

Sayyid Badr receives Arab League chief

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi, Foreign Minister, and Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League, on Monday exchanged views on a wide range of topics pertaining to the Arab League's tasks aimed at enhancing joint Arab action and affirmed the importance of Arab solidarity. They also touched on joint cooperation in various spheres of mutual interest.



P12

AFRIDI WINS CRICKETER OF THE YEAR AWARD



P15

OIL RISES ON SUPPLY FEARS AMID TENSIONS



P20

OMANI OLIVE OIL MILL TO COVER THE LOCAL NEED



MUSCAT

OMAN ATTENDS WHO COUNCIL MEETINGS

Represented by the Ministry of Health, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in meetings of the 150th session of the World Health Organization (WHO) being held in Switzerland from January 24 to 29, 2022.

In addition to health ministers, the event saw a large turnout of high-level officials from different countries of the world. The Sultanate of Oman is represented by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while the Ministry's under-secretaries and top officials are joining the meeting via videoconferencing.

OHRC COMMITTED TO PROTECTING RIGHTS

The Sultanate of Oman has always upheld the fundamentals of human rights. In cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has executed various projects that underline the importance of protecting the rights of individuals and society as a whole, according to Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, Chairman of OHRC. **SEE P3**

GREEN NEWS

SEASON: 02

EPISODE: 02

RETIREMENT

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INSIDE

LEBANON'S CABINET MEETS AFTER THREE-MONTH GAP

P6

TALIBAN HOLD LANDMARK TALKS ON FOOD CRISIS

P7

HONOURABLE LADY RECEIVES COLOMBIAN AMBASSADOR



The Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Monday received at Al Barakah Palace Ana Munoz de Gaviria, Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, The Honourable Lady wished Ambassador Gaviria continuous success in performing her duties. – ONA

Scope for more hospitals: MoH

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Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health for Health Affairs, said improvement of primary healthcare sector in health institutions in the governorates is linked to a set of issues, including absence of a unified entity responsible for all health services provided in the Sultanate of Oman, and the financial aspect that represents a major obstacle for the ministry in developing services and their continuity.

During his meeting with the Health and Environmental Committee of the Majlis Ash'shura on Monday, he indicated that it was necessary to increase the number of hospitals and specialised human cadres, to upgrade the special skills of Omani medical staff.

TURN TO P2

UAE intercepts two ballistic missiles over Abu Dhabi

DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates intercepted two ballistic missiles over the skies of Abu Dhabi on Monday, authorities said, the second attack in a week that targeted the Emirati capital.

Videos on social media showed the sky over Abu Dhabi light up before dawn, with what appeared to be interceptor missiles racing into the clouds to target the incoming fire. Two explosions later thundered through the city. The videos corresponded to known features of Abu Dhabi.

The WAM news agency said that missile fragments fell harmlessly over Abu Dhabi.

The missile fire disrupted traffic into Abu Dhabi International Airport for about an hour after the attack.

The Emirates "is ready and ready to deal with any threats and that it takes all necessary

measures to protect the state from all attacks", WAM quoted the UAE Defence Ministry as saying.

The ministry also tweeted a black-and-white video showing an F-16 striking the ballistic missile launcher used in the Abu Dhabi attack. The Defence Ministry identified the site as being near Al-Jawaf, a Yemeni province around 1,400 kilometres southwest of Abu Dhabi.

The latest attack came a week after Yemen's rebels claimed an attack on the Emirati capital targeting the airport and an Abu Dhabi National Oil Co fuel depot in the Mussafah neighbourhood. That attack on the fuel depot killed three people and wounded six others.

Yemen rebels also fired missiles on Saudi Arabia wounding two people in southern regions of Jazan. — **dpa/Reuters**



Buildings and cars were damaged by shrapnel from an intercepted ballistic missile fired by Yemeni rebels that landed in Dhahran. – Reuters

RO 155m mega solar project opens in Ibri



IBRI: Ibri Solar Project, the largest renewable energy facility of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, was inaugurated in the Wilayat of Ibri on Monday.

The 500 megawatt utility, which cost RO 155 million, figures among Oman Vision 2040 major projects aimed at optimising available investment opportunities and protecting natural resources.

The project, established on an area of 13 million square metres, of which 1.5 million was accorded to the double-sided solar panel, uses more than 7,000 square metres

The largest renewable energy facility of its kind will provide electricity to 50,000 homes and reduce CO2 emissions

of cables.

Mohammed Abunayyan, Chairman of ACWA Power, said that the project will peak in productivity through the generation of power sufficient for supplying 50,000 homes with electricity and cutting down

CO2 emissions by 340,000 tonnes a year.

The project constitutes an authentic form of partnership between the public and private sectors. It embodies the Sultanate of Oman's ability to attract direct foreign investments. Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, an arm of Nama Group, realised the project through contracts with a group of GCC investment firms led by ACWA Power, Gulf Investment Corporation and the Alternative Energy Projects Company to set up, own and operate the plant. **SEE P13**



Honourable Lady receives Colombian envoy



BARKA: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidy, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, on Monday received at Al Baraka Palace Ana Munoz de Gaviria, Ambassador of the Republic of Colombia to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, HH the Honourable Lady wished Ambassador Gaviria continuous success in performing her duties.

On her turn, Ambassador Gaviria expressed her utmost appreciation for HH the Honourable Lady's sincere sentiments, wishing her continuous good health, happiness and a long life.

— ONA

Enhancing joint Arab action in focus at meeting



MUSCAT: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy received here on Monday Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary General of the Arab League.

They exchanged views on issues pertaining to the Arab League's tasks aimed at enhancing joint Arab action. They also touched on

cooperation in various spheres of mutual interest.

They affirmed the importance of Arab solidarity, as well as means of actively engaging with current ground reality and future aspirations.

The meeting also reviewed regional and international matters of common concern.

— ONA

Scope for more hospitals: Ministry of Health

FROM P1

The meeting was attended by Hilal bin Hamad al Sarimi, Head of the Committee, members, and specialists from the ministry. It coincided with the committee's study on "evaluation of the quality of primary healthcare institutions in the country."

The meeting reviewed the performance of primary healthcare institutions and their absorptive capacities, quality of services provided, ability to work in times of crisis, standards



and controls in the geographical distribution of primary healthcare institutions in the country, and the basic criteria for determining health services that are provided in some centres.

In addition, the meeting touched upon topics related to the availability of specialised and qualified human cadres and medical devices, plans to appoint qualified human cadre to work in health centres, as well as a review of the possibility of investing in the primary healthcare system.

Pact on Wadi Bani Khalid road project

WADI BANI KHALID: An agreement was signed on Monday for a project to pave 16.4 km of internal roads in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid, the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah to the tune of RO 2,013,286.

The agreement was signed with the executing company by Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Al Sharqiyah.

The roads will help promote tourism, economic activities and urban development in the Wilayat of Wadi Bani Khalid, besides easing traffic between the Wilayat's villages. — ONA





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Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company

Diam Haya

Member of Nama Group

Announcement: Improvement Works in Qurayat Desalination Plant and Water Transmission Lines

Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) announces that it will be carrying out improvement works at the Qurayat Desalination Plant, the main water transmission lines and water distribution networks in Wilayat Al Amirat, Muscat Governorate from 28 to 29 January 2022 for a period of (48) hours.

Apologising for any shortages may occur in the water supplies, the company urges all beneficiaries to take necessary measures and continue rationalising water consumption.

For further information, kindly contact the Call Centre on (1442).

ص ب ١٤٧ | الرمز البريدي ١٣٣ | الكويز، سلطنة عمان | IBEF

P.O. Box 1047 | PC133, Al Khuwair | Sultanate of Oman | 1442 @ www.owwsc.nama.om

Oman at Cairo Book Fair

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and the Ministry of Information, will take part in the 53rd edition of Cairo International Book Fair 2022.

The event, beginning on Tuesday, will continue till February 7.

The book fair will portray Omani culture and highlight the country's positive civil contributions. It will also showcase Omani intellectual products, heritage, literature and history. — ONA



Oman attends meetings of WHO council

MUSCAT: Represented by the Ministry of Health, the Sultanate of Oman is taking part in meetings of the 150th session of the World Health Organization (WHO) being held in Switzerland from January 24 to 29.

In addition to health ministers, the event saw a large turnout of high-level officials from different countries of the world. Oman is represented by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, while the Ministry's under-secretaries and top officials are joining the meeting via videoconferencing.

The meeting began with the endorsement of the agenda of the WHO and a speech by its

Director General, followed by a review of the outcomes of the second extraordinary session of the International Health Society aimed to hammer out an international accord for consolidating the WHO's readiness to tackle pandemics.

It is hoped that the meeting will approve a proposal by Oman and Switzerland on the Global Health Initiative and discuss Oman's proposal to devise a comprehensive strategy for combating contagious diseases. Other topics on the agenda include the enhancement of WHO's financial resources and the discussion of WHO task team's report on mobility to address Covid-19. — ONA

Ministry reports nearly 200 Covid inpatients as cases increase

VINOD NAIR

vinot_nair

Despite assurances that Omicron is a less dangerous variant, there has been a spike in hospital inpatients.

On Monday, the Ministry of Health reported that 66 new patients were admitted to various hospitals across the country, bringing the total number of inpatients to 194, of which 22 are in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

As many as 1,647 new cases and one death were registered on Monday.

According to MoH, Omicron mutant has spread in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. There are governorates in which the test positivity rate has reached 25 per cent, which means for every 100 people who have symptoms, there are 25 with corona infection.

"While the symptoms of Omicron are generally minor compared to the previous mutant, it differs from one country to another and from one society to another, and all studies."

Speaking at the 150th session of the Executive Board of the WHO,



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, said, "On average last week, 100 cases were reported every three seconds, and somebody lost their life to Covid-19 every 12 seconds."

Since Omicron was first identified just nine weeks ago, more than 80 million cases have been reported to WHO — more than were reported in the whole of 2020.

So far, the explosion in cases has not been matched by a surge in deaths, although deaths are increasing in all regions, especially in Africa, the region with the least access to vaccines, WHO director said. Meanwhile, people arriving in England from abroad will no longer have to take Covid tests if they have been fully vaccinated, the UK prime minister said.

Boris Johnson said the further

relaxation of the travel rules was designed to show that the country was open to travellers and business.

He did not confirm when the rules would go, but the transport secretary is set to make a statement on Monday.

Vaccinated travellers currently need to do a test within two days of arriving. Johnson warned people must still be cautious.

Committed to protecting human rights, says OHRC chairman

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The Sultanate of Oman has always upheld the fundamentals of human rights. In cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) has executed various projects that underline the importance of protecting the rights of individuals and society as a whole, according to Shaikh Abdullah bin Shuwain al Hosni, Chairman of OHRC.

During the OHRC visit to the Detainees' Centre in Bausher Police Station on Monday, Al Hosni said upholding human rights always topped OHRC's activities.

"We always thrive to uphold human rights, and the rights

of children predominate the activities of the Commission. Protecting children from negligence and abuse is of paramount importance and is implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and Omani Women's Associations (OWA).

The detention centre was visited by a team from the OHRC on Monday, which included a number of members who met with detainees held for various crimes as well as part of legal procedures pertaining to some ongoing trials. This is within the framework of the field visits carried out by the Committee to the detention centres of the ROP as decided at its first meeting held on Sunday.

The OHRC team listened to



the detainees at the centre, got acquainted with the cases for which they were arrested, and exchanged conversations with them about the legal and human rights which are guaranteed by the nation to them, foremost of

which is their right to contact their families, and to appoint lawyers to follow up on their cases.

Colonel Abdul Hakim bin Khalid al Hosani, Assistant Commander of the ROP, Muscat

Governorate and Lieutenant Colonel Ahmed bin Rashid al Kasbi, Officer of the Bausher Police Station, and a number of officers and employees of the station were part of the team.

"We appreciate the initiatives

taken by the ROP in providing the best services to the detainees, and the efforts to reduce the number of detainees at Bausher Police Station is commendable", he said.

Oman Human Rights Commission was formed as a national platform to help promote and protect human rights across all segments and institutions of society in accordance with the national legislation and international laws.

Human rights violations can be reported on toll-free number 80077444 round the clock.

"OHRC also keeps a tab on the steps taken by the government to enhance human rights through joining international conventions and treaties and adapting its local legislations with their provisions", he added.

ROP participating in 'Arab Gulf Security 3' drill

MUSCAT: A team from the Royal Oman Police (ROP) continues its participation in the joint tactical exercise 'Arab Gulf Security 3' being held in the Eastern Region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Brigadier Salim bin Mubark al Arawi, Commander of the Police Special Task Force, said that the ROP's participation in the drill has great importance in terms of exchanging information and expertise, standardising concepts and tactical plans to boost security readiness in the Gulf region through training in rapid intervention and stimulation of high-risk operations. — ONA





BACK TO THE NEW REALITY

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The authorities had to backtrack on 'back-to-office' decisions due to a surge in Covid-19 cases and its Omicron variant.

Since the beginning of January 2020, the world has been enduring the Covid-19 pandemic, including the Sultanate of Oman. The government has made all the efforts to reduce the impact of this virus on its citizens and residents.

Even though many employees embraced 'work-from-home' during the past two years and even managed to attain a considerable degree of efficiency, they were able to revert to full-time work-from-office too, after a long gap.

The Supreme Committee monitoring the Covid-19 situation last week again reduced attendance in government offices to 50 per cent for two weeks in view of the rising number of Omicron infections and hospitalisations across all governorates.

Studies have identified a few trends that are already shaping how we'll be working and may be a window onto the future of office life.

Since the outbreak of coronavirus infection, the Sultanate of Oman has embarked on a journey for business transformation and technological innovation as part of its commitment to fulfilling Oman Vision 2040.

However, while the country's output is on a growth path with policy reforms and state-of-the-art infrastructure, a unified approach and synergetic strategy are required to transform it into a skill-driven society. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, the pandemic has brought some industries to a devastating halt, while others are still in the process of adapting to this new reality.

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, we witnessed companies in the Sultanate of Oman letting go of their traditional business models and adopting the latest possible modes of operating. This move has been particularly noticeable in companies that had not moved assets to the cloud and were now doing so at full throttle", points out the report.

In a matter of weeks, the Sultanate of Oman became a society where remote working was no longer a consideration for the future but a present-day reality.

In cooperation with the Supreme Committee on Covid-19, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has launched the 'work from home' initiative in March 2020. The initiative aimed to provide the government entities and staff with all required infrastructure and tools to continue the government tasks.

The ministry exerted great efforts to support all government entities and provide secure connections and environments on the government cloud.

The pandemic has also set in motion the wide acceptance of part-time work, as temporary work, "gig", or freelance work become part of the "new normal". Many people may now juggle a number of projects rather than jobs in their work portfolio at any one time.

