



P11

EXCITING ACTION ENDS AT AL RAYYAN SHOWJUMPING COMPETITION



P13

OMAN CRUDE SURGES TO \$96.51 PER BARREL



P20

THIS KID DIDN'T LET HER MEDICAL CONDITION BECOME A HINDRANCE



MUSCAT

HIS MAJESTY SENDS CABLES OF GREETINGS

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to Sultan Bolkiah. His Majesty also wished the people of Brunei Darussalam further progress and welfare. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to President Ali and the people of his country. — ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO PRESIDENT OF BRAZIL

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Jair Bolsonaro of the Federative Republic of Brazil, on victims of the floods and landslides that affected Petropolis City due to torrential rains. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Bolsonaro, families of the victims and the Brazilian people, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. — ONA



INSIDE



LIBYA INTERIM PM PROMISES ELECTIONS

P6



SOMETHING IS ROTTEN IN EAST JERUSALEM

P9

FIRST-OF-A-KIND RADIOTHERAPY



A medical team from the Royal Hospital's National Oncology Centre on Tuesday succeeded in conducting a radiotherapy for a patient suffering from a cardiac tumour. The local excision of the tumour was followed with precise mapping and intensive radiotherapy that enabled the team to continuously monitor the patient's condition.

DETAILS ON P5

Higher oil prices to help reduce budget deficit

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

As oil prices returned to 2014 levels on Tuesday, it was greeted with cautious optimism in the country. Oman crude was traded on Dubai Mercantile Exchange at \$96.51 (April 2022 delivery), a rise of \$4.27 from Monday's price of \$92.24. According to statistics, this was the high price for which Oman crude has been traded since September 2014.

"We remember all government and corporate spendings were reduced drastically as oil prices started to decline from the end of 2014. This year's budget sounded positive, and we just hope that it will be never looking back", Laila al Bulushi, who was earlier employed with an event management company, said.

Market analysts told the *Observer* that depending on the situation in Ukraine, prices might



This year's budget sounded positive, and we just hope that it will be never looking back. We remember cut in spendings as oil prices started to decline

LAILA AL BULUSHI

Analyst

go up higher and stay there for an extended period.

However, there are concerns that it may fuel higher inflation and threaten to interfere with the recovery of the global economy from the impact of the pandemic.

"One has to see the progress made on the Iran nuclear deal because a positive outcome will lead to the resumption of oil

exports by that country", a senior analyst and research head, said.

At the current oil price, a hike in revenues from the oil and gas sector will help reduce the budget deficit in 2022.

The jump in oil is compounding worries about inflation around the world, with the Federal Reserve coming under intense pressure to tighten monetary policy.

According to Fitch Solutions Group (FSG), an affiliate of Fitch Ratings, a recent report, "The Sultanate of Oman's crude oil production is projected to rise 9.8 per cent to 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2022, helping further narrow the country's current account deficit to 0.2 per cent of GDP for the year."

It added, "Bright prospects for oil prices and Omani production will be the main driver of a continued widening of the surplus in the trade in goods balance in 2022."

SEE ALSO P13

Nato warns Russia readying for 'full-scale attack' on Ukraine

BRUSSELS: Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said on Tuesday that Russian forces continue to prepare for a potential attack on Ukraine after Moscow recognised two separatist regions as independent.

"Every indication is that Russia continues to plan for a full-scale attack on Ukraine", Stoltenberg said after an urgent meeting with Ukraine's envoy.

"We see that more and more of the forces are moving out of the camps and are in combat formations and ready to strike."

Stoltenberg said "further Russian troops" had already moved across the Ukrainian border overnight into the



Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

Kremlin-backed territories.

"What we see is further invasion of a country which was already invaded", Stoltenberg said. Moscow seized the Crimea

peninsula peninsula from Ukraine in 2014 and has fuelled a separatist conflict in eastern areas for eight years that has killed over 14,000 people.

Russian President Vladimir Putin attempted on Monday to again rewrite his neighbour's borders by recognising the breakaway regions as independent states. Putin has warned he could now send his forces across into the rebel territories depending on how the situation develops.

The recognition has drawn condemnation from the West.

Europe and the US are poised to impose sanctions on Moscow.

SEE ALSO P7

80.24% success in GED first semester

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, on Tuesday approved the examination results of the General Education Diploma first semester for the academic year (2021-2022).

As per the details of the general indicators of the GED first semester examinations, 49,063 students appeared for the exams (regular education) and the success rate was 80.24 per cent.

The number of students who sat for the exams at GED for private (bilingual) schools was 1,450 and the success rate was 90.47 per cent.

SUCCESS RATE

The success rate for the Royal Guard of Oman Technical College was 100 per cent with 49 students sat for the examinations.

A total of 187 students sat for the examinations at the General Education Diploma and Islamic Sciences and the success rate was 97.86 per cent. Thirteen students sat for examinations at the GED (special education) achieving a success rate of 90.91 per cent.

TURNTO P2

Keep your car clean to avoid risk of paying fine

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Not wearing seatbelts, talking on the phone while driving, speeding and other improper behaviours on the road are common offences for which drivers pay fines and get a reprimand.

Drivers, however, should know that not keeping their cars clean is also an offence under the Sultanate of Oman's motor vehicle rules. It

has been clearly mentioned in an ROP traffic manual that driving a dirty car with deposit of dust on it amounts to an offence for which a car owner is liable to pay fine.

"Driving dirty vehicle with dust on it amounts to traffic rules violation", says the code on vehicle rules violations.

So it is advisable for car users to wash their car if it is dirty; otherwise it may invite fine during regular checking of the



traffic policemen.

A doctor working in a private hospital in Muscat admitted to having paid a fine because his car was not clean or maybe not "up to the mark" as per cleaning standards of the traffic rules.

"While driving one afternoon from home to office, I was stopped by the traffic policemen, who wanted to check whether I was wearing seatbelt or not. They checked, and I thought it was

okay for me to go. But they came closer to my car, touched the roof and said: Your car is dirty and you have to pay fine."

"A fine of RO 10 was registered against my vehicle, which I paid during the renewal of my Mulkiya", the doctor said.

"Since it was a new experience to me, I informed all my friends to keep their cars clean to avoid fines during regular vehicle checking", he said.



Muscat to host World Athletics Race Walking Championship on March 4

MUSCAT: The World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships (Muscat 22) will start at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on March 4

The two-day event is hosted by the Sultanate of Oman and organised by the World Athletics, in cooperation with the Oman Athletics Association. As many as 1,000 men and women athletes from 60 countries will contest the seven laps of the race.

The championship will witness the participation of the Omani national team, consisting of 16 players distributed between the two general categories for a distance of 20 km and 35 km, in addition to the male category for a distance of 10 km.

Teams will compete in seven



categories namely the 10 km walk race (age below 20) for both genders, 20 km walk race for women, 8 km sequential walking race (master class), 35 km walk race (unisex), 20 km walk race for males and a 10 km walk race (master class — unisex).

The championship's referees list will include 80 Omanis. It also includes 22 international referees distributed in the race tracks to ensure fair competition.

The World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships is organised every two years by the World Athletics. The tournament was scheduled to be held in the Belarusian city of Minsk, but it was cancelled and postponed several times due to Covid-19 and travel restrictions. — ONA

80.2% success in GED first semester

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry announced that the results will be available at 3:00 pm on Thursday through SMS via Omantel and Ooredoo or by sending a message containing the index number to 90200. The results will be

available on the Sultanate of Oman Education Portal later.

Dr Zuwaina bint Salih al Maskariyah, Director-General of Educational Assessment at the Ministry of Education, general supervisor of the GED examinations, said that requests for revaluation may be submitted

on the educational portal.

The applicants can fill in a form and then approach the Directorate-General of Education in the governorate to complete administrative procedures. The ministry will receive applications from February 27 to March 3. — ONA

Chronic cough torments Covid-recovered patients

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnassri

Doctors are baffled over the Covid-19 post-recovery symptoms like continuous coughing, which sometimes leads to speaking difficulty.

Most Covid-19 recovered patients are showing this symptom. Since the coronavirus is primarily a respiratory disease of the lungs, it is normal in some recovering cases to have a persistent mild cough for a short period after recovery. But in some cases, it lasts for months.

The virus can damage the lungs, heart, and brain, which increases the risk of long-term health problems.

Discussing the post-Covid-19 symptoms, Dr Isaa al Jahdhami, Consultant of Respiratory and Sleep Diseases, said, "Many patients come to the clinic suffering from persistent cough even after recovering from Covid-19, and they ask for solutions. Most of them have already received different treatments such as antibiotics, allergy pills and cough medicines".

He explained, "We should know that coughing is a natural reaction to a foreign body or an inflammation in the trachea and bronchi. There are nerve cells in these places that send signals to the brain to start coughing in case of infection or the like. Coughing is a way to get rid of phlegm and fluids in the airways, which if the body did not get rid of them (by coughing), would lead to complications." The doctor said about 10 per cent of people with mild Covid-19 may have cough



In general, there are many home medicines that are used to relieve coughing, but as doctors we cannot prescribe them to patients officially because there is no scientific evidence of their benefit, but only personal experiences

DR ISAA AL JAHDHAMI

Consultant, Respiratory and Sleep Diseases

for up to four months.

"What matters is treating the disease that is causing the cough. For example, if it is a bacterial infection, one will need to take an antibiotic. For Covid-19, antibiotics are ineffective. In general, in sputum discharge with cough, the patient needs to drink fluids so that the sputum

becomes less dense and easy to pass. Also, a medicine containing NAC, Carbocystine or Ambroxol can be used. While in case of dry cough (without sputum), medicines containing Guaifenesin or Mucinex can be used".

He added, however, that there are no good studies that show the best way to treat a cough after coronavirus infection.

"Some recommend using Gabapentin or Pregabalin because some studies showed that nerve cells in the airways were infected with the virus and subsequently transferred to the center that controls coughing in the brain stem. As for the use of cortisone, there are no accurate studies in this area, but some may improve with its use," he explained.

Regarding home remedies like bay leaves, Dr Al Jahdhami said, "In general, there are many home medicines that are used to relieve coughing, but as doctors we cannot prescribe them to patients officially because there is no scientific evidence of their benefit, but only personal experiences."

No more MoH registration for inbound passengers

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Passengers travelling to the Sultanate of Oman do not have to register anymore at www.travel.moh.gov.om, said the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) sources, based on the decisions of the Supreme Committee for Covid 19.

However, all arriving passengers aged 18 and above, both visitors and those holding resident cards, should have an insurance policy against the Covid-19 and a negative PCR report.

"All passengers aged 18 and above travelling to the Sultanate of Oman are required to present a negative result report of the Covid-19 PCR test upon arrival or within 24 hours after arrival and a health insurance covering the Covid-19," a circular from the CAA said.

Additionally, all passengers aged 18 and above, travelling to the Sultanate of Oman, must present a vaccination certificate indicating that they have received at least 2 doses of the Covid-19 vaccine approved by the country.

The travel and tourism sector, which was badly affected during the pandemic, hailed the move calling it 'a highly proactive step towards supporting the ailing



sectors'.

"Scrapping of the online registration will ease the travel formalities. The easier and relaxed rules are better for more business coming to the country," says Waheed bin Ibrahim al Balushi, Regional Manager Ground Operations, Salam Air.

Sunil D'Souza, CEO of Travel City Group, feels that the travel sector would benefit manifold from this move while ticket prices would reduce as more people would travel.

"Removal of these impediments would enhance the travel manifold. Also, with more people travelling, average ticket prices would drop. It is expected that more countries would lift travel bans, PCR tests and other restrictions that would, in my opinion, help us surpass 2019 figures in 2022 itself," said

D'Souza.

"This move by the Sultanate of Oman will also allow travellers to plan their trips well in advance without any hassle as it helps their overall travel experience. Additionally, business travel will have a new lease of life as it gives flexibility for immediate travel," said Venkat, another travel expert.

Prem Colaco, representative of Indigo Air, says it will help individuals to lessen the pre-arrival formalities.

"This e-mushrif or MoH pre-arrival registration is to track the incoming passengers flow on a daily basis with the Covid-19 formalities. I don't think it will boost tourism. But, it will help individuals lessen pre-arrival formalities while coming into Oman for business, leisure or employment."

Message by Ambassador

IN my capacity of Ambassador of Japan, I would like to extend my warm greetings to the people of the Sultanate of Oman. It is my honour to celebrate together with you the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan today on February 23rd.

I arrived at Muscat on January 11th, thus I started my duties in Oman by joining the people celebrating the second anniversary of the accession of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to the throne. I would herewith like to renew my heartfelt congratulations to His Majesty.

Today's world has constantly confronted challenges and changes. Existing values and past experience may sometimes lose their direction, whilst the long-standing person-to-person friendship has enhanced its importance all the more. Indeed, Japan has long enjoyed the privilege, as many friends, as represented by Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA) and others, have always extended to us courage, support and solidarity.

The people of Japan will never forget the heartwarming Omani support after the great earthquake in Japan in 2011. Japanese communities here in Oman highly appreciate the considerate treatment as elaborated under the current pandemic.

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan ascended the throne in 2019, and initiated his Era "REIWA", meant to be a beautiful harmony. This year marks the 4th year of this Era of beautiful harmony, and this day February 23, 2022, His Majesty becomes 62 years old.

As we recall with friends of Japan, Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress visited Oman in 1994 as the then Crown Prince and Crown Princess. Seven years later in 2001, His Majesty recited his recollection of Oman, which reads: "Across the waters came this Arabian horse".



JOTA YAMAMOTO
Ambassador of Japan
to the Sultanate of Oman



Twenty eight years later this year, Japan and Oman celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations. I see it a precious opportunity to look back to the history of our collaboration. By now, a large number of Japanese companies and investors have inspired and involved in a series of projects, and sustained the social infrastructures and life-lines for the people in Oman. Powers, energies, water, transport, logistics... these are just a few examples.

This 50th anniversary will also amplify chances to look forward to new avenues towards future collaboration. Advanced technologies, management skills, capacity building, as well as strategic perspectives and networking... these would be some relevant concepts. Yet, whatsoever should be done, pursuit for new avenues shall be made and based only upon our long-standing, heartwarming human connections.

I am quite optimistic about the value of person-to-person collaboration, and even more encouraged when I conveyed many congratulations to women's hockey team "Sakura Japan" for winning Asian Cup last month, whilst at the same time I extended many congratulations and thanks to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Hockey Association and all the people who successfully organised the Asian Cup 2022 in Muscat. During the tournament weeks, the spirit of collaboration and mutual appreciation was really working, and made possible its admirable success.

I would herewith like to renew my wishes for the continued prosperity and happiness of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and of the people of the Sultanate of Oman, and to congratulate the two countries for their 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations, and hereby would like to most cordially celebrate the birthday of His Majesty the Emperor.

Bonds bring benefits

Warm and Heartfelt Greetings to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on the Occasion of his 62nd Birthday

On behalf of all the Members of the Board of the Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA), I convey heartfelt greetings to His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito of Japan, on the auspicious occasion of his 62nd birthday.

It gives us pleasure to share that, this year, the Sultanate of Oman is celebrating the second anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession day. Under his wise and visionary leadership, the Sultanate of Oman will continue to move ahead on the path of progress, backed by peace and stability. We pray to the Almighty to bless His Majesty with good health and long life.

The Sultanate of Oman and Japan, two great nations with inspiring culture and heritage, share a deep-rooted relationship that goes back to hundreds of years. Over the years, these strong bonds have continued to grow from strength to strength. Bringing people of both nations closer and offering numerous cultural and economic opportunities to benefit from.

