

New prototype vehicle safety system

Students from National College of Automotive Technology have invented a prototype vehicle safety system comprising an air pressure built-in socket enabled to control tyre and engine operation when a safety issue arises. A student from the four-member team, Mohammed bin Habib al Ajmi, said that an electronic simulator is fitted underneath the vehicle to prevent its collision in certain circumstances. **DETAILS ON P5**



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VERSTAPPEN AIMS TO HIT BACK WITH HOME WIN FOR RED BULL



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REGULATOR OBLIGES POWER DISTRIBUTORS TO PAY COMPENSATION FOR POOR SERVICE



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OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN TO BOOST WELL-BEING



MUSCAT

HEAVY RAINS FOR THREE MORE DAYS

The impact of the low pressure area will continue to affect the weather situation in the Sultanate of Oman. Due to this heavy thunderstorms are likely on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, as some areas may experience heavy rains in the range of 20 to 80 mm, the Civil Aviation Authority said, and called upon everyone to take precautions during thunderstorms, not to cross wadis, avoid low-lying places and not go to the sea. — ONA

OMAN BEGINS SUBSIDISING WHEAT IMPORTS

The government has begun subsidising wheat imports to offset the steep rise in international wheat prices following the outbreak of hostilities between Ukraine and Russia in February this year. Majority state-owned Oman Flour Mills, one of the biggest importers of wheat in the country, said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Wednesday that it has begun receiving a subsidy on its wheat imports from the government. “We would like to disclose that Oman Flour Mills Company (SAOG) has received a letter from the government for the subsidy of wheat effective from May 1, 2022. As global wheat prices have seen a sharp increase, the government is keen to stabilise the prices of flour in the local market”, the publicly traded company stated. **DETAILS ON P13**



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HM SENDS MESSAGE TO JORDAN KING



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a written message to King Abdallah II of Jordan, dealing with the bilateral relations between the two countries and means of enhancing them. The written message was handed over by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, when he was received at Al Husseiniya Palace on Wednesday by Prince Faisal bin Al Hussein, Deputy to the King. The meeting was attended by Ayman al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, and Shaikh Hilal bin Marhoon al Maamari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Kingdom of Jordan. — ONA

No plans for snap election: Johnson

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson gave no sign that he was planning on resigning during a grilling by Commons members of parliament (MPs), as his leadership crisis continues to escalate.

In a dramatic encounter with the Commons Liaison Committee, which came as Johnson faces the most serious crisis of his leadership, he repeatedly denied that he was planning to call a snap election to firm up his ailing premiership. He also denied that he was going anywhere, stressing the need to tackle rising inflation and the crisis in Ukraine.

In one of the most eye-catching encounters, Labour MP Darren Jones told the prime minister that

senior Cabinet ministers were waiting at Downing Street to tell him to go.

Johnson was resolute that he saw no reason to go, repeatedly telling MPs that he was “not going to get into a running commentary on political events.”

“On the contrary, what we need is a stable government, loving each other as Conservatives, getting on with our priorities.”

Meanwhile, a new confidence vote in Johnson will not be brought by his lawmakers until at least next week, after the Conservative Party committee governing the rules agreed to elect a new executive before considering allowing one.

The so-called 1922 Committee decided on Wednesday it would hold an election to its executive on Monday, before deciding whether to change the rules to bring forward a confidence vote in Johnson, three Conservative lawmakers said. That new executive of the committee, which oversees any confidence vote in a Conservative Party leader, will then decide whether to change the rules to bring forward such a vote. **SEE ALSO P7**



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson

Overseas Haj pilgrims rejoice after 2-year Covid absence

MECCA: Of the hundreds of thousands of Muslims arriving in Mecca this week for the annual Haj pilgrimage, perhaps none had a more arduous journey than Adam Mohammed, a 53-year-old electrical engineer from the United Kingdom.

Mohammed, who is of Iraqi-Kurdish origin, decided last year to travel on foot to Saudi Arabia, a journey of more than 7,000 km that took him through nine countries before he crossed over from Jordan into the northwestern Saudi town of Tabuk.

The trip was made all the more dramatic by the fact that when he started his trek 11 months ago, pushing a cart in front of him that contained his food and other supplies, he had no idea whether he would be able to access the holy mosques in Mecca and Medina.

Now safely in Mecca, some 15 kg lighter than when he started,

Mohammed has no regrets.

“I cried when I first arrived. It’s an unbelievable feeling,” he said.

“My trip was exhausting. I stopped in many places for rest. But I was focused on one thing: I am 53 years old, so what if I spare 11 months on the road to reach the house of God? It’s doable.”

Mohammed said Saudi authorities granted him and his wife and two daughters a permit to participate in the Haj. — AFP



Worshippers pray around the Kaaba at the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca. — AFP



Sayyid Badr holds talks with Jordan Deputy PM

AMMAN: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met here on Wednesday with Ayman al Safadi, Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

The two sides reviewed the existing relations and cooperation between Oman and Jordan in various areas, particularly the economic, cultural and investment fields. They also reiterated the keenness

of the two countries' leaderships in boosting cooperation to serve the interests of the people of both countries.

The two sides also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Shaikh Hilal bin Marhoon al Ma'amari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

— ONA

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, has issued a ministerial decision declaring the formation of the Omani Women Association in the Wilayat of Muttrah, bringing the total number of Omani women's associations in the Sultanate of Oman to 60 and 6 branches in various provinces.

The association in Muttrah aims to develop and activate the role of women in contributing towards nation building and community development, raise the position of women and empower them in building society, increase awareness about health and social services and develop women's leadership skills.

In general, these associations aim to raise the status of Omani women, integrate them into various developmental fields and work to expand the base



of women's voluntary work numerically and geographically. Omani women took the lead in establishing the first civil society in the Sultanate of Oman, specifically in Muscat in 1971 as the first women's association in the country.

Under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Social Development, women's associations play many

roles in the field of women's empowerment at the wilayat level; that is, empowering women and enabling them in economic, cultural and professional aspects. This is in addition to providing various services to help them contribute to comprehensive development.

The associations are also meant for raising the level of

women's awareness about their role and rights and enhancing their participation in all fields to ensure their familial and social stability. The associations also aim to prepare and implement plans and programmes to train and rehabilitate women with disabilities and provide them with adequate knowledge, skills, experiences and capabilities that facilitate the process of their integration into society.

The Ministry of Social Development seeks to enable Omani women's associations to access self-financing by urging their boards of directors to invest in the associations' sites and facilities. That is done by searching for financiers and investors to set up investment projects that supplement the association's budget to cover its operational costs, programmes and development projects targeting various segments of society.

Oman and Brunei Darussalam explore trade, investment avenues

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: The Sultanate of Oman and Brunei Darussalam explored business and investment opportunities, available incentives and means of promoting economic and business relations between the two countries.

This came during an event organised by the Sultanate of Oman Embassy in Brunei Darussalam in conjunction with the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBM).

The several-day event, which coincides with the 3rd meeting of the joint Oman-Brunei Committee, includes seminars on investment and education. A heritage and tourism exhibition is also held on the sidelines of the event.

The event aims to broaden the vistas of joint cooperation and exchange of expertise in economic, cultural and tourism



fields.

This event comes within the framework of efforts exerted by

the Sultanate of Oman Embassy in Brunei Darussalam to intensify communication between public and private establishments of the two countries.

The event's opening ceremony

was held under the auspices of Dato Seri Setia Dr Awang Haji Mohd Amin Liew Abdullah, Brunei's Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister of Finance and Economy.

The minister affirmed that the event reflects the advancement of relations between the two countries which share many similar cultural values.

He added that the event highlights the diverse advantages offered by the two countries to encourage investments.

On his turn, Shaikh Ahmed bin Hashel al Maskari, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Brunei Darussalam, said that this event aims to promote cooperation in investment, higher education and tourism fields within the framework of economic diplomacy and general diplomacy in a bid to enhance relations and

achieve the aspirations of the two countries' peoples.

Meanwhile, the event highlights various investments of Oman-Brunei Investment Company, which has a total capital of \$200 million in diverse sectors, including aviation, healthcare, tourism, hospitality, industry, communications and education.

The opening ceremony was attended by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry, Dr Hajah May Fa'ezah Binti Haji Ahmad Ariffin, Brunei's Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Economy for Economy, heads of the Diplomatic Missions to Brunei Darussalam and some businessmen, academics and media personalities.

— ONA

41 pacts worth RO 6m signed for Al Buraimi projects

AL BURAIMI: Forty-one agreements for services and development projects in Al Buraimi Governorate at a cost of more than RO 6 million were signed on Wednesday.

The agreements, which were signed by Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, include designing and paving 60 km of internal roads in the wilayats of Al Buraimi, Mahdha and Al Sinaina, restoration of roads affected by heavy rains and lighting of the Hafeet-Al Sinaina road.

The agreements also involved a



consultative study for downtown project between Al Khandaq and Al Hilla castles, an architectural design and supervision of an integrated recreational project in the Wilayat of Al Buraimi.

The two projects are among the most important projects in terms of generating economic value-added for the governorate during the upcoming period. This is in addition to an agreement for enhancing digital transformation as well as a number of contracts allotted to small and medium enterprises.

— ONA

LABOUR MINISTRY CONDUCTS JOB TESTS IN DHOFAR



SALALAH: The Ministry of Labour has organised tests at the Technical College to fill job vacancies in government establishments in the Governorate of Dhofar. During the two-day tests, the applicants will compete to occupy 21 jobs under temporary contracts. The vacancies are available in government units of the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, and the Ministry of Social Development (in Dhofar). The tests are conducted under the Youth Employment Initiative 'Sahim', which seeks to consolidate the principle of decentralisation for the development of Omani governorates.

— ONA

SALE

SHOEMAKERS SINCE 1825

Al Khamis Plaza, Qurum - Tel. 24560992 | Muscat Grand Mall - Tel. 24399930 | Al Hail South - Tel. 24558148
Al Khamis Shoes Sohar - Tel. 26841178 | Al Khamis Shoes Al Hail - Tel. 24543045 93894474



BOOM TIME FOR TOURISM

SAMUEL KUTTY

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Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman is expected to boom during the coming days largely driven by arrivals from different countries thanks to the Eid al Adha holidays for both public and private sectors in the region.

The hospitality industry anticipates enhanced activities during the upcoming holidays which will, this time, commence on Friday, July 8 in most countries in the region.

The Omran Group, the premier development company in the country, has already launched its ‘WithinOman’ tourism promotion campaign with a wide array of special packages for all citizens and residents to enjoy leisure experiences across its hotels and resorts.

“This year’s edition is on inspiring individuals, families and groups of friends to enjoy and discover new places and things to do, as well as taking part in leisure and adventure activities at 21 hotels and resorts throughout Oman”, reveals a statement from the state-owned company.

Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the ministry hosts a number of tourism events throughout the year to woo visitors.

Many hotels in Oman had special deals for staycation guests, with most of the hotels recording optimum occupancy during these times. Hotels are also now offering ‘Daycation’ package for those who wish to spend the day in a hotel,



returning home by night.

Salalah, Jabal Akhdhar and Jabal Shams are the most popular

getaways and increasingly sought for short breaks during holidays like Eids to escape the summer



heat around this time of year in their respective countries.

“With so many glamorous

hotels in these cooler places, staycations have become more of a monthly road trip in recent times.

Citizens, residents and visitors from the region get affordable staycations with facilities to enjoy the cool weather”, said Kevin Goerge, an executive with a leading hotel chain in Salalah.

Bookings in most hotels during the upcoming holidays reached almost full thanks to holidays falling almost similarly except for Kuwait and Qatar.

Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development said that the Eid al Adha holidays for the two sectors will last for four days starting from the day of standing in Arafat on 9th of Dhul Hijjah, corresponding to July 8, until the end of 12 Dhul Hijjah, corresponding to July 11.

In the UAE, there will be a four-day holiday from Friday, July 8 and will end on Monday, July 11 and work will resume on Tuesday, July 12.

In the Sultanate of Oman, there will be five-day holiday till July 12. Official working hours will resume on Wednesday, July 13.

In Bahrain, the Kingdom’s ministries and public institutions will be closed on the day of Arafah and on Eid al Adha, corresponding to July 8 to 11 respectively.

The holidays in Qatar will start from Sunday, July 10, and continue until Thursday, July 14 and since Friday and Saturday are weekend days, this means that the Eid holiday will be 10 days. These are in addition to the weekend holidays.

Kuwait will suspend work in all ministries, government agencies, public authorities and institutions, from Sunday, July 10, until Thursday, July 14, on the occasion of Eid al Adha, and work will resume on July 17.

Taqah Castle restoration project gets under way

TAQAH: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has embarked on the maintenance of Taqah Castle, a major landmark in Dhofar Governorate.

The project, expected to be completed in the first quarter of next year, centres on renovating the walls, roofs and floors around the building.

Following the completion of the renovation project, a tender will be floated for operating the castle. Engineer Amjad bin Ahmed al

Mukhaladi, Director, Department of Maintenance and Restoration, said that the work on the project is in full swing and the restoration of the landmark will be completed in

the best possible manner.

In comments to ONA, the officials affirmed that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism attaches great importance to the

restoration and maintenance of the heritage landmarks as a number of contracts have recently been signed for similar projects in different governorates. — ONA





When words wound the heart



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What could be a critical period in one's life? The teenage years, because so many changes are happening from body to hormones. This is also the time when emotions are high. Complicating things further are aspects such as bullying because this is the time when a teenager is also trying to shape his/her identity.

Identity is a search that goes on for a while derived from role models and peers. But being a victim of bullying can hinder the process as it affects the self esteem.

Bullying on campus, whether school or college, may at times vary in intensity. While the victim might laugh with others, what he/she goes through in mind might never be known to the outer world.

In school a young boy was not too tall and wore spectacles. This was enough for him to be picked on. He wanted to collect his Transfer Certificate and leave to another school. He confided in his father and this is the advice he received – "We are not complete. There is something lacking in everyone. We are all made differently. That makes each person unique. He remained in the school for the rest of the years. In time he developed many talents and one of them is acting. He continues his passion through acting and participating in theatre productions in his university.

The Observer spoke to three college students on their experience and perspective.

"I liked observing behaviours of my schoolmates and college

mates. There were of course traces of bullying in some people. A lot of time it was about body shaming especially if someone was overweight or if they were thin. The other aspect was if they felt any of the students were different any way then there was a way the person would be avoided," said Lama Sulaiman.

As for Mazeed bin Mustahil Aka'ak, there were experiences of bullying and at times rough but in college it is different. "In college the students are matured and in my situation I never experienced any kind of bullying. It is a very different environment. People have become adults and they do not have same tendencies as children," he said.