"This is advantageous to the Omani economy where new industries are yet to open. Young Omanis are free to offer their skills and services to multiple companies simultaneously. This variety of projects will allow them to gain a range of experience that a traditional job position may no longer offer", the report opines.

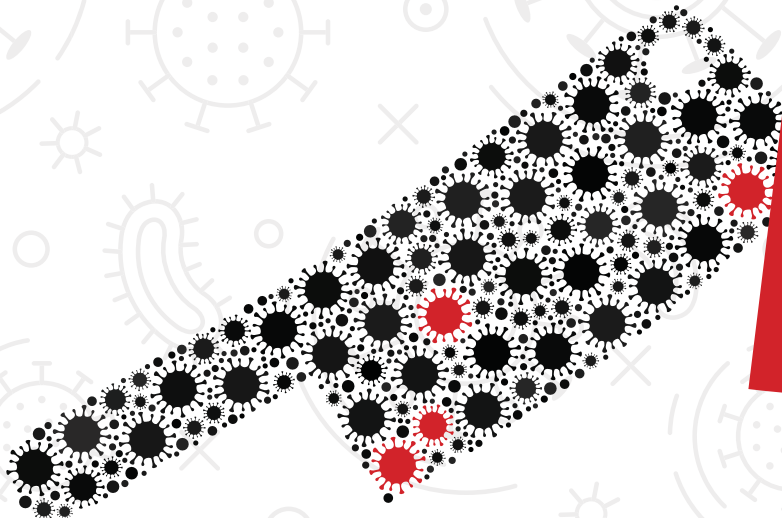
At the same time, the leaders in human resources will need to rethink the workforce, employee training and approaches to measuring performance. Criteria for employment will perhaps be more inclusive of a diverse skill set rather than focused on region-based experience, while potential candidates will be bold enough to question an employer's integrity.

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry has recognised this benefit and is currently in the process of setting up an effective plan that enables part-time work for one and all.

THE SUPREME
COMMITTEE
MONITORING THE
COVID-19 SITUATION
LAST WEEK AGAIN
REDUCED ATTENDANCE
IN GOVERNMENT
OFFICES TO

50%

FOR TWO WEEKS IN
VIEW OF THE RISING
NUMBER OF OMICRON
INFECTIONS AND
HOSPITALISATIONS





Transport minister inspects road projects in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate



NIZWA: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, met with the representatives of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate at Majlis Ashshura, members of the Municipal Council and citizens listened to their opinions and suggestions regarding road projects in the governorate. The meeting identified the challenges facing the projects being implemented by the ministry and discussed the paths of roads planned due to be executed by the ministry in its future plans. The minister also inspected a number of roads in the governorate and identified the challenges facing the implementation of some roads and ways of addressing these challenges.

Take precautions during dust storms to avoid health problems



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A noticeable drop in temperature is expected this week while clearer skies are forecast. As the country experienced dust storms in the weekend, there are chances of some more dust storms in the current season as well as during summer. While the dust storm impacted visibility, the air quality is also a matter of concern in terms of health. Not only people with asthma need precautions, but it is also essential for diabetics and heart patients to be cautious during a dust storm.

According to Dr Dilip Singhvi, Specialist Internal Medicine, Apollo Hospital Muscat, dust storms may adversely affect health, particularly in people who already have breathing or lung-related problems or allergies.

“Dust particles vary in size from coarse (non-inhalable), to fine (inhalable), to very fine (respirable). Coarse dust particles generally only reach as far as the inside of the nose, mouth or throat. Smaller or fine particles, however, can get much deeper into the sensitive regions of the lungs. These smaller dust particles have a greater potential to cause serious harm to our health. So finer dust particles may cause a serious health hazard.”

However, Dr Singhvi explained that some people with pre-existing lung diseases such as

Infants are more at risk than others, including children, adolescents, and elderly with respiratory conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema

DR DILIP SINGHVI
Specialist Internal Medicine

asthma or chronic lung disease like emphysema might experience breathing difficulties. According to him, the most common symptoms experienced during a dust storm are irritation to the eyes and upper airways, sneezing, throat irritation, cough as well as in severe cases, shortness of breath.

“Infants are more at risk than others, including children, adolescents, and elderly with respiratory conditions, such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema, in addition to people with heart disease or individuals with diabetes. In these people, exposure to a dust storm may trigger allergic reactions and asthma attacks causing serious breathing-related problems, and this can lead to cardiovascular or heart disease contributing to reduced life span,” pointed out Dr Singhvi.

Prolonged exposure to airborne

dust can lead to chronic (long term) breathing and lung problems, and possibly heart disease, and so these are the health precautions to be taken. Dr Singhvi listed out precautions one can take to protect and minimise the adverse effects of a dust storm.

MINIMISING IMPACT

- Avoid outdoor activity. If you must go outside, spend as little time outside as possible.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a mask or damp cloth to reduce exposure to dust particles.
- Avoid strenuous exercise, especially if you have asthma, diabetes or a breathing-related condition.
- Stay indoors, with windows and doors closed.
- Stay in air-conditioned places, if possible.
- If you are asthmatic or have a lung condition and if one develops symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, or chest pain, either take inhalers if on treatment or contact a specialist physician if symptoms do not settle.
- Visibility deteriorates very quickly during a dust storm. If you are on the road and have difficulty in driving safely, reduce speed, or park somewhere safe.
- If your car is air-conditioned, reduce the amount of dust entering your car by switching the air intake to ‘recirculate’. This will reduce exposure to dust or sand.

The doctor advised seeking early medical advice if symptoms are not controlled.



Ministry of Higher Education, Research & Innovation

ELECTRONIC TENDER

The Internal Tenders Committee of the Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation announces the re-launch of the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Company that are entitled to participate	Tender Price	Last Date for purchasing Tender	The deadline for submission of Tenders
(1/2022)	Repair and Maintenance of Existing Carpentry Workshop at Seeb Vocational College	Specialized in providing Same service and registered with the Tender Board with Grade: First	25/= OR	13/02/2022	05/03/2022

The purchasing of the tender documents by E-Tendering system, please visit the following link:
<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om/>

All companies that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (1%) of the tender value on behalf of His Excellency Dr. / Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee.

Preference will be given to companies' or small and medium enterprises registered with the General Authority for the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) that includes the largest proportion of its tender Omanization.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Chairman of tender committee
Ministry of Higher Education Research & Innovation



www.mohe.gov.om



OMAN DATAPARK
Procurement Department

CORRIGENDUM

Be advised that an error appeared in the Tender Notice No. (RFP#02-0122) released on Sunday corresponding to January 23, 2022 and that the Tender's particulars shall be read as follows

Tender Ref.	Tender Title	Tender Fees	Start date for documents sale/collection	Last date for documents sale/collection	Last date for clarifications	Tender submission date
RFP#02-0122	Design, Supply, Install, Test, Commission, Maintain Data Center for Hosting Facility	100 OMR	23/01/2022	27/01/2022 before 2:00 PM	3/02/2022 before 2:00 PM	27/02/2022 before 2:00 PM



SULTANATE OF OMAN
MINISTRY OF HEALTH



ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
2022/95	Providing upload and download services Sinaw Hospital	Before 9 am Tuesday 08/February/2022	Before 10 am on Tuesday 08/March/2022	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

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

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24402200
Email id: etenderhd@mtci.gov.om



Thousands in Sudan protest military rule

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas on Monday at crowds calling for civilian rule and demanding justice for the scores killed in crackdowns since a military coup nearly three months ago.

Thousands of protesters in the capital Khartoum chanting slogans against the army headed toward the presidential palace, an area which security forces had sealed off ahead of the march. Police forces later fired tear gas to disperse the protesters, according to a correspondent.

Protests were also held in cities including Wad Madani, south of the capital, the Red Sea city of Port Sudan, and the eastern state of Gedaref, according to witnesses.

“No, no to military rule,” and “civilian (rule) is the people’s choice” protesters shouted in Wad Madani, according to witness Emad Mohamed.

Sudan has been rocked by regular protests since the October 25 military power grab led by general Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

The coup derailed a civilian-military power-sharing deal, that had been painstakingly negotiated after the 2019 ouster of autocrat Omar al Bashir, stalling a planned for transition to civilian rule.

Anti-coup demonstrations have



Nemat Malik, one of the founders of No to Women’s oppression, in Khartoum. — Reuters

left at least 73 people killed and hundreds wounded, according to medics.

Sudan’s authorities have repeatedly denied using live ammunition against demonstrators, and insist scores of security personnel have been wounded during protests. A police general was stabbed to death during the unrest earlier this month.

On Sunday, Sudan’s key Umma party vowed “to remove all traces of the coup”.

It however warned that the “coup leadership” will “persist with its brutality and come up with new ways to commit violent massacres and launch mass arrests of revolutionaries.”

Hundreds of pro-democracy activists have been arrested in the crackdown on anti-coup activists.

On Saturday, a leading women



Sudanese protesters during a demonstration calling for civilian rule and demanding justice for those killed in crackdowns in Khartoum. — AFP

rights activist Amira Othman was arrested following a raid on her home in Khartoum, according to a statement by the “No to Women’s Oppression” initiative which she leads.

UN special representative

Volker Perthes slammed Othman’s arrest saying the “arrest and pattern of violence against women’s rights activists severely risks reducing their political participation.”

Other activists from the

“resistance committees”, informal groups which have been instrumental in organising anti-coup protests, were also arrested late on Sunday, according to members who requested anonymity fearing reprisals.

On Friday, Sudanese authorities requested delaying the arrival of UN expert on human rights in Sudan, Adama Dieng, who was appointed in November and had been due to make his first official visit. — AFP

Pro-Ankara party looks set to win Turkish Cypriot vote

NICOSIA: A right-wing nationalist party has won the majority of Turkish Cypriot votes in snap legislative elections in the breakaway northern region of Cyprus, according to provisional official results released on Monday.

The self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) — recognised only by Ankara — has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic and the plummeting value of the Turkish lira.

The National Unity Party (UBP) of right-wing nationalist Ersin Tatar, a close ally of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won 39.5 per cent of the vote, strengthening its presence in the TRNC parliament by taking 24 out of 50 seats.

As in 2018, the pro-Ankara UBP will have to form a coalition to govern.

The centre-left Republican Turkish Party (CTP) came second with 32 per cent of the vote to take 18 seats, according to the Supreme



President Ersin Tatar casts his ballot at a polling station in the northern part of Cyprus’ divided capital Nicosia, in the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. — AFP

Election Commission (YSK).

Final results are expected in the next few days with turnout estimated at 58.2 per cent when polls closed.

Analysts noted apathy among the roughly 204,000 voters, whose main concerns centre on health, safety and economic welfare.

“Compared to the previous

elections in northern Cyprus, there is much less energy and enthusiasm in the air,” political scientists Ahmet Sozen and Devrim Sahin wrote on the website of Italian think tank ISPI.

Cyprus has been split since 1974 when Turkish forces occupied the northern part of the island in response to a military

coup sponsored by the junta in power in Greece at the time.

The UBP favours a two-state solution while the CTP urges a settlement with the Greek Cypriots.

The small United Cyprus Party (BKP), which favours a federal solution, had called for a boycott of the vote, stating that “nothing will change” until Turkish Cypriots are “liberated from the yoke of Ankara”.

But unlike previous TRNC elections, campaigning this time focused on the territory’s economic woes rather than any talk of a solution to the problem. Hopes of resolving the intractable dispute suffered a setback when Tatar pulled off a surprise, narrow win over pro-unification candidate Mustafa Akinci in the TRNC’s 2020 presidential election.

Tatar has pressed for recognition and insisted on a two-state solution at UN-brokered talks on ending the division.

— AFP

Lebanese cabinet meets amid friction over budget

BEIRUT: The Lebanese cabinet met on Monday for the first time since October, convening after Hizbullah ended a boycott but with the powerful group and others objecting to a draft budget that was the main agenda item.

With Lebanon mired in one of the world’s sharpest financial crises, Prime Minister Najib Mikati hopes passing a budget will help talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which Lebanese officials say will begin on Monday.

Lebanon has failed since 2020 to make progress towards securing an IMF bailout, with no sign of long-delayed reforms sought by donors.

Mikati said he hoped the cabinet would “cooperate in a spirit of responsibility, far from any disputes”. A row over the probe into the 2020 Beirut port explosion had led Hizbullah and its closest allies to boycott cabinet.

But criticism of the budget suggests difficulties ahead.



Former Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri heads a meeting with the future parliamentary bloc in Beirut. — Reuters

Heavily-armed Hizbullah said on Sunday the draft did not “bode well”, criticising proposed tax increases and saying it could not support it.

The Free Patriotic Movement, the Christian party founded by President Michel Aoun, has objected to an article that gives the finance minister authorisation to set the exchange rate.

The Lebanese pound has lost more than 90 per cent of its value since the crisis erupted in 2019, plunging most Lebanese into poverty. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

Tunisian police arrest man after 3 stabbed

Tunisian police have arrested a man with apparent mental health issues after he stabbed and wounded three passengers on a tram in the capital, the interior ministry said.

A ministry official said that the alleged assailant in Sunday’s attack, who had been living in Italy before moving to Tunisia in 2020, ‘suffers from psychological problems according to his family’.

The motive for the attack



was under investigation. Police sent to Bab Alioua tram station near central Tunis had found “passengers in panic shoving each other to get out”, police said in a Facebook post.

BEIRUT

Nearly 850 children at risk in north-eastern Syria

Nearly 850 children are at immediate risk as violence continues in north-eastern Syria, children’s charity Unicef has warned. Intensifying violence in the city of Al Hassakeh, related to a prison break last week, has put nearly 850 detained children at serious risk, the organisation’s Syria representative Viktor Nylund said. Some of the children are reportedly as young as 12 years old. According to reports, more than 100 people were killed, and thousands were



displaced in the ongoing violence surrounding Geweran prison. “Children in the Ghwayran prison are children and have the right to access restorative justice procedures,” Nylund asserted.

GAZA

Qatar pledges gas supplies for Gaza power plant

Qatar says it will ensure the supply of gas for the only power plant in the Gaza Strip. It had signed an agreement to this effect with the companies responsible for electricity generation and distribution in the Gaza Strip, Qatar’s envoy, Mohammed el Amadi announced.

Until now, the Gaza Strip has been dependent on diesel deliveries for the operation of the power plant.

However, there are basically



too few megawatts produced in the coastal area and supplied from outside: The approximately 2.1 million inhabitants suffer daily power cuts that last for hours.



