lot," Farhadi said.

"When I announced the name for the first time, it was strange for some of my close friends, but when you place the main character next to the title, the combination of these two creates a new character."

Farhadi has created simple stories focusing on the challenges of being human.

"We have tried to give all the characters in the film a good amount of time to the audience to understand them and comprehend who they are," he said.

"A Hero" is currently streaming on Amazon Prime. — **Reuters**

Science fiction epic 'Dune' leads BAFTA nominations with 11 nods

SCIENCE FICTION epic "Dune", a mammoth adaptation of Frank Herbert's 1965 novel, led nominations for the British Academy Film Awards on Thursday, securing 11 nods.

Dark Western "The Power of the Dog" and black and white drama "Belfast" followed, with eight and six nominations respectively.

James Bond movie "No Time to Die", a remake

of "West Side Story" and coming-of-age tale "Licorice Pizza" each got five nominations.

Known as the BAFTAs (British Academy of Film and Television Arts), Britain's top movie honours will take place on March 13.

"This year's nominations showcase a remarkable range of creative work in front of and behind the camera," BAFTA Chair Krishnendu Majumdar said in a statement.

— **Reuters**

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
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Nawara: A film on the Arab Springs from a different perspective

TO MARK THE 11TH ANNIVERSARY of Arab Spring this year, I decided to watch a movie that talks about it from a different perspective; that of a poor woman called Nawara. Nawara (played by Menna Shalabi) works as a maid for a rich family who lives in a luxury compound located on the outskirts of Cairo.

Her daily routine consists of filling two jerrycans from a communal faucet and carrying it to her grandma's place — while struggling with their sheer weight and the impracticality of her wedge heels — before heading to the public hospital where her father-in-law is suffering from cancer and has to spend the day sitting on the floor as he can't find a free bed, despite his son's constant bribes to the nurse.

Nawara has been married for five years without consummation as they can't afford to move in together. Leaving this misery behind, Nawara has to take several transportations to reach the house of her employees. While riding the bus that moves her to a different world — a far cry from her own — along with maids working in other houses, the radio discusses the money that'd been smuggled out of the country by Mubarak and his cronies and the chance of getting it back and dividing it among the poor; a happy piece of news that is welcomed by the passengers with cheerful claps and ululations.

Nawara loves her employers as she's been with them her whole life. Her boss Usama (played by Mahmoud Hemida) is a former minister and an MP. He's in denial of the political upheaval happening around him despite that half of his acquaintances had fled the country in fear of liability.

After being coerced by his wife, he finally gives in and the family departs to London where their son is staying. Before leaving, they trust the villa and their dog Butch to Nawara with a promise of returning. However, when staying and tending the house, Nawara experiences a dreamlike life that ends abruptly when the police confiscate the place.

The end scene is heartbreaking yet speaks a thousand words of a corrupt system where the poor are made scapegoats for the wealthy. In the movie — also called *Nawara* — director Hala Khalil emphasises the wide gap between social classes in her country in almost every scene, from Nawara's daily trip to her employee's house to the conversations with her boss where her ignorance is highlighted.

Khalil uses wide space between the two: while Nawara is standing outside the pool, Usama is swimming away from her; always laughing at her naive and optimistic view of the revolution. Furthermore, to keep the viewer updated with the current political situation in Egypt, the director chooses news clips played in the background and conversations between Usama, his wife and friends.

Her message is clear: while the rich are panicking, the poor are too busy making ends meet to notice the chaos around them and its potential outcome. The director's feminine touch is given through Nawara; she reflects the way older generations of Arab women were brought up and taught never to complain. Her constant smile and optimism are infectious yet contrasting with her tough life. As usual, Menna Shalabi excels in her portrayal of the simple maid and her inaccessible dreams that seems to get harder after the revolution, with promises of equality and social justice that never materialise. Though very scarce, Layal Watfeh's score echoes brilliantly the sombre mood of the movie. *Nawara* won many film awards — mainly for best actress — such as Dubai and Malmo international film festivals. An exceptional movie. Available on Netflix.

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



Jewels from mind to paper to gold

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

She enjoys introducing her jewellery to others because it is just like poetry. She likes sketching and the designs were soon moving from paper to become jewellery to be worn. She named it OUSHK. Her collection is beautiful and delicate.

Areej al Saleh, the founder of OUSHK, was ready to take off and in came the pandemic, but she was ready with a contemporary brand no

matter what.

What does the name mean?

"OUSHK means to love and to be loved. It is a celebration of individuality and femininity. Each piece is made out of 18k gold and is handcrafted with passion. I wanted to make sure the quality is at its best. The jewellery also features diamonds and precious stones. I wanted OUSHK to contrast and fuse the classic and the modern designs. When you look at it one would realize it is not just traditional or just modern but a fusion of both. There is also use of dark and light, pragmatic and romantic a bit of fusion there too.

Most importantly it is founded in Oman", Areej explained.

Her latest collection is called Lullaby and it features alphabets and numbers.

"We wanted to make a personal collection for the people to choose from. It could be any letters that belong to them. So we have people choose their own letter or a letter of a loved one or it could be a significant number which means something special to them. We wanted to make it fun with the uses of colourful stones. So we have lapis, malachite, black onyx and so on. It is a collection that is very expressive", noted Areej.

With Lullaby Areej wanted people to reconnect with their inner child. She explained, "It aims to rekindle memories of innocence and it ignites curiosity and wonders about ourselves and the world around us."

If you reflect, we would realise we all have our own favourite numbers. Areej's own favourite number is 8.

"If you look at 8 in a horizontal view it looks like infinity", she said with excitement.

OUSHK contemporary jewellery brand reflecting sophistication and confidence is made in 18k gold because Areej wanted to create intricate designs. She points out the jewellery brand came out of pure passion. She actually wanted to launch the brand in 2018. For different reasons, it did not happen until 2020, which saw the onset of the pandemic.

"You could imagine that at that time it was very difficult for everyone. But I wanted to call the first collection XO because it reminds us that we need to love ourselves and the ones around us. XO means hugs and kisses and that was something we were not supposed to do with social distancing. So I wanted to create a collection that embodied that", she said.

In her collection, there are some delicate designs such as the ring made out of a thin chain.

Areej explained the steps, "I design them and the next step is crafting it. All our jewellery is tailor-made in order to have the convenience of everyone having the option of having the gold colour they want. So they can have it in white gold, rose gold or yellow gold."

The response has been interesting although the brand has been just around one and a half years.

"Truthfully, I met with a pleasant surprise because everyone was probably locked up at home and might have been enjoying social media too much and so I wanted to launch an online store by using Instagram as a platform showcasing my designs. The response has been good", she reflected.

She has also been receiving queries from other GCC countries. We look forward to 2022 with more travelling and joining exhibitions to further expand OUSHK in the region.

So who has been showing keenness in her jewellery, youngsters or seniors?

"It has been a combination of young ladies who are 18 years of age to women in their 50s. So it has been a wide range. That makes me really proud because I have been able to create something that does not just fit into a small box but a wide age group", she said excitedly.

Where does her inspiration come from?

"I love sketching and the inspiration from travels and just seeing things. They just come on paper", noted the jewellery designer and founder of OUSHK.

