

The son of late Philippines ruler Ferdinand Marcos on Wednesday claimed victory in the presidential election, vowing to be a leader "for all Filipinos", his spokesman said. With an initial count almost complete, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, popularly known as "Bongbong", has secured over 56 per cent of the vote and more than double the tally of his nearest rival, liberal Leni Robredo. In his first press conference, Marcos said that 31 million Filipinos had "voted for unity" -- but he stopped short of declaring victory as he waits for the vote counting to finish.



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AL HARTHY EYES PODIUM AT IMOLA



P13

POWER REGULATOR PROPOSES TARIFF MECHANISMS FOR SELF-SUPPLY



P18

ROHM PRESENTS PIPE ORGAN CONCERT FEATURING MUNCHNER KNABECHOR



MUSCAT

13,541 PEOPLE REGISTER FOR HAJ

Al Dakhiliyah topped other governorates with 2,455 Haj applications, followed by North Al Batinah with 2,054 applicants, three days after the online registration for Haj on the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs website began on Monday. According to the ministry sources, the registration closes on May 14 and aims to allow 6,428 pilgrims to perform this year's Haj rituals through the ministry. All citizens and residents who wish to perform Haj were allowed to register on the ministry's website to be able to make use of the quota. **DETAILS ON P3**



INSIDE



NEW ZEALAND FULLY REOPENS TO THE WORLD IN AUGUST | **P6**



BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO MEDICAL OXYGEN | **P9**

HIS MAJESTY GIVES AUDIENCE TO RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTER



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

During the audience, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. He also lauded Oman's wisdom in dealing with various regional and international issues. He briefed His

Majesty about the viewpoint of the Russian side on the current crisis with Ukraine.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his appreciation for the visit of the Russian Foreign Minister. His Majesty asked him to convey His greetings and best wishes to President Putin.

On the crisis between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Ukraine, His Majesty the Sultan stressed the importance of adhering

to international law and intensifying efforts to reach political and diplomatic solutions based on dialogue to preserve the countries' and peoples' independence, sovereignty and peaceful coexistence.

The audience was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Morgunov Ilya, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman, and members of the delegation accompanying the guest. — ONA

Oman calls for dialogue to solve Ukrainian crisis

ZAINAB AL NASSERI
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Sergei Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, praised the Omani position in resolving regional and international issues describing it as "constructive and balanced".

Addressing a joint press conference with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday, the Russian Foreign Minister said: "We have identical positions on most international issues", declaring "We value Sultanate of Oman's objective and balanced position on the Syrian crisis, and it can play a role in restoring Syria to the Arab family."

He also added, "We also affirmed to the Omani side our deep belief in the importance of activating negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis to reach a comprehensive solution to this historical issue."

TURN TO **P2**

Assigned by HM, Sayyid Belarab to open Sultan Qaboos Corner

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham al Said will inaugurate the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said's Corner at the National Museum's Renaissance Age Hall.

Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Chairman of National Museum's Board of Trustees, said that the opening of the Sultan Qaboos Corner constitutes a significant feature and is a turning point in Oman's modern's history. The edifice will portray the legacy of the late Sultan and manifest his achievements over the first five decades of Renaissance, which laid solid foundations for a comprehensive development process, said Al Mahrouqi, noting that the country is now advancing with firms steps towards a brighter future under the wise leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Al Mahrouqi added that, after this induction, the ministry will organise makeshift exhibitions showcasing the antiques of the late Sultan in the governorates of Oman.

The exhibits will include gifts made to Oman by leaders of Arab and non-Arab states, and these will in particular depict the country's regional and international status during

the late Sultan's era. Through the inauguration of the Sultan Qaboos Corner, the Renaissance Age Hall will celebrate Oman's modern history and the epochs of progress and prosperity that the country has witnessed since 1970. The pavilion will exhibit the country's evolution into a "State of Institutions", which paved the way for radical changes that enriched aspects of public life. — ONA

World seeks probe into Abu Akleh's killing

MUSCAT: The Omani Journalists Association (OJA) strongly denounced the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by the Israeli occupation troops while performing her job.

OJA holds the occupation forces accountable for targeting journalists and correspondents while demanding international organisations to take legal measures to ensure that justice is achieved based on the protection provided by international laws and



norms and the respect and sanctity of the journalistic profession and providing journalists with safe working conditions to perform their duty and support their right

to freedom of expression and delivering the facts.

OJA offered heartfelt condolences to the family of the deceased and the entire journalists in the brotherly State of Palestine.

Meanwhile, the European Union urged an "independent" investigation into her death, while the United States' envoy to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called for the killing to be "transparently investigated." **SEE ALSO P6**



HM gives audience to Foreign Minister of Russia



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Wednesday to Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.



Photo by Mohammed al Rashdi

Fahd receives Russian Foreign Minister

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, received on Wednesday Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation.

The two sides reviewed the bilateral relations and ways of enhancing cooperation between the two countries. They also highlighted the international efforts exerted to settle various issues to serve the interests of all parties.

On his turn, the Russian Foreign Minister underscored the importance of this visit, affirming his country's appreciation for Oman's foreign policy.

The meeting was attended by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Ilya Morgunov, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman.

OFFICIAL TALKS

Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held here a session of official

talks with Sergey Lavrov.

The two sides reviewed the cooperation relations between the two countries, affirming the keenness of both sides on developing them in all spheres to serve the joint interests.

The two sides also exchanged views on a set of regional and international issues. They underlined the importance of dialogue and cooperation to come up with diplomatic solutions for various issues.

The session was attended by Khalid Hashel al Musalhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department, several officials from the Foreign Ministry, Morgunov Ilya, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Sultanate of Oman and members of the delegation accompanying the guest.

Later in the day, Sergey Lavrov left here after the short visit.

The guest was seen off by senior officials at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Call for talks to solve Ukrainian crisis

FROM PAGE 1

Lavrov stressed that the two sides discussed the overall bilateral relations, including political dialogue and economic and trade cooperation.

The Russian minister elaborated: "We agreed with the Omani side to expand a package of bilateral agreements, including mutual exemption of visas for citizens of the two countries, avoidance of double taxation, and a cooperation agreement between the Russian Museum and the Omani National Museum."

Sayyid Badr affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman supports all international efforts that work to make the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear file a success, adding: "We do not blame any party for disrupting the negotiations, but we support dialogue and direct talk."

SITUATION IN UKRAINE

Sayyid Badr said that the Sultanate of Oman is following with great interest the situation in Ukraine and calls on all parties to exercise restraint and resolve differences peacefully to avoid aggravating the situation. "The Sultanate of Oman also supports all international efforts, especially the efforts of the United Nations aimed at strengthening security and stability in the region," stressing the importance of dialogue and negotiation over the causes of the Ukrainian crisis in a way that guarantees security and peace for all. "Logic will assert itself in the end to reach an agreement," he confirmed.

He added, "The risk of escalation will bring a nightmare more than possible destruction, and we call on everyone to find another way to resolve this crisis. The Sultanate of Oman will remain fully committed to the United Nations regulations and



international law. We will stand by all our friends as they take the difficult and bold decisions to restore peace."

RUSSIAN STAND

Sayyid Badr also affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's commitment to the existing agreements with the Opec+ group.

Commenting on Ukraine war, Lavrov said: "We informed the Omani friends about the developments of the Russian military operation in Ukraine and its geopolitical dimensions."

He confirmed that the objectives of the Russian operation in Ukraine are clear, saying "the first is to protect population in the eastern regions of Ukraine, specially in Donbas region, while the second is ensure that Ukraine, with the support of the West, does not turn into a source of a military threat to Russia."

He noted, "Russia and the Sultanate of Oman affirmed their full adherence to the principles on which the United Nations was based."

He indicated Russia has been opening daily the corridors of

OMAN AND RUSSIA DISCUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS, INCLUDING ECONOMIC AND TRADE COOPERATION

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN SUPPORTS INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS ON SUCCESS OF IRANIAN NUCLEAR FILE

CALL FOR DIALOGUE TO SOLVE THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS IN A WAY THAT GUARANTEES SECURITY AND PEACE

humanitarian passages, "but the Ukrainian extremists prevented the exit of civilians."

On the impact of the crisis on the food sector concerning the supply of wheat, grain and cooking oil to the Gulf countries, Lavrov blamed the restrictions imposed on Russia by Western countries. "These restrictions destroyed logistic and transport chains and closed our opportunities to export food, which is purely offensive by the West."

Recently, we saw a report of the United Nations Secretary-General on food and energy security, which didn't have a word on this topic, and we are surprised that this organisation ignores such issues."

He added, "There is another aspect that the regime in Kyiv does not allow the exit of dozens of ships loaded with wheat, including for this region. The regime lays mines, which makes the exit of these ships impossible. We have repeatedly put forward proposals to organise the exit of these ships, but the Ukrainians do not show any intention of cooperation."



Media from 120 countries to attend IFJ conference

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As many as 248 journalists and other media people from 120 countries will attend the General Conference of the 31st meeting of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) presided over by His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, in Muscat from May 31 to June 3.

Salim al Jahwari, the representative of the OJA (Oman Journalists Association), said three distinctive features make the conference different from the previous editions.

"This is the first time that a GCC country is hosting the IFJ conference and 2nd country in

This is the first time that a GCC country is hosting the IFJ conference and 2nd country in the Middle East after Tunisia

SALIM AL JAHWARI
OJA representative

the Middle East after Tunisia." The Press Photo Award for Journalists, for the first time in the region, will be given every three years, followed by the visit of five media families to the Sultanate of Oman each year. Besides, close association with the Asia Pacific Association for Press

which is coming to Oman for the conference is another milestone of the conference, which is, in turn, expected to give a fillip to the tourism sector.

The meeting, touted as an effort to make Oman the destination for global expertise in the field of journalism and media, to be held at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, is considered to be an achievement for the country and for all journalists and media people.

The global gathering will highlight the overall achievements of Oman, and the IFJ's acceptance for the General Conference in the country is evidence of international appreciation for the Omani press, as freedom of expression is the fundamental criterion for a country to be able to host the conference, according to the organisers.



SQU marks 22nd annual day

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) celebrated its 22nd annual day which marks the anniversary of the Royal visit of late Sultan Qaboos, under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, on Wednesday.

SQU announced the projects that won Royal grant dedicated to funding strategic research projects for this year.

The five winning projects are: 'Flash flood early warning and monitoring system for disaster management in Al Batinah Governorate' by Dr Ghazi al Rawas from the Centre for Environmental Studies and Research (CESAR), 'Improving the quality of water storage using improved strategic selective withdrawal and lack of ventilation taking into account climate changes: A case study of Wadi Dayqah Dam in the

SQU announced the projects that won Royal grant dedicated to funding strategic research projects for this year

Sultanate of Oman' by Dr Mohammad Radhi from the College of Engineering, 'School Bullying in the Governorate of Muscat: An in-depth study and development of national intervention strategies to confront the phenomenon' by Dr Mona al Saadoun from the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, 'Automatic extraction and collection of data from the cancer registry's electronic medical records using processing natural languages and

machine learning algorithms' by Dr Abdulrahman al Abdulsalam from the College of Science and 'Integrated renewable energy for sustainable energy generation for water system applications: A path to the water-energy relationship' by Dr Razgul Ehsan from the Nanotechnology Research Centre.

Speaking at the event, Sayyid Dr Fahad bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of SQU, stressed that the strategic research at the university reflects responsible dealing with urgent issues affecting society and effective solutions are available for them through the scientific competence and knowledge accumulation of researchers at the university. It is without doubt a significant aspect of the work of higher education institutions to contribute to the country's present and future.

OMAN TAKES PART IN ANTI-TERRORISM MEET



MARRAKESH: The Sultanate of Oman took part in the ministerial meeting of the Global Coalition Against Daesh held here on Wednesday. Oman's delegation was represented by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Barami, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Morocco. The meeting explored cooperation and coordination in addressing challenges in the African continent, combating hotspots of terrorist organisations like Daesh and reviewing initiatives to establish stability in the areas impacted with terror attacks and extremism. The global alliance against Daesh consists of 84 countries and international organisations. It was formed in September 2014 with a mandate to eradicate Daesh. — **ONA**

13,541 people register for Haj

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Al Dakhiliyah topped other governorates with 2,455 Haj applications, followed by North Al Batinah with 2,054 applicants, three days after the online registration for Haj on the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs website began on Monday.

According to the ministry sources, the registration that will close on May 14 aims to allow 6,428 pilgrims to perform this year's Haj rituals through Awqaf.

There were 106 applicants from Musandam while Al Buraimi (226), South Al Batinah (1,299), Muscat (2,032), North Al Sharqiyah (1,320), South Al Sharqiyah (1,016), Al Dhahirah (647), Al Wusta (127) and Dhofar (1,174).

There have been 1,085 expatriates who want to visit the holy sites through the Awqaf, making the total number 13,541 as of Wednesday morning, according to the statistics released by the ministry.

All citizens and residents in the Sultanate of Oman who wished to perform Haj were allowed to register their interest on www. Hajj.om to be able to make use of the Haj

quota 2022. "Registration for performing holy Haj this year is open on the electronic system on Monday, May 9, and all those who want to do this year's Haj need to register their names on the Ministry website", the spokesperson told the 'Observer'.

This year's Haj 2022 will begin on the evening of Thursday, July 7 and will end on the evening of Tuesday, July 12

The ministry has set up a hotline for technical support and inquiries through 80008008 during official working hours or submitting a report via the notification screen in the electronic system for registering pilgrims of the Sultanate of Oman via the link www.hajj.om/contact.

Any Omani citizen or expatriate aged between 18 to 65 years can apply to be qualified to perform this year's Haj online. They should have taken the basic doses of the approved vaccines for the Covid-19 with an approved certificate from the health authorities in the Sultanate of Oman and submitted a negative PCR test result for a sample taken within (72) hours before the date of travel to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

MoH workshop on recruitment procedures



MUSCAT: In line with Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Health (MoH), represented by the Digital Transformation Committee, organised on Wednesday a workshop on simplification of procedures titled 'Licensing Medical and Allied Medical

Categories' at the Learning and Development Centre in Al Wattayah. The workshop was led by coach Ahmed al Salmi, Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Office, and targeted the workers of licensing the medical and allied medical categories.

The workshop aimed to reduce the time and resources wasted in recruitment procedures and in issuing licences for the medical and allied medical categories, which will contribute to appointing qualified staff in the public and private sectors in record time.

Oman at GCC municipal conference

KUWAIT: The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the 11th GCC Municipal Work Conference being held in Kuwait. Oman's delegation to the 3-day conference is headed by Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar al Shehi, Governor of North Al Batinah.

The meeting discusses topics such as developing municipal work of the member states, the best practices of geographic information systems and voluntary work in the municipal field.

Education Ministry staff undergo training

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

The Ministry of Education, represented by the Department of Training and Rehabilitation in the Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs, has organised a training programme titled 'Management and evaluation of educational projects' in cooperation with the Centre for Community Service and Continuing Education at Sultan Qaboos University.

The programme, which began on May 8 targeting employees of the Department of Studies and International Cooperation at the



ministry, concludes on Thursday.

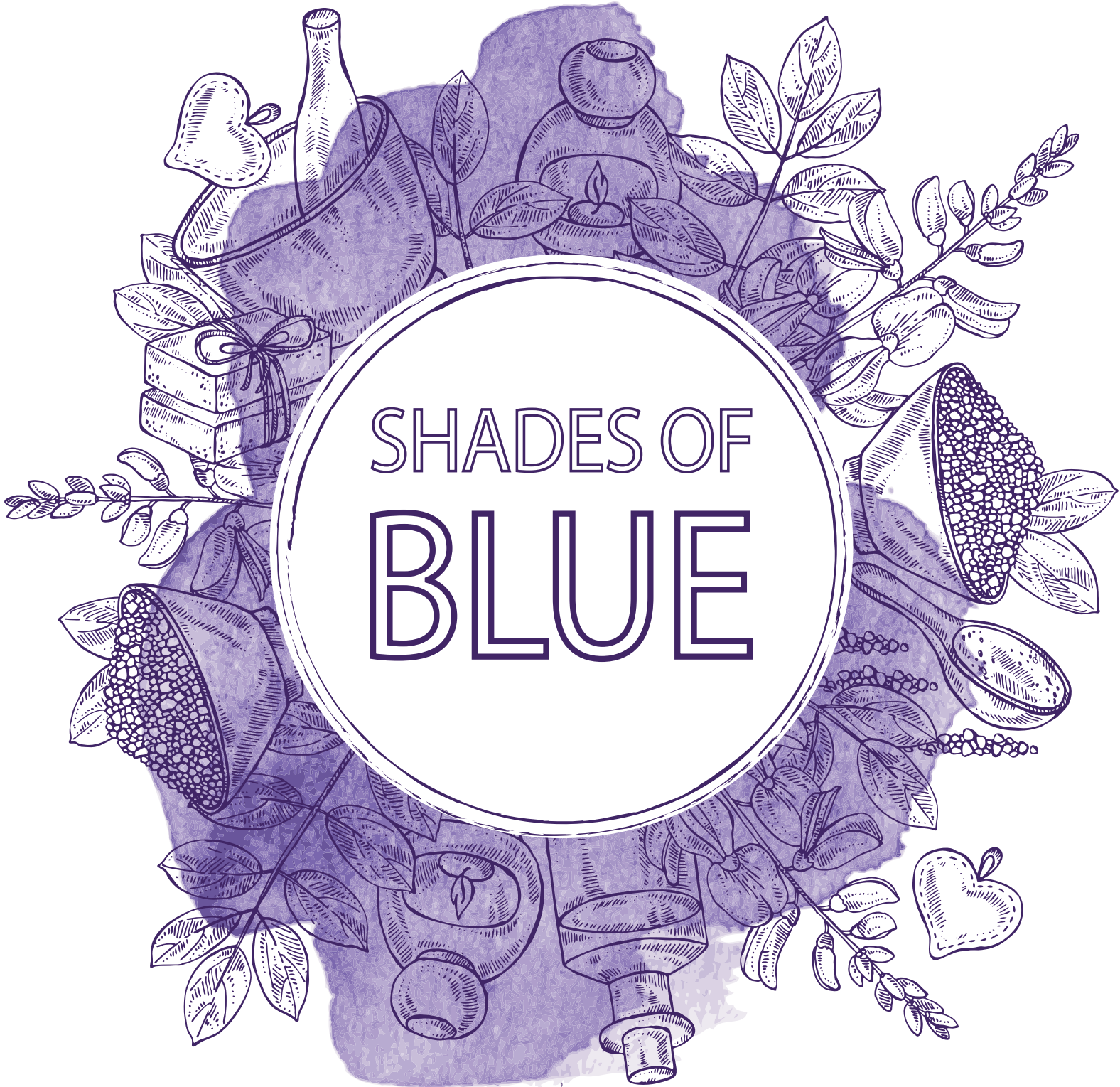
The programme was part of the professional development plan for employees of the ministry for the current year 2022. It highlighted the most important topics related to educational projects, as the programme was aimed at introducing participants to the concept of educational project management and planning,

implementation and evaluation of projects, the phases of projects and their components and the administrative tools included in each stage of educational project management.

