

RH discovers new genetic disease

A team of physicians from the Respiratory Diseases Unit of the Royal Hospital, acting in cooperation with counterparts from the Republic of Germany, have discovered a new genetic disease similar to cystic fibrosis that was the culprit behind cases of recent pulmonary infection in four children. The doctors identified the new gene as 'AGR2', which was not previously described as the cause of any disease. **SEE P3**



P12

NADAL,
BARTY
START
BRIGHT



P13

NEW RO 23M
4-STAR HOTEL
LAUNCHED
IN SEEB



P19

'ASCENSION'
CAPTURES
CHASE OF THE
'CHINESE DREAM'



MUSCAT

DEALS FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

The Sultanate of Oman and energy giant British Petroleum (BP) plc announced green energy deals on Monday. The Ministry of Energy and Minerals and BP signed two agreements to support the potential development of a multiple gigawatt, renewable energy and green hydrogen development facility in the Sultanate of Oman by 2030.

The integrated project expected to include onshore wind, solar, and green hydrogen production targeting both domestic and global export markets, BP said in a statement. The two deals, including a strategic framework agreement (SFA) and a renewables data collection agreement signed by the petroleum company and the country's Ministry of Energy and Minerals, allows BP to capture and evaluate solar and wind data from 8,000 kilometres of land.

SEE P 13

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES

The 'archaeological discoveries' exhibition, organized by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, kicked off on Monday in Al Baleed Archaeological Site, the Governorate of Dhofar. The exhibition, which will be held till February 15, comes in line with the ministry's programmes in promoting the heritage and tourism areas in the Sultanate of Oman by shedding light on the prominent archaeological discoveries in various governorates.

SEE P3

INSIDE



TEAR GAS IN SUDAN AS THOUSANDS PROTEST

P6



MILLIONS HUNKER DOWN AS STORM HITS US

P7



HM confers Order of Commendation on former chairman of AFESD

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday conferred the Order of Commendation on Abdullateef Yousef al Hamad, Former Director-General and Chairman of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development's (AFESD) Board of Directors.

The order reflects His Majesty the Sultan's recognition for the efforts of AFESD former chairman and his contribution to the development work on the Arab level. The order was handed over by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, and Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received Al Hamad in his office here on Monday. The conferment ceremony was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at the Office of HH Sayyid Asaad. — **ONA**

Intl drifting back after two years

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 17

International drifting is returning to the Sultanate of Oman after the Oman Automobile Association unveiled the schedule for the fourth edition of Oman International Drifting Championship (OIDC) on Monday.

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) will organise the first round of the keenly-followed international drift event at the Muscat Drift Arena on January 20 and 21. The Round 2 competition will take place on February 10 and 11, while the third and final round will be staged on February 17 and 18.



"We expect a top class drifting competition in this championship, which is returning to action after a gap of two years over the Covid-19 pandemic. We are fully ready to host the event adhering to strict medical protocols stipulated by the Supreme Committee", OAA Managing Director Suleiman al Rawahi said.

"Spectators are expected to show proof of their two vaccines doses but drivers have to go through a separate Covid checklist to be able to compete in the event."

TURN TO P2

555.55 carat black diamond goes on display

DUBAI: The world's largest known cut diamond went on public display for the first time on Monday ahead of its sale, when it is expected to reach five million dollars. The Enigma, the name of the rare black carbanado diamond, was put on display in Dubai.

The diamond is believed to have been created when a meteorite or an asteroid hit the Earth

more than 2.6 billion years ago, according to Sotheby's auction house jewellery specialist Sophie Stevens. One of the most difficult substances to cut, the 555.55 carat diamond has never been shown by its unnamed owner of the past 20 years, but experts turned it into a 55-face jewel.

Its shape was inspired by the Middle East palm-shaped sym-



bol of power and protection, the Hamsa, which is also associated with the number five.

"It is very different", said Stevens of the jewel, which holds a Guinness World Record as the largest cut diamond.

After being on show in Dubai the Enigma will also be taken to Los Angeles and London, before a seven day online auction starts on

February 3. What Sotheby's called a "cosmic wonder" could very well go to a bitcoin bidder, Stevens said.

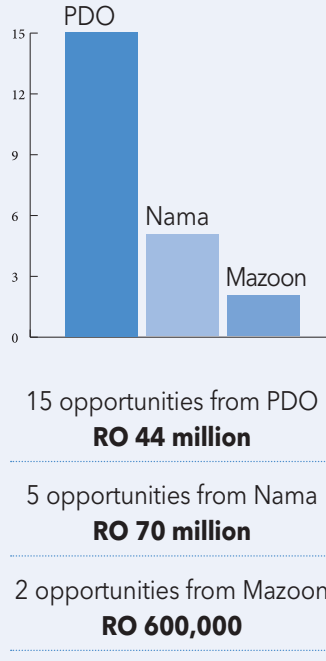
"We are accepting cryptocurrency for the diamond, which we have done for other important stones", she said.

Last year in Hong Kong, the Key 10138 diamond sold for \$12.3 million which was paid in cryptocurrency. — **AFP**

22 investment opportunities unveiled

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has unveiled 22 investment opportunities in the industrial sector as part of the 100-strong project initiative launched last year.

The initiative is being undertaken in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, Oman Investment Authority, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Petroleum Development Oman, Nama Holding group and Mazoon Dairy Company. **SEE P15**



Oman condemns attack on Abu Dhabi

THE FOREIGN MINISTRY EXPRESSED SOLIDARITY WITH THE UAE AND ITS SUPPORT FOR THE MEASURES IT IS TAKING TO SAFEGUARD ITS SECURITY AND STABILITY

MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministry expressed the Sultanate of Oman's solidarity with the brotherly United Arab Emirates and its supports to the measures it is taking to keep its security and stability.

The Foreign Ministry voiced

condemnation of the attack that targeted the capital Abu Dhabi on Monday leaving a number of deaths and injuries among civilians, affirming the Sultanate of Oman's constant stance against violence and the targeting of civilians. — **ONA** **SEE ALSO P6**



Minister reviews academic issues with Al Buraimi universities



MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Monday visited the University of Al Buraimi, Al Buraimi University College (BUC) and Al Buraimi Vocational College.

During the visits, the minister reviewed the most prominent academic and administrative developments and discussed the universities' futuristic educational and research plans.

The minister was accompanied during the visits by Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi, Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani CEO, Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Zahir bin Mohammed al Kaabi, Chairman of Al Buraimi branch of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), Engineer Hamad bin Saif al Hadhrami, Learning and Development Manager at Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and a number of officials at the Ministry of Higher Education, Research

During the visits, the minister reviewed the most prominent academic and administrative developments and discussed the universities' futuristic educational and research plans

and Innovation and concerned bodies.

The minister stressed the importance of cooperation and integration between educational institutions and the industrial sector in Al Buraimi Governorate to support the knowledge-based economy in the Sultanate of Oman. She underscored the need to pay attention to capacity-building and linking higher education to the labour market and industrial production through cooperation with the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn),

and Al Buraimi branch of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

At the beginning of the programme of visits the minister and the accompanying delegation visited the University of Al Buraimi, where she met with the president of the university and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees.

The minister also met with the deans of faculties, heads of academic departments and representatives of the student advisory council. She was briefed on the academic challenges facing the students exhorting them to continue with their efforts to raise their scientific standard and acquire the most prominent skills of the future. The minister called on students to pay attention to scientific research pointing to the importance of youth in achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

At Al Buraimi University College (BUC), the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation met with Shaikh Ahmed bin Nasser al Nuaimi,

Chairman of the Board of Directors, Dr Yasser Fouad, Dean of BUC, and his assistants, heads of departments and representatives of the student advisory council.

During the two visits, the minister stressed the importance of activating joint cooperation in the research field and forming joint research teams in cooperation with the industrial sector, pointing to the importance of upgrading the educational system in line with Oman Vision 2040 through focusing on the disciplines of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and artificial intelligence.

The minister and the accompanying delegation visited Al Buraimi Vocational College, where she met with the administrative staff, and listened to an overview of the college.

The minister met with the heads of the academic departments, representatives of the student advisory council, and concluded her visit with an inspection tour of the facilities and workshops of the college and its various departments.

More than 1,100 cases in 24 hours, no deaths

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Despite being rated as a relatively less fatal variant of Covid-19, compared to earlier variants, the latest wave is giving the health authorities few reasons to worry.

The Ministry of Health reported 1,113 new cases on Monday, while no deaths were reported in the last 24 hours.

According to estimates, the Sultanate of Oman reported 6,593 cases and five deaths during the period between January 3 and 16.

The UAE reported 38,155 cases and 23 deaths, Saudi Arabia 57,324 cases and 27 deaths and Kuwait 46,999 cases and eight deaths during the

same period.

In all, 69 lives were lost between January 3 and 16 in the GCC, while it is still not known whether the new wave is triggered by Omicron or due to a Delta resurgence.

The Sultanate currently has 87 patients in hospitals suffering from Covid-19, which include 12 in intensive care units (ICUs).

Dr Zakariya al Balushi of Royal Hospital has said that cases started to decline in many countries. Some countries also figure in the top list when it comes to giving boosters, especially in Europe and the US.

The total number of positive Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate is 313,538, 4,122 deaths.

International rally

FROM P1

He added: "We are looking forward to a very successful season and want the audience of Oman to experience it. It had been a huge success in the past and we hope this year would be even better as we aim to deliver a world-class championship."

OMAN INTERNATIONAL RALLY

Also coming to Muscat will be the Oman Rally Sohar International 2022, the opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), from January 27 to 29.

The Sultanate had hosted the final round of the 2021 regional series before two months.

The international rally will feature the newly-crowned four-time Dakar Rally winner

Nasser Saleh al Attiyah of Qatar along with local hope Abdullah al Rawahi, Czech driver Petr Kacirek and Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al Atya.

Fifteen drivers along with their co-drivers will take part in the first round.

The rally will showcase the country's fast and flowing gravel special stages and offers one of the most challenging and unique events in the FIA calendar.

The event is being organised by the Oman Automobile Association under the chairmanship of Brigadier (Retd.) Salim Ali Khalifa al Maskiry. Anwar Ali Soomar al Zadjali is the Rally Director, working with Clerk of the Course Hani Shaban and his deputies, Ahmed Soomar and Nicolas El-Hindy.

OSWL's first GCC cultural forum kicks off

MUSCAT: Omani Society for Writers and Literates' First GCC Cultural Forum kicked off here on Monday under the auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information.

The opening ceremony included a speech by Eng Said bin Mohammed al Saqlawi, board chairman of Omani Society for Writers and Literates (OSWL). Al Saqlawi said that the forum figures among tasks of the OSWL aimed at encouraging Omani and Arab writers and literates to enrich the literary march in the Sultanate of Oman.

The opening of two-day forum included an evening session in which Omani and other GCC poets took part.

During the event, Dr Hamoud al Dughaisi presented a working paper titled "A Combination of Shades", which was a critique about a collection of poems by Abdullah al Balushi. Dr Yousef al Maamari presented a paper titled "Omani prose poem" in which he explores years of his poetic output.

Kuwait researcher Amal Abdullah's paper dealt with the poetic movement in her country. It was a comparative study of poetry across the ages.

Dr Abdullah al Zahrani of Saudi Arabia presented a paper on the survival of rhymed poetry.

The Wilayat of Nizwa will host the programmes of the second day of the forum tomorrow under the auspices of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah.

Critics from Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Bahrain will elaborate on various forms of literature. — ONA





Archaeological discoveries on show at Al Baleed Site



Al Baleed Archeological Site

SALALAH: The Archaeological Discoveries exhibition, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, kicked off on Monday at Al Baleed Archaeological Site in the Governorate of Dhofar. The opening ceremony was held under the patronage of Eng Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, the Ministry's Under-Secretary for Heritage.

The exhibition, which will be held till February 15, comes in line with the ministry's programmes in promoting the heritage and tourism areas in the country by shedding light on the prominent archeological discoveries in various governorates. The exhibition includes 24 introductory boards and displays 60 archaeological artefacts. — ONA

Ministry takes legal action against violators of Land Transport Law

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has detected various instances of transgression and violation of the Land Transport Law (promulgated by Royal Decree No 10/2016) and took legal action against the perpetrators.

The violations included exceeding truck axle weight, manipulating vehicle operation cards and practising unlicensed land transport activities. Some of the offenders also surpassed foreign land transport procedures like exercising transportation between two points within the



Sultanate of Oman without obtaining clearance to do so and staying in the Sultanate of Oman beyond the 7-day period of stay without a licence. The breaches were discovered during inspection campaigns aimed at spreading awareness and encouraging

commitment to the Land Transport Law and its executive regulation. The campaigns also seek to limit the use of foreign transport and encourage the use of national transport vehicles as a measure to ensure a safe and sustainable transport environment. — ONA

RH team discovers new pulmonary genetic disorder in children

MUSCAT: A team of physicians from the Respiratory Diseases Unit of the Royal Hospital, acting in cooperation with counterparts from the Republic of Germany, have discovered a new genetic disease similar to cystic fibrosis that was the culprit behind cases of recent pulmonary infection in four children (three of them from the one family).

The doctors identified the new gene as 'AGR2', which was not previously described as the cause of any disease.

It took three years to complete the study which was conducted by a team that included Dr



Sumaya al Orami and Dr Khoulal Shidhani. The team applied the study to the gene's effect on infected mice to further establish the symptoms of the recurrent infections. — ONA

70 pass out after HR training at Oman Institute for Oil and Gas



MUSCAT: Oman Institute for Oil and Gas on Monday held a ceremony marking the passing-out of 70 engineers and geologists at the conclusion of the first phase of intensive training of human resources.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of Sayyid Musallam bin Salim al Busaidy, Human Resources Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Labour. The ceremony included the signing of an agreement between Oman Institute for Oil and Gas and Oman Environment Services Company (Be'ah) dealing with partnership in the field

of environmental resources sustainability.

Eng Nasr bin Nasser al Siyabi, Director-General of Oman Institute for Oil and Gas, stressed the significance of the institute's training programmes provided in honing the skills of the participants.

Meanwhile, Abulrahman Humaid al Yahyaee, CEO of Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL), told the media that all the participants joined the labour market (70% of them in oil and gas firms) after completing the three-year training programme. — ONA

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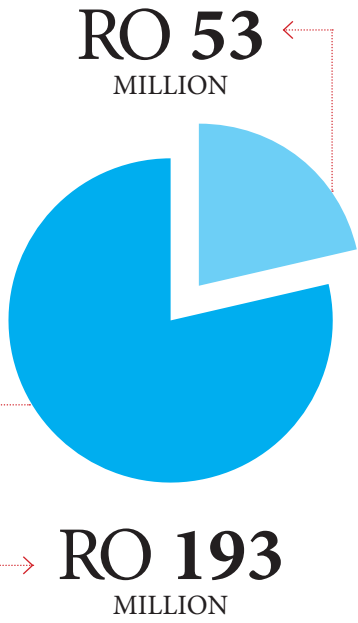
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THE YITI DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN IS A MULTI-TIERED, SUSTAINABLE MODEL THAT WILL CONTINUE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE NATION'S ECONOMY



AN AMOUNT OF **RO 193** MILLION, WHICH IS AN INCREASE EQUIVALENT TO **257 PER CENT**, COMPARED TO **RO 53** MILLION IN 2021, HAS BEEN ALLOCATED IN THE BUDGET FOR THIS PURPOSE

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

One of the economic pillars of Oman Vision 2040 and a key sector to achieve diversification plans, the tourism industry in the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing rapid growth.

With the development of many new mega projects, this sector is expected to increase the GDP's non-oil revenues and attract direct foreign investments. The country is fortunate to be blessed with a rich history and numerous natural and cultural assets. Naturally, this has fuelled growing investments in the sector.

Omran Group, the government's real estate and tourism development arm, will develop the projects including Yeti Sustainable City, Eastern Commercial District in Madinat Irfan, Port Sultan Qaboos Waterfront Project in Muttrah, Four Seasons Hotel Muscat, Souq Al Hafa, Al Sharq District Project and Diar Ras Al Hadd Project.

