

9 schools in Dhofar Governorate

The Directorate General of Education in the Governorate of Dhofar has endorsed the construction of 9 schools in the governorate's wilayats. The move comes within the framework of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Royal directives to construct 76 schools in the governorates of Oman. Seven schools will be built in the Wilayat of Salalah, of which four will be in Sahalnoot and 3 in Awqad. **SEE P5**



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MBAPPE IN POSITION OF POWER AT PSG AFTER AGREEING TO NEW DEAL



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STRATEGY FOR RENEWABLES, GREEN HYDROGEN FINALISED



P20

TURKISH CULTURE AND CUISINE WEEK SHAPES BETTER BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN OMAN AND TURKEY



SALALAH

DHOFAR GOVERNOR MEETS YOUTH

Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, met young people of Dhofar Governorate at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment, on Sunday. The meeting comes as a translation of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his attention to the youth and the efforts aimed at achieving their hopes and aspirations and activating everything that would create a real and effective partnership in building the renewed Omani renaissance.

DETAILS ON P 3

SCF SCHEME FOR PAYMENTS

The Ministry of Finance issued circular No 5/2022 on implementation of the Supply Chain Financing (SCF) Scheme to improve liquidity management and facilitate the payment of contractors and suppliers — under contracts worth no less than RO 100,000 — with various government units. The SCF scheme aims to ensure supply chain sustainability, facilitating the payments of the private sector, supporting the private sector and encouraging it to participate in public tenders. — ONA



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350 journalists from 100 countries to attend 31st IFJ Congress

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, will preside over the opening ceremony of the 31st Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

The Omani Journalists Association (OJA) will represent the Sultanate of Oman in hosting the four-day event which starts on May 31. The congress gains importance locally, regionally and internationally as the most prominent journalism and media related event in

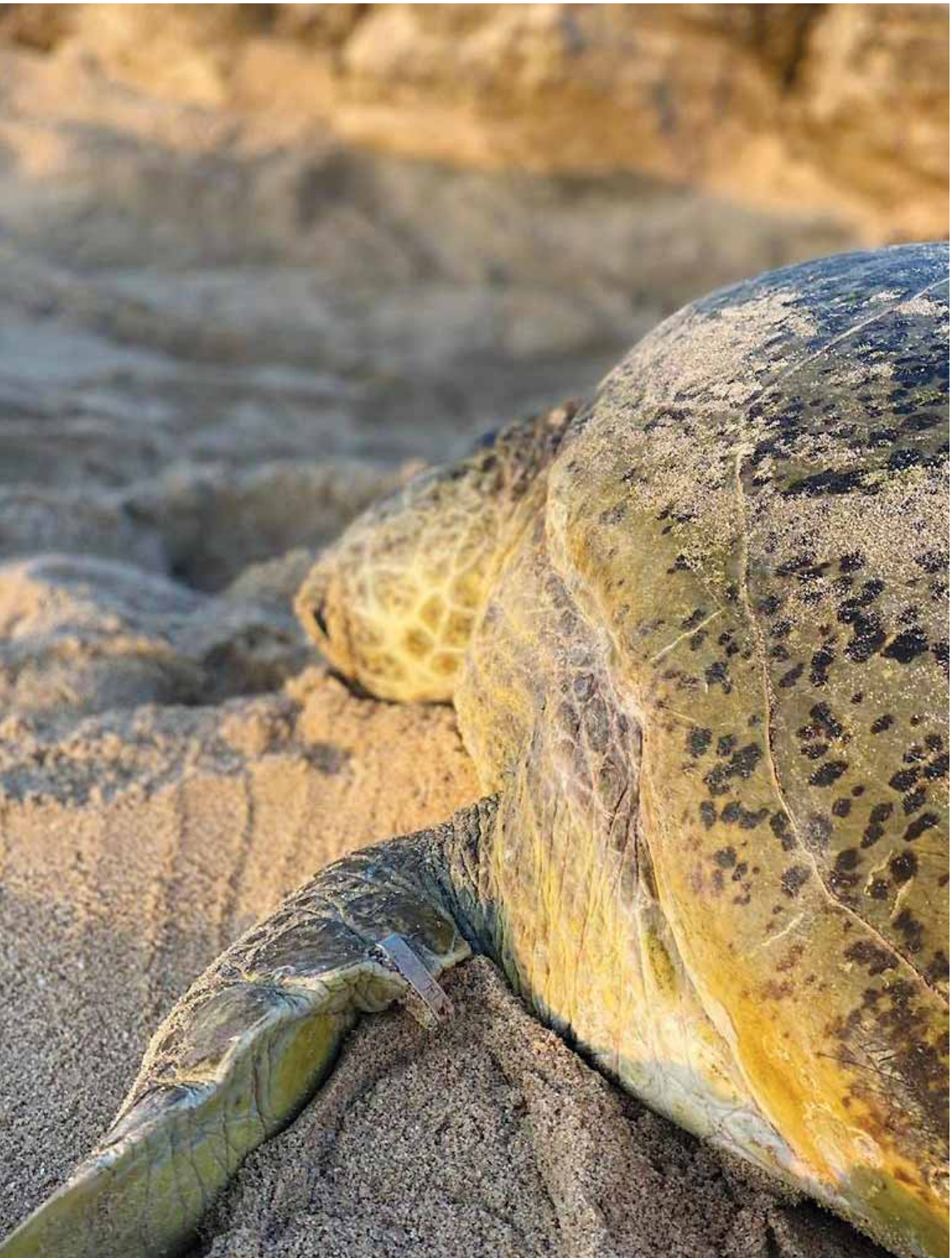
the Middle East. As many as 350 journalists, representing associations from over 100 countries will be taking part in the event, in addition to 50 journalists and media personalities who represent newspapers, radios, television channels and e-newspapers from all over the world.

Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Arai, Chairman of the OJA Board of Directors, said that the OJA, in cooperation with the Secretariat General of the IFJ, will announce the Asian Federation for Journalists, which will kick start in Muscat.

During the opening ceremony

of the congress, the Sultanate of Oman's award for the best press photo in the world will be announced and the families of 5 journalists who died on-job will be honoured. Oman is the second Arab country after Tunisia and the first Asian country to host the IFJ congress. — ONA

CONSERVING MARINE LIFE



The Environment Authority has signed an agreement with Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the United States Federal Government, to draft a strategy for the conservation and protection of sea turtles in the Sultanate of Oman. The species will be studied and tracked by satellite, within the context of a five-year plan to group Al Rimani turtles in the Wilayat of Masirah. As part of Oman's celebration of World Turtle Day (May 23), the Environment Authority has underscored the great attention accorded to marine life and noted that Omani beaches serve as a safe haven for sea turtles, particularly the species of Rimani, Al Hamsa and Al Sharaf. — ONA

All Covid-19 precautionary steps lifted in public places

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing convening, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has followed up updates on the disease and means of protection against the virus measures to curb its spread.

The Committee noted that data and statistics about cases of infection, patients admitted to hospital wards and intensive care units (ICUs) point to a gradual decline in the pandemic's curve and, accordingly, decided the following. All precautionary measures against Covid-19 in all public places and business outlets are deemed terminated.

Members of the society are advised to espouse a 'culture of health and protection' in all respects. In the event of someone experiencing fever or any morbid respiratory symptoms, he/she is advised to stay at home, avoid mixing with others and wear a face mask when mingling with people. All individuals — particularly the aged, people suffering from chronic diseases or im-

Citizens and residents are highly advised to take the booster dose of Covid-19

SUPREME COMMITTEE

munodeficiency — are urged to stick to wearing the face mask in closed areas.

Citizens and residents are highly advised to take the booster dose of Covid-19.

The Supreme Committee expresses thanks to citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman for their cooperation, as well as their adherence to procedures and precautionary measures.

The Committee also lauded the 'constructive role' of government institutions and private establishments whose cooperation, it said, contributed in curbing the spread of the virus. — ONA

Four-day heatwave likely as dust storm clears

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH @lakshmioman

Just as the dust storm has cleared, the Sultanate of Oman is experiencing a heatwave which will remain until Thursday. According to the weather expert at Oman Met Office, the temperatures across the coastal areas of Oman Sea and the Arabian Sea could touch above 45 degrees Celsius.

Oman Meteorology has warned of high temperatures in Al Amerat (46°C) Bausher (45°C), Wadi al Maawil (45°C) and Al Awabi (44°C). Dima W'attayeen was the hottest place in the country with a maximum temperature of 49.9°C during the last 24 hours. It has urged people to take necessary measures to avoid sunstrokes and heat exhaustion, especially workers who are



exposed to sunlight and high temperatures.

MID-DAY BREAK The Ministry of Labour has urged companies to take necessary measures to avoid the effects of high temperatures in workplaces, especially during the months from June-August. Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry

of Labour, speaking at the 'Heat Stress Forum' on Sunday spoke of the importance of mandatory implementation of the Ministry of Labour's decision to ban work at construction sites and open spaces during noon hours from June to August. The under-secretary said: "The ministry will work to complete the efforts to activate the heat stress campaign this year".

Bilateral ties, maritime pacts and transport issues discussed



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy with Javad Oji.



Eng Said Hamoud al Maawali with Rostam Qasemi.

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received here on Sunday Javad Oji, Minister of Oil in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The meeting reviewed bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields, particularly areas related to energy.

The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides discussed activating agreements of maritime affairs, connecting ports and boosting air traffic between the two countries. They also reviewed prospects for future developments in the two-way trade between Oman and Iran.

Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology's Under-Secretary for Transport, and several officials from both sides were present at the meeting.

Al Shamakhi also explored areas of cooperation in the field of transport and logistics with Shahriar Afandizadeh, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The two sides discussed several matters of common interest. — ONA

Oman-Iran trade exchange volume at \$1.336 billion

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH
MUSCAT, MAY 22

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran have maintained distinctive historic relations that were underpinned by geographical proximity and common interests. This opens broad prospects for the growth of economic, commercial and investment cooperation between the two countries.

Official figures indicate that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Iran reached \$1.336 billion as of last year. The previous period witnessed the opening of direct trade lines between the ports of the two countries, bringing the trade movement between them to the rate of 5 to 7 daily trips.

Businessmen in the two countries are eyeing more cooperation to raise the volume of trade exchange to greater levels in light of the political relations and common interests that unite them with the aim of establishing a joint investment firm, exchanging experiences and enhancing investments in various sectors such as nanotechnology, tourism, industry, education and health, among others.

Businessmen affirmed to the Oman daily that the Sultanate of Oman boasts an attractive investment environment supported by appropriate legislation, incentives and

facilities that are available for foreign investment. This includes full ownership of projects by foreign investors. This is in addition to the absence of restrictions on currency exchange, and the absence of income tax for individuals. There are industrial and free zones, and there are dozens of readily available investment opportunities offered by the government to investors.

Eng Ridha bin Jumah al Saleh, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), said that the Iranian president's visit to the Sultanate of Oman would enhance economic and investment cooperation and provide opportunities for Omani and Iranian businessmen and investors to hold bilateral meetings and discuss the forging of partnerships in promising sectors which, in turn, increases trade and investment exchange in the upcoming period.

The business environment in Oman constitutes an attractive factor for investors and businessmen as it provides many advantages and incentives such as national treatment for investments, legal transparency in the business environment and full ownership. In addition, Oman has no restrictions on currency exchange, and income tax for individuals, Al Saleh said.

Mohammed bin Abdulhussain bin Baqer

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al Lawati, head of Oman-Iran Businessmen Council at OCCI, aspires for greater Omani-Iranian trade relations in the coming years by increasing Iranian investments in the Sultanate of Oman and raising the volume of trade exchange between the two countries.

Al Lawati added that despite the strong political relations between the two countries, Iranian investments in Oman are still limited. He expressed his hope that there would be an increase in the volume of investment, especially in tourism, industry, oil and gas and nanotechnology sectors. He noted that Iran possesses great experiences in these sectors and that Oman can benefit from them.

Omani businessmen hope that the first visit of the new Iranian president will result in the establishment of a joint investment company between the two countries to organise import and export and financial transactions. This will raise the volume of trade exchange between the two countries to more than \$5 billion, Al Lawati said.

Al Lawati noted that the most important challenges facing Iranian investors doing business in Oman are the sanctions imposed on Iran which occurred during the period of the flow of investments to Oman, adding that the commercial banks of the two countries cannot conduct direct transactions due to the sanctions.





SAYYID BADR RECEIVES SYRIAN CULTURE MINISTER



MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received here on Sunday Dr Lubanah Mshaweh, Minister of Culture in the Syrian Arab Republic. They exchanged views on the Omani-Syrian relations and reviewed areas of cooperation. The two ministers also lauded the efforts exerted to enhance the bilateral relations between the two countries in terms of organising art exhibitions and antiquities restoration. The meeting was attended by several officials from both sides. — ONA

Over 2,000 visit Land of Frankincense sites in April

SALALAH: The number of visitors to the Land of Frankincense sites in the Governorate of Dhofar in April 2022 stood at 2,132 according to the latest data released by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar.

The number of visitors to Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Museum of the Frankincense Land reached 1,127 while the visitors to Samahram Archaeological Site stood at 567. Moreover, the number of visitors to the Wbar Archaeological Site (Shisr) reached 438.

The Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samahram, Wbar and the Wadi Dokka archaeological sites are registered on the World Heritage List under the name "Land of Frankincense" sites.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, represented by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar, develops the sites and provides them with service and aesthetic facilities to serve the goals of cultural and archaeological tourism in the governorate. — ONA

Oman's cardiac care programmes highlighted at world conference



GENEVA: The World Heart Summit of the World Heart Federation that involved leaders from the global cardiovascular community concluded on Sunday in Geneva.

The Sultanate of Oman took part in this exclusive event with a delegation headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health along with policymakers, diplomats, researchers, private sector partners and health advocates.

The Health Minister spoke at the World Heart Summit stating that the cardiovascular diseases (CVD) are the leading cause of death globally as well in the Middle East. He added that it is extremely important to concentrate on prevention as most cardiovascular diseases are luckily preventable by addressing behavioural risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet and obesity, physical inactivity, and harmful use of alcohol. He emphasised how daily consumption of fruits and vegetables, as well as regular exercise could potentially avoid two-thirds of heart disease.

Dr Al Saeedi pointed out that Oman started its national

NCD screening programme for all citizens aged 40 years and above in 2007 which has been instrumental in the early detection of NCDs in the country. Moreover, cardiovascular disease care is integrated in primary healthcare by establishing specialised clinics run by family physicians with close link with the hospitals to provide continuum of care to this population.

Moreover, the health minister added that Oman has established cardiac units and stroke units in the regional hospitals and opened the National Heart Centre in Muscat in 2015, which provides the most advanced cardiac interventions to all types of patients.

WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

The 75th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA75) being held from Sunday to Saturday (May 22-28) in Geneva, Switzerland, is attended by delegates of World Health Organization's member states.

Omani delegation, headed by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, comprises MoH's under-secretaries and senior officials.

Dhofar governor reminds youth of their role in development

SALALAH: Sayyid Mohammed bin Sultan al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, met with young people of Dhofar Governorate at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment, on Sunday.

The meeting comes in the wake of the Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his attention to the youth and the efforts aimed at achieving their hopes and aspirations and activating everything that would create a real and effective partnership in building the renewed Omani renaissance.



During the meeting, the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar stressed that the youth are the mainstay of the country and it depends on them for the success of development plans

and programmes. He added that there is no doubt that the youth are the basis of any development movement and ambitious plans that aim to develop countries.

He referred to the government's support for the youth and its keenness to overcome all the difficulties they face in order to achieve their aspirations. He stressed the importance of focusing on spreading the positives and strengthening them with hard work and developing practical solutions to deal with the difficulties they face.

On the occasion, Sayyid

Mohammad bin Sultan al Busaidy also listened to youths' questions, ideas and creative suggestions in the field of developing work in the governorate, stressing the importance of communication and cooperation between all youth segments to benefit from the opportunities offered by the government to support young people in various development programmes. This would support the comprehensive development process and help to achieve the government's strategies and contribute to the march of the renewed renaissance led by His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA



Mangam govt services labs kick off

MUSCAT: In cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Follow-up Unit, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Sunday launched a series of workshops (labs) to streamline government services under the codename of "Mangam Labs Initiative".

Towards this objective, workshops are being held at Oman Institute for Oil and Gas (InstOG) till June 16 to gauge

the impact and efficiency of the labs aimed at streamlining government services within the context of the Digital Government Transformation Programme 2021-2025.

