

Ukraine refuses to surrender Mariupol

Ukraine rejected a Russian ultimatum to surrender the besieged port city of Mariupol on Monday, as overnight Russian strikes destroyed a shopping mall in the capital Kyiv, killing eight people. Almost 350,000 people are trapped without water and electricity in the southern city of Mariupol, which has been bombarded by Russian troops for almost a month. Elsewhere in Ukraine, Russian bombs struck targets overnight, allegedly damaging a chemical plant in the north of the country causing an “ammonia leakage”. **DETAILS ON P7**



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

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

P10

ABDULLAH AL
TAWQI TOPS FIA
RALLY STAR
MENA FINAL



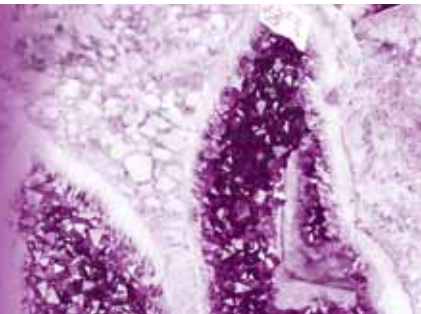
P13

REGULATION TO
SUPPORT ROLLOUT OF
EV CHARGING STATIONS
IN OMAN BY YEAR-END



P20

ECO-FRIENDLY
PRODUCTS IS AT THE
HEART OF THIS MARKET
FAIR IN BAUSHER



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO
PRESIDENT OF CHINA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China on victims of the plane that crashed in south-western China. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and sympathy to President Xi, families of the victims and the people of China. — ONA

OVER 1,000 CASES OF
DOWN SYNDROME

The total number of Down Syndrome cases in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,117. Among them, 638 are males and 479 females, who are benefiting from programmes and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development's rehabilitation centres and private civil societies. The statistics revealed in conjunction with the Sultanate of Oman marking the 'World Down Syndrome Day'. **SEE P3**



HONOURABLE LADY VISITS SOCIAL WELFARE HOME



Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Monday visited the Social Welfare Home in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Governorate of South Al Batinah. Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, was present during the visit. The Honourable Lady went around the facility, which comes in the purview of the Ministry of Social Development. **DETAILS ON P2**

COVID-19 STILL PREVALENT, TAKE PRECAUTIONS

YUSEF AL HABSI

MUSCAT: Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said that coronavirus (Covid-19) is still prevalent with the daily caseload starting to rise in many countries around the

world. The minister of health cautioned against non-abidance of precautionary measures and urged people to get the booster dose.

He noted that there is definitive evidence that the majority of deaths occurred among people

who have not received the booster dose, particularly those who got the second dose six months earlier.

The minister noted that the figures in the Sultanate of Oman are satisfactory, but he warned against complacency.

Revised fee for
work permits
from June 1

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Labour has clarified that new fee for expatriate work permits will come into force from June 1.

Companies and individuals will be waived off penalties for delay in the renewal of their work permits, provided that the renewal is completed before September 1 this year.

At the same time, the private sector has been urged to take advantage of the situation.

As per the Royal directives, the Ministry of Labour announced the new fee for expatriate workforce according to the profession. A 30 per cent discount will be granted to companies which abide by Omanisation percentage.

“The commercial fee of RO

201-301 have been divided into three categories and Omanisation percentage will be determined for each of these categories.”

DISCOUNT

The ministry said that RO 301 would be levied for senior and supervisory professions (managers, presidents, specialists and consultants, while a discount of 30 per cent (RO 201) will be granted to companies which abide by Omanisation percentage.

For technical and specialist jobs, RO 201 will be levied, while a 30 per cent discount (RO 176) will be granted to companies which maintain the Omanisation percentage.

In category three, RO 201 will be charged for unskilled jobs companies following the Omanisation percentage will have to pay only RO 141. **TURN TO P3**



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WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 31°C Min 23°C SALALAH: Max 31°C Min 22°C NIZWA: Max 35°C Min 21°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:10 FAJR: 04:55 DHUHR: 12:19 ASR: 15:45 MAGHRIB: 18:23 ISHA: 19:33



Honourable Lady visits Social Welfare Home



MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Monday visited the Social Welfare Home in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, Governorate of South Al Batinah.

Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, was present during the visit.

The Honourable Lady went around the facility, which comes in the purview of the Ministry of Social Development. The home offers services and programmes catering to the old aged and other social cases whose well-being is difficult to maintain within their households or social milieus.

HH the Honourable Lady toured the departments of the Social Welfare Home and inspected its different units. She took note of the integrated facilities and amenities offering high quality services to the residents and providing them with appropriate rehabilitation in terms of social, psychological and healthcare, as well as entertainment services.

The Honourable Lady talked to the residents, who briefed her about the comfort and attention they enjoy at the Social Welfare Home.

At the conclusion of the visit, HH the Honourable Lady expressed her deep appreciation and thanks for the efforts of the personnel in charge of the Social Welfare Home and wished them success in maintaining the performance of the facility. — ONA



Wheat yield increases in Oman

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

At a time when the supply of wheat in several parts of the world, including the Sultanate of Oman, has been disrupted due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the current wheat harvest season in the country shows a positive trend as high quality increased wheat harvest is noticeable in several wilayats.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has been encouraging farmers to go for cultivation of wheat and preserve it as much as possible. This is also an attempt by the government to diversify resources. The agriculture traits are intact in several wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman despite the oil boom that the country witnessed after 1970.

The initiatives included allocating additional areas for some basic crops, such as wheat, in the Najd area in the Dhofar Governorate. Wheat yield in Al Najd farms reaches about 1,500 tonnes, an increase of more than 1,000 tonnes over the last season. Wheat harvest has started in 35 farms covering an area of 1,547 ‘feddans’. Rashid bin Saeed al Ghafri, Director-General of the Directorate of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Governorate of Dhofar,



said: “The ministry is offering 50 per cent subsidy on improved wheat seed to farmers, in addition to wheat harvesting equipment and coordinating with the flour mills to market wheat produced by the farmers.”

The wheat crop production during the agricultural season 2020/2021 amounted to 2,649 tonnes, an increase of 19 per cent, while the total lands planted with wheat last season amounted to 2,449 acres, recording an increase of 19.6 per cent.

Cultivation of wheat is one of the Omani farmers’ ancient practices. These days the farmers are using a modern irrigation system, as wheat crops have shown adaptability in harsh desert conditions in some wilayats. The ministry works in cooperation with many international, regional and local organisations and research centres through the implementation of research and extension programmes to develop local wheat varieties and introduce imported varieties under the prevailing conditions in the country.

NCSI holds trial run of Mega Data Portal

MUSCAT: The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on Monday made trial launch of the Mega Data Portal (MDP) project, which is considered a global achievement in the field of using mobile data in statistical work as a source of bulk data collection.

The gateway project utilises data from located mobile phones to produce statistical indicators serving the areas of tourism, internal traffic and connectivity between sites in the Sultanate of Oman.

The Mega Data Portal explores inbound tourism traffic of delegations that visit Oman most from abroad, as well as domestic tourism within Omani governorates and wilayats. It also offers an opportunity to analyse data about connectivity among recurring visits to sites, the personnel operating during office hours and internal movement between wilayats.

The pilot project constitutes a quality shift forward in statistical data production operations. It provides for the development of a comprehensive system to enhance decision-making. It covers social, economic, environmental and cultural indicators for the measurement of performance. The United Nations’ statistical unit hailed the MDP as a global achievement in the field of mega data management.

The project is being undertaken in form of partnership between NCSI and the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), Omantel and Ooredoo.

— ONA



BAHRAIN SPORTS OFFICIAL RECEIVED



MUSCAT: Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidi, Minister of Interior, received in his office on Monday Issa bin Mohammed Abdulrahim, Chairman of the Bahrain's Sport for All Federation and the Bahrain's International Sport for All Federation. The two sides reviewed matters supporting means of sport for all. The meeting was attended by Dr Juma bin Ahmed al Kaabi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Sultanate of Oman. -- ONA

Oman's effective groundwater conservation efforts hailed

MUSCAT: The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Representation in the Sultanate of Oman commended the vital role and efforts being made by the Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, in taking appropriate measures which reflects the importance of groundwater in devising sustainable development policies through various projects in the fields of agriculture, industry, ecosystems and adaptation to climate change across the country.

The comments were made on the occasion of the World Water Day this year celebrated under the theme 'Groundwater: Making the invisible visible'.

The (FAO) Representation in the Sultanate of Oman indicated that the project 'Building Resilient Environment and Sustainable Agricultural and Water Resources in the Sultanate of Oman', implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water



Resources in coordination with FAO, the Civil Aviation Authority and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) with funding from the Green Climate Fund, is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman.

The project deals with one of the major traditional water sources, groundwater including traditional aflaj systems, and analyzes the impact of seawater

intrusion on the quality and availability of groundwater, it said stressing that this activity will contribute to identifying appropriate integrated solutions for water management, which will help in the future to take sound decisions for sustainable management of groundwater.

Population growth along with rapid urbanisation and economic development are among the factors that led to an increase in the demand for water, energy and food. Agriculture is the largest consumer of freshwater in the world as more than a quarter of the energy used globally is consumed on food production and supplies. Providing food to the world population, expected to reach 9 billion people by 2050, will require an increase in food production by 60 per cent. The exploration, protection and sustainable use of water will be critical to survival, adapting to climate change and meeting the needs of the growing population, it said. — ONA

Municipality launches anti-mosquito drive

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The Muscat Municipality has embarked on a campaign against insect breeding, targeting the vulnerable areas to control the spread of pest-borne diseases.

The campaign, carried out as part of its seasonal pest abatement process, aims at mosquito breeding sites and all neighbourhoods that are unhygienic, allowing pests, rodents and other creatures to breed and spread diseases.

"We call upon all community members to adopt hygiene practices to eliminate the breeding environment and take part in the anti-communicable diseases campaign," a message from the Muscat Municipality said.

Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has revealed to Oman evidence and data that suggest that Covid-19 will turn into a seasonal virus such as seasonal influenza, which may happen by the end of this year.

Dr Ahmed al Mandhari, Director of the WHO for the Eastern Mediterranean, had earlier pointed out that the facts suggest that the virus that causes Covid-19 would turn into a seasonal virus such as seasonal



influenza.

It may happen by the end of this year if countries succeed in achieving vaccination targets and continue to adhere to preventive measures and public health measures concerning the mutant Omicron.

"It cannot be definitively stated that it will be the last of the mutant for many reasons, the most important of which is the nature of viruses and their permanent activity, which generates the emergence of a new mutant, and we must be prepared for all the possibilities for countries to enhance their genetic sequencing

capabilities to be able to detect mutations in a timely manner," Dr Mandhari said.

However, the epidemic in the Sultanate of Oman has curved downward, with the recovery rate approaching 99 per cent. The registration of daily infections is below 100 for the first time in more than a month, and the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced on Monday that 122 daily cases of Covid-19 were recorded within the last 24 hours, while 180 recoveries were reported. The recovery graph is the most favourable trend this week.

Revised fee for work permits from June 1

FROM PAGE1

The SMEs (Riyada cardholders) will be charged RO 101 for hiring one worker up to five workers while hiring six workers up to 10 workers will cost RO 151.

In continuation of support to small and medium enterprises, the previously applicable work permit fees for the non-Omani workforce will be maintained.

RO 101 for issuance and renewal of recruitment permits for non-Omani manpower (1 to 5 workers) and RO 151 for issuance and renewal of recruitment permits for non-Omani manpower (6 to 10

workers).

In a statement, the Ministry of Labour said that fee reduction would lead to reducing the burden of commercial activities due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"It will help expand commercial activities and facilitate investment and provide accurate knowledge of the types of professions and specialisations required for the labour market. It will increase the number of generic jobs suitable for job-seekers and provide incentives to companies supporting Omanis."

Meanwhile, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)

said the new measures would help improve the business environment and raise the competitiveness of the Sultanate of Oman.

Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said the new fee would reduce the costs of companies and institutions, and helps the private sector to be competitive for its integration with the global standards.

Al Saleh urged the private sector to take advantage of the decision and increase the pace of providing job opportunities for nationals.

Over 1,100 cases of Down Syndrome in Oman

ZAINAB AL NASSERI

@zainabalnasseri

The total number of Down Syndrome cases in the Sultanate of Oman reached 1,117. Among them, 638 are males and 479 females, who are benefiting from programmes and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development's rehabilitation centres and private civil societies.

The statistics revealed in conjunction with the Sultanate of Oman celebration of the 'World Down Syndrome Day', which falls on March 21 every year.

This year, the celebration bears the slogan 'Active Participation and Integration into Society' to raise awareness about Down Syndrome and the valuable contributions of individuals of this category in their schools, rehabilitation centres, work, communities and public life in its many aspects.

Down Syndrome is defined as a genetic disorder, one in 700 natural births. It is one of the most common conditions caused by abnormal cell division, leading to an increase in total or partial copies of chromosome 21; therefore, the body cells contain 47 chromosomes instead

of 46 chromosomes. This extra genetic material causes a change in growth, physical features and health problems that characterise Down Syndrome, causing mild to moderate intellectual disability and lifelong developmental delay.

The book 'Down Syndrome in the Sultanate of Oman: Causes, Spread and Possible Risk Factors for the Syndrome' by researcher Dr Salma al Harrasi, a Consultant Genetic Laboratories and Head of Laboratories at the National Centre for Genetic Health at the Royal Hospital, refers to the ambiguity of the real cause of the increase in chromosome 21. "However, the only factor known to be associated with Down Syndrome is the age of the pregnant mother. Studies indicate a direct proportional relationship in its occurrence with the age of the mother. The older the mother, the more likely she is to have a child with Down Syndrome. For example, if the mother is 20 years old, the incidence of this chromosomal abnormality is one case per 1,500 births. But if the mother is 35 years old, the probability is one case per 350 births. At the age of 45 years, the percentage increases to one



case per 30 births. If the mother gives birth to a child with Down Syndrome, the probability of having another child with the same disease also rises to 1 per cent in addition to the mother's age," the book says.

As for the symptoms and health problems, Dr Salma mentioned

that the consequences of the abnormal increase in genes in Down Syndrome are large and very different and may affect the functions of the body and its organs. The most prominent symptoms are delayed mental development, mental and cognitive impairment, speech difficulties,

muscle relaxation, congenital defects in the stomach, intestines and heart, short stature, besides distinctive facial characteristics such as small eyes and ears and protrusion of the tongue.

Dr Salma indicated in one of the chapters of the book that since 2000, an increase has been

observed in the percentage of Down Syndrome cases diagnosed in the Sultanate of Oman, as laboratory statistics indicate that 100 to 120 new Down Syndrome cases are diagnosed each year.

The doctor also indicated in the book, which is the first medical publication dealing in depth with cases of Down Syndrome in the Sultanate of Oman, that there is no treatment for cases of this Syndrome after its occurrence, yet, it can be prevented by avoiding pregnancy for older mothers (over 35 years). She also indicated that the family should take care of Down children by protecting them from the associated complications, as they are more susceptible than normal children to contracting some diseases.

In addition, Down Syndrome children differ in their mental abilities and their abilities to understand language, cognitive and social communication, so it is necessary to take care of them in the family and private centres for them to be rehabilitated and gradually integrated into practical life and society, bearing in mind that the default age of people with Down Syndrome may be up to 60 years old.



