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SEEB, AL NASR PLAY OUT GOALLESS DRAW



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SPANISH FIRM WINS OQ GAS PIPELINE CONTRACT



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MYSTERIES AND MUSIC: LISTENING INTO UNDERWATER LIFE



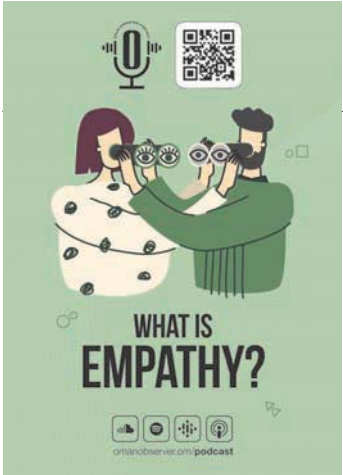
MUSCAT

HM GREET'S SAUDI AND SAINT LUCIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the occasion of the Founding Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments to King Salman, wishing him good health, happiness and long life. His Majesty also prayed for the return of this and similar occasions while the Saudi people realise aspirations of further progress and prosperity. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to Cyril Errol Charles, Governor-General of Saint Lucia, on his country's Independence Anniversary. — ONA

HM THANKED BY CHINESE PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from President Xi Jinping of the People's Republic of China in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of the Chinese New Year. In his cable, President Xi expressed his utmost appreciation to His Majesty's sincere sentiments. He stressed his keenness on promoting the joint strategic relations between the two countries, wishing His Majesty good health and permanent success. — ONA



INSIDE



Plan for metro rail in Muscat

VINOD NAIR @vinot_nair

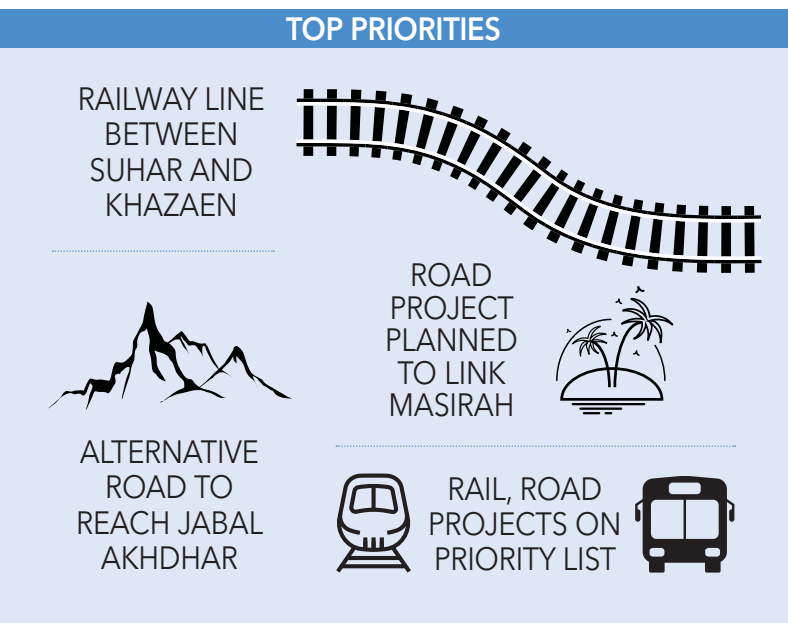
Nearly after over five years, the development of a railway network is on agenda as one of the top priorities of the government. With a special emphasis on the logistic sector, the Ministry of Transport, Communications, and Information Technology in its press conference said the focus will be improving the connectivity with Saudi Arabia and within the country.

Speaking exclusively to the *Observer*, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said: "As far as the train is concerned, this year the ministry is actively pursuing the possibilities of the project." The government will seek investments to establish a railway line from Suhar to Khazaen Dry Port area, which will be then linked to neighbouring Saudi Arabia to boost the logistics sector. There are also plans to work on a metro railway project for Muscat



Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali

as the authorities seek to develop the capital as a major metropolis in the coming years. "The committee to study metro project for Muscat submitted its first report last week. The committee included representatives of all relevant authorities", said the minister. REVENUES Among others, the government said that there has been an increase



of 5 per cent in the direct import of containers in 2022 and the revenues of land transport and maritime sector increased by 10 per cent. The number of ships received by the ports in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 1.3 per cent, while the handling of standard containers increased by 2 per cent. Meanwhile, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamaki, Under-

Secretary for Transport, spoke about the new projects, especially those linking tourist sites. He said: "Jabal Akhdhar is one of the tourist destinations which has lot of potential. Presently, there is only one road to reach Jabal Akhdhar which is hard to navigate for smaller cars. So, the ministry is looking at one or two alternative roads where even smaller cars could travel with ease."

Great strides towards space technology

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnassri

The annual media meeting of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology revealed a number of policies that the ministry is working on this year, including National Policy for Space and Space Science as one of the areas of exclusive focus in the digital field. Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communication and Information Technology, said, "Space and astronomy are among areas in which Omanis have excelled since ancient times. Various institutions worked and excelled. The issuance of the ministry's decree, however, gave a new direction to the competencies to develop the space sector. It was important to monitor this field and define its strategic direction", he said.

SEE ALSO P3

Fish consumption in Oman higher than world average

SAMUEL KUTTY @samkuttyvp

The Sultanate of Oman is among four countries where fish consumption is higher than the world average of 20.5 kilograms per capita annually. According to a new report by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Qatar, Egypt and the UAE are the other three countries where fish consumption is higher than other countries in the region. "All countries of the Near East and North Africa have access to marine areas, and thus fish and marine products constitute a major source of livelihood and nutrition in the region", the report points out.

STEADILY INCREASING While the average consumption is steadily increasing, the report reveals that it is still low at 12 kilograms per capita annually in most countries. However, the world per capita consumption of fish paints a slightly different picture. Even as the report warns



of climate change which will significantly affect fisheries in the region, it projects that global seafood consumption will reach a level of 21.5 kilograms per capita in 2030. "The Arabian Sea is among the regions that will witness the highest projected increase in temperatures and lower rainfall by the end of the century, where expectations in the event of high gas emissions indicate an increase in temperatures at an average rate of four degrees, and a 40 per cent decrease in precipitation", the report warns. Through 2030, this will increase in all regions except Africa, which will experience a decline of 3 per cent.

MI CARMEN FLAMENCA AT THE ROYAL OPERA



Watching Mi Carmen Flamenca last weekend at the Royal Opera House Muscat was like watching the 'bull run' in Spain. It was exhilarating, action-packed and there were only a few pauses in between that you barely have time to breathe to process what was happening. It's not everyday that the Compania Antonio Andrade is in town much more principal dancers Ursula Morena (Carmen), Jose Galvan (Don Jose) and Jose Jurado (Escamillo) who were stunning and magical in their performance it was a nearly two-hour show where every minute counted. DETAILS ON P20

Ukraine seeks urgent UNSC meet

KYIV: Ukraine on Monday requested an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council to address the threat of a Russian invasion, citing security assurances it received in return for giving up its nuclear arsenal in 1994. The agreement, co-signed by Russia, the United States and Britain, assured Ukraine that its "territorial integrity or political independence" would be respected in return for its decision to move all its nuclear weapons to Russia. The independent republic

of Ukraine inherited the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal when the Soviet Union formally dissolved in 1991. "On President (Volodymyr) Zelensky's initiative I officially requested UNSC member states to immediately hold consultations under Article 6 of the Budapest memorandum", Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted. The Security Council must address "practical steps to guarantee the security of Ukraine", he wrote. Article 6 of the 1994 agree-

ment says Moscow, Washington and London "will consult in the event a situation arises" that puts Ukraine's security under threat. Meanwhile, a Ukrainian civilian died in a shelling attack on a government-held village, officials said, with the incident coming as fears were rising of an imminent Russian invasion. Local officials said the civilian was killed in an attack on Novoluhanske, a settlement 35 km north of the eastern rebel stronghold Donetsk. SEE ALSO P7



Oman, Qatar review maritime cooperation



MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Rear Admiral Abdullah Hassan Al Sulaiti, Commander of the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces.

The two sides exchanged views

on several military matters of common interest.