An amount of RO 193 million, which is an increase equivalent to 257 per cent, compared to RO 53 million in 2021, has been allocated in the budget for this purpose.

Omran owns, manages and invests in many tourist assets across the country amounting to over 26 hotels and resorts with over 3,800 hotel rooms, ranging from luxury hotels and large-scale beach resorts to conference hotels and business hotels downtown, joint tourism as well as heritage and environmental destinations.

It was in the beginning of 2021 that Oman Investment Authority (OIA) announced the restructuring of its tourism and real estate investments by transferring them to Omran Group.

Omran has already unveiled the master plan and brand identity of 'Yiti' Sustainable City, which is one of the largest integrated tourism developments in the country.

It is set to act as a hub for tourism and a new model for urbanisation, connecting to and

extending the capital city of Muscat through a multi-phased expansion.

The Yiti Development Master Plan is a multi-tiered, sustainable model that will continue to contribute to the nation's economy. The scale of the development will directly contribute to the socio-economic development of the country and position Yiti as a unique destination that offers a mix of tourist, cultural and real estate offerings in the future.

It will be spread over four phases, offering a plethora of opportunities for domestic and foreign direct investments alike. This 4-phased development approach considers the accessibility to infrastructure, connection to main roads and ease of development and promote an organic expansion.

Situated in close proximity to the new international airport and enjoying excellent transport connections to the capital area and beyond, Madinat Al Irfan will become the gateway to the Sultanate of Oman; creating a new downtown for residents, businesses and visitors.

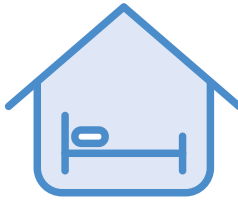
The city will establish an integrated, sustainable and inclusive community, catering for different ages, income groups and ethnicities.

As unique tourism and cultural landmark, Mina Al Sultan Qaboos Waterfront Project will play an instrumental role in creating new job opportunities and enhancing the country's position as a distinctive global tourism destination for local and international visitors.

This flagship national project aligns with Omran Group's mandate in creating unique destinations and experiences that contribute to the country's economic diversification and socio-economic development, in line with Oman Vision 2040 and the National Tourism Strategy.

Diar Ras Al Hadd, Oman, is an idyllic site close to the city of Sur. This eco-themed project delivers a number of unique tourist attractions within the master plan and the heritage village, which will celebrate the rich heritage and culture of the country.

OMRAN OWNS, MANAGES AND INVESTS IN MANY TOURIST ASSETS ACROSS THE COUNTRY AMOUNTING TO OVER **26** HOTELS AND RESORTS WITH OVER **3,800** HOTEL ROOMS



A TOURISM PROJECT HIGHLY DISTINCT





Oman Air gets ‘Airline Retailing Maturity status’ under IATA plan

MUSCAT: Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, on Monday announced that it has been granted ‘Airline Retailing Maturity status’ under IATA’s ARM Index Programme.

The certification recognises that Oman Air uses Shop/Order capabilities compliant with the standard Enhanced and Simplified Distribution message schema, version 18.2 and the ARM index Capabilities Verification Guidance.

Commenting on the certification, Umesh Chhiber, Senior Vice-President Revenue Management, Pricing and Distribution at Oman Air, said “Receiving this status is a proud moment for Oman Air as we now join the first few airlines to have attained the ARM Index certification. Airline retailing has been one of the biggest industry disruptors in recent years and Oman Air is working towards developing additional enhanced retailing capabilities on our NDC channel. These new capabilities, once developed and verified by IATA, will be published in our ARM Index Registry.”

Oman Air’s new strategy is focused on becoming an omni-channel airline that gives its customers the freedom to choose when and how they interact with the airline.

“As a customer-centric airline,



SalamAir bags Asia’s Youngest Aircraft Fleet award

MUSCAT: SalamAir has won Asia’s youngest aircraft fleet for 2022 and the third world Youngest Aircraft Fleet award from ch-aviation, Switzerland.

On this occasion, Capt Mohamed Ahmed, CEO of SalamAir said: “This will be the second year that we have won this accolade by ch-aviation. It is definitely a proud moment for all of us at SalamAir as we are celebrating our 5th anniversary of providing our customers

with the best value for money service, in the most state of the art aircraft the Airbus A320neo and A321neo. We are recognised among 4,700 active airlines globally, it makes us very proud to have such a young fleet as it helps us in being efficient, reliable while offering our customers comfort when travelling. Our environmental impact is also at our forefront as much as our customers; having a young fleet also helps

us reduce our carbon footprint with lower carbon emissions making us more environment friendly.

We have always maintained our service excellence and we will make all efforts to continue to do so in the future as well. We hope to receive our 2nd A321neo aircraft this year which will be utilised to further expand our network and take our customers to new and exciting destinations.”

Oman Air is committed to providing greater freedom of choice to our customers,” Chhiber added, “This is irrespective of whether or not they choose

traditional GDS distribution channels, OTAs, aggregators or the cost-optimal NDC Channel, which will help Oman Air reduce its distribution costs significantly. I

commend IATA and other airlines who alongside Oman Air are fully committed to the NDC journey by offering more freedom of choice to the customer.” — ONA

‘EU Missions info days’ virtual meet from today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), in collaboration with the European Commission for the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), will conduct the ‘EU Missions info days’ event on Tuesday and

Wednesday virtually as part of the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme for 2021-2027, with the aim of informing potential applicants about the new topics included in the EU Missions work programme 2021.

The event includes presentations by European Union specialists on the work programme of the new research

missions, the available funding opportunities and timelines for applying to them, such as the dates of implementation and participation. The info days will present a wide range of new topics for all five missions (Adaptation to Climate Change, Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030, A Soil Deal for Europe, Cancer and 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart

cities by 2030) which are part of the amended Missions’ Work Programme 2021 under Horizon Europe.

The first day of the sessions will start at 9.30 am CST while the second day will start at 9.00 am CST. Interested applicants can attend and follow the event through the European Commission’s website.

Four people held on drug smuggling charges



MUSCAT: The Coast Guard Police, in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in South Al Batinah Governorate, arrested four Asian nationals who were on a smuggling boat. The anti-drug police seized 7,010 tablets of psychotropic

substances and 34 large packs of crystal meth, during the crackdown.

The Coast Guard Police in Dhofar Governorate foiled an attempt to smuggle 30,000 sacks of smokeless tobacco loaded on a smuggling boat carrying three people of an Arab nationality.



Breastfeeding is a shared responsibility

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Compulsory breastfeeding the newborn for the first six months is a shared responsibility. Mothers have been urged to follow the national breastfeeding policy, according to the Department of Nutrition at the Ministry of Health.

“Infants can be protected against many known diseases if they are breastfed for the first six months as the milk contains antibodies. Up to two years, mother’s milk is safe and clean food for babies. It also provides all the energy and nutrients infant needs for the first six months and later,” Dr Salima al Mamary, Director of the Nutrition Department, said.

According to a study conducted by the department, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding until the age of



six months is only 23 per cent, despite all possible efforts.

The study, titled ‘National Nutrition Survey’ conducted by Nutrition Department in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Al Jisr Foundation, calls all mothers of children under six months old that it is necessary to adhere to exclusive breastfeeding.

According to Dr Salima, compulsory breastfeeding can also stop the trend of obesity and overweight among children under five.

New guidelines for travellers to India

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

International passengers arriving in India will now need to upload their RT-PCR report on the Air Suvidha portal for the test done on the eighth day of arrival, the country’s Ministry of Civil Aviation said.

As per the fresh guidelines, all international passengers must mandatorily be quarantined at home for seven days, followed by an RT-PCR test on the eighth day.

Earlier, isolation was needed only for those passengers coming from ‘at risk’ countries.

If the passenger tests negative on the eighth day, she/he will have to further monitor her/his health for the next seven days.

“As per the latest government guidelines, passengers arriving in India will have to upload the repeat RT-PCR test done on the eighth day of arrival on the Air Suvidha portal,” the Ministry of Civil Aviation said.

While passengers coming from United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been exempted from home quarantine, the seven-day isolation is applicable to international travellers arriving from countries via the UAE.



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Tender Announcement

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG invites Bidders to submit their proposal for the below detailed tender:

Tender No.	Description	Tender Fee (Non-refundable)	Tender Purchase Deadline	Clarification Deadline	Tender Submission Date
TENDER/2022/01/ENG/001	EXTERNAL ELECTRICAL WORKS AT YANKUL AL RAKI IN AL DHAHIRAH GOVERNORATE	50.000	24.01.2022	27.01.2022	01.02.2022

Bank Name & Account Number
Bank Muscat (0423005687760617)

The Conditions:

- Collection of Tenders:** Interested, specialized companies and establishments registered under grade 3 and above (in C.R) with minimum of 3 years’ experience in the same field and approved by DCRP. Bidders can collect the tender documents from the procurement department by sending a copy of the payment slip to procurement@almaha.com.om The tender may be collected on any working day between 08:00 AM – 03:00 PM.
- Bank Guarantee:** The bidder should enclose a bank guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for an amount equivalent to (1%) of the tender value, with a validity of (90) Days from the last date of submission and addressed to Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Company SAOG.
- Offer Submission:** Tender bid should be submitted a sealed envelope and addressed to the Chairman of Tender Committee, Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG marked with tender number and subject. Other marks or any reference must not be printed outside the envelope. The exterior of the envelope containing the tender document must not reveal the identity of the bidder.
- Submission Location:** The bid should be deposited in the tender box at Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing SAOG head office located in Ghala before 01:00 PM on the submission date.
- Any bid received after the specified date or if it does not meet the conditions will not be considered.
- Each bid shall be signed and stamped with the signature of the authorized person.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to accept, reject or cancel the tender without giving any reasons.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG reserves the right to add or cancel some of the works mentioned in the tender if necessary.
- Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co SAOG is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without giving any reasons.
- For any enquiry email us at (procurement@almaha.com.om) or by calling 24610289/24610287/24610355

Al Maha Petroleum Products Marketing Co. (SAOG)
PO Box No: 57, PC: 116, Mina Al Fahal, Sultanate of Oman

South Korea military says North carries out fresh missile test

SEOUL: North Korea fired two suspected short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM) on Monday from an airport in its capital city of Pyongyang, South Korea's military reported, the fourth test this month to demonstrate its expanding missile arsenal.

Japan also reported the launch, with chief cabinet secretary Hirokazu Matsuno condemning it as a threat to peace and security while China urged all sides to preserve for stability.

"We call on relevant sides to keep in mind the overall peace and stability on the peninsula," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a daily briefing in Beijing when asked about the suspected launch.

Nuclear-armed North Korea had already conducted three other missile tests in less than two weeks before Monday, an unusually rapid series of launches. It said two of them involved single "hypersonic missiles" capable of high speed and manoeuvring after launch, while a test on Friday involved a pair of short-range ballistic missiles fired from train cars.

Monday's launch appeared to involve two SRBMs fired east from Sunan Airfield in Pyongyang, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said in a statement.



A man walks past a TV screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test at a railway station in Seoul. – AFP

North Korea used the airport to test fire the Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) in 2017, with leader Kim Jong Un in attendance. The missiles fired on Monday travelled about 380 km to a maximum altitude of 42 km, the JCS said in a statement.

Japanese Defence Minister Nobuo Kishi said the missiles appeared to have landed in the ocean off North Korea's east coast and it was evident that North Korea was using the frequent launches to improve its missile technology.

"The repeated launching of North Korea's ballistic missiles is a grave problem for the international community,

LAUNCH IS FOURTH TEST IN LESS THAN TWO WEEKS AS JAPAN CONDEMNS IT AS THREAT TO REGIONAL PEACE

including Japan," Kishi told reporters, noting that the tests were a violation of UN Security Council resolutions that ban North Korea from all ballistic missile development.

The US military's Indo-Pacific Command said that the launch did not pose an immediate threat to the United States or its allies, but that "these missile launches

highlight the destabilising impact of (North Korea's) illicit weapons programme".

The pace of testing suggested that North Korea had enough missiles to feel comfortable about using them on tests, training, and demonstrations, and they reinforced its deterrent credibility by emphasising the volume of its missile force, said Mason Richey, a professor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul.

North Korea has not tested its longest-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) or nuclear weapons since 2017, but after denuclearisation talks stalled in 2019, it began testing a range of new SRBM designs.

— Reuters

Tear gas in Sudan as thousands protest

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas Monday at protesters opposed to last year's military coup, ahead of a visit by US diplomats to ramp up support for a civilian-led transition.

The latest rallies came with US envoy to the Horn of Africa David Satterfield and Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Molly Phee expected in Khartoum this week to push a message of "justice" for the Sudanese.

Demonstrators carrying the Sudanese flag gathered in central Khartoum as well as in Wad Madani, a city to the south.

Security officers who deployed in large numbers fired volleys of tear gas at the Khartoum protesters heading toward the presidential palace, an AFP correspondent said.

Several people were seen suffering breathing difficulties and others bleeding due to wounds by tear gas canisters, the correspondent said.

Sawsan Salah, from the capital's twin city of Omdurman, said protesters burnt car tyres and carried photos of people killed during other demonstrations since the October 25 coup. In Wad Madani, "around 2,000 people took to the streets as they called for civilian rule," said Emad Mohammed, a witness there.

"The military back to the



Sudanese rally against a military coup which occurred nearly three months ago, south of the capital Khartoum. – AFP

barracks," and "the rule is that of the people's", thousands of protesters chanted in North Khartoum, witnesses said.

Protesters — sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands — have regularly taken to the streets despite a deadly security clampdown and periodic cuts to communications since the putsch led by army general Abdel Fattah al Burhan.

The military takeover triggered wide international condemnation and derailed a fragile transition to civilian rule following the April 2019 ouster of longtime autocratic president Omar al Bashir.

The crackdown has so far killed at least 64 people, and left hundreds wounded, according to an independent group of medics. — AFP

Myanmar: UN help sought to halt worsening of crisis

BANGKOK: A United Nations envoy on Monday called on Thailand's support to prevent a deterioration in the crisis in neighbouring Myanmar and welcomed assurances that refugees fleeing military operations would be protected by the Thai government.

Noeleen Heyzer, the UN secretary-general's special envoy on Myanmar, met with Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha to court support for international efforts to help displaced people and press Myanmar's junta to commit to a five-point peace plan it agreed to with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean). "The prime minister has an important role in preventing further deterioration of the crisis in Myanmar, where an implosion would bring further instability to an already volatile border area,"

Heyzer said in a statement.

Myanmar's military has longstanding ties with Thailand, which experts say has been measured with its criticism of the junta, concerned that it could get flooded with refugees if the army steps up operations against opponents.

Thousands of Myanmar civilians have fled into Thailand since clashes near the border erupted after a coup last year. More than 1,300 people are still in a Thai shelter, according to official figures.

Myanmar's military has been fighting on multiple fronts since seizing power last year, cracking down with deadly force on protests while intensifying operations against ethnic minority armies and newly formed militias allied with the ousted government.