A JOURNEY TOWARDS SMART CITIES

BURAIMI GOVERNORATE'S POPULATION IS EXPECTED TO REACH 182,000 IN 2040, WITH A WORKFORCE OF

100,000

IN SOUTH AL BATINAH, THE POPULATION IS EXPECTED TO BE ONE MILLION, WITH A TOTAL WORKFORCE OF

551,000

AGRICULTURAL ADVANCEMENTS

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkutttyp

The Sultanate of Oman is entering an important growth cycle alongside its long-term ambitions for economic diversification based on innovation and technology. With Vision 2040 guidelines and support from the Oman National Spatial Strategy, all the governorates are in an acceleration mode in their journey towards smart cities and tap into the wealth of potential for social, economic and environmental development.

According to the strategy, Smart Cities are a national ambition, as a source for growth, jobs and a tool to diversify its economy away from oil exports.

As such, the government has been deploying several pilots and tools to support their emergence throughout the country and increasingly in collaboration with the private sector.

A major part of the strategy is the setting up of 'greater cities' that will help provide employment opportunities and infrastructure in alignment with the expected economic and population growth in these cities. These will then integrate with their neighbouring communities.

The strategy also aims to have a framework for land use that supports socio-economic development at national and regional levels. It will allow the government to organise high quality urban and rural development and to incentivise environmentally friendly development.

Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, affirms, "the National Strategy is the basic guide for the urban future as it is a spatial template into which various development programmes pour in in an integrated, balanced and multidimensional manner".

According to the minister, the strategy aims to increase the national workforce to 32 per cent, which is expected to be 3.9 million in 2040, and the percentage of skilled workers to 83.

The strategy aims to increase annual GDP growth by five per cent, contribution of foreign direct investment to GDP by ten per cent, percentage of the population with access to community services by 75 per cent, public spaces for recreation in urban areas by 10sqm/person, and prepare for demand for additional 911,400 housing units.

As a result of this plan, cities such as Greater Muscat, Greater Salalah, Greater Suhar, and Greater Nizwa have been planned for. Duqm, however, will continue to develop in accordance with the rate of its expansion.

Muscat will be made a global city by 2040 – a national gateway that connects the sultanate of Oman to the world. The population of Muscat Governorate will increase to 2.5 million in 2040, with a total workforce of 1.7 million, of which the national workforce will be 75 per cent.

The projected average GDP growth in the governorate will be eight per cent annually.

FOOD PROCESSING

A number of the governorates are starting to develop distinct specialisation and differentiation in line with the realisation of Vision 2040. They are drawing on their distinctive geographic characteristics to promote a transition from oil and gas to renewable energy sources and to protect and manage biodiversity, a number of them are starting to develop distinct specialisation and differentiation.

In South Al Batinah, the population is expected to be one million, with a total workforce of 551,000, of which the national workforce will account for 50 per cent. The projected GDP growth in the governorate will be 9.4 per cent annually.

The urban strategy for North Al Batinah includes a plan for it to become one of the main centres for international trade and play a major role in conducting various economic activities by 2040.

Al Buraimi Governorate is projected to be a pioneer nationally in the field of research and employment of green technology. The governorate's population is expected to reach 182,000 in 2040, with a workforce of 100,000, of which 22 per cent will be citizens. Al Dhahirah Governorate will witness growth in the fields of logistics, applied engineering, food processing and agricultural advancements.

LOGISTICS

APPLIED ENGINEERING

THE POPULATION OF MUSCAT GOVERNORATE WILL INCREASE TO 2.5 MILLION IN 2040, WITH A TOTAL WORKFORCE OF

1.7 MILLION

According to the strategy, Smart Cities are a national ambition, as a source for growth, jobs and a tool to diversify its economy away from oil exports

STRATEGY AIMS TO INCREASE NATIONAL WORKFORCE TO 32%, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO BE

3.9 MILLION IN 2040



Drowning incidents on the rise among under-5 children

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

“Cases of drowning in the Sultanate of Oman are very high. The majority of the victims are children under the age of five. This is worrying and sad,” said Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, during the concluding ceremony of the Aman campaign held on Monday.

He indicated that Al Dakhiliyah Governorate recorded the highest death of the young and the old due to large valleys, ponds and high rate of rainfall, noting that necessary measures were taken to reduce water accumulation to avoid death incidents in the future.

Referring to drowning as the third leading cause of death in the world, Dr Al Saeedi mentioned that the Aman campaign was not only devoted to shedding light on risks; it trained health workers and others on first aid and pulmonary resuscitation for the drowned.

“There is a cooperation with several other parties to put up guiding signs around the places where there are swimming pools and where rainwater is collected in abundance,” he added. In her speech, Sayyidah Dr Khawla bint Al Julanda al Said, Chairman of Oman Paediatric Society (OPS), marked



the OPS’s ceaseless endeavour to enhance children’s welfare through dedicating all efforts and available resources to raise health services in the Sultanate of Oman.

She pointed out that the Society has emphasised social issues, the most important of which is negligence as being a cause of paediatric mortality and morbidity.

The Aman campaign was started in 2019 by the Omani Paediatric Association in cooperation with the Departments

of Women and Child Health as well as Education and Health Awareness Programmes at the Ministry of Health. It aimed to educate community members and reduce deaths resulting from drowning accidents, especially for young people. The campaign guided the parents on children’s health amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The campaign also helped educate health workers about ways of dealing with children with Covid-19.

Royal Cavalry wins UAE Derby cup



ABU DHABI: The Royal Cavalry (RC) won the UAE Derby cup.

The horse “RC Haroon” came first in the 4th round (Derby Cup).

The race was held on the Abu Dhabi Equestrian Club racecourse for a distance of 2,200 metres.

The UAE Derby saw the participation of elite Arabian horses. RC won the Derby Cup as RC Haroon, jockeyed by Antonio Friso and coached by Ibrahim al Hadhrami, took the lead in the final few metres.

— ONA

GC holds meeting



MUSCAT: The Government Communication Centre (GC) on Monday organised the 16th government communication meeting, which brings together operators of communication and media departments of government units.

The meeting was attended by Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Radio and Television.

The meeting reviewed best practices in managing social media accounts of organisations. This comes within the

role of GC in enhancing the abilities of staff in departments of communication and media in various government units by enabling them in actively engaging with social media platforms. It also aims to enable staff in achieving quality access to the target audiences within the government’s visions and strategic goals.

The meeting also highlighted the standards of successful digital content creation and best practices in safely using social media platforms, among other topics. — ONA

MoCIIP holds meeting with honorary consuls

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, on Monday organised the third meeting with honorary consuls of the Sultanate of Oman in presence of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

The meeting was attended by the honorary consuls of the Sultanate of Oman in Portugal, Monaco, Milan, Zimbabwe and Pittsburgh.

This comes within the framework of constant meetings organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in collaboration with the Foreign Ministry, with ambassadors and honorary consuls in an effort to draw investors, enhance economic cooperation and find investment partners in friendly countries.



The under-secretary for investment promotion, said these meetings come within the framework of integrative work between government sectors and stakeholders. The honorary consuls of the Sultanate of Oman play a significant role in introducing the services provided by the ministry and

the incentives, initiatives and investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman. Hence, bringing foreign direct investment to the Sultanate of Oman and promoting Omani products in international markets, enhancing economic cooperation and building international business partnerships.

Over 9,900 environmental permits issued last year

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

The Environment Authority issued 9,947 in 2021, including 2,340 of categories A, B and C, 5,343 for chemicals and waste management, 1,363 for radiation protection and 281 for liquid waste management.

The Authority also issued permits for diving outside the scope of protected areas, protection of the marine environment, collecting fungal samples and conducting a field study, import and export endangered animals (CITES) and permits to import and export wildlife elements.

In order to provide high-quality services to the Authority’s clients, 95 per cent of the total services provided by the Environmental Assessment and Permits Center are now automatic, the Authority said. Besides, services of issuing a permit for the possession and use of hunting and tracking tools and simulating the sounds

of birds and wild animals’ devices were developed and re-engineered.

It is a new electronic service provided to the customers and will be available on the Authority’s website. Also, the Authority services have been merged down to 23 services instead of 36, according to Oman 2040 Vision to facilitate and encourage business and investment environment, the merger will be activated in 2022.

The Environmental Assessment and Permits Center is the Authority concerned with the environmental assessment of various projects in the Sultanate of Oman and the issuance of environmental permits accompanied by the environmental requirements.

Environmental permits are divided into three categories. Category A projects have a high environmental impact or are located in an environmentally sensitive area and require the preparation of an environmental impact assessment study for the project.

Category (B) projects are those with a medium environmental impact. In this case, they are located within the industrial zones of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates, Free Zones or approved industrial ports; the project owner is required to acknowledge approval of the environmental requirements and the permit is automatically issued. But the site of the proposed project is outside of these zones, the project owner is required to prepare an environmental impact assessment study, which is reviewed and evaluated and a permit is issued accordingly.

Category (C) projects have an environmental impact between medium and simple. Specialists at the Authority study the request in terms of the nature, location, sensitivity, production capacity and potential environmental impacts to determine whether the project owner is required to prepare an environmental impact assessment study or not.



Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby re- announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
2/2022	Maintenance work for Al Wafa Center at Al Swaiq	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, which have construction contracting and maintenance activities, and are registered in the second class	Sunday 10-4-2022 02:00 PM	Thursday 28-4-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Tuesday 22/3/2022.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

“ The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry ”

www.mosd.gov.om



Plane carrying 132 crashes in China, Xi orders probe

BEIJING: A China Eastern passenger jet carrying 132 people crashed onto a mountain in southern China on Monday causing a large fire, shortly after losing contact with air traffic control and dropping thousands of metres in under three minutes.

There was no immediate confirmation of the number of casualties, but the disaster prompted an unusually swift public reaction from President Xi Jinping, who said he was “shocked” and ordered an immediate investigation into its cause.

The Boeing 737-800 flight from the city of Kunming to the southern hub of Guangzhou “lost airborne contact over Wuzhou” in the Guangxi region on Monday afternoon, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC).

“This flight has crashed,” the CAAC said, adding the jet was carrying 123 passengers and nine crew members.

Hundreds of firefighters were dispatched to the scene in Teng county near the city of Wuzhou, state media reported, as nearby villagers rushed to help the rescue effort.

“Everyone went to the mountains,” Tang Min, who runs a small restaurant a few kilometres from the crash site, said by telephone.

Fears for the fate of the jet spread on Monday afternoon as local media reported that China Eastern flight MU5735 had not arrived as planned in Guangzhou after taking off from Kunming shortly after 1 pm.

Flight tracking website FlightRadar24 showed no data for the flight after 2:22



A flight information board shows a cancelled China Eastern Airlines flight at the Kunming Changshui International Airport in China’s southwestern Yunnan province. — AFP pm. The tracker showed the plane sharply dropped from an altitude of 29,100 feet to 3,225 feet in three minutes, before flight information ceased.

State broadcaster CCTV said the crash “caused a mountain fire” which was later extinguished.

One villager told a local news site that the plane had “completely fallen apart” and he had seen forest areas destroyed by

the fire it caused when crashing into the mountainside.

China Eastern changed its website to black and white only on Monday afternoon and opened an emergency assistance phone number.

A January company report said China Eastern had 289 Boeing 737-series aircraft in its 751-strong fleet.

Xi called for “all efforts” towards the

rescue and to find out the “cause of the accident as soon as possible”, according to CCTV.

“We are shocked to learn of the China Eastern MU5735 accident,” he said, calling for “the absolute safety of the sector and people’s lives”.

The arrivals board at Guangzhou airport showed the jet’s flight information for hours after it had crashed, as airport

State broadcaster CCTV said the crash ‘caused a mountain fire’ which was later extinguished

staff in full PPE held up signs to help relatives of the passengers assemble.

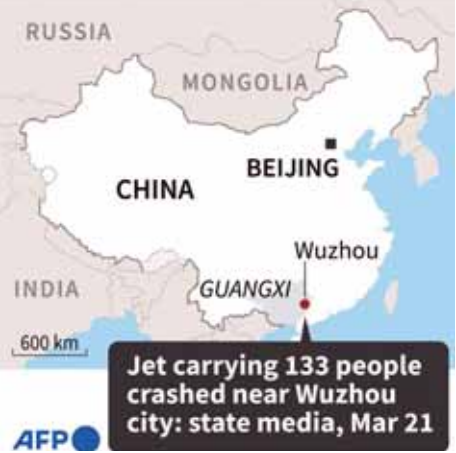
As dusk fell, there was still no information on the passengers.

A villager near the crash site surnamed Liu told state-run China News Service that he had driven a motorbike to the scene after hearing a loud explosion.

He said he saw debris on the ground, including an aircraft wing and fragments of clothing hanging from trees.

China had enjoyed an enviable air safety record in recent years as the country was criss-crossed by newly built airports and serviced by new airlines established to match breakneck growth over the last few decades. — AFP

Passenger plane crash



UN hopes for progress at Syria constitution talks, says mediator

GENEVA: Talks on a new constitution for Syria resume this week in Geneva, with the United Nations mediator hopeful of making headway.

Back in October, the sixth round of discussions between 15 representatives each from President Bashar Al Assad’s government, the opposition and civil society, ended with no agreement on how to move things forward.

But UN envoy Geir Pedersen said the two co-chairs -- from the government and the opposition -- had now come up with an improved procedure for finding common ground on the final day of the talks, which will be on Friday.

“Syria remains one of the gravest crises in the world and there is a clear need for progress towards a political solution,” Pedersen told reporters on Sunday. The Syrian Constitutional Committee was

created in September 2019 and first convened a month later.

The tentative negotiations are aimed at rewriting the war-torn country’s constitution. It is hoped the talks could pave the way towards a broader political process.

“The committee should work in a way that builds trust and confidence,” Pedersen said.

“During this session I hope to see the constitutional committee work with a sense of seriousness and purpose and determination to make progress that the situation demands.

“If the three delegations do what they have said they will do, I hope that we can see some steady progress.”

This seventh round of talks will focus on four principles: the basics of governance; state identity; state symbols; and the structure and functions of public authorities.

The delegates will spend one



If the three delegations do what they have said they will do, I hope that we can see some steady progress

GEIR PEDERSEN
UN envoy

day working on each principle, before spending Friday trying to concretise any advances made.

Ahmad Kuzbari, the head of

the government delegation and Syrian opposition negotiations leader Hadi Al Bahra, have co-chaired the talks thus far.

They traded barbs after October’s sixth round of talks, pointing the finger at each other for the lack of progress.

But Pedersen said the co-chairs had now reached an understanding on how business should proceed on the last day, namely a better mechanism for revisions of proposed constitutional texts.

“I’m looking forward to seeing on Friday how this will be put into practice,” the Norwegian diplomat said.

Pedersen met jointly with the co-chairs on Sunday, during which they decided on the four topics to be discussed this week.

That was followed by the three of them holding talks with the 15 civil society representatives.

— AFP

US imposes sanctions on Sudan’s riot police

WASHINGTON: The United States on Monday imposed sanctions on Sudan’s Central Reserve Police, accusing it of using excessive force against peaceful protesters demonstrating against last October’s military coup.

The US Treasury Department said in a statement the Central Reserve Police, a division of the wider police force, has been at the forefront of the “violent response” of Sudanese security forces to peaceful protests in Khartoum.