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), also received Rear Admiral Al Sulaiti, Commander of the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces.

The two sides reviewed fields of the existing maritime cooperation

between the RNO and the Qatari Emiri Naval Forces. They also exchanged views on several matters of common interests.

VISIT TO MSC

The Qatari commander and his delegation later visited the Maritime Security Center (MSC). During the visit, the guest



was accompanied by RNO commander. Upon the guest arrival at the MSC, he was greeted by the acting Head of the MSC.

The guest toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was briefed on the duties, tasks and roles carried out by the centre within its national duties,

as it coordinates with authorities concerned in search and rescue missions and in the safety of the maritime environment.

VISIT TO MTC

Rear Admiral Al Sulaiti also visited the Military Technological College (MTC). Upon the guest's arrival, he

was greeted by Air Commodore Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Siyabi, Commandant of the MTC.

The Qatari guest and members of the visiting delegation were briefed on the college's educational and service facilities, in addition to its general curriculum, technical specialisations and various educational levels. — ONA

Shura panel hosts Arab financial delegation

MUSCAT: The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash-Shura hosted a delegation from the Arab Federation of Exchanges (AFE) and representatives of Arab capital markets.

The visit is aimed at strengthening cooperation and communication with Arab financial markets and exchanging experiences.

During a meeting chaired by Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi, head of the Economic and Financial Committee, the delegation was briefed on the specialisations and working mechanisms of Majlis Ash-Shura and roles played by the committee in studying the state's draft budget and the development plans.

The delegation comprised the chairman of the Iraqi Securities



Commission, the chairman of the board of governors of the Iraq Stock Exchange (ISX) and the secretary-general of the Arab Federation of Exchanges (AFE).

The delegation viewed the council's facilities and listened to a brief explanation about

its components and modern technologies used for managing sessions and the advanced electronic voting mechanism.

Oman participates in GCC economic authority meet

DUBAI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Economy, took part in the 3rd meeting of high-ranking officials of the GCC Economic and Development Affairs Authority on Monday.

The two-day meeting is held in the pavilion of the GCC Secretariat General at Expo 2020 Dubai.

The Sultanate of Oman's delegation in the meeting was

headed by Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy.

The meeting discussed several topics, namely the roadmap of reaching economic unity between the GCC countries by 2025.

It also touched on a report covering the prominent indicators of economic development in GCC countries, among other topics. — ONA

French Navy Commander visits National Defence College



MUSCAT: Air Vice Marshal Eng Saleh bin Yahya al Maskari, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) on Monday received Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff of the French Navy and his delegation.

The two sides exchanged matters of common interests.

The guest and his accompanying

delegation toured the NDC's facilities. They were briefed on the college's facilities and equipment, as well as various departments and halls designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with the best educational systems, training aids and multi-purpose electronic network systems.

— ONA

SAUDI MILITARY DELEGATION VISITS MSC



MUSCAT: A delegation from the Command and Staff College and National Defence University of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), headed by Brigadier Hussain al Harbi on Monday visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). Upon their arrival, they were received by the Deputy Head of the MSC.

Members of the Saudi delegation were briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre in search and rescue missions, as well as in the safety of the maritime environment. They also toured the centre facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. — ONA

114 cultural activities will be staged at Muscat book fair

MUSCAT: The 26th Muscat International Book Fair 2022 will begin at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Thursday and last till March 5.

The opening ceremony of the fair will be held under the patronage of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham Al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The extravaganza will boast a strong comeback and host an elite selection of literati, media personnel, publishers and exhibitors,

with the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah as the Guest of Honour.

It will showcase a wide range of programmes and cultural activities carrying the insignia of its heritage and cultural legacy throughout the days of the book fair.

As many as 114 cultural activities, among them 29 unique to the South Al Sharqiyah Governorate, will be staged, but children's activities will be limited to 85 in line with Covid-19 precautionary measures. — ONA





PLANS FOR WATER TAXIS

as part of transport improvement plan

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is working on an improvement plan for the transportation sector, which will include organising the public transport and operations of trucks.

On the passenger transport front, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamaki, the Under-Secretary for Transport, told the *Observer*, that there are plans to introduce water taxis in Oman. “We are in discussion to identify possible spots to develop the water taxi service in Muscat and Musandam. Once the proposal is ready, a tender will be floated.”

The ministry said that currently 20 female drivers are in the taxi business, which will go up to 200 in the coming years. “We are open to more female taxi operators coming into the field and have not rejected any proposal so far.”

Major projects for the transport sectors include developing integrated transport stations, bus shelters, a joint command center, and yards to park trucks.

The ministry said in its report that there are 159,000 registered trucks in the Sultanate of Oman, of which 110,000 weigh over seven tonnes. Nearly 70 per cent of the operators are self-employed. “The sector is unregulated, and the total value of the sector can reach half a billion if organised properly.”

The government confirmed that the official opening of the strategic Empty Quarter Road and the border control has been one of the major achievements of the transport and logistics sector. It will pave the way for new horizons of social integration on the one hand and Omani and Saudi economic and logistical integration on the other hand. The road gives direct access to the ports and free zones in both countries.

Four petrol stations will be opened soon on the Al Batinah Expressway.

“There is 17,000 km of unpaved basic roads, compared to 16,000 km of paved roads in the Sultanate, which opens the door of opportunities for investment,” the ministry said.



20 female drivers are in the taxi business, which will go up to 200 in the coming years



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GREAT STRIDES MADE TOWARDS SPACE TECHNOLOGY

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

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Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary for Communication and Information Technology, said, “Space and astronomy are among areas in which Omanis have excelled since ancient times. Various institutions worked and excelled. The issuance of the ministry’s decree, however, gave a new direction to the competencies to develop the space sector. It was important to monitor this field and define its strategic direction,” he said and hinted at the possibilities of the launch of space rockets, the use of artificial satellites for urban planning, and many others.

Regarding the Sultanate of Oman’s position, Dr Al Shaithani said, “It is necessary to focus on certain areas to invest in the capabilities that the country enjoys, whether scientific, tourism, or space experiments that took place earlier. You should be watchful of the developments to be announced this year.

“The National Space Policy defines the facts to be focused and announced

this year,” he confirmed.

The government took part in many agreements in the field by issuing relevant decrees to serve the goals and requirements of economic development, including Royal Decree 76/2021 approving the Accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies; Royal Decree 77/2021 approving the accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Convention on Registration of Objects Launched into Outer Space; Royal Decree 78/2021 approving the Accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Agreement on the Rescue of Astronauts, the Return of Astronauts and the Return of Objects Launched into Outer Space; and Royal Decree 79/2021 Approving the Accession of the Sultanate of Oman to the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects.

On October 27, 2021, the Emerging Global Technology Company “ETCO” signed a memorandum of understanding to manufacture satellite parts in the country with the Italian company D-Orbit, on the sidelines of the Sultanate of Oman’s participation in the International Space Conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The memorandum of understanding, which came with the support of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, stipulates the establishment of a facility to manufacture parts for small and medium satellites and space logistics in the Sultanate of Oman through the transfer of Italian knowledge and expertise in this field and the localisation of knowledge through promoting the qualification and development of young Omani competencies in a plan that extends for three years.

It is hoped that this project, which is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman, will contribute to establishing a national base of competencies in the space industries and attract greater investments in this advanced sector.

Plan for metro rail in Muscat

FROM P1

The ministry is also studying a road connecting with Masirah. “Batinah Coastal Road Project is one of the ministry’s top priorities this year and it will start the tender process before the second quarter of this year,” the under-secretary said.

The ministry also unveiled a

navigation system initiative, a maritime zone for ship repair, a water taxi and ship registration project to be named Al Numani.

The ministry’s government digital transformation programme (2022) includes launching the first phase of the National Unified E-Government Services Portal, unrolling 88 e-services rendered to citizens

and the business community, streamlining procedures and re-engineering of 70 per cent of basic e-government services.

It also touched on projects to incentivise digital economy in 2022, including an initiative named “Jadara” for introducing advanced technical products into government establishments and firms. The plan also

envisages investment incentives and cybersecurity services, apps and AI services, training nationals and honing the skills of manpower specialised in modern technologies.

