

All set for 31st IFJ Congress

Elaborate arrangements are in place for the 31st Congress of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which is hosted by the Oman Journalists Association (OJA) in Muscat from May 31 to June 4 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. Nearly 350 journalists and media professionals from 60 countries are expected to take part in the four-day conference. **DETAILS ON P3**



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OMAN TOUR OF USA TO PLAY LAST LEG OF LEAGUE 2



P13

10 MILLION SQUARE METRES OF LAND PREPPED FOR INDUSTRIAL INVESTMENT IN DUQM SEZ



P20

FIRST OMANI PHOTOGRAPHER TO JOIN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY



ROME

OMAN BAGS MEDALS IN OLIVE OIL CONTEST

The Sultanate of Oman's extra virgin olive oil from Riyadh Al Jabal Al Akhdar Farm won four medals — two gold and two silver — at an international contest organised in Italy. The accomplishment was highlighted on the sidelines of Royal Court Affairs' participation in the 7th edition of the international extra virgin oils contest held in Campania in Nablus city, Italy. As many as 3,000 varieties from 31 countries were presented during the contest. The Omani variety of extra virgin olive oil figured among the top five northern hemisphere products.

DETAILS ON P2

FAHD RECEIVES PATRIARCH JOHN X OF ANTIOCH



HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Sunday received Patriarch John X of Antioch in the Syrian Arab Republic who conveyed greetings of the Syrian government to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd expressed Oman's appreciation and respect towards all religions. He also pointed out that Islam is a religion of tolerance and coexistence with all monotheistic religions. **(PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASDHI)**

Financial offences up during pandemic

MUSCAT: There has been a surge in financial offences during the pandemic due to the stagnation experienced by all businesses during the period, according to Oman Lawyers Association

(OLA). There is a huge increase in financial cases before the Fak-Khurba committee, an initiative by the OLA, and as many cases as possible were settled, thanks to the support.

Fak-Khurba initiative secured the release of 1,035 persons who were about to be imprisoned for minor financial offences during the holy month of Ramadhan. **DETAILS ON P2**

More incentives to attract foreign investments

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The Sultanate of Oman — like most countries of the world — has adopted economic stimulus packages with the aim of overcoming the economic repercussions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, which negatively affected the supply and demand sides of the economy.

This was stated by Qais bin Mohammad al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, at the thirteenth regular session of the third annual session of the ninth term of the Majlis AshShura on Sunday.

He said that the ministry is working in cooperation and integration with various units of the state's administrative apparatus to develop packages of facilities, incentives, and procedures to raise the contribution of sec-



Qais bin Mohammad al Yousef

tors related to the ministry. The ministry is working to continue the efforts with its partners in the government and the private sector to achieve greater successes during the next stage in the field of developing national industries, raising the level of internal and external trade, and improving business environment to attract local and foreign investments to achieve development in Oman. **TURN TO P3**

OWN AN APARTMENT STARTING FROM **35,000** RO. IN

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Oman’s policy of moderation hailed

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Sunday received Patriarch John X of Antioch in the Syrian Arab Republic who conveyed greetings of the Syrian government to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd expressed Oman’s appreciation and respect towards all religions. He also pointed out that Islam is a religion of tolerance and coexistence with all monotheistic religions.

HH Sayyid Fahd expressed the hope that this visit would contribute to bolstering rapprochement and understanding between countries on matters that enhance peace and stability.

On his turn, Patriarch John X of Antioch expressed his delight over this visit and his appreciation for the warm welcome accorded to him. He lauded Oman’s efforts of goodwill and its policy of moderation.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister and Shaikh Abdullah bin Mohammed al Salmi, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

The Patriarch is currently visiting Oman, following an invitation from the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs.

— ONA

OMANI OLIVE OIL WINS FOUR MEDALS IN ITALY

ROME: The Sultanate of Oman’s extra virgin olive oil from Riyadh Al Jabal Al Akhdar Farm won four medals — two gold and two silver — at an international contest organised in Italy recently. The accomplishment was highlighted on the sidelines of Royal Court Affairs’ participation in the 7th edition of the international extra virgin oils contest held in Campania in Nablus city, Italy. As many as 3,000 varieties from 31 countries were presented during the contest.

The Omani variety of extra virgin olive oil figured among



the top five northern hemisphere products (Italy, Greece, Spain, Portugal and Oman). Earlier this month, the extra virgin olive oil from Riyadh Al Jabal Al Akhdar Farm bagged silver and bronze at similar competitions in Zurich, Switzerland. — ONA

Royal Office Minister receives Swiss, Kazakh ambassadors

MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday Thomas Oertle, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation to the Sultanate of Oman. Al Numani welcomed the ambassador, wishing him success in carrying out his duties as the ambassador of his country to Oman.

On his turn, the ambassador expressed his sincere appreciations for the Sultanate of Oman and his keenness in enhancing areas of cooperation to serve the joint interests of the two countries.

The two sides also discussed several matters of mutual interest.

Gen Al Numani also received Mohammed Ali Najmuddin, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Sultanate of Oman.

The two sides reviewed areas



of joint cooperation and means of enhancing relations between the two countries.

The ambassador also expressed his sincere appreciation for the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Financial offences surged during pandemic: OLA



FAK-KHURBA INITIATIVE SECURED RELEASE OF 1,035 PRISONERS

KABEER YOUSUF
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There has been a surge in the financial offences committed during the pandemic and that is due to the standstill experienced across all businesses during the same period, according to the Oman Lawyers Association (OLA).

Instead of two or three digit financial cases presented before the Fak-Kurba committee, an initiative by the OLA, there were cases to the tune of four-digit dimension and as many cases as possible were settled, thanks to the Royal support and the kind Samaritans in the society.

Fak-Kurba initiative secured the release of 1,035 prisoners or those who were about to be imprisoned for minor financial offences comprising both citizens and expatriates during its 9th edition in the holy month of Ramadhan.

“We received a large number of financial cases where the plaintiff was behind bars or was about to be arrested and we managed to secure the release of 1,035 people comprising both citizens and expatriates from all the governorates,” said Dr Mohammed bin Ibrahim al Zadjali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Omani Lawyers Association.

As many as 3,934 such



prisoners were released in the last eight years, thanks to the initiative and support from across the board.

The release of these people who were imprisoned or were about to be imprisoned due to civil, commercial, labour or Sharia claims against them and ordered by the courts of Oman came days after a royal gesture to support the initiative was announced.

“We highly appreciate the efforts of individuals and institutions, and we are happy to have brought joy to the insolvent persons and their families,” said Al Zadjali.

Muscat Governorate topped with the number of cases with 209 cases while 148 cases from Al Sharqiyah South Governorate have been solved and 117 cases from Al Batinah South Governorate . As many as 194 cases from Al Batinah North Governorate , 49 cases from Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, 57 cases from Al Dhahirah Governorate, 78 cases from Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, 9 cases from Musandam Governorate, 72 cases from Dhofar Governorate,

98 cases from Al Buraimi Governorate and 4 cases from Al Wusta Governorate were settled by paying money donated by kind-hearted people.

“There has been an increase in the number of cases during the pandemic and two governorates reported a sudden surge,” said Dr Hamed al Rubaei, Deputy Chairman of the OLA.

“We identified that Al Buraimi and Salalah had a sudden surge in the cases related to financial offences,” he added.

The initiative, in its 9th edition this year, had introduced an online platform aiming at collecting financial donations to release those who have been imprisoned due to financial civil, commercial, or labour claims.

Nearly 100 male and female lawyers were part of this mega release campaign that had won the second place in the Sultan Qaboos Voluntary Work Awards, as it aims to highlight the role of lawyers in volunteer work and activate their participation in social responsibility, thanks to the community solidarity and humanity.

Dhofar Insurance CEO Sunil Kohli wins TOP CEO 2022 Award



In recognition of his outstanding leadership, Sunil Kohli, CEO of Dhofar Insurance Co (DIC) was recognised at the TOP CEO Conference & Awards 2022 held in Dubai recently. The Awards program, which is well reputed is attended by the most prominent executives from Top100 listed companies across the region, and recognises business leaders for their contribution to their institutions’ performance, agility, support to the growth of industry, and innovation amongst a number of other aspects.

Receiving the award, Sunil Kohli said, “I am truly humbled to receive this award, which underlines the efforts we have made as a team and our passion to bring best-in-class services to discerning customers in Oman. I would like to extend thanks to all my colleagues and each member of the DIC family for their hard work and dedication, our board and executive teams,

and our institutional clients and customers for the trust placed in us. I also would like to extend my gratitude to the regulators for their continued guidance.”

Under the able leadership of Sunil, DIC has demonstrated relentless pursuit of excellence in product development, creating customer centric value propositions and remarkable service. As the oldest insurance company in Oman, DIC has unparalleled reach across the country, and is an established leader in the property & casualty segments. Combined with a service-oriented approach and accelerated digitisation, DIC has established strong equity amongst all its stakeholders.

“DIC’s focus is to continue to better our own performance, and add value to all our stakeholders by delivering sustainable results. I am positive that this prestigious award will motivate us to push even harder in our journey”, Sunil added.

Top CEO is the Middle East’s most prestigious Conference & Awards ceremony for business leaders. It is one of the most iconic business conferences in the region, bringing together business leaders, government officials and thought leaders to engage, discuss and plan forward the future of their respective industries and the region.

The TOP CEO Awards were created in 2012 to recognize those who created value and boosted the region’s economy while maintaining transparency and good corporate governance. There is no nomination, no fee, and no jury for the awards. The formula has been jointly developed by the TOP CEO team and the prestigious INSEAD Business School (France) along with Dubai-based Hawkamah Institute for Corporate Governance. One of the Big Four consulting firms has audited the results.



Oman all set for International Federation of Journalists' Congress

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Elaborate arrangements are in place for the 31st Congress of International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which is hosted by the Oman Journalists Association (OJA), in Muscat from May 31 to June 4 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Center.

Nearly 350 journalists and media professionals from 60 countries are expected to take part in the 4-day conference, paper presentation, discussions, seminars and so on and so forth

who will earmark the Sultanate of Oman to the world in terms of various parameters such as economic, tourism, investment, as well as cultural and historical components of the Sultanate of Oman which will be a major boost to tourism.

Various committees and subcommittees under the umbrella of the Omani Journalists Association (OJA), named external relations, media, marketing, events, secretarial and financial, work like an oiled machine and continue to hold their meetings on a daily basis and give things a fine touch.



Dotted plans are afoot in terms of receiving the lists of participants, obtaining entry visas to the Sultanate of Oman, reserving the conference venue, setting up delegations and accompanying events, in addition to preparing a media plan to benefit from this global media

presence.

Regular communication is alive with the secretariat of the International Federation of Journalists in Brussels to follow up on developments regarding the needs and requirements of these meetings, which is to host elections for a new leadership for

the next four years.

The Sultanate of Oman is expected to gain a great upper hand from this congress as, besides the tourism potential, the site visits arranged for the journalists and media professionals, as well as students of journalism and media in universities and colleges, are expected to benefit from the experiences from the conference.

The OJA Executive Committee hopes that the Muscat conference would be a new major landmark in the regional history of journalism. Also, the Omani Journalists Association will be

able to assume its appropriate position in the international arena and the Asian Federation of Journalists, in addition to its presence in the General Secretariat and the leadership of the Union of Arab Journalists.

The Congress will also witness the election of a new leadership for IFJ, in addition that Muscat hosts during this event, the founding meeting of the Asian Journalists Association to elect its first new management board. The two outstanding events constitute a distinction in the international and Asian process work, 100 years after the establishment of IFJ.

More incentives to attract foreign investments

FROM PAGE 1

Al Yousef stated that the incentives include attracting foreign investments, improving operating levels, such as incentives to improve the business and investment environment, in terms of stimulating the overall supply, most notably — allowing business, commercial and investment activities to by obtaining initial licence without waiting for the final permit, treatment of foreign investment companies is the same as that of national companies with regard to the commercial registration fee, granting residency to foreign investors according to certain controls, in addition to the incentives of the labour and employment market, the most important of which are reduction in licence fee for recruitment of expatriate workers, and renewing the work permit.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

“It is expected that the application of such measures will lead to an increase in production, thus an increase in supply, which will have a positive impact on economic growth and employment”, he added.

With regard to the contribution of the trade sector, the minister said that the contribution of domestic trade to the GDP of most commercial economic activities including wholesale and retail trade activity (at current prices) increased by 8.60 per cent and stood at about RO 2.847 billion by the end of December 2021, while it amounted to about RO 2.464 billion during the same period in 2020.

The contribution of service activities to the GDP also increased by 50.20 per cent, reaching about RO 16.571 billion until the end of December 2021, compared to about RO 15.563 billion during the same period of 2020.

The contribution of wholesale and retail trade also amounted to about 8.60 per cent because of the gradual opening of the service activities sectors after vaccinating a large segment of citizens and residents and the receding of the repercussions of the pandemic.

TRADE EXCHANGE

With regard to the trade exchange, the minister said that total trade exchange of the Sultanate of Oman with the countries of the world increased to about RO 28.986 billion until the end of 2021, registering an increase of 47.1 per cent.

The number of commercial records registered with the



ministry increased by 7.54 per cent, as they reached 349,894 records until the end of December 2021, while the number in the same period of the year 2020 reached 325,369 records.

The total transactions completed through the “Invest Easy” platform reached about 789,493 in 2021, with an increase in transactions of 39.03 per cent compared to 2020.

With regard to e-commerce, Al Yousef stressed that the ministry has observed that global commerce is moving towards electronic trade, which explains the reasons for the high percentage of its contribution in general and the shortage of shops.

“For that, the ministry has allocated, within its administrative division, a special department concerned with implementing and regulating the e-commerce plan in a manner that preserves the rights of the merchant and consumer. The indicators show a clear recovery in the commercial records; this is an indication of the return to normal life, and these statistics confirm that we have begun the stage of recovery and economic growth and we look to the future with optimism”, he added.

INDUSTRIAL SECTOR

On performance of the industrial sector during the beginning of the Tenth Five-Year Plan, the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP until December 2021 was 9.70 per cent, with a total of RO 3.195

WORK IS UNDER WAY TO LAUNCH 28 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES WITH THE AIM OF FINDING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR AND PRESENTING THEM TO INVESTORS

THE VALUE OF DIRECT FOREIGN INVESTMENTS IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR UNTIL THE END OF THE THIRD QUARTER OF 2021 REACHED RO 1,584.9 MILLION

THE NUMBER OF BUSINESS REGISTRATIONS RECORDED WITH THE MINISTRY STOOD AT 349,894 UNTIL THE END OF DECEMBER 2021

billion, while the growth rate of industrial activities was about 13.6 per cent by the end of December of 2021. The manufacturing sector — which is one of the sectors of non-oil economic diversification — recorded a high growth rate during this period, amounting to about 9.70 per cent.

According to the statement of the minister, the reasons for the rise in the industrial sector's contribution can be attributed to the increase in domestic demand for petroleum derivatives from refineries (gasoline, diesel and others) as a result of lifting the ban and recovering from the pandemic, and the rise in the prices of petrochemicals, fertilisers, iron and aluminium

in international prices due to the recovery from the pandemic (Covid-19).

The General Directorate of Industry periodically implements industrial surveys which are an essential part of an integrated system of national industrial statistics, as they provide information about establishments and their activities, and collects data on all operating and licensed industrial establishments in the Sultanate of Oman.

“In 2020 (January-December), the manufacturing sector contributed an added value of RO 2.27 billion to the economy, representing about 8 per cent of the gross domestic product of RO 28.44 billion in the same

year according to NCSI. In 2021 (January-December), the manufacturing sector contributed an added value of RO 3.2 billion to the economy, representing about 9.7 per cent of the GDP of RO 33 billion in the same year. Comparing the full-year statistics for 2020 and 2021, it can be seen that the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP has grown from 8 per cent to 9.7 per cent. Yet, by comparing the years 2020 and 2021, it can be seen that non-oil goods grew from RO 3.03 billion to RO 5.79 billion, while total merchandise exports grew from RO 11.73 billion to RO 17.06 billion”, the minister added.

As for the investment sector, the volume of foreign direct investments in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to about RO 8.079 billion in 2019, while it amounted to RO 15.861 billion in 2020, with a growth rate of 18.4 per cent during the Ninth Five-Year Plan.

The volume of foreign direct investments in the Sultanate of Oman amounted to RO 16.43 billion in the third quarter of 2021, an increase of RO 876 million over the same period last year.

The oil and gas sector contributed 67.8 per cent of the total foreign direct investment, followed by the manufacturing sector with 9.2 per cent, then the financial intermediation sector with 8.8 per cent. The real estate, rental and commercial project activities sector contributed with 7.1 per cent, while other sectors 7.1 per cent.

In order to promote investments in the industrial sector and create ready-made investment opportunities, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion launched the initiative of 100 industrial investment opportunities, which included the first batch of 50 opportunities in 2021. The second batch, however, included (22) industrial opportunities in 2022. This batch was characterised by the existence of prior purchase contracts in coordination with partners in the private sector — the Petroleum Development Oman, Nama Holding Group and Mazoon Dairy Company.

“Work is in progress to launch 28 investment opportunities for different activities with the aim of finding investment opportunities in the industrial sector and presenting them to investors”, the minister said.