The programme also sought to enable participants to practise the administrative tools used in designing educational projects in a practical way, evaluate projects,

deliver, and close educational projects and overcome challenges of managing educational projects in terms of quality and risk management.

The Directorate-General of Administrative Affairs seeks to develop the technical and administrative skills of the employees, which contribute to the improvement and development of the work mechanism in the ministry through the programmes approved by the professional development plan and to provide trainees with basic knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the management of educational projects.



At the Bahla Souq, there is one person who can take his customers way back in time. Sulaiman bin Saif al Yahyai's antiques and gifts shop is visited by people not only to see his collection, but also to converse with him

The World Crafts Council had described about Bahla's indigo – "Indigo is used in the colouring of clothes, especially women's. Blue colour and there are specialised persons who can use this colouring in clothes and are called local dyers"

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Bahla Souq is a traditional market that can meet all the practical requirements, from handmade ropes to utensils to traditional wooden boxes.

But there is one person at the souq who can take his customers way back in time.

Sulaiman bin Saif al Yahyai has a shop called Heritage House Trading, dealing with antiques. The shop's board reads 'Antiques and gifts Shop'. Here one can find the most exciting aspects of lifestyle. In the frame is an auction record of Date Palm Fruits. Adjacent to it on the wall is a wooden cylindrical container to store grapes used in Jabal Al Akhdhar. Attractive are also the traditional footwear made out of palm fonts and ones made in wood.

He even has old boards, radios, metal vessels etc. His career in government service meant he could travel and stay in various parts of the Sultanate of Oman, which also meant a great opportunity to collect antiques. Once retired, he ensured he established his shop for antiques at the Bahla Souq.

He has great satisfaction with his shop of antiquities. People love visiting his shop not just to see his collection, but also to converse with him.

Al Yahyai remembered, "This place was full of people coming from Adam - border of Al Dakhiliyah, and Ibri from Al Dhahirah. People also used to come here specifically to buy Awwal, salted, dried fish."

His interesting conversation can go on for a while as he is flooded with questions, and knowingly he has placed a sitting area. His table is also a display tool because this is where customers can get to see the demonstrations. For instance, one will get to know there is more than frankincense and Bakhoor that can be burned as incense - such as King Rosemary that grows naturally on Jabal Al Akhdhar. And there are many more herbs.

"They can cleanse the atmosphere of the whole house," he said.

He has a collection of coins that could take us through a history class.

He poured out the coins from bottles and showed us the inscriptions. There were worn out coins depicting the exchange of hands it has gone through, coins used in Zanzibar, coins called Anna used in the Sultanate of Oman and India and many more.

"Sometimes I get the coins, and at other times people approach and give me." These old coins are of historical significance, but what was of great surprise was something this reporter had been looking for, for years. Had read about it but walking into the shop's second room gave me the

biggest clue about the topic that has always been on my mind - Indigo of Bahla.

On the shelf was a wood block with floral design that led us to this fascinating journey.

Holding it in his hand, Al Yahyai explained, "The cloth produced was white, but women wanted colours, and these woodblocks were used for block printing on the fabric. Of course, predominantly indigo was used, but they were also mixed with other plants to create different colours such as red, green and yellow."

"Nyla is extracted from the plant Adhlub, (indigofera tinctoria) and this plant was cultivated and harvested. It was stored and kept wept near the aflaj. It used to be grown everywhere. But the last time indigo was produced was in Nizwa in a place called Farq. At Hail Farq the plants were cultivated. But it has not been cultivated anymore like in the past. But we noticed that in the recent rains, the plants grew on their own once again. They are in Bahla too," he added.

Eagerly asked him if he had indigo, sure enough, he walked up to the shelves and brought back containers and laid out the contents and there they were, the indigo blocks with a beautiful hue.

"I sell each block of Nyla for about RO 1.200 and smaller ones for RO 1. The Omani Nyla was used for

many purposes but mainly for dyeing textiles. Mixing with other plants such as Qarrath gave different colours and designs. Another colour was by using the peel or skin of pomegranate fruits. Some plants were brought down from the mountains. Nyla blocks, when boiled, flowed like honey by the time it was ready to be used as a dye," Al Yahyai described.

The World Crafts Council had described about Bahla's indigo - "Indigo is used in the colouring of clothes, especially women's. Blue colour and there are specialised persons who can use this colouring in clothes and are called local dyers."

Indigo textile was of great cultural significance, especially during weddings and childbirth ceremonies. Indigo was considered to have benefits for the skin. They are still used in Dhofar, particularly in the people's attire of the mountain regions - the Jabal. The fabric when worn leaves blue colour on the skin and was considered to be beneficial for health and believed to enhance beauty.

The maroonish shiny cotton material with a blue tinge is also worn with great pride by the Firqat Force in the Sultan's Armed Forces.

There have been few initiatives to revive the indigo tradition of Oman. Hoping the indigo artisans will inspire a new generation and will find new markets. For the time being, the rains have brought back plants.





Cooperation with University of Cambridge explored

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

The Ministry of Education received a delegation from the University of Cambridge on Wednesday by Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Education and Majid bin Said al Bahri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Education for Administrative and Financial Affairs.

The visiting delegation included Prof Esra Ozyurek, Professor of Sultan Qaboos Chair for Abrahamic Religions and Shared Values at the University of Cambridge, Dr Daria Frank, Professor of the Sultan Qaboos Chair for Mathematics and Christopher Whitney, Director of Partnerships at the University of Cambridge.

They discussed the current challenges and priorities in developing education in line with the National Education Plan and Oman Vision 2040, laying out ways to develop an educational system at a global level, and enhancing research capabilities in the education sector. They also discussed related financial aspects such as establishing an effective and



sustainable financing system for the education sector and how to develop and monitor the main indicators for education, due to the importance of strengthening cooperation with such prestigious universities in which there are scientific chairs and presenting joint

initiatives and projects to serve academic and research interests and priorities in the Sultanate of Oman.

At the meeting, the delegation examined aspects of cooperation between the two parties and ways to create opportunities in the field of strengthening

teaching and learning in mathematics through innovative modern methods, making education more fun and exciting in practical life.

The delegation also touched on the idea of the ministry benefiting from the expertise of the University of Cambridge in organising the Math Olympiad competitions and benefiting from the experiences of this university also in providing expertise and educational consultancy for teachers, curriculum developers and decision-makers.

ISG student scales summits of success



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Akshaj Udaiwal, a class two student of Indian School Al Ghubra, Muscat successfully scaled the summits of two mountain peaks of Mount Nangakarshang (5077 metres above sea level) on April 28 and Mount Everest Base Camp (5364 metres above sea level) on April 30 under the watchful supervision of Lt Colonel Romil Barthwal (retd).

The seven-year-old's dream run began as a mere four-year-old when he accompanied his mother, Anuradha Udaiwal, on her hiking expeditions on the mountains of Oman. Little Akshaj claims mountain climbing comes naturally to him and he feels a deep sense of exhilaration as he fearlessly explores the natural terrains of the Indian subcontinent.

Colonel Pradeep Bist, SM identified Akshaj's unique ability and trained him in honing his mountaineering skills. In December 2021, Akshaj created a record of sorts by scaling the Chandrashila summit in Uttarakhand which is 4000 metres above sea level. This feat earned him a place in The India Book of Records wherein he was conferred with the Honour of Appreciation.

"The school is truly proud of Akshaj's stupendous achievement and wishes him luck in his future endeavours," said the school principal Papri Ghosh.

Akshaj Udaiwal is an inspiration for youngsters of his age who dream of creating a niche for themselves in the field of mountaineering.

FOR SALE

SALE OF VEHICLE/EQUIPMENT

Leading Construction Co. in Oman intends to dispose off their used vehicles and equipment, in 'as is where is' condition. The items identified are presently located at their Al Khoud yard and will be offered for inspection to the public on 15/05/2022, 16/05/2022 and 17/05/2022 between 8.00am to 12.00pm and 3.00pm to 5.00pm.

Last date for submission of closed tender is 17/05/2022 at 5pm. at our Al Khoud office.

Interested parties may contact at:
Tel: (+968) 24525345 / 24525314 / 24525303, Mob: 91354151.

شركة عمان للاستثمارات والتمويل
OMAN INVESTMENT & FINANCE Co. SAOG

Khedmah
Powered By OIFC

Report of the Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I have the pleasure to present the un-audited financial results for the three months period ended 31st March 2022.

Operating & Financial Performance

The Group made a net profit after tax of RO. 1.358 million for the three months period ended 31st March 2022, compared to RO. 1.059 million during the corresponding period of the previous year. The net profit after tax of the Parent Company was RO. 1.429 million for the three months period ended 31st March 2022, compared to RO. 0.932 million during the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Group made a profit before share of associate income & finance cost for the three months period ended 31st March 2022 of RO 0.816 million compared to a profit of RO 0.694 million in the corresponding period of the previous year. This profit was mainly due to increase in the collection business revenue and dividend income from investments.

Investments

The Parent company holds the following Investments in associates:

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		March 2022	March 2021
1	Sohar International Bank SAOG	15.42%	15.37%
2	The Financial Corporation Co. SAOG (FINCORP)	21.86%	21.82%
3	National Bureau Commercial Information SAOC (NBCI)	7.35%	7.35%

The shares in profits or losses from associates are accounted as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

The value of investment in NBCI has been fully written off in the parent company books since the company is under liquidation.

The Parent Company holds the following Investment in subsidiaries

S	Company Name	Holding %	
		March 2022	March 2021
1	Wasel Exchange SAOC	100%	100%
2	Afaf Al Musanah LLC	92%	92%

The Financial statement of the subsidiary companies have been consolidated as per the standards laid down by the International Financial Reporting Standards.

Business Outlook

The collection revenues are steadily improving and we expect improvement to continue. Further the parent company is engaged with multiple principles to explore new business opportunities. Unfortunately we have lost the contract for Meter Reading in Zone 3 in this year resulting in loss of relevant portion of revenue. However, the revenue loss has been offset by an increase in the collection business revenue. The Parent company is actively working on areas for pruning costs and increase efficiencies to cover up for the effected revenues due to the current situation.

Acknowledgement

On behalf of the Company, I take this opportunity to express our allegiance and solidarity with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to lead the country to new heights in prosperity and development.

We are grateful for the guidance and support received from the Capital Market Authority, Muscat Stock Exchange and Central Bank of Oman.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Muscat Clearing & Depository Co SAOC Oman Telecommunications Company SAOG, the Electricity Holding Company SAOC (EHC), Muscat Electricity Distribution Company SAOC, Majan Electricity Company SAOC, Mazoon Electricity Company SAOC, Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC, Dhofar Integrated Services Company SAOC, Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company SAOC (Haya Diem), Public Authority for Social Insurance, Oman Qatari Telecommunications Company SAOG (OOREDOO), Awasr, Dhofar Insurance Company SOAG, Oman Post and Oman Future Telecommunications Company (Vodafone) and the Company's bankers for their wholehearted support

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to the management team and all staff for their dedicated efforts and shareholders for their continued support.

Nasser Mohamed Al Harthy
Chairman – Board of Directors

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Income for the period ended 31st March 2022

	Group 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Group 31-Mar-21 RO'000	Parent 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Parent 31-Mar-21 RO'000
Operating income	4,307	5,078	2,997	2,975
Operating expenses	(3,829)	(4,534)	(2,702)	(2,760)
Doubtful debts	81	114	88	133
Depreciation	(204)	(268)	(117)	(175)
Investment income	599	73	599	73
Other Income	40	113	35	50
Reversal of Liabilities	-	300	-	300
Other expenses	(178)	(183)	(127)	(124)
	816	693	773	472
Share of profit in associates	1,436	1,132	1,436	1,132
Finance charges	(898)	(745)	(787)	(656)
Profit before taxation	1,354	1,080	1,422	948
Taxation	4	(22)	7	(16)
Net profit attributable to OIFC shareholders	1,358	1,058	1,429	932
Attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent company	1,365	1,051	1,429	932
Non-controlling interests	(7)	8	-	-
Profit for the period / year	1,358	1,059	1,429	932
Basic Earnings per share (RO)	0.006	0.004	0.006	0.004

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Comprehensive Income for the period ended 31st March 2022

	Group 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Group 31-Mar-21 RO'000	Parent 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Parent 31-Mar-21 RO'000
Profit/(Loss) for the period	1,358	1,058	1,429	932
Other Comprehensive Income				
Net release to income statement on sale of available for sale financial assets	(199)	(253)	(199)	(254)
Share of reserves movement of associates	-	229	-	229
Total Comprehensive Income for the period	(199)	(24)	(199)	(25)
Profit/(Loss) for the period after Comprehensive Income	1,159	1,034	1,230	907
Attributable to:				
Equity holders of the Parent company	1,166	1,027	1,230	907
Non-controlling interests	(7)	7	-	-
Profit for the period / year	1,159	1,034	1,230	907

Consolidated Unaudited Statement of Financial Position at 31st March 2022

	Group As on 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Group As on 31-Mar-21 RO'000	Group As on 31-Dec-21 RO'000	Parent As on 31-Mar-22 RO'000	Parent As on 31-Mar-21 RO'000	Parent As on 31-Dec-21 RO'000
ASSETS						
Non-Current Assets						
Property and equipment and intangible	4,101	4,004	4,087	1,604	1,960	1,599
Investment properties	1,768	1,880	1,768	1,768	1,880	1,768
Deferred Tax asset	1,970	2,053	1,966	1,961	2,005	1,954
Investment in associates and subsidiary	72,350	62,022	72,081	78,806	68,478	78,537
Financial Asset at FVOCI	7,574	7,207	7,764	7,574	7,207	7,764
Financial assets at amortised costs - non-current	-	750	-	-	750	-
Deposits	100	100	100	-	-	-
	87,863	78,016	87,766	91,714	82,280	91,623
Current Assets						
Inventories	509	546	511	40	66	41
Trade and other receivables	25,628	26,767	26,284	22,761	22,805	22,348
Investments at fair value through profit & loss	1,345	59	1,353	1,345	59	1,353
Cash and bank balances	3,704	4,112	3,100	695	1,288	675
	31,186	31,484	31,248	24,841	24,218	24,417
	119,049	109,500	119,014	116,555	106,498	116,040
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES						
Shareholders Funds						
Share Capital	23,700	23,700	23,700	23,700	23,700	23,700
Legal Reserve	7,234	6,902	7,234	7,162	6,842	7,162
Change in fair value through OCI	(1,010)	(539)	(811)	(1,010)	(539)	(811)
Associate reserves	(459)	(347)	(459)	(459)	(347)	(459)
Properties revaluation reserve	501	535	501	501	535	501
Retained earnings	(3,736)	(2,743)	(2,038)	897	1,728	2,531
Shareholder's equity	26,230	27,508	28,127	30,791	31,919	32,624
Non-controlling interest	(205)	(183)	(198)	-	-	-
Total equity	26,025	27,325	27,929	30,791	31,919	32,624
Non-current liabilities						
Non-current portion of term loan	34,142	16,777	23,846	31,103	14,400	20,800
Other non current liabilities	877	782	790	750	776	750
End of service benefits	402	409	432	195	205	214
Deferred tax liability	48	54	48	48	54	48
	35,469	18,022	25,116	32,096	15,435	21,812
Current liabilities						
Bank borrowings	23,124	30,245	30,008	20,775	29,152	27,568
Trade and other payables	32,469	30,302	30,247	31,594	26,891	28,962
Current portion of term loan	1,963	3,606	5,714	1,298	3,100	5,075
	57,556	64,153	65,969	53,668	59,144	61,605
Total Liabilities	93,024	82,175	91,085	85,764	74,579	83,416
Total Equity and Liabilities	119,049	109,500	119,014	116,555	106,498	116,040
Net assets per share (RO)	0.111	0.137	0.119	0.130	0.135	0.138

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OUTRAGE OVER REPORTER'S DEATH IN JENIN



WHO IS
SHIREEN ABU AKLEH?