More than 100 representatives of government and private establishments are participating in the labs, along with academicians, experts and representatives of civil society institutions and beneficiaries.

— ONA

Italy honours National Museum secretary-general

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnasseri

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, has been awarded the 'Order of the Star of Italy' (knighthood) by Sergio Mattarella, President of the Italian Republic, for his role in strengthening the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Federica Favi, the Italian Ambassador, handed over the medal to Al Moosawi at an event organised at her residence here on Sunday.

The Italian Ambassador praised the role of the Secretary-General of the National Museum in boosting bilateral relations in the areas of culture and museums

between Oman and Italy. The process started in 2011 through cooperation with Italian expertise during the founding stages of the National Museum project, especially in the preservation, conservation and development of museum narratives.

In 2019 an exhibition titled 'Visionists: Forty Years of Italian Archaeological Research in the Sultanate of Oman' was dedicated to the biographies of excavators and archaeological studies who conducted their research in Oman.

Cooperation between the two countries is also represented through the participation of the National Museum in a cultural visual lecture on the culture of fragrance, accompanying



the perfumes exhibition at the Turin Archeology Museum in 2020, and hosting the 'Fragrant Frankincense' exhibition in cooperation with the Italian Perfume Foundation in 2021 which included loaned artefacts

from the Italian Republic along with Omani archaeological collections.

Both exhibitions dealt with the civilisational, historical and religious dimensions of the culture of fragrance and the

role that the Sultanate of Oman played across the ages in cultural and commercial communication through the frankincense pathways, starting from the urban areas of the Land of Frankincense in the Dhofar Governorate.

The National Museum is the country's flagship cultural institution, showcasing its cultural heritage from the earliest evidence of human settlement in the Arabian Peninsula to the present day through which it looks forward to a promising future.

The Museum was established by Royal Decree 62/2013, issued on 16 Muharram 1435 AH (corresponding to 20 November 2013 CE), as a legal entity with financial and administrative independence and the capacity

to own, manage and dispose of tangible and intangible assets of Oman's cultural heritage in line with internationally recognised experiences and standards in classifying ancient museums. The Museum aims to achieve its educational, cultural and humanitarian mission by consolidating noble Omani values and raising public awareness among citizens, residents and visitors about its history, heritage and culture and by developing their creative and intellectual abilities, especially in the areas of preserving evidence, collectibles, and highlighting its cultural dimensions by employing and adopting the best practices and standards in the fields of museum sciences.



READYING YOUTH FOR FUTURE JOBS

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

YOUNG job-seekers should have the skills in demand in the market. Here lies the importance of soft skills and vocational training that help build their employability.

For employers, anyone who has multiple skills or is capable of performing more tasks than he's paid for has the edge over others. Having a desire for updates in any sector makes the candidates even more desirable.

Within the framework of these basic requirements, are the Omani youth ready for the challenges of the job market?

The latest issue of 'Scientific Insights' magazine published by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), discussed the scope of future jobs with the requirements of specialists and academics. "One-third of new jobs created in the United States in the past 25 years were types that did not exist, or barely existed, in areas including IT development, hardware manufacturing, app creation and IT systems management", it stated

A report based on 'Technology, jobs and the future of work' issued by McKinsey Global Institute (2017), states the world is constantly changing and affecting job requirements.

These reports offer a background for questions as to how they affect future jobs? How can various modern technologies be adapted to support a stable base in the labour market and create sustainable job opportunities? How can the Sultanate of Oman take advantage of these developments to formulate evident job sustainability?

Khalfan bin Saif al Touqi, an economist and academician, says we should be prepared for what the future holds as it moves rapidly with all the various developments.

"The transformation for future jobs will be quick and within months, and it will be very, very fast. This is evident when dealing with the current generation whose thinking process is completely different due to their exposure to various technical developments", he said.

According to him, the world has evolved a lot from the past when people dreamed of becoming engineers, pilots or doctors. Now our youth aspire to become YouTubers or bloggers because the way people think and live their lives has changed drastically.

It is expected that by 2025, 10 per cent of the clothes that people wear will be connected to the Internet of Things, and the robot will be an active member of the boards of directors of institutions. Liver transplants made from 3D printers is even expected to be successfully conducted.

"Future will be very different from what we live in today, and it is highly important to prepare the future generation for the jobs of the future", opines Dr Zahra bint Rashid al Rawahiyah, CEO of Artificial Intelligence Academy.

"Future jobs will require more investment in building qualified human capabilities, capable of creativity and innovation and able to adapt to the changing nature of business. Therefore, companies and institutions must boost innovation and make it their top priority for such matters", Dr Zahra asserted.

There are several social, economic and technological factors that will contribute to changing the future of jobs in the short-term, and the importance of each of these factors has been determined, say the market experts.

They say that digital technologies are developing at an astonishing speed and rapidly transforming work's nature. The challenge for countries worldwide is to adapt to the new digital economy, ensuring that each new generation is empowered to seize the opportunities it creates.

CURRENT PLANS

The Sultanate of Oman is ready for what is to come. There are programmes that some parties are currently carrying out, and there are programmes that need to be worked on. There needs to be cooperation between them to review the current plans to enrich the visions of what they must do, especially in the fields of technology and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They must develop initiatives and activate all the agreements it signed with countries of the world in the areas of joint cooperation, while enriching the content in the school curricula. It must not stop but rather multiply and be present in the minds of the aspirations of the young generation because they are the future generation inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Some ten jobs that the world will desperately need in the near future are programming, information security, data analysis, alternative energy, international law, 3D printing, distance education, marketing, personal consultant and financial planner.

WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK
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ARE THE OMANI YOUTH READY
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NINE SCHOOLS TO BE CONSTRUCTED IN DHOFAR

SALALAH: The Directorate General of Education in the Governorate of Dhofar has endorsed the construction of 9 schools in the governorate's wilayats.

The move comes within the framework of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's royal directives to construct 76 schools in the governorates of Oman.

Shaikh Yaqoub bin Saif al Shehaimi, Director General of Education in Dhofar told Oman News Agency that 7 schools will be built in the Wilayat of Salalah, of which four will be in Sahalnoot and three in Awqad. One school will be built in Tawi Ateer and one school in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna.

— ONA

Revised work permit fees will have positive impact on economy: OCCI

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

With the new fees for expatriate work permits coming into force from June 1, the Oman Chamber of Commerce has said that it will positively impact the country as an attractive destination.

Speaking exclusively to the Observer, Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of OCCI, said that the government is not looking to raise revenues from these fees but, it wants more investors to invest and bring business to the country.

"This revision of fees will only help businesses here, and it will encourage to speed up the process of providing more jobs to citizens. It may be noted that there have been no Omanisation percentage targets. As economies grow, it will also generate more jobs for citizens."

He added that the government had also been helping the private sector by providing RO 200 for monthly wages of fresh

recruitments for two years.

On taking advantage of the World Cup in Qatar, he said, "The OCCI has no direct role with regard to making arrangements, but will cooperate and support the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to get more visitors to the country. We will encourage the SMEs to set up stalls and shops in Qatar during the World Cup as this project was successful during the Expo 2020 in Dubai."

Considering the factor that new work fees will come into effect from June 1, the Ministry of Labour has waived off penalties for delay in the renewal of their work permits, provided that the process is completed before September 1 of this year.

At the same time, the private sector has been urged to take advantage of the situation and stipulates efforts to revitalise the global economy.

A 30 per cent discount will be granted to companies that abide by the Omanisation percentage.



This revision of fees will only help businesses here, and it will encourage to speed up the process of providing more jobs to citizens

RIDHA BIN JUMA AL SALEH

OCCI Chairman

"The commercial fees of RO 201-301 have been divided into three categories, and Omanisation percentage will be determined for each of these categories."

The ministry said that RO 301 would be levied for senior and supervisory professions (managers, presidents, specialists, and consultants, while a discount

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

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

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

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

Inflation rate rises by 2.7 per cent

MUSCAT: The inflation rate in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 2.7% in April 2022 compared to April 2021. The inflation rate also went up by 0.6% compared to March 2022, according to the latest data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The data indicate a rise in the prices of main groups in April 2022 compared to the same month in 2021, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages by 5.4%, education by 5.1%, health by 2.8%, transport by 2.4%, miscellaneous goods and services by 2.2%, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels group by 2%, recreation and culture by 1.4%, restaurants and hotels by 1.2%,



clothing and footwear by 1.1% and furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 0.3%. Meanwhile, the tobacco group declined by 1.1%.

Prices also went up for oils and fats by 14.9%, vegetables by 9.8%, fruits by 8%,

meats by 7.7%, fish and seafood by 6.5%, bread and cereals by 2.7%, sugar, jam, honey and sweets by 1.8%, milk, cheese and eggs by 1.3% and other foodstuff by 0.9%, while the prices of non-alcoholic beverages went down by 0.2%. — ONA

Health technology assessment training workshop begins

MUSCAT: The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) training workshop, organised by the Directorate General of Medical Supplies at the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Syreon Corporation, began here on Sunday.

The opening ceremony of the one-week workshop was held under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Saif al Hosni, Ministry of Health's Under-Secretary for Health Affairs, in the presence of members of the Higher Technical Committee of Drug, as

well the ministry's senior officials.

MoH's Under-Secretary for Health Affairs stressed the significance of the workshop, hoping that it would be beneficial in terms of evaluating medications as well the various types of medical devices.

The workshop, led by Professor Zoltán Kaló from Hungary, aims at building capacities of the work group concerned with studying the specialised medicines assessment, which is submitted to the Higher Technical Committee of Drug.

MEPA's Oman chapter launched

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

As the world observes May as Mental Health Awareness month, the Middle East Psychological Association launched the Sultanate of Oman Country Chapter at a function held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Saturday.

Oman is the seventh country for the association, which was launched in 2010 in Kuwait. It was formed to unify psychologists and other mental health professionals in promoting and supporting excellence in the practice of Psychology.

"I have been connected with MEPA since 2015, and now it is here in Sultanate of Oman and this would put all of us under one umbrella. We really need it and it is a good beginning for the future Psychologists and mental health professionals in the Sultanate of Oman. And I am very happy to work with the team. I hope we will be able to achieve important developments," said HH Sayyidah Basma al Said, Founder of Whispers of Serenity and the Not Alone Campaign.

MEPA has three essential goals: To de-stigmatise the regional view of psychology, provide the region with resources and education for practitioners



and adhere to an ethical code of practice.

The Middle East Psychological Association, a non-profit organisation, will also provide ongoing professional development activities in workshops, training and public information for consumers of mental health resources and social service professionals.

"We are trying to collaborate because we sometimes need professional development as therapists and at the same time we do not have to go all the way to the UK or USA to get the training. We do have qualified trainers in the Middle East," pointed out Nutaila al Kharousi, Secretary of the MEPA Sultanate of Oman Chapter.

In Oman, the field of psychology is growing, with more and more students graduating in this major. However, they are facing challenges and MEPA

could provide the support.

"Some of the graduates find it difficult to find a job or do not know where to go, and there are not many internships and training. So now that we have the Oman Chapter of MEPA, which is official and professional, we can work more together - government and private sector.

Of course, we as therapists need to do more than just intervention; we should also do more research under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Development," Al Kharousi noted.

According to the mental health professionals, having the Sultanate of Oman Chapter of MEPA is a big milestone for the field of mental health in the country. They hope to attract more recognition from other areas while realising the importance of mental health.

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
NSS/2022/2	MOBILE WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT FOR THE SITE SURVEY	29-May-2022	5-June-2022	50/- Plus, VAT Amount (2.500 OMR) Total: 52.500 OMR (Non-Refundable)

- Interested party may purchase the tender through the company website (www.nama.om/ar/new-tenders) at Quick Links-New Tenders) & Supplier user guide is available to be downloaded from the same page.
- Payment of the tender fees will be done online through the link available on the website. The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- Bids shall be submitted online through the I-supplier portal before 01.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday 5-June-2022.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for (90) days from the last date for submission of offers (to submit Original Bid Bond at NSS office). Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered. The original hard copy of the bid bond should be dropped in the tender box at Nama Holding reception area.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.


نماء للخدمات المشتركة
Nama Shared Services

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North Korea looms large as Biden lands in Japan

TOKYO: President Joe Biden arrived on Sunday in Japan for the second leg of an Asia trip underlining US commitment to the region but overshadowed by concern that North Korea will test a nuclear weapon after ignoring Washington's attempt at outreach.

Biden, making his first trip to Asia as president, flew from South Korea into Yokota Air Base outside Tokyo, where he will meet with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and emperor on Monday, as well as unveiling a US-led multilateral trade initiative.

On Tuesday, he reinforces the theme of American leadership in the Asia-Pacific by joining the leaders of Australia, India and Japan for a summit of the Quad group.

The trip, which comes as rival China is experiencing significant economic disruption due to Covid outbreaks, has been touted by Washington as a display of US determination to maintain its commercial and military edge across the region.

But hanging over every step of Biden's tour is fear that unpredictable North Korea will test a nuclear-capable missile or a



US President Joe Biden is greeted by Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi upon arrival in Yokota Air Base in Tokyo prefecture. — AFP

bomb. Speculation that this might even happen while Biden was just across the border in Seoul did not materialise. However, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters that the threat remains.

Echoing Biden's earlier statement that the United States is "prepared for anything North Korea does", Sullivan said the dictatorship has a choice.

"If North Korea acts, we'll be

prepared to respond. If North Korea doesn't act, North Korea has the opportunity, as we've said repeatedly, to come to the table."

Pyongyang has so far declined to answer US appeals for dialogue,

officials say, even ignoring offers of help to combat a sudden mass outbreak of Covid-19, according to Biden. And while in Seoul, Biden confirmed he was prepared to meet with Kim Jong Un if the

leader-for-life is "sincere", but Sullivan said that remains far off.

"We're not even at step one yet," he said. Symbolising the apparent one-way conversation, Biden said the only message he has right now for Kim would consist of a single word: "Hello. Period," he said.

Biden spent two days with South Korea's new President Yoon Suk-yeol, with beefing up the military defence against North Korea high on the agenda.

They issued a statement on Saturday saying that "considering the evolving threat" from Pyongyang, they were looking at expanding the "scope and scale" of joint US-South Korean military exercises.

Joint exercises had been scaled back due to Covid and for Biden and Yoon's predecessors, Donald Trump and Moon Jae-in, to embark on a round of high-profile but ultimately unsuccessful diplomacy with North Korea.

In contrast to the dovish Moon, Yoon said he and Biden discussed possible "joint drills to prepare for a nuclear attack" and called for more US assets to be deployed to the region.

— AFP

Australia's PM-elect promises to repair image overseas

SYDNEY: Incoming prime minister Anthony Albanese vowed to end Australia's reputation as a climate laggard and reset relations with the rest of the world on Sunday, as he raced to form a government in time for a key Tokyo summit.

Fresh from an electoral victory that ended a decade of conservative rule, Albanese signalled an era of fairer, greener and less pugilistic politics for Australia.

"I want to change the country," the 59-year-old centre-left leader said. "I want to change the way that politics operates in this country." It is still unclear whether Albanese's Labor Party will win enough parliamentary seats to form an outright majority, or whether he will have to turn to independents or smaller parties for support.

But "Albo" and key ministers are expected to be sworn in on Monday to be able to attend a summit with Japanese, Indian and US leaders — the so-called Quad.

Albanese said the summit was "an absolute priority" for Australia and an opportunity "to send a message to the world". He



Leader of the Australian Labor Party Anthony Albanese after winning the general election at Marrickville Library and Pavilion in Sydney. — AFP

said partners overseas can expect wholesale changes "particularly with regard to climate change and our engagement with the world on those issues". In recent years, images of smouldering eucalypt forests, smog-enveloped cities and blanched-out coral reefs have made Australia a poster child for climate-fuelled destruction. Under conservative leadership,

the country — already one of the world's largest gas and coal exporters — has also become synonymous with playing the spoiler at international climate talks. Albanese has vowed to adopt more ambitious emissions reduction targets and make the sun-kissed continent-nation a renewable energy superpower. After the summit and bilateral

Albo and key ministers are expected to be sworn in on Monday to be able to attend the 'Quad' summit

meetings with Quad leaders on Tuesday, Albanese said he would return to Australia on Wednesday.

US President Joe Biden called Albanese to congratulate him. "President Biden expressed deep appreciation for... (Albanese's) early commitment to the alliance, reflected in his decision to travel almost immediately to Tokyo to attend the Quad Summit," the White House said in a statement.

