

Pankaj Khimji elected to ACC

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket Council (OCC), has officially assumed office the Vice-President of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) for 2022-23 after being elected to the position. Pankaj Khimji, Director at the Khimji Ramdas Group, one of the most reputed conglomerates in the Sultanate of Oman, has been the driving force behind the sport cricket in the country. Amitabh Choudhary is the Chairman of ACC, while Jay Shah is the President. **DETAILS ON P12**



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: Abdullah bin Salim al Shueili

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

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SEEB, RUSTAQ
PLAYERS JOIN
NATIONAL
TEAM CAMP



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INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS
FROM US TO RISE, AMID
CRITICISM FOR RUSSIAN
PURCHASES



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AL GHANJA:
REVIVING ONE
OF OMAN'S
ICONIC SHIPS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO
TUNISIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Kais Saied of Tunisia on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and long life to the President, praying for the return of the occasion, while the friendly Tunisian people have achieved their aspirations for more progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN READY TO HOST
TRAINING CAMPS

The government will be making efforts to attract Fifa World Cup 2022 Qatar qualifying teams to set up practice camps in the Sultanate of Oman. Speaking to the youth at a weekly TV programme, Basil bin Ahmed al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, said, "There is coordination with the Oman Football Association to attract a group of teams that have qualified for the World Cup in Qatar 2022 to set up camps in the Sultanate of Oman before the start of the tournament." Qatar will host the tournament from November 21 to December 18. **DETAILS ON P2**

ANNUAL
HORSE RACE
IN SALALAH

Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Hamad bin Thuwaini al Said, presided over the Annual Horse Race of the Royal Cavalry (RC), on Saturday. In the first round dedicated to female jockeys, riding purebred Arabian horses, the mare Thaneya of the Royal Cavalry won the 1,200 metre race. The horse Al Tariq of the Royal Cavalry won the first place in the second round designated for purebred Arabian horses for 1,200 metre distance. **DETAILS ON P12**



Russia claims
missile strike,
Ukraine urges
ceasefire

KYIV: Russia said on Saturday that it had unleashed hypersonic missiles against an arms depot in Ukraine, the first use of the next-generation weapons in combat, after Kyiv's embattled leader pressed for "meaningful" talks to halt the war now in its fourth week.

Moscow also said its troops had broken through Ukrainian defences to enter the strategic southern port city of Mariupol, prompting more people to join the millions fleeing their homes.

If confirmed, the use of Russia's new Kinzhal (Dagger) hypersonic missile, which can elude most defence systems, would mark a new escalation in Russia's campaign to force Ukraine to abandon hopes of closer ties with the West.

Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ignat said that the depot in Deliatyn, a village near the border with Romania, had indeed been hit but "we have no information of the type of missile."

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who unveiled the Kinzhal missile in 2018, has termed it "an ideal weapon" that flies at 10 times the speed of sound -- analysts say Russia is leading the hypersonics race, followed by China and the US.

Ukraine officials also admitted they had "temporarily" lost access to the Sea of Azov, though Russia has effectively controlled the coastline for weeks after surrounding Mariupol. Moscow's announcement came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky again appealed for peace, urging Russia to accept "meaningful" talks in his latest video posted on social media.

SEE ALSO P6

Tourist arrivals set to increase

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyp

International tourist arrivals in the Sultanate of Oman gathered pace in the recent months following the removal of travel restrictions. This is evident from the manifold rise in the number of foreign guests in various hotels in the country.

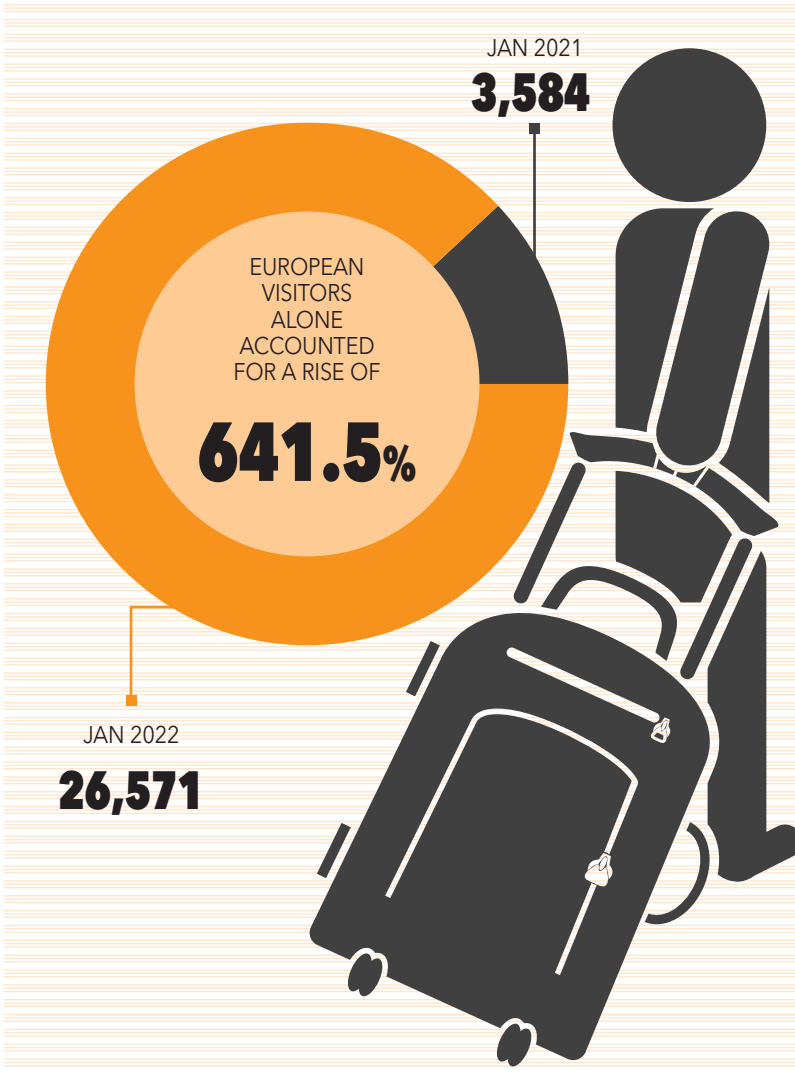
According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the number of European visitors alone accounted for a rise of 641.5 per cent in January 2022 against the same month last year.

Figures from the NCSI revealed that there were 26,571 European visitors at the end of January 2022 against 3,584 in January 2021.

At the same time, visitors from the Gulf countries grew by 270.6 per cent with their number reaching 5,548 in January 2022 compared to 1,497 in January 2021.

The Sultanate of Oman has already opened its borders to travellers of all nationalities with no country-specific bans in place.

Unvaccinated travellers must provide proof of medical reasons



preventing them from getting vaccinated. Foreigners cannot enter the country without a vaccination certificate or medical exemption.

The monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators also showed a significant increase in the total revenues of hotels in the category of 3-5 stars by 91.6 per cent during January 2022 amounting to RO 12.264 million, compared to the same month in 2021.

However, the number of Asian guests fell by 3.2 per cent, from 9,531 guests in January 2021 to 9,223 guests in January 2022.

According to the Hamburg-based research agency Statista, the year-on-year change in the revenue per available room of hotels in Muscat was forecast to be 14.9 per cent in 2024.

"It was expected that the revenue per available room would recover by an increase of 33.9 per cent in 2021 after the ease of the travel restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic", Statista, a leading provider of market and consumer data said.

TURN TO P2

READ IN
OPINION



HOW THE WAR IN UKRAINE IS
AFFECTING TRAVEL

ELAINE GLUSAC

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WHY IS IT CALLED
BEAUTY SLEEP?

RAY PETERSEN

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INSIDE



CZECHS WILL LOOK AFTER
UKRAINE'S REFUGEES: PM

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ENVIRONMENTALISM AFTER
THE UKRAINE WAR

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Believers excited as group iftars and Taraweeh may resume

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Believers are excited as the two important gatherings during the holy month, iftar (fast breaking) and Taraweeh (special mass night prayers), are to return to mosques during this year's Ramadhan, after two years hiatus, if everything goes well.

No mass iftars or Taraweeh prayers during the holy month were allowed as part of the Covid-19 restrictions and mass prayers including Friday noon prayers were limited to one's own

house since 2020.

"I'm truly excited to welcome the important gatherings of iftar and Taraweeh prayer along with Ramadhan starting from first week of April", Noorul Ameen told the Observer.

The Supreme Committee issued a ban on holding Ramadhan gatherings including mass iftars both in mosques or other places like tents and public areas as well as any other gatherings during the holy month until further notice on March 19, 2020.

All social, sporting and cultural



gatherings and all sorts of social activities too were banned during the holy month and the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs urged all to offer Taraweeh at home with or without family members in view of the spread of the virus during that time.

"Missing Taraweeh did not make one's fasting invalid, and attending Taraweeh does not rescue an improper or invalid fast hence both have no connection in terms of validity. One is a compulsory obligation, while the other is an optional prayers", a scholar from the ministry said.

During the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Taraweeh prayers were performed in congregation for a short period of time, after which the Prophet changed this practise and performed the prayer at home. This was done out of fear that people would start to consider it to be compulsory. During the time of Umar ibn al Khattab, the second caliph, 20 rak'at of Taraweeh prayer was led in congregation daily. These practices has been recognised as Sunnah, based on the Hadith, he further added.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 27°C Min 22°C SALALAH: Max 33°C Min 20°C NIZWA: Max 33°C Min 15°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:11 FAJR: 04:56 DHUHR: 12:20 ASR: 15:45 MAGHRIB: 18:23 ISHA: 19:33



Oman ready to host training camps for WC 2022 teams

VINOD NAIR
@Vinot_nair

The government will be making efforts to attract Fifa World Cup 2022 Qatar qualifying teams to set up practice camps in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the youths at a weekly TV programme, Basil bin Ahmed al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, said, "There is coordination with the Omani Football Association to attract a group of teams that have qualified for the World Cup in Qatar 2022 to set up camps in the Sultanate of Oman before the start of the tournament." Qatar will host the tournament from November 21 to December 18.

He added that the sports facilities for these teams have been prepared according to international standards.

Earlier speaking to the Observer, the tour operators representing the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism said, "Nearly 85 per cent of the hotel room bookings in Qatar will be handled by the agents approved by Fifa, which opens up demand for facilities in the neighbouring markets such as the Sultanate of Oman."

Saada al Harthi, Director of Business Development, MoHT, said, "Some packages will be announced in coordination with all stakeholders in time for the World Cup." Al Rowas said the Sultanate of Oman gives great attention to sports development with the launch of new strategies



and plans.

The under-secretary said sports have always received great attention from the government and the country has performed well in regional and international levels competitions.

"It has also hosted Asian and international championships. Among these recent achievements is Mohammed al Mashaykhi

who won shot put bronze at the Paralympic Games Tokyo 2021."

"There is a group of promising players in various individual and team sports who can achieve Olympic medals, and there is a project by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth to target young athletes who have performed well in recent times and prepare and support them for the Paris

Olympics and the Los Angeles Olympics," he said.

"We must keep pace with the vision of "Oman 2040 to have an active healthy society, economically viable sports organizations, and efficiently managed sports organisations."

Al Rowas said that as per the directives of the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth,

the focus is on to increase in investment and marketing, encouraging opportunities in the sports sector, and communicating with companies to support institutions and sports clubs.

Al Rowas indicated that there are many opportunities for investment in the sports sector, and sports is a promising market in general.



Semi-submarine cruise is a hit among tourists

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

For people who are scared of diving and snorkelling, here is a chance to explore breathtaking the Sultanate of Oman's rich marine life. One can enjoy these creatures and coral reefs as the sea around the Sultanate of Oman offers crystal clear visibility most of the time.

Welcome on board Oman's first semi-submarine hotel.

This concept of sleeping under the sea and listening to the sounds of dolphins, whales and fishes is a unique experience for tourists.

"I think this is the first time in Oman and possibly in the GCC that provides a fully furnished star hotel room under the sea for the visitors who yearn to live with marine creatures and explore the



underwater world," says Raya al Maskari, Business Development Manager at Muscat Yacht Club.

She said that the demand is increasing with lots of families approaching them for sea cruise and for conducting birthday parties or others.

A number of comfortable beds, sofa, reclining chairs, aesthetically kept toilets and fine dining experience are some of the facilities that await a visitor on board.

"For us, a hotel experience is incomplete without having to devour the authentic cuisine of the country and we have specialty chefs ready to take orders for the clients during the cruise," she said.

The first-of-its-kind semi-submarine with the star hotel living and dining experience located at the Marina Bandar Al Rowdha has many packages to choose from such as a day visit, overnight stay, sunset cruise and speed boat.

If one loves adventure, she/he can try snorkelling, diving and other sea ports under the expert guidance.

Invest Easy receives 159,529 automatic licensing requests

MUSCAT: The number of requests for automatic licensing submitted through the "Invest Easy" portal or through Sanad offices is 159,529 during the period between April 4, 2021, and February 2022.

A number of investors and businessmen who obtained automatic licences confirmed that the service contributes to creating a business environment that promotes growth as it allows business owners and investors to start their economic directly for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

LICENSING SERVICE

The automatic licensing service comes within the framework of the comprehensive development of services provided by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion through the Invest Easy portal, in coopera-

The service allows the investor to obtain an automatic licence for more than 1,500 economic activities

tion with a number of government agencies, within the economic stimulus plan.

The service allows the investor to obtain an automatic licence for more than 1,500 economic activities, which constitute 88 per cent of the total economic activities, including the sectors of agriculture, animal production, fishing, manufacturing industries, repair and installation of machinery, equipment, devices, electrical supplies, water, construction and building, in addition to the sectors of vehicle maintenance and repair, wholesale and retail activities.

Defence secretary-general leaves for US



MUSCAT: Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Defence, left here on Saturday through Muscat International Airport for the United States of America to head the Sultanate of Oman's side at the 16th meeting of Oman-US Joint Military Committee to be held in Washington during March 23-27. The Ministry of Defence secretary-general is accompanied by a military delegation comprising senior officers from the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces.

■ FROM P1

Tourist arrivals set to increase

The hotel sector in the Sultanate of Oman, like other countries in the world, was impacted greatly by the restrictions on travel and tourism following the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, along with the economic difficulties that took place in the GCC region in that period.

Meanwhile, Trading Economics in a report forecast that tourist arrivals in the Sultanate of Oman are expected to increase steadily over the next few years with 150,000 alone by the end of this quarter.

The econometric models published by the global agency projects the Sultanate of Oman tourist arrivals trend around 250,000 in 2022.

In January 2022, the number of visitors from Oceania reached 733 registering a slight growth of 3.4 per cent compared to the same month last year, and the number of guests from the African continent during the month of January 2022 stood at 698 visitors, a growth rate of 69.6 per cent compared to



January 2021.

Meanwhile, the number of guests of other nationalities reached 2,138, registering a growth rate of 36.4 per cent during January 2022 compared to the same month in 2021.



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3

Oman Pavillion tops million visitors at Expo 2020

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Dubai Expo 2020's Oman Pavillion received the millionth visitor on Thursday as the number of visitors to the event has increased with only two weeks left.

Shamsa al Ketbi was the millionth visitor to the Sultanate of Oman's Pavillion. Meanwhile, Expo 2020 Dubai reached the milestone of 20 million visits on Saturday, which was also the largest global gathering since the start of the pandemic.

Over 192 countries are taking part in the Expo.

The Oman pavilion, which has been focusing on sustainability, saw the launch of several innovative products that included the NSNS application, which is a marketplace offering travel information and booking services.

The prototype of the electric car made in the Sultanate of Oman was also unveiled at the Expo recently.