He also added that the most prominent efforts of the ministry during the last period were laying out a solid structure of legislation stimulating the business environment in harmony with the various authorities, the success of digital transformation facilitation of services, where of 88 per cent of licenses were converted to automatic licenses, reviewing and reducing the price of government services, in which the reduction rate has reached more than 90 per cent, providing incentives that limited the effects of the pandemic and preparing an integrated system for investment based on international best practices.



THE SITUATION
IS ALARMING
IN THE SULTANATE
OF OMAN AS

33%

OF THE POPULATION
ABOVE 18 SUFFERS
FROM HIGH
BLOOD PRESSURE

Warning bell on NCDs, diabetes

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THE World Health Organization (WHO) and health experts have set an alarm over the threat from non-communicable diseases.

The recently held World Health Assembly said that every second, 28 lives between the ages of 30 and 70 are cut short because enough measures have not been taken to respond to the needs of people living with cardiovascular diseases, cancers, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, or mental health conditions, including preventive, curative, palliative and specialised care.

The World Health Assembly (WHA) supported the creation of global targets for addressing diabetes. The targets are part of a new comprehensive set of recommendations to strengthen and monitor national diabetes responses.

The situation is alarming here in the Sultanate of Oman because 33 per cent of the population above 18 suffers from high blood pressure.

A senior health expert at the Ministry of Health told the Observer that symptoms may not be evident in the early years and even lifestyle factors such as excess intake of salt, alcoholic beverages and the lack of regular physical activity can worsen the condition.

“We should take preventive measures against diabetes from a very young age in children by regulating their diet, rather than waiting for them to become an adult and take corrective measures when it will be virtually impossible to go back to square one,” he added.

WHA claimed that by 2030, 80 per cent of people living with diabetes have been diagnosed; 80 per cent have good control of glycemia; 80 per cent of people with diagnosed diabetes have good control of their blood pressure; 60 per cent of people with diabetes who are 40 years or older receive statins; 100 per cent of people with type 1 diabetes have access to affordable insulin and blood glucose self-monitoring.

Diabetes is currently one of the top ten causes of death worldwide. World Health Assembly new recommendations for the prevention and management of obesity over the life course and a set of related targets in a bid to halt the rise of obesity in children under five, adolescents, and adults by 2025 and to end all forms of malnutrition by 2030. They outlined actions to be taken by governments to reduce the intake of free sugars to less than 10 per cent of total energy intake in adults and children.

The Oman Diabetes Association also pointed out that the incidence of diabetes exceeds the global average estimated at 9.3 per cent in 2019. ODA said diabetes is a costly chronic illness that demands control of blood sugar levels using medical devices.

The total number of diabetes patients registered in the MoH institutions is more than 105,000, and most of them have type 2 diabetes, and about 1-5% have type 1 diabetes, which is the type that often appears during childhood and adolescence, according to the 2019 health report. Moreover, the number of new cases among children is about 60 cases annually. The total number of cases for citizens of pre-pubescent age exceeds a thousand cases.



Recall Campaign



Date of Campaign : 30/05/2022
Campaign Type : Recall Campaign
Product Description : Airbag System Control Module software upgrade or replacement

Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Production Range	VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles
KIA	Soul (PS)	3rd Jan'2014 - 30th Oct '2014	KNAJP811XF7045403 - KNAJN811XF7774295	229
	Soul (PS EV)	16th May'2016 - 31st Dec'2018	KNAJN8115H7413088 - KNAJN8116K7917351	58
	Carnival (YP)	15th Jul '2016 - 27th Mar'2019	KNAMC8128H6274088- KNAMC8122L6565405	572
	Cerato(YD)	02nd Feb'2017 - 20th Jul'2018	KNAFZ4174H5723476 - KNAFK4117J5997115	913

Description of Defect:

On some affected vehicles in the specified production data range, the Airbag MIL may turn on in cluster with the diagnostic trouble code B1620 in Air bag system and in this case, the airbags will not deploy in crashes where deployment is necessary, thereby increasing the risk of injury.

Procedure:

Verify affected vehicles as per the VIN list, Inspect to upgrade or diagnose the trouble code B1620 in Airbag system and if necessary replace the Airbag control module. All affected vehicles will be inspected and repaired at no expense to the vehicle owner.

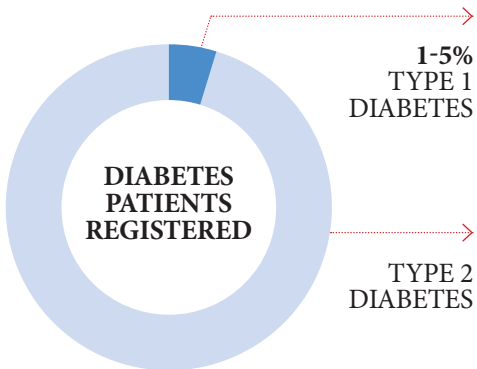
For More Information:

Customers, who own Soul, Carnival, Cerato models, may please contact M/s. Reliable International Automotive LLC for details / booking appointment etc. from 30/05/2022 onwards for installations.

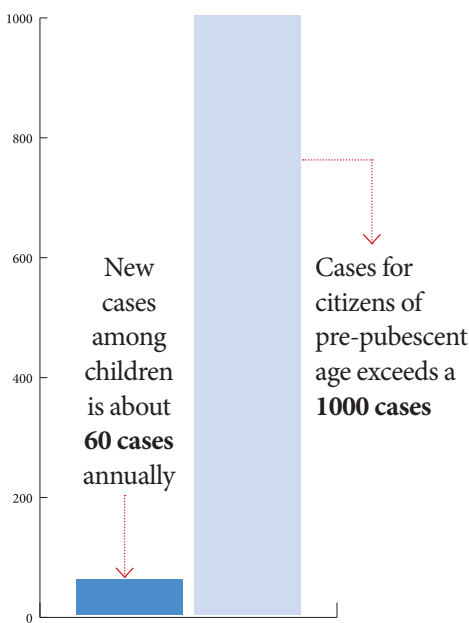
Contact Details:

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

C.R. 1707/183



The total number of new diabetes cases registered annually



Symptoms may not be evident in the early years and even lifestyle factors such as excess intake of salt, alcoholic beverages and the lack of regular physical activity can worsen the condition. We should take preventive measures against diabetes from a very young age in children by regulating their diet, rather than waiting for them to become an adult and take corrective measures when it will be virtually impossible to go back to square one

A SENIOR
HEALTH EXPERT



Mid-day break set to begin from Wednesday

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Even as the Ministry of Labour is set to roll out a campaign against the dangers of heat stress as part of the mid-day work break, the rise in the temperature has prompted health experts to issue a sound of caution.

The mid-day break, announced by the ministry every year in accordance with Article 16 of the Oman Labour Law for occupational safety and health regulations, obligates companies and institutions that have work sites under direct sunlight to stop work between 12:30 to 3:30 pm during the months of June, July and August.

“The ministry will work to complete efforts to activate the heat stress campaign this year and stop work between 12:30 to 3:30 pm during the months on a daily basis in the open places that can expose workers to the dangers of the hot sun”, Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, said at the Heat Stress Forum for 2022.

The ministry has called on company owners not to violate



the provisions of the decision and the necessity of implementing it in order to preserve the safety and health of workers during the summer period, while warning that legal measures will be taken against violations. Speaking to the Observer, an official at the ministry said that the inspection teams will conduct field visits to the work sites to ensure compliance with the provisions of the decision in the coming months.

“The mid-day break implementation stems from the ministry’s keenness to ensure the health and safety of workers in the work environment, taking

into account the provision of work equipment with the best standards of occupational safety and health”, he said.

As the temperature is forecast to reach 50°C in parts of Oman, health experts said that work involving excessive heat exposure is a serious health hazard and can lead to various problems, ranging from physical discomfort to life threatening conditions.

But with temperatures verging on 40°C forecast for the rest of the week, heat-related health problems still pose a very real hazard for the workers, many of whom are required to work long

hours outside in heavy clothing. According to Dr Shashiraj Eswarappa, Medical Superintendent and Consultant in Internal Medicine at Kims Oman Hospital Muscat, it is imperative for workers to take precautions when working outside in the sweltering heat.

“Worsening heat waves pose a serious threat, but illnesses from them are entirely preventable if proper measures are in place. The most serious health and safety concern is heat stroke”, he said.

Excessive physical activities under the direct sun can lead to loss of large amounts of salt and water. Sunstroke occurs when the body is unable to control the temperature, he said.

To prevent heat-related illnesses, Dr Shashiraj advised all people to wear loose clothing, drink enough water, stay under a shade, avoid physical exertion outdoors and to frequently shower to keep the body cool.

People who are less immune to including the elderly, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems and heart conditions also need to be cautious before stepping out during the summer, he added.



OAAAQA board meets

MUSCAT: The Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) Board held a meeting at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI) on Sunday.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, and chairperson of the OAAAQA Board. The agenda covered a number of items including: the approval (by circulation) of the National Qualifications

Framework in the Sultanate of Oman, updates on the development of the national system of quality assurance of school education, and the approval of the fifth version of the Appeals Manual in Arabic.

The meeting was attended by Dr Jokha bint Abdullah al Shukailiyah, CEO of OAAAQA, Dr Rima bint Mansoor al Zadjalayah - Deputy Chair, Prof Suleiman bin Mohammed al Balushi, Dr Zuwana bint Saleh al Maskariyah, Dr Ahmed bin Salim al Abri, Dr Ammar bin Mohammed al Ojaili and Ahmed bin Saud al Salmi.

Royal Hospital performs surgeries at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital



MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital performed 5 colon and rectal specialised surgical operations at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital. The initiative aims to bring medical services closer to patients and reduce long-waiting lists.

The surgeries were performed by Dr Aamed bin Khamis al Araimi, Consultant Colorectal Surgeon and Director of the Department of Surgery at the Royal Hospital, according to the latest treatment standards and surgical protocols.

In comments to ONA, Dr Al Araimi said the step embodies the hospital’s vision to open horizons for cooperation and exchange of experiences at all levels to realise the great roles undertaken by the hospital to serve the community in general and patients in

particular.

He noted that the initiative is part of other initiatives undertaken by the Royal Hospital to establish cooperation with referral hospitals in the governorates to conduct various operations. In addition, the department of surgery at the Royal Hospital plays educational and academic roles by transferring experiences and specialists to ensure that the service is provided with high quality and efficiency.

The initiative began some time ago and included several hospitals of Sur, Nizwa and Al Rustaq. Other hospitals will benefit from this initiative in the future and surgical services such as laparoscopic surgery will be introduced, Dr Al Araimi added.

— ONA

SQU, ARA Petroleum ink cooperation pact in innovation and scientific research

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the office of the vice-chancellor for postgraduate studies, and ARA Petroleum, signed a cooperation agreement in the field of innovation and scientific research, on Sunday.

The signing of the cooperation agreement aims to boost cooperation between SQU and ARA Petroleum in innovation and scientific research fields.

The agreement seeks to explore opportunities for mutual cooperation in various forms of scientific research and innovation between SQU and ARA Petroleum particularly in areas related to oil research and operations with the aim of reducing carbon emissions and establishing cooperation in the field of hydrogen production, green hydrogen and renewable energy.

Oman, Jordan intellectual and cultural cooperation reviewed

MUSCAT: Shaikh Ahmed bin Saud al Siyabi, Secretary-General of the Ifta Office, received here on Sunday a delegation from Al Albayt University of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The two sides reviewed areas of enhancing cooperation in intellectual and cultural fields. They also discussed several matters of common interest in civilisational, historical and cultural contexts.

The meeting came within the framework of the cooperation between the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Al Albayt University.



The university’s delegation comprises Prof Hani Aldmour, President of Al Albayt University, Prof Mohammed Al Harahsheh,

Vice-President of the university and Prof Anwar al Khalidi, Director of the Omani Studies Unit. — ONA

Let’s Read writing competition winners announced

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The winners of the 16th Children’s Writing Competition were announced at a prize giving ceremony held at Oman Avenues Mall.

There were three categories of participants as per the age groups - 8 - 10, 11 - 15 and 16 - 18.

The 16th edition of Dar Al Attāa Let’s Read Programme once again saw an enthusiastic group of participants.

Jane Jaffer, from Let’s Read, said, “This year, school children from 8 - 18 years of age were asked to write an essay, in English or Arabic, about friendship. We all know that friendship can have a huge impact on our mental health and well-being. A friend is someone who knows your past, believes in your future, and accepts you just the way you are. A real

friend is someone who walks in when everyone else walks out. As Marcel Proust once said: ‘Let us be grateful to the people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.’”

Jane said, “I believe friends hold up a mirror so that we can see ourselves in a more positive light.”

The judges received some heart-warming and uplifting entries which really portrayed true friendship. The essays not only described their friends’ appearance and characteristics but gave detailed examples of great acts of kindness. Friends who defended them when they were being bullied or sat by their bedside when they were sick. Friends who believed in them when they didn’t even believe in themselves. Friends who helped them with their studies or protected them from danger.



Friends who sacrificed a fun time to stay with their friends when they needed them the most.

According to the organisers, the nine judges had a difficult task in assessing the hundreds of entries they received.

Ghazal Mohammed, Rawnaq Waleed and Ghaith al Salti won the first, second and third prize in

8-10 age group.

In the 11 - 15 age group Nour Aidorous took the first prize followed by Abdulaziz al Gumari and Makkyah al Rashdi.

Layan al Mandheri came first in the age group of 16 to 18, with Sajad Alani in second place and Mozna al Busaidy in third place.

One of the judges, Mila

Gabruck, commented on the quality of the writing and explained how difficult it was to choose the winners. “These entries, written by children and teenagers, reveal a complex inner world where friends are celebrated, offer emotional support, laughter and positive experiences but can also show loneliness, longing

and sadness. Much more than short essays, these writings show us how deeply emotional and introspective these young writers can be, and how friendship is viewed as a much-needed source of strength and inspiration.

“It’s a great reminder for us adults not to dismiss the importance of childhood friendships and to take a moment to reflect on how blessed we are to call someone a friend,” she said.

Elizabeth al Sarhani has generously volunteered her services as a judge of the writing competition on many occasions over the past sixteen years. She said, “it was good to see more entries written in Arabic this year” and she added that “the writers have shown how it is possible to have a meaningful friendship whether it be with a parent, a family member, a school colleague or a pet.”



Nepal flight missing with 22 people on board

KATHAMANDU: A passenger plane with 22 people on board went missing in Nepal on Sunday, the operating airline and officials said, as poor weather hampered a search operation.

Nepal's air industry has boomed in recent years, carrying goods and people between hard-to-reach areas as well as foreign trekkers and climbers. But it has a poor safety record.

The Twin Otter aircraft operated by Tara Air took off from the western town of Pokhara bound for Jomsom at 9:55 am but air traffic control lost contact after 15 minutes.

"We are trying to locate the possible area where the aircraft might be," Sudarshan Bartaula, spokesman for Tara Air, said.

"Search and rescue teams from both the police and the army are heading towards that direction." He said there were 19 passengers on board and three crew members. The passengers included two Germans and four Indians, with the remainder Nepali. Jomsom is a popular trekking destination in the Himalayas about 20 minutes



Family members and relatives of passengers on board the Twin Otter aircraft operated by Tara Air, weep outside the airport in Pokhara. — AFP

by plane from Pokhara, which lies 200 kilometres west of the capital Kathmandu. Phanindra

Mani Pokharel, a spokesman at the Ministry of Home Affairs, said two helicopters had been

deployed for a search operation. But he said visibility was low. "The bad weather is likely to hamper the

search operation. The visibility is so poor that nothing can be seen," Pokharel said. Nepal's aviation

The European Union has banned all Nepali airlines from its airspace over safety concerns

industry has long been plagued by poor safety due to insufficient training and maintenance.

The European Union has banned all Nepali airlines from its airspace over safety concerns.

The Himalayan country also has some of the world's most remote and tricky runways, flanked by snow-capped peaks with approaches that pose a challenge for even accomplished pilots.

The weather can also change quickly in the mountains, creating treacherous flying conditions.

In March 2018, a US-Bangla Airlines plane crashed near Kathmandu's notoriously difficult-to-approach international airport, killing 51 people. — AFP

Lanka police tear-gas students in fresh clashes

COLOMBO: Police fired tear gas to disperse thousands of students trying to storm the Sri Lankan president's home on Sunday as the government offered an olive branch to demonstrators demanding his resignation. Anti-riot squads used water cannon followed by tear gas, as protesters pulled down yellow iron barricades across a road leading to President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's official residence in Colombo. Nearby, thousands of men and women demonstrated for the 51st straight day outside Rajapaksa's seafront office on Sunday, demanding that he step down over the country's worst economic crisis since independence. Prime Minister Ranil

Wickremesinghe went on national TV offering young protesters a greater say in how the country is administered.

"The youth are calling for a change in the existing system," Wickremesinghe said, laying out plans for 15 committees that would work with parliament to decide national policies. "I propose to appoint four youth representatives to each of the 15 committees," he said, adding that they could be drawn from the current protesters. Wickremesinghe was given the job after the president's elder brother Mahinda resigned as prime minister on May 9 after weeks of protests, when no other legislator agreed to step in. — AFP



Police use tear gas to disperse students taking part in an anti-government protest demanding resignation of Sri Lanka's President Rajapaksa in Colombo. —AFP

Pacific 'very positive' on Australian re-engagement, says prime minister

SYDNEY: Australia's newly elected prime minister has said Pacific leaders have been "very positive" about his government's renewed engagement, even as Beijing continues its diplomatic blitz across the increasingly contested region.