Notable among the foreign leaders who have welcomed Albanese's election are the ones from Australia's Pacific Island neighbours, whose very existence is threatened by rising sea levels.

"Of your many promises to support the Pacific, none is more welcome than your plan to put the climate first — our people's shared future depends on it," said Fijian Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama. — AFP

Shanghai partly resumes public transport

SHANGHAI: Shanghai partially restarted public transport on Sunday and set out new classifications for Covid-19 risk areas, signalling a gradual reopening after nearly two months sealed off from the outside world.

China's largest city has been almost entirely locked down since April, when it became the epicentre of the country's worst coronavirus outbreak since the early days of the pandemic.

Unlike other major economies, Beijing has dug in its heels on a strict zero-Covid approach that relies on stamping out clusters as they emerge, though this has become increasingly difficult with the infectious Omicron variant. But as new infections have slowed, Shanghai has cautiously eased restrictions, with some factories resuming operations and residents in lower-risk areas allowed to venture outdoors.

Four of the city's 20 subway lines restarted on Sunday along with some road transport, with officials announcing last week that it would provide a "basic network covering all central urban areas." Those who take public transport will have to

show a negative Covid test within 48 hours of their journey and have a "normal temperature", they added on Saturday.

Shanghai will also classify areas as high, medium or low-risk after May 31, city health official Zhao Dandan told a press briefing on Sunday.

Districts with 10 or more reported Covid cases — or at least two community infections — will be considered "high-risk" while areas with no positive cases for 14 days will be deemed "low-risk", Zhao said.

Medium or high-risk areas face lockdowns of two weeks.

The new system appears to set the stage for a degree of movement comparable to other cities, a shift from tough current measures in which even residents of lower risk areas have faced tight restrictions.

But despite broader attempts to ease those restrictions, the city's central Jing'an district was back under lockdown on Sunday, according to an official notice.

Jing'an will undergo three consecutive rounds of mass Covid testing from Sunday and residents are not to leave their homes during this period, a WeChat notice said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BANGKOK

Bangkok votes for new governor for first time

Bangkok went to the polls in its first governor election in almost a decade, with the ballot viewed as an indicator for a national vote expected within a year.

Around four million people are eligible to vote in the first major poll since Thailand's huge youth-led street protests in 2020 demanding political change and reform to the once-untouchable monarchy. But daily life rather than politics has dominated the candidates' campaigns, with the leading



contenders promising to clear up the congested, polluted and noisy megapolis home to 10 million. Polling centres opened across Bangkok at 8 am and closed at 5 pm. — AFP

SUNAMGANJ

B'desh floods recede but millions still marooned

North-east Bangladesh's worst floods in nearly 20 years began receding, but rescue workers were struggling to help millions marooned by extreme weather across the region that has killed around 60 people.

Floods are a regular menace to millions of people in low-lying Bangladesh and neighbouring northeast India, but many experts say that climate change is increasing the frequency, ferocity and unpredictability. In the past week after heavy rains in India,



floodwater breached a major embankment in Bangladesh's Sylhet region, affecting around two million people, swamping dozens of villages and killing at least 10. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Iraq trial of Briton, German for theft adjourned

An Iraqi court adjourned for two weeks the trial of a Briton and a German man accused of trying to smuggle antiquities after a defence lawyer called for more investigations.

James Fitton, 66, a retired British geologist, and Volker Waldmann, 60, a Berlin psychologist, have been in custody since they were arrested on March 20 at Baghdad airport as they wound up their holiday. According to statements from customs officers and witnesses,



Fitton's baggage contained 10 stone fragments, pieces of pottery or ceramics.

Waldmann allegedly had two pieces, but denied they were his.

— AFP



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In brief

■ LONDON



UK CONFIRMS LOCAL TRANSMISSION OF MONKEYPOX

Britain is seeing daily infections of the rare monkeypox virus that are unconnected to any travel to West Africa, where the disease is endemic, a health official said. The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) said new figures would be released on Monday, after it registered 20 cases on Friday. Asked if community transmission was now the norm in Britain, UKHSA Chief Medical Adviser Susan Hopkins said “absolutely”. “We are finding cases that have no identified contact with an individual from West Africa, which is what we’ve seen previously in this country”, she told BBC television. “We are detecting more cases on a daily basis.” — AFP

■ DAKAR



SCHOLZ STARTS FIRST TRIP TO AFRICA SINCE TAKING OFFICE

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in Dakar, Senegal for his first trip to Africa since taking office some six months ago. During his three-nation visit — Senegal, Niger and South Africa — the consequences of the war in Ukraine are expected to be a major topic, as the Russian blockade of Ukrainian grain exports has exacerbated the food crisis on the continent, especially in East Africa. The former German ambassador to Moscow said that Russian President Putin is deliberately aiming to trigger a famine in the Middle East and Africa. The Kremlin’s goal is to destabilise Europe through a massive refugee influx. — dpa

■ SFAX



TURTLES FREED IN TUNISIA WITH TRACKING MONITOR

Three rescued loggerhead turtles were released into the Mediterranean off Tunisia, one with a tracking beacon glued to its shell to help researchers better protect the threatened species. The main risks to sea turtles in Tunisia are linked to fisheries, since they become entangled in nets — including the three that were released into the wild. The migratory species, which can live to as old as 45, are listed as “vulnerable” in the Red List of threatened species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The turtles’ release was watched by a crowd of some 50 people, many of them children. — AFP

Ukraine’s parliament extends martial law

KIEV: The Ukrainian parliament on Sunday extended the period of martial law and general mobilisation for an additional 90 days, until August 23, a sign that Kiev expects many more months of fighting. President Volodymyr Zelensky first imposed the drastic measures across Ukrainian territory on February 24, just hours after Russia’s attack from the north, south and east.

Martial law gives the military expanded powers and restricts civil liberties such as the right to demonstrate. Able-bodied men aged 18 to 60 were prohibited from leaving the country and urged to join the fight against the Russians.

Several lawmakers confirmed via Telegram on Sunday that the extension recently proposed by Zelensky had been approved through August 23. Ukraine traditionally celebrates its Independence Day a day later.

Last week, Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych justified the three-month extension of martial law by saying there was no sign the war would be over by autumn.

He added that the Ukrainian population would be given false hope if martial law was prolonged for only 30 days, as it had been in the past. Also on Sunday, Polish President Andrzej Duda became the first foreign head of state to address the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, since the Russian offensive began.

No one can shake Polish-Ukrainian unity, Duda said in his speech, emphasising: “The free world has the face of Ukraine.” Again and again, the



A young girl passes by a destroyed apartment building in Bakhmut in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbass amid Russian assault of Ukraine. — AFP

France sees no EU entry before ‘15 or 20 years’

PARIS: A bid by Ukraine to join the European Union would not be finalised for “15 or 20 years”, France’s Europe minister said on Sunday, pouring cold water on Kyiv’s hopes for quick entry in the wake of Russia’s war. “We have to be honest. If you say Ukraine is going to join the EU in six months, or a year or two, you’re lying”, Clement Beaune told Radio J. “It’s probably in 15 or 20 years, it takes a long time.”

“I don’t want to offer Ukrainians any illusions or lies”, he said, reiterating an offer by President Emmanuel Macron to create a looser “European

political community” that could help integrate Ukraine with the bloc sooner.

President Volodymyr Zelensky on Saturday denounced “such compromises” and insisted on an immediate start of the process towards full EU membership. But Beaune said Macron’s proposal is not “an alternative to joining the European political community. It doesn’t prevent membership later on.”

Under Macron’s plan, “there could be free circulation in Europe, and it could benefit from the European budget for

reconstruction and the revival of its country, society and economy”, he said.

Some EU leaders share France’s scepticism about a rapid acceptance of Ukraine’s membership bid, concerned that it will take time to rebuild a war-shattered economy, reduce corruption and adopt far-reaching economic and legal reforms.

On Thursday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said there were “no shortcuts” to joining and the accession process “is not a matter of a few months or years”. — AFP

parliamentarians rose to applaud. Zelensky was also present. Duda’s surprise visit was announced only on Sunday morning. The 50-year-old travelled to Ukraine for the second time since the outbreak of war at the end of February. Among other things, Duda is campaigning for the neighbouring country to be granted EU candidate status as soon as possible. “Poland will do everything in its power to help Ukraine become a member of the European Union”, Duda said.

Almost 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees have entered Poland since February 24. Poland has granted refuge to by far the most of the total of around 6.5 million refugees from Ukraine. Around 44 million people lived in Ukraine before the war began. Heavy fighting was meanwhile continuing in eastern Ukraine’s Donbass, especially around the towns of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk.

Positions of Ukrainian troops in the area along the entire front line are being shelled with Russian artillery, the general staff in Kiev said on Sunday. Russian troops tried unsuccessfully to storm villages north, east and south of Sievierodonetsk. They are fighting just as hard for villages south of the route from Lysychansk to Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. The Russian army has been trying for days to cut off supplies from the Donetsk region to the Ukrainian groups around Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk. The day before, the Ukrainian side said a bridge over the Siversky Donets River between the twin cities was deliberately destroyed with 240-millimetre mortars. — dpa

Arab MP returns to coalition after quitting

TEL AVIV: A left-wing Arab-Israeli lawmaker who quit the governing coalition last week, citing grievances including police aggression at an Al Jazeera reporter’s funeral, reversed her decision on Sunday.

The decision by Ghaida Rinawie Zoabi (pictured) of the Meretz party to leave the coalition headed by right-wing Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had briefly left it with just 59 out of 120 seats in Israel’s parliament, the Knesset.

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid — the main architect who assembled the ideologically disparate coalition after elections last year — said Zoabi was now back in the alliance.

“I am happy that Ghaida Zoabi has returned to the coalition”, Lapid tweeted.

“We have put aside our differences and together we are resuming the work of the government”, he said.

The nearly one-year-old Bennett government has been seen as vulnerable from its inception.

It counts on support from parties ranging from the Jewish right and Israeli doves to an Arab party.

It lost its single-seat Knesset majority last month when a member of Bennett’s religious, nationalist Yamina party bolted.

Idit Silman said she could not “take part in harming the identity of Israel”, after the health ministry instructed hospitals to allow leavened bread products



onto their premises during the Passover holiday. Zoabi last week linked her departure to unrest and tensions at the flashpoint Al Aqsa mosque compound and the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem, and “the funeral of Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh”.

Abu Akleh, a veteran reporter, was shot dead during an Israeli army raid in the West Bank last week.

In a move that has sparked international outrage, baton-wielding Israeli police beat several pallbearers as they carried the journalist’s coffin out of a hospital before her burial.

Addressing the cabinet earlier on Sunday, Bennett portrayed his government’s ideological divergence as an asset.

“I think that if (lawmakers) from the left feel that the government is too right-wing, and (lawmakers) from the right feel that the government is too left-wing this is a sign that the government is in a good place in the middle — a good government that gets things done”, the premier said. — AFP

Fresh floods hit South Africa

DURBAN: Heavy rains lashed South Africa, forcing around 500 people to flee their homes on the east coast, officials said on Sunday, only a month after the worst floods in living memory killed more than 400.

No fatalities were immediately recorded but there was severe damage to some buildings, mainly in Durban, capital of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province.

“We are yet to receive a full comprehensive report on the impact of these latest heavy rains, but as reports come in a worrying picture is however emerging”, KZN premier Sihle Zikalala said during

a press conference. Torrential rain in late April killed 435 people in floods and landslides. Meanwhile, survivors were left without drinking water for nearly two weeks.

The repairs continue after the storms caused damage worth hundreds of millions of dollars. The latest floods hit infrastructure, roads, bridges and damaged buildings.

“Some areas are inaccessible and have become islands at this stage”, Zikalala said.

The South African Weather Service put the alert level at the highest. Officials called on residents to stay at home. Authorities opened

82 reception centres while police, firefighters and rescue workers were ready to respond rapidly to emergencies.

The army has also been called in for reinforcement.

Officials already evacuated elderly people in several villages. Around 3.9 million people live in Durban, and the Indian Ocean city hosts one of Africa’s main ports.

The rains are expected to continue until Monday, according to forecasts. South Africa is usually untouched by storms which regularly hit its neighbours like Mozambique and Madagascar.

— AFP



Local residents move to safety after they were trapped following heavy rains and winds in Umdloti north of Durban. — AFP

Smart cities can lead to smart education



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature, Sultan Qaboos University

The recent announcement by the Muscat Municipality to develop a large area on the Seeb waterfront as a multi-purpose park, as well as the 'Maidan Muttrah', a proposed bridge with a bird's eye view of the iconic landmarks around the Muttrah Corniche, both point to the development of smart cities which is the future of the urban landscape.

While attracting tourists and allowing for a variety of entertainment activities, such projects, in the long-term, add to the creative, sustainable, 'smart' education of younger citizens.

Smart education can be defined as the integration of traditional learning with contemporary skills like e-learning, entrepreneurship and effective skills like flexibility and innovation. It mainly focuses

on seamless learning, inside and outside the classroom.

Smart education is popular across the world, including in Singapore, South Korea and Japan. Australia designed a smart, multi-disciplinary student-centric education system, in collaboration with IBM.

Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is at the forefront of smart education. It implies that technologies are used as tools for accessing content, enhancing communication, offer collaboration platforms and help evaluate projects. It also entails that people from around the world could work on a common project in real time.

Smart learning is active, student centric and engaging. It prioritises the learning atmosphere as it underlines the impact of

SMART LEARNING
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collaboration and sustainability. It is, thus, more than learning from a device. In fact, it is the skill of using a device for larger, more permanent and innovative purposes.

Smart learning has been defined as being 'self-directed, motivated, adaptive, resource-enriched and technology-embedded'. It goes beyond passive memorising to being hands on, with critical and creative thinking and digital literacy going hand in hand.

This kind of seamless learning is primarily based on mobile

technologies, cloud computing and wearable technology. Hence smart cities focus predominantly on infrastructure – physical, social and digital. It imagines a connectivity between essential services like transport and electricity, to support systems like leisure and social life.

In effect, smart cities enhance the quality of life, safety and awareness of the world around us. With its emphasis on easy access to data, 'intelligent' public services and edutainment options, it focuses on a holistic way of life that is in tandem with 21st century lifestyle.

Smart cities tie seamlessly with smart education, as it entails that teachers can revise content and teaching methods based on student performance and feedback, connect globally with emerging pedagogies and methodologies, and

become proficient in intercultural awareness. Creating spaces for project based learning (PBL) is an integral part of the aim of smart cities. Being part of the immediate spatial and digital community will provide for learning opportunities outside the traditional textbooks.

Engaging with the community will enrich students' experiences in sustainable living and caring for the environment, among other concerns.

Such interactive learning will allow students to engage with new information and prepare them to face new challenges.

Smart cities are already here and increasingly the norm. Understanding their potential for learning will make them more attractive, and indeed indispensable to our world.

Rio's urban gardens produce healthy food for the poor

ANNA PELEGRI

Gun-toting youths watch over a street in a Rio de Janeiro slum hit hard by trafficking, but walk a bit further and this rough area also boasts the largest urban vegetable garden in Latin America.

This success story is unfolding in a favela called Manguinhos in the north of Rio, and thrives as the rest of the country frets over rampant inflation and worries over Russian fertiliser, a major concern for Brazil's powerful agriculture sector.

The first seed was planted in late 2013 on a parcel of land known then as 'crackolandia' because it was home to so many drug addicts.

And little by little it has established itself and come to be respected in a neighbourhood where drug traffickers are in charge.

These days the garden feeds some 800 families a month with produce that is pesticide free and affordable, two features that do not always go hand in hand.

"Why do poor people have to be doomed to eating poisoned food? My goal is to stop organic food from just being for the elite," Julio Cesar Barros, one of the managers of the garden, said, alluding to high priced fruit and vegetables sold in wealthy neighbourhoods like Copacabana and Ipanema.

The Manguinhos garden is one of 56 in Rio that Barros launched with city authorities in 2006. And it has been praised by an international agreement called the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact as one of the best such systems in the world.

This particular garden is the size of four football fields and every month it produces 2.5 tonnes of yuca, carrots, onions, cabbage and other vegetables. Half is sold to families for an average of two reales (40 US cents) per kilo and the rest is donated to orphanages and shelters.

Wearing a cap to ward off the hot sun, Dione Enedina Da Silva, 73, crouches down and rips up weeds growing among the rows of vegetable plants.