It accused the group of firing live ammunition on protesters in January, adding that one protester was shot and died.

The force, alongside anti-riot police and police, chased protesters trying to flee the scene, arresting and beating some, fatally shooting another protester and injuring others, the department said.

“Since the October 25 military takeover, Sudan’s Central Reserve Police has used excessive force

and violence intended to silence civilian activists and protesters,” the Treasury’s Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence Brian Nelson said in the statement.

“We condemn Sudan’s security services for killing, harassing and intimidating Sudanese citizens.”

A police spokesman could not be reached for comment. Military leaders have said peaceful protests are allowed and that protest casualties will be investigated.

The US, the UN and several countries have been critical of security crackdowns, which have killed at least 88 people since October.

Billions of dollars in foreign aid were suspended by Western countries and international financing institutions after the coup and military commanders have yet to appoint a prime minister to tackle the economic crisis.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Crisis claims fourth life in Sri Lanka

Beijing is considering a request for another \$2.5 billion loan package from crisis-hit Sri Lanka, China’s ambassador said, as a man was stabbed to death while queuing at a fuel station.

The island nation of 22 million people is in the throes of its worst economic meltdown, with widespread shortages of essential goods and worries that it may default on its \$51 billion in foreign debt. Qi Zhenhong announced that loan discussions were at an advanced stage, but stopped short



of saying whether Beijing would agree to a separate request from Colombo to restructure its debt. “China understands the need of Sri Lanka and its people,” Qi told reporters in Colombo. — AFP

CAIRO

Egyptian PM sets price for unsubsidised bread

Egypt has set a fixed price for unsubsidised bread in an effort to counter rising food prices after Russia’s war on Ukraine closed off access to lower-priced Black Sea wheat.

Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly set the price of commercially sold bread at \$0.66 per kg, his office said.

Food prices had been rising in Egypt even before Russia’s attack on Ukraine, but now bread - a politically symbolic staple on which many Egyptians are



heavily dependent - is becoming more expensive as Black Sea wheat exports are disrupted. The price of unsubsidised bread has jumped by as much as 25 per cent. — Reuters

TUNIS

Head-on train collision in Tunisia injures 95

A head-on collision between two passenger trains injured 95 people in the south of the Tunisian capital, emergency services said.

“The injured were taken to hospitals and there were no deaths,” civil defence spokesman Moez Triaa said, adding that only one of the trains was carrying passengers. Most of the injured were suffering from fractures and bruises, none of them life-threatening, he said. Many were in shock, he added, saying around 15 ambulances had been



dispatched to treat the wounded or take them to hospital. The incident happened at 9:30 am local time in the Jbel Jelloud area, on the approach to a terminus in central Tunis. — AFP

Ukraine defies Russian demand to lay down arms

LVIV/KYIV: Ukraine defied a Russian demand that its forces lay down arms before dawn on Monday in Mariupol, where hundreds of thousands of civilians have been trapped in a city under siege and already laid to waste by Russian bombardment.

Russia’s military had ordered Ukrainians inside the city in the country’s southeast to surrender by 5 am, saying those who did so would be permitted to leave, while those who stayed would be turned over to tribunals run by Russian-backed separatists.

“There can be no question of any surrender, laying down of arms” in Mariupol, Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk responded.

Russia’s war on Ukraine, now in its fourth week, has stalled along most fronts. Moscow has failed to seize a single major Ukrainian city much less capture the capital Kyiv or swiftly topple the government of President Volodymyr Zelensky.

But Russia has pounded residential areas, causing massive destruction. Nowhere has suffered worse than Mariupol, a port on the Sea of Azov, home to 400,000 people before the war. It has been under siege and constant bombardment, with no food, medicine, power or fresh water, since the invasion’s early days.

Some people have been allowed out in private cars since last week, but Russian forces have not permitted aid convoys to reach the city.

“Lay down your arms,” Colonel-General Mikhail Mizintsev, Director of the Russian National Centre for Defence Management, said in a briefing distributed by the defence ministry, announcing the ultimatum. “All who lay down their arms are guaranteed safe passage out of Mariupol.”

Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov praised the city’s



Service members of pro-Russian troops are seen atop of tanks on the outskirts of the besieged southern port city of Mariupol. – Reuters

“heroic defenders”, saying that by continuing to hold out they had helped thwart Russia’s march on other big cities across the country.

“By virtue of their dedication and superhuman courage, tens of thousands of lives throughout Ukraine were saved. Today Mariupol is saving Kyiv, Dnipro and Odesa.”

In Kyiv, six bodies were laid out on the pavement by a shopping mall that had been struck overnight by Russian shelling. Emergency services combed through the wreckage to the sound of distant artillery fire.

Firefighters were putting out small blazes around the smoldering carcass of the building, looking for possible survivors. Ukraine’s Prosecutor General said at least eight people had been killed in the shelling.

“It is hard for me to speak because my child worked here.

Ukraine replies: ‘No question of surrender’ in Mariupol

Hundreds of thousands of civilian trapped under siege

Shelling wrecks Kyiv shopping centre, at least 8 dead

She was at work just yesterday. And then this thing happened last night”, said tearful onlooker Valentina Timofeyevna.

Russia calls the war, the biggest attack on a European state since World War Two, a “special military operation” to disarm

Ukraine and protect it. The West describes this as a false pretext for an unprovoked war of aggression to subdue a country President Vladimir Putin describes as illegitimate.

Thousands of Russian and Ukrainian troops have died, and Russia’s artillery-heavy army has suffered large losses in tanks and armour. Five Russian generals have already been killed, a loss of senior commanders in such a short period almost unheard of in modern warfare.

“We are fighting for our salvation against one of the world’s biggest armies, against missiles, bombs and rocket artillery, against planes and helicopters on which the Russians are already writing ‘To Berlin’ because they want to go further, much further, than Ukraine”, President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his latest video address on Monday. — Reuter

War raises spectre of ‘famine’: EU ministers



French European and Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian, Moldovan Foreign Minister Popescu and Romanian Foreign Minister Aurescu attend a EU Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels. – Reuters

BRUSSELS: The war by Russia in Ukraine risks causing famine in parts of the world because of the two countries’ roles as major agricultural exporters, EU ministers in Brussels warned on Monday.

The European bloc is working on a plan to increase the area of EU land able to be given over to farm production, ease import restrictions on animal feed and looking at more direct aid to EU farmers, agricultural ministers said as they held a meeting.

The conflict “soon will bring risks of famine”, impacting food security not just in Europe but worldwide, France’s Foreign Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, said as he went into a separate meeting of his EU counterparts in Brussels.

“We need to take up the issue of global food security because we know the scale of cereal production, particularly from Ukraine and Russia, and we see the consequences of the war”, he said.

Ukraine and Russia are among the biggest exporters of farm-grown foodstuffs and fertilisers, notably of wheat, maize, rapeseed, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil.

Russia is also the biggest supplier of nitrogen fertilisers and the second-biggest of potassic and phosphorous fertilisers.

With Ukraine’s access to its ports cut off by the Russian assault and oilseed production halted, and Russia increasingly isolated from export markets and its entire economy under sanctions pressure, those supplies are shrinking fast. — AFP

Russians urged not to panic buy sugar, buckwheat

MOSCOW: Russia has plenty of sugar and buckwheat, a senior official insisted, urging the public not to panic buy staple foods due to President Vladimir Putin’s decision to send troops into Ukraine. Washington and Brussels’ coordinated response over the Ukraine conflict has made Russia the most sanctioned country in the world, sending the rouble into free-fall and accelerating already spiralling inflation. Unprecedented Western sanctions have sparked hectic scenes at supermarkets, with customers bulk-buying long-life essentials such as buckwheat, a popular toasted grain that can be eaten both as a side dish or a main course.

“I want to calm our citizens: We are fully self-sufficient when it comes to sugar and buckwheat”, Deputy Prime Minister Viktoriya Abramchenko told a government meeting in remarks broadcast on TV.

Russian court bans Facebook, Instagram

MOSCOW: A Russian court banned Facebook and Instagram in the country after finding Meta Platforms Inc “extremist”, TASS news agency reported. Russia has already banned Facebook for restricting access to Russian media while Instagram was blocked after Meta said it would allow social media users in Ukraine to post messages urging violence against Russian President Vladimir Putin and troops Moscow sent into Ukraine on February 24. Meta did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ukraine says all its ports remain closed to ship traffic

LVIV: All Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea and Azov Sea remain temporarily closed to ships seeking to enter or exit, Ukraine’s infrastructure ministry said. Soon after Russia’s attack on February 24, Ukraine’s military suspended commercial shipping at its ports, stoking fear of supply disruption from leading grain and oilseeds exporters.

Telegram becomes Russia’s top messenger

MOSCOW: Telegram has overtaken WhatsApp to become Russia’s most popular messaging tool, the mobile operator Megafon said with Russians flocking to the service as Moscow restricts some digital services. WhatsApp owner Meta Platforms Inc is embroiled in a Russian court case, with prosecutors seeking to label it an “extremist organisation”, and authorities have actively promoted Telegram as they have banned other foreign platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Russia’s military operation in Ukraine has added fuel to a simmering dispute between foreign digital platforms and Moscow. – Agencies

War impact on wheat threatens hunger in Sudan, says aid group

KHARTOUM: More than 80 per cent of Sudan’s wheat imports are at risk after Russia’s war on Ukraine, an aid group warns, exacerbating economic and humanitarian crises that deepened after last year’s military takeover.

Fighting and sanctions have disrupted grain shipments from Russia and Ukraine, which between them account for nearly 30 per cent of global wheat exports, threatening hunger and social upheaval in many countries.

The impact will be especially severe in Sudan, one of the world’s poorest countries, where a military coup in October led by army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan brought fresh turmoil and saw Western donor countries cut aid.

“Sudan is in a particularly vulnerable position because 86-87 per cent of its wheat imports is coming from Russia and Ukraine combined”, said David Wright, Chief Operating Officer at charity Save the Children.

By the end of the year, he said



David Wright, CEO, Save the Children International, during an interview in Khartoum. – AFP

in a Khartoum interview, UN data is warning of “almost 20 million people, or almost half the country, being food insecure”.

The northeast African country was already reeling from international aid cuts and economic turmoil which saw the local currency plummet and prices of food, fuel and electricity skyrocket.

Sudan -- a country where a rise in bread prices sparked the turmoil and mass rallies that led to the 2019 ouster of veteran president Omar al Bashir -- has already seen a 10-fold increase in bread prices in recent months.

Now, the almost month-old Ukraine conflict has turned farmland there into battlefields and agricultural workers into

Sudan’s ‘confluence of events’ are causing ‘a real exacerbation of what was already a bad situation’

soldiers while freezing shipments abroad through port cities that have become combat zones.

Exports from Russia have meanwhile been frozen by sweeping international sanctions, constraining global supplies of food staples such as wheat, barley and corn as well as fertiliser and sharply raising their prices.

Sudan’s “confluence of events” — political turmoil, violent unrest in far-flung regions and the deep economic crisis — are causing “a real exacerbation of what was already a bad situation”, said Wright. In December, the United Nations estimated that nearly one third of Sudan’s population, or more than 14 million people, would need humanitarian assistance in 2022. — AFP

Debunking some of the diabetic diet myths



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician and wellness adviser

Diabetes (type 2) has turned into an epidemic over the past recent years, particularly in urban settings. A lot of myths still prevail regarding a diabetic diet which becomes a hindrance towards opting for correct eating choices and healthier lifestyle practices. Diabetes is basically a metabolic disorder that arises as a result of faulty insulin secretion or insulin action; a hormone responsible for maintaining blood glucose levels produced by the pancreas in the body.

When your body is unable to synthesise the right amount of insulin, blood glucose levels rise. Substantial progress can be achieved in attaining health and well-being even living with diabetes and for that reason, it is imperative to debunk certain myths when it comes to a diabetic diet. What to eat, in what proportions, and at what timings is the core towards a

diabetic meal plate.

Myth 1: Diabetics should never eat sweets or desserts. Indulging in a small piece of your favourite cake or dessert once in a while is alright when you are following a healthy meal plan for the rest of the week.

Myth 2: Diabetics cannot have carbs. There is a common perception that consuming carbs will spike a rise in blood sugar. However, the type and portion of carbs matter. Go for complex carbs rather than sugary and refined ones.

Myth 3: Diabetics cannot have fruits. Fruits do contain natural sugars but can be consumed in moderation. More notably they contain other essential nutrients and are rich in fiber.

Myth 4: Diabetics can eat whatever they like if they are on medication. Consuming nutrient-rich food in balanced portions is the root principle to keep diabetes

CONSUMING NUTRIENT-RICH FOOD IN BALANCED PORTIONS IS THE MAIN PRINCIPLE TO KEEP DIABETES IN CHECK

in check. Don't go overboard as consuming additional drugs to compensate for your food intake may lead to developing complications.

Myth 5: Diabetics can substitute their carbs portion with protein.

ADA recommends 45 per cent of total daily dietary intake from carbs; therefore, swapping this figure with protein is a big no. If this protein has saturated fat, it can lead to cardiac complications.

Myth 6: Diabetics have to follow a special diet. There is no fancy diet for diabetics. A balanced diet rich

in all macro and micronutrients, low-fat dairy, lean meats, and unsweetened beverages which is similar to any other healthy diet. Consuming food timely is crucial to maintaining blood glucose levels.

Myth 7: Diabetic foods or diet foods are good for diabetes.

Highly processed foods or packaged foods are not good for anyone let alone diabetics. The labels might read sugar-free but may contain high amounts of artificial sweeteners.

Myth 8: Diabetics have to give up on their favourite foods.

It's all about taming and transforming your eating habits more healthily. You can certainly quit hopping on savories, chocolates, and candies and limiting it to once a week.

Myth 9: Diabetics can have as many fats as they like. Saturated fats and trans fats need to be kept

off the limit as they tend to raise cholesterol levels and become a precursor for cardiovascular issues.

Myth 10: Eating large amounts of sugar causes diabetes.

Consuming a large amount of sugar can be a contributing factor however, genetic predisposition and distorted lifestyle factors are the principal factors leading to diabetes.

It should be noted that there is no standard set rule for a diabetic diet that can apply to everyone. It depends on an individual's health status or any other associated medical condition and hence the eating plan varies from person to person and is best advised by a healthcare professional.

The chief goals are to maintain adequate blood sugar levels throughout the day, ideal body weight, prevent high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol as well as provide adequate nutrition.

An uncertain future for Afghans resettled in US

SUSANNAH WALDEN

In a storied corner of Boston, one of America's newest families is finding its feet months after fleeing Afghanistan: Israr and Sayeda are starting work, studying English and setting up home to welcome their first-born child.

But like many of the tens of thousands of Afghans evacuated after Kabul's fall to the Taliban, the young couple -- who asked to be identified by first names only -- are also taking steps to ensure the rug doesn't get pulled out from under their new life.

Though he worked as a US Army interpreter, Israr and his wife are in the US on what is known as humanitarian parole, a "tenuous legal status," according to resettlement organisations, that offers only two years residence.

After an arduous, months-long journey that took them from Kabul via Qatar, Washington and a military base in Texas, the pair settled early this year in Boston's Charlestown neighbourhood, where they were taken under the wing of a couple they now call their second "mama and papa." "My papa is working on it," 26-year-old Israr said of his immigration status. "He got me a pro bono lawyer."

