

**NEW ONLINE SERVICE TO BOOST
BUSINESS CLIMATE IN OMAN**

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has commenced the service of issuance of country of origin certificates for the Arab countries, Singapore and EFTA countries. **>A2**



**HIS MAJESTY THE SULTAN SENDS CABLE OF
CONDOLENCES TO RUSSIAN PRESIDENT**

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation on the death of former president of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sympathies to President Putin, the Russian people and the family of the deceased. **-ONA**



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Registration of patents boosts local economy, innovations in Oman



MUSCAT: Registration of patents is encouraged in Oman in order to protect the rights of inventors, and to contribute to the development of the national economy as well as to market innovations.

The National Bureau of Intellectual Property at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MOCIIP) reaffirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is concerned with the field of intellectual property in all sectors.

This attention and care accorded to intellectual property would contribute to the growth and development of the national economy and would open the door for investors to invest within the Sultanate.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion also accords due care to dissemination of intellectual property culture among members of the society.

The latest statistics issued by the National Bureau of Intellectual Property at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion showed that the number of applications for registration of patents has increased

during the past five years.

Statistics showed that the number of international applications submitted to the National Bureau of Intellectual Property which stood at 378 in 2017, increased in to 450 in 2021. The national applications registered totalled 13 in 2017 and increased to 102 in 2021.

Nida bint Yaqoob Al Tamtami, Patent Inspection Specialist at the National Bureau of Intellectual Property said the Sultanate has recently signed an agreement on establishment of technology transfer centres and the Lisbon agreement on geographic indicators, besides the joining of other agreements and treaties, which contributed to the development of all fields of intellectual property sector, mainly patents.

Awareness

She also reaffirmed that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion continues with its efforts for dissemination of awareness on the significance of intellectual property and organises workshops and training programmes in this field at the government and private sector establishments and schools. **-ONA**

OVER 729,000 STUDENTS RETURN AS NEW ACADEMIC YEAR BEGINS

The Minister of Education thanked His Majesty for his support to provide school essentials to the deserving students

Times News Service

MUSCAT: More than 729,000 students will return to over 12,000 schools in the Sultanate of Oman as the 2022/2023 academic year begins today.

Across the Sultanate, 1,242 schools will receive 729,331 male and female students, 57,033 teachers and 10,834 administrators and technicians from various governorates of the Sultanate to start the 2022/2023 academic year.

The number of students in government schools is 729,331, of whom 368,184 (50.9 percent) are male and 361,147 (49.5 percent) are female in about 1,242 schools, including 339 schools for the first cycle, 306 schools for the second cycle, 489 schools for the continuing cycle, 14 schools for grades 11-12 and 94 schools for grades 10-12, including 383 for male students with a percentage of 30.8, 227



1,242

schools across the Sultanate will receive 729,331 male and female students, 57,033 teachers and 10,834 administrators and technicians from various governorates of the Sultanate to start the 2022/2023 academic year.

schools for girls with a percentage of 18.3 and 632 joint schools with a percentage of 50.9.

These schools are divided into morning schools and evening schools. The total number of evening schools is 107, including 68 joint schools with a percentage of 63.5, 22 schools for males with a percentage of 22.6 and 17 schools for females with a percentage of

15.9, and the total of the first cycle schools of them number 63 schools. At a rate of 58.9 percent, the second cycle schools number 63 with a percentage of 33.6 percent, and the continuous cycle schools are (8 schools) with a percentage of 7.5 percent.

The number of teachers in these schools of the Sultanate reached 57,033, including 17,396

male teachers (30.5 percent) and 39,637 female teachers (69.5 percent).

The number of administrators and technicians in government schools reached 10,834, including 4,341 technicians and administrators at a rate of 40.1 percent and 6,493 administrative and technical at a rate of 59.9 percent.

>A5

TOP THREE INSIDE STORIES

OMAN Rise in volume of goods received at ports

1 Statistics issued by the NCSI showed that the volume of goods received through the Omani ports increased during the first five months of the current year to 15.7 million tonnes against 12.2 million tonnes during the corresponding period in 2021, an increase of 28.4 percent. **>A5**

WORLD Ousted Sri Lanka president back home

2 Sri Lanka's ousted President Gotabaya Rajapaksa returned home in the early hours of Saturday after fleeing the country in July, according to a senior security official. As per media, the leader fled the country as the economic crisis fuelled angry protests.

>A6



MARKET OETC signs MoU for tech cooperation

3 Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), has signed a memorandum of understanding with Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN), a Portuguese firm to boost work mechanisms, joint technical cooperation and knowledge sharing in the field of transmission of electricity. **>B1**



35°
MUSCAT



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Al Nahdha walkway in Al-Amerat to promote public health



Times News Service

MUSCAT: To humanise local cities and implement service projects that meet the standards of modern urban cities, the Muscat Municipality is working on Al Nahdha walkway in the Wilayat of Al-Amerat in Muscat.

The project comprises a walk-

way and a bicycle path, both 1,200 metres in length. The 5-metre wide walkway and the 3-metre wide bicycle path are separated by a 2-metre wide landscaping. The project also includes some sites designated for mobile vendors and paved parking lots. The place will be lit by 70 lighting poles.

The project is an attempt to ex-



plot public spaces with projects that promote sports and physical health, and to beautify the area in accordance with modern concepts in city management and planning, while taking into account the need to accommodate mobile vendors.

The project is the third-of-its-kind in Al-Amerat, the others being the Al-Muhajj walkway and the

linear park in the fifth zone.

A sustainable city takes into account the concepts of habitat by providing the components of projects that serve multiple purposes of community members, and thus achieve a healthy and safe city with the elements of prosperity and sustainability that serve all visitors and residents of the governorate.

KEY PROJECTS

MSX forum to outline future plans

MUSCAT: A two-day conference, being organised by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), seeks to acquaint local, regional and international investors about the financial performance of MSX-based companies about their key projects and future plans.

The conference includes a number of working papers regarding features of the strategic plans of MSX, investment opportunities available in Oman, the economic reforms being initiated in the Sultanate. The event highlights Oman Vision 2040 among other issues.

The conference also includes discussions on public joint stock companies listed with MSX and video presentations of the companies that are expected to offer shares. **-ONA**



OMAN



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Dhuhr.....12:11pm
Asr.....3:39pm
Maghrib.....6:28pm
Isha.....7:39pm
Fajr (Tomorrow).....4:33am

New online service to boost business climate in Oman

The service is offered electronically through “Invest easy” portal

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has commenced the service of issuance of country of origin certificates for the Arab countries, Singapore and EFTA countries.

The service is offered electronically through “Invest easy” portal and aimed to facilitate procedures for embellishments and companies operating in the field.

The introduction of this service is aimed to accelerate online issuance of certificates of country of origin without the need for physical presence at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

It also aimed to create an appropriate and attractive environment and to save time and efforts.

Mahmoud bin Shanon Al Souti, Industrial Planning Engineer at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion said that the service comes within



SAVES TIME: The introduction of this service is aimed to accelerate online issuance of certificates of country of origin without the need for physical presence at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. -ONA

the procedures taken by the Ministry to facilitate the procedures related to export of products and the comprehensive development of services offered by the Ministry and to transform all services of the Ministry to online services.

It also aimed to facilitate and improve the business environment and to implement the best international practices.

The companies and establishments interested in issuance of country of origin certificates when exporting to Arab countries, Singapore and EFTA countries could access the Invest Easy portal and attach the required documents which would be approved online by the personnel concerned at the Ministry or the directorates and departments affiliated to the Ministry.

He also called owners of national establishments including Omani entrepreneurs and owners of SMEs, Omani investors and other investors and craftsmen to avail from the economic agreements and FTAs executed between the Sultanate and other countries in terms of export, import and obtainment of preferential treatment. -ONA

JOCKEYS DISPLAY THEIR EQUESTRIAN SKILLS

Jockeys displayed their equestrian skills on the sidelines of the horse races at Al Rahba Racecourse in the Wilayat of Barka in the South Al Batinah Governorate. While riding horses, the jockeys showed their skills that reflects the extent of development and preservation of various horse sports in the Sultanate of Oman. - ONA



TRIP

‘Shabab Oman II’ leaves for Tangier port in Morocco

A CORUÑA: The Royal Navy of Oman ship ‘Shabab Oman II’ left on Saturday the port of the Spanish city of A Coruña, heading to Tangier port in Morocco as part of its sixth international voyage “Oman, the Land of Peace”.

During its voyage, the ship continues to extend the bonds of friendship and brotherhood between the Sultanate of Oman and various countries of the world, showcasing the glorious Omani maritime history and the Omani culture. -ONA



FORUM

OCCI explores boosting trade with South Africa



MUSCAT: Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) organized the Oman-South Africa Business Forum on Thursday.

The forum explored ways of enhancing investment and trade exchange, as well as means of developing partnerships between businesspersons from the two sides.

Oman-South Africa total trade exchange aggregated OMR40,065,000 by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

Working papers organised during the forum highlighted several features of Oman, namely the stable investment milieu, legal clarity and complete foreign business

The forum explored ways of enhancing investment and trade exchange, as well as means of developing partnerships between businesspersons from the two sides

ownership, with no restrictions imposed on foreign transactions or income tax. A plus-point stressed during the forum is Oman’s openness to the world.

Meanwhile, B2B meetings were held between business representatives from both countries with a view to studying the prospects of further partnerships and cooperation.

-ONA



Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Labor

ANNOUNCEMENT
Online Public Auction

The Ministry of Labour announces an online public auction to sell technical equipment, devices, furniture and some scrap. The auction will be held online through the website (www.safqa.om) for the Directorate General of Labour in North Al Batinah Governorate on Tuesday and Wednesday corresponding to 13 and 14 September 2022 according to the places specified by the Directorate. The auction will be held according to the following terms and conditions:

1. Bidders have to register and subscribe to the website (www.safqa.om).
2. The bidder must pay the insurance amount of RO 1000/- through the website.
3. The successful bidder must pay the value of the commodity by electronic transfer within a maximum period of three working days after the end of the auction, in addition to the auctioneer's fees at (3%) of the commodity value.
4. The successful bidder must transfer the materials that have been purchased and whose value has been paid in full no later than one week after the end of the auction; otherwise, the Ministry will not be responsible for their loss, transfer, or destruction.
5. The materials offered for sale can be inspected in coordination with the Directorate General of Labour in North Al Batinah Governorate from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at the Directorate's store in Al-Tarif village and at the Vocational College in Saham, two days before the start of the auction and also through the website (www.safqa.om).
6. The offered materials shall be sold as is. The Ministry has the right to cancel or postpone the sale without giving any reasons.
7. The insurance amount will be forfeited in two cases:
A. If the bidder does not pay the value of the purchased items within the specified period.
B. If the bidder does not transfer the purchased materials within the specified period.

Auction type	Inspection place	Date and time of inspection	Date of auction start online
Technical equipment, devices, furniture and some scrap	1-The Directorate's store in Al-Tarif village 2-The Vocational College in Saham	11-12/9/2022 from 9:00 am to 12: pm	13-14/9/2022

Best regards

labour_OMAN



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EDUCATION



ISWK holds investiture for Students Council members

Tribune News network

MUSCAT: To inculcate leadership qualities and empower the middle school students, the ISWK introduced the Junior Student Council and office-bearers at the middle school level itself. Dr. Aju Samuel, co-founder of strategy consulting firm, the Performance Factory, Chief Strategy Officer of Air Charter International, fellow of the International Compliance Association, was the chief guest at the Investiture Ceremony.