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TUESDAY | JANUARY 25 | 2022

7

In brief

■ FRANKFURT



GUNMAN DEAD, 4 HURT IN GERMAN SHOOTOUT

A gunman injured four people in a shooting inside a lecture hall at Heidelberg University in southwestern Germany, police said, adding that the perpetrator was now dead. German media reported that the gunman had killed himself and that he appeared to have no religious or political motive. "A lone perpetrator injured several people in a lecture hall with a long gun. The perpetrator is dead," Mannheim police said in a statement. Four people were "seriously injured" in the assault, police said. The suspect then fled outdoors. Police sounded the all-clear but gave no details on how the attacker died. The shooting triggered a major police operation at the university's Neuenheimer Feld campus, with police on Twitter urging people to steer clear of the area "so that rescue workers and emergency services can travel freely". — AFP

■ ATHENS



HEAVY SNOWFALL PARALYSES GREECE

A blanket of heavy snow covered Greece on Monday, from the Acropolis hill over Athens to the islands in the south, bringing transport and Covid-19 vaccinations to a halt and forcing schools to close. Train and bus services in the capital were suspended, and drivers who ventured out found themselves stranded. "We've already been here for three hours," said Theodoris Petrou, standing by his car. "It didn't have snow at first, there was only about 2cm on the road, but as time goes by things are getting worse and worse." Vaccination facilities in the wider Athens region and on the nearby island of Evia closed, health officials said. Many schools were shut and students switched to remote learning. Authorities urged the public to avoid non-essential travel until late on Tuesday. — Reuters

■ PARIS



FRENCH FASHION DESIGNER MUGLER, 73, DIES

French fashion designer Thierry Mugler, who dressed Beyonce and Lady Gaga, has died aged 73, according to a statement on Mugler's official Facebook page confirming earlier French media reports. "We are devastated to announce the passing of Mr Manfred Thierry Mugler on Sunday January 23, 2022. May his soul Rest In Peace," said the statement. Mugler, who reigned over fashion in the 1980s, was known for his daring theatrical designs featuring broad shoulders and plunging necklines. He dressed the likes of Beyonce, Lady Gaga, David Bowie, Diana Ross and Duran Duran — among many others — during his career at the top of the fashion industry. — AFP

EU threatens 'massive' sanctions

UKRAINE CRISIS

BRUSSELS: The European Union called on Russia on Monday to defuse tensions over Ukraine and reaffirmed that Moscow would face "massive" consequences if it attacked its neighbour.

The EU's 27 foreign ministers, meeting in Brussels, said the bloc "condemns Russia's continued aggressive actions and threats against Ukraine and calls on Russia to de-escalate."

"Notions of 'sphere of influence' have no place in the 21st century ... any further military aggression by Russia over Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe costs," they said in a statement, giving no details of the "consequences".

Russia has massed tens of thousands of troops near Ukraine's borders. It denies planning an invasion but Nato said it was putting forces on standby and reinforcing eastern Europe — moves that Moscow described as "hysteria".

Denmark said the EU would be ready to impose "never-seen-before" economic sanctions on Russia.



British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss is greeted by Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg prior to a meeting at Nato headquarters in Brussels. — AFP

The European Commission, the EU executive body, proposed a \$1.36-billion financial aid package for Ukraine, but there are differences among EU member states about how hard to be on Russia.

Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis suggested

Russia wanted to "splinter the West" and that the EU could not afford to be divided. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has urged Europe and the United States to think carefully when considering sanctions and some European politicians, and Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg

underlined the EU's heavy dependency on Russian gas..

Asked about potential sanctions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline from Russia to Germany, which is yet to win regulatory approval, Schallenberg said sanctioning something that is not yet operative was not a credible threat.

Another potential sanction would be cutting Russia off from the SWIFT global messaging system, but German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said wielding the "hardest stick" may not always be the best way to deal with such a situation.

The EU has been largely sidelined by direct Russia-US talks, but the foreign ministers began talks with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken remotely on Monday.

"Russia should know, (President Vladimir) Putin should know that the price of using provocations and military forces to change borders in Europe will be very, very high... We are ready to undertake the most severe sanctions, also more severe than in 2014," Danish Foreign Minister Jeppe Kofod told reporters. The EU, along with the US, imposed economic sanctions on Moscow targeting its energy, banking and defence sectors after Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula in 2014. For now, the EU does not plan to withdraw diplomats' families from Ukraine, its foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said after Washington announced such a move. — Reuters

Taliban hold landmark talks with West on food crisis



US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West with Sayed Ishaq Gailani (C) during a meeting in Oslo. — AFP

OSLO: On their first visit to Europe since returning to power, the Taliban held landmark talks with Western diplomats in Oslo on Monday over the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, where hunger threatens more than half population.

The international community has however insisted the Taliban must respect human rights before aid can be resumed to Afghanistan.

Having accepted a controversial invitation from Norway, the Taliban were holding talks with representatives of the United States, France, Britain, Germany, Italy, the European Union and Norway.

The closed-door discussions were being held at the Soria Moria Hotel, on a snowy hilltop outside Oslo, with the Taliban delegation led by Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Afghanistan's humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically since last August when the fundamentalists stormed back to power 20 years after

being toppled. International aid came to a sudden halt, worsening the plight of millions of people already suffering from hunger after several severe droughts.

RIGHTS-RESPECTING Thomas West, the US special representative for Afghanistan, tweeted on Sunday: "As we seek to address humanitarian crisis together with allies, partners, and relief orgs, we will continue clear-eyed diplomacy with the Taliban regarding our concerns and our abiding interest in a stable, rights-respecting and inclusive Afghanistan."

The Taliban meanwhile hope that meetings of this kind will help legitimise their government.

No country has yet recognised the Taliban regime.

Norway's Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt has stressed the talks would "not represent a legitimisation or recognition of the Taliban", but because of the humanitarian emergency "we must talk to the de facto authorities in the country". — AFP

Assange can take extradition case to UK's top court

LONDON: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange on Monday was given the chance to challenge at Britain's highest court a decision allowing him to be extradited to the United States to face 18 criminal charges including breaking a spying law.

US authorities want Australian-born Assange, 50, currently in jail in London as he awaits a ruling on his extradition, to face trial on 18 counts relating to WikiLeaks' release of vast troves of confidential US military records and diplomatic cables which they said had put lives in danger.

In December, the High Court in London overturned a lower court's ruling that he should not be extradited because his mental health problems meant he would be at risk of suicide.



A supporter of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange during a protest against his extradition to the US outside the High Court in London. — AFP

While High Court judges refused him permission for a direct appeal to the Supreme Court on their decision, they said his case raised an issue of legal importance that he could ask the UK's top court to rule on. This

means the Supreme Court will have to decide whether or not it should hear his challenge.

"The respondent's application to certify a point of law is granted," the judges said in their pronouncement.

They said the issue of whether the High Court could rely on US assurances about Assange's treatment, which had not been given in the initial proceedings, was a subject on which his legal team could seek clarification.

"Whether or not the issue needs ventilation in that court is a matter appropriately for its decision. We would respectfully invite the Registrar of the Supreme Court to take steps to expedite consideration of any application for leave to appeal which follows." — Reuters



Recall Campaign for KIA Carnival (YP) - SJB Upgrade for Turn Signal Operation



Date of Campaign : 25/01/2022
Recall Segment : Body Electrical System
Product Description : SJB (Smart Junction Box) software upgrade

Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle production range	VIN Range	No. of affected Vehicles
KIA	CARNIVAL (YP)	22nd Apr'2014 28th Jul'2016	KNHMF372XF6000536 KNAMB8122H6252915	490

Description of Defect:
When the Turn Signal lever is turned to left the right turn signal may blink temporarily on some affected vehicles in the specified production date range. The turn signal operation control logic has been improved.

Procedure:
Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list & upgrade the software of SJB (Smart Junction Box) to improve turn signal operation logic.

For More Information:
Customers, who own Carnival (YP) models, may please contact M/s. Reliable International Automotive LLC for details / booking appointment etc. from 25/01/2022 onwards for installations.

Contact Details:
Toll free No. 80073222 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 08.30 to 17.30hrs.

What kind of fiction did people read in 2021?



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Prof, Department of English Language and Literature, Sultan Qaboos University

In 1993, when Peter James wrote a novel ‘Host’ on a floppy disk, he was widely attacked for almost announcing the death of the paper book. Why would anyone want to knock down more trees if a book, and thousands more, could be found at the end of one’s palm?

Well, it wasn’t really the palm those days — more like a 20 kilo box of a screen, but you get the point.

They weren’t really wrong, at first.

Ever since Project Gutenberg created the first digital platform for books which could be accessible online in 1971, fiction found a ready and willing forum, of course with a not-so gentle nudge by Microsoft Reader and Palm Pilot, some of the early entrants into the world of electronic letters.

Not many were impressed though, and bookshops carried on,

mainly hoping that their worst fears wouldn’t come true.

Enter Amazon’s Kindle in 2007.

The behemoth organisation bought up books by the thousands to upload on its device, focusing on its long term plans of retaining customer base, even if it meant that the initial uploading of books cost a fortune. Along with Nook and the iPad’s success, traditional books seemed to have very little hope, especially as, by 2011, sales of e-books rose by 1,265 per cent.

Luckily for most, the next decade bucked that trend.

Pew and Association of American Publishers’ figures for 2019 showed that sales of electronic devices have plateaued, although the pandemic saw a rise again.

More interestingly though, the pandemic saw people just reading more, both in electronic

2021 SAW PEOPLE READING
HISTORICAL FICTION,
ROMANCE, FAMILY DRAMA,
CRIME AND DYSTOPIAN
NARRATIVES

and in traditional formats. Small bookstores suffered through 2020 but many rose to the challenge of doorstep delivery and personalised service in 2021, surviving to fight another day.

What kind of fiction did people read in 2021?

Well, absolutely all kinds from historical fiction, romance, family drama, crime and dystopian narratives. Young adult fiction saw a surge, as did novels by writers of colour.

If you are still trying to catch

up on fiction from last year before being hurled into 2022’s offerings, some of these may catch your attention. They cater to different tastes and interests:

Kazuo Ishiguro’s ‘Klara and the Sun’: What does it mean to fall, and stay in love? This, coming from a human robot who is waiting to be bought by someone in a store hits the right spot, especially now, with Artificial Intelligence creeping up everywhere (Think Alexa and beyond).

The novel is a special delight coming from Ishiguro’s firm, calm but loving narration as he deals with issues like climate change and machine-made emotions.

Nadifa Mohammed’s ‘The Fortune Men’: A Man Booker Prize shortlist nominee for 2021, this novel explores the events leading to the last hanging in a Cardiff prison

in 1952.

A Somali seaman, Mahmood Mattan, is accused of the murder of a white shopkeeper and of course the community and institutions do all they can to convict the poor, Black family man. Mohammed’s rendering of this slice of history is moving and compassionate, as is her prose.

Chetan Bhagat’s ‘400 days’: Love him or hate him Bhagat is one of India’s most famous contemporary novelists. Rued by many for writing ‘popular’ novels, his foray into crime fiction has some hits and many misses, but is interesting as a less popular genre in Indian fiction so far.

Using his time-tested tropes of the underdog vying for the perfect woman, the novel keeps our interest in the crime section with its racy and (truly) surprising turns.

Delivery race among grocery startups brings road safety risks

ADITYA KALRA & ABHIRUP ROY

Indian grocery startups are luring tech-savvy customers with the promise of deliveries within 10 minutes, sparking a boom in “quick commerce”, but heating up concerns about road safety as bike riders scramble to meet tight deadlines.

Competition is already intense in India’s \$600-billion grocery retailing industry, populated by the likes of Amazon, Walmart’s Flipkart and Indian billionaire Mukesh Ambani’s Reliance.

Now SoftBank-backed Blinkit and its rival Zepto are racing to hire staff and open stores in their bid to grab a share of the market by offering the convenience of delivery in 10 minutes, far lower than the hours, or days competitors take.

Their mission: pack groceries within a few minutes at so-called dark stores, or small warehouses in densely populated neighbourhood buildings, and send bike riders to nearby locations with about seven minutes to spare.

“It’s a threat to the larger players,” Ashwin Mehta, a lead IT sector analyst at India’s Ambit Capital, said. “If people get used to 10 minutes, those companies offering 24-hour deliveries will be forced to reduce their timelines.”

As activity grows, research firm RedSeer says India’s quick commerce sector, worth \$300 million last year, will swell 10-15 times to touch \$5 billion by 2025.

Blinkit and Zepto, started by two 19-year-old dropouts from Stanford, have caught consumers’ fancy, satisfying cravings for food and impulse shopping, as well as urgent needs for daily supplies.

“This is very convenient, it has made a lifestyle change,” said Sharmistha Lahiri, who now turns to Blinkit to fill the gap when ingredients suddenly run out in her kitchen, from tomatoes for soup to chocolate icing for a cake.

The 75-year-old, who lives in the city of Gurugram near the capital, New Delhi, was a keen user of Amazon and Indian conglomerate Tata’s online grocer BigBasket, but prizes Blinkit’s rapid response in such situations.

The unbeatable convenience of rapid deliveries is evident in Europe and the United States, where companies such as Turkey’s Getir and Germany’s Gorillas are expanding fast, but India’s accident-prone roads make quick commerce a dangerous business. — Reuters



ELAINE GLUSAC

The writer writes about travel, food and conservation and has won numerous awards for her work, including the Gold Medal as Travel Journalist of the Year

Has the pandemic undermined off season deals?

In many places, high-occupancy rates are inflating prices for budget-minded travellers who count on off-peak periods to find the best bargains.

Last February, I searched for a vacation rental in Door County, the wayward spear of Wisconsin that juts into Lake Michigan, for an early May getaway, confident I had beaten the summer rush to the popular vacation spot.

But Airbnb occupancy calendars for lovely converted farmhouses and log cabins were already full and when I called a local vacation home rental agency, the agent said they were almost completely booked through the summer. That’s how I ended up in a one-bedroom shack last spring with a wobbly card table in an ant-infested kitchen and a new awareness of the shrinking off season.

From Miami to communities around national parks like Zion in Utah and Joshua Tree in California, high-occupancy rates during traditionally off season times of the year are muddling what was normally a reliable way to save money — travelling when few others are. Continued work-from-anywhere policies have freed travellers from their homes, and as they have flocked to places like Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and the Florida Keys, lodging rates have soared.

In 2020, a survey from Booking.com found that 58 per cent of American travellers were more likely to travel during off-peak seasons — to avoid crowds and the risk of contracting or spreading Covid-19 — than they were before the pandemic. In 2021, it found the sentiment grew: nearly 7 in 10 travellers said they would choose an alternative destination in order to avoid peak season.

