

**CLOSE TO 47% RISE IN
SME REGISTRATIONS**

The number of SMEs registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development increased at the end of July 2022 by 46.8% to reach 81,460 compared to 55,491 during the same period in 2021, according to the statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). **>A5**



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HM SENDS CONDOLENCES TO PAKISTAN

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences and sympathy to Dr. Arif Alvi, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on the victims of the heavy rains and flood which hit a number of regions in Pakistan. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere condolences and sympathy to the president, the families of the victims and the Pakistani people, praying to the Almighty Allah to rest the victims' souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience to bear the loss and for the injured persons speedy recovery. **-ONA**



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3 Al Maha Ceramics (Al Maha) has announced the acquisition of a 45 per cent stake in Al Hael Ceramics Company. Al Maha was founded in 2006. **>B1**

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MUSCAT**

A2

PEOPLE OF OMAN PRAISE HIS MAJESTY FOR SETTling OUTSTANDING CLAIMS

HM's Royal orders have brought relief to the indebted small and medium enterprises, other individuals

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Official and citizens in Oman have appreciated the Royal orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik settling the outstanding claims against owners of some small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and other individuals, who had earlier been awarded prison sentences for default in repayment, in accordance with standard procedures.

Following the Royal orders, the Supreme Judiciary Council, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, has repaid a total loan amount of OMR2,445,563 of 1,169 SME owners and individuals, and cancelled the prison sentences handed down to them, besides the seizure of property processes



against them.

Hailing the Royal orders of His Majesty, the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) affirmed that this generous gesture is a reflection of His majesty's interest in small and medium enterprises because of the significant role they play in the

national economy.

His Excellency Eng. Ridha bin Juma Al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the OCCI, said His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's interest in this segment of the private sector confirms his keenness to address the problems faced by small and medium enter-

prises in order to encourage them to perform their desired role in the national economy.

He pointed out that the private sector, represented by OCCI, is looking forward to business owners, especially owners of small and medium enterprises, to benefit from this generous gesture.



1,169

In implementation of the Royal orders, the Supreme Judiciary Council, acting in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, has repaid the loans of 1,169 SME owners and individuals—to the tune of OMR2,445,563—and cancelled the related prison sentences and seizure of properties.

Saif Al Badi, Head of OCCI Al Dhahirah governorate's branch said: "In his first speech, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik focused on entrepreneurship, support for SMEs and innovation, in his belief in the importance of this sector which is one of the pillars of the economy across the globe. **>A5**

EDUCATION

More than 26,000 students offered seats by Unified Admission Centre

Times News Service

MUSCAT: A total of 26,170 students have been offered seats at the various educational institutions by the Unified Admission Centre and 16,345 students among them have already completed their registration process.

Giving details, Nada bint Mohammed Al Kiyomi, Director of the Department of Admission at the Unified Admission Centre said the results of first sorting was declared on 17 August and 26,170 students were informed about the allotment of seats at various educational institutions. 16,345 students have completed



ed their registration procedures, she said. Around 24,000 students accepted the offers and communicated with various educational institutions.

The delay in registration process is ascribed to the time taken at various establishments, she said, adding that some institutions require more documents compared to others.

Study abroad procedures

On registration for internships or scholarships abroad, she said the procedure is the same as each student would get an offer of one seat through the unified admission system, followed by the student's acceptance of the offer and communication with the educational establishment where he/she is accepted.

>A3

ENVIRONMENT

Setting fire to farm dump: Cheap but highly unsustainable

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Burning agricultural waste is becoming quite a practice in the agricultural regions of the Sultanate. Reasons for this are not far to seek; this is one of the cheapest and fastest ways of disposing agricultural waste. Besides, little or no effort is involved. This explains the spread of an otherwise negative practice among the farming communities.

What is lost sight of, however, is the adverse effects that the practice wreaks on the environment with all the toxic gases, including carbon dioxide, other harmful compounds and fumes left hanging in the atmosphere posing a serious threat to the health of people living in the vicinity and outside. Then there



is the decrease in soil fertility caused by this practice which is often glossed over.

Fadel Al Ameri, head of the Public Hygiene Department in Muscat Municipality in Bausher explains that the process of burning agricultural waste has become the norm rather than an exception, and the magnitude of this harmful practice has become alarming. He

continues: "There are a number of reasons why people choose to burn agricultural waste; it is a low-cost method and does not require much physical effort.

"But it poses significant risks to the environment around and is a serious threat to the public health as the air becomes burdened with toxic compounds and also leads to decreased soil fertility."

Regulations

Not that laws and legislations to prevent this harmful practice are not in place in the Sultanate, but such easy options continue to find a place in the farming community's regimen.

But since its disadvantages by far outweigh its advantages, the government has had to chip in to combat this harmful practice.

It came up with a number of deterrent legislative measures to protect the environment, combat pollution and promote public health; there is Royal Decree No. 114/ 2001 that stresses the protection of local environment along with controls to ensure that Omani environment remains free of pollution.

In line with this, local order

no. 55/ 2017 has been brought in which lays down punitive action against anyone who dumps or burns solid waste.

The Muscat Municipality too has come up with a local order no. 1/ 2006 which, under Article 11 stipulates that people are prohibited from dumping, leaving, placing or burning any waste in public places or disposing of it in places other than the disposal sites specified by the municipality.

Ambitious visions

To curb the adverse consequences that may arise from individual unhealthy and non-urban practices and to handle solid agricultural waste in large quantities, the Muscat Municipality emphasises its safe disposal at existing landfills in al-Amerat and Barka.

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Five-day Al Jabal Al Akhdar Tourism Festival concludes

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The five-day Al Jabal Al Akhdar Tourism Festival concluded on Saturday.

The activities at the Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar Tourism Festival opened on Friday evening, which included a parade of horses in traditional dress, a presentation of the art of horse transformation, and an exhibition accompanying some agricultural products, aromatic plant oils, preparations and some handicrafts.

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TOURISM INDICATORS

Luxury hotels in Sultanate see big jump in revenues

MUSCAT: Revenues of 3 to 5 - star hotels in the Sultanate registered an increase of 117.6 percent by end of July 2022 to reach OMR95.332 million.

Hotel occupancy stood at 25.4 percent at the time, according to the monthly statistics for tourism indicators issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The statistics showed that the total number of hotel guests increased by 45.4 percent to reach by end of last July 903,000 compared to the same period in 2021 where the number of hotel guests stood at 620,979.

The statistics showed that the number of GCC hotel guests registered a remarkable increase of 1,187.9 percent to reach 88,479 guests up to end of July 2022 compared to 6, 870 guests during the same period in 2021, followed by European hotel guests registered an increase of 703.2 percent



to reach 193,644 up to end of July 2022 compared to 24,109 by end of July 2021. The number of Omani hotel guests dropped by 7.1 percent from 447,659 to 415,711.

The number of American hotel guests stood at 30,210 up to end of last July, an increase of 191.6 percent compared to the same period in 2021.

The number of hotel guests from Africa stood at 4, 682, an increase of 103.3 percent compared to the same period in 2021. The number of Asian hotel guests increased by 33.4 percent to reach 111,703 by end of July 2022 compared to 83,736 for the same period in 2021. -**ONA**

EDUCATION

<FROM A1 More than 500 scholarships abroad available for students

The number of scholarships abroad stands at 550 and students may choose the country and the university, she said.

She said the unified admission system offers the student one seat based on the student's interest, she said, pointing to fact that the number of students applying through the unified admission centre exceeds the number of seats offered by the higher educational institutions and the internships and scholarships abroad.

As such, the unified admission centre distributed 95 percent of the available seats and the vacant seats would be offered to the students in the 'waiting list'.

During the past few days, we

have noticed a large number of students who have got high grades but have opted for specialisations that are in demand such as health and education and consequently, they could not get the desired seats. Besides, some students had been offered seats far away from their places of residence, she said, adding that they have been offered the opportunity which would be available from 29 August 2022, ahead of the second sorting.

The seats for the second sorting are limited, she said advising all students who have been offered seats in the first round to accept the offers and complete the procedures at the respective higher education establishments.

The students who confirm their acceptance of the offer in the first round or through the service of "improper ranking of choices" cannot compete for the seats in the second round, she said.

We have also noticed a number of vacant seats at some vocational colleges in general, and in Salalah Vocational College in particular, as the number of applicants are lower than the seats offered, she said. The number of internships exceeded 90,000, the number of seats at the government educational institutions exceeded 15,000 and the number of scholarships abroad including these in brotherly countries, totaled 610 seats, she said.