Apart from cultural aspects, the Sultanate of Oman and Japan continue to take big strides on the economic front backed by the strengths of both the nations. Japan has gained very high reputation for its expertise and precision in manufacturing a range of products that include machinery, iron, steel, electronics, automotive and more. Due to high demands for such products from Japan, the Sultanate of Oman witnesses continued imports from Japan. Similarly, as major producer of oil and gas, aluminium and fishery products, the Sultanate of Oman has remained a preferred nation to cater to the demands of the people of Japan, through exports. It is also very encouraging to note that a number of Japanese companies, have invested in the Sultanate of Oman and operate their businesses through joint ventures in various sectors, including the energy sector.

Today, on such a beautiful occasion, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reaffirms



MOHAMMED SAUD BAHWAN,
Chairman of the Board, Oman Japan
Friendship Association

its commitment to further strengthen the bonds of friendship that bind the Sultanate of Oman and Japan.

The Oman Japan Friendship Association plays a responsible role in promoting this remarkable friendship between the two countries to even greater levels. Over the years, in association with the Embassy of Japan, the Oman Japan Friendship Association has conducted several cultural exchange programmes and paved the way for improving people-to-people contacts. Such initiatives have cultivated a sense of curiosity, encouraging people of both nations to learn more about the absorbing culture and heritage of both nations. These initiatives ranged from musical concerts to fashion shows, book fair, art exhibitions, cultural dances and much more.

The last two years had been challenging, due to which many cultural initiatives had to be either put on hold or rescheduled. However, the digital world, opened the doors to a whole new realm of staying connected wherever people were, yet staying apart. Even though people were encouraged to limit people-to-people contacts, they were invited to participate in a few online events and programmes.

In September 2021, to mark the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relationship between Japan and the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan, invited the general public to submit designs for a 50th anniversary logo to be used to promote the events.

Each year, through events and activities like these, the Oman Japan Friendship Association uses every opportunity to encourage people of both nations to participate and benefit from the strengths of each nation. Going forward, the Association will continue to plan and initiate several such events and activities that will bring people of Oman and Japan closer.

On the special occasion, 62nd Birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito, once again, on behalf of all the Board members of the Oman Japan Friendship Association, I convey sincere greetings. May God the Almighty grant him good health and long life. And may the inspiring relationship between Oman and Japan continue to grow stronger.



Congratulations and Warm wishes
to the people of Japan on the occasion of the
Japanese National Day and the 62nd Birthday of
His Majesty Emperor Naruhito

Taking Lasting Friendship to Greater Heights

Oman and Japan, two great nations, with rich culture and heritage, have a strong and inspiring relationship. For generations, the people of both the nations, have remained rooted in traditional values like loyalty and generosity.

The Oman Japan Friendship Association, plays a passionate role in enhancing and promoting the ties between Oman and Japan. Through specially planned cultural programmes and several other initiatives, the Association aims to bring people of both the nations closer. Enabling them to benefit from each other's rich heritage and culture.

Today, on this special occasion, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reaffirms its commitment to the spirit of everlasting bonds between Oman and Japan.





TACKLING COVID-19 TRASH

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The world is slowly crawling out of the pandemic, but the piles of masks, gloves and other disposables which were used in the war against Covid-19 are going to pose a health hazard unless disposed carefully.

According to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO), tens of thousands of tonnes of extra medical waste from the response to the Covid-19 pandemic has put tremendous pressure on healthcare waste management systems around the world, threatening human and environmental health and exposing a dire need to improve waste management practices.

According to the WHO analysis, some 87,000 tonnes of personal protective equipment (PPE) procured between March 2020 and November 2021 and shipped to support urgent Covid-19 response needs through a joint UN emergency initiative are expected to have been converted into waste.

“However, this number does not take into account any of the Covid-19 commodities procured outside of the initiative, nor waste generated by the public like disposable medical masks,” said Dr Michael Ryan, Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme.

The statistics revealed are indeed shocking. More than 140 million test kits, with a potential to generate 2,600 tonnes of non-infectious waste (mainly plastic) and 731,000 litres of chemical waste, which is equivalent to one-third of an Olympic-size swimming pool, have been shipped, while over 8 billion doses of vaccine have been administered globally producing 143



Generally, medical waste disposal is well regulated in the Sultanate of Oman by the Ministry of Health (MoH). We have outsourced it and different types of contaminated waste materials are segregated from the beginning and collected in different types of containers and collected by the disposal service

DR BENNY PANAKKAL
Senior cardiologist

tonnes of additional waste in the form of syringes, needles and safety boxes.

“It is vital to provide health workers with the right PPE. But it is also vital to ensure that it can be used safely without impacting on the surrounding environment”, he added. The WHO study has found that today, 30 per cent of healthcare facilities worldwide, with 60 per cent in the least developed countries, are not equipped to handle existing waste loads, let alone the additional Covid-19 load. This potentially exposes health workers to needle stick injuries, burns and pathogenic microorganisms while also impacting communities living near poorly managed landfills and waste disposal sites through contaminated air from burning waste, poor water quality or disease-carrying pests.

However, according to reports, the Sultanate of Oman has an effective waste management system, and Covid-19 waste has not been in the limelight, at least for the time being.

“Generally, medical waste disposal is well regulated in the Sultanate of Oman by the Ministry of Health (MoH). We have outsourced it and different types of contaminated waste materials are segregated from the beginning and collected in different types of containers and collected by the disposal service”, says Dr Benny Panakkal, a senior cardiologist.

As various countries panicked with the task of securing and quality-assuring supplies of PPE, less attention and resources were devoted to the safe and sustainable management of Covid-19 related healthcare waste, indicating that having effective management systems and awareness campaigns for health workers on what to do with PPE and health commodities after they have been used became all the more important.

“As far as I know, all hospitals have a MoH authorised vendor for disposal of Covid-19 waste and internally also we follow the ministry guidelines of collection, storage and disposal of covid waste,” said Dr Dilip Singhvi.

Experts in medical equipment from the Sultanate of Oman suggested many ways to address the medical waste issue. Accordingly, using eco-friendly packaging and shipping, safe and reusable PPE such as gloves and medical masks, recyclable or biodegradable materials and investment in non-burn waste treatment technologies, such as autoclaves, can help reduce the risk to the environment.



Cardiac tumour removed with radiotherapy

MUSCAT: A medical team from the Royal Hospital's National Oncology Centre on Tuesday successfully performed radiotherapy for a patient suffering from cardiac tumour. The local excision of the tumour was followed with precise mapping and intensive radiotherapy that enabled the team to continuously monitor the patient's condition.

Dr Thuraya bint Nasser al Hajriyah, Consultant and Head of Radiotherapy Department at the National Oncology Centre, said that the tumours were while the heart is in continuous motion, without damaging the adjoining tissues. "There was apprehension from the probability of heart clotting or muscle weakening during the radiotherapy session, leading to the patient's death," said Dr Thuraya.

This time, we safely conducted a total of 30 radiotherapy sessions in a span of six weeks, she said.

"This case constituted the topic of a scientific paper published in a Cambridge University journal that discussed the causes of cardiac tumours, their symptoms and their treatment by adequate radiotherapy, as well as the associated difficulties. — ONA

New dams in the works

KHALIL AL KALBANI
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that a plan has been approved for constructing a number of new dams, depending on priorities and financial allocations.

The ministry told *Oman Arabic* daily, sister publication of the *Observer*, that no dams had been affected by Cyclone Shaheen in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq. Maintenance operations of Mayhat Bani Kiyum dam in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah, have been completed while maintenance work at Wadi Al Hawasnah dam is nearing completion.

Regarding the rehabilitation of dams, the ministry said a number of dams in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah have undergone restoration.

Maintenance work continues for aflaj



affected by Cyclone Shaheen in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq and Al Khabourah, the ministry said, adding that the competent

authorities carry out periodic maintenance of dams and aflaj to remove mud deposits and residues.



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement for Supplying of Medical Equipment

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces to retender the following Medical Equipment:

Tender	Tender Fee	Codes	Equipment	Quantity
CCCRC/T/080/2022	0.0 O.R	[MEO-MEQ-0186]	CSSD Dispenser Basket	2
		[MEO-MEQ-0182]	Flexible Fixation Device for Gynecological Application	1
		[MEO-MEQ-0171]	Half Cylindrical Knee Supports	3
		[MEO-MEQ-0087]	Abdomen Compression Belt	2

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall send a request by email mentioned below to get the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement.

Biddings that meet the above requirement should be submitted by email addressed with the Tender Number on or before Thursday, 10/03/2022.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than one week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact on Tel: 22774580 or via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.



Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG

P.O. Box 38, Mina Al Fahal, Postal Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Tel: 24570100 • Fax: 24570121 • www.shelloman.com.om

DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

In its meeting held on 15 February 2022, Shell Oman Marketing SAOG (the "Company") Board of Directors approved the company's audited financial results for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.

SUMMARY FINANCIALS

In OMR'000	Quarter			12 Months		
	Q4/21	Q4/20	%	2021	2020	%
Revenue	110,323	90,130	22%	398,429	367,090	9%
Gross profit	7,424	7,490	(1%)	30,039	27,235	10%
Add: Other income	880	1,238	(29%)	4,035	4,927	(18%)
Less: Selling, distribution and administrative expenses	(7,560)	(6,957)	9%	(28,030)	(27,110)	3%
Less: Financing and taxation	(516)	(629)	(18%)	(2,433)	(2,468)	(1%)
Profit and comprehensive income	228	1,142	(80%)	3,611	2,584	40%

- Twelve Months Revenue was at OMR 398.429 million, recording a 9% increase from the same period of last year.
- Twelve Months Gross Profit was at OMR 30.039 million, recording a 10% increase from the same period of last year mainly due to the increase in sales margins and the impact inventory value stock movements as a result of the increase in petroleum product prices.
- Twelve Months Profit and Comprehensive Income reached an amount of OMR 3.611 million. This is higher than the same period in 2020 mainly due to the increase in Gross Profit as a result of an increase in sales volume.

BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Mobility Business has been the largest revenue generator in the company. While industry demand remains challenged, the business continues to provide customers with a world class experience through a nationwide network of strategically located Shell service stations. This translated into improved sales volumes vs the year 2020. Despite the continuous impact of COVID-19 pandemic on mobility and commercial activities, the business continued delivering its products and services to customers with focus on care for customers and community. This was further demonstrated during Cyclone Shaheen which hit the northern part of Oman in early October. During the tropical cyclone, almost half of the company's business network were either partially or fully impacted. The business managed to turn around all impacted facilities in less than two days and resume operation while maintaining highest standards of safety and quality.

The business commemorated the National Day this year by opening its 200th service station at a prime location on Muscat Expressway, and announced the beginning of construction of four integrated service stations on Batinah Expressway. The construction is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2022.

The company continued to develop its social and digital media presence through content focused on customer engagement and promotions. Non-Fuel Retail (NFR) continues to play an important role in improving consumer experience and satisfaction. In line with this, one more convenience store was added to its portfolio in 2021.

Fleet Solutions Business remained resilient and a stable contributor to the Retail business, despite the Business-to-Business (B2B) customers facing challenges due to COVID-19 related restrictions. The business continues to focus on signing new customers and addressing evolving customer needs through acceleration of its digitalisation journey, its commitment to delivery promise and operational excellence. Also, it continued leveraging the Cards Management System to provide better transactional controls and continuously improving customers' experience through the Vehicle Recognition System (VRS).

Commercial Fuels Business continued to be impacted by lower demand due to pandemic related restrictions. However, it remains committed to support customer's business continuity through efficient cashflow management, operations excellence and providing effective mobility solutions. The last quarter, on the other hand, witnessed improvement in economic activity coupled with deals signed for new

upcoming infrastructure projects.

Marine Business continues to serve local and international customers at the key ports. The company remains committed to the highest HSSE and operational excellence standards leveraging its global expertise to ensure successful delivery of bunkering solutions to its local and international marine customers. The company's focus remained on strengthening its position in the Marine business by developing new business opportunities to expand its footprint across major ports in the Sultanate.

Lubricants Business has been challenged by the impact of the pandemic and the rise in global base oil prices which directly affected the overall cost of finished lubricants and its profitability. However, strong relationships with key customers and partners along with effective business continuity plans contributed to maintaining this sector's profitability and sales volumes at steady levels. A number of strategic B2B accounts in the energy sectors were also secured. The business maintained its market leadership position in the B2C sector with enhanced route-to-market strategies in collaboration with the key distributors and initiated several strategic levers that enabled growth and sustainability in order to overcome market challenges. This included introducing new revenue streams and an increased focus on co-branded products with strategic Original Engine Manufacturers such as Isuzu and Hyundai. Shell Lubricants has also retained its number one position in the world as the leading supplier of automotive and industrial lubricants for the 15th consecutive year. In addition to this, the business also continues to leverage its ISO 9001-certified Shell lubricant blending plant in Mina Al Fahal, with promoting In-Country Value (ICV) being a strong customer value proposition.

Aviation Business continued to witness limited air travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While restrictions on air travel eased in October, the global aviation and tourism sector remained weak, with many overseas destinations being closed or restricted. As a result, volumes from both domestic and foreign travels remained challenged and similar to the demand witnessed in the year 2020 post the onset of the pandemic. During this time, the company focused on securing new contracts in the cargo sector and retaining key contracts with international airlines at Muscat International Airport. In addition, operations in Duqm Airport was launched above and beyond the company's operating role in Muscat, Salalah and Marmul Fuel Farms leveraging the company's long history experience and operational excellence in Oman.

HEALTH, SAFETY, SECURITY AND ENVIRONMENT (HSSE) In 2021, the company maintained an excellent HSSE performance and continued its Goal Zero journey resulting again with a year of no harm and zero recordable Lost Time Injuries (LTI).

Moreover, the company continued its focus on caring for people and the environment, and its commitment to building people competencies and providing effective safeguards, through several initiatives, including an awareness campaign focusing on ergonomic & physical health, permit to work process, defensive driving, food safety, first aid, firefighting, and risk assessment training. A safety day was held under the theme "New Life Saving Rules" and included the inauguration of service champion big

rules for the front line to enhance the safety of frontline and customers.

The company continues to respond to the evolving risks related to COVID-19, with safety as a key priority, through a vaccination program for employees and their spouses and continues to enable employees to work from home.

The company has also completed the launch of its second solar-powered service station and the trial operation of the first electric charging unit this year. This comes as part of a sustainable environment journey to achieve its net-emission ambition.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The company remains committed to meet the Sultanate's growing energy demands in an economically, environmentally, and socially responsible way while creating sustainable value for the community. While the focus been on ICV, enterprise development, road safety and environment, the company is planning to reinforce its role in the energy transition journey in the Sultanate and to align its long-term strategy and direction with the Group's Powering Progress strategy as well as Oman Vision 2040.

The company strives to reinforce its collaboration with all stakeholders deliver its role as a responsible corporate citizen in Oman.

PROPOSED DIVIDEND

The Board is proposing that the dividend for 2021 be paid at 36 baisa per share for distribution in March 2022. Whilst coming to this decision, the Board has considered the net income of the year, current and expected market conditions, the liquidity in the money market, existing and anticipated borrowings and the capital investment programme for the year 2022, which has been put in place to secure the longer term profitability and competitive position of the company.

BUSINESS OUTLOOK

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact overall industry demand in 2021 due to decreased business activity following mobility restrictions being enforced through various stages for the year. The speed of industry demand recovery is expected to remain uncertain into 2022 following the resurgence of cases, both domestically and internationally. While uncertainty remains, 2022 is expected to demonstrate a more steady business environment owing to stronger macro economics factors including oil price and fiscal performance.

The company has also retained a robust balance sheet throughout the year 2021 to be in a position to continue investment in new business opportunities in 2022, while maintaining financial strength to remain resilient should external demand challenges rearise.

RISK AND CONCERNS

The speed of economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic remains a watch point for the company as does the overall availability of liquidity in the cash market. As a result, the company remains balanced in ensuring a resilient balance sheet, while cautiously continuing with selective investments. Additional focus areas for the company include information risk management and the opportunities and risks associated with new businesses arising through the energy transition.