Shaikh Ahmed bin Saeed al Maktoum, President, Dubai Civil Aviation Authority,



Chairman and Chief Executive of Emirates Airline and Group, and Chairman of the Expo 2020 Dubai Higher Committee, said, "When we started this journey in 2013, and even before then as we prepared the bid for Expo 2020 Dubai, we had a dream to welcome the world to Dubai and the UAE for an unprecedented global gathering that would live long in hearts and minds.

Domestic visitors have turned out in force to support Expo 2020 Dubai, with almost 70 per cent of guests hailing from the UAE. The latest figures show that children under the age of 18 have visited more than 2.8 million times, with the global event inspiring the next generation of innovators and change-makers.



SAF concludes Expo 2020 Dubai participation

DUBAI: The Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) on Saturday concluded its participation at Dubai 2020 Expo which came as part of the GCC Secretariat-General's pavilion.

SAF participated with the Royal Army of Oman's (RAO) music band, the Sultan of Oman Armour Cavalry, Royal Navy of Oman's ship Shabab Oman II,

the music bands of the Royal Guard of Oman and the Royal Cavalry.

GCC SCHEDULE

The military participation at Dubai 2020 Expo came at intervals in accordance to the schedule designated to each of the GCC countries.

Khalid bin Ibrahim al Shaikh,

Commissioner-General of the GCC Pavilion at EXPO 2020 Dubai, said the GCC armed forces participated at Dubai 2020 Expo through various military shows staged by music bands, cavalry teams, RNO's vessel Shabab Oman II, adding that all military events saw significant turnout with visitors hailing the military shows. — ONA

RAFO airlifts sick boy

The Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) on Saturday carried out evacuation for an Omani boy suffering from a critical health condition. The child was airlifted by a RAFO helicopter from Masirah Hospital in South Al Sharqiyah Governorate to the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital in Muscat.

Education ministry hosts art expo

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

An exhibition featuring a variety of artworks by more than 40 artists from the Ministry of Education began at Muscat Mall. Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education, inaugurated the art exhibition "The Imprints of Mushref" last week. The Ministry of Education represented by the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision - Department of Individual Skills Supervision / Supervision of the Fine Arts subject, is organising the exhibition in Muscat Mall from March 17 to 23.

The displayed works included wall paintings, drawings, photos, digital design works, three-dimensional sculptures and installations.

The exhibition is accompanied by workshops and critical dialogue sessions by arts specialists from Sultan Qaboos University, College of Scientific Design, and the Ministry of Education.

The applied workshops discuss several topics including relationship between creative thinking and the development of artistic skills of the arts supervisor; the investigation of art and its impact on developing the



skills of supervisors and teachers; and the role of the arts supervisor in enriching the technical and educational aspects of teaching and specialised art exhibitions.

These initiatives by the ministry are aimed at generating innovative artistic ideas and a healthy environment in which participating artists gain visual experiences, which helps them

in refining their technical expertise and acquiring new skills.

In a statement Dr Sulaiman al Jamudi, Director-General of the Directorate-General of Educational Supervision, he said: "The exhibition is the first of its kind by our fellow supervisors and specialists in arts. It aims to highlight their skill aspects and exchange specialised technical expertise among them, in addition to spreading awareness of the importance of arts in society and emphasising the importance of the role of supervisors as an experienced artist and role model for teachers and students in arts."

NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that Mr. Shyam Sharma Raveendra Sharma, worked as General Manager holder of Indian Passport No. R3328075 and resident card 917093202 until February 28, 2022. With effect from March 01, 2022 he is no longer authorized to represent the M/s. Muscat Electronics LLC.

MUSCAT ELECTRONICS L.L.C.

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Women's work is essential to thriving coastal fisheries... we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the imperative role that coastal women play along the fisheries value chain... We call on everybody to build a world in which coastal women are fully recognised and empowered to continue their contributions for human well-being, food systems and poverty alleviation through the responsible and sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture resources

DR NORA OURABAH HADDAD

TIDE TURNS IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN IN FISHING



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Millions across the globe harvest fish as their main occupation while millions of others have it as part of their staple diet. Commemorating the international women's day as well as the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYFA 2022), Food and Agriculture Organization in Oman hosted an event on Friday highlighting the role small scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers play in food security and nutrition, poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource use.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2022 the International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (IYFA 2022). The year serves as an important recognition of the millions of small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers who provide healthy and nutritious food to billions of people and contribute to achieving Zero Hunger.

The event served as a celebration of the many roles that women occupy in the fields of fisheries and aquaculture, as well as their contribution to achieving food security and nutrition, poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource management.

The Friday event featured a video walkthrough of an art exhibition of coastal women in Oman, as well as a children's workshop highlighting the importance of coastal women in the upbringing of the new generation.

Recognising the efforts of women and to increase their visibility and contribution to the globally important sectors in fisheries, FAO joined forces with the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and Bait Al Zubair to



organise the "Women and the changing tide: breaking the bias - Lessons from Omani small-scale fisheries" held at Bait Al Zubair Foundation under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The event highlighted how the workers hold enormous potential to promote transformative changes in production, processing, distribution and consumption of fish and aquatic products. While they contribute to a healthy diet, they also keep traditions alive.

As global food systems face many complex challenges, including hunger, malnutrition, degraded ecosystems and the impacts of climate change, experts said there is an urgency to act to shape agri-food systems to deliver the quality diets needed for good health, relieve pressure on the planet's natural resources and drive inclusive economic growth. The hope is that the transformation would also present many opportunities, including through the development of fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

They pointed out that women have played a vital role in the mentioned fields for centuries and are now making strides

in seizing opportunities to start their own businesses and seek management roles.

The event was conducted in a hybrid physical and virtual setting, which was broadcast to a live audience and also throughout the world, and featured a wide of array activities all devoted to empowering coastal women.

The Director-General of the International Organization for Women in the Seafood Industry, Camille Cherries, spoke on global views of the biases that women face in the fisheries sector - what needs to be done, what will be the impact?

Deputy Secretary-General of the Magrebeen Platform for Artisanal Fisheries addressed the issue on how women's collectives in the fisheries sector can empower women in terms of participation and decision making.

Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad stated, "Women's work is essential to thriving coastal fisheries. Together with Bait Al Zubair Foundation, we wanted to take this opportunity to highlight the imperative role that coastal women play along the fisheries value chain." She added, "We call on everybody to build a world in which coastal women are fully recognised and empowered to continue their

contributions for human well-being, food systems and poverty alleviation through the responsible and sustainable use of fisheries and aquaculture resources."

The celebration offered an opportunity to enhance dialogue between different actors, and to strengthen small-scale producers to collaborate with one another and make themselves seen, heard and included in decision making that shapes their everyday lives - all the way from local community level up to international and global forum.

Dr Mohammed bin Abdul Karim al Shahi, General Manager of the Bait Al Zubair Foundation, said: "This event represents the long standing partnership between the Bait Al Zubair Foundation and FAO, which previously included various joint activities and initiatives that aimed at establishing cultural awareness of food and agricultural systems. He added, "Finding common ground in the fields of culture and tradition, and food and agriculture is a key factor that Bait Al Zubair seeks to promote with FAO in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

FAO contributes to reducing gender inequalities through its work on norms and standards, data and information, policy dialogue, capacity development, knowledge and technologies, partnerships, and advocacy and communication. At the global and regional level, FAO advocates for sharpening the focus of high-level dialogue and decision making regarding food security and nutrition to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment issues are adequately addressed and mainstreamed in related programmes as a contribution to the sustainable transformation of food systems.



Kazakh citizens can visit Oman without visa

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Citizens of Kazakhstan will be able to visit Oman without obtaining a tourist visa, starting from April 1.

“The Government of Sultanate of Oman introduced a 14-day visa-free regime for Kazakh citizens. The decision will develop tourism relations between the two countries,” the Kazakhstan Embassy in Muscat said on Friday.

In the pre-Covid days, SalamAir had announced plans to open

Almaty-Muscat Nur-Sultan-Muscat direct flights, after Kazakh and Omani aviation authorities inked a memorandum of understanding in October 2019.

In line with national efforts to promote and ease services for tourists visiting Oman, nationals of 103 countries are exempted from entry visas for stays of up to 14 days.

The exemption will be subject to certain requirements including a prior and confirmed hotel booking, health insurance and a return ticket.

Al Isbaq is a medicine and a bulwark against soil erosion



TEXT& PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Most of Al Hajar mountain slopes and plains along highways linking the wilayats are covered in green thanks to the recent spells of winter rains. The verdant landscape in Al Sareen, Al Hobobiyah, Haifadh, Al Sawaqim, Al Mazarea and Wadi Alarbeien is the result of mushrooming of Al Isbaq (Euphorbia larica Boiss), a perennial plant that has many branches without leaves. Its height ranges between one and two metres. It is distinguished by the strength of its roots and resilient branches.

Bees depend a lot on the nectar of Isbaq flowers. The fruits of this plant are usually green and has a circular shape. However, sometimes it is yellow in colour. Moreover, various species of animals, namely deer and

Traditional healers extracted the juice of Isbaq to treat wounds and herders have used them to remove thorns from the feet and hands

sheep, feed on this plant.

This plant can be seen in most of the mountains, on the banks of wadis and in the desert. It has many uses. In ancient times, the stalks of this plant were used to build the roofs of houses. At a time when gas was not available, the dry stalks of this plant were also used to light the fire.

Houses with Isbaq roofs were common in mountainous areas as it protected the residents from harsh winter.

Traditional healers extracted the juice

of Isbaq to treat wounds and herders have used them to remove thorns from the feet and hands. It was also used to treat infections in eyes, bites, boils, burns and as an anthelmintic drug for deworming.

Isbaq, a dominant and common component of the native desert flora of northern Oman, is a bulwark against soil erosion in mountains and valleys during torrential rains.

“The plants and trees have been very significant to a wide spectrum of the Omani community from the last decades up to our present time. These resources have nutritional, medicinal and cosmetic values,” an environmentalist told the Observer.

An Oman environmental researcher said these traditional knowledge of plants should be preserved and passed down to future generations.

JOB OPPORTUNITY وظيفة شاغرة

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Civil Number: 60604676
He was working for Oman International Group SAOC. As Operations Manager, he's no longer representing the company in any way, and everyone who deals with him in the name of the company is at his own risk, and no responsibility falls on the company after publishing the advertisement.

Ministry takes part in TESOL ARABIA

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Educational Studies and International Co-operation, participated in the TESOL ARABIA conference. Eight educators specialised in teaching English in the Ministry took part in the conference held in Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates during March 11-14, within the framework of educational cooperation between the Ministry and the British Council.

It is worth noting that the conference is held annually with the aim of providing those involved in the English language with modern teaching methods by attending various workshops. It also aims at providing the opportunity for dialogue with peers from different countries of the world and learning about the most important experiences and best educational practices in the educational field.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (7/2022)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link:

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No	No E-Tender	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/22/015	2022/MM/ QS-9	Public Parking Project at (Bousher hay alBaydha) (E- Tender)	Rial 25	09/04/2022	28/04/2022	Second
PRE/22/018	2022/MM/ QS-10	Construction of pedestrian Walkway and Parking along alsahil Road in Quriyat (E- Tender)	Rial 35	09/04/2022	28/04/2022	First

Tender Conditions:-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+96824402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+96824402200/24402330).

Sultanate of Oman The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to re-submit the following tenders:

Tender no	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
13/2022	Maintenance Works At Muscat Court Complex	30/03/2022	24/04/2022	Third	RO 25/-
14/2022	Maintenance Works at Samail Court Complex	03/04/2022	25/04/2022	Second	RO 25/-
15/2022	Boundary wall grills and Main Gate maintenance Works at Nizwa Court Complex	30/03/2022	25/04/2022	Excellent, First, Second, Third, Fourth	RO 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below
website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:**
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:**
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:

Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Hypersonic missile used to destroy depot

MOSCOW: The Russian air force says it has destroyed a missile arsenal in Ukraine's Ivano-Frankivsk region with a hypersonic missile.

The "Kinzhal" (Dagger) missile hit and destroyed an underground ammunition depot in Delyatyn in south-western Ukraine on Friday, a spokesman for the Russian Defence Ministry said.

The information could not be verified, but if true it would be the first time since the beginning of the war that Russia has reported the use of its new ballistic air-to-surface missile. It would also be the missile's first ever deployment in combat, the ministry said. The Kinzhal missiles are fired from MiG-31 fighter jets and, according to Russia, can hit targets up to 2,000 kilometres away. Hypersonic missiles exceed the speed of sound several times over and fly at more than 6,000 kilometres per hour.

Japan PM visits India for 'candid' Ukraine talks



Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the signing of an agreement in New Delhi. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in India on Saturday, with officials in Tokyo predicting "candid discussions" about New Delhi's unwillingness to condemn Russia's war in Ukraine.

Unlike fellow members of the Quad alliance — Japan, Australia and the US — India has abstained in three UN votes deploring Moscow's actions, calling only for a halt to the violence. Earlier this month in a four-way call of Quad leaders, Kishida, US President Joe Biden and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison failed to convince India's Narendra Modi to take a tougher line.

A joint statement had said they "discussed the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in Ukraine and assessed its broader implications" — without any condemnation of Moscow. A separate Indian readout pointedly "underlined that the Quad must remain focused on its core objective of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region."

Germany delivers 3,000 tonnes of donated food

BERLIN: More than 3,000 tonnes of donated food from Germany have arrived Ukraine via Poland under the coordination of the Food and Agriculture Ministry. Some 100 truckloads with almost 3,300 pallets were used to deliver staple foods, water, juice, baby food and canned fish and meat, German Agriculture Minister Cem Özdemir said. The products were mainly donated by several German retail and food companies. The supplies were distributed in the direction of Kharkiv, Kiev, Zaporizhia and Chernihiv. A federal coordination office for commercial donations was set up to bring together requests from Ukraine and offers from private entities. Meanwhile, private and public organisations in Germany were responding to Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. German Federal Police have counted 207,742 so far, the Interior Ministry said.

Only refugees who are encountered by the Federal Police, for example at the Austrian-Bavarian border, at railway stations or on trains, are recorded. — **Agencies**

Talk peace now or suffer, Zelenskiy tells Russia



French soldiers from the 7th Battalion of Alpine Hunters take part in a drill to reinforce regional security at the Nato military base in Estonia. — Reuters

LVIV/ODESSA: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called on Saturday for comprehensive peace talks with Moscow to stop its invasion of Ukraine, saying it would otherwise take Russia "several generations" to recover from its losses in the war.

Russian forces have taken heavy losses and their advance has largely stalled since President Vladimir Putin launched the assault on February 24, with long columns of troops that bore down on Kyiv halted in its suburbs.

But they have laid siege to cities, blasting urban areas to rubble, and in recent days have intensified missile attacks on scattered targets in western Ukraine, away from the main battlefields in the north and east.

On Saturday, Russia said its hypersonic missiles had destroyed a large underground depot for missiles and aircraft ammunition in the western Ivano-Frankivsk region. Hypersonic weapons can travel faster than five times the speed of sound and the Interfax agency said it was the first time Russia had used them in Ukraine.

A spokesperson for the Ukrainian Air Force Command confirmed the attack, but said the Ukrainian side had no information on the type of missiles used.

Ukrainian authorities said on Saturday they have not seen any significant shifts over the past 24 hours in front line areas, noting the cities of Mariupol, Mykolaiv and Kherson in the south and Izyum in the east continued to see the heaviest fighting.

More than 3.3 million refugees have already fled Ukraine through its western border, with around 2 more million displaced inside the country. Efforts to evacuate civilians from cities under siege through "humanitarian corridors" continued.

Ukrainian authorities said they hoped to open 10 such evacuation routes on Saturday.