“Most of the demand in 2021 was leisure-driven,” said Ali Hoyt, the senior director of consulting at STR, which tracks the hospitality industry, noting that stimulus money helped satisfy pent-up demand for vacations and social gatherings in resort destinations. “People showed that once they were vaccinated, they were ready to travel.”

Seasonality isn’t the only factor affecting rates, of course. The hiring shortage has made finding hotel

employees harder, which might mean limiting the number of rooms available or paying new staffers more, thus increasing costs that may be passed on to travellers. Occupancy caps also curtail availability, and inflation and delivery issues have driven up prices for supplies that hotels use, from food to cleaning products.

But even with those caveats, in many popular resort areas, more travellers means higher rates.

During the pandemic, American leisure travellers favoured outdoor destinations in coastal regions and mountain towns.

Aspen, Colorado, smashed records

DURING THE
PANDEMIC,
AMERICAN LEISURE
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FAVoured
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DESTINATIONS IN
COASTAL REGIONS
AND MOUNTAIN
TOWNS

for summer high-season occupancy in July at nearly 88 per cent, and for the off season month of September, occupancy was at 69 per cent, about 20



In many places, high-occupancy rates are inflating prices for budget-minded travellers who count on off-peak periods to find the best bargains.

per cent over 2019.

Jackson Hole has also been busy throughout the pandemic, helped by the migration of urbanites to rural areas, according to local reports.

“Covid accelerated things for Jackson,” said Sadek Darwiche, the co-owner and general manager of Hotel Jackson downtown. The formerly slow months — October, November, April and May — saw a spike in visitation, nearly doubling pre-pandemic norms last October.

“Shoulder season, in 2022, might be gone in Florida, Hawaii and at the big national parks with many top destinations seeing double-digit hotel demand increases in January and February,” wrote Christie Hudson, a spokesperson for Expedia Group, in an email, noting that many of these areas exceeded 2019 lodging figures.

Most hotels charge more when demand allows. For The Westin Cape Coral Resort at Marina Village in Cape Coral, Florida, more visitors in the normally slow summer and mostly steady traffic otherwise pushed rates on average 10 per cent above 2019 levels.

At Gurney’s Montauk Resort, Seawater Spa in the Hamptons, the surge was more dramatic as urban exiles drove the off season nearly to extinction, according to George Filopoulos, the owner of the resort. There, average nightly rates in the normally quiet month of December climbed from \$368 in 2019 to \$486 in 2020 and \$524 this year.

One of the busiest hotel markets, according to STR, was the Florida Keys, where average daily rates grew from about \$272 in 2019 to \$380 in 2021 as of November, or nearly 40 per cent.

“Mid-February last year, we saw a spike in demand and it has not stopped,” said Stacey Mitchell, the tourism council director for the Florida Keys.

Of course, many destinations have been working hard to shrink the off season. Door County, for example, has a popular half-marathon in early May, and in 2021, it added a Christmas market in late November and early December to attract visitors at traditionally slower times.

— The New York Times

LEARN TO
BE FLEXIBLE
AND JUST
GO WITH
THE FLOW



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

Nature has been giving us lessons — we have always experienced the strength of the summer sun, but lately it has been the rushing rainwater, freezing evenings and now the strength of the

wind. The northwesterly roared through the land, mountains and the sea for they did not have to stick to the path of the wadis like the rainwater.

Water carries debris and here the wind brought in the dust so intense that it was even mistaken for rain clouds.

Ventilation is important as we combat Covid and its variants and with the cooler temperatures it was often suggested to open the window to bring in fresh air. Oh, not so during the visit of the northwesterly as even without the windows being opened there were coats of dust in the rooms. The sound of the wind was ferocious at times making one often wonder about the possibility in damages to property under such immense pressure. Looking through the glass window one could watch the trees swaying to different directions the wind pushed them and the agility meant they survived the dust storm.

It was interesting to see them using the phrase, ‘go with the flow,’ in their own terms. But they succeeded in holding on until the wind slowed down. A cushion from somewhere landed in the garden frightening the pet as he must have wondered, “This too from the sky?”

We are yet to figure out whom could this cushion belong to. Everyone had one more reason to wear the facial masks. Some wanted to enjoy the weather and take a walk but the calmer in between

NO MATTER
HOW ADVANCED
WE THINK
WE ARE - A BLOW
OF WIND
CAN SPOIL ALL
PLANS

moments also had the dust in the air. And health experts again warned to stay indoors to avoid respiratory infections.

It does not take much for nature to teach us lessons. Within minutes there were layers of dust from kitchen to the living room reminding you there are gaps enough for the dust to seep in.

In life too, we might try to make it fool proof with savings and investment plans. Yet we could be impacted when least expected just like humming and whistling wind suddenly transforming to roaring and screaming blowing waves of air that travelled across countries carrying anything that was light enough on their way.

There must be so many activities that must be occurring in the atmosphere without our awareness. But this was just a reminder it seems to let us realise how vulnerable we can be no matter how advanced we think we are — a blow of wind can spoil all plans. People found it difficult to drive as it effected visibility and the drivers naturally had to slow down. Imagine how restless we tend to be caught behind slow drivers? Now here we were having a lesson on patience.

So for those of us who have been longing to venture out, it looks like nature wanted us to stay put.

Nature always has the last word.

But do not forget the teaching from the tree — bend and bounce back, this too will pass. And the birds came back from their hiding once the wind slowed down its pace.

Life throws in many challenges but we do not have it all, sometimes it just requires to wait and let the situation pass by.



ENDURING
COLD WAVE

A woman removes snow on top of a tent at a camp for internally displaced people in the town of Azaz. Heavy snowfall has caused suffering in communities across north-west Syria, especially for those living in displacement sites. — AFP

How to retreat from Ukraine



Ross Douthat
The writer is a columnist at the New York Times and an author of half a dozen books

One of the hardest challenges in geopolitics is figuring out how to conduct a successful retreat. We witnessed that reality last summer in Afghanistan, when the Biden administration made the correct strategic choice — cutting our losses instead of escalating to preserve a morally bankrupt status quo — but then staggered through a disastrous withdrawal that wounded his presidency and laid bare American incompetence to a watching world.

Now we face the same problem with Ukraine. The United States in its days as a hyperpower made a series of moves to extend our perimeter of influence deep into Russia’s near-abroad. Some of those moves appear to be sustainable: The expansion of Nato to include countries of the former Warsaw Pact was itself a risk, but at the moment those commitments seem secure. But the attempt to draw Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit, the partway-open door to Ukrainians who preferred westward-focused alliances, was a foolish overcommitment even when US power was at its height.

Note that this is not a question of what Ukrainians deserve. Russia is an aggressor in the current crisis; Ukraine is a flawed democracy but a more decent regime than Vladimir Putin’s oligarchy. When we gave Ukraine security assurances under Bill Clinton, opened the door to Nato membership under George W Bush and supported the Maidan protests under Barack Obama, we were in each case acting with better intentions than Moscow in its own machinations.

But in geopolitics good intentions are always downstream from the realities of power. Whatever its desires or ours, the government in Ukraine has simply never been in a position to fully join the West — it’s too economically weak, too internally divided and simply in the wrong place. And the actions of the Bush and Obama administrations — and for all of Donald Trump’s personal sympathies for Putin, some Trump administration acts as well — have left us overstretched, our soft-power embrace of Kyiv ill-equipped to handle hard-power countermoves from Moscow.

Given those realities, and the pressing need to concentrate US power in East Asia to counter China, it’s clear enough where an ideal retreat would end up: with Nato expansion permanently tabled, with Ukraine subject to inevitable Russian pressure but neither invaded nor annexed, and with our Nato allies shouldering more of the burden of maintaining a security perimeter in Eastern Europe.

But as with Afghanistan, the actual execution is harder than the theory. Coming to a stable understanding with Putin is challenging, because he’s clearly invested in being a permanent disrupter, taking any opportunity to humiliate the

West. Extricating ourselves from our Ukrainian entanglements will inevitably instil doubts about our more important commitments elsewhere, doubts that will be greater the more that Kyiv suffers from our retreat. And handing off more security responsibility to the Europeans has been an unmet goal of every recent US president, with the particular problem that a key European power, Germany, often acts like a de facto ally of the Russians.

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Given those difficulties, the Biden administration’s wavering course has been understandable, even if the president’s recent news conference was too honest by several orders of magnitude. The US cannot do nothing if Russia invades Ukraine; we also would be insane to join the war on Ukraine’s side. So the White House’s quest for the right in-between response, some balance of sanctions and arms shipments, looks groping and

uncertain for good reason: There’s simply no perfect answer here, only a least-bad balancing of options.

But my sense is that we are still placing too much weight on the idea that only Nato gets to say who is in Nato, that simply ruling out Ukrainian membership is somehow an impossible concession. This conceit is an anachronism, an artefact of the post-Cold War moment when it briefly seemed possible that, as historian Adam Tooze puts it, the world’s crucial boundaries “would be drawn by the Western powers, the United States and the EU, on their own terms and to suit their own strengths and preferences.”

That’s not how the world works now, and precisely because it’s not how the world works I would be somewhat relieved — as a US citizen, not just an observer of international politics — to see our leaders acknowledge as much, rather than holding out the idea that someday we might be obliged by treaty to risk a nuclear war over the Donbas.

And if we cannot give up the idea outright, the idea of giving it up for some extensive period — like the 25 years suggested by Thomas Graham and Rajan Menon in a recent Politico op-ed — seems like a very reasonable deal to make.

Something can be reasonable and still be painful — painful as an acknowledgment of Western weakness, painful to the hopes and ambitions of Ukrainians. But accepting some pain for the sake of a more sustainable position is simply what happens when you’ve made a generation’s worth of poor decisions, and you’re trying to find a decent and dignified way to a necessary retreat.

— The New York Times Service



A member of Ukraine’s military on the front line of Zolote.

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JAPAN DRUB MALAYSIA TO EMERGE GROUP TOPPERS

India outclass Singapore to enter semis

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Defending champions India outclassed Singapore 9-1 to book their spot in the semifinals of the Asia Cup women's hockey tournament, here on Monday. India qualified as the second placed team with six points from three matches, with their only loss coming against Japan.

INDIA ALL THE WAY
India were off to a rollicking start

as they scored three goals in about 11 minutes. Monika started off the goalfest as her reverse flick landed in the left bottom corner. Vandana Katariya doubled the lead in no time with a deflected goal and then Gurjit Kaur converted a penalty corner to fetch India's third goal. Mariana Kujur then slammed the fourth goal from a close-in range to give India a 4-0 lead at the end of the first quarter. India were dominating the

game through and through and were well set to add a lot more goals in the second quarter. And that's exactly what happened when Monika sounded the board after a penalty corner conversion to make it 5-0. India were right on top and Singapore were in tatters struggling to contain the marauding Indian forwards. Singapore averted further damage as India missed a couple of penalty corners ending the second quarter at 5-0.

After the commencement of the third quarter, Gurjit Kaur converted a penalty corner to take India's lead to 6-0. The Indians were toying with the Singapore defence and goals were always around the corner. Then much against the run of play, Singapore found a consolation goal through a penalty corner conversion by Sardonna. India immediately responded to that goal when Jyoti deflected a cross from the left flank to add the seventh goal in India's kitty.

Gurjit Kaur continued her scintillating form on the night as she converted her third successful penalty corner as India went up 8-1. Jyoti scored another one with three minutes to go as it was 9-1 India. JAPAN CRUSH MALAYSIA Earlier, Japan pummelled Malaysia 8-0 in their Pool A match to confirm their place in the semifinals as the group toppers. It was a thoroughly clinical

performance from the Japanese riding high on their hard-fought and much deserved win over defending champions India on Sunday. Goals from Yuri Nagai (4th), Shihori Oikawa (20th), Kaho Tanaka (16th, 28th, 39th), Mai Toriyama (30th), Kana Urata (48th), Sakurako Omoto (57th) propelled Japan to the huge victory. Malaysia were completely outplayed by the much superior Japanese outfit and struggled to score even a single goal.

S Korea overwhelm Thailand to seal last-four berth

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 24

South Korea topped the Pool B and secured spot in the FIH Hockey Women's World Cup 2022 in Spain and Netherlands as they moved to the semifinals of the Women's Asia Cup. The Korean women thrashed Thailand 6-0 in the concluding group match on Monday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. South Korean head coach Han Jin Soo expressed satisfaction with the players' performance during the match. "Thanks to the players for their top show in all the three matches. They performed very well and managed to earn full

points. They delivered a high quality game. We are very pleased to qualify to the FIH Women's World Cup 2022. The remaining matches in the Asian tourney will assist us in preparing and focusing for the global showpiece event. We will face second placed team in Pool A, which might be India. Then, it will be very tough match in the semifinal. Indian hockey team is very strong and includes experienced players", he said. "Our team featured many new faces and young girls. The Covid-19 impacted on the team a lot as we could not face strong teams during the last two years. However, we have prepared very hard for the Asian

assignment since four months. We are looking for a tough challenge in the semis and wish to move to the final match", he concluded. Against Thailand, Baek Eeseul opened the account as she netted the opening goal in the 14th minute through penalty corner. South Korea players consistently put pressure on Thailand goalkeeper Saetan Watsana and had many moves to score more goals. Five minutes later, Seo Jungeun added the second goal from penalty corner again. After a brilliant move, Cheon Eunbi scored the third goal in the 23rd minute. Kim Seona made it 4-0 with

another field goal. Thailand women tried to do some attacks in between but could not penetrate the tight defence and strong Korean goalkeeper Hwang Hyeona. From a penalty corner, Cho Hyejin scored the fifth goal in the 33rd minute to enhance Korean domination. Cheon Eunbi confirmed Korean triumph as she struck the sixth goal in the fourth quarter in the 48th minute. In another fixture, China drubbed Indonesia 7-0 in a one-sided fixture. With the top-margin triumph, China moved to the semifinals of the Asian event as the second-placed team of Pool B.





Tottenham Hotspur's Lucas Moura in action with Chelsea's Hakim Ziyech. – Reuters

CHELSEA BACK IN FORM AS SPURS LOSE

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 24

Chelsea inflicted a fourth defeat on their London rivals Tottenham Hotspur this season, with two of them in the last 18 days. Having won both legs of the Carabao Cup, Chelsea hit two second-half goals in a space of eight minutes to remain firmly in third position in the Premier League.

With their next match two weeks away, Chelsea manager, Thomas Tuchel, said: "It was important to go into this (winter) break with a performance we want. We needed this but needed also to do things better. The guys are very tired because it was a long run for us."

He commented on Chelsea's second goal, scored by Hakim Ziyech, former Ajax player, signed last year: "It was a brilliant goal, brilliant technique. I was right behind it. I had the feeling it was too high but it dropped at the right second."