The company's forward investment and business plan assumes stability in the fixed margin rates in the dominant Mobility segment, and this is dependent on the authorities. The company tests investments against various scenarios, including changing price structures, forecasted demand and the evolving economic environment to ensure we continue to take robust investment decisions concerning the shareholders' available funds.

INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

The Board of Directors recognises that good corporate governance results from strong internal controls. The Board affirms its overall responsibility for reviewing the adequacy and the integrity of the Company's internal control and management information systems, including systems for compliance with applicable laws. There was no material loss reported during 2021 as a result of weaknesses in internal controls. The management of the Company continues to take measures to strengthen the overall internal control environment.

BOARD CHANGES

In the latest Directors elections held at the March 2021 AGM, the shareholders elected the new Board of Directors with two new Directors Ali Kharusi and Adriano Ritskes replacing Directors Juma Al Khamisi and Faisal Waheed, respectively.

IN APPRECIATION

We, in Shell Oman Marketing Company, would like to reaffirm our commitment as part of this nation to continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our partners and stakeholders in the Sultanate and work to power its progress together and continue building on its achievements. We will continue to serve Oman and the people under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and to support his vision for the Sultanate.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my sincere thanks to our

shareholders, the management, our employees, customers, contractors and all our other stakeholders for their loyalty, perseverance, dedication, and effort in the face of an ever growing and challenging business environment. The Board of Directors remains committed to pursuing all opportunities with a view to maintaining the company's growth while enhancing shareholders' value. We are grateful for your constant support as we work to power its progress together.

Walid Hadi

Chairman, Shell Oman Marketing Company SAOG Muscat, February 15, 2022

Audited Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 December 2021

AUDITED STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME		
	Audited Year ended 31 Dec 2021 RO'000	Audited Year ended 31 Dec 2020 RO'000
Income		
Revenue from contracts with customers	398,429	367,090
Cost of sales	(368,390)	(339,855)
Gross profit	30,039	27,235
Other income	4,035	4,927
Selling and distribution expenses	(22,705)	(22,503)
General and administration expenses	(5,325)	(4,607)
Operating profit	6,044	5,052
Finance costs	(1,797)	(2,001)
Finance income	20	26
Profit for the year before taxation	4,267	3,077
Income tax expense	(656)	(493)
Net profit and total comprehensive income for the year	3,611	2,584
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.036	0.026

AUDITED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION		
	Audited 31 Dec 2021 RO'000	Audited 31 Dec 2020 RO'000
ASSETS		
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	56,843	54,882
Intangible assets	49	69
Right-of-use assets	27,986	29,755
Total non-current assets	84,878	84,706
Current assets		
Inventories	8,551	6,646
Trade and other receivables	39,222	33,901
Cash and cash equivalents	8,796	4,607
Total current assets	56,569	45,154
Total assets	141,447	129,860
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES		
EQUITY		
Share capital	10,000	10,000
Legal reserve	3,587	3,587
Retained earnings	39,913	36,302
Total equity	53,500	49,889
LIABILITIES		
Non-current liabilities		
Non-current portion of term loan	3,334	6,667
Non-current portion of lease liabilities	24,216	25,770
Deferred taxation	38	51
Employees' end of service benefits	280	301
Total non-current liabilities	27,868	32,789
Current liabilities		
Current portion of term loan	3,333	3,333
Current portion of lease liabilities	3,063	3,375
Trade and other payables	52,890	40,003
Taxation	667	282
Provision for employee retention scheme	126	189
Total current liabilities	60,079	47,182
Total liabilities	87,947	79,971
TOTAL EQUITY AND LIABILITIES	141,447	129,860
Net assets per share (RO)	0.535	0.499

* The complete financial statements are available from the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).
* The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder on request, in either Arabic or English, within 7 days of receipt of the request. The request should be sent to the Chief Financial Officer at the address shown above.
* The previous year's figures have been reclassified to conform to the presentation adopted in the current year.



Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani meets Libya's Interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah at the 6th GECF summit in Doha. — Reuters

Libya interim PM promises legislative polls

TRIPOLI: Libya's Interim Prime Minister Abdelhamid Dbeibah reaffirmed on Monday that he will only cede power to an elected government and announced a plan for legislative elections before the end of June, in the wake of an attempted ouster by parliament.

Already plagued by divisions between rival administrations in the east and west, Libya has found itself with two rival prime ministers in Tripoli after missing a crucial deadline for December elections.

The parliament sitting in the east appointed former interior minister Fathi Bachagha to replace Dbeibah at the head of the interim government on February 10.

The deputies also voted for a new political roadmap calling for presidential elections within 14 months.

Dbeibah has insisted he will only cede power to an elected

Dbeibah announced a new political roadmap which would begin with legislative elections 'no later than June 24'

government, and in a televised address on Monday evening launched into a diatribe against the "hegemonic political class", in particular the eastern parliament, whose "reckless" decision to replace him "will inevitably lead to war".

He in turn announced a new political roadmap which would begin with legislative elections "no later than June 24" — the date marking the end of the political process sponsored by the UN.

It is within this process that Dbeibah was appointed to head an interim government after years of war and division. — AFP

16 hurt as Yemen drone targets Saudi airport

RIYADH: Sixteen people including foreigners were injured in Saudi Arabia when the kingdom destroyed a drone launched against an airport by Yemeni fighters, the coalition said on Monday.

It is the second airport attack in less than two weeks blamed on, or claimed by, the Ansar Allah insurgents.

The fighters regularly launch attacks against Saudi Arabia which has for seven years led the military coalition which intervened to support Yemen's government in the face of Ansar Allah advances.

"A drone launched in the direction of King Abdullah

Airport in Jazan was destroyed, with debris falling inside the airport," the coalition said, as reported by the official Saudi Press Agency.

"Sixteen civilians of different nationalities were injured," it said, accusing the Ansar Allah of "again launching cross-border attacks from Sanaa airport".

The airport, and the Yemeni capital city Sanaa, are held by the Ansar Allah, who claimed responsibility for an attack that took place on February 10, also in Saudi Arabia's southwest near Yemen.

Officials in the kingdom said 12 people were hurt on that occasion

by falling debris when the Saudi military blew up a Yemeni fighter "bomb-laden" drone targeting Abha International Airport.

In response, the coalition on February 14 said it destroyed a communications system used for drone attacks located near the telecoms ministry in Sanaa.

In December, the coalition said the Ansar Allah had fired more than 850 attack drones and 400 ballistic missiles at Saudi Arabia in the previous seven years, killing a total of 59 civilians.

That figure compares with the 401 coalition air raids carried out in January alone over Yemen, according to the Yemen Data

Project, an independent tracker which reported around 9,000 civilian fatalities from the strikes in that country since 2015. Rights groups have long criticised the coalition for civilian casualties in its aerial bombardment.

The UN has estimated the war killed 377,000 people by the end of 2021, both directly and indirectly through hunger and disease.

On Monday, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on Twitter that "following bombing" overnight in Hajjah province, its team in the emergency room of Abs general hospital "received a 12-year-old girl and a 50-year-old woman, both dead on arrival". — AFP

Skiing in Lebanon too steep for most with currency in freefall



People ride on a chairlift at a ski resort in Kfarddebian, Lebanon. — Reuters

700,000 and a million pounds — more than the current monthly minimum wage and a sizeable chunk of an average salary.

Lebanon is mired in its worst crisis since the 1975-90 civil war, with banks imposing tight restrictions on how much cash

savers can withdraw, forcing even those with money to think more carefully before they spend.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka inflation hits record high for fourth consecutive month

Sri Lanka's inflation hit a record high for the fourth consecutive month, official data showed as an economic crisis driven by a crippling foreign exchange shortage worsens. The National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) rose 16.8 per cent in January from a year earlier, the fourth consecutive record rise and more

than double October's figure of 8.3 per cent. The record highs came as the South Asian island struggles to find dollars to finance essential imports, including food, fuel and medicines.

The energy ministry announced it was struggling to buy fuel on credit and reported shortages at many pumping



stations, leading to queues and forcing some to shut.

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's prime minister wants TV debate with Indian counterpart

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said he would like to have a televised debate with his Indian counterpart, Narendra Modi, to resolve differences between the two neighbours. "I would love to debate with Narendra Modi on TV," Khan told Russia Today in an interview, adding that it would be beneficial for the billion



people in the subcontinent if differences could be resolved

through debate.

India's Ministry of External Affairs did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. "India became a hostile country so trade with them became minimal," Khan said, stressing his government's policy was to have trade relations with all countries.

KHARTOUM

Sudan slams Ethiopia move at controversial Blue Nile dam

Sudan has condemned neighbouring Ethiopia for launching power generation at a controversial dam on the Blue Nile without the agreement of downstream nations, saying the "unilateral move" violated international commitments. Sudan "has emphasised

its rejection of all unilateral measures with regard to filling and operation" of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, the spokesman for its negotiating team, Omar Kamel, said.

He said the Ethiopian move was a "fundamental breach"



of its commitments under international law.



Musandam Power Company SAOG
PO Box 228, PC 134, Al Qurum, Jawharat Al Shatti, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.musandampower.com

INVITATION TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF MUSANDAM POWER COMPANY SAOG

The Board of Directors of Musandam Power Company SAOG invites its respective shareholders to attend the Annual General Meeting ("AGM") which shall be held at 3:00 pm, on 10/03/2022 at Crowne Plaza Hotel Al Qurum, Al Sindibad Hall, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

Failing quorum of the AGM, a second AGM shall be convened at 3:00 pm, on 15/03/2022 at Crowne Plaza Hotel Al Qurum, Al Sindibad, Muscat Governorate, and on the e-portal for convening general meetings which may be accessed through the Muscat Clearing and Depository SAOC ("MCD") website (www.mcd.gov.om). The agenda include the following:

- To consider and approve the report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To consider the Corporate Governance Report for the financial year ended 31 December 2021.
- To consider the Auditor's report and to approve the Financial Statements in respect of the Company for the year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To approve the proposal authorizing the Board of Directors' to determine and distribute cash dividends to the Company's Shareholders who are registered with the MCD as of the dates to be decided by the Board of Directors in March 2022 and September 2022 out of the retained earnings as per the audited financial statements for the financial year ended 31 December 2021, provided that the amount shall not be more than 29.8 Baisas per share (13.8 Baisas per share in March 2022 and 16 Baisas per share in September 2022).
- To disclose the transactions that the Company entered into with related parties during the financial year ended on 31 December 2021 (Annexure 1).
- To consider and approve the proposed transactions to be entered by the Company with related parties during the financial year ending on 31 December 2022 (Annexure 2).

- To ratify the payment of sitting fees to the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the financial year ended 31 December 2021 and to determine the sitting fees of the Board of Directors and Sub-Committees for the next financial year ending on 31 December 2022 (Annexure 3).
- To ratify the payment of Directors' remuneration for an amount of RO 142,200 (Rials Omani a Hundred forty two thousands and two hundred) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2021.
- To appoint the statutory auditors for the financial year ending on 31 December 2022 and approve its fees.
- To elect new Board of Directors from amongst the shareholders or non - shareholders.

Any person who wishes to nominate himself/herself to the Board of Directors should complete a nomination form available with the Company. The nomination form can be obtained from the Company's head office. The completed forms should be delivered to the Company minimum five days prior to the AGM date. Nomination forms received after 5pm on Thursday, 3rd of March 2022 shall not be accepted.

- To approve the independent consultant report for the annual appraisal of the performance of the Board of Directors during the year ended 31 December 2021.

In accordance with the Rules for Convening General Meetings via Electronic Means, issued by the CMA we would like to call your attention to the following:

- only a corporate person may authorize a natural person to attend and vote on its behalf on decisions/resolutions of the AGM general meeting, through electronic means, provided such natural person must have an investor number at MCD;
- voting on any item of the agenda shall commence prior to the convention of the AGM general meeting at a maximum of three (3) days and ends on the day of the AGM. If a shareholder's balance is changed either by increase or decrease the voting process shall stand canceled and must revoke at the AGM.

Please attend at the venue or online at least 30 minutes prior to the AGM
For more information, please contact Mr. Abdulhamed Al Jabri of Musandam Power Company on telephone No. 24063555.

Chairman	Auditor	Legal Advisor
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In brief

NEW DELHI



INDIA SENDS WHEAT AID SHIPMENT TO AFGHANISTAN

India dispatched the first in a series of aid shipments containing wheat to Afghanistan as the country faces poverty and hunger since the takeover by the Taliban last year. The first convoy of 50 trucks carrying 2,500 metric tonnes of wheat left the north Indian city of Amritsar after a ceremony attended by India's foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla, India's foreign ministry said in a statement. "India remains committed to its special relationship with the people of Afghanistan", the statement said. In total, India plans to send 50,000 tonnes of wheat to Afghanistan on an infrequently used land route through Pakistan.

CORFU



HOPES DIM OF FINDING SURVIVORS IN FERRY FIRE

Smoke billowed from a ferry that caught fire off the Greek coast, as coastguards prepared to tow the vessel into port and hopes dwindled of finding more survivors after five days of searching. At least one person was killed and three passengers are in hospital after fire ripped through Italian-flagged *Euroferry Olympia*. Most of the passengers aboard the ship, north of the island of Corfu, were quickly evacuated but the fire has continued for days and 10 truck drivers remain missing. The ferry is to be towed to "a safe port" in western Greece "to continue the operations with maximum security", the coastguard said.

ROME



NEARLY 600 MIGRANTS RESCUED OFF CALABRIA

Nearly 600 migrants packed into overcrowded fishing boats in bad weather were rescued overnight off the coast of Calabria, Italy's coastguard said, adding that one body had been found. The 573 migrants were found aboard "two overloaded fishing boats and left at the mercy of waves with unfavourable weather conditions that were expected to worsen significantly", it said in a statement. A large ship and three patrol boats aided in the rescue, which took place about 110 kilometres off Cape Spartivento at the southern tip of Calabria, it said.

Ukraine calls for 'tough' Russia sanctions

- Germany blocks opening of pipeline
- West responds to Russian moves
- Russian parliament recognises breakaway regions
- Ukraine says two soldiers killed in shelling
- Global markets rattled, oil hits 7-year high
- Ukraine may cut ties with Russia

MOSCOW / DONETSK:

Germany froze a new gas pipeline and Britain hit Russian banks with sanctions on Tuesday, as the West responded to Moscow's recognition of two separatist regions in Ukraine and a speech by President Vladimir Putin suggesting more belligerent aims. Russia's parliament approved treaties with the two breakaway regions in Ukraine's east, a day after Putin announced he was recognising the independence of enclaves controlled by Russian-backed fighters since 2014.

The prospect of a disruption to energy supplies and fears of war, stoked by reports of shelling and movements of unmarked tanks in the city of Donetsk, rattled international markets and sent oil prices surging to their highest level since 2014.

Germany is Russia's biggest customer for natural gas, and the decision by Chancellor Olaf Scholz to halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline — built but still not opened — was widely seen as one of the strongest measures Europe could take.

Scholz said he had asked the economy ministry to take steps to ensure that certification could not take place for now.

"This is a morally, politically and practically correct step in the current circumstances", Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba

tweeted. "True leadership means tough decisions in difficult times. Germany's move proves just that."

Putin said Russia would keep global gas supplies flowing.

"Russia aims to continue uninterrupted supplies, including liquefied natural gas, to the world markets, improve related infrastructure and increase investments in the gas sector", he said in written remarks for a gas summit in Qatar.

EU foreign ministers in Paris were discussing sanctions that would hit Russian banks. Britain announced sanctions on three Russian billionaires and five of its banks.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said it was "inconceivable" that the European Champions League soccer final could go ahead in Russia as scheduled in May.

The United States has discussed sanctions, but so far limited to measures directly related to the separatist regions, apparently preferring to keep a much larger planned sanctions package against Russia itself in reserve for now.