Unprecedented Western sanctions aimed at crippling Russia's economy and starving its war machine have yet to halt what Putin calls a "special operation" to disarm its neighbour and purge it of "Nazis". Kyiv and its allies have called this a baseless pretext for war.

Zelenskiy calls for comprehensive peace talks

Ukraine says it has lost access to Sea of Azov

Biden warns China's Xi against helping Russia

"I'll go (to Germany) for three weeks but I hope I can go home after that," said Olga Pavlovska, a 28-year-old refugee in the Polish town of Przemysl, hoping Zeleksi's calls for comprehensive peace talks would bring an end to the invasion.

Ukraine's defence ministry said on Friday it had "temporarily" lost access to the Azov Sea, a strategic link with the Black Sea, after Russia said it was "tightening the noose" around Mariupol.

Hundreds of thousands have been trapped there for over two weeks with power, water and heat supplies cut off. Its Soviet-era apartment blocks have been

blasted into burned-out shells and bodies amid the rubble are a common sight. Local officials say fighting has reached the city centre and heavy shelling kept humanitarian aid from getting in.

Rescue workers were still searching for survivors in a Mariupol theatre that authorities say was flattened by Russian air strikes on Wednesday. Russia denies hitting the theatre and says it is not targeting civilians.

The Ukrainian prosecutor general's office said on Saturday that 112 children had been killed since the invasion began. Reuters could not immediately verify the information.

Zelenskiy said refusal to compromise would come at a steep price for Russia.

"I want everyone to hear me now, especially in Moscow. The time has come for a meeting, it is time to talk," he said in a video address. "The time has come to restore territorial integrity and justice for Ukraine. Otherwise, Russia's losses will be such that it will take you several generations to recover." — **Reuters**

Czechs will look after Ukraine's 'wives and children': PM

PRAGUE/PRZEMYSL: Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said on Saturday his country would take care of the "wives and children" fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has driven about 3 million Ukrainians to seek refuge in the EU's eastern flank.

Fiala, who travelled to Kyiv earlier this week with his Polish and Slovenian counterparts to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, added that the Czech Republic could cope with further refugee arrivals from Ukraine.

With men of conscription age prevented from leaving Ukraine, mostly women and children have crossed into the EU at border points in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania.

"I have informed Ukrainian friends that we will take care of their wives and children," Fiala said on Twitter. "The speed

and size of the refugee wave is incomparable with past waves but the Czech Republic can (handle) it."

Echoing the concerns of other leaders in the region, Fiala said countries receiving large numbers of refugees should receive EU financial support but voiced opposition to quotas.

"We do not want the EU to introduce quotas but to have financial solidarity with the countries most affected by the refugee wave," he said.

REFUGEE ARRIVALS

Poland, which shares a roughly 500-kilometre border with Ukraine, has accounted for more than 2 million of the refugee arrivals.

The deputy mayor of Przemysl, a town near Poland's busiest crossing with Ukraine, said the flow of refugees has eased, but



Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala speaks after his arrival from Kyiv in Prague. — Reuters

cautioned that further Russian military attacks in western Ukraine could change the situation quickly.

"Most of the people who left eastern Ukraine are now

coming to Poland," Swiezy added.

While Russian forces have taken heavy losses and their advance has largely stalled, they have laid siege to cities and in recent days intensified missile attacks on scattered targets in western Ukraine, away from the main battlefields in the north and east.

PEACE TALKS

In Przemysl, Ukrainian refugee Olga Pavlovska said she hoped Zelenskiy's calls for comprehensive peace talks with Moscow would bring an end to the Russian invasion, allowing her to return.

"I'll go (to Germany) for three weeks but I hope I can go home after that," said Pavlovska, 28, who fled the central Ukrainian city of Kryvyi Rih with her two young sons.

Western sanctions aimed at crippling Russia's economy have

yet to halt what Russian President Vladimir Putin calls a "special operation" to disarm and "de-Nazify" its neighbour.

The attacks in western Ukraine led Tetiana Huseva, 62, to flee with her daughter and granddaughter this week. Her husband, who is too old to be conscripted, chose to stay behind and continue in his job at a local utility.

"My husband is a senior citizen, but he refused to leave," Huseva said at Przemysl's train station. "He said he needed to work."

The family initially stayed in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, but decided to leave the country on Friday when they heard a rocket flying above them, she said.

Volunteers across the region have rushed to transport, house and feed refugees, but aid workers fear a second wave of arrivals could stretch host countries to the limit. — **Reuters**

Putin’s war is all too familiar: Poet

CARLOTTA GALL

At 83, no longer a young poet, Ihor Kalynets knows something of life under Russia’s thumb. Having spent nine years in the Soviet Gulag, including hard labour cutting stone, he secretly wrote on cigarette papers what are regarded as some of his best verses. They were crumpled into tiny balls and smuggled out of prison.

For 30 years of his professional life — during Soviet times — he was able to publish only abroad, infuriating the authorities, or through samizdat, the underground self-publishing network. Today, he lives on a leafy street in Lviv, a city in western Ukraine inundated with Ukrainians displaced by Russia’s war on their country. His daughter and son-in-law live up the street, and he has opened his art-filled home to a family of refugees.

War is raging to the east and around Kyiv, the capital, but he insists he has no intention of joining the exodus of people fleeing to neighbouring Poland and other European countries.



IHOR KALYNETS

“I will stay in Ukraine”, he said, looking around his living room, where he sleeps on a cot, surrounded by his books and paintings, his old-fashioned radio close at hand. “The Russians will not come here”, he said, adding that western Ukrainians would put up a determined defence of their region.

More than habit or age, what keeps Kalynets in Lviv is his entire life history, which has been one of resistance driven by a deeply rooted connection to his homeland and Ukrainian culture.

“I did not grow up as a pioneer or a komsomolets”, he said, referring to the Communist youth groups that schooled generations of Soviet youths. “I was bred in a Ukrainian family in the national spirit.”

Kalynets has seen the full arc of his country’s history, from before and during Soviet rule, to independence, and now to its present struggle.

Born in 1939, in Khodoriv, a town not far from here, when western Ukraine was still part of Poland, he grew up in the tumult of World War II that ravaged the region and changed state borders. Lviv was occupied by Nazi Germany and then seized by the Soviet Army.

As a teenager he saw at close hand the resistance against the Soviet state that lasted well into the 1950s. Ukrainian nationalists, led by Stepan Bandera, had first opposed Polish rule, then joined forces with the Nazis and later British intelligence to fight against Soviet rule in their home territory.

“I was brought up in this milieu”, he said, and its imprint remains with him.

“I think of the cruelty of the Muscovites and how the Ukrainian patriots were basically destroyed”, he said.

The early experience led to a lifetime of opposition



A Ukrainian service member checks cartridges for a machine gun at a position on the front line in the north Kyiv region, Ukraine. – Reuters

to Soviet rule and stretches to Russia’s latest war, which President Vladimir Putin has termed an operation to de-Nazify and “liberate” Ukraine. “I knew who our so-called liberators were”, Kalynets said.

As a student, he moved to Lviv and studied at the Language and Literature Faculty of Lviv University, graduating in 1961. He married another poet, Iryna Stasiv, and the two became well-known participants in the burst of cultural activity that emerged in the 1960s after the end of Stalinist repression.

“We were mostly interested in the political conditions in Ukraine”, he said. “We were not expecting to gain liberation and we understood it would be a long time to gain independence. There was only a handful of us, but we believed something should change.”

He wrote a first collection of poems, “Excursions”, but it never saw the light of day. The entire print run was confiscated, according to an account of his life by the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

Some of the poems appeared in journals and newspapers, and in 1966, a collection, “Kupal’s Fire”, was published in Kyiv, but also swiftly proscribed.

A modernist poet — he developed his style from the avant-garde poets of the 1920s — he focused often on the richness of Ukrainian culture, celebrating literary figures and ancient customs, while offering a lament for the loss and destruction of that culture under Soviet rule. He wrote odes to a country water well, stained-glass windows and happiness, “written in sand with a finger.”

His poetry was criticised by the Soviet authorities, who demanded a more uplifting propagandistic tone of work. He was excluded from the Union of Writers.

In 1971, his wife was arrested and charged with anti-Soviet agitation.

Six months later, he was arrested, too. He served six years in a labour camp in Perm in the Ural Mountains, followed by three years of internal exile in Chita, in Siberia, where he was reunited with his wife.

Can travel be a force for peace? This tour leader thinks so

Aziz Abu Sarah and his business partner, Scott Cooper, had one big ambition when they started their travel agency: They wanted to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Well, sort of. It was kind of a joke between the two of them, Abu Sarah said recently. But the two friends — one a Palestinian who grew up in Jerusalem, the other an American — had worked together in mediating and resolving international conflicts in places like Syria, Afghanistan and Colombia.

Feeling limited by the number of people they could reach through this work, Abu Sarah and Cooper decided to apply their experience in a completely different field: Tourism. Their goal was nothing less than to transform travel — and travellers — into a force for peace.

A defining feature of the tour company they founded in 2009 is the “double story” tour, in which a tour group is led by two guides: One on each side of a conflict or divide long-standing that has affected the region the group is visiting.

On the company’s tour of Ireland and Northern Ireland, for example, a Unionist and a Nationalist jointly lead the tour of venues around Belfast, Derry and Dublin. And on their tour of the Holy Land, the groups visit Tel Aviv, Bethlehem and Jerusalem accompanied by both a Palestinian Arab and an Israeli.

“Literally everyone we knew told us that was the dumbest idea”, Abu Sarah said recently from his home in South Carolina. “They thought no one would ever pay to do something like this. But in one year, we proved them wrong.

More than a decade after its inception, Mejdī Tours has welcomed over 20,000 guests and the company now

organises trips to the Balkans, Colombia, Egypt, Morocco, Chile and Costa Rica, among others.

During this time, Abu Sarah was named a TED Fellow and a National Geographic Emerging Explorer. He has also written a book that argues for travel as a force for peace.

The company’s tours were mostly suspended during the pandemic, but Abu Sarah and Cooper used the downtime to develop or expand several new trips to the United States, including a tour on the History of Civil Rights in the American South, an Indigenous tour of the Southwestern United States and “Red/Blue Divide Tours” of Washington, DC and Detroit.

When I joined him, Abu Sarah was about to leave to lead a group tour in Egypt. But he took the time to talk about the danger of the single narrative, the power of bringing opposing perspectives together, and what he learned from the toughest journey he’s ever taken.

Why is the dual narrative approach so important?

In so many places Scott and I had travelled, we always encountered one dominant narrative, and then there were all these other narratives that were never heard in the public sphere. So with our tours, we said to ourselves: “No more unique history. No more single story. We decided to start in Jerusalem, Palestine and Israel, and that’s the area we knew best. And what we’ve seen is that dual storytelling is so powerful because it gives you the opportunity to hear different opinions, but also to understand the people you meet, to understand their fear and their anger, and really fall in love with the place you are visiting.



Everyone we knew told us that was the dumbest idea. They thought no one would ever pay to do something like this. But in one year, we proved them wrong

AZIZ ABU SARAH
IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Discussions must sometimes be heated. Have you ever had problems with tension in groups?

It is extremely rare. If there are any conflicts, it’s personality driven, which is what you would see on any band tour. We have very conservative people and very liberal people doing the same trips, but because these two guides with different backgrounds are able to hold a conversation, it kind of helps the group hold those conversations as well, without starting to beat. So we almost never have a problem between the guests themselves — or between the guides, which was the other concern people had.

And now you apply this approach to tours in the US?

I lived in Washington, DC, which is a very segregated city, especially class-wise, and I realised that my friends and I wouldn’t venture out of neighbourhoods we already knew. So we started developing a city tour, and we asked a Republican and a Democrat to co-lead it. This first trip was amazing. Looking at the news, you would think that if you put a Republican and a Democrat together, they would just talk to each other. But that was not the case at all.

One of the most interesting conversations we had was during a visit to the Heritage Foundation, which is very conservative. Some of the liberal people in the tour group had never had this kind of open conversation with a conservative that wasn’t just sound bites, but a real productive conversation. At the end, the discussion was about “What is the solution? rather than “You are doing this or that wrong.” It was fascinating. And that’s what happens during our tours in Israel and Palestine.

How to solve a problem



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

We meet problems on a daily basis and we often get involved in solving them without noticing the mental processes we use. Some problems are easy to solve such as deciding what to have for dinner or where to spend the long weekend while others need more effort.

According to psychologists, problem solving is a mental process that we use to discover a problem then analyse and solve it. This process usually involves the following steps.

First you discover there is a problem, then you decide to deal with it but first you need to understand it, look for available options then you try out these actions to see which one works.

Let us apply this to an example. Imagine that you are getting ready

to go to work one day but when you get into your car you discover that the battery is dead. The car battery shop is not open and you have an important meeting at work first thing in the morning which you can't miss. What are you going to do? You would probably feel angry and blame yourself for not checking the batteries in regular bases.

But feelings aside, you will need actions to solve this problem. You would probably start thinking of a list of options that eventually let you arrive at your workplace on time with little compromises. Can you take your wife's car, or ask a work colleague if he can pass by your house and you go with him? Or you can call a taxi. You would then go through each option and see which one would work best. If your wife

'PROBLEMS ARE INEVITABLE PART OF OUR LIVES, LEARNING HOW TO SOLVE THEM WILL IMPROVE OUR WELL-BEING'

is not working or she doesn't need the car that day then taking her car would be the quickest choice.

If she does need her car then going with your colleague "provided he lives nearby and has not left to work yet would be a good option. If not then calling a taxi will be more practical provided there is a taxi service in your town and they can get to you on time so you don't miss your meeting.

It is normal to worry about the problems we have but worrying

would not help us solve it, if anything it will only make us feel frustrated.

Therefore, psychologists developed what they call problem solving techniques. They recommend that you start by identifying and considering each problem one at a time, ask yourself if there is anything you can do about the problem right now, if the answer is yes, then start by thinking about potential solutions.

If the problem does not need addressing right now, say a presentation you need to give next month, allocate a time in your calendar when you will start working on it. If the problem is beyond your capabilities to solve then acknowledge that and seek help from someone more

specialised.

Try to shift your focus on something else if you find yourself still worrying about it.

Sometimes when we are facing problems we find ourselves constantly thinking about them which leads us to develop unhelpful thinking patterns called rumination where you are constantly thinking about the problem to the point of losing sleep or concentration.

To overcome this, try to focus on what you can control would liberate you from those negative thoughts and make you feel better. Be kind to yourself and remember your strengths and the problems you were able to solve in the past.

This will boost your confidence and give you the skills to solve your problems.

Telegram and WhatsApp duck Russia bans

JOSHUA MELVIN

Chat platforms like WhatsApp and Telegram have avoided being blocked by Russia — unlike some of the world's biggest social networks — in a tenuous tolerance that experts warn could end suddenly.

Years of tension between Moscow and US-based Facebook and Twitter erupted into confrontation after the war with Ukraine, with the platforms targeting state-tied media and then finding themselves restricted in Russia.

YouTube, which has barred channels linked to Russian state media globally, was also facing a direct threat of being blocked after Russia's media regulator, Roskomnadzor, accused the site's owner Google of being "anti-Russian."

Messaging apps, however, have gotten a pass so far in part because Meta-owned WhatsApp is less suited for mass communication, while Telegram's ability to blast information to large groups has made it useful both for independent media and the Kremlin.

"I think it's unlikely Russia will ban Telegram because they are so short on platforms where they can operate," said Sergey Sanovich, a postdoctoral researcher at Princeton University, who noted that authorities in 2020 aborted efforts to block the service.

Telegram, criticised as having a lax content policing policy, offers a forum for Russian authorities to promote narratives friendly to their internationally condemned war.