A goalless first half had seen chances missed. Chelsea striker, Romelu Lukaku volleyed over

the bar, in the first minute a pass from Mason Mount and in the 32nd minute he couldn't make contact with another fine pass from the right by Mount. While for Spurs, Steven Bergwijn's left footed shot went past the far post in the 38th minute.

A minute later, Harry Kane found the net when Ryan Sessegnon squared the ball from the left. But Kane had fouled Thiago Silva, pushing him in the back, and the goal was disallowed despite the VAR check.

Chelsea took the lead two minutes into the second half. An excellent pass from Callum Hudson-Odoi, as he surged down the left, came to Ziyech and the Moroccan moved in to unleash a marvellous curling shot with his left foot which dipped inside the far top corner totally fooling Hugo Lloris in the goal.

In the 55th minute, Chelsea added the second goal. Eric Dyer gave away a free kick in fouling Hudson-Odoi and Mount swung the ball in from the left. Thiago Silva, in the midst of Spurs players, did well to head the ball

before Davison Sanchez, who was directly behind him, could make an attempt. Lloris had no chance as the ball flew in from his left.

Later, Lukaku had a shot pushed away after he had beaten Sanchez and in the 88th minute Kepa Arrizabalaga made a fine diving save from a header by Kane. There was some disorder when objects from Spurs supporters were thrown in the direction of Antonio Rudiger who complained to the referee.

Spurs manager, Antonio Conte, unhappy with Kane's disallowed goal, said: "It's best to tell the referee in a polite way. To see this type of goal disallowed in England was dreadful. In Italy it would be 50-50 but in England it's incredible."

With injury problems, he added: "It's difficult with injuries to make a starting 11. At the same time, I'm proud of my players. We made a big effort. The performance and the attitude as good. I have to be proud despite the defeat. The defeat hurts me a lot."

Badar al Aamri emerges champion of Assarain Golf Classic 2022

MUSCAT: Badar al Aamri of Oman overcame a stiff competition from a strong field to emerge champion at the Assarain Golf Classic. The 26th edition of the Assarain Golf Classic was held at the Ghala Golf Club on January 21 and 22 with the participation of over 136 golfers.

A delighted Badar said: "The Assarain Golf Classic is a fantastic tournament and it feels great to win a competition of this stature. I would like to thank my playing partners over the last few days. It was a pleasure to be in this event and again I would like to thank the sponsor Assarain Group of Companies."

Khalil al Wahaibi, General Manager of Ghala Golf Club, who managed the event, said: "The atmosphere was electric from the first day. I was truly amazed by the participation and overall feel of the 2022 Assarain Golf Classic. We were oversubscribed and had to have a cut off for players as we unfortunately could not fit all of them in, but overall, it was a tremendous occasion."

HH Sayyid Azzan bin Qais al Said was the guest of honour at the ceremony held on the final day that was graced by a host of



dignitaries.

The Assarain Classic ended with its tradition of raffling off a Hublot watch which was won by Ahmed Syaifudin.

Commenting upon the success of the event, Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director of Assarain Group of Companies, said: "I would like to congratulate all the winners in the respective categories and would like to thank all the participants. With the success of the 2022 event, we are committed to making the Assarain Golf Classic tournament bigger and better in the coming years while maintaining our strong professional standards of hosting one of the oldest golf

tournaments in the Sultanate of Oman."

RESULTS

MEN:

Gross champion: Badar al Amri 81 & 75 - 156
Runner-up: Fahad al Kitani 84 & 74 - 158
Nett first: Mohamad Nasaruddin 68 & 74 - 142
Nett second: Vishal Dhawan 73 & 71 - 144

LADIES:

Gross winner: Jameela Daud -93 & 95 -188
Nett winner: Maralyn Hayes - 73 & 75 - 148

JUNIORS:

Gross winner: Adam al Barwani 86 & 80 - 166
2. Faris al Busaidy - 92 & 97 - 189

Samiksh XI bag Ruwi Cup 2022



MUSCAT: Ruwi unit of Kairali Arts Club Oman, a premier organisation involved in socio-cultural activities for past several years, organised the first ever Ruwi Cup 2022 cricket tournament at Amerat Ground on January 14. The competition started at 10 am on Friday in full compliance with the Covid protocol.

Unit Secretary Riyaz welcomed the teams and its players and President Sugathan presided over the function. Indian Social Club Oman Kerala Wing Convener Santhosh Kumar inaugurated

the event. Kairali Oman General Secretary Balakrishnan greeted the gathering. Sixteen important teams from different parts of Oman competed in the tournament. The Samiksh XI defeated the Desert XI in the final.

Ashok of Samiksh XI was named Man of the Series, Man of the Match, Best Batsman and Desert XI's Rahul was adjudged the best bowler.

The event was sponsored by Purshottam Kanji Exchange, one of the first money exchanges in Oman. The organising committee

said the Ruwi Cup will be well organised in the years to come.

Balakrishnan, General Secretary, Kairali Arts Club, Oman and Supin James, General Manager, Purshottam Kanji Exchange, presented the trophies to the winners and runners-up. Abhilash Sivan thanked the players and sponsors on behalf of the organising committee.

Kairali Ruwi thanked the government authorities and former secretary Manoj Peringeth among others who helped to make the event a success.

Vanderlande, Design Group, Pitspot and Mazoon Dairy win

MUSCAT: Vanderlande's wonder boy Rahul Chadha helped his side to a 46-run victory against Khalsa United in a C Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Opening the innings, Rahul top-scored with a fluent 39 off 28 as Vanderlande posted 161 for 8 on the board. Muhammed Pervez picked up 3 for 32.

Khalsa folded up for a paltry 115 in 19.4 overs. Sajid Ali top-scored with a 29-ball 40 as Rahul Chadha, Vignesh Kumar, Haja Hussain and Aasim Mohammed all took two wickets each.

KARTHIK STARS IN DESIGN GROUP WIN

In another C Division game, Design Group rode on a superb 52 by Karthik Rajappa to beat Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting by 6 wickets at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Chasing Al Jadidi's 148 for 5, Design Group raced to the target in just 17.3 overs, scoring 149 for four wickets thanks to brilliant batting by Karthik and Chaitanya (43).

WAJID HELPS PITSPOT TO VICTORY

Wajid Ali struck a match-winning 67 off 53 to steer Pitspot to a 6-wicket victory against OCT Al Mabela in a D Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 3 on Friday.

OCT Al Mabela set a modest target, scoring 124 for 8 thanks to major contributions from Shareef Al Balushi (38) and Bashar al Balushi (25). Mohazin Moosa claimed 3 for 26.

Pitspot surpassed the total in only 16.5 overs, scoring 125 for 4 thanks to top knocks by Wajid and Fahad T (32). Shareef al Balushi bowled well, taking 3 for 21.

ALI TAKES MAZOOON DAIRY TO VICTORY

Ali Asger's magnificent 38-ball 55 powered Mazoon Dairy Company to a 4-wicket win over Landmark Group in an E Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Dayanandan Rau's 3 for 14 and Ameer Hussain's 2 for 10 were instrumental in Restricting Landmark Group to a lowly 120 for 9. Mohamed Farzan was the main scorer with 21-ball 28.

Ali led the chase with a fine fifty as Mazoon Dairy sealed the win in 15.1 overs, scoring 121 for

6. Krishna Kydesi bagged 2 for 23.

BRIEF SCORES

C Division

Vanderlande 161 for 8 in 20 overs (Rahul Chadha 39 - 7x4, Barathwaj Vinayagam 32 - 3x4, Muhammed Parvez 3-32, Harminder Singh 2-23) beat Khalsa United 115 all out in 19.4 overs (Sajid Ali 40 - 4x4, 1x6, Rahul Chadha 2-13, Vignesh Kumar 2-17, Haja Hussain 2-20, Aasim Mohammed 2-34,) by 46 runs.

D Division

Al Jadidi Engineering and Contracting 148 for 5 in 20 overs (Qamar Nazir 33 - 1x4, 3x6, Mohammed Haris 2-41) lost to Design Group Engineering Consultants 149 for 4 in 17.3 overs (Karthik Rajappa 52 - 6x4, 1x6,

Chaitanya 43 - 4x4, Gokul Gopinath 2-20) by 6 wickets.

D Division

OCT Al Mabela 124 for 8 in 20 overs (Shareef al Balushi 38 - 3x4, Bashar al Balushi 25 - 1x4, 1x6, Mohazin Moosa 3-26, Aneesh Chaziyottill 2-22, Valiyapeediyekkal Fasil 2-17) lost to Pitspot 125 for 4 in 16.5 overs (Wajid Ali 67 - 10x4, Fahad T 32 - 3x4, Shareef al Balushi 3-21) by 6 wickets.

E Division

Landmark Group 120 for 9 in 20 overs (Mohamed Farzan 28 - 4x4, Dayanandan Rau 3-14, Ameer Hussain 2-10, Yusuf Patanwala 2-18, Essam Othman 2-20) lost to Mazoon Dairy Company 121 for 6 in 15.1 overs (Ali Asger 55 - 8x4, Krishna Kydesi 2-23, Kugan Kuganeswaran 2-36) by 4 wickets.



Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi

Afridi wins cricketer of the year award

LONDON: Pakistan paceman Shaheen Afridi was named player of the year by the International Cricket Council on Monday, with England captain Joe Root selected as the outstanding Test cricketer in 2021.

Afridi's 78 wickets in 36 internationals across different formats secured him the Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy, with best bowling figures of 6-51 in a Test match against the West Indies.

He claimed 47 wickets in only nine Tests at an impressive average of 17.06 and took seven wickets in six matches during Pakistan's run to the semi-final of the Twenty20 World Cup.

"In 2021 our team performed really well and we won some very good matches," the 21-year-old said.

"I had many good performances including five-fors in Tests but the most memorable one for me would be the one we won against India (he took three wickets against them at the T20 World Cup)," he added.

"It was a historical match and matches with India draw a big audience."

ROOT BEST PLAYER

Root picked up the award for

men's Test player of the year after scoring 1,708 runs in 15 matches in 2021.

His tally is the third-highest total on record in a calendar year, with only former Pakistan player Mohammad Yousuf and West Indies great Viv Richards ahead of him.

Root registered two double centuries and a further four hundreds, including three in successive Tests against India during England's home series.

"I am incredibly proud to receive this award," said the 31-year-old, only the second Englishman to win the accolade after Alastair Cook in 2011.

"I am very humbled to be in the same breath as a number of wonderful players around the world and it means a huge amount."

Despite Root's personal achievements, England had a poor year in Test cricket, winning just four out of their 15 matches.

They lost the Ashes in Australia — where Root failed to score a century — and also lost series against India and New Zealand.

India's Smriti Mandhana won the Rachael Heyhoe Flint Trophy for ICC women's cricketer of the year. — AFP

Medvedev pushed to the limit

Tsitsipas battles to last 8, Kanepi upsets Sabalenka

MELBOURNE: Tetchy title favourite Daniil Medvedev was pushed to the limit before reaching the last eight of the Australian Open on Monday but women's world number two Aryna Sabalenka crashed out after an epic that finished on the stroke of midnight.

Men's fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas survived a late-night fright to reach his third Australian Open quarterfinal after a pulsating day of marathon matches, frayed tempers and searing heat at Melbourne Park.

Tsitsipas was staring at defeat, trailing two sets to one before clawing back to beat the 20th seed Taylor Fritz 4-6, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in 3hr 23min of classic punch and counter-punch tennis on Rod Laver Arena.

"It was an epic match. I gave everything out on the court today, I am very proud of myself with the way I fought," said the 23-year-old Tsitsipas who will now play Italian Jannik Sinner, who beat Australia's Alex de Minaur 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4.

Sabalenka lost a thriller that went to a final-set 10-point tie-break as veteran Kaia Kanepi ended the Belarusian's hopes of a maiden Grand Slam title.

Second seed Sabalenka saved four match points before losing 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (10/7), sending down 15 double faults as her serving yips that have plagued her throughout the Australian summer came back to haunt.

The unseeded Kanepi, 36, made it to the last eight in Melbourne for the first time, a stage she has reached at every other major over a Grand Slam career dating back to 2006.

"It was a really tough match," said Kanepi, who defeated three-time major champion Angelique Kerber in the opening round.

The Estonian's reward is a quarterfinal on Wednesday against seventh seed Iga Swiatek of Poland who battled from a set down to beat Sorana Cirstea of Romania 5-7, 6-3, 6-3.

IT'S BORING!

Earlier it took the petulant Russian men's world number two Medvedev 3hr 30min to subdue the unseeded American serve-volley specialist Maxime Cressy 6-2, 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (4/7), 7-5 to set up a quarterfinal against Canada's



Russia's Daniil Medvedev in action during his fourth round match against Maxime Cressy of the US. — Reuters

Felix Auger-Aliassime.

"It was long and it was not easy, the scoreline apart from the first set were all tough sets," said Medvedev, who clashed with the umpire, complained of bad luck and screamed "It's boring!" at Cressy's tactics.

In the end, The US Open champion was mightily relieved to come through the most severe examination of his title credentials so far.

"If I didn't win the fourth set I would have been in a tough mental shape," he admitted.

French veteran Alize Cornet made the quarterfinals of a Slam for the first time in her long career.

Cornet ended her last-16 hoodoo in her 63rd Slam and will now face Danielle Collins for a place in the women's singles semifinal after upsetting former world number one Simona Halep of Romania 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 in energy-

sapping daytime heat.

Collins had an even longer battle, the American outlasting Elise Mertens of Belgium 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 across 2hr 51min of bruising action.

Men's ninth seed Auger-Aliassime overcame the 2018 Australian Open finalist Marin Cilic 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) in 3hr 35min on John Cain Arena.

He joins Denis Shapovalov in the last eight. — AFP

Australian Open Results

MEN (4TH ROUND)

Jannik Sinner (ITA x11) bt Alex De Minaur (AUS x32) 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x4) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x20) 4-6, 6-4, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4; Felix Auger-Aliassime (CAN x9) bt Marin Cilic (CRO x27) 2-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-2, 7-6 (7/4); Daniil Medvedev (RUS x2) bt Maxime Cressy (USA) 6-2, 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (4/7), 7-5

WOMEN (4TH ROUND)

Danielle Collins (USA x27) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x19) 4-6, 6-4, 6-4; Alize Cornet (FRA) bt Simona Halep (ROM x14) 6-4, 3-6, 6-4; Iga Swiatek (POL x7) bt Sorana Cirstea (ROM) 5-7, 6-3, 6-3; Kaia Kanepi (EST) bt Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (10/7)

Shonal finishes runner-up at Dubai O'Plate race

MUSCAT: Shonal Kunimal's excellent run this season continues as the ten-year-old Muscat-based go-karting racer claimed a creditable runner-up finish in micro-max category of the highly-competitive 2022 Dubai O'Plate Championship that concluded at the Dubai Kartdrome on Sunday.