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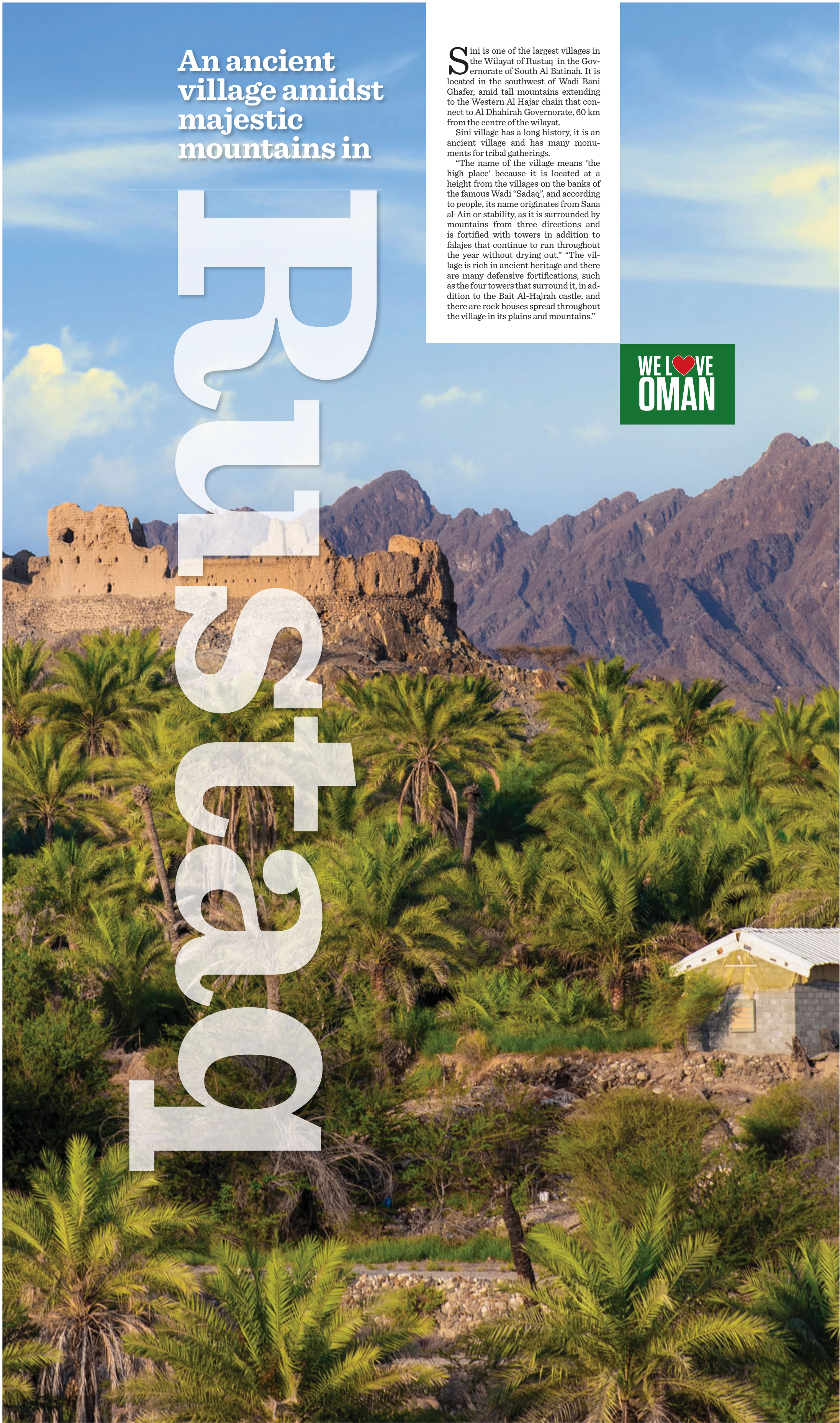
An ancient village amidst majestic mountains in

سني

Sini is one of the largest villages in the Wilayat of Rustaq in the Governorate of South Al Batinah. It is located in the southwest of Wadi Bani Ghafer, amid tall mountains extending to the Western Al Hajar chain that connect to Al Dhahirah Governorate, 60 km from the centre of the wilayat.

Sini village has a long history, it is an ancient village and has many monuments for tribal gatherings.

“The name of the village means ‘the high place’ because it is located at a height from the villages on the banks of the famous Wadi “Sadaq”, and according to people, its name originates from Sana al-Ain or stability, as it is surrounded by mountains from three directions and is fortified with towers in addition to falajes that continue to run throughout the year without drying out.” “The village is rich in ancient heritage and there are many defensive fortifications, such as the four towers that surround it, in addition to the Bait Al-Hajrah castle, and there are rock houses spread throughout the village in its plains and mountains.”





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INCENTIVE PACKAGE

His Majesty the Sultan thanked by citizens for generous initiative

<FROM A1 Saif Al Badi, Head of OCCI Al Dhahirah governorate's branch further said: "He also encouraged Omani youth to continue to engage in entrepreneurship and stressed the importance of providing an appropriate environment for small enterprises.

"The wise government has provided many exemptions and facilities during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, and these incentives are still continuing, like the one paying off the debts of more than 1,169 units. It is one of the most important initiatives that may serve as a driver of continuity and sustainability of these institutions."

Al Badi added: "Undoubtedly, the pandemic had an impact on various sectors and in different countries, and it was an example of the unexpected challenges that the private sector may find itself faces with. Here, business owners in the future must develop plans that will protect institutions from stumbling and make financial strategies and plan properly to keep pace with market fluctuations, and the changes that may occur at the local or external level, as also the introduction and use of modern technologies."

"In return, we hope for more support through incentive packages that provide an impetus to this sector and encourage entrepreneurs," he said

Societal circles in the Sultanate of Oman also expressed satisfaction with the orders of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Entrepreneur Abdullah Hamad said: "We thank the generous initiative from His Majesty the Sultan. The initiative will restore comfort and tranquility among many families who have been affected by this crisis and the accumulated debts. It also gives incentives and confidence among the entrepreneurs that the government cares for them. We aspire for more incentives and facilities for business owners to revive the local market."

END OF JULY 2022

Number of SMEs registered increases by 46.8% to 81,460

MUSCAT: The number of SMEs registered with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development rose by 46.8 percent to reach 81,460 at the end of July 2022 compared to 55,491 during the same period in 2021, according to the statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The current year has seen an increased registration of SMEs with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) Development as to benefit from the facilities offered for the owners of SMEs by the government departments and major companies in the private sector.

NCSI data showed that the number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the first seven months of the current year increased to 16,800 against 6,822 during the same period in 2021 and from 2,396 registered in 2020.



The increase in registrations reflects the interest of the Omani youth in establishing their own projects at the time the statistics showed appreciable growth in the economic activities following the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and on account of the attention accorded to SMEs sector by the various government departments and local banks financing the sector. The SMEs avail from the government facilities offered to the sector and the return of economic activities back to growth and the government endeavours

to increase spending at the time the government allocated 10 percent of the value of government tenders to SMEs.

The data showed that the number of SMEs exceeded 81,000 at the end of July 2022.

The number of SMEs in Muscat Governorate amounted to 27,400, representing 33.6 percent of the total SMEs registered. Followed by North Al Batinah Governorate at 12,538, Al Dakhiliyah Governorate at 9,104, Dhofar Governorate at 8,584, South Al Batinah Governorate (5,975), North Al Sharqiyah (5,563), South Al Sharqiyah Governorate (4,928), Al Dhahirah Governorate (4,110) and Al Buraimi Governorate at 1,617 SMEs, respectively.

Al Wusta Governorate came in the tenth place at 1,234 SMEs and Musandam Governorate in the 11th place at 408 enterprises.

- ONA

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A story on the Apple iPhone 14 launch

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The Midday Update video

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NATO ACCESSION

Sweden, Finland, Turkey meet over NATO accession bids

ISTANBUL: Official representatives from Turkey, Finland and Sweden met close to the Finnish capital on Friday in an attempt to advance the bids by the two Nordic countries to join the NATO alliance.

Friday's talks in the city of Vantaa were the first since the three signed an agreement in Madrid in June.

Turkey is the only NATO mem-

ber to explicitly oppose Helsinki and Stockholm's accession, claiming they had imposed an arms embargo against Ankara while harboring individuals it deems "terrorists."

Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto described the meeting as setting out goals for cooperation and establishing contacts as agreed in Madrid.

"The participants discussed

the concrete steps to implement the Trilateral Memorandum and agreed that [the countries] will continue to meet at the expert level during the autumn," his ministry said after the meeting.

Turkish presidential policy advisor Ibrahim Kalin, who took part in the meeting on Ankara's behalf, said that Stockholm and Helsinki were open to Turkey's demands.

"Finland and Sweden have re-

newed their commitment to demonstrate full solidarity and cooperation with Turkey in the fight against all forms and manifestations of terror," Kalin's office said in a statement.

June's agreement set the way for the clearing obstacles, but Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to freeze the application process shortly afterward. **bw**



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US Justice Department releases affidavit that led to Trump search

The move was highly anticipated to shed more light on evidence that led to the unprecedented search



WASHINGTON: The US Justice Department on Friday released a redacted version of the legal document that allowed the FBI to seize classified government records from former President Donald Trump's Florida home.

The move was highly anticipated to shed more light on evidence that led to the unprecedented search.

US Magistrate Judge Bruce Reinhart, who had approved the warrant that led to the FBI's search of Trump's Mar-a-Lago residence on August 8, had ordered the unsealing of the redacted affidavit by

noon (1600 GMT) on Friday.

What does the affidavit say?

"The government is conducting a criminal investigation concerning the improper removal and storage of classified information in unauthorized spaces, as well as the un-

lawful concealment or removal of government records," the 32-page affidavit began.

"The FBI's investigation has established that documents bearing classification markings, which appear to contain National Defense Information (NDI), were

among the materials contained in the FIFTEEN BOXES and were stored at the PREMISES in an unauthorized location," the FBI affidavit read.