— Reuters

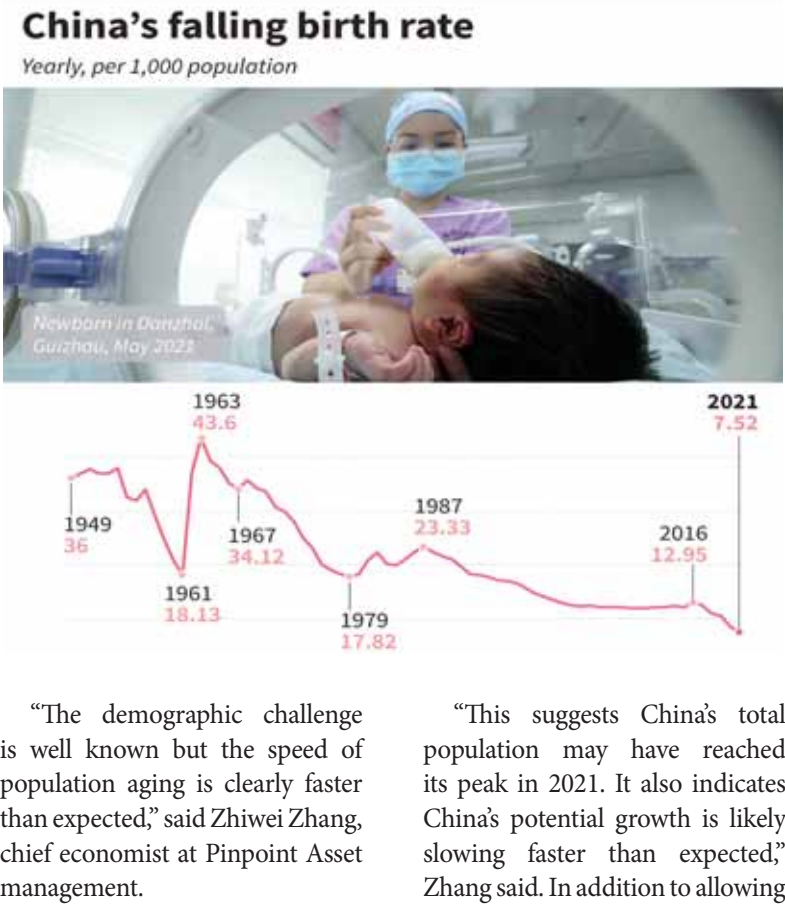
China's birth rate drops to record low in 2021

BEIJING: Mainland China's birth rate dropped to a record low in 2021, data showed on Monday, extending a downward trend that led Beijing last year to begin allowing couples to have up to three children.

China scrapped its decades-old one-child policy in 2016, replacing it with a two-child limit to try to avoid the economic risks from a rapidly aging population, but the high cost of urban living has deterred couples from having more children.

The 2021 rate of 7.52 births per 1,000 people was the lowest since 1949, when the National Statistics Bureau began collating the data, adding further pressure on officials to encourage more births.

The natural growth rate of China's population, which excludes migration, was only 0.034 per cent for 2021, the lowest since 1960, according to the data.



couples to have three children, China has been adopting policies aimed at reducing the financial burden of raising children, including banning for-profit after-school tuition, a massive industry, last year. China's working-age population is already declining, which will add pressure on the country's ability to pay and care for an increasingly elderly country.

There were 10.62 million births in 2021, the data showed, compared with 12 million in 2020.

Huang Wenzheng, a demography expert with the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalisation, said birth numbers are likely to fluctuate in the 10 million range before declining further in the absence of more policy changes.

"But policies will provide greater support for the birth rate in the longer run," Huang said.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ABU DHABI

Three killed in Abu Dhabi tanker explosion

Three people were killed when three oil tankers exploded in Abu Dhabi on Monday, in a blast that might have been caused by drones, police said. A minor fire also erupted at the city's airport. Shortly after, Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters said they have carried out a military attack on the UAE.

One Pakistani and two Indians were killed in the explosion that took place at an industrial area in the capital of the UAE. It was close to storage tanks of the state-owned ADNOC.



Police said an initial investigation showed that both fires might have been caused by "small flying objects, possibly drones, that fell in the two areas," police said, in a statement.

TOKYO

Japan weighs state of quasi-emergency for Tokyo

Japan's government is discussing whether to impose a quasi-state of emergency in the capital, Tokyo, and surrounding areas this week to contain a surge in Covid-19 infections, broadcaster FNN said on Monday. The highly infectious Omicron variant is driving a resurgence in coronavirus cases, which are hovering near record levels, after new infections exceeded 25,000 nationwide in the past two days.

Last week, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said the capital



would request measures such as a quasi-emergency if the use of beds allocated for Covid-19 patients climbed to 20 per cent. On Sunday, the figure was 19.3 per cent.

ISTANBUL

Court rules to keep Kavala in jail during trial

A Turkish court said on Monday that philanthropist Osman Kavala must stay in prison, lengthening his detention of more than four years without conviction, in a trial which has added to strains in Ankara's relations with Western allies. The court ruled by a majority of votes to keep Kavala in jail for the duration of his trial. It set the next hearing for February 21 and said his detention would be re-evaluated on February 13. Kavala was detained on October 18, 2017. Human rights groups have



said the case has political motivations and is part of a crackdown on dissent under President Tayyip Erdogan. The government rejects this and says Turkey's courts are independent.



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In brief

■ PARIS



ZEMMOUR CONVICTED OF HATE SPEECH

A French court on Monday found far-right presidential candidate Eric Zemmour guilty of hate speech for a televised tirade against unaccompanied child migrants. Zemmour drew widespread outrage in September 2020 when he told the CNews channel that child migrants were “thieves, killers, they’re rapists. That’s all they are. We should send them back”. Zemmour, a media pundit who is struggling to assemble the endorsements from elected officials required to compete in April’s presidential vote, did not appear in court to hear the verdict, having skipped his trial in November.

■ STOCKHOLM



SWEDEN PROBES DRONE FLIGHTS OVER NUCLEAR PLANTS

Sweden’s intelligence service is launching an investigation into several drone flights that took place over nuclear power plants in the country over the weekend, the agency said. The Swedish Security Service (Sapo) said in a statement that it had taken over the probe from the police regarding “the events where drones have been sighted at Forsmark, Ringhals and Oskarshamn’s nuclear power plants.”

Forsmark is located some 140 kilometres north of Stockholm, while the other two are in the south of Sweden. Swedish police said on Saturday that it had received reports of drones flying over several nuclear power plants.

■ TEHRAN



IRAN SAYS DECISION TIME FOR US IN N-TALKS

Iran said it is time for the United States to take political decisions to resolve key remaining issues, including on lifting sanctions, at talks aimed at reviving Tehran’s nuclear deal. “What remains are important and key issues that require specific political decisions”, foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said at his weekly news conference.

“Washington, in particular, must announce its decisions on removing sanctions and the remaining issues”, he said. “If this happens... we will reach a lasting, reliable agreement at a good pace.”

Former Ukrainian president lands in Kyiv to face treason case

KYIV: Ukraine’s former president, Petro Poroshenko, landed in Kyiv on Monday to face treason charges in a case he says was trumped up by allies of his successor, Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

In a brief stand-off at border control after arriving on a flight from Warsaw, Poroshenko accused border guards of taking away his passport. He later emerged to a crowd of thousands of cheering and flag-waving supporters outside the airport.

Poroshenko’s return sets up a showdown with President Zelenskiy’s government in what critics say is an ill-judged distraction as Ukraine braces for a possible Russian military offensive and seeks the support of its Western allies.

Western diplomats called for political unity in Ukraine before the arrival of Poroshenko, who was president from 2014 until 2019.

Poroshenko, 56, is being investigated for alleged treason linked to the financing of Russian-backed separatist fighters through illegal coal sales in 2014-15. He could face 15 years in prison if convicted. His party accused Zelenskiy of a reckless attempt to silence political opposition.

Zelenskiy’s administration says the prosecutors and judiciary are independent and accuses Poroshenko of thinking he is above the law.

“We are not here to protect Poroshenko, but to unite and protect Ukraine”, Poroshenko told the crowd, before heading to the Pechersk court in central Kyiv for a hearing into his case, as supporters



Supporters of Ukraine’s former leader Petro Poroshenko hold banner reading ‘Ukraine needs Poroshenko’ as they attend a rally during a court hearing in Kyiv. – AFP

chanted outside the building.

During a break in the court session, he told the crowd: “The authorities are confused, weak and instead of fighting (Russian President Vladimir) Putin, they are trying to fight us.”

Tetiana Sapyan, a spokeswoman for the State Bureau of Investigations (DBR), told a separate briefing that the DBR was apolitical.

On Friday, Zelenskiy’s chief of staff batted away suggestions that Zelenskiy was behaving like Viktor Yanukovich, a former president who was backed by Russia and whose political rival Yulia Tymoshenko was jailed in a case that Western countries widely condemned as politicised.

The row has raged as Ukraine tries to rally Western support in its standoff with Moscow after

sounding the alarm about a build-up of tens of thousands of Russian troops near its borders.

A confectionary tycoon, Poroshenko was elected as head of a pro-Western government after the Maidan street protests that ousted Yanukovich in 2014.

Relations between Ukraine and Russia collapsed in 2014 after Russia annexed the Crimea peninsula and backed separatist

fighters in a conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Zelenskiy trounced Poroshenko in an election in 2019. He ran on a ticket to tackle corruption and curb the influence of oligarchs in the former Soviet republic.

Prosecutors asked a Ukrainian court in December to arrest Poroshenko, with the possibility of bail set at 1 billion hryvnia (\$37 million). — Reuters

Millions hunker down as storm hits US

WASHINGTON: Millions of Americans hunkered down as a major winter storm hit the eastern United States with heavy snow and ice knocking power out for an estimated 190,000 customers as of early Monday. The National Weather Service (NWS) said the storm was bringing a miserable combination of heavy snow, freezing rain and high winds, impacting the southeast and coastal mid-Atlantic before moving up to New England and southern Canada. A swath from the upper Ohio Valley north to the lower Great Lakes region could expect more than a foot of snow on Monday, it warned. “Heavy snow and ice accumulations are likely to produce hazardous travel, downed trees, and power outages through Monday for portions of the eastern US”, it said. In all, more than 80 million people fell under the winter weather alerts, US media reported. About 190,000 customers were without power early Monday, according to the website PowerOutage.US. The storm spawned damaging tornadoes in Florida and flooding in coastal areas, while in the Carolinas and up through the Appalachians icy conditions and blustery winds raised concerns. Transport was seriously disrupted, with thousands of flights cancelled, and a portion of busy interstate highway I-95 closed in North Carolina. More than 3,000 flights within, into or out of the United States



A snow sweeper clears sidewalks near the National Mall in Washington, DC, during a winter storm. – AFP

were cancelled Sunday. Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina was the worst-affected with 1,200 flights, or more than 90 per cent of its scheduled services, cancelled, according to the FlightAware website. A further 1,200 flights nationwide had been cancelled early Monday. Drivers were warned of hazardous road conditions and major travel headaches from Arkansas in the south all the way up to Maine, on the Canadian border. Georgia Governor Brian Kemp had declared a state of emergency on Friday, and snowplows were at work before noon Sunday to clear the roads.

More than 80 million people fell under the winter weather alerts, US media reported

Virginia and North Carolina also declared states of emergency. More than 15 inches of snow had fallen in parts of North Carolina by late Sunday night, the NWS tweeted, with areas of Georgia and Tennessee also seeing 10-11 inches. Virginia State Police said on Twitter they had responded to almost 1,000 crashes and disabled vehicles on Sunday. “Mostly vehicle damage. No reported

traffic deaths”, the force said. A “multi-vehicle backup”, along with minor crashes, had earlier stopped traffic on a major interstate in the southern part of the state. North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper said on Twitter that up to a foot of snow had fallen in some areas by midday, and that “significant icing is causing trouble in the Central part of the state” as he reminded people to stay inside and avoid travel if possible. Also in North Carolina, students were shaken up after the storm caused the roof of a college residence hall to collapse, according to a local ABC news station, though no one was hurt. — AFP

At least 12 killed in Afghan earthquake

HERAT, Afghanistan: At least 12 people were killed after an earthquake hit western Afghanistan on Monday, an official said.

The victims died when roofs of their residential houses collapsed in Qadis district in the western province of Badghis, District Governor Mohammad Saleh Purdel said.

The quake was magnitude 5.3, according to the US Geological Survey, who originally recorded the magnitude as 5.6.

“Several people were also injured in today’s earthquake”, Purdel said, adding that the victims included women and children.

Afghanistan is frequently hit by earthquakes, especially in the Hindu Kush mountain range, which lies near the junction of the Eurasian and Indian tectonic plates.

The European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) said the earthquake was at a depth of 30 km, it added.

Earthquakes can cause significant damage to poorly built homes and buildings in impoverished Afghanistan.

— Reuters

Between the spines: A book lover’s corner



Dr Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

January is a time for resolutions, listicles, and planning ahead. We promise to eat better and strike a better work-home balance, maybe even put in some hours at the gym. Many of us also plan to read more, promising ourselves to find time to at least check out a few of the bestsellers inevitably found in the end of year lists of all newspapers, blogs, celebrity interviews and Instagram reels. If you’re wondering about the last one is, check out ‘bookstagram’, a space in Instagram for book lovers to share reviews, photographs and even book cover design ideas. That just shows we all need some help in finding that perfect book — perfect for the mood we’re in, a pick me up, a thriller or whodunit, a romance or even a travel or food guide that will take us far away in these days of being cooped up at home, with only Netflix for company.

2021 brought with it a range of motivational books on the back of the pandemic when people seemed to want to be re-assured that the world wasn’t actually going to end, that this was a blip in our lives and we would overcome the challenges of Covid-19 and even come out victorious. Some more academic than others, most talked about what we can learn from this experience and how we can use these lessons to create a more responsible, caring and sharing world. Fareed Zakaria’s Ten Lessons for a Post-Pandemic World talks about how the pandemic has upended the world as we knew it — questioning how prepared we are to tackle global emergencies, how the pandemic gave us a moment to stop and think of our world and the direction in which it is going and how interconnected we all are, not just as people, but

nations as well. Far from being alarmist, Zakaria takes a studied, much needed calm approach, actually celebrating our ‘resilient world’. He calls for an empathetic world based on good governance and equitable distribution of wealth, a move away from the obsessions of materialism in the last few decades. SMART WORK: The Ultimate Handbooks for Remote and Hybrid Teams by Jo Owen takes on another raging issue raised by the pandemic. In so many ways, work has been re-defined in the last two years, with work-from-home leading to questions of whether we even need offices and their mandatory 5-day week, on how to juggle family and work in the four walls of a home. The professional side of this challenge is addressed by Owen

who focuses on how traditional hierarchies in an office have been removed, with less day-to-day accountability, focusing on a job being done rather than on how and who is doing the work. In the new work space, priority is on trust, collaboration and persuasion, not coercion and control. This has huge implications on leadership styles which will have to be reimagined, according to the author. As the world worked through its banana breads and dalgona coffee, cooking became another popular pastime, with recipes being shared on social media and fusion cooking becoming the rage. According to *The New York Times*, bestsellers ranged from air frying recipe books to vegan and plant based cooking, in addition to, of course, dessert and diet books, all at once! From Jamie Oliver’s Together:

Memorable Meals, Made Easy to Drew Barrymore’s Rebel Homemaker: Food, Family, Life, the obsession with all things cooking seems to be going strong. There is something for everyone: Foodology: A food-lover’s guide to digestive health and happiness by Saliha Ahmad for vegetarians, The Diabetic Cookbook by Michael Swamy, Yotam Ottolenghi’s Test Kitchen: Shelf Love that uses everyday ingredients found in the fridge and pantry and Stanley Tucci’s Taste with its re-discovery of Italian flavours — later made into a docu-series as well. The culinary world has offered wondrous gifts to keep us busy beyond the pandemic days and months. The lesson here must surely be that we humans can create the best outcomes from the most challenging of moments, and in that, there is hope — keep reading!