Qusai al Abri looks at the situation of bullying quite philosophically, "I have faced bullying in life and not just I, but students and I have seen it in college too. I often wonder, 'why?' Maybe they think it as a joke, but we do not know what thoughts the victims are going through."

Lama feels the bully gets some sort of sense of validation but she always noticed changes in the

BULLYING ON CAMPUS, WHETHER SCHOOL OR COLLEGE, MAY AT TIMES VARY IN INTENSITY. WHILE THE VICTIM MIGHT LAUGH WITH OTHERS, WHAT HE/SHE GOES THROUGH IN MIND MIGHT NEVER BE KNOWN TO THE OUTER WORLD

person who was being bullied. "Their voice, the tone changed and they would just leave the room. I often ask the person why they make such comments and their usual reply he/she knows it is just a joke and we are just trying to be funny. People around the individuals laugh too, and at times it is just to move

out of the awkward situation."

Weight is something that can be changed because one could lose weight but what if you were born with some challenges?

"My friend had a certain problem on his face that affected his facial expression. The others found it a reason to laugh and pass comments. I often asked them why because he did not ask for this situation. He was born with it. But they did not accept it and said they laughed with us. My question is he laughed with us, but what about when he is alone?"

Mazeed has seen bullying of a different kind and that at times is on people's backgrounds, "And this is in school not in college. If your parents are from different nationalities or if you were weak in language then you might be exposed to some comments."

How do young people cope with the problem of being bullied? Do they prefer to go to a counsellor or would they use a hotline?

"Move on, is what I would say? Why go to these places? Don't think too much about it," said Qusai.

Mazeed said victims might be

shy to talk about it and would not want to discuss it thinking they would be considered as a weak person. "If you are bullied and you tell someone about it, if the bully finds about it things could get worse. I think lot of times children want to act as if things are okay. They do not want to make a situation out of it," he pointed out.

Lama's opinion is different, "I just want to say that to talk about it is not a sign of weakness at all. If you have faced any time of bullying then one must tell them it is wrong otherwise this act will be continuing. Maybe one individual can handle it but someone else may not be able to take care of the situation. So I think we need an open conversation so that people know they have options such as therapies and they have to know it is okay to ask for help. Talking about your feelings is not wrong and what is wrong is when you avoid talking about your feelings because all of it could accumulate and things could get worse."

She gave the example of children who developed eating disorder because they were body shamed.

Now all the three agree that each person can contribute to creating an environment that is encouraging and supporting to each other.

"I think it is important to have friends who support them and they could be the ones they could speak to. A hotline would be very beneficial because they could get advice. It is important that we discuss this with our friends and family," Mazeed pointed out.

No one should be left alone to suffer silently.



Telecom services restored in Musandam

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JULY 6

The telecommunication services, hindered by technical problems during the past few days, have been restored in the Musandam Governorate. The communication traffic had gone haywire after one of the marine fiber optic cables snapped, as reported by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority.

The authority had earlier explained that the breakdown

affected the fixed and mobile communications and the Internet, to some extent, in the governorate. The Internet services of Omantel and Ooredoo subscribers were affected as a result of the damage to the submarine cable. The authority acted soon after the problem was reported and coordinated with the companies concerned to restore the telecommunication traffic through the network operation centres.

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, which is headed by Eng Omar bin Hamdan



al Ismaili, CEO, said the repair work on the submarine cable has been completed and that the communication services will be

made available gradually.

The maintenance teams had the task of repairing the cable after locating the fault, which was time consuming. In addition to that, the companies concerned had to provide alternative telecommunication services to some priority sectors such as health and banking.

Submarine cables are crucial in the transmission and exchange of digital data around the world, as 80 per cent of all communications and data transmission take place

through these cables, due to the speed of data flow through them. They also have a high degree of security and confidentiality, besides high accuracy in transmitting signals and low cost compared to satellites and other means.

The authority appreciated the understanding and cooperation of the people of the governorate with the authorities, and praised the continuous efforts made by the maintenance teams to restore Internet services.

Scientific Insights highlights impact of research on tourism

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has published the 35th issue of the *Scientific Insights* magazine, which explores a number of different reports and articles in the fields of science and innovation.

The cover story of this issue of *Scientific Insights* dived into the impact of research and innovation on the tourism sector. It explores the important roles of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN Group), the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and academic institutions in enhancing the tourism sector in Oman, attracting tourists and advancing tourism services and products which contributes to allowing more people to discover the rich culture and heritage of Oman as well as the beautiful Omani landscapes.

The 35th issue also examined the development of an augmented wind turbine system using 3D printing technology, the shallow



water levels at Sultan Qaboos University, the creation of a natural product that extends the shelf-life of fruits and vegetables, the relationship between scientific research and academic accreditation systems and rankings, and many more interesting articles.

Scientific Insights is a scientific journal published every three months by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in both Arabic and English and the magazine can be accessed online through the ministry's official social media channels.

— ONA

■ SAF CHIEF INSPECTS AL HAZM DRILL



MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), accompanied by a number of army commanders and senior officers on Wednesday inspected the aerial exercise Al Hazm being executed by the affiliates of the 35th course at the National Defence College (NDC). They were briefed about the activities of the exercise which is carried out within the framework of the general plan of the course and as the culmination of a series of exercises implemented by the students of the Command and Staff College (CSC).

KO donates Eid gifts to Social Care House

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

Ahead of Eid al Adha, a Knowledge Oman team has visited the Social Care House in Rustaq to donate gifts and spend quality time with the elderly. This is in line with knowledge-sharing platform's giving-back to society programme initiated in 2018 to bring joy and happiness to the families in need.

"Apart from arranging and conducting seminars, delivering workshops and initiating projects that we periodically do for society, it is also our responsibility to give back to the community

by visiting, donating, sharing gifts and spreading joy to the various associations that need care in Oman. Such activity helps Knowledge Oman members learn about the values and impact of giving as an individual and a professional as well," said Balqees al Hassani, Knowledge Oman President.

The initiative was organised to support the elderly in terms of knowing their needs in greater detail and also establish a sense of belonging amongst them, besides sharing the happiness and bringing back the positive memories and ensuring their general well-being.

The team members of



Knowledge Oman spent quality time with the elderly with an agenda that included having lunch, decorating the Care House and finally a session of gifting tokens of appreciation. Clothes, food, gifts, and other Eid al Adha items were donated by Knowledge Oman to the Social Care House.

"Knowledge Oman is committed to giving back to the community through conducting corporate social responsibility initiatives with the focus on the betterment of society as a whole, and the betterment of members as individuals involved in the project," said Tariq al Barwani, Knowledge Oman founder.

OQ signs agreement to sponsor Innovation Platform initiative

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JULY 6

An agreement was signed on Wednesday by OQ group with the 'Youth Vision' to sponsor the OQ Innovation Platform initiative as a part of the group's efforts to promote Omani youth initiatives and innovation in scientific fields which aims to achieve sustainability.

The initiative aims to establish an innovative programme that contains educational materials for the Omani youth which will enable national competencies to obtain the required skills, technical know-how and leadership which is required to be successful in the modern technology market.

On behalf of OQ, the agreement was signed by Mariam al Shaibaniyah, VP of HR, Technology & Work Culture at OQ and Mariam al Aamriyah, the CEO of Youth Vision. Commenting on the occasion,



Mariam al Shaibaniyah said, "The OQ Innovation Platform falls under the Social Investment Programme and is based on support and growth within the fields of education, health and economic well-being."

She noted that innovation and inventions is a sector that has the attention of the Government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and OQ translates this interest with various authorities and companies to employ

innovation in their work fields. Bearing this in mind, OQ intends to involve the Omani youth via Youth Vision within these projects to contribute towards enhancing the added value of these projects and expand the innovation to employ it in the needed areas within the nation.

She also added that through this agreement, OQ seeks to sponsor programmes that contribute to the development of society and youth, believing in the importance of supporting these quality initiatives that contribute to further motivate the Omani youth. She emphasised that this initiative would open wider horizons for Omanis by developing their capabilities.

Mariam al Aamriyah expressed gratitude for OQ's support for the OQ Youth Innovation Platform and how it is important to unleash the scientific energies of youth within the innovation arenas.

Students invent new vehicle safety system



MUSCAT: Students from National College of Automotive Technology have invented a prototype vehicle safety system comprising an air pressure built-in socket enabled to control tyre and engine operation when a safety issue arises.

A student from the 4-member team, Mohammed bin Habib al Ajmi, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that an electronic simulator is fitted underneath the vehicle to prevent its collision in certain circumstances.

Al Ajmi added that another advantage of the model is the fact that its safety system automatically stops the engine running, once the fuel tank is opened at a filling station, to avoid a fire incident.

Al Ajmi pointed out that the project gains the support of the College and that the team hopes to develop an unmanned hi-tech local car that operates with remote sensors. — ONA



Iran seeks lasting N-deal after talks with Qatar

DUBAI: Iran said on Wednesday it sought a strong and lasting nuclear agreement with world powers following talks with Qatar on easing stalled efforts to revive a 2015 nuclear pact.

Qatari Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani visited Tehran a week after EU-mediated indirect US-Iran talks in Doha failed to break a deadlock hindering efforts to resurrect the nuclear agreement.

“We are determined to seek a good, strong and lasting accord and despite American claims... we have not raised any demands outside of the nuclear deal”, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian told a joint news conference with Shaikh Mohammed in Tehran.

Since last week, Iran has questioned US resolve to save the pact while Washington has said Tehran added new demands at the Doha talks.

Iran’s Amirabdollahian, however, said on Tuesday that Washington “must decide if it wants a deal or insists on sticking to its unilateral demands”.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran curbed its uranium enrichment work, a potential pathway to nuclear weapons, in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. Iran says it seeks only civilian atomic energy.

But former US president Donald Trump pulled the United

“
We are determined to seek a good, strong and lasting accord... we have not raised any demands outside of the nuclear deal

HOSSEIN
AMIRABDOLLAHIAN
Iranian Foreign Minister

States out of the pact in 2018 and reimposed tough economic sanctions, prompting Tehran to breach many of the deal’s nuclear limitations.

After almost a year of indirect negotiations in Vienna, the broad outline of a revived deal was agreed. But then talks broke down in March, largely over Tehran’s demand that Washington remove its Revolutionary Guards from a US terrorism list. The United States refused, arguing this was outside the scope of reviving the agreement. Other remaining obstacles to an agreement, Iranian and Western diplomats had said, include providing assurances that Washington will not quit the pact again and the International Atomic Energy Agency dropping its claims about Tehran’s nuclear work.



Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian meets with Qatar’s Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim al Thani (R) in Tehran. — AFP

“The American side should guarantee that Iran will fully benefit from a 2015 revived deal. So far, the American side has not been able to give such assurances”, Amirabdollahian said.

PRISONER SWAP: Meanwhile, Belgian lawmakers gave initial clearance on Wednesday to a prisoner exchange treaty with Iran that could lead to

the release of an Iranian diplomat convicted of planning to bomb a rally of an exiled opposition group.

The foreign relations committee of Belgium’s Lower House debated the treaty for more than six hours over two days before finally approving it.

The measure still needs to be put before the full 150-member Lower House of Parliament, most likely in the next two weeks, but the chamber normally follows votes of its committees, given they have similar party compositions.

The prisoner exchange might secure the release of a Belgian aid worker who was detained in Iran in February and could help Swedish-Iranian academic Ahmadreza Djalali, who has

taught in Belgium and been sentenced to death in Iran.

Iran has called for the release of Assadollah Assadi, sentenced to 20 years in prison in Belgium in 2021 over a foiled 2018 bomb plot. His was the first trial of an Iranian official for suspected terrorism in Europe since Iran’s 1979 revolution. — Reuters

Sudan anti-coup protests reject army offer

KHARTOUM: Sudanese anti-coup protesters manned barricades on the streets of the capital on Wednesday, saying they did not believe promises by the army chief he would make way for a civilian government.

A day after Sudan’s main civilian bloc rejected a proposal by the country’s coup leader Abdel Fattah al Burhan as a “giant ruse” and urged more protests, crowds of demonstrators held firm in rallies in both Khartoum and its suburbs.

The transitional government uprooted by Burhan last year had been painstakingly forged between the military and civilian factions in 2019, following mass protests that prompted the army to oust longtime ruler Omar al Bashir.

He also said that the ruling Sovereign Council would be disbanded and, on Wednesday in an apparent move to carry out the process, Burhan issued a decree relieving five civilian members of their posts.

But any hopes of the army chief



Protesters gather during a sit-in outside the Al Jawda Hospital in Khartoum. — AFP

it would help stem protests were scuppered after the main civilian alliance, the Forces for Freedom and Change, labelled Burhan’s move a “tactical retreat” and called for “continued public pressure”.

Protesters have kept up rallies demanding a restoration of the transition to civilian rule despite repeated crackdowns by the security forces, who have in recent

days fired live bullets, launched barrages of tear gas canisters and deployed powerful water cannons to break up the crowds, according to medics.

Burhan’s pledge on Monday to step aside for a new civilian “government” with “executive” powers was accompanied by another pledge — the establishment of a new “Supreme

Council of Armed Forces”.

This body would be in charge of defence and security, he said, feeding into concerns among opponents that it would not be answerable to any government.

Burhan said the Supreme Council would combine the regular army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, a much feared and powerful unit commanded by Burhan’s deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Key FFC member and ex-rebel Yasser Arman, in a statement late on Tuesday, warned that Burhan’s “intention is to choose a prime minister who is a wolf in sheep’s clothing and takes his orders from the military council”.

Arman said that Burhan’s announcement was aimed at the “regional and international community, some of whose members are looking for quick solutions” including those who he warned are “prioritising stability over democracy”.

— AFP

22 Malian migrants died in boat disaster off Libya

GENEVA Twenty-two Malian migrants died in a boat disaster off the Libyan coast, the UN said, citing survivors who reported victims drowning and dehydrating with three children reportedly among the dead. After nine days at sea, 61 survivors, mostly from Mali, were rescued by the Libyan coastguard and brought back to shore, the UN’s International Organization for Migration said, with the toll confirmed by Mali’s expatriates ministry.

The migrants embarked from the Libyan city of Zuwara, near the Tunisian border, on a rubber boat, at around 1 am local time on June 22, said IOM spokeswoman Safa Msehli. “After nine days at sea, they were picked up by the Libyan coastguard”, she said.

They were brought back to shore on Saturday.

“According to the survivors, 22 migrants, all from Mali, died during the journey. Reported

causes of death are drowning and dehydration. Among the dead are three children”, said Msehli. “The total number of survivors is 61, with the majority from Mali.”