The comments from Anthony Albanese — aired on Sunday in an interview with Sky News — came as Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Fiji for closely watched meetings with the island nation's leaders and other Pacific foreign ministers.

Wang, who began his South Pacific tour on Thursday in Solomon Islands, is expected to discuss with his fellow foreign ministers a wide-ranging draft agreement and five-year plan, which was leaked last week.

The leaked drafts, obtained was circulated to at least 10 Pacific nations ahead of the Fiji meeting, sparking concern about Beijing's ambitions to dramatically expand security and economic cooperation within the South Pacific.

Albanese was scathing in his assessment of the former Australian government's Pacific

plan, saying it had "dropped the ball" in the region — blaming both foreign aid cuts and "a non-engagement on values".

"For our Pacific Island neighbours, the issue of climate change is an absolute national security issue," he said.

In addition to increased action on the environment, Albanese touted a boost in aid and a plan to set up a defence training school in the Pacific.

During Australia's recent election campaign, Albanese's centre-left Labor party said the school would involve forces from Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

Albanese said Australia's renewed diplomatic push in the Pacific, which began with a visit to Fiji by new foreign minister Penny Wong, had been well-received.

"The response has been very positive," he said.

Australia and China have been locked in a tense duel for influence in the Pacific, after Beijing last month surprised Canberra by securing a wide-ranging security pact with Solomon Islands.

Foreign Minister Wong urged



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese flanked by Foreign Minister Penny Wong (L), attends a bilateral meeting in Tokyo. — AFP File

South Pacific nations to spurn China's attempts to extend its security reach across the region while in Fiji on Friday.

"We have expressed our concerns publicly about the security agreement," Wong told reporters in the capital of Suva.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang said China was willing to work with other major powers in

the Pacific region to help island nations develop. "China is willing to carry out more tripartite cooperation with other countries, especially countries with traditional influence in the region" to help island countries accelerate their development, Wang said when he met on Sunday with Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Henry Puna. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEHRAN

Iran unveils underground drone base

Iranian state television broadcast footage of an air force base for drones under the Zagros mountain range in the west of the country.

The exact location of the base was not revealed, although the TV reporter said he travelled on a helicopter for nearly 40 minutes from the city of Kermanshah to reach it.

Iran started developing drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), in the 1980s during its eight-year war with Iraq. Video



aired on state television showed Iran's armed forces chief of staff General Mohammad Bagheri and army commander Abdolrahim Mousavi visiting the underground site. — AFP

KHARTOUM

Two killed in Sudan anti-coup protests

Sudanese security forces killed a protester during the latest mass demonstrations against last year's military coup, medics said.

One protester died after "taking a bullet to the chest" during rallies in the capital Khartoum, the pro-democracy Central Committee of Sudan Doctors said. Another was killed after suffering "suffocation by tear gas", the committee said.

The latest deaths bring to 98 the toll from a crackdown on anti-coup protests, which have taken place regularly since the



October 25 military putsch led by army chief Abdel Fattah al Burhan, the committee said. Thousands took to the streets in several parts of Khartoum. — AFP

MANILA

7 fishermen missing after Philippine sea collision

Rescuers searched waters off the Philippines for seven people missing after a collision between a fishing boat and a cargo ship, authorities said.

The Philippine fishing vessel and Marshall Islands-flagged *MV Happy Hiro* collided east of Palawan Island, the Philippine Coast Guard said.

The fishing boat capsized and sank in the Sulu sea, coast guard spokesman Commodore Armando Balilo said.

Thirteen of its 20 crew members were plucked from the water by



another fishing boat before being transferred to the *Happy Hiro*. The coast guard deployed rescue teams from nearby stations to scour the waters for the seven missing crew members. — AFP



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In brief

■ BAGHDAD



4 KILLED IN BAGHDAD RESTAURANT GAS EXPLOSION

Four workers were killed in a gas-related explosion that struck a central Baghdad restaurant on Sunday, civil defence and medical sources in the Iraqi capital said. The three-storey building, which housed the restaurant, completely collapsed after its gas system exploded, they added. Rescue teams retrieved the bodies of four workers — three Iraqis and a Bangladeshi man — after hours of searching through the rubble, they said. Explosions in the Iraqi capital were once almost daily occurrences but have become less frequent in the past few years, particularly following the defeat of the IS group in 2017. — dpa

■ RIO DE JANEIRO



GUSTAVO EYES HISTORIC WIN IN COLOMBIAN ELECTION

A former guerrilla fighter and ex-mayor of Bogotá, Gustavo Petro, is the favourite to win the first round of voting in Colombia's presidential elections which began on Sunday. According to the latest polls, the leftist is clearly ahead of the right-wing candidate, Federico Gutiérrez, and Rodolfo Hernández, who is not affiliated with any party. None of the candidates is likely to win outright in the first round, which would require more than 50 per cent of the vote. In the second round, the entrepreneur and ex-mayor of Bucaramanga, Hernández, could pose a threat to Petro. — dpa

■ ROME



POPE ANNOUNCES 21 NEW CARDINALS

Pope Francis has announced the names of 21 clergy who he will elevate to the rank of cardinal at the end of August. The Vatican number one revealed the names to worshippers after the Regina caeli prayer in St Peter's Square on Sunday. Among the new cardinals, 16 will be eligible to elect a new pope in a conclave, because they are under 80 years old. They include Britain's Arthur Roche and Lazzaro You Heung-Sik from South Korea as prefects of two congregations in the Roman Curia, and Spain's Fernando Vergez Alzaga as head of the Vatican's state administration. — dpa

Russia makes push for Donbas

KRAMATORSK: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Sunday made his first trip to the country's war-torn east since the launch of Moscow's attack, as Russian forces tightened their grip around key cities in the Donbas region.

Zelensky's office posted a video on Telegram of him wearing a bullet-proof vest and being shown destroyed buildings in Kharkiv and its surroundings, from where Russian forces have retreated in recent weeks.

Since failing to capture the capital Kyiv in the early stages of the war, Russia has shifted its focus to the eastern Donbas region as it attempts to consolidate areas under its control.

Its forces said on Saturday they had captured Lyman in the contested region, as they upped the pressure on the twin cities of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk.

The situation in Lysychansk had become "significantly worse", the Regional Governor of the Lugansk region, Sergiy Gaiday, said on the messaging service, Telegram.

Meanwhile, on the eastern bank of the Donetsk river, Russian forces "carried out assault operations in the area of the city of Severodonetsk", according to the Ukrainian general staff. Fighting in the city was advancing street-by-street, Gaiday said.

Zelensky has been based in



A young boy stands in front of a damaged building after a strike in Kramatorsk in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP

Kyiv since Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his full-scale attack on Ukraine on February 24.

"In this war, the occupiers are trying to squeeze out at least some result", Zelensky said in a later Telegram post on Sunday. "But they should have understood long ago that we will defend our land to the last man. They have

no chance. We will fight and we will definitely win." "The situation is very difficult, especially in

'In this war, the occupiers are trying to squeeze out at least some result', says Zelensky

those areas in the Donbas and Kharkiv regions, where the Russian army is trying to squeeze at least some result for itself", Zelensky said late on Saturday in his daily address to the nation. Russia's defence ministry had said the "town of Krasny Liman (Moscow's name for Lyman) has been entirely liberated from Ukrainian nationalists." Lyman

Biden heads to Texas town to mourn school dead

UVALDE: US President Joe Biden arrived on Sunday in Uvalde to console residents mourning 19 children and two teachers who were gunned down at an elementary school in the small Texas town.

Biden and First Lady Jill Biden were to visit a memorial outside the school and attend a Catholic Mass, as well as meet with first responders and mourning relatives of the dead.

Harrowing accounts emerged of the ordeal faced by survivors of Tuesday's attack, as Biden called for action to prevent future massacres in a country where efforts to tighten firearms regulations have repeatedly failed.

"We cannot outlaw tragedy, I know, but we can make America safer. We can finally do what we have to do to protect the lives of the people and of our children", Biden said on Saturday in a speech at the University of Delaware.

As residents gathered in a central square in Uvalde over the weekend to pay homage to the victims, haunting stories emerged of students who played dead while the teen gunman sprayed bullets and police held back from storming in to the rescue.

Ten-year-old Samuel Salinas was sitting in his fourth-grade classroom when the shooter, later identified as Salvador Ramos, 18, barged in with a chilling announcement: "You're all going to die."

Then "he just started shooting", Salinas told ABC News.

Texas authorities admitted on Friday that as many as 19 police officers were in the school hallway

'We cannot outlaw tragedy, I know, but we can make America safer'
JOE BIDEN,
US President

for nearly an hour without breaching the room where the shooter was, thinking he had ended his killing. Officials called this delay the "wrong decision."

Ramos was finally killed by police.

Survivors of the attack have described making desperate, whispered pleas for help in 911 phone calls during his assault.



US President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden pay their respects at a makeshift memorial outside of Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas. —AFP

Some played dead to avoid drawing the shooter's attention.

Eleven-year-old Miah Cerrillo even smeared the blood of a dead friend on herself as she feigned death.

Salinas said he thinks Ramos fired at him, but the bullet struck a chair, sending shrapnel into the boy's leg. "I played dead so he wouldn't shoot me", he said.

Another student, Daniel, whose mother would not provide his last name, said he saw Ramos fire through the glass in the classroom door, striking his teacher.

The bullets were "hot", he told 'The Washington Post', and when another bullet ricocheted and struck a fellow student in the nose, he said he could hear the sickening sound it made.

Though his teacher lay on the floor bleeding, she repeatedly told the students, "Stay calm. Stay where you are. Don't move," Daniel recalled. —AFP



44 die, 56 missing in heavy Brazil rains

RIO DE JANEIRO: The number of deaths caused by catastrophic rains in Brazil's north-eastern Pernambuco state has increased to 44, with another 56 people missing, Regional Development Minister Daniel Ferreira said on Sunday.

Twenty-five people were injured in the violent storms around the port city of Recife and nearly 4,000 people lost their homes, he said.

On Saturday alone, 30 people died due to the severe weather, which began in the middle of the week and caused numerous landslides amid the torrential downpours.

In the greater Recife area, more than 200 millilitres of rain fell within 24 hours, according to the Pernambuco state government.

"Although it has stopped raining for now, we expect more heavy rains in the coming days. So the most important thing is

Zelensky visits Ukraine's east

lies on the road to Kramatorsk and Severodonetsk, which is "now surrounded", according to a police official in Lugansk province cited by Russian state media. But governor Gaiday insisted that "Severodonetsk has not been cut off".

In the embattled city, where an estimated 15,000 civilians remain, a local official said "constant shelling" made it increasingly difficult to get in or out.

"Evacuation is very unsafe, it's isolated cases when we manage to get people out.

Now the priority is for the wounded and people who need serious medical assistance", said Oleksandr Stryuk, head of the city's military and civil administration.

The water supply is also increasingly unstable, and residents have gone more than two weeks without a mobile phone connection, he added.

Governor Gaiday said the sole road link to the outside world was expected to be the focus of continued Russian attacks.

"Next week will be very hard, as Russia puts all its resources into seizing Severodonetsk, or cutting off the (area) from communication with Ukraine", he said.

— AFP

Rethinking assessment in education



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

As the academic year in schools and colleges is drawing to a close, there is some introspection among teachers about the way in which assessment continues to be implemented at different levels and whether it really reflects the learning methods, or even the aims of young learners today.

Traditionally, exams have been the only trusted way of giving out marks and grades. This begins at kindergarten, where toddlers are given smileys or stickers as recognition for completing tasks like identifying colours or numbers. The reward and implied punishment formula suggests that knowledge on its own is important, and the only way to sieve the wheat from the chaff. This system

continues through secondary and tertiary education. The much feared final exams stresses students into insomnia, depression and other forms of mental health issues which, at least now, get to be talked about, unlike earlier when they remained taboo.

What this form of assessment does not consider is the changing face of the learner, and indeed, even the purpose of learning today.

Information per se is not at a premium anymore.

Everybody has access to facts, dates, definitions and formulae at the end of their palm, on their smart phones. It doesn't even take a minute to know the historical dates of a war, or the chemical symbol for water. And yet, this is what we

THE SKILLS REQUIRED IN THE WORKPLACE HAVE SHIFTED FROM PEOPLE MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING TO CRITICAL THINKING, FLEXIBILITY, AND SERVICE ORIENTATION

continue to demand students to remember and memorise.

What is more important today is what we do with the information we have. The application of a historical date, for example, to other events at that time in different parts of the world and the way they all, together, contributed to a larger event would help learners understand the complex connections in the world.

The Open University, UK, defines innovative assessment as 'something that enables the learner to transfer knowledge, skills, competencies and dispositions between learning and assessment.'

It suggests that, even between 2015 and 2020, the skills required in the workplace have shifted from people management and decision making to critical thinking, flexibility, and service orientation.

This suggests that traditional ways of assessing through repeatedly asking for retrieval of information is no longer enough. Whether continuous (formative) or end-of-term (summative), exams still test facts and data, both of which can be easily accessed in the real world without much trouble.

The challenge today is what to do with the surfeit of information we have and how this information could be used. The application of an idea or a theory is more important than knowing the theory. So is being able to work together to create new ways of understanding.

We all know that education is more impactful when done through doing, not passive learning.

Yet, traditional methods of assessment continue to be used to test learners on what they have learnt, not what they can do with what they have learnt.

Collaboration, application through transference and developing competencies, not knowledge per se, will help to prepare learners for their future.

Cost-of-living crisis forces more Brits to foodbanks

JOE JACKSON

On an overcast morning in Bradford, northern England, a steady stream of locals arrive at a foodbank to collect produce parcels described as “a lifesaver” during the worst cost-of-living crisis in a generation. Bradford Central Foodbank is helping twice as many people compared to pre-pandemic, as spiralling prices for energy, food and other basics leave a growing number of Britons struggling.

“The numbers since I’ve been a volunteer have only multiplied and I can only see it getting worse,” said Karl Carroll, 33, who has relied on the parcels since 2019 and is now volunteering at the foodbank.

“I’ve barely got £40 (\$50) by the time I’ve paid everything out, so I imagine families are struggling in more ways,” he said. Simon Jackson, 43, an unemployed former supermarket worker who is accessing long-term government sickness benefits, has been a foodbank user since February.

“It is a tougher time at the minute... the cost of living’s skyrocketed to a point of we’re having to use foodbanks a bit more,” he said.

Jackson currently gets around £900 a month in various government support payments but, like Carroll, once his bills are paid, there is little left over for food.

Rising prices are exacerbating the situation. “Places like (this) here in Bradford are a lifesaver. They can really help balance your decisions -- sometimes between the heating and eating,” he said.

One of the clearest signs of the crisis is the surge in foodbank use. The Trussell Trust charity says its more than 1,400 affiliated sites handed out 2.1 million parcels in the past year -- 830,000 of them to children -- in a 14 per cent increase on pre-pandemic levels.

Its central Bradford operation is hosted three days a week by a local church organisation, and can supply people with only three parcels within six months to manage demand.

They contain basics such as cereal, tinned soup, meat and fish, pasta, sauces, vegetables, biscuits, sugar, tea and coffee.

Started in 2011, it is one of around 30 free food providers now in the city of just over half a million residents, and currently helps around 1,000 people a month, said manager Josie Barlow.

Greater Bradford’s population -- the sixth biggest metropolitan area in England -- is the fifth most income-deprived and sixth most employment-deprived nationwide, according to the government’s last poverty index published in 2019.—AFP

It’s going to be a hot summer. It will be hotter if you’re not rich

ANNE BARNARD, COREY KILGANNON, JAZMINE HUGHES & EMMA GOLDBERG

BLACK NEW YORKERS ARE MORE THAN TWICE AS LIKELY TO DIE FROM HEAT AS WHITE RESIDENTS, CITY DATA SHOW

As summer begins, danger lurks behind New Yorkers’ joy at getting back to beaches and parks. Blazing heat is expected to blanket most of the country, setting records as it has for several years running.

The Northeast is most likely to spike above average summer heat according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. While the West battles drought and wildfires, in aging cities like New York, the climate crisis takes its most threatening form as pockets of heat that can suffocate and sudden downpours that can drown and destroy, both deadliest for the most vulnerable with the fewest options.

On scorching days the recipe for relief is simple: nature, cool water, books, a shady stoop. In New York, a city where life unfolds in public spaces, the ingredients are supposed to be available to all. Just as rich and poor share subways and sidewalks, anyone — in theory — can enjoy public pools, parks, libraries and tree-lined streets.

But in practice, these public spaces do not serve New Yorkers equally. As the planet heats and a lingering pandemic makes indoor gatherings risky, public places to stay cool and

occupied become necessities, not just for recreation, but for health and safety. That respite is often least available to those who need it most.

All last summer, New York Times reporters roamed the city to see the disparities and how these differences affect people’s lives. What they learned reveals clues about who will suffer most in this summer’s expected heat waves, and how better policies could make the hot weather not just easier and more fun — but also less deadly.