According to the affidavit, officials found in those boxes 184 classified documents, including 25

documents marked as top secret. Agents who inspected the boxes found sensitive information about government informants and intelligence-gathering.

"There is probable cause to believe that additional documents that contain classified [information] or that are Presidential records subject to record retention requirements currently remain at [Mar-a-Lago]," the FBI document added.

"There is also probable cause to believe that evidence of obstruction will be found at [Mar-a-Lago]," the affidavit continued.

Trump reacts

Trump has reacted with outrage to the publication of the redacted affidavit. On the online service Truth Social, which he launched earlier this year, Trump accused the FBI and the Justice Department of a "total public relations subterfuge."

The search in Florida marked a significant escalation in one of the many federal and state investigations Trump is facing from his time in office and in private business.

The Republican former presi-

dent had suggested he might run for the White House again.

The FBI action was part of a federal probe into whether Trump illegally removed documents when he left office in January 2021 after losing the presidential election to Democrat Joe Biden, and whether he tried to obstruct the government's investigation.

What is an affidavit?

The affidavit, a document that is not usually made public unless someone is charged with a crime, is a sworn statement outlining the evidence that gave the department probable cause to seek a search warrant.

Prosecutors had asked for the entire document to be sealed to protect the integrity of their ongoing investigation, prompting media companies to file a legal challenge to get it released.

In his order on Thursday, Reinhart said the Justice Department had valid reasons to keep some of the document secret, including the need to protect the identities of witnesses and federal agents as well as the government's investigation and strategy and grand jury material. **bw**

GAS BURNING

Russia burns large amounts of gas amid supply cuts to Europe

MOSCOW: Russia has been wasting vast amounts of natural gas while cutting its supplies to Europe, analysts from the Norwegian energy consultancy Rystad Energy revealed on Friday.

Satellite images of the Portovaya compression station show a huge flare as large amounts of gas are burned off.

The facility is close to the border with Finland and is part of the network that feeds the Nord Stream 1 pipeline bringing gas into Germany. Flows through the pipeline have been reduced to just 20% of its capacity.

Vast amounts of gas being burned

"Exact flaring volume levels are hard to quantify but are believed to be at levels of around 4.34 million cubic meters per day," the consultancy said, adding that the figure "equates to 1.6 billion cubic meters on an annualized basis."

Burning off some gas or oil — known as flaring — is a common practice, but the level being re-



corded is unusually high.

It was first reported in Finland earlier in the month. Gazprom, the Russian energy giant, may have been burning off €1,000-worth (\$998.70) of gas per hour for the past two months, according to Esa Vakkilainen, a professor at LUT University.

Environmental catastrophe

Vakkilainen also warned that this is "a big environmental problem, especially for the North Pole area

where this soot has definitely an effect on global warming."

"The flaring is an environmental disaster with around 9,000 tons of CO2 being emitted daily," Rystad said.

Russia is the world's fourth-largest emitter of greenhouse gases and has set a goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2060. But Gazprom has seen its gas output reduced by 13% since the invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent standoff with the West.

"Although the exact reasons for the burning are unknown, the volume, emissions and location of the flaring are a visible reminder of Russia's dominance over Europe's energy markets," Rystad's market analyst chief Sindre Knutsson told Spanish news agency EFE.

"The flaring flame is highly visible, perhaps indicating that gas is ready and waiting to flow to Europe if friendly political relations resume," the consultancy said. **bw**

GREAT TRAGEDY

Humanitarian situation in Afghanistan 'a great tragedy', says US envoy

KABUL: Rina Amiri, the US special representative for Afghan girls, women and human rights, has described the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan as "a great tragedy" and urged the Islamic countries to raise their voice.

Rina Amiri, the US special representative for Afghan girls, women and human rights, called the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan "a great tragedy" and called on Islamic countries, especially Saudi Arabia, to respect women's rights and human rights in Afghanistan.

to raise the voice," TOLO News reported citing the Saudi Gazette newspaper. Amiri also said that women and girls have the right to education, work and public participation and called on the Islamic Emirate to fulfil the commitments of the Doha Agreement.

Recently, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Martin Griffiths had said that the situation of Afghan women and girls is regressing and also called out the Taliban for reo-

pening girls' schools.

"Women and girls are facing alarming rollback on their rights," said Martin Griffiths.

"Girls' schools have been closed to female students for a year. One of the presidents of India has said that 'Even if I die, don't close girls' schools because a generation will miss one day of education,' Khaama Press reported citing a student, Shabana. 'I ask them to reopen schools, it is our right and we have to get our rights,'" said Parwana, another student.

Previously, Amnesty International has said that women and girls have been stripped of their rights and face a bleak future, according to Khaama Press.

"Arbitrary detentions, torture, disappearances, summary executions have returned as the order of the day. Women and girls have been stripped of their rights and face a bleak future, deprived of education or the possibility of taking part in public life," Amnesty International's South Asia Regional Director, Yamini Mishra said. **ANI**

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WORLD



UN agency slams airstrike in Ethiopia that ‘hit kindergarten’

The strike came days after fighting between government forces and Tigrayan fighters resumed

ADDIS ABABA: The United Nations children's agency UNICEF has denounced an airstrike that “hit a kindergarten” in Ethiopia's Tigray region, leaving at least four people, including two children dead.

In a statement published Saturday, UNICEF Executive Director Catherine Russell said that the agency “strongly condemns” the air strike that took place a day before in Mekele, the capital of the northern Tigray region.

Russell stressed that the children of Ethiopia are at risk once again amid the escalating violence and called all parties to “agree to an immediate cessation of hostilities.”



“Yet again, an escalation of violence in northern Ethiopia has caused children to pay the heaviest price. For almost two years, children and their families in the region have endured the agony of this conflict. It must end,” her statement said.

Friday's strike came days after fighting between government forces and Tigrayan fighters resumed in the region's southern border. Putting an end to a five-

month truce.

Until the strike on Friday, fighting was mostly taking place near Tigray's southeastern border.

The Ethiopian air force has been accused of hitting the residential area in which the kindergarten was situated, claims the government denied.

Addis Ababa said it was “targeting only military sites” and accused the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) — the militia

that is at the heart of the bloody conflict and controls the region — of staging civilian deaths.

Tigray Television, controlled by the regional authorities, quoted witnesses as saying that a kindergarten called Red Kids Paradise was hit during the raid and aired graphic images following the attack.

The broadcaster claimed that seven civilians, among them three children, were killed in the attack.

In November 2020, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed ordered a government offensive in Tigray, in response to an attack on a military base.

A battle of attrition began with fighting spreading to the neighboring regions of Afar and Amhara a year ago.

In November last year, Tigrayan forces marched towards Addis Ababa, but were pushed back by another government offensive.

A ceasefire was announced in March, with the government declaring a humanitarian truce.

Fighting in Tigray has killed thousands of civilians and displaced millions. The conflict has also pushed parts of the region into famine conditions. **DW**



World looking up to India's development model: Speaker Om Birla in Canada

HALIFAX: The “Indian model of development” is being seen as an ideal model by countries across the world, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said while highlighting the aspirations and achievements of the ‘New India’.

Birla led a parliamentary delegation to the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference held here. “Spoke about aspirations-achievements of New India. Mentioned that the Indian model of development is being seen as an ideal model by other countries. Impressed by their enthusiasm to contribute to their host country,” he tweeted while wrapping up his visit to the north American country. During his address to the diaspora, Birla stressed that as India is celebrating the 75 years of Independence or Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav and that Indian and Canadian youth should join hands, exchange knowledge, skills and experiences for the development of both countries.

“Proud to note that Indian Diaspora is wearing Bharatiya Sanskar on their sleeves,” he said.

As he left Canada, the Lok Sabha Speaker thanked the presiding officers of both the Houses of Canadian Parliament for successfully organizing the 65th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference and for

extending warm hospitality.

On Thursday, Birla had said that the IT revolution has played a significant role in empowering democracy in a vast country like India. He made this remark while addressing the workshop on “A People's Parliament: Accessibility through Innovation”.

Observing that the hopes and aspirations of people in a parliamentary democracy are expressed through the Parliament, Birla opined that people see the Parliament as a medium of transformation in their socio-economic status.

“Therefore, as the supreme representative body, it is the responsibility of the Parliament to act according to the expectations and aspirations of the people,” he said. Birla urged delegates to build a prosperous, inclusive and enlightened society so that the benefits of development could reach the last person in the queue.

Speaking on the successful democratic system in India, Birla said, “The people in India have consistently reposed their faith in democratic institutions through free and fair elections in the 75 years since independence. The increasing voter turnout in the elections has proved that the people consider democracy as the best form of governance.” **ANI**

FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

US donates 3,000 metric tonnes of food for Sri Lankan children

COLOMBO: The United States through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and in partnership with Save the Children, donated 320 metric tonnes of split yellow peas as a part of 3,000 metric tonnes of food to nourish school children across Sri Lanka.

“This donation from the Ameri-

can people targets the most vulnerable Sri Lankans, children and enables them to focus on their schooling rather than on their hunger. Every nourishing meal will be a testament to the U.S.'s commitment to helping all Sri Lankans emerge from the worst economic crisis since the coun-

try's independence,” Ambassador Julie Chung said as quoted in the statement released by US Embassy in Sri Lanka on Friday.