Major achievements made in 2021 include the partial opening of Adam-Haima-Thamrait dualisation project, the finalisation of the National

Indicators Initiative for Logistics Sector Efficiency (Tamayyuz). It also opened the Al Suwaiq-Al Hoqain dualisation project and the invitation of investment bids for the management, operation and development of Khasab and Shinas ports.

The 2021 official opening of the Rub-el-Khali carriageway figures as another major

milestone in the transport and logistics sector, said the ministry, noting that the project swings the door fully open for social and economic integration between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia due to the fact that the highway is linked to ports and airports in both countries.

(With ONA inputs)

In the Sultanate of Oman, date palms are the first agricultural crop, with a production volume of

377,000
tonnes in 2019

Oman is one of the major Arab countries (**sixth**) in date production with more than

8.5m
date palm trees

GLOBAL PRODUCTION

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries contribute **21 per cent**

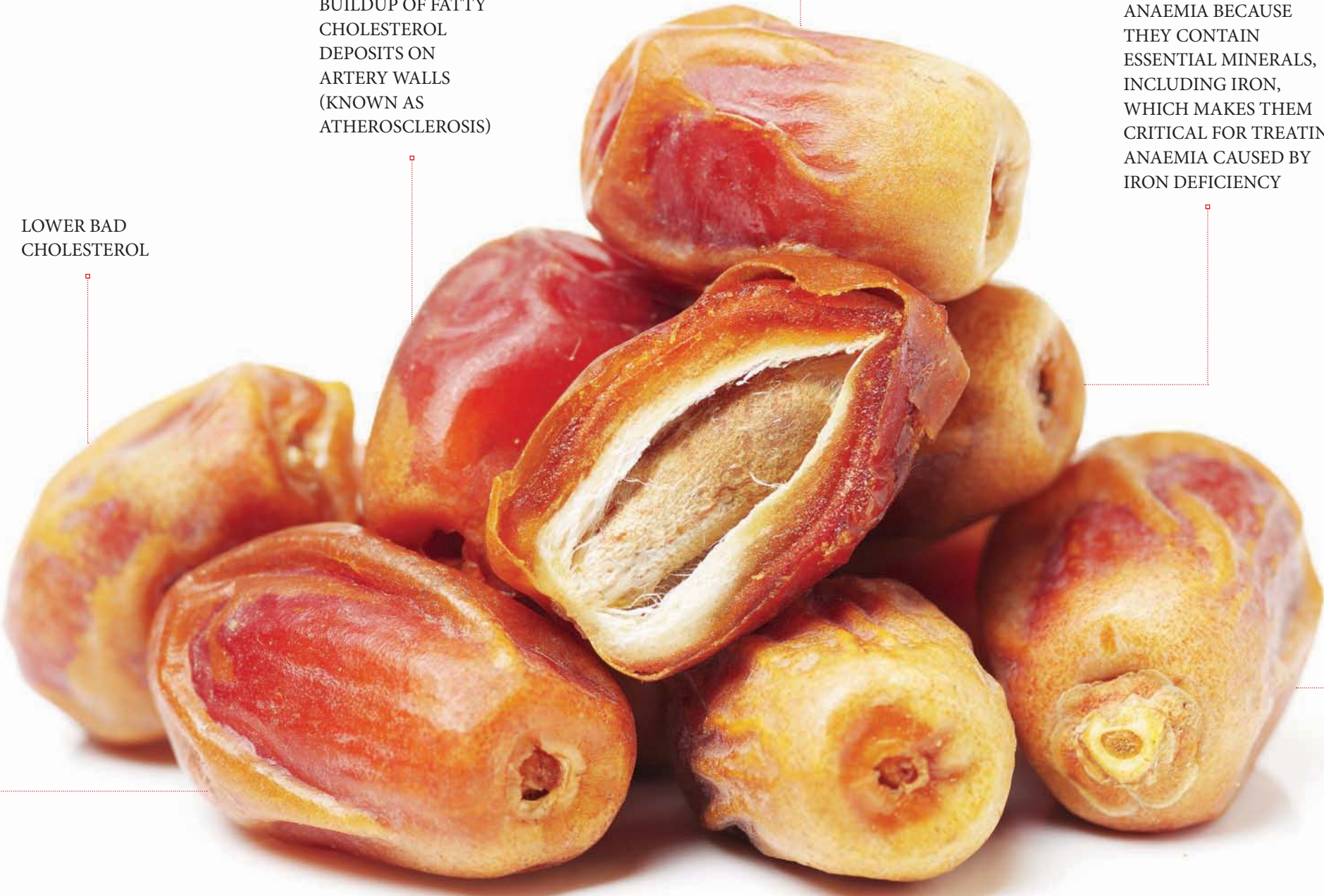
The statistical data of the FAO for the year 2018.



Country	Percentage
Saudi Arabia	9.24%
UAE	5.82%
Oman	4.42%
Kuwait	1.07%
Qatar	0.36%
Bahrain	0.13%

Oman established one of the largest organic farms in the world called 'Masrooq Farm' in the Wilayat of Ibri in the Al Dhahirah Governorate. This place was selected for organic farming with a capacity of about

100,000
palm trees



REDUCE THE RISK OF HEART DISEASE

PROTECTS AGAINST ANAEMIA BECAUSE THEY CONTAIN ESSENTIAL MINERALS, INCLUDING IRON, WHICH MAKES THEM CRITICAL FOR TREATING ANAEMIA CAUSED BY IRON DEFICIENCY

REDUCE THE RISK OF CHRONIC DISEASES, INFECTIONS AND CANCER AND CONTROL BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS

PREVENT THE BUILDUP OF FATTY CHOLESTEROL DEPOSITS ON ARTERY WALLS (KNOWN AS ATHEROSCLEROSIS)

LOWER BAD CHOLESTEROL

CONTAIN POWERFUL ANTIOXIDANTS, INCLUDING CAROTENOIDS, POLYPHENOLS AND ANTHOCYANIN

INCREIBLE DATES

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnasseri](#)

Whether you eat them as a snack with juices, salads or sweets, dates have great health benefits. Available in different types and varieties, the fruit contains multiple nutrients.

Dates that date back to more than 5,000 years are rich in soluble fibre, which can lower bad cholesterol and help prevent the buildup of fatty cholesterol deposits on artery walls (known as atherosclerosis).

It also helps in reducing the risk of heart disease, according to the American website 'Eat This Not That'.

According to research, dates contain powerful antioxidants, including carotenoids, polyphenols and anthocyanin, which play an important role in reducing the risk of chronic diseases, infections and cancer and controlling blood sugar levels. A person with diabetes can consume dates in moderation. It is recommended, however,

to consume dates in a well-studied nutritional plan after consulting a doctor.

Dates also protect against anaemia because they contain essential minerals, including iron, which makes them critical for treating anaemia caused by iron deficiency. Iron in it helps supply the body with energy and get rid of fatigue caused by anaemia.

In the Sultanate of Oman, date palms are the first agricultural crop, with a production volume of 377,000 tonnes in 2019. According to the FAO, Oman is one of the major Arab countries (sixth) in date production with more than 8.5 million date palm trees. This gives the country reason for the high self-sufficiency rate in dates up to the level of 99 per cent.

The country's dates exports recorded 22,000 tonnes, India being the most prominent. On the other hand, imports amounted to 24,000 tonnes in 2019. Besides, Oman's annual per capita consumption of dates is 82 kilograms, with a daily average of 255 kilograms, the

'Khalas' dates are one of the most popular types among the Omani consumers, followed by 'Fardh', as dates are at the fore on the Omani table, especially during the holy month of Ramadhan

highest in the world. 'Khalas' dates are one of the most popular types among the Omani consumers, followed by 'Fardh', as dates are at the fore on the Omani table, especially during the holy month of Ramadhan.

QUALITY OF DATES

As part of the country's interest in improving the quality of dates and maximising the added value, several projects have been launched in recent years. They aim to address food security issues, improve quality according to international quality standards, and establish integrated factories for sorting and packaging after being purchased from farmers.