Alkesh Joshi, Honorary President of the School Management Committee, D. N. Rao, Principal, Vice Principals and the parents were present on this occasion.

After lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the Chief Guest and other dignitaries, the school western music choir offered a prayer song to invoke the Almighty's blessings. The programme commenced with handing over of charge by the previous year's House In-charges to their newly appointed office-bearers. This was followed by the presentation of badges to the members of the Student Head Council as well as the House office-bearers by the Honourable Chief Guest.

The Chief Guest conferred the Badge of Office on the Head Council members and House office-bearers of both senior as well

as junior categories: Master Lael Alva (Senior Head Boy), Miss Gayathri Hari (Senior Head Girl), Master Aaron Jose Robin (Junior Head Boy), Miss Mihika Nair (Junior Head Girl), Master Vardhan Dhat (Senior Deputy Head Boy), Miss Benita Sara Thomas (Senior Deputy Head Girl), Master Johann Gladson (Junior Deputy Head Boy), Miss Sarah Khan (Junior Deputy Head Girl), Master Krishhang Srivastava (Boy Sports Coordinator Senior), Miss Joanna Varughese (Girl Sports Coordinator Senior), Master Ayush Shetty (Boy Sports Coordinator Junior), Miss Yara Fathima (Girl Sports Coordinator Junior), Master Furqan Jaazib (Boy Cultural Coordinator Senior), Miss Ananya Prasad (Girl Cultural Coordinator Senior), Master Adit H Menon (Boy Cultural Coordinator Junior), Miss Tapasya Tilwani (Girl Cultural Coordinator Junior), Master Ibrahim Mohammad (Boy Public Relations Coordinator) and Miss Sienna Shibu (Girl Public Relations Coordinator).

The newly appointed Prefects of classes 6 to 12 were also invested by the honorary President of the S.M.C, Alkesh Joshi.

In his address to the elected student body, Dr. Aju Samuel reminded them of their special status and the responsibility that they would be required to shoulder.

The Chief Guest reiterated that the student leaders should impact the lives of the student community. He emphasized on the need to remember the three important points, 'Aspiring Future, Engaging Stakeholders and Promising Delivery', which ought to be held close to their hearts throughout their lives.

The Chief Guest's inspirational speech was followed by the formal ratification of the Oath of Office. In the presence of Dr. Aju Samuel, Alkesh Joshi and D. N. Rao, the Head Boy and the Head Girl of both the senior and junior categories ratified the Oath as a symbol of acceptance of their duties and responsibilities vested upon them.

Donning their new roles as student leaders, committed to lead from the front, one could feel a new wave of enthusiasm surging within them. To mark the end of the solemn proceedings, the school's Hindustani choir captured the emotions of the Student Council in the words of a vibrant song, 'Ye Waqt Na Thahra Hai...Ye Waqt Na Thahrega...Himmat Se Kaam Lenge Ghabrana Kaisa...'

The programme concluded with the Hindustani choir's rendition of the National Anthem. The proud student leaders captured the mood of the day with an elaborate photo session.

HEALTH

Call for early action to check increasing cases of dementia

Times News Service

MUSCAT: With the prevalence of dementia increasing, experts in the Sultanate and wider region MENA have called for early action.

Dementia prevalence in the MENA region is increasing at alarming rates, but progress to tackle the neurodegenerative condition is far too slow, according to Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI), the global federation for 105 Alzheimer's and dementia associations across the world.

The MENA region currently has almost 3 million people living with dementia, with cases set to rise by 367 percent across the region to over 13.8 million cases by 2050 according to the latest estimates, the highest regional increases in the world.

Dr Hamad Al Sinawi, Chairman of the Oman Alzheimer's Society, and Consultant and Psychiatrist at the Department of Behavioural Medicine at the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital in Muscat, says "The statistics provided by ADI and WHO are concerning, and we need to start acting now. However, the issues faced by MENA countries regarding dementia differ greatly to other regions, which is why national dementia plans need to be localised and tailored to these specific issues."

"The root-cause problems, which we need to focus our efforts and energy on, are a lack of proper health education and health care services. We are still dealing with a stigma around memory loss being considered a normal part of the ageing process," explains Dr Al Sinawi.

Furthermore, insufficient diagnostic and screening tools result in many people with dementia remaining undiagnosed without access to treatments and support. Those who are diagnosed, then face a lack of aged care services which is why at-home caregiving is a go-to option, however often an unaffordable and in some countries culturally unacceptable approach.

"In most parts of the world health care and social care are joining together, but specifically in the Middle East very few countries manage to merge these services. A national dementia plan will have to consider accessibility as a major issue. Most people will appreciate an update of healthcare services, care homes, and recruitment first," Dr Al Sinawi continues.

"Tackling dementia now for some nations is like climbing Mount Everest - there is so much to do, but all nations need to start somewhere," says ADI Chief Executive Officer, Paola Barbarino. "Time is running out to imple-

ment national dementia plans by the WHO deadline of 2025, which is why it's even more important for MENA countries to start educating and spreading awareness about the seriousness of dementia and the oncoming wave of dementia cases."

The latest dementia prevalence statistics show that the number of people living with dementia worldwide will rise to 139 million by 2050, according to the WHO. Forecasts show increases of almost 2,000 percent in some countries by 2050, especially those in the MENA region.

Ageing populations, lifestyle and environmental risk factors are contributing to these spiraling numbers. "Risk factors like diabetes and obesity are common in our region. In addition, social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic arose as a new risk factor. We are used to visiting the Mosque for prayers up to 5 times a day which wasn't possible over the last couple of years," says Dr Al-Senawi.

"Covid-19 has an impact on forecast numbers in different ways. We also have serious concerns that the neurological impact of the virus on the brain may spark a future wave of people developing dementia - driving prevalence up even higher," says Barbarino.

Trending ON SOCIAL MEDIA



MOST READ ON FACEBOOK

60,785 REACH

will help to develop the fisheries sector in Oman.



Story on 3 new development projects announced in Oman

A story on 3 new development projects announced in Oman reached 60,785 people and had 1,694 link clicks on Facebook.



MOST VIEWED VIDEO ON INSTAGRAM

700 VIEWS



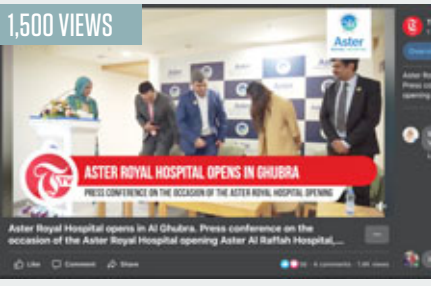
Maghrib Minute video in Hindi

The Maghrib Minute video in Hindi had 700 views and 37 likes on Instagram.



MOST WATCHED VIDEO ON FACEBOOK

1,500 VIEWS



Aster Royal Hospital opens in Al Ghubra

A video on Aster Royal Hospital opens in Al Ghubra had 1,500 views and reached 6,400 people on Facebook.



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NCSI DATA

Oman sees 28% increase in imports through its seaports

MUSCAT: Omani seaports recorded an increase in the volume of imported goods during the first five months of this year to 15.7 million tonnes, compared to 12.2 million tonnes in the same period last year, an increase of 28.4 per cent.

The value of merchandise imports through sea customs ports amounted to OMR4.1 billion, an increase of 37.4 per cent over its level in the same period last year, accounting for 67.6 per cent of the total value of merchandise imports.

This is on the back of the efforts to upgrade the capabilities of the ports for imports and exports during the past five years.

This is at a time when Duqm Port is all set for a new stage during which automatic lifting equipment would operate instead of the current cranes used.

Statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) showed that the increase comes within the recovery and growth in a number of economic sectors coupled with the Sultanate's efforts for increasing spending as to enhance and improve economic activity and to support economic growth.

The increase is also driven by



the procedures taken by the Directorate General of Customs at Royal Oman Police which aimed to facilitate customs procedures and online customs clearance and online provision of details of cargo 48 hours ahead of arrival of the vessel /ship.

The goods received through the ports represent 86.1 percent of the total imports of goods received at all customs posts / outlets during the first five months of the current year, which amounted to 18.3 million tonnes.

The value of goods imported

through sea customs posts during the first five months of the current year amounted to OMR4.1 billion (67.6 percent of the total value of registered imports), an increase of 37.4 percent compared to the corresponding period of 2021.

The first five months of the current year saw an increase of 21.7 percent in the value of goods registered which increased from OMR5 billion to OMR6.1 billion while the total imports increased by 17.7 percent to reach 18.3 million tonnes. — OMA

BACK TO SCHOOLS

Efforts of administrative and teaching staff appreciated

< FROM A1 Praising His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Dr. Madiha bint Ahmed Al Shaibaniya, Minister of Education, said that on behalf of students, teachers and employees of the Ministry of Education, we extend thanks and gratitude for His Majesty's generous and continuous sponsorship of the educational process in the country, and for the great care and attention he has bestowed through his recent supreme directives to provide school essentials to deserving groups. Her Excellency Minister of Education, congratulated the students and members of the teaching, administrative and technical staff on the occasion and welcomed the new teachers saying, "I am pleased to take this opportunity to welcome fellow teachers and new teachers who have had the honour to join us in the educational system."

Better future for learners

"We will contribute to strengthen the work in various sectors of the ministry, which comes within the framework of global trends aimed at providing the education sector with well-qualified teachers, to secure a better future for learners, in order to achieve the goals of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and in line with the strategic direction of the Oman 2040 vision on education," she said.

Her Excellency confirmed her follow-up work and appreciation for the efforts of the teaching and administrative staff, and said: "We have followed with interest and appreciation the efforts made, the effective initiatives and the roles presented by you during the pandemic and the recovery phase, which stems from your deep belief in your lofty message and your professional responsibility towards present and future generations. I am confident that you will continue your efforts to bring about a positive change in learning at all levels, she said, adding that "together, we will continue to ensure that the gains of the pandemic are exploited,

and we support policies to empower teachers to achieve the envisaged goals."

Her Excellency referred to the qualitative shift in the educational curricula, saying the conditions and qualitative transformations that the world is going through today require us all to join efforts and do everything in our power to achieve quality and keep pace with the requirements of sustainable development, diversify sources of funding and offer educational paths to enhance the skills of learners and meet the future needs of the labour market. It is necessary to make a qualitative shift in our educational curricula to keep pace with the Oman 2040 vision and the digital transformation in the educational learning process.

On the most important preparations for the education sector, Dr. Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Education, said the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation has recently modified and developed the documents for evaluating students' learning in various academic subjects, based on feedback from the educational field and developments in the evaluation of curricula.

His Excellency confirmed that the centre will start the actual application electronically, for the first time, for the International Study in Mathematics and Science (TIMSS 2023), the International Study for the Measurement of Computer and Information Skills (ICILS 2023) and the national tests for intermediate grades (4-7-10) for the academic year 2022/2023.

His Excellency indicated the readiness of the centre to test the electronic application for the tenth grade, provided that the complete electronic transformation of the application of national tests for all intermediate grades (10,7,4) in the 2023/2024 school year are undertaken.

Dr. Abdullah Ambusaidi spoke about the Ministry's interest in the private school education sector and the diversity and multi-

plicity of educational services it provides.

His Excellency stressed the Ministry's endeavour to provide everything that helps achieve quality in the performance of the 1,046 private school educational institutions, both private and international, and to provide support to them, follow up their performances and overcome the challenges they face.