Ambassador Chung, Sri Lanka's Education Minister Susil Premajayantha, and representatives from the Ministry of Health, the National Planning Department,

and Save the Children attended the handover ceremony.

The shipment is part of the USDA McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program, a five-year USD 26 million projects aimed at providing immediate emergency assistance. **ANI**

DEVASTATING FLOODS

Death toll from floods nears 1,000 in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Nearly 1,000 people have been killed during devastating floods caused by monsoon rains that have hit much of Pakistan since June, officials said Saturday.

The new death toll was announced a day after Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif declared an emergency and asked for international help in responding to the disaster.

Rescuers have struggled to evacuate thousands of people left marooned by the floods, and the rainy season still has another two weeks to run.



Sania Safi, a top administrator in Charsadda.

In Sukkur, over 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) south of Swat, farmlands irrigated by the Indus were under water, and tens of thousands of people were seeking shelter on elevated roads and highways.

An official in Baluchistan said all 34 districts of the impoverished province in Pakistan's southwest were badly affected, with road networks destroyed and bridges washed away.

More evacuations ordered

On Saturday, authorities ordered thousands of residents in threatened areas to evacuate their homes as rivers were close to bursting their banks and as the rains were expected to continue this week.

“Initially some people refused to leave, but, when the water level increased, they agreed,” Bilal Faizi, spokesman for the Rescue 1122 emergency service, told the AFP news agency. **DW**

What is the latest on the ground?

The National Disaster Management Authority said the death toll had increased by 45 over the 24 hours into Saturday.

Many rivers in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — a picturesque province of rugged mountains and valleys — have overflowed in the past few days, sweeping away entire buildings, including an iconic hotel.

A local resident told The Associated Press that road access from Kalam Valley to the rest of the province and both power and communications were down.

The sheer volume of water destroyed the gates of a major water control system at the Swat River, leading to flooding in the districts of Charsadda and Nowshera, said

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India start their title defence with match against Pakistan

India has an edge overall, with wins in seven matches out of these. Pakistan has won only two

ABU DHABI: India is set to kick off their Asia Cup title defence against arch-rivals Pakistan in Dubai on Sunday and revenge will be on the mind of players after suffering a humiliating defeat the last time these Asian giants collided on cricket pitch.

So far, both sides have locked horns on nine occasions in T20I matches. India has an edge overall, with wins in seven matches out of these. Pakistan has won only two. But the last time these two met was during the ICC T20 World Cup 2021, in which India suffered a humiliating ten-wicket defeat. Left-arm pacer Shaheen Afridi destroyed the Indian top order with two quick strikes. Contributions from then-skipper Virat Kohli (57) and Rishabh Pant (39) took India to 151/7 in their 20 overs, but knocks from Mohammed Rizwan (79*) and Pakistani skipper Babar Azam (68*) meant that Men in Blue succumbed to a shocking defeat.

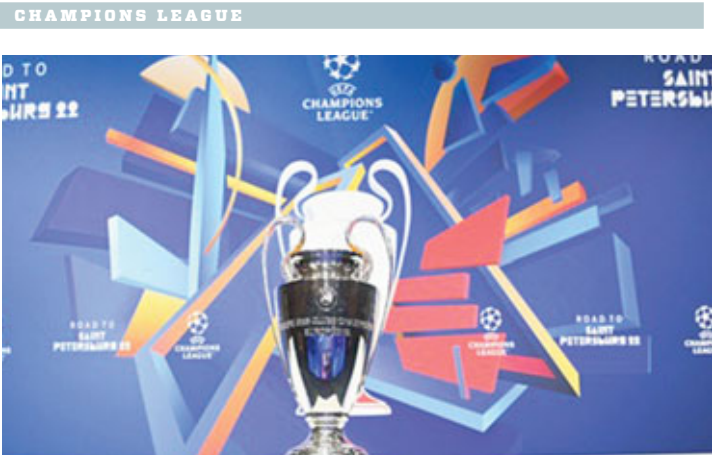
India will be looking forward to putting up a big fight this time around. They have been in fantastic form as of late, having defeated England and West Indies in their respective territories in ODI and T20I series. They are also the



number one side in T20Is. For this, it will be extremely vital for skipper Rohit Sharma, star batters Virat Kohli and KL Rahul to be at peak of their powers and showcase the brutality with their willow that has earned them millions of fans. All eyes will be on Rohit and Virat to regain their best form and play a match-winning knock. India's middle order has been seeing a rise of new stars. Suryakumar Yadav and Deepak Hooda are two exciting strikers who can attack from ball one. These two hitters have their chance to etch their names in history in this match against their arch-rivals. Experienced middle-order batters/all-rounders like Hardik Pandya and Rishabh Pant will also be looking forward to carrying on the fine form they are in. Indian bowling attack has a lot of depth. In absence of lead pacer Jasprit Bumrah, all eyes will be on Bhuvneshwar Kumar to lead

the attack. He has been superb for India in T20Is this year, especially during powerplays, a phase in which India will look up to him for early strikes. Youngsters Arshdeep Singh and Avesh Khan will have their chance to make an impact as well. In the spin department, veterans Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja will be leading the attack. They along with Yuzvendra Chahal and youngster Ravi Bishnoi will have to complement the pace attack well and bamboozle Pakistanis with their deliveries. Coming to Pakistan, they are the third-ranked side in ICC T20I rankings and are not to be taken lightly. Their top order has two in-form batters in Babar Azam and Mohammed Rizwan. These two are Pakistan's best as far as T20Is are concerned but the side has to make sure that they are not reliable just on them and collapse if these two underwhelm with the bat.

Other batters/all-rounders like Fakhar Zaman, Asif Ali, Haider Ali etc will have to contribute with the bat with the same energy and efficiency as their top batters if they are to pose a big challenge to the Men in Blue. In absence of left-arm pacer Shaheen Afridi, Pakistani pace attack has taken a big dent. Yet another pacer Mohammed Wasim was also ruled out due to injury on Friday. Injuries have put pressure on young pacers like Naseem Shah, Haris Rauf. Veteran Hasan Ali is also back in the mix. Mohammed Hasnain has also been brought to the squad as a replacement for Shaheen. Pakistan, reputed over the years of producing some of the finest bowlers ever, has its chance to give a proof of its pace greatness here in absence of its leader. Spinners Usman Qadir will also have to deliver something really brilliant to trap the world-class Indian batting lineup. **ANI**



Lewandowski and Haaland to face former clubs

ISTANBUL: The draw for the Champions League, the holy grail of football was drawn in Turkey on August 25. The fans will get to witness the finest clubs in the world playing for the coveted trophy with some great matchups on the cards. Hamit Altintop (former Turkish football player) and Yaya Toure (a former Ivorian football player) drew from the team pots to determine the teams in different groups. This year's Champions League draw features some extremely exciting draws. Barcelona has been drawn against Bayern Munich in the 2022-23 Champions League group stages, which means Robert Lewandowski will play against his former club, while Manchester City's Erling Haaland will face off with his former club, Borussia Dortmund. Lewandowski left Bayern Munich bitterly in July to join Barcelona in a EUR50 million deal, and the two clubs have been drawn together in Group C. Haaland had left Borussia Dortmund for a EUR60 million deal to join Premier League team, Manchester City in June. Due to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, which begins in November, this season's Champions League group stage will be played over a shorter period of time of nine weeks rather than the usual

12 weeks. The knockout stages of the competition will begin on February 14, 2023, one year later than what was the trend in previous years. On June 10, 2023, the final will be held at Istanbul's Ataturk Olympic Stadium. The list of the various teams that will feature in the eight groups are: Group A - Ajax (Netherlands), Liverpool (England), Napoli (Italy), Rangers (Scotland). Group B - FC Porto (Portugal), Atletico Madrid (Spain), Bayer Leverkusen (Germany), Club Brugge (Belgium). Group C - Bayern Munich (Germany), Barcelona (Spain), Inter Milan (Italy), Viktoria Plzen (Czech Republic). Group D - Eintracht Frankfurt (Germany), Tottenham Hotspur (England), Sporting CP (Portugal), Marseille (France). Group E - AC Milan (Italy), Chelsea (England), FC Salzburg (Austria), Dinamo Zagreb (Croatia). Group F - Real Madrid (Spain), RB Leipzig (Germany), Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukraine), Celtic (Scotland). Group G - Manchester City (England), Sevilla (Spain), Borussia Dortmund (Germany), FC Copenhagen (Denmark). Group H - Paris Saint-Germain (France), Juventus (Italy), Benfica (Portugal), Maccabi Haifa (Israel). **ANI**



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FIFA lifts AIFF ban, India to host U-17 Women's World Cup



ZURICH: International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) on Friday lifted the suspension from the All India Football Federation (AIFF) with immediate effect citing "FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022 scheduled to take place on October 11-30 2022 can be held in India as planned." "Under these circumstances, the Bureau of the Council decided on August 25, 2022 to lift the suspension of the AIFF with immediate effect. As a consequence, the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022™ scheduled to take

place on October 11-30 2022 can be held in India as planned," FIFA said in a statement. "Finally, as foreseen in the decision of the Bureau of 14 August 2022, a further communication to the AIFF will follow shortly with respect to the next steps to be taken towards holding elections. Kindly take note that FIFA and the AFC will continue to monitor the situation and will support the AIFF in organising the elections in a timely manner," the statement added. The decision was taken after FIFA received confirmation that

the mandate of the committee of administrators that was set up to assume the powers of the AIFF Executive Committee had been terminated and that the AIFF administration had regained full control of the AIFF's daily affairs. FIFA and the AFC will continue to monitor the situation and will support the AIFF in organising its elections in a timely manner. As a consequence, the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup 2022 scheduled to take place on October 11-30, 2022 will be held in India as planned. **ANI**