Msehli said some of the migrants were in very bad health and so were taken to hospitals by the IOM.

Libya has become a key route for irregular migration to Europe in the chaotic years since the 2011 overthrow and killing of ruler Muammar Gaddafi in a Nato-backed uprising.

While many have drowned at sea, thousands have been intercepted by the Libyan coastguard, which has been backed by Italy and the EU, and returned to Libya.

“The (expatriates) ministry offers its condolences in the name of the government to the affected families and to the Malian people for this tragedy”, Mali’s government said in a statement. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISLAMABAD

Monsoon rains claim 77 lives in Pakistan

Pakistani authorities said that at least 77 people have died in rain-related incidents as heavy monsoon downpours wreaked havoc across the country.

“At least 77 people, including children, lost their lives during the monsoon season that began on June 14”, Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman told the media on Wednesday.

“The rains across Pakistan are 87 per cent more than the average..”, she said. The minister said that south-western province



of Balochistan was adversely hit by the heavy rains and 39 people had lost their lives. During the last 24 hours, over a dozen people had died in rain-related incidents in Balochistan. — dpa

COLOMBO

Lanka to hold road shows in 5 key Indian cities

Sri Lanka will hold road shows in five key Indian cities to attract more visitors from its populous northern neighbour in a bid to bring more foreign currency into the crisis-hit island, Tourism Minister Harin Fernando said.

Known for its rolling hills, pristine beaches and laidback seaside towns, Sri Lanka is grappling with its worst financial crisis, partly triggered by economic mismanagement and the Covid-19 pandemic, which wiped out its lucrative tourism



industry. The country of 22 million people is now without enough foreign currency to import even essentials, leading to shortages of medicine, food and fuel. — Reuters

TUNIS

Tunisian oppn leader faces laundering allegations

Tunisia’s main opposition leader Rached Ghannouchi has been summoned by a judge over money laundering allegations, his Ennahda party said accusing the authorities of targeting him for political reasons.

The July 19 summons is to answer questions about the allegations, which Ennahda say are untrue and a result of “distortion and fabrication”. Reuters could not immediately reach a judiciary spokesperson. Ghannouchi has emerged as the



loudest critic of Kais Saied since the president seized broad powers last year, moved to rule by decree and ousted the elected parliament in which the Ennahda leader is speaker. — Reuters



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In brief

ROME



ITALIAN GOVERNMENT AVERTS COALITION COLLAPSE

A governmental crisis has been averted in Italy after the Five Star Movement (M5S) announced that it would stay in the ruling coalition. The populist party has heavily criticised the government in recent weeks on topics including the delivery of weapons to Ukraine and the distribution and amount of government financial support in Italy. M5S leader Giuseppe Conte had a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi on Wednesday. “We are prepared to continue to share the responsibility of government, as we have done so far, but in an honest and constructive fashion”, Conte said afterwards. — dpa

PARIS



FRANCE'S LEFTIST BLOC SUBMITS VOTE OF NO CONFIDENCE

Members of the left-wing alliance in the French National Assembly have tabled a vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne's government. The political groups made the announcement shortly before Borne's planned government statement. Borne had previously said that she would not ask for a vote of confidence as usual after the declaration. Her government, from the camp of liberal President Emmanuel Macron, had lost its absolute majority in last month's parliamentary elections. However, the left-wing alliance has no chance of success with the vote of no confidence. — dpa

KARACHI



LONG-EARED KID GOAT TAKES PAKISTAN BY STORM

A kid goat with extraordinarily long ears has become something of a media star in Pakistan, with its owner claiming a world record that may or may not exist. Simba is now living a pampered existence in Karachi, where he was born last month with ears that were strikingly long — and have grown further to reach 54 centimetres. Breeder Mohammad Hasan Narejo says he has approached ‘Guinness World Records’ to see if his charge can be included as the Greatest of All Time, although a category for “longest-eared goat” does not currently appear on the organisation's website. — AFP

UK PM refuses to quit despite resignations

LONDON: Britain's Boris Johnson vowed on Wednesday to fight on and not give in to a chorus of calls for him to resign, but his defiant pledge to keep going was met with derision and disregard from a mounting number of his own lawmakers.

With the tide of resignations rising to more than 30, some questioned whether Johnson could fill those vacancies at a time when the government needs to tackle a cost-of-living crisis and support an economy heading for a slowdown, possibly a recession.

But despite being all but fatally wounded by a wave of resignations of senior colleagues and junior ministers who said he was not fit to govern, Johnson sought to come out fighting at parliament's weekly prime minister's questions session.

He later attended a bizarre session of the so-called liaison committee, where it was almost business as usual as he was questioned by senior lawmakers from across the political spectrum over his government's policies and future plans.

Arriving in parliament for the appearance, he responded to questions over whether he would quit with the words: “No, no, no.”

Johnson's immediate fate could be decided as soon as later on Wednesday at a meeting of the so-called 1922 Committee that sets the rules for leadership confidence votes. A spokesperson



British Prime Minister Boris Johnson speaks during Prime Minister's Questions at the House of Commons in London. — Reuters

said Johnson was confident he would win a confidence motion.

“Frankly, the job of a prime minister in difficult circumstances when you've been handed a colossal mandate is to keep going”, Johnson said.

“And that's what I'm going to do.” Earlier, he tried to reassert his authority by quickly appointing

Nadhim Zahawi, a rising star in the Conservative Party widely credited for the successful rollout of Covid-19 vaccines, as finance minister.

But Johnson's performance in parliament encountered a brutal response.

Underlining the tenuous position he is in, some colleagues

in his cabinet team of top ministers struggled to contain their laughter as the opposition Labour leader poked fun at his cabinet for being in the “charge of the lightweight brigade”.

Three members of Johnson's own party asked whether he would resign. “Clearly, if there were circumstances in which

Johnson faces brutal questions as support ebbs and resignations rise. There are now questions over how long Johnson can hold on

I felt it was impossible for the government to go on and discharge the mandate that we've been given” then I would, Johnson said.

Overall, it was a muted performance for a prime minister who has seen his political fortunes tumble from a landslide election victory in 2019 to now, when the resignation of his finance and health ministers opened the floodgates for more junior ministers to quit.

Standing in the backbenches, his former health minister, Sajid Javid, detailed the scandals, missteps and gaffes that have marked Johnson's tenure so far.

“At some point, we have to conclude that enough is enough. I believe that point is now”, Javid told a silent parliament, with Johnson listening stony faced. At a later appearance before the chairs of select committees, the prime minister was asked about his defence policies, his stance on Ukraine and Brexit.

He appeared to rule out wanting to call an early election. — AFP

Germany plans new path to residency for migrants

BERLIN: The German cabinet on Wednesday signed off plans to make it easier for migrants with “tolerated” status to stay in the country permanently and integrate into the job market.

The proposals, outlined in a draft document seen by AFP, apply to migrants who have been denied asylum but cannot be deported and who have been living in Germany for at least five years.

Around 130,000 such migrants will be granted a “right of opportunity to stay” lasting for one year, according to the document.

After that, if they can prove they have a reliable source of income and a sufficient command of the German language, they will be granted official permanent residency.

“These people, who have made a life for themselves in Germany over a long period of residence, are to be offered a perspective under residence law and given a chance to obtain the necessary requirements for legal residence”, according to the document.

“Criminals remain fundamentally excluded from the right of opportunity to stay.”

Ulrich Schneider, an employment adviser to migrants for the Caritas NGO in the Black Forest town of Freiburg im Breisgau, welcomed the proposals.

“We have waited a long time for such a bill... in particular because it offers a perspective to people who until now lived under the threat of possible expulsion”, he said.

“Tolerated” asylum seekers often find themselves in legal



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz answers questions during a session at the Bundestag in Berlin. — AFP

limbo because they are unable to prove their nationality, or because deportations to their country of origin have been suspended for political reasons.

Those currently living in Germany include many Afghans who arrived during the 2015-16 refugee influx. They have been left “on a sort of waiting list” where their permission to remain in the country must be reviewed every three months.

The draft bill includes plans to make it easier for migrants to be joined by family members, especially if they are skilled workers, and to improve access to vocational and language courses.

It also proposes measures to make it easier to deport asylum seekers with criminal convictions.

The changes must still be voted through in the Bundestag and Bundesrat Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament before becoming law.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck called the move “pragmatic and smart” at a time when the country was suffering from labour shortages in many sectors. — AFP

Russian advance on Ukraine's Donetsk region thwarted

KYIV/KRAMATORSK: Ukraine has so far thwarted an attempted Russian advance into the north of its Donetsk region, but the city of Sloviansk and other civilian areas there were being heavily shelled, Ukrainian officials said on Wednesday.

Russia has increased its focus on Donetsk, the southern part of which it and its proxies already control, after completing its seizure of the neighbouring Luhansk region on Sunday with the capture of Lysychansk, much of which now lies in ruins.

Moscow says fully pushing the Ukrainian military out of both regions is central to what it calls its “special military operation” to ensure its own security, a now four-months-long offensive that the West calls an unprovoked war of aggression.

Donetsk and Luhansk comprise the Donbas, the eastern part of Ukraine that has witnessed the biggest battle in Europe for generations and which Russia wants to wrest control of for separatists it backs.

Ukrainian officials reported heavy fighting as Russian forces tried to push into Donetsk from Luhansk and towards Sloviansk.

“We are holding back the enemy on the (Luhansk/Donetsk) border”, Luhansk governor Serhiy Gaidai told Ukrainian television.

He said Russian regular and reserve forces had been sent there in an apparent effort to cross the Siverskiy Donets river and that two small settlements just inside Luhansk's borders were the scene of fierce fighting.

“Luhansk region even now is fighting. Almost all the territory



Defeated by Ukrainians, a destroyed Russian T-72 tank and a Russian armoured self-propelled cannon 2S-19 howitzer are on view at the Royal Castle square in Warsaw. — AFP

Ukraine says it is holding back Russian advance as heavy fighting is under way. Two city mayors complain of heavy shelling

has been captured, but in two settlements fighting is ongoing”, he told a video briefing.

Vadym Lyakh, the mayor of Sloviansk, told a video briefing the city had been shelled for the last two weeks.

“The situation is tense”, he said, speaking a day after local officials said Russian forces had struck a market and a residential area in Sloviansk and killed at least two people.

He said that, in all, 17 residents

had been killed there since President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine on February 24.

Russia's defence ministry says it does not target civilians and on Wednesday said it was using high-precision weapons to take out military threats. It said it had destroyed two advanced US-made HIMARS rocket systems and their ammo depots in the Donetsk region, an assertion dismissed as false by Ukraine.

To the south, the port city of Mykolaiv was also being heavily shelled, Oleksandr Senkevych, its mayor, told a briefing.

Russian forces were using multiple launch rocket systems to pound the city which had shed about half of its pre-war population of half a million, he said. — Reuters

In-car entertainment is media



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The writer is a journalist, academic, researcher of media studies

Driving from Ruwi to Al Khoudh in Muscat is so much more interesting when there is a nice programme to listen to or a good soundtrack playing on the local radio. But driving from Muscat to the country’s interior is tedious due to signal transmission — then, optional resources are needed to make the trip interesting and relaxed. That is when it comes to how we listen to music and the devices used in the car. Car radios are not given much thought. It is like old furniture. It is there and no one notices it until it is no longer useful or needs to be replaced. It is, after all, 98 years old. Nonetheless, we have to appreciate the evolution of the car radio — it is part of car accessories and it has changed considerably over time. In-car entertainment is media. The variety of music and pastimes

available while driving is vast thanks to streaming services, Internet radio and podcasts. Most of the time, after getting into a car and fastening the seat belt, the next thing is to reach for some entertainment: Call a friend, listen to music, or listen to the news. My favourite pastime now is listening to classic music on the local radio station. Had other preferences in the past, but the changes in programming prompted me to turn to the classic music station — it is more enriching. History can be boring, but if I want to make the best of my sound system while driving, it is worth spending time learning about it. The car radio was introduced in the 1930s, but it took enthusiasts nearly a decade to figure out how to integrate radio into cars. In early 1920s, some young people had played with the idea of installing radio into a car. Creativity and

CAR RADIOS ARE NOT GIVEN MUCH THOUGHT. IT IS LIKE OLD FURNITURE. IT IS THERE AND NO ONE NOTICES IT UNTIL IT IS NO LONGER USEFUL OR NEEDS TO BE REPLACED

thinking out of the box worked wonderfully. It took two decades of AM broadcasts and in 1952, the first AM/FM head unit was sold. People’s reactions — history says, while many drivers embraced the new sounds in their vehicles, others were up in arms about the dangers they presented. Does it sound familiar? People called the car radio a ‘dangerous

distraction’; those in favour, pointed out that the radio could be useful in warning drivers about bad weather. Developments always raise concerns and questions about the continued existence of old models. After all, fear of the unknown is a tendency to be afraid of something we have no information about. Who would want to listen to the radio when they can watch television? Who would want to listen to the radio when the Internet is widely available? Academics raised these questions when investigating the survival of radio as a channel of communication. Tech-savvy go-getters had a better imagination. Radio not only survived but advanced in sophistication. Innovation and technology are changing the way radio works by integrating cost-effective broadcast distribution with online features such as portals and mobile

applications; radio has entered the 21st Century. It is not just the sophistication of entertainment systems in today’s cars. Another area of radio and the automobile industry is car audio system design, which takes into account obstacles such as vibration, heat, wind, road noise, glass and leather. Excellent opportunities exist for car audio designers. Cutting-edge in-car entertainment is no longer a luxury. Can you think of a car without a radio? The emphasis then shifts to human talent. Who wants to listen to someone boring or pompous? Keeping an ear to the ground and in touch with the community is capitalising on the end-user: The listener. Despite digital trends and technological advancements, local radio remains the best media deal. Radio is an emotional multiplier. You travel with me. You come into my house.