Geoengineers seek a diplomatic fix

ALISTER DOYLE

In 1965, US President Lyndon Johnson’s science advisers urged research into reflecting sunlight to keep the Earth cool amid projections of an alarming build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere as a result of burning fossil fuels. Almost six decades later, “solar geoengineering” research has made scant headway. It attracts less than 1 per cent of climate science budgets, amid fears that tampering with the global thermostat could produce unexpected consequences — and distract from an overriding need for deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. But governments are facing ever starker choices as global warming creeps towards 1.5 degrees Celsius — a threshold set in the 2015 Paris Agreement, agreed by about 200 countries, to avert ever more damaging floods, droughts, wildfires and melting ice. Such impacts are already surging with temperatures now just 1.1C above pre-industrial levels. Last year, opposition from indigenous peoples forced the cancellation of an early, high-profile outdoor test of solar geoengineering technology by Harvard University. The planned balloon flight over Sweden was designed as a first step towards releasing tiny reflective particles 20 km high in the atmosphere, to see if they could form a planetary haze mimicking a volcanic eruption. Major eruptions — like that of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991 — can cut global temperatures for more than a year, as an ashen mask circulates in the stratosphere. This year, after the setback, backers of research into the risks and benefits of solar geoengineering are turning to diplomacy to advance their work. “There is no question that in the public battle, if it is Harvard against indigenous peoples, we can’t proceed. That’s just a reality,” said David Keith, a professor of applied physics at the Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, who was involved in the balloon project, known as SCoPEX. Harvard was considering alternative launch sites but Keith said “we also could kill the project. We really don’t know.” Åsa Larsson-Blind, vice-president of the Saami Council of reindeer herders, which led opposition to the test, sent an open letter to Harvard University in June urging an end to SCoPEX. The group said the project violated indigenous peoples’ principles of living in harmony with nature. So far, “we haven’t heard back”, she said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Millions have lost a step into the middle class



STEVE LOHR The writer has covered technology, business and economics for *The New York Times* for more than 20 years. In 2013, he was part of the team awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting

Over the last two decades, workers without four-year college degrees have lost ground in the occupations that used to be ladders to middle-class lives for them and their families. While the trend has been well-known, putting a number on the lost steppingstone jobs has been elusive. A new study, published on Friday, estimates that such workers have been displaced from 7.4 million jobs since 2000. The research points to the persistent challenge for the nearly two-thirds of American workers who do not have a four-year college degree, even as some employers have dropped the requirement in recent years. “These workers have been displaced from millions of the precise jobs that offer them upward mobility,” said Papia Debroy, head of research for Opportunity@Work, the nonprofit that published the study. “It represents a stunning loss for workers and their families.” Opportunity@Work is part of an emerging coalition of groups that seeks to change the culture of hiring and promotion in corporate America. They are trying to encourage a shift to hiring and career development based on people’s skills rather than degrees. Part of that effort is to create a body of research that highlights the problem but also the untapped potential of workers. The group’s researchers analysed employment trends across a wide variety of occupations. The jobs included business managers, nurses, software developers, sales supervisors, financial analysts, purchasing agents, industrial engineers and administrative assistants. Had workers without college degrees maintained the share of those jobs they held in 2000, there would have been 7.4 million more of them by the end of 2019, the study concluded. A previous study by Opportunity@Work, with academic researchers, dissected skills in different occupations and found that up to 30 million workers had the skills to realistically move to new jobs that paid on average 70 per cent more than their current ones. Some major companies have started to adjust their hiring requirements.

Rework America Business Network, an initiative of the Markle Foundation, has pledged to adopt skills-based hiring for many jobs. Companies in the group include Aon, Boeing, McKinsey, Microsoft and Walmart. OneTen, a nonprofit, has gathered commitments from dozens of companies to pursue the goal of hiring or promoting 1 million Black workers without college degrees to jobs with family-sustaining incomes over the next decade. The companies include Accenture, AT&T, Bank of America, Caterpillar, Delta Air

THERE IS RECENT EVIDENCE THAT THE PANDEMIC SHORTAGE OF WORKERS MAY BE PROMPTING COMPANIES TO LOOSEN DEGREE REQUIREMENTS



Del Walker, who was hired by Accenture in 2020 after she completed its apprentice programme at her office in Chicago.

Lines, IBM, JPMorgan Chase, Merck, Target and Wells Fargo. The drive to increase workforce diversity is one motivation for the change. Screening by college degree hits minorities particularly hard, eliminating 76 per cent of Black adults and 83 per cent of Latino adults. But companies and labour experts

also emphasise the competitive and economic benefits of tapping a wider pool of capable workers. “The country as a whole will benefit from not stranding human capital,” said Erica Groshen, an economist at Cornell University and a former head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics. There is recent evidence that the pandemic shortage of workers may be prompting companies to loosen degree requirements. A study published this month by Keith Wardrip, a researcher at the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, compared online job listings in the five quarters before Covid hit and the five quarters after. In the pandemic period, there were 2.3 million more postings for what he classified as opportunity employment jobs — those that pay more than the median national wage of \$36,660 and are accessible to workers without a four-year college degree. Much of the increase was due to the higher demand by companies that were short of workers as many people pulled out of the job market for health concerns, family obligations or personal reasons. But Wardrip found that 38 per cent of the increase was attributable to lower education requirements for some jobs. Major companies that have moved to skills-based hiring in recent years say the shift has given them a stronger, more diverse workforce. A few years ago, Wells Fargo, as part of a broader review, was rethinking its hiring and career development practices. A question at the time, recalled Carly Sanchez, executive vice-president for hiring and diversity recruiting, was, “Are we eliminating some of the best talent?” The bank decided it was and changed its practices. Today, more than 90 per cent of jobs at Wells Fargo do not require a four-year degree, “almost a total reversal for us” from five years ago, Sanchez said. Accenture began an apprenticeship programme in 2016. What started as a small corporate citizenship initiative, with fewer than 20 apprentices, has become a significant part of the technology consulting and services company’s recruiting and hiring. — The New York Times Service

Learning from plants: Valuable insights for human thriving



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

The seeds lying on ground have been awakened by the recent rains transforming the brown mountains and hills to shades of green.

The rocky surface has sprouted sturdy plants and they are least concerned regarding soil and fertilisers.

This reminds us about the potential and possibilities we have in life.

Most of the time

we end up comparing ourselves with others and we think we must be part of that norm to achieve what others have.

And here is the plant looking at me through the window cheerfully fluttering the leaves in the gentle breeze, as if to ask, “What are you complaining about?”

The plant probably knows it is just a short duration for it to enjoy the glory of being there anchored and alive to everything that is moving in the nature from stopovers of butterflies to raindrops, but it does it with full satisfaction enjoying the moment, the day, the week, the month, the season.

It does so with full confidence as it lets its seeds fly with the wind to reach any patch of soil or pots and even on its own rocky home in this mountain corner.

For if it unfortunately withers it knows the next winter or shower of rain will bring it alive again as the seeds sprout. No amount of temperature and sunshine will deny its appearance again to prove its existence.

It appears like wild spinach and do not have pretty flowers to impress me but I am not going to deny its existence by calling it a weed to be cleared, for it shows me the meaning of life.

It tells me, “accept and expect.”

Accept nature’s way and know your turn will come, so why ruin this moment and not enjoy what it is offering? Expect the worst if you want to be prepared for the worse so there are no surprises and shocks.

At the same time, we can expect and hope for the best. So often we are so carried away with what we think is crisis only to realise the goodness behind it.

All we have to do is pause, take a deep breath, hold and slowly release it. Half of our creativity is achieved facing challenges. Can you imagine a life without deadlines? It is how we meet the deadlines that make the difference.

They say do not worry about the past because it is not yours anymore, do not worry about the future because it is still not a reality and then you have this day and this moment. What and how you are going to handle it is in your hands. In fact, it is up in your thoughts.

A shift in thought can transform the process. We can do it differently and see if there is anything achievable with a new approach. For sure, the calendar gives you 365 chances and that means not just a second chance. So we can try again and again until we hit the formula of success as per our terms.

We bring up resolutions and we give up, never questioning ourselves, but excuses we have plenty.

The process can be begun by just asking one question- what is our purpose in life?

THE PLANT PROBABLY KNOWS IT IS JUST A SHORT DURATION FOR IT TO ENJOY THE GLORY OF BEING THERE ANCHORED AND ALIVE TO EVERYTHING THAT IS MOVING IN THE NATURE FROM STOPOVERS OF BUTTERFLIES TO RAINDROPS, BUT IT DOES IT WITH FULL SATISFACTION ENJOYING THE MOMENT, THE DAY, THE WEEK, THE MONTH, THE SEASON



NO WAY FORWARD

A migrant from Central America sits on a road in front of a Guatemalan police officers after a migrant caravan was blocked by Guatemalan authorities, near the border with Honduras outside of Puerto Barrios, Guatemala.

– Reuters

Bosnia’s next crisis



CARL BILDT

Carl Bildt is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden

The Russian threat to Ukraine is not the only potential crisis in Eastern Europe this year. Bosnia and Herzegovina is heading for a period of deep political turmoil, with a key election scheduled for October.

Bosnia has never been an uncomplicated place. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it generated one crisis after another, eventually contributing to the outbreak of World War I. Then, with the breakup of Yugoslavia in the late twentieth century, it was the site of a brutal war between Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Serbs, and Croats.

The Dayton Accords ended the conflict in 1995, after more than 100,000 people had been killed — including in the genocidal Srebrenica massacre that July — and after millions more had been driven from their homes. The next step was to build a functioning state out of the wreckage. But the armies of the three groups were the only functioning structures left, and many local leaders saw peace as little more than the continuation of war by other means. Hopes that a new generation of non-nationalist leaders would rise out of the ashes were soon dashed.

Although international aid has transformed the country, covering up most of the traces of war, its politics remain profoundly dysfunctional, due to the continued political dominance of nationalist parties. As a result, the prospect of Bosnia joining the European Union looks increasingly distant.

In its 2021 annual assessment of Bosnia, the European Commission notes that “political leaders continued to engage in divisive rhetoric and unconstructive political disputes.” There has been virtually no progress in meeting the 14 benchmarks for starting EU accession talks, and “during the pandemic, the negative effects of widespread corruption and signs of political capture continued to manifest strongly.” Neither judicial officeholders nor political leaders have managed to tackle these problems.

Moreover, owing to the “generalised phenomenon of corruption” and an “inefficient and oversized” public sector, Bosnia’s per capita GDP remains just one-third of the EU average. An estimated half-million people have left the country over the last few years, draining it of precious young talent.

Bosnia should be doing much better than it is 26 years after the war ended.

Instead, another deep crisis looms. The Bosnian Serb leader, Milorad Dodik, is beating the nationalist drum and pushing for Republika Srpska (one of the country’s two mostly autonomous regions) to assert even greater independence vis-à-vis the central government. The rhetoric

is intensifying on all sides, leading to calls by Christian Schmidt, the EU High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, for another international intervention.

But this is the wrong medicine for what ails Bosnia. One factor in the current political crisis is a controversial new law banning genocide denial, imposed last summer by the outgoing international high representative just days before he left office. Bosnian Serbs immediately responded by pulling out of common state functions, and Dodik has since issued strident ultimatums.

Dodik occasionally calls for Republika

NATIONALIST RIVALRIES AND RAMPANT CORRUPTION CONTINUE TO HOLD BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA BACK. NOW THAT IT IS IN ANOTHER DEEP POLITICAL CRISIS, THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST RECONSIDER AND CLARIFY ITS OWN ROLE, CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR BOSNIAN LEADERS FINALLY TO SIT DOWN AND HASH OUT THE COMPROMISES NEEDED TO MAKE THE COUNTRY WORK

Srpska to break away from Bosnia entirely. This rhetoric gets him headlines, but it should not be taken seriously. After all, both Serbia and Russia have clearly called for Bosnia’s territorial integrity to be respected.

But the crisis both has deepened nationalist divisions in Bosnia and highlighted the confusion at the heart of the international community’s presumed role in the country. Is Bosnia supposed to be a protectorate, where the international community can devise, impose, and implement decisions at will? Or is it a truly sovereign country that should sort out its own problems?



Police march in Banja Luka to mark the Serb Republic’s national holiday on January 9. – Reuters

In a sense, the office of the international high representative – a post that I was the first to hold after the war – has gone from being part of the solution to part of the problem. On the Bosniak side, its presence invites constant demands for international action to be taken against reluctant Bosnian Serbs or Bosnian Croats, while for the latter groups, it instils fear that such action will indeed be taken. The result is paralysis and distrust, because neither side feels a need to sit down and hash out the hard compromises needed to make the country work.

A major factor in the current crisis is Bosnia’s general election later this year. In the 2020 local elections, opposition parties made impressive gains against the dominant nationalist forces in Sarajevo and in the Bosnian Serb centre, Banja Luka. Fearing further losses, nationalist leaders on all sides are eager to create a new crisis to scare and mobilise their bases.

It is critical that the general election be held as planned. But afterwards, the international community should reconsider its approach to Bosnia. If it isn’t ready to assume full protectorate powers, it should step back and leave the country’s leaders grudgingly to sort things out themselves. That process will be slow and difficult; but it must happen sooner or later if Bosnia is to have any chance of functioning as a sovereign country.

In stepping back, the international community should establish two hard conditions: Bosnia’s territorial integrity must be maintained; and the small EU military mission in the country should remain, because it has the capacity to call in rapid Nato reinforcements if necessary.

This year will undoubtedly be politically tumultuous for Bosnia. Bosnian Serb nationalists will want more power devolved to them, and Dodik – despite new US sanctions against him – might well engage in more brinkmanship to rally his supporters. At the same time, Bosniak nationalists will demand that more power be centralised in Sarajevo, and they will seek the international community’s help in imposing this. Bosnian Croat nationalists, for their part, will remain profoundly unhappy (not unreasonably) with an election law that effectively denies them representation in the country’s highest decision-making body.

This political crisis certainly is not Bosnia’s first, and it won’t be its last. Calls for another massive international intervention are not surprising, but they are ill-advised. Bosnia should no longer be treated as a protectorate. While the EU and the United States remain ready and willing to help, Bosnians ultimately must take responsibility for Bosnia.

— Project Syndicate Services

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Oman International Drift returns

5 4 T O P D R I F T E R S T O C O M P E T E I N O I D C 2 0 2 2 F I R S T R O U N D

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Oman International Drift Championship (OIDC) is back after a two-year-gap due to Covid-19 related situation.

The fourth edition of the much-followed international drift action will enliven the Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) Muscat Drift Arena from January 20 onwards.

The first round of OIDC will be held on January 20 and 21.

The second round is scheduled for February 10 and 11, while the third and final round is slated for February 17 and 18.

A total of 54 drivers will be participating in this year's competition which include 14 Omanis, 24 drifters from the Middle East, and 16 other international drifters make up the list.

OAA Chairman Brigadier (Retd) Salim bin Ali bin Khalifa al Maskary said this is a welcome relief for all those related to motor

sports that the exciting events have returned after the challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We are delighted to organise our premier events after a two-year uncertainty. Our team is fully prepared to stage the international events complying with the medical protocols and other safety measures," Al Maskary told *Oman Daily Observer* on Monday.

The event will be sponsored by Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Redbull Mobile and Zestino.

DRIFTING CHAMPS RETURN

Top drifters have confirmed their participation in the OIDC 2022.

Last edition runner-up Sebastian Peter Fontijn will be one of the favourites this year in the absence of Ireland's defending champion James Deane and Latvian teen sensation Nikolass 'Niknak' Bertons.

Local drifters in the challenge include Haitham al Hadidi, Ali al Balushi and Tariq al Shaihani

among others.

OAA Managing Director Suleiman al Rawahi exuded confidence from the previous successful editions of the international drift championships.

"We have been conducting these top events successfully earlier. But the OAA have well prepared to stage such tournaments in the new situation. We also want to showcase the Omani talent in the sport as well as organising such big events," Al Rawahi told a press conference to announce the event at the OAA on Monday.

Alongside the OIDC, a training course for drift judges in coordination with global motorsports body FIA will be organised.

"We will be coordinating with the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) to host a judge training course during the event, which will be used as a platform to train judges in the region. This is an additional act we are trying to promote since the

sport has become very popular in the country and is growing fast, so we need to qualify judges who would be able to manage the competitions," Suleiman said.

Mentioning the OAA's efforts to promote local drivers, Al Rawahi said: "The OAA has always been proactive to developing the level of our local championship. We had managed to attract top international drivers and the local drivers will gain a great exposure by competing with the top-class drivers in the world."

SPECTATORS TO BE ADMITTED

Spectators those who adhere to the Covid protocols will be admitted for the event, Fahmi al Busaidy, race director of OIDC, said.

The spectators should have taken two doses of vaccine and should wear masks and observe social distancing, Al Busaidy said.

"Spectators are expected to show proof of their two vaccines doses but drivers have to go through a

separate Covid checklist to be able to compete in the event," he added.

For the qualifying series, regular and family tickets will be available for RO 1.

For main race, regular and family tickets for RO 3 and VIP tickets will cost RO 15. The reception at OAA facility will be opened from 9am to 9pm every day.

