

OMAN SAIL SAILORS HEAD TO ITALY TO COMPETE IN NASTRO ROSA TOUR

Five of Oman Sail's team have headed to Italy to compete in the upcoming Marina Militare Nastro Rosa Tour held in port cities along the Italian coast from 26 August through to 20 September 2021.

>A8



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SAYYID BADR PARTICIPATES IN MIDDLE EAST MEDITERRANEAN SUMMER SUMMIT

Sayyid Badr Hamad Al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister has participated in the fourth edition of the Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Summer Summit, held at the Swiss-Italian University in Lugano, Switzerland.

>A5



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BACK TO CLASSROOMS FOR STUDENTS IN OMAN

As the number of vaccinated people rises and infection rate falls, educational institutions are taking up either blended or physical learning

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Schools and universities in Oman are preparing to welcome students back to classrooms after more than a year, under COVID-19 precautions drawn up by the government.

Classes have moved online since the pandemic came to Oman in February 2020, but with more than 2.3 million people vaccinated, a drop in daily infection rates, and emphasis on vaccinating students and teachers, education institutions in the country are taking up either blended or physical learning, although some continue to offer online classes for those who wish to continue



distance learning.

Already begun

While some education systems have already begun the new term

conducting only online classes, others will have students return to classrooms when they reopen in September.

Schools and universities that

wish to encourage more enrolment on their campuses can also reach out to Muscat Media Group for offers on special advertising packages.

SQU students to attend class
Sultan Qaboos University has said all students will be required to attend classes on-campus, with the new academic year beginning on September 5.

“SQU exhorts students, teaching and administrative staff to take the vaccine against COVID-19 and to stick to the precautionary measures and procedures set by the Supreme Committee,” said the university. “An instructional guide to this effect was issued by the university to ensure a safe return to study.” The protocols laid down mean that both the Indian and Pakistan school systems have to set up individual seating arrangements for each school, based on student strength.

“We have received circulars from the Ministry of Education on how to organise classrooms, and this has been circulated to all the school management committees in our institutions,” said an official from the Board of Directors for Indian Schools in Oman. “Obviously, the practices each school will follow will vary, because of the differing student numbers.” >A5

COMMENTARY

Why are Holidays Always Declared at the Last Minute in Oman? It's Time for a Change

MOHAMED ISSA AL ZADJALI

The Sultanate of Oman will have another public holiday in just two months. But why do we have to wait 12 days before knowing when the holiday will fall?

The waiting period for any holiday announcement is always far too long. For decades, Omanis, residents, businesses, schools and tourists have always been informed at the last minute, spending weeks and days speculating, assuming, hypothesising how the upcoming holiday will look like based on past experience.

We can expect the next holiday, the Holy Mawlid Al Nabawi (the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, Peace Be Upon Him) in the middle of October. We also have our National Day in November, which will also give us another short break in 2021.

If we are already aware of these upcoming occasions, why can we not designate which days will be public holidays ahead of time?

Late in the evening on August 8, it was declared that the 1st of Muharram 1443 AH (which fell on Tuesday the 10th of August) would be the official holiday for the Islamic new year. At 8 pm on Sunday, we all discovered we have to work the next day, and the holiday would follow the day after.

Announcing holidays in this way has always created uncertainty and even anxiety. People and businesses, as well, cannot plan with any degree of accuracy and often have to reschedule and adjust plans to accommodate the unnecessary late announcements of holidays.

For what? What real purpose does this serve in 2021? After all, the Islamic world isn't the only community that celebrates holidays not based on a fixed date. Such holidays are referred to as 'movable holidays'.

Thanksgiving in the USA is a holiday based on the last Thursday in November. Presidents' Day in the USA and Family Day in Canada is the third Monday



MOHAMED ISSA AL ZADJALI
Chairman, Muscat Media Group

of February. These official dates are known by everyone.

At the beginning of each calendar year, an official holiday calendar is published. Anyone living in these countries is aware of the fact that there is a public holiday on certain specific days, which allows their people to plan ahead.

Not having a published nation-wide holiday calendar is not only inconvenient, but can cause severe consequences.

Suppose someone has scheduled an important doctor's appointment and has been waiting weeks to see the physician. Suddenly, a holiday is declared at the last minute and the appointment must be rescheduled for a later date, leaving the patient in even more distress.

Impact

Educational institutions are impacted by the lack of holiday planning, from scheduling exams to hosting school events.

Even international business deals can have a negative impact when holidays are announced abruptly. Imagine when business people arrive in the country to sign important contracts and suddenly it is announced that tomorrow is a holiday, this actually impacts the cost of their travel plans, views of the country and their potential investment. >A5

A4



Oman's frankincense route

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Ibra man saves two girls from accident

1 Had it not been for Hamad bin Hassan Al Amri, a 28-year-old from the wilayat of Ibra in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah, the traffic accident that occurred last Saturday in Muscat Governorate, could have had a far worse outcome. >A3

WORLD US sticks to Afghan evacuation deadline

2 US President Joe Biden is reportedly sticking to his plan to end the evacuation by August 31. “The president of the United States did not announce any new dates beyond August 31 today,” German Chancellor Angela Merkel said after a virtual G-7 meeting. >A7

MARKET Several envoys visit SEZ at Duqm

3 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, organised a visit for a number of ambassadors of the brotherly and friendly countries to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. >B1

MOC SIGNED

National initiative to plant 10mn trees



MUSCAT: The Environment Authority and Nama Group on Wednesday signed a memorandum of cooperation to allocate OMR100,000 as a contribution for the national initiative to plant 10 million trees. The MoC was signed by Dr. Abdullah Ali Al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, and Eng. Omar Khalfan Al Wahabi, CEO of Nama Group.

Dr. Al Amri affirmed in a statement that the authority and the departments concerned have set a plan to press ahead with the initiative. Therefore, the greenhouses were expanded and new ones were established and

provided with seeds from the recently established seed bank, added Dr. Al Amri, who pointed out that community and formal teams were formed to collect these seeds from various types of wild trees in the Sultanate as well as organising farming campaigns in selected sites.

The agreement states that Nama Group allocates OMR100,000 of its social responsibility funding to support farming projects and initiatives; in addition to contributing with quantities of treated water from its sewage plants for five years which will cover a number of governorates. >A4

BACK TO SCHOOL

With the reopening of schools for students in the Sultanate scheduled in September, Muscat Media Group would be offering special, discounted advertising packages for schools and educational institutions across its print, digital, radio and social media platforms of Times of Oman & Al Shabiba to showcase their establishment and invite enrolments.

For further details please call 93852823 or email to sales@mmg.om

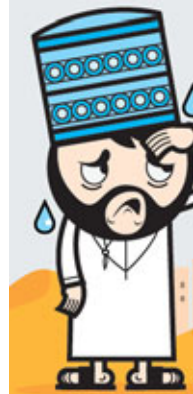
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Asr	3:41pm
Maghrib	6:36pm
Isha	7:49pm
Fajr (Tomorrow)	4:29am

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1991 - the Year of Industry



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- Weather

Overcast skies will continue over Dhofar coast and the adjoining mountains with late night and early morning drizzle. Partly cloudy skies are also likely over mountains of northern Oman towards afternoon with showers of isolated rain showers. Mainly clear skies will prevail over the rest of the Sultanate with morning low clouds along the coastal areas of northern Oman.

Moderate to fresh south to southwesterly winds will prevail along southeastern coast and light to moderate southwesterly over the interior of northern Oman. Coastal areas of northern Oman will have light to moderate sea breeze during day and light southwesterly at night.

Sea will be moderate to rough from Rasut to Ras Al Hadd with a maximum wave height of 3.0 metres and slight to moderate along Oman coast with a maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Maximum temperature for the Muscat area is 35C and minimum temperature is 26C. Relative humidity is 55%-90%.

Tide will be high at 10:06 a.m. and low at 4:21 p.m. It will be high again at 10:12 p.m. and low at 04:15 a.m.

For the Salalah area, maximum temperature is 25C and minimum temperature is 23C. Relative humidity is 85%-98%.

Tide will be high at 09:55 a.m. and low at 3:43 p.m. It will be high again at 9:23 p.m. and low at 3:38 a.m.

Temperatures recorded in other countries:

Abu Dhabi	40	Dubai	38
Riyadh	42	Jeddah	36
Kuwait	46	Aman	30
Doha	37	Cairo	32
Karachi	30	Bombay	28
Paris	22	London	20

Moroccan offensive

MADRID — Moroccan troops have seized a stronghold of the Polisario forces in new offensive in Western Sahara, Spanish Radio quoted. Polisario sources are saying yesterday.

The broadcast said the Moroccan had taken control of Bir Labbou, provisional capital of the Democratic Arab Republic of Sahara, proclaimed by the rebels in 1976.

The radio said hundreds of families had fled to seek sanctuary in the desert after five divisions of the Moroccan Army advanced on the town, located near the borders of Algeria and Mauritania.

-DPA

NORWAY, DENMARK GRANT RECOGNITION

Rebel republics on road to freedom

VILNIUS — Norway and Denmark established diplomatic relations with the Baltic republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia yesterday, officials said.

European Community Foreign Ministers will meet later this week to decide whether it is 12 member nations should recognise the independence of the Baltic states.

Each of the three republics has intensified its push for independence since the bungled coup against Mikhail S. Gorbachev as Soviet power has waned across the union.

In Moscow, Russian Federation President Boris N. Yeltsin issued decrees on Saturday formally recognising the independence of Latvia and Estonia. Yeltsin had earlier recognised the independence of Lithuania.

The decrees also urge Gorbachev and other world leaders to recognise Estonia's independence, according to Tass, the official Soviet news agency. Yeltsin's successful leadership of resistance to last week's failed hardline coup against Gorbachev has greatly enhanced his clout.

Denmark's government followed its announcement of Baltic recognition by adding that Ambassadors would be sent to them next week.

Norway plans to send diplomats to the Baltics in a few days to work out details of representation.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg said, "We had to find the right time for es-

tablishing diplomatic relations. We have followed developments from hour to hour, and yesterday morning the time was right."

Iceland in January became the first to recognise Lithuania during its current independence drive, but has not yet announced an exchange of Ambassadors.

Belgium said yesterday it was ready to exchange envoys with the

WASHINGTON — U.S. Defence Secretary Dick Cheney said yesterday, he believed it was only a matter of time until the United States recognised the Soviet Baltic republics as independent nations.

"I think that's basically question of formality at this point," Cheney said in an interview of NBC television.

"I expect its going to be relatively short period of time until there will be recognition of the independence of the Baltic Republics," Reuters said.

Baltic states as soon as the EC adopts that stance.

"We have always recognised the three Baltic republics," Belgian Prime Minister Wilfried Martens said.

But said of opening diplomatic relations "that is another matter. There must be Governments that totally control these countries. Also, we need a common European Community position" on sending Ambassadors, Martens said.

Several nations never recognised the 1940 Soviet annexation of the Baltic states, leaving the small republics in diplomatic limbo.

Sweden on Tuesday plans to discuss the issue of formally recognising the Baltics' independence in its parliamentary Foreign Affairs committee.

European Community Foreign Ministers will meet this week to debate whether the EC should recognise Baltic independence, the Dutch Foreign Minister said yesterday.

The meeting was requested by France, which has joined Germany and Belgium in urging EC recognition of the three Baltic republics.

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher yesterday invited his Baltic counterparts to come to Bonn to discuss diplomatic recognition if the Baltic states gain independence from the Soviet Union.

Brian's Prime Minister John Major said that Foreign Office Minister Douglas Hogg will travel to the Baltic states in the next few days for meetings with leaders of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Foreign Secretary Douglas Hogg said the Baltics are on their way back to full independence.

"They now have to work out ar-

rangements with the centre before they are in complete effective control of their countries but that's happening quickly . . . and I think the sooner they can find their way to effective independence the better."

Hurd told British Broadcasting Corp. radio.

Hurd said a senior British diplomat is in the Baltics investigating the possibility of recognising them as separate from the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev's spokesman, Vadim Ignatenko, told Cable News Network in Moscow yesterday that "there is no one today to prevent the national republics to choose their own road" within the framework of the constitution and the law.