Former heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman accused of assault

LOS ANGELES: A lawsuit filed in Los Angeles alleges that former Olympic gold medalist and two-time world heavyweight boxing champion George Foreman sexually assaulted at least two women in the 1970s, local media reported on Friday. The two women accused Foreman of abusing them when they were teenagers and below the age of consent in the 1970s, KABC-TV, the West Coast flagship station of the ABC network, reported. The lawsuit, filed on Wednesday in the Los Angeles Superior



Court, does not identify Foreman by name, but identifies the alleged abuser as a former professional heavyweight boxer who defeated Joe Frazier in 1973 to become

the heavyweight champion of the world, said the report, adding that Foreman became champion after defeating Frazier on Jan. 22, 1973. Foreman, 73, has denied the allegations in a statement to ABC News, alleging people are "trying to extort millions of dollars each from me and my family." According to the report, Foreman said in the statement that he will work with his lawyers to "fully and truthfully expose my accusers' scheme and defend myself in court. I don't pick fights, but I don't run away from them either." **Xinhua**

INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves dipped by \$6.687 billion to \$564.053 billion for the week ended August 19, the lowest level in more than two years, due to a sharp drop in foreign currency assets as the RBI continues to intervene in the currency markets to defend the rupee.

MARKET BUSINESS & FINANCE



FINANCING OPTIONS

In line with its customer-centric vision of offering the best services and facilities to benefit its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, has announced the availability of financing options with special reduced rates for first-time borrowers.

Al Maha acquires 45% stake in Al Hael Ceramics Company

As part of the transaction, Al Maha will also operate Al Hael for five years with a possibility of extending for another five years, thereby allowing Al Hael to benefit from Al Maha's extensive experience in the production and sales of tiles

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Al Maha Ceramics (Al Maha) has announced the acquisition of a 45 per cent stake in Al Hael Ceramics Company (Al Hael).

Al Maha was founded in 2006 and is one of the largest ceramic tiles manufacturers in Oman. It produces around 6 mil sqm of tiles annually and exports its tiles to over 15 countries.

Al Hael is the largest manufacturer of tiles and porcelain in Oman with a capacity to produce up to 18 mil sqm of tiles annually. Al Hael manufacturing plant was completed in 2019 with an investment of around OMR40 million. The factory has state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities and its equipment has been purchased from the leading Italian equip-

ment manufacturer, SACMI. Al Hael can produce tiles of a large variety of sizes including the largest sizes in demand by the market.

As part of the transaction, Al Maha will also operate Al Hael for five years, with a possibility of extending for another five years, thereby allowing Al Hael to benefit from Al Maha's extensive experience in the production and sales of tiles. In return, Al Maha will receive OMR 120,000 as a service fee in the first 2 years and in subsequent years it will be entitled to 10 per cent of the net profits.

The GCC market of floor and wall tiles is estimated to grow at an annual rate of 6 per cent between 2022-2028 CAGR and reach 328 mil sqm and \$4.1 billion in revenues by 2028.

The market demand in Oman for



tiles is currently estimated to be around 40 mil sqm per annum and valued at around \$550 mil. Oman's tile market is expected to grow to 65.5 million sqm by 2028 and generate revenues of \$1 billion.

Al Maha and Al Hael will have a total combined capacity to produce over 24 mil sqm in porcelain and ceramic tiles. It will become one of the largest tiles producers in the GCC and the only producer of

porcelain tiles in Oman.

It will therefore be in a favourable position to serve Oman and the GCC demand for ceramic and porcelain tiles.

Al Maha plans to start produc-

ing its first tiles in the Al Hael factory in November 2022. The factory is expected to create over 300 jobs and will support Oman's Vision 2040 in diversifying Oman's economic activity.

ENHANCING OPERATIONS

CCED boosts telecommunications at camps in Eastern Central Oman

Times News Service

MUSCAT: CC Energy Development (CCED), in collaboration with Omantel, has delivered 4G GSM Services through its most recent telecommunication infrastructure upgrade in its operating blocks.

This upgrade includes a 60m tall telecommunication tower and a fibre optic cable to camp facilities located in Eastern Central Oman. The construction of the tower also serves the local community by providing enhanced mobile services.

The telecommunication infrastructure hosts various services from both major service providers in the Sultanate, including the previously hosted Ooredoo 4G+ Service as well as the recent introduction of Omantel 4G services.

This infrastructure utilises modern information processes to transfer real-time operational data which advances remote field management.

Muna Al Badi, Head of Information and Communication Technology at CCED said, "Delivery of this major Telecommunication Infrastructure in our blocks, is part of our strategy to drive digital transformation; this infrastruc-



ture supported Omantel 4G Services at our camp facilities as well as other major upgrades of services. We believe that the telecom services have direct and indirect benefits to our operations and the community at large. For example, with the internet, mobile apps, VoIP and other means of communication, our team can exchange information in real-time and stay connected to our partners and clients. Having these technologies in place, can also reduce operational costs, and increase productivity

across all departments."

Given the high demand for telecom services in the Sultanate, CCED previously built telecommunication infrastructure in its Blocks 3 and 4. This addition offers the local community improved connectivity, while also supporting the government's efforts to ensure better access to information, encourage innovation and promote e-learning.

Since the beginning of its operations in 2007, CCED has been focused on community and peo-

ple development by utilising the latest technologies and offering its team the best facilities and services to excel.

The new telecommunication tower also contributes to the development of the area by optimizing network coverage and providing opportunities for telecom operators to accelerate the rollout of new wireless technology. The company is committed to continually improving day-to-day operating processes, while also benefiting the local community.

CYBERSECURITY SOLUTIONS

Trend Micro to accelerate digital agendas of Oman's small to medium-sized enterprises

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Trend Micro Incorporated, a global leader in cybersecurity solutions, announced the launch of a strategic initiative to bolster the cyber security stance of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) in Oman, through its Worry-Free services- a suite of SMB-specific security solutions.

The company aims to strengthen the nation's SMBs in their digital transformation journeys through dedicated cybersecurity to protect them in the modern-day digital era.

"SMBs are crucial components of the country's economic development, as they generate job opportunities and cultivate an environment of innovation transforming the way citizens live and work," says Assad Arabi, Managing Director, Gulf Cluster, Trend Micro, "This is why smaller organisations need to operate and grow their businesses with the support of stronger cybersecurity strategies that protect their digital agendas against the rapidly evolving threat landscape. We at Trend Micro remain committed to helping Oman's SMBs reach greater milestones and safely navigate through today's digital challenges by providing them with our expertise and services to secure their future endeavours."

According to Trend Micro's Annual Cybersecurity Report for 2021, the company's security solutions detected and blocked over 4 million email threats, and more than 4.6 million URL victim attacks throughout Oman. Additionally, 700,607 malware attacks were identified and stopped. And as the country transitioned into remote work, Smart Home Network (SHN) solutions shielded home devices and prevented 581,119 SHN events. With the threat landscape consistently evolving, these figures show that businesses need to adopt multi-layered solutions to be able to protect their operations in to-



The company aims to strengthen the nation's SMBs in their digital transformation journeys through dedicated cybersecurity to protect them in the modern-day digital era

day's day and age.

Trend Micro's Worry-Free Services suite is a cutting-edge cybersecurity solution that provides complete threat protection across endpoints. Additionally, the combination of high-fidelity machine learning and an in-depth detection algorithm provides superior protection against ransomware and advanced attacks. Trend Micro Worry-Free XDR can perform detailed investigations and respond quickly due to the AI-powered, automatic data correlation across endpoints, servers, cloud, networks, and email. It is a single solution that relieves overworked IT staff by providing multi-layered security and making it an ideal platform for SMBs to safeguard their operations.

VALUE-ADDED BENEFITS

ahlibank offers cashback to its credit cardholders at Shell

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In a continued effort to offer value-added benefits and services to its customers, ahlibank has once again teamed up with Shell Oman Marketing Company (Shell Oman) to provide all its credit card holders with an exciting cashback offer.

Scheduled to run for 5 days each month till the end of the year 2022, the promotion offers all ahlibank credit cardholders 20 per cent cashback when fuelling or shopping in Shell service stations and Select shops with a maximum cap of OMR10 per customer.

Commenting on the promotion, Muneer Al Balushi - AGM- Head of Retail Distribution, ahlibank, said, "Our role as one of the Sultanate's leading banking institutions requires us to develop offers and services that meet customer



needs over time. This will enable us to fulfil their intention to utilise their credit cards in the best way possible. Such offers enhance our customers' loyalty and give them added value."

"We are pleased to announce

this offer, which will help us strengthen relationships with existing clients and build relationships with new ones. With the launch of the latest promotional offer, ahlibank is demonstrating its leadership in providing innovative

banking reward programs and solutions that meet the diverse needs of its customers," he added.