Russia's recognition of the separatist areas, and Putin's authorisation of "peacekeeping" troops there, still stops far short of the massed large scale invasion that Western countries have said for weeks they fear Moscow is planning. It leaves Western leaders guessing as to Putin's intentions



Military coalition announces Baltic Sea drills

LONDON: Defence ministers from 10 countries on Tuesday announced manoeuvres in the Baltic Sea, after talks in Britain at which they condemned Russia for its actions in Ukraine. The Joint Expeditionary Force said in a statement they would "shortly conduct an exercise demonstrating JEF nations' freedom of movement" in the strategic zone.

"These and subsequent activities will remain preventative and proportionate.

"In acting together, we shall demonstrate the JEF's solidarity, capability and resolve to stand together for security and stability in our region."

The JEF, set up in 2012, is made up of Nato members Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway the United Kingdom, and non-members Finland and Sweden. It is focused on security in the "High North" region around the Arctic, the North Atlantic and the Baltic

Sea area. Ministers were hosted at talks in central England by UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, and said the grouping was more important than ever in the light of Russia's actions. They unanimously condemned Russian President Vladimir Putin's recognition of two pro-Moscow rebel regions in Ukraine and the Kremlin's deployment of troops there. "We call on Russia to de-escalate and encourage (Russia) to engage in transparent dialogue", they added.

The UK's highest-ranking military officer, Chief of Defence Staff Tony Radakin met his counterparts in Sweden last Tuesday to discuss Ukraine and European security issues.

"In a world defined by competition and confrontation, it is vital that like-minded nations like ours come together to protect our shared values and defend the rules and freedoms that underpin security and stability in Europe", they said.

— AFP



A Ukrainian serviceman is seen at a position on the front line with Russia-backed separatists near the settlement of Troitske in the Lugansk region. — AFP

for a force of up to 190,000 troops deployed on Ukraine's borders.

But Western countries saw ominous signs in Putin's rambling televised address on Monday, in which he characterised the Ukrainian leadership as illegitimate and the Ukrainian state as artificial, and wrongly wrested from Moscow after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Ukrainians consider such descriptions offensive and false. Kyiv is older than Moscow and, while parts of Ukraine were captured by Russian tsars, other parts were not ruled by Moscow until World War Two. Kristina Kvien, the top US diplomat in Ukraine, said Putin's "outrageous statements about Ukraine and the Ukrainian people were delusional, reflecting a warped vision reminiscent, not of a global leader, but of Europe's worst authoritarians."

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine may sever diplomatic ties with Russia and urged allies not to wait for a further escalation to impose sanctions.

Russian parliamentary approval of friendship treaties with the two regions could pave the way for Moscow to build military bases there. The Kremlin said it hoped Russia's recognition would help restore calm and that Moscow remained open to diplomacy with the United States and other countries.

Ukraine said two soldiers had been killed and 12 wounded in shelling by pro-Russian separatists in the east in the past 24 hours, and reported new hostilities on Tuesday morning. US President Joe Biden signed an executive order to halt US business activity in the breakaway regions.

"We've got to ensure that, whatever happens, Russia will feel

the pain... to make sure Russia has absolutely no incentive to go further", said Ireland's Europe minister, Thomas Byrne.

The West, which imposed sanctions on Russia after it annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, appears likely to hold back on its toughest sanctions for now.

A US official said deployment of Russian troops to the breakaway regions did not merit the harshest sanctions Washington and its allies have prepared in the event of a full-scale invasion, as Russia already had troops there.

EU sanctions could include putting hundreds of politicians and officials on black lists, a ban on trading in Russian state bonds and an import and export ban on separatist entities, EU diplomats and officials said. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov brushed off the threat of sanctions.

— Reuters

Hope, fear and uncertainty on streets of Donetsk

DONETSK: On the streets of the biggest city in Ukraine's breakaway eastern regions, some residents expressed joy and gratitude on Tuesday over Russia's decision to recognise their independence, but others were filled with foreboding for what might come next. President Vladimir Putin on Monday granted official recognition to the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and signed friendship treaties with their leaders, a step that paves the way for Russia to send in troops and establish military bases. The West condemned the move as an illegal act that could mark the prelude to a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and began imposing some sanctions.

But for some in Donetsk, where Moscow-backed separatists have battled Ukrainian government forces in a conflict that Kyiv says has cost 15,000 lives since 2014, it was long overdue. "This is very important for me. I know that the blood I spilled with my comrades and our labours and efforts and the losses of civilians were not in vain all this time", said Dmitry, a former member of a pro-Russian separatist militia. He was looking forward to the arrival of Russian troops as part of the agreements signed on Monday.

"This great people of Donbass have suffered so much, they need



People stand at the door of their building's basement they use as a shelter during bombings in the town of Schastia, near the Ukraine city of Lugansk. — AFP

Putin: Russia not aspiring to re-establish empire

MOSCOW: Russia is not seeking to re-establish an empire, despite its controversial recognition of separatist areas in eastern Ukraine, according to President Vladimir Putin.

"This absolutely does not correspond to reality", Putin said in the Kremlin on Tuesday.

Moscow had seen "speculation" on the issue "that Russia wants to re-establish

the empire within the imperial borders", Putin said, after he had earlier recognised the Luhansk and Donetsk "people's republics" as independent states.

During a televised address on Monday, Putin had declared that Ukraine owed its existence to the Russian and Soviet empires. He also questioned the statehood of the former Soviet republic — dpa

it now (Russian troops). They've had enough blood, enough death", he said. A convoy of at least a dozen cars flying large Russian

tricolor flags and honking their horns wound its way through the city centre. "Russia, hoorah!" shouted one driver. — Reuters

Is extended recess at school – beneficial or detrimental?



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

Recess has always been a part of the school, but there has been a growing trend in recent years in reducing recess time and reallocating time to learning and academic subjects.

We, as adults, sometimes even have a nagging sense that recess is a privilege for children at school.

However, researchers and teachers alike report that when recess is taken away, there is an increase in behavioural problems and anxiety observed in children. The heightened expectations and loss of playtime at school are to blame for this.

Often, children who lose physical activity or are punished during recess time are the ones who need it most and it can have a snowball effect.

The American Academy of Pediatrics believe that recess is a crucial and necessary component of a child’s development and it should not be withheld for punitive

or academic reasons.

Studies show that recess plays an essential role in promoting the optimal development of the whole child and taking recess time away puts this vital facet of a child’s school day at risk.

Recess serves as a necessary break from the rigours of concentrated academic challenges in the classroom. However, equally important is that safe and well-supervised recess offers cognitive, social, emotional and physical benefits that may not be fully appreciated when a decision is made to diminish it.

Children learn valuable communication skills through play at recess, including negotiation, cooperation, sharing, problem-solving and coping skills, such as perseverance and self-control.

These skills become fundamental, lifelong personal tools. Recess offers children a

EMBRACING RECESS AND GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR CRITICAL FREE TIME IS A BENEFIT AND NOT A DETRIMENT

necessary, socially structured means for managing stress.

There is a wealth of literature published on the need for and benefit of recess, not only for a child’s physical well-being but also for their academic and social maturation.

Although not all children play vigorously at recess, it provides the opportunity for children to be active in their chosen mode and practice movement and motor skills.

Importantly, recess affords young children free activity for the sheer joy of it.

While play has always been an

essential part of childhood, when teachers prioritise incorporating intentional play to promote social and emotional development, children learn to work with others, take turns, manage impulses.

Play is foundational for child development and can also help children process and heal from the impact of living through stress, trauma, or grief, including a global pandemic.

The benefits of a break in the school day extend beyond the value of the time outside.

A 2014 study of more than 200 elementary students found that physical activity improved students’ fitness and brain function, enhancing their accuracy and reaction time in mental tasks.

Other studies have concluded that children who have unstructured time during the school day exhibit greater creativity and problem-solving skills, are less

disruptive, and learn crucial social lessons like resolving disputes and forming cooperative relationships.

Studies show that unstructured playtime is crucial to development, benefiting physical health and improving cognitive faculties not generally associated with play, including focus and recall.

Schools that give longer breaks to students report improvement in their creative writing, fine motor skills, body mass index and attention in the classroom.

Embracing recess and giving children back their critical free time is a benefit and not a detriment. It is hard for children to sit for long periods and taking a break during recess helps them remain focused. They are ready to settle down and learn, making school fun.

Recess should never be withheld as punishment and is not a luxury for children but is crucial for their learning and growth.

South Sudanese frustrated by lumbering peace process

WAAKHE SIMON WUDU

When Tunda Henry’s family fled South Sudan’s brutal civil war five years ago, they vowed to return after the upheaval. But as the young nation’s shaky peace process struggles to make progress, he fears that day may never come.

Tuesday will mark two years since President Salva Kiir and his deputy Riek Machar formed a unity government, cementing a peace deal signed in 2018 that brought an end to a conflict that cost almost 400,000 lives.

Since then, the world’s newest nation has lurched from crisis to crisis, battling flooding, hunger, interethnic violence and political malaise as the promises held out by the peace agreement fail to materialise, leaving citizens like Henry deeply disillusioned.

“I am not happy,” said the father-of-five, the only person in his family to stay in South Sudan. Fear continues to dog his life, making it near impossible for him to travel to his home village from the capital Juba.

“Some people disappear on the way,” he said, with rebel groups such as the National Salvation Front (NAS) — which did not sign up to the peace deal — still at large.

Meanwhile political bickering threatens to undo even the fragile gains made in implementing the peace process. Machar and Kiir have been unable to agree on key provisions such as the creation of a unified army that will bring their forces under a single command. With less than a year left before elections are due, South Sudan risks “going back to conflict”, the United Nations warned earlier this month, barely a decade after winning its hard-fought independence from Sudan in 2011. The five-year civil war which erupted in 2013 forced millions of people to flee their homes, with Henry’s family now living as refugees in Uganda.

The 40-year-old works two jobs in Juba, ferrying customers on his motorcycle to earn extra cash to supplement his teacher’s salary of 35,000 South Sudanese pounds (\$80) — more than half of which is spent on rent. “My salary could not sustain me... I have to rent a house, I have to send money to my family,” he said. Despite being an oil-rich nation, South Sudan’s economy has effectively been held hostage by political corruption, with a UN report last September accusing the ruling elite of looting tens of millions of dollars from public coffers. — AFP

Putin calls Ukrainian statehood a fiction. History suggests otherwise

MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ, MARIA VARENKOVA AND RICK GLADSTONE

In his speech to the Russian nation on Monday, President Vladimir Putin buoyed his case for codifying the cleavage of two rebel territories from Ukraine by arguing that the very idea of Ukrainian statehood was a fiction.

With a conviction of an authoritarian unburdened by historical nuance, Putin declared Ukraine an invention of Bolshevik revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin, who he said had mistakenly endowed Ukraine with a sense of statehood by allowing it autonomy within the newly created Soviet state.

“Modern Ukraine was entirely and fully created by Russia, more specifically the Bolshevik, communist Russia,” Putin said. “This process began practically immediately after the 1917 revolution and moreover Lenin and his associates did it in the sloppiest way in relation to Russia — by dividing, tearing from her pieces of her own historical territory.”

As a misreading of history, it was extreme even by the standards of Putin, a former KGB officer who has declared the Soviet Union’s collapse the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

The historical reality of Ukraine is complicated, a thousand-year history of changing religions, borders and peoples. The capital, Kyiv, was established hundreds of years before Moscow, although both Russians and Ukrainians claim Kyiv as a birthplace of their modern cultures, religion and language.

The history and culture of Russia and Ukraine are indeed intertwined — they share the same Orthodox Christian religion and their languages, customs and national cuisines are related.

But the happy brotherhood of nations that Putin likes to paint, with Ukraine fitted snugly into the fabric

of a greater Russia, is dubious. Parts of modern-day Ukraine did indeed reside for centuries within the Russian empire. But other parts fell under the jurisdiction of the Austro-Hungarian empire, or Poland or Lithuania.

“Putin’s argument today that Ukraine is historically subsumed by Russia is just not right,” said Cliff Kupchan, chair of the Eurasia Group, a political risk consulting organisation. While the themes of Putin’s speech were not new for the Russian leader, Kupchan said, “the breadth and vehemence with which he went after all things Ukrainian was remarkable.”

The newly created Soviet government under Lenin that drew so much of Putin’s scorn on Monday would eventually crush the nascent independent Ukrainian state. During the Soviet era, the Ukrainian language was banished from schools and its culture was permitted to exist only as a cartoonish caricature of dancing Cossacks in puffy pants.

Putin also argued that the myth of Ukraine was reinforced by the crumbling Soviet government of Mikhail Gorbachev, which allowed

Ukraine to slip free of Moscow’s grasp. It was a weakened Moscow that “gave” Ukraine the right to become independent of the Soviet Union “without any terms and conditions.”

It was not Moscow that granted Ukraine’s independence in 1991, but the Ukrainian people, who voted resoundingly to leave the Soviet Union in a democratic referendum.

Now, with an estimated 190,000 Russian troops surrounding Ukraine like a sickle, Putin’s declaration that Ukraine’s very existence as a sovereign state was the result of historical error threatened to send a shudder through all the lands once under Moscow’s dominion. It also elicited expressions of contempt from Ukrainians.

“For the past few decades, the West has been looking for fascism anywhere, but not where it was most,” said Maria Tomak, an activist involved in supporting people from Crimea, a Ukrainian territory Putin annexed in 2014. “Now it is so obvious that it burns the eyes. Maybe this will finally make the West start to sober up about Russia.”

—The New York Times



A festival for booklovers



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

The Muscat International Book Fair is back after a gap of two years which were marred by coronavirus pandemic. The largest platform for all book lovers in the Sultanate of Oman, the fair with 361,230 titles from 570 publishers together from 27 countries around the world, will start from February 24. The tell-tale signs of the fair, which is now in its 26th iteration, not only gets us excited about books, but also provides a happy place where authors, publishers and book enthusiasts come together to celebrate literature. It also offers a wonderful opportunity to discover new writers and reconnect with the classics.

When families, students and educators gather at book fairs, all of them interact with each other about the books of their interest, which on the other hand improves their reading appetite.

For children, it gives them access to a large variety of books, specifically selected to match their interests. It is at book fairs that they get an opportunity to discover mystery books, help build home libraries and enhance their interest in reading.

And for parents and elders, taking a stroll through the book fair will make them feel like kids again! It will all be nostalgia cherished in the old school days! I am sure this is a time they can get away from the routine angst or anxiety and relax.

AND FOR PARENTS AND ELDERS, TAKING A STROLL THROUGH THE BOOK FAIR WILL MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE KIDS AGAIN! IT WILL ALL BE NOSTALGIA CHERISHED IN THE OLD SCHOOL DAYS!

A book fair is like the festival where all celebrate their love for reading. All the bibliophiles know how important books are in their lives.

Alas! The reading culture has undergone changes over the years. There was a time when reading books was tasking. To get a book of our choice we had to search the shelves of a library one by one.

And the only way we could read a book was to be in a well-lit room or in an open space.

And if the book is heavy, use both hands to carry them, and a working table would be necessary if you needed to write notes while reading a book! I still remember the painstaking process involved while making a copy of the book.

But still we loved holding a book, smelling it and then getting lost in its world.

Now, one can access hundreds of resources on almost any subject with just a click of a button and by using search engines. The way Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press did in the 15th century, in the 21st century we are experiencing another such revolution, thanks to digital technology.

The reading culture has changed. We have moved from reading physical books with bookmarks to reading a book through the mobile device. With digital gadgets, you can store several books in one device.

Even as global book sales have broadly remained flat over the past decade, interestingly, however, there is still demand for hard copies as evidenced by the overwhelming response that book fairs continue to get.

Many people still prefer printed books, mostly for reading activities such as reading a book with their children at bedtime.

Significantly, as a crowd puller, at the Muscat Book Fair, as many as 114 cultural activities, among them 29 unique to the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, will be staged, but children's activities will be limited in line with Covid-19 precautionary measures.