Arctic police make sure far north doesn’t go too Wild West

PIERRE-HENRY DESHAYES

With its ghost towns and armed men taking on a vast wilderness, one could almost mistake the Svalbard archipelago for the Wild West. But a tiny Arctic police force on these islands halfway between Norway and the North Pole keeps outlaws — and polar bear botherers — at bay. Its 12 officers dash around on snowmobiles, helicopters or in boats keeping the peace among the 3,000 or so hardy souls tough enough to endure the endless winter nights. “Obviously most cases are pretty trivial,” police chief Stein Olav Bredli said from his office in the main town of Longyearbyen, with its stunning view of the fjord outside. But Svalbard’s penal code has its own local peculiarities like disturbing a polar bear or boats breaking sea ice. The law takes a dim view of both, with a \$1,587 fine for bear bothering. Bredli’s bread and butter are petty thefts, snowmobile accidents, occasional locals caught with drugs, and anti-drink driving campaigns. In fact, the most common crime was once said to be shoe stealing — either intentionally or accidentally after one drink too many — because everyone removes their shoes when stepping indoors, even into a public building. The crime section of the local newspaper Svalbardposten — like almost everything else here, the northernmost in the world — is pretty thin. “A few brawls after the bars close” is about as much as editor Borre Haugli can hope for. And yet Svalbard’s residents are armed to the teeth. It’s mandatory to carry a rifle when leaving urban areas in case of a close encounter with a polar bear. Since 1971, six people have been killed by the bears. Haugli can only recall a single car theft in his two years as the paper’s chief. “It was probably drunk people who, after a party, saw a car with the keys inside,” he said. Locals usually leave their homes and cars unlocked. It helps when you have to make a quick getaway from a polar bear — and it’s also a sign of the trust required to survive in such a hostile environment. Besides, where can a thief run to with only 40 kilometres of roads and the only connection with the outside world — beyond a very long boat journey — is the small airport on the outskirts of Longyearbyen? —AFP

Palestinian outrage after US says journalist was killed by accident



Patrick Kingsley

The writer is an international correspondent for NYT

Palestinians expressed disappointment and anger at the United States on Tuesday, after Washington said it had concluded that Shireen Abu Akleh, a Palestinian American journalist killed while reporting in the occupied West Bank, was likely shot unintentionally by a bullet fired from Israeli military lines. The US conclusion renewed Palestinian claims that the United States does not act as a fair broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, days before a visit to the region by President Joe Biden, who has not reversed several Trump administration moves that Palestinians deemed harmful to their hopes of independence. The State Department assessment released contradicted the official Israeli position that Abu Akleh, a veteran television broadcaster shot dead in the city of Jenin on May 11, might have been hit by either Palestinian or Israeli fire. But by asserting that she was shot by accident, and that the fatal bullet was too damaged to match it with a specific rifle, the United States also signalled that it did not expect Israel to pursue criminal charges against any particular soldier. The US conclusions “provided the occupying state with a safe way of evading responsibility for killing Abu Akleh, using flimsy and feeble pretexts,” the Palestinian Authority’s ministry for foreign affairs said in a statement. The Biden administration said it had acted independently of Israel and had not exonerated Israel of involvement. For years, Palestinians have questioned Washington’s ability to neutrally mediate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, citing strong US support for Israel at the United Nations and the size of US financial and military support to Israel, which has cumulatively received more US aid than any other country since World War II. Against that backdrop, the Palestinian Authority, which



A man walks past a mural depicting slain Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed while covering an Israeli army raid in Jenin in May, drawn along Israel’s controversial separation barrier in Bethlehem, West Bank. — AFP

THE US ANALYSIS OF THE BULLET WAS BASED ON TESTS BY INDEPENDENT FOREIGN EXPERTS, NOT ISRAELI BALLISTICS SPECIALISTS

administers parts of the West Bank, including the city where the shooting occurred, initially ignored weeks of US pressure to share the bullet that had killed Abu Akleh, 51, with Israeli investigators. But the Palestinian Authority reversed positions on Saturday, handing over the bullet after US officials had argued that a forensic examination might link the bullet to the rifle that fired it. The inconclusive findings of the subsequent test, and the US assertion about the accidental nature of the killing, fueled a sense of betrayal among Palestinians, resurfacing charges of

pro-Israel bias in Washington. Ned Price, a spokesperson for the State Department, said that US investigators had not favoured either the Israelis or the Palestinians. He added that the US analysis of the bullet was based on tests by independent foreign experts, not Israeli ballistics specialists. “Our goal in this was not to please everyone,” Price said. “Our goal in this was not to please anyone.” The US intervention came days before a visit by Biden to Israel and the West Bank, his first as head of state, in which he is expected to avoid making major statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It also occurred amid rising Palestinian frustration that the Biden administration has not cancelled several moves by president Donald Trump that Palestinians felt damaged efforts to create a Palestinian state. Despite promising to reopen the US Consulate in Jerusalem to the Palestinians, closed under Trump, the Biden administration has kept it shut following pressure from Israel. The Palestinian mission in Washington, also shuttered under Trump, remains closed. — New York Times

Rising heat drives crippling sandstorms across Middle East



Sanam Mahoozi

The writer is a journalist based in London

Over the past two months, Iraqis have been living, working and breathing in thick clouds of dust, as at least nine sandstorms - lasting up to several days each - have hit the country, blanketing everything in grit.

Hospitals have reported a surge in admissions, with thousands of patients coming in with severe respiratory illnesses, while schools and offices have had to close and flights have been grounded for days at a time.

“I can’t walk outside without coughing or covering my mouth,” Azzam Alwash, founder of non-governmental green group Nature Iraq, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation from his home in Baghdad.

The latest storm “kept me in the house for two days. I have asthma, so I have to stay inside to protect my lungs,” he said.

Iraq, Iran, Syria and other Gulf states are no strangers to sand and dust storms (SDSs) which have historically occurred in the hot months from May to July when strong northwesterly winds carry large amounts of dust throughout parts of the region. But these days the storms are coming earlier and more frequently, rising well above the once-normal once

or twice a year, starting as early as March and spreading over a wider area.

As governments struggle to cope with the dusty onslaught, environmentalists and government officials say what’s driving the threat is a combination of climate change and poor water management practices that together are turning more of the region’s soil into sand.

They warn that rising temperatures and changing weather patterns suggest there’s worse to come, unless governments can work together to cut climate-changing emissions and reduce the health and financial impacts of the waves of sand sweeping through the region.

“The increase in droughts is a particular concern,” said Kaveh Zahedi, deputy executive secretary for sustainable development at the United Nations’ Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

He said affected countries should invest in early warning and forecasting systems, craft more efficient water and land management policies, and put in place insurance and social protection measures to help the most vulnerable communities recover from the storms. Travelling thousands of kilometres, each sand and dust storm can wreak havoc through a dozen countries.

They damage buildings, powerlines and other vital infrastructure, kill crops, reduce visibility for drivers and interrupt air, rail and water transportation, according to a 2019 report from the World Bank.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) loses about \$13 billion a year to the effects of sandstorms, from the costs of clean-up and recovery to treating health problems and a decline in productivity, the report says.

Kaveh Madani, a research scientist focused on environmental justice, security and diplomacy at City College of New York, said the dangers posed by sand and dust storms have been overlooked by local and international governments for too long. “This transboundary and transgenerational issue... is only becoming more dangerous every year,” said Madani, who previously served as deputy head of Iran’s environment department.

“It’s really disappointing to see that one of the most debilitating environmental problems of the 21st century is not being properly recognised by major intergovernmental and scientific agencies,” he said in a telephone interview.

The Middle East has always been naturally burdened with strong winds, dry soil and hot weather, which combined provide the perfect conditions for sand and dust storms.

—Thomson Reuters Foundation



FLOOD ART HOUSE

A volunteer poses in front of the “flood art house” (Flutkunsthau) painted by helpers and residents in Dernau in Rhineland-Palatinate, western Germany on Wednesday, almost one year after the region was devastated by floods that caused damages and casualties. Before the flood, the building was the community centre in Dernau. The flood completely destroyed the house and it has to be demolished. It has now become a symbol of hope known throughout Germany thanks to countless media reports and photographs on social media. The graffiti above her reads ‘Everyone concerned is a super hero’. — AFP

Will the Ukraine war fuel nuclear proliferation?



Joseph S Nye, Jr

The writer is a professor at Harvard University and author of Do Morals Matter? Presidents and Foreign Policy from FDR to Trump

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Ukraine inherited part of its nuclear arsenal. But in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine agreed to return these weapons to Russia in exchange for “assurances” from Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States that its sovereignty and borders would be respected. Russia violated this promise when it annexed Crimea in 2014, and tore up the memorandum with its full-scale war on Ukraine on February 24. Many observers have concluded that Ukraine made a fateful mistake by agreeing to surrender its nuclear arsenal (once the world’s third largest). Are they right?

In the early 1960s, US president John F Kennedy predicted that at least 25 states would have nuclear weapons by the following decade. But in 1968, United Nations member states agreed to a non-proliferation treaty that restricted nuclear weapons to the five states that already had them (the US, the Soviet Union, Britain, France and China). Today, just nine states have them — the five named in treaty signatories plus Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea — but there are more “threshold states” (countries with the technological ability to build nuclear weapons quickly) considering the option.

Some analysts suggest that proliferation might be a good thing, because a world of nuclear-armed porcupines would be more stable than a world of nuclear wolves and unarmed rabbits. In their view, Russia would not have dared to invade a nuclear-armed Ukraine. Moreover, they question why some states should have a right to nuclear weapons while others do not.

Others advocate the abolition of all nuclear weapons, a goal enshrined in the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which entered into force in 2021. It currently has 86 signatories and 66 parties (though none of the nine states with nuclear weapons have signed up).

Sceptics of this approach argue that while nuclear abolition may be a worthy long-term aspiration, efforts to get there too quickly could increase instability and the likelihood of conflict. The real ethical challenge, they maintain, is not nuclear weapons’ existence but the probability of their use. It might be better if humanity had not learned to harness the power of a split atom in the 1930s; but that knowledge cannot be abolished, so it is better to focus on reducing the risks of its use in warfare.

Suppose that you live in a neighbourhood that suffers continuous devastating break-ins, burglaries and assaults. One day, some of your neighbours

WHILE IT IS TEMPTING TO THINK THAT UKRAINE WOULD HAVE REMAINED SAFE IF ONLY IT HAD HELD ONTO ITS SOVIET-ERA NUCLEAR WARHEADS, THAT FRAMING OF THE ISSUE IS TOO SIMPLISTIC. ULTIMATELY, ALL COUNTRIES WOULD BENEFIT MORE IN THE LONG TERM FROM A STRONG NON-PROLIFERATION REGIME THAN FROM POSSESSING THEIR OWN ARSENALS

decide to equip their houses with massive explosive devices and trip wires, and post warning signs to deter intruders. The problem is that if these devices are used, your house will be damaged, too. Yet there are also considerable dangers in trying to dismantle the system in the short run.

What would you do? You might ask your neighbours to use the system only to defend against intruders and not to threaten others. You could encourage them to install devices to reduce the risk of accidents, and demand compensation for the risk they impose on you by including your house under their warning signs. And you might persuade them to take steps to dismantle the system sometime in the future, when relatively safe means can be found.

By rough analogy, these are the types of conditions enshrined in the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and that is why the Russian war on Ukraine is so damaging. Russia has not only violated its explicit security guarantee under the Budapest Memorandum; it has also hinted at nuclear escalation to deter others from coming to Ukraine’s aid. It is thus weakening the taboo against treating nuclear weapons as normal war-fighting weapons — a convention that the Nobel Laureate economist Thomas Schelling

called the most important global norm since 1945.

But it would be a mistake to exaggerate the harm that the invasion of Ukraine has done to the non-proliferation regime. For one thing, those who think the invasion will teach other states that they would be more secure if they had nuclear weapons are oversimplifying history. One cannot assume that nothing would have happened if Ukraine had kept its Soviet-era nuclear weapons.

After all, such weapons do not come ready to use “off the shelf.” The fissile material in the long-range Soviet missiles stationed in Ukraine would have had to be removed, reshaped and repurposed. Not only would that have taken time and expertise, but it might have accelerated Russia’s intervention. When states approach the nuclear threshold, they enter a “valley of vulnerability” that may reduce their security and increase general instability. Even when stable deterrence is imaginable in a region, it may be highly risky to try to get from here to there.

Some theorists argue that just as nuclear weapons encouraged prudence among great powers, by giving them a “crystal ball” with which to foresee the devastation that would follow from nuclear war, the spread of nuclear weapons would similarly produce stability among smaller regional rivals. Nuclear porcupines would act like rabbits, not wolves.

But not all regions are equal in terms of escalation risk, and it cannot be assumed that all leaders would have the wisdom to use their crystal balls. Regions differ in terms of the number of civil wars and overthrown governments, civilian control of the military, the security of communications, and weapons-control protocols. If new proliferators have a higher risk of using nuclear weapons — even if inadvertently — they and their neighbours will become even more insecure in the “valley of vulnerability.”

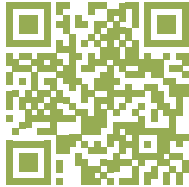
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Some analysts suggest that proliferation might be a good thing.

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Red Bull's Max Verstappen in action during the race. – Reuters

VERSTAPPEN AIMS TO HIT BACK WITH HOME WIN FOR RED BULL

VIENNA: Formula One championship leader Max Verstappen will be chasing his fourth Austrian Grand Prix victory in five years on Sunday as Red Bull seek to return to the top of the podium at their home race.

The team, belonging to the Austrian energy drinks manufacturer that also owns the Red Bull Ring, had a run of six consecutive wins ended by Ferrari's Carlos Sainz at last weekend's British Grand Prix.

It was a first win for the Spaniard, with Verstappen only seventh after his car was damaged by debris from sister team AlphaTauri.

That cost the Dutch driver, who had led early on, what would have been a seventh win of the year but Spielberg is the ideal place to bounce back.

He has won four times in Austria — three in the Austrian Grand Prix and the fourth in last year's Styrian Grand Prix at the same track.

Verstappen is 34 points clear of Mexican team-mate Sergio Perez and 43 ahead of Ferrari rival Charles Leclerc, with Austria the halfway point of the 22-race season.

Buoyed up by his army of orange-clad fans, the 24-year-old will be favourite to win again around the undulating layout, with the weekend running to the Sprint format.

That means a race on Saturday to set the starting grid and a maximum of 34 points available over the weekend instead of the usual 26.

Verstappen won the only other Sprint so far this year, at

Italy's Imola in April.

Leclerc, fuming after Ferrari kept him out on old tyres behind the safety car at Silverstone in a move that dropped him from first to fourth, will be especially fired up to beat Verstappen.

He lost a wheel-banging battle for the lead against the Dutchman in the closing stages of the race in 2019 and needs a win to rein in his rival.

"There are three more challenging races coming up before the summer break and, as Silverstone showed again, each race this year is absolutely unpredictable", said Ferrari team boss Mattia Binotto.

"We will make sure that we have our cars ready for the challenge and present ourselves as a strong team and a strong unit."

Mercedes have won at the Red Bull Ring five times since the venue returned to the calendar in 2014.

At Silverstone, they appeared to have made a big improvement to their difficult 2022 car, with Lewis Hamilton hunting down the Ferraris in pursuit of a record-extending 104th win.