BORN IN
JERUSALEM
IN 1971

ONE OF AL
JAZEERA'S ELITE
JOURNALIST

HOLDS A BA
DEGREE IN
JOURNALISM
AND MEDIA

WORKED FOR
LOCAL,
INTERNATIONAL
MEDIA AGENCIES
NAMESLY PALESTINE
VOICE RADIO,
RADIO MONTE
CARLO

KILLED WHILE
COVERING
ISRAELI RAID
IN W BANK

Tunisian
journalists
protest the
death of
veteran Al
Jazeera
Palestinian
journalist
Shireen Abu
Akleh, who
was killed
while
covering
clashes in
West Bank,
outside the
national
journalists'
union in
Tunis. — AFP



RAMALLAH/TEL AVIV: Qatari TV channel Al Jazeera accused the Israeli military of murder on Wednesday following the death of its reporter Shireen Abu Akleh in the northern West Bank city of Jenin during an Israeli army operation.

With many facts still unclear, Israel said it would investigate the circumstances of Abu Akleh's death, suggesting that she could have been killed by Palestinian fire.

In a strongly worded statement, Al Jazeera said: "In a blatant murder, violating international laws and norms, the Israeli occupation forces assassinated in cold blood Al Jazeera's correspondent in Palestine, Shireen Abu Akleh."

Abu Akleh was "conducting her journalistic duty, clearly wearing a press jacket that identifies her as a journalist", the statement continued.

"Al Jazeera Media Network condemns this heinous crime, which intends to only prevent the media from conducting their duty."

The US Embassy in Israel confirmed that the 51-year-old, a well-known journalist in the Arab world, was also a US citizen.

"We were deeply saddened to learn of the loss of American and Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh today in Jenin", an embassy spokesperson said, calling for a "swift, thorough, and transparent investigation."

Israel's Foreign Minister Yair

Lapid tweeted: "We have offered the Palestinians a joint pathological investigation into the sad death of journalist Shireen Abu Aqla."

A journalist from the Palestinian newspaper 'Al Quds', Ali al Samoudi, also suffered gunshot injuries in the Jenin incident, according to the Palestinian news agency Wafa. Al Samoudi claimed that he and other journalists had been deliberately shot at by Israeli troops.

The Israeli army tweeted that soldiers had been deployed to Jenin to arrest terror suspects, and that suspects fired at the troops and threw explosive devices. The soldiers fired back, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said. "The IDF is investigating the event and looking into the possibility that the journalists were hit by the Palestinian gunmen", the Israeli military said.

Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas called the incident an "execution." The Hamas movement, which



A woman lights a candle in front of a poster depicting veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh in Bethlehem. — AFP

controls the Gaza Strip, condemned the killing "in the strongest terms", calling it an "assassination." Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said the Palestinian accusations had no solid basis. UN Middle East envoy Tor Wennesland condemned the killing and called for "an immediate and full investigation." The US and Arab League also called for an investigation.

The Arab League blamed "Israeli bullets" for the journalist's death.

— dpa



Journalists escort the body of veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh on the West Bank's Jenin refugee camp. — AFP



A Palestinian woman reacts as the body of veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh is carried toward the offices of the news channel in the West Bank city of Ramallah. — AFP

SHIREEN: An iconic personality in Arab media

TEL AVIV: Shireen Abu Akleh who was killed on Wednesday while covering clashes in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, was among Arab media's most prominent figures and widely hailed for her bravery and professionalism.

In the hours after her death, young Palestinians described Abu Akleh, 51, as an inspiration, especially to women, many of whom were motivated to pursue journalism because of her.

"She never tired", Al Jazeera senior international correspondent

Hoda Abdel-Hamid said by phone from Ukraine. "She was always there whenever anything happened... She wanted to be there, to tell the story, constantly", she added.

In an interview shortly before her death, Abu Akleh, who was also a US citizen, described herself as a "product of Jerusalem", with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shaping much of her life.

She was born in Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem to a Palestinian Christian family. Her mother was born in west Jerusalem, before the

creation of Israel in 1948, and her father was from Bethlehem, in the occupied West Bank.

She graduated from university the year the Oslo peace accords were signed and then joined the nascent Voice of Palestine radio, before switching to Al Jazeera in 1997, where she went on to become an iconic personality in Arab media. In a sign of her importance to Palestinian audiences, flowers were placed on the side of the road by West Bank residents as the vehicle carrying her body moved

towards Nablus, where an autopsy was scheduled before her burial in Jerusalem.

Journalist Muhammad Daraghme, a close friend who teaches at Birzeit University in the West Bank, said Abu Akleh was "one of the strongest journalists in the Arab world".

Her prominence grew through her coverage of the second Palestinian intifadha, or uprising, from 2000 to 2005. Senior Al Jazeera journalist Dima Khatib tweeted that Abu Akleh was "one of the first

Arab women war correspondents in the late 1990s when the traditional role of women was to present from the television studio".

"Shireen was a pioneer in a generation that broke stereotypical gender roles in TV journalism."

Al Jazeera, the Palestinian Authority and witnesses said she was shot by Israeli forces while covering an Israeli army raid in Jenin.

Israel's Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said it was "likely" that she was killed by indiscriminate gunfire

from Palestinian militants.

Abdel-Hamid said: "We need investigation and accountability, not just investigations that lead nowhere."

In a recent interview, Abu Akleh said she was often afraid while reporting but made sure to avoid unnecessary risk.

"I don't throw myself at death", she told an outlet in the West Bank city of Nablus. "I search for a safe place to stand and how to protect my crew before worrying about the footage." — AFP

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka defence chief rules out military coup

Sri Lanka's top defence official ruled out a military takeover despite the island nation's political deadlock and thousands of troops on the streets to keep order after two days of deadly mob violence.

A nationwide curfew is in effect and troops are patrolling streets with instructions to shoot on sight anyone attacking property or committing acts of violence.

Footage of armoured personnel carriers moving



around the streets of the capital Colombo have prompted accusations from opposition lawmakers and social media users that the country could be facing an imminent coup. — AFP

WELLINGTON

New Zealand fully reopens to the world in August

New Zealand will fully reopen to the world in August, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, ending one of the toughest anti-Covid-19 border restrictions. Border safeguards will be lifted fully and all pre-departure testing dropped from 11:59 pm on July 31, with Ardern saying "New Zealand is in demand and now fully open for business". The controls dating back to March 2020 have been hailed as world-leading in some quarters, with New Zealand boasting one



of the lowest coronavirus death rates among developed nations. However, critics have decried the system as lacking flexibility and compassion, as well as curtailing the economy. — AFP

THE HAGUE

UN seeks donors to stop Yemen oil spill

The United Nations and the Netherlands will hold a donors' conference today to raise millions of dollars to stop an ageing oil tanker unleashing a potentially catastrophic oil spill off the coast of Yemen.

The 45-year-old FSO Safer, long used as a floating storage platform and now abandoned off the Yemeni port of Hodeidah with 1.1 million barrels of crude, was in "imminent" danger of breaking up, the UN warned. The UN says it is seeking pledges



of nearly \$80 million to transfer the oil from the "rapidly decaying" tanker — but that it would be far less than the colossal \$20 billion it would cost to clean up a spill in the Red Sea. — AFP



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In brief

■ BERLIN



EU LIFTS MASK MANDATE FOR FLIGHTS, AIRPORTS

The EU will lift its mask requirement for flights and airports from next week, its aviation safety agency said, as the pandemic eases in Europe. “The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) issued an update to the health safety measures for air travel, dropping the recommendation for mandatory wearing of medical masks in airports and on board a flight, while noting that a face mask is still one of the best protections against the transmission of Covid-19,” the Germany-based EASA said in a statement.

— dpa

■ NAIROBI



BURUNDI SAYS READY FOR ‘DIALOGUE’ WITH REBELS IN DRC

Burundi President Evariste Ndayishimiye says he is ready “to dialogue” with Burundian rebels operating in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo’s violence-torn east, in his first press briefing since taking power two years ago. The president mentioned in particular the RED-Tabara, the most active of the rebel groups, which is deemed “terrorist” by Burundi, as well as the National Forces of Liberation (FNL). “If the RED-Tabara and the FNL ask to negotiate, we are ready to welcome them and to dialogue with them,” Ndayishimiye told Tuesday’s briefing, which lasted more than six hours. — AFP

■ MANILA



MARCOS JUNIOR CLAIMS VICTORY IN PHILIPPINES ELECTION

The son of late Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos claimed victory in the presidential election, vowing to be a leader “for all Filipinos”, his spokesman said. With an initial count almost complete, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, popularly known as “Bongbong”, has secured over 56 per cent of the vote and more than double the tally of his nearest rival, liberal Leni Robredo. In his first press conference, Marcos said that 31 million Filipinos had ‘voted for unity’ -- but he stopped short of declaring victory as he waits for the vote counting to finish. — AFP



Ukrainian soldiers gesture around their anti aircraft missile system near Sloviansk, eastern Ukraine, amid the Russian war of Ukraine. — AFP

Russia urged to take over Ukraine’s Kherson region as battles rage

KYIV: Pro-Kremlin authorities in Ukraine’s Kherson said on Wednesday they will ask Russia to annex the region as Moscow seeks to shore up its gains in the increasingly drawn-out and bloody war.

Gas supplies to energy-starved Europe were also disrupted by a halt in Russian supplies flowing through Ukraine as the international shockwaves of the February 24 war continued.

The developments came as Ukraine said it was pushing Russian troops away from the country’s second city Kharkiv in the northeast but facing stiff resistance from the attacking forces.

Russia has focused on eastern and southern Ukraine since it failed to take Kyiv in the first weeks after the February 24 war, and US intelligence has warned Putin is ready for a long war. Kherson, the first major Ukrainian city to fall after the Russian attack of its pro-Western neighbour, is north of Crimea, which itself was annexed by Moscow in 2014 after an internationally-condemned vote.

Kirill Stremousov, deputy head of Kherson’s Moscow-installed civilian and military administration, said there would

be a “request to make Kherson region a full subject of the Russian Federation.”

Stremousov suggested the authorities would appeal directly to Putin without putting the move to a vote. But the Kremlin replied that it was up to the residents of Kherson to “determine their own fate”. Kherson is just north of Crimea and essential for its water supplies. But Russia also appears set on creating a land bridge to Crimea from its own territory, with US intelligence suggesting it wants to go all the way across the southern coast to Moldova. On the battlefield, Ukraine’s forces were boosted by what Kyiv says is the recapture of four villages around Kharkiv

President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his nightly address on Tuesday that he had “good news” from Kharkiv and praised the “superhuman strength” of Ukrainian defenders.

Ukraine’s general staff of the armed forces said on Wednesday that “occupiers continue to focus their efforts on preventing the further advance of our troops towards the state border of Ukraine” from Kharkiv.

But Ukraine is engaged in what appears to be an increasingly

Ukraine reduces gas supplies to Europe; as Scholz, Fernández warn that war may worsen food insecurity

desperate effort to hold the Russian-speaking Donbas region in the east.

“They come in waves,” volunteer fighter Mykola said of the Russians’ repeated attempts to push south past a strategic river near a rural settlement called Bilogorivka.

Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Argentine President Alberto Fernández on Wednesday warned of the global consequences of the war in Ukraine, particularly in relation to food supply.

“It is a war that has consequences for the whole world,” Scholz said during a joint press conference with Fernández in Berlin, pointing to rising energy prices and the risk of disruption to the global food chain.

There was a possibility that countries such as Ukraine, which play an important role in global

food security, will no longer be able to meet demand, Scholz added. “Latin America is suffering the consequences of the war,” Fernández said. “The sanctions against Russia have consequences not only in Russia, Nearby, the casing of a cluster munition stood upright like a fence pole not far from a team of Ukrainian medics rushing a bleeding soldier from the eastern front.

One of the doctors reassured the wincing fighter that the tourniquet being squeezed just above his knee did not mean he was about to lose a part of his leg. US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines on Tuesday said Putin was “preparing for prolonged conflict” and “still intends to achieve goals beyond the Donbas.”

The war in Ukraine has also fuelled Europe’s growing energy crisis, with Kyiv pressing for an embargo on oil and gas imports from Russia.

Ukraine on Wednesday said Russia had halted gas supplies through a key transit hub in the east of the country, a day after the Ukrainian state energy company Naftogaz said it was no longer responsible for gas coming through Russian-occupied territory.

— AFP

Britain signs security deals with Sweden, Finland

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed historic security assurance declarations with Sweden and Finland on Wednesday, in the face of Russia’s war of Ukraine, pledging to “bolster military ties” and support both countries should they come under attack.

The Prime Minister arrived in Stockholm on Wednesday before travelling to Harpsund, the country residence of his Swedish counterpart, Magdalena Andersson, where he set out a UK commitment to come to the country’s aid in the event of a crisis.

Mr Johnson is set to visit to Finland later in the day, where he is expected to formalise a similar agreement with the country’s President Sauli Niinistö during a whirlwind 24 hours.

An offer to increase deployments to the region, including with Royal Air Force, British Army and Royal Navy personnel and assets, will also be made. It comes as both countries consider the prospect of Nato membership in the face of Russian President Putin’s ongoing military aggression.

Boris Johnson said: “We are steadfast and unequivocal in our support to both Sweden and Finland and the signing of these security declarations is a symbol of the everlasting assurance between our nations.”

“These are not a short-term stop-gap, but a long-term commitment to bolster military ties and global stability, and fortify Europe’s defences for generations to come.”

The declarations build on claims made earlier in the month that the UK would always aid Finland if it were attacked by Russia, regardless of whether the country was a member of Nato.

Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said it was “inconceivable” that Britain would not help either Finland or Sweden if it were in crisis, even “without any big formal agreement”. — dpa

Australia’s election foes get personal

SYDNEY: Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison derided his Labor Party opponent on Wednesday as an unreliable “loose unit” on the economy as he fought to catch up in the opinion polls 10 days from May 21 federal elections.

In their third televised election debate, characterised as the “final showdown” before 17 million Australians cast their compulsory votes, Morrison and Labor’s Anthony Albanese got personal.

“He’s a loose unit when it comes to the economy. He makes things up as he goes along,” said Morrison, using a slang term for someone who is unreliable because of the Labor leader’s campaign stumbles. At the outset of the campaign last month, Albanese forgot both the unemployment rate and the main lending rate. More recently, he apparently had difficulty



Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Opposition Leader, Albanese, attend the third leaders’ debate of the 2022 election campaign in Sydney. — AFP

explaining his party’s disability policy. Albanese hit back, accusing Morrison of shirking responsibility for the slow rollout

of vaccines and rapid antigen tests in the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as for his management of the 2019-2020 “Black Summer”

Albanese accused Morrison’s Liberal-National Party coalition of allowing climate change policy to drift

bushfires and this year’s deadly east coast floods. When Morrison faces challenges, he “blames someone else consistently”, he said.

Albanese accused Morrison’s conservative Liberal-National Party coalition of allowing climate change policy to drift. The prime minister has vowed to mine and export coal for as long as there are buyers, touted a “gas-fired recovery” from the pandemic, and resisted global calls to cut carbon emissions faster by 2030.

“Climate change is real and it is here now. We see it with the bushfires and floods,” Albanese told the debate. “Australia can be a renewable energy superpower

for the world if we seize this opportunity.” The pair also sparred on a string of other policy disagreements: Morrison’s failure to fulfil a three-year-old campaign promise to create a federal anti-corruption commission; Albanese’s support for minimum wages to match inflation; and Labor’s backing for more government funding for childcare.

Despite the public wrangles, including in two previous election debates, the opinion polls have not budged much since Morrison called the election a month ago. A weekend Newspoll gave Labor a 54-46 per cent lead over Morrison’s ruling coalition on a two-party basis. — AFP

War and sustainability



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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation advisor

Even the most pessimistic thinkers would have not imagined that humanity instead of appreciating peace as we are recovering from a global pandemic is now discussing whether we are on a path towards World War III.

We as human beings assume that this impressive Environmental, Social & Governance (ESG) progress that we have made in the past century alone is irreversible. However, as we watch the news of on-going conflicts, especially Russia's war on Ukraine our progress seems fragile and reversible.

While the saying goes that 'the first casualty of war is truth,' it also seems that the second casualty of war is sustainability. For this

reason, it would be wise to launch a global initiative that examines how we can mitigate the war's short-term and long-term impact on the environment, society and governance.

War's impact on the environment

Traditional war in the past few centuries involved using firepower to subdue adversaries through by air, land and sea. Unfortunately, the enormous use of thousands of tonnes of munition means death to countless flora and fauna and thousands of tonnes of harmful emissions to atmosphere that supports the life of every single being on our planet.

This negative impact on the environment is exacerbated by

EVERY CONFLICT THAT ESCALATES INTO A FULL-SCALE WAR PUNCTURES A WHOLE IN OUR COLLECTIVE FAITH IN THE 'INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY'

growing demand for energy from non-renewable sources and weapons, as opposed the healthier trend of prioritising renewable energy and investing in health education and mobility.