The championship features some of the best racers in the region and Shonal, who finished second in the recent fourth round of the UAE Rotax Max Championship Series, proved that he is one of the in-form racers.

A former champion (Bambino class) in the Dubai O'Plate race, Shonal had a consistent run in the three heats, pre-final and the final

race. The Indian School Ghubra fifth grade student was second in all but one race and finished behind Greek racer Leonidas Peruzzi.

Lebanon's Jayden Hidding came third to complete the podium.

It was a gritty comeback by Shonal, who was pushed to third place in the pre-finals but displaying good speed and track sense, he fought back to claim the second spot, the second podium finish in recent weeks.

Shonal has had good memories of the Dubai O'Plate, having won the Bambino class title in 2019, and was determined to do a repeat but according to him 'technical hiccups' stalled his progress for the win.



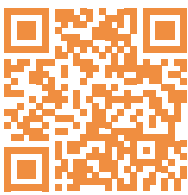
"I would have wished to win the race as I did in 2019 but I experienced problems with my kart and that proved to be a stumbling block in my bid to repeat the win. It was a tough grid with some of the best racers in the region lined up. I am glad that I could get my second straight podium finish in the past two races," said Shonal.

Mentored by former Oman international Sanad al Rawahi, Shonal expressed thanks to his coach Sanad and his dad, Shojai Kunimal, for their strong support.

"I owe a lot to my father and my mentor along with my technical team of Carlo John Bariquit and Mark Rose," he added.

Shonal believes that he has in him to 'win races regularly' but need a bit of luck and strong corporate support to back his ambition to become a top-class go-karting champion.

The senior Kunimal was all praise for the support of Oman Automobile Association (OAA) managing director Suleiman al Rawahi.



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LARGEST RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN INAUGURATED

LANDMARK PROJECT: 500MW Ibri 2 Solar Power plant, set up with an investment of RO 155m, is the first mega renewable energy scheme to be connected to the main electricity grid

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The inauguration of the Ibri 2 solar power plant, the largest renewable energy project in the Sultanate of Oman, was celebrated in the Wilayat of Ibri under the auspices of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The project represents a robust partnership between the public and private sectors and embodies another example of the Sultanate of Oman's ability to attract foreign direct investment, as the Omani Power and Water Procurement Company (a Nama Group company) contracted with a Gulf consortium led by ACWA Power along with the participation of the Gulf Investment Corporation and the Alternative Energy Projects company to establish, own and operate the plant, with an investment of nearly RO 155 million.

Mohammad Abunayyan, Chairman of ACWA Power, said: "As a company that is driving the transition globally, we are extremely proud to play a key role in supporting the Sultanate of Oman's ambitious Vision 2040 energy transition goals.

Since our market entry into



Oman in 2011, we have brought in significant foreign direct investment, because we believe strongly in its vision and future. Together with our partners Gulf Investment Corporation and Alternative Energy Projects Co, we have leveraged our combined

strengths in investments, industry expertise and technological know-how to achieve the rapid and successful completion of the milestone Ibri 2 project, despite challenging conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"As we look ahead, partnerships,

and solutions like we have introduced at Ibri 2, will be crucial in solving the real-world problems associated with climate change, and ensure that together we realise a greener future," Abunayyan added.

At its peak production capacity, the project will be able to supply nearly 50,000 homes with electricity and contribute to reducing 340,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually.

In addition to providing clean energy efficiently to the main electricity grid, the new project will contribute to providing tangible social and economic value, as well as taking into account local content and will involve local start-up

companies in the framework of the supply chain necessary for the project.

Engineer Yaqoub bin Saif al Kiyumi, CEO of the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company, indicated that this project is in the interest of the national priorities set by Oman Vision 2040, which are environmental conservation, utilisation of natural resources, governorate development and the involvement of the private sector.

AlKiyumi added that the success of this project will be a turning

point for launching other similar projects in the field of renewable energy, as the company is currently developing two plants to produce electricity using solar energy in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with a total capacity of 1,000 megawatts, in addition to wind energy projects in the governorates of South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta.

For his part, Engineer Yahya bin Mohammed al Rawahi, CEO of Shams Al Dhahirah Electricity Generating Company, said: "I am truly proud to be a part of an exceptional Omani and international team that has successfully achieved this milestone in an incredible short span of 13 months during peak Covid-19 pandemic times, and amid global supply chain disruptions.

With Ibri 2, we have demonstrated immensely strong project development capabilities, as this is the largest solar PV power plant in my country, that also incorporates the most advanced technological solutions in the world. I am confident that it will lead the way in contributing significantly towards Oman's clean energy ambitions for the future."

The project was built on an area of 13 million square metres, and it uses about 1.5 million double-sided solar panels and more than seven thousand kilometres of cables.

300 MW capacity wind energy projects on anvil

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Wind energy projects of capacity not less than 300 MW are envisioned for development in the wind resources rich Wilayats of Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and Duqm in the Sultanate of Oman.

State-owned Oman Power and Water Company (OPWP), the sole procurer of new electricity generation capacity, is currently analysing meteorological data to pinpoint exact locations and assess generation capacities, said OPWP CEO Eng Yaqoub al Kiyumi.

"Hopefully, we will start the qualification process of interested developers by next year, and probably get into the



(projects soon thereafter)," he stated.

Speaking at the launch of the Ibri 2 Solar Power Project in Al Dhahirah Governorate on Monday, he said the proposed wind farms will complement Investments in Solar PV capacity currently gaining pace in the Sultanate of Oman.

The goal, he said, is to secure at least 20 per cent of



national power demand from renewable energy sources by 2030.

In line with this objective, OPWP — part of Nama Group — plans to move ahead with the implementation of the country's largest solar PV project — a giant 1,000 MW

scheme — planned at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The venture consists of two solar projects each of 500 MW capacity to be developed side by side in the Wilayat of Manah. An award is anticipated before the end of this year, CEO added.

SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers to the following tenders:

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee (OMR)
1	SIDC 2021/011	Pre-Qualification Consultancy Services for SOHAR Port Master Plan	262.500

- The above-mentioned tender fees including the VAT 5%.
- Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00am on Tuesday, 25/01/2022 until 4:00 pm on Tuesday 08/02/2022.
- Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:

- A request for the electronic tender documents
- Scanned bank transfer
- The firm's commercial registration documents
- All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address: sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic Pre-Qualification Document by e-mail.

Step 4: Tenderers should raise any clarifications regarding this tender no later than 4:00 pm on Thursday 17 February 2022.

Step 5: Tenderers should submit the Pre-Qualification Proposal no later than 4:00 pm on Thursday 24 February 2022.

For any clarification regarding the tenders, kindly send an e-mail to: sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

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Malabar Gold & Diamonds opens 6 new showrooms

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one of the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 280 outlets spread across 10 countries, opened 6 new showrooms across Qatar, the Sultanate of Oman, Malaysia and India. Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom in Al Khoudh Street, Muscat was inaugurated by Khamis bin Thani bin Thunai al Mandhari, Director, Malabar Gold & Diamonds in the presence of Najeeb K, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Muhsin P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other dignitaries and management team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom in Mall of Oman was inaugurated by Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Investment promotion (MoCIIP) in the presence of Khamis bin Thani bin Thunai al Mandhari, Director, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Najeeb K, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Muhsin P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, SM Basheer, Managing Director, Babil Group, other dignitaries and management team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds.



MGD — Lifestyle Jewellery showroom in Al-Meera Jeryan Jenaihat, Qatar was inaugurated by Shaikh Hamad Nazar bin Abdulla al Thani, Shaikh Salah al Marri in the presence of Santhosh TV, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Naufal Thadathil, Zonal Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other dignitaries and management team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. MGD — Lifestyle Jewellery outlet at Landmark Shopping mall,

Gharafa, Qatar was inaugurated by Shaikh Abdulla Nazar bin Abdulla al Thani, Shaikh Hamed Nazar bin Abdulla al Thani in the presence of Santhosh TV, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; Naufal Thadathil, Zonal Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, other dignitaries and team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom in Penang, Malaysia was inaugurated by Yb Prof Dr P Ramasamy A/L Palanisamy,

Deputy Chief Minister II of Penang in the presence of Nijeesh P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Aljas CV, Assistant Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds; other dignitaries and team members of Malabar Gold & Diamonds. Malabar Gold & Diamonds showroom in Varanasi, UP, India was virtually inaugurated by M P Ahamed, Chairman, Malabar Group after which Varanasi Cantonment MLA Saurabh Srivastava opened the

OUT OF THE 6 NEW SHOWROOMS, 2 EACH ARE IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN AND QATAR, 1 IN MALAYSIA AND 1 IN INDIA

THE INAUGURATIONS ARE PART OF THE 22 NEW STORES OPENING GLOBALLY, IN JANUARY 2022, ANNOUNCED BY THE GROUP

showroom for customers in the presence of senior management officials of Malabar Gold & Diamonds and other dignitaries. The showroom in Malaysia was inaugurated on January 20 while the showrooms in the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar and India were inaugurated on January 22, 2022. The newly opened showrooms in Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman cater to the design preferences of Arab customers, specifically Qatari and Omani nationals and showcase exquisite jewellery in 18K and 21K alongside diamonds, platinum and pearl jewellery, specially handpicked for jewellery lovers. Additionally, these stores have an impressive array of kids jewellery, with specific

designs that appeal to children. “In addition to making ourselves more accessible, I am sure that all our new stores will impress jewellery buyers with strong customer service and product variety. We constantly make efforts to evolve in line with the jewellery preferences of our multicultural and multinational customers, as part of which we have launched stand-alone stores exclusively for local customers of the respective regions, with more openings in the pipeline”, said Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director – International Operations. The newly opened showroom in Penang is the 6th outlet of the brand in Malaysia and 9th in Far East region, showcasing an extensive range of designs to suit traditional and contemporary tastes. With the latest collection crafted in gold, silver, platinum and diamonds, and trained jewellery experts, the showroom in Varanasi, UP, India will provide a world-class shopping experience to all its customers. Malabar Group commits 5 per cent of its profit to support socially responsible purposes both in India and abroad, since its inception in 1993. Education, health, women empowerment, affordable housing and environmental protection are the focus areas for the Group.

ahlibank achieves positive growth in profits and assets in 2021

MUSCAT: Continuing to establish its position as a preferred bank not just for customers, but also as an employer, ahlibank has been conducting a series of recognition meetings to felicitate its employees and keep them motivated. At the back of exceptional business performance, ahlibank held a ceremonial event to honour the most outstanding achievements of its Retail Banking team, post a review of the bank's 2021 fourth quarter, based on a series of indicators reflecting the bank's overall performance and the way forward approach for 2022. ahlibank has been able to achieve positive growth in its profits and assets over the past year, due to its keenness to strengthen its traditional and digital products and services to serve its customers, with a key focus on retail banking. This highly competent division of the bank has been instrumental in expanding ahlibank's portfolio



of retail products and services in 2021, even during the challenging business environment. The team strengthened ahlibank's retail product portfolio with new launches for diverse customer categories, including, 'MyChoice' and 'Al-Nukhba'. Designed to meet the clients' future requirements, ahlibank's strengthened retail portfolio supports its sustainable growth and expansion in the Sultanate. Commenting on the success and excellence achieved by the team, which reflected positively

on the bank's performance, Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, “ahlibank's Retail Banking team has extensive experience in the sector. The dedicated work along with the new banking solutions, with the aim of achieving effective results that improve customer satisfaction, have enhanced the bank's overall performance. This has also helped in supporting our ability to overcome challenges, and take advantage of market opportunities optimally.”

OTE to hold mega warehouse sale

MUSCAT: Yet another edition of OTE's hugely anticipated warehouse sale – the biggest in the home appliances and electronics space – will take place at the end of this month. Spanning a total of five days from January 26 to 30, 2022, this blockbuster retail event features a staggering array of merchandise from three world-leading brands: LG, Bosch and Hisense. The venue is the LG Warehouse at Ghala (next to the OTE Service Centre Complex), where a multitude of items is up for grabs at attractive discounts ranging from 20 – 70 per cent. As with previous editions of this popular annual bumper sale, customers can expect great deals on everything from television sets, washing machines, refrigerators, dish washers, cookers, air-conditioners, IT products, audio-visual devices, and other home appliances. LG, Bosch and Hisense are world-class brands distributed in the Sultanate of Oman by OTE Group. The biggest of these brands is LG, a prominent player in the global consumer electronics industry, well-known for its innovations in the TV, home appliance and air conditioner product segments. Positioned in the high-end, yet affordable



luxury brand segment is German brand Bosch, which is synonymous with the manufacture of energy-efficient household appliances ranging from washing machines and dryers to refrigerators, freezers, stoves and ovens and dishwashers, to small appliances such as coffee makers and food processors. Hisense has made a mark in the Sultanate of Oman with its TVs and ACs. Bargain prices await customers on a wide collection of new stock items, showroom display units and repaired sets across all three leading brands during the mega showroom sale. Visiting hours are from 9 am – 1 pm and 4 – 8pm on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. (4 – 8 pm on Friday). For directions or other details, please contact Rafi (95372731) or Alawi (95870063) or send or query via Whatsapp at 79336776. Established in 1991, OTE Group is one of the Sultanate of Oman's largest business houses representing renowned international brands distributed across the automotive, auto ancillary, electronics, home appliances, and leasing and finance segments of the consumer business.

Bahwan International Group signs 55 training contracts

MUSCAT: Bahwan International Group (Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, International Integrated Equipment, Gulf Great Sands, Arabian Gulf Automobiles), in cooperation with the National Automobile College and the Ministry of Labour represented by the National Training Fund at the beginning of 2022 has signed 55 training contracts associated with employment within the framework of the enforcement of government orientation to increase the Omanisation rate in the sector.

The contracts are product of the Employment Training Programme — considered to be one of the most successful programmes for employing the national workforce. Bahwan International Group, represented by Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, started this programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour 12 years ago. The Employment Training Programme is a comprehensive training programme that qualifies the trainee for a specific technical specialisation and then is assigned to one of the establishments.



After the trainee completes a training period, he is directly employed in the private sector that was previously contracted directly. The objectives of the programme are to meet the company's requirements for a professionally qualified national workforce in various specialisations needed by the private sector, as training programmes continue to be developed based on professional standards that have been identified in coordination with the private sector.



Oil prices rise on supply fears amid tensions

TOKYO: Oil prices rose on Monday on worries about supply disruption amid rising tensions in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, which could make an already tight market even tighter, while Opec and its allies continued to struggle to raise output.