In Crotona Park East in the Bronx, 41 per cent of residents fall below the federal poverty line, 24 per cent of households lack air-conditioning, and few have cars to reach beaches or forests.

By contrast, in Carnegie Hill on the Upper East Side, one of the city’s wealthiest, whitest sections, 96 per cent of households are air-conditioned. So many residents have money and flexibility to flee the city that during the hottest weeks last summer, some streets felt empty; the advantages of nearby Central Park were left largely untapped.

Indoors, too, were stark divides. Public libraries are soothing refuges that double as emergency cooling centres. But wealthy SoHo, for instance, has a sleeker, better appointed library than the Washington Heights branch, where, on a sweltering July day, the

air-conditioning was on the fritz. Heat kills about 350 New Yorkers each year. But the risk is not shared equally. Black New Yorkers are more than twice as likely to die from heat as white residents, city data show.

Differences were compounded in the flash floods that hit the city after Hurricane Ida last August, another climate-driven hazard. The 11 city residents who died as stormwater filled basement apartments lived in neighbourhoods that were already more vulnerable to heat.

These are inequalities that New Yorkers see every day without always realising their impact.

Many wealthy New Yorkers — those with access to second homes, vacations, children’s camps and road trips — have never been to a public pool. But 1.5 million people visit one of the city’s roughly 50 outdoor pools every year, and for residents of modest means, disproportionately Black and brown, they are a summer staple.

New York still has less than 1 pool per 100,000 residents, fewer than most US cities, with more per capita in the whitest, wealthiest boroughs, Manhattan and Staten Island, according to the Trust for Public Land. Black and Latino children still lag in access to swimming lessons and drown at higher rates.

— The New York Times



A mother and her son walk in Jamaica Estates in the Queens neighbourhood which is dominated by heat-absorbing streets and where high temperatures can be deadly.

Chill out in a little of summer



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

It is almost summer, bringing the hot season, smelling of roses and blossoms. The daily sunshine comes like golden sparks over the desert and green land alike! What a beautiful and a refreshing summertime indeed. This time of the year is basically known as the perfect timing for a long holiday. Everyone intends to have a break during summer - the most preferred season

for many. Summer is a good time to relax after the long hectic and busy first half of the year. It is the much-awaited holiday season for individuals and families as it coincides with school holidays too, so the whole family can enjoy a long break. It is almost everyone's perfect time for holiday. Getting the family together is never a bad idea at all! It would be definitely very refreshing and stimulating for everyone in the family.

Everyone loves summer, when days become warm, hot and really long, while nights in this season are the shortest. Sun shines so bright and everything around is whispering to go outdoor! It is the best time to go on a vacation, spend time near the sea. It is a great time for doing some outdoor sports, spending time with families and friends. Everyone feels happier in this time of the year. Fun, sand and sea that sounds like all summer is about!

IT IS VERY ESSENTIAL FOR EVERYBODY TO HAVE A BREAK IN LIFE EVERY NOW AND THEN, NO MATTER HOW BUSY PEOPLE ARE. ALL NEED TO BE AWAY FOR A BREAK FROM THE DAILY ROUTINE

It is very essential for everybody to have a break in life every now and then, no matter how busy people are. All need to be away for a break from the daily routine. A short break would always be an advantage for one to refresh the memory, recharge the body's power and stimulate spirit and interests.

Perhaps, summer marks the most preferred rest time of the year for all.

Usually, the summer season brings bright and longer days that mirror the different aspects of nature's beauty. Each part of the world is distinguished with special natural, historical and cultural characteristics that make summer more enjoyable there. Hence, there would be no excuse for people, but to enjoy summer in a way that could refresh them. Summer always offers a wide range of enjoyment options for people to meet their desires and amuse themselves.

Therefore, people's plans to enjoy the season differ based on their interests and budgets, being key factors to sufficiently plan their holiday. Some are more interested in enjoying their time with the family through a special tourism agenda. They prefer to go around different tourist destinations within the country. Those are more into domestic tourism for they are mostly interested to enjoy their holiday the easy way. Else, it might be their limited budget that restricts them from flying abroad for a vacation.

On the other hand, budget could be a challenge for those who would never enjoy their summer holiday without flying to a different destination. For them, tourism abroad is more refreshing as well as bringing the real thrill of enjoying the holiday. It is true as one needs sometimes to think out of the box. One likes to be out of the place to get the mind and spirit more refreshed.

As people are different on the way they think and behave; they are also different on the way they enjoy life. Each one has a different perception of life and how to enjoy life, live the moment and take the experience. As Mahatma Gandhi advised, "Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever."

Summer marks a real experience reflecting the importance of enjoying life. One has to make his summer one of those good times ever in the year, combining delightful weather, great moments and exciting deeds. Wish you all an inspiring and refreshing summer.



FLYING HIGH

A Palestinian flag hanging from a civilian drone flies over the walls of the old city of Jerusalem on Sunday, ahead of the Israeli 'flags march' to mark "Jerusalem Day". Jerusalem is bracing for a controversial "flag march" by Israelis that has sparked warnings of a new escalation from Palestinians.

-AFP

How big finance can scale up sustainability

J DAVID STEWART & HENRY P HUNTINGTON

Addressing the ever-worsening climate crisis will require the largest sustained movement of capital in history. At least \$100 trillion must be invested over the next 20-30 years to shift to a low-carbon economy, and \$3-4 trillion of additional annual investment is needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and stabilise the world's oceans.

Mobilising these huge sums and investing them efficiently is well within the capacity of the global economy and existing financial markets, but it will require fundamental changes to how these markets work. In particular, traditional financial institutions will need help in sourcing the right projects, simplifying the design and negotiation of transactions, and raising the capital to fund them.

Many sustainability ideas are small-scale, which partly reflects the nature of innovation, whereby ideas are developed, tested, and, if successful, eventually copied. But the disconnect between those developing sustainability projects and the world of traditional finance means that scaling such initiatives is not straightforward.

At the risk of oversimplifying, sustainability advocates may be suspicious of "Big Finance" and its history of funding unsustainable industries. Investors, on the other hand, may be wary of idealistic approaches that ignore bottom-line realities, and might not be interested in small-scale transactions.

Given this disconnect, how do we scale up sustainable projects from small investments to the \$100 million-plus range that begins to attract Big Finance and thus the trillions of dollars needed to make a global difference?

Three steps in particular are necessary. First, securitisation techniques should be employed to aggregate many smaller projects into one that has enough critical mass to be relevant. Securitisation got a bad name in 2007-08 for its role in fuelling the subprime mortgage crisis that brought the developed world to the brink of financial ruin. But when properly managed, joint financing of many projects reduces risk, because the likelihood that all will have similar financial and operational issues simultaneously is low. For the resulting whole to interest investors, however, the numerous smaller projects need to have common characteristics so that they can be aggregated. This cannot be done after the fact.

For example, we need to develop common terms and conditions for pools

of similar assets, as is already happening in the US residential solar market. Then, we need to explain the fundamentals of securitisation to more potential grassroots innovators through regional conferences that bring together financiers and sustainable-project developers.

Second, we must reduce the complexity of key transaction terms and make it easier to design and negotiate the specifics of instruments used to invest in sustainable projects. In established financial markets, replicating significant parts of previous successful deals is much easier than starting from scratch for each transaction. This approach works because many of the terms and conditions for subsequent deals have already been accepted by key financial players.

Making successful innovations more visible to investors is therefore crucial. To that end, we should establish a high-profile, open-source clearinghouse of previous sustainable projects, including those that have been successfully funded and those that failed. This would be similar to many existing financial-sector databases but freely available, with reputable third-party oversight to ensure accuracy.

Third, the range of funding sources for sustainable projects needs to be expanded and made more transparent. Because sustainability investments may offer lower returns according to historic financial-market metrics, traditional asset-allocation practices, against the backdrop of "efficient markets," would imply reduced attractiveness.

But historic benchmarks do not sufficiently factor in the exploding field of impact investing, which embraces different return and time thresholds and now accounts for about \$2.5 trillion of assets. Securitising tranches of different kinds of impact investing could prove to be a game changer for sustainability

financing. It would thus make sense to create an open-source database of investor appetite – similar to the project database mentioned above – that is searchable by innovators and designers of new sustainable projects. This would make it easier to identify investors – equity, credit, or some hybrid – who might commit funding. The database could be housed in an organisation such as the International Finance Corporation, the United Nations, or the Global Impact Investing Network.

There are encouraging precedents. The green bond market started just over a decade ago, and total issuance already could reach \$1 trillion this year. And a critical mass of the financial world attended the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow last November. Under the leadership of UN Special Envoy Mark Carney, the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) has made \$130 trillion in climate-finance commitments.

In 1983, Muhammad Yunus founded Grameen Bank in order to provide banking services, and especially loans, to individuals (primarily women) previously considered to be "un-bankable." By the time Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, "micro-lending" had become a global phenomenon, with traditional financial institutions involved in securitising these loans.

The financial revolution that Yunus started transformed retail lending, streamlined how such transactions are structured, and tapped a new source of scaled investment capital.

To help address today's existential sustainability challenges, capital markets and their major players need to be more innovative still and open the door to non-traditional, even disruptive, voices and ideas.

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Making successful innovations more visible to investors is crucial.

sport

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Real Madrid's Brazilian defender Marcelo lifts the Champions League trophy after Madrid 's victory in the UEFA Champions League final football match between Liverpool and Real Madrid at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, north of Paris. – AFP

Vinicius strikes as Real Madrid beat Liverpool in Champions League final

PARIS: Vinicius Junior scored the only goal of the game as Real Madrid beat Liverpool 1-0 in Saturday's Champions League final in Paris to become kings of Europe for a record-extending 14th time after a night marred by problems outside the ground that led to the kick-off being delayed by over half an hour.

Brazilian winger Vinicius turned in Fede Valverde's enticing low cross in the 59th minute at the Stade de France and Liverpool could not find an equaliser as Jurgen Klopp's side lost to the Spanish giants in a Champions League final for the second time in five seasons.

The Anfield side will wonder what might have been had the outstanding Thibaut Courtois not pushed Sadio Mane's shot onto the inside of a post when they were on top in the first half, as they fell short of a trophy treble.

Winners of the English League Cup and FA Cup this season, they just missed out to Manchester City for the Premier League title and were denied a victory here which would have put them level with AC Milan on seven European Cups.

"These boys played an outstanding season. The two competitions we couldn't win, we didn't win for the smallest possible margin," said Klopp.

Instead Real have a fifth Champions League in nine seasons to go with their Spanish title, as Carlo Ancelotti becomes the first coach to win European club

European Champions Cup: winners

Last 10 winners

2022

La Rochelle (FRA)

2021

Toulouse (FRA)

2020

Exeter (ENG)

2019

Saracens (ENG)

2018

Leinster (IRL)

2017

Saracens (ENG)

2016

Saracens (ENG)

2015

Toulon (FRA)

2014

Toulon (FRA)

2013

Toulon (FRA)

AFP

football's greatest prize for a fourth time.

Ancelotti was also in charge of Real when they won the 2014 final having triumphed with AC Milan in 2003 and in 2007, the latter victory coming against Liverpool.

"We managed the game very well," said Ancelotti, who called himself "a record man".

"I had luck to come here last year and have a fantastic season. A fantastic club, a really good squad with a lot of quality and mental character," he told BT Sport.

DELAYED KICK-OFF
The match kicked off 35 minutes later than the planned 9:00 pm (1900 GMT) start in the French capital after chaos at entrances to the stadium led to fans being unable to get to their seats.

Real Madrid wins Champions League 2021-2022

REAL MADRID

14th title for Madrid club

4th for its coach

THIBAUT COURTOIS (BEL)

Goalkeeper

Age: 30

VINICIUS JR (BRA)

Forward

Age: 21

KARIM BENZEMA (FRA)

Forward

Age: 34

LUKA MODRIC (CRO)

Midfield

Age: 36

Florentino Perez (ESP)

PRESIDENT

Carlo Ancelotti (ITA)

COACH

Founded in 1902

2021-2022 PERFORMANCE

TITLES

Final

1/2

1/4

1/8

14 Champions League

4 UEFA Super Cup

2 Europa League/UEFA Cup

Liverpool (ENG)

Manchester City (ENG)

Chelsea (ENG)

Paris SG (FRA)

Source: UEFA

AFP Photos

AFP

UEFA said it was "sympathetic" towards those affected and put the huge build-ups of supporters at gates down to "thousands of fans who had purchased fake tickets which did not work in the turnstiles".

Tear gas was also fired by police as some people could be seen trying to scale fences around the perimeter of the ground.

The final was only moved to the French capital after Saint-

Petersburg was stripped of the game following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The delayed kick-off may have been responsible for the slow start to the game, as it took 16 minutes before there was an incident of note, Mohamed Salah turning a low Trent Alexander-Arnold cross towards goal only for Courtois to save.

Liverpool were seen as favourites to avenge their loss to

the Spanish giants in the 2018 final in Kyiv and they began to take control of the game.

Mane came agonisingly close in the 21st minute as he skipped his way into a shooting position inside the box only for Courtois to tip his net-bound shot onto his right-hand post.

Klopp's side, with Fabinho and Thiago Alcantara starting in midfield after overcoming fitness worries, were on top but could not

turn their superiority into a lead.

OUTSTANDING COURTOIS
Real, meanwhile, created almost nothing in the first half with Karim Benzema quiet, but their captain briefly thought he had got the breakthrough two minutes before the interval.

The Frenchman prodded home after the ball broke back to him inside the area but the offside flag was raised.

The decision to disallow the goal was upheld after a lengthy VAR check, despite Fabinho deflecting Valverde's touch through to Benzema.

Yet Ancelotti's side kept their nerve and were rewarded with the goal as the hour mark approached.

Valverde drove forward down the right before firing a low ball across the face of goal for Vinicius to turn it in at the far post past his Brazilian national team colleague Alisson.

Just like in 2018, Real had drawn first blood, but this time there was no need for them to send on Gareth Bale in order to ensure victory.

Courtois was superb, flying to his right to keep out a Salah curler before two saves in quick succession late on.

First the Belgian got down low when substitute Diogo Jota deflected Salah's effort towards goal, and then he produced a strong arm to turn a Salah strike behind.

It was Real Madrid's night. — AFP

OOC succeeded in obtaining 9 national athletes support to 2024 Paris Olympic Games

MUSCAT: Within the framework of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) keenness to benefit from the opportunities available from International Olympic Solidarity Programmes for National Olympic Committees (NOCs), OOC succeeded in obtaining support for the preparation of a number of Omani athletes within the Olympic Scholarships for Athletes Programme. This is in four sports included in the Olympic programme represented in shooting, swimming, athletics, and weightlifting, a programme that aims to support a number of beneficiary athletes and contribute to the financing of programmes and plans for their preparation and rehabilitation in preparation for their participation in the Olympic Games (Paris 2024).

In the context of preparing for this file in accordance with the approved international standards, OOC had previously nominated a number of players based on coordination with the Planning and Following-up Committee (formerly), which raised the list of athletes authorised and qualified to benefit from the grant and compete for it according to the nomination of sports federations and committees, where the selection was made based on the recorded numbers and achievements of athletes from the national teams.

OOC was able to obtain 9 grants for Omani athletes, which is the first time that this number of supports has been granted to OOC, as the International Olympic Solidarity usually grants 5 grants to athletes from each NOC that participated in less than 70 athletes in the last Olympic Games. OOC has been excluded this time based on its active request in this regard and its desire to support the largest possible



number of deserving athletes who meet the conditions for obtaining support cards.

It should be noted that it is fortunate that OOC succeeded in obtaining this important number of grants within the Olympic Solidarity Programme coincides with the new formation of the sub-committees, where the "High Level Sports and Olympic Planning Committee" was created, which will work in effective partnership with the Solidarity Committee Olympic. One of the priorities of the newly created committee will be the development of a system for classifying high-level athletes, including the criteria for enjoying Olympic Solidarity grants. Which will enable concerted efforts, pool the available capabilities under one

roof and rationalise their use, so that this programme is the unified national reference for classifying athletes and targeting them with exceptional support programmes that may be provided by various stakeholders.

On the other hand, the aforementioned nine grants were fairly distributed and circulated to a larger number of athletes, federations and sports committees to benefit from them. The list includes Al Anoud al Khalili from Oman Shooting Association, Abdulrahman al Kulaibi and Issa al Adawi from Oman Swimming Federation, weightlifter Amer al Khanjari from Oman Weightlifting and Physical Strength Committee and 5 players from Oman Athletics

Association, Mubeen al Kindi, Ali al Balushi, Hussein al Farsi, Mohammed al Sulaimani and Fateh Bait Jaaboub.

The grants provided by the Olympic Solidarity aim to assist athletes who are selected and proposed to participate by NOCs in the stages of preparation and qualification for the 33rd Olympic Games in France. This programme allows NOCs to obtain financial and technical support for high-level athletes who are seeking to qualify for the Olympic Games.

IOC has set a set of qualitative standards at the continental and international levels that have been adopted as a condition for obtaining the support card. It is the need for the athlete to have the technical level that enables him to

qualify for the Olympic Games, provided that this is proven through the results he has achieved in national and international competitions, and his practice for any individual sport at the international level. Provided that, this sport is included in the Summer Olympics programme, in addition to adherence to the standards of sports ethics in accordance with the Olympic Charter and IOC, and adherence to the Code of the World Anti-Doping Agency and not being convicted of any violation of anti-doping rules.