Society

As war requires subduing adversaries using any means necessary, psychological war and disinformation become common in our lives and on the internet. Many vulnerable groups in the society fall

victim to the divisive rhetoric that accompanies the conflicting stories promoted by the adversaries.

The clearest recent example of how dangerous divisive rhetoric could get is the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol by groups fed on online hatred for years if not decades.

In Russia's war on Ukraine the rhetoric placing national security interests of the "others" over the value of human lives has made war a preferred way for the nations that are perceived to be stronger to impose their will on nations that are perceived to be weaker.

Governance

What do words such as "international society" or international law mean during

war? I would argue that every conflict that escalates into a full-scale war punctures a whole in our collective faith in the "international society." No victims of war or their loved nor the generations that are and will be scarred by war will trust international bodies to help manage their conflicts.

Just our ancestors were creative and innovative in finding solutions, I have full faith that God has bestowed in us that ability to reason even in the darkest times. I have no doubt that we are witnesses to a historic setback that shall serve as a reminder that we should not let our guard down when it comes to always prioritising reason and peace, environment, society and governance all depend on it.

The path to Nato for Finland and Sweden

Finland and Sweden are weighing membership bids for US-led military alliance Nato after Russia's war of Ukraine upended decades of careful non-alignment.

The Nordic neighbours are already close partners of Nato and alliance chief Jens Stoltenberg has pledged they would be quickly welcomed with "open arms".

Here are the steps they'd need to go through to become full members:

If and when they decide they want to join, the governments in Helsinki and Stockholm will write letters to Nato formally requesting to be let in.

The alliance's 30 current members will then discuss the applications at a meeting of Nato's main decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council.

This would typically consist of the ambassadors permanently at alliance headquarters in Brussels, but can include senior envoys from national capitals, such as a foreign ministers.

At that meeting the allies would decide if they wanted to move on to the next stage and convene talks with the aspirants.

Those accession talks — informally known as the "marriage vows" — check that the countries agree to the obligations involved in being a Nato member. That includes the alliance's collective defence commitment and cost sharing worked out according to the size of their economies.

The talks in Brussels are heavily prepared in advance and usually only last a day in total.

In the cases of Finland and Sweden there are not expected to be any hurdles as both are long-standing EU democracies that have cooperated and exercised with Nato forces for years.

Provided the country applying accepts all the commitments demanded by Nat, its foreign minister needs to agree in writing.

Nato also draws up a report and submits that to the 30 allies for them to make a call on whether to sign the "accession protocol".

From start to finish, a Nato official estimated that for Finland and Sweden this first part of the process could take just "a couple of weeks" to complete. It requires another meeting of the North Atlantic Council to give the final go-ahead and this could take place at the summit of Nato leaders in Madrid at the end of June.

The next stage would then be expected to take longer as the process moves to the national capitals of the 30 Nato members for lawmakers to ratify the decision. This process varies from ally to ally. In the United States it requires a two-thirds majority to pass the required legislation in the Senate, whereas in Britain no formal parliamentary vote is required. — AFP



Choe Sang-Hun

The writer is a Pulitzer Prize-winning South Korean journalist and Seoul Bureau Chief for NYT

In Korea, a new president in the South vows a harder line on the North

Yoon Suk-yeol, the new president of South Korea, was sworn into office in Seoul on Tuesday, using his inaugural speech to make promises to heal political and economic divides at home, to fight for international norms and to offer an ambitious package of economic incentives to North Korea.

Yoon is taking office at a time when conflict in Ukraine and democratic backsliding around the world have become pressing international issues.

He must also contend with an escalating nuclear threat from North Korea and growing friction between the United States and China, two great powers with which South Korea's diplomatic and economic interests are deeply intertwined.

Yoon vowed to meet those challenges by standing up for values like "freedom" and "liberal democracy."

"We, as global citizens, must make a stand against any attempt that aims to take our freedom away, abuse human rights or destroy peace," he said during his inauguration ceremony, held on the lawn of the National Assembly.

Yoon brings conservatives back to the centre stage of South Korean diplomacy, signalling a directional shift in Seoul's policy on North Korea. His

YOON IS TAKING OFFICE AT A TIME WHEN CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING AROUND THE WORLD HAVE BECOME PRESSING INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

foreign policy team has emphasized enforcing sanctions against the North, in contrast to outgoing President Moon Jae-in, who prioritized improving inter-Korean ties.

Under Moon, South Korea had avoided "taking sides" in the great-power competition between the United States, South Korea's only military ally, and China, its largest trading partner.

But Yoon has vowed to align his country more closely with Washington while also mending fractured ties with Japan.

On Tuesday, Yoon said South Korea was ready to "present an audacious plan that will vastly strengthen North Korea's economy and improve the quality of life for its people."

He added that such a move would be possible only "if North Korea genuinely embarks on a process to complete denuclearisation."

Yoon, 61, won the March 9 election with a razor-thin margin against his rival, Lee Jae-myung.

He faces myriad challenges at home, like a parliament controlled by the opposition and a society rife with political tribalism.

Young voters remain disgruntled by deepening inequality and sky-high housing prices.

During the campaign, Yoon was accused of pandering to widespread sentiment against China and promised to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Women, a move that helped him win votes from young men who say the country has been overrun by angry feminists.

— The New York Times



Yoon Suk-yeol is sworn into office as president of South Korea in Seoul on Tuesday.

West Bank families fear evictions ‘at any time’



Gareth Browne

The threat of losing his West Bank land has loomed over Ali Mohammed Jabbareen for more than two decades, but he now fears an Israeli court decision may finally force him to go.

Jabbareen, 60, lives in the Palestinian village of Jinba, part of the Masafer Yatta area in the Israeli-occupied West Bank that has been at the centre of a protracted legal battle. In the early 1980s, the army declared the 7,400 acre area a restricted military area — calling it “Firing Zone 918”.

The army said it was uninhabited, and that anyone claiming to live there was doing so illegally. The roughly 1,000 Palestinians who live there say Masafer Yatta was their people’s home long before Israeli soldiers set foot in the West Bank. Israel’s top court ruled against the Palestinians last week, saying they had “failed to prove” their claim to permanent residence before its declaration as a military training zone.

The European Union condemned the decision on Tuesday, saying “the establishment of a firing zone cannot be considered an ‘imperative military reason’ to transfer the population under occupation”. The ruling made no specific mention of evictions, which are usually followed by demolitions such as one carried out Tuesday at Silwan in annexed east Jerusalem.

But Jabbareen fears they could be carried out with little notice. “We have no information about the demolitions”, he said as he gazed through the open door of his one-room house at an Israeli military patrol stirring up dust on the unpaved road nearby. Army units with clearance to destroy his home, “could come at any time”, he said.

Masafer Yatta residents insist they lived in the area even as control of the West Bank changed hands— from the British mandate period through Jordanian rule from 1948 to 1967, the year the Israeli occupation began. The isolated community is in the West Bank’s “Area C”— which is under full Israeli control— and is more than an hour’s drive from the nearest paved road. Few of the homes are connected to a water supply system or power grid. Jabbareen built his house into a rocky outcrop in the heart of his farmland. It is currently home to 12 people, who scratch out a living raising sheep and growing vegetables. “This is my land and they want to expel me from it”, he said. Some residents of Masafer Yatta were first kicked out in 1999.

The following year, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) helped some of the families challenge their expulsion in court. They secured a temporary reprieve that remained in force pending the high court’s final decision last week. Roni Pelli of the ACRI said the verdict was “inherently flawed”.

“The villages in Masafar Yatta are the homes of the petitioners, and they have no other home.”

She insisted expelling them was “illegal”, and backed a long-standing allegation made by Israeli critics that the army uses the military zone designation as a pretext to grab West Bank land. The Israeli human rights group Akevot, which specialises in state and military archival research, has obtained a document from 1981 in which then agriculture minister and future prime minister Ariel Sharon proposed to set up the firing zone. Sharon, in the document, says the military zone declaration will ultimately make it easier to expel the Palestinian residents. It was not immediately clear if the residents have any further legal recourse to ward off evictions.

Inside Jabbareen’s house, where blankets are piled high against a wall, he gestured to a nearby Jewish settlement and reflected on what he termed grossly unequal treatment in the West Bank.

Some 475,000 settlers now live in the West Bank in communities considered illegal under international law, alongside some 2.7 million Palestinians. They are frequently granted permission to build permanent structures with proper electrical connections, while many Palestinians are denied building permits and live under the threat of eviction, he said. “They build with concrete”, he said of the settlers. “They are provided with electricity and water. The army is guarding them, but we are just the opposite.” — AFP



Breathing new life into medical oxygen



Leith Greenslade

The writer is Coordinator of the Every Breath Counts Coalition

Covid-19 has taken at least 18 million lives, and it is anyone’s guess how many of those deaths were due to a lack of medical oxygen. Governments don’t want to talk about the issue, because that could mean admitting that thousands—or even hundreds of thousands—of their citizens died unnecessarily. But unless health systems take steps to ensure a sufficient supply of oxygen in the future, they will be risking a repeat of the past two years.

While high-income countries are already working to secure their supplies of medical oxygen, many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) will continue to need international support. Deaths from a lack of medical oxygen in these countries preceded the pandemic, because global health and development agencies made no serious effort to help LMIC governments close the gap between need and supply.

That gap is one factor underlying LMICs’ stubbornly high newborn and child mortality, adult deaths from infectious and chronic conditions and deaths from injuries that require surgery. Research published prior to the pandemic found that four out of five children hospitalised with pneumonia in Nigerian hospitals did not receive the oxygen they needed, and that simply putting oxygen into paediatric wards could reduce child deaths by 50 per cent.

As Mike Ryan of the World Health Organization puts it, Covid ripped a bandage off an old wound, driving a ten-fold increase in the need for oxygen in the space of just weeks in some countries. LMICs now need about 500,000 large oxygen cylinders every day to treat Covid patients, and this is the just the tip of the iceberg. For every Covid patient who needs oxygen, there are at least five other patients who also need it, including the 7.2 million children with pneumonia who enter LMIC hospitals each year.

The main vehicle for the international response is the ACT-Accelerator (ACT-A) Covid-19 Oxygen Emergency Taskforce, expertly chaired by Unitaid, which has built a system to help LMICs prevent oxygen shortages. To date, the Taskforce has delivered almost \$1 billion— including \$560 million from the Global Fund alone — to LMIC governments and their United Nations and NGO partners. This money has been spent on liquid oxygen, pressure swing absorption oxygen-generating plants, mobile oxygen concentrators, oxygen therapies and the workforce needed to install, operate, and maintain the equipment.

This funding has helped more than 100 countries, mostly in Africa and Asia. But there are still LMICs struggling to provide

IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC EXPOSED A LONG-NEGLECTED PROBLEM THAT WAS ALREADY CONTRIBUTING TO UNTOLD PREVENTABLE DEATHS EVERY YEAR

oxygen, so the Taskforce has asked for another \$1 billion in 2022. US President Joe Biden’s Second Global Covid-19 Summit this week also will emphasise the issue with an appeal to governments, companies, and philanthropies to do more. The case to make to donors is clear. There is a moral obligation to treat Covid patients and to flatten the pandemic death curve once and for all. Investments in oxygen will serve that goal and also save lives in the future. Not only is oxygen an essential treatment for almost all of the health conditions targeted by the UN Sustainable Development Goals; it is also a critical pillar of effective pandemic preparedness and response (PPR).

As the world pivots to long-term Covid management, oxygen production and distribution systems will need to be embedded in global health infrastructure. International organisations with mandates to improve newborn and child survival, infectious-and chronic-disease management, and PPR all have a stake in access to oxygen. These agencies should formalise their nascent ACT-A oxygen partnership by transforming it into a Global Oxygen Alliance with a mandate extending to 2030 (to align with the SDGs), and with a membership broadened to include international agencies focused on chronic diseases. There are five components to a successful alliance to close the oxygen access gap. First, LMIC

governments and the national institutions responsible for providing medical oxygen need to take the lead. Ideally, they would be guided by politically endorsed national plans for oxygen access, with governments financing the effort as part of their health budgets. Second, LMIC governments that need external support to finance their national plans should be able to leverage loans and grants from a variety of multilateral, bilateral and philanthropic sources. The Global Fund should continue to provide grant funding as part of its new PPR objective and multilateral development banks should provide loans for this purpose as well.

Third, oxygen producers should be given more incentives and opportunities to work in partnership with LMIC governments and global health and development agencies. Memoranda of understanding, non-disclosure agreements, and transparent and competitive tenders for equipment procurement, installation, and maintenance should all be made available, building on the ACT-A Covid-19 Oxygen Emergency Taskforce’s existing blueprint for industry partnerships. Moreover, development finance institutions should offer loans, equity, and guarantees to oxygen producers, and support LMICs seeking to reduce their dependence on oxygen imports and fragile global supply chains.

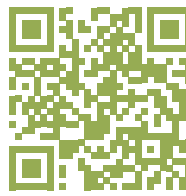
Fourth, UN agencies and NGOs with a strong LMIC presence must continue to support these governments as they develop national oxygen plans, collect data, procure supplies, train healthcare workers and biomedical engineers, and monitor and evaluate progress. To do so, they will need ongoing funding from bilateral development agencies (such as USAID, the European Commission, and others) and philanthropies (such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Skoll Foundation, and others). © Project Syndicate 2021



LMICs now need about 500,000 large oxygen cylinders everyday to treat Covid patients.

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Seeb secure second straight OL crown

S E E B E N S U R E T I T L E W I T H O N E M A T C H T O G O

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Seeb club sealed their second straight Omantel League title despite a goalless draw against Al Musannah in the 25th week of the top flight league at Seeb Stadium on Tuesday.

Ahead of the league conclusion by one week, Seeb ensured title after Al Rustaq held Al Nahda to a 1-1 draw.

The goalless draw of Seeb and Al Musannah confirmed Seeb topping the league table at 54 points while Al Nahda raised their credit to 50 points ahead of the league conclusion on Saturday in the final 26th week. The first title of Seeb club was in 2019-2020 season.

The HM Cup champions will lift the league title on Saturday at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex when they meet Dhofar in the concluding round of the top-tier league. The match will kick off at 7:10 pm.

Seeb fans started the celebration at Seeb Stadium on Tuesday night while the top gala festival will be on Saturday.

Seeb's triumph of league shield



came after 25 tough weeks. Seeb players managed to end 25 matches with 16 wins, six

draws and three defeats. Seeb strikers netted 49 goals while they conceded 16 goals. Abdulaziz al

Maqbali emerged as the top league scorer with 13 goals while his team-mate Mohsin al Ghassani

scored 11 goals to come second and Marwan Taeab registered eight goals. Seeb's forward line was ranked as the strongest striking line in the league.

Serbian coach Boris Bunjak has now led Seeb to titles in HM Cup and the Omantel League. He was in charge of Seeb coaching staff in last 17 rounds since eighth week of the league.

RELEGATION BATTLE

On the other hand, the penultimate round did not unveil the identity of the relegated teams to first division league.

All the key matches in the bottom league order ended in a draw except Saham's victory over Al Suwaiq. Nizwa finished their match against Al Ittihad in a 2-2 draw at the former's home in Nizwa Sports Complex. Nizwa are at 13th place with 20 points while Al Ittihad are at 10th place with 22 points.

A goalless draw was the final result of Muscat and Bahla match at the ROP Stadium. Both teams are not in the safe place as Bahla are placed 11th and Muscat in the 12th position with the same 21 points.

Saham revived their chances to stay among the top teams as they edged Al Suwaiq 1-0 at Suhar Sports Complex. Mohammed al Balushi scored the only goal in the match.

The win took Saham to 19 points while Al Suwaiq are in ninth place with 31 points.

Saham will play against Al Musannah in the final round while Muscat will take on Al Nasr and Nizwa will meet Bahla in a tight clash to conclude the 2021-22 Omantel League.

OMANTEL LEAGUE POINTS TABLE (RANK, TEAM, PLAYED, WON, DRAW, LOST, GD, POINTS)

1. Seeb	25	16	6	3	33	54
2. Al Nahda	25	14	8	3	17	50
3. Dhofar	25	13	8	4	22	47
4. Musannah	25	12	6	7	9	42
5. Al Nasr	25	11	8	6	6	41
6. Sohar	25	9	9	7	0	36
7. Al Rustaq	25	9	8	8	2	35
8. Oman	25	8	7	10	-2	31
9. Al Suwaiq	25	8	7	10	-3	31
10. Al Ittihad	25	4	10	11	-20	22
11. Bahla	25	4	9	12	-10	21
12. Muscat	25	5	6	14	-12	21
13. Nizwa	25	4	8	13	-25	20
14. Saham	25	3	10	12	-17	19

Oman top group in Asian Games Qualifier

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Oman national hockey team will meet Uzbekistan in their final group stage match in the Asian Games 2022 Qualifier in Thailand on Thursday.

Oman, who had already qualified to the Asian Games in China, top the Pool A with 9 points in the Asian qualifiers being held in Thailand from May 7 to 15.

Nine teams are taking part in the qualifier tournament, divided into two groups. Pool A included

Oman, Thailand, Hong Kong, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Pool B included Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Singapore.

In their group matches, Oman started with a 3-0 thrashing of Kazakhstan. Rashad al Fazari, Fahd al Lawati and Akram Ashour were the scorers.