Guidelines issued

His Excellency said the Ministry has issued many guidelines that regulate the workflow. He added that the Ministry is working to continue coordinating with international educational institutions regarding programmes and qualifications, preparing guidelines for programmes and curricula for all levels of study in private schools, preparing their own training seminars and studying requests for the application of international educational programs, enrichment of school stages and their approval, in addition to reviewing and amending the methodological frameworks for a number of study subjects and preparing curricula documents and study plans for the academic year 2022/2023.

His Excellency stated that the Ministry is working on composing the unified ministerial curriculum for schools teaching the Holy Qur'an, activating the programmes included in the tenth five-year plan, including the digital transformation of the services of the General Directorate of private schools, issuing an investment guide in private school education with the participation of a number of authorities, and activating the expansion plan in early education stage in Al Wusta Governorate and the oil concession areas. His Excellency touched on authoring the curricula aimed at developing the learner's ability to communicate, developing the learner's research and investigation skills, encouraging him for self-learning and developing the skills of leadership and innovation.

Full story @ timesofoman.com/oman

FIREFIGHTING TEAMS PUT OUT TWO FIRES

The firefighting teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) put out a fire on a farm in Al Obeid area of the Wilayat of Nakhl in South Al Batinah Governorate. Another team from the CDAA extinguished a fire at a workers' accommodation in the Wilayat of Sur in the South Sharqiyah Governorate Governorate. The rescue teams were able to put out the blaze without recording any injuries. The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority said: "The firefighting teams of the CDAA in the South Sharqiyah Governorate were able to put out a fire that broke out in a workers' housing in the Wilayat of Sur, without recording injuries."

— Times News Service



IN FISHERIES SECTOR

OMR5.7mn pact signed

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Thursday signed three agreements in the fisheries sector to the tune of OMR5.7 million.

The projects in the fisheries sector provide for the establishment of a fish market in the Wilayat of Khasab, breakwaters in the villages of Al Jari, Al Ghamda'a, the Wilayat of Bakha. — OMA

ANNOUNCEMENT



This is to inform all concerned that **Mr. Vijesh Vijayan** holder of Indian Passport No.U0085102 Resident card No.63970734, has resigned from our company **Al Ruban Reconstruction & Development LLC** from 01/9/2022. Therefore, all the concerned are requested to stop dealing with the above named in favor of the company. If anyone is dealing with him it is at their own risk and company will not take any responsibility hereafter. If anybody has any claim, he/she should report to the company within next 15 working days.

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UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND APPLIED SCIENCES

LOCAL TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

The Internal Tender Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences announces the tender shown in the following table:

Tender No.	Tender subject	Establishments eligible to bid	Document's Price	Last date for bid purchase online	Last date for bid submission
27/2022	Purchasing Microsoft licenses for the University of Technology and Applied Sciences	Companies and establishments specialized in this field and registered with the Tender Board at the Excellent, First, Second, Third and Fourth Grades	RO 28,500 (Twenty eight Omani Riyals and five hundred Baizas only)	12/09/2022 at 14:30 pm	18/09/2022 at 10:00 am

Tender documents may be purchased online starting from Sunday 04/09/2022 at 07:30 am through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

All bidding companies must attach with their bids a temporary tender bond in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified by a bank operating in the Sultanate, not less than (1%) of the bid value, addressed to the name of the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee, and valid for a period of (90) days from the date of bid submission. Any bid that does not meet the required temporary tender bond shall not be considered. Bid shall be submitted sealed and signed by the authorized person, and uploaded in the electronic tender system of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences with the tender name and number only.

Preference in awarding will be given to small and medium enterprises registered with the Authority for SME development and whose bid includes the biggest percentage of Omanisation and a biggest purchase percentage of national products.

The University shall not be bound to accept the lowest or any other bid

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Sri Lanka’s ousted president Rajapaksa returns home: Official

Rajapaksa resigned after protesters angered by a debilitating economic crisis stormed his office and residence

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka’s ousted President Gotabaya Rajapaksa returned home in the early hours of Saturday after fleeing the country in July, according to a senior security official.

As per UK-based media, the onetime leader fled the country as the economic crisis fuelled angry protests. Rajapaksa resigned after protesters angered by a debilitating economic crisis stormed his office and residence. The former president fled the county following mass agitations calling for his resignation on July 9.

Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka in the early hours of July 13 after massive protests erupted in Colombo and demonstrators angry with the country’s economic crisis stormed his official residence and office.

He resigned as president after reaching Singapore, where he was issued a 14-day visit pass.

He had fled to Singapore via the Maldives and then spent the past few weeks in Thailand. He returns almost after two months after fleeing to Thailand.

On August 11, the former President reached Thailand following



a request from the Sri Lankan government. Tight security has been provided to his Mirihana residence. However, Thailand has denied reports that the former Sri Lankan President has sought asylum in the country.

The Thailand Foreign Ministry said it received a request from Rajapaksa to visit the country with no intention of seeking political asylum. According to Jamila Husain, Deputy Editor at Daily Mirror, Rajapaksa arrived in Sri Lanka from a Singapore Airlines flight.

“... and the man returns Former Pres Gotabaya Rajapaksa arrived in #SriLanka a short while ago on board a Singapore Airlines flight. Several ministers are awaiting to welcome him at the BIA. Media is not allowed. He will be provided with all facilities granted to

a former President,” tweeted Husain. President Ranil Wickremesinghe made arrangements for his return upon a request by Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) as a result of which the president is reported to have contacted Rajapaksa to discuss arrangements for his return to the country, Daily Mirror reported citing a source close to him.

Earlier, former Sri Lankan Ambassador to Russia, Udayanga Weeratunga, who is also related to Gotabaya, hinted that Rajapaksa will return to the country on August 24.

Thailand was the second Southeast Asian country after the Maldives that Rajapaksa was seeking temporary shelter in after fleeing his island nation last month amid mass protests. Sri Lankan Par-

liament Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena announced the official resignation of Rajapaksa on July 15. After the resignation of Gotabaya Rajapaksa, Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as President of Sri Lanka on July 21 in Parliament.

He was earlier appointed as interim president of Sri Lanka as Rajapaksa fled abroad after his palace was stormed by angry protesters amid the unprecedented economic crisis. Sri Lanka is suffering its worst economic crisis since gaining independence in 1948, which comes on the heels of successive waves of COVID-19, threatening to undo years of development progress and severely undermining the country’s ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). **ANI**



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Actress Jane Fonda diagnosed with cancer

CALIFORNIA: US actress Jane Fonda announced on Friday that she had been diagnosed with non-Hodgkin Lymphoma and had begun a six-month course of chemotherapy treatment.

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma is a form of cancer that begins in the white blood cells and affects parts of the body’s immune system.

The 84-year-old Oscar winner said, “This is a very treatable cancer. 80% of people survive, so I feel very lucky.”

Fonda shared the news of her illness in an Instagram post in which she spoke of her access to health insurance along with the best doctors and treatments, and added, “I realize, and it’s painful, that I am privileged in this.”

Fonda uses illness to highlight healthcare issues

Well known for her activism, Fonda also pointed out that while she was fortunate to be receiving such treatment, the same could not be said for others who found themselves in a similar situation.

“Almost every family in America has had to deal with cancer at one time or another and far too many don’t have access to the quality health care I am receiving and this is not right,” Fonda said.

The environmentalist and so-



cial campaigner said she would not let her treatment interfere with her climate activism, and even pointed to the upcoming midterm elections in November, saying she would be there.

“The midterms are looming, and they are beyond consequential so you can count on me to be right there together with you as we grow our army of climate champions,” Fonda said.

Fonda has been acting in film and television for more than six decades, and won Academy Awards for roles in the 1971 movie “Klute” and 1978’s “Coming Home.” Her latest film, “Moving On,” will premiere at the Toronto Film Festival this month.

She also recently starred in the final season of the Netflix comedy “Grace and Frankie.” **DW**

WILDFIRES

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

Thousands evacuated as California wildfires rage

CALIFORNIA: Thousands of residents were forced to evacuate their homes in northern California on Friday as a rapidly spreading wildfire continued to burn across more than 1,000 acres (around 400 hectares). According to local fire authorities, the so-called Mill Fire has destroyed multiple homes in Siskiyou County and has led officials to issue mandatory evacuation orders for the towns of Weed, Lake Shastina and Edgewood.

Fire presents ‘immediate threat to life’

“Immediate threat to life. This is a lawful order to leave now. The area is lawfully closed to public access,” the evacuation order said. Cal Fire reported that multiple resources were en route to help battle the Mill Fire. Spokeswoman Suzi Brady said several people had been injured and had been taken to hospital, but did not specify how many. Weed councilwoman Sue Tavalero said the Mill Fire began at a lumber mill north of the town and rapidly burned



through homes in nearby Lincoln Heights, prompting the evacuation measures. “I don’t know how many. I’m positive several homes have been lost,” she said.

Videos and images of the fast-moving fire have been shared widely on social media, with one video showing a time-lapse view over a 45-minute period. The fire comes as the region experiences high temperatures, with some areas reaching 38 degrees Celsius (100 degrees Fahrenheit).

“September is off to a searing start in the West with record-breaking temperatures and fire

weather expected to expand and settle over that part of the country this Labor Day weekend,” the National Weather Service said in its daily bulletin, referring to the Labor Day holiday in the US on Monday.

Siskiyou is heavily forested and has been at the receiving end of a number of forest fires over the past few years. An ongoing drought in the American West has allowed for more destructive fires. Most scientists believe global warming is causing natural weather events to become more extreme. **DW**

Thousands rally in solidarity after assassination attempt on Argentinian vice president

BUENOS AIRES: Messages of solidarity came from across the world and thousands showed up in solidarity in Buenos Aires after a man tried to shoot Argentine Vice President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

President Alberto Fernandez declared a public holiday on Friday and said the attack was the worst since the country returned to democracy in 1983 after a military dictatorship.

“Cristina remains alive because, for a reason that has not yet been technically confirmed, the gun which contained five bullets did not fire despite the trigger having been pulled,” the president said. A man attempted to shoot Fernandez de Kirchner, 69, with a loaded pistol from point-blank range outside her house where many of her supporters were present, but the firearm failed to discharge. Authorities have not yet confirmed the cause for the attack on the vice president, who also led



the country from 2007 to 2015.

A senator close to Fernandez de Kirchner told local radio that the vice president was in shock, but physically unharmed.

Videos and photos of the attack have gone viral across the country, showing a gun being pushed toward the vice president’s head before she crouched down and covered her face with her hands. Supporters then took the man away.

Police have arrested a 35-year-

old Brazilian man who local media reported had been working as a driver and had rented apartments in the capital. About 100 bullets were recovered when police raided the property, said La Nacion newspaper.

The suspect had previously been arrested for illegal weapons possession, according to police sources quoted by the Telam news agency. Images from his social networks showed the man with a Nazi tattoo. **DW**

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WORLD



Over 1/3 of Pakistan under water amid its worst floods in history

Torrential monsoon rainfall, 10 times heavier than usual, has caused the Indus River to overflow

ISLAMABAD: More than one-third of Pakistan is under water amid its worst floods in history, according to satellite images from the European Space Agency (ESA).

As deadly floodwaters threaten to create secondary disasters, food is in short supply after water covered millions of acres of crops and wiped out hundreds of thousands of livestock, reported CNN. Torrential monsoon rainfall -- 10 times heavier than usual -- has caused the Indus River to overflow, effectively creating a long lake, tens of kilometres wide, according to images from the ESA on August 30. Pakistan is facing twin food and health crises brought by the unprecedented floods. According to the charity Action Against Hunger, 27 million people in the country did not have access to enough food prior to the floods, and now the risk of widespread hunger is even more imminent, reported CNN.