DRIVERS LIST

International drivers: From El Salvador - Nasser al Harbali; from Japan - Kisaragi Awano, Tsubasa Takizawa and Tsuyoshi Arakaki (Toni); from Lithuania - Andrius Vasiliauskas and Benekdita Cirba; from Malaysia - Choong Yew Hing and Muhammad Zaiham Hamdan; from Netherlands - Clint Oort and Sebastian Fontijn; from Pakistan - Talha bin Azhar; from the UK - Martin Richards and Steve Baggsy (Stephen Biagioni); and from Ukraine - Dmitriy Illyuk, Rostyslav Rarakhovskiy and Serhii Kremet, from USA - Nicholas Solomon and Noor Daoud.

Mena drivers: From Jordan - Ahmad Daham, Hamzeh Naamneh and Moaid Marwan Mahmoud Yousef; from KSA - Khalid al Zayed and Turki Alzeer; from Kuwait - Ali Mustafa Makseedm, Hamad al Hajeri and Mesyar Nawaf Abushaibah; from Lebanon - Ayman Bou Fakher El Dine, Hussein Mohamad Messelmani, Ihab Ghassan Abou Falah, Rabi al Awar and Samer Sabeh; from Qatar - Mohammed al Jabir and Saoud al Attiyah; from Syria - Rami Zabdi; from UAE - Abdulla Ali al Shehhi, Hamzeh Naamneh, Hazaa al Hosani, Jaseem Allaghai, Mohamed Hassan al Mansoori and Yousuf al Herai; and

Omani drivers: Abdullah al Mamari, Ahmed al Amri, Ali al Balushi, Ali al Shaihani, Haitham al Hadidi, Ibrahim al Azri, Mohammed bin Shaikh al Abri, Mundher al Manji, Muthasim al Haruni, Nawaf al Wahaibi, Riyadh al Mabsali, Said Salim al Badwawi, Tariq al Shaihani and Waqqas al Balushi.



Leeds United's Jack Harrison celebrates scoring their third goal and his hat-trick against West Ham with Daniel James, Lewis Bate and Stuart Dallas. – Reuters

Leeds avenge FA Cup defeat by Hammers

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 17

With the first hat-trick of his career, Jack Harrison led Leeds to a 3-2 win over West Ham and in the process enabled his side to avenge the defeat they suffered a week earlier against the London side in the FA Cup.

Leeds Manager, Marcelo Bielsa, whose side secured back-to-back wins in the Premier League, for the first time this season, said: "It was a very even game. It was beautiful, a typical Premier League game. It was good it was in our favour but the margin was very close."

He added: "It was a triumph for the players because their effort they put in was moving and they showed a desire to win. It gives us a bit of momentum. To win two games in a row is good but we have to sustain these performances over time."

Leeds took an early lead when Harrison hit a fierce shot past Lukasz Fabianski after a pass from Adam Forshaw who had picked up the rebound from a save by the Leeds goalkeeper from a shot Mateusz Klich. Aaron Cresswell may well be blamed for the goal as he had failed to intercept a pass before the ball went to Klich.

The Hammers pressed hard up front and in the 34th minute came



Leeds United's Jack Harrison celebrates scoring their third goal and his hat-trick. – Reuters

the equaliser from a corner taken by Cresswell which was headed in by Jarrod Bowen after he was quick to move away from Stuart Dallas. But just three minutes later Leeds were leading again with Luke Ayling heading a corner to the far post where Harrison, just about onside, squeezed the ball in with his thigh.

Daniel James badly missed two chances for Leeds during stoppage time of the first half but seven minutes into the second half

the Hammers equalised again. Fornals picked up the ball on the right and went past Pascal Struijk before shooting into the near corner.

Leeds continued relentlessly to press hard and were certainly the more energetic of the two sides. Their winning goal came an hour into the game. Raphinha sent a through pass that went past two defenders to Harrison who superbly lifted the ball over the advancing goalkeeper.

In the later stages, chances were missed by both sides. A free kick taken by Raphinha hit the post and Klich had a goal disallowed when his shot touched Rodrigo who was offside. In added time the Hammers could once again have found an equaliser but Bowen missed from four yards when he chested the ball over the bar instead of attempting a header.

Hammers Manager, David Moyes, not happy about the match scheduling, said: "You don't expect me to feel good about the result, do you? Not with a performance like that."

He went on to say: "I have to give credit to the players for playing Leeds one Sunday then another and then a game in between while Leeds didn't have a game. An excuse? Maybe, but I think it's a fair one."

Muscat CT too good for Majees, Waqas stars in Al Jadidi win

MUSCAT: Star-studded Muscat CT showed their batting prowess in a 96-run drubbing of Majees CT when four of their top five batters struck sizzling fifties in a 50-over Premier Division League match at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Shoaib Khan (75), Jatinder Singh (72), Kashyapkumar Prajapati (69) and Sandeep Goud (51) all batted brilliantly as Muscat posted an impressive 325 for 5 on the board. Amanpreet Singh took 2 for 49.

Majees struggled to stay on course despite a superb 112 by Ravindra K'Ratne before being dismissed for 229 in the 45th over. Chonira Aiyappa, Ganesh Chandrashekher and Samay Shrivastava all claimed two wickets each.

Waqas helps Al Jadidi win
Splendid 57 by Muhammed Waqas and Shaheer Najeeb's 3 for 13 were the highlights of Al Jadidi Stars' comfortable 7-wicket win over Ernst and Young in a T20 game of A Division League at OC Turf 2 on Saturday.

Ernst and Young failed to prosper, getting bowled out for 112 due to brilliant bowling by Shaheer, Ali Muhammed (3 for 21) and Aneermon (2 for 18).

Al Jadidi raced to the target in 16.2 overs, scoring 116 for 3 thanks to top knock by Waqas. Alkesh Joshi picked up 2 for 23.

Akbar steers Ideal to big victory
Akbar Shaikh's magnificent 97



Vanderlande's Rahul Chadha and Haja Hussain.

and Ruban Durai's 4 for 7 powered Ideal International to a massive 180-run victory against OCT Al Amerat in a C Division T20 clash at Muscat Municipality ground 2 on Friday.

Ideal's huge 253 for 2 included top scores of 97 from Akbar, 53 by Salman Khan, 41 by Wasim Jamadar and 39 from Ruban Durai. Anaya Allah bagged 2 for 38. No batter from OCT Al Amerat could stay on to fight except Sulaiman Haider who struck 33 as the whole side was restricted to 73 for 7 in 20 overs.

Rahul lifts Vanderlande
In another C Division match at Muscat Municipality ground 1, Vanderlande rode on a superb 54 by its star performer Rahul Chadha and 3 for 24 by Haja Hussain to defeat Design Group Engineering Consultants by 30

runs. Vanderlande's 205 for 6 included top scores of 54 by Rahul and 37 by Barathwaj Vinayagam. Amir Mohammed and Satham Hussain took two wickets each.

Design Group fought well but fell short by 30 runs, scoring 175 for 7 in 20 overs. Parvez Beg (52) and Muhammed Althaf (45) were its main scorers. Haja Hussain and Vignesh Kumar claimed three and two wickets respectively.

BRIEF SCORES
Premier Division 50 overs
Muscat CT 325 for 5 in 50 overs (Shoaib Khan 75 - 6x4, 3x6, Jatinder Singh 72 - 5x4, 3x6, Kashyapkumar Prajapati 69 - 7x4, Sandeep Goud 51 - 2x4, 4x6, Amanpreet Singh 2-49) beat Majees 229 all out in 44.3 overs (Ravindra K'Ratne 112 - 12x4, 5x6, Chonira Aiyappa 2-23, Ganesh Chandrashekhar 2-26, Samay Shrivastava 2-52) by 96 runs.

A Division T20
Ernst & Young 112 all out in 18.2 overs (Krishnan Karthik 35 - 2x4, 2x6, Issa Al Balushi 27 - 5x4, 1x6, Shaheer Najeeb 3-13, Ali Muhammed 3-21, Aneermon Abdulrahman 2-18) lost to Al Jadidi Stars 116 for 3 in 16.2 overs (Muhammad Waqas 57 - 8x4, 1x6, Alkesh Joshi 2-23) by 7 wickets.

C Division
Ideal International 253 for 2 in 20 overs (Akbar Shaikh 97 - 14x4, Salman Khan 53 - 9x4, 1x6, Wasim Jamadar 41 - 6x4, 2x6, Ruban Durai 39 - 7x4, 1x6, Anaya Allah 2-38) beat OCT Al Amerat 73 for 7 in 20 overs (Sulaiman Haider 33 - 4x4, Ruban Durai 4-7, Sachin Mamnani 3-8) by 180 runs.

C Division
Vanderlande 205 for 6 in 20 overs (Rahul Chadha 54 - 7x4, 2x6, Barathwaj Vinayagam 37 - 4x4, Amir Mohammed 2-38, Satham Hussain 2-39) beat Design Group Engineering Consultants 175 for 7 in 20 overs (Parvez Beg 52 - 5x4, 1x6, Muhammed Althaf 45 - 2x4, 1x6, Haja Hussain 3-24, Vignesh Kumar 2-22) by 30 runs.

Over 130 golfers register for Assarain Golf Classic

MUSCAT: The 26th Assarain Golf Classic, one of the most prestigious golf tournaments of the Sultanate of Oman, will take place at Ghala Golf Club on January 21 and 22.

More than 130 golfers have registered for the event, according to the organisers.

The organisers of the Assarain Golf Classic, sponsored by Assarain Group of Companies, said the tournament is a premium golfing event that gives amateur golfers the opportunity to participate in a professional tournament that meets international golfing standards. Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director, Assarain Group of Companies and the pioneer of the Assarain Golf Classic, said: "We support golf and are committed to help the game flourish in Oman. It is unfortunate that we could not conduct the tournament in the year 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. We look forward to the 2022 edition of the Assarain Golf Classic and are confident that it will exceed all expectations."

"The 2022 Assarain Golf Classic is a highly anticipated golfing tournament, one that the entire golfing community in Oman looks forward to. The Classic, to be staged at Ghala Golf Club, will witness the coming together of golfers of varying handicap who will take on the challenge of taming the greens. Open to men, ladies and juniors, the



Assarain Golf Classic 2022 is a highly awaited golfing tournament in Oman".

I always look forward to this tournament as it sets a new standard every year."

The 36-hole completion is one of the largest golfing tournaments in the region and is open to all players with a verifiable handicap. Another not-to-be-missed attraction will be the colourful presentation ceremony planned for January 22 to felicitate the winners of different categories.

Seeb, Dhofar drawn with top clubs in AFC Cup

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Seeb were grouped with Kuwait SC, Lebanon's Al Ansar and Jableh of Syria in 2022 AFC Cup.

Dhofar clubbed Al Riffa from Bahrain, Palestine's Shabab Al Khalil and Kuwait's Arabi SC.

Seeb have been clubbed with Kuwait SC, Lebanon's Al Ansar and Jableh of Syria in Group A of the 2022 AFC Cup. The other Oman's representative in the AFC Cup, Dhofar, joined Al Riffa from Bahrain, Palestine's Shabab Al Khalil and Kuwait's Arabi SC. The draw of AFC Cup took place in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

Only the winners from the three groups in the west are guaranteed to advance to the zonal semifinals alongside the team with the best runners-up record. Omani clubs are aiming for top show in the Asian event. The



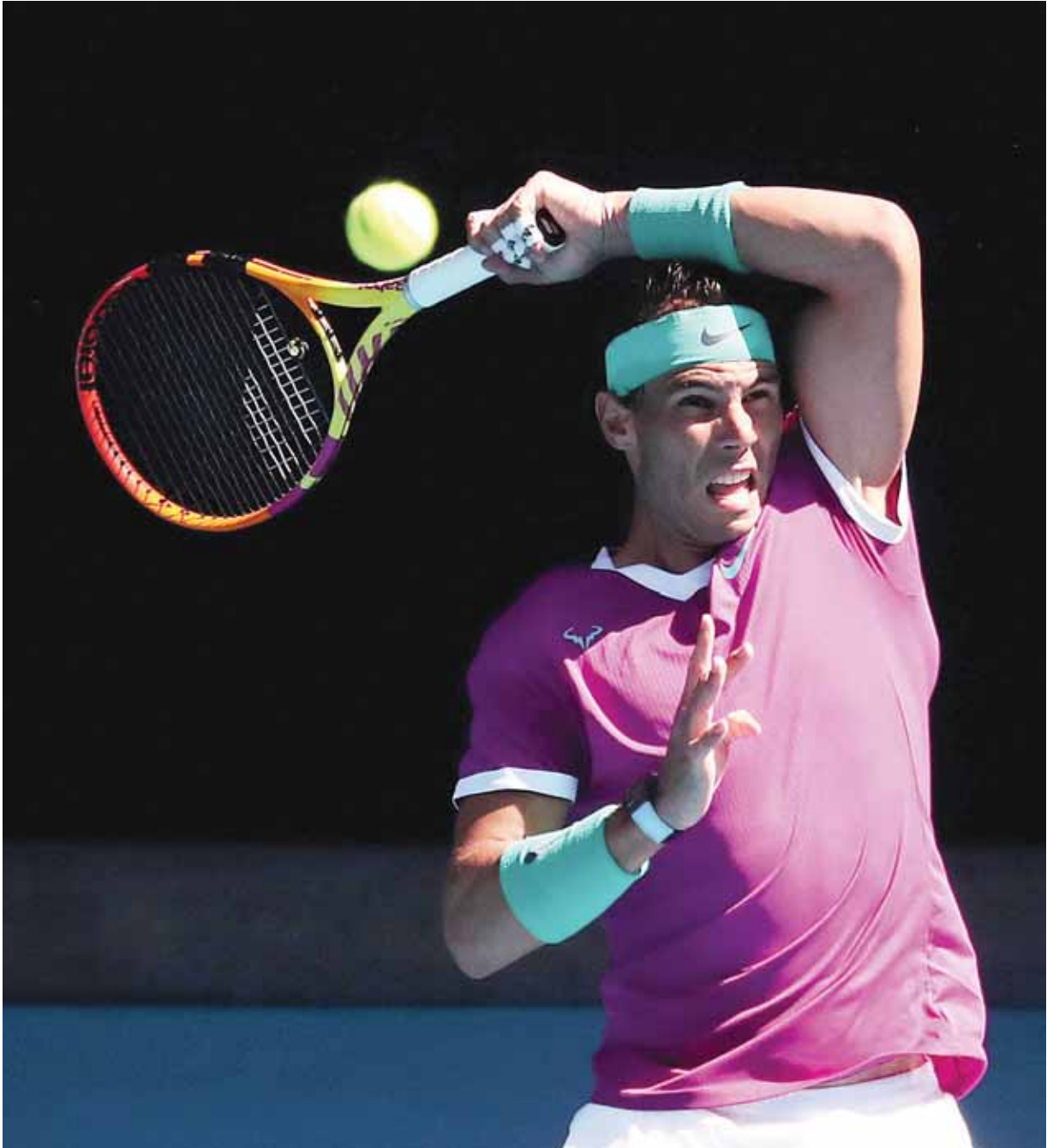
Sultanate of Oman representative Dhofar played two matches only in the AFC Cup in 2020 which was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. In 2018, Dhofar came second in the group round behind Jordan's Al Faisaly SC, Lebanon's Al Ansar FC and Syria's Al Wahda Sports Club.

Dhofar head coach Rasheed Jaber said the draw of the 2022 AFC Cup was equal for most of the teams. "The technical performance of the participating teams are almost similar. Dhofar will work hard this season to deliver top show in the AFC Cup", he said.

The Salalah giants are leading

the top-tier Omantel League with 26 points, while Seeb are in second spot with 24 points. Dhofar managed to beat Bahla 2-1 in the last round. Seeb blanked Al Nasr 2-0 in the same round. The competition is tough between both teams for the top spot in the league table.





Australia's Ashleigh Barty celebrates winning her Australian Open first round match against Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko at Melbourne Park. RIGHT: Spain's Rafael Nadal in action during his first round match against Marcos Giron of the US. – Reuters

NADAL, BARTY START BRIGHT

OSAKA BEGINS WITH WIN, GAUFF BECOMES EARLY CASUALTY

MELBOURNE: Rafael Nadal and Ashleigh Barty made devastating starts to their Australian Open title campaigns on Monday as the Grand Slam attempted to move on from the Novak Djokovic visa saga. Naomi Osaka launched the defence of her women's crown with victory but Coco Gauff was an early big-name casualty, the American 17-year-old dumped out in straight sets by Wang Qiang, who is ranked outside the top 100.