The Briton finished third and, while Red Bull and Ferrari still hold the edge on outright pace, Mercedes will once again be hoping to put their cars in the fight.

"Overall it was a pleasing result for us", said the team's trackside engineering director Andrew Shovlin. "But we need to build on this performance because we know that we're not quite quick enough just yet."

— Reuters



Red Bull's Max Verstappen after qualifying in second place. – Reuters

Sri Lanka spin reinforcements for Australia showdown

GALLE, Sri Lanka: Dimuth Karunaratne's Sri Lanka are looking to level the Test series with spin reinforcements for the second match starting on Friday against an upbeat Australia.

The tourists batted and bowled with control on a turning Galle track in a crushing opening win, forcing the hosts to turn to their one-day heroes who helped beat Australia 3-2.

Spinners Maheesh Theekshana, Dinuth Wellalage and Prabath Jayasuriya have been added to the Sri Lankan squad along with all-rounder Lakshita Manasinghe who bowls off-spin.

"I was very surprised with the selections for the first Test, because I thought there were a couple of names that should have been there after the one-day series performances," former captain Aravinda de Silva said.

Theekshana, a mystery spinner, claimed four wickets and kept down the runs in the ODIs while 19-year-old Wellalage remained the leading bowler with nine wickets from his left-arm spin.

Both players are looking for their first Test cap in the absence of Praveen Jayawickrama, who had been expected to play the second match but tested Covid positive on Monday.

Australian spinner Nathan Lyon took a match haul of nine wickets to lead his team's domination in the opener as they bundled out Sri Lanka twice for 212 and 113.

But Aravinda remains confident in the talent that Sri Lanka has.



Sri Lanka's players attend a practice session at the Galle International Cricket Stadium in Galle. — AFP

"All the guys are very, very talented lot. You saw them play in the one-dayers. It's just that they need to understand that it's a mind game," said the World Cup winner.

"Because they have the ability and just need to be selective in shot-making and to understand their roles. Having Angelo (Mathews) and Dimuth really helps with their enormous experience in the conditions that they are used to."

Mathews has rejoined the Sri Lankan team after he tested Covid positive on the third morning of the first Test.

Australia, led by Pat

I was very surprised with the selections for the first Test, because I thought there were a couple of names that should have been there after the one-day series performances

ARAVINDA DE SILVA
Former SL captain

Cummins, beat the odds against the hosts they suffered a 3-0 whitewash in 2016 to come up with a clinical show in the first match.

Batting 'courage'

If the bowlers got wickets, the batsmen scored runs at a quick pace to manage a crucial lead of 109 in the first innings.

Cameron Green batted with maturity to rebuild the innings after an early stutter and took the attack to the opposition with sweeps and reverse sweeps in his match-winning 77.

Steve Smith lauded the courage shown by the touring batsmen and said each one brought something different to

the table. "It's good we all play a little bit differently," Smith said.

"There's not the same continuity, so bowlers have to change their lengths a bit more and when you're in a partnership, you can cruise along quite freely. Just a really good balance, and guys sticking to their plans for long periods."

The 23-year-old Green said they must have done some things right to force midway changes in the opposition squad.

"Three days away and we don't know what team they are going to pick," said Green, who has played 13 Tests since his debut in 2020. — AFP



Dhawan named India captain for ODIs in West Indies

NEW DELHI: Opener Shikhar Dhawan will lead India in three one-day internationals in West Indies later this month with Ravindra Jadeja named deputy in the squad announced on Wednesday.

Top names including all-format captain Rohit Sharma, star batsman Virat Kohli and fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah have been rested and are not part of the 16-member touring group.

The three matches will be played at Port of Spain on July 22, 24 and 27, followed by five Twenty20 internationals.

The left-handed Dhawan, 36, has previously led the team in ODI and T20 matches in Sri Lanka last year.

During that tour he became the oldest person to captain India in the 50-over format at the age of 35.

India, who lost their Covid-delayed fifth Test to England on Tuesday, will play three T20 matches and three ODI games in England before touring the West Indies.

Bumrah captained in the absence of Rohit, who missed the Test due to Covid but will return to lead the team in the white-ball matches in England. — AFP

SQUAD: Shikhar Dhawan (capt), Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shubman Gill, Deepak Hooda, Suryakumar Yadav, Shreyas Iyer, Ishan Kishan (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Ravindra Jadeja (v.capt), Shardul Thakur, Yuzvendra Chahal, Axar Patel, Avesh Khan, Prasidh Krishna, Mohammed Siraj, Arshdeep Singh

Mancilla selects squad for Oman youth team camp



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JULY 6

Spanish coach Wan David Gordo Mancilla has selected 26 players for the Oman national youth team camp, which begins on July 10.

They will play two matches with the Palestinian team on July 14 and 16 before travelling to Saudi Arabia to participate in the Arab Youth Cup, which will be held from July 20 to August 5.

The selected players are Ahmad al Harmali, Saeed al Adawi, Mulham al Hadrami, Jawad al Azzi, al Muntasir al Maawali,

Osama al Rawahi, Salem al Abri, Salem al Mashaikhi, Salem al Abdali, Khalfan al Rudaini, Abdul Aziz al Khalidi, Al Mutasim al Samin, Sultan al Marzouqi, Saeed al Ghanbosi, Mamoon al Arai, Abdul Alim al Rawahi, Ahed al Mashaikhi, Mazen al Balqar, Ali al Mashaikhi, Nasser al Balushi, Ayman al Nabhani, Mohammed al Awfi, Al Muhtadi al Abri and Mohammed Bait Subai.

The Olympic national team will start its external camp in the Republic of Turkey from July 18 to 31, and there will be four friendly games including two matches

with the Bahrain Olympic team on July 22 and 24.

On the other hand, Oman Olympic team finished the internal camp with the participation of 26 players led by national coach Akram Habrish. It was in preparation for major international assignments including the West Asian U-23 Championship next November, the Arab Gulf Cup U-23 Championship in August 2023, and the Asian U-23 qualifiers in September 2023, which acts as a qualifier for the Paris Olympics 2024.

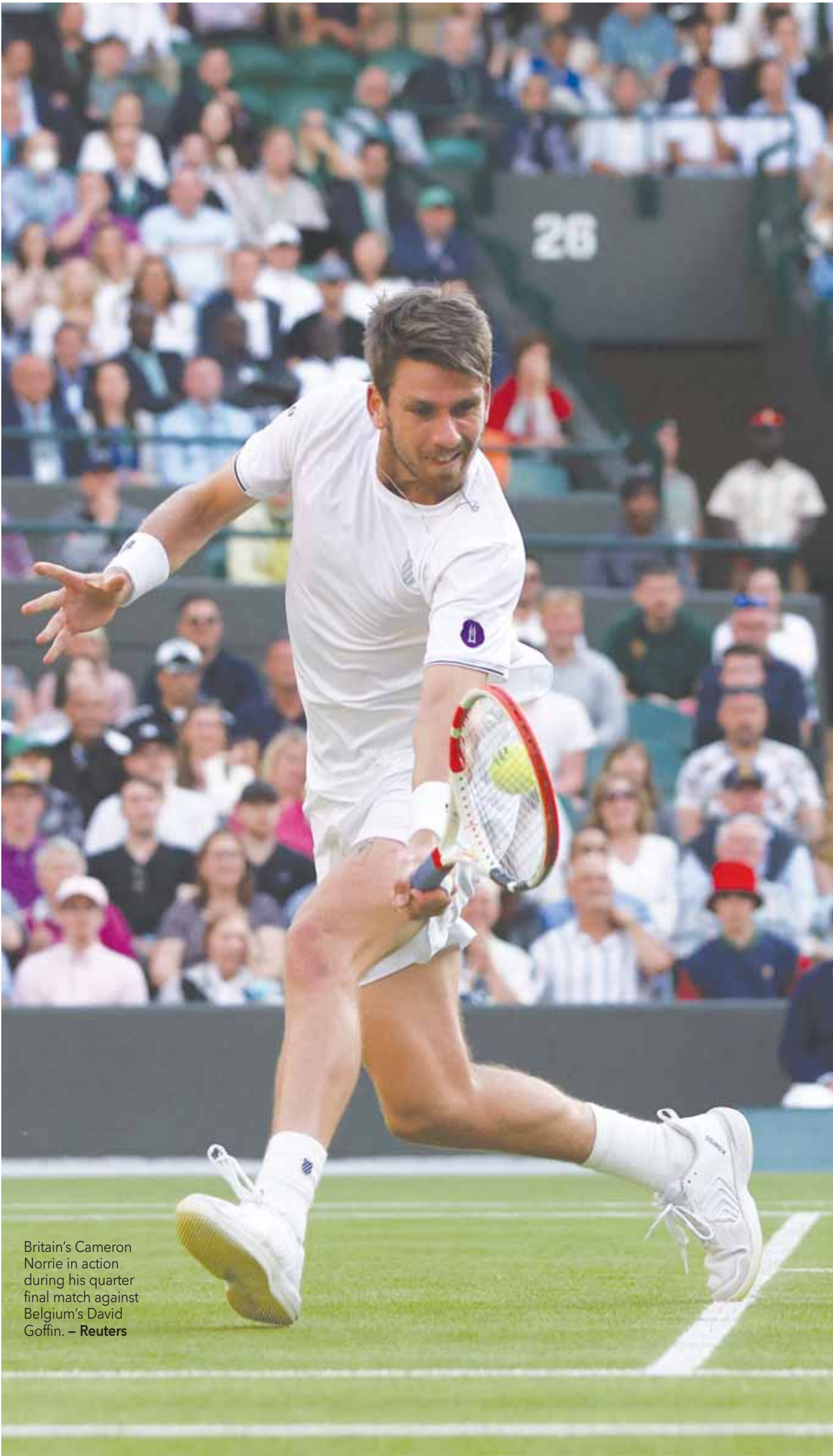


ETO'O IN OMAN TO OVERSEE CAMEROON TEAM'S PREPARATORY CAMP

Cameroonian football federation chairman Samuel Eto'o arrives in Oman, accompanied by the technical and administrative staff of the team. They were received by the vice-chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Football Association and the chairman of Sohar Club. Eto'o is here to oversee the preparations for the Cameroon team's camp in Suhar.

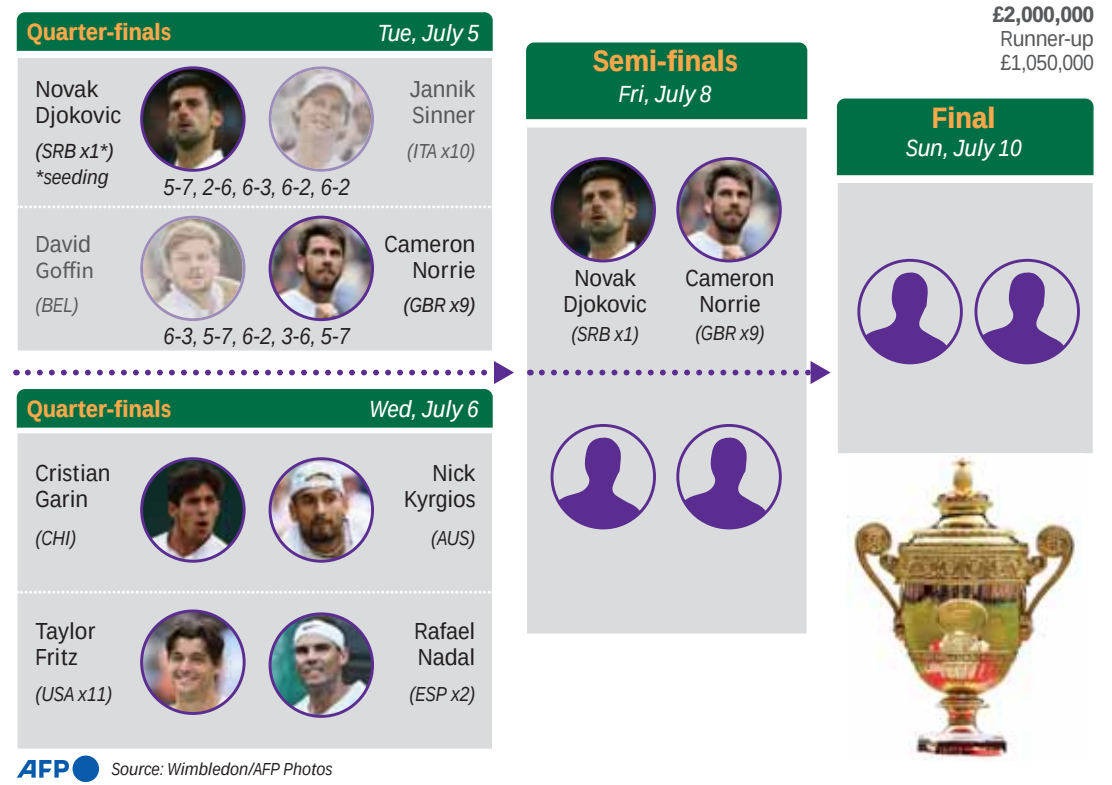


Norrie reaches first Grand Slam semifinal



Britain's Cameron Norrie in action during his quarter final match against Belgium's David Goffin. – Reuters

Wimbledon 2022: men's singles





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OMAN GOVERNMENT BEGINS SUBSIDISING WHEAT IMPORTS

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JULY 6

The Omani government has begun subsidising wheat imports to offset the steep rise in international wheat prices following the outbreak of hostilities between Ukraine and Russia in February this year.

Majority state-owned Oman Flour Mills (OFM), one of the biggest importers of wheat in the country, said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) on Wednesday that it has begun receiving a subsidy on its wheat imports from the government.

“We would like to disclose that Oman Flour Mills Company (SAOG) has received a letter from the government for the subsidy of wheat effective from May 1, 2022. As global wheat prices have seen a sharp increase, the government is keen to stabilise the prices of flour in the local market”, the publicly traded company stated.

It is the latest in a series of measures adopted by the Omani government to ensure that the high international cost of wheat, coupled with restrictions on global



wheat trade, do not translate into a substantial increase in the price of flour products in the Sultanate of Oman.

Prices of wheat have skyrocketing in the wake of the outbreak of war between Ukraine and Russia, both major producers and exporters of the commodity. With other producers curtailing exports of wheat to meet their

domestic requirements, the Sultanate of Oman has taken steps to source its requirements from third countries.

Oman Flour Mills, for example, recently announced plans to invest in the agriculture sector in Australia, well-known as a premium producer of grains and cattle. To this end, the company set up OMAUS Pty, a new subsidiary.

While importers in the Sultanate of Oman are trying to diversify their sources of wheat, Omani farmers are pitching as well to support this effort by ramping up domestic production of wheat.

Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources signed agreements that will help boost local wheat output

As global wheat prices have seen a sharp increase, the government is keen to stabilise the prices of flour in the local market.

OMAN FLOUR MILLS COMPANY (SAOG)

to at least 10 per cent of Oman’s total annual wheat requirement of 320,000-350,000 tonnes.

Al Dakhiliyah Governorate currently tops the list of wheat producing regions of the country, with 1,109.6 acres under cultivation, or 45 per cent of the total area under wheat cultivation in Oman.

Salalah Mills Company, another important importer, recently announced that it has awarded contracts for the procurement of 180,000 tonnes of wheat from India and Australia.

Opec Secretary General Barkindo dies at 63



VIENNA: Opec Secretary General, Nigeria’s Mohammad Barkindo (pictured), has died unexpectedly at the age of 63, it was announced on Wednesday, leaving the oil cartel without a head at a tumultuous time for the markets.

Barkindo had headed the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries since 2016 and was scheduled to be replaced by Kuwait’s Haitham al Ghaith next month.

Under his stewardship, the cartel forged ties with 10 other oil-producing countries, such as Russia, to form a wider group known as Opec+ in a bid to better tame global oil prices, rocked by the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic and more recently the war in Ukraine.

“We lost our esteemed Dr (Mohammad) Sanusi Barkindo. He died at about 11:00 pm yesterday July 5, 2022”, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation’s Chief Executive Mele Kyari tweeted, without providing any further details about the circumstances of Barkindo’s death. “Certainly a great loss to his immediate family, the NNPC, our country Nigeria, the Opec and the global energy community. Burial arrangements will be announced shortly”, Kyari wrote.

“This tragedy is a shock to the Opec Family”, Vienna-based Opec tweeted. “We express our sorrow and deep gratitude for the over 40 years of selfless service that... Barkindo gave to Opec. His dedication and leadership will inspire Opec for many years to come.”

Only a few hours earlier, Barkindo — who had not shown any sign of being ill — had met Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari in Abuja, where Buhari praised Barkindo’s “distinguished achievements at Opec. “You were able to successfully navigate the organisation through turbulent challenges”, Buhari had said.

In a statement, Opec expressed its “immense sorrow and sadness” at the news, describing Barkindo as “a trailblazer widely admired and respected throughout the globe. A dear friend to many.”

— AFP

Oman’s regulator obliges power distributors to pay compensation for poor service

NEW BENCHMARKS: New Guaranteed Service Level Standards come into force from July 1, 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Electricity subscribers are now entitled to compensation from licensed distributors under new Guaranteed Service Level Standards that came into effect in the Sultanate of Oman from July 1, 2022.

Introduced by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), the new standards are applicable to licensed distributors: Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), Majan Electricity Company, Mazoon Electricity Company, Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer) and Dhofar Integrated Services Company — all members of Nama Group.

The new standards encompass a total of around 10 customer service criteria that licensed electricity distributors must



meet if they are to avoid paying compensation to their subscribers for any breaches.

These criteria pertain to, among other conditions, meter reading, handling of customer complaints, processing of new electricity connection applications, delayed reconnections, notification of customers in the event of planned and unplanned outages and so on. Breaches of these standards

entitle the aggrieved subscriber to claim compensation amounts ranging from RO 5 to RO 30 per episode — amounts that can also be adjusted against the customer’s monthly bills.

In issuing the new standards, the regulator cited Article 22 of the Law on the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector, which guarantees certain minimum

standards in the supply of electricity and related water services to consumers across the Sultanate of Oman.

In particular, it seeks to safeguard the interest of subscribers, in particular, low-income individuals, the sick and the elderly.

“The objective of setting these standards is to protect electricity service subscribers from receiving

low levels of service. It will also contribute to motivating (distribution) licensees to address the poor quality of services provided by them for subscribers of electricity services in the Sultanate of Oman”, the Authority noted.

For example, the new standards prescribe strict timelines and targets for acting on complaints submitted by consumers. Failure to meet these deadlines will result in the licensees being forced to cough up the stipulated compensation to the customers.

Additionally, subscribers are required to be notified of any planned periodic outages at least two day in advance, either through announcements in the local media, short text messages (SMS), posts on their social media platforms or other suitable channels.

However, compensation is waived where the planned outage is of one hour or less for subscribers associated with low voltage (voltage 0.415 kV) and half an hour or less for subscribers connected to high voltage (voltage 11 kV) and more).

OQ, Ministry of Education sign two pacts to support the education system in Oman

MUSCAT: OQ Group and the Ministry of Education have signed two agreements to support the education system in Oman. As per the agreements, OQ will finance a number of education and research projects to enhance the education system and encourage students to exhibit their skills and talents in the fields of science, mathematics and technology, besides honing their skills in sports.

The projects are part of the OQ CSI programme to support educational initiatives in the Sultanate of Oman. The agreements were signed by Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education, and Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, CEO of People, Technology and Culture, at OQ Group.

As per the first agreement, OQ will be the strategic sponsor for Oman School Sports Federation for one year. The Group will finance a number of school activities and competitions. It will also provide supplies to support and motivate students in their extracurricular



activities that polish their skills and capabilities.

More than 250,000 students are expected to benefit from this initiative across all governorates.

As per the second agreement, OQ will sponsor StemOman project, which provides training in science, technology, engineering

and mathematics in a novel way, in order to motivate the students and instil innovation among students in targeted schools. The duration of the sponsorship is for 1 year and the initiative is expected to benefit more than 300 students across the Sultanate of Oman.

The Under-Secretary of the

Ministry of Education hailed the support provided by OQ Group to the initiatives and programmes of the Ministry of Education. He noted that the support is part of OQ's social responsibility programme.

"The support provided as part of the two agreement plays a key

role in the success of the plans developed to enhance students' skills in the scientific fields as well as their extracurricular activities", Ambusaidi added.

"We hope students will benefit from the valuable support and the initiatives to improve their capabilities and acquire new skills that help them to become responsible citizens in the future".

On his part, Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari noted that OQ's Social Investment Programme focuses on areas related to education, health, environment and economic welfare.

The two agreements will be a driving force for Omani students to showcase their talents in these areas. It will help them hone their skills in school sports activities, thus helping them to acquire mental and physical skills.

"We are confident that the agreements will provide the required boost and encouragement to the efforts made by the Ministry of Education to prepare students to become the future leaders in their respective fields", he concluded.

Alizz Islamic Bank supports Omani Haj Mission



MUSCAT: In line with its strategy to promote Islamic values and religious occasions, Alizz Islamic Bank announced its support for this year's Omani Haj Mission, represented by Al Iftaa delegation and via the 'Manasik' contest which covers Haj rituals.

This contest is held under the supervision of a number of prominent scholars who are keen to educate pilgrims about the best and correct ways to prepare for and complete all Haj rituals.

These contests contribute to raising awareness about theoretical and practical matters and promoting the culture of Haj among the younger generation.

It does so by presenting questions and useful information on the principles of Haj to be adhered to, as well as the merits and rewards of Haj.

In addition to being a source of knowledge to pilgrims, this contest also serves as a recreational activity since it's held during the Haj season and stimulates the spirit of participation.

The bank's support to this contest is part of its commitment to promote religious values in online spaces for the scholars and researchers interested in new and contemporary issues related to Haj in light of the recent circumstances that had greatly impacted people's life during the last two years.

Issa bin Salim al Riyami, Head of the Sharia Compliance and Audit Department at Alizz Islamic Bank, said: "Haj is one of the five pillars of Islam and every Muslim is required to perform it at least once in their lifetime. We, at Alizz Islamic Bank, are keen to be present at such religious events which undoubtedly play a significant role in educating pilgrims about Haj provisions."

NBO now offers immediate transactions processing 24/7

MUSCAT: Continuing to unlock opportunities for businesses to go digital, National Bank of Oman (NBO) is now offering immediate transactions processing through its Corporate Internet Banking (CIB). With the new feature, any transaction up to RO 20,000 initiated through the platform will be processed instantly, 24/7, even on weekends, official holidays and offline periods.

Mohammed bin Yahya al Jabri, Head of Global Transaction Banking at NBO, said, "For companies, the initiation and execution of real-time transactions has become an essential part of modern business processes. Staying on par with global advances in payments technology, our new feature is just one way we're serving these needs.

Accessible through our easy-to-use digital platform, it is the ideal solution for streamlining the payment process and improving cash flow, making day-to-day banking more efficient while supporting their wider business ambitions."



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

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

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

Buy a Kia and get a chance to win trip to watch FIFA World Cup Qatar

MUSCAT: Kia is offering football fans a fantastic opportunity to win with Kia and enjoy a fully paid trip to watch FIFA World Cup event in Qatar. Kia customers owning a brand new Kia can get a chance to Scratch & Win more than 100 match tickets where they can witness teams like Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Japan and more, LIVE in action.

Apart from Fifa Qatar match tickets, customers will also get Comprehensive Service up to 50,000 kms and 1 Year Insurance. The campaign will end on 4th November 2022. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)

Speaking about this fantastic campaign by Kia, a representative from Reliable International Automotive, the dealers for Kia in Oman said, "FIFA 2022 in Qatar is the most exciting event, millions of football fans across the world



are looking forward to. In Oman too, there are scores of fans eagerly looking forward to witnessing this event live.

At Kia, we wish to get customers closer to experiencing their desires and hence this campaign. When customers buy a Kia, they get a chance to scratch and win more than 100 match tickets. Not just that, they also get accommodation in Qatar. An absolute advantage considering the demand hotels will have and the difficulties fans can face in getting

accommodations during this event. Besides this, customers will also get comprehensive service and 1 year insurance as well. This is definitely the best time of the year to own a Kia and be a winner."

Reliable International Automotive the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

OCEC empowers young Omani professionals

MUSCAT: With their participation in this year's AIPC annual conference on July 4-6 in Budapest, Hungary, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) is taking another step ahead in enhancing their capacity as a premium events venue in Oman providing world-class experiences.

The International Association of Convention Centres (AIPC) — of which OCEC is a member — is committed to encouraging and recognising excellence in convention centre management, and to providing the research, education and networking resources to achieve high

standards in the industry.

The 2022 Conference took place under the theme "Reshaping the Future", and will serve as a platform to exchange knowledge and expertise on the latest trends in venue operation and management.

The event will also shed light on future-generation leadership and ways to develop the industry with youth talents.

In addition, with the OCEC's Events Manager, Saba al Azki participating in the 2022 AIPC Conference as a member of the Future Shapers programme, the OCEC is furthering their goal to empower young



Omani professionals through international learning and development opportunities.

The Future Shapers programme

supports the development of high performers to think and act like leaders. The programme participants are predominately

senior managers within the AIPC community who are seeking additional learning opportunities with practical outcomes.

As part of the Future Shapers membership requirements, each participant has to complete a number of learning and development sessions with topics such as "Becoming a Leader", "Leadership and Your Personal Journey", and "Towards a Sustainable Future".

Commenting on Al Azki's Future Shapers participation at the 2022 AIPC Annual Conference, Eng Said al Shanfari, Chief Executive Officer — OCEC, said: "Our participation at this globally

renowned conference forms part of OCEC's commitment to empowering young Omani professionals with the skills, training and international experience required to make a meaningful difference in the event management industry, and related sectors in Oman.

OCEC is honoured to provide opportunities for our younger generation — who are our future events industry leaders — to engage in programmes such as the UFI Certified Professional and UFI Exhibition Management Degree, as well as this latest Future Shapers programme, which is an excellent initiative."



OOMCO inks pact to provide bunkering services at SOHAR Port

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 6

Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) and SOHAR Port and Freezone have signed a bunker licence agreement for OOMCO to provide marine fuels to vessels visiting SOHAR Port and also at the anchorage area.

The bunker licence will see Oman Oil Marketing Company operate the 10,000 metric tonne bunker barge MT ALPHA (IMO 9286451) to enhance the position of SOHAR Port as the port of choice in the region for vessel owners and operators requiring bunkering services by improving turnaround times and maintaining supply chain efficiency.

The bunker barge is capable of supplying all low Sulphur fuel-compliant marine fuels, in line with IMO 2020. Fuels available will include Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil (VLSFO) 0.5 per cent and Low Sulphur Marine Gas Oil (MGO) 0.1 per cent and High Sulphur Fuel Oil (HSFO) 3.5 per cent at delivery rates up to 1,000 m3 per hour.

Tarik al Junaidi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Oil Marketing Company, commented, "We are very pleased with the performance of our bunker equipment and team, and we look forward to utilising



our capability and resources to supply SOHAR Port and Freezone with high quality bunker fuels that meet the highest international standards and specifications.

"We believe that this service provides a significant stimulus for further growth for both SOHAR Port and Freezone and OOMCO as we further consolidate our position as the leading marketer and distributor of multi-sector fuel in Oman and regionally.

"This bunker licence represents an important joint effort to work together to further boost Oman's logistics sector and contribute to the national economic diversification efforts."

Omar bin Mahmood al Mahrizi,

Chief Executive Officer of SOHAR Freezone, DCEO, SOHAR Port, said, "SOHAR is located close to some of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The need to serve these ships at SOHAR Port in a quick and efficient manner in order to allow them to continue on their journey and meet transportation deadlines is highly important to help ensure the integrity of global supply chains and strengthen the position of SOHAR as an integrated logistics hub with great connectivity to major shipping lines globally.

"We have been very pleased with the quality, safety and speed of the service offered by OOMCO and we are delighted to continue this

relationship by working together.

"This will serve to strengthen Oman's shipping and logistics sector as demand for high-quality and regulatory-compliant bunker fuels increases in the future."

The bunker fuel market in the Middle East and Africa region is expected to grow at more than 12 per cent during the period of 2022-2025.

By offering convenient bunkering services to even the world's largest cargo ships, SOHAR Port and Freezone will be able to serve the needs of the global shipping market, attract further investment and support Oman's journey to becoming a world class international logistics hub.

4 Omanis among Forbes Middle East's Top 100 CEOs 2022

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 6



Four Omanis have been named among Forbes Middle East's "Top CEOs in the Middle East" ranking released on Wednesday.

Eng Abdulrahman al Hatmy – Group CEO, Asyad Group Oman (ranked 25th); Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO – Omantel (ranked 42nd); Waleed bin Khamis al Hashar, CEO – Bank Muscat (ranked 66th); and Abdulaziz al Balushi, Group CEO – Ominvest, were among the prestigious ranking of C-suite executives making significant contributions to the region's economies.

Overall, the 100 listees managed revenues of over \$1 trillion in 2021. Their firms are currently collectively worth more than \$5 trillion.