"Our priority right now is to help save and protect lives as waters continue to rise. The scale of these floods has caused a shocking level of destruction -- crops have been swept away and livestock killed across huge swathes



of the country, which means hunger will follow," said Saleh Saeed, chief executive of the Disasters Emergency Committee, a United Kingdom-based aid coalition.

Prime Minister Sharif said on August 30 that people were facing food shortages and the price of basic items such as tomatoes and onions had "skyrocketed."

"I have to feed my people. Their stomachs cannot go empty," Sharif said. The WHO has also classified Pakistan's worst floods on record as an emergency of "the highest level," warning of a rapid spread of disease due to the lack of access to medical assistance. World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned of new outbreaks of diarrheal diseases, skin infections, respiratory tract infections, malaria and dengue in the aftermath of the floods, while a litany of waterborne diseases also posed health risks.

Meanwhile, aid agencies have warned of an uptick in infectious diseases, leaving millions vulnerable to illness caused by what the United Nations has called a "monsoon on steroids."

More than 1,100 people have died from the floods since mid-June, nearly 400 of them children, while millions have been displaced, according to Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Pakistan, which was already grappling with political and economic turmoil, has been thrown into the front line of the human-induced climate crisis.

Pakistan's monsoon season usually brings heavy downpours, but this year's has been the wettest since records began in 1961, according to the Pakistan Meteorological Department.

In the southern Sindh and Balochistan provinces, rainfall has been 500 per cent above average

as of August 30, according to the NDMA, engulfing entire villages and farmland, razing buildings and wiping out crops.

Pakistan is responsible for less than 1 per cent of the world's planet-warming gases, European Union data shows, yet it is the eighth most vulnerable nation to the climate crisis, according to the Global Climate Risk Index.

And it's paying a hefty price -- the South Asian country faced dramatic climate conditions this year, from record heat waves to destructive floods -- as the climate crisis exacerbates extreme weather events, reported CNN.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has warned the world is "sleepwalking" into environmental destruction. "South Asia is one of the world's global climate crisis hotspots. People living in these hotspots are 15 times more likely to die from climate impacts," said Guterres. **ANI**

COMPLETELY NEW VARIANT



New COVID strains possible this winter, warn health experts

LONDON: European Union officials and health experts urged governments on Friday to step up measures to curb an expected spike in COVID-19 infections this winter.

The urging comes after the EU's medicines agency approved vaccines from Moderna and BioNTech-Pfizer that have been updated to tackle the omicron subvariant.

use in specific settings, such as public transportation.

What about new variants? The Commission, the executive arm of the EU, said the spike in cases over this summer "reminded us very clearly that the pandemic is not yet over."

As more activities move indoors and children return to school in the cooler months, the potential for spreading the virus increases. Furthermore, the Commission said changes in behavior due to pandemic fatigue and the lifting of restrictions could have an impact as well.

"These factors make it easier for the virus to circulate rapidly in the EU and this opens the door to new variants emerging that could evade immunity, spread more easily or cause more severe disease," the Commission cautioned.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) also cautioned that further coronavirus variants could be on the horizon, but that existing vaccines will still protect people.

"There might be a completely new variant emerging that we are not able to predict today," EMA vaccines chief Marco Cavaleri told a press conference on Friday.

He urged people not to wait for specific vaccines that have been adapted for the now-dominant omicron strain. **DW**

NEW PRIME MINISTER

UK to get new PM on Monday as Tory leadership vote closes

LONDON: Outgoing UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will soon be replaced as voting by Tory members for their choice between Indian-origin former Chancellor Rishi Sunak and Foreign Secretary Liz Truss which started early August closed Friday evening.

This comes as Sunak, 42, and Truss, 47, have gone head-to-head in over a dozen debates over the past month to win over the votes of an estimated 160,000 Tory electorate. The online and postal voting closed on Friday evening, the deadline for Tory members to register their votes. "Voting is now closed. Thank you to all my colleagues, campaign team and, of course, all the members who came out to meet me and lend your support," wrote Rishi Sunak.

During their hustings, Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak had explained their long-term visions for Britain. Both contenders went through bouts of 12 nationwide events with the first bout in Leeds, Northern England. All eyes are now on the results as members voted to elect a new leader. The result will be announced on September 5.

Truss indicated that she will strongly push back against "iden-



tity politics of the left" as she has envisioned the legislation for single-sex spaces such as domestic violence shelters whereas Sunak backtracked by putting forward the idea of cutting VAT to revive the country's economic situation.

Moreover, Truss has promised to introduce a moratorium on the green levy and reverse the National Insurance increase, responding to which Sunak said that direct financial assistance is the best way out to support people with low incomes rather than tax cuts.

On Brexit, both the Tory leadership candidates vowed to reset the relationship between European Union (EU) and the UK and said that the next leader will continue to create opportunities to re-establish the ties.

"The EU and UK are 'at loggerheads' over the Northern Ireland Protocol but with a new prime minister we have a chance to reset that relationship," Sunak had said earlier in one of the face-offs with Truss. **ANI**

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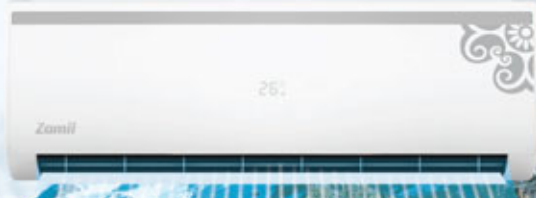
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Zimbabwe edge Australia in 3rd ODI thriller to seal historic win

It was only Zimbabwe's third win against Australia in 33 attempts and their first since 2014 in Harare

QUEENSLAND: Zimbabwe defeated Australia by three wickets to win the third ODI in a famous victory at the Riverway Stadium in Queensland.

It was only Zimbabwe's third win against Australia in 33 attempts and their first since 2014 in Harare. This was also the first time they have defeated Australia in Australia in ODI cricket. Despite



THIRD ODI: This was also the first time they have defeated Australia in ODI cricket.

this loss, Australia sealed the ODI series 2-1 thanks to their victories in the opening two matches.

Chasing 142, Zimbabwe had a decent partnership at the top, with Takudzwanashe Kaitano and Tadiwanashe Marumani giving them a 38-run opening stand. But after Kaitano was dismissed on 19 by Hazlewood, the visitors would have to endure some jitters.

Hazlewood then sent Wessly Madhevere (2) and Sean Williams packing on back-to-back deliveries to further increase the tension in the Zimbabwe camp.

Sikandar Raza (8) also could not much of a contribution and Marumani's dismissal for a well-made 35 by Green had the visitors wobbling at 77/5.

A crucial partnership of 38 runs between skipper Regis Chakabva and Tony Munyonga then calmed some nerves. The pair batted patiently, taking their time, while not taking any unnecessary risks.

Their stand took Zimbabwe to 115, when Ashton Agar put an-

other spanner in their hopes of a Zimbabwe victory. Munyonga was bowled for 17 by the left-arm spinner, with the visitors still needing 17 more runs for a win.

Chakabva, joined by the hero with the ball Ryan Burl edged Zimbabwe sealed a famous win. Chakabva would play a captain's knock of (37*) while Burl scored 11. Mitchell Starc claimed his 200th ODI wicket as he dismissed Burl late in the innings but Zimbabwe held their nerves to win the match by three wickets, with Brad Evans smashing home the winning runs.

Earlier, Zimbabwe captain Regis Chakabva won the toss on Saturday and the visitors took three wickets inside the first 10 overs and bowled Australia out for 141 runs.

Brief score: Australia 141 (David Warner 94, Glenn Maxwell 19; Ryan Burl 5-10) vs Zimbabwe 142/7 (*Tadiwanashe Marumani 35, Regis Chakabva 37*; Josh Hazlewood 3-30). **ANI**

US OPEN

Serena Williams bows out, Medvedev snaps Wu's historic run at US Open

NEW YORK: 23-time Grand Slam singles winner Serena Williams bowed out after her 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-1 third round loss to Australian Ajla Tomljanovic on Friday while defending champion Daniil Medvedev defeated China's Wu Yibing.

The American tennis legend thanked her parents, older sister Venus and fans after the match.

"It's been the most incredible ride and journey I've ever been on in my life," she said.

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) honored Williams as one of "the greatest champions in the history of sports."

"The WTA today celebrates the extraordinary Serena Williams, who retires from professional tennis having secured her place among the greatest champions in the history of sports," the organization said in a statement.

Turning 41 later this month, the record Grand Slam title holder in Open Era has 73 tournament wins, including 23 singles, 14 doubles and two mixed doubles Grand Slam titles as well as four Olympic gold medals.

She also topped the world



singles rankings for 319 weeks.

In the men's singles on Day 5 of US Open, World No.1 Medvedev from Russia, not dropping a single set so far, snapped the history-making run of Chinese player Wu Yibing 6-4, 6-2, 6-2.

"I was serving a little bit better than him, and that was the key

today. But it was a really tough match, a lot of tight games," said the defending champion who seized the victory with 12 aces, winning about 71 percent of his first-serve points.

The 2022 US Open marked the 22-year-old Wu's Grand Slam main-draw debut. Despite the defeat, he had already started a new

page in Chinese tennis history by reaching US Open men's singles last 32. "This amazing journey gives me more confidence to forge ahead. It is a valuable opportunity to learn from world leading tennis players. I will keep practicing and improving my skills to bring more surprise to fans in the future," said the former US Open boys' champion.

In the fourth round, Medvedev will face Australian Nick Kyrgios in the fourth round, who took a victory over American J.J. Wolf 6-4, 6-2, 6-3. Casper Ruud of Norway, seeded No. 5, outlasted American 29th seed Tommy Paul 7-6 (3), 6-7 (5), 7-6 (2), 5-7, 6-0 in four and a half hours.

In the women's singles, No. 5 seed Ons Jabeur of Tunisia defeated American Shelby Rogers 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 while No. 17 seed Caroline Garcia of France overcame 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu 6-3, 6-2.

China's Zhang Shuai claimed a straight-set victory over Canadian Rebecca Marino 6-2, 6-4, reaching the round of 16 at the US Open for the first time in her career. **Xinhua**

ASIA CUP 2022

Babar Azam lauds performances of pacers Naseem Shah, Shahnawaz Dahani

SHARJAH: Following his side's thumping 155-run win over Hong Kong in Asia Cup 2022, Pakistan skipper Babar Azam lauded pacers Naseem Shah and Shahnawaz Dahani for their performances.

Mohammad Rizwan's unbeaten 78 followed by Shadab Khan's four-wicket haul guided Pakistan to a massive 155 runs victory over Hong Kong in the ongoing Asia Cup 2022 here at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on Friday. "Very good win for us. We were not able to get our shots away initially with the bat. Our plan is for batters at the top to play at the end. It becomes easier for those coming in. Naseem and Dahani are performing really well having made debuts very recently," said Azam in a post-match presentation.

With this victory, Pakistan has qualified for the Super Four stage of the tournament, setting another blockbuster clash against India for Sunday.

Coming to the match, put to bat first by Hong Kong, Pakistan posted a powerful 193/2 in their 20 overs.

After the fall of Azam (9) early in the innings, Mohammed Rizwan (78*) and Fakhar Zaman (53) rebuild the innings with their half-centuries and a 116-run stand among themselves. Then, perfect finishing touches were delivered by batter Khushdil Shah (35*), who hit four sixes in the final over to guide Pakistanis to a 190-plus score.

Chasing 194, Hong Kong never looked like a threat. None of the Hong Kong players were successful in getting to double digits.

Captain Nizakat Khan was the highest scorer for his team with eight runs as his team was bundled out for a mere 38 runs, giving Pakistan a 155-run win.