In the second match, Oman sunk Hong Kong 5-1. Khaled al Shuaibi and Rashad al Fazari netted two goals each while Fahd al Lawati scored one goal for Oman.

In a tight match against the hosts, Oman edged Thailand 1-0.

On Thursday, four matches will be played. Oman meet Uzbekistan, Indonesia play Sri Lanka, Bangladesh take on Singapore and then Hong Kong will face Thailand. The final matches in the qualifiers will be held on Saturday and Sunday.

OMAN SQUAD

Fahd al Lawati, Aseel al Muaini, Osama al Shibli, Ammar al Shuaibi, Sanad al Fazari, Ahmed al Balushi, Asaad al Qasimi, Khalid al Shuaibi, Faisal bin Saeed, Akram bin Ashour Ramadan, Muhammad al Nawfali, Ahmed al Nawfali, Fahd al Nawfali, Elias al Nawfali, Salah al Saadi, Rashad al Fazari, Osama Beit Fadda, Muhammad Ramadan and Sami bin Awad.





GUJARAT THRASH LUCKNOW TO BOOK IPL PLAY-OFF SPOT

PUNE, India: Afghanistan's Rashid Khan claimed four wickets as Gujarat Titans became the first team to qualify for the IPL play-offs with a 62-run thrashing of Lucknow Super Giants on Tuesday.

Indian opener Shubman Gill made 63 off 49 deliveries to steer Gujarat to 144 for four after electing to bat first on what seemed like a tough pitch to score in Pune.

Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid then returned figures of 4-24 — his best in IPL — to dismiss the opposition for 82 in 13.5 overs as Gujarat, in their debut season, bounced back from two losses to top the 10-team IPL.

Hardik said they learnt from being complacent in their previous loss to Mumbai Indians by five runs.

"In the last game we thought the game was already over before it was over. That was the learning

which we took," said Hardik.

"Even in this game when they were eight down, I said, 'Let's be ruthless. This game is beautiful. If it's not over, it's not over. If they're down, let's keep them down, get this done and relax post-game.'"

Both Gujarat — owned by global capital venture fund CVC Capital — and Lucknow are new additions to the IPL this season.

Gujarat reclaim the top spot from Lucknow who slip to second but are still in with a strong chance of making the play-offs.

The top four teams will make the play-offs starting on May 24.

Gill set up victory after he lifted Gujarat from 51-3 to build key partnerships including a 52-run fourth-wicket stand with David Miller (26) and 41 unbroken for the fifth with Rahul Tewatia (22 not out).

Mohsin Khan had removed opener Wriddhiman Saha for five before Avesh Khan caused

further trouble by sending back Australia's Matthew Wade, for 10, and Hardik, for 11.

Gill smashed seven boundaries and Miller hit the only six of the innings to guide Gujarat to a total that looked under-par but proved enough for victory.

"Coming into the season, not many people gave us a chance or thought we'd qualify but here we are sitting on top of the table so it feels pretty good," said man of the match Gill.

Lucknow made a mess of their tricky chase after they fell to 33-3 with opener Quinton de Kock (11) and skipper KL Rahul (eight) back in the dug out.

Wickets kept tumbling and Australian all-rounder Marcus Stoinis was out after a mix up with Deepak Hooda who made a valiant 27 before falling to Rashid's leg-spin.

Left-arm spinner Sai Kishore took two wickets before Rashid wrapped up the innings. — AFP

Grand Group 5x5 basketball tourney to conclude tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Grand Group 5x5 basketball tournament for Filipino community will conclude at the Al Amal Club hall on Friday. Dr Mohammad bin Humaid al Alawi, Administration and Finance Manager at Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital, will be the chief guest for the closing ceremony.

The tournament, organised by the Grand Global Investment company with the aim of motivating individuals and society as part of Corporate Social Responsibility, was going on for five months. The competition witnessed excitement among the participating teams and the spectators.

The teams were divided into two divisions A and B, where the division A included six strong teams and division B included 10 teams, and the first four teams qualified from each division.

On Friday, Division A will



Chief organisers
Ali al Alawi



feature Mediacom going against a determined OCTAL Team while the Division B action will be contested between DB Schenker and Travel Buddies Holidays Teams.

Trophies, medals and prizes will be awarded to the teams, players, coaches and participants on the final day.

Chief organiser Ali al Alawi expressed his appreciation for all that contributed to the success of this tournament.

"We had organised a 3x3

basketball tournament earlier. This 5x5 tournament has come up really well. We at the Grand Global Investment are determined to organise more such exciting events in the future," Al Alawi said.

Expected to be present during the awarding ceremony following the final game will be the main sponsors, Omantel, Grand Auditing & Consulting and Grand IT Solutions among others and other dignitaries and VIPs from the organisers and the team sponsors.

Friendship Cup brings together embassies, Oman Cricket

MUSCAT: The 'Friendship Cup Cricket Tournament 2022' was held at the Oman Cricket Academy between April 22 and 29, 2022.

It was organised as part of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' - an initiative celebrating the 75 years of Indian independence.

Four teams took part, with Oman Cricket's Chairman's XI joining the sides representing the embassies of India, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The competition was inaugurated on April 22 by Paul Sheridan, Vice-Chairman, Oman Cricket, along with the ambassadors of the other three nations to Oman.

OC's Chairman's XI won all their games in the league stage to set up a showdown with the Indian Embassy team in the final. In it, the latter posted a first innings score of 103 in 15 overs. The run chase was a nail-biting affair and in the end, the Chairman's XI clinched a last ball victory to take home the inaugural 'Friendship Cup'.



Finalists Indian Embassy and OC's Chairman's XI.

Speaking of the overall experience, Amit Narang, Ambassador of India to Oman, said, "This unique tournament saw riveting cricketing action, with amateur diplomat-cricketers showcasing impressive skills with both bat and ball but more importantly, it was a beautiful show of sportsmanship and camaraderie and also gave the families from respective countries a chance to come together and enjoy the sporting entertainment."

Pankaj Khimji, Chairman, Oman Cricket, added, "It was an

honour and a lot of fun to host this event at the Oman Cricket Academy. I thank everyone involved in making it a success, with a special mention to the families of those that took the field. My appreciation also extends to all the spectators that turned up to cheer us on. Looking forward to another edition very soon."

The tournament managed to capture the interest of locals and expatriates in the region alike, while also serving to strengthen the ties between the nations involved.

Nadal eases past Isner into Rome last 16, Zverev wins

ROME: Rafael Nadal eased into the last 16 of the Italian Open on Wednesday with a straightforward 6-3, 6-1 win over John Isner, while Alexander Zverev beat Sebastian Baez.

Third seed Nadal made short work of Isner as he bids for an 11th title in Rome, the King of Clay seeing off his American opponent in one hour and 17 minutes under blazing sunshine at the Foro Italico.

A quarterfinal loser to countryman Carlos Alcaraz in Madrid, Nadal can profit from the in-form teenager's absence in the Italian capital to win the last big clay event before the French Open later this month.

The 35-year-old had been out for six weeks with a rib injury before returning in the Spanish capital last week but Isner put up

little resistance against the 21-time Grand Slam winner.

"I need to build again the things after a tough stop and that's what I'm trying, just to stay with the right attitude and let's see if I'm able to make that happen," Nadal said.

The match swung in Nadal's favour in game eight, when Nadal broke veteran world number 27 Isner before serving out to take the first set.

From there Nadal cruised to victory, dropping just 14 points on his way to setting up a third round clash with Denis Shapovalov.

"I need to play better than I did today but after a while out it's another victory and tomorrow another chance to play against one of the best players in the world," Nadal added.

Earlier, Zverev got through

ATP/WTA ITALIAN OPEN RESULTS	
MEN (SECOND ROUND)	
Rafael Nadal (ESP x3) bt John Isner (USA) 6-3, 6-1; Alexander Zverev (GER x2) bt Sebastian Baez (ARG) 7-6 (8/6), 6-3	
WOMEN (SECOND ROUND)	
Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Karolina Plisková (CZE x6) 6-2, 4-6, 6-4; Petra Martić (CRO) bt Anett Kontaveit (EST x5) 6-2, 6-3; Aryna Sabalenka (x3) bt Zhang Shuai (CHN) 6-2, 6-0; Amanda Anisimova (USA) bt Belinda Bencic (SUI x12) 7-6 (7/5), 6-1; Elena Rybakina (KAZ) bt Lauren Davis (USA) 6-4, 6-3	

with a straight-sets 7-6 (8/6), 6-3 win over Baez in just over an hour and a half.

Second seed Zverev, soundly



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates a point against USA's John Isner at Foro Italico in Rome. — AFP

beaten by Alcaraz in the Madrid final at the weekend, will face one of Tommy Paul or Alex de Minaur.

A gruelling first set went with

the serve right until the fourth point of the tie-break, when German world number three Zverev took a 3-1 lead.

Baez fought back to 6-6 but Zverev broke the Argentine before serving out the set and making sure of his passage into round three in a less complicated second set.

Former champion Karolina Pliskova was dumped out of the women's tournament after being beaten by Switzerland's Jil Teichmann 6-2, 4-6, 6-4.

Pliskova had made the previous three finals in Rome, winning the title in 2019, but the sixth seed lost to 24-year-old Teichmann in a battle which lasted two hours and 40 minutes.

Third seed Aryna Sabalenka strolled into the next round with a routine 6-2, 6-0 win over Shuai Zhang, while Coco Gauff is also in the last 16 after seeing off fellow American Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-4. — AFP



Liverpool rally to keep EPL title hopes alive

BIRMINGHAM, United Kingdom: Liverpool kept their Premier League title hopes alive as Sadio Mane’s winner beat Aston Villa 2-1 on Tuesday to move level on points with Manchester City at the top of the table.

The Reds quickly made amends for a slow start as Joel Matip cancelled out Douglas Luiz’s opener inside six minutes.

Mane’s fine header 25 minutes from time then did enough to keep the pressure on City, who have a game in hand away to Wolves on Wednesday. However, Liverpool’s narrow margin of victory keeps Pep Guardiola’s men top on goal difference.

Victory also came at a cost for Jurgen Klopp’s men, who lost Fabinho to a muscle injury that is likely to rule him out of both Saturday’s FA Cup final and the Champions League final against Real Madrid on May 28.

With one eye on Wembley, Klopp rolled the dice with his team selection as Mohamed Salah and Thiago Alcantara were left on the bench, while there was no place in the squad for Andy Robertson.

The visitors looked like a much-changed side as Villa sprang out of the traps and caught them cold.

Alisson Becker had already denied Ollie Watkins by the time Steven Gerrard’s men took the lead on three minutes.

Luiz’s header was parried by Alisson, but only back into the path of his Brazilian international teammate to hammer the rebound high into the net.

Villa won this fixture 7-2 last season, but Liverpool this time bounced straight back from the early blow of conceding.

The hosts did not deal with a free-kick into the box and the ball eventually broke for Virgil van Dijk to square for his centre-back partner Matip to apply the finishing touch.

Liverpool went through the gears in the second period to show the gulf in class between the sides. Luis Diaz’s arrival in January has played a huge part in keeping Klopp’s men in contention for four trophies.

The Colombian created the winner as he teased Tyrone Mings before delivering a pinpoint cross for Mane to head in his 22nd goal of the season. — AFP

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER TUESDAY’S MATCH (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):											
Man City	35	27	5	3	89	21	86				
Liverpool	36	26	8	2	89	24	86				
Chelsea	35	19	10	6	70	31	67				
Arsenal	35	21	3	11	56	42	66				
Tottenham	35	19	5	11	60	40	62				
Man Utd	37	16	10	11	57	56	58				
West Ham	36	16	7	13	57	46	55				
Wolves	35	15	5	15	35	34	50				
Brighton	36	11	14	11	38	42	47				
Crystal Palace	35	10	14	11	46	42	44				
Aston Villa	35	13	4	18	48	49	43				
Brentford	36	12	7	17	44	52	43				
Newcastle	36	11	10	15	40	61	43				
Leicester	34	11	9	14	49	56	42				
Southampton	36	9	13	14	41	61	40				
Everton	34	10	5	19	37	56	35				
Burnley	35	7	13	15	32	49	34				
Leeds	35	8	10	17	39	74	34				
Watford	35	6	4	25	32	70	22				
Norwich	35	5	6	24	22	75	21				

Al Harthy eyes podium at Imola

OMANI STAR AIMS FOR FIRST ELMS SILVERWARE IN ROUND 2

IMOLA, Italy: Oman’s Ahmad al Harthy is preparing to firmly kick-start his maiden European Le Mans Series campaign when round two of the championship takes place at Imola in Italy this weekend, May 14/15, where the Oman Racing driver is eyeing nothing less than GTE podium success.

Having showcased fantastic speed and competitiveness during the opening ELMS event of the season at Circuit Paul Ricard in France last month, Al Harthy and Oman Racing team-mates Sam De Haan and Marco Sorensen were prevented from challenging for silverware after lap one contact.

With De Haan at the wheel of the No 69 Aston Martin Vantage GTE at the time of the incident, leading the class early on after Al Harthy had qualified an excellent second fastest, damage to the steering caused by contact from an errant LMP3 class car led to instant retirement.

Frustrating to say the least for the entire Oman Racing team, which had performed so impressively during the build-up to the first four-hour race of the season, ELMS debutant Al Harthy was still very happy with the pace and competitiveness shown.

While heading to Autodromo Internazionale Enzo e Dino Ferrari having to mount a fightback where the



GTE championship standings are concerned, confidence is high within Oman Racing of a suitably strong weekend and Al Harthy is determined to challenge for his first ELMS podium.

The coming weekend’s action will also mark the Omani’s first ever visit to the legendary Italian track, a challenge he is looking forward to as the team — which carries support from the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports

and Youth, OQ, Omantel and MHD-ITICS — puts the luckless dramas of round one firmly in the past and focuses instead on success going forward.

“I’ve no doubt our car will be strong again for Imola, as it was at Paul Ricard, Marco, Sam and I will be competitive and able to push for a strong result and give a real kick-start to our season”, said Al Harthy, “In qualifying and race trim we were very strong in France

and I know the TF Sport guys, who prepare the car, will do an amazing job again as always.

“I can’t wait to race at Imola for the first time, it’s such a famous track and it’s always great being faced with a new challenge. We were able to learn a lot about the GTE car at Paul Ricard so hopefully that will give us a solid base to build from at the weekend. Hopefully we can fight for our first podium in the ELMS at Imola and proudly fly the flag

for Oman there.”

Opening free practice and a dedicated session for bronze graded drivers will take place at Imola on May 13, ahead of a second practice session on May 14, which will lead in to qualifying at 14.05 local time. On May 15, the 4 hours of Imola will get under way at 11.30 local time with live streaming available online here: <https://live.europeanleamansseries.com/en/>

Al Shabab tie up with Saudi academy



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Oman’s Al Shabab club has signed a strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia’s Al Reyadah Sports Academy.

The signing agreement function took place late on Tuesday in Barka under the auspices of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis AshShura in presence of Ahmed bin Abdullah al Owaisi, Chairman of Al Shabab club, besides many officials and invitees. The agreement was signed by Al Owaisi from the Omani side while Nasser al Aseri, Chairman of the academy signed on behalf of Saudi academy.

The five years agreement will enable the domestic and expatriate potential young faces in football to develop and strengthen their technical capabilities under supervision of professional coaching staff provided by the Al Reyadah



Academy.

The Saudi academy has many branches in Asia and Europe and many top players have graduated from this academy. The contract between both parties will furnish the technical and high quality training standards that will assist the clubs to boost their squad and then support the national team with strong players.

The signing event featured

attendance of many football icons including Ahmed Eid, former Saudi Football Association chairman, Imad al Hosni, former Omani player in Saudi’s Al Ahli club, besides presence of Fahad al Raisi, OFA Executive Director and many other former international players.

The chairman of Al Shabab club in his speech elaborated on the agreement details.

”This partnership aims

to exchange the expertise in different fields including coaching and learning football. There will be series of coaching seminars and training workshops for team managers besides special intensive courses on players development. Many of the top players will get the chance to play in Europe along with the top players to have the right exposure and experience”, he said.

Ahmed Abdullah said the academy will be opened in Barka from June.

“It will target players from the early ages including junior, youth and Olympic players. The agreement is for five years and we hope to get the desired output from this partnership”, he added.

Ahmed Eid said the agreement is part of Oman-Saudi cooperation in the sporting field.

“This is an essential step to develop the junior players in football and provide them with the right environment to develop as football is rapidly improving globally. This agreement will focus on junior and youth categories and will assist them to grow with the necessary skills and experience. This academy have strong technical and logistics strength and this will assist to have better young players in the near future”, he concluded.

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Sultanate of Oman, India drive new business agenda

STRONGER TIES: 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting held in New Delhi

BUSINESS REPORTER
NEW DELHI, MAY 11

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) attended the 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting on Wednesday in New Delhi, holding discussions with Indian counterparts Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce and Industry and Raj Kumar Singh, Minister of Power and New and Renewable Energy.

With the goal of forging a new business agenda to help drive growth for both the Sultanate of Oman and India, the highly productive meeting took place on the second day of a five-day trade and investment mission to India, one of the world's fastest growing economies and a country which Oman has historic cultural and commercial ties.

Accompanied by senior management from Oman Investment Authority, Oman



Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones and Madayn, Al Yousef will hold high-level talks with senior management from Tata Steel, Hitachi, HCL, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry and NITI Aayog, the Government of India's leading policy think-tank.