"We are on the eve of major shifts in the situation in the Baltic states, but everything will proceed with the participation of the President," Gorbachev, said Ignatenko.

Leonard Mart, the Estonian Foreign Minister, said it was necessary for the Baltic states to move quickly because of the continuing danger of a military coup.

The Russian leadership will not be capable of dismantling this power structure immediately. The possibility of another coup remains."

The Baltic republics were independent between the world wars. But in 1939 the Soviet signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany including a secret protocol placing Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and parts of eastern Poland in the Soviet sphere of influence.

AP



RIGA — Latvians applaud as the statue of Soviet state founder Vladimir Lenin lies on its back yesterday. The monument in the centre of the Latvian capital was dismantled in accordance with a decision by local authorities. - Reuters wirephoto

OMANISATION PROGRAMME

Private sector not doing enough, says businessman

MUSCAT — The Government's Omanisation programme is not getting much support from the private sector, a leading businessman said on Saturday.

Sheikh Mohammed Bahwan, Managing Director of Bahwan Automotive Centre, told newsmen only a few companies were taking Omanisation seriously.

The Government has envisioned 50,000 new jobs for Omanis in the next five years. Mr. Bahwan said it was unlikely this target could be met, unless the private sector did something about it in a more massive scale.

"All these efforts by a few companies won't make a dent," he said, adding "private business should do much more." While he had nothing against expatriate workers, Mr. Bahwan said local businessmen should realise that "Omani workers will be the pillar of the economy in the future."

"The expatriate workers are not here forever," he added, stressing that private enterprises should go out of their way to train nationals on various aspects of business.

Mr. Bahwan revealed that in his automotive company, more Omanis were being trained for executive and marketing positions.

At the moment, only 11 executive positions are held by nationals in the company. The ultimate aim, he added, was to hire more Omanis for managerial posts.

He admitted hiring Omani workers proved to be a big headache in the beginning. "Tardiness, job-hopping were the commonest problem the company encountered."

But he had been able to deal with this problem, according to him, by giving the Omani job satisfaction and the feeling of self-importance.

By Felipe Olimpo

In fact, a number of Omanis were recently sent to Japan to train, according to him.

Mr. Bahwan said Bahwan Automotive Centre expected to employ more than 1,000 Omanis by 1995. The company currently employs more 400 Omanis.

The other night, he hosted a reception at the Al Bustan Palace Hotel for his Omani workers, giving away certificates to those who have

proved outstanding in their work. Dr. Yagham bin Talib al-Hinai, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry was the chief guest.

In a talk with newsmen after the reception, he also disclosed the company planned to recruit graduates from the Sultan Qaboos University as management trainees.

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A certificate is presented to an Omani employee.

Swicth by Gorbachev adviser

MOSCOW — Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, former Soviet Armed Forces Chief of Staff and President Mikhail Gorbachev's personal military adviser, has committed suicide, a Presidential spokesman said yesterday.

He declined to elaborate but Russian security sources said Akhromeyev hanged himself. His body was found at his Moscow flat on Saturday, they said. No other details were available.

Akhromeyev, appointed Presidential Adviser in December 1989, has not been named publicly as a participant in last week's abortive coup attempt.

The 68-year-old Marshal, who played an important part in super-power arms negotiations in the 1980s, was the second leading Soviet figure to commit suicide since the coup's collapse.

Boris Pugo

Interior Minister Boris Pugo, a member of the emergency committee that announced Gorbachev's overthrow, shot himself on Thursday to avoid arrest after the takeover failed.

Although an active voice of conservatism, four months ago Akhromeyev gave a ringing rebuff in a video symposium linking Moscow and Paris, to suggestions the army would consider overthrowing Gorbachev.

"Please don't worry about the Marshals of the Soviet Army overthrowing President Gorbachev or presenting some sort of danger . . . This just does not apply."

Akhromeyev used his influential post and his seat in the Soviet Parliament to denounce what he saw as a coming "democratic" coup led by Russian President Yeltsin.

"The democrats have now set the aim of preparing and staging a second Nuremberg trial of the Communist Party," he told an interviewer recently. - Reuters

Nutrition survey ends

MUSCAT — Oman's first country-wide survey on nutrition has been completed and the data collected from a cross-section of families all over the Sultanate is being analysed.

The survey conducted by the Ministry of Health in conjunction with Sultan Qaboos University and UNICEF will help identify problems of nutrition in Oman, including malnutrition.

Based on the findings of the survey, the Sultanate will develop programmes aimed at improving nutritional habits and standards.

The data on the nutritional status and habits of families and other related social, economic and cultural information is being studied with the help of computers.

Miss Deena bint Hamza al-Asoor, Co-ordinator of the Nutrition Programme at the Directorate General of Preventive Medicine, Ministry of Health, told the "Times" in an exclusive interview that the results of the survey are expected in September.

The data of the survey is being studied to establish the association between socio-economic factors and eating habits, she said. It will find the relation between education and nutritional habits and to what extent higher levels of education have a bearing on awareness of nutritional status.

Data on eating patterns and their relation to weight is being studied. Also under analysis are various other factors and parameters.

A total of 1,000 households were surveyed by a team of 44 students from the University and the Institute of Health Sciences.

The student-surveys underwent special training programme. Blood samples were also collected from family members to determine the amount of haemoglobin.

Miss al-Asoor said that besides the nutritional status and habits of family members, other information



Deena al-Asoor

was also collected - like the number of family members and children, height and weight of the members, child spacing, handicaps, medical history, number of rooms in the house, bathroom and toilet, radio and TV programmes viewed, sports, exercise and recreational activities.

By Oswald Pereira

The data related to daily eating habits, as also frequency of consumption of "junk" food. Those surveyed were shown posters to see if they understood them with a view to determine the subjects' educational level.

To assess their level of awareness, they were asked about their ideas on clean drinking water and health.

All the nine medical regions in Oman were covered by the survey with the size of the sample depending on the size of the region.

In the Muscat region a total of 300 families were surveyed. Miss al-Asoor said. "The cooperation and response from all the regions was very enthusiastic," she added.

A UNICEF consultant, Dr. Abdulrahman Obaid Musaitir, has been specially designated to assist in conducting the survey and an-

Scouts meeting in Muscat

MUSCAT — The National Organisation for Scouts and Guides will host the meeting of Scout trainers in the AGCC states next month.

The meeting will last for six days and aims at strengthening the brotherly relations between the scout leaders in the AGCC states. They will also exchange views and new methods of training, a NAGSG spokesman said.

Twenty-three scout trainers are expected to participate.

Arab bank heads to meet in Cairo

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Oman’s frankincense route



The frankincense route contains a number of sites where the process of manufacturing and exporting of frankincense took place. According to Oman’s Ministry of Tourism, “Some of the frankincense trails incorporated in the World Heritage List are:

Frankincense Museum
The Land of Frankincense Museum is considered one of the most prominent historical museums in Oman. The Frankincense Land Museum is situated on the coastal strip of Salalah, about 5 km from the city centre. The museum is a comprehensive view of the Sultanate, its various gov-

ernorates, its time periods and an opportunity to learn about its historic and maritime heritage.

The Frankincense Land Museum provides visitors and researchers with a summary on the country’s march and an opportunity to familiarise with its long historic and maritime heritage, as well as examples of archaeological evidence through the ages to the present time through two halls; the History Hall, which is a window on many cultural and archaeological sites that contains six sections, namely the Geography of Oman, Oman in Ancient Times, the Land of Frankincense, Islamisation of the People of Oman, Chapters of Omani History, and the Renaissance of Oman..

Al Baleed City

The history of Al Baleed dates back to 2000 BC when it had its main settlement at the eastern outskirts of Salalah. It was already mentioned by Ibn Battuta in the 13th century that the city of Al Baleed, situated in the immediate vicinity to the Indian Ocean was one of the important Omani harbours, which traded not only the Arabian gold, the frankincense, but also horses and other goods to Indian harbours.

Khawr Al Baleed

This lagoon takes its name from the ancient city which lies on the banks of this lagoon. The lagoon flanks the city on the east and north.

Khawr Ruri

Khawr Ruri is the largest reserve in the Governorate of Dhofar. It is considered the most attractive to tourists.

Awbar

The ruins of Awbar lie in Dhofar Governorate. This city remained lost for centuries and was considered one of the mysterious archaeological secrets read more..

Wadi Dukah

Wadi Dukah lies in Najd region on the northern slopes of Dhofar Governorate, located approximately 25 kilometres north of the city of Salalah. Wadi Dukah is a valley where the frankincense trees grow.

VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING

World scout conference opens

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Directorate General of Scouts and Guides participated in the activities of the 42nd World Scout Conference which kicked off on Wednesday. The event organised by the World Organisation of Scout Movement (WOSM), via videoconferencing, from August 25 to 29, saw the participation of 172 countries.

The Sultanate’s delegation was

chaired by Dr Yaqoob bin Khalfan Al Nadabi, Director General of the Directorate General of Scouts and Guides and membership of 20 scout leaders from the various governorates of the Sultanate.

It is worth mentioning that the conference is organised every three years and is an opportunity to the member organisations to review the policies and criteria of scout movement. – OMA



Tender Announcement

E-Tender

Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones
سلطنة عمان

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) invites the reputable and experienced Companies/Bidders for participating of following road construction tender in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) through E-Tendering System. This tender is strictly restricted to tender participation for the **Joint Venture between "Sultanate of Oman" and "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia"** companies only. Any Individual or other International Companies' bids shall **NOT** be accepted. Tender award is exclusive to Joint Venture of Oman and Saudi companies only.

CONSTRUCTION OF ROADS FROM DUQM AIRPORT TO RAS MARKA:

Purchasing, participating and collecting/ downloading softcopy of the Tender Documents:	Through E-Tendering System https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
Start of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	25th August 2021 (8.00 AM Muscat Time) onwards
End of submission of "Bidder Authentication Form" (Date):	Downloading of Form: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om . Submission of Form via email: Tenders@opaz.gov.om Tuesday/ 14th September 2021 (3.00 PM Muscat Time)
End of Tender Documents' Sale (Date):	Wednesday /22nd September 2021 (3.00 PM, Muscat Time)
Site Showround/Visit (for all bidders):	Wednesday /22nd September 2021 (9:30 AM, Muscat Time) At SEZAD/TATWEER HQ Office at Duqm, Oman.
Tender Closing (Submission) & Opening of Technical Bids Date:	Wednesday/20th October (3.00 PM, Muscat Time)
Cost of Tender Documents (payable and non-refundable; unless cancelled):	OMR. 3,000 (Omani Rial Three thousand only).

- Interested companies that are (already) registered with the Oman Tender Board (TB) are invited to participate to obtain details, the specification and terms of conditions from the following website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- Participants from Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Oman Companies/bidders are (required) to have registered with the Oman Tender Board (TB); website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>.
- Interested Companies who wish to participate in this tender is required to download the format uploaded under NDA Document and furnish the details as per the provided template via email to Tenders@opaz.gov.om within the specified end date. The details shall be verified by the OPAZ and thereafter, the company shall be invited to participate in this tender. The Participant who submits the "Bidder Authentication Form" after the deadline date shall not consider for further tender participation.
- Bidders MUST submit their bids online on the given website; signed and sealed. Bidders MUST enclose a photocopy of the tender's Bank Guarantee/Bid Bond; the value shall be in between (2% to 5%) of the Tender Value, valid for (180) days from the Proposals' submission date; **addressed to H. E. The Chairman, OPAZ Tender Committee (OTC).**
- The Original Bank Guarantee/Bid Bond MUST be submitted to OPAZ Tenders and Contracts Department, Muscat office on the Tender Closing (Submission) Date; between 9.00 AM – 2.00 PM.
- OPAZ is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bid and reserves the right to accept or reject any offer without giving reasons.

For further clarifications, you may contact via
Tel. +968 24166409; +968 2416 6670 and/or Email: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om.



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MEETING

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Oman’s participation in MEM summit hailed by GCC youth

LUGANO: Sayyid Badr Hamad Al-Busaidi, Foreign Minister has participated in the fourth edition of the Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Summer Summit, held at the Swiss-Italian University in Lugano, Switzerland.