Even though the Fair is not expected to clock the same elegant attendance of over one million visitors in 2019 due to restrictions, it will be a gateway opportunity for booklovers in the country.

So to say, even though change is in the air, the extent of this transformation to e-reading remains firmly under the readers' control!



MAROONED BY FLOODS

Houses in Ironbridge, central England, are surrounded by flood waters from the burst banks of the River Severn, on Tuesday. – AFP

Something is rotten in Jerusalem



Daoud Kuttub

The author is a former journalism professor at Princeton University, and is the founder and former director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al Quds University in Ramallah

Anyone interested in understanding the root of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict needs only to visit East Jerusalem. There you can see all the major flashpoints. After four years of meticulous, exhaustive study, Amnesty International recently published a report showing that in all areas under Israeli control, two very different systems exist: one that honours rights, equality and freedom for Israeli Jews; and one that denies rights, equality and freedom for Palestinian Arabs.

This racial discrimination is clear to see in Sheikh Jarrah. After the 1948 war, Palestinian refugees in this East Jerusalem neighbourhood lived in squalid tents until the United Nations, cooperating with the Jordanian government, agreed to build homes for them. But since Israel occupied East Jerusalem in June 1967, it has honoured undocumented claims by Jews who say that a particular plot of land belonged to their nineteenth-century ancestors, while denying Palestinians' claims to homes and lands that their parents and grandparents were forced to flee during the heat of the war.

Making matters worse, Jewish settlers who have appointed themselves caretakers have increasingly succeeded in forcing Palestinian families from their homes, so that they can be turned over to Jewish families. These evictions, carried out with the help of the Israeli army, are clear violations of international law. When the Geneva Convention IV (on civilians) was drafted after World War II, its express purpose was to forbid precisely this kind of ethnic cleansing.

Not far from Sheikh Jarrah is another hot spot. In 2014, a US-sponsored

agreement between then-Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and King Abdallah II of Jordan demarcated Islam's third holiest mosque, Al Aqsa, as a shrine where only Muslims may pray, but where all others may visit. But now, the agreement is being violated daily as Israeli security forces allow Jewish extremists to visit the site to pray — a highly charged act that threatens to turn a political conflict into a religious war.

The offense is so great that King Abdallah — the head of the Hashemite family, which maintains custodianship over Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites — has yet to meet publicly with Israel's current head of state, President Isaac Herzog, or Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

North, south and east of Sheikh Jarrah, Israel has built an eight-metre-high cement wall dividing Palestinian neighbourhoods. It has provided separate roads for Jewish Israelis while denying access to basic services for Palestinian residents, especially those living beyond the wall but under Israeli control. Some 100,000 Jerusalemites live in areas where Israeli services and security are absent but Palestinian police are not permitted entry. In these legal twilight zones, violence, drugs and lawlessness are rife.

Israel's discriminatory policies are not only violations of international law. They are also being implemented with brute force and intimidation. Owing to the resulting tensions in Jerusalem, the occupied territories have become a battle zone where Israeli hooligan settlers routinely attack Palestinians, who can defend themselves only by throwing

stones.

Israel frequently prevents Palestinians from engaging even in peaceful political activity, and events as innocent as a puppet show can be shut down if they are funded by or through the Ramallah-based Palestinian semi-government. And last April, the Palestinian leadership had to cancel a general election because Israel barred Palestinians in East Jerusalem from using post offices there to mail absentee ballots — an open refusal by Israel to honour its commitments under the Oslo Accords.

The deteriorating situation in Jerusalem, and the daily clashes between illegal settlers and Palestinians across the occupied territories, reflects the absence of any political horizon in the conflict. The Palestinian government is unable to intervene because it is too weak to confront the Israeli occupiers. Palestinians are left to resist the occupiers on their own, without any source of hope for the future.

Every avenue for a peaceful resolution of the conflict has been blocked by the Israeli government. Israel and its allies are doing precisely what they denounced the Arab world for doing after the 1967 Khartoum Arab League summit, where leaders issued the "Three Nos": no peace, no negotiations, and no recognition of Israel. Bennett comes from a far-right pro-settler party and has made clear that he has no intention of holding talks with the Palestinians. He boasts about his refusal even to meet with Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, and he remains staunchly opposed to the two-state solution.

@Project Syndicate, 2021



Palestinians and activists take part in a protest in the flashpoint neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem. Hundreds of Palestinians face eviction by Israel from homes in Sheikh Jarrah and other east Jerusalem neighbourhoods. – Reuters

sport

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Action from the UAE-Nepal semifinal match of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A. – Photos by Hussain Ali al Maqbali

UAE, Ireland book World Cup spots



ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 22

United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Ireland qualified for the ICC T20 World Cup Australia 2022 after thumping wins over Nepal and Oman in the semifinals of the Qualifiers here on Tuesday.

At OCA ground 2, hosts Oman suffered a 56-run defeat against Ireland, while the UAE beat Nepal by 68 runs at OCA ground 1.

Simi Singh bowled a brilliant spell of 3.3 overs taking 3-20 while Joshua Little, Andy McBrine and Craig Young took two wickets each.

Gareth Delany (47) was the top-scorer for Ireland, while Harry Tector (35) and Andy McBrine (36) hit vital runs.

In the other match, UAE captain Ahmad Raza took 5-19 in his four overs to lead a sensational bowling effort against Nepal. Junaidd Siddique bagged 3 for 27.

UAE chose to bat and posted 175-7 in 20 overs.

Opener Mohammad Waseem scored 70 runs from 48 balls studded with four boundaries and sixers each.

19-year-old talent Vriitya Aravind belted 46 (23 balls, 5x4, 3x6) before being bowled by Nepal captain Sandeep Lamichhane.

Jitendra Mukhiya (3-35) and Abinash Bohara (3-46) were among the wickets for Nepal.

SENSATIONAL SIMI
Oman lost first wicket at 13 runs

when Kashyap Prajapati skied up a shot off Mark Adair in the third over to be caught by Craig Young at short fine leg.

Simi Singh struck in his very first ball in the sixth over and bagged the big wicket of Jatinder Singh (7) trapped leg before with the score at 28-2.

Oman suffered twin blows in the 11th over by left-arm seamer Joshua Little. Both Shoaib Khan (30 from 22 balls) and new batsman Khurram Nawaz (0) edged their shots to wicketkeeper Lorcan Tucker in similar fashion as Oman fell to 68-4.

Simi Singh struck again in the 14th over when he trapped Khawar Ali (10) leg-before with a yorker after the batsman attempted a

reverse sweep with the score at 84-5.

Naseem Khushi got out next after his sloppy pull was caught by McBrine who made the attempt interesting by juggling the ball.

Stuart Young grabbed the prize wicket for Zeeshan Maqsood next ball when the Oman captain's late cut rested in the hands of Simi Singh at backward point. Oman slumped to 87-7 at this point from 14.4 overs.

The tail-enders could not make much of it as Oman's campaign ended at 109 in 18.3 overs.

Earlier, Oman won the toss and elected to bowl first.

Oman got the first wicket with Bilal Khan's good length ball

pitching outside legside was driven by Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie (12) only to be caught by Khurram Nawaz in the third over.

Star batsman Paul Stirling followed suit immediately, with Bilal striking the second blow in the same over when Stirling's shot ended at the hands of Khawar Ali.

Ireland reached 50-2 in the sixth over with Delany and Tector in the crease.

Khawar Ali came into act in the 10th over as Ireland reached 77 for 2.

Explosive batsman Delany changed gear in the 11th over bowled by Zeeshan. The right-hander hit three back-to-back sixers as Ireland raced to 96-2 after fetching 19 from the over.

Ireland reached 100 in the next over as Khawar Ali gave only 3 runs.

Kaleemullah was brought back next over and the lanky bowler proved his worth with twin strikes in the over.

BRIEF SCORES
At OCA Ground 1: UAE 175-7 in 20 overs (Muhammad Waseem 70, Vriitya Aravind 46; Jitendra Mukhiya 3-35, Abinash Bohara 3-46) beat Nepal 107 all out in 18.4 overs (Dipendra Singh Airee 38; Ahmad Raza 5-19, Junaidd Siddique 3-27)
At OCA Ground 2: Ireland 165-7 in 20 overs (Gareth Delany 47; Bilal Khan 3-23) beat Oman 109 all out in 18.3 overs (Shoaib Khan 30; Simi Singh 3-20).



DJOKOVIC RETURNS TO ACTION WITH VICTORY IN DUBAI

DUBAI: World number one Novak Djokovic belatedly began his 2022 campaign with a convincing 6-3 6-3 defeat of Italian teenager Lorenzo Musetti at the Dubai Championships on Monday.

The 34-year-old showed no sign of rust or mental baggage from the Australian Open visa saga that rocked the sports world, producing a polished display to ease into the second round, afterwards describing it as a "pleasant experience."

It was Djokovic's first match this year after his Australian Open hopes were dashed when he was deported following an 11-day saga revolving around his decision not to have a Covid-19 vaccination and a controversial exemption he had been granted to play in the event.

Two court hearings were required before Djokovic was expelled on Jan. 16

having spent several days in a hotel, with the country's immigration minister ruling he could fuel anti-vaccine sentiment if allowed to compete.

Back on a tennis court of Dubai's Aviation Club, Djokovic showed just why he would have been favourite to win a 10th Australian Open crown and beat Rafa Nadal to a men's record 21st Grand Slam title. After being cheered on to court by the late night crowd, he moved through the gears, breaking Musetti's serve in the fourth game of a routine first set.

Djokovic, watched by his entourage including wife Jelena, got an early break in the second set with a forehand winner.

He briefly wavered when serving at 3-2 and was forced to save break points, but never looked threatened as his supporters, many with Serbian flags, cheered his

winners. Djokovic crunched a superb forehand winner in the final game and claimed victory on his first match point.

Even if he wins the Dubai title for a sixth time, he could lose his world number one ranking this week should Russian Daniil Medvedev win the Acapulco title.

But for Djokovic, enjoying an ATP record 361st week as number one, that was the last thing on his mind as he put one of the darkest episodes of his career behind him.

"I couldn't ask for a better reception. It's been a while since I played the last match and I couldn't pick a better place to kick-start the season," Djokovic, who had not played since the Davis Cup Finals in November, told fans after performing his trademark salute to all sides of the arena.

— Reuters



Oman hockey team gears up for Men's AHF Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Oman hockey team will take part at the Men's AHF Cup Jakarta 2022 from March 11-20 in Jakarta city, Indonesia.

Oman are clubbed with Singapore, Bangladesh, Iran and the hosts Indonesia in group B while China led group A which featured also Thailand, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

The national hockey team, coached by Lim Chiow Chuan, will begin the campaign in the Asian event with a tough match against Iran on March 12. In the following game, Oman team will face Bangladesh on March 13 and the third clash will be against Singapore on March 15. The concluding game in group stage will be against the hosts Indonesia on March 17.

The top three teams at the Men's AHF Cup will advance directly to the Asia Cup which will be held during May end. The teams which finish in top four will secure slots for the 2023 Men's FIH Hockey World Cup in Odisha, India.

The Sultanate of Oman hockey team aims to book a spot for the Asia Cup. The newly appointed

Malaysian coach Chuan worked hard during the last few days on gearing up the players for the next crucial assignment.

The team resumed the training sessions after a long absence due to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sporting field.

"Two internal warm up camps were conducted during the last period after the stoppage of the team in the last two years due to the pandemic. During the initial domestic gathering, the focus was on the fitness and technical sides during both morning and evening sessions. The second preparatory camp saw the implementation of many attacking tactical sessions and executing different styles of playing," coach Chuan said.

The experienced Malaysian coach affirmed that the target is to advance to the Men's AHF Cup

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) signed a contract with the Malaysian coach Chuan last December to lead the coaching staff of senior and junior teams. The 2022 Men's AHF Cup Jakarta will be the first assignment for the former Singapore team coach.

Exciting action concludes at Al Rayyan Showjumping competition

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Al Rayyan Show jumping Competitions held under the supervision of the Oman Equestrian Federation and organised by Al Rayyan Stables, owned by Shaikh Khalid bin Saeed al Wahaibi, concluded at Al Rahba Farm in Barka over two days.

More than 100 horses participated in the event from government units and private stables. They were divided into five categories per day, beginners category, 90-95 cm height, category (E) with height 100-105 cm, category (D) 110-115 cm height, category (C) height 120-125 cm, and category (B) height 130-135.

In the first day, in the Beginners category with 90-95 cm height, 27 horses participated. Vanida Shahboub on 'Simba' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre won the first place, the second place was taken by Ibrahim al Sidrani on 'a jewel' from the armoured vehicles and the third place was bagged by Khalfan al Hattali on 'Tahadi' from Royal Cavalry.

Category (E) 100-105 cm Here 28 horses competed in this level, Mohammed bin



Salim al Hadhrami won the first place on 'Robin' from the Royal Cavalry. The second place was taken by Qasim bin Mohammed al Farsi on 'Sahwah' from the Royal Oman Police and the third place was Ahmed al Shahat on 'Joshi' from Mojo Equestrian

CATEGORY (D) 110-115 CM

In the Category D 110-115 cm level, 14 horses participated, where Khalid bin Darwish al Subhi won the first place on 'Charming Geal' from Al Rayyan Stables. The second place was bagged by Mohammed bin Salim al Hadhrami on 'Thikrayat' from the Royal Cavalry and the third place was taken by Jamal bin Humaid al Sharyani on 'I gayen'

from the Royal Guard of Oman.

In the Category B 130-135 cm, three horses participated, Ahmed Mohammed al Shahat clinched the first place on 'Channel' from the Mojo Equestrian Centre. The second place was Hamoud bin Sultan al Touqi on 'Talbot' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre and the third place was by Sultan bin Hamoud al Touqi on the 'Hang over' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre.

SECOND DAY

On the second day, in the Beginners category of 90-95 cm, 27 horses participated with Ibrahim al Sidrani claiming the first place on 'a jewel' from the armoured. The second place was

Vanida Shahboub on 'Simba' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre and the third place was bagged by Issa al Subhi on 'Hamran' from the Royal Cavalry.

CATEGORY (E) 100-105 CM

In the Category E 100-105 cm, there were 28 horses that competed in this category and the first place was clinched by Madin bin Saeed al Yousufi on 'Wadud' from the Royal Cavalry.

The second place was bagged by Bassam bin Nasser al Ghabshi, ahead of 'Falah' from the Royal Oman Police and Jamal bin Humaid al Sharyani 'Tawfan' of the Royal Guard of Oman settled for the third place.



In the Category (D) 110-115 cm, 14 horses also participated in this category, where Mohammed bin Salim al Hadhrami won the first place on 'Thikrayat' from the Royal Cavalry.

The second place was Haider al Rashed on 'Qwaidam' from the Arabian Stables and the third place was taken by Hamoud bin Sultan al Touqi over 'Daneen' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre.

CATEGORY (C) 120-125 CM

In the Category (C) 120-125 cm, Ahmed Mohammed al Shahat won the first place out of eight horses on 'Fernand' from the Mojo Equestrian Centre. The second place was taken by

Hamoud bin Sultan al Touqi on 'Filo' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre and the third place was Shaikh Khalid bin Saeed al Wahaibi on the 'Albay' from Al Rayyan Stables.

CLASS (B) 130-135 CM

In the Category B 130-135 cm, 3 horses participated in the competition with Ahmed Mohammed al Shahat clinching the first place on 'Channel' from the Mojo Equestrian Centre. The second place was Sultan bin Hamoud al Touqi on the 'Hang over' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre and the third place was Khalid bin Darwish al Subhi on the 'Perfect Z' from Rayan stables.



Marafiq, Centralized Utilities Company LLC, is a joint venture utilities company with shareholders from OQ (Oman's leading energy company) and Gulf Energy Development (GED) (Leading power and water utilities company based in Thailand). Marafiq is developing various utility facilities

that are key for the development of the Special Economic Zone of Duqm (SEZ-D) and Oman's plan to transform Duqm into a global trading hub. Marafiq will offer industries with reliable supply which create synergies and allow them to focus more on their core businesses.