Noting his satisfaction with the outcomes of Wednesday's 10th Oman-India Joint Commission Meeting, Al Yousef said, "Today's

session underlined the fact that this is a partnership that can boost exports and investment as well as deliver growth, jobs and opportunities for our people.

Under the wise guidance of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and with the ambitious framework provided by Oman Vision 2040, I see enormous possibilities for what our two countries can achieve together in areas from renewable energy and pharmaceuticals to new partnerships in small business

development and manufacturing — areas where Oman and India have common interest and expertise."

Indian investment in the Sultanate of Oman which topped \$7.5 billion in 2022 was one of the key topics discussed by meeting participants with Al Yousef noting the great interest expressed in the success of MoCIIP's Invest Easy portal.

"Since April 2021, we have seen a 94.8 per cent increase in the number of Indian businesses

Today's session underlined the fact that this is a partnership that can boost exports and investment as well as deliver growth, jobs and opportunities for our people

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSEF
Minister, MoCIIP

registering with Invest Easy, this is up from 450 in 2019 to 877 in 2021. This uptick shows the great faith Indian companies have in Oman.

A remarkable achievement that has been made possible thanks to the opportunities opened up by Oman Vision 2040, which, while future-focused is already having a positive impact on attracting investment into Oman and our economy in general."

Cutting red tape is MoCIIP's Invest Easy one-stop shop for

investors, issuing licenses from ten leading authorities and approvals for more than 1,500 economic activities in one single e-transaction. Since the launch of the ministry's new service in April 2021, over 196,000 licenses have been issued, 23,000 of which to foreign investors, a year-on-year rise of 305 per cent.

Commenting on the Sultanate of Oman's \$1.2 billion non-oil exports to India in 2021, a jump of 172 per cent on the previous year, Al Yousef said, "This is a remarkable achievement given the serious disruptions we have seen to business during the pandemic and is testament to the hard work and dedication of manufacturers the length and breadth of Oman."

Concluding, Al Yousef stated, "India has long been an important partner for Oman and there are real opportunities to further strengthen commercial relations between our two countries, particularly in manufacturing, renewables, healthcare, tourism, mining and logistics. By working together, business-to-business, government-to-government, and as people, we can, I believe, build a brighter, more prosperous future for India and Oman."

Omani banks' credit fundamentals recover

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

Omani banks' credit fundamentals are recovering as pressures on the operating environment have eased and economic activity is gradually picking up amid higher oil prices, Fitch Ratings has stated in a new report.

Omani banks' credit fundamentals have been fairly resilient to the pandemic shock which caused a 3.2 per cent GDP contraction in 2020, according to Fitch.

Performance metrics recovered substantially in 2021 and this is expected to continue in 2022, supported by higher interest rates, capital metrics will remain reasonably sound, while pressures on banks' funding and liquidity profiles have eased.

This has been underpinned by government support measures combined with the recent rebound in oil prices, it noted.

Oman's power regulator proposes tariff mechanisms for self-supply, direct access

MARKET REFORM: Move to further liberalise the electricity sector by enabling supply arrangements between generator and large consumer bypassing the single buyer OPWP

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

In a further liberalisation of the country's electricity sector, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has unveiled proposals that would enable — for the first time — large power consumers to secure their electricity requirements directly from generators, thereby bypassing the current single buyer — Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP).

The proposals, once finalised and approved, are expected to pave the way for the entry of renewables-based generators to offer 'green' electricity to interested industrial or commercial customers operating against low or zero-carbon commitments.



The proposals are set out in a consultation paper issued recently by APSR on 'Access Charging Methodology for Self-Supply or Direct Access'. The latter represent new mechanisms for the supply of electricity outside the scope of the single buyer model under which the market is currently regulated.

In the single buyer model, generators serve the market under long-term power (and water) purchase agreements with state-owned Oman Power and Water Procurement Co (OPWP), a member of Nama Group.

Effective from January 1, 2022, this model was slightly tweaked

following the introduction of the wholesale electricity (spot) market, which allows generators with expiring power purchase agreements to sell their output on the spot market to OPWP.

But with renewables set to play an increasingly important role in power generation going forward, the Authority is preparing guidelines to enable 'bilateral' and 'wheeling' arrangements between generators and large customers.

Bilateral pacts refer to arrangements agreed by a generator to supply energy directly to a large consumer outside OPWP's remit as the single buyer.

'Wheeling' refers to arrangements agreed with Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the monopoly owner and operator of the country's transmission network, to supply electricity from the generator to the customer.

APSR's paper proposes a set of tariff mechanisms based on the type of use of the transmission network for bilaterals and wheeling pacts. One mechanism is for 'Self Supply', which applies to customers who use power without accessing the transmission system.

"Specifically, this includes customers that use power which

they generate (or "self-generate") and access by generating on-site or private wire connection," the regulator explained in its paper.

The other mechanism is Direct Access, which applies to customers who use power served directly by an off-site generator via the transmission system, without going through the spot market or a power purchase agreement with OPWP.

"Direct access generators may wish to wheel power onto the existing electricity transmission network to serve their customers.

Direct access also provides an option for customers wishing to generate their own power off-site and wheel it to themselves via the transmission system rather than via private-wire," the regulator noted.

"Against this backdrop, APSR tasked the Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) with designing a system access (or "wheeling") charge which allows customers to generate their own power off-site and wheel it to themselves using the transmission grid and also allows licensed production facilities to wheel power to entities other than OPWP using the transmission network," APSR added.

Welcome immersive experiences in the all-new 2023 Sportage



MUSCAT: The all-new Kia Sportage sports one of the most inspiring designs on the roads off late. Eye-catching at the very first instance, the all-new Sportage does much more than just make the perfect first impression.

The all-new Sportage's advanced technology of the remote start offers the convenience of enabling you to remotely start your Kia. A perfect opportunity to get in and about quickly on a busy day. The striking personality of the all-new Sportage is carried on in the interior too. Everything is designed around the driver.

From the immersive curved display to the intelligent, easy-to-use controls. Digital keys, Wi-Fi, wireless charging, and mobile-paired audio. Connectivity is more seamless than ever. So you can have all the right technologies, in all the right places. The android auto and Apple car play allows users to connect their compatible smartphone to the vehicle, giving access to many applications on the device.

What immediately draws attention is the perfectly laid panoramic curved display. The 8" Infotainment touch screen is the interior centre piece. Its presence is matched with all of the latest connectivity tech, ergonomically placed to be commanded from the tip of your fingers.

The available audio system with 8" display allows users to easily choose their favourite music and make the most of the journey. To keep you connected on the go, the all-new Sportage with the available wireless charging tray, keeps your devices charged at all times.

The Sportage sports an impressively large panoramic glass roof that provides passengers with a view unlike any other. Enhancing comfort on every drive is the 3-stage automatic fan control that adjusts from a gentle breeze to strong air circulation with dual-zone temperature control according to your preference.

Planning fun journeys with your loved ones is now even more exciting with an impressive rear seating legroom. Allowing you to comfortably share the ride with family and friends.

Additionally, when seats are folded, you can nearly double your cargo room the remote 2nd row seatback folding. Power up your journey with the drive mode select which offers quick, logical changes, making your drives even more thrilling. Another impressive feature is the Electronic Parking Brake which disengages in Drive or Reverse when you press the accelerator.

Customers can experience the all-new Kia Sportage at any Kia showroom. Reliable International Automotive, the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way. No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership award', 'Family Like Care' Service award, and 'Kia 'Distributor of Distinction' award.

AQAR launches Rimal 2 project

MUSCAT: Al Khonji Real Estate & Development (AQAR), a leading property developer in the Sultanate of Oman, celebrated the launch of its high-end integrated residential complex (Rimal 2), located in Bausher, as an extension of (Rimal 1), which also developed by AQAR, while its units were sold within two weeks of its launch.

The celebration ceremony also included signing of a memorandum of cooperation with Bank Nizwa to finance the bank's customers who are interesting to own a residential housing units in Rimal 2 project.

The Memorandum of cooperation was inked by Mohammed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman and CEO of AQAR, on behalf of Al Khonji Real Estate & Development, and Arif al Zaabi, AGM Retail Banking at Bank Nizwa, on behalf of the Bank.

Arif al Zaabi expressed his pleasure by the bilateral cooperation between Bank Nizwa and AQAR, to provide innovative and Shariah-compliant real estate financing solutions. He stated that: "We have designed our real estate financing solutions to meet the different requirements of our growing customer base, while we are confident that, the new profitability rate is an exemplary



rate for the retail customers who are interesting in utilising the Shariah-compliant real estate financing solutions easily and flexibly".

In his speech at the press conference held on the occasion of the launch ceremony, Mohammed bin Abdullah al Khonji, Chairman and CEO, clarified that the Rimal 2 project is being built on a building area of 40,000 square meters, nearby the attractive dune of Bawshar, which offers enjoyable opportunities by the natural sightseen.

He pointed out that, it is expected to take three years to build this project, where its construction works will be undertaken by Al-Binaa Contracting Company, "the main contractor", a subsidiary of AQAR, while 35 per cent of the

project was sold during the first offer that allocated for AQAR's existing customers.

Al Khonji added: There is no doubt that the company's success of (Rimal 1) and the great demand that it has received, as its units were sold within two weeks of its launch, was considered as a great incentive for us to launch our new project, (Rimal 2), asserted that AQAR is thoroughly committed to developing quality real estate projects, that are built on the modern specification and provided with integrated services.

He pointed out that, the location of the Rimal complex in a lively area at Bausher, is considered as an attractive advantage, that many investors are looking for, where it is located nearby a number of

well-known commercial centers such as Oman Mall, Grand Mall, Panorama and Avenues Mall, as well as its proximity to Mohammed Al-Amin Mosque and other service facilities.

He added that Rimal 2 includes 148 residential units of different sizes, allowing multiple options for all nationalities who would like to own state-art integrated property, while AQAR keens to provide all the required services and facilities that serve the residents of the project and of the surrounding area.

The commercial mall at Rimal 2 will be linked with the commercial mall of Rimal 1, within walking distance of the residence, where it will be the largest commercial centre of its kind in the integrated residential complexes.

Maisarah enhances customers' experience

MUSCAT: Responding to the growing demand for more accessible, instant and convenient financial services, Maisarah Islamic Banking Services continues to enhance its customers' banking experience with an expansive array of innovative digital solutions.

The Islamic banking window of BankDhofar had launched a bundle of pioneering facilities to give customers instant access to more services through a larger network of ATM/ CDM outlets nationwide, in addition to its 24/7 mobile banking platform.

Marwan bin Mohammed



al Zadjali (pictured), Head of Digital Banking at Maisarah, highlighted the Islamic financial services provider's commitment to bring added value to its

customers through innovative digital banking solutions. "We are thrilled to see the increasing demand for Maisarah's digital banking touchpoints.

The number of our mobile banking services, for instance, has increased rapidly, and we expect higher turnaround of new customers across Oman as more services and further enhanced features are to be introduced. The same applies to our Internet banking for both retail and corporate customers, as well as other self-services outlets such as ATM/ CDM ports," he noted.

In a remarkable move to making banking easy for customers in all parts of Oman, Maisarah had enabled customers to deposit cash to their own accounts and to other Maisarah accounts instantly via a wide network of more than 70 BankDhofar and Maisarah CDMs in all major Omani cities and towns.

This made Maisarah one of the first Islamic banking services provider in the Sultanate of Oman to offer such cost-free instant cash deposit facility using beneficiary phone number instead of the bank account number.

SAMENA Summit stresses 5G's role in driving digital transformation

Digital renaissance: Huawei highlights commitment to technological advances and creating new values

HAMMAM AL BADI
DUBAI, MAY 11

Leaders and experts from the telecommunications industry came together at this year's SAMENA Council Leaders' Summit hosted by Huawei for the ninth consecutive year. The annual gathering was held under the theme of "Thriving with Resilience & Integration in the New Opportunity Realm" and focused on the new business opportunities that 5G and allied technologies provide for all industries and economic sectors.

This year, Huawei shed light on the role of 5G, cloud and digital power in tackling the sustainability needs of the telecom industry and how an integrated intelligent

ICT architecture will light up the future. Through its 'Everything as a Service' model, Huawei highlighted the cloud's integral role in enabling the digital economy and data sovereignty.

The Summit also focused on the opportunities gained by integrating technologies, infrastructure investment, connectivity, and spectrum availability, which will benefit vertical industries and economic sectors.

Steven Yi, President of Huawei Middle East, highlighted the crucial role of 5G in driving digital transformation across the region and the immense opportunities for enterprises in the 5G era.

"Digital renaissance triggered by the pandemic has pivoted digital transformation to new heights, with 5G era infrastructure and communications technologies taking center stage. A strong drive for digital transformation is taking place worldwide, and Huawei is committed to bring the ingenious new technologies that will enrich people's lives with immersive



digital services and enabling new opportunities in the industry's digital transformation with smart digital solutions," Yi noted.

Bocar A BA, SAMENA Council CEO, said, "We held very fruitful discussions on the future direction of our networks, particularly in the 5G era. What was apparent is the transformational role of networks in driving digital transformation and economic growth. Participants also agreed that networks themselves must evolve to meet the region's sustainability goals. In

this regard, the role of innovation in enabling net-zero transition through digital power technologies is increasingly important for the Middle East."

Vanness You, Vice-President of Marketing and Solution, Huawei Middle East, officially launched Huawei IntelligentRAN in the region.

Vanness You noted that: "Towards the future, intelligence in every industry and connection, Huawei IntelligentRAN opens new paths to wireless intelligence,

bringing the next level of service capability including agile service, smart experience, smart green and smart O&M."

Additionally, IntelligentRAN allows intelligent air interfaces to use key technologies like smart grids, scheduling dictionaries, and channel graphs. These tools can configure air interface resources intelligently and achieve optimal user experience and capacity.

Service prediction with IntelligentRAN also guides non-real-time spectrum and channel selection on the network side and real-time symbol scheduling and transmit power configuration on the base station side.

This significantly reduces energy consumption across the entire network. Huawei Executives took part in several panel discussions.

Mohamed Madkour, VP of Wireless Networks Marketing and Solutions at Huawei, participated in the "Leaders' Exchange Connectivity for the New Decade" panel. He noted that intelligent

connectivity is the lifeline for everyone and integral to every country's digital economy.

He reiterated Huawei's commitment to providing powerful, intelligent, simple and efficient digital infrastructure and operational tools to create more commercial and social values for societies, industries and economies.

He also highlighted that growth oriented ICT policies are key to facilitate a favorable environment for business and technology innovations.

Emaad Ahmed, Chief Expert, Huawei Middle East, took part in a panel discussion titled "Techno-Business Convergence Achieving Sustainable Integration in the 5G Era." He noted that operators' OPEX increases due to system and network complexity. Therefore, reducing OPEX and achieving green development is essential for operators' future growth in light of the carbon-neutral background and the demand for cost reduction and increased efficiency.



GCC travellers plan for new travel experiences

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 11

GCC travellers are looking to make up for lost time when it comes to travel, with the anticipation of new experiences dominating conversations, according to research revealed yesterday at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2022 by leading consumer intelligence company D/A.

The research is based on the analysis of over four million social media posts and comments from more than two million Arabic-speaking unique users in the GCC. The number of travel conversations and posts about travel increased by 110 per cent and 151 per cent, respectively, between 2019 and 2021.

Speaking on the ATM Global Stage, Paul Kelly, Managing Partner, D/A, said: "Travel



conversations increased to over 1.3 million in 2021, underscoring the willingness by Arabic speakers

in the GCC to travel, regardless of age or nationality. We are ultimately witnessing the pent-up

demand from the last two years coming to the fore as borders reopen, flights are back on track

TRAVEL CONVERSATIONS INCREASED TO OVER 1.3 MILLION IN 2021, UNDERSCORING THE WILLINGNESS BY ARABIC SPEAKERS IN THE GCC TO TRAVEL, REGARDLESS OF AGE OR NATIONALITY

and restrictions are lifted."

GCC travellers have a vital role in tourism recovery, a direct result of their spending power. According to the UNWTO, GCC travellers spend 6.5 times more than the global average, with 40 per cent of GCC travellers spending more than \$10,000 on their last trip to Europe.

"Overall, when it comes to the GCC traveller, the conversations indicate that something new is the order of the moment. Even in the familiar, a new experience is at the top of the wish list for those intent

on travelling soon — a huge change from what we have seen in the past year or two", Kelly added.

In terms of holiday preference, the consensus is on escaping and breaking free and discovering new experiences, which many have been unable to do in the last two years.

Those in the younger age groups were keen on shopping and enjoying local flavours, while the older groups were more focused on staying closer to nature and relaxing.

Having fun was a mainstay; however, mid-career professionals have a lot of work travel lined up.

Holiday destinations favoured by GCC travellers followed the global google trend, which saw a spike in the search terms 'staycation' in 2020, which was representative of the number of people from GCC countries looking to vacation locally.

Malaysia central bank hikes key interest rate to tame inflation

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's central bank raised its key interest rate on Wednesday for the first time since 2020, in a surprise move aimed at taming inflation. Bank Negara Malaysia joins other central banks around the world in tightening monetary policy as the cost of everyday goods is pushed higher by supply chain problems and surging commodity prices.