Topping the list is Saudi Aramco's Amin H Nasser, who led the company to become the world's most valuable by market value again, surpassing Apple. ADNOC's Sultan Ahmed al Jaber placed second as the firm took three of its subsidiaries – ADNOC Drilling, Fertiglobe,

and Borouge – public, with Borouge's \$2 billion IPO becoming Abu Dhabi's largest-ever IPO.

Rounding up the top three is Ahmed bin Saeed al Maktoum of Emirates Group. All three maintained their rankings for the second consecutive year.

The 2022 cohort represent leaders from 26 nationalities. Emiratis dominated with 19 entries, followed by Egyptians with 16, and Saudis with 15.

Combined, these three groups make up 50 per cent of the ranking. With 27 CEOs, banking and financial services is the most represented sector.

Eight entrants work in telecom, and seven head energy and logistics companies. Four of the top five leaders work in energy.

To construct this ranking, Forbes Middle East assessed the size of the CEO's company using various metrics, the individual's accomplishments and innovations over the past year, and their impact on their firm and the wider industry.

Bankrupt Sri Lanka asks Putin for fuel, tourists



COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has asked Russia to provide fuel and resume tourist flights to help the country weather its unprecedented economic crisis, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa said on Wednesday.

The island nation has suffered months of blackouts, rampant inflation and critical shortages of food and petrol after running out of foreign currency to finance imports. Rajapaksa said he had spoken with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to ask for supplies of urgently needed fuel on loan and to "humbly" request the resumption of flights between Moscow and Colombo.

"We unanimously agreed that strengthening bilateral relations in sectors such as tourism, trade and culture was paramount in reinforcing the friendship our two nations share."

Aeroflot suspended flights last month after a Sri Lankan court briefly detained an Airbus belonging to the state-owned airline's fleet over a payment dispute.

The US and European Union have both imposed embargoes on Russian oil in response to the country's war against Ukraine. — AFP

Oil prices rebound from losses as supply concerns return

LONDON: Oil prices rose on Wednesday, clawing back some of Tuesday's heavy losses as supply concerns returned to the fore and outweighed lingering worries about a potential global recession.

Brent crude futures rose by \$1.43, or 1.39 per cent, to \$104.20 a barrel at 1120 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude climbed 65 cents, or 0.65 per cent, to \$100.15 a barrel after closing below \$100 in the

previous session for the first time since late April.

Both contracts recorded their largest daily drop since March on Tuesday on recession fears and other bearish pressures, which also kept a lid on Wednesday's price rise.

Oil prices have seen a knock from a resurgent dollar, which is holding at a 20-year high against the euro and multi-month peaks against other major currencies.



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Oklahoma. – Reuters

A stronger US dollar usually makes oil more expensive in other currencies, which could curb demand.

Renewed concerns of Covid-19 lockdowns across China could also cap oil price gains. Adding to the downward pressure on prices, all oil and gas fields that were affected by a strike in Norway's petroleum sector are expected to be back in full operation within a couple of days, Equinor said. — Reuters

GCC states' rapid economic recovery fuels major investment in energy transition: PwC

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JULY 6

Energy prices are driving a rapid economic recovery in the GCC, with most states forecast to achieve significant fiscal surplus by the end of the year, according to international professional services firm PwC's latest Middle East Economy Watch - Q2, titled 'Oil booms and hydrogen looms.'

Launched on Wednesday, the newsletter however notes that, unlike in past cycles, PwC expects to see stronger discipline around spending and surpluses utilised to pay down debt and to invest domestically and internationally.

Some of the investment in the region is funding the energy transition, where the region's abundant sunshine and cheap marginal land is driving a boom in solar power and the development of hydrogen as a key component of a future circular carbon economy, it stated.

In February, the war in Ukraine resulted in various implications



across the region. The surge in oil and gas prices — which is the third major oil price boom of the 21st century — had a radical impact on the fiscal outlook for oil-exporting countries (the GCC, Iraq and Libya), forecasting to achieve fiscal surpluses this year. Conversely, oil importers (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) suffer from the rise in prices which are a major source of strain on their fiscal position.

It can't be determined if this third boom will be prolonged, or followed by a sharp decline.

However, governments in the region have often demonstrated pro-cyclical fiscal policy.

The IMF's latest April 2022 forecasts see a 5-per cent spending increase in 2022, driven by Qatar and the UAE, while Saudi Arabia and Oman are both showing modest 4 per cent year-on-year increases in expenditure.

Richard Boxshall, Middle East Chief Economist at PwC Middle East, commented: "We have high hopes that the surge in oil prices will support the recovery of oil

exporters' countries, diversify the GCC economies and encourage the investment in other forms of energy."

Boxshall added: "If spending is indeed controlled, the region will have a major surplus to direct to other purposes. Oman and Saudi Arabia have given the clearest indications of how they intend to use the funds. Oman's government was directed to reduce debt, which peaked at \$55bn of GDP last year.

"While Saudi Arabia developed the national debt management plan, giving the priority on rebuilding reserves and flowing the rest to the Public Investment Fund and the National Development Fund to finance local development projects."

Hydrogen or hot air?

Over the last two years, dozens of projects have been proposed across the region for the development of hydrogen production and export.

The UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman have so far been the most aggressive in advancing hydrogen, as seen in Saudi Arabia's NEOM

hydrogen project, the formation of the UAE's Abu Dhabi Hydrogen Alliance and green hydrogen plant in Dubai, and various projects in Oman including a 3.5GW plant in Duqm. Other countries in the region, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Libya, are also waking up to the hydrogen race with major hydrogen projects being planned or under development.

Stephen Anderson, Middle East Strategy and Markets Leader, commented: "The region is in a unique position to take advantage of the current situation and accelerate its energy transition, particularly hydrogen. The global community has begun to take net-zero targets more seriously, and if the Middle East can proactively lead this transformation, then the 2030s are likely to be a boom decade for hydrogen in our region.

"A recent global study by Strategy& projected that global demand for hydrogen could reach 530m tonnes/year in 2050, and identified the GCC as the region with the strongest export potential."

War helps Russian nickel king expand his realm

Vladimir Potanin is striking while the iron is still hot. Shortly after snapping up two Russian banks in a post-sanctions fire sale, the largest shareholder and chief executive of \$47 billion Russian metals group Norilsk Nickel is eyeing a takeover of \$16 billion aluminium maker Rusal.

Norilsk Nickel definitely has the upper hand in any negotiations – it is bigger, more profitable and brings more to the table in terms of sanctions protection. As the United States learned in 2018, blacklisting Rusal had disastrous consequences for the global aluminium market.

Sanctioning Norilsk Nickel would multiply the pain across nickel, copper, palladium and platinum — all metals key to the transition to a lower-carbon economy. With inflation already rocketing, Washington is even less likely to take the risk.

And, despite being ice hockey buddies with President Vladimir Putin, Potanin has somehow managed to stay off the US blacklist, unlike his Rusal rival, Oleg Deripaska.

Rusal would also get access to Norilsk's shipping fleet, a rarity for metals groups. And a larger company with hefty sanctions armour-plating would secure cheaper finance, handy for developing sites like the massive Kolmozerskoye lithium ore deposit in Murmansk on Russia's northwest tip.

However, there are snags, in particular Potanin and Deripaska's prickly personal history, which has spilled over into disputes in London courtrooms over how Norilsk should be run.

Chuck in Deripaska's 45 per cent slice of the Rusal owner, and it's easy to see how Potanin's crown could be dislodged in the merged entity.

Of course, Deripaska technically doesn't control Rusal because of a sanctions deal with the US Treasury, but he's unlikely to agree a merger that doesn't recognise at least some of his Rusal clout.

Putting such differences aside is easier now that they're on the same side against a hostile West. If they can keep it going after the guns fall silent, Russia's nickel and aluminium kings will have expanded both their realms. — Reuters

Sanctioning Norilsk Nickel would multiply the pain across nickel, copper, palladium and platinum – all metals key to the transition to a lower-carbon economy.



CHALKED UP
Workers package finished chalk into boxes at the Jordan Chalk company in Karak, around 120 kilometres (70 miles) south of the capital Amman. Long before whiteboards, beamers and laptops entered modern school classrooms, teachers relied on the humble, dusty, sometimes screechy blackboard chalk – a material that has created a Jordanian business success story. – AFP

Renewable energy development beset by financing challenges



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

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

Political and military conflict plaguing many parts of the world today can only be resolved if people can live in an atmosphere of dignity, mutual respect and prosperity. A key contributory factor is access to clean energy resources.

Renewable energy projects are one of the resources that the Almighty has bestowed upon mankind through which economic and social development projects can be promoted, especially in our Arab region due to the availability of sunlight throughout the year, in addition to an abundance of wind and mineral resources.

Everyone knows today that it is necessary to provide financing methods to achieve these projects, which will provide the world with many kinds of resources that it needs to achieve its sustainable goals.

Today, these projects can support a country's transition to low-carbon energy sources and help them achieve their commitments to global warming mitigation.

Despite the progress that has been made in this regard, the volume and cost of switching to renewable energy resources in many countries of the world remains a major challenge due to the absence of financial capabilities.

However, some emerging markets have begun to finance their renewable energy plans. It requires the rich and wealthy countries of the world to help those that are unable to finance their energy transitions. Some countries that are dependent on coal, which can cause harm to the environment, need to be assisted to transition towards renewable energy sources.

It is imperative that governments, private sector institutions, development banks and international organisations work together to support the energy transition away from polluting fossil fuels towards greener sources – thereby contributing significantly to reducing global emissions.

If these initiatives succeed with the support of international financing, then the transition will be more rapid and widespread across the world.

In recent months, several European countries, as well as the United States, have announced plans to help some African and Asian countries to finance their decarbonisation over the coming decades and help them accelerate their shift to renewable energy projects.

These efforts are achieved as a result of the international community's desire to cooperate in this regard by reducing emissions and reducing the rise in average global temperatures.

This collective effort will have positive benefits for the economic, social and health status of peoples and countries, and will alleviate climate change.

Challenges in the drive towards renewable energy are impeding the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. There are several countries in the world, such as Indonesia, for example, that depend on coal for about 60 per cent of their electricity needs. Such countries need large investments to achieve their sustainability goals.

The supply-side fight against inflation



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics Emeritus and a former dean of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University.

OVER THE PAST YEAR OR SO, THE ROLLBACK OF PANDEMIC-CONTAINMENT POLICIES HAS SPURRED A SIMULTANEOUS SURGE IN DEMAND AND CONTRACTION IN SUPPLY.

Central banks' efforts to contain high and rising inflation are fuelling growth headwinds and threatening to tip the global economy into recession. But the proximate cause of today's inflationary pressures is a large, broad-based, and persistent imbalance between supply and demand.

Higher interest rates will dampen demand, but supply-side measures must also play a large role in inflation-taming strategies.

Over the past year or so, the rollback of pandemic-containment policies has spurred a simultaneous surge in demand and contraction in supply. While this was to be expected, supply has proved surprisingly inelastic.

In labour markets, for example, shortages have become the norm, leading to cancelled flights, disrupted supply chains, restaurant closures, and challenges to health-care delivery.

These shortages appear to be at least partly the result of a pandemic-

driven shift in preferences. Many types of workers are seeking greater flexibility — including hybrid or work-from-home options — or otherwise improved working conditions. Health-care workers, in particular, report feeling burned out by their jobs.

If this is true, the inflation picture must include an adjustment in relative labour costs. To bring markets back into balance, wage and income increases will be needed, even for jobs for which there was previously an ample supply of workers.

This transition will generate some inflationary pressure. Yes, nominal prices and wages have limited downward flexibility. But at a time of excess demand, firms generally try to pass on higher costs via price increases — and they often get away with it, at least for a while.

Lingering blockages associated with the pandemic, especially in China, which remains committed to its zero-Covid policy, are also fuelling inflation. But these blockages will eventually subside,

as will short- to medium-term capacity constraints caused by shifts in the composition of demand (in terms of both products and geography), though some will persist for a while. Capacity — whether in ports or semiconductors — takes time to build.

But today's inflation has deeper roots. Over the past several decades, the activation of massive amounts of underutilised labour and productive capacity in emerging economies has generated deflationary pressures.

With those resources having now been significantly depleted, the relative prices of many goods are set to rise.

Moreover, there is a global push to diversify and, in some cases, localise demand and supply chains — a response to the increasing frequency of severe shocks and rising geopolitical tensions. A more resilient global economy is a more expensive one, and prices will reflect that.

The war in Ukraine has not only accelerated this supply-chain transformation, but also has caused

energy and food prices to skyrocket, further exacerbating inflation, especially in lower-income countries. In the case of fossil fuels, a prior pattern of underinvestment in capacity at multiple points along the supply chain has compounded the problem.

But there is even more to the story. More than 75 per cent of the world's GDP is produced in countries with aging populations. Old-age dependency ratios are rising, and in some countries, the workforce is shrinking.

Productivity gains could counter the contraction of labour supply relative to demand, but after nearly two decades of falling productivity growth, such gains are not forthcoming.

So, inflation is rising fast, and central banks are under pressure to take drastic action. But their only real option is to reduce demand, by raising interest rates and withdrawing liquidity. These measures have already spurred a massive repricing of assets, including currencies, and they threaten to push global growth

below potential, with lower-income economies suffering disproportionately, and to reduce investment in the energy transition.

There is another way: supply-side measures. Trade and investment have long enabled supply to expand rapidly in response to growing global demand.

But, for nearly two decades – and especially in the last few years – proliferating trade barriers have been adding friction to this process.

Creeping protectionism must be reversed, with US President Joe Biden removing the tariffs imposed by his predecessor, Donald Trump, and Europe accelerating the integration of its services markets. At the same time, efforts must be made to improve productivity.

Digital technologies will be crucial here. While the pandemic helped to accelerate the digital transformation, many sectors — including the public sector — are lagging, and concerns about the effects of automation on employment persist.