Israr had carefully packed all his documents before heading to Kabul airport as the chaotic evacuation unfolded in late August.

But after nerve-racking encounters with Taliban at the airport entrances, Sayeda, 23, hid some on her person, hoping they wouldn't search, or beat a woman.

In the event, she was beaten to the point she couldn't walk. Israr, also injured, abandoned the bags and carried her. "I lost my luggage, my important documentation, my money, my clothes, my everything," he said.

They finally made it onto a plane with only his passport, a handful of documents and the clothes on their backs.

Now the couple face an uncertain path to permanent residency.

For the time being, the main avenues are the Special Immigrant Visa -- reserved for those who aided the US government -- and asylum.

Israr said completing his SIV application is proving complicated, but asylum comes with other challenges. While he describes "threats" and "blackmail" from the Taliban, a credible fear of persecution is not always easy to prove.

— AFP

It's now Putin's plan B in Ukraine vs Biden's and Zelensky's plan A



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

After a confusing month, it is now clear what strategies are playing out in Ukraine: We're watching Vladimir Putin's Plan B versus Joe Biden's Plan A and Volodymyr Zelensky's Plan A. Let us hope that Biden and Zelensky triumph, because Putin's possible Plan C is really scary — and I don't even want to write what I fear would be his Plan D.

I have no secret source in the Kremlin on this, only the experience of having watched Putin operate in the Middle East over many years. As such, it seems obvious to me that Putin, having realised that his Plan A has failed — his expectation that the Russian army would march into Ukraine, decapitate its 'Nazi' leadership and then just wait as the whole country fell peacefully into Russia's arms — has shifted to his Plan B. Plan B is that the Russian army deliberately fires upon Ukrainian civilians, apartment blocks, hospitals, businesses and even bomb shelters — all of which has happened in the past few weeks — for the purpose of encouraging Ukrainians to flee their homes, creating a massive refugee crisis inside Ukraine and, even more important, a massive refugee crisis inside nearby NATO nations. Putin, I suspect, is thinking that if he cannot occupy and hold all of Ukraine by military means and simply impose his peace terms, the next best thing would be to drive 5 million or 10 million Ukrainian refugees, particularly women, children and the elderly, into

'UKRAINIAN FORCES HAVE DEFEATED THE INITIAL RUSSIAN CAMPAIGN OF THIS WAR,' SAYS THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, IN ITS ANALYSIS

Poland, Hungary and Western Europe — with the purpose of creating such intense social and economic burdens that these NATO states will eventually pressure Zelensky to agree to whatever terms Putin is demanding to stop the war.

Putin probably hopes that although this plan most likely involves committing war crimes that could leave him and the Russian state permanent pariahs, the need for Russian oil, gas and wheat — and for Russia's help in addressing regional issues — would soon force the world to go back to doing business with "Bad Boy Putin" as it always has in the past. Putin's Plan B seems to be unfolding as planned. French news agency AFP reported from Kyiv on Sunday: "More than 3.3 million refugees have fled Ukraine since the war began — Europe's fastest growing refugee crisis since World War II — the vast majority of them women and



A view of the site of a bombing at a shopping centre as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues in Kyiv.

children, according to the UN. Another 6.5 million are thought to be displaced inside the country." The story went on to say: "In an intelligence update late on Saturday, Britain's Defence Ministry said Ukraine was continuing to effectively defend its airspace, forcing Russia to rely on weapons launched from its own airspace. It said Russia had been forced to 'change its operational approach and is now pursuing a strategy of attrition. This is likely to involve the indiscriminate use of firepower resulting in increased civilian casualties, destruction of Ukrainian infrastructure, and intensify the humanitarian crisis.'"

Putin's Plan B, though, is running headlong into Biden and Zelensky. Zelensky's Plan A, which I suspect is playing out even better than he hoped, is to fight the Russian army to a draw on the ground, break its will and force Putin to agree to Zelensky's terms for a peace deal — with only minimal face-saving for the Kremlin leader.

For all the barbaric bloodshed and bombings by Russian forces, Zelensky is — wisely — still keeping one eye on a diplomatic solution, always pushing for negotiations with Putin while rallying his forces and people.

The New York Times reported that "the war in Ukraine has reached a stalemate after more than three weeks of fighting, with Russia making only marginal gains and increasingly targeting civilians, according to analysts and US officials.

Biden's Plan A, which he explicitly warned Putin of before the war started in an effort to deter him, was to impose economic sanctions on Russia the likes of which have never been imposed before by the West — with the aim of grinding the Russian economy to a halt. Biden's strategy — which also involved sending arms to the Ukrainians to pressure Russia militarily as well — is doing just that. It is succeeding probably beyond Biden's expectations because it was amplified by hundreds of foreign businesses operating in Russia suspending their operations there — voluntarily or under pressure from their employees.

— New York Times

Why fear public speaking?



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

Should we have a fear for public speaking? People who have so much to say often take a back seat. They might have solutions to the problem but they prefer to keep to themselves. So there — a solution never sees the sunlight. So why are some ready to speak up and share their thoughts while others are hesitant?

The stage fear need not be just on stage instead it could be the result of never having had the opportunity to practise public speaking. It may need not be in a classroom setting.

Although the memory of public speaking classes are still fresh in mind and the realisation of knowing when the fright turned out to be a dilemma between fight or flight between thoughts, winning was to have a successful conversation. It seemed then it was one sided with the rest of the people seated as audience and thus became a successful speech.

So what is that frightens us? If you have ever gone through this feeling walk with me step by step. Was it the worry of having an effective speech and writing it right? Was it the fear of forgetting the matter in between while you are delivering the speech? Or is it the fear of being judged? Are we worried about voice and diction?

So let us rewind and go back to being a conversationalist. How interesting are we as a conversationalist? Are we able to capture the listener's attention or did you have their eyes look for a clock on the wall or have them look at their wrist watch or glance at their mobile phone?

Have you been talking about a topic that is absolutely irrelevant to the listener? So often, dominating speakers while in a conversation forget to give the listener a chance to speak. It can only be a conversation if all parties are participating. There are often situations where the other parties in the conversation shy away and hold their breath along with what they would have liked to say — if only they could overcome their shyness.

Not to forget the intellectuals who might want to give it a miss so they would rather be silent. But for most people the hesitation can be overcome by a simple thought process. Whether we are skilled or not one thing is for sure — we all have opinions. And that too opinions on almost every topic whether we know the matter or not.

Now, maybe this opinion is what we carefully work on to practise public speaking. Take the opportunity today to summarise your opinion on a topic that is current. Play the conversation in your mind and then talk about it with a close friend or an understanding family member. Take time to complete the sentences and express the concept clearly. There, according to me, you have taken the first step toward practicing public speaking. However, in the process please do not become a full fledged opinionated person. A good communicator is someone who is open minded. While in the process talking to a mirror can also be effective. In other words no excuses on shying away from public speaking. Like any other art, public speaking too needs practicing.



CELEBRATING SPRING

A member of the Kurdish community in Lebanon takes part in a celebration marking Nowruz, in the Lebanese capital Beirut. Nowruz, the Persian New Year is an ancient Zoroastrian tradition celebrated by Iranians and Kurds which coincides with the vernal (spring) equinox and is calculated by the solar calendar. — AFP

Building the green-recovery consensus

BRIAN FINLAY AND
LOLWAH AL KHATER

While Russia's war on Ukraine is capturing global headlines, Covid-19 continues to wreak socioeconomic havoc around the world. The pandemic has taken more than six million lives, pushed 124 million people into extreme poverty, and impeded progress towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. Fortunately, around five billion people have now received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine and the World Health Organization and Gavi have set a goal of vaccinating 70 per cent of people in all countries by this July.

Notwithstanding the horrific war in Ukraine, the pandemic and its lasting toll will continue to top the list of pressing global concerns alongside climate change. The effects of the latter crisis are already being felt daily, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report shows. Just recently, extreme temperatures and droughts have ravaged West Asia and North Africa. Rising sea levels are threatening many island states and low-lying countries. Catastrophic flooding has inundated parts of Europe and China. And wildfires have torn across the American West and large swaths of Australia.

Scientists now warn that "business as usual" will likely increase the average global temperature, relative to the pre-industrial level, by a catastrophic 3-4° Celsius by the end of the century. To keep global warming at a far safer level, below 1.5°C, carbon dioxide emissions will need to fall by 45 per cent (from 2010 levels) by 2030, and then to net-zero by 2050.

Now that we know Omicron to be less deadly than earlier Covid-19 variants, we should use this moment to build on the momentum generated last November at the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. The world needs to draft a recovery plan that goes well beyond pandemic response by also starting to tackle climate change. The recovery must be not only broad-based but also green.

What does this mean in practical terms? In advance of the 20th edition of the Doha Forum on March 26-27, our organisations teamed up to explore 20 targeted initiatives for driving a just, healthy and sustainable global recovery. These are outlined in a recently published report, Building Back Together & Greener.

To make the recovery green and sustainable, we propose a Global Green Hydrogen Alliance to facilitate more efficient, climate-friendly methods of producing hydrogen. Once established, the next steps would include setting up a global inventory of green hydrogen programmes, protecting intellectual-property and licensing rights while expanding global access and encouraging

alliance-wide standard setting for safe storage and transportation.

A fair and inclusive recovery requires more investment in human capital – particularly to upgrade workers' skills – and an emphasis on supporting the people who are most at risk. Planning processes should privilege public and private financing for low-carbon

EVEN IF EVERYONE CAN
AGREE IN PRINCIPLE
THAT THE GLOBAL
RECOVERY FROM THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC
SHOULD BE EQUITABLE
AND SUSTAINABLE, THAT
DOESN'T MEAN IT WILL
BE. WHAT IS NEEDED IS A
CONCRETE ROADMAP WITH
CLEAR GOALS, TIMELINES,
AND INNOVATIVE
IDEAS TO ENSURE THAT
POLICYMAKERS AROUND
THE WORLD ARE ON THE
SAME PAGE

activities and infrastructure that have the greatest potential to generate jobs for young people and other vulnerable groups facing employment challenges.

To ensure that the recovery supports health and well-being, we need a Global Fund for Social Protection to assist developing-country governments in providing adequate social programmes. Such a fund would boost coordination efforts and mobilise domestic and external resources to provide a buffer against economic shocks, including those induced by climate-related environmental disasters.

Finally, to realise the potential of digitalisation in advancing the recovery, we need to promote large-

scale investment in information- and communications-technology infrastructure, both to achieve digital equity and to leverage the economic, health and environmental potential of new technologies. International organisations and governments should work with businesses to provide effective and reliable digital connectivity, including through targeted investments in the steady digitalisation of most (if not all) public services.

Several significant international meetings will be held over the next seven months, each of which will provide an opportunity to take steps towards a shared recovery. But marshalling governments, businesses and civil society behind a coherent, representative and sustained global implementation strategy will require a culminating meeting.

That is why we are calling for a "Green Pandemic Recovery Summit," to be orchestrated by the United Nations and the G20. A two-day event, timed to coincide with the annual UN General Assembly in September, would help to ensure that political leaders at the highest levels commit to pursuing sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development in the post-Covid era.

The trillions of dollars spent by wealthy countries during the pandemic shows that there are financial tools available to tackle serious challenges. What is needed is political will, creative market incentives, and a practical blueprint, with clear goals, timelines, and programming ideas.

Resources drawn from related initiatives can help. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Build Back Better World partnership and national-level "green deals" are generally aligned in their key objectives. UN Secretary-General António Guterres's Our Common Agenda report offers additional timely and ambitious ideas for delivering global public goods and addressing major risks.

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The world's 50 largest economies have pledged to spend trillions of dollars on post-pandemic green recovery initiatives. — Reuters file photo

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Abdullah al Tawqi tops FIA Rally Star Mena final

OMANI DRIVER STEP CLOSER TO WORLD RALLY SPOT

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Oman's Abdullah bin Masoud al Tawqi emerged on top in the FIA Rally Star Middle East and North African Final at the Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Sunday. Abdullah bin Masoud, who qualified from Oman only due to the absence of third-placed Abdullah al Yahyai in the regional final, made it a memorable one by clinching the top prize in Abu Dhabi.

Al Tawqi earned a life-changing place in the FIA Rally Star Training Season in 2023 after he came out on top of two days of rigorous assessment and evaluation presided over a five-person jury.

Abdullah al Tawqi, 23, was ecstatic after finishing on top. "I'm very happy to have won the FIA Rally Star. We tried the cross cars during the shakedown, it was very hard to drive. I got used to it during the qualifying day and final, the competition was intense, but I finally won!"

In qualifying for the FIA Rally Star Training Season, Masoud al Tawqi moves a step closer to a dream drive in the FIA World Rally Championship. At the end of 2023, the best four FIA Rally Star Team members are rewarded with a season in the FIA Junior WRC in 2024. For 2025, three drivers go forward into a second Junior WRC season. And if one of the FIA Rally Star Team members wins the title, they secure a WRC2 campaign in a Rally2 car for 2026 with a Rally1 drive their next target.

Masoud al Tawqi joins Estonia's Romet Jurgenson, the winner of the FIA Rally Star European Final in January, in the FIA Rally Star Training Season with four places still up for grabs at the remaining Continental Finals.

Meanwhile, Farah Zakaria of Jordan qualified for the FIA Rally Star Women's Final, which is due to take place in North America later this year, by completing the FIA Rally Star Mena Final as the leading female competitor.

Farah Zakaria, 23, said: "I'm so happy to have won! It has been a super experience, I would like to congratulate the other competitors that have participated. I'm really looking forward to represent Jordan during the Women's Final in America." The seventh spot in the Continental Finals will go to the Women's Final winner where Mena qualifier Zakaria will join Maja Hallen Fellenius (Sweden) and Katie Milner (United Kingdom), the joint top female performers in the European Final in Germany.

FIA RALLY STAR MENA FINAL
Day three of the FIA Rally Star Middle East and North African Final was held in warm and dry conditions with the 12 qualifiers from Saturday's stages in action on a purpose-built gravel course. The 1 km layout was set up in reverse direction from the previous day to add to the challenge facing the drivers. After completing their timed runs in the Pirelli-equipped, 115-horsepower TN5 Cross Car from FIA World Rally Championship ace Thierry Neuville's LifeLive organisation, the 12 drivers were interviewed by the five-person jury headed by former rally driver Pernilla Solberg and including WRC stage winner Gus Greensmith. The 12 also underwent physical assessment to determine their fitness levels.

The four best-performing drivers progressed to the deciding phase of the competition with Masoud al Tawqi eventually chosen as the winner following lengthy deliberation by the jury. Pirelli Rally Activity Manager Terenzio Testoni, French racing driver turned karting coach David Terrien and M-Sport Poland head Maciej Woda joined Greensmith and jury President Solberg on the decision-making panel.

Patrik Hallberg from Sweden, who was selected as the Reserve Driver at the FIA Rally Star European Final, was also in attendance as the Driver Advisor.