The project to plant one million palm trees, directed by the late Sultan Qaboos, is one of the largest projects in this field. It aims to achieve food security goals. There are ten environment-friendly farms and one organic farm. The project adopts the concept of smart agriculture using digital

technology. Within the same project, the Sultanate of Oman established one of the largest organic farms in the world called 'Masrooq Farm' in the Wilayat of Ibri in the Al Dhahirah Governorate.

This place was selected for organic farming with a capacity of about 100,000 palm trees. According to an official, the farm, developed on 6,400,000 square metres, is expected to produce about 10,000 tonnes of organic dates annually. Masrooq Farm has been certified as the first organic palm farm in the Sultanate of Oman and the region by the National Accreditation Authority of Germany (DAKKS) and the Egyptian Center for Biodynamic Agriculture (COAE).

The Gulf Cooperation Council countries contribute 21 per cent of global production, Saudi Arabia at the forefront with 9.24 per cent, UAE 5.82 per cent, Oman 4.42 per cent, Kuwait 1.07 per cent, Qatar 0.36 per cent and Bahrain 0.13 per cent, according to the statistical data of the FAO for the year 2018.



Omani children to participate in Maths Olympiad



Khulood bint Khala'a al Abria
Aysha Riyami School



Rabeeh bin Habeeb al Dhafri
Ansa bin Nadhira School



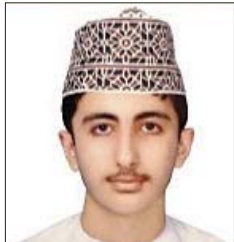
Hanoofa bint Ahmed al Isai
Amna bint Imam Jabir School



Abdullah bin Masaood al Fazari
Abu Abyadh School



Aysha bint Abdul Qadir al Ma'amaria
Hawa bint Yazeed School



Waqas bin Mahmoud al Khadouri
Uthman bin Ma'oon School



Aya bint Zahran al Harrasia
Rustaq School



Reem bint Nabhan al Azvaniah
Marfa Daris School



Manar bint Mahmoud al Dahliya
Saima Foundation School



Al Balja'a bint Zahran al Abria
Fathima bint Qatab School

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Ten Omani boys and girls are set to represent the country in the forthcoming 8th Arabian Gulf Maths Olympiad and 4th Arabian Gulf Physics Olympiad to be held from March 13 to 18 in Saudi Arabia.

These students from different schools of the country have cleared their way to the most sought-after school activities that give the children an opportunity to grow in the subjects.

Six students will brush their skills in Maths with many other students from various schools in the region while four students will hold national flag for physics competition.

The participating students from Oman are: Haya bint Zahran al Harrasia, Rustaq School; Aysha bint Abdul Qadir al Ma'amaria, Hawa bint Yazeed School; Waqas bin Mahmoud al Khadouri, Uthman bin Ma'oon School; Balja'a bint Zahran al Abria, Fathima bint Qatab School; Manar bint Mahmoud al Dahliya, Saima Foundation School; and Reem bint Nabhan al Azvaniah, Marfa Daris School.

Abdullah bin Masaood al Fazari, Abu Abyadh School; Hanoofa bint Ahmed al Isai, Amna bint Imam Jabir School; Rabeeh bin Habeeb al Dhafri, Ansa bin Nadhira School; and Khulood bint Khala'a al Abria, Aysha Riyami school are the four Omani students who are selected to represent the Sultanate of

Organised and supervised by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, Gulf Olympiad is a periodic competition in mathematics and physics for students of member states of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States

Oman in the Fourth Gulf Physics Olympiad 2022.

"We are proud to send our future scientists and mathematicians to the most challenging tests that will

give them confidence in facing challenges in Maths and Physics," a representative from the Ministry of Education said.

Organised and supervised by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, Gulf Olympiad is a periodic competition in mathematics and physics for students of member states of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States.

Launched in 2012, Gulf Olympiad is hosted by one of the member states, and it aims to create an appropriate environment to raise scientific competition among students of member states, in various fields of competition and to contribute to Enriching school curricula and developing education.

"It also aims to develop the students' talents for the scientific subjects and allow them to go through different experiences from those they undergo at schools," she added. The first edition was held in the UAE, while Qatar hosted it in 2013; Oman (2014); Kuwait (2015); Saudi Arabia (2016 and 2017); and Oman again in 2019.

The test in Maths will assess the students' ability to answer untraditional and deepened questions that require higher mathematical levels in algebra, geometry, digits theory and combinations of digits.

In Physics, the students will undergo both theoretical test which assesses the students' knowledge of the various fields of physics and practical test that includes

performing two experiments and inferring accurate and scientific measurements.

All the experiments and other sessions will be conducted under the supervision of an Arab and international specialised team in mathematics and physics, according to the source.

A set of roundtable discussions and workshops pertaining to the questions selection and assessment mechanism is also arranged as part of the tests.

The winners will receive gold, silver and bronze medals and certificates of appreciation in accordance with their degrees of excellence. Additionally, the students and the supervisors will have opportunity to visit different sites in the host country.

February 28 last date for online admissions to Indian schools

MUSCAT: The online registration for admission in Indian Schools in the capital area for the next academic year (2022-2023) will be closed on February 28. Parents seeking the admission for their wards may visit <http://indianschoolsoman.com/our-services/admission-2022-23/> for more details regarding the admission procedures.

The centralised admission system with online registration introduced by the Board of Directors, Indian Schools in Oman has facilitated the entire admission process, making it convenient for

parents and schools to take care of rush for admissions.

Online registration for admissions is applicable to seven Indian Schools in the capital area — Indian School Bousher, Indian School Muscat, Indian School Darsait, Indian School Al Wadi Al Kabir, Indian School Al Ghubra, Indian School Al Seeb and Indian School Al Maabala.

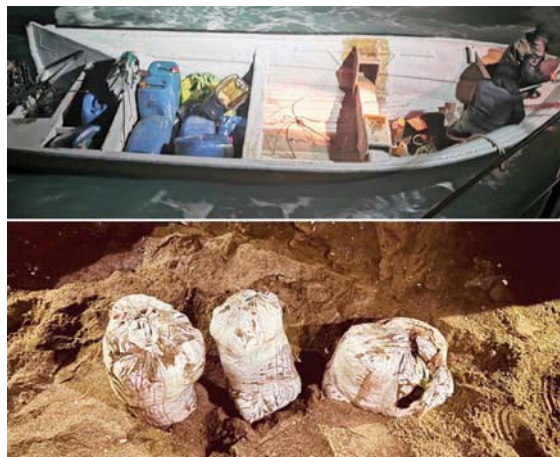
Admission is open to children of Indian and other expatriate communities with valid resident visa. Children who have completed three years as on April 1 are eligible

for Kindergarten admission.

Admissions for children with special needs are open at Care and Special Education (CSE) which is located on the Indian School Muscat premises. Parents can approach the CSE administration directly for admission (www.cseoman.com)

Considering the Covid pandemic situations, admission procedures have been made completely online; parents, therefore, do not have to visit the schools for submission of documents or the remittance of admission processing fee.

TWO DRUG SMUGGLERS NABBED IN S BATINAH



The Coast Guard Police, in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at South Al Batinah Governorate Police Command, seized a boat carrying two Asian infiltrators while attempting to smuggle a large quantity of hashish and crystal meth into the country. Legal procedures against the defendants are under way.



Indian Social Club Oman

NOTICE CALLING THE AGM

Members are hereby notified that the Annual General Body Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Oman, is scheduled on Friday, 25th March 2022 at 6.00pm at the Indian Social Club hall, Darsait.

Agenda:

1. Reading of the notice calling the meeting by the General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the Chairperson.
3. Approval of the minutes of the previous Annual General Meeting.
4. General Secretary's Report.
5. Discussion and approval of the audited accounts for the year 2021 and appoint auditors for the year 2022.
6. Any other points raised by the members, with the permission of the chair.

Members who have renewed their membership before 28th February 2022, only may attend the meeting.

**HON. GENERAL SECRETARY
INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB, OMAN**

6,260 business activities during 3Q last year

MUSCAT: The number of business activities in various governorates, registered with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) during the third quarter of 2021, reached 6,260. The Information, Data and Statistics Department of the MoCIIP indicated that the movement of business activities during the third quarter of 2021 were concentrated in the Governorate of Muscat, accounting for 40.69 per cent of the total volume of business activity in Oman.