Spinner Shadab Khan did the most damage to Hong Kong, taking 4/8 in 2.4 overs. **ANI**

CRICKET

Second match between India, Pakistan scheduled for Sunday

DUBAI: Another high-octane India versus Pakistan clash is set for Sunday, as both arch-rivals will be looking forward to making the best out of their opening Super Four match at the ongoing Asia Cup 2022.

India heads into the Super Four with a clean record, they are at the top of the table with two wins in two matches and four points. While Pakistan is in the second position with one win in two matches and two points. Notably, India and Pakistan had clashed in a moderate-scoring thriller. This was a match which opened their campaigns at the Asia Cup 2022. India made a winning start to its title defence by defeating Pakistan by five wickets. Hardik Pandya (3/25) and Bhuvneshwar Kumar (4/26) had helped in bundling out Pakistan for 147 in 19.5 overs. Rizwan was Pakistan's top scorer with 43.

Chasing 148, Virat Kohli (35), Ravindra Jadeja (35) and Hardik Pandya (33*) made contributions that guided Team India to a five-wicket win with two balls to spare. Mohammed Nawaz (3/33) and Naseem Shah (2/27) delivered solid performances for their side with the ball.

But now, the stakes are high this time around. Both teams are looking forward to start their Super Four Phase with a victory which will make their road to the Asia Cup final easier. Fans are also praying that both Asian giants do well going ahead so that they battle it out in the final as well.



Indian top order consisting of KL Rahul, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli will have to deliver their best in this match. While Virat seems to have shed some rustiness after his unbeaten 59* against Hong Kong, openers Rahul and Rohit are still struggling to give a positive start and make the most out of their powerplay. For Rohit, the task will be to get among the runs again while for Rahul, it will be not only about scoring, but also maintaining a healthy strike rate.

Indian middle order has shown more reliability as of late. Likes of Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Rishabh Pant, Dinesh Karthik, Deepak Hooda have stepped up and taken responsibility whenever they needed to. Swashbuckling batters like Suryakumar, Hardik,

Pant will be looking forward to showcasing their wide variety of strokes against a quality Pakistan attack.

Indian bowling has been good largely, with likes of Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Arshdeep Singh and Hardik Pandya delivering not only key wickets, but also economic spells. Pacer Avesh Khan's expensive outing against Hong Kong, in which he conceded 53 runs in four overs, is a cause of worry. It will be interesting if Avesh gets the backing of team management despite being leaking runs with the ball as of late.

Ravindra Jadeja, India's most trusted all-rounder will miss out due to an injury and his side will miss his services in all three departments on the field dearly. **ANI**

LEGENDS LEAGUE CRICKET

Brett Lee, Muralitharan, Watson, Kallis top picks in Legends League Cricket players' draft

NEW DELHI: Four franchises -- Adani Sportsline-owned Gujarat Giants, GMR Sports' India Capitals, Manipal Group's Manipal Tigers, and Bhilwara Group's Bhilwara Kings -- came together with a combined purse of INR 32 crore to pick 59 stars from the players' draft held virtually on Friday for the upcoming edition of the Legends League Cricket (LLC).

The players' draft included 79 cricketers and each team had a purse of Rs 8 crore each. Each team will now have three more days to submit their final squad wherein they can buy more players with the available purse.

"Among the teams, Manipal Tigers splurged the most amount of Rs 6,91,20,000 and have a remaining purse of 1,08,80,000. Tigers were followed closely by India Capitals as they spent Rs 6,38,80,000 and Gujarat Giants who splurged Rs 5,51,80,000 on their stars. Bhilwara Kings were the most economical as they spent Rs 5,62,20,000.

All of them have made judicious spend, the player mix seems great and it will be very interesting to see what each of them does now on the field. I wish everyone the best of luck," said Raman Rajheja, CEO and Co-Founder of Legends League Cricket.

The teams have already selected their captains and were given a



chance to choose one more player on their own accord.

Manipal Tigers named former Australian pace sensation Brett Lee in their squad while Gujarat went for their hometown hero and former India wicket-keeper Parthiv Patel. India Capitals named Ravi Bopara even as Bhilwara Kings picked Yusuf Pathan, who will now get a chance to team up with his brother Irfan in the tournament.

Gujarat Giants, too, did their best to strike a nice balance in their team.

Besides Patel, they have picked Sri Lanka's mystery spinner Ajantha Mendis and former New Zealand captain and left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori. West Indies batter Lendl Simmons is likely to open with captain Virender Sehwag at the top while Mitchell McClenaghan will spearhead the

pace bowling department. "It has been an enthralling draft today with Gujarat Giants securing the envisaged team mix for the upcoming season of Legends League Cricket. On the one hand, former Indian opener Virendra Sehwag will be captaining the team and on the other, top-order batsman and wicket-keeper, Parthiv Patel from Gujarat will be energising the game like never before. We look forward to contributing to one of the best experiences for cricket fans by bringing their favourite legends back in competitive cricket," said Satyam Trivedi, Head- Adani Sportsline.

Another Australian speedster Mitchell Johnson will star in the tournament after being picked by India Capitals. The left-arm fast bowler will be supported by former England pacer Liam Plunkett. **ANI**

WORLD FOOD PRICES DROP
World food prices have fallen for a fifth consecutive month but are still nearly eight per cent higher than a year ago, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization reported. Its latest Food Price Index shows that the prices of five commodities - cereals, vegetable oil, dairy, meat and sugar - were lower in August than in July.

MARKET BUSINESS & FINANCE



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WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
The World Economic Forum has released a series of four reports on how cities can take a systems approach to finance and deliver urban transformation projects in the wake of COVID-19, widening inequality and global conflicts.

DIGITAL REVOLUTION

Pact inked to use blockchain in sustainable energy management



Times News Service

MUSCAT: Al Shawamikh Oil Services Company, one of the local community companies in the energy sector, signed a cooperation agreement with the leading technology company; Frontech, to develop a sustainable energy management system through the usage of blockchain technology.

The pact signed by Dr Aflah bin Said Al Hadhrami, CEO of Al Shawamikh Oil Services and Dr Ammar bin Darwish Al Obaidani, CEO of Frontech looks into enhancing the work system and co-operation in developing sustainable energy solutions.

Dr Aflah bin Said Al Hadhrami said, "Blockchain or the digital blockchains are the new digital revolution that may go beyond the Internet revolution and has gained great momentum recently. The agreement between Al Shawamikh and Frontech comes to take advantage of one of the possibilities of the fourth industrial revolution to develop sustainable energy solutions

and to meet the aspirations and objectives of Oman's vision 2040 in its renewable renaissance."

He pointed out that blockchain technology contributes to finding smart solutions to develop performance, increase efficiency, and reduce the time and effort required to provide the service while maintaining the highest standards of quality and effectiveness through the use of smart and unconventional patterns.

From his side, Dr Ammar Al-Obaidani, CEO of Frontech, said, Frontech was established to achieve national goals by providing high-level technical solutions to leading technologies. The company works on implementing many projects and initiatives with various sectors, whether from the governmental or private sectors. This partnership with Al Shawamikh Oil Services Company will accomplish one of those goals through the National Blockchain Network, as it provides a points system on blockchain technology for its partners and clients.

Based on the agreement, Frontech will develop a system for generating points of specific and recognised value using blockchain technology to represent the units produced in sustainable energy networks, to effectively manage the units of energy produced, and the ability to use them in different ways. In the implementation of this agreement, both parties will also hold regular workshops to exchange knowledge and allow specialized experts from various institutions in the two sectors to exchange ideas on field studies of the system.

Al Shawamikh Oil Services is one of the trusted local community companies in the oil and gas sector within the energy market in the Sultanate of Oman including fields of sustainable energy. While Frontech is a leading provider of integrated, customised solutions and systems empowered with blockchain using the latest technologies to develop various systems and platforms in Oman and around the world safely and sustainably.

OETC signs MoU to boost technical cooperation

This memorandum aims to enhance cooperation between OETC and Redes Energéticas Nacionais, to share knowledge, exchange experiences and best practices in the technical and technology field

Times News Service

MUSCAT: Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), a member of Nama group, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Redes Energéticas Nacionais (REN), a Portuguese company.

REN operates in the transmission of electricity in high voltage in Portugal and transmission of high-pressure natural gas to boost work mechanisms, joint technical co-operation and knowledge sharing



between the two companies in the field of transmission of electricity.

With the participation of Eng. Omar Al Wahaibi Nama Group CEO, the MoU was signed by Eng. Saleh Al Rumhi, OETC CEO, and, it was signed by Rodrigo Costa, REN CEO.

This memorandum aims to enhance cooperation between the two parties, to share knowledge, exchange experiences and best practices in the technical and technology field.

The MoU also encourages cooperation in the field of sharing information and exchanging experiences and studies in Technical and Scientific development in the elec-

tricity transmission sector and the use of the 4th industrial revolution in the development and operation of electrical networks.

Commenting on the MoU, Eng. Saleh Al Rumhi OETC CEO stated, "Signing this MoU is an important step towards achieving the company's vision to have a world-class smart transmission grid. We are confident that cooperation with REN will contribute to upgrading the Sultanate electricity transmission grid by benefiting from the REN's experience in this field."

"According to the MoU, the two parties will cooperate to carry out training activities in fields related to electricity transmission, studies

and research as well as arrange for visits of professionals from both Parties. Each party may also seek experts' assistance of the other party," Al Rumhi said.

OETC is the responsible company for the transmission and dispatch of electricity in the northern Sultanate's network and also in the Governorate of Dhofar, where electricity is transferred from generations' stations to distributed load centres in all governorates of the Sultanate.

The transmission network operates at a voltage of 132 kV and above to cover most governorates of the Sultanate, whether in the north or the south.

INFORMATIVE SESSIONS

Tax Authority organises workshops on VAT and corporate income tax

Times News Service

MUSCAT: The Tax Authority, in coordination with the General Authority for Economic and Free Zones, organised two workshops on value-added tax and corporate income tax over two days in the Salalah Free Zone, in the presence of several officials and employees of the authority, the Industrial City of Raysut (Mada'in), the free zones of Salalah and Mazyona, the office of the governor of Dhofar and investors in the industrial zones.

The first workshop presented by Saeed bin Ahmed Al-Shanfari, Director-General of the Second General Directorate of Taxation, addressed several themes, the most important of which is the Value Added Tax Act, which is imposed on all supplies of goods and services in Oman unless an exemption or submission is provided at zero per cent, in addition to the VAT mechanism, types of supplies, tax rates and tax-exempt supplies.



Participants were also introduced to the mechanism for filing VAT tax returns at the Tax Authority, annual revenue components, tax

collections and services provided by the Tax Authority through the www.taxoman.gov.om portal.

Al-Fadil Abdulaziz bin Salem

Al-Mukhaini, Director-General of Administrative and Financial Affairs of the Tax Authority, also presented the second workshop on general concepts of corporate income tax, the way to properly file annual returns through the electronic services portal and the importance of enhancing tax compliance among taxpayers.

The workshops were attended by a large number of employees and investors in the industrial zones and interacted widely by asking specialists from the tax authority, who in turn provided all the necessary clarifications about the tax.

It is worth noting that the Tax Authority has started a series of awareness seminars on income taxes on companies and value-added to promote tax compliance among all taxable persons in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman and to promote awareness and tax culture among the various segments of society.