Russia still operates accounts on platforms like Facebook, despite blocking the service at home, but this week the Silicon Valley giant took down posts from Moscow's pages that contained misinformation about its deadly offensive.

Telegram has become an essential exchange for news on the war, with its growth accelerating after the Kremlin's latest crackdown on independent media and the lock-out of apps like Facebook and Instagram.

An average of 2.5 million new users joined Telegram daily in the last three weeks, the firm said, about a 25-per cent jump from the weeks prior.

But experts highlighted a risk to Telegram and its users due to a lack of default, end-to-end encryption that potentially leaves the company susceptible to government pressure to turn over information.

Alp Toker, director of web monitoring group NetBlocks, noted WhatsApp has put in place firestops that offer insulation against that sort of pressure.

"By improving their security and adopting end-to-end encryption technology, they have essentially protected their own platform from legal risk and potential demands for content access requests," Toker added. — AFP

How the war in Ukraine is affecting travel



An Oceania Cruises ship in Stockholm.



ELAINE GLUSAC

The writer is the Frugal Traveler columnist for TNYT travel section

Just as the travel industry was seeking to climb out of a two-year depression, Russia's attack on Ukraine has scrambled schedules and given Americans pause as they consider international vacations.

The extent to which travellers will feel the effects of the war depends on where they're going, though experts say the rising price of oil will likely affect all airline ticket prices, even on domestic routes.

For Americans with international plans, the world map, which recently seemed to be expanding with the relaxation of Covid restrictions in many countries, has shrunk anew. Operators have largely scrapped travel in Russia for the rest of the year, which greatly affects Baltic cruise itineraries where the marquee port of call was St Petersburg.

All of this comes at the time of year when many Americans plan their summer vacations. Some are hesitating. In a recent survey of about 350 American travellers on the impact of the war, the market research firm MMGY Global found that 47 per cent are waiting to see how things pan out in Ukraine before making Europe plans.

The conflict leapfrogged Covid-19 as a factor influencing decision-making, with twice as many respondents citing concern about the war spreading beyond Ukraine as those who fear the pandemic.

So far, travel companies are not seeing mass cancellations as travellers, who may have been conditioned to remain flexible by the pandemic, are sticking to their resolve. Nearly 65 per

cent of American adults surveyed by TheVacationer.com, a travel strategy website, said they would accept higher prices, longer transit times or another deterrent in order to travel in 2022.

"We're not seeing a change in behaviour for now from our American travellers," said Sarah Casewit, a senior travel curator with Origin, a membership-based travel-planning service, which has seen a rise in Europe bookings in recent weeks.

Whatever inconveniences travellers experience is, of course, nothing compared to the suffering inflicted on Ukrainians. Many travellers want to support Europeans who have been hoping for a robust summer season, but do not want to complicate humanitarian efforts to help war refugees.

Given the unpredictability of the war, travellers will need to remain flexible as flight operations, cruises and tours adjust to the conflict.

No commercial carriers from the United States fly to Russia, and

those with code-share and interline agreements with Russian carriers, including Delta and American, have cut them.

But the Federal Aviation Administration's prohibition on flying over Ukraine, Belarus and much of Russia requires some routes to make costly diversions. For commercial flights departing from the United States, these routes are largely limited to India, which only reopened to tourists in mid-November.

United Airlines has temporarily suspended service between San Francisco and Delhi and between Newark and Mumbai, though it is continuing service to Delhi from Chicago and Newark.

Rerouting to avoid Russian airspace on Asia flights by flying lower latitude routes over Alaska adds to the cost of operating those flights, said Robert Mann, an airline consultant, who estimated an extra hour of flight time can add up to \$12,000. Those aren't the only additional expenses that will be passed on through higher ticket prices. The rising cost of oil, expected to rise even more after the Biden administration banned Russian oil imports, is contributing to higher airfares.

But for now, interest in Europe remains high among flyers. The airfare app Hopper found prices on Europe-bound flights from the US have risen 16 per cent since mid-February, from \$660 to \$763 round trip, which it attributes to post-omicron travel enthusiasm and the usual seasonal cycle of rising prices.

— The New York Times

Why is it called beauty sleep?



The writer is a media consultant

“Sleep,” I muttered from under my blanket and pillow, “I know I forsook you when I was a child, but I yearn for you today, so much.” Who, after all, doesn’t like to sleep? Yes, hardly anyone... and some people live to sleep, don’t they? You know them, they always must be, usually virtually, but sometimes actually, dragged from the ‘pit,’ kicking and screaming. There’s one in every house! But maybe we should accord them more latitude, as Caesar did, saying, “He is a dreamer. Let us leave him.”

Dreams are weird toys, aren’t they? Antigonus, in ‘The Winter’s Tale’ surely thought so. The great unfinished symphonies of our modest lives, our dreams see us achieve mightily, fail spectacularly, and mirroring life I guess, we find they, like Groundhog Day (Remember Bill Murray and Punxsutawney Phil?) are re-occurring, and the same situations tend to revisit us, frustratingly unresolved. America’s National Institute for Neurological Disorders and Strokes, tells us that our dreams occupy us for up to two hours a night, so it’s no wonder we wake up tired, and like Caliban, in ‘The Tempest,’ thought “When I waked, I cried (I wanted) to dream again.”

The mighty William Shakespeare found time to dream, and at length, to ponder their influence on our lives through ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ where he wondered what it is to be human in the guise of Puck, who spoke of “slumbers, while visions appeared,” as naught but a dream, inconsequential. Or Hamlet’s “To die,

WE DO SEEM TO NEED SLEEP, AND LIFE DOES SEEM TO BE BETTER AFTER A SLEEP, BUT CONSIDERING WE SPEND AROUND A QUARTER (FOR SOME, MORE) OF OUR LIVES DOING IT, WE DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT, DO WE?

lives doing it, we don’t know much about it, do we? And quoth Hamlet, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” And the bard’s philosophies on the longest sleep, ensure we know that of that little we know, we find much to consider, as Hamlet again contemplated its possibilities saying, “To die, to sleep – to sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there’s the rub, for in that sleep of death what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause,” or at least something, to think about.

The romance of dreams and sleep is never far away, that romance perpetuated in Sonnet 43’s beautiful, haunting, “All days are nights to see till I see thee, and the nights bright days, when dreams do show me thee.” What more could one ask of sleep, of dreams? Indeed, Leontes, in ‘Much Ado About Nothing,’ tells us of her daughter’s saying, “she hath often dreamed of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing.” However, even in literature, the realities of life, its pressures and demands, stay contrary to all hearts and roses, at least for ‘Merchants of Venice,’ among whom Shylock muttered, “Look to my house. I am right loath to go: There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest, for I dreamed of moneybags to-night.”

Closer to home, those who don’t have to must find it incredibly comfortable to hear their other half getting ready for work, as they snuggle just a little lower, and cuddle their pillow a little tighter. Me, I just subscribe to the teachings of Kobi Yamada, who says, “Follow your dreams, they know the way.” I hear you Kobi, but to follow my dreams I need to go back to sleep, so I just go back to bed... “Forsooth, if ye tell the dream, and the expounding thereof, its rewards, gifts, and much honour... then tell me the dream (Daniel 2:6),” and let me share in it. It may even be worth waking up for.



CELEBRATING NEW YEAR

Kyrgyz riders play the traditional Central Asian sport of Kok-Boru or Buzkashi (Goat Grabbing) in Cholpon-Ata near Issyk-Kule lake some 250 kms from Bishkek on Saturday. Mounted players compete for points by throwing a stuffed sheepskin into a well. Games are dedicated to the celebration of Nowruz, “The New Year” in Farsi, is an ancient festival marking the first day of spring in Central Asia on Monday. – AFP

Environmentalism after the Ukraine war



GIULIO BOCCALETTI

The author is an honorary research associate at the University of Oxford’s Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, is a former chief strategy officer of The Nature Conservancy and the author of Water: A Biography (Pantheon, 2021)

Russia’s war in Ukraine is tragic, infuriating, and unspeakably sad. It is also an unexpected turning point for environmentalism. Until a few days ago, climate change topped the global agenda, with science-based targets pointing the way to a cleaner, more sustainable future. But now, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s decision to wage war on Ukraine and threaten nuclear war has revealed weaknesses in the architecture of international rules and multilateral governance. It is hard to believe that global environmental efforts have any chance of succeeding within such a fragile system.

Strikingly, this realisation has not yet dawned on those engaged in environmental work. A week into the war, the United Nations hailed a major agreement on single-use plastics as a “triumph” for planet Earth. But such agreements depend on the mutual recognition of sovereign nation-states – precisely the principle that Putin has called into question.

The war also imperils efforts to transform the energy system through global cooperation. Sharp increases in oil and gas prices are testing the goodwill of governments and companies. Many Opec suppliers are seeking to profit from the situation rather than helping to mitigate the shock. Yes, high oil and gas prices and the clear security risk implied by dependence on petrostates like Russia may well accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels. But the economic turmoil on the horizon will discourage investment, and green energy may find itself competing against the military-industrial complex for public finance.

These developments pose a significant challenge for contemporary environmentalism, a still-young intellectual framework that has seldom had to deal with geopolitical issues. With roots in the pacifist, anti-capitalist movements of the 1960s, the movement became institutionalised at the 1992 UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity were established. In addition to serving as the backbone of the environmental movement for three decades, these agreements long stood as a monument to the post-Soviet world order.

Comforted by the notion that all countries could agree, in principle, to be held accountable to environmental objectives, activists and environmental institutions focused their efforts on private and public actors’ predatory and illegal behaviour. Taking the rules-



A boy shows a victory sign from a window of an evacuee bus after fleeing Mariupol in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. – Reuters

SINCE ITS BIRTH IN THE 1960S, THE MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT HAS TAKEN THE RULES-BASED SYSTEM FOR GRANTED, TRUSTING IN NATIONAL COMMITMENTS EVEN WHEN THEY CAME FROM SOME STATES. BUT NOW THAT RUSSIA HAS EXPOSED THE FRAGILITY OF THE GLOBAL ORDER, THE TIME HAS COME TO RECONSIDER CORE PRINCIPLES

based system for granted, they relied on science-based targets to produce global roadmaps to desired outcomes. For a while, this politically neutral approach allowed everyone to avoid the question of whether outcomes delivered by some states are acceptable. But those days are over: environmental goals can no longer be considered separately from the sources of power that define state authority.

Consider the issue of biodiversity protection. Most environmental organisations have mobilised behind a “30x30” target – protecting 30 per cent of land and ocean areas by 2030. But protecting nature requires more than advocacy. It ultimately depends on the regulatory power of the state, which exercises sovereignty over territory, using force if necessary. Indeed, the Latin origin of “territory” is not the noun terra, “land,” but the verb terrere, “to terrorise.”

Until recently, this distinction would have seemed pedantic. Not anymore. Conservation depends on state power, so it matters very much which state we are talking about.

The problem is hardly limited to Putin’s delusions of empire. When Chinese President Xi Jinping, on his first visit to Davos in 2017, portrayed his government as a global environmental steward, he was met with applause. China’s “ecological civilisation” was hailed as an example of global environmentalist leadership, rather than as an application of ecological Marxism, a project that is indifferent to individuals’ civil and political rights. But now, we should recognise the danger.

Traditional Western environmentalism grew up protesting an order that it now must defend. The question is whether it is prepared, or even equipped, for the task. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz apparently saw no need to consult his Green Party coalition partners before he greenlit sending weapons to Ukraine and vastly increasing Germany’s military spending – two paradigm-shifting policy changes.

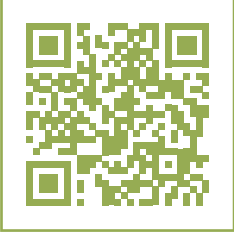
Moreover, as governments around the world sanction Russian oligarchs who owe their fortunes to Putin, we should not forget that many environmental initiatives have also benefited from wealth created under such regimes.

Modern environmentalism may now need to re-examine its methods. With the war in Eastern Europe dragging on, it is already clear that the movement can no longer afford to ignore the nature of political power. The defence of self-determination and political agency now must become a fundamental principle of environmental action.

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Seeb, Rustaq players join National team camp



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

Seeb and Rustaq players, who featured in the His Majesty’s Cup football championship final on Thursday, joined the Oman national football team’s internal camp on Saturday. ‘Red Warriors’ are gearing up to take on Vietnam and China on March 24 and 29 respectively as part of Group B matches in the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to Qatar.

Six players from Seeb joined in the warm-up camp including: Mohsin al Ghassani, Khalid al Buraiki, goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi, Marwan al Siyabi, Arshad al Alawi, Amjad al Harthi and Mohammed al Amri. Rustaq players who are picked up for the national team featured Mohammed al Ghafri and AbdulRahman al Ghassani. The Sultanate of Oman football delegation will travel to Hanoi city on Monday as the match will be held at My Dinh

National Stadium venue in Hanoi city, Vietnam, on Thursday. The match will start at 4:00 pm (Oman time). It is expected that the team will have more than three training sessions to perform ahead of Vietnam’s encounter. Despite Oman’s hopes which were dented to qualify to Qatar 2022, Ivankovic’s men will look to end the Asian qualifiers campaign in the fourth place. The qualifiers registered some memorable results for ‘Red

Warriors’ including the most notably the historic win over the Asian heavyweights Japan in the opener in September. After Japan’s victory, Oman had suffered two successive defeats against Saudi Arabia (1-0) and Australia (3-1). Then, Oman beat Vietnam 3-1 before holding China to a 1-1 draw in Sharjah city. Later, Japan edged Oman 1-0 while Saudi Arabia repeated their win in the away game 1-0 while the last encounter against

Australia ended in a 2-2 in Muscat. On March 11, 29 players were called up by the national team’s head coach, Branko Ivankovic for the forthcoming domestic camp ahead of Vietnam assignment. The list featured seven probables from Seeb club including: Mohsin al Ghassani, Khalid al Buraiki, Ahmed al Rawahi, Marwan al Siyabi, Arshad al Alawi, Amjad al Harthi and Mohammed al Amri while others were from different

clubs including: Fahmi Bait Durbeen, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Khamisi, Omar al Fazari, Mahmood Mabrook, Ayman Darweesh, Omar al Malki, Abdullah Fawaz, Motaz Saleh, Mohsin Jawher, Ahmed al Kaabi, Mohammed al Ghafri, AbdulRahman al Ghassani, Al Mundher al Alawi, Khalid al Hajri, Fayez al Rushedi, Zاهر al Aghbari, Jameel al Yahmadi, Harib al Saadi, Juma al Habsi, Salah al Yahyaei and Essam al Subhi.

Oman under-18s take silver at GCC Golf Championships

MUSCAT: The 2022 GCC Golf Championships concluded on March 17 at Abu Dhabi Golf Club. The course, which has tested some of the World’s best golfers during the 16 consecutive HSBC Golf Championships held there, played host to the top Men’s and Under-18 amateur golfers from the six participating nations: the Sultanate of Oman, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait. The Under-18 division, in its 13th edition, was played over three rounds with the best two scores from the team of three each day being combined to give the overall team score. Oman’s team of Ayman al Busaidi, Al Munther al Hinai and Mohammed al Numani produced three consistent days of golf to secure the silver medal position, the team from the UAE were the overall winners and Bahrain finished in third place. Individually, Al Busaidi finished in sixth place after rounds of 80, 80 and 86, with Al Hinai a further place back in seventh spot and Al Numani in ninth. Peter Bailey, Oman’s National Team Manager, is quoted as saying, “The 2022 GCC Championships were very encouraging for Oman, it was great to see our team of players pulling together and playing with pride and passion. I am sure that the Under-18 result will inspire many other youngsters to come and try golf, a game where you



challenge yourself and can mix with friends of all ages. We have worked hard on allowing the players to focus more on the process rather than the result and I am very proud of how they have all performed this week.” The Men’s event in its 24th edition was played over four rounds. On each day the best three scores from the teams

The Under18 division, in its 13th edition, was played over three rounds with the best two scores from the team of three each day being combined to give the overall team score



of four players were counted. Oman, represented by Azaan al Rumhy, Badar al Amri, Mohammed al Busaidi and Fahad al Kitani, finished the tournament in fifth place. With Qatar dominating to take the gold medal by ten strokes over Saudi Arabia who took silver, with Bahrain winning bronze.