The cashback campaign reflects the bank's commitment to its growth strategy by creating products and services that offer value-added benefits to the customers and help consolidate its position in the market as one of Oman's leading and most trusted banks.

The bank continues to offer a comprehensive suite of services, modern technology, and innovative solutions across its branches in Oman.

All its product offerings and account types aim to achieve its customers' targets and consolidate its position in the market.

The bank offers top-class retail, commercial, and investment banking solutions in line with its vision of being a vibrant and innovative centre of banking.



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Bank Muscat offers special interest rates for its first-time borrowers

The special rates are meant for customers with salaries OMR1,000 and over who have either recently opened an account with Bank Muscat or those Bank Muscat customers who have accounts but have not availed of any loan facilities before

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision of offering the best services and facilities to benefit its customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services

provider in the Sultanate, has announced the availability of financing options with special reduced rates for first-time borrowers.

The special rates are meant for customers with salaries OMR1,000 and over who have ei-



ther recently opened an account with Bank Muscat or those Bank Muscat customers who have accounts but have not availed of any loan facilities before. Customers should be employed in govern-

ment, quasi-government or approved private sector (Tier 1) organisations to be eligible.

Bank Muscat launched the special offer after extensively analysing customer feedback and loan

booking data, which is once again a demonstration of its commitment to customer-centricity. Available to employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as select private-sector (Tier 1) companies, the special offer includes highly-competitive interest rates of 4.25 per cent for Baituna Home Loans and 4.5 per cent for Personal Finance for loan tenors over 48 months.

The bank added that customers can visit its Baituna sales centres in Qurm, Mabelah, Barka, Sohar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch across Oman for more information as well as to apply for Baituna. Baituna, which is well known for its prompt processing, documentation and prompt disbursal, can be used to construct or purchase new homes

as well as to buy land for residential construction. The bank offers Baituna Home Loans for up to OMR500,000 and up to 25 years to eligible customers.

At the same time, customers who require personal finance can visit their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards, which will ensure speedy processing of their applications. Financing up to OMR200,000 is available to customers based on the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM.

FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES



India's forex reserves slump by \$6.68 billion to hit two-year low

MUMBAI: India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves dipped by \$6.687 billion to \$564.053 billion for the week ended August 19, the lowest level in more than two years, due to a sharp drop in foreign currency assets as the RBI continues to intervene in the currency markets to defend the rupee.

As per the Reserve Bank of India's weekly statistical supplement, foreign currency assets, which are the biggest component of the forex reserves, fell by \$5.779 billion to \$501.216 billion during the week ended August 19.

This is the third weekly fall in the country's forex reserves. The forex reserves had slumped by \$2.238 billion during the week ended August 12.

India's foreign currency assets had declined by \$2.652 billion to \$506.994 billion during the week ended August 12.

Expressed in US dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-dollar currencies like the Euro, UK's Pound Sterling and Japanese Yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

For the week ended August 19, all components of the country's forex reserves declined.

The value of gold reserves fell by \$704 million to \$39.914 billion during the week under review.

The value of India's Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund declined by \$146 million to \$17.987 billion during the week under review, the RBI data showed.

India's reserve position in the International Monetary Fund declined by \$58 million to \$4.936 billion during the week ended August 19, as per the RBI Weekly Statistical Supplement. -ANI

ECONOMIC WATCH

China's industrial performance continues recovery, despite marginal profits decline

BEIJING: China's industrial performance has continued its recovery momentum, even though industrial profits edged down as a result of multiple factors, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said Saturday.

Major industrial firms, each with annual business revenue of at least 20 million yuan (about \$2.92 million), saw their profits fall 1.1 per cent year on year in the first seven months of 2022, to reach 4.89 trillion yuan, data from the NBS showed.

The combined revenues of these firms sustained a faster growth pace during the period, rising 8.8 per cent year on year to 76.57 trillion yuan.

A total of 16 out of 41 major industries saw growth in profits in the January-July period, and 14 of them reported growth of over 5 per cent.

NBS senior statistician Zhu Hong highlighted the recovery of the equipment manufacturing industry and the uptick of industrial profits of the automobile manufacturing sector, as supply and production chains are resuming, and pro-consumption policies such as the car purchase tax cuts are taking effect.

In July, the profits of the equipment manufacturing industry increased 6.8 per cent year on year, up 2.7 percentage points compared with the growth registered in June and rebounding for three



PRODUCTION LINE: Workers operate on a production line at an assembly workshop of CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotive Co., Ltd. in Zhuzhou, central China's Hunan Province. - Xinhua

consecutive months.

Automobile manufacturing was one of the industries that saw the fastest profit growth, reporting a sharp profit surge of 77.8 per cent in July, up 30.1 percentage points from June.

As China took stronger steps to ensure the energy supply, the expansion of the coal and crude oil output, as well as energy production, has driven up the profit growth of related industries, according to Zhu.

From January to July, profits of the coal mining sector jumped 1.05

times from the same period last year, which contributed 10.3-percentage-point growth to the profits of major industrial firms.

The raw material manufacturing industry weighs the most heavily on overall industrial profits, Zhu said. In the first seven months, the profits of the industry plunged 21.6 per cent year on year, expanding by 7.6 percentage points compared with the drop in the first half.

More efforts are needed to consolidate the recovery, said Zhu, citing reasons including relatively

higher costs for businesses, softening market demand in certain sectors, increasing operating pressure, as well as a more complex global landscape.

For the next stage, Zhu highlighted the importance of ensuring the smooth operation of production and supply chains, expanding effective investment, boosting consumer demand, and strengthening support for enterprises, to create more favourable conditions for the sustained and steady recovery of the industrial economy. -Xinhua

IN HYDRO AND WIND POWER

Germany, Denmark sign deal to ramp up renewable energy

BERLIN: German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock on Friday signed a deal with Denmark to boost investment in hydro and wind power, on the same day German electricity prices hit a new record.

Baerbock, who is in Copenhagen for talks with her Danish counterpart Jeppe Kofod, said the renewable energy partnership was a "very ambitious" investment in future generations.

Green electricity and hydrogen should become "central anchors for a more climate-neutral and sovereign Europe," Baerbock said.

The visit also included talks on security and defence cooperation.

What is included in the deal with Denmark?

The two countries will seek to "dramatically upscale" wind farm projects in the North and Baltic Seas, a statement from Germany's Foreign Ministry said, along with plans to use wind energy to produce green hydrogen which can then be piped to Germany.

A statement from Germany's Foreign Ministry said while Denmark has an abundance of renewable energy sources, its hydrogen needs are expected to be far lower than its neighbour to the south.

As Europe's largest economy phases out fossil fuels, it will increasingly need hydrogen to power its heavy steel and chemical industries.

The ministry said the neighbours would begin a dialogue on building the infrastructure required to transport hydrogen through pipes between Denmark

and Germany. The commitment also includes plans to cooperate on carbon capture and storage to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In a video message before the talks, Baerbock said the Baltic Sea can produce "more than twice the installed capacity of all German coal-fired power stations."

She said Denmark is a "role model" for Germany, which seeks to reduce its reliance on Russian energy following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Renewable energies make up 70 per cent of the mix of electricity generation in the Nordic country. Germany has nearly 30 offshore wind farms in the Baltic and the North Sea and plans for several more.

German electricity prices rise 10-fold in a year

Friday's deal signing came as electricity prices in Germany soared

to a new record.

The year-ahead contract soared to €850 (\$850) per megawatt hours (MWh) — a stark contrast from €85 last year.

Energy prices continue to skyrocket as European countries spur demand to avoid possible cuts to their natural gas supply from Russia. Moscow has reduced deliveries and there are fears of more drastic cuts over winter in retaliation for Western sanctions over the war in Ukraine.

Baerbock hit back at Russia's tactic, saying that using energy supply as "a weapon of war is an absolute breach of the rules to bring about social division." That is why it is so important for EU states to stand together when it comes to energy supply, she added.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholtz has set a date of 2045 for the country to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions, the

earliest of any major industrialised nation.

To meet the goal, his government has said it would close coal-fired power plants that were reactivated during the war in Ukraine and end imports of Russian oil and coal. The country will also aim to stop using Russian gas within the next two years.

On July 1, Germany assumed the one-year rotating presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. The intergovernmental forum for regional cooperation consists of the European Union and 10 member nations: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland and Sweden.

Russia was suspended from the council following the invasion of Ukraine. Moscow said later it had pulled out altogether, accusing the body of turning into "an anti-Russian tool." -nw



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STUDY SUGGESTS BROTHERS, SISTERS SHAPE CHARACTER LESS THAN THOUGHT

The finding of an international study by researchers from Leipzig University, the University of Zurich and Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand shows that our personality as adults is not determined by whether we grow up with sisters or brothers.

The results have now been published in the renowned journal "Psychological Science".

Siblings play a central role in childhood, and so it seems reasonable to assume that they influence each other's personalities in the long term. In fact, psychological research has been dealing with the question of what difference it makes whether people grow up with sisters or brothers for more than half a century.

Scientists have repeatedly investigated whether brothers and sisters influence the extent to which their siblings adopt traditional "gender-conforming" characteristics, i.e. characteristics that are considered "typically male" or "typically female" in society. There are many assumptions and also contradictory findings on this, which is due in part to the fact that earlier studies were often based on limited and not very robust data.