FINANCIAL TECHNOLOGY



Agreement for new digital experience for payments signed

Times News Service

MUSCAT: In an experiment that is considered to be the first-of-its kind in financial technology in the Sultanate, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (Member of Nama Group) and Digital Digits (Easy Coins) signed Memorandums of Understanding with connected chains to trial stable coin Hasalah Wallet for payments.

The agreements were signed (remotely) by His Highness Sayyid Azzan Bin Qais Al Said, Co-founder, on behalf of Digital Digits and at the OWWSC premises by Qais bin Saud Al Zakwani, CEO, on behalf of OWWSC with Eng. Nabil Salim Al Siyabi, Co-Founder of Connected Chains.

The agreements signed indicate both OWWSC and Easy Coins keen interest to be part of a first-of-its-kind fintech trial within the Sultanate of Oman, whereby a cryptographic digital stablecoin, pegged to the value of the Omani Rial, can be trialled for payments of dues from subscribers, in a selected number of customer service halls of OWWSC, and online on Easy Coins, using the Hasalah Digital Wallet.

and Information Technology (MTCIT) said, "We believe that the advancement of technology in Sultanate of Oman is in need of increased collaboration and coordination of such trials. Through supporting technology innovation and experimentation by the government and private sector, we foresee many local tech products growing and scaling regionally and globally. MTCIT's Sas Center is continually supporting such trials between government entities and tech startups through our Jadara programme and looks forward to their positive outcomes to increase confidence and adoption levels of technology in Oman."

Nabil Al Siyabi, CEO of Connected Chains said, "We are excited to work with OWWSC, Easy Coins and the other relevant stakeholders in tokenising the Omani Riyal to enable real-life benefits in doing so to payments."

"We welcome any other government or private entities interested in accepting the tokenised Omani rial when fully rolled out with its associated benefits. Furthermore, we welcome any government or private entities interested in tokenising their assets of value, using our ISO 27001 & ISAE 3402 Type 1 security certified solution (Nexus) and regulatory compliant focus on tokenisation, to reach out to us."

"We can evaluate how tokenisation can add value to your institution, undergo a legal and technical assessment and aim to tokenise your assets with a minimal to no cost overhead goal."

It is worth noting that OWWSC would be the first governmental establishment to provide such an experience to customers. The trial would be evaluated periodically to further develop its integration with OWWSC and address any challenges that may be identified. After ensuring its success and achieving broader flexibility for OWWSC customers, it will be implemented and approved as one of the primary channels for payment at OWWSC. It is worth noting that the trial is aimed to commence in coordination and alignment with all relevant governmental stakeholders.

Hamood Al Hamadan, Director of Sas Center from the Ministry of Transport, Communications



MARKET



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Forum provides comprehensive blueprint for future-ready cities

Each report – on city financing models, technology adoption, urban inclusion, and climate preparedness – guides city leaders with case studies and toolkits to successfully manage digital projects and new financing models to achieve more climate-ready and equitable cities

NEW YORK: The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released a series of four reports on how cities can take a systems approach to finance and deliver urban transformation projects in the wake of COVID-19, widening inequality and global conflicts.

Each report – on city financing models, technology adoption, urban inclusion, and climate preparedness – guides city leaders with case studies and toolkits to

successfully manage digital projects and new financing models to achieve more climate-ready and equitable cities.

The Global Future Council on Cities of Tomorrow, which comprises 45 sector experts from around the world, collaborated throughout the pandemic to help struggling cities build more future-ready communities for all citizens.

“Cities are on the frontlines of



climate mitigation and adaptation. They are also under pressure to improve residents’ standard of living and increase community cohesion while progressing towards sustainable development,” said Alice Charles, Lead, Urban Transformation, World Economic Forum. “To meet these high expectations,

cities need to develop strategies using a systems perspective to deliver net-zero carbon and climate-resilient urban infrastructure. The Global Future Council on Cities has done an extraordinary job with these reports to provide cities with the tools they need right now.”

Implementing a systems ap-

proach across urban sectors: Rethinking City Revenue and Finance; Using Digital Technology for a Green and Just Recovery in Cities; Accelerating Urban Inclusion for a Just Recovery and Equity and Delivering Climate-Resilient Cities Using a Systems Approach.

Together the four reports provide a roadmap for cities to become more equitable and resilient to the shocks and stresses caused by global conflict, climate change and rapidly changing technologies. As the Global Future Council co-chairs Carlo Ratti and Maimunah Mohd Sharif point out, preparedness on one front often has unexpected benefits elsewhere.

In the foreword to the climate preparedness report, they write: “Systems approaches are complex – more connections lead to more complications – yet the successes of cities such as Melbourne, Fukuoka and Helsinki demonstrate that extraordinary rewards can be attained, especially if siloed thinking is dismantled. The solution to a transport query might lie in housing; the unanticipated positive impact of a new park might be felt in a nearby water treatment plant. By pursuing a systems approach, we can bring fresh ideas to fields as diverse as housing, energy, mobility, public and green spaces, water treatment, stormwater management, waste management and many others.” -WAM

FOREIGN EXCHANGE

India’s forex reserves drop by \$3 billion to \$561 billion

MUMBAI: India’s foreign exchange (forex) reserves fell by \$3.007 billion to \$561.046 billion for the week ended August 26 dragged by a slump in foreign currency assets, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data showed.

This is the fourth weekly fall in the country’s forex reserves. India’s forex reserves had slumped by \$6.687 billion in the week ended August 19. The country’s foreign exchange reserves have declined sharply in recent months as the RBI continues to intervene in the currency markets to defend the rupee.

As per the Reserve Bank of India’s weekly statistical supplement, foreign currency assets, which are the biggest component of the forex reserves, dropped by \$2.571 billion to \$498.645 billion

during the week ended August 26.

The foreign currency assets had declined by \$5.779 billion during the week ended August 19.

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

All components of the forex reserves declined during the week under review. The value of gold reserves fell by \$271 million to \$39.643 billion during the week ended August 26.

The value of India’s Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) with the International Monetary Fund declined by \$155 million to \$17.832 billion during the week under review, the RBI data showed. -ANI

RENEWS PARTNERSHIP

Omantel joins hands with Dar Al Atta’a

MUSCAT: Omantel, the leading provider of integrated telecommunication services in the Sultanate of Oman, is implementing several social initiatives that aim at giving back to the community and ensuring a better life for everyone.

Omantel, being a responsible organisation, seizes every opportunity to serve and ensure the welfare of the community on top of its priorities. To this end, Omantel has announced that it has renewed its partnership with Dar Al Atta’a Association to renovate the houses of underprivileged families. The move comes as part of Omantel’s CSR programmes to reinforce the sense of integration and solidarity in Omani society.

During the signing ceremony of the agreement, the importance of the partnership and continued the cooperation between the two parties over the past seven years was discussed, which contributed to the maintenance and restoration of more than 170 houses of underprivileged families in various governorates across Oman.

The agreement was signed by Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, and Honorable Maryam bint Essa Al Zadjali, Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Dar Al Atta’a Association.



This agreement renews the partnership between the two parties to include the renovation and maintenance of 22 houses for OMR100,000. The ‘My House, My Shelter’ Programme is one of the programmes implemented by Dar Al Atta’a to maintain houses that are selected by the Development Committees of the Ministry of Social Development. The tenders for renovating and maintaining houses in different wilayats are awarded to local SMEs at the same wilayat.

Commenting on the agreement renewal, Talal bin Said Al Mamari, CEO of Omantel, said, “The main objective of this partnership is to create a sustainable impact for the

company’s CSR initiatives and enhance the values of “Give, Care and Share”. Omantel is very keen to be part of the daily living of everyone in Oman. We promote and support a number of social initiatives that serve our community’s needs. Omantel has been, and still is, an inseparable part of the fabric of the Omani community.”

Positive impact

On her part, Mariam bint Essa Al Zadjali, Chairperson of Dar Al Atta’a Association, praised the partnership with Omantel and noted that the support provided by Omantel to the Association initiatives reflects the great role

Omantel plays within its CSR programmes. “We are glad to continue this partnership for the 8th consecutive year and looking forward to creating a positive impact on our society,” she commented.

Omantel is the Sultanate’s first and leading integrated telecommunications services provider, enabling the digital society to flourish, allowing new ways of doing business and delivering a world of information, news and entertainment. While striving to ensure optimum customer satisfaction, Omantel plays a key social role to provide the required support and subsidy to all sectors of Omani society.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION

World food prices drop for fifth consecutive month: FAO

ROME: World food prices have fallen for a fifth consecutive month but are still nearly eight per cent higher than a year ago, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported.

Its latest Food Price Index shows that the prices of five commodities - cereals, vegetable oil, dairy, meat and sugar - were lower in August than in July.

The Index tracks the monthly international prices of these breadbasket staples. It averaged 138.0 points last month, down nearly two per cent from July, though 7.9 per cent above the value a year before.

FAO said the decline in cereal prices reflected improved production prospects in North America and Russia and the resumption of exports from Black Sea ports in Ukraine.

A landmark agreement to unblock Ukraine’s grain exports amid the ongoing war was signed in July by the country, Russia, Türkiye and the UN.

Rice prices on average held steady during August, while quotations for coarse grains, such as maize, increased marginally.

Vegetable oil prices decreased by 3.3 per cent, which is slightly below the August 2021 level. FAO attributed this to the increased availability of palm oil from Indonesia, due to lower export taxes, and the resumption of sunflower oil shipments from Ukraine.



Although dairy prices saw a two per cent drop, they remained 23.5 per cent higher than in August 2021. The price of cheese increased for the tenth consecutive month, though milk prices “eased” following expectations of increased supplies from New Zealand, even amid projections of lower production in Western Europe and the US.

The price of meat declined by 1.5 per cent but remained just over eight per cent higher than the value last August.

International quotations for poultry fell amid elevated export availabilities, and bovine meat prices declined due to weak domestic demand in some top exporting countries.

Sugar prices also hit their lowest level since July 2021, largely due to high export caps in India

and lower ethanol prices in Brazil. FAO has also issued its global cereal production forecast for this year, which projects a decline of nearly 40 million tonnes, or 1.4 per cent from the previous year.

The bulk of this decline mainly concerns coarse grains, with maize yields in Europe expected to drop 16 per cent below their five-year average level due to the exceptionally hot and dry weather conditions affecting the continent.

By contrast, FAO expects there will be a “negligible drop” in worldwide wheat production resulting from expected record harvests in Russia and conducive weather conditions in North America. Global rice production is also expected to decline by 2.1 per cent from the all-time high reached in 2021. -WAM

SBI REPORT

India set to become third largest economy by 2029: Report

MUMBAI: India has undergone a large structural shift since 2014 and is now the 5th largest economy overtaking the United Kingdom. India would surpass Germany in 2027 and most likely Japan by 2029 at the current rate of growth, the State Bank of India (SBI) said in a research report.

Interestingly, India surpassed the UK as the 5th largest economy in December 2021. The path taken by India since 2014 reveals India is likely to get the tag of 3rd largest economy in 2029, a movement of 7 places upwards since 2014 when India was ranked 10th, according to a research report from the State Bank of India’s Economic Research Department. India should surpass Germany in 2027 and most likely Japan by 2029 at the current rate of growth. This is a remarkable achievement by any standards, said the report, authored by Soumya Kanti Ghosh, Group Chief Economic Adviser, SBI.

India’s GDP growth in Q1 FY23 was 13.5 per cent. At this rate, India is likely to be the fastest growing economy in the current fiscal. Interestingly, even as estimates of India’s GDP growth rate for FY23 currently range from 6.7 per cent to 7.7 per cent, we firmly believe that it is immaterial. -ANI



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LIFESTYLE

RESEARCHERS SUGGEST MORE EFFECTIVE WAY FOR AUTOMATIC SPEECH RECOGNITION



Popular voice assistants such as Siri and Amazon Alexa have made automated speech recognition (ASR) available to the general public. Despite decades of development, ASR models suffer with consistency and dependability, particularly in noisy situations. Chinese researchers created a framework that significantly increases ASR performance in the chaos of everyday auditory situations.