It was followed by the Governorate of Dhofar by 19.57 per cent, the Governorate of North Al Batinah by 12.76 per cent, and the remaining percentage was distributed among the rest of the governorates according to the volume of the business activity.

— ONA

Omani, Dutch businessmen discuss cooperation



DUBAI: The General-Commission of Oman's pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai, in coordination with the pavilion of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, held a meeting between businesspeople from Oman and the Netherlands, as well as representatives of mega companies which have headquarters in Dubai.

The meeting aimed to discuss areas of business cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the fields of renewable energy, food, waste management and investment opportunities available in those areas. The investments of Omani local establishments in various sectors were presented by officials from the Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the Public Authority for Special Economic

Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. They also touched on investment opportunities available in the industrial cities.

Meanwhile, the Dutch side highlighted the prominent investment opportunities available in the Netherlands in the fields of renewable energy, food and waste management.

B2B meetings were held between members of the business delegation, which comprises representatives of several private and public establishments in Oman, with representatives of mega Dutch companies. Those meetings explored areas of cooperation between the two sides. — ONA

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

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

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents	Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission	Tender Fee (OMR)
EHC/2022/05	Property All Risks Insurance 22/23 for Oman Water & Wastewater Services Company	28-FEB-2022	23-MAR-2022	1500 (Plus VAT amount: 75 OMR)
EHC/2022/02	Property All Risks Insurance 22/23 for Dhofar Integrated Services Company	28-FEB-2022	23-MAR-2022	50 (Plus VAT amount: 2,500 OMR)

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tender name & tender number as per the below:
 1. Commercial Proposal
 2. Technical Proposal
 3. Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception before 2.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on 23-Mar-2022.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NH is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Interested party to deposit the Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Electricity Holding Company, Bank Muscat: 0423-010776440-018 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 12.00 pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.



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Sudan hospital patient killed amid protests



A Sudanese demonstrator during ongoing protests in Khartoum North near the capital. – AFP

KHARTOUM: A patient standing on a hospital balcony was killed by a stray bullet fired by security forces in Sudan on Sunday, medics said, as protesters pursued a four-month campaign against military rule.

A 51-year-old man was shot while trying to get fresh air amid heavy tear gas in the city of Bahri, across the Nile from Khartoum, the Central Committee for Sudanese Doctors, a group aligned with the protest movement, said.

The death brought the number of people killed since the protests began to 82.

Police had no immediate statement on the death and could not be reached for comment.

The protests against the October 25, 2021, coup have faced crackdowns that have drawn local and international condemnation. The military leadership has vowed to investigate the deaths.

In protests in Khartoum on Sunday, security forces fired tear gas and stun grenades and water cannon sprayed red water at protesters, a Reuters reporter said. Gunfire could be heard.

Some protesters were carried away bleeding on motorcycles, the reporter said.

The protesters managed to reach within less than 500 metres of the heavily protected presidential palace for the first time in more than a month. “We will continue taking to the streets until we succeed, defeating the coup and achieving democracy,” said Iman, a 35-year-old protester. — **Reuters**

Iran hails nuclear talk ‘progress’

DOHA: Iran on Monday signalled “significant progress” in talks on reviving a stalled accord on its nuclear programme but President Ebrahim Raisi, on his first visit to a Gulf state, again insisted that the United States must lift its crippling sanctions.

Iran’s leader, a personal target of the US sanctions, spoke out ahead of a summit of natural gas exporting nations in Qatar. The summit will take place against the backdrop of mounting tensions in Ukraine and reported advances in resuming a deal limiting Iran’s nuclear programme.

The United States under former president Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 accord in 2018, saying it was not tough enough in curtailing Iran’s weapons ambitions. Tehran has always denied seeking an atomic bomb.

But months of negotiations in Vienna have brought the two sides closer to a new deal. Iran’s foreign ministry said on Monday that “significant progress” has been made and the number of outstanding obstacles had been “considerably reduced”. “But the problems that remain are most difficult, the most difficult and most serious to be resolved,” it added.

Talks on reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have been held in the Austrian capital since November, involving Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and the United States indirectly.

After arriving in Doha and



Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani meets with Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi in Doha. – **Reuters**

meeting Qatar’s Emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, a close US ally who has encouraged the two sides to narrow their differences, Raisi again took aim at the US sanctions that have ravaged his country’s economy.

“The United States must show their desire to lift the main sanctions,” he said.

“To reach an accord, it is necessary to guarantee the interests of the Iranian people, in particular the lifting of sanctions, (give) a strong guarantee and end dossiers of a political character.”

Raisi was named in US Treasury sanctions in 2019 before he became president last year. The trip to Qatar is only his fourth abroad since he took office in August.

Qatar has added the Iran

Iranian President Raisi insists that US lift the main sanctions

nuclear dispute to its list of diplomatic hotspots where it has taken a mediation role and the emir called for more dialogue to settle the showdown.

This month, Qatar’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani went on an unannounced visit to Tehran after the emir met US President Joe Biden in Washington.

Sanctions have badly hit Iran’s oil and gas revenues and the Tehran government is anxious to get new investment and customers.

The exporters’ summit has been

dominated by Ukraine tensions that have raised prices and European fears that its supplies of Russian gas may be cut.

The United States has asked Qatar to help Europe by preparing emergency supplies if the Ukraine crisis worsens.

But producing nations say they will not be able to provide substantial amounts of replacement gas if sanctions against Russia do affect Western Europe.

Raisi and the Qatari emir will be joined at Tuesday’s summit by Algeria’s President Abdelmadjid Tebboune and Trinidad and Tobago’s Prime Minister Keith Rowley. Energy ministers from the other seven forum members, who include Russia, will also take part. — **AFP**

SECURITY FORCES EXCEL



Members of the Palestinian security forces show their skills during a graduation ceremony in Gaza City. – **AFP**

DR Congo leader hails ‘historic’ ties in Erdogan visit

KINSHASA: “Win-win” security and economic deals were reached during Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s “historic” official visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the African country’s leader said on Sunday.

President Felix Tshisekedi met with his counterpart, who was backed by a delegation of Turkish government members and businessmen, in the capital Kinshasa for a two-day visit.

He said the DRC and Turkey reached “win-win” cooperation agreements on security, infrastructure, health and transport, hailing a “historic day” for relations between the nations after speaking with Erdogan.

Tshisekedi added that the DRC requested Turkish assistance in the long-running fight against



President of Democratic Republic of Congo Felix Tshisekedi greets Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan at the Palais de la Nation in Lukunga district of Kinshasa. – **AFP**

militias in the conflict-torn east of the country. Erdogan’s African tour, from February 20 to 23, will move on to Senegal and Guinea-Bissau after his DRC trip.

It follows bilateral meetings held between the two heads of

state last year.

In September, Tshisekedi paid an official visit to Ankara on the theme of economic cooperation and travelled to Istanbul in December where he took part in a Turkey-Africa summit. — **AFP**

SEOUL

S Korea parliament clears \$14 bn extra budget

South Korea’s National Assembly approved a 16.9-trillion-won (\$14.2 billion) supplementary budget aimed partly at funding the response to Covid-19 and supporting businesses hit by pandemic restrictions. The amount approved was 2.9 trillion won more than the sum unveiled last month. The bill includes provisions for more than 3 million small businesses and self-employed people to receive 3 million won each in relief money, starting as soon as the



end of this month, according to a Finance Ministry statement. The extra budget comes as the ruling Democratic Party struggles to recover public support before a presidential election on March 9. — **Reuters**

CAIRO

Kerry in Egypt to discuss COP27 summit

The United States and Egypt launched a working group to prepare for the COP27 climate summit this year, with US envoy John Kerry urging more countries to come on board.

The meeting will take place in November in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, seeking to build on gains made at the previous conference in Glasgow last year. “In Glasgow, we made significant progress... we now need to bring more countries on board,” Kerry told



reporters in Cairo.