Mahir Badri, CEO of the Emirates Motorsports Organisation (EMSO) said it was a satisfying event. "We are glad to have hosted this event in collaboration with the FIA. We can see that the participants are happy to be here. Cross car is a fantastic discipline, EMSO and the FIA are trying to attract more people to compete in motorsport, especially the ones at the younger age." Pernilla Solberg, Jury Chairwoman, Former Driver: "I'm very happy and it's an honour to be here in Abu Dhabi for the Rally Star Mena final. It's a tough job, to be part of the jury, because they are good drivers and it's not easy to make the right decision. Speed is the important criterion of course, but with the members, we like to find out what kind of person they are, how they take care of the car, how clean they are. Because we need to find a person who can work within a team, with engineers, mechanics and it's important to see how they communicate. To have all of these criteria is what makes it interesting." David Terrien, jury member and former Karting World Champion, said: "It was a great event. Looking at the prize, it was a huge opportunity for all the drivers competing here. I have been here since the Shakedown, and I have been very impressed with their lap time improvement, especially with the drivers qualified for the final that were very fast, and also knowing that they had no experience before racing here. It was a hard decision to take because it was a close competition. All the members of the jury were very involved, we tried to go deep into the discussions with the drivers, because this is event is going to be a life-changer for the winner." Twenty drivers representing eight countries took part in the FIA Rally Star Mena Final. And while there were only two winners, all competitors were able to showcase their skills, represent their respective countries in a sporting arena and gain vital experience for the future.



SOUTH AFRICA TO HOST 2023 WORLD ITPF CHAMPIONSHIPS

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Muscat-based International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF), held the annual general assembly meeting on Sunday under chairmanship of Mohammed bin Issa al Fairuz and in presence of all the members.

Most of the members attended the meeting physically while the presence of others were remotely. The meeting discussed several topics including acceptance of Myanmar and Uzbekistan in the membership of ITPF. During the

meeting, the members approved the dates of the 2023 World ITPF championships which will take place during August 23 to 26 in South Africa.

As part of the meeting, the draw of qualifiers for the world championships took place. Egypt will host first group qualifiers and the group featured Saudi Arabia, United Kingdom, Palestine, UAE, Qatar, Malaysia besides hosts Egypt.

Sultanate of Oman led the second group besides Netherlands, Kuwait, Yemen, Germany, Iraq and USA.

OMAN TO HOST SECOND GROUP QUALIFIERS IN MUSCAT



The third group comprised of hosts Pakistan, Nepal, Jordan, Libya, Iran, Australia and Syria. Sudan will host fourth group competitions besides Canada, Bahrain, India, Norway, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

Top two teams in each group will advance to the 2023 World ITPF championships which will be held in South Africa. In fourth group, South Africa guarantee their presence in the world event as they are the hosts and if they claim first or second places then the team ranked below them will move to the finals.

ITPF Chairman Mohammed bin Issa al Fairuz, said that ITPF calendar for 2021 was impacted due to the challenges of Covid-19. “Despite the difficulties, the ITPF managed to organise International Tent Pegging Traditional Championship in Duqm along with some other meetings and workshops. An educational syllabus for tent pegging was prepared by coach Daleen Paksa, head of Women Tent Pegging Committee and special thanks to her and Royal Jordanian Equestrian Federation for the top efforts,” he concluded.

Sanaa al Shekaili claims third in women’s rally in S Arabia

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 21



Sanaa al Shekaili, first Omani racer from the GCC to participate in the 2020 Middle East Rally Championship, claimed the third place at the Saudi Arabia’s Rally Jameel, which saw a global participation of 68 women rally drivers from March 17 to 19.

Saudi national Dania Akeel bagged the top honours while US-based racer Sedona Blinson came second in the race that saw 34 teams from 15 countries showing their mettle.

Speaking to the Observer from Barka, Sanaa said, it was her undying passion complemented by the relentless support from her family, friends and the Oman Automobile Association that made her come with flying colours.

“Rally Jameel is my chance to renew the love I’ve had of challenges since my childhood, especially in the field of motor racing, where I have the ability to challenge myself and the other competitors in this distinguished GCC women-only event,” a jubilant Sanaa said.

The open-to-all navigational rally, which was not designed as a speed test, was held in the north-central city of Hail, taking in the sites of Al Qassim city and then heading to the capital, Riyadh, via hidden checkpoints and challenges.

“This is very exciting to participate in. As well as empowering Omani women in the world of car racing and rallying, it is also showcasing Omani women in this field on the international stage,” Sanaa, who also established the first women’s car club in Oman, added.

Dania Akeel, who was the first Saudi to participate in the Dakar Rally in 2022 is a well-renowned figure in the regional motorsport scene.

“Rally Jameel inspires a sense of adventure and discovery. This rally will support the increasing number of women on the road to become comfortable behind the wheel and experience driving in a completely different way to driving on the road,” Sanaa said.

US-based competitor Sedona Blinson has previously participated in Rally Jameel’s inspiration, the Rebelle Rally.

While teams from both the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman represented the GCC, 22 teams from Saudi, representing both Riyadh and Jeddah underlined their presence from the host country and some from Egypt and elsewhere represented their countries.

Pakistan stun West Indies to end WC drought

HAMILTON, New Zealand: Pakistan ended an 18-match losing streak at Women’s Cricket World Cups with an eight-wicket win over the West Indies in Hamilton on Monday, blowing open the race for the semifinals.

In a rain-shortened match with innings of 20 overs, Pakistan bowled superbly to contain the West Indies’ potent batting line-up to 89-7 then overhauled the modest target with seven balls to spare.

It was their first win at the World Cup since the 2009 tournament in Australia, where they also beat the West Indies.

“This was desperately needed, we all wanted that win,” said spinner Nida Dar, who took a career-best 4-10. “This one goes to all the Pakistani fans who are watching and supporting us.”

Pakistan remain out of the semifinals reckoning with one win in five matches but the shock result will boost the West Indies’ rivals in a tight race for the final four.

The West Indies can still make the semifinals but need to beat South Africa and have results involving India and England go their way.

“It’s a do-or-die situation now and we have to come out banging,” West Indies captain Stafanie Taylor



Pakistan’s Bismah Maroof (L) and Omaima Sohail (R) celebrate winning the match against West Indies during the 2022 Women’s Cricket World Cup at Seddon Park in Hamilton. — AFP

said of her team’s match against South Africa on Thursday.

Taylor admitted the total against Pakistan was sub-par, crediting Pakistan’s spinners with choking her side’s big hitters.

“We knew that we had to rotate strike to go big but we couldn’t get going,” she said.

Pakistan won the toss and opted to bowl first after a deluge saw the start delayed by five hours.

Pakistan limited the West Indies to 23-1 in the first five overs, then

38-2 at the halfway mark.

Dar ended her spell with a flourish, taking two wickets off successive balls to finish the 16th over.

Nashra Sandhu then took another with the first ball of the 17th to make it three wickets off three deliveries for Pakistan.

The West Indies ended on 89-7, with Deandra Dottin top-scoring on 27.

Pakistan made a slow start to the chase but managed to preserve

wickets, reaching 57-2 in the 13th over when Muneeba Ali was caught for 37.

They kept up pressure on the West Indies with quick singles, chipping away at the total as Bismah Maroof and Omaima Sohail saw Pakistan home with 20 and 22 respectively. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES:

West Indies 89-7 in 20 overs (D Dottin 27, S Taylor 18; N Dar 4-10) lost to Pakistan 90-2 in 18.5 overs (M Ali 37, O Sohail 22; S Selman 1-15)

Royals, Thunders, Rangers and Busters advance

MUSCAT: The first round of the D10 league concluded successfully at the Oman Cricket Academy on March 20, 2022. Amerat Royals, Qurum Thunders, Ruwi Rangers and Bousher Busters were the teams to advance to the next round.

Proceedings on Day 8 — the final day of Round 1, began with a nail-biting 1-run victory for the Amerat Royals over the Qurum Thunders.

Put to bat first after losing the toss, the Amerat Royals made 115-3 after 10 overs.

Akshaykumar Patel continued his scintillating form with the bat and top scored for the Royals with an unbeaten 50. Pratik Athavale, Karan Sonavale and Mehran Khan were the others with sizable contributions.

Chasing, the Qurum Thunders fell agonisingly short. They needed 2 runs off the final delivery but Utkarsh Sahu, who had been very expensive for the Royals until

then, kept his cool to bowl a dot and turned match-winner. Suraj Kumar Singh led the scoring in the second innings with a well-made 26. Bilal Khan, Hemalkumar Tandel and Rafi Ullah picked up 2 wickets apiece for the Royals.

In the day’s second game, the Khuwair Warriors recorded a 23-run victory over the Darsait Titans, saving themselves the ignominy of losing all 7 games of the first round, while condemning their opposition to that exact fate in the process.

Electing to bat first, the Warriors made an excellent 129-3 at the end of their innings. Their top order looked in fine form, with all of Zeeshan Siddiqui, Azam Ali and Aamir Kaleem crossing the 25-run mark. Aamir finished on a 24-ball half-century.

In response, the Titans could only muster 106 runs after their 10 overs. Khawar Ali and Zeeshan Maqsood looked dangerous for the duration of their stints at the crease



but ultimately, the asking rate proved too high and the rest of the batters, bar Ubaid Ullah, folded for single digit scores. Sajeed Ahmed was the star of the second innings with the ball. He ended the day with figures of 2-6.

The Ghubrah Giants eased their way to a 9-wicket win over the Bousher Busters in the day’s third contest.

Electing to bat first, the Busters posted a first innings total of 88-7. With 33 runs, Adnan Sulehri was the pick of their batting unit. The Busters never really recovered after losing him in the 4th over. Asif Khan and Fawad Ali were the others to reach double digits. Kashif Ali was brilliant with the ball for the Giants, picking up 2 wickets in his 2 overs.

The Giants made light work of their task at hand, wrapping up the victory with 16 balls to spare. A 16-ball 43-run blitz from Dean Foxcroft, alongside unbeaten 28 and 17 run contributions from Ghazanfar Iqbal and Kashif Ali secured them the win.

In the final game of the day, table-toppers Ruwi Rangers beat the Azaiba XI by 8 wickets.

Put to bat first after losing the toss, the Azaiba XI made their way to 106-6 after 10 overs.

Arsalan Bashir cemented his place at the top of the D10 first round scoring charts with an elegant 20-ball 38. Rao Waqar, Haythim Bahar Ali and Usman Haider were the others to chip in with valuable tallies. Mujibur Ali was the pick of the bowlers for the Rangers, picking up 3 wickets in his 2 overs.

With two dismissals in the very first over courtesy Nasir Ali, the second innings saw the Rangers get off to a shaky start. However,

no further damage was done and a destructive 109-run partnership between Wasim Ali and Hannan Rizwan sealed their well-deserved victory.

BRIEF SCORES

Amerat Royals 115-3 in 10 overs (Akshaykumar Patel 50 (26b, 4x4, 3x6); Samay Shrivastava 1-16) beat Qurum Thunders 114-7 in 10 overs (Suraj Kumar Singh 26 (13b, 5x4); Bilal Khan 2-12) by 1 run. Khuwair Warriors 129-3 in 10 overs (Amir Kaleem 50 (24b, 3x4, 4x6); Zeeshan Siddiqui 31 (16b, 1x4, 3x6); Amanpreet Singh 1-10) beat Darsait Titans 106-7 in 10 overs (Khawar Ali 26 (14b, 3x4, 1x6); Sajeed Ahmed 2-6) by 23 runs. Bousher Busters 88-7 in 10 overs (Adnan Sulehri 33 (14b, 5x4, 1x6); Kashif Ali 2-11) lost to Ghubrah Giants 94-1 in 7.2 overs (Dean Foxcroft 43 (16b, 5x4, 3x6); Mahmood Sufyan 1-7) by 9 wickets. Azaiba XI 106-6 in 10 overs (Arsalan Bashir 38 (20b, 3x4, 3x6); Jitinkumar Ramanandi 1-10) lost to Ruwi Rangers 111-2 in 7.3 overs (Wasim Ali 64 (23b, 1x4, 8x6); Hannan Rizwan 33 (20b, 1x4, 3x6); Nasir Ali 2-17) by 8 wickets.

Future looks bright for revitalised Barca: Xavi



MADRID: Barcelona are back, manager Xavi Hernandez said after his side's 4-0 thrashing of rivals Real Madrid at Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday.

Xavi's side gave a football masterclass in a match they dominated from the start and which they arguably deserved to win by even more than four goals.

"I'm delighted, it's a night to enjoy," Xavi told reporters.

"Barca is back. Today we showed that we can fight against a great Real Madrid team that are on a roll and in their stadium. It is a great achievement to encourage us for the future of our project."

A former Barca great on the pitch, Xavi is the first person to win by four or more goals at Real Madrid both as a coach and as a player, having been in the Barca team that won 6-2 at the Bernabeu in 2009.

"I'm happy because we were much better than Real Madrid. We have played a spectacular match. I'm enjoying it because more than just being Barca's coach, I am a lifelong club supporter, so nights like this are those you never forget." Barca were without a victory against Real Madrid in three years, a devastating record that spoke volumes about the club's recent struggles.

"It was important to put an end to that losing streak, to that negative mentality and feeling that the club was going through. It's a big boost in morale and we will keep progressing," Xavi said.

Xavi has revitalised Barca, who have climbed to third in the standings and are unbeaten since their extra-time defeat by Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey on January 20. "I don't think we can make a late run for the title. Real Madrid are 12 points ahead and we arrived too late, but the future is bright for us."

— Reuters

Spanish La Liga results on Sunday:

Espanyol 1 (Tomas 42)
Real Mallorca 0
Celta Vigo 0 Real Betis 0
Cadiz 1 (Sobrinho 90)
Villarreal 0
Sevilla 0 Real Sociedad 0
Real Madrid 0 Barcelona 4 (Aubameyang 29, 51, Araujo 38, Torres 47)

Son keeps Spurs hope alive for top-four

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, MARCH 21

No partnership has combined more effectively for goals in the Premier League than that of Harry Kane and Son Heung-Min. It showed yet again in Tottenham Hotspur's 3-1 win in the London derby against West Ham with Son scoring twice and Kane assisting in all three goals.

Spurs manager, Antonio Conte, said: "There is only one target in our dressing room and that is the race for fourth place. We know how difficult it is to reach this target in England because there are four very top teams in Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United and Liverpool. But if one of these teams has a struggle, like with Manchester United, we have to be there.

"We know Arsenal have the advantage – they are showing great stability. But we have all the players to take the responsibility to fight for this target. With Tottenham, for sure, I have taken a team at a lower level than the top teams in this league."

Headed: "But now we are ready to make it difficult for anyone. I have seen a great improvement in the players' mentality, technically and tactically. Every player is improving and we are becoming a strong team."

West Ham had hardly settled when Spurs took the lead in the 9th minute. Matt Doherty won possession and passed to Kane whose cross was missed by Son but went into the net off the left knee of Kurt Zouma for an own goal.

The Hammers missed a chance for a quick equaliser when Michail Antonio shot wide after intercepting a pass from Kane to his defenders. Then in the 12th minute Son was unlucky to hit the post after receiving a pass from Dejan Kulusevski. But Son made no mistake in the 24th minute when he took a long pass from Kane from inside the centre circle and left-footed a shot into the far corner taking a slight deflection from Zouma again.

West Ham reduced the lead ten minutes before the break as they fought back putting Spurs' defence under pressure. Doherty conceded a corner which was headed back by Craig Dawson and Said Benrahma volleyed in a powerful right-footed drive before Son could tackle him.

While three goals came in the first half, it wasn't until two minutes before time that the next goal was scored with Son having the final word. It came with Kane beating Dawson and Zouma for a header to Son whose clinical finish took him to his 14th goal of the season.