The only Australian Open champion in the men's draw after nine-time winner Djokovic's deportation, Nadal started his quest to become the first male to win 21 Grand Slams by sweeping aside 66th-ranked Marcos Giron, 6-1, 6-4, 6-2.

The draw has opened up for

the Spanish great with defending champion Djokovic out of the picture and the other member of the 'Big Three', Roger Federer, not at Melbourne Park because of injury.

But the 35-year-old Nadal said he was just relieved to be playing tennis after Djokovic's refusal to get vaccinated against Covid overshadowed the first Grand Slam of the year right up until the last moment.

Although Djokovic's absence is good news for Nadal's tilt at men's tennis history, he said he would rather the world number one from Serbia was playing.

"The ideal situation in the world of sport is that the best players are on court," said Nadal, who plays Germany's Yannick Hanfmann in the second round.

He may not be there, but Djokovic still looms over the tournament.

Nadal was all guns blazing at Rod Laver Arena, showing no apparent ill effects from a foot injury he suffered last year and then being "very sick" with Covid in December.

"Today is one victory in the first Grand Slam. Happy for that. One month ago situation had been different — looks very ugly in some way," he said.

Other winners in the men's draw on day one of the so-called 'Happy Slam', where crowds have been capped at 50 per cent because of the pandemic, included seventh seed Matteo Berrettini.

The Italian defeated American Brandon Nakashima in four sets despite tummy trouble.

Also through was third seed Alexander Zverev in the night match, but 12th-seeded Briton Cameron Norrie lost in three sets to Sebastian Korda, the son of 1998 Australian Open champion Petr Korda.

There was to be no fairytale run for "lucky loser" Salvatore Caruso. The Italian had earned a place in the main draw when Djokovic was deported but he fell at the first hurdle.

BARTY CRUISES, GAUFF DEPARTS

In the women's draw, top seed and world number one Barty made a real statement of intent, crushing qualifier Lesia Tsurenko in 54 minutes, 6-0, 6-1.

The 25-year-old faces Lucia Bronzetti of Italy next as the

pre-tournament favourite and home hope chases a maiden Australian Open title. "There's always something special about playing on a Monday night in the Australian Open," said Barty, who will need to deal with high expectations from the home fans.

Japan's former world number one Osaka, the reigning champion, was also largely untroubled with a 6-3, 6-3 win against Colombia's Camila Osorio. Seeded 13 after a disrupted 2021 in which she said she had suffered "long bouts of depression", Osaka cruised through in 68 minutes.

"I would say I feel more comfortable in my skin, if that makes sense," said the 24-year-old, who won the title at Melbourne Park in 2019 and 2021.

She will play American

Madison Brengle next.

Also through are French Open champion Barbora Krejčíková, Greek fifth seed Maria Sakkari and reigning Olympic champion Belinda Bencic.

But there was heartbreak for Tunisian ninth seed Ons Jabeur, who did not even make it onto court and withdrew because of injury before her match.

Also out was the 18th-seeded prodigy Gauff, surprisingly losing 6-4, 6-2 to China's Wang.

"I think just everything disappointed me about today," said Gauff.

"I feel like in the pre-season, I worked really hard, and I felt like I was ready to have a good run here.

"Today I just didn't perform well." — AFP

Real blank Athletic to claim Super Cup in Riyadh

RIYADH: Real Madrid were crowned Spanish Super Cup champions after goals from Luka Modric and Karim Benzema earned them a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Real took the lead in the 38th minute after Rodrygo sprinted past two defenders before passing to Modric, who rifled a shot into the back of the net.

Benzema extended their lead in the second half with a penalty after the video assistant referee spotted a handball from Yeray Alvarez inside the area.

Real were reduced to 10 men three minutes from time after Eder Militao was sent off for a goalline handball.

Real goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois brilliantly stopped Raul Garcia's penalty kick with his left

foot in the dying seconds.

"You can never get tired of winning," Modric told a news conference.

"I enjoy the same every title, when you play at Real Madrid you have to win. It's part of the DNA of this club. Fans expect the most of you. So now we have to look forward to win more and again in the next months."

After two exciting semifinals, the final was a one-sided encounter, with Real Madrid completely dominating and never facing any real danger.

Real enjoyed the great majority of support from the 30,000 fans in the King Fahd Stadium, which was at 50 per cent capacity due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

France striker Karim Benzema had the backing of the Saudi supporters, but it was Modric's



night in Riyadh.

Carlo Ancelotti had said in the buildup to the game that his side were the very essence of a counter-attacking team and on Sunday Modric and forward Rodrygo would have made their coach proud, with a perfectly executed counter to open the scoring.

Benzema has made a habit of scoring against Athletic and doubled the advantage from the spot with his 18th goal in 26 games against the Basque side, the most he has scored against one team in his career.

It was the 12th time Real had won the Spanish Super Cup, having claimed both editions of the competition in Saudi Arabia. Last year's edition, won by Athletic, was held in Spain due to the pandemic. — Reuters



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BP-Sultanate of Oman strategic partnership to support renewable and hydrogen development

MULTIPLE GIGAWATT SCHEME:
Integrated project expected to include onshore wind, solar and green hydrogen production

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Energy major BP and the Oman Ministry of Energy and Minerals signed on Monday a Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) and a Renewables Data Collection Agreement which will support the potential development of a multiple gigawatt, world-class renewable energy and green hydrogen development in the Sultanate of Oman, by 2030.

As part of the agreement, BP will capture and evaluate solar and wind data from 8,000km2 of land — an area more than five times the size of Greater London.

The evaluation will then support the Omani government in approving the future developments of renewable energy hubs at suitable locations within this area to take advantage of these resources.

The renewable energy resources could also supply renewable power for the development of green hydrogen, targeting both domestic and global export markets.

Dr Mohammed al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals of the Sultanate of Oman, said:



“This is a proud moment for Oman and a significant step towards delivering our 2040 Vision. In partnership with BP, we will progress the development of new, world-class solar and wind resources — generating renewable power for the grid and powering the manufacture of green hydrogen to supply domestic demand and to export to global customers.

Over the past 50 years, we’ve advanced our hydrocarbon production. Today’s agreement signals the next step in our energy journey — unlocking the potential for Oman as a low-carbon energy

hub.”
The UK’s Minister for Investment Lord Gerry Grimstone added: “Following the signing last week of the UK-Oman Sovereign Investment Partnership, this investment by BP into Oman’s renewable energy sector is a shining example of our countries’ joint ambition to facilitate strategic and commercial bilateral investment.

The project demonstrates our shared vision for future prosperity through clean growth, further strengthening the partnership between the United Kingdom and

the Sultanate of Oman”.
This partnership represents a significant evolution of BP’s business in the Sultanate of Oman and is aligned with BP’s strategy, which includes rapidly growing our developed renewable generating capacity and to take early positions in hydrogen.
BP Chief Executive Bernard Looney said: “Today’s agreement represents what BP is able to offer as an integrated energy company. These projects will build on our gas business, and bring wind, solar and green hydrogen together in a distinctive and integrated way

supporting Oman’s low carbon energy goals.
“And we’re not just investing in energy. We are investing in Oman to create and develop infrastructure, support local supply chains and cultivate the skills and talent needed to usher in this next generation of energy leaders. We look forward to working closely with the Omani government to take this forward.”
Under the SFA, BP and Oman will also consider ways to collaborate in a number of areas, including a renewables strategy, regulation, the establishment of

“
In partnership with bp, we will progress the development of new, world-class solar and wind resources — generating renewable power for the grid and powering the manufacture of green hydrogen to supply domestic demand and to export to global customers

**DR MOHAMMED
AL RUMHY**
Minister of Energy and Minerals

a renewable energy hub and the development and reskilling of the local workforce.
The Sultanate of Oman has a strong track record in the oil and gas industry, which it has grown over recent years. Monday’s announcement, which is subject to final agreement of commercial terms, is an important step towards the country’s 2040 Vision and an opportunity to become a leading low-carbon energy hub. And it would further support the Omani government’s goals of diversifying the economy and bolstering investment.

Several Omani govt entities to be listed on MSX this year: Chairman

Major upgrade: Five-year strategy envisions introduction of short-selling and other features, conversion of MSX into a public joint stock company

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

A number of state-owned companies will be listed on the MuscatStockExchange(MSX) this year, Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi (**pictured**), Chairman of the Board of Directors of MSX, announced here on Monday. Addressing the board’s first meeting of the year, Al Ardhi said the planned move stems from an agreement with the Oman



Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman.
The proposed listing of new companies, he said, will support the levels of liquidity, increase the depth of the stock exchange and its investment attractiveness.
This is in addition to initiatives related to improving the infrastructural underpinnings of the stock market, the rollout

of new investment tools, and upgrading the technological features, among other projects, to improve the market’s performance in all aspects ahead of the transformation of the stock exchange into a public joint stock company.
Following the constitution of the new board in April last year, the MSX had worked with all relevant stakeholders to overcome obstacles and transform challenges into opportunities that would enhance the position of the stock exchange on the investment map and meet aspirations and ambitions and achieve the desired goals, said Al Ardhi.
A new five-year strategy adopted by the Board at the meeting affirms a commitment to support the development of

the national economy, enhance the attractiveness of the stock exchange, upgrade financial technology, improve the commercial performance of the stock exchange, and develop its overall infrastructure and support system.
A key goal is to upgrade the stock exchange into a leading player that garners favourable ratings from international rating agencies. To achieve this goal, work will be done to raise the liquidity of listed shares, raise market values, and focus on facilitating the entry of foreign investments and activating some trading features such as short selling, lending and borrowing of securities, and other initiatives that enable the Stock Exchange to be featured on global indices.

New RO 23m 4-star hotel launched in Seeb

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Avani Muscat, a new four-star hotel property constructed at Al Seeb with an investment of around RO 23 million, was formally inaugurated here on Monday.
Owned by Safari International Group and managed by Minor Hotels chain, Avani Muscat features 206 hotel rooms, 45 apartments, a 700-seat capacity ballroom, meeting rooms and other amenities. The opening was held under the auspices of Eng Isam bin Saud al Zadjali, Chairman of Muscat Municipality, who underlined the property’s importance to the country’s broader goals to develop a strong tourism and hospitality sector.
Ismail bin Yaqoub al Toby, Chairman of Safari International Group, said the hotel’s location within proximity of tourist attractions in and around the capital city, as well as key commercial landmarks, positions it well to attract business, tourist and other travellers.
Set on an area of 20,000 sq metres, Avani Muscat adjoins the popular Al Araiimi Boulevard mall, which also has a wide choice of dining outlets and a multi-screen cinema.



(With inputs from ONA)

Alizz Islamic Bank staff attend Etimad programme

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has enrolled a number of its staff in the National Leadership Development Programme (Etimad) which empowers Omanis in middle and upper management positions in the private sector with leadership skills.

The Etimad programme which is considered a real turning point for private sector leaders in several vital fields seeks to extend bridges and build trust between Omani leaders and private sector companies.

The well-established programme cooperates with international consultancies and well-known local partners to offer high-quality outputs that reflect a sense of national responsibility, and provide growth opportunities to all parties, whether citizens who receive training, companies that support their human resources with competent Omani leaders or the community that benefits from better job opportunities and private

sector capabilities.

Etimad aims to train and empower 10,000 Omanis in middle and senior management positions in the private sector over the next few years. However, the programme initially targeted 500 applicants from a number of private sector companies to join a training programme that would last from three to six months.

Registration in this stage was exclusively open for companies classified as “Excellent”, “First” and “International” with a workforce exceeding 500 employees to ensure future career paths for graduates of the programme and to increase the percentage of Omanis in middle and senior management positions in the private sector.

Commenting on the enrolment of some of the bank’s staff in the Etimad Programme, Mohamed al Balushi Head of Human Resources at Alizz Islamic Bank, said: “We are committed



to empowering our young Omani employees to take the lead in the future, whether in Alizz Islamic Bank or other institutions. We urge the employees that

were honoured with being selected to do their best to acquire the necessary skills and fulfil the expected objectives.

In addition, we will offer them the necessary support and will equip them with the appropriate tools, as a true leader doesn’t tell the employee what to do, but rather shows him/her how to do it. In this context, I would like to thank those in charge of the programme as it is considered one of the important pillars in a promising future for the Sultanate. Together with the Government, we will spare no effort to support Oman’s pioneering role in all respects.”

The empowerment of Omani cadres in the private sector, particularly in leadership and supervisory roles, is considered one of the national priorities that the government seeks to fulfil in partnership with the private sector.

Therefore, the National Leadership Development Programme upskills and empowers Potential Omanis for middle

and senior leadership positions in the Private Sector and is one of the initiatives emerging from the recommendations of the labour market and employment lab of the National Economic Diversification Programme (Tanfeedh) with the aim of preparing qualified national leaders that can take the lead in key areas of the private sector and promote Omanis to senior positions by providing specialised training and empowerment for Omani employees.

Etimad constitutes a real partnership between the public and private sectors, as the initiative’s team examined the needs of the Omanis and the private sector companies in order to align them in the programme, in collaboration with representatives from the private sectors and representatives of policy-makers and decision-makers in the public sector.

It is worth noting that the programme will be funded and managed by the Government during its first years.

10% cash reward awaits salary transfer customers of ahli islamic

MUSCAT: Assessing the needs of its customers to continue providing them with offers that provide added benefits, ahli islamic has announced a cashback reward of 10 per cent of up to RO 500 when transferring monthly salary of at least RO 1,000 with the bank. Once the monthly salary has been transferred to ahli islamic, all current and new Omani customers and expatriates will be eligible to receive a one-time cash reward.

The offer is part of the Bank’s initiatives to enhance its services and products, maximising benefits for its customers, within a framework that conforms to the Islamic-sharia’h principles. Through its new salary transfer campaign, which will run for two months starting January 2022, ahli islamic aims to provide its customers with Islamic banking products and services that suit the ever-evolving choices of today’s customer.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General



Manager and Head of ahli Islamic said, “Islamic banking has recently become increasingly popular among the Sultanate of Oman’s new workforce, which is characterised by being more aware, and decisive of their choices. Clearly, the trend is attributed to customer’s awareness of the benefits offered by Islamic banks. With our current promotion, we aim

to enhance our valued customers’ experience, whether by giving them advantage of this offer or through the various offers and programmes designed for them.”

“The Bank’s cashback reward to its salary transfer customers is an exclusive opportunity that allows customers to make a wise choice and invest their money in line with their conviction. It also serves the national priority of financial inclusion among the community, especially among youth,” he added.

2022 Kia Carnival MPV: Exceptional space & comfort

MUSCAT: Kia Carnival is one of the most preferred vehicles for making the most of family time. Owing to its space, comfort and ability to carry loads of luggage, the Carnival scores well with customers who love to enjoy suite-like experiences on-road.

Based on Kia’s new mid-size platform, the Carnival is more refined, roomy, and capable than ever, offering generous space and increased efficiency than its predecessors. It has three-row seating configuration, with room for eight occupants in total.

The new Kia Carnival illustrates the evolution of Kia’s design philosophy, offering customers visually stunning, dominating vehicles on the road, with customer driven, futuristic interior surfaces and finishing. The Carnival’s SUV inspired design makes for a stylish and robust presence on the road and within the Multi-Purpose Vehicle (MPV) segment.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in



the Sultanate of 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.

NBO continues journey towards cashless payments



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has been on the journey towards cashless for a number of years and in support of Oman’s 2040 Vision to promote nationwide digitalisation, its ever-growing portfolio of smart solutions are helping individuals and businesses alike make the switch. From QR Codes to mobile wallets, biometrics and NRI (instant remittance), it is tapping into the world’s leading technologies, while its cards offer an ever-expanding range of benefits and rewards that not only exceed its customers’ expectations but genuinely improve their lives.

“Oman is fast moving towards becoming a cashless society, bolstered by the government’s recent mandate for private sector businesses to start switching to cashless payment channels. The use of cards has been on an upward trajectory for a while and now digital payment modes are also expected to double in popularity by next year, having skyrocketed during the pandemic” said Maha Saud al Raisi (pictured), AGM, Head of Retail Products at NBO.