On the nature of the support, IOC has allocated financial support to the nine players for a programme to prepare them to qualify them to participate in Paris

2024 Olympic Games, so that this support will continue until August 2024 before the start of the Olympic Games. As well as, there is a continuous follow-up of the technical levels of the nine players through the preparation plans and the established executive programmes by their federations and sports committees, technical reports and results achieved at the Arab, continental and international levels. This support can also be used to qualify the players technically through local or regional qualification centres, in addition to the possibility of using high-level coaches by the relevant sports federations and committees to qualify the selected players, each according to his sport.

IOC, in coordination with the sports federations and committees, seeks to benefit from these grants by providing all facilities for training, and allocating qualified and specialised trainers to train these players with the aim of raising their technical levels in a way that will achieve the desired results and numbers that qualify them to participate in the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

It is worth noting that Olympic Solidarity Committee of IOC provides 4 support programmes to NOCs every 4 years according to a budget allocated for this. These programmes are represented in support programmes for athletes, programmes to support coaches, programmes to support Olympic values, and programmes for the management of NOCs and knowledge exchange. OOC is keen to benefit from these programmes, which aim to refine and qualify national technical and administrative cadres for the benefit and benefit of them and enhance their capabilities in the field of sports.

Jai Hindley on brink of Giro glory after snatching lead in Dolomites

PASSO FEDAIA, Italy: Jai Hindley took a huge step towards winning the Giro d'Italia on Saturday after snatching the overall lead from Richard Carapaz in the final kilometres of the gruelling penultimate stage in the Dolomites, won by Italian Alessandro Covi.

Bora-Hansgrohe's Hindley all but ensured that he would win his first Grand Tour after a dazzling raid at the end of the mountainous, 168 km 20th stage which left him one minute and 25 seconds ahead of Carapaz in the fight for the pink

jersey.

The 26-year old made his move with less than three kilometres remaining of the final Passo Fedaia climb and left Carapaz needing a miracle in Sunday's final stage time-trial in Verona.

"I knew this was going to be the crucial stage of the race. I knew there was a brutal finish and that you could make a difference," said the 26-year-old.

"We just stayed patient, saved our energy until today and, you know, actually it was perfect.



"I will die to defend the pink jersey."

The Australian, who has won only stage nine in this year's Giro,

started the day just three seconds behind 2019 winner Carapaz and demolished the Ineos rider towards the summit of the Passo Fedaia.

Ecuadorian Carapaz visibly struggled to keep up with Hindley on a 14 km climb at 7.6 per cent and watched his slender lead vanish after a powerful and well-time attack by his rival.

Carapaz even finished behind Mikel Landa, who had appeared out of the running earlier in the day and is 1:51 off the pace in the

general classification. Hindley will be especially happy with the time gap between him and Carapaz as he struggles in time trials and lost the 2020 edition of the Giro on the final time trial stage.

He had come into that year's climax in Milan level with Briton Tao Geoghegan Hart, who ended up winning the overall race.

Covi finally gets his chance

Stage winner Covi claimed the biggest win of his career on home turf after a bold attack with over 50km to go. — AFP

Fernandez into French Open quarterfinals for first time



PARIS: Canadian teenager Leylah Fernandez reached the French Open quarterfinals for the first time on Sunday with a 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 win over 2019 semifinalist Amanda Anisimova of the United States.

Fernandez, seeded 17th, who was US Open runner-up last year, will face Martina Trevisan of Italy for a place in the semi-finals.

The 19-year-old Fernandez has made the quarterfinals on the back of an impressive 23 service breaks over four rounds at Roland Garros.

"It was a very complicated match. Amanda is a very good player but I was happy to win in front of you," said the 2019 junior champion, name-checking French football great Thierry Henry who was watching the match on Court Philippe Chatrier. — AFP

Ahly seek historic third straight African title amid venue fury

JOHANNESBURG: Egyptian outfit Al Ahly go into the CAF Champions League final against Moroccan hosts Wydad Casablanca on Monday thrilled to be on the verge of creating history but furious at the choice of venue.

Ahly are among four teams who have won the marquee African club competition twice in a row since its 1964 debut, but all of them failed when attempting to secure a third straight success.

Having flopped in 2007 and 2014, the Cairo Red Devils have a third chance after victories over

fellow Egyptians Zamalek and South Africans Kaizer Chiefs in the previous two title deciders.

But hopes of further glory suffered a huge blow when the Confederation of African Football (CAF) controversially decided to stage the final at the Stade Mohammed V, the home ground of Wydad. CAF said Morocco and Senegal were the only countries who applied to host the highlight of the African club calendar and the west Africans later withdrew, without offering an explanation.

Angry Ahly officials asked



the Switzerland-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) — the highest legal body in sport — to force CAF to choose a neutral venue instead, but the appeal failed.

Playing in Casablanca means Wydad will have the backing of about 35,000 supporters in a crowd limited to 45,000 — two thirds of the capacity. Wydad fans rank among the most passionate and partisan in Africa with their limitless energy enabling them to sing, cheer and dance whenever their heroes have the ball, and boo when opponents have it. — AFP



Oman's women Padel team capture gold medal at GCC Games

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Oman's women Padel team clinched the gold medal on the conclusion day of padel competition under way at the third GCC Games in Kuwait on Sunday. The ceremony was held in presence Taha al Kishry, Secretary General of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) beside attendance of Dr Saleh bin Amer al Kharousi, Oman's Ambassador to the State of Kuwait. The triumph of Oman national team for the women's Padel came after defeating of Kuwaiti side, the host of the tournament, which came in second place. The UAE padel team finished in third place.

Oman's Padel team commenced their campaign with a 2-1 victory over Saudi Arabia while in the following game they beat UAE team with a score of 1-2. In third fixture, Oman's women managed to beat Bahraini team 1-2 and finally they were crowned with a deserved victory as they blanked the hosts Kuwaiti team 2-1.

The national women's basketball team (3X3) concluded their journey on Saturday in the tournament. The team began their journey in the competition with a 12-9 loss against Kuwait team. In the following game which was held at the Sheikh Saad Al Abdullah Al Sabah Complex, they suffered to a 12-16 loss from Qatar team. The third defeat was from Bahrain team which ended the game at 10-21 while they lost against UAE team 7-18 in the concluding match.

VOLLEYBALL COMPETITION
The Omani national volleyball team bagged bronze medal on Saturday at the end of the volleyball competition. The winning of bronze medal resulted after defeating Saudi Arabia team with a scoreline of 3-0. The first set ended at 25-22 while the gap was two points in the second set at 27-25 and it ended at 25-23 in the last set. Qatar team won first place and grabbed the gold medals as they registered a 3-0 win over UAE team. Bahrain team won the second place and gained silver



Oman tour of USA to play last leg of League 2

MUSCAT: The final leg of Oman's qualification run for the berth in the Qualifiers of the ICC ODI World Cup 2023 in India will begin on June 8, 2022 with a tri-series against the hosts USA and in-contention Nepal. A double-round robin format will be followed, with the matches being played as part of the ICC Men's CWC League 2 2019-22. Duleep Mendis, Head Coach and Chief Development Officer — Oman Cricket said, "As a team, we are very positive to get started with these next set of games in the CWC League 2. Our last 2 tri-series in the UAE were fairly successful and we will look to deliver at a similar level this time around too. The boys have had a good recovery and regaining

period over the last 3-4 weeks and also have trained hard to keep up and in-shape for this tour. We will be heading to USA a week prior to play couple of practice games and get accustomed to the conditions. USA and Nepal are both formidable sides and we are looking forward to some competitive and high-quality cricket over the next two weeks". Oman currently holds a 16-point advantage over second-placed Scotland in the table but having played close to twice the number of matches than the other 6 teams making these final set of 4 ODI's crucial for better their shot at the Qualifiers of the ICC Cricket World Cup in 2023. All the matches will be streamed live on icc.tv worldwide and Willow TV in the US.

medals as they managed to beat the hosts Kuwait team 3-2. Kuwait team positioned in the fourth place while Saudi Arabia team came in fifth place and UAE positioned in the bottom of the group. Oman national team had played five matches in the competition. The team lost in the opening match against Qatar with a score of 0-3. Then, they defeated Kuwait team 3-2 and lost again by Bahrain

team 3-1. Later, they blanked UAE team 3-0 and then ended their competition with a victory over Saudi Arabia. The hosts Kuwait maintained their lead of the medals rankings in the third GCC Games as they topped by 77 medals including 28 gold, 22 silver and 27 bronze. Bahrain remained in second place as they have 56 medals including 20 gold, 21 silver and 15 bronze.

UAE placed in third place after raising its tally to 42 medals including 17 gold, 14 silver and 11 bronze. Qatar came in fourth place with 46 medals including 14 gold, 19 silver and 13 bronze while Oman returned to fifth place with 29 medals including 12 gold, 5 silver and 12 bronze. Saudi Arabia dropped to sixth and last place with 53 medals including 11 gold, 18 silver and 24 bronze.

Royal Cavalry won second place at the French Toulouse Racecourse

MUSCAT: The horse 'Karim' owned by Royal Cavalry won the second place in the first half competitions that were held at the French Toulouse Racecourse. "Karim" was led by jockey Maxime, and under the supervision of coach Charles Jordan. The race was allocated to purebred Arabian horses for a distance of (1,600) metres, while the horse 'Murad' won the first place, owned by Al Shaqab Racing led by the jockey Valentin and under the supervision of coach Charles Jordan. The horse 'Mysore al Sham', owned by Ali Al-Haddad, led by jockey Jane Bernard and supervised by coach Elizabeth Bernard, won the third place award.



Ji SWEEPS INTO LPGA MATCH-PLAY SEMIFINALS

LOS ANGELES: South Korean Ji Eun-Hee barrelled into the LPGA Match-Play semifinals on Saturday, downing previously unbeaten Madelene Sagstrom 7&6 as the remaining three quarterfinals all went to extra holes. "My putting works really well today", said Ji, the 2009 US Women's Open champion. "Just pretty confident out there." Ji said she didn't even realise until her caddie told her that she was wrapping up the match on the 12th hole at Shadow Creek in Las Vegas, Nevada. She won the first hole, and three of the next five to seize a commanding lead. After she and Solheim Cup player Sagstrom halved the seventh and eighth, Ji won the next three holes to close out the match. It was a less stressful finish than her round of 16 clash with



compatriot Choi Hye-Jin in the morning. After Choi pulled level on the 15th hole, Ji won the 16th and 17th for a 2&1 victory that put her through to the last eight. It made the day in the desert much shorter for Ji, who will face American Allison Lee in the semifinals on Sunday for a place in the Sunday afternoon final. — AFP



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10 million square metres of land prepped for industrial investment in Duqm SEZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
DUQM, MAY 29

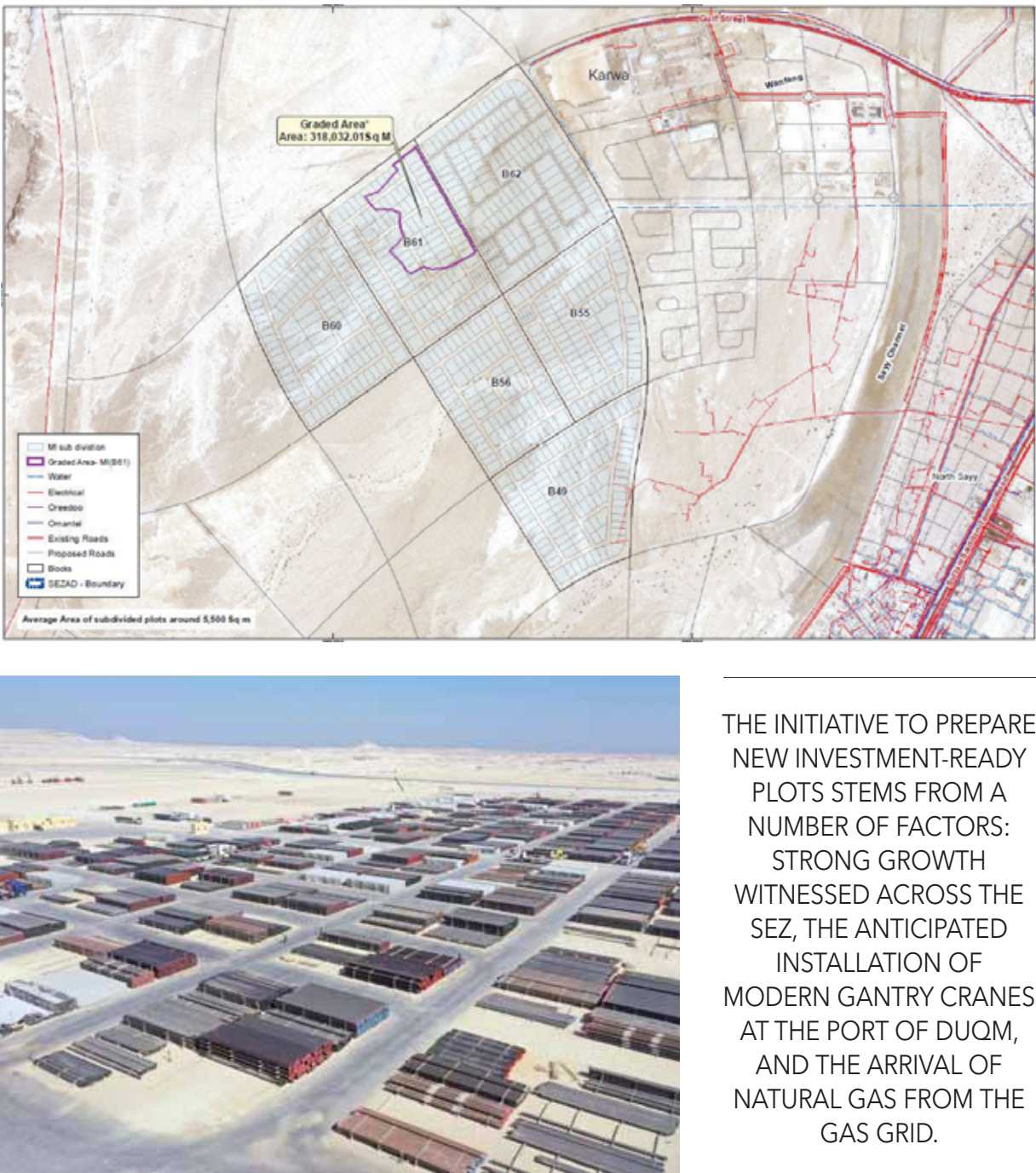
The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) has announced it has readied plots covering a total area of 10 million square metres for industrial investment.

Besides levelling and grading of the plots, SEZAD is also working to enhance the infrastructure of these lands by providing electricity, water and gas services to get them ready for investors.

The initiative to prepare new investment-ready plots stems from a number of factors: Strong growth witnessed across the SEZ, the anticipated installation of modern gantry cranes at the Port of Duqm, and the arrival of natural gas from the gas grid.

It also complements the facilities and incentives offered by the Zone to investors, commitments to complete land usufruct applications expeditiously and pledges to support the early start-up of investment projects.

In addition, interested investors can take advantage of the electronic service for the direct selection of lands that was recently launched by the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) at SEZAD. Investors could select the plot of land directly from the Zone's masterplan once they determine the type of their



THE INITIATIVE TO PREPARE NEW INVESTMENT-READY PLOTS STEMS FROM A NUMBER OF FACTORS: STRONG GROWTH WITNESSED ACROSS THE SEZ, THE ANTICIPATED INSTALLATION OF MODERN GANTRY CRANES AT THE PORT OF DUQM, AND THE ARRIVAL OF NATURAL GAS FROM THE GAS GRID.

investment projects and the plot of land required.

This enables investors to quickly and easily choose the appropriate location among the already levelled and graded lands with the possibility to know the distance between the land and nearby available utilities.

Commenting on these developments, Eng Saleh bin Rashid al Hashmi of SEZAD said the SEZ is constantly seeking to strengthen its support for investors and provide an attractive investment environment to investors.

The investment-ready industrial lands, which have the requisite infrastructure set in place, enable investors to start their projects without bearing any additional costs towards levelling and grading works. The sites are also within proximity of key facilities and projects in Duqm, he said, adding that SEZAD has also awarded a number of tenders to connect all the lands with paved roads.

Covering an area of 2,000 sq kilometres, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm stands as the largest in the Middle East and North Africa. It offers ready sites for commercial, tourism, economic and industrial investment projects, as well as renewable energy related ventures, among other project types.

Key panel to adjudicate over grievances of foreign investors



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has issued a decision setting out the functioning of the Grievance Committee, the establishment of which has been mandated by in the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

The decision seeks to further strengthen protections made available to foreign investors as set out in the Foreign Capital Investment Law. The move comes amid increasing competition between world economies to attract foreign investments against a combination of incentives and investment safeguards.

The committee will investigate all grievances filed against decisions issued by the Ministry or authorities concerned within the context of the Foreign Capital Investment Law.

In this context, a grievance has to be submitted to the committee after 60 days from the date the defendant is notified or made fully aware of the claim. The procedure should be communicated through a standard model comprising all information and documents.