Sayyid Badr delivered a keynote address on the issue of social justice and its relevance to both foreign and domestic policy.

Oman’s participation at the summit was warmly welcomed by a diverse audience including a number of young people from the GCC states, Morocco and Palestine.

The main topics discussed at the summit throughout the week were the Palestinian cause, the challenges facing Europe as a result of refugees fleeing conflict



zones, and the need for the new US administration to rebuild the trust of their regional allies.

The summit analysed the complexity of the Middle East Mediterranean Region, contextualising its current developments in global history and prompting a broader reflection on contemporary challenges.

The participants noted that this region has a significant impact on international dynamics, and on Europe and its political structures.

-ONA

<FROM A1> Why should we have to speculate about the upcoming holidays?

I cannot find a solid reason why Oman cannot adopt the concept of movable holidays. As an example, the Prophet’s (PBUH) Birthday, will either be on the 18th or 19th of October this year. If Oman declares Sunday the 17th as the start of the holiday, this would give us enough time to plan ahead, and enjoy our country’s tourist attractions.

Another good example is National Day. The public holiday could start on the last Sunday of November for a period of two days. For this year, the suggested holiday would fall on the 28th and 29th of November.

Why should we have to wonder, speculate, wait, reschedule and guess when we already know

there are holidays coming up?

The uncertainty over holiday timings, especially as holidays approach, leaves people restless and stressed. So many people travel during a holiday both locally and internationally. Being able to plan in advance not only eases the mind but has a positive financial impact for local businesses as well.

In order to improve how the country runs, from the highest ranks in government all the way down to the children who know nothing but play, we must start creating and announcing an annual holiday calendar. This calendar should be released at the beginning of each year, clarify each day and date on which a

holiday falls.

To improve operations in the business sector, moving the holidays to the beginning of the week, on Sunday, rather than on Thursday, will have a more positive impact for local businesses dealing with companies outside of Oman. Financial institutions will heavily benefit from this switch, as there will be more days to conduct business with the rest of the world.

Having an official holiday calendar is part of being a world-class, cosmopolitan and sustainable metropolis. I believe we are ready and need to make this leap. It may seem like a small gesture but it will have a very big impact on the country as a whole as well as the good people who call it home.

NEW ACADEMIC YEAR

<FROM A1> All students urged to get vaccinated

There are currently 21 Indian community schools across Oman: Muscat, Al Ghubra, Wadi Kabir, Darsait, Seeb, Maabela, Salalah, Sohar, Nizwa, Muladha, Sur, Ibra, Ibra, Jalan, Rustaq, Khasab, Buraimi, Masirah, Thumrait, Saham, and Bausher.

“We are currently drawing up plans for each school and these will be finalised in the coming days,” added the board official.

There are also seven schools under the Pakistan school system in the country, operating in Muscat, Mussanah, Nizwa, Seeb, Buraimi, Sohar, and Salalah, and are overseen by Senior Principal Nasir Nawaz.

“The protocols drawn up by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education are to do with safe distances between students, so we need to make sure this is factored into our seating plans,” he said.

“We had, in March of this year, set up a similar plan with 16 students in a classroom, but then we moved completely online after the Supreme Committee decisions to

stop all in-person learning.”

British School Muscat will continue to offer online classes to those who need them, but expects students to return to in-person learning on September 1.

“We are open!” the school said in a statement. “We look forward to welcoming all our students back onto the school site for the start of term on 1 September 2021. Online learning options are still available if required. Please contact the school offices or our admissions team to find out more.”

Safety protocols

Meanwhile, keeping COVID safety protocols in mind, other universities and colleges in the country have also come up with plans for in-person learning that do differ between institutions.

Muscat University has made it clear that only vaccinated students will be allowed on campus.

“As the new academic year 2021/2022 is set to start, we urge all the students to get completely vaccinated as soon as possible,”

the university said in a statement. “Vaccination is a prerequisite to enter the campus premises and hence to get attendance.”

Over at Middle East College, as part of efforts to keep students safe during their academics, postgraduate students can choose from three blended modes of study: weekend learning, part-time, and full-time. Student learning plans at MEC will be made in keeping with ministerial regulations.

“It is always a priority for us to introduce mechanisms to provide access to working individuals who are planning to upskill and advance their careers,” said Dr Smitha Nair, the head of the Centre for Postgraduate Studies at MEC. “The new modes of master’s degree programmes with a blended weekend and part-time format are convenient options.”

The German University of Technology (GUTech) has also announced that an in-person graduation ceremony will take place for those who have gradu-

ated this and the previous year.

These will be held “consecutively in November/December for the cohort of 2020 and in January for the cohort of 2021 in the open atrium on campus,” said GUTech. “Holding both ceremonies will be dependent on obtaining approvals from relevant authorities.”

The Ministry of Education has said that depending on student strength, high-density international or community schools with 3,000 or more students may function with 30 per cent to 70 per cent capacity.

Such schools can function using blended learning, a combination of physical and online classes.

Students from grades one to six must be seated at distances of two metres from each other when in class, while students between grades seven and 12 must be 1.5 apart.

However, private schools offering special education classes can continue to follow the direct education system, while adhering to precautions.

15TH ARAB-TURKISH ECONOMIC FORUM

Investment prospects in Oman highlighted

ISTANBUL: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and the Omani business delegation took part in several exhibitions on the sidelines of the 15th Arab-Turkish Economic Cooperation Forum, being held in Istanbul.

The forum covers a spectrum of areas namely food materials, technologies specialising in food processing, agriculture, hotel equipment, restaurants, cafes and bakeries among others.

Eng. Rida Juma Al-Saleh, Chairman of OCCI and head of the Omani business delegation said that the forum is an opportunity to highlight the investment climate and the attractive environment for investment in the Sultanate.



Trade relations

Al-Saleh added that the forum underscores the importance of Arab-Turkish economic and

trade relations.

He also reiterated the keenness of boosting those relations and benefiting from them, especially in developing the private sector and increasing its contribution in the gross domestic product (GDP).

The Omani business delegation comprises officials operating in diverse economic and investment sectors in the Sultanate. Madayn and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) are taking part in the event. -ONA

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WORLD



Biden sticks to evacuation deadline despite G-7 request

Other foreign military forces have said that without the US presence at Kabul airport, they will not be able to maintain security

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is reportedly sticking to his plan to end the evacuation by August 31, despite leaders of other top industrialised nations urging him to extend the effort at the G-7 summit on Tuesday.

“The president of the United States did not announce any new dates beyond August 31 today,” German Chancellor Angela Merkel said after the virtual meeting.

Ahead of the talks, ministers from Germany, the UK and Spain expressed doubt over the possibility of evacuating all eligible Afghans before the August 31 withdrawal deadline set by US President Joe Biden.

“Even if [the evacuation] goes on until August 31, or even a few days longer, it will not be enough time to evacuate those who we, and the United States, want to evacuate,” German Foreign Min-



NO EXTENSION: European Council President Charles Michel said on Tuesday that European leaders had implored their “American friends” to “secure the airport as long as necessary”.

ister Heiko Maas also told Bild TV. Other foreign military forces have already said that without the US presence at Kabul airport, they will not be able to maintain security.

US worried about risk to troops, looks into alternatives

European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that European leaders had implored their “American friends” to “secure the airport as long as necessary to complete the operations and ensure a fair and equitable access to the airport for all nationals entitled to evacuation.”

Nevertheless, according to US officials, President Biden has decided against extending his August

31 deadline after meetings with his national security team. Washington says the decision was made after weighing the risks of keeping forces on the ground beyond that time. Biden has, however, asked his team to prepare contingency plans in the event that evacuations cannot be completed by then.

The Taliban has threatened “consequences” if foreign troops stay beyond the deadline and reiterated that stance on Tuesday evening.

Longer-term humanitarian pledges

The UK is currently serving as the chair for the G-7, which also includes Germany, Canada, France, Italy, Japan and the US. Repre-

sentatives from the EU and NATO were also present at the summit.

“Our first priority is to complete the evacuation of our citizens and those Afghans who have assisted our efforts over the last 20 years — but as we look ahead to the next phase, it’s vital we come together as an international community and agree a joint approach for the longer term,” British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in a statement on Tuesday.

Johnson called on the Taliban to ensure free passage for those Afghans who sought to leave the country, even after Western troops had departed.

G-7 leaders have agreed that the militants “must guarantee safe passage for those fleeing Afghani-

stan beyond the current August 31 evacuation deadline,” according to Boris Johnson.

Moreover, the prime minister’s office released a statement of warning: “We reaffirm that the Taliban will be held accountable for their actions on preventing terrorism, on human rights in particular those of women, girls and minorities and on pursuing an inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan.”

The UK already announced on Friday that it would double its humanitarian and development aid for the country to £286 million (€334 million, \$392 million).

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the EU would try to boost humanitarian assistance to Afghans from €50 million (\$59 million) to €200 million based on contributions by EU member states.

Thousands may be abandoned

Around 50,000 foreigners and Afghans have managed to flee Afghanistan via Kabul’s airport since the Taliban took power of the capital just over a week ago.

However, many remain trapped in the country, including those who supported foreign troops and who are now fearing retribution from Taliban militants.

Those who are outside of Kabul are encountering additional difficulties, as even many approved for evacuation by foreign states have been turned back by the Taliban before reaching the airport. **DW**

Taliban say religious scholars will lead govt in Afghanistan

KABUL: The Taliban have said that religious scholars will lead the upcoming government in Afghanistan as the country’s government collapsed over a week ago when the terror group seized Kabul, a media report said.

At a gathering in Kabul, the Taliban said that their 20 years of struggle should not go in vain and religious scholars should take the lead and be the core of the upcoming government in Afghanistan.

The terror group had invited tens of religious scholars in a grand gathering to ask their cooperation in forging a sound political system and inviting people to support the future government, Afghanistan’s Khaama Press said on Monday. Zabiullah Mujahid, the Taliban’s spokesperson, said that they are creating an all-inclusive government in which the rights of all people will be secured.

“Irrespective of the partisan, lingual, and sectarian values, the people should come together and work for the development of Afghanistan as Afghans,” Khaama quoted him as saying.

The Taliban are in talks with intra-Afghan leaders in an attempt to form a government.

Mujahid has denied accusations that the Taliban are smuggling weaponry and military vehicles to other countries. On August 15, the terror group entered the presidential palace in Kabul soon after president Ashraf Ghani fled the Afghan capital. **ANI**



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Trudeau says Canada to keep military in Afghanistan even after US deadline gets over

OTTAWA: Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced on Tuesday that Canada is to keep its military personnel in Afghanistan despite US President Joe Biden’s commitment for the August 31 American military deadline in the country.

“Our commitment to Afghanistan doesn’t end when this current phase, this current deadline comes. We will continue to put pressure on the Taliban to allow people to leave the country,” Trudeau said. “We’re going to continue to work every single day to get as many people out alongside our allies. The commitment by our fellow G7 nations is clear: we’re all going to work together to save as many people as possible,” Trudeau added.

Trudeau’s remarks came after the Tuesday virtual summit of G7 leaders who met to discuss whether an extension of the American military commitment to Afghanistan is needed for evacuating all foreign nationals and vulnerable Afghans who helped the Americans and the NATO allies before the country’s recent fall to the Taliban.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson called the urgent summit to discuss the evacuation crisis and plot longer-term engage-



ment with Afghanistan’s Taliban leaders, as well as deal with the humanitarian crisis for refugees.

Canada is one of the allied countries taking part in the evacuation of people from Kabul’s chaotic airport, which American-led forces have secured for the time being.

A Canadian military plane departed Kabul with over 500 evacuees on board on Monday, Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan said in a tweet. “Canadian evacuation flights will continue for as long as conditions permit.”

Before the summit, Trudeau said the return of the Taliban would have to prompt a broader rethinking of Canada’s aid spending in Afghanistan. “That is absolutely something we’re looking at right now, obviously, with the Taliban in control of the country. Our regular aid, investments and agencies need to be looked at carefully to make sure we are not supporting, indirectly, the Taliban,” Trudeau said. **ANI**



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Oman Sail sailors head to Italy to compete in Nastro Rosa Tour

The team will take part in the first six stages before joining their teammates in Switzerland to train for the Star Sailors League Finals



Times News Service

MUSCAT :Five of Oman Sail's team have headed to Italy to compete in the upcoming Marina

MilitareNastro Rosa Tour held in port cities along the Italian coast from 26 August through to 20 September 2021.