“As we carry this momentum forward, we are ensuring that we are equipped to cater to future demands and at the same time, offer our customers a wholly modern banking experience.” As part of its efforts, NBO has made several additions to its mobile banking app such as a digital remittance service, and a cardless cash service that utilises QR codes for ATM withdrawals. Savvy customers can also take advantage of its multi-purpose banking kiosk, which enables customers to renew and print out their cards on the spot.

Get up to 3.5 per cent and free Life Takaful with Meethaq’s Savings Account

MUSCAT: Since its launch, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat has been endeavouring to enhance the role of promoting a healthy savings habit in the Sultanate of Oman. Meethaq continues to work to shed light on the importance and benefits of enhancing the saving culture in society for a bright and secure future.

In line with its commitment to meet the customers’ needs, the Meethaq Savings Account is designed with exciting benefits and it offers attractive Shari’a-compliant profit rates that are based on principles of Mudarabah.

On this occasion, Sami Arfah Bait Rashid (pictured), Assistant General Manager — Meethaq General Banking, said: “I would like to extend my gratitude to people in general and Meethaq’s customers in particular for their trust in the innovative services and products that Meethaq Islamic Banking offers. We are working



constantly towards developing our products in line with global trends and to provide added value to our customers. The Meethaq Savings Account is designed to meet customers’ needs in getting financial benefits that are in line with Shari’a, and based on the Mudarabah contract.”

Sami Arfah Bait Rashid stressed that Meethaq will continue working towards achieving its customer-centric strategy in developing the various products and services that meet customers’



aspirations and based on global Islamic banking trends. He encouraged customers to enjoy the benefits and banking facilities offered by Meethaq starting from opening the account to enjoying Meethaq’s unique customer experience.

Customers can open a Meethaq Savings Account via Meethaq’s website or by visiting the branch to earn up to 3.5 per cent p.a. and also avail free life Takaful cover upon maintaining a monthly average balance of RO 30,000.

Omani customers may visit any Meethaq branch along with their ID card and a copy of any utility bill, while expatriates should provide their resident card, passport and a copy of any utility bill to open their new Meethaq Savings Account.

The Meethaq Savings Account offers profit at competitive rates, which will be credited to the customer’s account on a monthly basis and there is no minimum balance requirement for profit eligibility. Profit will be credited to customer accounts based on the monthly average balance.

All products of Meethaq are designed according to the guidelines set down by the Central Bank of Oman for Islamic banking and they also undergo a thorough process of Shari’a compliance certification by the bank’s Shari’a Supervisory Board.

A Savings Account holder provides funds as ‘Rabb-ul-maal’ and Meethaq invests these funds

as ‘Mudarib’ (the fund manager), and based on this relationship, the depositors and Meethaq become beneficiaries of the profit earned.

When the joint investment pool earns profit, it is distributed in a pre-agreed ratio between the depositors and Meethaq.

In addition to the high profit rates and free life Takaful cover, Meethaq Savings Account customers can enjoy a Debit Card with daily cash withdrawal limit of RO 600, withdrawal and deposit facility through Meethaq’s nationwide ATM/CDM network, 24x7 access to the account through free electronic banking services including Internet Banking, ATMs, Cash/Cheque Deposit Machines and Mobile Banking, flexibility to make purchases at millions of Visa-endorsed shopping outlets worldwide, ability to pay bills for electricity, water, telephone, Internet and school fees through e-channels, and no minimum balance charges.



Minister of Higher Education visits Al Buraimi Industrial City

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, visited Al Buraimi Industrial City on Monday to study opportunities for value creation at the manufacturing hub.

Receiving the delegation, Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, explained that Al Buraimi Industrial City — along with the rest of Madayn's expanding network of industrial cities — was established to achieve the vision of Madayn in enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading regional centre of manufacturing, ICT, innovation and entrepreneurship excellence, and its mission in attracting industrial investments.

Al Buraimi Industrial City was established in 1998 on an area of over 5 million sqm, and is adjacent to key ports and local and regional airports.

Located nearly 100 km away from Sohar Port and Suhar

Al Buraimi Industrial City was established to achieve the vision of Madayn in enhancing the Sultanate of Oman's position as a leading regional centre of manufacturing, ICT, innovation and entrepreneurship excellence, and its mission in attracting industrial investments

Airport and around 120 km away from Dubai International Airport and Jebel Ali Port, Al Buraimi Industrial City today is home to over 300 projects of various activities.

Moreover, the officials explained that Madayn is currently implementing an infrastructure development project in Al Buraimi Industrial City, which includes an area of 300,000 sqm to incubate Small and Medium Enterprises.

Dr Al Mahrouqiyah was briefed about the Service Centre which is currently in its soft opening phase in Al Buraimi.

She also visited the facilities of Canroyal Oil Lubricants and Qila'a Al Batinah Trading.

MoCIIP unveils 22 industrial investment opportunities



MANUFACTURING SECTOR IMPETUS: Latest portfolio includes 15 opportunities supported by PDO (with total purchases of products equivalent to RO 44 million), 5 opportunities by Nama (RO 70 million) and two opportunities from Mazoon (RO 600,000)

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has unveiled 22 investment opportunities in the industrial sector as part of the 100-strong project initiative launched last year.

The initiative is being



undertaken in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, Oman Investment Authority, the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Nama Holding group and Mazoon Dairy Company.

The launch ceremony was held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of

Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. Dr Saleh bin Said al Masan, Commerce and Industry Under-Secretary, said the second package of investment opportunities in the industrial sector provides pre-purchase contracts, in addition to a 10 per cent preferential treatment opportunity to enhance in-country added value.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Under-Secretary

of Investment Promotion, said that investors top the priorities of the Ministry. She added the investment promotion sector at the Ministry is willing to act on behalf of investors in finalising all their procedures in record time.

Sami bin Salim al Sahib, Director-General of Industry at the Ministry, gave a visual presentation about the second package of industrial opportunities. He added that the batch includes 15 opportunities supported by PDO (with total purchases of products equivalent to RO 44 million), 5 opportunities by Nama (RO 70 million) and two opportunities from Mazoon (RO 600,000).

— ONA

Finance Ministry workshop highlights role of audit units

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Finance held a workshop focusing on a plan to draft the final version of the quarterly report of internal auditing departments at government units.

The plan, set to enhance the role of government internal audit units, is being implemented in

association with priorities of Oman Vision 2040, aimed to realize a system of legislation, justice and monitoring of financial activities. During the workshop, the Ministry reviewed the quarterly report's final draft and the best practices endorsed by government units to

ensure the implementation of the budget and detection of financial breach.

The workshop was attended by Abdullah bin Salim al Harthi, Under-Secretary of the Finance Ministry, and representatives of government units. — ONA

Gas markets lead broad commodity strength in 2022



BY OLE S HANSEN

Commodities extended their strong start to the year this week with the broad Bloomberg Commodity index trading up 4.1 per cent so far this month while the energy-heavy SP GSCI has notched up gains in the region of 5 per cent.

The energy sector has been the main focus so far this year with tighter-than-expected supply driving crude oil higher by close to 10 per cent while extreme roller-coaster rides best describe what is unfolding in the natural gas market, both in the US and especially in Europe.

Another roller-coaster week unfolded in global gas markets. The US natural gas first month futures contract jumped 14 per cent on Wednesday to a six-week high, in response to frigid freezing

weather before collapsing by 12 per cent the following day on the prospect for weather turning milder and after the weekly stock draw was in line with expectations.

Adding to this was the recent surge in LNG shipments to Europe and the once-insulated US market has become much more exposed to international developments, all of which supported the biggest weekly rise since November.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the energy crisis rumbles on and despite an armada of LNG ships delivering increased supplies, prices remain at punitively and for some, unaffordable prices.

The mentioned arrival of LNG shipments and so far mild January weather has reduced the risk of blackouts and gas storage running empty, but uncertainties regarding the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and Russia's intentions in Ukraine continue to trigger sudden spikes and high volatility.

On Thursday, the Dutch TTF benchmark gas future briefly traded below €70/MWh in response to the mentioned mild weather and strong overseas LNG supplies, before suffering a sharp reversal higher back above €90/MWh after Russia-US talks failed to ease fears of military action in Ukraine, a crossing point for



around one-third of Russian gas to Europe.

Crude oil continues its month-long rally and while the early January jump was driven by temporary worries about supply disruptions in Libya and Kazakhstan, a bigger and more worrying development has become apparent during this time.

Besides the surging Omicron variant having a much smaller negative impact on global consumption, it is the emerging sign that several countries within

the Opec+ group are struggling to raise production to the agreed levels that has supported prices this month.

For several months now we have seen over compliance from the group as the 400,000 barrels per day of monthly increases was not met, especially due to problems in Nigeria and Angola.

However, in their latest production survey for December, SP Global Platts found that 14 out of the 18 members, including Russia, fell short of their targets.

According to Platts, the 18 members in December produced 37.72 million barrels a day, some 1.1 million barrels below their combined quota.

The rising gap between Opec+ crude oil quotas and actual production has already been felt in the market with front month futures prices in both WTI and Brent having rallied stronger than later-expiring contracts.

The spread or so-called backwordation between the first and the second Brent futures

contract has risen from a low point at 20 cents a barrel in early December, when Omicron worries sparked a sharp correction, to 70 cents a barrel currently.

Global oil demand is not expected to peak anytime soon and that will add further pressure to available spare capacity, which is already being reduced monthly, thereby raising the risk of even higher prices.

This supports our long-term bullish view on the oil market as it will be facing years of under investment with oil majors diverging some of their already-reduced capital expenditures towards low carbon energy production.

The timing of the next move up hinges on Brent's short-term ability to close above \$85.50/b, the 61.8 per cent retracement of the 2012 to 2020 sell-off, followed up by a break above the double top at \$86.75. First though, the chart below increasingly points to the need for a period of consolidation or perhaps even a correction.

But with firm fundamentals in play only a bigger than expected omicron development and stronger production can send the price sharply lower. *(The author is Head of Commodity Strategy – Saxo Bank)*

When it comes to living with Covid, businesses are on their own

Companies looking for an official rule book on pandemic precautions will be disappointed. The Biden administration's nationwide coronavirus vaccine mandate has been overturned. The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention is facing criticism for its shifting guidance on isolation times. And just as cases surge to record levels, tests are scarce — and may not always be effective.

As the federal government's efforts to contain the coronavirus hit their limits — as the administration itself admits — employers are largely on their own.

Business leaders must decide whether and how to use tools such as their own vaccine mandates, masking, distancing, and testing at their offices and other work sites. And more fundamentally, they must decide what kind of company they want to run: one that manages cases or one that manages risk.

Managing cases, with a goal of avoiding all infections at the workplace, has been the approach of many companies thus far. This zero-Covid strategy treats the pandemic as an acute, emergency situation that requires upending business as usual. That might mean telling employees to work remotely indefinitely, with strict rules for those who come into the office.

But some experts believe that the Omicron surge could peak this month. That could allow for a relatively safe return to workplaces as soon as February, given the bolstered immunity of the millions who have been vaccinated and recovered from infections.

(It may not work out that way, of course: An alternative pandemic path is "it gets worse," said Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, an oncologist and a former White House adviser, "which would be a disaster.")

If the optimistic forecast pans out, it will make managing risk — not cases — a more viable option for employers who want to bring employees physically back together.

Managing risk would require investment in a "new normal" of living with the virus for a long time, echoing a national strategy that a group of former White House health advisers, including Dr. Emanuel, recently recommended to the Biden administration.



This zero-Covid strategy treats the pandemic as an acute, emergency situation that requires upending business as usual. That might mean telling employees to work remotely indefinitely, with strict rules for those who come into the office

What does running a business mean if you're expecting Covid to be forever? "You run it like you're running it with a flu," Dr Emanuel said — but with some improvements.

How to live (and work) with Covid

Living with Covid does not mean ignoring Covid. It means working to prevent the worst outcomes. Vaccines reduce deaths and hospitalisations. And though some states, like Florida and Montana, have passed laws restricting employer vaccine mandates, experts say requiring employees to be vaccinated is one of the most effective ways businesses can create a safer workplace.

United Airlines said this week that it had gone eight straight weeks without Covid-related deaths among its vaccinated employees, despite the surging Omicron variant of the virus. Before its mandate, it averaged one death per week.

Booster shots are essential to boosting immunity — even if the C D C does not

update its definition of fully vaccinated beyond two doses of an mRNA vaccine or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Some companies already require boosters for office entry, like Facebook's parent, Meta, and Blackstone.

Beyond vaccinations, health experts say that investing in upgraded ventilation is one of the most important things that companies can do to prevent airborne illnesses — whether Covid or the flu.

Paid sick leave to allow for sufficient isolation time will continue to be vital. Ideally, companies would provide up to 10 days of paid sick leave, with more available if a state or national public-health emergency is declared, said David Michaels, an epidemiologist and a former head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

With Covid, the best isolation policy for most workers would allow them to return to the office after five days as long as they had a negative result on a rapid test and

continued to wear a mask through Day 10, Dr Michaels said.

Once the Omicron surge abates, other guardrails may become less necessary.

"If you've mandated vaccines, encourage boosters, have good ventilation and filtration — amazing, you've done what you need to do to prevent the worst outcomes," said Joseph Allen, a professor of public health at Harvard who advises companies on their Covid policies. It is then "reasonable," he believes, to say: "We are not going to de-densify. We're not going to keep stickers on the ground before you get in the elevator. We're not going to have you wear a mask all day, everyday."

Frequent testing during the Omicron surge is essential to understanding its scope and controlling its spread, but such testing is unlikely to be necessary in the future, Dr. Allen said. He envisions employers eventually using tests only when workers have symptoms or want to return after being infected.

Davos without 'Davos'

For the second year in a row, the World Economic Forum scrapped its annual meeting in the Alpine resort town of Davos, Switzerland, because of the pandemic.

The gathering is an essential stop on the annual circuit for the global elite, a week-long schmoozefest where billionaires and autocrats mingle over canapés while activists protest in the frigid mountain air. Companies make climate pledges. Economists discuss inequality. Everyone walks on the same slippery, slushy roads.

It was at the January 2020 annual meeting that many executives and world leaders first heard about the coronavirus, as news reports about a mysterious illness began to trickle out of Wuhan, China.

Last year, the forum abandoned Davos and planned to hold the meeting in Singapore during the summer, but the Singapore event was cancelled, too.

This year's event was scheduled to begin on Monday and proceed more or less as usual. Multinational corporations were renting out suites in luxury hotels. Dinner party invites were being sent. Then in December, with the omicron variant spreading rapidly, the organisers said they had decided to postpone the gathering once more, with hopes of staging it this summer instead.

"Everyone hopes that in 2022 the Covid-19 pandemic, and the crises that accompanied it, will finally begin to recede," Klaus Schwab, the patrician founder of the World Economic Forum, said in a statement on Thursday.

So far, however, there is little sign that the pandemic is beginning to wane. And for a second year in a row, with Davos the event on hold, Davos the town is stuck in limbo.

Before the pandemic, "Davos" came to connote not simply the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum

In my early days, I was demonstrating during the WEF for better action against climate change and social justice. Now, I am trying to get the WEF back to Davos

PHILIPP WILHELM
MAYOR OF DAVOS

itself, but a state of mind.

Pro-capitalism, pro-democracy, pro-globalisation, Davos is the spiritual home of the stakeholder capitalism movement (which encourages companies to be better corporate citizens) and a testing ground for any number of new win-win market-oriented solutions to combat climate change, ameliorate hunger and repair frayed international relations.

More practically, Davos also came to refer to an entire universe of satellite events, subconferences and loosely affiliated marketing stunts that all took place in Switzerland throughout mid-January. Facebook constructed a temporary headquarters on the town's main thoroughfare, known as the Promenade. Salesforce held a private lunch in a giant geodesic dome.

Yet no matter what party might be going on or which company had the best off-site augmented reality installation, the inner sanctum of Davos has always been the Congress Centre, a convention space that serves as the gathering's nexus and main stage.

It is where, in 2020, you might have found Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany or President Donald Trump addressing a crowd of thousands while, in an adjacent lobby area, Jane Goodall took in a demonstration of Google's new mapping technology.