“This is about a threat to our planet and it is driving our considerations and our thoughts about how to deal with that,” he said alongside Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. — **AFP**

BENGALURU

Covid shot gets India emergency approval

Indian vaccine maker Biological E Ltd said its Covid-19 vaccine received an emergency use approval in the country for use in children aged 12 to 18. The company’s shot, called Corbevax, is the third vaccine approved for use in children aged 12 and above in India, joining Zydus Cadila’s DNA shot ZyCoV-D and homegrown player Bharat Biotech’s Covaxin. India has so far only started vaccinating children aged 15 and above. More than 76 million children between 15 and



17 have been inoculated mainly using Covaxin.

The emergency use approval for restricted use in the 12-18 age group for Corbevax is based on interim results of an ongoing mid- to late-stage clinical study.



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In brief

■ TBILISI



SAAKASHVILI ANNOUNCES FRESH HUNGER STRIKE

Georgia's jailed ex-president and opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili renewed a hunger strike to protest what he said was the government's failure to provide him with proper medical care. "Today, I am going on a hunger strike", Saakashvili told a Tbilisi court, explaining, "my demand is that I am given adequate medical care, as advised by independent doctors", who diagnosed him with a serious neurological condition resulting from his previous 50-day hunger strike last year. He then refused food for 50 days to protest his jailing for abuse of office, a conviction he has denounced as politically motivated.

■ SYDNEY



AUSTRALIA RE-OPENS TO TOURISTS AFTER COVID CLOSURE

Jubilant visitors returned to Australia on Monday as the country reopened its borders to vaccinated tourists, nearly two years after the island nation imposed some of the world's strictest Covid-19 travel restrictions. At the country's two major international airports in Sydney and Melbourne, tired but elated family and friends rushed from gates to embrace loved ones after years apart. Bernie Edmonds was emotional as he hugged his eight-year-old granddaughter, Charlotte, who had just landed in Sydney. "It's great to have her back", he said. "She's got to go again but we'll get her back again."

■ CORFU



GREECE RESUMES SEARCH FOR FERRY FIRE SURVIVORS

Greek rescuers resumed the search for 10 people still missing from a ferry fire that has killed at least one truck driver, with three survivors still in hospital. Television footage showed smoke still billowing from the Italian-flagged *Euroferry Olympia*, more than three days after a fire ripped through the vessel as it sailed from Igoumenitsa in Greece to Brindisi in Italy with nearly 300 people aboard. The Belarussian and two other men from Bulgaria and Romania remained hospitalised on Monday with breathing difficulty, Corfu hospital director Leonidas Roubatis told reporters.

Kremlin says no plans for summit with Biden

MOSCOW/PARIS: The Kremlin on Monday said there were no concrete plans for a summit over Ukraine between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his US counterpart Joe Biden, after the French president said the two leaders had agreed on a meeting in principle.

A summit might offer a path out of Europe's biggest military crisis in decades, and European financial markets edged higher on the glimmer of hope for a diplomatic solution. But by 1200 GMT they were in the red, and Russian stocks had plunged 7-8 per cent.

Both Washington and Moscow played down hopes of a breakthrough, and satellite imagery appeared to show Russian deployments closer to Ukraine's border than before.

Western countries accuse Russia of planning to invade a neighbour that it had controlled for centuries until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Moscow denies planning any attack but has demanded sweeping security guarantees, including a promise that Ukraine will never join Nato. Nerves frayed further when Moscow's close ally Belarus announced on Sunday that Russia would extend military exercises there.

Russia has tens of thousands of soldiers in Belarus — part of



Spanish pilots and soldiers stand in front of a Spanish Eurofighter EF-2000 Typhoon II aircraft during the visit of Spanish Defence Minister Margarita Robles near Plovdiv.

what Washington says is a force now numbering 169,000-190,000 troops in the region, including pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine.

After talks in Brussels with Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, British Foreign Minister Liz Truss said Western countries were preparing for a "worst-case scenario". The airlines Lufthansa, KLM and Air France all cancelled flights to Kyiv.

But the European Union

rebuffed a call from Kyiv to impose some sanctions now to try to avert war before it started.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said a call or meeting between Putin and Biden could be set up at any time, but there were no concrete plans yet for a summit. Tensions were growing, he said, but a foreign ministers' meeting was possible this week.

Macron's office and the White House said the substance of the

plan would be worked out by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov during a meeting planned for Thursday. An adviser to French President Emmanuel Macron told Reuters that Macron had put the summit proposal to Putin at Biden's request.

"We're slowly changing the course of things", said the adviser, who declined to be named.

The White House said Biden

had accepted the meeting "in principle" but only "if an invasion hasn't happened".

"We are always ready for diplomacy", White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said. "We are also ready to impose swift and severe consequences, should Russia instead choose war."

Ukraine said it must be included in any decisions aimed at resolving the crisis, and that it had seen warnings online that hackers were preparing to launch cyberattacks on government agencies, banks and the military.

"No one can resolve our issue without us", top security official Oleksiy Danilov told a briefing.

However, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and some of the assembled national foreign ministers made clear the bloc would not act yet. Borrell said he would convene an extraordinary meeting to agree sanctions only "when the moment comes".

The crisis has raised worries about the stability of energy supplies to Europe. Germany, which relies on Russia for around half of its natural gas, said its supply was currently "secured". Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who visited Putin in Moscow last week, was due to speak with him again on Monday, a government spokesperson said.

— Reuters

Mt Etna spews smoke and ashes, closing airport

CATANIA: Mount Etna, one of the world's most active volcanoes, belched smoke and ashes in a new eruption on Monday, forcing the temporary closure of the airport of Catania in Sicily.

The ash cloud rose 10 kilometres into the air above a crater on the south-east of the volcano, the INGV National Institute for Geophysics and Volcanology said on Twitter. The nearby Vincenzo Bellini international airport in Catania closed at lunchtime on Monday until further notice, with inbound flights diverted to Palermo.

Ash covered roads, balconies

and roofs of towns nearby, Italy's civil protection agency said. INGV said it had recorded a gradual rise in volcanic-seismic tremor — induced by escaping gases — which could be a sign that Etna is heading towards another spectacular burst of fiery lava fountaining, known as paroxysmal activity. At 3,324 metres, Etna is the tallest active volcano in Europe and has erupted frequently in the past 500,000 years.

The eruption, from the volcano's south-east crater, sent an ash cloud 12 kilometres into the sky, the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology

(INGV) in Catania announced. Live footage of the volcano showed a dense black cloud drifting towards the south-east. There were no immediate reports of damage or casualties, though local residents reported ash and dust falling from the sky via the Telegram messaging service.

The nearby airport in Catania, to the south of the volcano, temporarily suspended all flights, the airport tweeted.

The same thing happened a year ago, only with an even bigger build up of magma, and by October the highly active volcano had erupted around 50 more times. — dpa



Workers clear a tree from a road during Storm Franklin in Cambrai, France.

— Reuters

Storm Franklin batters Britain with flooding

LONDON: Storm Franklin has sparked evacuations in parts of Britain and caused widespread rush-hour travel disruption, with train operators warning customers not to travel amid gale-force winds and flooding. A yellow wind warning that covers England, Wales and south-western Scotland is in place until 1 pm, while an amber warning for Northern Ireland expired at 7 am.

Winds were peaking during rush-hour, according to Greg Dewhurst, senior meteorologist at the Met Office, who added that they will begin noticeably easing around lunchtime.

Heavy showers lashing northern England and Northern Ireland are set to move south-eastwards, he said.

Storm Franklin's highest gust of 87 mph was recorded at the Needles on the Isle of Wight on Sunday evening, followed by current gusts of 79 mph on a mountaintop in Wales.

"It's still pretty strong out there and it will continue to be strong over the next few hours", Dewhurst told the PA news agency.

National Rail told people not to travel as it said the first

services on most routes were cancelled, while there is a reduced timetable for Monday, alternative travel is unavailable and further disruption is expected.

Major flooding across parts of Yorkshire has blocked multiple lines and shuttered South Yorkshire's Rotherham Central railway station until Tuesday.

Train operator Northern posted a photograph on social media showing the rail line through Rotherham station flooded to the extent that the tracks are not visible.