The Foreign Capital Investment Law came into force in the Sultanate of Oman on January 1, 2020. This law, which had been promulgated on July 1, 2019, with the issuance of Royal Decree 50/2019, regulates direct foreign investment in the Sultanate with the aim of providing an attractive investment environment that will encourage more investors to invest directly in the country.

The new law grants incentives and privileges to foreign investors as well as guarantees certain rights of foreigners who invest in the country.

— **With inputs from ONA**

Spiralling global inflation fuelling commodity price increases in MENA: IMF report

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 29

A report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned that spiralling international inflation is a principal factor behind rising commodity prices in the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) region.

"Food prices accounted for about 60 per cent of last year's increase in headline inflation in the Middle East and North Africa, excluding the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Hence, we project inflation to remain elevated in the region in 2022 at 13.9 per cent — a significant upward revision relative to our previous projections in October", the world body noted in a recent IMF Blog titled 'Middle East and North Africa's Commodity Importers Hit by Higher Prices'.

In the Sultanate of Oman, inflation rose by 2.7 per cent in



April 2022 compared to April 2021, according to the latest data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

In March 2022, the inflation rate also went up by 0.6 per cent compared to March 2021. The NCSI data indicates an uptick in the prices of the main representative indicators during April 2022 compared to the same

month in 2021, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages (5.4 per cent), education (5.1 per cent), health (2.8 per cent), transport (2.4 per cent), miscellaneous goods and services (2.2 per cent), housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels group (2 per cent), recreation and culture (1.4 per cent), restaurants and hotels (1.2 per cent), clothing and footwear

(1.1 per cent) and furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance (0.3 per cent).

However, the tobacco group declined by 1.1 per cent. The increases were steeper for oils and fats (14.9 per cent), vegetables (9.8 per cent), fruits (8 per cent), meats (7.7 per cent), fish and seafood (6.5 per cent), bread and cereals (2.7 per cent), sugar, jam, honey and sweets (1.8 per cent), milk, cheese and eggs (1.3 per cent) and other foodstuff (0.9 per cent).

However, the prices of non-alcoholic beverages went down by 0.2 per cent.

Significantly, the IMF blog urges policymakers in the MENA region to be aware of all the risks and the impact of high international prices on the people.

"It is urgent that countries address food security risks and mitigate the impact of high international prices on the poor.

The most effective way is to ensure vulnerable households are protected with targeted, temporary and transparent transfers.

Where safety nets are less strong, prices could be raised gradually. For low-income countries, sustained financial support from the international community is crucial", the authors said in the report.

"For countries with high debt, these measures should be accompanied by offsetting measures elsewhere — for example, cutting unnecessary spending, promoting additional tax equity, or a combination of the two — to safeguard debt sustainability given limited fiscal space, also coordinating fiscal and monetary policies and anchoring them in credible medium-term policy frameworks will help ease these trade-offs", they further added.

Agenda finalised for 2nd GHSO conference & exhibition

MUSCAT: International visitors and delegates attending the 2nd Green Hydrogen Summit Oman (GHSO) conference and exhibition, due to take place in Muscat later this year, can look forward to a carefully curated conference agenda that aligns perfectly with the broad objectives of Oman's future green energy-focused economy.

The conference agenda, focusing on high-impact segments of the green hydrogen economy, is the product of two days of animated deliberations by members of the GHSO Technical Committee who gathered together recently amid the spectacular settings of Jabal Akhdhar, one of Oman's most popular tourist hotspots.

The mountaintop conclave was made possible courtesy of generous funding support from

United Finance, a leading non-banking financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman.

Taking part in the discussions were: Prof Dr Ing Michael Modigell, former rector of GÜtech (Chairman), Dr Khalil al Hanashi of Energy Renewal (PDO); Basil El Zein — Integration Manager, Shell; Olav Carlsen, CEO — Hydrogen Rise; Dr Rashid al Abri — Head of Sustainable Renewable Energy Center SQU; Talal al Wahaibi, Associate Professor at Engineering Department, Al Sharqiyah University; Dr Ruth Prelicz, Geostrategic Adviser — AHK; Cédric Roux, Green Hydrogen Technical Manager — TotalEnergies; Eng Faiza al Harthy, Energy Sector Head, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation & Follow-up Unit; and Nasser al Rizeiqi, Hydrogen/New Energies Specialist — Ministry of Energy



and Minerals.

As Oman's signature platform for green hydrogen, this year's edition of the GHSO Conference & Exhibition will focus primarily on the nation's strategy to develop a world-class industry that, on

the one hand, meets the energy requirements of the Sultanate of Oman's future low-carbon economy, and on the other, serve as a major global supplier of the carbon-neutral fuel.

Accordingly, expert

presentations spread over the two-day summit will offer high-level perspectives on, among other themes, Oman's energy transition, underlying policies and regulatory frameworks, the vision of a green hydrogen hub in the Sultanate of Oman, current and future renewable/green hydrogen projects, ICV and localisation opportunities, technological developments and R&D prospects.

For the first time, a session dedicated to student research in the green energy space will be one of the highlights of the summit. GHSO 2022, which will be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) Muscat from December 5-7, 2022, continues to garner local and international interest in light of the Sultanate of Oman's leading position as a potential frontrunner

among green hydrogen producers.

Organised by Birba Energy in cooperation with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the forum has already received sponsorship support from a number of leading energy companies, developers and technology providers.

Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL) and Asyad Group have signed up as Strategic Partners.

Also backing the event are leading global organisations notably the International Energy Agency (IEA), Green Hydrogen Lab, Arab-German Chamber of Commerce and Industry, AKH German Industry and Commerce, and World Hydrogen Leaders.

For further details regarding registration, sponsorship, partnership and exhibition space, check out the dedicated website: greenhydrogensummitoman.com.

NBO introduces new customer experience training programme

MUSCAT: Aiming for greater customer satisfaction, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has introduced a dynamic new customer experience programme for all branch employees.

Known as 'Dhiyafa', a value that cascades down from the aim to implement a long-term company-wide mindset towards exceeding customer expectations and delivering a seamless experience.

The course will run for three months and focus on communication etiquette, customer expectations, standards for serving customers, face-to-face interactions and all aspects of the NBO customer experience.

Dhiyafa reflects NBO's commitment to staff development and customer satisfaction by enhancing frontline services.

One of the most important



objectives of Dhiyafa to ensure the connection between the bank and customers remains strong, mirroring NBO's approach to delivering the right innovative products and services through the right channel to empower customers to reach their financial goals and achieve an ultimate customer experience.

Said al Marhoobi (pictured), Head of Customer Experience at NBO, said, "NBO places people

at the heart of everything it does and Dhiyafa intersects our strategy across all of the bank's operations and our dedication to our customers.

The objectives of Dhiyafa reflect NBO's core values and will help to create a sustainable and self-perpetuating culture across the bank's entire branch network. Our mission is to continue innovating our products as well as ways to exceed expectations and delight customers."

Enhancing the capabilities and effective deployment of NBO's people through empowering career development programmes have been identified as key to achieving and delivering the bank's strategic and business objectives. The bank will continue to equip its employees with the skills required to better serve our customers.

ahli islamic extends finance offers

MUSCAT: Reaffirming its commitment to foster a savings culture among its customers and champion their goals with flexible schemes and ventures, ahli islamic has extended its popular Ramadhan offer of auto, home and personal finance.

The finance bundle, launched during the Holy Month of Ramadhan was designed to assist customers with their personal obligations and aspirations, was a major success, and will be extended further, providing account holders with a convenient finance facility to tide over budgetary constraints.

While the provision of auto finance will bolster plans of car enthusiasts who could not avail the offer during the month of Ramadhan, when car sale campaigns were in full swing, the comprehensive home and personal finance will provide anchorage for customers



seeking to renovate/construct/purchase home or fulfil personal requirements.

Salary-transfer customers of ahli islamic can avail mortgage-free auto finance starting from as low as 3.49%; the same will also be available for customers whose salaries are not transferred to ahli islamic, at the profit rate of 4.99%. Personal and home finance will be offered at 4.75%, encouraging customers to take conclusive decisions on their home plans

or to fulfil any immediate/long-term personal needs.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic said, "Our main objective is to strengthen our customers' purchasing powers with requisite financial packages. We are constantly creating stronger avenues for our customers' growth and focusing on delivering exceptional banking experiences. The extension of these offers stems from our objective to constantly support customers with their socio-economic needs.

Over the years, we have realised the significance of flexible financial offers that are not occasion bound. Although special occasions are major draws for consumer spending, there are segments of buyers whose purchase decisions are triggered by personal evaluations."

Exceptional banking experience with Maisarah's high yield account

MUSCAT: Central to its commitment to enrich its customers' experience with a diverse bundle of savings and investment solutions that are tailored to meet the specific needs of retail banking customers across the Sultanate of Oman, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services continues to offer expected profit rates of up to 2.5% per annum for High Yield Account holders.

"The High Yield Account is based on the Islamic concept of Mudarabah and it comes with added benefits to those who want to save money while earning competitive expected monthly profit," stated Mohammed bin Ahmed al Maashani — Head of Distribution Network at Maisarah.

"This is not a completely new product; however, it is an enhanced version of Maisarah's Savings Account. The attractive expected profit rates per annum of up to 2.5% are subject to applicable weightages for each month."

Maisarah, the Sharia-compliant



window of BankDhofar, has been at the forefront of bringing about customised solutions that meet customers' aspirations and exceed their expectations.

In addition to the High Yield Account, Maisarah's customers can avail a wide selection of banking solutions that suit their requirements, including Fixed

Deposits, Ameen Term Deposit, Mudarabah Saving Account, Current Account and Ameen Investment Account. Maisarah also offers various finance schemes that include Auto Finance, Home Finance, Property Finance, Goods Finance, Personal Finance, Education Finance, Travel Finance and Commercial Finance.

Customers can enjoy an exceptional banking experience with the added services under the High Yield Account such as instant issuance of debit card, cardless cash, instant fund transfers and 24/7 digital banking experience.

Attractive savings and investment options can be availed at any of Maisarah's branches in Athaiba, Al Hail, Salalah, Suhar, Birkat Al Mouz, Greater Muttrah, Al Khuwair, Sur, New Salalah and Araqi. To learn more, visit the nearest Maisarah Islamic Banking Services branch, check out the official page www.maisarah-oman.com or call 24775777 for further inquiries.

Since the launch of its operations in 2013, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services has set its vision to be the best Islamic banking services provider in Oman, and it has demonstrated a high degree of product innovation with an expansive range of Sharia-compliant financial solutions that cater to the needs of retail and corporate customers.

GAC Motor GA4 now with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: Own the GA4 sedan and avail exclusive benefits. The benefits include manufacturer's warranty — 5 years/150,000 kms, comprehensive insurance 1 year (Oman & UAE) and a chance to win raffle — one GA4 GB 1.3 T.

The campaign is valid until June 9, 2022 (Conditions apply. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom).

The stunning GA4 is designed to immediately draw attention, with its halogen headlamps, sharp daytime running lights and halogen front fog lamps. Interestingly the halogen headlamps are also equipped to allow height adjustment, alert through alarm and courteously guide the owner home with the follow-me-home ability.

The clean flowing lines on

the GA4 move outwards from the front all the way to the rear. Highlighting the inspiring design language is the imposing and stunning grille, that's makes a positive impression on every arrival.

In Oman, GAC Motor vehicles are distributed by New World Autos and backed by Saud Bahwan Group. For more information, please visit www.gacmotoroman.com or www.youtube.com/GACMotorOman or www.facebook.com/GACMotorOman or instagram.com/GACMotorOman/.

For further details, & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah, Seeb, Nizwa, Sur and Suhar.



India faces wider coal shortages, worsening power-outage risks



Workers lift a basket full of coal at an industrial area in Mumbai. — AFP

NEW DELHI: India is expected to face a wider coal shortage during the quarter ending September over expectations of higher power demand, an internal power ministry presentation, worsening risks of widespread power outages.

The energy-hungry nation expects local coal supply to fall 42.5 million tonnes short of demand in the September quarter, 15 per cent higher than previously projected, due to higher growth in power demand and lower output from some mines.

The grim forecast shows the extent of the fuel shortage in India, at a time when annual power demand is seen growing at the fastest rate in at least 38 years and global coal prices are trading at near-record levels due to a supply crunch resulting from the Russia-Ukraine crisis.

India has stepped up pressure on utilities to increase imports in recent days, warning of cuts to supply of domestically mined coal if power plants do not build up coal inventories through imports.

However, one of the slides

in the presentation showed that most states had yet to award contracts to import coal and that Indian utilities would run out of coal by July if no coal was imported.

Only one state had awarded a contract to import coal as of end-April, a power ministry import status report showed. India expects domestic coal supply of 154.7 million tonnes, 42.5 million tonnes short of the projected requirement of 197.3 million tonnes in the September quarter, the presentation showed. It previously expected a shortage of 37 million tonnes.

The presentation was made on Friday in a virtual meeting in which the federal coal and power ministers were present, with top energy officials from the federal government and the states in attendance, according to two government officials familiar with the matter.

Coal inventories at power plants have declined by about 13 per cent since April, which translates to eight days of coal requirement, the lowest level at this time of the year in at least nine years. — **Agencies**

Qatari tech firm acquires Akeed, announces Oman foray

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 29

Snoonu, a leading technology company in Qatar, has announced the acquisition of Omani delivery platform Akeed for \$10 million.

The announcement came at a Snoonu Gala held in Doha on Saturday. Akeed's acquisition by Snoonu is the first by the latter outside of Qatar, and signals the start of its geographical expansion starting with the Sultanate of Oman. Besides strengthening its position regionally, the acquisition will also support Snoonu's market diversification objectives.

Present at the gala were members of the management of both companies. Hamad Mubarak al Hajri, CEO and co-founder of Snoonu, said the acquisition was



a decision they took based on Akeed's excellent reputation as one of the leading food delivery platforms in the Sultanate of Oman.

Akeed CEO Gaurav Anil Nahar said the company is pleased to conclude this agreement with Snoonu. "We look forward to a future vision that brings us in

the Sultanate of Oman the latest in e-commerce and the logistics sector," he commented.

Snoonu, a homegrown tech platform, is Qatar's leading is Qatar's leading local delivery app, that enables users to order anything, including food, grocery, electronics, clothes, and other merchandise.

Established in 2019, Snoonu has expanded to become an online e-commerce platform as well which utilizes a mobile application that has local stores, restaurants, groceries, shops, and their online ordering menu listed, from which we provide delivery using a fleet of personnel, enabling people to order food, laundry, gifts, flowers, health and beauty products and more at their convenient places.

Serbia secures new gas agreement with Russia

BELGRADE: Serbia, which has been trying to tread a delicate balancing act between East and West since Moscow invaded Ukraine, said on Sunday it has secured a new long-term contract with Russia to ensure that it has sufficient gas supplies next winter.

As energy prices soar across the globe, the exact terms of the deal — which will ensure Serbia has "a safe winter when it comes to gas supply" — will be announced in the coming days, said President Aleksandar Vucic. Vucic insisted the contract would give the Balkan country "by far the best terms in Europe".

"At the moment, this is almost a third of what everyone else in Europe will pay, and in winter it will represent than one tenth" of

what other countries pay, he said.

Serbia is currently almost wholly reliant on Russian energy supplies and imports about six million cubic metres of gas daily from Russian giant Gazprom.

Moscow also owns a majority stake in Serbia's oil and gas company, NIS. But the deal comes at a time when the European Union is trying to reduce its dependence on Russia for energy following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, and is scheduled to discuss a possible embargo on Russian oil at an emergency summit on Monday.

Vucic also said that he had discussed with Russian President Vladimir Putin the possible expansion of gas storage facilities in Serbia. — **AFP**

Airline easyJet cancels more than 200 flights

LONDON: Low-cost carrier easyJet is to cancel more than 200 flights over the next 10 days due to airport delays and other restrictions, disrupting travel during the school holidays.

The European airline has been hit by a string of problems since the removal of Covid restrictions led to a rebound in travel, with many British airports struggling to recruit enough ground staff while easyJet has also struggled with IT problems.

It said in a statement on Saturday it would cancel around 24 flights a day from London's Gatwick Airport between May 28 and June 6. It was forced to cancel around 200 flights on Thursday due an IT problem.

"We are very sorry for the



late notice of some of these cancellations and inconvenience caused for customers booked on these flights however we believe this is necessary to provide reliable services over this busy period", it said.

"Customers are being informed from today and provided with the option to rebook their flight or receive a refund and can apply for compensation in line with regulations." — **Agencies**

Despite headwinds, the economy is looking up

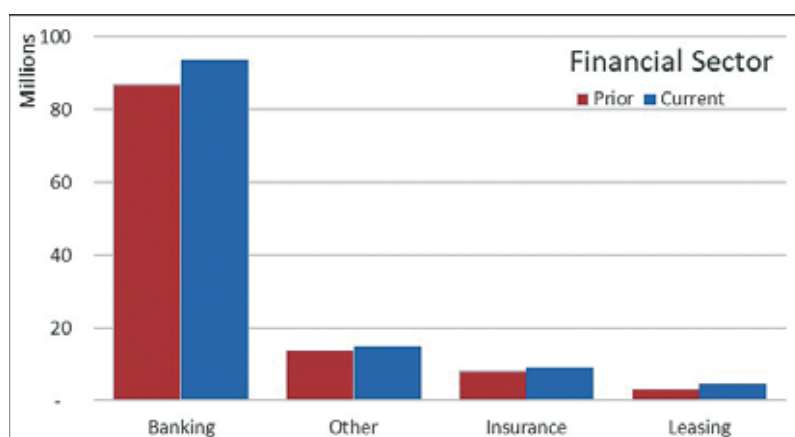


KARL JACKSON

MUSCAT: As we wave goodbye to two downbeat years of Covid, Oman SAOGs are now in positive territory, with a general improvement in Y-o-Y profitability, despite a few worrying sectors that are more directly impacted by the outbreak of war between Russia and the Ukraine, which is putting huge pressure on the supply side.