"The garden changed everything for me: the way I lived, the way I ate," this woman with 10 grandchildren and many great grandchildren said. "Before I barely had money to buy carrots and onions." Da Silva is one of 25 employees of the garden, who are paid with revenue from sales. She used to work cleaning hospitals, but other workers at the garden were involved in drugs and crime in the slum and had a grim future, said Barros.

That is the case of a 40 year old employee who prefers not to give his name or details of his past. "Working here is therapy. I come everyday, rain or shine. I am not leaving," he said. — AFP

The heat across much of the country is not normal for this time of year

SOPHIE KASAKOVE
& RICK ROJAS

PUBLIC
HEALTH
OFFICIALS
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SYMPTOMS
OF HEAT
EXHAUSTION.
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SPLASH PARKS
AND COOLING
CENTRES

Cities across a wide swath of the country tied or broke heat records on Saturday as blazing heat and humidity roasted states from Texas to Massachusetts, placing more than 38 million Americans under a heat advisory in the hottest hours of the day.

Records fell in places like Austin, Texas, which hit 99 degrees at its airport and 100 at Camp Mabry; Vicksburg, Mississippi, which reached 98 degrees; and Richmond, Virginia, where the thermometer climbed to 95. Philadelphia tied its record at 95 degrees, as did Worcester, Massachusetts, where temperatures reached 88.

At a community sidewalk sale in Philadelphia on Saturday, residents in the Fishtown neighborhood displayed tables of old books, clothing and trinkets they were looking to sell for a little extra cash. Ashley Horowitz, 34, said she had a lot of people come by until her side of the street became bathed in direct sunlight in the early afternoon.

"This is not pleasant," she said.

In West Virginia, public health officials urged people to look out for symptoms of heat exhaustion. In Washington, DC, officials activated heat emergency plans, opening splash parks and cooling centres.

A runner in the Brooklyn Half Marathon in New York City — where organisers had warned participants of potential heat concerns — died on Saturday morning, though it was not immediately clear if the weather had played a role.

Memorial Day, the unofficial start of summer, is still more than a week away.

But by the end of the weekend, more than half of all Americans will have experienced temperatures of 90 degrees or higher from a blast of hot air that started in the Southwest, swept across the eastern third of the country, and will move through New England into Canada.

Washington, DC, reached a high of 92 on Saturday afternoon, 3 degrees shy of its daily record. New York City

saw a high of 90; its record for May 21 is 93. With temperatures in the mid-90s at Baltimore's Pimlico Race Course, which hosted the Preakness Stakes, the usually rowdy infield was sparse and uncharacteristically sedate in early afternoon, with the biggest crowds found at the water stations or beneath tents or in the shadows cast by concession stands and supply trucks.

In other parts of the country, the misery set in weeks ago.

In drought-parched New Mexico, the largest wildfire in the state's recorded history is burning, months before the start of the peak fire season. Other blazes are driving evacuations and fears in Colorado, Arizona and Utah.

Parts of Texas, where heat-intensified wildfires burned 30 structures near Abilene this week, saw their earliest triple-digit temperatures on record this month.

And in a sign of just how strange things could get, Denver whiplashed from 90-degree weather this past week to a late-spring snowfall overnight on Friday into Saturday.

Above-average temperatures and drought conditions will contribute to high energy demand and put several parts of the country at elevated or high risk of energy shortfalls this summer, the North American Electric Reliability Corp warned this week.

In many places, temperatures

could be 20 degrees or more above what residents are accustomed to for this time of year. In Boston, for instance, the average temperature for the weekend before Memorial Day is typically in the high 60s. Although the high on Saturday was 71, the forecast for Sunday is that it could reach 96.

"Definitely very abnormally warm temperatures expected tomorrow," Torry Gaucher, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Boston, said on Saturday.

The predicted high of 96 degrees in Worcester on Sunday would exceed the monthly record of 94 degrees, set in 2010, the National Weather Service said. The agency's office in Gray, Maine, with a territory covering Maine and New Hampshire, noted that it had never before issued a heat advisory during the month of May.

"With the forecast continuing to hint at record-breaking heat, and high humidity, this weekend," the office said in a post on Twitter, "this streak may end."

Elsewhere in the East, the stretch of heat is expected to fade over the rest of the weekend, though it may be followed by thunderstorms and severe weather, according to the National Weather Service.

And heading into Monday, parts of Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas could see excessive rainfall and thunderstorms.

— New York Times



Jeanne Han enjoys ice cream near the Washington Monument on a hot Saturday afternoon.

Where truth and history are hunted



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

since they happened. Therefore, some people made the history of nations in different forms, but others have written history, which has been recorded and documented throughout all these years.

In order to pass history to a generation after another over the years, people have been employing various techniques and ways to preserve the antiques and historical objects.

Technology, for instance, has been used to record historical events and restore historical transcripts and documents too.

In view of that, some historical facts require an evidence, either to prove it right. Though some of the old facts or stories, which people know might be pure fiction that doesn't make them less fascinating. The traditional and historical monuments too demand a visual proof through which it could be demonstrated for public to observe and value it. From writers to inventors, philosophers and politicians, everyone has an opinion on the importance of history overall.

AS THE WORLD CELEBRATES THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY, WHICH FALLS ON MAY 18, IT IS A GOOD TIME TO SHED LIGHT ON MUSEUMS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

Here comes the significance of having national museums as hubs accommodating the cultural and historical treasures of countries. Actually, a museum is more than a collection

of arts, sculptures or heritage. Rather it marks a storehouse of the history of the extinct generations and their cultures. As it has been said that if one doesn't know his past history, he is a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree or a tree without roots.

As the world celebrates the International Museum Day, which falls on May 18, it is a good time to shed light on museums in the Sultanate of Oman. The country accommodates different historical, natural and military museums, attracting visitors from within and outside Oman throughout the year.

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), these museums attracted around 113,600 visitors in 2021, with 49 per cent representing the visitors of the National Museum of Oman only.

Through these museums, the past glory of Oman, mirrored in many forms of traditions, culture and heritage, is being preserved. Such landmarks with all its mesmerising demonstrations stand as key tourist destinations for Omanis, residents and tourist alike. With all its various attractions and historical treasures, these museums bring Oman's rich history, culture and heritage back to life! Further, they mark educational hubs where truth and history are hunted.

As the National Museum attracts almost half of all the museums' visitors throughout a year, this reflects its high importance and attractiveness to promote the history of Oman.

Other than being fun to see all the antiques demonstrated in the museum's different corners, it offers an educational and knowledge-enriching journey to its visitors.

Always learning about the genuine culture and real history of a certain nations starts from a visit paid to a museum.

Overall, visiting a museum is a very insightful experience to all, regardless their age, interests and background. For school students, for instance, the museum will be the perfect place to narrate the history of Oman and how people lived in the past centuries with a highlight to their lifestyle. The museum represents a new school that touches on most features of the Omani history and people of Oman.

Visiting a museum is essential not only for school students and kids, but families alike.

With all the museum's historical and lifestyle displays, it revives the past life experiences and history of Omanis to the current and coming generations.

While not everyone is keen to study history as a discipline, all are fascinated when they hear a good story from the past, whether it is about the way people used to live or how empires and civilisations were built. Likewise, people get attracted by an object that is displayed in a museum or an exhibition. In fact, human beings have found ways to leave a trace of their existence and inheritance. From cave carvings to heroic acts that have been remembered over centuries



HARVESTING WHEAT

An Egyptian farmer takes part in wheat harvest in Bamha village near Al Ayyat town in Giza province, some 60 km south of Cairo on Saturday. – AFP

Oman-German relationships and contacts in history



Sultan al Bimani
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The contacts and relationships between Oman and Germany have a long and rich history.

This relationship began when several German travellers visited Oman in the 17th Century and they were of different quality: personal, economic, diplomatic, scientific and cultural background. To understand these relations and contacts better, it seems helpful to arrange them within the historical background. In texts that were written by diplomats, naturalists and photographers, it looks at German representations of Oman as a place, people and culture. Specifically, it is devoted to the travellers accounts of five German travellers who visited Oman in different periods of time, motivated by different purposes.

The first traveller is Engelbert Kaempfer, a doctor and naturalist, who arrived in Muscat in 1688.

Though he stayed for three days only, he found time to make detailed notes and some sketches.

Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), a German pioneer traveller in Arabia, visited Oman in 1765. In 1760, he joined the scientific expedition sent by Frederick V of Denmark to explore Egypt, Syria and Arabia.

His journey is told in his work 'Travels through Arabia, and other countries in the East'.

Friedrich Rosen, a diplomat with a Doctorate in Persian and Hindustani, visited Muscat in 1887. His account of the city is included in his book: 'Oriental Memoirs of a German Diplomatist'. Max Baron von Oppenheim (1857-1909), a diplomat and archaeologist, stopped in Muscat in 1893, during his journey from Bandar Abbas to Zanzibar. He provides us with an important picture of the

OMAN AND GERMANY HAVE SUCCESSFULLY CONTINUED ENJOYING THE RICH HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS AND THE DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS. THESE EVENTS BEGAN IN 1967, WITH THE EXCHANGE OF OFFICIAL LETTERS BETWEEN SULTAN SAID BIN TAIMUR AND WILLY BRANDT, GERMAN FOREIGN MINISTER, TO ESTABLISH CONSULAR RELATIONS FOLLOWED BY DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS IN 1972

commercial development. As a real "trade empire", it controlled commerce, trade, and shipping in the whole of the Indian Ocean. In addition, it maintained contacts with India, China, the Molucca Islands, the USA, Great Britain, France and last but not least, with Germany (Busch, 1976).

It is reported that in 1820, a treaty already existed between Oman and the Hasna town of Bremen, Germany, which guaranteed the Sultan the exclusive right to import a special shiny cloth (chintz), which was produced in Apolda, Germany. It was mainly used for the masks of the Bedouin women. During that time, several German merchants visited the markets of Muscat and Zanzibar, where they found a rich selection of all kinds of oriental, Asian and African goods.

In 1859, an agreement of friendship, trade and shipping was signed between Oman and the Hasna towns of Hamburg, Bremen and Luebeck (scholz, 1990).

Oman and Germany have successfully continued enjoying the rich historical connections and the diplomatic contacts. These events began in 1967, with the exchange of official letters between Sultan Said bin Taimur and Willy Brandt, German Foreign Minister, to establish consular relations followed by diplomatic relations in 1972. And became physically visible with the opening of the embassies in 1975 in Muscat and Bonn (West Germany).

In 1970s, Oman started economic and technical experience and established contacts with several German construction companies, banks and scholars. Oman was also interested in promoting its cultural richness and supporting scientific studies in geography, botany, agriculture, history, and others.

Sultan's palace in the last decade of the 19th century. And Hermann Burchardt, a German photographer who travelled widely not only in the Arab Middle East and North Africa, but also Turkey and Persia.

In 2006, in a volume with texts: 'Along the Gulf from Basra to Muscat' includes Burchardt's journey in 1904. He called Musandum "The Arabian Norway" due to its steep cliffs and many inlets falling deeply into the sea (Alhajri, 2008).

Under the reign of Sultan Said bin Sultan (1804-1856), Oman reached the zenith of its political domination and



Carsten Niebuhr (1733-1815), a German pioneer traveller in Arabia, visited Oman in 1765.

sport

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Seeb, Dhofar lose closely at AFC Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

Oman's Seeb and Dhofar posted close defeats in the AFC Cup first round matches late on Saturday. The Omantel League title holders missed the chance to secure a spot into the second round of AFC Cup after they suffered a 2-1 loss against three times champions Kuwait SC in Seeb.

In a Group B match in Kuwait City, Bahrain's Al Riffa captured a 3-2 win over Salalah giants Dhofar after Kumail al Aswad scored the crucial goal for them in 90th minute from a penalty.

At Seeb Stadium, Fahad al Rushidi powered his Kuwaiti team to a crucial win by scoring the winner in the 64th minute. His team-mate Taha Yaseen put Kuwait SC ahead in the 45th minute but Mohsin al Ghassani equalised immediately. Later in the following half, Al Rushidi netted the winner. With the victory, the Kuwaiti club earned four points from two matches to lead the table. Seeb are second with three points from the opening game against Jableh of Syria.

On the other hand, Jableh snatched a thrilling 1-0 win over Lebanon's Al Ansar in the same venue on Saturday in another Group A match. The Syrian club's triumph kept chances alive for all the teams to progress from the

group. Hussein al Juwayed netted the only goal in the crunch fixture in the dying minutes.

EXHAUSTED

Seeb's Serbian coach Boris Bunjak said the team had played several games during the last 40 days. "Most of the players are exhausted and some of them are back from injury and we could not take risks with them," he said.

The head coach of Seeb later said the strikers missed many scoring attempts. "If we could score from any missed chances then the match may end with a different result. Our players could manage to return into the match promptly but the Kuwaiti side scored the winning goal. Asian matches' quality are different from the local games as the opponents here have professional players besides the strong substitutions list. In this kind of strong competition, you need your substitutes at the same level of the starters and that can amend the final result," he ended.

Seeb will meet Al Ansar while Kuwait SC's last game see them face-off against Jableh with a win guaranteeing them the top spot on Tuesday. Dhofar will face Kuwait's Al Arabi in a strong match with an aim of victory while Al Riffa will aim to win over Palestine's Shabab Al Khalil to claim the second spot in the group on the same day.



"Nasmah" of Al Hashar Stable runner-up at Polish Warsaw track

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 22

The horse 'Nasmah' belong to Al Hashar Stable owned by Shaikh Nasser al Hashar achieved the runner up position in its first appearance at the grass track of the capital Warsaw city in Poland. The horse 'Nasmah' managed to make a difference in the last metres of the race as having been all the way with rare group before the rider gave the order into the straight to finish in second place in their debut.

Ibrahim bin Zaher al Hadhrami, supervisor of Al Hashar Stable, said that 'Nasmah' was born in Al Hashar Stable in France. "this presence of 'Nasmah' is considered as the first in Poland. The decision behind that was to improve the experience and to evaluate its technical level whether it will come to complete its path in the UAE or return to France for childbirth," he added.

Al Hadhrami completely satisfied with the performance of 'Nasmah'. "Despite her failure to deal correctly with the course of the race due to lack of experience, Nasmah managed to impress in overall. The next participation will be on the same track in the middle June and we expect better performance," he ended.

Oman Sail named as a dual finalist in the Middle East Sports Industry Awards 2022

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has been announced as a nominee for the prestigious Middle East Sports Industry Awards 2022 (SPIA), joining a host of renowned sports events and organisers from across the region. Shortlisted for both 'Best Sports Event Organiser of the Year' and 'Best Sports Event of the Year' for the Youth Sailing World Championships 2021, Oman Sail showcased hosting capability post-pandemic by delivering on a series of continental and world sailing championships, culminating in the hosting of the 50th edition of the Youth Sailing World Championships, making the Sultanate of Oman the first country in the region to host this prestigious event.

In 2021, Oman Sail delivered nine major projects in the sport of sailing, attracting over 2,500 international competitors to experience the world-class facilities and conditions that Oman has to offer. Utilising its many years of international event management experience, the Sultanate of Oman positioned itself as a Covid safe destination for major global sailing events, ensuring championship events could proceed following the



withdrawal of original host venues.

These events were planned and delivered by a 96% Omanised team, contributing over RO 2.8 million to the national economy, including over 7,800 hotel room nights to the Sultanate of Oman's tourism industry.

Dr Khamis al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO, said, "2021 was an incredibly successful year for Oman Sail as we managed to come back strongly to host a significant number of

international events in the Sultanate of Oman, while a considerable part of the world was still experiencing Covid-19 related challenges. We welcomed nations from around the world to Oman through our event hosting and ensured all athletes, support teams and race officials were best placed to deliver their optimum performance and delivery on and off the water. Our 96% Omanised workforce delivered a world-class portfolio of events

and firmly established the Sultanate of Oman as a renowned destination for world-class sports events."

Barcelo Mussanah Resort played host to the Asian and African Sailing Olympic Qualification event in April 2021, bringing 456 Sailors from 46 nations to Oman to decide qualification for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Following the completion of the Games in Tokyo in August, the eyes of the sailing world moved to Oman where

three World and two Asian sailing championship events were staged, in addition to two of Oman Sail's signature events.

October 2021 saw the start of a busy final quarter of the year as Oman Sail hosted the 2021 Asian Windsurfing Championships and Mussanah Race Week - which included a Para Sailing event for the first time - before welcoming the 2021 49er & 49er FX Asian Championships and the 2021

49er, 49er FX & Nacra 17 World Championships.