There is severe disruption on many of its routes, including between Sheffield and Manchester, Scarborough and Hull, York and Sheffield, Bradford and Leeds, Chester and Manchester, Carlisle and Newcastle.

Rail operator TransPennine Express told customers on Twitter: "Due to a river flooding the railway at Mexborough, trains are currently unable to operate between Doncaster, Meadowhall and Sheffield. All lines are blocked." This is preventing road transport in the area. Customers are advised only to travel if their journey is essential.

— dpa

UK premier set to scrap Covid restrictions

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's "living with Covid" plan, scrapping coronavirus restrictions and cutting access to free tests, drew 11th-hour objections on Monday that it was premature and would leave the country vulnerable to new viral variants.

As Hong Kong builds isolation units and Europe retains social distancing and vaccine rules, Johnson is moving to repeal in England any pandemic requirements that impinge on personal freedoms, such as self-isolating after a positive Covid test.

But the plan, geared to help deflect discontent over his scandal-ridden leadership among lawmakers in his Conservative Party that has threatened his grip on power, ran into difficulty just hours before he was due to launch it. A cabinet meeting of top ministers was delayed just before it was supposed to sign off on the new strategy, and the leaders of Scotland and Wales —



Today will mark a moment of pride after one of the most difficult periods in our country's history as we begin to learn to live with Covid

BORIS JOHNSON

British Prime Minister

both sharply critical of Johnson's rule — said the policy would make it harder to tackle new coronavirus variants in a timely

way, heightening risks to the public.

"Testing has played a pivotal role in breaking chains of transmission and as a surveillance tool helping us detect and respond to emerging variants", Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford said on Twitter. "It's essential that this continues."

Just a day after Queen Elizabeth tested positive for the virus, Johnson was expected to drop legal requirements to self-isolate and replace them with voluntary guidance, bringing Covid-19 into line with how Britain treats most other infections.

The government is also expected to reduce access to free tests, a move that has been blasted by scientists after mass testing helped Britain to spot new variants during the pandemic.

That decision seemed to have sparked a row between the health and finance ministers before a cabinet meeting over what level of testing should continue and how it should be financed. — Reuters

Why are book fairs still so popular in a digital world?



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

There is much anticipation for the launch of the Muscat International Book Fair on February 24 at the Oman Convention Centre.

Coming after a year's gap, this will be one of the first public events on a large scale. It is bound to bring book lovers, educationists, writers and publishers together for a much awaited event.

Traditionally seen as a large space with specific kiosks dedicated to individual publishers, book fairs have evolved into mega cultural events, often termed 'festivals', with a wide array of associated events like workshops, guest talks, interviews and even concerts and exhibitions.

This is both, a way of bringing out a variety of crowds as well as staying relevant in the digital age, where networking and browsing

can all be done online.

This is a far cry from the Frankfurt book market of the 12th century where handwritten books were sold, not surprisingly, to a very exclusive group of ultra-rich clients, mainly of the church.

By 1462, there are records of books printed on the newly invented printing machines being sold in the markets of Frankfurt. The Frankfurt Book Fair remains, 500 years later, the largest trade fair for books. The London Book Festival is another very popular draw in Europe.

Elsewhere, the book festival at Guadalajara in Mexico and the Jaipur Literary Festival are two of the most famous book fairs. The latter is now coined to be the 'the world's largest literary festival'. It's not entirely wrong — the

BOOKS HAVE A TOUGHER STRUGGLE WHEN FACED WITH SO MANY COMPETITORS FROM AUDIO BOOKS, E-BOOKS AND THE EVER PRESENT DIGITAL SCREEN

organisers claim to have hosted over 2,000 speakers and had millions attending in-person over a decade, and possibly many more in the two years when the festival went online. They also now run a franchise across various cities, including Toronto, Qatar and Adelaide.

Closer home, book festivals have been popularised for over two decades. While Cairo and

Beirut have had book fairs for half a century, the Sharjah book festival, the Emirates Airline Book Festival and others in Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and Bahrain all rake in millions in dollars, as well as attendees. The Muscat International Book Fair is also hosting its 26th edition this year. So, why are book fairs still so popular today when a book can be seen and bought at the click on a screen?

It's mainly because book fairs have re-invented themselves to be more than a place to buy a book. It is now an experience, an opportunity to interact with writers, ask questions, listen to them read from their books, and even debate with them. It is an immersive activity for children where the open spaces create a carnival atmosphere with opportunities for drawing

and painting, feeling the books, browsing through them before final selection and even sitting down and devouring a book right there and then.

The battle for the attention of a distracted mind is more real now than ever before.

Everywhere we look, there is something to catch our eye for a brief moment before going to the next attraction. Books have a tougher struggle when faced with so many competitors — audio books, e-books, free downloads and the ever present digital screen.

Book fairs have to re-invent themselves continually to stay relevant, because, all said and done, there is nothing more comforting than curling back with your favourite book — hopefully with a happy ending.

Young people in UK spurred into sewing

VALENTINE GRAVELEAU

From jogging outfits to summer dresses, Lea Baecker has stitched together most of her wardrobe herself from inside her London flat, part of a burgeoning number of young amateur seamstresses.

Like many others in the growing horde of sew-it-yourself enthusiasts, she has grown increasingly disillusioned with the retail clothing industry, viewing it as too destructive.

"My main motivation was not having to buy ready-to-wear clothes anymore because I didn't want to support fast fashion," Baecker, 29, said, referring to clothes made and sold cheaply to be thrown away after minimal use.

The doctoral student in neuroscience only started sewing in 2018, beginning with small bags before moving on to clothes.

Four years on, she estimates about 80 per cent of clothes in her wardrobe are homemade, from pyjamas to long fleece coats, as well as jeans made with denim scraps scalped from relatives.

Baecker now buys new clothes "very rarely", she added, wearing one of her self-made long, hand-sewn dresses. The fashion and textile industry is the third most polluting sector globally after food and construction, accounting for up to 5 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, according to a 2021 report by the World Economic Forum.

Low-cost fashion retailers are regularly criticised for their waste and pollution, as well as the pay conditions imposed on their workers.

Tara Viggo knows fast fashion only too well, having worked in the industry for 15 years as a pattern maker. "I realised the scale that the fashion industry was working at and it was a bit terrifying," she said. In 2017, Viggo decided to start creating her own patterns — the blueprint drawings on paper before garments are made.

She started out small, selling only around one set of patterns per year, a far cry from the four a day that she would sometimes churn out in the ready-to-wear industry. Viggo conceded independent operators like her were only tiny competitors to the big brands, but insisted they still could have a meaningful impact. "The more of us that do (it), the better," she said.

"It's like a trigger... People start to look at where their consumption" is, she added noting it also made you aware of the true costs involved. "Once you know how to sew your own clothes, you can't fathom that a shirt should be £3 anymore." Viggo's "Zadie" jumpsuit is now a top seller on "The Fold Line", an online platform selling independently produced sewing patterns, according to its co-founder Rachel Walker. — AFP

Risking their lives, for little pay, to guard India's forests



SHALINI VENUGOPAL BHAGAT

The writer joined the South Asia bureau of *TNYT* in 2014

Armed only with a bamboo stick, Bijesh T K was part of a team looking for a tiger that had escaped from a wildlife sanctuary. But it was the tiger that saw him first.

"It tried to bite my neck, but, thankfully, my helmet protected me," he said, describing the attack last year near Wayanad, in the southern state of Kerala. "Its jaw was so wide that my whole head could have fit inside."

There was nothing his colleagues could do. They tried to shoo the tiger away, but it clamped its teeth onto Bijesh T K's right arm, refusing to let go, before finally slipping back into the wilderness. His arm was permanently damaged.

Bijesh T K and hundreds of other part-timers across India risk their lives every day for a front-line job that is vital for preserving the country's forests but often pays less than minimum wage.

They battle poachers, criminal gangs, and fires and other disasters, and in this part of the country, where forests mingle with villages, they are the de facto peacekeepers between humans and wildlife. It's a broad mission that involves deterring wildlife from eating crops and livestock near protected areas, while also guarding the lives and livelihoods of local residents and the wildlife that could face reprisal attacks by communities.