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Outdoor activities for children to boost well-being

Playing outside gives your child the chance to explore the natural environment and have adventures. Your child can play games, test their physical limits, express themselves and build their self-confidence. Outdoor play can also mean more mess – and more mess often means more fun!... **P20**

Kew Gardens announces new giant waterlily species

EXPERTS AT LONDON'S Kew Gardens on Monday revealed they have discovered the first new giant waterlily species since the mid-19th century – after it was initially mistaken for another. Specimens of the new species had lain undiscovered at the botanical garden for 177 years and in the National Herbarium of Bolivia for 34 years. It had been thought they were from the "Victoria amazonica", one of the two known varieties of giant waterlilies whose genus was named after queen Victoria in 1852. But their true identity was revealed after experts at Kew worked with a team from the Latin American country to

establish they were in fact a third variety. As well as being the newest species of giant waterlily, "Victoria boliviana", whose leaves grow as wide as three metres in the wild, is also the largest in the world. A paper detailing the years of detective work is outlined in a paper in the journal Frontiers in Plant Sciences, published on Monday. Seeds from the suspected third giant waterlily species were donated by Santa Cruz de La Sierra Botanic Garden and La Rinconada Gardens in Bolivia. Botanical artist Lucy Smith said they had been growing – unlabelled – in a glasshouse at Kew for the last four years. "A few people have asked, why does this



one look so different from the others? But we've had to say, well, we think it's similar to this or similar to that," she said. "So in fact, we've had this wonderful secret hiding in plain sight all this time." Carlos Magdalena, a research horticulturalist who specialises in saving plant species that are near extinction, described the plant as "one of the botanical wonders of the world".

Magdalena said some 2,000 new plant species are identified every year but he added: "What I think is very unusual is a plant (this) size with this level of fame to be discovered in the year 2022. "That is quite unusual. It also highlights how many things could be out there. "It really highlights how little we know in the end about our natural world."

Giant waterlilies bloom and turn from white to pink at night. "Victoria boliviana" is named in honour of the Bolivian partners on the team and the plant's natural ecosystem. Kew is the only place in the world where all three species of the Victoria genus – "amazonica", "cruziana" and now "boliviana" – can be seen side by side. — AFP

READ

TALKING AS FAST AS I CAN

BY LAUREN GRAHAM

The beloved star of *Gilmore Girls* and *Parenthood* reveals stories about life, love, and working as a woman in Hollywood – along with behind-the-scenes dispatches from the set of the new *Gilmore Girls*, where she plays the fast-talking Lorelai Gilmore once again



TUNISIAN FILM STAR HICHEM ROSTOM DIES

Tunisian actor Hichem Rostom, who starred in *The English Patient* and dozens of films across Europe, died on Tuesday at the age of 75. — AFP



BABY GIRAFFE BORN IN SANTIAGO ZOO IN CHILE

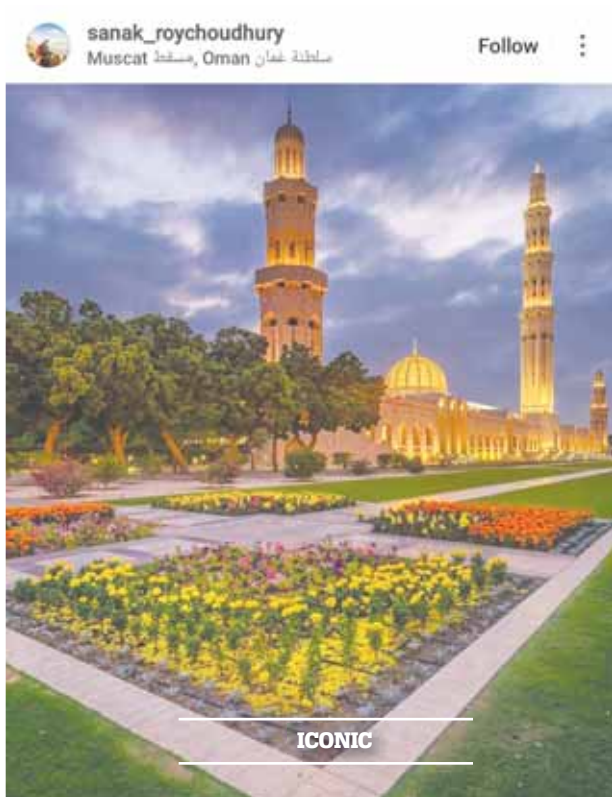
The Santiago Zoo in Chile has a new resident: a male giraffe calf weighing almost 100 kilograms (220 pounds) and measuring 2 metres (6.5 feet). — Reuters





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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

A towering contributor to the history of music



RICHARD TARUSKIN, A MUSIC historian of towering intellect and erudition who delighted in stirring up good trouble, died on Friday at 77. Physically, he was a bear of a man, and his manner, though typically warm and upbeat, could occasionally seem gruff and untamed. He suffered fools not at all. He rode herd on the musical and critical communities, sending unsolicited — indeed, dreaded — postcards to colleagues with capsule critiques, noting errors or inanities, often scathingly.

Yet he was a joy to work with. His writing was brilliant, profound, stylish and witty, scarcely in need of editing, except for length. He never tired of trying to fit, say, a 2,500-word peg into a 1,500-word hole. That was not so much a problem at Opus, the small, free-form record magazine where I started working with him, in the mid-1980s. But it became a serious issue a few years later, at our next stop, the Arts & Leisure section of The New York Times, with its hard-and-fast space limitations. Richard's sparkling prose was not something you — or he — ever wanted to cut wholesale.

But even this proved unproblematic. We would tighten a piece sentence by sentence, word by word, and Richard welcomed suggestions. He eventually took the process as a challenge, a puzzle that we would solve together.

He was the most nimble and retentive mind I've ever worked with closely over time. It was almost scary to hear him quote from memory a paragraph of something he had read a decade or two before virtually verbatim. And he seemed to have read everything.

It came as a particular jolt recently to hear that what Richard was dying of was cancer of the esophagus. With suddenly renewed force, I recalled the circumstances of our early work together, at Opus. That started while he was writing his first oversized book, "Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions," which in 1996 ultimately weighed in at two volumes and 1,757 pages. Richard would work on Stravinsky for three or four weeks, then take a week off between chapters and write for Opus. In one of those breaks, he might produce six or seven 500-word CD reviews, a 1,000-word think piece, two 2,500-word essays and a 4,000- or 5,000-word blowout. They arrived in a fat manila envelope, which, when opened, reeked of cigar smoke.

Richard went on to earn his doctorate at Columbia under Lang's tutelage, writing about Russian opera in the 1860s, a topic that led to several of his many books of essays. Nor was it lost on Richard that Lang's magnum opus, "Music in Western Civilization," from 1941, remained in wide use as a textbook at Columbia and elsewhere. Emulating his mentor with an eye towards producing a textbook, Richard embarked on a magnum opus of his own in 1991.

ART

At the met, protest and poetry about water



IN A TRANSFIXING two-minute video called "River (The Water Serpent)" in the Metropolitan Museum's American Wing we see a drone shot of a snow-flecked landscape where a crowd has gathered. Each of its members holds a vertical mirrored panel. Together, on cue, they place the panels horizontally over their heads, reflective side skyward, and begin a procession. At first, it's loose and tidally pooling and eddying. Then it tightens into a stream of light, gains velocity, and spirals like a whirlpool.

The landscape is a stretch of prairie on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation spanning the border between North and South Dakota. The time of the filming was December 2016. The procession, conceived by two Native American artists, Cannupa Hanska Luger and Rory Wakemup, was a combined act of protest and preservation.

It was performed by some of the many hundreds of demonstrators who had come as "water protectors," intent on halting the US government's plan to install a major oil pipeline near Black Rock, a move that could potentially poison the reservation's water supply, and would certainly desecrate its ancestral cemeteries. The mirrored panels were shields designed to protect the protectors from resistance they'd meet and make their assaulters look hard at themselves.

The video is one of 40 works that make up "Water Memories," a poetically faceted pocket-size show about the material and symbolic role of water in Native American life. Organised by Patricia Marroquin Norby (Purépechal), the Met's associate



curator of Native American art, it combines traditional objects from the permanent collection with modern and contemporary loan pieces, including some by non-native artists.

A fleet of toylike 19th-century canoe models with origins from the Northwest coast to the Northeast woodlands establishes the bicoastal range of the show, and suggests the role of water as a medium for commercial and cultural networking. The equivalent of long-haul trucks, Native American boats transported raw materials and handcrafted trade products — baskets, ceramics, luxury beadwork — on riverine highways up and down and across what is now called North America.

Also transported were ideas about values and governance, about past and the future, about life in this world and others. Wisconsin-born Ho-Chunk artist Truman T. Lowe (1944-2019) paid tribute to the cosmopolitan nature of water travel in his 1993 "Feather Canoe," an open-work boat made of willow

branches and filled with white feathers. Suspended from the ceiling and illuminated from within, it projects patches of shadow and light onto the gallery floor.

Acquired by the Met last year, it's a beautiful thing and seems to have had personal meaning for Lowe, a curator of contemporary art at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington.

"If I have a religion," he said, "it must be canoeing. I canoe wherever there's water. It puts me in a totally different state of mind and provides all I need to exist."

A strip of ocean is visible in the background of a large 1989 triptych painting called "Possession on the Beach" by Fritz Scholder (1937-2005), an artist of one-quarter Luiseño descent who has been both admired and reviled for his popular "Indian" portraits. He claimed that both critical responses were equally cool with him. He just wanted people to keep looking. — **NTT**

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Conscious patient in the era of Corona!

While you are sitting in an institution or any other place, with the people around you and someone not wearing a face mask is coughing hard a few rows from the back. Even you and the others are trying to take a look at what's going on, suddenly the cough gets deeper and continuous! Perhaps no one said anything to the that individual. However, if someone had done this, I imagine he would have responded with a phrase that is familiar nowadays especially in the time of the pandemic: Don't worry, it's not Corona (Covid-19)! Up to that point such affirmations can be rather well and polite, rather than be said to have showered them with a deadly virus! It has recently become clear that a negative Corona test (you do not carry the virus), especially in the early days of symptomatic illness, does not guarantee that you will not be infected.

On the other hand, if you got a fever and a cold for example and just because you do not suffer from Corona, this does not mean that you throw the face mask and go on a plane or in a gathering and next to other people, as this is undoubtedly harmful and may carry a lot of rudeness, because you – If I can say – you may ruin someone's vacation and maybe one of those is going to see his parents, causing death or hospitalisation of one of them. So, let's not destroy the lives and plans of others.

Especially over the past two years, our community has undergone an intensive and indirect training course through various means and to prevent the transmission of the Corona virus. In fact, we have learned the importance of medical testing, physical distancing, isolation and ventilation. Thus, these lessons also apply to more common pathogens such as influenza, coronaviruses and their various strains that have truly

reshaped our lives. The obvious thing is that we now understand better than ever how sick you can be and here we will see if anyone uses this knowledge to apply it in practice!

This leads me to believe that the first and most important rule for feeling sick is to stay home. And I assert here that this directive is the easiest and the most difficult at the same time. Easy because it's so simple: stay home! No technical experience required. On the other hand, it is difficult because in fact following it involves major disruptions in anyone's daily life.

In addition, it is also a good practice to notify people with whom you may have been in contact, even if it seems embarrassing, just when we have been encouraged to do so with Corona. If, for instance, you have a fever, isolate yourself as much as possible until at least 24 hours after it's gone. Also if you don't have a fever, you should be clear to get back to those around you after your symptoms are gone. On the other hand, if you are still showing symptoms after the isolation period, or if you must get out before it ends, due to your work and the difficulty of getting sick leave, you must wear a high-quality mask.

In the end, there is no one-size-fits-all formula that gives us the right answer in every case and for every type of infection and possible isolation. Even for the most responsible people among us, this ambiguity can lead to some embarrassing calculus. Can you afford to miss out on family lunches and family gatherings and would it be difficult to cancel those travel plans... should you?!

A physician, medical innovator and a writer

art & life

Local Scene

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THURSDAY | JULY 7 | 2022



Outdoor activities for children to boost well-being

By Ruqaya Al Kindi

Playing outside gives your child the chance to explore the natural environment and have adventures. Your child can play games, test their physical limits, express themselves and build their self-confidence. Outdoor play can also mean more mess – and more mess often means more fun!

Below are some tips for outdoor activities in the summer.

Field trips are one of the inexpensive options. Parents with their children can go to one of the natural areas in the country in which they live and learn about the names of trees and flowers, the components of nature and the animals etc.

Since the Sultanate of Oman has many agricultural areas, introducing children to everything related to agriculture and its importance in our lives and teaching them the components of tree and its related industries is an amazing idea.

Children love playing with water which is responsible of stimulating many of their senses (touch, sound, sight). Most children love to use their five senses to learn and develop, which includes the senses of touch, sight and sounds, which most water play has.

You can also visit museums such as the Oman Children's Museum in Muscat, which aims to simplify science and technology and review the stages of its development and applications in various fields, in addition to presenting inventions and modern means, allowing the visitor to understand the vital role of science in human life (Insta account:child_mus).

Many libraries offer free activities

for children or activities at nominal rates, search about them and take your children.

Art as well is not only a fun activity for children, but it can also be an important development tool! "Marsam" is the first private art studio in Oman and it knows the incredible benefits of art for Kids that make them serious to open doors for them (Insta account :marsam_art).

"Art can help facilitate communication and bonding between children even if they don't know each other or don't share many common interests. Creating art in small group settings encourages cooperative behaviour in children, giving them opportunities to practice crucial social skills like sharing, and working together," the administrator of Mursam said.

"Deciding what kind of art to make and what materials they will use are some of the first opportunities for young children to exercise autonomy and make decisions for themselves. By making their own independent choices to express what they are thinking/feeling children build confidence in themselves and their abilities, and become comfortable expressing their feelings," he added.

Summer vacation for children does not means stopping learning, as knowledge does not have to be confined to a specific time and place, so the Engineering Village (which is an Omani project), provides a space for skill development, innovation and creative problem solving through the provision of the education, equipment, environment and experience in a simplified manner that helps spread the culture of innovation and scientific exploration through experimenting and practice. (Insta account: ev_cent-

ers).

Volunteer work is one of the best ideas that young people can engage in, as it helps them to develop human feelings, cooperation and love of good for all. Adults, for example, can organise a neighbourhood cleaning campaign in which young children participate. Taking the child to visiting charitable organisations and learn about the importance of charitable work is a great idea too.

Summer education centres in the Neighbourhoods is one of the most prominent forms of spending the summer period in Oman and are spread all over the Sultanate of Oman. Educated women volunteer to teach children a lot of skills and knowledge in various fields such as religion, language, arts, life skills, etc. Children gather in a public hall (locally called Sablah) in an atmosphere always full of fun.

Organising evenings and competitions for children at the neighbourhood level is a delightful idea for children. Mothers can participate in preparing snacks and drinks to reduce the financial costs of the gathering and also make it more beautiful.

Involving children in sports club activities is also a great option, as these clubs provide children with an environment that guarantees them fun, energy discharge and making new friends.

New sports can strengthen the muscles, develop the brain comprehension. There are many options in Oman such as Karate, Taekwondo, swimming like Dolphin Swim Centre (Insta account:dsc_muscat) which is Omani project and the first swimming centre in Oman that was established in 2012.