In the individual category, Saleh al Kaabi from Qatar struggled a little on the final day but having opened with two very strong rounds of golf, including a very impressive six under par 66 on day 2, secured the gold medal, Oman’s Azaan al Rumhy finished in seventh position individually after rounds of 75, 74, 78 and 82. Mundhir al Barwani, Chairman of the Oman Golf Association, said, “We are very pleased to have been able to participate in the GCC Championships and must extend our gratitude to MHD ITICS and Lujaina Mohsin Haider Darwish for their support. I would also like to thank the EGF and Abu Dhabi Golf Club for their hospitality. We are delighted to have won the silver medal in the Under-18 division and I congratulate all the players for their performances. “Junior golf development has always been a key objective of the Oman Golf Association. These young golfers are the future of the game in the Sultanate of Oman, their development would not be possible without the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, our Junior Programme sponsor Oman LNG, and our Association partners Sohar Aluminium and Moore. We now look forward to readying our teams for the Under 13, 15 and Ladies GCC Championships which will be played later this year.”



Australia's captain Meg Lanning plays a shot (L) during the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup match against India in Auckland. — AFP

Classy Lanning leads Australia into World Cup semifinals

AUCKLAND: A classy 97 by Meg Lanning confirmed unbeaten Australia's place in the Women's World Cup semifinals as a record run chase saw them to victory over India on Saturday.

In a match that went down to the wire in Auckland, title favourites Australia reached 280-4 to overtake India's 277-7 with three balls to spare.

The previous best successful run chase in a Women's World Cup match was 258-2 set by Australia against Sri Lanka at Bristol in 2017.

Australian captain Lanning guided the innings with her player-of-the-match performance and said she feels she is coming into form after scores of five and nought in her previous two games.

"It was nice to contribute. I was disappointed after the last couple of games," she said.

"It was a belter of a wicket, it came on really nicely, there wasn't a lot of turn and any width given was really hard to defend.

"So, yeah, we'll take the win today, but understand we've got a bit to work on."

Australia have a superior run rate over the only other unbeaten side, South Africa. The two meet in a much-anticipated showdown in Wellington on Tuesday.

The other three places in the last four of the tournament are still up for grabs although South Africa seem sure to go through.

India, sent into bat by Australia, believed they had set a competitive target after Mithali Raj, Yastika Bhatia and Harmanpreet Kaur all scored half centuries.

But Australia were undaunted and received a rollicking start from Rachel

It was nice to contribute. I was disappointed after the last couple of games. It was a belter of a wicket, it came on really nicely, there wasn't a lot of turn and any width given was really hard to defend

MEG LANNING
Australia captain

Haynes and Alyssa Healy, who together raced to 121 at better than six an over before Healy was out for 72.

Haynes, the tournament's leading run scorer, went in the following over when she edged a short-pitched delivery from Pooja Vastrakar to wicketkeeper Richa Ghosh.

Lanning, with Elysse Perry for support, punished the Indian bowlers and the pair put on 103, of which Perry contributed 28.

Australia needed eight to win off the final over and Beth Mooney, who had replaced Perry, went four, two, four, to seal the match.

India, after being rocked by two early wickets, were rescued by Raj and Bhatia, who turned the innings around with a 130-run stand for the third wicket. Harmanpreet Kaur and Vastrakar added a further 64 at the close.

The Indian total was also boosted by 29 extras including a phenomenal 24 wides, of which 10 came in Perry's opening over. — AFP

Oman Cricket announces squad for GCC Women's T20I Cup

MUSCAT: The GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup will commence on March 20, 2022 as per schedule.

Six nations will compete for the trophy and for ICC WT20i points, namely Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. All the fixtures will be fulfilled at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground over a span of 7 days.

The Oman Cricket Academy is open to spectators for the GCC Women's T20i Championship Cup. Submission of proof of double-vaccination against COVID-19 during entry is mandatory.

The matches will be broadcasted live for the first time. They can be viewed on FanCode, CricTracker on Youtube and Sports Eye on Facebook.

The squad for the Oman Women's team in the tournament is as follows:

Vaishali Jesrani (captain), Fiza Javed (vice-captain), Sameera Khan, Nayan Molly Anil, Priyanka



Mendonca, Snehal Nair, Amanda Dcosta, Sakshi Vijaya Shetty, Saya Channa, Sushanthika Ashok Sathiya, Afida Afthab, Kashish Deep Jayawant, Nikhita Jagdish, Bhatki Shetty;

Reserves: Alifiya Asif Sayed, Minduli Sharuni Medagoda Ralalage, Shreya Suresh Prabhu;

Support Staff: Haider Ali (Manager/Head Coach), Nilesh Parmar (Assistant Coach), Amir Ali (Bowling Coach), Vijay Kaliswaran (Physio)

Oman's fixtures in the upcoming tournament are as follows:
20th March 2022 Oman v

Bahrain 9 am (Turf 2)

21st March 2022 Oman v Saudi Arabia 1:30 pm (Turf 2)

22nd March 2022 Oman v UAE 6:00 pm (Turf 2)

24th March 2022 Oman v Kuwait 9:30 am (Turf 1)

26th March 2022 Oman v Qatar 7 pm (Turf 1)

Chelsea face Real Madrid in Champions League

PARIS: Troubled holders Chelsea were drawn against 13-time winners Real Madrid in the quarterfinals of the Champions League on Friday, while Manchester City were paired with Atletico Madrid.

Liverpool were drawn to play Benfica as the three remaining English clubs were kept apart and Bayern Munich were paired with Spanish side Villarreal.

Chelsea are hoping to defend their title in Europe despite turmoil at the club, which is up for sale after the British government sanctioned Russian owner Roman Abramovich in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Thomas Tuchel's team will play Real at home in the first leg on April 6, before the return at the Santiago Bernabeu on April 12.

"We know what is coming but



it will be an exciting and tough challenge," said Tuchel.

It was reported this week that Chelsea may have to play home Champions League ties behind

closed doors due to EU sanctions on Abramovich that prevent the club selling tickets.

"It would be a disadvantage," admitted Tuchel. "In general this

kind of game is for the spectators and the game changes so much without them so hopefully we find a solution."

Chelsea beat Madrid — coached by ex-Blues boss Carlo Ancelotti — in the semifinals last season before defeating Pep Guardiola's City in the final in Porto and lifting the Champions League trophy for the second time under Abramovich's ownership. With the draw for the semifinals taking place at the same time, Chelsea and City know they would meet in the last four should they progress, but a Madrid derby is also a possibility.

Having eliminated Manchester United in the last 16, Atletico will return to northwest England on April 5 for a first leg against City, as Guardiola pits wits against Diego Simeone. — AFP

Azaan sets records to win the 48th Muscat Open Golf Championship

MUSCAT: The 2022 Muscat Open Golf Championship was played at Ras Al Hamra Golf Club on March 11 and 12. There was a full field of 92 golfers from Oman and the GCC who competed for the longest running amateur golf competition in Oman and the GCC.

In his closing remarks, President of the Muscat Open Committee Jas Dhanju thanked HSBC, Hydro, Masirah Oil Ltd., CMS, Ramada Encore, Seven Seas Petroleum LLC and Milly O'Brien's for their sponsorship.

The champion golfer for the Muscat Open Golf Championship was local favourite Azaan al Ruhmy.

Azaan shot a new course record of 69 (-2 under par) on day 1, and then repeated this score on day 2, giving him a total score of 138 (-4 under par) and a victory by 10 shots from second place Nasser Yaqoob (Awali Golf Club).



Another local favourite Badr al Amri sealed third place with a score of 150. The leading junior in the gross category was Darsh Pawani with a score of 157.

It was a very proud moment as Azaan was presented with the trophy by Dr Mohammed bin

Hamad al Rumhy, the Minister of Energy and Minerals and the Chairman of the Board of Directors of Petroleum Development Oman.

This was the sixth time Azaan has won this tournament and he commented afterwards that, "this tournament is the most

prestigious golf event in Oman, if I can pick one tournament to win in Oman then it would be the Muscat Open. It was my first two back to back rounds in the 60s. I wish to thank the sponsors, the organising committee and my family for all of their support."

The net prize this year went to Tore Solberg (134) who was closely followed by junior Ras Al Hamra golfer Juan Moreno (136) and Salim al Harthy (138).

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club Captain, Simon Walker commented, "Congratulations to Azaan on winning this coveted championship for a 6th time. The course is in superb condition due to the tireless work from our team. We were delighted to welcome such a high caliber of golfers to the club; golf is thriving in Oman and visitors are always welcome to our club which is the only floodlit course in the country."

Royal Cavalry Annual horse race held

SALALAH: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Hamad bin Thuwaini al Said, presided over the Annual Horse Race of the Royal Cavalry (RC), on Saturday.

In the first round dedicated to female jockeys riding pure-bred Arabian horses, the mare Thaneya of the Royal Cavalry won the 1,200-metre race.

The horse Al Tariq of the Royal Cavalry won the first place in the second round designated for pure Arabian horses for 1200-metre distance.

The horse Shars owned by Shaikh Mohammed bin Shihab

al Balushi won the first place in the third round dedicated to pure-bred Arabian citizens' horses for 1600-metre distance.

The horse Safwa of the Royal Cavalry won the first place in the fourth round dedicated to pure-bred Arabian horses for 1600-metre distance.

Horse Soko of the Royal Cavalry won His Majesty's Cup title in the fifth round designated to pure-bred Arabian horses for 2,000-metre distance.

The race rounds were interspersed with equestrian shows, traditional Omani horse games and music performance.

— ONA



Salalah emerge champions in Oman Open Water meet

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

Salalah Club won the first place and the title of the Oman Open Water Swimming Championship in its 14th edition, which was held in Musandam, with the participation of 67 swimmers representing 15 clubs.

The tournament was sponsored by Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in the presence of Shaikh Ahmed bin Ali al Habsi, Wali of Daba, and Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, President of the Oman Swimming Federation.

The tournament included



four rounds, which were run by a national jury, led by the international jury Abdul Moneim bin Khamis al Alawi and 19 Omani judges.

Salalah Club achieved first place in the overall club standings with 107 points, Jaalan Club came in second with 90 points, and Majees Club achieved third with 88 points.

In the junior category

race (13 and 14 years) for a distance of 1 km, the main title was won by swimmer Ali bin Adel al Hasani from Salalah Club.

The swimmer Adel bin Mubarak al Ruwaihi from Jaalan Club came in second and Shihab bin Ahmed al Battashi from Masirah Club reached third place.

In the youth category

race (15 to 17 years) for a distance of 2 km, Nasser bin Saif al Kindi from Salalah Club managed the first place, Adam bin Salim al Raisi from Majees Club came in second, and Mishaal bin Salem al Kulaibi from Jaalan Club in third.

In the general category

race for a distance of 2 km, Abdul Rahman bin Yahya al Kulaibi from Salalah Club took first place, Ayman bin Talib al Qasimi from Jaalan Club came in second, and Nayef bin Munir al Qasimi from Bausher Club claimed the third.

In the 500-metre Masters category, Ibrahim bin Marhoon al Kulaibi won the first place, Ahmed bin Khalfan al Falahi came second, and Adnan bin Abdullah al Khadouri is the third winner.



Oman Cricket's Pankaj Khimji elected as ACC Vice-President

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman of Oman Cricket Council (OCC), has officially assumed office of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) as the Vice President for 2022-23 as he was elected to the position.

Pankaj, the scion of the Khimji conglomerate in the Sultanate of Oman in the capacity of the director, has been the driving force behind the sport cricket in the country.

Speaking to the Observer from Sri Lanka, the Headquarters of ACC, Pankaj said he was thrilled to be representing the Sultanate in the Asian region and beyond and is a reflection of the fast progress that the country is witnessing over the last few years.

“My selection to the ACC is the result of the support and enthusiasm that the Sultanate of Oman has been providing to the sport along with other areas and is the culmination of the state attention to infrastructure development and progressive vision,” he said.

Pankaj's relentless efforts complemented by the committed team of OCC, made it possible for a country like Oman where the sport has been in the nascent stage, to host the qualifying rounds despite the lack of any existing infrastructure suitable of holding such an international event.

“We have been working really hard to enroot the sport in the Sultanate and it is an achievement that we last year hosted the T20 qualifiers and World Cup as an associate member of ICC.”

The Oman Cricket was formed in 1978 under the patronage of His Highness Syed Abbas bin Faisal al Busaidi from the Royal Family and Mohammad Afzal with late Kanak Khimji as President and Madhu Jesrani as Treasurer.

Later in 1999, Oman secured the approval from the International Cricket Council and (ICC) as an affiliate cricketing nation and in 2002 as an associate member of Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

In 2006, Oman Cricket was registered under the aegis of Oman's Ministry of Sports and was given a plot in Al Amerat to build their cricketing infrastructure. Today's Amerat Cricket Ground stands head and shoulders above the rest on a sprawling 63,000 square metres ground.

The Oman Cricket Academy was formed in 2018, where cricket enthusiasts were given a platform to meet while tiny tots started to take their first steps in cricket.

Oman's name was etched in cricket history in 2021 when it co-hosted the T20 World Cup as an associate member of ICC along with the United Arab Emirates, the first ever World Cup cricket event in the country.

“My selection to the ACC is the results of the support and enthusiasm that the Sultanate of Oman has been providing to the sport along with other areas and is the culmination of the state attention to infrastructure development

PANKAJ KHIJMI
Oman Cricket chairman



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Sultanate of Oman’s space policy to aid storm prediction and climate change mitigation

PROMISING OPPORTUNITIES:
Local Omani startups urged to tap into billion-dollar global climate tech industry

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A National Space Policy, currently under formulation by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), will provide strong impetus to, among other things, the growth of downstream space industries in the Sultanate of Oman, according to a high-level official. Dr Ali al Shidhani, Communications and Information Technology Under-Secretary, said a future downstream space industry will primarily centre around satellite data analysis to support predictions of adverse weather and aid climate change mitigation efforts.

“We are working on a national space policy that will most



likely focus on the downstream industry of space, which means the utilisation of satellite data to predict extreme weather conditions, and to analyse and mitigate climate issues as well,” he stated.

Speaking at the Oman Sustainability Week 2022, which concluded in Muscat last week, the official referenced the country’s

nascent space programme as an example of ongoing efforts to harness modern technology to drive national development and innovation.

In recent months, the Omani government has firmed up plans to develop a space programme aimed initially at the delivery of a nanosatellite into low Earth orbit, followed by a deep space

“In Oman, we are just seeing its start; It’s a cross-sector domain that requires lot of collaboration, understanding of the environment and technology, and we think that Oman has to capture some of that valued

DR ALI SHIDHANI
Under-Secretary, Communications and Information Technology, MoTCIT

exploration mission.

To this end, the government — represented by the MoTCIT — is collaborating with a number of key international players to support the design, manufacture and launch of a first-ever Omani

CubeSat satellite aboard a Virgin Orbit rocket. Partnering in this historic initiative are Omani technology firm ETCO, international digital technology specialist Tuatara, and Polish nanosatellite manufacturer and operator SatRevolution, besides Virgin Orbit.