Hammers manager, David Moyes, said: "If somebody said at the start of the season that West Ham would be challenging for the top four, you'd have had a belly laugh. So, the question should be, 'How well have we done to get to the final seven or eight games of the season and for the first time might have dropped out of the running for the top four?'"

He added: "We have been in that bracket all season despite the quality and spending power of the teams around us."



West Ham United's Ben Johnson in action with Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min. — Reuters

105 riders take part in Al Rayyan show jumping

BARKA: The Al Rayyan Show-jumping Stables Championship, organised by Al Rayyan Stables, owned by Shaikh Khalid bin Saeed al Wahaibi, was launched under the supervision of the Oman Equestrian Federation at Al Rahba farm in Barka on Sunday.

As many as 105 horses participated, distributed in eight categories for the first day.

Future Knights 1 with a height of 60-70 cm, Future Knights 2 with a height of 90-100 cm, a women's category at a height of 100-105 cm, a beginner's category with 90-95 cm height and a category (E) with hurdles of 100-105 cm, category (D), hurdles height 110-115 cm, category (C) height 120-125 cm and category (B) height 130-135 cm, where jockeys and horses of government

cavalry units and private stables competed.

In Future Knights 1, height of 60-70 cm, 11 horses participated, rider Abdullah bin Ahmed al Hoqani on 'Zainard' from the Al Hoqani Stables won the first place, Mohammed bin Majid al Hadhrami on 'Pasha' from the Arab Stables was second and Anas bin Walid al Wahaibi on 'Hajis' from the Al Amarat Stables finished third.

In Future Knights 2, with height of 90-100 cm, nine horses participated. Al Baraa al Harthy on 'Amani' from Al Seeb Equestrian School claimed the top spot, Warith bin Tamim al Mahrouqi on 'Fam' from the Olympic Equestrian Centre was second and Mohammed bin Ahmed al Abri on 'Faidal' from the Mojo Equestrian



Centre was third.

In women's category for a height of 100-105 cm, 12 horses participated. Amna bint Nasser al Sharjiyah grabbed the top place on 'Royal' (Mojo Equestrian Centre), Barbara on 'Kasir' from Al Said

Stables was second and Al Yaqin bint Taher al Kindiyah on 'Futur' from Al Rayyan Stables finished third.

In beginners' category (hurdles height 90-95 cm), Asaad bin Humaid al Hadi of Royal Oman

Police on 'Hayam' bagged the first place out of 19 participants, Issa al Subhi on 'Hamran' from Royal Guard of Oman was second and ROP's Barakat bin Muhanna al Hadi on 'Haya' finished third.

In Category E, (100-105 cm), 26 horses competed, ROP's Bassam bin Nasser al Ghabshi won the first place on 'Rabeh', and RGO riders Jamal bin Humaid al Sharyani on 'Twfan claimed second spot and Saeed bin Humaid al Shukaili on 'Alabab' finished third.

In Category D, (110-115 cm), Haider bin Anwar al Rashed over 'Qwaidam' from the Arabian Stables finished on top among 14 riders. Madin bin Saeed al Yousifi on 'Wadood' from Royal Cavalry was second and Jamal bin Humaid al Sharyani on 'Any Jain' from RGO was third.

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Local community contractors win contract extensions from PDO



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) on Monday, March 21, 2022, signed contract extension agreements with several Super Local Community Contractors (SLCCs), which reflects the great success and the maturity achieved by these companies in the oil and gas sector.

The signing took place at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre during Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES), which was inaugurated by His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Central Bank of Oman Board of Governors. The prestigious event is organised under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy & Minerals and hosted by PDO.

The contracts extended with Al Baraka Oil Services, Shawamikh Oil Services and Al Sahari Oil Services are to provide well maintenance services.

PDO External Affairs and

Value Creation Director Eng Abdul-Amir al Ajmi said: “The importance of this event lies in the fact that it establishes a new stage for SLCCs which have reached a high level of merit and efficiency in their various areas of operations. These contracts will contribute to providing these companies with high-tech electric hoists in order to reduce their environmental impact and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

The Company also signed the second contract with Sakan Facility Management, an SLCC consortium, to build an integrated station to provide land transportation services for employees working in the concession areas.

Eng Al Ajmi added: “The signing of the contract to establish an integrated station for land commuting to serve the employees of the concession areas is part of our efforts to reduce traffic accidents and raise the level of safety, to which PDO attaches utmost importance.

OPES 2022 opens with focus on new oilfield technologies

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Oman Petroleum & Energy Show (OPES) formally began at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Central Bank of Oman Board of Governors. The inauguration was also attended by key officials from various ministries, top-level executives from global companies, and other industry leaders.

The three-day forum is being conducted under the patronage of the Ministry of Energy & Minerals and hosted by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy & Minerals, said: “The Oman Petroleum & Energy Show is a national event that has, over the years, become a respected platform for the oil and gas industry across the region.

This year’s conference theme reflects the major developments happening not only in the Sultanate of Oman, but in the wider region.

Oman has made significant advancements in IOR/EOR methods, offshore drilling and field development, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, and these will be debated and shared by leading experts through panel sessions, technical discussions, and presentations at the SPE Conference at OPES.”



A key highlight of the event is conference organised by the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) with a fine selection of highly acclaimed experts. The participants will convene to exchange ideas, share industry insights, and drive engagement through informative discussions and technical presentations on key topics shaping the current and future needs of the energy industry.

Themed ‘Shaping the Future of the Energy Industry’, the conference will be chaired by Dr Saleh al Anboori, Director-General of Exploration and Production of Oil and Gas, Ministry of Energy and Minerals. An Executive Plenary Session will focus on ‘How the Petroleum Industry is Preparing itself for the Era of Decarbonisation and Energy Transition’.

Other engaging features of the conference agenda include four panel sessions, an Energy Think-Tank session, 28 technical and knowledge sharing ePoster sessions, and an OPES Awards Showcase Pavilion.

Dr Bader al Kharusi, PDO Oil North Director and Programme Committee Chairperson said, “We are indeed delighted to act as the host organisation of this prestigious event and are confident that all participants and visitors to the exhibition will find it to be a truly rewarding and fulfilling experience. OPES 2022 brings together the very best the Oman hydrocarbons sector has to offer. As we work together to support Oman Vision 2040 by reducing our carbon footprint, embracing technological innovation on an unprecedented scale, and operating more

efficiently, it is evident that the Sultanate of Oman’s energy industry is taking monumental strides in its energy transition to a sustainable economy with net-zero emissions.

The upcoming event will showcase many examples of how operators are delivering excellence, growth, and sustainable value creation within and well beyond our industry.”

OPES will also host a Digital Oil and Gas Zone featuring Digital Oil and Gas Talks that will unite senior executives, service providers, contractors and related suppliers, technology innovators, and industry experts to develop business ideas and exchange thoughts on revolutionising the oil and gas industry with an emphasis on increasing profitability through sustainable measures.

Regulation to support rollout of EV charging stations in Oman

Decarbonisation goal: Multi-stakeholder team working together under auspices of APSR to formulate regulations to underpin investment in charging infrastructure

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Regulations designed to enable the rollout of safe, robust and standardised Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure – a key requisite for the rapid uptake of electric cars in the Sultanate of Oman – are proposed to be introduced before the end of this year.

That effort is being overseen by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), which has set up a multi-sectoral team to ensure that the design and technical

specs of charging stations meet with international industry standards, as well as the specific requirements of motorists and other stakeholders in the country.

“We are currently working in the Authority, with the help of key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion as part of a team,” said Shaikh Dr Mansoor bin Talib al Hinai, Chairman – APSR. “The Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and the Royal Oman Police are also part of this multi-stakeholder task force. We are hoping, by the end of 2022, to issue regulations on the charging stations. It requires all the parties concerned to come together.”

Shaikh Dr Al Hinai made the revelation at the opening session of the International Sustainability Resources & Technology Conference (ISRTC), which was held in Muscat last week. Also



taking part in the session were HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said, Assistant Professor of Economics at the College of Economics and Political Science, Sultan Qaboos University (as Moderator); Dr Ali al Shidhani, Communications and Information Technology Under-Secretary – Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Eng Ahmad al Subhi, Chairman – Oman Environmental Services

Holding (be’ah).

Interest in an EV market is reviving rapidly, with the regulator as well as market players, building on pre-pandemic efforts to stimulate the growth of a thriving electric vehicle market in the Sultanate of Oman. Leading fuel marketing companies are investing in e-mobility hubs and charging stations at selection locations around the country in anticipation of a pick-up in EV

adoption.

During the panel discussion, Dr Al Shidhani – Communications and IT Under-Secretary, also noted the need for “incentives and regulatory schemes” to help drive the uptake of electric cars in the country. The growth of an EV market in the Sultanate of Oman is seen as key to supporting decarbonisation efforts in line with the Omani government’s commitments under the Paris Accords to mitigate global warming. A transition to renewables, such as solar and wind, and eventually green hydrogen as well, will also help accelerate this effort.

Significantly, a study commissioned by the Authority and published three years ago recommended financial incentives in the form of tax exemptions, registration fee waivers and other subsidies to help fuel the uptake

and promotion of electric cars in the country.

The report was compiled by US-based Energy and Environmental Economics, Inc (E3) with its subcontractor Baringa Partners. It identified an array of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives that Oman’s authorities could consider for implementation in order to stimulate the growth of an EV market in the country.

Also boding well for heightened interest in electric vehicle adoption are a number of localised initiatives, notably the launch recently of the country’s first indigenously designed and crafted electric car under the ‘Mays’ brand. Additionally, Karwa Motors – a partnership of Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and Mowasalat Qatar – is also planning to manufacture electric buses at its facility at Duqm SEZ in the next phase of its operations.

CCED joins industry leaders at OPES 2022



MUSCAT: CC Energy Development (CCED) participated at the latest edition of the Oman Petroleum and Energy Show (OPES), where it supported the event as Gold sponsor, as well as exhibiting with a dedicated booth.

Held at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, OPES is Oman's largest international event of its kind and brings together oil and gas industry leaders from over 30 countries. It's the latest in a range of local and international platforms and dialogues that CCED has been involved in as part of its aim to facilitate knowledge-sharing and secure the long-term sustainable development of the industry.

Walter Simpson, Managing Director of CCED said, "We make an effort to be part of important conversations about the future of the energy sector and we are delighted to have been

involved in another OPES event, as part of our strong partnership with the government and our dedication to supporting Oman's socio-economic development.

The event offered us a unique platform to connect with other players in the energy sector, decision-makers and stakeholders, and share knowledge about the trends, developments and current issues in the industry, while continuing to contribute to Oman's energy future."

Established in 2007, CC Energy Development (CCED) is an independent upstream international oil and gas operator that, through its associated companies, brings over 20 years of exploration, development and production experience in the oil and gas industry. Maximising the use of technology, innovation and smart partnerships, it aims to be a sustainable and low-cost contributor to Oman's long-term hydrocarbon vision.

Lulu kicks off campaign to promote 'Made in Oman' products

MUSCAT: Lulu Oman has launched a campaign to promote "Made in Oman" products. The campaign to "Think Buy and Go Local" was flagged off at Lulu Hypermarket in Mall of Muscat on Sunday, March 20, 2022, under the auspices of Engineer Hilal bin Hamed al Hasani, CEO of Madayn.

The campaign aims to promote Made in Oman products in the local markets and boost their consumption rate. It also introduces customers to national products in local and international markets as Omani products are always a preferred option for those who look for quality and excellence. By promoting local products, Lulu intends to support SMEs, open up job opportunities for locals and create added value for the national economy.

Speaking on the promotion, Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, stated "The campaign is an excellent step towards marketing Made in Oman products. It is one of Lulu's promotional campaigns that contribute to support local businesses, boost sales of Omani manufacturers, maintain better returns for the national economy, as well as contribute to providing direct and indirect job opportunities for locals."

"This campaign is in line with our commitment towards the



society and an important step in our efforts to enable customers to "Think Buy and Go Local." This is also an initiative to encourage entrepreneurs to develop their business, market their products and encourage consumers to buy locally produced goods", he added.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director - Lulu Hypermarkets, Oman, stated "Choosing local products is considered a national responsibility of each individual toward enhancing the purchasing power and increasing the production of local firms. Lulu has always demonstrated its

commitment towards promoting Oman-made products in all its stores through such platforms. These campaigns help in spreading awareness about the positive effect of purchasing Omani products in supporting the national economy."

All Lulu outlets have been stocked up with a wide range of local products for customers to pick up during the pre-Ramadhan shopping season. The promotion of Omani products is happening along with other offers and discounts coinciding with Ramadhan shopping. This year, Lulu has introduced a first-of-its

kind Shop and Win promotion offering RO 100,000 worth cash prizes.

There is a grand prize of RO 10,000 and weekly prizes of RO.5000 and more. For the pre-Ramadhan shopping, Lulu has stocked up on all essential items such as food and beverages, sweets, coffee, spices, nuts, milk and dairy products and other miscellaneous products. Omani products enjoy excellent reputation and are marked by their high quality and standards. These products are also widely spread locally, regionally and internationally.

Alizz Islamic Bank, IFIN to provide instant 'goods financing'

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank and IFIN (the first Islamic Fintech of its kind) continue to provide instant 'goods financing' for the bank's customers. This is part of Alizz Islamic Bank's constant pursuit to provide its clients with innovative financial solutions.

The instant finance solution is available at all branches of Danube Home as well as at Mustafa Sultan Electronics, Enza Home, Sofa Land and Fahmy Furniture. Alizz Islamic Bank customers are able to avail instant finance on their goods right at the stores.

This service allows customers



to instantly take home their desired goods from any of the aforementioned merchant stores having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch. The process of availing

finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store's checkout counter, where the customer will go through an online verification process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval.

IFIN is the world's first Shari'a compliant, multi-institutional, multi-product, multi-channel Islamic FinTech solution facilitating instant Islamic financing at the retailer outlets. This game-changing solution is geared to redefine the way Islamic financing is being done, making it secure, quick and easy for everyone.

3.45 per cent interest rate with BankDhofar's Ramadhan car loan offer

MUSCAT: BankDhofar launched Ramadhan Car Loan offer with attractive interest rate. The offer translates BankDhofar's commitment to provide the best services, products and financial solutions to its customers.

The offer enables customers to own their dream car during the holy month of Ramadhan with interest rates starting from 3.45 per cent.

Commenting on the offer, Muhannad al Raisi (pictured), Executive Manager - Assets Products Development and Bancassurance, said: "With this offer we wanted to make sure that our customers get the chance to buy the car of their choice without having to worry about the high



interest rates.

At BankDhofar, we are always keen to provide our customers the best financial solutions. Recently we have launched various loan offers, and we look forward to design further attractive offers

that will meet the various needs of our customers."

The offer will be valid until May 31, 2022. To avail the offer customers may visit nearest BankDhofar branch to apply for the car loan during this period. More details on the terms and conditions and the eligibility are available on BankDhofar's website (<https://www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/Loans.aspx>).

BankDhofar is one of the best banks in the region, catering to customers' needs and requirements and setting the standard for the best customer experience within the banking industry in the Sultanate of Oman through innovative products and creative solutions.