Business Overview



Marafiq is an integrated utility services provider through one-stop services that serves industries in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm through a central utility services agreement with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones. It has started implementing a number of vital projects in the region.



Marafiq is licensed by the Regulator, for potable water to operate a water utility for the entire potable water value chain, within SEZ-D, comprising of: Production, Transmission, Distribution, Customer Service, Billing and Collection.



Marafiq has established a Special Purpose Vehicle (Duqm Power Company S.P.C. [DPC]) for the execution of the following projects: Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant (DIPWP) with a total capacity of 320 megawatts and 36,000 cubic meter per day and 132 KV High Voltage Transmission System to Raz Markaz.



\$500 million
Total development costs



More than
1000
Total manpower



10 million
Safe man-hours achieved without LTI



More than
\$37 million
SME's (Goods and Services)



More than
\$77 million
Made In Oman Goods and Services



30 Trainings
for Development provided for Oman's



30 Trainings
for indirect employment provided for Oman's



5 Trainees
with employment from Duqm Residence



5 Scholarships
provided for Oman's

Duqm Integrated Power and Water Plant (DIPWP) and 132 KV Transmission System to Raz Markaz Projects



The projects will supply required utilities to OQ8 (Duqm Refinery) and Oman Tank Terminal Company

The projects include:

- 326 MW** Installed Capacity Combined Cycle Power Plant
- 80 km** of **132 KV** Transmission line from Duqm to Ras Markaz
- 36,000 m³/day** Seawater Reverse Osmosis Desalination Complex = **800** large water tankers per day
- Sea Water Intake and Outfall (SWIO) facilities, with a capacity to supply **1.5 million m³ / day** of seawater to Duqm = **33,300** large water tankers per day



DIPWP Key Achievements

94%
Overall Completion

Early Power & Water Supply to OQ8: Q4 2021

Forecasted project completion Q4 2022



132 KV RMT Key Achievements

Project completed in Q4 2021

Power Supply to Tanweer (RAECO) Project



Marafiq will supply power to Tanweer through Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) for up to 80MW using mobile gas turbines.

The project outcome will:

- Substantially **lower cost** per MW for Tanweer
- Reduced government subsidy** compared to diesel cost
- Substantially **lower emissions** and **reducing environmental impact**.

Duqm Power Plant



Project Status

Marafiq in a collaboration with Tanweer starting The commercial operation of the power plant



The plant is **gas-based power** instead of diesel-based power, it will **reduce** the annual carbon dioxide **emissions** by up to **90,000 tons / year** - equivalent of taking up to 20 thousand cars off the roads.



Cost-effective solution compared with diesel-fueled technologies



Reliable power supply and **sustainable** source for the special Economic Zone at Duqm

Water and Wastewater Sector

Marafiq has achieved the following:

- Added 8000 m3/day of production capacity and **eliminate water shortages**
- Implemented a **cost reflective tariff** and eliminated requirement for government subsidy
- Established a **customer service office** in Duqm to serve customers.
- Added storage capacity of **5000 m³**



Ongoing Water & Wastewater Projects

Wastewater Master Development Plan

Duqm currently has no centralized wastewater network system. Marafiq is working on a study to **develop a master plan to implement a wastewater system** to meet the utility needs of SEZ-D.

- 55% overall completion.**

Say Area Network Expansion Project

Distribution Network upgrade in the Rock Garden Area and Connection to the Port Duqm Company

- Project awarded in Q 3 2021 and to be completed in Q1 2022

Marafiq plans to further develop the water sector include the following:

- Expand transmission network** to supply the Fisheries Industrial Zone (FIZ)
- Construct a permanent RO plant (20,000 m3/day)** to supply the entire special economic zone's future demand.
- Expand the existing potable water distribution network.**
- Introduce a smart metering system** to enhance customer service and reduce commercial losses.
- Implement a Non-Revenue Water (NRW) Reduction Program.**

business

MUSCAT
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EXCHANGE
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CRUDE
OIL PRICE
Oman Crude \$96.51
Brent Crude \$97.49
Light Crude \$93.87



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‘Souq Madayn’ digital platform to showcase Omani products

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) launched on Tuesday the first integrated Omani digital platform (Souq Madayn) for displaying, buying and selling Omani products. The launch was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

Souq Madayn platform will showcase and market Omani products between companies (B2B) as well as offering government procurement (B2G). The platform shall enhance the presence of national industries in local and foreign markets by utilising cutting-edge technologies and software, and taking the utmost advantage of e-commerce technologies.

Speaking at the event, Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, said the platform will be of benefit to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in promoting their products, increasing income, reducing costs and raising efficiency.

“Madayn will seek to link Souq Madayn with the Tender Board, which will help in distributing purchases in a smart and fair approach electronically.

“This will eventually contribute



to promoting Omani products and boosting production, as well as offering job opportunities for the Omani nationals,” Al Hasani pointed out.

He added, “As the Sultanate of Oman’s government is paying great importance to the digital transformation programme, being an essential pillar of strategic sectors and taking into consideration its impact on boosting the national economy, this platform comes to keep pace with the efforts made in this regard and to devise digital solutions that increase the sales of Omani products and explore new markets for these products.”

Wafaa al Salmi, Head of the E-Marketing at Mizah Marketing

and Business Development — the marketing arm of Madayn — said the digital platform is characterised by many features that enable Omani factories to showcase their products to local and international buyers representing government and private bodies.

“Through Souq Madayn, users can benefit from volume purchase and bulk discounts, flexible payments options, secure payment transactions, support from Credit Oman, logistics facilities, minimum order quantity, wholesale bulk order, option to Request for a Quote – (RFQ), online auction, e-tendering facility, value package memberships for suppliers,

brand sponsorship and online advertisement opportunity. The factories operating in Oman can now register through Souq Madayn to benefit from its variety of services.”

Souq Madayn also complements the objectives of ‘Made in Oman’ campaign, which is designed to encourage consumers both individuals and organisations to choose locally manufactured products and services, highlight the competent capabilities of the Omani products to compete locally and internationally, and stress the significance of buying Omani products and its direct contribution to the national economy.

Oman crude surges to \$96.51 per barrel



JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Oman crude jumped nearly 4 per cent to reach \$96.51 per barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Tuesday, tracking seven-year highs witnessed by leading international benchmarks amid soaring tensions over the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Oman’s crude oil futures contract gained \$4.27 per barrel on Tuesday, up from \$92.24 per barrel on Monday, to reach peaks last seen in 2014.

The spike came as Brent crude, the global benchmark, climbed to its highest level since September 2014 when it reached a peak just shy of the \$100 per barrel. It climbed 2.4 per cent to hit \$99.50 per barrel.

According to the Dubai Mercantile Exchange, benchmark crude oil prices have largely been on a one-

way path in recent weeks as the sharp rally lifted oil markets to levels not seen since October of 2014. The Middle East medium sour Oman crude trading on the Exchange has surged by over \$20 per barrel since December 20 to stand at a seven-year high of \$91.38 per barrel on February 7, or a gain of 30 per cent.

DME Oman futures have also gained against the Dubai physical market since the start of the year, with spread widening out to around \$0.40 per barrel in early February, having traded at around parity for most of 2021.

Meanwhile, other benchmarks too posted significant gains as news emerged of Russian troops entering the breakaway regions of Ukraine. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude jumped by \$2.92, or 3.2 per cent, to \$93.87. It also reached a seven-year high on Tuesday as it peaked at \$96.

Long-proposed Masirah sea-bridge project plan revived

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A long-proposed sea-bridge project linking Masirah Island, off the Sultanate of Oman’s eastern seaboard, with the mainland is back on the government’s radar more than 12 years since it was first mooted primarily to enable the speedy evacuation of the island’s population in the event of weather-related emergencies, as well as to help unlock Masirah’s promising economic and tourism potential.

On Monday, top officials of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology listed the Masirah sea-bridge project among a raft of landmark road transportation related ventures that they hope to advance during the course of 2022.

The list includes proposals for a new carriageway linking Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate with Al Tayeen in Wilayat Dima W’attayeen (North Al Sharqiyah

THE MASIRAH CAUSEWAY
BRIDGE PROJECT STEMS
FROM ROYAL DIRECTIVES
ISSUED IN JUNE 2010
TASKING THE GOVERNMENT
WITH EXPLORING THE
OPTIONS FOR A SEA-BRIDGE
SPANNING THE CHANNEL
SEPARATING MASIRAH WITH
THE MAINLAND

Governorate), an alternative route to Al Jabal Al Akhdhar from South Al Batinah, the Salalah-Thamrait truck road project, Al Maabela-Tharmad truck road, a rail project, and weigh-stations on key roads.

The Masirah Causeway Bridge project stems from Royal directives issued in June 2010 tasking the government with exploring the options for a sea-bridge spanning the channel separating Masirah with the mainland.

Those Royal orders came in the wake of Cyclone Phet, which struck large parts of the country’s



(Picture for illustration purpose only)

east coast, including Masirah Island, necessitating a mass evacuation of residents from these areas.

In 2015, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology selected an Omani-Korean joint venture to undertake a Social and Economic

Feasibility Study, as well as prepare the Initial Design and Financial Plan for a sea-bridge between Masirah Island and Shannah on the mainland.

The JV comprised Omani consultancy services firm National Engineering Office (NEO), and Korean international engineering

consultancy firms Dohwa Engineering and Pyunghwa Engineering Consultants.

A key part of the JV’s remit was to identify the most suitable alignment for a combination of a causeway and sea-bridge spanning the shallow Strait of Masirah separating the Island from the

mainland, which varies in width from 15-25 kilometres and ranges in depth from 0 to 15 metres.

Furthermore, with a view to identifying investment and developmental opportunities stemming from the bridge project, the consultants were also tasked with preparing a Master Plan Study and Land Uses on Masirah Island.

Opportunities for commercial, tourism and industrial investment inflows into the island in the wake of the bridge link were to be assessed as well.

However, with a price tag, estimated at around RO 500 million, the proposal was placed on the back-burner as a looming global economic downturn forced a review of spending priorities at the time. Its revival will be greatly welcomed not only from the standpoint of its importance as an escape route during weather-related perils, but also in opening up the country’s largest island to economic investment and development.

Bank Nizwa becomes first Islamic bank to address inclusion in education system

MUSCAT: A progressive bank that is aligned with the national goals of building a knowledge-based economy, Bank Nizwa has remained committed to contributing to the education sector through various meaningful partnerships. Recently, the bank signed an MoU with Paradise Valley Private School (PVPS), an inclusive school where children with learning difficulties study together with mainstream children, to offer Sharia-compliant financing options to its customers.

The agreement was signed between Arif al Zaabi, AGM – Retail Banking of Bank Nizwa, and Mahesh Verma and Khalid al Qassabi, Directors of PVPS. Commenting on the partnership, Al Zaabi, said, “The youth of today are the future of Oman and knowledge is the most powerful



tool they can equip themselves with in order to better prepare for the challenges that lie ahead. Aligning itself to Oman Vision 2040 and the emphasis it places on the education sector, Bank Nizwa

has been dedicated to empowering the youth. “We are delighted to join hands with PVPS and offer a range of Sharia-compliant finance facilities to ensure that the learning

journeys of students remain uncompromised. The inclusive system of education followed in PVPS will cater to the social, emotional and academic needs of students with varying abilities

and help them unlock their true potential. “By helping build a knowledge-based economy where individuals reserve the skills and capabilities to drive transformational change, Bank Nizwa seeks to achieve sustainable progress in the country.”

As per the agreement, Bank Nizwa and PVPS will mutually promote the various finance facilities that the bank’s customers can avail of. Focusing on simple, quick and hassle-free financing, Bank Nizwa ensures the entire journey to avail the finance is as seamless as possible.

While PVPS submits a quote to Bank Nizwa, individuals seeking to secure finance from the bank will also need to submit all the documents required for credit assessment. Bank Nizwa will assess

the individual’s creditworthiness and communicate the same to PVPS and the applicant, once the financing is approved.

Students will then be granted admission to the programme. PVPS and their academic partners Pallavan Learning Systems recognise the different learning styles and abilities of students and create responsive and innovative systems to develop their interests while making learning fun, interactive and seamless.

To further aid in the learning process, the school follows the Five Areas of Development (cerebral, physical, social, emotional and ethical) and has various professionals including special educator, occupational, speech and physical therapists to help children overcome various challenges.

Stemazone participates in 26th Muscat International Book Fair

MUSCAT: In reiterating its commitment to promoting a culture of scientific thinking and problem solving within a knowledge-based economy, Khimji Ramdas (KR) Eshraqa’s Stemazone initiative is hosting a booth at the 26th Muscat International Book Fair 2022. Organised under the patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Fair will take place from February 24 to March 5, 2022, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

Established by Eshraqa, the Corporate Social Responsibility arm of Khimji Ramdas, Stemazone is a sustainable educational programme that has been conceptualised in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to introduce Omani children, between 6 to 16 years, to the marvellous world of science, technology, engineering, arts and math (STEAM).

As a farsighted educational initiative that aims



to do its bit towards achieving Oman Vision 2040 by creating a workforce of competent and knowledgeable citizens, Stemazone is providing convenient access to activities and information surrounding its programmes to Omani students through its interactive pavilion — 1K1 and 1K2 (opposite the kids arena) — at the exhibition area of the Fair.

NBO promotes science and culture with trip to Expo 2020 Dubai

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, has sent 25 science students and those working in the field to the Oman Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai. The trip was organised to mark the International Day of Education on January 24 and the International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11.

With participants carefully selected due to their potential, the trip provided them with the opportunity to engage in various cultural and educational activities, part of an ever-increasing number of initiatives through which the bank is supporting and empowering Oman’s next generation.



NBO’s role does not stop at offering innovative banking solutions, but extends through its values as a community-focused organisation.

Working closely with its partners and the government, it channels support on a wide range of enriching social and

educational initiatives. Outward Bound Oman, the Youth Awards, and the Hackathon, are all reflective of the bank’s dynamic and innovative culture and its commitment to empowering local talent and positioning Oman as a future-ready economy.

MEC to celebrate graduation of batch 2020



MUSCAT: Middle East College (MEC) will celebrate the graduation of its students from the 2020 batch on Saturday, February 26, 2022, at the Student Hub on its campus located in Knowledge Oasis Muscat.

This year, a total of 1,219 students will be graduating from the college’s undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) programmes in Engineering, Science and Technology, and Business and Management.

There will be four different graduation sessions for the various awards and degrees that the students will be receiving, namely diplomas, advanced diplomas, bachelor’s degrees, and postgraduate degrees. The

ceremony will be conducted with 70 per cent capacity following guidelines issued by the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

MEC has always embraced a philosophy of inclusive education, life-long learning, and scientific research with the aim of building a knowledge society and has accomplished several milestones as it celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2022.

The college is accredited by the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), where it received high ratings for teaching quality and research performance.

Bank Muscat extends strong support to 26th Muscat International Book Fair

MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to provide strong support for local events and activities and contributing to national developmental goals, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced its strong support for the 26th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair.

The book fair will commence on Thursday, February 24, 2022, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. The bank’s support for the event, which will continue till March 5, 2022, is part of its strategy of supporting activities that help in the further development of the country.

The bank aims to promote the Sultanate of Oman’s potential in a manner that complements and supports the government’s efforts to create new economic, commercial and social



opportunities that strengthens Oman’s economy and its society.

The Muscat International Book Fair aims to contribute to enriching the Omani, Arab and international culture by organising a number of events, lectures, literary and poetry evenings. It will host an elite selection of literati, publishers, exhibitors and media personnel through as many as 114 events as per the information from the organisers.

As many as 23 new publishing houses are participating in the event in 2022, which will see a

total of 715 participants from the Arab region and elsewhere. The highest participation is from Egypt, which has as many as 33 publishing houses taking part at the event.