Dr Al Shidhani also urged Omani entrepreneurs and start-ups to tap into the lucrative global climate tech sector, given especially its promising potential for the Sultanate of Oman. The flurry of destruction cyclones witnessed in the country in last several years underscores the need for climate tech services to help “predict, manage and mitigate calamities”, he noted. Citing a recent report by well-known global advisory services firm PwC, the Under-Secretary pointed out that climate tech investments had totalled around \$220 billion over the past decade alone.

“In the period between the second half of 2020 and the

first half of 2021, climate tech investment amounted to \$56 billion in the US alone, \$18 billion in Europe and \$9 billion in China. There are around 3,000-plus active start-ups in the climate tech space globally, with more than 6,000 investors. Of every venture capital dollar invested, 14 cents are invested in climate technology, which already has 78 unicorns in. So it’s a growing business.”

The Sultanate of Oman is also making tentative forays into the climate tech industry, he said. “In Oman, we are just seeing its start; It’s a cross-sector domain that requires lot of collaboration, understanding of the environment and technology, and we think that Oman has to capture some of that value.”

One local startup that has already done the Sultanate of Oman proud in the climate tech space is 44.01, a carbon removal firm that is currently doing “mindboggling” work in carbon capture and related fields, he added.

Ukraine war may slightly dampen GCC GDP growth

KEY FINDINGS: Middle East expansion plans appear robust despite global instability caused by conflict

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 19



The latest ‘Economic Insight’ report for the Middle East, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics, has revealed that while most Middle Eastern countries welcome inflated oil prices, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has created global uncertainty which may dampen non-oil growth.

This has led to a modestly lower ICAEW forecast for GCC GDP growth to 4.8 per cent for 2022, previously 5 per cent. According to the report, the start of the year saw the pace of activity in the GCC soften due to Omicron concerns.

While global uncertainty as a result of the pandemic appears to be subsiding, fears over the potential economic fallout from the Russia-Ukraine conflict have heightened.

With oil prices predicted to soar to all-time highs, expansion plans in the region are expected to remain robust, underpinned by increased oil production and strong investment plans.

Although momentum in the non-oil economy has slowed in recent months, hampered by Omicron, it is expected to

rebound, led primarily by recovery in the travel and tourism sector, despite visitor numbers only expected to return to pre-crisis levels in 2023. Proven stability in the region has improved investor confidence, which is driving growth in lending and subsequently enabling private sector expansion.

ICAEW’s 2022 forecast for GCC non-oil growth stands at 3.4 per cent, up marginally from 3.3 per cent three months ago, but modestly slower than the expansion of 3.8 per cent in 2021.

The predicted slowdown comes in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, which has seen a surge in global energy and food prices, as well as mass supply chain disruption. As a result of the increased cost pressures, combined with withdrawal of regional subsidies and growing domestic demand, inflation is predicted to rise in the GCC to an average of 2.7 per cent from 2.3 per cent in 2021, before falling below 2 per cent in 2023.

Food inflation and shipping

disruptions will be of concern to the region, although the impact of high inflation on growth will be offset by higher oil output, as part of the Opec+ plans of steadily increasing oil output.

Vanessa Heywood, ICAEW Head of Middle East, said: “The GCC’s oil producers stand to benefit from the surge in oil prices, with fiscal deficits narrowing or even turning into surpluses, which has lessened pressures to secure external financing. The increase in government finances is good news for ongoing economic diversification efforts, especially for public investment into renewable energy projects.”

Scott Livermore, ICAEW Economic Adviser, and Chief Economist and Managing Director, Oxford Economics Middle East, said: “Inflation in the energy market could benefit the GCC economies. This has meant that global investors looking for stability amid increased market volatility may seek out investment opportunities in the GCC. While there have been regular calls for the GCC economies to ditch the dollar peg over the years, it can be expected that the current environment will once again reignite the suggestion. The response from the leadership, especially in the current political landscape, will be telling of where they see the future.”

Unlike many emerging markets, GCC monetary authorities have been able to maintain very low interest rates.

Medco and Abraj extend cooperation



MUSCAT: Oil and gas are the backbone of the Sultanate of Oman’s economy, and over 1,000 new wells are drilled each year to ensure consistent production. This necessitates seamless collaboration between clients and contractors in order to develop oil and gas fields through continuous improvement in drilling performance and strict control of HSE exposure.

One notable example of such collaboration is the one between Medco LLC Oman and Abraj Energy Services in the development of the Karim Small Fields in PDO Oman’s South Area. Abraj Energy Services is the market leader in Omani drilling services, offering custom-built rigs that are tailored to our

clients’ needs.

This collaboration began in May 2010 with the award of Abraj Rig 102. Abraj provided a highly mobile Rig 105 in 2017, which has been setting new benchmarks in the Karim Small Fields. As a result, Medco LLC Oman and Abraj Energy Services recently extended Rig 105’s contract for another two years.

The contract was signed by Ahmad Syaifudin, Oman Country Manager of MedcoEnergi International Tbk and Eng Salah al Harthy, Acting Managing Director of Abraj Energy Services SAOC. Such outstanding performance is critical for efficiently producing and meeting oil targets from the Karim Small Fields in the long term.

Oman’s biggest Ayurveda centre launched

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 19

The Coimbatore Ayurveda Centre (CAC) is poised to become the Sultanate of Oman’s top Ayurvedic centre. The CAC, a branch of the popular and prestigious Arya Vaidya Pharmacy (AVP), Coimbatore Limited, launched its fifth branch at Maabela in Muscat on Friday.

The new brand was opened under the aegis of the chief guest, Dr Muhanna bin Nasser al Muslahi, Director General of Private Health Establishments – Ministry of Health. Also present were Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador, C Devidas Varier, Managing Director, AVP, Coimbatore, Yousuf al Aamri, Chairman, Babu Kolara, Managing Director and Bijesh Kolara, CEO.

The launch of a new brand is



part of CAC’s vision to open an in-patient service hospital for long-term treatments and to add four more centres across Oman over

the next five years. “With this launch, we are poised to become the biggest Ayurveda centre in Oman. We will also guarantee exceptional services and aspire to develop as the best Ayurvedic centre in Oman”, Bijesh Kolara, CEO, CAC, stated.

The CAC, which began operations in Oman in 2008, is the “first and only authorised dealer and treatment centre in Oman for AVP”, noted Bijesh, adding that in the beginning, the AVP was aiming to spread Ayurveda in Oman. “Within the next five years, our future projects include in-patient service hospital for long treatments and four more centres of CAC across Oman”, Bijesh revealed. “Our five branches are focused on providing traditional Ayurvedic treatments. We are not only cost effective, but also determined to maintain high quality in the treatments provided. Currently, all our outlets are outpatients based. In the near future we hope to set up a totally professional Ayurvedic treatment centre that will be able to take inpatients like a proper hospital.”

Exclusive benefits on Lexus range ending soon



MUSCAT: Now is a good time to own a Lexus and benefit with service 3 years/30,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year free registration. The campaign will end on March 23, 2022 (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

In Oman, Lexus has a distinctive range that include luxury SUVs, sedans and coupes too. The new NX is designed to meet the diverse lifestyles of customers around the world. Lexus has introduced two new petrol engines in the NX range, New NX 350 in introduced with 2.4 L Turbocharged Gasoline engine with 275 HP/6000 Rpm - 8 Speed AT and 2.5 L HEV with 240 HP (Combined power) CVT. The NX’s luxurious interiors include the latest 14” NAV with touch screen/10 premium speakers and with Digital inner view mirror for uninterrupted rear views.

The Lexus UX has a front-wheel drive configuration and is powered by a high-efficiency 2.0 litre, four-cylinder engine, which is coupled with a Direct Shift Continuously Variable Transmission (DCVT). The five-seat Lexus RX350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 that is mated to an eight speed automatic transmission. The RX is also available in a 3-row 7-seater option. Also available is the Lexus RX450h, a hybrid version featuring a 3.5-litre Atkinson-cycle engine. The Lexus GX460 is perfect for families who seek no-holds-barred adventure on their days off, yet also desire an easy-driving, comfortable and versatile luxury SUV for the work week.

The Lexus GX460 features a 4.6L engine that provides outstanding power and responsive performance. In sedans, the range includes the IS350. This sleek and stylish powerful sedan is equipped with a 3.5-litre engine that’s paired to an 8-speed automatic transmission.

The turbocharged IS300 features a 2.0-litre twin-scroll turbocharged inline four-cylinder engine with intercooler that generates 241 Hp. The flagship LS which is an inspiring luxury sedan, is available in 3.5-litre V6 Multi Stage Hybrid System producing 354 hp, a 3.5-litre V6 naturally aspirated Atkinson-cycle producing 311 hp and 38.7 Kg.M Torque, and a 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 engine producing 415 hp and 61.2 Kg.M of Torque.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or subscribe to YouTube channel “Lexus Oman”, or like Lexus Oman on Facebook or Follow Oman. Lexus on Instagram.

Omani SME signs JV with regional firm



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Atakamul Aldhahabiya Oil and Gas LLC, an Omani SME registered with Riyada, has entered into a Joint Venture agreement with Orill Oilfield Services LLC, a Dubai-based multinational oil and gas OEM spare parts supplier, which will provide all drilling rigs OEM spare parts for its oil and gas operations in the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to the Observer, Salim Abdullah al Shanfari, Managing Director, Atakamul Aldhahabiya Oil and Gas LLC, said: “This JV between the companies will add on to the ICV in line with Oman’s Vision 2040

and will provide employment to local manpower in the coming future in the field of logistics and warehousing solutions”, he said, adding that the joint venture will also help reduce their OPEX of oilfield contractors, while increasing their profitability by reducing the downtime of equipment. “We are glad to be entering Oman with our JV partner, Atakamul Aldhahabiya Oil and Gas LLC and hope to be partners in nation building process by adding value to their services. We are also able to provide various solutions to the Oil and Gas Sector in Oman”, added Mohamed Ghazal and PG Gopinath, Partners - Orill Oilfield Services.

BankDhofar holds savings account scheme year-end prize draws

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has recently conducted its Year-End Prize Draws as part of the Savings Account Scheme 2021. The draw, which was conducted under the auspices of Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said, saw 3 lucky winners, where 2 customers had the chance to take home RO 50,000 each, while one lucky customer from Al Riadah Priority Banking had the chance to win RO 200,000. Congratulating the winners, Iman al Amri, Executive Manager - Retail Products & Segments at BankDhofar said: “I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to our customers who had the chance to be the lucky winners at the Year-End draws. With this draw, we come to the end of this year’s scheme in which we provided chances to win for various segments of our customers. I hope that our customers will continue saving habits to achieve their financial goals.” With a total of RO 2.304 million, this year’s scheme



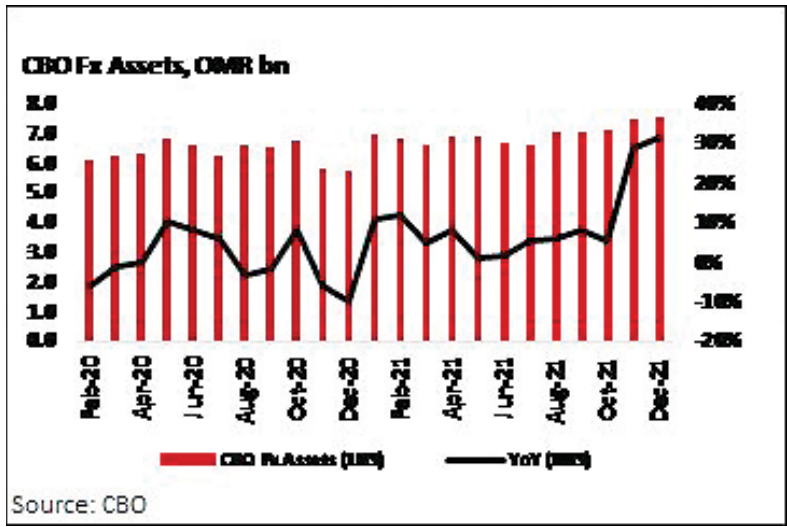
rewarded BankDhofar customers who saved a minimum of RO 100 in their accounts in the Monthly Guaranteed Prizes for branches, Monthly Prizes for Children, Monthly Prizes for Youth and the Monthly Prizes for Amaan Retirees Banking Services’ customers. Additionally, the scheme included Omani Women’s Day Prizes and National Day Prizes, and the Year-End Grand Prizes. As for Al Riadah Priority Banking Services’ customers,

the scheme included Monthly Prizes, Al Riadah Prestige Monthly Prizes and Year-End Grand Prizes. To learn more, check-out BankDhofar pages on social media; Facebook (www.facebook.com/BankDhofar), Twitter (@BankDhofar), Instagram (www.instagram.com/BankDhofar), or visit the official website www.BankDhofar.com or contact the Customer Engagement Hub 24/7 on (+968) 24791111 for inquiries.

MSX Index closes the week marginally lower

MUSCAT: MSX30 Index ended the week lower by 0.29 per cent. The financial index closed lower by 0.77 per cent. Industrial index and service index was up for the week by 0.74 per cent and 0.28 per cent respectively. The MSX Shariah index closed lower by 0.56 per cent. National Gas has informed its shareholders that due to the recent pandemic effects and substantial escalation in the steel prices and construction costs, it is envisaged that the India LPG terminal project cost could escalate. In the shareholders’ interest, the Company has been in negotiations for the divestment of its entire 60 per cent share in the project. The Company has been able to conclude the negotiations and is pleased to inform the shareholders that the divestment would be at a premium that would result in a gross profit of \$3.5

million (RO 1.35 million). The gross proceeds that the Company expects to receive is — RO 6.24 million. The Company intends to pay off its loans with the proceeds and will be able to consolidate and strengthen its balance sheet for future expansion and growth purposes. The transaction is expected to take 2-3 months to close. The Board of Directors of the Financial Corporation Company SAOG has decided to cancel the activity of issues management, due to the failure to meet the minimum number of employees required for the aforementioned activity according to the requirements of the Capital Market Authority. The company undertakes that there are no obligations related to the licence to be deleted and pledges to settle any obligations that may appear in the future. As per the CBO, Oman’s narrow money supply (M1) grew in



Dec’21 by 1.3 per cent MoM and 3.3 per cent YoY. The MoM expansion was due to an increase in Demand Deposits of 2.2 per cent despite currency outside commercial banks contracting by 1.4 per cent MoM. Broad money (M2) supply also increased by 0.6 per cent MoM and 4.6 per cent YoY. YoY increase was led by a 5.1 per cent rise in

Quasi Money. While on monthly basis, domestic liquidity increased by about RO 117 m. On YoY basis, M2 is up RO 895m. CBO’s foreign assets which include bullion, IMF reserve assets, placements abroad and foreign securities, rose to RO 7.6 bn as at the end of Dec’21, having increased by 32 per cent YoY and 1.4 per cent MoM. CBO’s foreign

assets grew at the strongest pace on record during Dec’21, rising by RO 100m during the month and by RO 1.8 bn during the year 2021. The MoM increase is brought about by a 1.6 per cent MoM rise in placements abroad (which account for 54 per cent of the total foreign assets), a 1.3 per cent MoM increase in securities held (41 per cent of total), and despite a marginal MoM decrease recorded in IMF reserve assets, while bullion stayed flat. CBO’s foreign assets are notably above the trailing 12-month simple average of RO 7 bn. The RO overnight domestic inter-bank lending rate fell to 0.413 per cent in Nov’21 compared to 0.948 per cent in Nov’20. The rate has been roughly on a downtrend since the Fed funds rate cuts began in 2019 and increased slightly during Jun’20 before easing again in July’20. [Courtesy: U-Capital]



Oman's commitment to sustainability reaffirmed

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, MARCH 19

The activities of the Oman Sustainability Week (OSW 2022), which lasted for three days, concluded on March 16, 2022 with a strong reaffirmation of the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the principles of sustainability enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) criteria. Officials and experts from around 22 countries took part in the discussions over the three-day event.