Bp Oman launches 2021 socioeconomic review

MUSCAT: Bp launched the second edition of its socioeconomic review in Oman at the opening of Oman Petroleum and Energy Show, where it was presented to HH Sayyid Taimur bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman.

The review highlights bp's commitment to Oman in line with the company's sustainability frame, its alignment with Oman's 2040 Vision, as well as its aim to be a leader in the transparency of reporting. Yousuf bin Mohammed al Ojaili, bp Oman President stated, "Oman continues to be

a strategically vital country for bp and through our various projects at bp, we are aligning our objectives with Oman's 2040 Vision, to encourage economic diversification and empower local talent."

Key 2021 highlights include:

- Spending \$3.4 million on social investment programmes, with nearly 14,000 people benefiting.
- Supporting local Omani company, Fahud Oil Services and Energy to carry out its first well test at Block 61 with zero flaring.
- Spending \$312 million directly with Omani registered companies - 89 per cent of bp



Oman's total procurement spent.

- Achieving a 90 per cent Omanisation rate four years

earlier than planned.

- We've safely avoided around 90,000 tonnes CO₂

emissions through our 'green completions' technology at Block 61

- Working to digitalise Oman's educational curriculum to benefit 600,000 students and 55,000 teachers as a gift to the nation.

Dr Khamis bin Saif bin Hamoud al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, commented, "We are proud of bp's efforts with their social investment programmes and their contribution towards developing Omani talents.

As well as utilising environmentally friendly

technologies, such as the green completions concept which aligns with our efforts towards achieving some of the key objectives of Oman Vision 2040, such as sustainability and supporting economic diversification."

The review showcases examples of bp's commitment to improve people's lives through various programmes such as supporting the establishment of Oman's first national Paralympic sailing team consisting of 25 Omanis to empower disabled youth through the sport of sailing — giving 25 Omanis the chance to compete in local, regional and international championships.



Al Maha Petroleum inks pact with Vision Insurance



MUSCAT: Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG signed a partnership agreement with Vision Insurance Company at W Hotel on March 16. The agreement was signed by Eng Hamad bin Salem al Maghdari, CEO, Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company and Issam Mouslimani, CEO, Vision Insurance.

The agreement will offer additional benefits to Al Maha customers who hold a prepaid Al Maha fuel card - a free voucher for car care from M3 Spa for vehicle care, in addition to three discount vouchers for car care from Vision Insurance. Eng Hamad al Maghdari said, "Al Maha Oil Products Marketing Company has strengthened its services by offering quality products according to the needs of the market in line with the strengthening of the economic sector as per Oman vision 2040."

Al Maghdari said, "The Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company has witnessed a significant growth in the local market with the expansion of service station networks across, which led to gaining the loyalty of many customers who continue to trust the quality of products and services that are of the highest specifications."

Tejarah Talks 2nd series: Corporate culture the secret sauce?

CORPORATE CULTURE:

Companies with the strongest culture outperform by 40% across all measures of business performance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Post-Covid corporate culture and its many challenges - from the Great Resignation sweeping global companies of all sizes to hybrid working and more - is the topic up for discussion at the next edition of Tejarah Talks. Organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) in association with Oman Business Forum and supported by HSBC and SOHAR Port & Freezone, Tejarah Talks is scheduled for 7:30 pm, Wednesday, March 30 at the Civil Aviation Authority Training Centre in Al Hail North.

With His Highness Sayyid Dr Adham al Said (pictured), Founder, The Firm as moderator, the panel line-up includes Sir Charles Shaw, CEO, Bondoni; Shatha al Maskiry, Managing Director, Protiviti Oman; Dr Ghalib al Hosni, Chief People Officer, Omantel and Saif al Manji,



Managing Consultant, Quintal Ventures.

Speaking ahead of the event, Maymuna al Adawy, MoCIIP Director and Tejarah Talks organiser explained: "Clearly the pandemic has impacted on the way we all work and our attitudes to our jobs and careers, bringing significant changes to corporate culture in its wake. While this might seem initially to mean things like different approaches to business hours and office set up, it also extends to areas around manufacturing practices, employment conditions, privacy regulations, or environmental commitments. And these changes are having a significant impact on

business results.

In fact, a recent LRN Corporation survey of 8,000 executives across 14 countries and 17 industries found that companies with the strongest culture outperform by approximately 40% across all measures of business performance, including customer satisfaction, employee loyalty, innovation, adaptability as well as growth."

Al Adawy continued: "While the LRN data provides a strong and compelling case for Omani businesses to invest in building a stronger corporate culture it is important to acknowledge that culture change in any organisation, irrespective of size is not easy."

A STRONG CORPORATE CULTURE DOES NOT MAGICALLY APPEAR AND TO UNDERSTAND ITS REAL IMPACT OMANI BUSINESS LEADERS NEED TO THINK ABOUT IT MORE HOLISTICALLY.

Commenting on the importance of corporate culture, HH Sayyid Dr Adham al Said remarked: "A strong corporate culture does not magically appear and to understand its real impact Omani business leaders need to think about it more holistically."

We have to understand how culture can fundamentally shift the way a company operates, in a way that generates better outcomes for the business, employees and customers. If the challenges of the past two years have taught us anything it is that corporate culture truly counts. Needless to add, it will take an effort to change things, but given the potential rewards it is clearly worth it."

To reserve your place at Tejarah Talks email your name and contact details to TT@tejarah.gov.om

Al Omaniya Financial announces RO 2.54m net profit

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Annual General Meeting of Al Omaniya Financial Services was held on March 20, 2022 under the chairmanship of Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahil al Mashani, Deputy Chairman.

Speaking on the occasion, the Deputy Chairman stated that the shareholders have given their approval for the audited financial statements of the company as well as for the 12 per cent dividend comprising of 7 per cent cash dividend and 5 per cent Unsecured Non-



Convertible redeemable bonus stock bonds Aftab Patel, Chief Executive Officer, said the company's loan book stands at RO 117 million as of end-2021.

Total revenues stood at RO 15.671 million, with pre-tax profit of RO 3 million and net profit RO 2.564 million. The Earnings per Share is

RO 0.009, and net worth of the company stands at RO 70.6 million.

The book value of the share is RO 0.223 Patel further added that the company has a well-diversified portfolio of assets with the lowest NPA ratio of 3.76 per cent in the industry (as per IFRS9).

The cumulative ECL provisions towards Instalment Finance receivable including special reserve for non-performing assets stand at RO 16.475 million, which covers 374 per cent of the non-performing assets.

The company has been at the forefront of issuing innovative financial instruments, having pioneered the issue of Bonus Stock Convertible bonds as dividends over several years. This year, the company's dividend comprises Unsecured Non-convertible Redeemable bonus stock Bonds, which is a first for any financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

The company has also been paying consistent dividend since inception, he said, adding that cumulative dividend paid till date stands at 466.33 per cent.

OABC hosts Business Networking Evening

MUSCAT: The Oman American Business Center (OABC) hosted an evening of business networking at Fresco Al Marina. Over 80 OABC members from companies in every sector of Oman's business community enjoyed an evening of connecting with new people.

"What stood out to our team the most about this event was the incredible number of new faces", says Rebecca Olson, Executive Director of the OABC. "We've had over a dozen new member companies sign up since our last networking evening just a month ago. It's important to OABC members to always see old connections and also new ones at each event - it ensures the time of networking is interesting and effective."

Nominations open for 5th Oman PG Student Awards

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

CC Energy Development, one of the biggest independent oil operators in the Sultanate of Oman, will offer two paid internships to the Winners of the 5th Student Awards for the Advancement of Postgraduate Education in support of the country's initiative to identify the brightest young minds to lead a new era of innovation.

By 2050, global demand for energy will nearly double, while demand for water and food will rise by more than 50 per cent. Now consider that Oman must balance these factors with its growing population (+46 per cent by 2050), rising energy consumption (+55 pre cent across the Middle East by 2040), and an expanding environmental rule book.

The enormity of this challenge cannot diminish its urgency - the climate clock is ticking louder

than ever before and every corner of Oman's government, industry, academia, and society need to be part of the solution.

The Oman Student Awards, now in their fifth edition, recognise and celebrate the country's future industry and academic leaders who will contribute to building Oman's innovations hubs. This pioneering Awards' campaign strives to promote Omani role models, establish ambassadors for the Advancement of Postgraduate Education and advance their employability through a robust 3-month paid internship.

"The Oman Student Awards are designed to reward talent and enhance the prestige of research-focused education as major pillars of building knowledge capacity as both are required to deliver an innovative R&D ecosystem in Oman", said Walter Simpson, Managing Director, CCED.

"It is a core objective at CCED to contribute to building local and



national talent, and we believe it is our responsibility to invest in the communities we work with while

generating business that can bring value to Oman on its journey to becoming a knowledge economy",

said Simpson.

There is no doubt that significant progress has been

made in Oman to create an environment where excellent thinkers can thrive, encompassing scientists, engineers, economists, communicators, analysts and many other critical skillsets, especially with such initiatives as Innovation Park Muscat and Ejaad.

The appetite for post-graduate education is clearly growing. For example, currently, there are around 1,700 students enrolled in over 100 programmes at Sultan Qaboos University.

Recognising the achievements of Oman's Masters and PhD students will spark the imagination of a new generation of thought leaders. The Award nominations recognise Omani and Oman-based postgraduates with outstanding achievements in the field of energy and will be evaluated by a proficient Selection Committee that will announce two winners, in the Masters and PhD postgraduate categories.

Tokyo gets helpful shove from unhelpful war

The Japanese economy is feeling the fallout from the Russian war on Ukraine. But although rising import costs will sting, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is making good use of the crisis so far.

Japan, the world's fifth-largest energy consumer in 2019, relies heavily on fossil fuels, a condition exacerbated by its decision to turn off most of its nuclear reactors after a tsunami caused a meltdown in 2011. That forced a pivot to natural gas, which together with coal and oil comprise nearly 90% of energy consumption.

With supply constricted, Japanese buyers are now on the receiving end of skyrocketing import prices just when their economy was starting to turn a corner, a vulnerability exacerbated by sharp currency depreciation.

The yen is now trading around 119 per dollar, a level not seen since 2016.

Yet while official data showed energy prices popped 20.5% in February, overall consumer price inflation was a tepid 0.9% year-on-year. In fact Japan, by dint of its ageing society and investments in efficiency, has become less energy-intense when it comes to driving growth, which is forecast to hit nearly 3% in the current fiscal year. It won't feel a serious pinch from oil until prices exceed \$150 per barrel, according to an analysis by HSBC. Equity investors aren't panicking; the Topix index is down only 4% in 2022.

As for the loss of the Russian market, the hit to roughly \$8 billion worth of annual exports is manageable. Those consumers are a nice-to-have for brands like Uniqlo, but currency sanctions have made it a liability. Japanese bank exposure to Russia is less than \$10 billion, per an analysis by CLSA.

The natural gas crunch will accelerate Kishida's push to re-open the country's mothballed nuclear plants. That will alleviate the country's dependence on imports and help it hit its carbon neutral target by 2050.

This crisis has also given the government cover to start easing Covid-19 lockdown measures and reopen borders to tourism, which could ease the impact if foreign demand for Japanese exports plummets. Next might come more moves to upgrade the country's defence industry's innovation and export competitiveness.

No matter how the war turns out, Japan still faces serious challenges: Economic, demographic and now, military. The tragedy in Ukraine can prod Tokyo to focus on solving them. — Reuters

With supply constricted, Japanese buyers are now on the receiving end of skyrocketing import prices



RISING PETROL PRICES

An employee works at a gas station in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The prices of oil and grains produced in Latin America increase due to the war in Ukraine, a situation that at first sight seems positive for the regional economy but has a flip side: it is the return of rampant inflation and the rising prices in food and fuel. — AFP

Economic weapons of mass destruction



RAGHURAM G RAJAN

The author, a former governor of the Reserve Bank of India, is professor of Finance at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and the author, most recently, of *The Third Pillar: How Markets and the State Leave the Community Behind* (Penguin, 2020).

ECONOMIC WEAPONS, MADE POSSIBLE BY GLOBAL INTEGRATION, OFFER A WAY TO BYPASS A PARALYSED GLOBAL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

War is horrific, no matter how it is waged. Nevertheless, Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine, with its scenes of Ukrainian civilians being murdered or driven from their homes, undoubtedly had to be opposed.

In addition to supplying Ukraine with military weapons, governments around the world have deployed economic weapons against Russia. While Russia, an economic midget relative to its military power, may still lash out by expanding the range of military weapons it uses and the territories it targets, it is a risk the world had to take.

Compared to Russia's indiscriminate bombing, economic weapons will not kill people as quickly, create as much visible destruction or inspire as much fear.

Nonetheless, the unprecedented economic weapons that have been deployed against Russia will be unquestionably painful.

The strictures on Russia's central bank have already contributed to the ruble's collapse and new limitations on cross-border payments and financing have had an immediate impact, weakening confidence in Russian banks.

Though trade sanctions, restricting exports of key inputs such as airplane parts to Russia, as well as purchases from Russia, and the exodus of multinational corporations from Russia will have a less immediate effect, they will reduce economic

growth and increase unemployment significantly over time.

If these measures are not reversed, they will eventually translate into lower living standards, poorer health and more deaths in Russia.

That we have come to this point reflects a widespread political breakdown. Too many powerful countries are now being led by authoritarian rulers whose reliance on nationalism makes them less willing to compromise internationally and who face few domestic constraints on their behaviour. If Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggression were to go unpunished, more international provocations like his war in Ukraine would become inevitable.

Equally problematic is the breakdown of the international order. The United Nations Security Council cannot legitimately act against any of its permanent veto-wielding members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States).

The organisation's impotence translates into impunity for strongmen who flout international norms. Moreover, even if the UN could approve a military response, the will to confront a determined nuclear power militarily would probably be lacking.

Economic weapons, made possible by global integration, offer a way to bypass a paralysed global governance system. They allow other powers an effective (that is, painful) but civilised way to respond to aggression and barbarity.

But the risks that these weapons can

create must not be underplayed. When fully unleashed, sanctions, too, are weapons of mass destruction. They may not topple buildings or collapse bridges, but they destroy firms, financial institutions, livelihoods, and even lives.

Like military WMDs, they inflict pain indiscriminately, striking both the culpable and the innocent. And if they are used too widely, they could reverse the process of globalisation that has allowed the modern world to prosper.

There are several related concerns here. For starters, the seemingly bloodless nature of economic weapons and the lack of norms governing them could result in their overuse. This is not merely speculative. The US still maintains harsh sanctions against Cuba even though there are far worse regimes in the world; and China recently sanctioned Australian exports, apparently in retaliation for Australia's demand for a full inquiry into the origins of Covid-19.

Equally worrisome is the growing public pressure on corporations to stop doing business in certain countries. These demands can lead to sanctions being broadened beyond what policymakers intended. It is not impossible to imagine a country being subjected to economic warfare because of its government's position on, say, abortion or climate change.

A widespread fear of indiscriminate sanctions would lead to more defensive behaviour.

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Washington and London ready to resume trade talks

DELPHINE TOUITOU

Washington and London have chosen the port city of Baltimore — just an hour's drive from the US capital — as the site of Monday's talks on deepening their economic relationship. The United States is Britain's biggest trade partner, and the two countries are particularly interconnected when it comes to services trade and direct foreign investment.

In total, the US and the UK do some \$263 billion (200 billion pounds) worth of trade per year.