The team will take part in the

first six stages before joining their teammates in Switzerland to train for the Star Sailors League Finals which runs from 21 September to 4 October 2021.

Team Captain, Nasser Al Mashari, along with Hussain Al Jabri, Ali Al Balushi, Haitham Al Wahaibi and Akram Al Wahaibi, will proudly represent Oman at the races in Genova, Rome, Gaeta, Naples, Brindisi and Bari before joining their teammates for the Star Sailors League Finals.

The 12-man team will compete against professional teams from around the world for the Sir Roland Symonette Trophy in the first major international tournament for Oman's elite sailors post-pandemic.

Nasser Al Mashari, said, "We are all eager to get back on the water and take every opportunity we can to learn, train and compete. The Nastro Rosa Tour is a great chance to gain experience on the DIAM 24 ahead of Sailing Arabia - The Tour later this year, assess our perfor-

mance and test ourselves against some very experienced sailors both in Italy and at the Star Sailors League in Switzerland."

Oman Sail's team will meet their cohorts from Nastro Rosa again at Sailing Arabia - The Tour when the Italian team travels to Oman to participate in the Sultanate's premier offshore race, taking place from 24 November to 5 December 2021.

In most seasons, the Star Sailors League Finalists are the top ranked teams based on five major events each year, however due to the lack of international competition, the teams have been invited to ensure there can be a winner this year. The Sultanate of Oman was selected based on the sailors' impressive track record and the country's long-standing pedigree in global sailing.

The finals take on a playoff-style knockout format to decide the eventual winners.

The team will then return to Oman ahead of a busy winter season which sees Oman Sail host seven major tournaments, including the 2021 World Youth Sailing Championships, 2021 49er, 49er FX&Nacra 17 World Championships, and the 2021 ICLA Radial World Championships headed to these shores.

Oman Sail will also organise the 2021 49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 Asian Championships and 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships, alongside regular fixtures in Oman's sailing calendar when the Mussanah Race Week and Sailing Arabia - The Tour 2021 return to close out the year as the competitive sailing spotlight shines on the Sultanate.

OMAN CRICKET

Arif, Noushad claim B Division top awards



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Arif Hussain of Orient Travels/Gitacs and Noushad Haneefa of LC Tech were presented best batsman and best bowler awards respectively at a prize ceremony for toppers of B to F Division organised by Oman Cricket at OC Ground One in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

The prizes were presented by Oman Cricket Board Directors including Madhu Jesrani, OC Secretary, Kiran Asher, Treasurer, Paul Sheridan, Ali Moosa Yousuf and Alkesh Joshi in the presence of Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer, Oman Cricket. C Division's top prizes went to Pervez Baig (best batsman) of Design Group Engineering Consultants and Ad-

nanul Haq (best bowler) of Maniz Azad. Wajid Ali of Pitspot won the D Division's best batsman award while best bowler and best all-rounder prizes went to Rahul Chadha who was the star player for Vanderlande. Omani player Rafeeq Mohammed of OCT Al Nahdha received E Division's best batsman award while Shah Abbas of Aflag Group won the best bowler prize. Yusuf Patanwala of Sketch International wad declared the best all-rounder.

Mazoon Dairy's Sakeel Khan claimed the best batsman award for his brilliant batting in F Division's League competition whereas Prashan Rana of Y Horizon was presented the best bowler prize. The best all-rounder prize was received by Saud Haroon Khan of BSI.

OMAN VS MUMBAI

Oman vs Mumbai white-ball tour matches to be live streamed

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket Board, in partnership with ITW Consulting has announced that they will be broadcasting 6 games of Mumbai's white ball tour of Oman. Two T20 four One Day matches would be available Live on Fan Code in India; Geo Super in Pakistan; CricLife in the UAE.

Confirming the broadcast, Pankaj Khimji, Chairman Oman Cricket, said, "We are elated to announce that the 6 matches between Oman and Mumbai will be live streamed from 26th August to 3rd September 2021. This will give the Oman Cricket an exhilarating opportunity to a reach wide audience and encourage the players for the upcoming season. In association the ITW Consulting, we believe in accelerating the recognition cricketers received by broadcasting the game."

Richard Saldanha, Head of New Initiative, ITW Consulting MEA, confirmed that the Tournament would have Dafa News, as Principle Sponsors and Brighto

Paints & Osaka Batteries as Associate Sponsor. He said "We are delighted to partner with Oman Cricket & start a new journey in bringing Oman Cricket matches to viewers regionally as well as internationally. For the upcoming series we are pleased to confirm Live telecast of these matches will be on Fancode in India; Geo Super in Pakistan; CricLife in the UAE"

"We are discussing with other broadcast partners as well to reach maximum viewers" he added.

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Office & National Coach, Oman Cricket added: "We are not only committed to improve the quality of the game but also be known for our talents. Broadcasting the white-ball tour helps them to gain momentum and acknowledgment internationally. This tour is a healthy practice for both the teams and will also be a delight for cricket enthusiasts around the globe."

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OMAN CRUDE PRICE RISES

The price of Oman oil has increased, with prices for delivery by October 2021 reaching \$69.58, said Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME). The DME statement said that the price of Oman oil rose by 78 cents from the price of Tuesday, which was at \$68.80. - **ONA**

MARKET BUSINESS & FINANCE



MSX INDEX ENDS HIGHER

The MSX index closed at 3,958.92 points, up 0.08 per cent from the previous close. The Sharia Index ended up by 0.20 per cent at 595.99 points. Salalah Mills, up 9.78 per cent, was the top gainer while Sembcorp Salalah, down 2.38 per cent, was the top loser.

Sezad highlights its projects to seven ambassadors in Oman

The two-day visit programme included an overview of the zone and a visit to key projects

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones, organised a visit for a number of ambassadors of the brotherly and friendly countries to the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad).

The visit included seven participants from various embassies of the Sultanate abroad. The two-day visit programme included an overview of the zone and a visit to several projects including the dry dock, the port of Duqm, Saay commercial neighbourhood, the Duqm refinery project, Karwa Motors, the multi-purpose fishing port project, and fish and food industries complex.

Saleh bin Suleiman Al Harthi, the Sultanate ambassador to the Republic of Kenya said, "This visit came as an initiative from



INTRODUCTORY VISIT: This visit came as an initiative from the management of Sezad, intending to introduce the zone, its existing and planned vital facilities, economic enterprises, investment facilities, commercial outlets and tourist resorts. - *Supplied picture*

the management of the authority, intending to introduce the zone, its existing and planned vital facilities, economic enterprises, investment facilities, commercial outlets and tourist resorts."

He added, "We were indeed pleased to see the great and relentless efforts made to develop this zone, which is planned to be

an integrated global economic gateway with a large strategic port that can serve shipping and shipping lines from east to west. As key partners in supporting Oman economy abroad, our introductory visits are significant and will undoubtedly open new horizons of communication and cooperation in marketing this promising zone

to gain its place on the global economic map."

Idris Abdulrahman Al-Khanjari, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate to the United Nations, stressed the importance of increasing visits to the targeted countries to introduce the zone, its components, available incentives and opportunities to help



attract more diversified investments that add value and enhance strategic objectives. Noting that, it is important to increase the communication efforts with different countries by coordinating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Sultanate's diplomatic missions abroad, and the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, which has good relations with the Joint Arab Chambers of Commerce in many countries of the world. "Through these channels, we

can promote the objectives of the promotional campaign for Duqm at a global level. Through these channels, we can also arrange and organise seminars and programs to introduce the zone abroad on a continuous periodic basis," he added.

After the visit, the ambassadors of the Sultanate visited the rock garden, which is one of the most important geological sites in Oman, to see its unique and diverse rock formations.

PLATFORM FOR INNOVATORS

Madayn to launch Industrial Innovation Programme in South Al Sharqiyah

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates – Madayn, in cooperation with Oman Liquefied Natural Gas (Oman LNG), is all set to launch Industrial Innovation Programme in October. The programme comes in line with Oman LNG's project of financing business incubator project at Sur Industrial City under the supervision of Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy.

Presenting an ideal platform for the innovators and entrepreneurs in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, the programme aims at qualifying Omani industrial innovation specialists through a series of training courses to be delivered by innovation experts.

The programme will feature

Presenting an ideal platform for the innovators and entrepreneurs in the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, the programme aims at qualifying Omani industrial innovation specialists through a series of training courses to be delivered by innovation experts

a variety of topics including an introduction to innovation; innovation in the food and beverage industry; transforming innovative food products into viable models; food safety and food systems; branding; marketing of in-

novative products; and development of initial innovative models of food products.

The programme, which will take place in October in Sur Industrial City, targets entrepreneurs and innovators in South Al Sharqiyah in

the food and beverage industry, as well as owners of household food products, and graduates of food science and nutrition, sales and marketing, and business fields in the governorate.

By end of the programme, the participants will be awarded certification by Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy, Innovation Certification Level 1 by Global Innovation Management Institute in the United States, certification by the World Packaging Organisation, and certification by the National Registry of Food Safety Professionals. Moreover, the top six participants will be selected for their food products to be developed for commercial production with the support of Oman LNG and under the supervision of the Madayn Industrial Innovation Academy.

MANAGEMENT CHANGE

Petrofac appoints Dr Khalid Al Jahwari as country manager of the Sultanate

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Petrofac has appointed Dr Khalid Al Jahwari as Country Manager, Oman. This leadership appointment recognises the activities and multiple substantial projects the company has in-country and the strategic importance of the Sultanate to the group.

Dr Al Jahwari brings over 20 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, with a varied background in technical, commercial and management roles, working across the Middle East, Africa and Europe. He holds a bachelor's degree in Petroleum Engineering from Muscat's Sultan Qaboos University, as well as an MBA and a PhD from the UK's University of Strathclyde.

Dr Al Jahwari has significant leadership experience, most recently as Shell's General Manager of Operations in Egypt, having previously been Shell's Global Production Excellence Leader, based in The Hague, Netherlands. Before Shell, he spent 15 years with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), holding many key roles.

This appointment is aligned to Petrofac's model of local execution to global standards. It will help un-



Dr Khalid Al Jahwari

Dr Al Jahwari brings over 20 years of experience in the oil and gas industry, with a varied background in technical, commercial and management roles, working across the Middle East, Africa and Europe

operations in Oman.

Elie Lahoud, Petrofac's Chief Operating Officer – Engineering & Construction, said, "I am delighted to welcome Khalid to Petrofac. He brings significant experience, with a track record spanning an impressive career, built both internationally and in Oman. This is a key market where we remain firmly focused on maximising local and sustainable delivery, generating in-country value, and playing our part in the region's energy transition for many years to come."

Petrofac has been supporting

Oman's energy sector since 1988 with a strong track record in delivery, excellent safety record and focus on enhancing in-country value through local goods and services. During the past 33 years, Petrofac has established a multi-discipline engineering and project execution office in Muscat and invested in a state-of-the-art technical training centre, Takatuf Petrofac Oman.

Substantial ongoing projects include the Duqm Refinery. The mega project is designed to be able to process a range of blended crude oils, configured as a full-conversion hydrocracker/coking facility that will utilise advanced technology. Petrofac, in a 50/50 joint venture with Samsung Engineering, is delivering the EPC package 2.

Petrofac has a long-term Framework Agreement with PDO for the provision of engineering, procurement, and construction management services for major oil and gas projects in the Sultanate. These include the massive Yibal-Khuff Project, which is strategically important for PDO and will help meet Oman's growing medium and long-term oil and gas demands. It is now at the critical final commissioning stage and set to come on stream soon.

KASPERSKY RESEARCH

5.8mn gaming-related threats detected over the past year: Report

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Over 5.8 million attacks by malware and unwanted software disguised as popular PC games were detected and prevented by Kaspersky solutions from Q3 2020 to Q2 2021.

This increased volume may be connected to the rapid growth of gaming activities during the pandemic. The data comes from the latest game-related cyberthreats report by Kaspersky, in which researchers assessed the changes of gaming-related threats during the pandemic.