Researchers from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and WeBank proposed a new framework - phonetic-semantic pre-training (PSP) and demonstrated the robustness of their new model against synthetic highly noisy speech datasets.

Their study was published in CAAI Artificial Intelligence Research

on Aug. 28.

"Robustness is a long-standing challenge for ASR," said Xueyang Wu from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Department of Computer Science and Engineering. "We want to increase the robustness of the Chinese ASR system with a low cost."

ASR uses machine learning and other artificial intelligence techniques to automatically translate speech into text for uses like voice-activated systems and transcription software. But new consumer-focused applications increasingly call for voice recognition to work better -- handle more languages and accents, and perform more reliably in real-life situations like video conferencing and live interviews.

Traditionally, training the acoustic and language models that comprise ASR requires large amounts of noise-specific data, which can be time- and cost-prohibitive.

The acoustic model (AM) turns words into "phones," which are sequences of basic sounds. The language model (LM) decodes phones into natural-language sentences, usually with a two-step process:

a fast but relatively weak LM generates a set of sentence candidates, and a power-

ful but computationally expensive LM selects the best sentence from the candidates.

"Traditional learning models are not robust against noisy acoustic model outputs, especially for Chinese polyphonic words with identical pronunciation," Wu said. "If the first pass of the learning model decoding is incorrect, it is extremely hard for the second pass to make it up."

The newly proposed framework PSP makes it easier to recover misclassified words. By pre-training a model that translates the AM outputs directly to sentences along with the full context informa-

tion, researchers can help the LM efficiently recover from the noisy outputs of the AM.

The PSP framework allows the model to improve through a pre-training regime called a noise-aware curriculum that gradually introduces new skills, starting easy and gradually moving into more complex tasks.

"The most crucial part of our proposed method, Noise-aware Curriculum Learning, simulates the mechanism of how human beings recognize a sentence from noisy speech," Wu said.

Warm-up is the first stage, where researchers pre-train a phone-to-word transducer on a clean phone sequence, which is translated from unlabeled text data only -- to cut back on the annotation time. This stage "warms up" the model, initializing the basic parameters to map phone sequences to words.

In the second stage, self-supervised learning, the transducer learns from more complex data generated by self-supervised training techniques and functions. Finally, the resultant phone-to-word transducer is fine-tuned with real-world speech data.

The researchers experimentally demonstrated the effectiveness of their

framework on two real-life datasets collected from industrial scenarios and synthetic noise. Results showed that the PSP framework effectively improves the traditional ASR pipeline, reducing the relative character error rates by 28.63% for the first dataset and 26.38% for the second.

In the next steps, researchers will investigate more effective PSP pre-training methods with larger unpaired datasets, seeking to maximize the effectiveness of pretraining for noise-robust LM.

Other contributors include Rongzhong Lian, Di Jiang, Yuanfeng Song, Weiwei Zhao, and Qian Xu, and Qiang Yang from WeBank Co. Ltd. Qian Xu and Qiang Yang are also affiliated with The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

-ANI

ASR uses machine learning and other artificial intelligence techniques to automatically translate speech into text for uses like voice-activated systems and transcription software.





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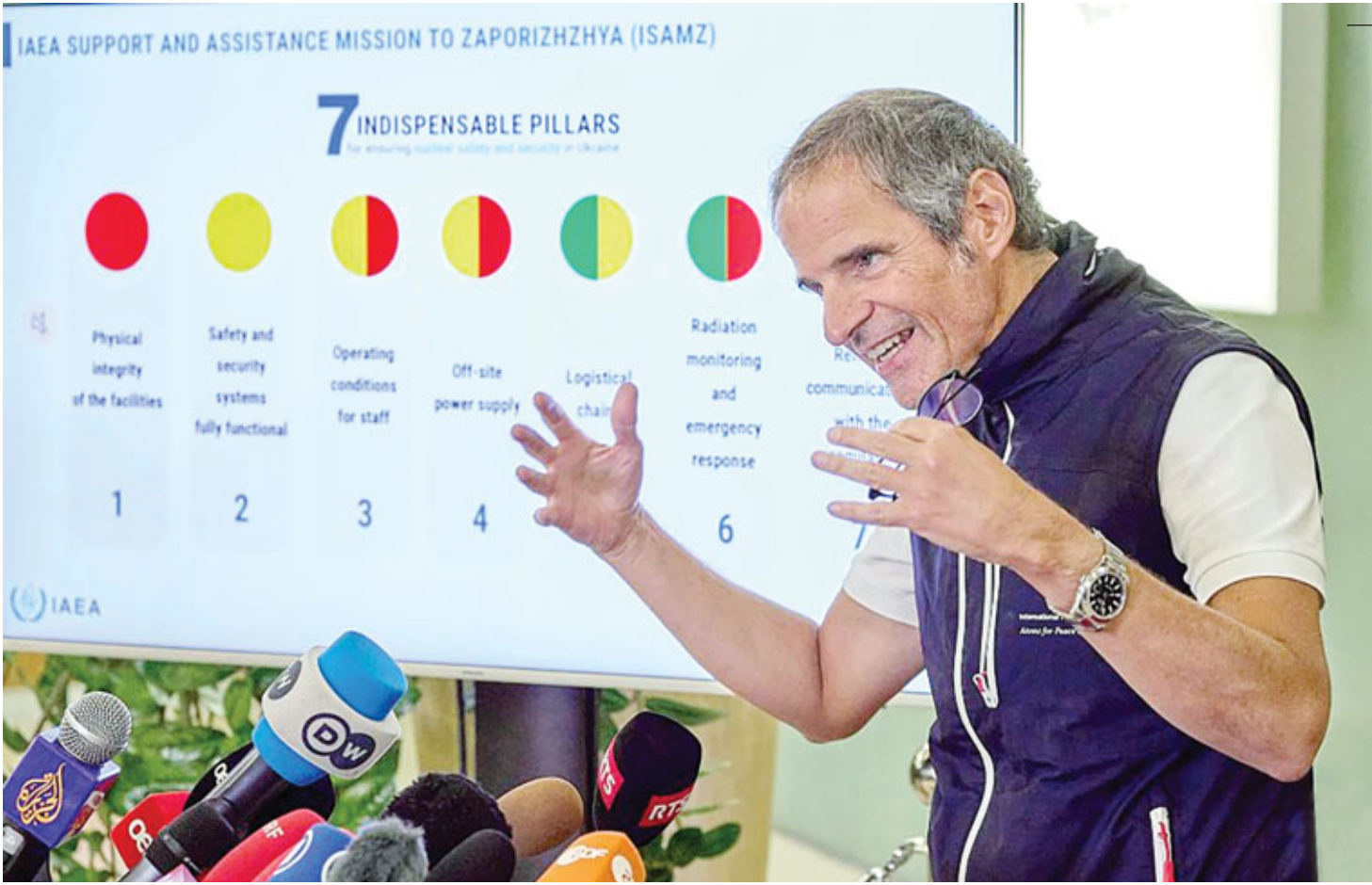
Toronto Dragon Festival celebrated
A giant dragon lantern is seen during the Toronto Dragon Festival at Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, Canada. Hosted by Canadian Association of Chinese Performing Arts (CACPA), this annual event is held here from September 2 to 4 to promote Chinese traditional culture through performing arts, craft displays, food vendors and more. — Xinhua

Contemporary African art exhibition held in Vilnius, Lithuania
Picture shows a painting of a contemporary African art exhibition in Vilnius, capital of Lithuania. More than 30 contemporary African artworks by fifteen artists from six countries are on display. — Xinhua



Panda family's 'nanny daddy' in Malaysia
Giant panda caretaker Akmal Hadi Samsuddin feeds giant panda Yi Yi at the Giant Panda Conservation Center at Zoo Negara near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. — Xinhua

Child labour in Iraq on rise after years of war, instability
A boy pushes a cart loaded with goods at al-Rasafi Square in central Baghdad, Iraq. — Xinhua



IAEA to keep experts permanently at Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant
International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director-General Rafael Grossi speaks at a press conference upon arriving in Vienna, Austria, after a visit to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. — Xinhua

People surf amid high temperature
People surf amid high temperature at the Pacifica Beach in north California, the United States. — Xinhua



Highlight of 79th Venice International Film Festival
Director Luca Guadagnino (centre), actor Timothée Chalamet (right) and actress Taylor Russell attend a photocall for the film 'Bones and All' during the 79th Venice International Film Festival in Venice, Italy. — Xinhua



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FEATURE



How to make it rain: CLOUD SEEDING TO COMBAT DROUGHT



COUNTRIES in the northern hemisphere continue to struggle with heat waves, wildfires and extreme drought, prompting climate scientists and engineers to try and alter the weather themselves.

China is currently experiencing its longest heat wave ever recorded with temperatures regularly exceeding 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit) in the province of Sichuan in the past two months. The heat is pushing the Yangtze, Asia's longest river, to record low levels, causing a drought that China's Ministry of Water Resources said was "adversely affecting drinking water security of rural people and livestock and the growth of crops."

In response to the critical situation, the Chinese government has launched an effort to induce rainfall via something called "cloud seeding."

How does cloud seeding work?

Clouds form when air containing water vapor rises into the atmosphere, cools and forms icy particles. Once enough of those particles clump together, a cloud forms. Inside the cloud, the icy particles combine.

When the combined droplets have grown large and heavy enough, they fall to the ground as some form of precipitation: Rain, snow or hail, depending on the temperature and other weather conditions.

With cloud seeding, small particles of silver iodide, a salt with a crystalline structure similar to that of ice, are added to clouds. This process can be performed either from a plane or drone, or particles can be shot up from the ground.

The method allows the water vapor inside clouds to be "tricked" into forming droplets around the silver iodide particles, Jose Miguel Vinas, a meteorologist with Meteored, a Spanish company that runs weather websites in several countries, told DW.

Once the droplets become heavy enough, a process that is accelerated by the addition of the silver iodide, they drop from the clouds as precipitation.

The way the process works explains why Beijing is currently struggling to cloud seed: There is a need for at least some clouds to already be in the parts of the sky where you want to induce rain, and some of the regions in China that need water most desperately don't have enough cloud cover for the method to work. Humans still cannot create rain clouds out of thin air.

Who is making it rain and why?

The first attempts at cloud seeding were made by US scientists at the General Electric Research Laboratory in the 1940s. Today, the method is used in various countries across the world. China is the most recent example, and Beijing had employed the technique once before to make it rain ahead of the 2008 summer Olympics.

Russia is also known to employ cloud seeding ahead of big holidays so that public celebrations aren't ruined by rain. In 2016, Russia reportedly paid 86 million rubles (€1.44 million or \$1.43 million) for cloud seeding measures to ensure a dry May Day holiday. The day of the celebration, the weather was sunny in Moscow.

Today, the method is mostly used to make it rain in regions experiencing drought. Aside from China, the US has also been using cloud seeding, most recently in western states hit especially hard by drought, such as Idaho and Wyoming.

Looking a little further back, the US employed cloud seeding as a weapon in the Vietnam War to extend the monsoon season, thereby disrupting the Viet Cong's supply chain and crippling its progress by turning the ground muddy with more rain.