Speaking on the occasion, Talib bin Saif al Makhmari (pictured), Manager, Community and Media Relations, said: “Bank Muscat is delighted to partner with Muscat International Book Fair and contribute to its great success, thereby highlighting the Sultanate of Oman’s cultural achievements and role.

“The book fair plays an important role in introducing some of the most important Omani and Arab works and publications across various fields to a much wider audience. I would like to wish the book fair and all the planned events and activities within it all success.”

He added that Bank Muscat would always be happy to cooperate and partner with the organisers in order to

maximise the achievements of the exhibition, and showcase the noble achievements of Oman’s cultural heritage to an ever-growing and diverse audience.

Bank Muscat is always keen to strengthen cooperation and partnership with various governmental, private and non-governmental organisations to successfully organise and conduct various events and initiatives that contribute to sustainable development across different sectors in the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank’s participation in social and cultural activities and events such as the Muscat International Book Fair provide it with multiple opportunities to deepen its commitment and partnership for sustainable development.

Hence, the bank always aims to provide strong support to worthy causes and contribute to their success in the overall strengthening of the Omani society and nation.



Fitch Ratings revises outlook on HSBC Bank Oman to stable



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

International ratings agency Fitch Ratings has revised the Outlook on HSBC Bank Oman SAOG's (HBON) Long-Term Issuer Default Rating (IDR) to Stable from Negative and affirmed the IDR at 'BB' and Viability Rating (VR) at 'bb-'. The rating actions follow similar action on the Sultanate of Oman's sovereign rating on December 20, 2021. Fitch has also revised its outlook on the Omani operating environment score to stable from negative.

"The latter reflects our view that pressures on the operating environment from the pandemic and lower oil prices have eased sufficiently and that despite these pressures, the bank's financial metrics have been resilient in the past quarters," Fitch said.

"Fitch has withdrawn HBON's Support Rating as it is no longer relevant to the agency's coverage following the publication of its updated Bank Rating Criteria on 12 November 2021. In line with the updated criteria, we have assigned HBON a Shareholder Support Rating (SSR) of 'bb', the agency further added.

Shell Oman launches first mobility hub with EV charging

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Shell Oman Marketing Company has launched its first electric vehicle (EV) charging hub in the Sultanate of Oman, located at Al Bandar Service Station in Al Seeb. It has supplemented the existing fuel station with a fast electric charging point, catering to the EV owners in the capital.

The new Shell Recharge service will enable customers to charge their EVs speedily and to enjoy seamless drives within and around the city.

Already featuring an environmentally sustainable design with built-in solar panels on the Shell Select store, the service station is now also equipped with a 50kW electric charging point.

Along with a comfortable waiting area and the Shell Select convenience store, the site also includes the newest Shell Café, Shell's own in-house coffee brand, which is being launched in a growing number of countries around the world.

While at the inaugural



ceremony, István Kapitány, Global Executive Vice-President of Shell Mobility said, "Shell has a proud tradition of supporting Oman's drivers and making their journeys better with products like our premium Shell V-Power fuels and great convenience offers.

I'm pleased to be opening the next chapter of Shell's history in the Sultanate of Oman with the introduction of Shell Recharge to our forecourts. We've designed

the Al Bandar hub to offer an EV charging experience that is as convenient and comfortable as possible." Expressing his delight with the launch of the new Shell Recharge at Al Bandar service station, Dr Mohammed al Balushi, CEO, Shell Oman, said, "The Shell Recharge at Al Bandar service station marks a first in our EV roadmap and it will redefine EV charging in Oman. As a leading player in our

sector, Shell Oman will contribute expertise in energy transition to support Oman's Carbon Control Target Plan which is rooted in the Oman Vision 2040. It remains our endeavour to collaborate with the relevant authorities and stakeholders to realise the goals of the National Energy Strategy and accelerate the gradual transition to a lower carbon economy and an energy matrix with lower carbon emissions."

OQ Trading digitalises flagship borrowing base facility

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

OQ Trading (OQT), the trading arm of OQ Group – the integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, has become one of the first corporates to nominate Komgo as Digital Agent on their flagship borrowing base managed by ING, following renewal of the facility in mid-June 2021.

Following successful deployment of Komgo's 'Konsole' and 'Trakk' solutions, OQT has invested in further data activation via Komgo's professional services team, to enable more automated and intelligent functionality at scale across their trading business.

The first implementation will automatically generate and send to ING the relevant Notice of Assignment (NOA) based on data embedded in sales invoices, without any human intervention.

This application will be



scaled to 80 per cent of the trade portfolio by mid-2022, for an estimated 8 man hours saved per week.

A similar setup is deployed for the generation of utilisation requests on the purchase side, said OT Trading in a press statement.

"Our objective is to lead the industry in terms of efficiency and sustainable value. For many of our banks and partners, this

value comes through increased security and reliability of data, the ability to automate tasks and report on demand.

Komgo's Digital Agent is gathering verified data from across their trusted network to provide highly contextualised reporting and supplementing existing data flowing from our internal systems," said Sam Naylor, CFO, OQ Trading.

Al Mouj Muscat signs financing partnership with United Finance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Al Mouj Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman's premium lifestyle destination, has entered into a new partnership with United Finance giving residents the option of preferred financing rates to help them reach their lifestyle goals.

Nasser bin Masoud al Shaibani, CEO of Al Mouj Muscat, says: "Al Mouj Muscat is a community designed to give all of our resident's access to a truly unique oceanfront lifestyle, where life can be enjoyed at its best.

Partnerships like this one are a perfect example of the opportunities we create, an easy, tailored and extremely attractive financing offer that is entirely exclusive. A true



reflection of our on-going commitment to providing services and experiences our residents value."

United Finance was established in 1997 and commenting on the recent signing, its CEO Nasser bin Salim al Rashdi says: "It is an honour to provide this bespoke service for the residents of Al Mouj Muscat. As a non-banking financier, we are always looking

for ways to reimagine our customer service experience and by make financing and loans readily available to consumers."

The preferred rates United Finance have introduced to Al Mouj Muscat require only a 20 per cent down payment for up to three years credit which applies to owners as well as tenants at Al Mouj Muscat who meet the eligibility criteria.

Romanian companies eye Oman's infra, mineral sectors

KABEER YOUSUF
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Backed by the high-level visits following the opening of the embassy in Muscat, Romanian companies expressed their intent to work with the Sultanate in a wide number of sectors, according to Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Speaking to the *Observer*, Mircea Chitic (pictured), Charge D'Affairs, at the newly opened Embassy of Romania in Muscat, said that the areas of mutual cooperation would be infrastructure, minerals, tourism among many others.

"Romanian holdings

and companies are ready to accompany Sultanate of Oman in this endeavour and to enhance the cooperation in key fields such as transport, agriculture and fisheries, energy, but also IT. Our expertise and knowledge can be of great relevance for the Omani development agenda in the backdrop of the Vision 2040," he said.

"The Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry is always welcome to newer bilateral relations with Romania and trade and industrial cooperation is mooted with the Romanian companies," said Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the



OCCI.

Mircea continued that a number of business visits and economic forums by

The new diplomatic mission in Muscat can boost tourism, bilateral visits by delegations of Omani businessmen and entrepreneurs and assure the possibilities of Omani students to study at Romanian Universities

MIRCEA CHITIC
Charge D'Affairs,
Romanian Embassy

both countries are currently in the pipeline which would further advance the economic cooperation by exploring new ways and means of promoting the shared interests. Plans are afoot to further enhance cooperation and exchanges in the areas of oil, green energy, railway, ports and electric grids infrastructures.

"The new diplomatic mission in Muscat can boost tourism, bilateral visits by delegations of Omani businessmen and entrepreneurs and assure the possibilities of Omani students to study at Romanian Universities," he added.

The Sultanate of Oman and Romania established diplomatic

relations in 1974 and the first embassy of the South Eastern European country was established in 2018 following which an official visit at the Prime Minister level was organised by the Sultanate of Oman on that occasion.

"Over the past 48 years, our bilateral relations have witnessed a considerable development thanks to the common values and commitment of our countries," he said, adding that both will continue the process of building, consolidating, harmonising and developing bilateral relations and will assess the opportunities and interests of both parties in the process of boosting relations in various spheres of cooperation.

Sustainability: A nice-to-have or a need-to-have?



MARK GEILENKIRCHEN

Tejarah Talks

BUSINESS STORIES ABOUT THINGS THAT MATTER

As part of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion's newly launched Tejarah Talks series we sat down with Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO, SOHAR Port & Freezone to get his views on sustainable energy and environmental protection, CO2 emissions, the national Hydrogen alliance Hy-Fly, the benefits of switching to renewable energy and more.

1. Can you tell me about your role and responsibilities as a sustainability leader at Sohar Port & Freezone?

SOHAR has its own goals which run parallel to Oman's Vision 2040 priorities for sustainable energy and environmental protection. With the expansion of the Port and Freezone, and industry in Suhar as a whole, gathering pace, we recognise the need to provide sustainable energy to support the national drive to diversify the economy and become cleaner.

2. Where is Sohar Port & Freezone on its sustainability journey?

SOHAR Port & Freezone is Oman's largest port and industrial complex, making the need to address gas dependence and CO2 emissions essential. SOHAR has adopted renewable electricity produced by Shell's Solar Qabas farm, as well as Al Tamman Ferrochrome, exporters Chromite Ore from SOHAR Freezone which accounts for 10 per cent of the total worldwide production of this mineral.

We have also made the decision to replace combustion with clean power where possible to reduce our carbon footprint. We are investing in green hydrogen, the most widely-acknowledged viable alternative power source.

Nearly one-third of all-natural gas produced in Oman is consumed by heavy industry. By transitioning to green hydrogen, industries in SOHAR will significantly reduce emissions and make a huge contribution to national targets.

3. How is your team structured to be able to meet the company's sustainability goals?

Oman's national goals have our full support. Working alongside tenants within the complex, management successfully explored how to increase



synergy between the companies and used by-products of one to fuel another. For example, there are companies that produce CO2 and companies that need CO2 to boost production. Previously there had been a disconnect between the two.

Our objective is to make sure CO2 leaves our industries as a product and not as a harmful greenhouse gas. Being able to reuse resources frees up gas and other feedstock supplies for other uses and helps tenants to be more efficient, which helps businesses and SMEs to grow.

4. How do you go about setting sustainability goals knowing there are so many directions you can go in terms of trying to deliver the impact you want to see?

We are aware of our capabilities and our requirements, and the goals are set with this in mind.

In August 2021, SOHAR Port joined a national Hydrogen alliance led by The Ministry of Energy and Minerals — known as Hy-Fly.

The alliance is made up of 13 key public and private organisations — the Authority for Public Services Regulation, Petroleum Development Oman, Energy Development Oman, OQ, Oman LNG, BP Oman, Oman Shell and Total Energies Oman, Sultan Qaboos University, GUTech and the ports of Sohar and Duqm — and facilitated by PDO's Energy Renewal Unit with the aim of working together to support the production, transportation and application of clean hydrogen for domestic use and export.

The alliance is also promoting clean hydrogen through investments, technologies, policies and expertise across the whole supply chain. SOHAR is also looking to partner with leading Italian energy companies in the

development of green hydrogen and renewable energies. An agreement will offer Oman access to the latest alternative energy technology already in development in Europe.

5. How do you measure sustainability progress?

Our KPIs measure output and by-products as waste. By reducing this waste — by re-using the by-products themselves and by cutting emissions — we are able to record our progress. It is important to be realistic and we understand that initial results may be lower than where we need to get to. It is a process and there is always a beginning, but we are confident in our abilities to make the changes required.

6. When does it make sense for companies to invest in sustainability initiatives?

Right now. If companies have not already begun the process, they must do soon. This is why we are so focused on using green hydrogen across the entire complex.

The concept has been endorsed by the International Energy Agency, and while hydrogen is the most abundant element on the planet, it still needs to be produced, but then it can be transported, stored and converted into electricity.

In Oman, and across the GCC, we are very fortunate. With high-levels of sunlight every year, the potential to generate electricity is near-endless. This can be used for anything to make a difference. Powering office lights, running air-conditioning, heating water, using rechargeable batteries. Even recycling drinks cans and water bottles around the site makes a difference. Small changes lead to bigger ideas.

7. In practical terms, what is the first step Omani businesses,

particularly small firms, can take on their sustainability journey?

The first step has to be to see where businesses can make positive changes. Whether it is by reducing energy requirements, or changing the primary energy source, reducing waste in packaging, office waste or waste in processes and finding ways to reuse or replace these elements of their operation.

You can even make sure all non-essential power is off at the end of the day or switch to automated lights so the buildings are not using more electricity than they absolutely need. There are more solutions to these issues, big or small, available than ever before and the cost is far more affordable than it has been in the past.

8. What do you see as the sustainability challenges facing Omani companies today?

There may be barriers to entry for some companies; processes have been the same for so long that to change to become sustainable may be considered far too expensive or disruptive. Once the change is made, however, benefits far outweigh the initial investment.

The cost of switching to renewable energy begins to pay for itself in savings in utility bills and operational costs. There are industries where the potential to become more sustainable is genuinely more difficult than others, but this also means there could be opportunities elsewhere to off-set the emissions by improving in other areas.

9. Do you think there is a gap between consumer expectations and sustainable product availability?

There certainly has been, but demand for sustainable products has grown rapidly in recent years and companies understand the need

to meet this demand. Before where it may have been considered a gap in the market to offer sustainable products, just as it was to offer organic foods at one point, but there is a growing market for these products and consumers have more of a choice than ever before.

10. Knowing which sustainability issues are of concern to consumers and which issues are growing in importance is vital information for a business looking to generate value with sustainability. How can local companies go about capturing this valuable information?

Market research is key, learning from those who have been successful already, reaching out to companies with shared goals and taking on board suggestions from customers, staff and the global market as a whole.

It is vital to know where you intend to be at the end of the journey towards sustainability, identify the potential obstacles and source viable solutions.

11. Omani consumers continue to expect more corporate responsibility, transparency and accountability from the companies they do business with — are local firms responding quickly enough?

This will vary from company to company. However, with the requirements of Oman Vision 2040 set, all companies will have to be as transparent as they can be. For some, changing processes will be more complicated than it will be for others, but given the need to change it is something businesses will have to address sooner or later.

12. What do you think it is going to take for more companies to make larger investments in sustainability?

Oman Vision 2040 is a huge incentive already; however, I think the impact on company finances is another factor. Access to materials will be another issue.

With time, these aspects can be addressed and industry, the environment and society as a whole will be better for it.

13. One final question, what is one thing that most people, maybe customers or someone who walks into your office does not know about sustainability at Sohar Port & Freezone?

Our commitment to sustainability extends way beyond just the port and freezone. Last year we funded the installation of solar panels at 100 local mosques in Suhar, reducing costs and promoting sustainability within the community.

IN OMAN, AND ACROSS THE GCC, WE ARE VERY FORTUNATE. WITH HIGH-LEVELS OF SUNLIGHT EVERY YEAR, THE POTENTIAL TO GENERATE ELECTRICITY IS NEAR-ENDLESS. THIS CAN BE USED FOR ANYTHING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Confidence high as firms plan expansion



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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

Inflation may be at a 30-year high but optimism is back on the up for UK financial services firms, as 90 per cent say they plan to retain or grow their operations in London's financial district (known as the 'City').

That figure is up from 75 per cent in spring 2021 and 50 per cent in 2020, according to an EY survey of decision-makers from 40 large global financial services firms that tracks the attractiveness of the UK each year.

Positive sentiment had sunk to 11 per cent in spring 2019, ahead of the Covid-19 pandemic. Overall, 41 per cent of firms said they planned to increase UK investments, with 8 per cent planning a "substantial" increase — higher than the 6 per cent recorded in a 2021 survey.

The latest polling also showed

that 87 per cent of firms believe the UK offers the right environmental, social and governance (ESG) investment and 59 per cent indicated ESG is among their top three priorities. Just 3 per cent said ESG was not an area of focus.