Unprecedented growth

The gaming industry witnessed unprecedented growth over the past 18 months, in part, thanks to users being forced to find alternative means of entertainment as they stayed at home. Even though the world has become safer this year, the demand for games persists, and the industry is predicted to grow even further, reaching a potential peak of \$175.5 billion by the end of 2021. With this in mind, Kaspersky researchers reviewed various game-related threats that its users faced throughout the pandemic – from potential attacks on PC and mobile to phishing schemes.

Malware

To get a clear picture of the trends, Kaspersky analysed the attacks with malware and unwanted software disguised as the 24 most popular PC games and the top 10 mobile titles of 2021. The results showed that PC game-related cyber threats soared with the introduction of lockdowns in Q2 2020, hitting 2.48 million detections worldwide – a 66 per cent increase compared to Q1 2020 when 1.48 million attacks were detected. Interestingly, the number of attacks and affected users declined sharply in Q2 2021 – to just 636,904 attacks.

Mobile games showed a slightly different trend, with the number of users affected growing by 185 per cent at the beginning of the pandemic, from 1138 users in February 2020 to 3253 users in March 2020. Furthermore, the number of users striving to unwind on mobile phones did not

drop significantly after the two waves of the pandemic, showing on average just a 10 per cent drop in users attacked per month in Q2 2020 versus Q2 2021. This showed that mobile threats remained attractive to cybercriminals even as lockdowns were being lifted across the world.

Popular games

Speaking of popular games, Minecraft topped the charts for both PC and mobile categories as the game most often used to disguise the distribution of unwanted software and malware. Such overwhelming popularity of Minecraft may be explained by the fact that there are multiple versions and a myriad of mods – additional modifications that can be installed on top of the game to diversify it and the gaming experience. Usually, the mods are created by users and are unofficial, providing a convenient disguise for malicious payloads or unwanted software. From July 2020 to June 2021, 36,336 files disguised as Minecraft were distributed.

While the majority of files distributed under the guise of gaming titles were downloaders – programmes capable of downloading other software to infected devices and adware, occasionally, both PC and mobile users faced much more serious threats, including Trojan-Stealers designed to steal data about cryptocurrency and other valuable data, Trojan bankers and even backdoors.

"We have witnessed a clear effect of the pandemic on the number of gaming-related threats. As more people switched to gaming, more users faced threats that were disguised as games."

"Two popular ways of threat distribution are phishing pages – there have been a myriad of them targeting users of different gaming platforms, many of which are very hard to tell apart from real sites for regular users."

"Another attack vector is warez sites – in particular, we have traced a well-coordinated campaign that distributed a dangerous dropper via such sites, affecting users in 45 countries," comments Anton V. Ivanov, a security researcher at Kaspersky.

MARKET

MSX index ends higher



Salalah Mills, up 9.78 per cent, was the top gainer while Sembcorp Salalah, down 2.38 per cent, was the top loser

MUSCAT: The MSX index closed at 3,958.92 points, up 0.08 per cent from the previous close. The Shar-ia Index ended up by 0.20 per cent at 595.99 points. Salalah Mills, up 9.78 per cent, was the top gainer while Sembcorp Salalah, down 2.38 per cent, was the top loser. Shares of Bank Muscat was the most active in terms of the number of shares traded as well as in terms of turnover.

A total number of 354 trades were executed during the day's trading session, generating a turnover of OMR2.35 million, with more than 8.14 million shares changing hands. Out of 46 traded securities, 8 advanced, 12 declined and 26 remained unchanged. At the session close, foreign investors were net buyers for OMR104,000 while local investors were net sellers for OMR117,000 followed by GCC & Arab investors for OMR13,000 worth of shares.

Financial Index closed at 6,291.41 points, up 0.19 per cent. Vision Insurance, Bank Nizwa, Taageer Finance, and National

Bank of Oman were up by 3.90 per cent, 2.11 per cent, 1.22 per cent, and 1.08 per cent respectively. Prices of United Finance, Oman & Emirates Investment Holding, Ominvest, National Life & General Insurance, and Bank Muscat were down by 1.67 per cent, 1.41 per cent, 0.64 per cent, 0.53 per cent and 0.45 per cent respectively.

Industrial Index closed at 5,959.81 points, up 0.71 per cent. Salalah Mills and Construction Material Industry were up by 9.78 per cent and 3.23 per cent respectively. Prices of Galfar Engineering, Oman Cement, national Aluminium, and Al Anwar Ceramic were down by 1.25 per cent, 0.88 per cent, 0.83 per cent and 0.44 per cent respectively.

Services Index was down by 0.26 per cent before closing at 1,710.16 points. Prices of Muscat Desalination and Renaissance Services were up by 2.44 per cent and 0.44 per cent respectively. Sembcorp Salalah, Dhofar Generating, and OIFC were down by 2.38 per cent, 2.31 per cent and 0.80 per cent respectively. — United Securities

MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE

MUSCAT
STOCK
EXCHANGE

INDICES							
Index	High	Low	Value	Prev . Value	Diff	Diff %	
MSX 30 INDEX	3,964.59	3,958.59	3,958.92	3,956.23	2.69	0.07	
FINANCIAL INDEX	6,299.09	6,286.25	6,291.41	6,279.73	11.68	0.19	
Industry Index	5,960.46	5,906.21	5,959.81	5,917.75	42.07	0.71	
Services Index	1,715.25	1,709.12	1,710.16	1,714.57	-4.41	-0.26	
MSX Shariah Index	595.99	595.39	595.99	594.79	1.20	0.20	
MSX TR INDEX	4,858.36	4,851.01	4,851.42	4,848.11	3.30	0.07	
Trading Summary							
Volume	Turnover	Trades	Market Cap	Up	Down	Equal	Sec. Traded
8,147,040	2,354,204	354	21,582,940,209	8	12	26	46

SHARE PRICE BULLETIN FOR WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 25

	SECURITY NAME	VOLUME	TURNOVER	TRADES	OPEN PRICE	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE PR.	PREV. CLOSE	DIFF (RD)	DIFF %	LAST PR	LAST RD	LAST OFFER	PUR VALUE	MARKET CAP
REGULAR MARKET																
OM0000006920	VISION INSURANCE	5,200	416	1	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.077	0.003	3.896	0.080	0.078	0.080	0.100	8,000,000
OM0000003234	RENAISSANCE SER.	710,000	321,176	23	0.450	0.454	0.446	0.452	0.450	0.002	0.444	0.446	0.446	0.450	0.100	106,857,320
OM0000001400	OMAN FLOUR MILLS	12,000	9744	2	0.812	0.812	0.812	0.812	0.812	0.000	0.000	0.812	0.000	0.812	0.100	127,860,000
OM0000001418	RAYSUT CEMENT	3,000	816	1	0.272	0.272	0.272	0.274	0.274	0.000	0.000	0.272	0.260	0.272	0.100	54,800,000
OM0000001707	OMAN CABLES INDSTR	5,000	4,900	2	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.980	0.000	0.000	0.980	0.960	0.980	0.100	87,906,000
OM0000001772	ALANWAR INVESTMENT	85,000	9,940	6	0.116	0.117	0.116	0.117	0.117	0.000	0.000	0.117	0.117	0.117	0.100	23,400,000
OM0000002200	AHLI BANK	1,017	110	1	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.000	0.000	0.108	0.108	0.108	0.100	210,563,000
OM0000002226	AL JAZEERA SERVICES	1,800	716	3	0.398	0.398	0.398	0.400	0.400	0.000	0.000	0.398	0.396	0.398	0.100	24,481,709
OM0000002440	AL SHARGIA INV.	24,021	2,278	6	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.000	0.000	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.100	8,510,000
OM0000003036	OMAN TELECOM	387,125	295,857	40	0.760	0.776	0.760	0.764	0.764	0.000	0.000	0.760	0.760	0.768	0.100	573,000,000
OM0000003398	SOHAR INT. BANK	103,388	9,508	5	0.091	0.092	0.091	0.092	0.092	0.000	0.000	0.092	0.091	0.092	0.100	275,085,731
OM0000003968	QOEDDOO	882,766	263,548	32	0.386	0.386	0.386	0.386	0.386	0.000	0.000	0.386	0.386	0.394	0.100	251,264,473
OM0000005005	ALMAHA CERAMICS	551,000	253,460	23	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.000	0.000	0.460	0.460	0.460	0.100	25,300,000
OM0000002168	AL ANWAR CERAMIC	139,240	62,443	15	0.456	0.456	0.448	0.448	0.450	-0.002	-0.444	0.448	0.444	0.448	0.100	98,560,000
OM0000002796	BANK MUSCAT	1,291,073	566,741	36	0.438	0.440	0.438	0.438	0.440	-0.002	-0.455	0.438	0.438	0.440	0.100	1,565,619,959
OM0000001533	OMINVEST	522,292	163,032	17	0.314	0.314	0.312	0.314	0.312	-0.002	-0.637	0.314	0.314	0.312	0.100	252,024,967
OM0000001525	OMAN INVEST & FIN.	276,209	34,250	16	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.124	0.125	-0.001	-0.800	0.124	0.123	0.124	0.100	28,988,000
OM0000001749	OMAN CEMENT	10,000	2,260	4	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.226	0.228	-0.002	-0.877	0.226	0.228	0.228	0.100	74,777,232
Total	18	4,810,131	2,001,295	235												
Parallel Market																
OM0000001889	SALALAH MILLS	6,115	6,042	1	0.988	0.988	0.988	0.988	0.900	0.088	9.778	0.988	0.988	0.988	0.100	49,363,507
OM0000007084	MCT DESALINATE	7700	647	2	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.082	0.002	2.439	0.084	0.083	0.084	0.100	13,066,234
OM0000004420	BANK NIZWA	1,247,956	121,039	21	0.095	0.097	0.095	0.097	0.095	0.002	2.105	0.096	0.096	0.097	0.100	145,500,000
OM0000003281	TAGEER FINANCE	5,100	425	3	0.083	0.084	0.082	0.083	0.082	0.001	1.220	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.100	21,047,970
OM0000001483	NATIONAL BANK OMAN	50,000	9,350	1	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.187	0.185	0.002	1.081	0.187	0.185	0.187	0.100	304,051,969
OM0000001095	DHOFAR INSURANCE	5,100	970	2	0.199	0.199	0.190	0.190	0.190	0.000	0.000	0.190	0.190	0.197	0.100	19,000,000
OM0000001152	OMAN NAT. ENG.	20,000	1,820	2	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.091	0.000	0.000	0.091	0.091	0.092	0.100	11,830,000
OM0000001301	DHOFAR CATTLE	12,128	970	2	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.080	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.080	0.075	0.080	0.100	5,468,000
OM0000001517	HSBC BANK OMAN	676,000	62,960	12	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.000	0.000	0.093	0.093	0.093	0.100	186,029,089
OM0000001568	OMAN FISHERIES	4,000	296	1	0.074	0.074	0.074	0.080	0.080	0.000	0.000	0.074	0.074	0.000	0.100	10,000,000
OM0000001897	MAJAN COLLEGE	13,690	2,163	4	0.158	0.158	0.158	0.158	0.158	0.000	0.000	0.158	0.152	0.158	0.100	14,220,000
OM0000001982	AL MADINA INV.	100,000	6,300	2	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.063	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.063	0.063	0.064	0.100	4,410,000
OM0000003125	GLOBAL INV. H.	24,525	1,632	5	0.067	0.067	0.065	0.067	0.067	0.000	0.000	0.065	0.065	0.066	0.100	13,400,000
OM0000003681	VOLTAMP ENERGY	887	114	2	0.128	0.128	0.128	0.137	0.137	0.000	0.000	0.128	0.128	0.135	0.100	11,152,177
OM0000004669	SHARGIYAH DESALIN.	200	24	1	0.120	0.120	0.120	0.116	0.116	0.000	0.000	0.120	0.118	0.120	0.100	11,345,051
OM0000004768	MADINA TAKAFUL	95,000	9,785	7	0.103	0.103	0.103	0.103	0.103	0.000	0.000	0.103	0.102	0.103	0.100	18,025,000
OM0000004925	ALBATINAH POWER	30,000	1,521	5	0.050	0.051	0.050	0.051	0.051	0.000	0.000	0.051	0.049	0.051	0.100	34,419,259
OM0000005903	PHOENIX POWER	9,800	447	5	0.046	0.046	0.045	0.046	0.046	0.000	0.000	0.046	0.045	0.046	0.100	67,276,667
OM0000006979	OMAN QATAR INSUR.	35,000	5,390	3	0.154	0.154	0.154	0.154	0.154	0.000	0.000	0.154	0.154	0.154	0.100	15,400,000
OM0000007043	NATIONAL LIFE INS.	105,000	39,690	3	0.378	0.378	0.378	0.378	0.380	-0.002	-0.526	0.378	0.370	0.380	0.100	100,170,000
OM0000001319	ALUMINIUM PROD.	31,000	37,009	6	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.119	0.120	-0.001	-0.833	0.119	0.110	0.119	0.100	3,995,003
OM0000003521	GALFAR ENGINEER	66,613	5,420	8	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.080	-0.001	-1.250	0.079	0.079	0.079	0.100	16,033,929
OM0000001681	OMAN EMIRATES HO.	31,700	2,219	4	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.071	-0.001	-1.408	0.070	0.070	0.070	0.100	8,531,250
OM0000002374	UNITED FINANCE	144,147	8,505	8	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.059	0.060	-0.001	-1.667	0.059	0.059	0.057	0.100	20,599,520
OM0000007407	DHOFAR GENERATING	131,782	16,743	4	0.128	0.128	0.127	0.127	0.130	-0.003	-2.308	0.127	0.124	0.129	0.100	28,224,480
OM0000004735	SEMBCORP SALALAH	100,362	8,230	2	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.084	-0.002	-2.381	0.082	0.082	0.082	0.100	78,274,900
Total	26	3,235,905	349,618	116												