And in April 1986, Soviet air force pilots seeded clouds that were moving from Chernobyl, where a nuclear power plant had just exploded, toward the Russian capital Moscow. The operation was considered a success by the regime, the radioactive clouds didn't reach Russian cities. Instead they rained nuclear waste particles over rural Belarusian provinces and the several hundred thousand people who lived there.

Humans can influence the weather to a degree. Today, cloud seeding, or artificial rain, is mostly used to bring water to drought-ravaged regions. But it's also been misused in the past.

Why is cloud seeding controversial?

Those last two examples show that a technology developed for the greater good can always be misused by people in power. But there are other factors that have some experts skeptical about whether cloud seeding is a good idea.

One argument: If you seed clouds over your region to combat drought, those clouds won't carry rain to the next region, where they might have otherwise provided a much-needed rainy reprieve.

"If you make it rain one place then you reduce rain downstream," said professor of applied physics at Harvard University David Keith, whose research focuses on the intersection of climate science, technology and policy. He likened the process to "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

"It inherently makes winners and losers," he told DW.

Experts also warn that controlling the weather could be too tall an order to go off without a hitch, and worry that it could remove the focus from more traditional measures intended to help deal with climate change.

"Geoengineering, including large-scale cloud seeding, is a dangerous experiment that can be out of our control and lead to unintended consequences," Vinas said.

"If we want to reduce the impacts of droughts or storms, particularly intense in the context of current global warming, we should invest in adaptation and mitigation measures." - DW



ROUND-UP



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Bank Muscat, Suhail Bahwan Group join hands for digital transformation

Through this agreement, Bank Muscat will leverage its digital capabilities in providing industry-proven innovative solutions of B2B payments, account services, collections & receivables and liquidity management to Suhail Bahwan Group Holding for making their entire transaction process efficient, seamless, and secure

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate and Suhail Bahwan Group Holding, one of the largest diversified business and commercial groups in the GCC, headquartered in the Sultanate of Oman have signed a cooperation agreement to expand the bank's cutting-edge digital solution coverage within the group, thereby accelerating digital transformation.

Through this agreement, Bank Muscat will leverage its digital capabilities in providing industry-proven innovative solutions of B2B payments, account services, collections & receivables and liquidity management to Suhail Bahwan Group Holding for making their entire transaction process efficient, seamless, and secure.

This agreement further enhances the existing relationship of Bank Muscat with Suhail Bahwan Group Holding, which includes a wide range of banking solutions and services comprising corporate loans, trade finance services, investments, and digital channel solutions.

The agreement was signed by Amal Suhail Bahwan, Vice Chairperson, Suhail Bahwan Group Holding and Ilham Murtadha Al Hamaid, General Manager-Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat.

Speaking on the digital transformation, Ilham Murtadha Al Hamaid, General Manager-Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "We are currently in an exciting new era which is characterised by innovation, technology, and digi-



itisation. Digital transformation is very much essential for an organisation to maximise execution capacity and for achieving breakthrough performance levels.

"We are further strengthening our long-standing relationship with Suhail Bahwan Group Holding, with our new-age digital solutions accelerating the digital and process transformation initiatives within the group.

"As a trusted banking partner, we are pursuing an ambitious digi-



tal transformation strategy to support the success of our customers. We are building on our expertise and understanding of the transaction landscape to bring sophisticated digital solutions to our customers to enhance their banking convenience.

Amal Suhail Bahwan, Vice Chairperson, Suhail Bahwan Group Holding said: "The case for digital transformation has never been so clear. We are delighted to partner with Bank Muscat to drive

business transformation within our group in all areas of banking, which includes payments, collections, visibility of funds and liquidity management. Digitalisation will immensely benefit our customers, partners, and employees. The new digital initiatives will act as a catalyst in shaping our journey to become a future-ready and sustainable organisation. A shift to digital typically brings in a host of benefits including efficiency, cost reduction, accountability, speed and scalability to our group which enables us to stay ahead of the market change."

Bank Muscat's 'B2B Connect' platform is a Host-to-Host solution through which corporates can directly integrate with the Bank's systems, and embed the banking solutions for salary and vendor payments within their ERP systems. The bank's niche Business to Business (B2B) Connect platform is particularly useful for institutional customers as they can achieve a high degree of automation in payables reconciliation and minimise risks related to payment processes through the solution. The enhanced ease of banking will enable the institution to provide better service to its vendors, customers and other stakeholders because of the straightforward nature of online channels.

Bank Muscat's Transaction Banking solution enables the achievement of automation in the activities of the treasury/finance team through cutting-edge tech-

nology and processes aligned with corporate needs.

The Account Services solution provides an enhanced visualisation of the overall banking relationship across all banks which include accounts with Bank Muscat as well as other local/international banks. Direct Debit and Virtual Accounts are collection solutions, which facilitate automation in the reconciliation of receivables in addition to providing corporates with complete control and visibility of collections.

'Sweeps' is an advanced liquidity management solution for account balance management, which allows automation in funds movement between accounts as per pre-defined rules.

With business connectivity and digitalisation now more important than ever, Bank Muscat's corporate banking solutions are providing its valued clients with seamless access to a number of corporate services that are crucial to their success in the modern world.

The bank's corporate offerings include tailor-made solutions such as Corporate Internet Banking, Remote Cheque Deposit and Direct Debit solutions. Bank Muscat has been a pioneer in Oman in implementing digital banking solutions for its customers and is focused on helping corporates to make a smooth transition towards efficient tech-focused processes and use cutting-edge technology to their best advantage.

SPORTS CAR



Subaru WRX resonates with motorsport enthusiasts in Oman

MUSCAT: Having dazzled automotive markets around the world with its design features and rally-inspired performance, the Subaru WRX is charming motorists in the Sultanate of Oman as well.

The product of three decades of innovation, the WRX need not only be enjoyed from the viewing galleries of racing circuits, but can provide a thrilling ride on Oman roads as well.

The WRX symbolises 'World Rally Experimental', which recalls the brand's superior engineering, fashioned from its award-winning performances at global racing championships. From its brawny exterior to its distinctive interior, the all-new WRX exudes the persona of its thoroughbred avatar that has set racetracks on fire around the world. This is reflected in the iconic bonnet scoop, the seductive LED switchback headlights, the striking grille and signature sporty wheels.

Under the hood is the WRX's pulsating heart - a 2.4-litre direct injected, turbocharged horizontally-opposed BOXER engine, delivering 275 horsepower at 5,600 rpm and

broader torque curve with 350 Nm of torque from 2,000-5,200 rpm. Thanks to its acclaimed symmetrical All-Wheel Drive (AWD), power is distributed to all wheels for better traction on wet and slippery roads.

Significantly, the all-new WRX's ultra-low centre of gravity design, along with improved power-to-weight ratio, support dynamic stability and acceleration. The redesigned body also delivers a chassis boasting increased rigidity for improved overall control, steering response and cornering ability.

Driving the all-wheel-drive sport compact car, can be an adrenaline-pumping experience. The Drive Mode Select feature comes with four pre-set modes - Comfort, Normal, Sport and Sport+ - which easily switches from sporty drives to comfortable trips with the family. Enhanced acceleration, better gas-pedal response and improved fuel efficiency add to the exhilarating experience at the wheel of the WRX.

Peace of mind in suitably handling its raw power is afforded by the cutting-edge safety technol-

ogy of the EyeSight Driver Assist system, the advanced Subaru Vision Assist technology and Driver Monitoring System, in addition to the new front passenger seat cushion SRS airbags for added protection. Together, they incorporate Adaptive Cruise Control (Lane Departure Prevention and Lane Centring Control and Preceding Vehicle) and Adaptive Steering Control (Pre-Collision Throttle Management, Pre-Collision Braking System, Autonomous Emergency Steering, Lead Vehicle Start Alert and Manual Speed Limiter).

Every WRX comes with an elaborate 11.6-inch touchscreen display that allows smartphone-like operation for audio, HVAC and other useful vehicle functions. It also supports an array of infotainment features such as Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

OTE Group is the exclusive distributor of Subaru in Oman with sales and aftersales outlets distributed throughout the country. Visit any Subaru outlet to check out the full line-up of WRX variants and colour options.

OFFICIAL VISIT

Indian envoy visits state-of-the-art Aster Royal Hospital



MUSCAT: Indian Ambassador to Oman, Amit Narang visited the Aster Royal Hospital's advanced facilities during his official visit as a part of hospital's Zuwarat Aster Programme.

Aster Royal Hospital, super specialty hospital was honoured by Narang's official facility visit before its soft opening. Aster Royal Hospital is located in the heart of the capital, Ghubra Muscat. He had a tour to all facilities of the new hospital including the state-of-the-art Intensive Care Unit, radiology department, physiotherapy department, Modular Operation Theatres, Cath-Lab and the various Aster centre of excellences.

After the tour, Narang said, "I am excited to visit Aster Royal Hospital and I am so happy to know that various advanced procedures in neurosurgery, spine surgery and oncology will now be available in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman-India relations will be further strengthened since many patients travelling to India for emergency treatment can now be treated at the Aster Royal Hospital in Oman rather

than by airlift." Hospital grand tour was guided by the hospital's CEO, Dr. Ashendu Pandey and COO Dr Shinoop Raj along with the HR Director Nadiya Azghar Al Balushi.

Pandey said, "There are certain platforms we are developing such as digital way finding, robot assisted services, RFID enabled patient tracking system, computer on wheels in IP for on-time records maintenance, integrated contact centre, augmented reality for patient education, AI enabled WhatsApp platform, to name a few which will help us to deliver a seamless quality of service. After launch, with association and approval from MOH Aster wishes to start organ transplantation. Surgical robotics will also be offered for urology, gastroenterology, and orthopaedic procedures at our hospital in Oman for the first time."

The advanced hospital information system with unified patient records feature will enable easy access to patient history for fast and accurate diagnosis around various Aster facilities

across Oman. Hospital features a dedicated women floor with a modular operation theatre and post OP& pre OP facilities within the floor which can save time especially with pregnancy complications where time is of the essence. Aster Royal Hospital will have a fully equipped dialysis Centre which will help those patients suffering from chronic kidney diseases.

Aster Royal Hospital will have centres of excellence for gastroenterology, urology, orthopedics, obstetrics & gynecology and interventional radiology & stroke unit in addition to other super specialties equipped with all the advanced equipment and services. The hospital will feature state-of-the-art operation theatres and a cardiac catheterization lab. It is a purpose-built hospital that adheres to global standards of healthcare and has an expert panel led by Omani consultants and aptly supported by an international panel of doctors. Aster Royal Hospital will be the largest private hospital in the Sultanate of Oman with 200 inpatient beds.



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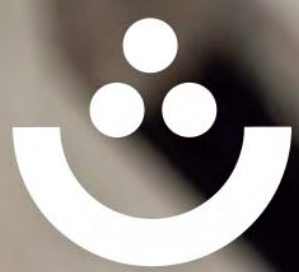
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WADI ALQAHFI



Head north from Muscat towards Sohar and just after Saham before Al Qasabiyat, take a right (any right) and drive until the road meets the sea. Here, in the middle of nowhere, sits the ruins of a little abandoned tower surrounded by fishermen boats. Continue heading north and from Sohar before turning onto Route 7 towards Buraimi take the diversion to Mahdah at the roundabout in Humaydah. Enjoy the drive between rocky mountains through Wadi Sharm, a narrow valley with breathtaking views. The narrow, winding road will take you straight to Wadi Al Qahfi in Al Fayy. With the water flowing most of the year this Wadi offers plenty of activities for the visitors. While you watch the rocky mountains, you will surely get mesmerised when you see the natural swimming pool below.