Following Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, London has been negotiating agreements far and wide in an effort to boost its international trade footprint — and has sought in particular to reinforce

its relationship with the United States.

But even though the administration of former president Donald Trump seemed ready to make a new bilateral arrangement with London and had even opened negotiation talks, the administration of current President Joe Biden does not seem to be in a hurry to continue them.

"It's important to remember that these (trade) agreements are just one tool at our disposal", said a senior US trade official on the condition of anonymity.

US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, who will lead the American side on Monday's and Tuesday's talks, is expected to talk about "the need to get creative and think outside the box when it comes to our trade dynamic with the UK", another official said during a telephone conversation with

reporters.

"Some of our trade tools were developed decades ago, many decades ago, and don't particularly represent the global challenges that we faced today", the second official said.

Asked whether this week's meeting marked a revival of negotiations that were interrupted last year, the officials insisted these talks are more about "deciding where to go together", and said they are confident the conversations would be productive.

"The purpose of this dialogue is to work together to make our trade smarter, and to help our workers and businesses compete in a really tough global economy", the second official said.

Tai and her British counterpart Anne-Marie Trevelyan are expected to address a series of challenges, such as reducing bottlenecks in

global supply chains, reducing carbon use, promoting digital trade and supporting their nations' workforces through labour rights, a favourite issue of the Biden administration.

The talks come as the war in Ukraine continues to rage more than three weeks after the country was invaded by Russia, but the meeting in Baltimore is not expected to lead to any announcements of new sanctions against Moscow, the American officials said.

That's "in part because many of the major sanctions issues reside with other departments in the US government", the second official said. The discussions will, however, "be broadly based on the many ways in which we can pursue our shared interests vis a vis Russia, visa a vis China", they said.

The talks will focus on "how the UK and US can use trade

intelligently in the modern global economy" while deepening trade links, Trevelyan said last week in announcing her trip, adding that Tai would visit Britain for another round of discussions "later this spring."

The two sides are not likely to discuss their disputes over steel and aluminium in Baltimore, as the topic falls under the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce, the US officials said, but noted progress has been made in resolving that disagreement.

Britain and the United States in January announced efforts to put an end to the Trump-era steel and aluminium conflict. The United Kingdom became one of several countries upon which the US imposed an additional 25 per cent tariff on steel and an additional 10 per cent tariff on aluminium in 2018. — AFP

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m.alrahd86@yahoo.com

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ali.almashari@omandaily.om

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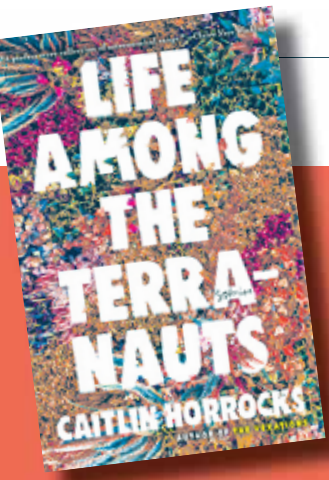
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Eco-friendly products are at the heart of this Market Fair in Bausher

READ



LIFE AMONG THE TERRANAUTS
BY CAITLIN HORROCKS

A group of volunteers are paid to live in a biodome. They had been chosen for their "fortitude, for pigheaded faith," but 542 days in, with 188 to go, food is scarce and things are falling apart.

ART

Canova's lost 'Maddalena Giacente' seen fetching up to \$10m at auction

A REDISCOVERED ANTONIO Canova marble sculpture of Mary Magdalene is seen fetching up to \$10 million when it heads to auction in July.

Described by auction house Christie's as the Italian neoclassical sculptor's "lost master-

piece", "Maddalena Giacente" (Recumbent Magdalene) was commissioned by the Earl of Liverpool, then British prime minister, and took three years to carve.

Depicting Mary Magdalene in a state of religious ecstasy, the



sculpture was completed just before Canova's death in 1822.

"This is one of the last works that Canova actually executed... it's just recently come to light after having been in collections in the 20th century, unrecog-

nised as a significant marble by Canova," Donald Johnston, Christie's International Head of Sculpture, told Reuters at a media preview on Thursday.

"It was one of the highlights of the Art Treasures exhibition in Manchester in 1857... it was sold with the contents of a

house to a gentleman... there was a fire at the house. He had an auction of the contents, and by the time that auction happened in 1938, the identity was lost and she was just referred to as a classical figure."

The sculpture, on show at Christie's London this weekend, will go on tour to New York and Hong Kong. It will be offered for sale at a July 7 auction, with a price estimate of 5 million pounds - 8 million pounds (\$6.60 million- \$10.6 million).

"For me facially, it's absolutely typical of Canova but there are other signs as well," Johnston said.

"The way the feet are done, the way the hands are done, the way that the fingers have this sort of gentle curve... it's very typical of Canova. Generally the quality of the piece... it sings out. So you were always going to be looking for a master as the author of this marble." — **Reuters**



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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL

Burkina's 'Opera Village' by its groundbreaking architect



WITH ITS IMPOSING, angular proportions made out of clay, laterite and other local building materials, the Opera Village cultural and educational project, designed by Burkina Faso-born architect Francis Kere, blends into the landscape.

It overlooks Laongo, a rural community not far from Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, and is the sort of groundbreaking design that helped Kere scoop architecture's most prestigious award, the Pritzker Prize, this week.

In so doing, the 56-year-old, who holds dual Burkina and German nationality, became the first African to win the honour in its more than 40-year history. Built on 20 hectares (almost 50 acres) of a granite plateau, the Opera Village is shaped like a spiral, with 26 buildings housing workshops, a health centre, guest houses and a school.

Eventually, at its centre will be a performance venue and covered exhibition area with 700 seats.

Built in the early 2010s with the aim of combining art, education and ecology, the project was the brainchild of late German theatre director and film-maker Christoph Schlingensiefel.

'THE SIMPLEST MATERIAL'

Kere was hailed by the Pritzker's sponsors on Tuesday for designs that are "sustainable to the earth and its inhabitants — in lands of extreme scarcity". His Opera Village used local construction materials, such as clay, laterite, granite and wood to allow it to withstand the extreme heat of the region, the site's administrator Motandi Ouoba said.

"These are local materials that the architect found on site: Blocks of compressed earth, bricks taken from the site, paving stones made from granite", he said. Kere "starts with the simplest material, which we commonly share... which our parents used, and he makes something noble out of it", he added.

"It's the earth, it's all that's around us, when he brings them together, he brings to life something that is magnificent."

It also blends well with local vegetation, contributing to a sense of harmony.

BIOCLIMATIC BUILDINGS

The immense roofs overhang the walls and ventilation keeps the temperature in the rooms down, even when it's more than 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) outside.

Kere ensured that "our buildings are bioclimatic, with a double ceiling and openings to dissipate hot air", Ouoba said.

The health centre's consultation and treatment rooms have dozens of long windows that slide upwards. "With so many openings, patients feel less isolated by hospitalisation. They have a view of the landscape", doctor Issa Ouedraogo said.

The stylish classrooms filled with daylight are a far cry from the makeshift decor of many of the schools in Burkina Faso, a country battling an insurgency since 2015 that swept in from neighbouring Mali. "The architecture of the buildings changes everything. We are in perfect classrooms because it is very hot here and not everyone can afford fans or air-conditioning", said headmaster Abdoulaye Ouedraogo, who is also an actor and playwright.

Six classrooms can accommodate 181 pupils — and there's a separate space for music, dance, theatre, plastic arts, photography and audiovisual lessons. — **AFP**

GASTRONOMY

Michelin Guide returns to celebrate 'resilient' French food scene



THE MICHELIN GUIDE launches its 2022 edition on Tuesday, vowing to celebrate the diversity of French cooking and the industry's resilience after two challenging years caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Expected each year with apprehension by chefs and gourmets, the famous red book is being unveiled in Cognac in southwest France, the first time in its 122 years the ceremony has taken place outside Paris.

"The 2022 edition is a very fine vintage which reflects the diversity of cuisines that can be found in France", the guide's Director Gwendal Poullennec told AFP.

"But it will also make room for a new generation of chefs who have taken the risk of embarking on this journey in spite of the challenging context", he said.

"Despite the crisis, the profession has shown great resilience. It was an opportunity for professionals to reinvent themselves, to go further and that's what we want to support."

Last year's ceremony, in the midst of a months-long shutdown caused by the pandemic, was a low-key affair with only one chef — Alexandre Mazzia — promoted to three stars, the highest distinction.

While Poullennec said the judges' criteria remained the same, there was an increased focus on more minimalist, sustainably sourced restaurants that have come to

dominate the food scene.

Remaining relevant
Controversies have long swirled around the guidebook and the pressure it places on chefs.

In 2020, Michelin shocked

After a long period during which French restaurants were accused of growing stale and lazy, the past 15 years have seen an influx of young chefs more open to global influences and new approaches, said Paris-based food writer Lindsey Tramuta.

The Michelin Guide has sometimes struggled to keep up, she added.

"When you have something as structured as Michelin, it is very tricky to incorporate all the things that are happening in the food scene — things that are high-calibre, but maybe aren't as formal", she said, adding that female chefs remained poorly represented.

"But Michelin is still very important for chefs and owners. If it motivates their kitchen staff and team, and brings more diners and curiosity, then it has value."

Created in 1900 by tyre manufacturers Andre and Edouard Michelin as a guide for motorists, it now has editions across Europe, Asia, North and South America.

In March, it announced it was suspending operations in Russia due to the war, just a few months after launching its first guide in Moscow. — **AFP**

THE IMPULSE TO TRAVEL



Yeru Ebuen
Insta: yru_here

Home is not the house you grew up in, it's your mom

IT'S NEARLY THREE years since I last saw my mother. In-person, that is. Thanks to the pandemic, flying home is like going through the seven stages of hell that it's much better not to test the waters. Every once in a while, we turn to technology to bridge the distance.

The last time we had a decent conversation was nearly three months ago. She was located on an island, on top of a mountain, that even to this day the mobile signal remains terrible. While a lot of us have the first world problem of wondering what phone to buy, my mother still has to walk about 10 minutes to my uncle's house located on another hill where the signal is much better so we can talk.

In our last call, I remembered how frail she looked compared to the last when we saw her. Her white hairs had become more visible and the years had become readable on her face. She was a round face on a square mobile box but it was easy enough to see that the years are not being kind to her.

It's hard to imagine my mum growing old. I think a lot of us had this trouble of recognising that every year we earn our age, so does our mothers.

While I'm penning this, I had trouble getting in touch with my mum. I'm sure she's out in the field chasing after chickens or our neighbour's ducks. That brings a touch of nostalgia for me, remembering her in her elements, so dominant and so sure even the dogs and the goats tremble at her voice when she shouts.

Just like many kids, I've always looked at my mum as a superwoman. There was nothing she cannot do. She raised three kids on her own while my father was away. She juggled being a housewife and a church officer on top of

bringing food to the table. She was an exemplary woman and she was the reason why early on, I believe that women can do anything.

We all love our mums for many reasons. We love them for always supporting us as we navigate the world trying to create a better version of ourselves. In case you haven't realised it yet as well, our mums are our homes. It's not the house we grew up in or the place where the house is built that is home. The one who gives it meaning and the reason we call it home is that she was there — a presence we know so well that even if the world crash and burn, with her around, it is a safe space.

I'm happy for everyone who celebrated Mother's Day with their mothers. I am envious of the opportunity that you can take them out, buy them flowers or gifts, and treat them out to a nice restaurant — something that they don't ask but we all know they deserve.

While it will be a while before I'll be able to hug my mother, I urge you to hug yours real tight. This Mother's Day, remember how lucky you are that you have a woman that celebrates your achievements and cheers you on when you fall. Some of us don't deserve such adoration but we get it anyway. So thank them because it's the only thing you can do and even it will not suffice.

To all the mothers, a happy mother's day. I hope your children treat you well. I hope they buy you flowers. I hope they lavish you with gifts. I hope they make you laugh — that priceless sound we know so well and we will miss terribly if it's gone. I hope your children make you proud everyday and even if they don't, thank you for the best love no one else can give.



Eco-friendly products is at the heart of this Market Fair in Bausher

By Anan al Balushi

Today's world has embraced the concept of living, loving and thinking green which all lead to being mindful of the environment and promoting a safer, sustainable and better planet.

Within this vein, a Market Fair promoting mixed eco-friendly products had been organised by Thy Yard bringing in one location more than 20 vendors who sell not just goods, traditional clothing, accessories and food but also some artisanal gifts that people can give to their mothers in celebration of Mother's Day.

Sarah al Lawati, the owner of @wheat_grass_oman, is one of the participants in this year's pop-up event. Her product concept revolves around urging people to go for healthier snacks and a fitter lifestyle.

Sarah is proud that her confectionaries are made of real-squeezed fruit juices and use alcohol-free fragrances.

Sarah said that these are good alternatives to candies handed out during events such as Qaranqasho, Christmas and Easter.

"We do custom-made giveaways for weddings, birthdays and bridal showers. We also offer perfumes that are made for sensitive skin. This decision is made because a lot of kids suffer from eczema so we made a product that is 100 per cent essential oils and water," Sarah explained.

"I have witnessed how people are becoming more conscious about what they put in their mouths and appreciate the value of organic alternatives. I'd been in the shows of people wanting to find healthy and safe products without hassle that's why I decided

ed to provide the gap in the market," she said.

Mae Louise, the creative brain behind @likathandmade, meanwhile, introduces 100 per cent handmade macrame pieces.

"I make different items such as earrings, covers, jars, bags and more! The macrame cords are shipped from Poland but the creation takes place in Oman. I need exposure, so people learn how to cherish these exquisite jewel-like portraits patterns of cords," she said.

Mae Louise said that the great thing about handmade products is that no two items are alike although the style may look similar.

"I like to think that each item you purchase is made only once for you. Handmade is both art and love combined. It's one way of projecting yourself in the eyes of others," she added.

@omanbasket on the other hand provides certified eco-friendly cosmetics that are wholly organic. They sell head-to-toe skincare products including face and hair that fits all ages. They said that the product can also be bought online and can be delivered for "busy mums."

"Our products are available in some shopping centres and local pharmacies to give people, especially those wanting organic some nice choices. Besides, we localise our products' variety and promote Omani-made organic items. We are trying to add more organic labels to embrace eco-friendly environment products under one umbrella; that is our goal," the Oman Basket team shared.

For seven years now, Anita, the soul behind @symphony_of_body_mind_and_soul found her way to understand crystals and the power hidden in this material.

"I can use crystal reiki healing

and sound therapy; they have different stories and meanings. Also, they help you bond with your inner peace and higher self like labradorite. For instance, Rose quartz includes unconditional love and amethyst has a lot of positive energy. Tigers eye is the stone of confidence, sacral chakra stone helps you build a safe and firm foundation," she shared.

She added, "Where Lepidolite is a go-to stone —if you are going through stress and anxiety, just hold it for five minutes and sense the awe of calmness," she said. Hold onto a random piece, and if you happen to like how it feels, that means it's good for you!

"You may get your beloved mother a matching stone gift to thank her for all her sacrifices. Finding your crystal is a way of the universe guiding you to your inner harmony," she urged.

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Undoubtedly, the demand for eco-friendly products is becoming popular among people, especially young adults. The new generation is helping to spread awareness and influence our society to live healthier and go green!