The annual premier event, Sailing Arabia - The Tour, began in Mussanah on 24 November and ran through to 5 December with teams competing from 4 different nations. The penultimate event of 2021 was the ICLA 6 World Championships, where Oman Sail once again offered a Covid safe venue for some of the world's best sailors and the perfect preparation for the management team prior to the start of the Youth Sailing World Championships.

The Youth Sailing World Championships attracted over 800 international guests, including 357 sailors, making it the largest ever edition of this annual event. The Championships also witnessed another landmark achievement as Oman Sail set a new Guinness World Records title for the Most Nationalities Collecting Litter in a single location. Under supervision by an adjudicator from Guinness World Records, participants at the Youth Sailing World Championships, including sailors, Oman Sail officials and staff at Barcelo Mussanah Resort broke a new record with 73 nationalities collecting over 344kg of litter at Mussanah public beach.



MBAPPE IN POSITION OF POWER AT PSG AFTER AGREEING TO NEW DEAL

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe's decision to stay at Paris Saint-Germain confirms the Qatar-backed club's position of power within European football but also means the superstar striker is likely to wield huge influence as they rebuild for another assault on the Champions League.

The 23-year-old had for so long seemed certain to sign for Real Madrid before being persuaded to commit to a new three-year deal at PSG, the club he joined in 2017 from Monaco.

His new salary is set to be even more eye-watering than before and accompanied by an astronomical signing-on fee: there were reports that Real's own offer included a signing-on fee of 150 million euros (\$154m).

Yet PSG will also be determined to do everything they can to provide Mbappe with a team good enough to deliver finally the trophy he wants the most, and that the Qataris have chased without success since arriving in Paris in 2011.

This season's defeat in the last 16 to Real Madrid following a collapse in the second leg was just the latest humiliation for PSG in the Champions League, a series that most notably includes the 6-1 defeat to Barcelona in 2017.

Five years ago they reacted to that stinging loss by signing Neymar from Barcelona as well as a teenage Mbappe.

Now they have exacted revenge on Madrid by denying them Mbappe.

"I always said that Paris was my home. I hope I can carry on doing what I love most — playing football and winning trophies," the player said after the announcement of his new deal and before scoring a hat-trick in PSG's 5-0 win over Metz on Saturday in their last game of the season.

Hours after that came the news that sporting director Leonardo — heavily criticised by supporters — had been fired.

Reports in France on Sunday suggested PSG may now look to replace Leonardo with Luis Campos, the Portuguese recruitment guru who helped build title-winning teams at Lille and Monaco and knows Mbappe



well.

Pochettino set to follow Leonardo
Coach Mauricio Pochettino is also expected to leave despite delivering the club's French record-equalling 10th league title.

"I only found out a few minutes before the official announcement," admitted the Argentine on Saturday



when asked about Mbappe's new deal.

Pochettino has struggled to stamp his mark at PSG, although it is not clear who they might look to as a successor — the possibility of Zinedine Zidane appears unlikely.

Then there is the team itself.
"It is a big step forward, but there is still a lot of work to be done," admitted captain Marquinhos following Mbappe's decision to stay.

PSG's recruitment of Lionel Messi has not worked out as hoped, the former Barcelona man managing just 11 goals in his first season in France.

Messi won his seventh Ballon d'Or last year but will be 35 next month, while Neymar continues to struggle with his form and fitness.

Could PSG look to offload both as they make Mbappe the undisputed figurehead of their project? And if so who would be willing and able to take Messi and Neymar off their hands?

Too much influence?
A sensible approach for PSG would surely be to focus more of their efforts on bringing through the best players emerging from the vast Paris region, one of the most fertile breeding grounds for footballing talent in the world.

Too many academy graduates have left PSG early in recent years. The latest France squad features Mike Maignan, Adrien Rabiot, Kingsley Coman, Moussa Diaby and Christopher Nkunku, all former PSG players who

chose, or were encouraged, to depart.

Nkunku has just won the player of the year award in the Bundesliga after scoring 35 goals for RB Leipzig.

But front and centre is Mbappe, the World Cup winner from the northern Paris suburb of Bondy who finished the season with 39 goals.

There is arguably no more thrilling sight in modern football than Mbappe running at full speed at an opposition defence. His pace is astonishing. He is a voracious goal-scorer and the player expected to dominate the sport for years to come. — AFP

World Cup police brace for huge crowds in Qatar's capital

DOHA: Controlling hundreds of thousands of football fans in Qatar's capital will be the biggest security challenge of World Cup 2022, Fifa told police chiefs from competing nations on Sunday.

Unlike previous World Cups, where only two teams and their supporters would generally converge on one city at any given time, all the games will take place in and around Doha. The most geographically compact World Cup therefore represents the tournament's biggest "challenge", Fifa security director Helmut Spahn told a security conference for the tournament in Doha.

Qatar has predicted that 1.4 million people will visit during the 28 day tournament,

that starts November 21, with "approximately 350,000" attendees in Doha "at the same time", Spahn noted, speaking on the sidelines of the conference.

"You have to manage that," he said. "But we can create history and I am pretty sure that we will manage it."

Major General Abdulaziz al Ansari, head of Qatar's World Cup security operation, also acknowledged that the numbers were the main concern. "But we are very much confident that we have reviewed this over and over again," Al Ansari said. "Of course there are going to be challenges, but the challenge is going to be part of the enjoyment." — AFP



RB Leipzig win first German Cup trophy

BERLIN: Ten-man RB Leipzig lifted the German Cup at the third attempt on Saturday winning 4-2 on penalties having fought back to draw 1-1 against Freiburg after extra-time.

"To win with ten men says a lot about our mentality and I'm really proud. It's great to finally get a first title," said Leipzig midfielder Emil Forsberg.

Maximilian Eggstein gave Freiburg an early lead at Berlin's Olympic Stadium before Christopher Nkunku equalised inside 90 minutes after Leipzig had Marcel Halstenberg sent off.

Leipzig's triumph comes having lost their previous German Cup final appearances to Bayern Munich in 2019, then Dortmund last season.

"That's crazy, we played 60 minutes with ten men," Leipzig managing director Oliver Mintzlaff told ARD.

"We're going to party hard, this is an historic evening for us."

The trophy ceremony was delayed while a person, believed to be a fan, was treated next to the pitch for a medical emergency.

It is the first major title won by RB Leipzig, who are backed by energy drinks giants Red Bull and were only founded in 2009.

They shot up Germany's football pyramid with four promotions in seven years to reach the Bundesliga in 2016/17, twice finishing second to Bayern Munich in the last six



years.

Leipzig coach Domenico Tedesco finishes his first season with a trophy having replaced Jesse Marsch last December.

In Saturday's shoot-out, Freiburg captain Christian Guenter, then replacement striker Ermedin Demirovic failed to convert their penalties as Leipzig nailed all four of theirs.

Freiburg stamped their authority when Eggstein's shot from outside the area rocketed past Leipzig goalkeeper Peter Gulacsi on 19 minutes.

Leipzig protested furiously as replays showed the ball clipped the hand of Freiburg's Roland Sallai in the build up but the goal stood after a VAR review.

The momentum swung towards Freiburg when Halstenberg was left with his head in his hands after earning a red card by pulling the shoulder of Freiburg striker Lucas Hoeler, who was through on goal.

Leipzig deserve credit for fighting back as defender Willi Orban headed a free-kick to the far post where Nkunku tapped in.

Despite the numerical

disadvantage, Leipzig pushed for the winner. Only a reflex save by Freiburg goalkeeper Mark Flekken kept out a Dominik Szoboszlai free-kick, then Dani Olmo fired wide from close range.

Freiburg replacement striker Janik Haberer had a shot palmed onto the post, then clipped the crossbar in extra time.

Kevin Kampl was shown a red card on Leipzig's bench after furiously appealing for a penalty after Freiburg's Nicolas Hoefler tackled Dani Olmo in the area just the penalty shoot-out. — AFP



Golden boy Virat Kohli gets a shot at first IPL title

NEW DELHI: Faltering superstar Virat Kohli and his IPL side Royal Challengers Bangalore have a shot at winning their first title after a late blitz and a bit of luck secured them a play-off spot.

Bangalore, led by Faf du Plessis after Kohli stepped down, sneaked in as the fourth side to make the final four after Delhi Capitals went down to wooden-spooners Mumbai Indians on Saturday.

With eight wins in 14 league matches, Bangalore entered the play-offs for the third time in a row in the Indian Premier League, and will play Lucknow Super Giants in the eliminator on Wednesday.

Kohli, who bounced back from three golden ducks this season with a match-winning 73 in his team's last league game, tweeted "Kolkata" — venue of the eliminator — after Mumbai's victory.

"It was unbelievable, the

emotions in the changing room were unbelievable", Kohli said after he and the rest of the team watched the Mumbai-Delhi game on TV.

"Thank you Mumbai, will remember this for a long time", he said.

Du Plessis said, "The last game we played we felt almost like we played our best game of cricket of this campaign so far and that's how you want to enter those knockout stages.

"We needed someone to do us a favour in Mumbai so we're really thankful for that but obviously, now the work starts again."

TOPSY-TURVY

It has been a topsy-turvy 15th edition of the IPL, held in India for the first time in its entirety since the pandemic but in just two cities — Mumbai and Pune

— and with limited spectators.

Five-time winners Mumbai — led by Kohli's replacement as India captain Rohit Sharma — had a shocker, ending bottom of the table with 10 losses.

Also keeping up the rear were defending champions Chennai, led by MS Dhoni, who finished ninth in a season of surprises.

Two new franchises — Gujarat and Lucknow — finished first and third.

Winning the IPL would be a welcome success for Kohli, 33, after a torrid year that saw him replaced as Indian captain and fail to score a century in more than 100 matches in all formats.

For all his exploits for India, he has never won the IPL title since joining Bangalore before the inaugural contest in 2008, including as captain between 2013 and 2021. — AFP

Mumbai knock Delhi out of IPL, RCB enter play-offs

MUMBAI: Ishan Kishan's 48 and a late cameo by Tim David helped Mumbai Indians down Delhi Capitals by five wickets, a result that allowed Royal Challengers Bangalore to sneak into the IPL play-offs on Saturday.

Chasing 160 for victory, David lifted Mumbai from a precarious 95-3 in 14.3 overs to smash 34 off 11 balls as they achieved the target with five balls to spare and knock Delhi out of the final-four race.

"I know a couple of teams were watching us keenly but for us it was important to get what we wanted to get out of this game", said Mumbai skipper Rohit Sharma as his side — most successful in IPL with five titles — ended bottom of the 10-team table with 10 losses from 14 matches.

"To make sure that we finish on a high and to take some positives from this last game and try to see where we didn't do well this season and try to correct those mistakes."

IPL newcomers Gujarat Titans and Lucknow Super Giants made the final-four early, while Rajasthan Royals became the third team to make the play-offs.

Gujarat end the league as number one in the 10-team table followed by Royals as the top two



teams will have a second shot at making the title clash even if they lose their first qualifier on May 24.

Lucknow will meet Faf du Plessis' Bangalore, who ended the league stage on 16 points — two ahead of Delhi (14), in the eliminator on May 25.

LEADERSHIP REVIEW

Delhi let go of their chances as skipper and wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant failed to take a review when David edged his first ball to the glovesman and replays suggested the batsman had nicked it.

"It's always hard to put your finger on single aspect of the game. You can rewind the clock to the start of the game as well when our top-order batting was so

poor", Delhi coach Ricky Ponting told reporters.

"Obviously Tim David was out first ball but there are so many aspects that we will be disappointed (with), but the important thing is that the players need to learn from games like this."

Ponting also dismissed any doubts on Rishabh's choice as leader, stating: "Absolutely no doubt in my mind that Rishabh, even the last season, was the right choice for captaincy."

"He is still a very young man. He is still learning about the captaincy side of things. He has certainly got my full backing and looking forward to getting back working with him next year." — AFP

Jabeur, Thiem crash at French Open as Alcaraz starts Roland Garros bid

PARIS: Arab trailblazer Ons Jabeur crashed out of the French Open at the first hurdle on Sunday as Spanish teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz prepared to give Roland Garros a glimpse of the future of Grand Slam tennis.

Sixth seed Jabeur, seen as a potential champion, despite never having previously got past the fourth round, lost 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 to Poland's 56th-ranked Magda Linette.

Jabeur came into the event with a season-leading 17 wins on clay in 2022 and with the prestigious Madrid title under her belt.

However, she was undone on Sunday by 24 unforced errors in the two hour 28-minute match.

Linette had lost to Jabeur in the third round in 2021 having stunned an injury-hit top seed Ashleigh Barty in her previous match.

"I just tried to stay focused after the first set and tried to make her uncomfortable. I was happy to fight for every single point", said Linette who needed treatment on a leg injury after dropping the first set.

"I wanted to put her in the situation where she couldn't move me around as much."

Two-time runner-up Dominic Thiem, whose ranking has slipped to 194 after a lengthy battle with a wrist injury, was another early casualty, losing 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 to 87th-ranked Hugo Dellien of Bolivia.

Thiem, the 2020 US Open champion, has yet to win a match in six attempts since his return in March. He has now lost 10 tour-level matches in a row. His last victory came in Rome just over a year ago.

NOT GREATEST FEELING

The 28-year-old Austrian, a former world number three, reached at least the quarterfinals at Roland Garros five years running from 2016 to 2020.

He finished runner-up to Rafael Nadal in 2018 and 2019.

"It's not the greatest feeling



Tunisia's Ons Jabeur serves the ball to Poland's Magda Linette during their women's singles match on day one of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament at the Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris. — AFP

to go in a Grand Slam knowing that all is not perfect in practice. I don't play like I would like to in practice", said the Austrian.

Alcaraz, 19, bidding to become just the eighth teenager to capture a major men's title, is widely tipped to end the dominance of 13-time champion Rafael Nadal and two-time winner Novak Djokovic.

He is the tour's dominant player in 2022, winning a season-leading 28 matches with just three losses.

Three of his titles have come on clay in Rio, Barcelona and

Madrid where he defeated Nadal, Djokovic and world number three Alexander Zverev to take the title.

Later on Sunday, Alcaraz begins his French Open campaign against Argentine lucky loser Juan Ignacio Londero, ranked at 141 but who made the last 16 in 2019.

Alcaraz was ranked 97 this time last year. He was only two when Nadal won the first of his 13 French Opens in 2005 but he made his mark at the 2021 tournament where he came through qualifying to reach the third round. — AFP

Australia's Titmus smashes Ledecy's 400m freestyle world record

ADELAIDE: Olympic champion Ariarne Titmus smashed Katie Ledecy's 400m freestyle world record at the Australian championships on Sunday, touching in 3mins 56.40secs.

The 21-year-old upset Ledecy in the Tokyo Olympic pool last year to claim gold and has now shattered the American great's world best of 3:56.46 set at the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

"Oh my God, I've just loved swimming the past six months, just going to training with no pressure and just enjoying the sport", she said poolside in Adelaide.

"I never thought this meet, post Olympics, I'd be swimming faster than Olympic trials and the Olympic Games. I guess if you



keep surprising yourself it keeps the sport interesting."

Titmus was under world record pace for the entire race, turning at the halfway mark in 1:56.99 before bringing it home to huge cheers from the crowd.

Ledecy won the 400 free at the US trials last month in 3:59.52.

But Titmus is not expected

to defend her world title against Ledecy in Budapest in June, opting to skip the event and focus on the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in July.

It capped an impressive meet for Titmus who won the 200m freestyle in 1:53.31, the third fastest time ever, and clocked a personal best in the 100m. — AFP



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Strategy for renewables, green hydrogen finalised

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 22

A National Energy Plan setting out a strategy for the exploitation of renewable resources, with the specific accent on green hydrogen, has been completed, according to Abdulaziz bin Said al Shidhani (pictured), Head of the Directorate General of Renewable Energy and Hydrogen at the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

In a statement to Oman News Agency, he said the plan has been formulated keeping in mind the global energy transition, as well as the national potential.

However, studies are ongoing for the development of the new energies sector, he said, adding that a consultancy firm will shortly be appointed to assist in the formulation of a regulatory and legislative framework for the industry.