Shaikh Mohammed al Harthy, Executive Vice President - Strategic Development Sector, be'ah – a key sponsor of OSW 2022, said the next edition will take place in March 2023.

Speaking at the concluding session, Al Harthy said: "During the past three days, various decision-makers spoke about many important things, including educational awareness, sustainable finance, social behaviour, importance of technology in achieving sustainability, policies and legal frameworks to support sustainability, and so on. At be'ah, our

policies flow from Oman Vision 2040, and this realisation encourages all our employees to continue to contribute towards SDG or ESG goals."

Delegates also witnessed the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoU). Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) signed two pacts: The first relates to providing solar energy systems in homes under 'Project Noor', and the second relates to the safe disposal of electronic and electrical waste.

Additionally, an MoU was signed between Oman Shell and Oman Airports to support the launch of green hydrogen project for mobility. Also notable was the signing of a memorandum of cooperation between the Oman Environmental Services Holding Company (be'ah) and Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) to implement a Waste to Energy power plant in the Wilayat of Barka. Leading figures who participated in the concluded session also shared their thoughts on sustainability.

Eng Saleh al Shanfari, CEO, Oman Food Investment Holding Co, said: "Sustainability reflects our awareness of the environment around us; When



it comes to food – a sector which I'm familiar with, there are many things affecting sustainability, such as the global warming, for example."

Shaima al Lawati, Vice-President - Sustainability, OQ, underlined the need for collaboration and cooperation in driving sustainability. "In any institution,

the team must work in cooperation and harmony, and believe in the importance of sustainability. At OQ, what we have achieved in sustainability is the result of team work."

Marc Tijhuis, Managing Director, International Solid Waste Association (ISWA), described the three-day

proceedings as enriching. "I'm confident the next event in March 2023 will be a success going by what we have seen in the last three days. I learn a lot from these sessions. Sustainability, from what I understand, is about protecting the environment."

Eng Hassan al Amri, Executive Investment Director, Saudi Investment Recycling Company (PIF Company), noted that the younger generations are more aware of environmental issues than the older generations. He attributed this heightened awareness to school curricula and modern technology as well.

"Harnessing technology in preserving the environment has become urgent and obligatory on the other hand, due to its ease and availability for all segments" he stated.

Asked by a member from the audience about the apparent lack of interest in adopting Western recycling practices, such as the widespread installation of reverse vending machines for used plastic bottles, Eng Hassan explained that the relative high cost of labour tends to make recycling activities economically unattractive.

US booking sites seeing strong demand for travel

WASHINGTON: US booking sites including Vrbo, Hopper and KAYAK are seeing higher demand for spring and summer leisure travel as Covid-19 restrictions ease and travellers appear to be shunning off added costs to plane tickets and road trips from rising fuel prices.

"We are seeing strong booking activity for spring break and the beginnings of a very strong

summer", said Jamie Lane, VP of research at AirDNA, which tracks the daily performance of over 10 million properties on vacation rental firms Airbnb and Vrbo.

Oil has soared over \$100 a barrel as Russia's invasion of Ukraine jolted global markets. But US carriers including Delta Air Lines Inc, United Airline Holdings Inc and American Airlines Inc this week reported a

strong rebound in travel demand after the blip caused by the Omicron coronavirus variant.

AirDNA data said the booking pace for travel in the northern hemisphere spring is 49 per cent higher than this time last year, and 26 per cent higher than pre-pandemic 2019. "The rush to book summer vacation homes has further accelerated in 2022", Vrbo said in

a statement.

The vacation rental booking platform reports demand for properties is already outpacing last summer by 15 per cent. "When reviewing the booking data, it's clear that Omicron was a bigger concern for travelers than rising fuel costs", said Dakota Smith, Chief Strategy Officer at Hopper, a travel booking app.

— Reuters

India's oil imports from United States to rise



A worker holds a nozzle to pump petrol into a vehicle at a fuel station in Mumbai, India. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: India's oil imports from the United States will rise by 11 per cent this year, officials said on Saturday, as the severely energy-deficient country looks to secure supplies from producers around the world, including heavily sanctioned Russia.

The surge in oil prices following Russia's war on Ukraine last month threatens to fan Indian inflation, stretch public finances and hurt growth just when it was emerging from a pandemic-induced slowdown.

New Delhi faces criticism from the West for its long-standing political and security ties with Moscow, with some saying that engaging in business with Russia will help fund its war. India has urged an end to the violence in Ukraine but abstained from voting against Russia.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, meeting his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi during a visit on Saturday, said he will encourage a unified approach on Ukraine.

India buys most of its oil from the Middle East, but the United States has emerged as the fourth-biggest source and this year supplies will rise substantially, a government official briefed on the matter told Reuters. Iraq supplies 23 per cent of India's oil, followed by Saudi Arabia at 18 per cent and the United Arab Emirates at 11 per cent.

The US share of the Indian

market will rise to 8 per cent this year, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with government policy. Russia has been a marginal player in the Indian market, but since its Feb 24 invasion has been offering discounted oil to soften the blow of sweeping sanctions imposed by the United States and other countries.

Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, recently ordered 3 million barrels of Russian oil through a tender, while Hindustan Petroleum Corp has booked 2 million barrels for May loading.

India welcomes competing offers for oil sales including from Moscow, especially when global prices have jumped, another government official said, defending the decision to buy from Russia.

European countries continue to import Russian oil and gas, and India cannot be stopped from doing so too, the second official said. Western sanctions have carve-outs to avoid any impact on energy imports from Moscow, and Russian banks that process payments for these sales remain on the SWIFT network, this official said.

The official said India's legitimate energy transactions should not be politicised. "Countries with oil self-sufficiency or those importing themselves from Russia cannot credibly advocate restrictive trading." — Reuters

Building a resilient security strategy



DAVID BROWN

Organisations create security policies and security frameworks to help reduce vulnerabilities and to build a culture of security efficiencies both internally and externally. However, once built the challenge is also to revisit them and update them in areas that help to build resilience and reduce vulnerabilities.

Policies and configurations For example, security controls and configurations go through changes throughout their life; sometimes functionality requirements change; there are unpredictable needs; and sometimes there are unauthorised changes.

In other words, the need for continuous assessment and review of policies and configurations cannot be overlooked.

Whatever the reasons, changes to an organisation's security policies must follow a systematic change request process. On a planned basis this can include regular quarterly assessments; mapping all valid change requests; changes required in a fixed window pattern of 30, 90,



180 days with auto-expire or auto revalidation.

Any changes made to security policies and configurations, that have not been mapped would then trigger an internal security event. Continuous review of security policies and configurations should not be confused with operational patching cycles.

Round-the-clock, patching routines, and cycles are determined by vendor releases and other threat vulnerability intelligence. Priority for patching routines is based on risk levels as well as those with the shortest time to apply.

Attack surfaces

Managing the attack surface of an organisation is an important part of its resilience security strategy. An immediate implication of the lack of understanding of an organisation's attack surface is poor cyber hygiene. Poor cyber hygiene creates doors for initial access and lateral movement of threat actors. On the other hand, a well-understood and

managed attack surface helps the organisation to build layered defences that are proactive and reactive.

Baselining

Another important activity to build a resilient security strategy is to baseline an organisation's network and host layers. Information system types can also be used as a baseline and can track growth in capability and capacity.

While monitoring baseline activity is often talked about, in practice it is seldom rolled out and maintained, if initiated. From an organisation's point of view, baselines are very effective to flag, through automation or human monitoring, when something is not normal.

An organisation's resilient security strategy will be incomplete without an attack surface management programme and monitoring of baseline of activity.

Continuous improvement

A policy of continuously improving the levels of cyber

hygiene in an organisation leads to an enhanced level of situational awareness. This enhanced level of situational awareness helps the enterprise to mitigate threats early in the attack lifecycle.

For enterprises that build an enhanced level of situational awareness, they are able to reduce the meantime for vulnerabilities appearing on its attack surface.

They are also able to prioritise which vulnerabilities to remediate, with well-defined clear actions and controls.

Enhanced level of situational awareness also helps to create proactive plans such as incident response and preparedness plans. This plan provides clear actions and remediation paths in a simplified format for non-technical stakeholders and a fully detailed structure for technical stakeholders.

Continuous improvement in cyber hygiene helps to build practices for network and system hardening, information assurance and vulnerability management processes. It also helps to support data classification systems, all of which are secured with a 3-2-1 back schema as a critical component.

On the flip side, an enterprise that lacks an understanding of its cyber hygiene practices can only open itself to adversary actions who can finally only achieve their objectives.

(The writer is Security Operations Director of Axon Technologies)

China Inc walks tightest of ropes over Ukraine

Chinese companies are at the pointy end of Beijing's foreign policy. Those with overseas businesses are awkwardly falling behind their government's position on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This war could accelerate the downgrade of Chinese Inc's global ambitions. Washington is worried that President Xi Jinping's refusal to condemn President Vladimir Putin's aggression means China will also undercut Western-led sanctions. China could buy more Russian energy, for one thing. It exported nearly \$50 billion of goods to Russia in 2019, and now it has an opening to sell even more goods and services there as foreign consumer and technology brands sever ties.

Some are already well-established, and therefore vulnerable. Technology giant Alibaba's joint venture in Russia holds about 10% of the country's e-commerce market and hopes to grow that to 20% by 2025. Xiaomi had around a quarter of the local smartphone market before the war.

Knowing that China supplies the majority of Russia's semiconductors, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in early March warned the White House could "essentially shut" Chinese chipmaker Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp if it steps over the line.

Companies face the risk of backlash no matter what. Ride-hailing giant Didi Global reversed a decision to exit after Chinese social media users accused it of succumbing to US pressure. On the other hand those dependent on Western markets — like laptop maker Lenovo — risk being attacked from both sides. Two foreign executives left the UK board of telecom-equipment maker Huawei over its silence on Ukraine.

Conundrums abound. Short video app TikTok, owned by China's ByteDance, has cooperated with Russia's new censorship laws instead of leaving. That will play poorly in the United States, a far more important market, where politicians are already worried about the app's influence among young Americans; indeed the White House saw fit to brief TikTok influencers about Ukraine.

The speed at which Russia is being deglobalised is making investors nervous that something similar might eventually happen in the People's Republic if tensions between Washington and Beijing escalate. As internationalised Chinese companies walk the tightrope over Ukraine, their global footprints look less like assets and more like liabilities. — Reuters

Companies face the risk of backlash no matter what. Ride-hailing giant Didi Global reversed a decision to exit after Chinese social media users accused it of succumbing to US pressure



THROWAWAY ECONOMY

An employee walks past plastic waste to be recycled piled up at a recycling centre in Merignac in the outskirts of Bordeaux, southwestern France, on March 18, during the Global Recycling Day 2022. Countries are neglecting the massive impact of the 'throwaway' economy on planet-warming emissions, according to research by the organisation Circle Economy published in January 2022 that calculated more than half a trillion tonnes of virgin materials have been consumed since the 2015 Paris Climate Deal. — AFP

Pricing existential risk



WILLEM H BUITERS

The writer is an adjunct professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University

STOCK MARKET CHART WITH INFORMATION OVER THE MODERN BUSINESS BUILDING GLASS OF SKYSCRAPERS, BUSINESS ECONOMY TRADING AND FINANCE CONCEPT

Since the start of Russia's attack on Ukraine, much has been written about the increased risk of nuclear annihilation and its impact (or lack thereof) on stock-market valuations. But, leaving aside the issue of whether stocks are overpriced or underpriced, an equally pertinent question is whether existential risk can be ignored entirely from a financial perspective.

In a recent note titled "Rising Risk of a Nuclear Apocalypse", Peter Berezin, the Chief Global Strategist at BCA Research, argues that although the probability of a civilisation-ending nuclear conflict in the coming year has risen (in his view) to 10 per cent, investors should "stay bullish on stocks" over a 12-month horizon.

The reason is that, although stock prices will fall if there is a nuclear war — and could even reach zero in the case of nuclear Armageddon — so will the price of every other asset (if asset markets survive). Since you cannot hedge the risk of a nuclear war, Berezin thinks you should stay long on assets whose value will rise if nuclear war is avoided.

It is certainly true that you cannot hedge apocalypse risk, and that it therefore makes sense to go long on assets whose value will otherwise increase. But this proposition is not helpful unless you know which assets will go up in value from their current levels if nuclear war is avoided (for the time being) or if its likelihood is at least reduced.

Berezin argues that stocks fall into this category. But what if current (and future) stock prices are not equal to their fundamental, intrinsic, or fair value?

It would make no sense to go long on stocks at a price far above fair value, if you

believe that their fair value will be restored sooner or later (even if fair value increases). The case for being long on stocks would be fatally undermined by a market failure in which current market prices reflect a substantial underestimate of the likelihood of nuclear conflict and/or of the damage that such a conflict would do to the fundamentals driving stock prices.

The problem with Berezin's argument becomes apparent by considering the following two quotes from his article: "If an ICBM is heading your way, the size and composition of your portfolio becomes irrelevant", he writes. "Thus, from a purely financial perspective, you should largely ignore existential risk, even if you do care about it greatly from a personal perspective."

The first statement is correct, but the second is wrong. The fact that a nuclear war would wipe out the value of stocks (as well as all other assets and the organised markets for exchanging them) is surely relevant to the proper pricing of stocks in scenarios in which nuclear annihilation had not (yet) occurred.

The fundamental, intrinsic, or fair value of a company's stock is the (risk-adjusted) present discounted value of the stream of expected future dividends and other payments. That fundamental value would indeed go up if the likelihood of nuclear annihilation were to fall in the coming weeks and months. In this scenario, a future in which there would be no profits (and in which the investor would be unlikely to survive) would become less likely, while a future with positive profits would be more likely.

But this is an argument for buying or

holding stocks only if their current market value equals their fundamental value and will continue to do so in the future. This would not be the case if markets failed to price existential risk correctly because they underestimated either the probability of a nuclear apocalypse or the magnitude of the damage to future profits in such a scenario.

And a similar argument could of course be made for the pricing of sovereign debt. Even triple-A instruments would default comprehensively in the event of a nuclear apocalypse that wipes out the institutions of the state along with the rest of human civilization.

When I noted recently that markets are in denial about nuclear risk, I was making an argument about market failure. My worry is that markets are underestimating both the likelihood of all-out nuclear war and the impact that such an event would have on the future streams of corporate profits. If this assessment is correct, today's stock markets are overpriced. There is an apocalypse-denial bubble.

Though such denialism can persist, it cannot last forever. Consider the case where no nuclear war has erupted (thus far) and the denial bubble bursts. That would be good news for humanity and the fundamentals upon which stock-market valuations are ultimately based.

But it also means there could be a market correction (if the bursting denial bubble trumps the improvement in the fundamental valuation), in which case it would have been prudent to have shorted stocks. Periodic departures from market rationality underscore the need for proper pricing of existential risk.

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BoE raises rates again in bid to corral inflation



ESHE NELSON

The author is a business and economics reporter for The New York Times in London.

The Bank of England (BoE) raised interest rates to their pre-pandemic level in an effort to combat rapidly accelerating inflation that has been worsened by the war in Ukraine. The central bank raised rates by 25 basis points to 0.75 per cent, the third consecutive increase at a policy meeting, as it lifted its forecasts for inflation.

But the decision wasn't unanimous as policymakers weighed the gloomier outlook for the British economy.

While the war has led to higher energy and commodity prices, pushing up the expected peak in

inflation, it is also predicted to cut economic growth in Europe, including Britain.