CHINA

Cross-border finance blockchain platform

XIFAN: China has established a digital finance service platform to leverage blockchain technology to spur development of a China-Europe cargo train service. The one-stop platform, launched by the country's State Administration of Foreign Exchange, provides services like financing application and credit extension. **Xinhua**

MEGA PROJECTS

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 unleashes nearly \$1 trillion infrastructure projects

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has resulted in close to \$1 trillion of real estate and infrastructure projects being announced across Saudi Arabia since 2016, according to an analysis carried out by global property consultant, Knight Frank.

Faisal Durrani, Partner – Head of Middle East Research at Knight Frank explained: "Saudi Arabia is a country being reborn. The ambition that underpins Vision 2030 is being borne out in reality and we are rapidly closing in on \$1 trillion of developments, all of which are colossal. And this is only about a third of the total spend plan.

"The number and value of megaprojects around the country set to transform the country's real estate landscape, the standard of living, lifestyle offering and perhaps most importantly, showcase the Kingdom's vision for an ultra-modern future to a global audience."

According to Knight Frank, nearly \$300 billion of the total spend is dedicated to new infrastructure, including vast passenger rail networks and a brand-new airport for Riyadh (\$147 billion), which is expected to be the home base for a new national airline.

Phenomenal

Durrani continued, "The scale of infrastructure improvements in the country is phenomenal. The aggressive targets laid out by the government around attracting 100 million annual visitors to the country by 2030 means both adequate and first-class gateways need to be created. And we're already seeing the first of these trickling through. Take for instance the new cruise terminal at Jeddah Islamic Port – the first cruise routes are already in operation. And these developments are not vanity projects; they are going to have a significant impact

on economic growth."

Cruise industry

The cruise industry itself is set to create up to 50,000 jobs nationally, according to the Public Investment Fund and 1.5 million cruise visitors are expected annually by 2028.

On the real estate front, Knight Frank highlights 8 new cities that are planned, mostly on the country's western seaboard, along the Red Sea coast, where nearly \$575 billion is being spent to deliver over 1.3 million new homes, more than 3 million sqm of world-class offices and over 100,000 hotel rooms.

NEOM alone will cost an estimated \$500 billion and is being positioned as a new vision for future cities. This new metropolis will not be another smart city, but one that sees cutting edge technology being used to create one of the most innovative and sustainable places in the world.

LOGISTICS & SERVICES

Adnoc acquires 6-line boats to provide critical marine services

ABU DHABI: Adnoc Logistics & Services, the shipping and maritime logistics arm of the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc), announced the acquisition of six-line boats to provide critical marine services across petroleum ports in Abu Dhabi.

All six vessels are the Damen Stan Tug 1606 type and were contracted directly from Sharjah-based Albwardy Damen, as part of Adnoc Group's commitment to boost In-Country Value across its operations, a company press release said.

The steel-hulled, twin-screw vessels are powered by two Caterpillar engines providing nearly 16 tonnes of bollard pull. With their proven design, these line boats enable Adnoc L&S to continue providing reliable and efficient operations to the Petroleum Ports Authority in Abu Dhabi.

Captain Abdulkareem Al Masabi, CEO of Adnoc L&S, said, "The acquisition of these state-of-the-art line boats from Albwardy Damen is aligned with our strategy of growing the Adnoc L&S fleet with highly specialised marine services, including comprehensive port operations for customers in the UAE and worldwide."

The contract was awarded in July 2020 to Albwardy Damen. **-WAM**

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Indian male. B. COM with M. Com & PGDCA, tally (advanced level) & ERP, +visual basic programming with over 12 years working in Oman looking for Senior Accountant position. Contact +968 71551938

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CAN TEACH IMPORTANT VALUES

Playtime is not only fun, it can also be an opportunity to teach children important values and help them learn to give back. Here are three ideas for infusing a philanthropic mindset into fun. With a little creativity, instilling values of generosity and kindness in your children can happen anytime, even during play.

ECO-FRIENDLY PLAY

There are a number of ways to promote environmental stewardship through eco-friendly play. Try making homemade toys out of upcycled materials and explain how you are reducing your impact on the environment. Play a board game that educates children about endangered species, climate change or threats to habitats. Finally, boost kids' appreciation for nature by getting outdoors for playtime.

TOYS THAT GIVE BACK

Shop with toy brands that give back. Doing so can be a good way to teach children the importance of helping others in need. For example, Breyer, the world's leading brand of horse-inspired toys is a proud partner of Covenant House in the US, an organisation that provides food, shelter, crisis care and other support for young adults experiencing homelessness in the United States, Canada and Latin America.

Every year, Breyer features a themed limited-edition Horse of the Year, and this year, that horse is "Hope, the 2021 Freedom Series Horse of the Year." Splashed with shades of purple, turquoise, pink and gold, the markings on her coat reveal hidden images and the word "Hope." Available at specialty retailers, Amazon and BreyerHorses.com, for every Hope purchased, Breyer is donating \$1 to Covenant House to care for youth facing homelessness and give them hope to keep moving forward.

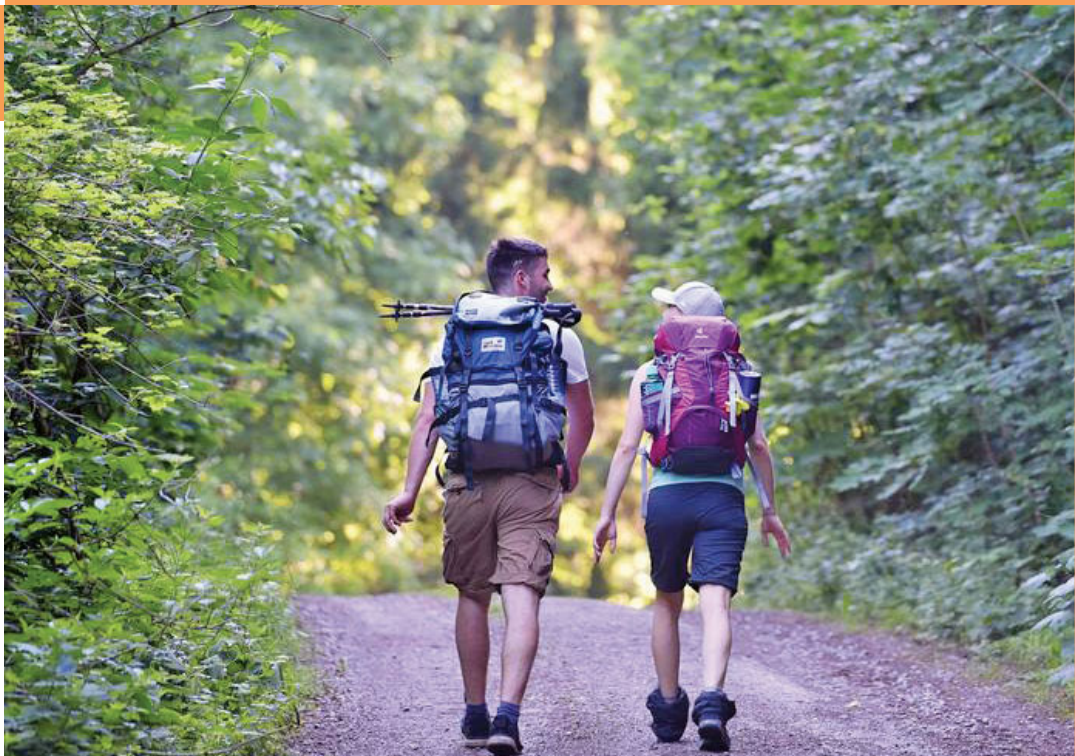
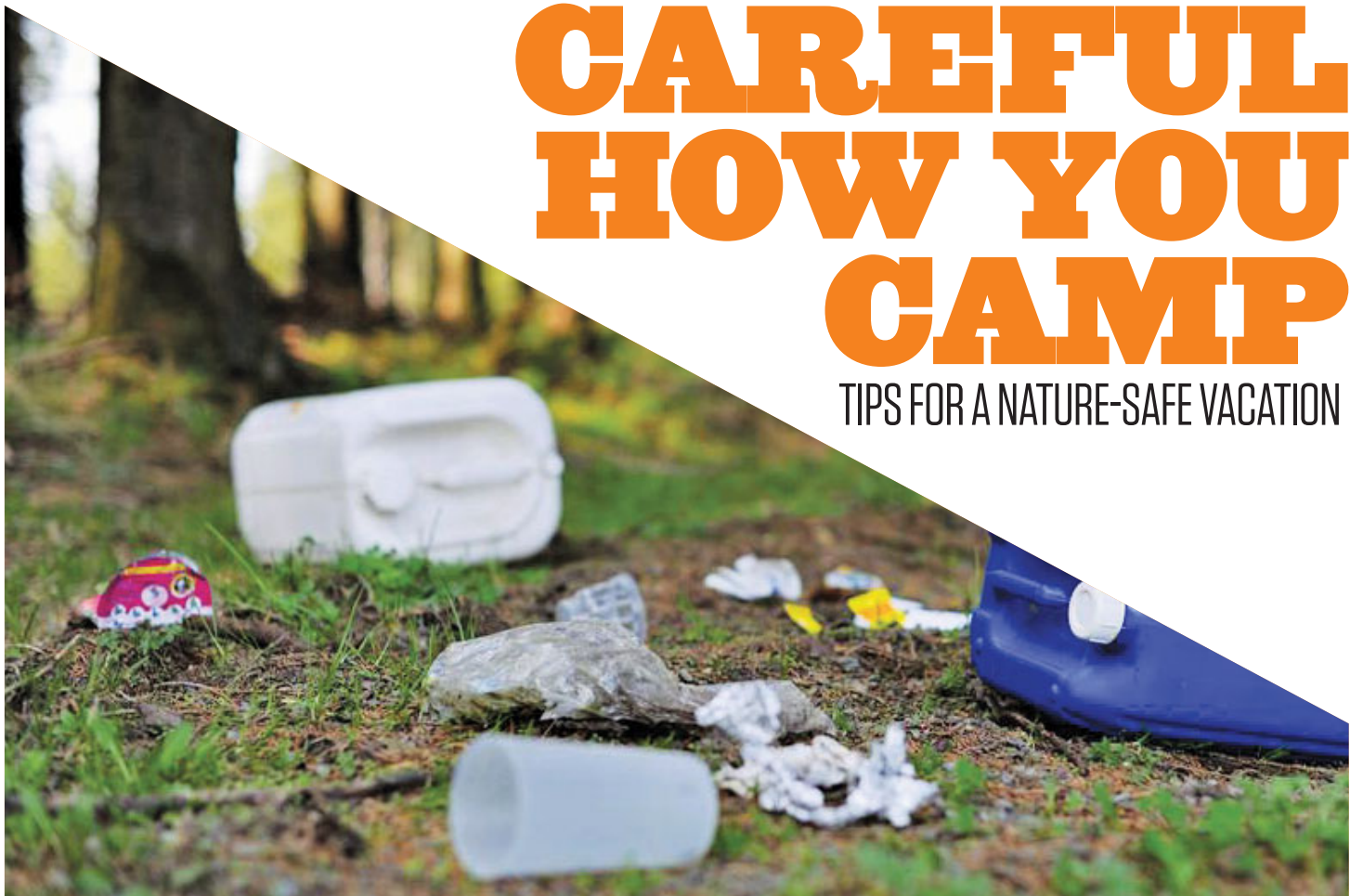
CRAFTING WITH INTENTION

Many elderly experience loneliness, particularly those who live alone or away from family. However, knowing there are people out there who are thinking of them can help combat some of those feelings of isolation. With that in mind, consider turning your child's next crafting session into a force for good. From beaded necklaces to watercolours, your child's beautiful artwork can be made into a gift that brightens someone's day. While some nursing homes are still limiting visits, you can arrange to drop off your goodies or even become a penpal with a resident.