Also as part of its brief, the consultant will also prepare a National Policy for the Energy Transition. In conjunction with this effort,



WORK IS UNDER WAY TO IDENTIFY SUITABLE SITES THAT CAN BE OFFERED AS CONCESSION AREAS FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS. THIS EXERCISE IS BEING PURSUED IN COLLABORATION WITH VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS AND RELATED PARTIES.

studies will also be undertaken in consultation with industry stakeholders to recommend incentive and facilities to attract investments in renewable resources and hydrogen. An appropriate model for generating



revenue for the stage will be evaluated as well.

Al Shidhani also noted that work is under way to identify suitable sites that can be offered as concession areas for renewable energy projects. This exercise is

being pursued in collaboration with various stakeholders and related parties.

The batch of concession areas will be offered to prospective investors at the earliest opportunity, he said.

In parallel with the identification of concession areas, preparations are under way for topographic studies aimed at assessing energy storage options.

All of this data will form part of a national energy database which

will support policymaking and project planning in the future.

On behalf of the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals is spearheading the development of a robust green hydrogen economy in collaboration with relevant government agencies and competent companies. A high-level Ministerial Committee, supported by various technical teams, is overseeing this initiative.

The Sultanate of Oman aims to join the front ranks of countries that are eager to capitalise on their renewable resources, chiefly solar and wind, to produce green hydrogen for its own domestic use as well as for export to global markets.

Last August, a National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly) was established under the auspices of the Ministry to chart a roadmap for the positioning of the Sultanate of Oman on the global map of major green hydrogen producing nations. As many as 13 major public and private enterprises are part of the alliance.

Burgeoning auto parts crunch has motor insurers fretting over soaring repair bills

FALLOUT: Faced with higher bills, coupled with the prospect of compensation payouts, insurance firms may have to consider raising their premiums, says official

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

A burgeoning shortage of automotive spares in the Sultanate of Oman has motor insurers fretting that the resulting delays in the repairs of vehicles and settlement of claims may impact on their financial statements and expose them to legal action and penalties.

Their concerns were recently relayed by the Chairman of the Finance & Insurance Committee at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) to the Vice-President of the Insurance Sector at the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

“We approached the CMA, as the regulator of the insurance sector, to use its good offices to take up this problematic issue with, among others, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion,” said Murtadha M J Ibrahim al Jamalani, Chairman of OCCI’s Finance & Insurance Committee.

“Their urgent intervention



is necessary to find practical solutions to the long-standing problem related to the dearth of auto parts in the country. Although insurers are not to blame for this shortage, they are under severe pressure from their policyholders whose vehicles are held up in garages and workshops for want of the requisite spare parts.”

The spare parts crunch dates to the start of the pandemic two years ago when global lockdowns disrupted the supply of automotive components, among scores of other types of products, sourced

from around the world.

While supplies have resumed in the wake of the easing of the pandemic in many parts of the world, shipping bottlenecks and supply chain challenges continue to pose a problem, say experts.

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Jamalani noted that motor insurance firms feel susceptible to legal action in the current circumstances.

“If, for example, a taxi driver whose livelihood is derived only from the operation of his cab, which is stuck in some garage for want of parts, the

Although insurers are not to blame for this shortage, they are under severe pressure from their policyholders whose vehicles are held up in garages and workshops for want of the requisite spare parts

MURTADHA M J IBRAHIM AL JAMALANI

Chairman, OCCI Finance & Insurance Committee

courts or Consumer Protection Authority may order his insurer to compensate him for loss of earnings.”

Significantly, the shortage has also hampered the timely repairs of vehicles that were damaged in flash flooding linked to Cyclone Shaheen last October.

“This is making the insurers increasingly concerned that they are exposed to legal risks stemming from the lengthy delays in the repairs of the vehicles of their policyholders.”

While the dearth of auto parts is primarily attributable

to the lingering effects of the pandemic, Al Jamalani also holds the local automotive industry partly responsible for the protracted nature of the crisis. “In part, the scarcity has been compounded by what we believe is reluctance on the part of auto companies to invest in adequate stocks,” he stated.

“Even standard items, such as windscreens, bumpers, and lights are not in stock. The agents say that some parts have to be airfreighted in the circumstances, which leaves the insurer bearing the additional cost.”

Faced with higher bills, coupled with the prospect of compensation payouts, insurance firms may have to consider raising their premiums, Al Jamalani said.

“Motor premiums have remained stagnant for the last several years due to severe market competition, as well as pushback from consumers against any attempt to raise premiums. But if the crisis over auto spares is not resolved, then the insurance companies will have no other option but to raise premiums,” he pointed out.

In this regard, Al Jamalani urged the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to step in and bring all stakeholders together to explore speedy and practical solutions to the spare parts crunch.

Forum on green hydrogen at SQU



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 22

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, in cooperation with the Sustainable Energy Research Centre (SERC) at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), will hold a forum on Tuesday, May 24, 2022, with a focus on the prospects of green hydrogen development in the Sultanate of Oman.

The event aims to promote constructive cooperation between institutions concerned with the clean and renewable energy sector.

It will include several working papers and seminars that cover a spectrum of topics, including the prospects of green hydrogen in Oman and the experiences of regional projects in the field of hydrogen energy, among other topics.

The forum highlights the advantages of green hydrogen and ways of benefitting from it in areas of sustainable development in line with Oman Vision 2040. — ONA

BANK MUSCAT HOLDS ANNUAL LEADERSHIP FORUM, CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF PROGRESS

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, organised the bank's Leadership Forum for the year 2022 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, in the presence of Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar (pictured), Chief Executive Officer. The event was attended by members of the Executive Management as well as officials and branch managers from both Bank Muscat as well as Meethaq Islamic Banking.

The organisation of the annual forum comes as part of the bank's strategy to enhance strategic alignment with managers and frontline employees, and also discuss various business strategies and plans aimed at developing the bank's operations and services, in addition to exchanging knowledge about upcoming trends and challenges and how to address them. The Annual Leadership Forum also plays an important role in introducing

employees to the bank's future strategy, goals and how to achieve them, as part of its customer-centric vision "To serve you better, every day".

Coinciding with the Leadership Forum this year, Bank Muscat also announced the launch of its 40th Anniversary Logo and the celebrations of its great successes and achievements, which have contributed to strengthening the bank's leadership within the Sultanate of Oman's banking sector. These include providing the best banking services and facilities to customers as well as contributing to the growth and development of various economic and social sectors, and a strong Public-Private Partnership to serve the community. The bank released a special logo for the occasion, which presents a futuristic and modern view of Bank Muscat.

Addressing the 2022 Leadership Forum, Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar, Chief Executive Officer, Bank Muscat, stressed that the



bank's strategies and plans primarily focus on serving customers and providing them the best banking services and facilities possible in the Sultanate of Oman. He explained how the bank's customer-centric

vision "To serve you better, every day" plays a key role in achieving these goals, and also helps keep pace with the numerous developments in the financial sector.

Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar expressed his thanks and appreciation to all customers including individuals, corporates, institutions and business owners for their strong confidence and trust in Bank Muscat's numerous services and facilities.

Bank Muscat's CEO also commended employees for their dedication and commitment in taking the bank to ever greater heights. He reminded all employees that sustainable development required each and every bank employee to constantly make efforts to better serve customers in such a manner that the bank continues to lead, progress and excel. This will ensure that the bank is automatically associated by everyone as the leading financial institution contributing to the socio-economic development of the

Sultanate of Oman. He stressed on the need to implement all the bank's plans and strategies in a new and innovative manner that inspires customer service and at the same time, achieves all of the bank's goals.

Shaikh Waleed K al Hashar also expressed his sincere delight and great pride in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the bank. The bank has played, and continues to play an ever-growing and important role in sustainable development and in pioneering Corporate Social Responsibility in Oman.

He called on all employees to work with team spirit and continue their efforts to benefit society as a whole. He concluded by drawing attention to the bank's glorious history, steady leadership and excellent corporate culture that features a pioneering mentality. He exhorted all employees to continue working with dedication, integrity, accountability and partnership.

Lulu distributes prizes to winners of 'Shop & Win' promotion

MUSCAT: Lulu Oman distributed the prizes to the winners of its recent 'Shop & Win' promotion, which was held from March 10 to May 7, 2022, coinciding with the Ramadhan and Eid celebrations.

The prize distribution ceremony was held at Lulu Hypermarket in Avenues Mall. The prizes were distributed to the winners by the senior management members of Lulu Oman in the presence of shoppers, well-wishers as well as management and staff of Lulu Hypermarket Oman.

The first-of-its-kind promotion 'Shop & Win' gave 281 customers a chance to win cash prizes worth RO 100,000. A Grand Prize of RO 10,000 cash as well as Weekly Cash Prizes of RO 5,000, RO 750, RO 500, and more were won by Lulu customers from all over Oman. The winners of each draw were picked and their names were announced in the presence of officials from the MoCIIP, the management of Lulu and other dignitaries.

Shoppers purchasing for a minimum value of RO 10 at any



Lulu Hypermarket in Oman during the promotional period were entitled to register themselves to be part of 8 e-raffle draws held during the entire period.

Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman & India, stated, "I congratulate all the winners of our Shop and Win Promotion, especially the Grand Prize winner. The response to this year's unique promotion was overwhelming. We could see a perceptible excitement during the promotion, which was a clear indication of the promotion having caught the customer's imagination. We at Lulu, constantly strive to up

our offerings and enhance the customer experience so that the process is rewarding in more than one respect", he added.

Shabeer K A, Regional Director — Oman, said, "We offer 'meaningful deals and discounts' to meet consumer needs for every season and occasion. Our innovative strategies and ideas are tailored to meet and exceed customer expectations. A lot of other promotions, deals, offers and discounts were also offered alongside the Shop and Win promotion to make shopping at Lulu an enjoyable and rewarding experience for our customers during Ramadhan," he added.

Vodafone to debut at Comex 2022

MUSCAT: Vodafone will be making its entrance into the 31st edition of the Comex Technology show, which will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) & Virtual Support Platforms today.

Vodafone will be a sponsor as well as a participant in this event, which has been highly acclaimed as the Sultanate of Oman's Official Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation Show.

The 31st Annual Hybrid event will see major players across key sectors and industries coming together to bring about a new perspective on technology and showcase innovative advancements in various fields as well as be the single point of contact for chief ICT decision-makers in the region.

Commenting on the sponsorship and participation, Bader al Zidi, CEO of Vodafone said, "As a brand, Vodafone's objective was not only centred



around our entrance as the third telecommunications operator but to showcase how we set ourselves apart by our radically different digital propositions.

We also aim to be a key driver of differentiation with a series of "firsts" that only Vodafone can bring to the market, such as our first virtual store, eStores and being among the first to launch with 5G services and bring new experiences to our target segment. We pride ourselves

as a digital-first company that leverages the latest digital technology and agile working culture to deliver sustainable and profitable growth, alongside an unmatched digital customer experience during their entire lifecycle. Our onboarding process emphasises on simplicity, transparency and personalisation via our "My Vodafone App" which ensures that the customer is always in control."

Alizz Islamic Bank launches 'Ruwad Alizz' leadership development programme

MUSCAT: During a festive ceremony, Alizz Islamic Bank launched 'Ruwad Alizz' Programme, in collaboration with, Harvard Manage Mentor, the on-line learning platform and a subsidiary of Harvard University, one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

With this programme, Alizz Islamic Bank endeavours in a mission to develop Leadership by suit the "Future of Work" by steering a holistic and an accelerated development journey to its potential future leaders. Further, The bank believes that there is immense opportunity in collaborative learning and exchanging ideas in the new age of digital and automated business environment.



Upholding this vision of the CEO, the programme pursues to make the learner experience more enriching by including delegates with potential from different industries in Oman which would also be conducive in nurturing alliances. Moreover, the future business ecosystems will also need communities of interconnected individuals, organisations and industries that work in tandem

in a complex environment, where members play roles of leaders, innovators, and most importantly, entrepreneurs who will be able to develop commercial allies across industries.

The event was attended by, Sulaiman bin Hamad al Harthy, Chief Executive Officer, members of senior management along with the internal and external delegates who were selected to join the pilot

Batch. The event was also graced by the Line Managers of the external delegates, the representatives from the Performance Factory — the training partner for Ruwad Alizz, and Shatha al Maskiry as the Guest Speaker for the event.

Welcoming the guests, Mohammed al Balushi, Chief Human Resources Officer at Alizz Islamic Bank, stated that the initiative was suggested by the CEO, which was later consented by the Board of Directors.

Al Balushi added that the programme aims to certify 60 delegates every year, across two batches. He further elaborated that the programme is not restricted to lecture-based classes, it is rather a blended programme that consists of different methods of learning.

Ford Bronco SUV: Tough build, powerful performance

MUSCAT: The Ford Bronco is built for outstanding experiences. Power, style, features and performance that will leave you thoroughly impressed, the Bronco is available as a Bronco two-door, first-ever Bronco four-door model and all-new rugged, small SUV, Bronco Sport — the only domestic brand of SUVs with standard 4x4.

The all-4x4 Bronco brand is Built Wild and ready to deliver thrilling experiences with its heritage inspired style, engineering and smart off-road technology, plus innovative features to help outdoor enthusiasts create adventures in the most remote corners of the world.

Just like the first-generation



Bronco, the all-new Bronco delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence.

Bronco incorporates off-road mapping and drive technologies to give novice adventurers as much fun as hard-core off-road experts, while its Built Wild durability makes for lasting performance in the harshest of conditions for generations to come.



SAP highlights Oman's commitment to rapid digital transformation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 22

Amid the rapid pace of digitalisation across the Sultanate of Oman's government and private sectors, global technology company SAP SE is showcasing its customisable solutions for digital transformation at COMEX, held from May 23 - 25 at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Waheed al Hamaid (pictured), SAP Executive Director of Business Development in Oman, says SAP's participation at COMEX is focused on enabling entities to align with Oman's Vision 2040, which includes developing information and communications technology.

Al Hamaid explains that having identified current market priorities through public sector research, SAP is highlighting its solutions for the intelligent enterprise, supply chain management, human experience management and intelligent spend management during COMEX.

"A recent SAP-commissioned survey of IT decision-makers in Oman and other GCC countries showed that areas of priority for digital investment in 2022 and beyond include human capital management, enterprise resource planning (ERP), core business solutions and procurement", he says.

Al Hamaid points out that there are several factors that



make this year's COMEX event in Oman particularly important.

"First, the pace of digital transformation across Oman and the whole GCC has accelerated as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, according to our survey results.

Second, we were delighted to see that Oman's current focus on digital transformation was recognised by the Arab ICT Ministers Councils, which selected the sultanate as the Arab Digital Capital for this year.

COMEX 2022 is, therefore, an ideal venue for sharing knowledge and ensuring that all entities in Oman — whether private or public, large or small — can find solutions that meet them where they are, and accelerate their journey to becoming an Intelligent Enterprise."

SAP defines an Intelligent Enterprise as one that consistently applies advanced technologies and best practices within agile, integrated business processes. This approach helps the enterprise to be more profitable, resilient, and sustainable, while also transforming into a best-run business.

OQ showcases achievements in driving HSE sustainability

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 22

OQ, the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, participated in the 8th edition of the Global Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Conference & Exhibition 2022 that took place at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre last week. It was held under the auspices of Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

OQ fielded a number of keynote speakers who spoke on Health and Well-being, diversification in upstream operations along with carbon footprint reduction, GHG estimation and climate change impact. Officials also participated in panel discussions, while showcasing HSE achievements at the OQ booth.

The Chief Guest was briefed about the efforts exerted by OQ Group in the fields of Health, Safety and Environment as well as current practices in sustainable growth across OQ locations and operations.

Leading an HSE culture change, OQ has created a long-term strategy for a foundational change in every process. The very foundation on which energy is imagined is challenged for the better through development of



green energy such as renewables, biofuels, CCUS, amongst others.

Under the Leadership pillar, OQ has transformed work culture by promoting the Safety Leadership Programme (Downstream) that empowers individuals to stop work when and if required.

Another critical initiative is the Leadership Accountability programme that covers various segments such as the OPAL Road Safety Forum, Camp Standards Programme, Fitness to Work amongst others while also adapting industry best practices for a safer working environment.

On the digitalisation front, OQ is constantly redefining the

way they work. Technological innovations such as the OQ Odour Abatement Project (e-nose network — that predicts odours or release of gases); the introduction of the Well Assurance Safety Programme (WASP) and ePTW system to prevent worker injury and fatality along with the introduction of Firefighting Virtual Reality (FLAIM) programme are in place to eliminate any pertinent risks.