With localised disasters/events now having such huge impacts throughout the world, we really do seem to be witnessing Edward Lorenz's chaos theory metaphorical argument that a butterfly flapping its wings can cause a hurricane.

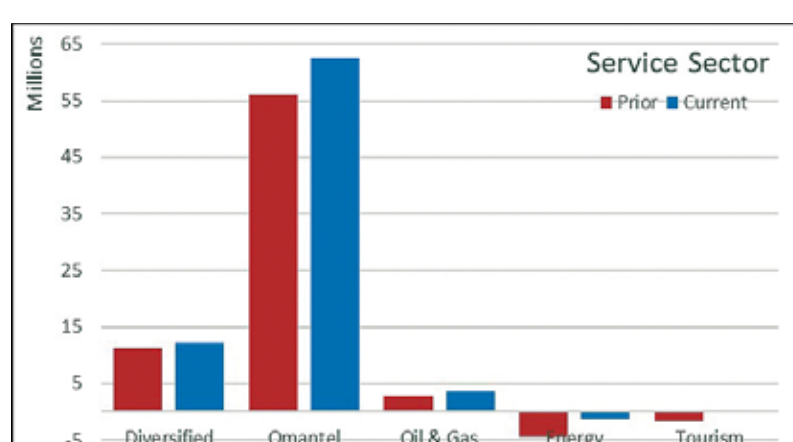
In the financial sector, we see the banks and leasing companies have shrugged off the high ECL impairment charges of 2021 and, with asset portfolios that have remained high due to the lack of



repayments (due in a big part to the CBO mandated loan deferrals arrangements), have been able to post increased profits this year.

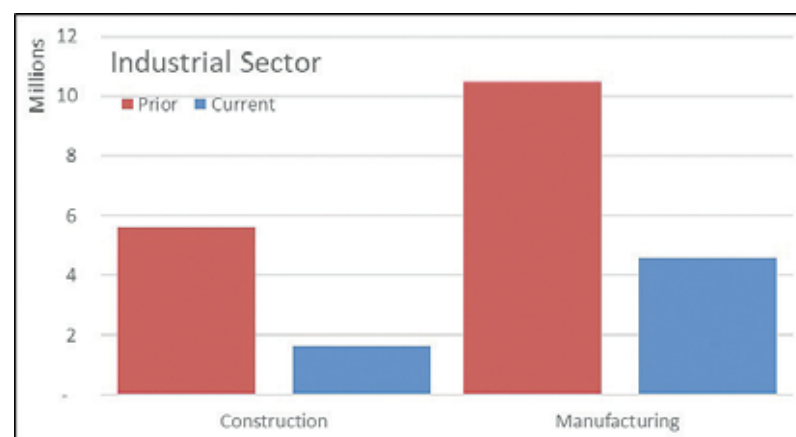
However, the remainder of 2022 will be a very critical year for the banks, as many customers are now exiting from the deferral programmes and further loan restructures/deferrals will be made on more commercial grounds with their bankers. It is unlikely that they will all be successful.

However, the banks have a canny way of making their good customers pay for their bad customers. Whilst the insurance companies are struggling to return to pre-Covid levels of profitability



(as premium pricing in a smaller market is challenging), they have benefitted from increased values of their asset portfolios.

The industrial sector, comprising of construction and



the sector with a combined RO 4.5m reduction in profitability.

The story within the manufacturing sector, is primarily an external one.

Many of the companies are struggling as they are unable to pass on the higher cost of imported raw materials and shipping to customers, either within Oman or in the overseas markets they export to.

A situation that is only going to get worse, the longer the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine continues.

Finally, as we look at the service sector, we can definitely observe the early shoots of recovery. Despite the entry of Vodafone

to the local market, Omantel continues its dominance and Renaissance Services has led the way in the diversified sector.

Within the oil and gas sector, we see the 3 petrol station owners showing improvements as lockdowns and working from home become just memories.

Although not a major sector for listed companies, the six hotels within the tourism sector have definitely turned the corner as tourists return and physical conventions start taking place, as we try and say goodbye to webinars.

The energy sector is the most interesting. Overall, the companies reporting in both years have reduced their losses but missing from the list are ACWA Power, Al Kamel Power and United Power that have ceased operations following the introduction of the spot market for electricity.

[This article, written by Karl Jackson, an Audit and Assurance Partner with Crowe Oman, is based on financial data published by the Muscat Stock Exchange. He may be contacted at: karl.jackson@crowe.om]

UK companies to trial four-day workweek

Louis Bloomsfield inspects the kegs of beer at his brewery in north London, eagerly awaiting June, when he will get an extra day off every week. The 36-year-old brewer plans to use the time to get involved in charity work, start a long-overdue course in particle physics, and spend more time with family.

He and colleagues at the Pressure Drop brewery are taking part in a six-month trial of a four-day working week, with 3,000 others from 60 UK companies.

The pilot — touted as the world’s biggest so far — to help companies shorten their working hours without cutting salaries or sacrificing revenues.

Similar trials have also taken place in Spain, Iceland, the United States and Canada. Australia and New Zealand are scheduled to start theirs in August.

Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, a programme manager at 4 Day Week Global, the campaign group behind the trial, said it will give firms “more time” to work through challenges, experiment with new practices and gather data.

Smaller organisations should find it easier to adapt, as they can make big changes more readily, he said.

Pressure Drop, based in Tottenham Hale, is hoping the experiment will not only improve their employees’ productivity but also their well-being.

At the same time, it will reduce their carbon footprint.

The Royal Society of Biology, another participant in the trial, says it wants to give employees “more autonomy over their time and working patterns”.

Both hope a shorter working week could help them retain employees, at a time when UK businesses are confronted with severe staff shortages, and job vacancies hitting a record 1.3 million.

Pressure Drop brewery’s co-founder Sam Smith said the new way of working would be a learning process.

“It will be difficult for a company like us which needs to be kept running all the time, but that’s what we will experiment with in this trial,” he said.

Smith is mulling giving different days off in the week to his employees and deploying them into two teams to keep the brewery functioning throughout. — AFP

The pilot — touted as the world’s biggest so far — to help companies shorten their working hours without cutting salaries or sacrificing revenues.



UNTHINKABLE WAGE

An employee hands a customer’s order at a fast food restaurant in New York. Fast-food workers protesting in New York city to demand \$20 an hour would have been unthinkable prior to the pandemic, but amid worsening US labour shortage more companies are granting huge pay hikes. But workers at the lower end of the income scale continue to lag behind. As the world’s largest economy reopened amid a wining Covid-19 threat, companies have struggled to fill open positions.

– AFP

Jerome Powell’s Volcker deficit



STEPHEN S ROACH

The author is a senior fellow at Yale University’s Jackson Institute of Global Affairs and a senior lecturer at Yale’s School of Management. He is the author of “Unbalanced: The Codependency of America and China.”

VOLCKER WAS THE QUINTESSENTIAL US PUBLIC SERVANT. HIS LEGACY WAS A SINGLE-MINDED DISCIPLINE IN ATTACKING A PERNICIOUS GREAT INFLATION.

Poor Jerome Powell. With US inflation close to a 40-year high, the Federal Reserve chair knows what he needs to do. He has professed great admiration for Paul Volcker, his 1980s-era predecessor, as a role model. But, to paraphrase US Senator Lloyd Bentsen’s famous 1988 quip about his vice-presidential rival, Senator Dan Quayle, I knew Paul Volcker very well, and Powell is no Paul Volcker.

Volcker was the quintessential US public servant. He smoked cheap cigars, wore rumpled off-the-rack suits, and had a strong distaste for the glitz of Washington power circles. His legacy was a single-minded discipline in attacking a pernicious Great Inflation.

Unlike the modern Fed, which under Ben Bernanke’s intellectual stewardship created a new arsenal of tools – balance-sheet adjustments, special lending facilities, and the “forward guidance” of outcome-dependent policy signals – the Volcker approach was simple, blunt, and direct.

Monetary policy, in Volcker’s view, started and ended with interest rates. He once said to me, “If you are not prepared to act on interest rates, you may as well get out of town.”

Volcker, of course, raised US interest rates to unheard-of levels in 1980-81, and there were many who did want him to get out of town. But howls of protest from builders, farmers, citizens’ groups,

and members of Congress demanding his impeachment did not dissuade him from an unprecedented tightening in monetary policy.

It was long overdue. Under Volcker’s predecessor, Arthur Burns, the Fed had become convinced that inflation was part of the US economy’s institutional fabric.

The price level was thought to have less to do with monetary policy than with the power of labour unions, cost-of-living wage indexation, and regulatory pressures on costs stemming from environmental protection, occupational safety, and pension benefits. Burns argued that oil and food-price shocks reinforced the institutional biases of an inflation-prone US economy.

In other words, blame the system, not the Fed. The Fed’s research staff, which at the time included me, squirmed but raised no objections. Volcker did more than squirm when he took over as Fed chair in August 1979. At the time, the consumer price index was surging by 11.8% year on year, on its way to 14.6% in March 1980.

Volcker was determined to find the interest-rate threshold that would break the back of US inflation. Using the political cover provided by the 1978 Humphrey-Hawkins Act, which formalised the Fed’s price-stability mandate, and drawing operational support from a shift to targeting the money supply, Volcker went

into action. The Fed increased its benchmark federal funds rate from 10.5% in July 1979 to 17.6% in April 1980.

Volcker then reversed course during an ill-advised but short-lived experiment with credit controls in the spring of 1980, before resuming a monetary-policy tightening that eventually pushed the funds rate to a monthly peak of 19.1% in June 1981. Only then did the fever of double-digit inflation break.

By late 1982, with the US in deep recession, annual headline CPI inflation had slipped below 4%, and the Fed started to reduce the benchmark policy rate. Mindful of the deeply entrenched inflationary psychology still gripping America, the Fed moved slowly and cautiously. Volcker, having broken the back of inflation, was not about to “leave town” until the Fed’s mission was complete.

Fast-forward 40 years, and Powell’s problem is glaringly apparent. Yes, the world today is certainly different than it was back then.

But the modern Fed apparently has no institutional memory of the mistakes that it made in the Burns era. In 2021, there was a striking sense of déjà vu when US central bankers treated the initial surge in inflation as transitory and squandered the credibility of well-anchored expectations of low inflation.

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Despite high gas prices, US refiners strain to meet demand

THOMAS URBAIN

Only time will tell how much record US prices at the pump will dent driving demand this summer, but don’t expect a significant increase in gasoline supply from American refineries.

The reason: Several US gasoline refineries have shut down in recent years, or been converted to make other fuels, crimping America’s refining capacity and exacerbating the hit from high crude oil prices in the current energy crunch.

US refineries operated at 93.2 per cent last week, the loftiest level since December 2019 and an exceptionally high rate for a season normally associated with plant maintenance.

It all points to a stressed US energy system ahead of the summer driving season, which kicks off this weekend

with the Memorial Day holiday.

“We’re set for failure,” said Robert Yawger an analyst at Mizuho Securities. “Basically, we’re set for high prices, increasing inflation, and it doesn’t bode well.” But limited refining capacity is also a global problem, according to a note from the Eurasia Group that described a tight fuel market with little relief in site.

“Increased demand is outstripping both storage and production capacity, leading to shortages,” Eurasia Group said.

“Right now, demand is drawing down that storage much faster than it can be replaced, depleting inventories and driving refined product prices higher. While International Energy Agency data from this week shows global refinery throughput capacity increasing, it still remains below pre-pandemic levels.” Besides lifting crude prices, the Ukraine invasion has also pinched supplies of some refined products exported from

Russia, especially low-quality gasoil.

Gasoline prices in the United States have soared more than 70 per cent in last year to record levels, nationally averaging about \$4.60 per gallon. Analysts at JPMorgan Chase believe prices go higher still this summer, surpassing \$6.00 a gallon.

The number of active US refineries has fallen 13 per cent in the last decade and now stands at the lowest level in the modern era.

The list of closures includes the Philadelphia Energy Solutions plant, which had been the largest in the northeastern United States prior to being shuttered in June 2019 following an explosion.

This group includes some refineries that were suspended early in the pandemic as fuel demand sank. Some, such as Marathon Petroleum’s refinery in New Mexico, were never restarted.

The issue has “become a greater concern here in the United States as we’ve shut down a million barrels a day of refining capacity over the last year,” said Andy Lipow of Lipow Oil Associates.

Large US refineries have also been shifting some of their capacity to biofuels and other renewable fuels in light of policies to address climate change favoured by investors who prioritise environmental, social and governance (ESG) goals.

At its Cheyenne, Wyoming refinery, HollyFrontier is converting a 52,000 barrel a day refinery from gasoline production to renewable diesel.

But many in the oil industry are loath to undertake significant new refinery projects in light of the heavy investments by automakers like General Motors and Ford building electric vehicles that will lower gasoline’s market share as a transport fuel.

Major airlines have also pledged to use more renewable fuels, lowering demand for jet fuel, another product at petroleum refineries. Experts also pointed to policies such as ban on the sale of new gasoline-fired cars after 2035 that is being considered by the European Union.

“Laws like that are a clear signal that demand for your product at some point is going to go down,” said Bill O’Grady of Confluence Investment Management. “There is very little incentive to invest.” Building a new refinery requires extensive capital, years of planning and regulatory approvals and would not pay off for 10-20 years, said Richard Sweeney, a professor of economics and the economy at Boston College.

“Gas prices are very, very high and diesel prices are very, very high,” said Sweeney, adding, “I don’t think anyone thinks that’s going to last years.” — AFP

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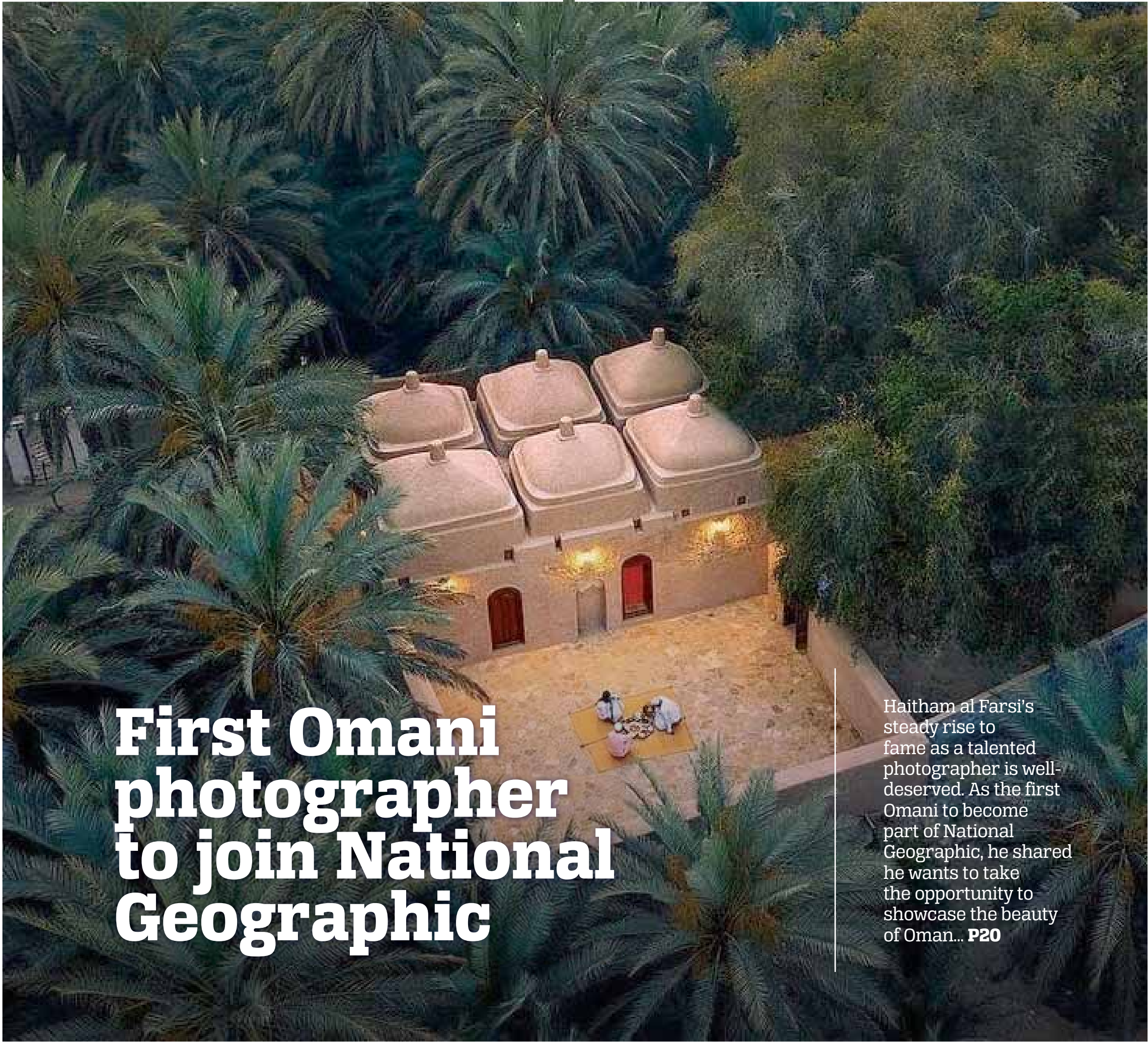
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First Omani photographer to join National Geographic

Haitham al Farsi's steady rise to fame as a talented photographer is well-deserved. As the first Omani to become part of National Geographic, he shared he wants to take the opportunity to showcase the beauty of Oman... **P20**

Jordan's plastic trash turned into art with a message

JORDAN-BASED artist Maria Nissan is on a mission: to rid the world of single-use plastics and to raise public awareness about the environmental scourge through eye-catching art. One of her best-known murals graces the side of a building in the capital Amman, a giant work made from more than 2,000 plastic bottles, almost 1,000 shopping bags and over 150 hookah pipe hoses. A US citizen of Iraqi origin, Nissan said she became enchanted with Amman when she first visited three years ago, but also felt "frustration and anger" at the piles of garbage on the streets and in areas of natural beauty. "Despite the beauty of the city, walking its streets can be a journey

filled with all kinds of trash," the 35-year-old said. "My eyes cannot turn away from the abundant shiny plastic bags, glass bottles, soda cans, candy bar wrappers," said Nissan, who occasionally sports a dress made from a sturdy blue Ikea bag. Trained in painting and drawing in the United States and Italy, Nissan decided to collect and repurpose the trash to create art -- often collages themed on women's faces, flowers and Oriental motifs. Her home, where she has a rooftop workspace under a large canopy, is filled with every imaginable kind of discarded plastic object, from razors and toothbrushes to lighters, pens and plastic spoons.