ROUND-UP

CAREFUL HOW YOU CAMP

TIPS FOR A NATURE-SAFE VACATION



Hiking, camping or a stroll along the beach might seem like the perfect way to enjoy the natural world. But these activities can have unintended consequences.

With the pandemic, many people have been vacationing closer to home, bringing down the carbon cost of getting away. And even those covering long distances are increasingly trying to reduce their environmental impact — perhaps by taking the train instead of flying.

But sometimes what looks like an eco-friendly choice isn't as harmless as it seems. Here's some advice from the experts on how to visit the world's beauty spots without contributing to their destruction.

Be careful where you camp

In much of Europe, wild camping is forbidden, and even in places like Scandinavia and the Baltics where it is permitted, overnight stays in nature reserves or national parks are not allowed. And for good reason, says Hanspeter Mayr of Germany's Sächsische Schweiz National Park.

"Even if wild campers don't make campfires or lots of noise and take all their trash away with them, they still can be disruptive," he said. "Animals can see, smell and hear people much more easily than we imagine, so the mere presence of humans can cause some animals to avoid a habitat."

Because campers in "recreational vehicles" (RVs) mostly tend to prefer secluded spots with a great view, or near a river,

word of these prized locations gets around on digital platforms. "The impact on nature quickly becomes apparent, for instance when campers wash themselves in creeks," leaving soaps that can disrupt ecosystems, Mayr explained.

And outdoor toileting is a problem, too, according to Mayr: "When a lot of people urinate in the same spot over and over again, it has the effect of overfertilization, which significantly impairs the ecosystem." The same is true for feces, he continued. And again, it's pretty off-putting for the locals: "Because of the smell, for animals, these places are 'human territory' to be avoided."

In Germany, caravanning is booming. The German Caravanning Industry Association says nearly 63,000 motorhomes and caravans were newly registered just in the first half of 2021. But there aren't enough official sites for them. According to a study by market research institute Puls, in 2019 there were already around five times as many registered recreational vehicles as parking pitches for them in Germany.

But there are alternatives to overcrowded campsites that don't encroach on wild habitats. There are now online platforms where farmers and those with suitable gardens can offer a place to pull up, or pitch a tent, with basic facilities such as toilets and trash cans provided.

Package holidays might be a greener option

Striking out alone may feel like a good way to get close to nature, but Petra Thomas of Forum Anders Reisen, an industry group for sustainable tour operators, says independent itineraries tend to have a bigger environmental footprint than package tours. "Tourism always has the least negative impact when it is properly managed, but that's just not possible with individual tourism," Thomas said.

Tourists on organized trips save on emissions by sharing transport, she points out. And insider tips shared by independent travelers can lead to real problems when off-the-beaten-track

beauty spots in places like Asia become hot destinations overrun with backpackers.

Too many people vacationing in the same place at the same time consumes a lot of energy and resources. In some cases, local water supplies can even run dry.

But for those determined to go it alone, arriving by train and then getting around using local public transport can help. Don't hire a car, and shop for local produce to help the local economy.

And in the long run, staying in remote areas can at least avoid boosting demand for ever-more megahotels in popular coastal areas.

Another trend that's seen a boost during the pandemic is day tripping, with picturesque coasts in particular drawing crowds.

Anja Szczesinski at the WWF's Wadden Sea office says a deluge of tourists to the North Sea hasn't been much fun for local wildlife. "There are many more guests coming to the North Sea who are not familiar with the rules there and, for example, let their dogs run free without a leash," scaring off roosting birds, she explained.

Water sports enthusiasts who surf too close to breeding spots cause the same problems. "If the birds are startled too often, it costs them a lot of energy," and that can leave them too exhausted to make seasonal migrations, Szczesinski said.

Check your route and take home your trash

Exploring the wilderness on foot might seem like the ideal way to connect with nature without causing harm. But hikers do unintentional damage, too.

A survey by the German Hiking Association found that over half of hikers noticed more trash and a higher volume of traffic along hiking routes last year. And just as Insta-perfect views can draw crowds to previously peaceful environments, apps and online platforms that allow hikers to share their routes can have negative impacts on nature.

"The problem is when routes end up being shared that might



run through sensitive natural areas that explicitly should not be entered, such as breeding grounds," said WWF tourism expert Martina von Münchhausen.

She would like to see such platforms automatically filter out routes that trespass on such areas. But that's not easy.

In Germany alone, there are around 250,000 protected zones, each with its own rules and regulations, explains Neele Larondelle, who is responsible for protected area management at the National Natural Landscapes Association (the umbrella organisation for Germany's national parks, biosphere reserves and certified wilderness areas).

National parks usually have signs showing which areas are off-limits. But Larondelle says they should also be available online to help people plan their hikes. That is why her association is working with other nature conservation groups and representatives from outdoor sports and vacation spots to "digitise the rules for using nature."

"We want to create a standard user interface that each park can then populate with its own regulations," she says. The data will also be freely available to other platforms and apps.

Larondelle believes most people getting out there to explore nature also want to protect it — but they don't necessarily know how. "It's our job to make them aware," she says. -nw



ROUND-UP

Oman Shell launches new version of Intilaaqah with focus on sustainability

The new version of Shell Intilaaqah includes an intensive one-month certifiable training programme, where participants will undergo courses in the fields of sustainability, solar panel installation, health, safety and environment, as well as topics in the fields of entrepreneurship

MUSCAT: Oman Shell has announced the launch of the new version of Shell Intilaaqah, which aims to build the capabilities of entrepreneurs and Small and Me-

dium Enterprises (SMEs) in the fields of sustainability and renewable energy. The launch comes in collaboration with the SME Development Authority (Riyada).



Oman Shell designed the programme to ensure that it aligns with Shell's social investment strategy and Oman Vision 2040. The programme takes into consid-

eration the aspirations of its partners and entrepreneurs, whilst focusing on empowering entrepreneurs and Omani businesses working in the fields of sustain-

ability and renewable energy. The new version of Shell Intilaaqah includes an intensive one-month certifiable training programme, where participants will undergo courses in the fields of sustainability, solar panel installation, health, safety and environment, as well as topics in the fields of entrepreneurship, marketing, quality management, work ethics, compliance and other relevant topics. **Practical experiences** Additionally, the programme will host local and regional experts to enrich the programme with their practical experiences. The programme also includes a module that is considered a requirement to register and obtain accreditation in the installation of solar panels by the Authority for Public Services Regulation. "Through our partnership with Shell, we look to support SMEs growth and widen their horizons with necessary knowledge and skills. This programme will contribute to achieving better results by connecting entrepreneurs to experts who have paved the way in Solar energy and sustainability in Oman and beyond," said Halima bint Rashid Al-Zari, President of Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Riyada). Malakbint Ahmed Al-Shaibani, GM Corporate Relations and In-Country Value, Oman Shell said, "Since the inauguration of Shell-Intilaaqah in the Sultanate more than 25 years ago, it has positively inspired and equipped entrepreneurs and SMEs with the right skills and tools to develop their businesses and contribute to the national economy."

BEST-SELLING SUV

Head out to exciting experiences in Ford Escape



MUSCAT: The Ford Escape is a perfect SUV to make the most of when you choose to get around the city or head out to fascinating experiences in the countryside. One of Ford's best-selling SUVs for a reason, the Escape's popularity is born of its reputation for great fuel economy, versatility, and technology aimed at helping customers, and it stands proudly as an integral part of Ford's SUV line-up. The Escape offers Ford's sophisticated SYNC 3 communications and entertainment system with Apple Carplay compatibility, an 8" Touchscreen, innovative driver assistance technologies, an ergonomic and comfortable interior. And powerful and efficient engine including Ford's twin-scroll turbocharged, direct-injected 2.0-litre four-cylinder

EcoBoost engine, which produces 242 PS and 345 Nm of torque. This is paired with a 6-speed automatic SelectShift transmission. The Ford MyKey technology allows Escape owners to programme a key for younger drivers that can inhibit incoming phone calls; restrict top speed; prevent deactivation of driver assistance and safety features; reduce audio system maximum volume, and disable the audio system altogether if occupants are not using safety belts. The enhanced MyKey system offers a greater number of choices in both the speed limiter and speed minder settings. Driver-Assist technology in the Escape includes cruise control with ASLD, compass display, electric parking brake, intelligent ac-

cess with push-button start, steering wheel radio toggle, rearview camera and reverse parking sensor. The Escape's meticulously crafted interior has been refined to offer a more ergonomic, stylish and comfortable experience for occupants. It features dual-zone automatic climate control, rear AC ducts and more. A range of convenience features make Escape even more user-friendly; an electronic parking brake is effortless to operate and frees room for improved storage in a centre console that now also features a storage area capable of accommodating a variety of bottles and cups, and a new USB connection point for integrating and charging mobile devices. A door lock indicator now tells drivers at a glance whether the doors

are locked. The Escape also offers Hands-Free Liftgate that can be opened or closed using a kicking motion beneath the rear bumper. The technology helps parents to easily access the boot when returning to their vehicle with shopping, push-chairs or toddlers. Like all other Ford vehicles, safety makes a reassuring mark with features like 7 airbags, ESP that includes trailer stability function and Hill Launch Assist with Rollover mitigation, electronic emergency brake assist, power door locks, childproof rear door locks, seat belt reminder and tyre pressure monitoring system. In Oman, Ford vehicles are brought to you by Arabian Car Marketing Co.

INTERACTIVE



Nissan launches video call service with sales consultant

MUSCAT: Nissan Oman from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA) has launched a video call service that enables its customers to communicate with the brand's sales consultants from the comfort of their homes. Using the link <https://en.nissanoman.com/services/video-service.html> provided in the Nissan Oman website, prospective or current customers can book a video call after filling in details in the form provided. The details to be filled in include preferred model, city, title, first name, last name, email and mobile no. Once the details are received, Nissan Oman will arrange a convenient time for the customers to

receive a video call back. A senior official of Nissan Oman said, "Whether a customer needs a quote for a vehicle they are interested in or want details about a Nissan model, they will receive an interactive video call from one of our sales consultants at a showroom they have booked the service from. At Nissan Oman, the safety of the community and employees is always our highest priority. We have implemented several proactive actions aimed to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 and are taking measures to help ensure a safe environment. The video call service offers customers the convenience of calling from the comfort of their homes."