In order to shed light on the previously inconsistent data situation, a team of researchers has now analysed

data from more than 80,000 adults from nine countries, including Germany and the US, but also Mexico and China, for example. This was made possible by various national longitudinal studies that systematically collect information about people over decades, including their living conditions and personality traits determined in various ways. Statistical analysis of this data showed across national borders that personality traits such as risk-taking, emotional stability,

Siblings play a central role in childhood, and so it seems reasonable to assume that they influence each other's personalities in the long term.

conscientiousness and patience are not systematically related to sibling gender.

"Our findings refute the idea that growing up with brothers or sisters causes us to develop certain personality traits in the long term that are considered 'typically female' or 'typically male' in a society," explains Dr Julia Rohrer, one of the authors of the paper. "Overall, current research suggests that siblings have a surprisingly small impact on personality in adulthood. For example, previous studies by our research group here in Leipzig show that sibling position - that is, whether a person is a firstborn or a sandwich child, for example - also does not play a major role in personality."

However, the results of the new study do not mean that sibling gender does not play a role at all in long-term life paths. Economic studies have shown that in the US and Denmark, women with brothers earn less when employed. "So there do seem to be some interesting dynamics here that are related to gender," says Rohrer.

"But personality is probably not part of the explanation for such effects."

-ANI



Our findings refute the idea that growing up with brothers or sisters causes us to develop certain personality traits in the long term that are considered 'typically female' or 'typically male' in a society," explains Dr Julia Rohrer



IN PICTURES



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Annual weigh-in in ZSL London Zoo

A keeper weighs penguins during the annual weigh-in in ZSL London Zoo in London, Britain. Animals in the ZSL London Zoo were weighed and measured on Thursday. The statistics will be shared with zoos across the world.

Xinhua



'Beyond the Moonlit Door' art installation show opens in Kuala Lumpur

People pose for photos as they visit the 'Beyond the Moonlit Door' art installation show during a media preview at Kwai Chai Hong in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Xinhua



Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt during the promotion of their film 'Brahmastra Part One: Shiva'
Bollywood actor Ranbir Kapoor and his wife and actress Alia Bhatt pose for a picture with the fans during the promotion of their upcoming film 'Brahmastra Part One: Shiva', at Mehboob Studios, in Mumbai.

ANI Photo



International Dog Day celebrated in Canada

People gather with their dogs during an event celebrating the International Dog Day in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Xinhua

Frankfurt organises Museumsuferfest to celebrate cultural, museum landscape

People visit the Museumsuferfest in Frankfurt, Germany. Frankfurt organised the Museumsuferfest to celebrate its cultural and museum landscape from August 26 to August 28. On both the northern and southern banks of the Main, 25 museums keep their doors open until late at night. In addition to museums, numerous catering stands, sculptures, paintings and installations will be on display on the riverbank.

Xinhua



China-aided pilot project sets good example for poverty alleviation in Cambodia's rural areas

Aerial picture shows the Tanorn village in Doung commune of Bati district in Takeo province, Cambodia.

Xinhua



92nd Lisbon Book Fair kicks off in Portugal

People visit the 92nd Lisbon Book Fair at the Parque Eduardo VII in Lisbon, Portugal. The 92nd Lisbon Book Fair kicked off at the Parque Eduardo VII in Lisbon on August 25 and will run until September 11.

Xinhua



Fire site in Georgia forest area

Picture shows a fire site in the forest area of the central resort town of Borjomi, Georgia.

Xinhua



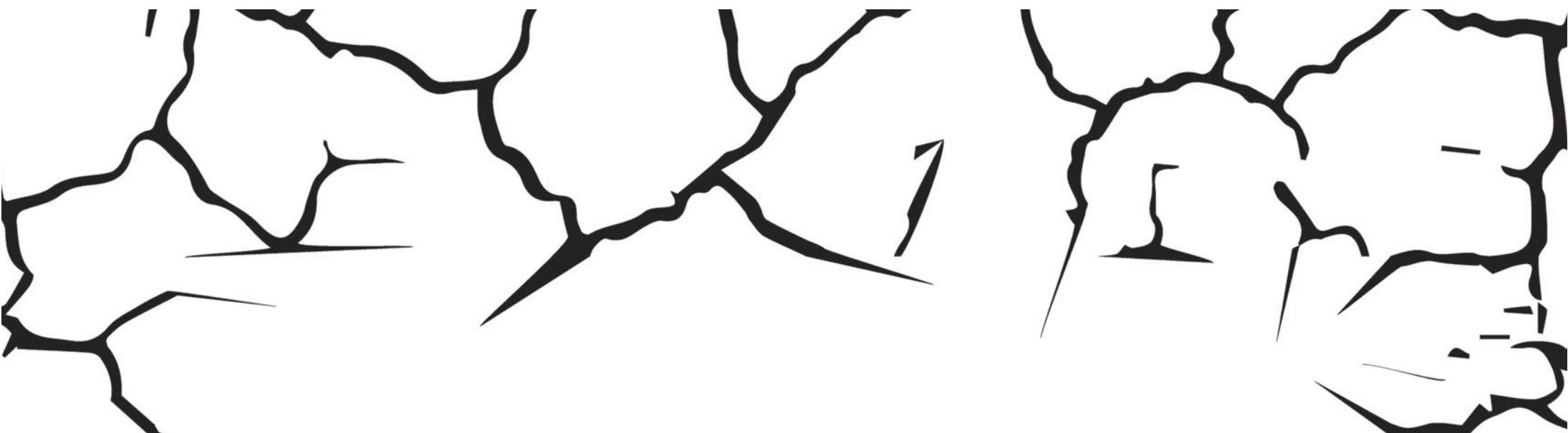


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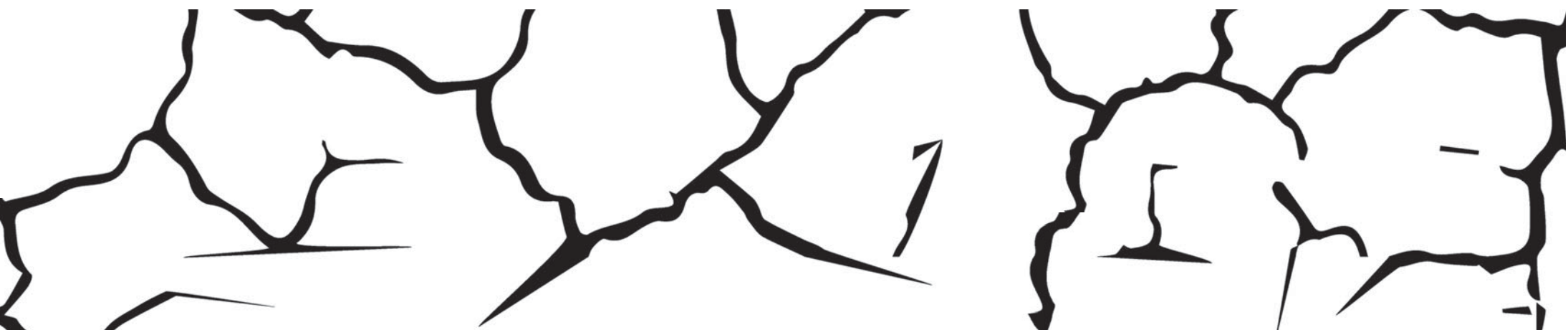
FEATURE





DROUGHT:

What is it and what can we do about it?



AFTER a summer of extreme heat and scarce rain leading to parched forests and farmland, scientists have warned that Europe is facing its worst drought in at least 500 years.

The assessment, which is based on preliminary findings published by the European Commission's science and knowledge service this week, comes as low river levels disrupt shipping and hydropower generation.

And Europe is not the only place affected. According to the UN, an estimated 55 million people globally are directly impacted by droughts every year. Africa is the most affected continent, accounting for 44 per cent of drought events around the world.

Although scientists know they are becoming more frequent, intense and longer-lasting as a result of climate change, droughts can be tricky to predict and monitor.

So what exactly is drought?

In a nutshell, drought refers to a period of drier-than-normal conditions caused by lack of precipitation.

They are complex phenomena that can last for weeks, months or even years, and often have huge implications for people and economies. Scientists generally divide drought into four categories. What's known as meteorological drought happens after a prolonged period of dry weather patterns and below-average rain and snowfall. When levels subsequently drop in streams, rivers, reservoirs and groundwater, a hydrological drought is occurring.

Agricultural drought happens when the lack of moisture in the soil starts to affect plants and crops. And finally, when water shortages impact the supply and demand of goods, for example, by disrupting shipping or energy production, that's socioeconomic drought.

Oldrich Rakovec, a scientist at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in the German city of Leipzig, says often, but not always, all four of the above scenarios can play out — as is the case with the current drought in Europe.

"But usually a meteorological drought starts first," he said. Rainfall records are normally the first sign of drought, and it might take some time before that leads to shrinking rivers or stressed vegetation.

At what point do dry conditions officially become drought?

Scientists monitor drought using different indices representing precipitation, the health of vegetation and moisture in the soil, among other things. When conditions cross the threshold of what is considered to be normal — based on long-term data — then it's clear a drought has begun, said Rakovec. Likewise, a drought event is over when conditions return to their usual state.