This creates a challenge for the bank. Its goal is to bring inflation back down to its 2 per cent target, but policymakers will want to avoid cooling the economy too aggressively and knocking the postpandemic recovery off course.

"The global economy outlook had deteriorated significantly following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February, and the associated material increase in the prices of energy and raw material", the bank said in a statement.

On Wednesday, the Federal Reserve raised US interest rates

for the first time since 2018 and projected six more increases this year as inflation soars. Last week, the European Central Bank moved closer to raising its bench mark interest rate when it proposed an end date for its bond-buying programme.

"The economy has recently been subject to a succession of very large shocks", the Bank of England said on Thursday. "Russia's war on Ukraine is another such shock." If energy and commodity prices stay high, it will weigh on Britain's economy.

"This is something monetary policy is unable to prevent", the bank added.

The bank's remit is to target an inflation rate of 2 per cent, and another interest rate increase was needed to stop higher trends in pay and consumer prices from becoming entrenched, it said.

The annual rate of inflation rose to 5.5 per cent in January and is projected to rise to about 8 per cent in the second quarter, the bank said. The bank had previously expected inflation to peak in April when energy bills rise, but it now says inflation could be even higher later this year, possibly several percentage points higher.

Even as inflation gets further away from target, the future pace of interest rate increases is less clear.

The central bank reiterated that "some further modest tightening" in monetary policy might be appropriate but added a caveat on Thursday, saying there are risks to this judgement depending on path of inflation.

Before the war, there were already concerns in Britain about a cost-of-living crisis. Inflation was outpacing wage growth, energy bills were set to jump higher and tax increases are scheduled for next month. The government is under increasing pressure to reconsider its plans to raise taxes when it announces an update to the budget next week.

— The New York Times

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features

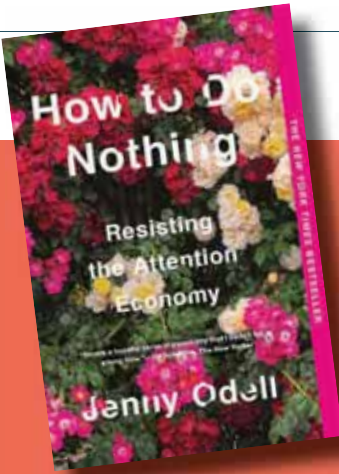
Al Ghanja: Reviving one of Oman's most iconic ships

Al Ghanja is one of the most famous ships built in the Wilayat of Sur and while everyone thought its days were over, Mohammed al Raisi has embarked on a journey to bring it back to life and make it appealing to the modern travellers... **P20**



FASHION

READ



HOW TO DO NOTHING
BY JENNY ODELL

Jenny Odell shows us how we can still win back our lives. Odell sees our attention as the most precious — and overdrawn — resource we have. And we must actively and continuously choose how we use it.

Japan fashion magnate Maezawa buys 'affectionate' robot venture

JAPANESE FASHION magnate Yusaku Maezawa is buying robotics start-up Groove X, which makes an "affectionate" companion robot, saying on Tuesday he was drawn by its ability to "make people feel happy".

A fund owned by Maezawa has taken a majority stake in the start-up, founded by an alumni of SoftBank Group Corp's (9984.T) robotics business, and will move to full own-

ership in April, Groove X said, without providing further detail.

Lovot, an amalgam of "love" and "robot", has wheels and resembles a penguin with cartoonish human eyes. It has interchangeable outfits and communicates in squeaks.

Lovot "can't clean or do work but I see big potential in a presence that can make people feel happy, particularly at this time," Maezawa said in the statement.

Groove X previously raised 8

billion yen (\$67.6 million) from investors including funds backed by the Japanese government and Toyota Motor Corp (7203.T).

The state fund, INCJ, said on Tuesday it had sold its stake to Maezawa for an undisclosed amount. It declined to say if it made a profit.

Maezawa "showed a strong interest in the concept of a home robot as providing a solution to social issues," INCJ said.

The entrepreneur, who visited the International Space Station on a Russian rocket last year, made his fortune founding the online fashion retailer Zozo which was bought by SoftBank's Internet business.

Through his fund Maezawa has invested in ventures such as a maker of smart cat-litter trays that analyses toilet habits and tracks animal health and another offering personalised videos from celebrities.

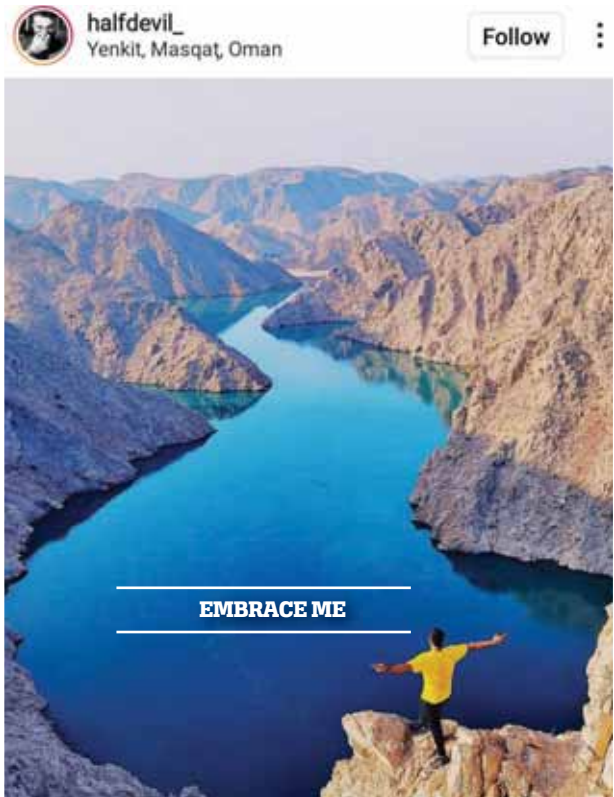
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AROUND THE WORLD

CONSERVATION

Once-starving lions roar back to life in Sudan sanctuary



KANDAKA THE lioness was once sick and emaciated in a rundown zoo in Sudan's capital, but thanks to wildlife enthusiasts she now thrives in a reserve watching her cubs grow.

She was among five lions suffering from starvation and disease with visibly protruding ribs and flaccid skin, held in grim cages with rusty bars in Khartoum's Al Qurashi zoo.

Conditions worsened as Sudan's economic crisis deepened in the wake of months-long protests in 2019 that led to the toppling of former dictator Omar al Bashir.

Of the five lions in the ramshackle zoo, two died.

The animals' plight shot to public attention two years ago after an online campaign prompted veterinarians, conservationists and animal enthusiasts the world over to rush to their aid.

Along with the two other surviving lions, Kandaka was moved to the Al Bageir reserve.

"Their health has since improved greatly," said Othman Salih, who founded the reserve in January 2021.

The site, an hour's drive south of Khartoum, spreads over some four hectares (10 acres), or about the size of six football pitches.

As a testament to her recovery, the five-year-old lioness was called Kandaka — the name of Sudan's ancient Nubian queens.

It is a term that has come to be associated with the women who played a vital role in the protests that unseated Bashir.

She is now thriving in Al Bageir, one of 17 lions from across Sudan.

But keeping the reserve up and running comes with its own set of steep challenges.

Volunteers, often juggling full-time jobs with their passion for animal welfare, have been struggling with long commutes, soaring prices and limited resources.

The challenges have increased since last year's military coup led by army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan, which triggered regular mass protests and roadblocks.

"The prices are very high," said Salih, who travels to the reserve all the way from Khartoum every day.

The reserve's running costs remain high, including providing more than 100 kilograms (220 pounds) of meat for the big cats daily.

It has so far been kept afloat by donations and tours for schoolchildren and families. — **AFP**

CULTURE

'This Is Everyone's Culture': Ukraine's Architectural Treasures Face Destruction



RUSSIA'S WAR on Ukraine brought searing images of human tragedy to witnesses around the world: thousands of civilians killed and injured; broken families, as mothers and children leave in search of refuge while fathers and other men stay behind to defend their country; and millions of refugees having already fled to neighbouring countries, after just two weeks of war.

In addition to that human suffering, a second tragedy comes into focus: the destruction of a country's very culture. Across Ukraine, scores of historic buildings, priceless artworks and public squares are being reduced to rubble by Russian rockets, missiles, bombs and gunfire.

In 2010, I saw some of Ukraine's vibrant — and, sadly, often overlooked — culture firsthand while writing a travel article about the beautiful, centuries-old wooden churches in the western region of Zakarpattia. At the time, there was very little in the way of infrastructure for tourists in the area, despite the attraction of stunning buildings like the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin, an immense wood-work construction dating from 1619, which I visited in the village of Novoselytsia. A few years later, however, the wooden churches — or tserkvas — of the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine and nearby Poland were added to UNESCO's World Heritage List, which seeks to highlight "cultural and natural herit-

age around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity."

That list currently includes seven sites scattered throughout Ukraine, all of which are obviously in grave danger, while many other important sites have already been damaged, if not destroyed. The internationally recognised memorial at Babyn Yar — a ravine near Kyiv where the Nazis massacred more than 33,000 Jews in two days in 1941, followed by an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 others over subsequent years — was near a Russian missile attack on March 1 that, according to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, killed at least five people.

In the northeastern city of Kharkiv, Russian attackers hit multiple landmarks, including the city's sprawling Freedom Square, home to

Derzhprom, or the Palace of Industry, an eye-popping constructivist building dating from 1928 that is currently on a UNESCO "tentative" list for consideration as a World Heritage site in the future. The nearby Kharkiv State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre and next-door Kharkiv Philharmonic were reduced to ruins.

In a televised address to the European Parliament, Zelenskyy highlighted the destruction of one of the largest public squares in Europe.

"Can you imagine, this morning, two cruise missiles hit Freedom Square? Dozens were killed. This is the price of freedom. We are fighting, just for our land and for our freedom," he said. "Every square, after today, no matter what it is called, is going to be called Freedom Square, in every city of our country." — **NYT**



COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
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Ancient Arabic proverbs: 5

And we continue our journey through meaningful ancient Arabic proverbs:

29) War is a Draw: this proverb is used to indicate that life is ever-changing and nothing stays the same. It was famously used by Abu Sufyan after the Muslims loss to Quraysh in the Battle of Uhud (625 A.D). Riding his horse and coming across the defeated he shouted: "Days alternate and war is a draw!". Referring to the loss they had the year before in the Battle of Badr.

30) Your Hands Tied and Your Mouth Blew: there was a man who decided to cross a river swimming. He brought a leather bag to aid him float, blew it and tied it. His friends advised him to blow it more and secure the knot better but he ignored them. He went swimming and when reaching midway, the knot untied and the air leaked out fast that he almost drowned. He shouted at his friends for help but all he got was: "Your hands tied and your mouth blew", meaning that you're responsible of your own actions.

31) Your Brother is Forced, Not Being a Hero: this was first said by the Prophet's companion Amr ibn Al-Aa's (573-664 A.D) when asked to fight Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and the 4th Rashidun Caliph. It was the time of Fitnah Wars and the Prophet's companions were divided between those who supported Ali and those who opposed him. Ali asked for someone from the opposing camp to challenge him. Mu'awiya — the leader of the opposing camp-kept asking for volunteers but no one dared to fight Ali, the Prophet's cousin and a well-known fearless warrior. Mu'awiya finally picked Amr ibn Al-Aa's — the most cunning man Arabia had known- who instantly refused but then was forced. He came face to face with Ali, and knowing that he was no match to this great war veteran, he dropped his sword saying: "Your brother is

forced, not being a hero!" which made Ali laugh and walk away. Till now this proverb is used to indicate when doing something unwillingly.

32) Survive a Rajab and You'll See Wonders: Rajab is the 7th month in the Arabic lunar calendar that is also considered one of the 4 sacred months where war is prohibited. It's said that first who said this proverb was Al-Harith ibn Abbad who had recently divorced one of his wives because of his old age. She got married to a younger man that she loved more than Al-Harith. When the two men met, Al-Harith said: "Survive a Rajab and you'll see wonders" meaning that the passing of time changes everything, even feelings.

33) The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back: a man had a camel that he overloaded with luggage. There was a bundle of hay left that was the camel's feed. The man loaded the bundle over the rest of the luggage straw by straw, till he reached the last one and the camel crumbled under the sheer weight of the luggage. This proverb is used when small actions accumulate to create a bigger problem that suddenly occurs.

34) Urqoob Timings: Urqoob was a man from Al-Amaleeq tribe who lived before the time of Prophet Moses. He was known for not keeping his word. Once he'd promised his brother the fruits of his own palm tree. When the fruit came, he promised the dates instead. And when the dates came, he plucked the fruits at night and kept it for himself. This proverb is used to describe people who never keep their word or never on time.

(To be continued....)

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



Al Ghanja: Reviving one of Oman's iconic ships

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Shipbuilding is one of the most distinguished traditional industries for which the Omanis are famous for and it occupies a prominent position in ancient Omani history.

The creativity of the Omanis and the society's growth can be traced by how they built their boats and the genius of Oman's boatmakers can best be seen in the Wilayat of Sur where the boat building tradition is still practised to this day. Thankfully, there are still some brilliant young Omanis who are dedicated to the revival of ancient local ships used by their ancestors.

Al Ghanja is one of the most famous ships built in the Wilayat of Sur. The people of Sur have excelled globally in building wonderful and strong ships that they use for trips that take months. Sur had an active role in the navigational activity between Oman and Yemen on the one hand, and the coasts of East Africa, India and China on the other.

Al Ghanja is a traditional large vessel made of high-quality wood. It is a purely Omani ship that is manufactured only in the Sultanate of Oman. It is one of the large-sized ships, with a tonnage of (400) tonnes, and it is one of the ships that were used for long-distance sailing. Building Al Ghanja has stopped several years ago.

Mohammed al Raisi, who has a big interest in ships and planes, decided to bring life back to Al Ghanja ship after he saw a wood

model of it while he was visiting Sur. He got thrilled with the ship's shape, the beautiful carvings surrounding it and the captivating scene of its ropes and sails. From that spurt of inspiration, he would move on and decided to create a wireless model, something that will bring the Al Ghanja back to life and into the future.

With his background in aeroplane making, Mohammed felt that moving towards shipbuilding isn't hard. When he was making radio-controlled aeroplanes, he also needed to look at weight, balance and cruise which are shared characteristics when building a ship.

Mohammed shared that when shipbuilders created ships in the past, they do so without any building plans. And that's exactly how he decided to do this project. He also used simple and accessible materials including wood and cork. He shared that this experience has taught him that exquisite work does not need much money, it needs the worker's passion and interest.

Building Al Ghanja takes a whole year. A fine example of this is Fath Al Khair, now located in front of the Maritime Museum in Sur and was erected to serve as a memorial to this ancient city.

For Mohammed's project, it took him four months to finally show us his masterpiece. He explained that it took a while as he wanted to get the work done



precisely and without any pressure. He wanted to enjoy every single moment while doing it. He was also keen on representing a model that is identical to the real ship.

Mohammed shared that while he thinks it was easy to make the ship in theory, it was a different thing in reality facing different challenges along the way. He mentioned that one of his major issues was how to convert the ship to a wireless model and figuring out how to make an engine work for his project was a lot of challenges. He also said that he has to figure out a way how to maintain the traditional ship but also enhance its ability to sail.

Mohammed shared he was

really happy while going through the process of building the ship. He shared it was magnificent and distinctive to embark on such a project as he felt like his breathing new life into a lost practice and tradition. He said the greatest joy is being able to show appreciation to the older generation who allowed the country to see beautiful vessels that became a big part of Oman's identity.

Despite all the challenges, Mohammed succeeded in pursuing his plans of creating a wireless model of Al Ghanja, something he said was his way of showing his gratitude towards his homeland and its legacies.