Confidence in London as the chief location for new financial services investment remains — 54 per cent agreed that the capital is the most attractive region in which to establish or expand financial services operations, up from 31 per cent, though 54 per cent noted the need to further prioritise geographic rebalancing of the UK economy.

Key risks identified for investors included future pandemics and environmental or cyber crises, as well as the liquidity of capital markets and the availability of capital.

EY's UK financial services managing partner Anna Anthony said the feedback was encouraging. "This is testament to the stability and resilience of the mature UK market, which continues to ably withstand the material challenges and uncertainty of both the pandemic and Brexit", she said. "It is also positive that the investors see the UK as the right place for growth in ESG, which, post-COP26, is a major and increasing focus for boards."

She added: "The UK clearly has many unique selling points attractive to investors in both boom times and crisis. The key now is to ensure that rhetoric is turned into action."

It is therefore, not a major surprise that UK Fintech investment topped \$39.3 billion (£27.5 billion) in 2021, a seven-

fold increase compared to 2020, as deal-making activity soared. Britain has emerged as a hub for fintech investment post-Brexit, with over 600 M&A, private equity and venture capital deals finalised in 2021, up by 27 per cent compared to 2020.

The investment total was boosted by a string of high value deals with five of the ten largest fintech deals in the EMEA region completed in the UK, according to KPMG data. A spokesperson for the Treasury said: "The UK is a world-leader in fintech, which is good for jobs and the economy. We welcome these figures from KPMG, that show how our work to create an environment that supports innovation and attracts investment is paying off."

Britain was a clear front runner in Europe, with the EMEA region

attracting a total of \$77 billion in investment in 2021.

Head of financial services for the UK and EMEA at KPMG, Karim Haji, said: "The UK remains at the centre of European fintech investment with British fintechs attracting more funding than their counterparts in the rest of the EMEA combined."

Globally fintech funding reached \$210 billion across a record 5,684 deals last year, with fintech firms focused on payments attracting \$51.7 bn. KPMG said surging interest in "buy now pay later", embedded and open banking is a sign of a "robust" sector.

The UK's financial watchdog is mulling tough new regulation for "buy now pay later" payment services, which were used by one fifth of British adults last year amid booming popularity.

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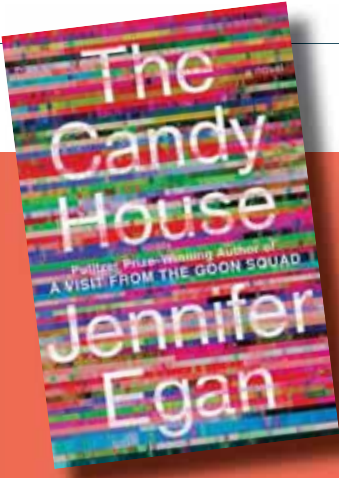
features

This kid didn't let her medical condition become a hindrance to becoming a great artist

Raising a kid with special needs is not easy but for the parents of little Saba al Rashdi, it's not only about recognising the child's limitation but also focusing on her strength. Check out the story of this budding artist who continues to defy expectations...**P20**



READ



THE CANDY HOUSE
BY JENNIFER EGAN

The Candy House begins with tech entrepreneur Bix Bouton and his venture called Own Your Unconscious, wherein people can download and view their own memories and share and exchange the memories of others

DISCOVERY

Rare baby shark delights New Zealand scientists

WHILE TYPICALLY heard in an omnipresent children's song, the phrase baby shark has delighted New Zealand scientists after the rare discovery of a juvenile ghost shark during a survey off the east coast of the country's South Island.

Ghost sharks, also known as chimaeras, are not really sharks but are related to sharks since both of their skeletons consist of cartilage rather than bone.

Not much is known about these marine creatures because they usually reside at depths of up to 6,000 feet (1,829 metres), largely inaccessible to researchers.

"What we do know tends to come from the large adults which are usually a metre, a metre and a half in length, so finding one that



actually kind of just sits in the palm of my hand is incredibly uncommon," Brit Finucci, a scientist at New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research said on

Thursday.

This newly hatched ghost shark was grabbed from a depth of 1.2 kilometres (0.75 mile), Finucci said. Photos of the baby ghost shark showed black fins

connected to a body of translucent skin with a wispy white tail and black eyes.

"I thought it was cool, other people on the boat not so much," laughed Finucci. "I knew right away it was just something different that we don't generally come across so I grabbed it and took a couple of photos which have now spread all over the Internet."

Juvenile ghost sharks tend to be found at different depths than the adults and in some cases look different than the adults, she said. The creatures, which are also called ratfish, rabbitfish, elephant fish or spookfish, have large heads and oversized eyes versus their body.

Ghost shark embryos develop in egg capsules laid on the sea floor, feeding off a yolk until they are ready to hatch.

The "very rare and exciting find" will give some insight into the species, she said. "It kind of fills in some of the little gaps here and there." — Reuters



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

One of England's oldest zoos to shut after 186 years



ONE OF BRITAIN'S oldest zoos will close the doors of its 186-year-old site for good in September, with all its animals set to move to a new location.

The Bristol Zoological Society said Bristol Zoo Gardens in the Clifton area of the city in the south-west of England will shut permanently on September 3, having been open to the public since 1836.

It is moving to the site of the society's wildlife park, the Wild Place Project, in Gloucestershire to the north of the city.

Since it first opened, the zoo has received an estimated 90 million visitors and helped save 175 species from extinction through its conservation programmes.

The decision to sell the site was announced after the second national lockdown in England, after the zoo had already missed out on revenue from the peak spring and summer months.

The zoo had already been struggling with declining visitor numbers before the pandemic hit, with the organisation having made an operating loss in four out of the past six years.

The Bristol Zoological Society has planned a number of events ahead of the closing date for people to share their memories of the site, which will be announced over the coming weeks.

Dr Justin Morris, the society's chief executive, said: "Bristol Zoo Gardens is a special place for so many people and we want to give them a chance to come, to see our animals and the gardens and to talk about their memories."

After the move, parts of the site are due to be developed into housing, with the gardens themselves to be open to the public free of charge.

The children's play area and theatre building will also be kept open as a community space for workshops and events.

The famous monkey temple will also be left standing, while the zoo's entrance will be transformed into the "Clifton Conservation Hub" hosting the Avon Gorge and Downs Wildlife Project.

Morris said: "This is our legacy. Our way of guaranteeing that people throughout the Bristol area will still be able to enjoy the gardens for generations to come.

"They will remain an important destination for people to visit and enjoy."

The money from the sale of the site will be used to pay for the new Bristol Zoo, which is due to open in 2024.

The Wild Place Project, which is near junction 17 of the M5 motorway, will be open to visitors as normal. — dpa

ART

Tomás Saraceno: Following the Airborne Lives of Spiders



THE SHED HAS GONE all out for the multitasking Tomás Saraceno — a visionary Argentine artist and environmentalist celebrity who ranks among the world's greatest spider-whisperers — by giving him the run of three of its four public spaces, or about 28,000 square feet. And Saraceno seems to have returned the favour, mounting a revelatory of high-minded survey of his work in makeshift galleries, as well as two inspiring installations elsewhere in the building. The total is titled "Tomás Saraceno: Particular Matter(s)".

The most ambitious of these is a Shed commission that may leave you feeling, literally, weak in the knees. "Free the Air: How to Hear the Universe in a Spider/ Web" is, in essence, the piece de resistance of this entire undertaking.

The smaller installation, "Museo Aero Solar," on view in a third large space, centres on an enormous sphere that resembles a tent and is, in fact, a grounded balloon made of plastic grocery bags — it looks fantastic, like a colourful, translucent crazy quilt, and visitors can enter it and walk around. It is one of the projects of the Aerocene Foundation, a crowd-sourced global group led by Saraceno and dedicated to developing fuel-free flying — powered only by the movements of the wind and sun.

The exhibition and installations together form something like the full Saraceno: part education; part collaboration; part out-of-body experience, with various kinds of beauty threaded throughout. "Particular Matter(s)" is tagged the largest presentation of the artist's work in the United States. The entirety has been organised by Emma Enderby, The Shed's curator-at-large, with Alessandra Gómez

and Adeze Wilford, its assistant curators. The Shed's display is supplemented in useful ways by Saraceno's show at his long-time representative, Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in Chelsea.

Saraceno is not so much an artist as a polymath on a mission, and his efforts often seem more like science than art. The Shed's various displays reflect, to varying degrees, his activities as arachnophile, artist, architect, activist, teacher, musician, environmentalist and social justice warrior for clean air. His overarching goal might be summed up simply as getting humans to live right. This means getting them to understand that they are not the top of a pyramid of power in what is called the Anthropocene era, but exist on a horizontal plane with all non-humans, to which they should be sensitised and from which they have plenty to learn. And they exist in what Saraceno prefers to call the Aerocene era in which interspecies-cooperation and clean air are required.

That said, one might ask how someone with the acute environmental consciousness of Saraceno allows his work to be shown at The Shed. Granted, the building, or at least its exterior, may be the best part of the civic catastrophe and failure of will that is Hudson Yards, perhaps the worst of this city's many recent self-inflicted architectural wounds.

Saraceno's quest has been inspired by spiders and the ingenious basis of their airborne lifestyle — the multifunctional webs that provide shelter, protection, food and, when vibrated, a means of communication. Spider webs also served as models for levitating sculptures. Consisting of translucent webs and orbs these have

become Saraceno's best-known work, of which "Free the Air" is the latest example.

The exhibition portion of "Particular Matter(s)" begins with the quiet spectacle of his collaborations with spiders: in a darkened gallery, seven plexiglass boxes each holding several different connected webs, all shimmering white. Each web has been built by a different species of spider on a sturdy wire frame in Saraceno's studio, where he monitors their progress, switching out one species and introducing another. Especially in the dark, these pale, ghostly crystalline structures make you appreciate how much we already owe spiders, since their webs provided early humans with precedents for architecture and textiles.

To the amateur eye, the webs of the different species here generally divide into grids, often in fanlike expanses, pillowy canopies and crazed masses of strands that can resemble tossed pickup sticks suspended in air. The combinations are stunning, suggestive of modern architecture and — because of the abrupt shifts in pattern and rhythm — brushstrokes or music. Information about the spiders that worked in each vitrine (how many members of which species for how long) is found, unfortunately, only on a label outside the gallery; it should be available on a handout.

From here, the theme shifts to air pollution, which endangers spiders and humans alike, especially the infinitesimal, breathable grains of carbon called particulate matter. In one nook, you'll see "Arachnomancy," a deck of tarot cards printed with ink made from particulate matter that pays tribute to the spider diviners of Cameroon. — **NYT**



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Giving spirit!

EVERYONE KNOWS that giving is never a one-way deal. A donation to a charitable organisation for instance may lead to strengthening the role of individuals and the meaning of giving in society. However, sending a gift to a friend or to a family member who is undergoing challenges in life or through a particular difficulty increases your relationship with that person and at the very least, you may get thanks or you might have a feeling that is sought in our time by people of high determination and hearts that spread goodness constantly in their communities.

So, if you want to reap the benefits of giving to others, then give up waiting for thanks, admiration, or praise because it's a quick punch that would just sour your good deed. Rather, the feeling of happiness is deeper and lasting in the good deed that no one knows you did.

Giving something, a donation if I may say so, isn't the only means that you can donate to an organisation or the community. While cash is usually the easy route, some help are also needed in order to help.

Offering, for example, your experience, your energy and your passion can provide great benefits for the happiness of others as well as you. Certainly, volunteering is one of the many ways of giving and sometimes the volunteer may be unknown, seeking reward from God. However, you can at least refrain from flaunting it on social media!

Nevertheless, I firmly believe here that our passion should be the basis of our giving. It's not about how much we give, but how much

love we put into that giving. Moreover, when we give to others, we not only make them feel closer to us, but we also feel closer to them. Thus when we give, we are not only helping the direct recipient of our gift for instance. We also catalyse a multiplier effect of generosity through our community. Of course you agree with me that when a person behaves generously, it inspires the observers to subsequently act generously towards different people.

On the other hand, acts of giving and kindness also play a protective role when it comes to our mental health. These actions stimulate dopamine and endorphins in the brain regions and thus make us feel happy and positive and affect our perception and emotions and increase our self-esteem, especially that by our giving and kindness to others we also prevent ourselves from falling victim to depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

In the end, whether you're buying gifts, volunteering your time, or donating money to charity in your community, your donation is ultimately much more than a chore. Whatever you give, it gives meaning to every day that you and others live with. Also, help you build stronger social bonds by launching a series of ongoing giving and through your community... don't be surprised if you find yourself benefiting from a huge dose of happiness every day from your giving.

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.



This kid didn't let her medical condition become a hindrance to becoming a great artist

By Baraah al Mujaini

Plagued by a medical condition since she was a baby, the parents of little Saba al Rashdi are proof that a kid's potential does not lie on just outward appearances alone but rather the nurturing environment that brings out the best in them.

Raising a kid with special needs, little Saba's parents discovered that while she may not be able to express herself in the 'normal ways', giving her art materials had allowed them to understand their child better.

We realised she has a special inclination towards painting and drawing and knowing this, we provided her with the tools and materials that allow her to express herself, Mr and Mrs Al Rashdi said.

The couple, upon initial discovery of their daughter's talent, had reached out to a well-known artist to help them decipher the meaning behind their daughter's creation. It is here they got their confirmation that their daughter has a unique point of view.

Recognizing the considerable progress in Saba's drawings provoked her parents to devote extensive care to her talent especially since some artists were impressed by her exceptional workings as a child.

Every painting Saba drew was always praised and highly valued by her parents, "I always admire her painting and we've given her the motivation she needs to continue", the father said.

To even further strengthen their daughter's confidence, the whole family had given Saba the title "the artist" as an acknowledgement and support to what



she can do.

"It is the parents' mission to notice and discover their child's talent, even those children with birth defects have hobbies and talents. A child, regardless of medical conditions, must have a talent", Saba's father stressed.

Her physical and mental limitations did not stop Saba from engaging in different activities and competitions. She has participated in many art workshops and competitions. Locally, "Saba won the second place in a competition sponsored by General Director of Education, on the occasion of the

Omani National Day", Saba's father said.

Regionally, Saba got the silver medal as the best artist in Cairo Capital of Islamic Culture for Painting Competition. The theme of the competition was "Cairo viewed from kids eyes around the world". Saba's meaningful painting showed an Omani girl giving a flower to an Egyptian girl in front of an Egyptian landmark (Al-Fath Mosque).

This accomplishment had a great influence on Saba, particularly, and on the family in general. "We have received supportive

words from everyone. Some of my friends sent gifts and voicemails to Saba directly, which have a special impact on Saba as she felt proud and appreciated", Saba's father said.

One of Saba's earlier challenges is her capacity to adapt and assimilate with others with hindered her from learning in school. Ever since she started joining art clubs and workshops and her parents give her more leeway to practice her art, her health significantly improved and so followed her mental health.

Saba's painting is a reflection of her mental strength and agility. Her optimistic perspective

of life is reflected in her choices of bright colours. She is also very observant that taking inspiration from the world around her and in particular, Oman's diverse landscape.

"I always take her to art exhibitions, encourage her to enjoy the glorious sunset, incredible sunrise and various landscapes in our country. I believe this will shape her artistic talent gradually", Saba's father said.

As a step taken by Saba's parents to support their daughter, and all kids either normal or the less fortunate ones, they have decided at the beginning of 2022 to create a page on Instagram @saba.alrashdhi which showcases some of Saba's work including all her accomplishments and awards — the page created to inspire others too to support their children's pursuit of interest.

As a message to other parents, Saba's father said, "Help your child. Invest in their potential. What you put in will come back to you one day when you see them happy and thriving. Their success is a reflection of the support they get and the reward may contribute significantly in changes in society, country and maybe the world", Saba's father said.