"Art made of plastic is a concrete and powerful way to raise concerns on environmental issues that affect Jordanians, their children, their communities and natural environments

in the kingdom," she said.

EVERYBODY'S PROBLEM

"A bottle littered in a valley will take up to 450 years to decompose,"

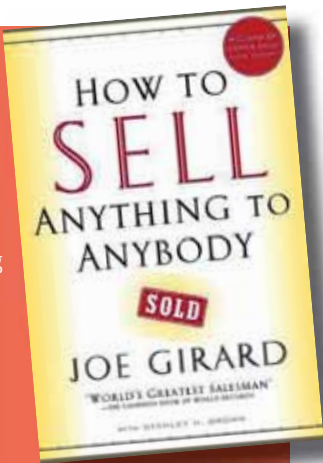
said Nissan, pointing out that the effect is "micro-plastics polluting the soils, water and the wildlife. "Because plastics are littered indiscriminately in fields and water, livestock and fish feed themselves indirectly with plastic pieces that we will ultimately find on our plates." Nissan's work has been exhibited in 12 shows in Jordan as well as in Italy and Greece, and features on her Instagram channel @marianis-sanart, all with the purpose of changing minds and habits. Jordanians use three billion plastic bags every year, part of the country's annual solid waste load of 2.2 million tonnes, of which only seven percent is recycled, according to the UN Development Programme. Nissan urges people to avoid buying plastic products and to go shopping with reusable bags, and also advocates a tax on single-use plastics. "The consequences of single-use plastic pollution are often delayed, and therefore it is difficult to have people feel accountable and responsible for their own acts," she said. "Plastic comes back to us in one way or another ...It's nobody's responsibility until it becomes everybody's problem."--AFP

READ

HOW TO SELL ANYTHING TO ANYBODY

BY JOE GIRARD

Brown's book titled "How to Sell Anything to Anybody." Girard believes that "salesmen are made, not born. If [he] did it, you can do it." In the book, Girard explores his fifteen-year career as a salesman, selling over 13,000 cars to become the Guinness World Record holder



PRIZED FRUITS

A pair of the famous Japanese Yubari melons was sold for 3 million yen (\$23,605) at a season-opening auction in the northern city of Sapporo. The highest price last year was exceeded by 10%, the broadcaster NHK World reported on Thursday. The melons had been harvested the day before. The successful bidder was a food packaging company from the city of Yubari, east of Sapporo.--dpa



DISCOVERY

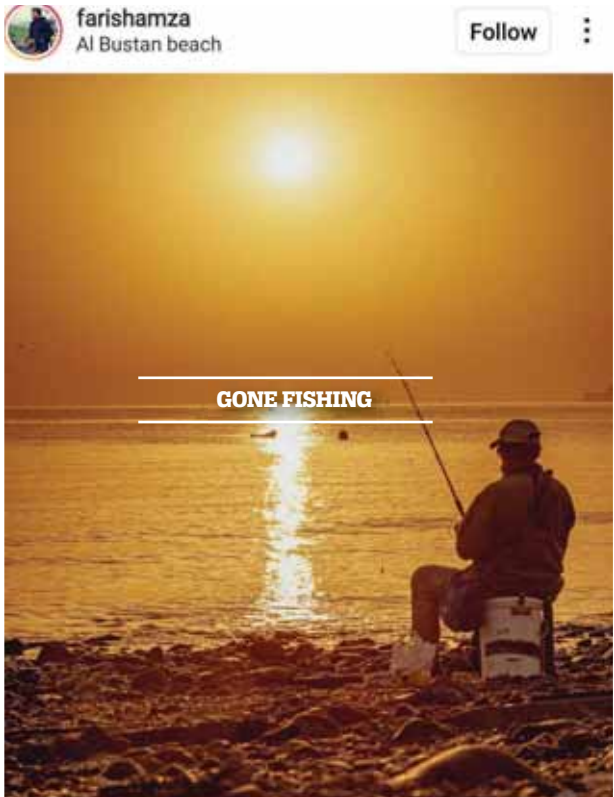
Scientists have discovered a new species of lizard in the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in Peru. The new species was named Proctoporus optimus, after the character Optimus Prime from the "Transformers" movie franchise, which was partly filmed in Machu Picchu, Peru's Conservation Authority said in a Friday statement. Another new species of lizard was discovered in the Machiguenga Communal Reserve, a protected area in the Cusco region of Peru, and named Proctoporus katerynae after the biologist Kateryn Pino Bolaños. Both species are considered endangered.--dpa





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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Baby bumps and hot pink lips: Cannes fashion highlights



IT IS ONE of the special aspects of the Cannes Film Festival that it serves as much as a parade of extremely expensive clothing as it does as a showcase for devastating films focused on poverty, inequality and emotional crises.

What should one wear to the premiere of a film about a family struggling to make ends meet ("Leila's Brothers"), or desperate African refugees forced into crime ("Tori and Lokita") or a biting satire about the excesses of the super-rich ("Triangle of Sadness")?

The answer is always: Something fabulous! Though only for women of course, thanks to the festival's rules about which gender is allowed to be colourful and which is condemned to formal black tie.

BABY BUMP

The hottest fashion accessory in 2022 is the foetus. Rihanna made the baby bump an integral part of her look at Paris Fashion Week earlier this year, and it was the turn of Brazilian model Adriana Lima to put her belly on full display at Cannes. She appeared first in a black robe with the tummy section open. But perhaps her most arresting look of the festival fortnight was the apparent homage to Princess Leia's slave outfit from "Return of the Jedi", which she sported for the premiere of "Elvis".

COVERED UP

Balenciaga has created some very bold looks for recent red carpets — not least shrouding Kim Kardashian head-to-toe in black for last year's Met Gala, or wrapping her entirely in yellow Balenciaga-branded packing tape at Paris Fashion Week. Another of the label's ambassadors, French actress Isabelle Huppert, at least left her face on show this week at Cannes as she coated herself entirely in green — in a dress that covered even her shoes and hands.

DEEPIKA BRINGS BOLLYWOOD GLAM

By selecting Indian superstar Deepika Padukone as one of the jury members this year, the festival guaranteed itself a daily display of Bollywood megastyle walking up the red carpet. Depending on the day, there were elaborate saris, a neck full of jewels, or a sleek black dress and heavy kohl eyeliner, and at one point a giant-shouldered furry black-and-gold combination by Louis Vuitton that looked rather warmer than the sweltering Cannes weather required.

LIPS AND FEATHERS

Jake Gyllenhaal made a rare public appearance with his French model girlfriend Jeanne Cadieu, and her dress was a lip-smacking delight.

The hot pink look featured an image of pursed lips across the chest that led to more than a few double-takes on the red carpet. Other outfits that caught the eye of fashionistas included the silver mirror gown worn by Eva Longoria for the launch of "Top Gun: Maverick", the canary yellow in which Women in Motion award-winner Viola Davis appeared and the black feather dress chosen by Naomi Campbell. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT

Iranian Zar Amir Ebrahimi wins best actress at Cannes



IRANIAN ZAR Amir Ebrahimi, who lives in exile following a smear campaign about her love life, wept with joy as she won the best actress award at the Cannes Film Festival on Saturday.

Ebrahimi, 41, won for "Holy Spider", in which she plays a journalist trying to solve the serial murders of prostitutes in the holy city of Mashhad.

"I have come a long way to be on this stage tonight. It was not an easy story", she told the audience at the awards ceremony.

She said she had been "saved by cinema".

"It was humiliation but there was cinema, it was solitude but there was cinema, it was darkness but there was cinema. Now I'm standing in front of you on a night of joy."

"Holy Spider", directed by Danish-Iranian Ali Abbasi, is inspired by the true story of a working-class man who killed prostitutes in the early 2000s and became known as the "Spider Killer".

Abbasi was denied permission to film in Iran and it was ultimately shot in Jordan.

Ebrahimi became a star in Iran in her early twenties for her supporting role in one of its longest-running soap operas, "Nargess".

But her life and career fell apart shortly after the show ended, when a sex tape was leaked online in 2006 which, it was claimed, featured her.

ABOUT WOMEN

Ebrahimi's character in "Holy Spider" has also been a victim of lascivious rumours and male predation.

The film suggests there was little official pressure to catch the murderer, who ends up a hero among the religious right.

"This film is about women, it's about their bodies, it's a movie full of faces, hair, hands, feet, breasts, sex — everything that is impossible to show in Iran", Ebrahimi said.

"Thank you, Ali Abbasi for being so crazy and so generous and for directing against all odds this powerful thing."

At an earlier press conference following the film's premiere, Ebrahimi said that she had been inspired by her real journalist friends in Iran.

"I know the difficulties they face everyday", she said. "Many of my journalist friends, especially women, left Iran just after me."

EVERYDAY LIFE

Abbasi insisted the film should not be seen as controversial.

"Everything shown here is part of people's everyday life. There is enough evidence that people in Iran have sex, too. There's ample evidence of prostitution in every city of Iran", he said.

Ebrahimi grew up in Tehran where she went to drama school, making her

first film at 18, and quickly became known for playing wise and morally upstanding characters.

In 2006, Iranian investigators began probing a video widely distributed on the black market that purported to show the young soap star making love to her boyfriend.

The leak's author, facing arrest, fled the country. Ebrahimi said at the time that she was the victim of an "immoral campaign". The case became so high-profile that Tehran's chief prosecutor handled it personally.

Ebrahimi then moved to Paris, speaking no French, and kept afloat with odd jobs.

"I knew nothing about the film industry in France", she told daily 'Le Monde'. "There was nobody to help me. It took me two or three years to figure out where I had landed."

At the awards ceremony she thanked France, calling her adopted homeland "exotic, paradoxical — happy but loves to be unhappy".

"Holy Spider" drew several strong reviews in Cannes, with 'The Hollywood Reporter' saying it was "equal parts gripping and disturbing, and not always for the squeamish".

"The Guardian" called the movie a "strangely fictionalised account", but added that "Abbasi undoubtedly conveys the brutal attitudes which create victimhood". — AFP



Rasha al Raisi

The old man who read love stories

DUE TO THE pandemic, my old friend Josip has been locked up in his apartment in Hamburg for almost two years. Having no connection to the outside world but through his landline, I'd call him from time to time to check on him.

We'd exchange quick news about what's happening in our lives in general before we delve into our favourite topic: Books that we've read. Josip is a man with a voracious appetite for literature like no other, you mention an author and trust that he'd read one of his books. Lately, he recommended Luis Sepúlveda's: "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories".

Having read Sepúlveda's, "The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly", I decided to give Josip's recommendation a shot. Needless to say, it was one of the best reads of this year. The book is short (135 pages) yet it's deep and precise.

The main character is Antonio José Bolívar Proaño—also known as the old man—who lives in a village called El Idilio in the Amazonian region of Ecuador. He's not a native though as he'd moved down from the mountains along with his wife ages back when the government decided to inhibit the region as marking boundaries with neighbouring Chile.

The old man gets to learn to survive the jungle and to co-exist with its creatures after meeting up with the Shuar, the natives of the area. More settlers move in and they bring along with them nature's worst enemy: Civilisation. But nature retaliates and dead bodies of gold diggers and tourists start appearing on regular bases.

The governor asks Antonio José Bolívar Proaño to investigate further and find the culprit. That's when Antonio's journey of tracking and hunting the killer down starts. Sepúlveda succeeds in depicting a world far and unknown to the reader yet filled with wonders: The world of the jungle.

In sharing the old man's experience of living with the Shuar tribe, he reflects

the reader's own ignorance and at times questions his/her survival abilities in those dire conditions (I found myself wondering if I could live under constant rain and humidity or if I could eat monkey meat).

The characters of the book are memorable even when they're not mentioned much (the deceased wife), bystanders with funny comments (the villagers) or stereotypical corrupts (the governor). The old man's fascination with reading is heartwarming. The conversation he has with the villagers regarding love stories and their confusion about Venice is witty.

Sepúlveda focuses on the theme closest to his heart: How human greed destroys nature. This could be justified in the old man's choice of love stories which the author describes as: "That sometimes make him forget human barbarity". Published in 1988, the book was an instant success and won the Tigre Juan literature prize. It was translated into 60 languages and sold more than 5 million copies since then. It was turned into a movie starring Richard Dreyfuss in 2001. Like his book, Luis Sepúlveda led a fascinating life. Born in Ovalle in 1949, he was an active member of the Chilean Communist Party and was jailed for two years. He was sent to exile several times and kept escaping to different countries till he settled in Asturias, Spain. Meanwhile, he worked as a journalist, taught, founded theatrical companies, worked to improve Latin American indigenous lives and became a crew member on a Greenpeace ship. He died in 2020 of Covid-19. "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories" is beautiful and devastating. A brilliantly imagined tale that should be on every book lover's shelf.

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of: "The World According to Bahja". rasha.books@yahoo.com

art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | MAY 30 | 2022



Haitham Al Farsi
هايثم الفارسي

First Omani photographer to join National Geographic

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Haitham al Farsi, an Omani photographer has joined the global agency, National Geographic, as their professional lensman among 80 other photographers around the world.

Haitham is a very skilled photographer who started his journey many years ago. His ultimate goal is to feature Oman in a way that is unique and never presented before. He is extremely interested in all the subjects, places and cultures that are related to his hometown; thus, he promised to dedicate his talent for photography to the Sultanate of Oman only.

From Musandam to Dhofar, Haitham wandered with his companion camera snapping many astonishing scenes that amazed his social media followers from inside and outside the country. This made him one of a kind and whenever there is a special event, people wait especially for the photos that he takes.

His interest in the Sultanate of Oman and dedication to his subject involving Oman paved the way for him joining the National Geographic Society as the first and only Omani photographer. The Society invests in remarkable photographers who are following specific standards named by the concerned committees at National Geographic.

"The story did not start recently, it took four years of connection, letters and preparation between me and the officials at National Geographic where they asked me to provide several photos to be posted on the Society's official account on Instagram. It is worth noting that National Geographic is more concerned with the overall message of photos rather than the artistic side of them. The winning photos are the ones that carry deep stories and meanings", he shared.

Haitham knew he was accepted when they finally followed his page and posted one of his most recent and popular photos on their account. The photo displays a small group of people who were having iftar in the holy month of Ramadhan. It went viral and it was well-received by many people and international photographers.

In light of this and to express his joy at his achievement Haitham said: "I am thrilled to be a contributor at National Geographic Society and I hope to reflect Oman's rich culture in this international platform in decent and professional means."

Known to be a photographer with broad cultural interests and a wide circle of friends, Haitham got to visit and see many people and families in Oman to know more about their unique customs and take photos of them. This opened new horizons and opportunities for the photographer to work with other global institutions and agencies around the world. Recently he was contacted by the 'Daily Mail' to provide photos for a report about Oman. He is looking forward to this project being published soon.

As a part of his efforts to show the Sultanate of Oman from an eye of a photographer, Haitham is working on a programme which he named "Senyar". On YouTube, he displays cultural and artistic Omani aspects through short films where he also provides some tips for taking photos in terms of the angle taken and other photographing skills.

Such an achievement is a cause of pride not only for Haitham himself but also for the country as a whole and we look forward to seeing more Omani figures on stage achieving what they dreamed of.