Brent crude futures rose 58 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$88.47 a barrel by 0742 GMT, reversing a 0.6 per cent loss on Friday. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures gained 57 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$85.71 a barrel, having fallen 0.5 per cent on Friday.

Both benchmarks rose for a fifth week in a row last week, gaining around 2 per cent to hit their highest since October 2014. Prices are already up more than 10 per cent this year on the concerns over tightening supplies.

“Investors remained bullish due to geopolitical risk between Russia and Ukraine as well as in the Middle East, while Opec+ continued to fail to reach its output target”, said Kazuhiko Saito, chief analyst at Fujitomi Securities Co Ltd.

“An expectation for higher heating oil demand in the United



Engineers work at a Saudi Aramco facility in Saudi Arabia, in this file photo. — AFP

States amid cold weather also added to pressure”, he said.

Fuelling fears of supply disruption in Eastern Europe, the *New York Times* reported late on Sunday that US President Joe Biden was considering deploying

thousands of US troops to Nato allies in Europe and the Baltics.

Russia will face severe economic sanctions if it installs a puppet regime in Ukraine, a senior British government minister said on Sunday, after Britain accused

the Kremlin of seeking to place a pro-Russian leader in power there.

The US State Department also announced it was ordering diplomats’ family members to leave Ukraine, as President Biden weighed options for boosting

America’s military assets in Eastern Europe to counter a buildup of Russian troops.

In the Middle East, the United Arab Emirates intercepted and destroyed two Houthi ballistic missiles targeting the Gulf country on Monday with no casualties, its defence ministry said, following a deadly attack a week earlier.

Opec+, which groups the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) with Russia and other producers, is struggling to hit its monthly output increase target of 400,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Opec+ compliance with long-installed oil production cuts rose to about 122 per cent in December, two sources from the producer group said, indicating that some members continue to struggle to raise their output.

“Expectations that Opec+ members such as Saudi Arabia and Russia are likely to keep the current policy of gradual increase of output to maintain Brent oil prices between \$85 and \$90 a barrel are providing support to an overall sentiment”, said Tetsu Emori, CEO of Emori Fund Management Inc. — Reuters



A woman pushes a shopping cart at a supermarket in Singapore. — Reuters

Singapore reviews inflation forecasts

SINGAPORE: Singapore is reviewing its official inflation forecasts, authorities said on Monday, after data showed its key price gauge climbed in December by the fastest pace in nearly eight years, driven by a steep increase in air fares.

The core inflation rate — the central bank’s favoured price measure — rose to 2.1 per cent in December on a year-on-year basis, the highest since July 2014 and topping economist forecasts. A poll of economists had forecast a 1.7 per cent increase.

Singapore’s central bank tightened its monetary policy in October, delivering its first such move in three years, amid mounting cost pressures. Its next policy review is scheduled for April when it is widely expected by economists to tighten further.

Monday’s data showed headline inflation rose by 4 per cent, a near nine-year high, beating economists’ forecast of 3.75 per cent.

Steep increases in air fares and Covid-19 testing costs under Singapore’s quarantine-free travel schemes were a major factor in December’s price jump.

There remains significant uncertainty surrounding the outlook for inflation in the near term, including from the costs of air travel and commodity prices such as food and oil, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in a statement. — Reuters



Employees assemble a car at Porsche AG plant in Stuttgart, Germany. — AFP

Euro zone growth slows

BRUSSELS: Economic growth in the euro zone slowed sharply in January, a key survey showed on Monday, as new coronavirus restrictions hit consumer spending, raising a new obstacle for the region’s recovery.

In its closely watched monthly survey, IHS Markit said the deceleration, which brought growth to an 11-month low, was completely attributable to the services sector, with manufacturers enjoying a reprieve from supply challenges and seeing a boost in activity.

IHS Markit said that the sky-high caseloads for the highly contagious Omicron variant had disrupted consumer-facing

services through staff absences and continued social distancing.

The purchasing managers’ index (PMI) from IHS Markit dropped to 52.4 in January, after posting 53.3 points in December and hitting a high 59 points in August.

A figure above 50 indicates growth. Tourism, travel and recreation were “especially hard hit”, said Chris Williamson, Chief Business Economist at IHS Markit.

However, he added that the impact on other parts of the economy was “relatively muted” and that the overall fallout from Omicron “so far looks less severe than prior waves”. — AFP

Japan factory growth hits 4-year high

TOKYO: Japan’s factory activity grew at the fastest pace in four years in January as output growth picked up, though pressure from a persistent chip shortage, rising input prices and the coronavirus pandemic clouded the outlook.

However, activity in the private sector as a whole slipped into contraction for the first time in four months as a surge in Omicron variant coronavirus cases hurt customer-facing businesses in the services industry.

The au Jibun Bank Flash Japan Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) rose to a seasonally adjusted 54.6 from the prior month’s final of 54.3 to mark the fastest pace of expansion since January 2018.

Manufacturers reported the fastest increase in output prices since July 2008, suggesting firms were increasingly passing on higher input costs, which continued to rapidly rise.

Output and new order growth quickened after momentum fade somewhat in the previous month. But worries about the Omicron variant amid a record surge in new coronavirus infections and a reintroduction of Covid-19 curbs in parts of the country greatly hurt activity in the services sector.



Employees work on the automobile assembly line at Kawasaki factory in Kawasaki, south of Tokyo. — Reuters

The au Jibun Bank Flash Services Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index slumped to a seasonally adjusted 46.6 from December’s final 52.1 to contract at the fastest pace in five months.

The rate of job shedding in the sector quickened for the second consecutive month to reach its fastest since May 2020, the survey showed.

“Private sector firms reported that the surge in Covid-19 cases from the more transmissible

Omicron variant had hindered client confidence”, said Usamah Bhatti, economist at IHS Markit, which compiles the survey.

“Disruption was also reported in the labour market, where employment levels fell for the first time in a year.”

The au Jibun Bank Flash Japan Composite PMI, which is calculated by using both manufacturing and services, dropped to 48.8 from last month’s final of 52.5. — Reuters

HK airline Cathay Pacific to record narrower loss in 2021

BRUSSELS: Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong’s flagship airline, said passenger travel remained extremely subdued throughout 2021, as a result of ongoing travel restrictions and strict quarantine requirements.

The group is expected to record a consolidated loss attributable to shareholders of approximately HK\$5.6-6.1 billion (around \$719-784 million). This is compared to the attributable loss to shareholders of HK\$21.6 billion in the prior year. The company said the improvement was primarily

driven by strong cargo demand, high cargo yield and load factors, together with continued focus on effective cash and cost management.

For the full year of 2021, the number of passengers carried dropped by 84.5 per cent against a 61.8 per cent decrease in capacity and a 79.5 per cent decrease in revenue passenger kilometres, or RPKs, as compared to 2020, the company reported.

For December 2021, Cathay Pacific carried a total of 92,219 passengers, an increase of 130.6 per cent compared to December



An employee checks her phone at the Cathay Pacific check-in counter in Hong Kong International Airport. — AFP

2020, but a 96.9 per cent decrease compared to the pre-pandemic level in December 2019.

For December 2021, RPKs rose 156.5 per cent year-on-year. Passenger load factor increased by 18.2 percentage points to 36.6 per cent. Capacity, measured in available seat kilometres, increased by 28.6 per cent.

Cathay Pacific noted that the tightened aircrew quarantine requirements and travel restrictions will have a significant impact on its passenger and cargo flight capacity.

For the month of January 2022,

cargo has reduced to 20 per cent of its pre-pandemic capacity and passenger flights have reduced to around 2 per cent of their pre-pandemic capacity.

“Regrettably, the capacity reduction will have an impact on Cathay Pacific’s business and we have been evaluating the potential impact of these measures on our operations and cost base. According to our preliminary assessment, we expect these capacity levels to result in an operating cash burn of HK\$1.0-1.5 billion per month from February,” CEO Augustus Tang said. — dpa

Rapid inflation fuels debate over what's to blame: Pandemic or policy

The price increases bedeviling consumers, businesses and policymakers worldwide have prompted a heated debate in Washington DC, about how much of today's rapid inflation is a result of policy choices in the United States and how much stems from global factors tied to the pandemic, such as snarled supply chains.

At a moment when stubbornly rapid price gains are weighing on consumer confidence and creating a political liability for President Joe Biden, White House officials have repeatedly blamed international forces for high inflation, including factory shutdowns in Asia and overtaxed shipping routes that are causing shortages and pushing up prices everywhere.

The officials increasingly cite high inflation in places including the euro area, where prices are climbing at the fastest pace on record, as a sign that the world is experiencing a shared moment of price pain, deflecting the blame away from US policy.

But a chorus of economists point to government policies as a big part of the reason US inflation is at a 40-year high.

Although they agree that prices are rising as a result of shutdowns and supply chain woes, they say that America's decision to flood the economy with stimulus money helped to send consumer spending into overdrive, exacerbating those global trends.

The world's trade machine is producing, shipping and delivering more goods to American consumers than it ever has as people flush with cash buy couches, cars and home office equipment, but supply chains just have not been able to keep up with that supercharged demand.

Kristin Forbes, an economist at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology, said, "More than half of the increase, at least, is due to global factors." But "there is also a domestic demand component that is important," she added.

The White House has tried to address inflation by boosting supply — announcing measures to unclog ports and trying to ramp up domestic manufacturing, all of which take time. But rising inflation has already imperiled Biden's ability to pass a sprawling social policy and climate bill over fears that more spending could add to inflation.

Sen Joe Manchin, D-W Va, whose vote is critical to getting the legislation passed, has cited rising prices as one reason he will not support the bill.



President Joe Biden holds a news conference at the White House in Washington.

The demand side of today's price increases may prove easier for policymakers to address. The Federal Reserve is preparing to raise interest rates to make borrowing more expensive, slowing spending down, in a recipe that could help to tame inflation. Fading government help for households may also naturally bring down demand and soften price pressures.

Inflation has accelerated sharply in the United States, with the Consumer Price Index climbing by 7 per cent in the year through December, its fastest pace since 1982. But in recent months, it has also moved up sharply across many countries, a fact administration officials have emphasised.

"The inflation has everything to do with the supply chain," Biden said during a news conference. "While there are differences country by country, this is a global phenomenon and driven by these global issues," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said after the latest inflation data was released.

It is the case that supply disruptions are leading to higher inflation in many places, including in large developing economies

such as India and Brazil and in developed ones such as the euro area.

Data released in the United Kingdom and in Canada on Wednesday showed prices accelerating at their fastest rate in 30 years in both countries. Inflation in the eurozone, which is measured differently from how the US calculates it, climbed to an annual rate of 5 per cent in December, according to an initial estimate by the European Union statistics office.

"The US is hardly an island amidst this storm of supply disruptions and rising demand, especially for goods and commodities," said Eswar Prasad, a professor of trade policy at Cornell University and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

But some economists point out that even as inflation proves pervasive around the globe, it has been more pronounced in America than elsewhere.

"The United States has had much more inflation than almost any other advanced economy in the world," said Jason Furman, an economist at Harvard University and former Obama administration economic adviser, who used comparable

methodologies to look across areas and concluded that US price increases have been consistently faster.

The difference, he said, comes because "the United States' stimulus is in a category of its own."

Although many nations spent heavily to protect their economies from coronavirus fallout — in some places enough to push up demand and potentially inflation — the United States approved about \$5 trillion in spending in 2020 and 2021.

That outstripped the response in other major economies as a share of the nation's output, according to data compiled by the International Monetary Fund.

Many economists supported protecting workers and businesses early in the pandemic, but some took issue with the size of the \$1.9 trillion package in March under the Biden administration.

They argued that sending households another round of stimulus, including \$1,400 checks, further fuelled demand when the economy was already healing. Consumer spending seemed to react: Retail sales, for instance, jumped after the checks went out.

The world's trade machine is producing, shipping and delivering more goods to American consumers than it ever has as people flush with cash buy couches, cars and home office equipment, but supply chains just have not been able to keep up with that supercharged demand

Facebook's unglamorous mistakes

BY SHIRA OVIDE

In a Facebook group for gardeners, the social network's automated systems sometimes flagged discussions about a common backyard tool as inappropriate sexual talk.

Facebook froze the accounts of some Native Americans years ago because its computers mistakenly believed that names like Lance Browneyes were fake.

The company repeatedly rejected ads from businesses that sell clothing for people with disabilities, mostly in a mix-up that confused the products for medical promotions, which are against its rules.

Facebook, which has renamed itself Meta, and other social networks must make tricky judgment calls to balance supporting free expression while keeping out unwanted material like imagery of child sexual abuse, violent incitements and financial scams. But that's not what happened in the examples above. Those were mistakes made by a computer that couldn't handle nuance.

Social networks are essential public spaces that are too big and fast-moving for anyone to effectively manage. Wrong calls happen.

These unglamorous mistakes aren't as momentous as deciding whether Facebook should kick the former US president off its website. But ordinary people, businesses and groups serving the public interest like news

These are legitimately hard problems, and I wouldn't want to make these trade-offs and decisions. But I don't think they've tried everything yet or invested enough resources to say that we have the optimal number of errors

EVELYN DOUEK
SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW,
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

organisations suffer when social networks cut off their accounts and they can't find help or figure out what they did wrong.

This doesn't happen often, but a small percentage of mistakes at Facebook's size add up. *The Wall Street Journal* calculated that Facebook might make roughly 200,000 wrong calls a day.

People who research social networks told me that Facebook — and its peers, although I'll focus on Facebook here — could do far more to make fewer mistakes and mitigate the harm when it does mess up.

The errors also raise a bigger question: Are we OK with companies being so essential that when they don't fix mistakes, there's not much we can do?

The company's critics and the semi-independent Facebook Oversight Board have repeatedly said that Facebook needs to make it easier for users whose posts were deleted or accounts were disabled to understand what rules they broke and appeal judgment calls. Facebook has done some of this, but not enough.

Researchers also want to dig into Facebook's data to analyse its decision making and how often it messes up. The company tends to oppose that idea as an intrusion on its users' privacy.

Facebook has said that it's working to be more transparent, and that it spends billions of dollars on computer systems and people to oversee communications

in its apps. People will disagree with its decisions on posts no matter what.

But its critics again say it hasn't done enough. "These are legitimately hard problems, and I wouldn't want to make these trade-offs and decisions," said Evelyn Douek, a senior research fellow at the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.

"But I don't think they've tried everything yet or invested enough resources to say that we have the optimal number of errors."

Most companies that make mistakes face serious consequences. Facebook rarely does. Ryan Calo, a professor at the University of Washington law school, made the comparison between Facebook and building demolition.

When companies tear down buildings, debris or vibrations might damage property or even injure people. Calo told me that because of the inherent risks, US laws hold demolition companies to a high standard of accountability. The firms must take safety precautions and possibly cover any damages. Those potential consequences ideally make them more careful.