The bank lifted its main rate 25 basis points to two per cent, despite most economists having predicted no change until later in the year. It was the first hike since July 2020, when rates were slashed to a historic low to combat the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Inflationary pressures have increased sharply due to a rise in commodity prices, strained supply chains and strong demand conditions, particularly in the US." With life returning to normal as the pandemic abates, the Malaysian economy is now on a "firmer footing", giving policymakers room to start tightening



The Bank Negara Malaysia, the country's central bank, is pictured in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

policy to head off inflation, it said.

Malaysia's headline inflation was 2.2 per cent in March, lower than in many other countries, but food inflation jumped four per cent and economists expect further increases. — AFP

Sri Lanka economy will 'collapse' if no new government in two days

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's economy will "collapse beyond redemption" unless a new government is appointed within two days to restore political stability, the central bank chief said on Wednesday.

He said the latest wave of mob violence derailed the bank's recovery plans, and the resignation of the prime minister on Monday and the lack of a replacement were complicating matters.

He said political stability was vital to implementing economic reforms aimed at addressing the country's debt crisis and the acute shortage of foreign exchange to

import essentials.

"If there is no government in the next two days, the economy will completely collapse and no one will be able to save it," Central Bank of Sri Lanka Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said.

"The country was fast going down a slope when I took over just over a month ago. I thought we were able to apply the brakes, but with events of Monday the brakes no longer work.

"Within a week or two the economy will completely collapse. No one will be able to save Sri Lanka at that stage. My being here as governor will not help",

he said. "I will resign if there is no immediate action to form a government." Shortly after taking over last month as the bank's chief, Weerasinghe announced defaulting on Sri Lanka's \$51 billion external debt saying the country had no money to pay its creditors.

He almost doubled interest rates and allowed the rupee to depreciate rapidly to ensure better foreign exchange liquidity in the commercial banks. Sri Lanka is facing its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948 after it ran out of dollars to import even the most essentials. — AFP

Toyota posts record full-year net profit



A man is seen inside Toyota showroom in Tokyo. — AFP

TOKYO: Toyota on Wednesday posted a record full-year net profit helped by strong sales and a cheaper yen, but issued cautious forecasts as the pandemic and war in Ukraine disrupt supply chains.

The Japanese auto giant, which kept its crown as the world's top-selling carmaker in 2021, reported a net profit of 2.85 trillion yen (\$22 billion), up 26.9 per cent from the previous year.

But for the current year to March 2023, it said it expects to post an annual net profit of 2.26 trillion yen (\$17.3 billion), citing ongoing uncertainties. Toyota said its robust results were due in part to beneficial foreign exchange rates, with

a cheaper yen helping inflate profits from sales abroad.

It also cited cost reduction efforts and stronger sales helped by marketing efforts. In the year to March 2022, operating profit surged 36.3 percent year-on-year to three trillion yen, as sales increased 15.3 percent to 31.4 trillion yen — also a record.

Toyota's strong sales came despite the firm being forced to repeatedly adjust production targets because of supply chain issues ranging from the semiconductor shortage to pandemic-linked factory closures.

On Tuesday it said it was suspending production at its eight domestic plants. — AFP

China's consumer inflation picks up

BEIJING: China's consumer inflation rose at its quickest pace in nearly half a year, official data showed on Wednesday, reflecting the growing costs of the country's zero-Covid curbs and high commodity prices.

The damage from Beijing's strict zero-Covid strategy has been increasingly reflected in economic data, as lockdowns in key cities such as Shanghai snarled supply chains and pushed up transportation prices.

April's consumer price index (CPI), a key gauge of retail inflation, rose more than expected at 2.1 per cent on-year, picking up from levels seen the month before, said the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). This was due to "factors like the domestic epidemic and continued rise in international commodity prices," the bureau's senior statistician Dong Lijuan said.

Since April, China's biggest city Shanghai had been almost entirely sealed off. Most of its 25 million residents have been confined to their homes, while goods piled up at its port as authorities rush to stamp out the worst Covid resurgence since the early days of the pandemic.

Dong said that "due to the rise in logistics costs during the



Women shop inside a supermarket in Beijing. — AFP

pandemic and increase in demand for stockpiling", prices of potatoes, eggs and fresh fruits ticked up.

The latest figures also showed that after four consecutive months of contraction, food prices overall rose for the first time on-year in April.

Meanwhile, the producer price index (PPI) — which gauges the cost of goods at the factory gate — came in at 8.0 per cent, higher than expected but down slightly from in March.

A key reason was that prices of commodities such as crude oil and non-ferrous metals remained at a high level, Dong said. Virus-related supply disruptions likely pushed up producer prices as well, said Julian Evans-Pritchard of Capital Economics in a report.

But he added that "the main source of higher prices continues to be oil, gas and iron ore", and that factory-gate prices of consumer durables and electronics were unchanged last month.

"We think producer price inflation will continue to drop back over the coming quarters", he said. April's weak economic data follows industry data released on Tuesday that showed China saw its largest drop in car sales in two years — likely due to consumer sentiment battered by Covid restrictions.

Vehicle sales plunged a steep 35 per cent to about 1 million in April, according to China Passenger Car Association — a drop not seen since March 2020. — AFP

Renewable energy to grow to new record

The world will set a new record for renewable power capacity this year led by solar energy in China and Europe, but growth could lose steam in 2023, the International Energy Agency said on Wednesday.

A record 295 gigawatts of new renewable power capacity was added in 2021 despite supply chain bottlenecks, construction delays and high prices of raw materials, the IEA said in a report.

An additional 320 gigawatts is expected to be installed this year, equivalent to the entire electricity demand of the European Union's total electricity generation from natural gas.

Solar energy will account for 60 per cent of renewable power growth in 2022, ahead of wind and hydropower, according to the agency, which advises developed nations on energy policy.

“The additional renewables capacity commissioned for 2022 and 2023 has the potential to significantly reduce the European Union’s dependence on Russian gas in the power sector,” the IEA said.

“However, the actual contribution will depend on the success of parallel energy efficiency measures to keep the region’s energy demand in check.”

The EU set a goal of slashing its heavy reliance on Russian natural gas by two thirds this year following Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

“Energy market developments in recent months — especially in Europe — have proven once again the essential role of renewables in improving energy security, in addition to their well-established effectiveness at reducing emissions,” IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said. He urged governments to cut red tape, accelerate the deliveries of permits and provide the right incentives for a faster deployment of renewables.

The IEA warned that, based on current policies, “renewable power’s global growth is set to lose momentum next year.” — AFP

Energy market developments have proven once again the essential role of renewables in improving energy security, in addition to their well-established effectiveness at reducing emissions..



STEEL WALKER

A steel worker works on the maintenance of the blast furnace at Zaporizhstal, Ukraine's third-biggest metals plant, in Zaporizhzhia, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Food and water stockpiles, generators, toilets, stacks of mattresses and even wood-burning stoves in bunkers deep underground — this Ukrainian steel mill was built with the threat of war in mind. — AFP

Good roads are vital to tourism growth



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The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCIL.

Nations around the world are working to improve their road networks while strengthening their tourism infrastructure to help drive sustainable economic growth. Good roads make a good impression on tourists and encourage visitors to travel further afield into the various regions of the country.

In our region, the Gulf Cooperation Council countries have shown great interest in development of the road sector, with the result that they have secured top spots in world rankings.

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved the eighth place globally and first in the Arab world on the Road Quality Index in 2018. This has contributed to Oman’s competitive appeal in tourism, business and logistics.

Despite this great development, the road and tourism sectors need further to help drive greater inflows of tourists. Good roads serve to move goods and people very quickly, in addition to stimulating the tourism sector.

Enhanced partnerships between government institutions and the private sector can support the implementation of

joint projects related to road infrastructure and tourism, thereby promoting economic diversification and employment creation. Good roads also boost vehicular traffic and reduce traffic accidents.

From this standpoint, many countries are working to develop and broaden their carriageways to support four-lane and even five-lane traffic, particularly where they connect with popular destinations.

Everyone is aware that the global travel tourism movement witnessed during the past two decades a great boom before declining in the past two years due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of travellers around the world for tourism exceeds one billion people annually, while the tourism sector achieves a growth rate ranging between 4 – 6 per cent annually.

Since the countries of the region, including the Sultanate of Oman, are working to activate the tourism and travel sector to enhance their share of global tourism, they are continuing to develop these sectors to access distinctive tourist sites in their respective countries.

It also helps to overcome obstacles and facilitate procedures to increase the added

value of the tourism sector and increase its contribution to the gross domestic product.

The importance of tourism in the Sultanate of Oman lies in a number of social, cultural, political and economic factors.

It needs to promote awareness and marketing for this vital sector, in addition to providing more facilities, public services, and communication and media channels to get word across to all tourists around the world.

In order to enhance its competitiveness in the global tourism market, it needs to attract larger numbers of tourists by targeting new markets and thereby achieve the strategic goal boosting tourism’s contribution to 6 per cent of the GDP in the year 2040.

The current figures for tourism indicate that there are more than 200,000 people working in the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The industry contributes 2.5 per cent to the gross domestic product, according to 2019 data, while there are hopes that the tourism sector, with the country’s excellent roads, will play a major role in driving growth in the coming years.

The Fed waves its wand



JAMES K GALBRAITH

The author is chair in Government/Business Relations at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin

WITH NEGATIVE REAL GDP GROWTH IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2022, FISCAL STIMULUS IS OBVIOUSLY FINISHED FOR NOW, AND THERE IS NO PROSPECT THAT ANY MORE WILL BE ENACTED.

According to economist Kenneth Rogoff of Harvard University, “a growing crescendo of commentary places the blame for the current surge in US inflation squarely on the Federal Reserve”. His reference is to a leader in The Economist, which blames America’s central bank not for the inflation itself, but for failing to raise interest rates sooner and more harshly than it finally did, on May 4.

Rogoff disagrees with this judgment, and I sympathise with his argument, up to a point. There is a distinction between price increases driven by supply disruptions, oil shocks, and war, on the one hand, and the additional heavy costs that often follow from sustained campaigns of high interest rates: bankruptcies, unemployment and financial chaos. Being reluctant to inflict the second set of costs on top of the first set is the mark of a reasonable, non-sadistic public servant. The Economist disapproves, but Rogoff and I do not.

Beyond that, however, Rogoff’s logic is hard to follow. He seems to suggest that the Fed was intimidated by America’s oh-so-powerful progressive movement, which was in thrall to a Stony Brook University professor (and lifelong academic) named Stephanie Kelton.

That idea is not totally implausible. With a sharp pen and a quick wit, Kelton is a skilled debater and policy polemicist. Her ideas, advanced under the rubric of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT), are drawn partly from such titans as John Maynard Keynes, Abba Lerner and Hyman Minsky.

But, more than that, they stem from close and accurate observations of actual central bank practice. They are partly prescriptive, to be sure; but their prescriptive force is rooted in a realism that makes MMT accessible to policymakers and thus truly dangerous to the monetary mystics of Harvard, Chicago, Princeton, and MIT.

Still, there is scant evidence for Rogoff’s claim that MMT “had many influential adherents

in politics and the media”. None is cited. While a *New York Times* profile of Kelton this February was indeed a breakthrough (causing conniptions in Cambridge), it hardly establishes that MMT held sway at the Fed back in early 2021.

Moreover, Rogoff acknowledges, correctly, that “respected centrists” like Olivier Blanchard of the Peterson Institute for International Economics had also argued against premature credit tightening.

He also makes a passive-voice reference to “helicopter money”, giving the impression that this idea is uniquely affiliated with MMT. Yet those of us with long memories would sooner associate the concept with Milton Friedman and Ben Bernanke, a moderate Republican who was appointed to chair the Fed by President George W Bush, and who deployed helicopter money à outrance in response to the 2008 financial crisis. Rogoff even mentions his own argument for a more expansionary, pro-inflation monetary policy in 2019.

Thus, by Rogoff’s own account, opposition to early anti-inflation hysteria was not a fringe view.

Rather, it was one of those rare points on which the left and many eminent members of the mainstream roughly agreed.

As for the Fed’s own economists, Rogoff concedes the possibility that when “price growth accelerated in late 2021... [they] really thought inflationary pressures were temporary”. Yes, this is possible. After all, the first round of post-pandemic oil price hikes was over by June, along with the big jump in used-car prices, which had been driven by a semiconductor shortage that stalled production of new cars.

Under the circumstances, the central bank’s sensible technicians might well have expected price stability to return (at the new levels). Perhaps they didn’t realise the political pressure that would build on their bosses, partly fueled by Ivy-League loudmouths, when the media kept the old news in the headlines, month after month.

Unlike unemployment or the GDP reports, inflation numbers are published on a 12-month rolling basis, which meant that the price jumps from early 2021 kept

on making news. Having delivered headlines about “record inflation” for almost a full year since they occurred, they are only now on the verge of fading from the numbers.

Nor could a sensible technician have reasonably forecast the oil price spike to \$130 per barrel that occurred in early March. That, too, will sustain sensational headlines for a while, even though the price increase itself has already been mostly reversed.

In any case, the Fed has now acted, raising interest rates by half a percentage point. That is the largest incremental increase in 22 years, though it is not, by itself, an economic earthquake. The timing is possibly brilliant.

With negative real GDP growth in the first quarter of 2022, fiscal stimulus is obviously finished for now, and there is no prospect that any more will be enacted. With the 2021 price spikes finally passing from the 12-month window, and with oil back down a bit, there is a chance that those technicians on Team Transitory (if they existed) will be proven right after all.

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The metaphors of conquering an adventure park in Jabal Akhdhar

Jabal Akhdhar is not only a place best for hiking, it is one of the best natural adventure parks offering exhilarating experiences and adrenaline-pumping activities perhaps in the whole of the Middle East. The latest addition to Akhdhar's mountain offering comes in an 8,000-square metre Adventure Park filled with ropes courses, wall climbing adventure and even a zipline. We talked to the adventure park manager to learn more about the park...**20**

Two more statues of Iron Age boxers unearthed in Sardinia

ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN Sardinia have unearthed the torsos of two more limestone statues of boxers within the Iron Age necropolis of Mont'e Prama, Italy's Culture Ministry said on Saturday.

Culture Minister Dario Franceschini called the find at the archaeological site in Cabras, western central Sardinia, an "exceptional discovery" that should shed more light on the ancient Mediterranean

culture whose tombs and statuary have been slowly uncovered since the 1970s.

The naked torsos and other fragments have been identified as boxers, due to a shield that wraps around their bodies, and are similar to another two sculptures unearthed a few metres away in 2014 and now on display at the local museum, the ministry said.

Archaeologists working on the

southern part of the sprawling necropolis — first discovered in 1974 by local farmers — also found the continuation of the site's funerary road on a north-south axis, along which have been found tombs dating back to between about 950 BC to 730 BC.

While small and medium-sized fragments are being documented and recovered from the earth, "the two large and heavy blocks of torsos will need time to be freed from the sediment surrounding them and to be prepared for safe recovery", said the culture ministry's superintendent for southern Sardinia, Monica Stochino.

The site is believed to be part of the Nuragic civilisation that controlled the island of Sardinia for centuries beginning in the Bronze Age. The people erected mysterious stone towers called "nuraghe" that today dot the Sardinian countryside and whose original purpose remains unknown.

Thousands of fragments and major pieces from Mont'e Prama discovered over the decades have so far been reassembled into about two dozen statues,



each over 2 metres tall, that have been identified as warriors, archers or boxers.

Archaeologists still do not know precisely what the statues represent or what purpose they served.

Nor is it clear where they were origi-

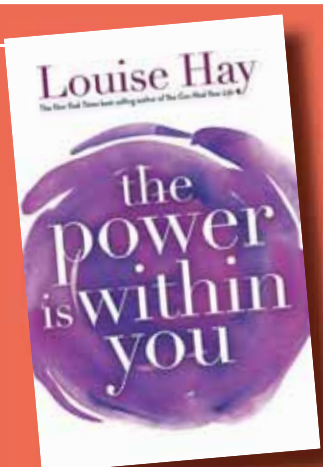
nally located before being deliberately shattered in ancient times, according to researchers — who cannot agree whether by Phoenicians, Carthaginians, or by warring Nuragic groups themselves — and strewn above and near the tombs. — AFP

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THE OPERA

ROHM presents Pipe Organ Concert featuring Munchner Knabenchor

THE ROYAL OPERA House Muscat is delighted to announce a very special concert marking another historic moment in the 10th anniversary season of the Royal Opera House Muscat: The Pipe Organ Concert featuring the Munchner Knabenchor and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra. A landmark opera house

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In 2022, the concert takes on added significance as the concert will premiere the new composition by esteemed Italian composer Marcus Tutino. The Dreaming Lion has been written especially for the ROHM pipe organ and the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra. This two-part concert also presents the international organist, Hansjörg Albrecht, alongside the children of München Knabenchor. Omani

organist, Rashid Salim al Rashidy will also feature. The Pipe Organ Concert provides a stage not just for the immense expression of world-class music but also a creative collaboration spanning the world.

The performance will take place at the Royal Opera House Muscat. Enjoy an evening concert on Saturday, May 14. 7.30 pm ROHM.