OQ has a come a long way in its transformation journey. As a versatile innovator, it has embraced new cultures and synergies to expand horizons and create opportunities.

Today, OQ stands proud of its

ever-evolving environment, safety & health culture.

With the endorsement of this event, OQ shares with the community the HSE advances, systems and policies, which are aligned with the international best practices and standards.

Hamad al Shidhani, Vice President of Health and Safety in OQ Upstream, gave a presentation in which he explained that health, safety of operations and environmental sustainability at the Group is a leadership-enhanced style of work that is applied at all levels at OQ to ensure the integrity of assets and enhance reliability, productivity and sustainability at the Group.

MUC and GCET sign two MoUs

MUSCAT: Majan University College (MUC) and the Global College of Engineering and Technology (GCET) signed two MoUs — one covering research and innovation, and the second focusing on benchmarking professional/non-academic support practices and processes, and staff development, yesterday.

The signing ceremony was hosted by MUC's Dean, Dr Maha Kobeil and held in MUC's modern auditorium. GCET was represented by

the College's Dean, Professor Geoffrey Elliott. Three staff from GCET and a range of staff from MUC also attended.

MUC was established in 1995 as the first private higher education institution in Oman and in 2017 it became the first HEI in Oman to receive national institutional accreditation by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (now the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of

Education).

GCET was established in 2014 with the aim of offering high quality education in Engineering and Technology. The MoUs arose from recognition that the complementary profile of the two institutions, and the affiliation of both to UK universities, presents opportunities for cooperation and collaboration for mutual benefit, and will contribute to the ongoing development of higher education in Oman.

IFRS 17 transformation journey to enable timely completion



DR SHAHNAWAZ KHAN

CEO – Baker Tilly Oman

MUSCAT: The International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) issued IFRS 17, "Insurance Contracts". IFRS 17 is effective for annual reporting periods beginning on or after January 2023 and replaces IFRS 4 Insurance Contracts. IFRS 17 establishes internationally consistent accounting for insurance contracts and will drive greater standardisation.

Across the globe, in the GCC and the Sultanate of Oman, IFRS 17 transformation turns out to be a once-in-a-lifetime change in most of the lives of insurers. IFRS 17 reporting is primarily based on cash-flows and requires updated information regarding insurance contracts' obligations, risks, and performance.

This new standard will impact how insurance and reinsurance contracts are recognised and

measured, thereby impacting profit and equity as well as reserving and financial reporting processes, actuarial models and IT systems. The journey involves various phases such as impact assessment, design, and implementation, including system updates.

The standard is not only complex but also requires a significant investment of stakeholders' time and money. While decent progress is made in the impact assessment and design phase.

Most insurers are finding it hard to steer through the implementation phase. Several decisions are making required in the implementation phase such as underwriting, actuarial modelling, financial reporting, system upgrade, or installation.

Some insurers in the region are in an advanced stage of the implementation phase such as insurers in the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Insurers in the State of Kuwait and Qatar are in the early stage of the design phase, while the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Bahrain insurers are making progress



towards the advanced stage of implementation.

As the deadline for implementation is fast approaching i.e. January 1, 2023, the insurers in Oman should prioritise the following:

IFRS 17 PROJECT GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL STRUCTURE:

The structure should be developed to ensure the smooth implementation of IFRS 17. There should be a minimum, of a Project Steering Committee, and a Project Implementation Committee. The governance framework will ensure that the implementation changes

in technical accounting, actuarial, systems updates, or installations are performed as per the approved plan.

SUPPLIERS

IFRS 17 implementation is highly likely to require the involvement of several external suppliers. Implementation plans should be designed to select vendors, and manage execution risk as it relates to suppliers, including availability, oversight, and cost monitoring.

Process and systems

IFRS 17 will require the implementation of a new chart of accounts resulting in entities gathering new data leading to process and information system

changes to satisfy requirements. The data dictionary needs to be well-defined to identify gaps in data and synchronise with mapping with the new chart of accounts and systems.

RESOURCING

IFRS 17 implementation will require significant internal resources to ensure a successful outcome. Plans should be in place to ensure that resourcing is sufficient to implement IFRS 17 successfully. Project management services should be engaged to fill the gaps if any during the implementations.

FINANCIAL REPORTING

IFRS 17 interaction with IFRS 9 "Financial instruments" and policy matter choices such as acquisition costs and finance costs should also be assessed including considerations to reduce volatility on the profit or loss. Preparation of proforma financial statements and accounting policy should be completed well in advance. Takaful products are also to be considered.

TESTING AND DRY RUNS TO PREPARE FOR THE TRANSITION

IFRS 17 transition requirements

require several considerations and depend on the availability of historical data. Validation of data, technology, financial close processes, and other aspects of IFRS 17 implementation should be addressed adequately in the implementation phase and tested during the dry runs. The audit Committee should maintain a dialogue with the external auditor and keep obtaining feedback during the testing and dry runs phase.

INDUSTRY OR REGULATOR

LEAD KNOWLEDGE GROUPS
IFRS 17 is a principle-based standard. The insurer should become part of the knowledge groups and share input and seek feedback from peer groups, other insurers in the region, and the Capital Market Authority (CMA) at regular intervals.

The insurers in Oman should keep into consideration, the above areas, and accelerate their journey of transformation, then only IFRS 17 can become a pathway to better reporting and will help in achieving the desired objective of the International Accounting Standard Board and the Capital Market Authority.

‘Enormously risky’: How NFTs lost their lustre

A slew of celebrity endorsements helped inflate a multi-billion dollar bubble around digital tokens over the past year, but cryptocurrencies are crashing and some fear NFTs could be next.

NFTs are tokens linked to digital images, “collectable” items, avatars in games or property and objects in the burgeoning virtual world of the metaverse.

The likes of Paris Hilton, Gwyneth Paltrow and Serena Williams have boasted about owning NFTs and many under-30s have been enticed to gamble for the chance of making a quick profit.

But the whole sector is suffering a rout at the moment with all the major cryptocurrencies slumping in value, and the signs for NFTs are mixed at best.

The number of NFTs traded in the first quarter of this year slumped by almost 50 per cent compared to the previous quarter, according to analysis firm Non-Fungible.

They reckoned the market was digesting the vast amount of NFTs created last year, with the resale market just getting off the ground. Monitoring firm CryptoSlam reported a dramatic tail-off in May, with just \$31 million spent on art and collectibles in the week to May 15, the lowest figure all year.

A symbol of the struggle is the forlorn attempt to re-sell an NFT of Twitter founder Jack Dorsey’s first tweet.

Dorsey managed to sell the NFT for almost \$3 million last year but the new owner cannot find anyone willing to pay more than \$20,000.

Molly White, a prominent critic of the crypto sphere, said there were many possible reasons for the downturn.

“It could be a general decrease in hype, it could be fear of scams after so many high-profile ones, or it could be people tightening their belts,” she said. The reputation of the industry has been hammered for much of the year.

The main exchange, OpenSea, admitted in January that more than 80 per cent of the NFTs created with its free tool were fraudulent — many of them copies of other NFTs or famous artworks reproduced without permission.

“There’s a bit of everything on OpenSea,” said Olivier Lerner, co-author of the book “NFT Mine d’Or” (NFT Gold Mine).

“It’s a huge site and it’s not curated, so you really have no idea what you’re buying.”

It could be a general decrease in hype, it could be fear of scams after so many high-profile ones, or it could be people tightening their belts

MOLLY WHITE
Crypto sphere critic



SUMMIT GUARDIAN
A security officer guards the entrance to the congress centre ahead the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting in Davos. The world’s political and business elite will hobnob in Davos this week after a two-year break caused by Covid, with the Ukraine war set to dominate the exclusive Swiss mountain summit.
— AFP

Another global recession?



JIM O'NEILL
The author, a former chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management and a former UK treasury minister, is Chair of Chatham House.

A GLOBAL RECESSION COULD BE UPON US. IF SO, IT WILL HAVE BEEN REMARKABLY SUDDEN, COMING SO SOON AFTER THE LOCKDOWN-INDUCED MINI-RECESSIONS OF 2020 AND 2021.

At the start of the year, I expressed concerns about the outlook for financial markets, owing to all the considerable uncertainties that I could identify, and to the many other potential risks that were not yet clear.

This was after Russia had begun to mass troops on Ukraine’s border, but before it had invaded. Now that Russia has launched its war of aggression, it has been almost totally removed from the international economy and markets, and energy and food prices have spiked.

At the same time, Western central banks have undertaken a major shift in their policy stances, having finally dropped the idea that today’s inflation is a merely temporary phenomenon that would subside on its own.

They are now deliberately tightening global financial conditions (by both unwinding their balance sheets and increasing interest rates), and this is adding to cyclical pressures on household incomes, and thus on the wider economy.

As if that weren’t enough, China’s economy — the world’s second-largest and ten times bigger than Russia’s — has been deliberately held back by the government’s “zero-Covid” strategy.

And this comes on top of existing efforts to dampen excessive housing prices, reduce credit growth, and rein

in business sectors (starting with major tech conglomerates) that are seen to be interfering with the government’s new “fairer growth” objective.

Given these developments, it looks as though a global recession could be upon us. If so, it will have been remarkably sudden, coming so soon after the lockdown-induced mini-recessions of 2020 and 2021.

How bad will this downturn be, and are there policies that could avert it, or at least minimise its scale and severity?

In China, policymakers are worried that a more relaxed stance on Covid-19 could drive up infections and overwhelm the country’s urban hospitals.

Since we have already seen the same sequence play out elsewhere – particularly in the United Kingdom, which was forced to impose sudden, harsh lockdowns in 2020-21 – China can hardly be criticised for being generally cautious.

But the evidence suggests that Omicron (the dominant global variant) is so transmissible that even lockdowns are unlikely to stop it completely. Moreover, it appears to be less virulent than previous variants, which makes a draconian response harder to justify.

China’s blunt zero-Covid strategy comes on top of an already weak economy, so it has added to underlying cyclical weaknesses. The most recent trade data (for April) show that Chinese imports remain exceptionally

low — just one of many signals pointing to a weak economy.

The problems facing China have implications extending beyond the economy and markets. China’s single-party leadership has long legitimised its rule by delivering ever-rising living standards for the country’s 1.4 billion people. But this implicit pact cannot easily be sustained under conditions of persistent economic weakness.

Having watched China for more than 30 years, I would say that one of its government’s biggest strengths has been its exceptionally good risk management. In the past, it has dealt with major potential problems decisively and in a timely manner. Not so today. If it doesn’t change course soon, there will be much more pain in store for its economy and for the rest of the world.

On the other hand, if the government can abandon “zero-Covid” and some of its other more draconian economic crackdowns, growth could well rebound quickly.

As for the rest of the world, two major factors beyond China will determine how things play out: major central-bank policies and Vladimir Putin. The Russian president’s intentions remain as difficult to predict today as they were three months ago when he launched his invasion.

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Bitter harvest for Indian farmers after wheat export ban

JALEES ANDRABI

When New Delhi banned wheat exports as prices soared over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine it provoked consternation abroad and drove the cereal even higher.

Now Indian farmers and traders are fuming they have been denied a windfall as domestic prices have plummeted.

India is the world’s second-biggest wheat producer, but the government — itself the country’s biggest buyer of the crop — said it chose to protect food security for its mammoth population despite inflation concerns.

The move — along with dwindling global supplies

from Russia and Ukraine, both among the world’s top five wheat exporters — sent prices to all-time highs on commodity exchanges in Chicago and Europe.

But at Asia’s largest grain market in Khanna, in India’s breadbasket state of Punjab, values went the other way.

Every year, thousands of farmers from the wheat-growing region sell their produce at the facility, which is dominated by a dozen giant storage sheds, each the size of a football pitch.

From 2,300 rupees (about \$30) per 100 kilogrammes of wheat before the export ban, prices slumped to 2,015 rupees — the government-set minimum price at which it buys grain for its vast public distribution system.

India’s hundreds of millions of small farmers eke out a borderline

existence, subject to the vagaries of the weather, and some in Punjab were already reeling from production losses due to a severe heatwave.

The price fall represents the difference between a bumper payout and heartache, they say.

Farmer Navtej Singh saved half his 60-tonne wheat harvest to sell during the lean season, when prices normally rise and is aghast at the government’s decision.

Now he is scrambling to sell his remaining stock.

“This ban has come as a shock,” he said. “The price has dropped to the lowest and doesn’t even cover our expenses. I can’t even wait for a day.” The authorities had not consulted anyone and had acted “selfishly”, he said.

“We were already hit with production losses this year, and

the ban order has made our life difficult.”

Before the war in Ukraine and the heatwave, India’s wheat production of 109 million tonnes in 2021 and seven million tonnes of exports had both been expected to rise this year.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month even offered to help plug the global wheat deficit and “feed the world”.

But extreme weather conditions are becoming more frequent in a phenomenon experts say is driven by climate change. After producers in Punjab were hit by a heatwave, the national harvest came in at four million tonnes less than expected.

Now federal and state authorities are cutting procurement for the public

distribution system, which provides free and highly subsidised grains to nearly 800 million people, as food security schemes set up during the coronavirus pandemic are cut back.

Even so, retail wheat flour prices are at a 12-year high, and Manish Pajni, head of the Punjab government’s grain procurement department in Khanna, has backed the ban, saying wholesale rates could have gone as high as 3,000 rupees without it.

But trader Raj Sood said the government should have adopted a wait and watch policy before abruptly halting exports and causing market turmoil.

“The market was already under stress from the harvest crisis and, without a thought, the government came up with the

ban,” he said.

“No doubt the major losses will be incurred by big exporters like Cargill, ITC and Glencore, but small traders and farmers will also be impacted.” And many businessmen in Khanna say the measure will only have a temporary effect as the rules of supply and demand are unavoidable.

Flour mill owner Divender Verma usually obtains his raw materials from government stocks but said they were running at their minimum.

“This time we do not hope they can provide for us. So the scenario for wheat is tight,” Verma said.

Private suppliers will inevitably charge more, he added — further driving up prices for bread and other wheat products. — AFP

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Turkish Culture and Cuisine Week shapes better bilateral relations between Oman and Turkey

Oman is the oasis of peace and wisdom. Turkey is the cradle of civilisation with their centuries of old history. Nothing will show these relations better than the Turkish Culture and Cuisine Week happening from May 21 until May 27... **P20**

Rihanna welcomes first child after high-fashion, self-affirming pregnancy

SUPERSTAR RIHANNA and rapper **ASAP Rocky** have reportedly welcomed their first child, after a pregnancy the singer flaunted in a radical revamp of normally covered-up maternity style.

The entertainment and fashion mogul behind the hits "Diamonds" and "Umbrella" gave birth to a boy on May 13 in Los Angeles, according to TMZ, which first reported the news.

People Magazine confirmed the celebrity birth, citing a source close to the couple who said they are at home with the baby and that "Rihanna is doing well. They are very excited to be parents."

Representatives for the couple did not immediately respond to an AFP request for

confirmation.

No other details, including the child's name, have been made public.

The Barbadian-born Robyn Rihanna Fenty, 34, in recent years has become a billionaire, parlaying her music achievements into successful makeup, lingerie and high-fashion brands.

Rumours that she and ASAP Rocky, 33, were dating swirled for years before the pair confirmed last year that their romance was official.

The pair announced they were expecting in January with a set of glamorous snow-dusted images taken in Harlem, the mother-to-be sporting a long pink jacket buttoned only at the top, paired with a long



bejewelled necklace over her bare belly.

Since then, Rihanna has triggered a paparazzi frenzy and left the fashion industry in awe, appearing in barely-there maternity looks that showcased her growing baby bump, no holds barred.

Weeks after announcing her pregnancy, the pop icon dazzled the fashion week circuit in look after look, notably arriving in Paris in a completely see-through Dior lace cocktail dress, under which she donned lingerie from her own Savage X Fenty line.

Paired with spiky heeled knee-high boots, a leather trench coat, and silver necklaces, the star walked with such grace and confidence she appeared to float.

"You're late!" shouted someone off-camera in a viral clip.

Rihanna slowly turned her head, held her bump and narrowed her piercing eyes: "No shit."

REWRITING' PREGNANCY RULES

It's a quip that's come to encapsulate the artist's embrace of her changing body -- Rihanna didn't just bare her belly, she boasted of it, adorning herself in jewels, sequinned bras, and low-slung miniskirts.

"She's changed something profound in fashion -- single-handedly rewriting the rules of pregnancy dressing with one jaw-dropping style maneuver after another," wrote Vogue, which featured Rihanna on its May cover.