But Calo said that laws that govern responsibility on the Internet didn't do enough to likewise hold companies accountable for the harm that information, or restricting it, can cause. "It's time to stop pretending like this is so different from other types of societal harms," Calo said.

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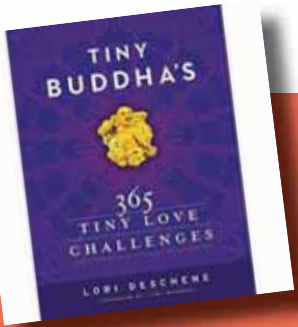


Omani olive oil mill eyes sustainable production for local needs

Omani entrepreneur Deyaa al Harrawy has a big dream to own an oil mill factory that can produce high-quality olive oil that can cover the need of the Sultanate of Oman. He shared some of the reasons for this initiative as well as where he hopes to see it in terms of growth...**P20**

COMMUNITY

READ



TINY BUDDHA'S 365 TINY LOVE CHALLENGES
BY LORI DESCHENE

A simple guide to help readers pursue happy, connected lives and bring greater love into the world. Keep an eye out for someone who looks sad — a friend, coworker, or even stranger — and say something that might make them laugh or smile.

16th Annual Children's Writing Competition kicks off

THE LET'S READ COMMITTEE, together with The London Speaker Bureau and Oman Perfumes, is delighted to announce the launch of its 16th Annual Children's Writing Competition. Jane Jaffer, spokesperson for Let's Read, told the *Observer* that students from the ages of 8 to 18 years are invited to enter the competition by submitting an essay about friendship.

Elaborating on the theme, Jane said, 'Friendship is a devoted relationship between two individuals. Real friends are loyal and stay by our side through thick or thin. In a true friendship we can be ourselves without being judged. A true friend will always motivate us and cheer us up. Friends help us grow stronger and become more confident. They help us through difficult times and make life more fun'.

Giving more details about how to enter the competition, Jane said, 'We hope schoolchildren in Oman will take up the challenge to write an essay about their best friend. Entrants will need to

describe their friend's physical attributes and personality and give details of a particular incident where a friend has helped them. For example, a good friend may have defended them against a bully or saved them from a dangerous situation. Perhaps a



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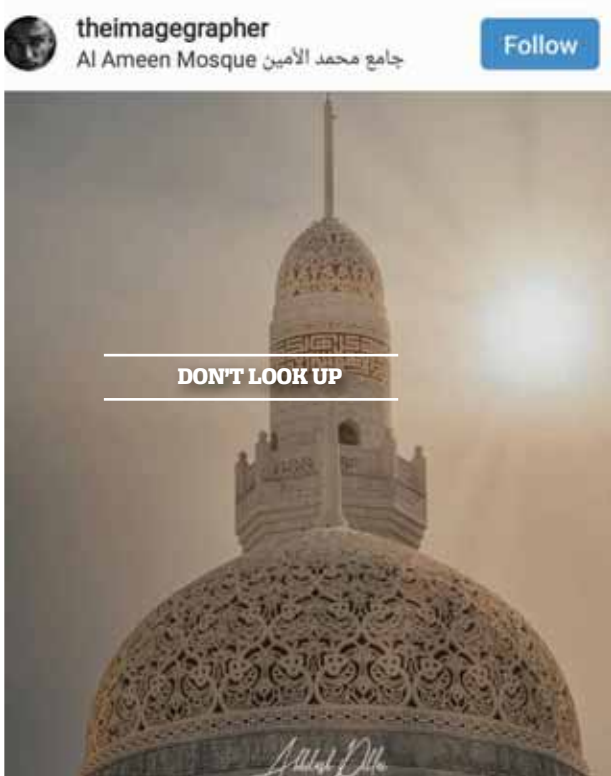
friend encouraged them to develop hidden talents or helped them with their studies? Maybe a good friend supported them when they were sick or gave them the courage to do something they thought they could never do'. Entries can be written in either English or Arabic. Word count must not exceed 500 words. For additional points, entrants can submit a photo or illustration of themselves with their friend.

Entries must include: name, age, phone number, email address of entrant and school email address and phone number. Winners will be presented with great prizes and may see their work in print. All entries should be submitted to: The Let's Read Charity Book Shop on 3rd floor of the Oman Avenues Mall. Or sent by email to: letsread-oman@gmail.com. Deadline for submissions is April 2, 2022.



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AROUND THE WORLD

RESTORATION

Restoration of Michelangelo's Pieta statue in Florence reveals flaws in marble



THE RESTORATION of Michelangelo's famous Pita del Opera del Duomo in Florence has revealed that the single block of marble from which the masterpiece was carved was defective, providing a possible reason why it was abandoned earlier completed now.

The statue, known as Bandini Pieta, represents the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene holding the body of Christ as lowered from the cross by a man, Nicodemus, whose face is a self-portrait of the Italian Renaissance artist.

"It's a home that has suffered and it's very intimate", Beatrice Agostini, Director of the Restoration Project, told Reuters. "It's a really personal statue."

The restoration work confirmed that the 2,700 kilogramme marble had veins and many micro-cracks, especially at the base, which may be the reason behind Michelangelo's decision to stop work on the sculpture before it was completed, according to a statement.

The artist had initially planned to place the statue next to his grave but only years after beginning to sculpt it, in the mid-1500s, the 75-year-old Michelangelo decided to give up the masterpiece, presenting it as a gift to a servant, then selling it to a banker, Francesco Bandini.

The statement added that restorers had not found any sign of hammer blows, making it unlikely the prevailing hypothesis that an unhappy Michelangelo tried to destroy the statue in a moment of frustration.

The non-invasive restoration process started in 2019 but has been interrupted several times due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Sediment was removed from the surface of the statue, which was then cleaned, to return it to its original colour.

The project was commissioned and managed by the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore and funded by the American non-profit organisation Friends of Florence.

"The operation restored to the world the beauty of one of Michelangelo's most intense and disturbing masterpieces", a joint statement read.

Visitors were able to witness all stages of the process as the statue was always on display, in an open laboratory, on a podium, behind a glass screen. — **Reuters**

GASTRONOMY

Meet the Man Championing Lebanon's Culinary Traditions



EVER SINCE Lebanese social entrepreneur Kamal Mouzawak began championing his country's culinary heritage and empowering the people who keep it alive, he dreamed of extending his reach abroad. But he never expected it to happen under such trying circumstances.

Souk El Tayeb, the first farmers' market in Lebanon that he opened in Beirut in 2004, put the 52-year-old humanitarian on the global food map. That inspired other projects across the country, from community outreach and guesthouses to a series of restaurants called Tawlet, where women from different regions of Lebanon came each day to cook dishes from their villages. In total, Mouzawak estimates that more than 500 women, including refugees, have

been trained and employed across his organisation's projects and programs.

But the deadly explosion in Beirut's port in August 2020 upended everything. While his partner, the Paris-based fashion designer Rabih Kayrouz, was being treated in the hospital for a brain haemorrhage caused by the blast, Mouzawak faced the devastation to their home, their city and the business he spent nearly two decades growing.

Almost overnight, he and his team created an emergency community kitchen, in partnership with Spanish-American chef José Andrés' non-profit World Central Kitchen, to feed residents who lost everything, hospital staffers caring for thousands of injured people and rescue workers

searching for survivors. Although all locations of Tawlet closed (and all but one guesthouse), he was able to rebuild a space across from the port thanks to \$200,000 in donations. Today, it's where his team of nearly 100 workers run Souk el Tayeb, and one outpost of Tawlet, as well as a grocery and a permanent community kitchen that serves 2,000 meals per day.

As this operation carries on under the leadership of Mouzawak's business partner, Christine Codsí, Mouzawak is building anew in France, with Tawlet Paris, a canteen and grocer that opened this month in the 11th arrondissement.

During the restaurant's opening week, Mouzawak talked about his journey from one market to many, his feelings about leaving Lebanon — a former French mandate — and how food can unite. "I was trying to change the world. I still want to change the world! It's not that I decided to do it, I just followed a stream. Nothing I've done in my life has been with long term planning. During the war, Lebanon was divided into small parts, each unreachable from the others. But when the war ended, the whole country opened. I traveled for more than a year to write a guidebook about Lebanon and discovered this country I heard about, but could never visit. I was not only amazed by its natural beauty but by the link between the people I met. Whether Christian, Muslim or Druze, we were all the same. I went to meet people with open arms, and they had even wider arms. Then, I wrote about travel and food, learned about macrobiotics and slow food, joined the board of the Slow Food organization for several years, and knew food was the way to unite". — **NYT**

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

The Rocks of Swollen Betrayals

The following are translation of poems by the Omani poet Hilal Al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

MEMOIRS OF KHALID AL JLANDAANI (1)

GUEVARA
Guevara
I greet you thousands of times
O commando
Whose military cap still hangs
From a huge oak branch
In the forests of Bolivia
To fall on the mad skull
Of an upcoming rebel!

RAHMA BIN JABIR AL JALHAM (2)

I know
Once a prophet wore his military uniform
He shouldn't take it off.
But
The moment you smashed your ship
On the rocks of swollen betrayals
There was
In the farthest place in the Gulf
A sailor collecting the wreckage of his ship
To tighten the circle anew.

AL SHEBA (3)

All I recall is
Your shabby tatters
While you sneaked them away
Between barracks
Of phantom armies,
Looking
For a loaf of security
For a nation quivering since creation.

ABU MOSLEM AL BAHLAANI (4)

The tribes of Yajooj and Majooj (5)
Have not yet penetrated the Barzakh (6)
I wonder:
Do you have estrangement enough
To fall together into a deep well
And then squat on the sword edge
Awaiting for calamity?!

The moment I crave for writing
Like I crave for death
Adulterous words and

ideas escape from me!
Terrible it is to be poor
To own nothing but words.

Terrible it is to be
Between emptiness and nothingness.
Like ether,
What do I want and what not?
That's the raw crab
My heart chews.
O Sibylla (7)
With breasts boarded
With letters and words
I'm the child who lacks the alphabet of talk
Yet in his heart
There're twenty years of floods and doubts!

1 The protagonist of a novel called *The Angels of Jabal Al Akhdhar* by the Omani novelist Abdullah Mohammed Al Tai. The novel revolves around the Jabal Al Akhdhar War (translator).

2 Al Jalhami (1757-1826) is a famous fighter from the Arabian Gulf. He fought British troops and was the head of Jalalima from the Otub tribe (the translator).

3 Al Sheba is the nickname of Mohammed bin Abdullah al Salmi (1896-1985), a well-known Omani historian. He wrote important books on the political disturbances that Oman witnessed in the 20th century (translator)

4 Abu Moslem Naser bin Salim al Bahlaani al Rawahi (1860-1920) is a well-known Omani poet. He travelled to East Africa as a young man and settled there (translator).

5 Proper names that appear in the Quran refer to people known both for their great numbers and wickedness. They also appear in the Old Testament as Gog and Magog (the translator).

6 Barzakh is an Arabic word that means 'screen', 'divider', or 'bar'. As a concept alluded to both in the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet, it refers to the stage that separates this world from the world of the after-life (the translator.)

7 A Greek name that means 'prophetess' and 'oracle' (the translator.)



Omani olive oil mill eyes sustainable production for local needs

By Balqees al Araiimi

For thousands of years, olive oil has been used in cooking and is one of the most important substances in a healthy diet. The word "oil" comes from the Arabic "az-zait", which refers to the juice of olives.

It is mainly used in the Middle East and its use is known around the world.

Many local people keep looking for the original olive oil imported from the Levant countries which grow the finest types of olives in their lands. Olive oil has been a very important ingredient in the life of Omanis for ages due to its medical advantages.

This need and demand prompted some ideas by Omani youth to start their own factories to produce this foremost product.

Aside from its medicinal use, olive oil is also used to prepare many dishes as it adds a delicious flavour. Olive oil differs from other vegetable oils due to its extraction and production methods. It also contains natural botanicals, the most significant of which are the antioxidants found in olive kernels, which are known for their health benefits. This oil is a central and distinguishing component of the Mediterranean diet, one of the healthiest diets around. Moreover, it's a diet that was declared an Intangible Cultural Heritage by Unesco in 2012. This article provides an overview of an Omani project dedicated to pressing olive oil locally.

Deyaa bin Ahmed al Harrawy, the owner, said that he had the idea to meet consumers' need for high quality, pure olive oil pressed in Omani lands. He had this big dream that this factory will be the reference for the finest olive oil produced in the Sultanate of Oman that no one will question the quality of the product.

The factory is a legal facility regulated by food control laws, allowing for a high level of hygiene and quality without preservatives or additives.

Founded in January 2021, the mill has its own trademark under the name "Jallan Binbuali Press for Extra Virgin Olive Oil". Consumer's confidence in the products sold in the market, as well as the quality of olives used to produce olive oil, are factors that helped keep the mill operating. The owner of Jallan Binbuali olive oil press assured that the olive kernels used to produce olive oil come from the finest and most luxurious farms of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which are the farms of the Jordanian Hashemite Royal Court. The agricultural crop on these farms is of high quality, purity and cleanliness. In addition, the olives go through the stage of picking, cleaning, and packing in boxes designated for this purpose.

"They are shipped from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan through the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then the UAE and then reached the Sultanate of Oman," Said al Saadi, a co-founder, explained.

There, the olives are checked through the border crossings, and they are again checked in logistics. He affirmed that they are happy about these procedures and legal steps that are taken to ensure the safety and validity of the product, to ensure the provision of a high-quality product to the consumer. The project is self-financed, and aims to recruit professional Omani youth, al Saadi said.

Explaining the process of extracting olive oil, al Saadi said, "The basic steps in making olive oil are always the same, no matter what kind of equipment is used, from The Olive Oil Source's First Press to very large commercial mills built to process many tons of olives per hour. The first step in

the oil extraction process is cleaning the olives and removing the stems, leaves, twigs, and other



debris left with the olives. The olives should be washed with water to remove pesticides, dirt, etc. Rocks and sand will damage a hammermill and quickly wear out a centrifugal decanter or oil separator, reducing the life span from 25 to as little as 5 years.

The second step is crushing the olives into a paste. Malaxing the paste for 20 to 45 minutes allows small oil droplets to combine into bigger ones. It is an indispensable step. The paste can be heated or water added during this process to increase the yield, although this generally results in lowering the quality of the oil. The next step consists in separating the oil from the rest of the olive components. This used to be done with the first press but is now done by centrifugation, except in old facilities.

The marketing process is carried out by a team with more than 10 years of experience in the field of commercial marketing.

You can view the products on Instagram @Jallan_binbuali