Germany's Drought Monitor at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research assesses agricultural drought by tracking moisture in the soil. According to its model, a drought has begun when soil moisture reaches a level seen in only 20% of years over a long time period.

Unlike other extreme events such as wildfires and floods, droughts often creep up slowly, causing immense damage by stealth. So what qualifies as a drought? And what can we do to safeguard against it?



In the drought assessment published by the European Commission this week, researchers used the Combined Drought Indicator that measures precipitation, soil moisture and stress on plants to conclude that the current event appeared to be the worst in five centuries. The report also said almost half of Europe's territory had reached a warning level for drought — meaning a clear deficit of soil moisture — while 17 per cent was in a state of alert, meaning vegetation had also been affected.

Recovery and future resilience

A region's ability to recover will depend on just how severe and prolonged a drought is. And whether enough rainfall eventually arrives to soak the soil, recharge groundwater and replenish reservoirs — in other words, to return conditions to their normal state.

Andrea Toreti, senior researcher with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, said withstanding droughts will require improving water management practices in collaboration with local users and limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

"In the medium to long term, what we have to do is to, on a world scale, cut greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate effectively and reduce the risk of additional warming," he said.

Rakovec stressed there was also a need "for new technological developments to mitigate the effects of extreme droughts."

On a regional scale, establishing large water reservoirs, such as underground storage systems, could help retain water for times of need. Smart irrigation technologies that target the roots of crops can also reduce water waste and keep plants healthy. Rakovec said breeding more heat-resistant crops could limit losses during droughts.

Planting mixed forests rather than monocultures is also a good idea, as diverse species are better at holding water and surviving drought.

Ultimately, Europe will need to adapt to extremes, said Rakovec. -DW



ROUND-UP



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Renault Koleos allows owners to elevate their everyday adventure

The 2022 Renault Koleos SUV is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn

MUSCAT: Renault Koleos effortlessly blends refined luxury with functionality offering business class comfort for everyday adventure. Owners say it is a vehicle that offers the discerning driver a unique experience that combines innovative technology, unequalled comfort and uncompromising safety to perfectly serve all of their top-end vehicle expectations.

The 2022 Renault Koleos SUV is engineered to demand attention and make heads turn. Offering off-road capability with its all-wheel drive transmission, Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. With its athletic profile, robust front end, roomy seats, taut lines underscored with chrome, Renault Koleos allows owners to take their journey with confidence. Featuring a powerful and efficient new engine and more on-board technologies Renault Koleos fully embodies the values of the top of the Renault line-up.

The 2022 Renault Koleos also comes with additional features, such as rich acoustics with the BOSE audio system, lighting options, multimedia, navigation, Bluetooth and driving assistance systems in addition to easy park assist.

Renault Koleos has been capturing everyone's attention in Oman with its charismatic, features rich and packed with safety attributes. If you are looking for a spacious SUV with elegant styling and unparalleled four-wheel drive technology, Renault Koleos is the car to buy.



Afrah Al-Kharusi from Nizwa is fascinated with the brand's easy trunk access and hand-free function. She says, "The model features powerful, efficient engines, safety attributes and on-board technologies. The SUV is marked for its fuel efficiency and infotainment options too. With a sensor located under the bumper, all you need is a simple gesture with your foot to open the boot with ease. It is very practical when your hands are full when returning from office or shopping. I also like its 8.7" touchscreen navigation with R-Link2 system & Bose sound, 5 colour ambient lighting."

The model's spacious cabin inspired Taamir Al Hinai from Muscat into buying a Renault

Koleos. "Renault Koleos has a 2,705 mm wheelbase – for a total vehicle length of 4,673mm – counts amongst the longest in the class and allows Koleos to boast record-breaking interior space to position itself as a D-segment SUV," Taamir says.

Sabeel Al Mashari from Muscat says, "Renault Koleos stands out with its assertive exterior design and enhanced interior comfort. The wide-ranging suite of driver-assistance systems and infotainment options it offers make it a top brand."

Sohail Al Jabri, who loves to go on adventure drives, loves Renault Koleos All mode 4x4-i technology. "One can get off the beaten track with Renault Koleos any time. It's

all mode 4x4-i technology, swap between 2WD mode, Auto mode and 4x4 (lock) mode is really impressive. It offers an ideal balance of torque between the front and rear wheels for perfect grip in all circumstances," he adds.

Sameer Zedjali from Rusayl likes Renault Koleos for its strong and high-end design, comfort and outstanding performance. He says, "Koleos extends a variety of features that are among the most capable in the market. I particularly like its blind spot warning with flank protection warning, auto park assists and remote start engine with timer option."

A spokesperson for Renault Oman, from the house of Suhail Bahwan Automobiles, said, "Well-

defined edges make the overall profile of the 2022 Koleos appear solid and athletic and is one of the most prominent features in this new version. A great combination of power and refinement, the Koleos makes its presence felt with large shoulders and muscular side panels that are further enhanced by a robust front-end; broad, smart-looking tires; and a distinctly large wheelbase."

The all-mode 4x4-i transmission results in a car that promises owners all the power and comfort they would require on the road. The engine can be switched between two- and four-wheel driving giving drivers the liberty and flexibility to choose their own experience.

The car is engineered to mirror the comfort of being home,

with spacious leg space, ventilated memory seats, a breathable cabin.

With a choice of colours for the seats, owners can choose what defines them the best – for a roomier feeling, one can opt for lighter shades, while darker ones can be picked for more assertive looks. The 2022 Koleos also comes with all-new black titanium trims that replace its predecessor's wooden trims.

The car's ambient lighting, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, R-LINK 2 all make for a memorable drive each time. The 2022 Renault Koleos is certainly a notch above when it comes to contemporary SUVs that set out to offer a bit of everything to cater to all customers, no matter their drives.

Renault Koleos particularly amazes car enthusiasts who value distinctive design, advanced technology, high reliability and superior performance. Koleos exudes elegance with its strong lines and signature Renault design cues. The carefully sculpted bonnet on the Koleos flows seamlessly from the stylish, chrome-highlighted grille to the sweeping taillight design.

Renault Koleos LE model has LED fog lamps with chrome borders, new 19-inch Kavea alloy wheels and resplendent new front grill. The Renault Koleos SE has been augmented with Sand Grey leather seats, tilt adjustment front headrests, one touch easy folding rear seats with two step reclining and power seats, electric power seats for driver and passenger, 18-inch Argonaute two tone alloy wheels, auto folding rear view mirrors with door lock, auto-dimming rear view mirror. It also supports Apple car play and android auto.

At the rear, Renault's trademark style is again prominently on display. The wide, horizontal tail lights amplify the impression of width (1,843mm) and draw the eye to the Renault logo on the tailgate. Chrome inserts set into the lower part of the rear bumper take the shape of twin exhaust tail pipes, a detail that is complementary with Koleos' overall exterior design.

UAE-BASED PHARMACY

BinSina Pharmacy Group opens flagship outlet at Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: Renowned UAE-based pharmacy group BinSina, announced its foray into the Oman market with the launch of its flagship outlet at the Mall of Oman.

The state-of-the-art pharmacy's grand opening began with a ribbon-cutting by Dr Ibrahim Bin Nasser Al Rashdi, Assistant Director General of medical supplies at the Ministry of Health Oman. Officiated by Dr Doaa Marouf, Chief Executive Officer of Al Khayyat Investments (AKI) Pharma, the ribbon-cutting ceremony was followed by a presentation, photo-shoot and tour of the pharmacy for guests and the media.

Speaking on the sidelines of the pharmacy's grand opening, Dr Doaa Marouf stated, "Our ongoing success allows us to continue growing and expanding our network of pharmacies in the GCC, and with that opportunity, we bring our innovative and modernised approach to managing pharmacies and customer experiences to the people of Oman. Particularly those residing and working in the vicinity of Mall of Oman."

"Our flagship outlet offers a complete range of products and services. We couple these products and service offerings with a strong team of experienced pharmacists,



who will deliver personalized services and a more holistic approach to wellness to our customers in Oman", he added.

Strategically located in the centre of the city at the Mall of Oman in Baushar, BinSina is a trusted brand that promotes good health and wellness. The Pharmacy is located on the Mall of Oman's 2nd Floor (Shop J14); and dispenses a wide range of products and special offers including healthcare, vitamins and supplements, over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, personal care, baby care, skincare, cosmetics, fitness, homecare, and health foods. It is staffed by experienced trained pharmacists who

will serve the community in Muscat and neighbouring areas.

BinSina is one of the leading pharmacies in the UAE with a growing network of more than 120 outlets. Established in 1965, as part of Ibn Sina Group Pharmacies (LLC) and Al Khayyat Investments, BinSina is UAE's first pharmacy chain that brings more than 57 years of expertise from the world of health, wellness and beauty. Focusing on a community's ever-growing needs, BinSina works with brands and partners, to offer quality products that aim at promoting a healthy lifestyle.

PROMOTION

Continental Tyres launches exciting new campaign

MUSCAT: Customers buying Continental Tyres can now look forward to getting free Lulu vouchers on cash purchases.

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Continental tyres is renowned across the world for its reliability and dependability.

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conversion sizes precisely matching the requirements of its customers. After all, a unique vehicle deserves unique tyres.

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