"I'm hoping that we were able to redefine what's considered 'decent' for pregnant women," the performer told the magazine.

"My body is doing incredible things right now, and I'm not going to be ashamed of that. This time should feel celebratory."

She's far from the first celebrity to show off her pregnant belly: Demi Moore posed nude while expecting on Vanity Fair's cover in 1991, a stunning move for the time.

Since then, Britney Spears, Cindy Crawford and Serena Williams have all sat for similar glossy pregnancy portraits. Beyonce meanwhile announced her twins with a highly polished, belly-baring Instagram post chock full of art-world references including Botticelli's Venus.

But Rihanna's scantily clad looks have been far less calculated and far more frequent, a statement on maternity that goes beyond the magazine cover to be an everyday celebration of self.

"Right now I'm really into pushing the idea of sexy," she told the lifestyle website Refinery29 in February. "When women get pregnant, society tends to make it feel like you hide, hide your sexy."

"I don't believe in that shit," she continued. "So I'm trying stuff that I might not have even had the confidence to try before I was pregnant."

"The strappiest, the thinnest, and the more cut-outs -- the better for me." — **AFP**

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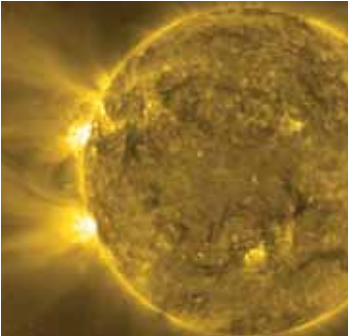
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SOLAR AFFAIR

Powerful flares, views across the solar poles, and a curious solar "hedgehog" are among the latest haul of images from the Solar Orbiter. The spacecraft's closest approach to the Sun, known as perihelion, took place on March 26, taking it inside the orbit of Mercury, at about one-third the distance from the Sun to the Earth. David Berghmans, from the Royal Observatory of Belgium, and the principal investigator of the extreme ultraviolet imager (EUI) instrument, which takes high-resolution images of the lower layers of the Sun's atmosphere, known as the solar corona, described the images as "really breathtaking." — dpa



FASHION TRENDS

A model presents a design by Colombian brand Faride Ramos during Bogota Fashion Week, in Bogota. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

MOVIES

New Scandinavian film wave rolls into Cannes



A NEW GENERATION of Scandinavian film-makers is making waves, following in the footsteps of Ingmar Bergman, Lars von Trier and the Dogme movement, with three directors in competition at Cannes this year. Swedish cult director Ruben Ostlund, who won the 2017 Palme d'Or for "The Square", is back with "Triangle of Sadness".

He is joined by two other films from rising stars with immigrant backgrounds: "Boy from Heaven", by Sweden's Tarik Saleh and Danish-Iranian Ali Abbasi's "Holy Spider".

Scandinavian films have been a fixture at the Cannes Film Festival over the years.

Denmark's Bille August is one of a handful to win the Palme d'Or twice and Von Trier won the top prize in 2000 for "Dancer in the Dark", while Bergman was the first-ever recipient of an honorary Palme in 1997 for his body of work.

Nordic film-makers often "push the limits of cinematographic language," said Claus Christensen, editor of Danish film magazine Ekko.

"It's entertainment, but (the goal is) also to challenge the audience. The director has the freedom to explore whatever his artistic vision is," he said.

Abbasi, 40, is making his second appearance at Cannes, after winning the newcomer's Un Certain Regard section in 2018 with "Border", an eccentric troll-fantasy film about a border guard.

His new film "Holy Spider" is the gritty story of a serial killer "cleansing" the Iranian holy city of Mashhad of street prostitutes.

"You can't pigeonhole him. When you think you have him, he's a shapeshifter and does something else," his producer Jacob Jarek said.

Abbasi recently finished filming episodes for the upcoming post-apocalyptic HBO series "The Last of Us", based on a video game.

That versatility defines others from his generation, said Jarek.

IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES

The previous wave of Danish film-makers, such as von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, won international acclaim with the Dogme movement, which set strict film-making rules aimed at ensuring realism in their films. But the new generation is "more willing to work with genre, to mix genres: to do comedy and lighter stuff mixed with dark stuff," said Jarek.

Both Abbasi's and Saleh's films draw heavily on their immigrant backgrounds.

Abbasi left Tehran for Sweden in 2002, while Saleh was born in Stockholm to a Swedish mother and Egyptian father.

Saleh's background was essential to making "Boy from Heaven", he said.

"I think there's a reason a lot of directors, historically, have immigrant backgrounds, like (Francis Ford) Coppola and (Miles) Forman," the 50-year-old said.

"You're positioned on the inside and outside of something. In a way, that's the director's role... to see both the similarities and the differences."

Hidden world

"Boy from Heaven" is a dark thriller set in Cairo that follows a poor boy granted a scholarship to the prestigious Al-Azhar University, who finds himself drawn into a brutal power struggle between Egypt's religious and political elite. Being an outsider was crucial, Saleh said.

"No one has ever gone into (Al-Azhar University) with a camera before. (An Egyptian film-maker) would go to prison if they did," he told.

A former graffiti artist, Saleh grew up with a film-maker father and worked in his film studio before attending art school in Alexandria. In addition to directing episodes of "Westworld" and "Ray Donovan", his 2017 film "The Nile Hilton Incident", also set in Cairo, won the Sundance Grand Jury Prize. — **AFP**

CULTURE

'Straight to your soul': Japan's taiko reinvents drum tradition



IN A HALL ON Japan's Sado island, 71-year-old Yoshikazu Fujimoto strikes the imposing drum mounted before him, producing a boom so powerful that it reverberates through the floorboards.

Fujimoto is a veteran performer of Japanese taiko drumming, a musical form with roots in religious rituals, traditional theatre and the joyous abandon of seasonal festivals called matsuri.

But for all its ancient pedigree, taiko as a stage performance is a fairly modern invention, developed by a jazz musician and popularised in part by one of Japan's most famous troupes: Sado Island's Kodo.

Fujimoto is the oldest of the 37 musicians that make up the group, which recruits members through a rigorous two-year training programme.

It was founded partly to attract people to Sado, off Japan's west coast, and tours internationally, spreading the gospel of taiko.

"Taiko itself is like a prayer," said Fujimoto, who came to Sado in 1972 to join the group that evolved into Kodo.

"It used to be said that the area reached by the sound of a drum made up a single community," he said.

"Through taiko... I want to become part of a community with the audience and send a message of living together, a message of compassion."

It has been a life-long project for Fujimoto, who is a specialist performer of the o-daiko, an enormous single drum mounted on a stand that is struck by a musician standing with his back to the audience and arms raised overhead.

The effect is an all-encompassing wall of sound that seems to enter the ribcage and vibrate through its bones.

And it is highly physical, with Fujimoto grunting in

exertion as the muscles in his almost-bare back flex beneath the straps of his tunic with every strike.

ONE WITH THE SOUND

"I become one with the sound," he said. "Playing taiko makes me feel I'm alive."

Kodo's performances range from the sombre power of the o-daiko solo to ensemble pieces featuring flute and singing, and even comic interludes that encourage audience participation.

Taiko simply means drum in Japanese, and performers use two main types.

The first is made from a single, hollowed tree trunk with cow or horsehide nailed over each end. The second uses hide stretched over rings attached with ropes to a wooden body.

They have been part of rituals and theatrical artforms like noh and kabuki in Japan for centuries.

But drumming in those contexts is often a solemn practice, while modern taiko performance is closer to folk festivals where troupes often made up of local residents play in streets or fields to unite the community, drive away malign influences or pray for a good harvest.

"Contemporary taiko drumming took a lot of inspiration from this local festival drumming and combined with more formal traditional performing arts to evolve into what we see as taiko drumming today," explained Yoshihiko Miyamoto, whose company Miyamoto Unosuke has made taiko for over 160 years.

Key to that evolution was jazz drummer Daihachi Oguchi, who moved festival drumming onto the stage in the 1950s and 60s.

Then in 1969, musician Den Tagayasu moved to Sado to

found a taiko troupe that he hoped would attract young people to the island and revitalise it.

STRAIGHT TO YOUR SOUL

Fujimoto left his native Kyoto to join the group known as Ondekoza, and when they split he stayed and helped found Kodo.

Joining now involves an arduous two-year training programme, where apprentices aged 18-25 live in dorms, without phones or televisions.

"The day starts at 5am, when we get up and immediately go out to stretch. Then we start cleaning and polishing the floors," said Hana Ogawa, a 20-year-old who completed the trainee programme this year.

After cleaning, the trainees go for a run and then spend the entire day practising, with breaks only for food. They have one day off a week.

It might not be for everyone, but Ogawa, who decided to join Kodo after seeing them perform in high school, has no regrets.

"I'm happy every day, because I love taiko and I pursued this one goal and achieved it, so it's a dream come true," she told.

Taiko drumming has been growing in popularity at home and abroad in recent years, with troupes established in Europe and the United States and a steady rise in overseas orders for Miyamoto's store.

"Taiko has the power to connect people with its sound," he said.

"Especially in this contemporary age, you hear the sound of machines everywhere, but taiko uses this raw hide and the drum bodies made by wood," he added.

"It's like a sound of nature, it's very organic. I think that's one of the reasons it comes straight to your soul." — **AFP**

EXHIBITIONS

Goddesses and witches star in British Museum show



ALLURING, WARRIOR-LIKE or nurturing, goddesses and other female spiritual beings from around the world are the focus of a new exhibition at the British Museum.

Entitled "Feminine Power: The Divine to the Demonic", it includes ancient sculptures of Roman goddesses Venus and Minerva and Egypt's lioness-headed goddess Sekhmet, as well as modern images of deities worshipped today.

The exhibition is the "first with a cross-cultural approach to this extraordinary, absolutely fundamental subject", the London museum's director Hartwig Fischer told reporters.

Specially for the show, the museum commissioned a brightly painted icon of the Hindu warrior goddess Kali wearing a garland of severed heads, from Kolkata-based artist Kaushik Ghosh.

The exhibition, which runs until September 25, also features commentary from high-profile figures including the feminist writer Bonnie Greer and classicist Mary Beard.

"We're not trying to tell people what they should think or how they should feel about this," curator Belinda Crerar told AFP, saying she wanted the exhibition to start a conversation.

One section on "compassionate" figures such as the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, notes that reverence for such female divinities "in many societies has not translated into a higher status for women themselves".

"This is the big question" raised by the exhibition,

Crerar said.

"It's not straightforward and there is no singular answer to it."

"I believe there is a link between spiritual ideas relating to femininity and masculinity and how... women and men are viewed, but it is culturally specific."

For a section called "Magic and Malice" about witches and demons, the museum consulted a collective of practising British witches called Children of Artemis.

"What we felt was really important to do in this section was to actually work with a group of men and women today who identify as witch or modern pagan or who practise Wicca," said project curator Lucy Dahlsen.

"Those relationships have been really important, to ensure we are looking at a living tradition in an appropriate way."

Some reactions came as a surprise.

She pointed to a Pre-Raphaelite-style painting by John William Waterhouse of Greek goddess Circe casting a spell while wearing a see-through gown over her naked body.

Many see this painting as "epitomising the male gaze and an image of a sorceress depicted as a kind of femme fatale," Dahlsen said.

But one British witch, Laura Daligan, commented that the picture was not far off.

Witches "don't always practise with clothes on - it is kind of realistic in a way," she said in a comment posted online by the museum. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | MAY 23 | 2022



By Mai al Abri

Stressing on the remarkable relations and historical ties going back to the 16th century between the Sultanate of Oman and Turkey, the Embassy of Turkey, in cooperation with the Turkish Airlines and the Muscat Grand Millennium Hotel launched the Turkish Culture and Cuisine Week starting from May 21 until May 27, 2022.

This collaboration is the fruit of the trustful and deep-rooted political relations, 15 billion dollar trade volume and economic relations, besides the strong cultural ties between the two countries.

Oman is the oasis of peace and wisdom. Turkey is the cradle of civilisation with their centuries of old history. Nothing will show these relations better than this cultural occasion.

Turkish Cuisine Week aims to showcase Turkish dishes with all their original qualities. The event is simultaneously celebrated with promotional events in Türkiye and abroad.

The gastronomy book titled "Turkish Cuisine With Timeless Recipes", was published under the leadership of First Lady Emine Erdoğan and under the auspices of the Presidency with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism aims to promote the richness of Turkish cuisine to a global audience.

Published in Turkish and English, the book presents 218 recipes for healthy, traditional and zero-waste dishes. It sustains a waste-free, ecological and sustainable way of nutrition in a world that is rapidly changing, bringing unhealthy diets to human beings.

In this event, an award-winning Turkish Chef Sinem Özler, who has also contributed to the 'Timeless Recipes' book, is also invited to Muscat for introducing this unique outlook to the Omani people.

The week will highlight the cultural and gastronomic dimensions of Türkiye. Throughout the week, the most distinguished delicacies of the traditional Ottoman Turkish cuisine prepared by the award-winning Chef Sinem Özler and her team will be presented. Additionally, talented representatives of traditional Turkish arts will make demonstrations of their art during the week at Muscat Grand Millennium Hotel. For water marbling, artist Önder Cankurtaran who is also an artisan of prayer beads; for miniature, Halime Karataş; for traditional Turkish tiles Gizem Kanbur will present us their talents.

Alongside this gastronomy week, Bait Al Zubair Museum holds two great collections of art. Exhibition of Calligraphy and Illumination by Mr and Mrs Hüsrev and Naciye Subaşı titled 'Al Multazim', and, Istanbul Paintings exhibition by artist Selahattin Kara from Mehmet Çebi's collection.

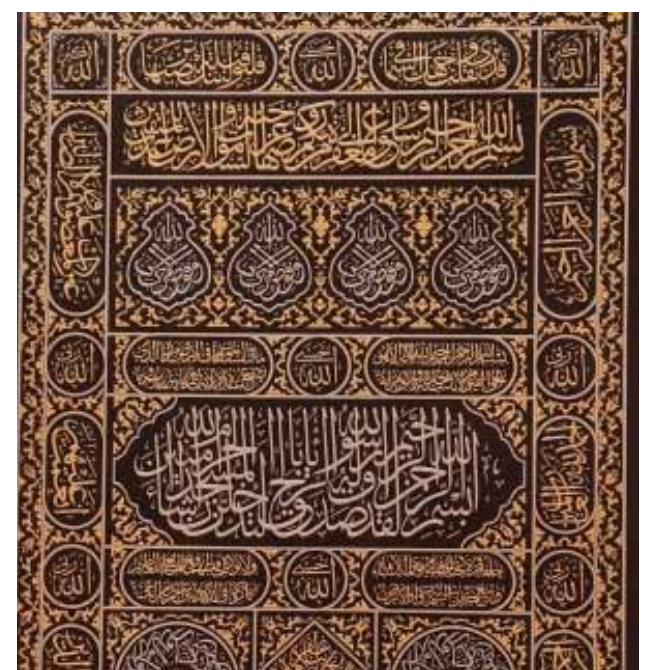
The exhibition of "Al Multazim" is a fascinating representation of traditional Turkish calligraphy and illumination art. Naciye Subaşı, born in Istanbul, started studying the art of Illumination (tezhip) in 1980 in the Illumination Workshop at Kubbealti Academy, Istanbul.

In an attempt to carry the Ottoman style of Turkish Illumination and Decorative Arts to the present day, the artist reinterprets this classical style through her own original understanding and creativity.

She has participated in numerous local and international art exhibitions. The artist won the third prize in the International Contest of Al Burdah Award (UAE-2008). Her work of Hilva won the first prize in the International Contest of Al Mahabba Awards (Abu Dhabi — 2008).

Istanbul Paintings by Selahattin Kara is a unique collection portraying the hidden beauties of the city of Istanbul with an authentic style. Kara received his formal artistic training in the famous Atatürk Education Institute — Fine Art Department. Worked as an art teacher between 1979-1984, Kara then decided to devote himself entirely to art production. Having always been fascinated by the city of Istanbul and its people, he naturally chose them as his subject.

There are some other activities hosted this week like "The Art of Calligraphy and Calligrapher Ottoman Sultans" lecture at Bait Al Zubair on May 23rd and the renowned Turkish musician Sedat Anar and his band will give a breath-taking concert on the same day at Bait Al Zubair.



Turkish Culture and Cuisine Week shapes better bilateral relations between Oman and Turkey