CUSTOMER SAFETY

'I am vaccinated': OTE Group frontline staff double as vaccine champions

MUSCAT: Visitors to any of OTE Group's countrywide network of showrooms will see evidence of the company's commitment to keeping its retail spaces safe and secure from the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the strict enforcement of preventive safety protocols mandating face coverings, physical distancing and regulated entry, all surfaces and touchpoints within the premises are thoroughly wiped down at regular intervals – a safety regimen that assures employees and customers that their health and well-being remain an uncompromising priority for the company. Recently, OTE Group has gone a step further. Customer-facing staff at the company's showrooms now dons badges that declare their vaccination status. Emblazoned with the message 'I am vaccinated', these labels communicate



the wearers' – and OTE Group's – commitment to the nation's ongoing campaign to rein in the pandemic. This move reassures customers of a safe environment while interacting with the company's frontline staff during their visits to any showroom. In addition to serving as evi-

dence of the wearer's vaccination status, the badges also confer on the employees the informal role of 'Vaccine Champions'. Proudly displayed by customer-facing staff both on indoor and outdoor assignments, these badges are a gentle reminder that getting vaccinated against the deadly pandemic is not only the right and proper thing to do, but also a national imperative. Since the outbreak of the pandemic early last year, OTE Group has been at the forefront of initiating solutions. Notable has been Hyundai, exclusively distributed by OTE Group in the Sultanate, donating 13,000 personal protective sets (PPEs) to the Ministry of Health for use by its frontline workers last August. It also distributed 10,000 3D-printed face masks to the children of customers visiting its showrooms over three months ending in July 2021.

Furthermore, OTE's Lube Division, represented by Shell and Caltex lubricant brands, distributed custom-designed kits that included face masks, sanitisers and digital thermometers throughout its dealer network. Truck drivers visiting the outlets of the brands received free hand-wash and sanitiser sets. Caltex also gave away free face masks and face shields against purchases of its world-class products. Commenting on OTE Group's Covid-19-centric CSR activities, Sudhir M., CEO – OTE Group, said, "We are proud to have leveraged our extensive network, covering the length and breadth of the country, to strengthen awareness in support of Covid-19 prevention and safety. This is an ongoing campaign involving novel initiatives, as exemplified by the 'I am vaccinated' drive."

LUCKY WINNERS



Oman Oasis picks final draw winners of Eid promotion

MUSCAT: Committed to producing high-quality bottled water, Oman Oasis has been recognised as the nation's leading water brand. Produced and distributed by Oasis Water Company, Oman Oasis conducts innumerable promotions, contests and draws that focus on rewarding its customers for their loyalty to the brand. In a recent announcement, Oman Oasis revealed the third and final round of winners of its Ramadan and Eid promotion on all 5-gallon products. After conducting two successful draws in June and July, the final draw took place on August 2 and saw a total of 88 lucky winners. The key prizes from the final draw included 8 grams 22 Carat gold coins and 4 grams 22 Carat gold coins. Bennit Joseph and Ahsan were the fortunate

winners who walked away with an 8-gram 22 Carat gold coin each while Nimmy Thomas, Abdul Ajis, P S Sebastian, Padmakar Boyapati, Navin Agarwal and Suman Kumar were the final six winners who were rewarded with a 4-gram 22-carat gold coin each. The Ramadan and Eid promotion on 5 Gallon products which was common to Oman Oasis and Oman Oasis Sifr ended on 31st July and witnessed a total of 310 winners. The prizes given away included 10 - 22 carat 8 grams gold coins, twenty - 22 carat 4 grams gold coins, two hundred - 10 Oman Oasis 5 Gallon water coupons and eighty - Lulu gift vouchers worth OMR10. Recording an overwhelming response from the market, the promotion marked yet another milestone in Oman Oasis's journey to success.

ROUND-UP

Omani students do well in ACCA course

The programme is being supported by Bank Muscat in partnership with PDO

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has announced that the Omani youth supported by the bank in the Chartered Certified Accountant course by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) has been achieving excellent results.

The bank has partnered with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to provide scholarships for a number of Bachelor's degree holders to complete this international-

ly-recognised accountancy course, which prepares entry and mid-level professionals to work in any aspect of finance or management.

The participants supported by the bank have been achieving excellent results with many of them ranking among the highest globally and the GCC region. The group performance in ACCA subjects surpassed global benchmarks validating the bank's strategy of supporting talented Omani youth. Completing the programme successfully will help Omani youth advance in their professional careers in finance, accountancy and management. The bank's support for Omani youth in completing this course is part of its efforts to enhance the skills and qualifications of national human capital.

The bank was also successfully re-accredited by the UK-based Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) as an ACCA Approved Employer ear-

lier in 2021. Bank Muscat has been recognised by ACCA from 2007 onwards and has supported many employees in gaining ACCA certification and excel in their roles at the bank.

This accreditation is given to formally recognised partners of ACCA, and rewards organisations that ensure that the highest standards are met in providing a working environment that supports ACCA members and trainees.

Speaking about the achievements of the bank in developing Oman talent, Said Salim Al Aufi, Group Deputy General Manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat, said, "Bank Muscat is delighted with the excellent results achieved by the students. The bank continues to focus on nurturing and supporting Omani talent to meet the ambitious growth plans of the bank and also help Omani youth develop their skills and qualifications. The bank earmarks substantial fund-

ing every year for the training and development of employees across all job functions and roles. This approach is part of a strategy put in place by the bank's Executive Management to enhance the role of Omani cadre across all the different lines of business and activities of the bank."

Bank Muscat is always keen to give top priority to the development of its human resources and makes continuous investments in this regard. Opportunities are available for Bank Muscat staff to pursue part-time diploma/Bachelors programmes at local colleges and universities as well as post-graduate programmes at leading international business schools. With over 3,800 employees and an overall Omanisation ratio of about 95 per cent, it is a matter of great pride for Bank Muscat that most of its senior and middle management have been promoted from within the bank's employees.



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The bank continues to focus on nurturing and supporting Omani talent to meet the ambitious growth plans of the bank

Said Salim Al Aufi
Group Deputy General Manager - Human Resources, Bank Muscat

CSR INITIATIVE



National Finance collaborates with Dar Al Atta'a to support community welfare

MUSCAT: With a solid commitment towards helping improve the quality of life of those in need within our community, National Finance has once again partnered with Dar Al Atta'a under 'Imtidad', an independent wing for the company's CSR and sustainable initiatives.

Dedicated to creating positive, long-term and sustainable impacts in the local community, National Finance has been a key contributor to Dar Al Atta'a's charity programmes, particularly for family welfare, ever since 2018. Under the most recent partnership, National Finance joins hands with Dar Al Atta'a to support families with low incomes through sustainable initiatives that focus on helping families with limited income.

"We believe that by maintaining a strong culture of sustainability, giving and community service, we will pave the path for a brighter future. Our partnerships with organisations like Dar Al Atta'a, enable us to be a part of something bigger, expand our reach and extend the support to those that need it the most," said Ali Al Mani, Acting CEO at National Finance.

Commenting about the part-

nership, Dar Al Atta'a Chairperson, The Honorable Maryam Al Zadjali said, "National Finance has always shown its unconditional support towards the community and we are delighted to enhance our partnership further this year. We are certain that it will go a long way to positively change the lives of so many beneficiaries. We greatly value the support of companies like National Finance who never hesitate to seize every opportunity to contribute to the growth, prosperity and well-being of the people of the nation."

National Finance, established in 1987, has built a reputation as the market leader trusted by thousands of customers across the Sultanate. National Finance offers a wide range of products targeting both individual customers and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through its 20 branches across the Sultanate. Recognising its efforts, the company has won many accolades, the latest of these being the 'Most Innovative Retail Finance - Automobile - Oman 2021' Award by International Finance Awards, and the 'Best SME Finance Solution 2021' award by Capital Finance International (CFI.co).

ONLINE EVENT

Ferrari Portofino M: Evolution of Prancing Horse 2+ GT Spider unveiled

MARANELLO: The Ferrari Portofino M, the evolution of the Prancing Horse's 2+ GT spider, the Ferrari Portofino, was unveiled.

In a move unprecedented in the Maranello marque's 70-year-plus history, the new car's premiere took place entirely online.

The build-up to the unveiling included the sending out of a series of newsletters to clients over recent weeks at the end of which they were given access to a platform containing exclusive videos illustrating the concept behind the car, its restyling and main technical contents.

The Portofino M is the first Ferrari to be presented in the wake of the company's temporary closure due to the Covid-19 crisis, making it the symbol of a voyage of rediscovery. It is the (re)starting point for Prancing Horse's pursuit of innovation whilst fully respecting its heritage, passion and constant search for perfection. All of these



values are reflected in the new Portofino M. In fact, the 'M' in its moniker stands for 'Modificata', which in Ferrari nomenclature refers to cars that have undergone an evolution that has significantly boosted their performance.

There is no shortage of technical innovation in the stunning new evolution of the Ferrari Portofino, the most notable being its re-

signed powertrain, a brand-new eight-speed gearbox and the five-position Manettino that includes a Race mode, an absolute first for a Maranello GT spider. As a consequence of these and many other new features, the Portofino M guarantees an unprecedented combination of authentic GT performance, driving pleasure, agility and exceptional versatility in eve-

ryday driving contexts.

This latest design and engineering masterpiece from the Prancing Horse is the perfect evolution of the Ferrari Portofino. Sportier in character than its predecessor, it also delivers superior handling whilst not only maintaining but enhancing onboard comfort, courtesy of specific new optional features, such as ADAS, and ventilated and heated seats. The Ferrari Portofino M thus retains the Ferrari Portofino's twin soul and is the only car on the market that can rightfully be described as an authentic coupé with its top closed and a genuine spider when it is open. This is thanks, of course, to the Retractable Hard Top (RHT), the signature feature of all the Prancing Horse's convertibles.

The Portofino M's compact dimensions also make it ideal for all occasions. Its unparalleled versatility and onboard comfort turn every trip into a voyage of (re)discovery.

VERSATILE PICKUP

Nissan Navara: 80 years of powerful drive and versatile movement on all road conditions

MUSCAT: With its go anywhere capabilities and built-in technology, the Nissan Navara is built on over 80 years of Nissan pickup heritage and reliability. A versatile pickup perfect for a tough week at work followed by an adventurous weekend outdoors, Nissan Navara is an outstanding performer both on and off the road.

A senior official of Nissan Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles (SBA), said, "The multi-award-winning Navara has set a new benchmark in the pickup sector, blending the best of Nissan's crossover leadership with over 80 years experience in designing and manufacturing robust and ingeniously engineered pickups. Nissan Navara is a combination of the powerful, square design of a traditional pickup and sophisticated and modern details, meeting all customer demand, off-road to urban mobility."

A dependable partner for work or travel, the Nissan Navara comes with many best-in-class technologies, including an array of Nissan Intelligent Mobility features and safety systems, making it among the most advanced yet. Nissan has a long history of build-



ing strong, dependable pickups. With each new model, the boundaries of innovation have been pushed, providing drivers with everything they need to get the job done. Nissan Navara pickup helps get the job done."

Merging a tough, working pedigree, with premium ride comfort, smart technologies and modern styling, Nissan Navara pickup pushes the boundaries of innovation further. Adding to this, Nissan Navara pickup delivers an enhanced level of safety, comfort and driving pleasure, while continuing to bring durability, reliability, and versatility.

Right amount of power

The Nissan Navara is powered by the latest generation of Nissan engines and is designed to give the right amount of power when and where you need it most. The legendary Nissan Navara is available with two transmission options with both 2-wheel drive and 4-wheel drive options. The 2.5 L engine used in the Navara has a displacement of 2488 cc producing up to 168hp/244nm torque.

Pickup one can trust

Navara also comes with a diesel engine option.

This has been developed for

excellent fuel efficiency and emissions ratings, yet with impressive power output and acceleration. Diesel engine option is available with YD25 engine, a 2.5L unit producing 161hp/403nm torque. This variant comes with PDO specifications for use in desert operations.

Being a pickup one can trust right down to its core, Nissan Navara's full-length fully boxed ladder frame provides solidity and strength one can rely on. With its steel double-wishbone front suspension and rigid leaf suspension, drivers and owners are sure to experience a smooth and comfortable ride on and off the road.

Enclosed on all four sides, the fully boxed ladder frame is reinforced in strategic areas with high-tensile strength steel for improved structural rigidity.

Stronger than conventional steel, it provides increased torsional stiffness, offering a marked improvement over traditional steel C-section frames.

All of which ensures it performs impressively in the toughest driving conditions. In addition, all cross members are welded, not riveted, which helps resist flexing and increases durability.

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