Normally packed with lanyard-wearing conference-goers hustling from a meditation session led by monks to a panel discussion about sovereign wealth funds, the halls of the Congress Centre are, for the time being at least, empty. Besides delivering Switzerland a helping of cultural cachet, the World Economic Forum's annual meeting is a major source of revenue for the national and local economy.

The 2020 meeting, the last one held in person, contributed about \$120 million to the Swiss economy, according to a

study by the University of St Gallen that was commissioned by the forum. The bulk of that, roughly \$70 million, was spent in Davos, which has a year-round population of about 11,000 people. That number essentially doubles when the forum comes to town. Hotels will feel the pain particularly acutely.

Whether the organisers will be able to pull off a gathering in Davos this summer remains up in the air. Cases are skyrocketing around the globe. Switzerland has introduced new restrictions as hospitals in the country are once again strained.

"It was a smart thing to do to not be hosting it right now," said Valerie Keller, a Davos regular and a co-founder of Imagine, a company that works with executives to improve the state of the world and whose mission board includes Richard Branson and Arianna Huffington. "It would have been totally negligent if we were all in Davos right now."

And still, is Davos really Davos without Davos? The town, or at least its name, has taken on a totemic significance that far eclipses its modest population.

The term "Davos Man" has come to describe individuals so wealthy and powerful that they play by their own set of rules, and write the rules for the rest of us.

The annual meeting has come to define the place more than the mountains, the ski slopes or the mulled wine served in chalet taverns. Even onetime critics of the World Economic Forum have come around and now embrace its singular place in Davos.

"In my early days, I was demonstrating during the WEF for better action against climate change and social justice," Philipp Wilhelm, the mayor of Davos, told *The Guardian* after last year's event was cancelled. "Now, I am trying to get the WEF back to Davos."

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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Passion for culinary delights

By Kaushalendra Singh

By her looks, you will not make out that you are meeting a woman who has so much love for food. You will realise her potential only after an opportunity to eat what she cooks.

She shuffles time between office, home and her hobby of cooking. Fond of doing things with perfection, Huwaida al Shaikhani has a knack for striking a balance in all the roles she plays and to everyone's surprise, she comes out with

perfection professionally and personally for her hobby, which according to her "is more than a hobby." The food items that she makes are not only delicious, but they

are also aesthetically pleasing and matches all professional levels either in cooking or in their packaging. "Anything comes out nicely if you love what you do. I love cooking and offering food to people known to me. In course of time, my family and friends started liking my food and encouraged me to do it professionally, said Huwaida while explaining her love of learning cooking from her mother and doing it as a serious pastime. She is much in demand from her family and friends whenever there is any small or big function at their houses for her valuable tips on cooking. Huwaida admits cooking is not her full-time work. "I cook whenever I am in a mood to cook. I love to taste good food and try them with my own variations from traditional to continental food," she says. "My love for cooking started as a hobby. I loved to cook for the family and friends and take their opinion. Later when I realised that my cooking is good and improved up to a professional level, I thought of launching a business. I launched a brand under the name of 'Um Lamis' and I am happy it is doing

well." She gives her family full credit for pursuing her hobby. "They kept on suggesting to me what meal should I cook. They worked as my food tasters and used to approve it with strong thumbs up. They motivated me to do what I am doing today." "Generally, I take orders two days before so that I can arrange my schedule with family, children and my work," she quipped while commenting on time management. She can cook for more than 50 people in one go. It takes one full day for her to plan. "It starts with preparing sweets and cold meals and then I move to hot dishes. Cutting of salad also can be done anytime, as I try to keep ready the beverages one day before the gathering." She works on her unique selling point (USP) of 'health and hygiene while cooking. Depending upon orders she can cook spicy or non-spicy food and does her marketing mostly through her social media account @alshikaniya on Instagram. But mostly her promoters are family and friends who do the 'marketing' by the word of mouth.

READ

THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK OF STYLE
BY NINA GARCÍA

Every time you dress, you assert your identity. With style, you tell the world your story. In that way, style affords you opportunities to think about your appearance as a quality of your creative character.





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AROUND THE WORLD

MOVIES

Oscar-shortlisted 'Ascension' captures chase of the 'Chinese Dream'



FILM-MAKER JESSICA Kingdon travelled to 51 locations across China on a quest to document everyday scenes showing the country's economic progress and the growing class divide.

The result is "Ascension", her debut feature which has been shortlisted for the Oscars and which Kingdon hopes will get audiences reflecting on the universal aspects of consumerism.

An impressionistic fly-on-the-wall documentary featuring no interviews or narration, "Ascension" takes viewers on a visual journey through the Chinese social classes. Structured in three parts around the themes of labour, consumerism and wealth, the film juxtapositions the lives of its subjects.

Starting off with scenes of hordes of workers looking for low-wage jobs, Kingdon takes viewers to assembly lines, private bodyguard and butler schools, and a crammed waterpark.

She captures former US president Donald Trump's "Keep America Great" merchandise in mass production at one factory and workers at another chatting away as they assemble high-end sex dolls.

"The intention is really to create space for an audience to experience the images and sounds without passing judgement, but rather experiencing it and sitting with it, rather than trying to make sense of it and categorise it," the New York-based film-maker told Reuters.

Kingdon, who is Chinese-American, was inspired to make "Ascension" after shooting her 2017 short film "Commodity City" in the world's largest wholesale market in Yiwu, China, and witnessing its excesses of materialism.

Setting out to shoot a trilogy related to the cycle of production, consumption and waste, her plans changed when the camera started rolling.

"Originally it was going to be more environmentally driven, but as I was shooting, it became more about the quest for upward mobility and a study of materialism and a study of China's economy," Kingdon said.

Filming in over 50 locations was essential to connect the dots of the economies powering the world's supply chains and consumer lifestyles, she said.

"The film in some ways is a kind of fever dream where it's one thing leads to the other leads to the other, it kind of snowballs," she said.

Steering clear of political commentary was paramount, said Kingdon, adding that through its China and "factory of the world" setting, she hopes "Ascension" will encourage audiences elsewhere to think about the industrial systems and consumption in their countries. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

ROHM unveils January 2022 performances



FOLLOWING THE SUCCESS

of the season-opening performance by Saber Rebai on the 6th and 7th of January, the Royal Opera House Muscat announces the upcoming performances scheduled for the rest of January.

On January 15, the enduring and popular Lunch Music series returns.

Early this week, they have opened the exhibition that delved into the creative inspiration and works of one of the world's finest stage directors. The Artistic World of Franco Zeffirelli is an exhibition curated to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Royal Opera House Muscat, honouring a great artist, whose contribution to the world of opera is considerable. The exhibition features details and items from some of his greatest productions, brought together and on display for the first time. The exhibition is open to visitors between 10 am and 5 pm from the 16th of January to the 20th of March 2022.

A World Premiere takes place on the 20th of January with Giuseppe Verdi's Rigoletto. In a stunning presentation from the master of grand stagings Franco Zeffirelli, the Royal Opera House Muscat's production of this classical masterpiece will be a feast for opera lovers the world over. Co-produced with Fondazione Arena di Verona and the Lithuanian National Opera and Ballet Theatre,

featuring a host of stars, conducted by Jan Latham Koenig, the glittering production team has created a production of epic proportions and significance. The story of the court jester whose lashing wit makes him the worst of enemies is a riotous production of colourful characters and cunning schemes for revenge. 20th, 21st and 22nd January at the Royal Opera House Muscat, 7 pm. Don't forget the pre-performance talk which takes place at 6 pm ahead of the performance, to learn more about the production, the opera and the work behind the scenes.

Giuseppe Verdi is further celebrated on the 23rd of January with a concert entitled Verdi's Masterpieces. A composer known and loved the world over for his incredible canon of work, this concert explores the arias and duets which have captured fans throughout the world for generations. Sung by artists from the Fondazione Arena di Verona, with the orchestra of the company conducted by Jan Latham-Koenig.

The 25th of January is a date to mark in your diaries for Coffee and Dates (7 pm) with American artist and star performer Chris Botti ahead of his concerts on the 27th & 28th January.

This is the perfect lead into the next fixture of this incredible first month of 2022, the 10th anniversary season: An Evening with Chris Botti. Chris Botti is a

musical phenomenon, outstandingly talented as a composer and musician, currently America's best-selling instrumentalist. This evening promises to be brilliant. Botti presents a programme of his greatest hits and inspired renditions of jazz favourites at the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts.

Finally, January draws to a close with Absolute Music, a concert dedicated to the sound of the accordion with the acclaimed artist Giancarlo Palena. In Out of the Magic Box, enjoy an hour of soulful sounds of a bygone era in the intimate setting of the House of Musical Arts. January 31, 7 pm.

The enduring and popular Lunch Music series also returns on January 15. Enjoy an informal dip in and out of opera at the Opera Galleria. Grab a coffee or an early lunch and bring the family to enjoy live music in the mall. Free of charge and full of fun. No better way to enjoy a lazy Friday lunchtime. Lunch Music starts at 12.30 and will be performed by the Fondazione Arena di Verona.

All performances will take place under the guidelines issued by the Supreme Committee entrusted with taking measures to tackle any developments of Covid-19. Safety measures are in place throughout the opera house to ensure your comfort and safety. For more information, download the app or visit the ROHM website.

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Victim of a Ravenous Night

The following are translation of poems by the Omani poet Hilal al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

AT SOME MOMENT

On the peak of Jabal Al Akhdhar
When
The world burns out
And the secret in your eyes shines
When heaven comes close to earth
Everything becomes Possible:
To pluck a moon
Or sleep with a star:

ALIENATION

The waitress
To whom I said one night,
"I crave to cry
In your bosom"
Has left the city.
And the star
That seduced me at dusk
Has died out now
At dawn.

DEFUNCT

A redundant body
With no mission
Wings of imagination
Take him
Round an orgy of delight
Where human surplus
Prevails even over emptiness.
How can I break up this blockade?
The mind fire I can hardly quench
Is
Victim of ravenous nights.
O roofs, come closer to earth
O corners, embrace me without pity
O joggling cup,
Feed on from my wounded soul!

ODE TO AN UNKNOWN PHOENICIAN WARRIOR

O sand lady
Good evening,
An evening of jelly-like time
An evening of time torn in Balgees' tower
(She thinks it a sea)
An evening of myths... noth-

ing but myths...
From them we start love,
with them we end the kisses
An evening of time that will never come,
An evening
Large as treasons in One Thousand Nights,
Far as the distance
Between a prophet who lights
A match to burn his village,
And another who drowns it in decay,
Large as the neigh it lucked,
The drums of the dervishes
In the village of salt and gossip
Large as the commandments
Torn apart
By the child's hand
Shivering in the sky
Large as the languages in my mouth
Nothing there but letters of crying.

An evening of childhood,
O sand lady,
An evening of an epoch
that's gone,
An evening of time that will never come.
What is between the cradle
of breathing in and out?
A wide expanse of loss
bargains me
My steeds are bargained
The questions stretch out
And the paths to death are virgin.
No prophet has yet stepped
on the square of my mind.
There're the tribes grilling
Mornings in the palm of sun,
Awaiting for the impossible knight.
In cradle was tranquility
In grave was tranquility
So where do we start our wishes?
Tomorrow
All the caravans travel to the mazes
No footwear do I have but the rear of questions.

An evening of childhood
O sand lady
An evening of an epoch
that's gone
An evening of time that will never come.



Hot milk and grooming for camels at Saudi luxury 'hotel'

WITH HEATED STALLS AND hot milk, life couldn't get more glamorous for Saudi Arabia's most beautiful camels when they stay at a luxury compound near Riyadh.

For 400 riyals (just over \$100) a night, the camels are trimmed, scrubbed and pampered before taking part in beauty contests, where millions of dollars are at stake.

The camels, many of which are rented, are checked closely for Botox and other illegal enhancements which could see them thrown out for cheating.

And it's all done in a Covid-safe environment to prevent any disruptive outbreaks.

The Tatman, described as the first hotel for camels, is an open-air desert compound near the annual King Abdelaziz Festival, which has prizes totalling \$66.6 million.

It's a logical step for the lucrative industry in the well-heeled Gulf, where camels are prized as a symbol of traditional life.

The animals are judged on attributes including their lips, necks, humps and colouring, and wins are highly prestigious for their owners.

Omar al Qahtani, who is Saudi,

checked 80 camels into the Tatman for 16 days, saying it would cost him \$160,000-213,000.

The facility is "very comfortable, as the camels remain under their care and undergo regular medical examinations", the 51-year-old businessman told AFP.

It has 120 enclosures, including singles and doubles, each equipped with plastic containers for water and fodder. Check-out is 12:30 pm.

During their stay, 50 workers look after the animals and are kept under strict sanitary conditions to minimise the risk of Covid cases.

'OBSESSION WITH CAMELS'

In years past, Qahtani and his assistants would set up tents near the festival, tending to and feeding the camels themselves.

Many of the four-legged guests are competitors in Mazayen al Ibl contest, the world's biggest camel beauty pageant and a highlight of the King Abdelaziz Festival.

Mohamed al Harbi, media chief of the camel club that organises the competition, said the group dreamed up the hotel

"to protect and preserve camels and also to reduce the burden on the owner".

He said the hotel was popular, bringing in revenues of more than \$1.6 million.

Money is no object for some attending the festival, which features well-appointed buildings and tents in the middle of the desert, and booths for luxury car-makers Rolls-Royce and BMW.

Saudi enthusiasts can spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on camels entered into the contests, where unscrupulous competitors sometimes seek an illegal advantage.

Forty-three dromedaries were drummed out of the festival when camel checkers spotted infringements such as Botox, silicone and fillers injected into lips, humps and tails.

But Harbi said the hotel provides a "check" so that people "can find any tampering early", reassuring them their rented beasts won't be sent packing.

Qahtani said this is a big advantage, as doctored camels can attract fines of up to \$26,000.

The competitions "reinforce the obsession with camels in Saudi Arabia", Harbi said. — **AFP**

Men's fashion week in Milan eyes dressing for post-Covid excursions



FITTED FROCK COATS, bow ties and exuberant colours graced the runway as Dolce & Gabbana and Fendi both imagined more glamorous, post-pandemic wardrobes for their fall/winter collections at the Milan men's fashion week.

Designer Silvia Venturini Fendi took inspiration from the 1920s dandy at her fashion house's show on Saturday, punctuating refinement with touches of

with wide shoulders and a cinched waist.

Others were wrapped up in thick, oversized down jackets in bold colours or eco-friendly furs, ready to face the winter cold during post-Covid excursions.

And like at Fendi, the skirt featured as part of the male wardrobe, with the designer duo citing young people's ability to choose their clothes freely, without worrying about gender.



eccentricity.

Blazers were transformed into capes, knitwear featured sizeable chest cutouts and the accessories veered towards the flashy.

The collection also aimed for a more fluid interpretation of typically gendered clothes, with wide-leg pants ballooning into half-skirts.

"We women wear men's jackets, I do not see why they could not take inspiration from our wardrobe", said the designer, the granddaughter of the Italian fashion house's founders.

At Sicilian duo Dolce & Gabbana's show, casual and sartorial styles mixed in a celebration of returning to the great outdoors.

Tailored to appeal to a younger generation, the show featured rap and punk music orchestrated by Machine Gun Kelly.

Models wore loose-fitting coats with leopard or zebra prints, white suits embroidered with pearls or tight-fitting pants and tuxedos

Both shows carried on despite the disruption sown across Europe by the surging Omicron variant, which has curtailed the fashion week calendar.

After Giorgio Armani announced its withdrawal, the number of physical shows was reduced from 23 to 16. Eighteen brands opted for a purely virtual presence, while others presented their collections by appointment.

Still, those that went ahead, like Dsquared2 on Friday, embraced the return to the catwalk.

In their first live show in two years — attended by football star Zlatan Ibrahimovic — the Canadian twins behind the label displayed a festival of bright yellows, pinks, reds and blues alongside floral patterns, sequins and crystal embroidery.

With a glimmer of hope and much enthusiasm, Dsquared2's globe-trotting styles were a nod to getting out of the cocoon and going on a long-awaited trip. — **AFP**