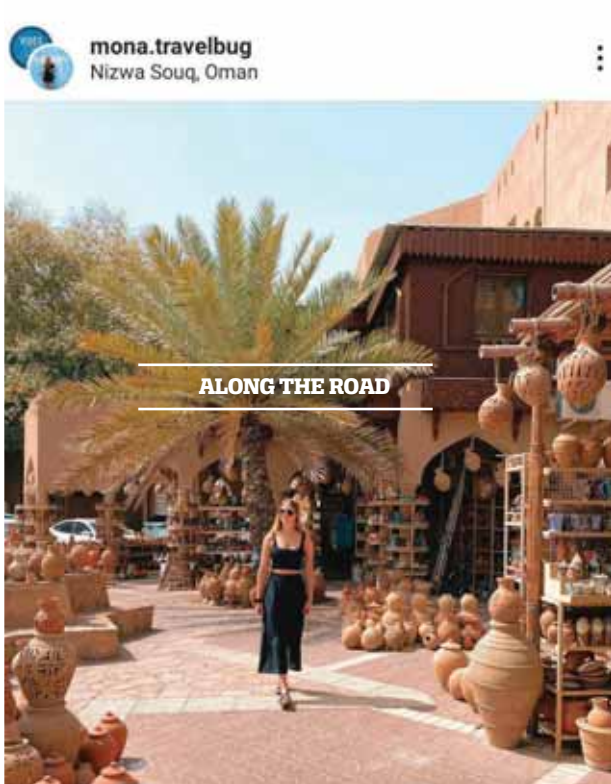
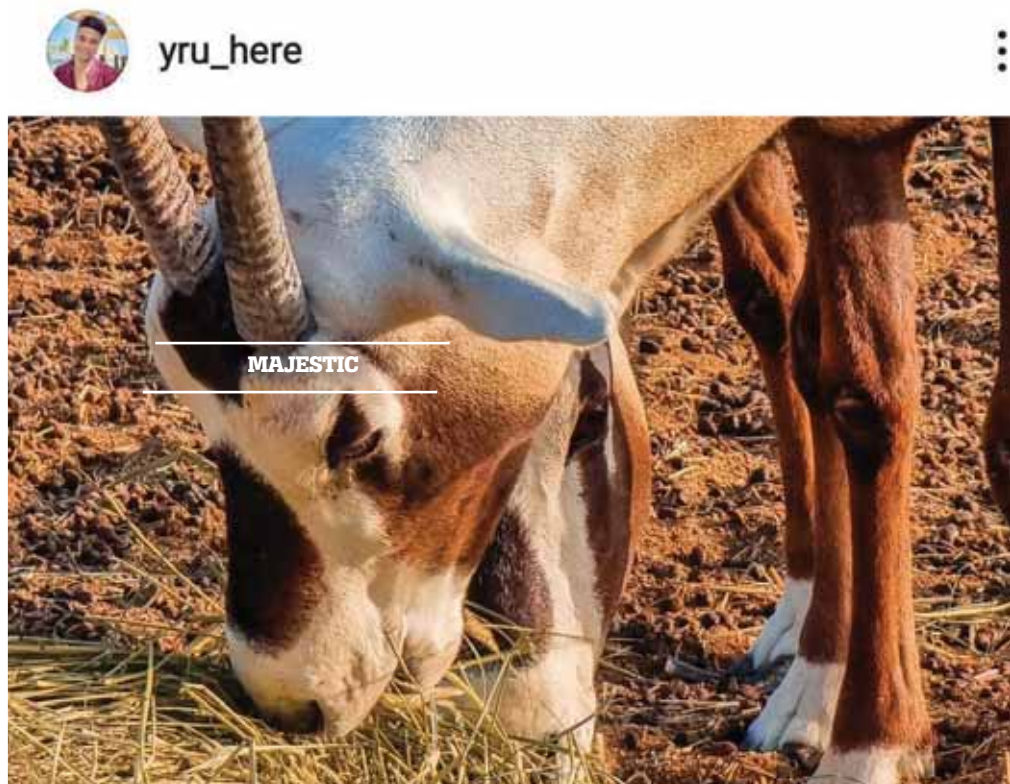
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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Hold the world's madness, Eurovision has begun



JUST IN TIME, against a backdrop of war in Europe, comes Eurovision, the world's biggest live music event with its quirky, camp celebration of culture and song.

Watched by millions, the song contest held this year in Italy's northwestern city of Turin is providing a welcome moment of celebration and solidarity amid the geopolitical turmoil caused by Russia's attack on Ukraine.

With a first semi-final on Tuesday night and a second on Thursday, the 40 competing countries will whittle down to 25 to battle in the finale on Saturday.

Ukraine's rap folk band Kalush Orchestra is the favourite to win.

Fans gathered outside the PalaOlimpico sporting arena on Tuesday expressed cheer at the atmosphere of camaraderie.

"I think it's amazing that this year Eurovision can happen again, especially now with the circumstances in Europe," German fan Matthias Korte, 30, said.

Ricardo Duarte from Lisbon called Eurovision "magic".

"I believe there is a Eurovision spirit and you can feel it when you're here," said Duarte, 53. "It unites people and all in a very joyful way."

"Ukraine is very much a part of our Europe, the Europe that we love and the Europe we want to build together," he said, adding it would be tragic to "let Russian President Vladimir Putin get his way".

Give That Wolf a Banana

The European smorgasbord of musical kitsch and culture has enthralled the continent for decades, serving up a steady supply of no-holds-barred belting, flamboyant costumes, onstage pyrotechnics and awkward presenter banter in heavily accented English.

In its 66th year -- 2020's edition was cancelled because of coronavirus -- the cultural mash-up is camp and over-the-top, and often just outright odd.

This year appears to be no exception as seen by Norway's Subwoolfer, who perform their upbeat "Give That Wolf a Banana" wearing cartoonish yellow wolf masks complete with white teeth, or Latvia's entry "Eat Your Salad" by Citi Zeni with its naughty lyrics and planet-loving message.

Enjoying a flood of popular support and tipped by bookmakers to win the cult competition is Ukraine's Kalush Orchestra, with the brisk rap lullaby "Stefania".

The song addressed to a mother, which mixes hip-hop and traditional Ukrainian music, was written before Russia's February attack on Ukraine.

But with striking lyrics such as "I'll always find my way home even if all the roads are destroyed", the song has become "really close to the hearts of many Ukrainians", said frontman rapper Oleh Psiuk, who along with the band received special government authorisation to attend Eurovision.

"There are efforts that have been made now to destroy and discredit Ukrainian culture, but we are here to show that Ukrainian music and Ukrainian culture exists," Psiuk said on Sunday during the official kickoff to the competition.

"They are authentic, original and really unique and this is what we want to showcase." -- AFP

CULTURE

Egypt's ancient 'zar' ritual puts exorcism on stage



A STAGE, LIGHTS, a mesmerised audience: it looks like an Egyptian folkloric concert but Umm Sameh is singing to heal the sick by driving out the demons that possess them.

The music and dance ritual known as "zar", with centuries-old roots in Ethiopia and Sudan, is traditionally performed to ward off or exorcise jinn or evil spirits.

"We're not quacks or witches," said Umm Sameh, aged in her 70s, with Kohl-lined eyes, large hoops swaying in her ears and gold bracelets tinkling on her arms.

"The singing is spiritual and brings out negative energies," said the lead singer of the Mazaher ensemble, adding that they also perform prayers from Islam's mystic Sufi practices.

Traditionally, the zar ritual would last several days and include animal sacrifices. But no blood is spilled at Cairo's Mekan Cultural Centre, where the group performs to the delight of foreign and local guests.

The audience is bewitched by Umm Sameh's voice and nod their heads to the drumbeat.

In a patriarchal society where women face frequent discrimination, zar ceremonies are among the few cultural practices in which they take centre stage.

Umm Sameh said she learned the ritual from age 11 from her mother and

grandmother.

Six decades later, she recites the same lyrics to the same tunes -- all from memory, she adds proudly, because she has "inherited them and grown up with them".

OLD HEALING RITUAL

"Zar is a very old healing ritual, a bit like medical treatment," said Ahmed al Maghraby, founder of Mazaher, which he says is Egypt's last group to perform zar in public.

He set up the Mekan performance space 22 years ago "to preserve this cultural heritage and archive local music from all over Egypt".

It was a tough feat, he said, because zar has historically been derided by devout Muslims as a pagan practice, and rejected by modernising state authorities as a backward rural tradition.

"Middle Eastern and Egyptian society regards everything local with disgust," lamented Maghraby.

He said it was foreign tourists who first brought Egyptians to the shows, who he remembered used to say "No! There's jinn and blood!"

"For them, the zar was always something sinful."

Ensemble member Abou Samra said "people have a very negative idea of zar because of the movies," in Egypt, long regarded as the Hollywood of the Arab world.

In one of them, 1987 horror movie "Al Taweeza" (The Curse), superstars Yousra and Tahia Carioca contorted themselves, drenched in fake blood, and emitting shrill cries.

But zar is "an art like all other arts," said Abou Samra, who plays the tanbura, a six-string lyre. "We have to let go of these stereotypes."

NEW GENERATION

Times are indeed changing. The ensemble, whose musicians and dancers were all over 60, have brought in a new member.

Azza Mazaher, who grew up watching her mother Umm Hassan do percussion, now also drums and energises the show as she dances across the stage.

Azza said the group now performs in both the old and new ways.

"If someone feels sick and the doctors can't find a treatment, we can hold a ceremony," she said.

"But here, we're performing a light piece of folklore, so people can discover it, understand it and enjoy it."

Mazaher has taken part in several European festivals, and more Egyptians are flocking to their Cairo performances, appreciative of the home-grown artform.

Mariam Essawi, an audience member in her 20s, said: "They look like us, they represent us. Zar is part of our history and our cultural heritage. It's very strange that we don't know it." -- AFP

A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Real Corona immunity!

NOT LONG ago, the world held out hope for herd immunity or community immunity. So that the population will eventually reach a certain level of protection enough to eliminate the outbreak for good. However, months ago, experts might have assumed that once 60 to 90 per cent of people were infected, vaccinated or not, the virus would simply run out and disappear.

Perhaps that would be an oversimplification! Our immunity indeed works against the most dangerous forms, especially if they are acquired by vaccinations. But our immune and defence shields as humans are not robust enough to prevent long-term spreads and the virus -- if I could say -- still finds cracks in our immune blockade.

Here I am certainly not going to say, that our immune protection is useless. The types of immunity most relevant to the current pandemic era dampen the frequency and intensity of future waves, rather than obliterating them.

If the classic herd immunity -- if I may say so -- is a silencer, then the first thing we have to replace it with is a mild herd immunity -- a silencer whose effects gradually accumulate -- it can still be enhanced with effort and time. As immunity builds up and then wanes, transmission can be reduced but not completely blocked. There is really no clear line that defines the post-crisis phase.

On the other hand, in the absence of that complete immunity, there can be no sharp line between people who have been infected in the past and people

who will be infected in the future. Especially since immunity recedes and flows normally, better vaccines will come that will help the anti-infective immunity to stay longer. But until then, another variant could arrive, a massive and different departure from both Omicron and our current vaccines and might reset our immune landscape.

As such, we do not forget that even in the absence of a complete change, the coronavirus has a lot of tricks to continue spreading, as it was, for example in South Africa, where cases were again ticking!

And here we must realise that the gradual nature of immunity to this virus is exactly the reason why the world feels motivated to continue building it. Hence, the higher the immunity to the circulating strain, the better. The longer it takes for the virus to spread, even if the infection continues to occur, it does not have to occur as frequently as it is now.

In the end, all this requires a kind of balance from societies and work to achieve and maintain it, especially since antibody levels decline over time and new mutations appear. Off course, this is the difference between recognising the infection as somewhat typical and rejecting it as normal, between recognizing that this virus is part of our future lives and calling ourselves to surrender completely to it!

Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer.

art & life

Local Scene

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THURSDAY | MAY 12 | 2022

The metaphors of conquering an adventure park in Jabal Akhdhar

By Yeru Ebuon
Instagram: @yru_here

In the Middle East, there is no doubt that Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is one of the best natural adventure parks offering exhilarating experiences and adrenaline-pumping activities.

Not only a place best for hiking and offering some of the most scenic trails, but the "Green Mountain" is also a fine escape for abseiling, via Ferrata and even survival training.

The latest addition to Al Akhdhar's mountain offering comes in an 8,000-square metre Adventure Park found inside the Dusit D2 Naseem Resort filled with ropes courses, wall climbing adventure, and even a zipline.

Over the long holiday, in one day alone, the adventure park has seen nearly 100 adventure seekers hoping to check out what the park is all about.

Overseeing the park is Brighton Vitolwe, Ranger Park Manager supported by a team of three with a possible expansion of 6 experts by the end of the year. He came to Oman with over 15 years of experience as an adventure instructor, survival trainer and adventure safety expert.

"I started my career as an Instructor for Outward Bound Zimbabwe, moved all over the world conducting different learning and camp activities for kids and even adults. I am a certified survival trainer where I trained people on where to get water and food in the wild, and how to adapt to a survival situation. Before Oman, I worked in UAE. I only visited Oman but I'd been hearing it's

a beautiful place that offers lots of outdoor adventure. When I heard they were looking for somebody to manage the adventure park, I thought it was a great opportunity to see and explore the country as well as offer my kind of speciality in outdoor training and adventure management," he said.

"Adventure gives people a better opportunity to know themselves. Many people are scared of going out of their comfort zones but when you face the challenges heads on, that's when you will get to know yourself better. The best way to know yourself is to push yourself, to force yourself to take on a challenge," he added.

"I'd been in Oman for six months now. During that time, we worked so hard to create a great adventure park with multiple adventures to choose from. We have a ropes course system with three levels: the green level is the lowest level which can be done by somebody from the age of 7 to 11. It includes about 12 activities or obstacles. The next one is the blue level which can be done by ages 12 to 15. It also has about 12 activity zones. The top one is the red level for 16 years and above," Brighton shared.

"For every level, we have separate safety operating procedures. There were lots of considerations made regarding which stage is best for a particular age group. This is not just about the adventure, it's about the experience. We don't want to scar participants for life instead give them a meaningful experience," he shared.

"Other than the ropes courses, we also have freefall adventure which is more like a bungee jump that's about 8 meters deep. We

also called this the quick jump. We have a zipline which is 107 metres long offering a very fast, very cool way of moving one tower to another. We also have a climbing tower which is 10 meters high with three sides. These sides are for beginners, intermediates and experts. All three can be done in one visit depending on your confidence," he explained.

Asked regarding the safety measures in place, Brighton explained, "We have to make sure that it's very safe for our participants. We subscribe to the safety standards of the European Union EN 15567 which has something to do with ropes courses and ziplines. This includes making sure that we have standard operating procedures in conformity with the international standards."

He added, "we have safety gears that include helmets, harness, pulley system and what we call a sassa that connects participants to their lifeline. We also have gloves as an option. Anything that happens, participants are not gonna fall, they're just gonna hang there."

"The adventure park is fully operational now. When people come here, they will have a nice experience. I am a professional myself, we have Sammy as well that assists me in the safety and instructional needs of the participants. We have two other team members working with us and two more will be joining us later part of the year. It's a full team looking after the safety of the adventurers," he shared.

A METAPHOR FOR LIFE

While Al Jabal Al Akhdhar is filled with outdoor activities, the adventure park is a necessity

according to Brighton because some needed proper instructors and that way the controlled environment will look after the safety of the first-timers.

He said not everyone is cut out right away for adventures in the wild and while Oman is a country of rough terrains and thousands of possible activities, confidence is not built overnight and this is where they come in.

"I didn't start as confident in outdoor adventures just like a lot of people. I'm from Zimbabwe and as a young man, I was looking for something adventurous to do. In 2006, I was accepted to work with Outward Bound. I trained for one month to get the certificate," he shared.

"In the beginning, to be honest, it was very tough. I didn't know that going on adventures will be that tough. We would go on expeditions for four days. We would carry our bags with 20kg of weight and sometimes we have to walk on foot for kilometres. But that whole experience taught me to believe in myself and to keep going. It was a hard experience but a learning one because, by the time you reached our destination, I looked back and said, "Oh man, I did it." That's how I got into this adventure management and training," he said.

With Outward Bound, Brighton used to train the youth in different life skillsets like climbing, abseiling, rafting, and teambuilding to build their confidence and let them understand the need to work together as a team. Enjoying his job, he would move to a different organisation four years later as a senior instructor emphasising teaching and training kids on how

to go on adventures, boosting their confidence and developing their sense of leadership as well as making them more compassionate towards others.

"Majority of kids, they usually grow with one view of life but adventures give people a wider perspective. These outdoor training and adventures make people look at life in a grander context and not just through a narrow lens," he said.

He added, "These kinds of activities, they are metaphors. They represent the real things in life. For example, in this wall climbing course, the goal is to reach the top. The top defines your goals, dreams and ambition. You start from the bottom and work your way towards it. It teaches you that to get to the top, you have to put your hand on the left and your foot on the right, that you needed to push yourself."

"The way that you manage to conquer the challenges on these activities is the same way you conquer the challenges in your life. When you're rock climbing, you don't see your path because sometimes, you are too close to the rock, but other people, they can see, so they must guide you. Some people are cheering you on. You have to trust your parents, your mentor or your friends because they have a better view of what's happening than you have," he said.

Overall, Brighton said that the Dusit D2 Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Adventure Park was created in such a manner that participants not only enjoy it but that they also learn through the experience. For inquiries or details, Adventure Park can be contacted through their Instagram: [dusitd2jabalakhdar](#)