This part of southern India has the largest contiguous tiger population in the world, with more than 720 tigers prowling a biodiversity hot spot in the Western Ghats, moving among at least five tiger reserves that sprawl across three states.

This region also has the largest Asian elephant population in the world, and wild elephants are a common sight.

"The herd comes trooping through our yard at 7:30 pm several days a week," said Lalitha, 72, who uses one name. "We can't grow anything here. If the elephants don't destroy it, then the deer or the wild boar come and eat our fruit and vegetables. We can't step out of the house at night."

Forest watchers, who report to guards recruited at the state level, are typically ill-equipped to deal with such situations. They are often members

THERE IS LITTLE DATA ON SERIOUS INJURIES TO FOREST WATCHERS IN INDIA, BUT THE COUNTRY HAS RECORDED AT LEAST 318 RANGER DEATHS SINCE 2012

of local communities and Indigenous tribes who traditionally helped with tasks such as patrolling protected areas and fighting forest fires. Bijesh T K, 38, received the helmet and a safety jacket only days before he was attacked. That meager protection had been a hasty response to another mauling by the same tiger.

But as a part-time forest watcher, he was not eligible to receive compensation from the Kerala forest department after the attack. The government helped pay for his treatment and continued to pay his monthly salary, \$108. The \$334 he got from a nonprofit group went to medical expenses.

"Foresters need to be given the same respect that our armed forces get," said Vivek Menon, founder of the Wildlife Trust of India, which gave Bijesh the extra money and has been pushing for more recognition for front-line staff members. "They protect vast areas of India's land, our entire ecological heritage, but many of them are temporary staff who don't even have life insurance in case they

die on the job," Menon said. Before the attack, Bijesh's primary source of income was masonry, but he can no longer do that work. So, despite his trauma and the relentless nature of the job, he signed up as a full-time forest watcher. His salary, just \$143 a month, is still desperately low, and he struggles to provide for his family of five.

Each night, he is out chasing away wildlife foraging for food in neighbouring villages — mostly elephants, boar and deer but occasionally tigers and leopards. He is armed with a flashlight and some firecrackers to drive the animals away. In the daytime, he must check the electric fencing that keeps the elephants out and look out for forest fires in the summers.

Most forest watchers are hired as contractors, receiving a fraction of the salary and benefits that permanent government employees earn. Many spend decades working part-time.

Interviews with staff members in different regions of the country revealed a similar tale of a system in desperate need of overhaul. While several senior officers spoke of how they were trying to improve the working conditions of front-line staff members, they expressed frustration with a system that seemed designed to hamstring them at every turn.

"Forest staff should be officially designated as front-line staff across the country," said Gaurav Sharma, a division forest officer in charge of 2 million acres in Panna, in Madhya Pradesh state. — **The New York Times**



A forest officer on a trained elephant searches for a stray tiger in a village in Karnataka.

Why do we need to be empathetic?



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

Today, however, empathy is being looked upon as a skill and is one of the five components of emotional intelligence. It is also a trait, agree experts while defining it as an important element of interpersonal communication, which can be developed.

On the other hand, lot of times we tend to do this — when someone is actually being or looking out for some sympathy or ears to hear them out, we tend to bring in logic and this is where men and women tend to clash.

This is why it was great to have it as a topic on GreenMent, *Oman Observer's* weekly podcast on mental health. Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Psychiatrist, said it is the ability to put oneself in other's shoes.

EMPATHY HELPS ONE TO DEVELOP GOOD SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, AS WELL AS SOCIAL SKILLS WITH PEOPLE, BESIDES PEOPLE ARE NOW MORE AWARE OF MENTAL HEALTH WELL BEING AT WORK, WHATEVER THE FIELD OF WORK

People may not care to seek your sympathy but would definitely appreciate your sense of empathy. This is true from family to work environment.

It is good to be sympathetic but being empathetic requires one to have a balanced approach. So how do we go about it?

In this world of impatience we tend to react more often than analysing the situation and doing the needful.

Dr Hamed says women are better in acknowledging the feelings and giving that comfort of encouraging the other person to speak more. He said it is important to acknowledge people's feeling as people have different difficulties - physical or psychological.

But could there be a chance for people to take advantage of someone's empathetic approach in life and work. Quite often administrators might face this dilemma, which is why it would be nice if everyone practiced empathy.

Empathy is not a weakness, instead it is being looked upon

as a leadership quality.

Empathy is definitely a much needed trait and quality in healthcare workers, but it would also be nice if others understood the situations the staff go through.

They have to handle emotional situations without being too involved, Dr Hamed had explained in the podcast.

Social media has played a significant role in making people less empathetic because they are able to say what they want without the difficulty of seeing the hurt people go through due to their words and actions.

Then again there is the generation issue.

Dr Hamed pointed out that some studies said that as doctors aged few of them could be less empathetic because of all the difficulties they have seen through the years.

It could be a good thing too in certain situations as in the case of doctors who work in trauma centres — where one needs to take action instead of being emotional.

What about the corporate world?

Empathy helps one to develop good social relationships, as well as social skills with people, besides people are now more aware of mental health well being at work, whatever the field of work.

This is how the senior psychiatrist puts it - a good leader or a good manager empathise with staff and team members and acknowledges if anyone of them is going through a hard time.

Most important part is to express empathy up to the right point.

You can listen to mental health podcast, GreenMent @omanobserver_podcast.



CAPTURING THE WAVES

A man takes pictures as waves crash against a breakwater at Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, on Monday. — Reuters

Biden’s vow to put a Black woman on the Supreme Court stirs emotions

TYRONE BEASON

THE IMPENDING RETIREMENT OF JUSTICE STEPHEN G BREYER HAS GIVEN BIDEN A CHANCE TO MAKE GOOD ON HIS PROMISE TO PUT A BLACK WOMAN ON THE SUPREME COURT

As US President Joe Biden prepares to deliver on his promise to nominate the first Black woman to the US Supreme Court, Black Americans in the legal profession say they feel conflicting emotions: vindication and pride, exasperation and dread.

While they appreciate Biden's determination to make history as he vets candidates, they worry about his overt use of race as a prerequisite at such a hyperpartisan time. Black Americans already find themselves having to defend against accusations that they're not as skilled, intelligent or prepared as their fellow white citizens.

"My initial reaction was probably like most Black folks: It's about time," says Merle Vaughn, an attorney and recruiter in Los Angeles who specialises in helping big firms hire lawyers of colour. "He's keeping his promise to Black women because Black women put him in the White House.

"My second reaction is: I can't believe we're still seeing headlines that say 'first Black this' and 'first Black that' — that to me is so old," says Vaughn, 62. "What's sad about it is we just can't be seen as people."

For South Carolina lawmaker Todd Rutherford, an attorney who serves as the Democratic minority leader of the state Legislature, his happiness with Biden's goal comes tinged with frustration.

"Saying that makes it look like white people don't have a chance — and white people are a little sensitive about that," says Rutherford, a friend of J Michelle Childs, a US District Court judge in South Carolina who is reported to be on Biden's list of candidates for the nomination.

"You almost wish that the president had said, 'I'm going to pick the most qualified person and then nominated an African American woman,'" says Rutherford, 51. "Without intending to do so, he created the framework for affirmative action that upsets a lot of Americans."

The cries of "reverse discrimination" that rang out on cable shows and social media in response to Biden's pledge sounded all too familiar to Vaughn and Rutherford. They know some Americans can't get past the notion that if a Black person succeeds, it must be because a more qualified white person was passed over.

Biden's promise puts the contenders, who also include California Supreme Court Justice Leondra Kruger and US Appeals Court Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, in the uncomfortable position of being doubted despite their stellar

careers, Rutherford says. The questions over the contenders' fitness sting on a personal level, he says, because he has seen for himself how formidable Childs can be on the bench.

"I've been there in front of her in the courtroom and she is by far the most qualified person that Joe Biden could pick — period," Rutherford says. "Notice I didn't say 'most qualified African American.'"

A Yahoo News/YouGov poll found that while a majority agreed that the top contenders are qualified, only a third of respondents said they have confidence that Biden will choose "the right kind of person" to fill the vacancy.

It's also hard for Rutherford to feel completely at ease with the president's approach when he knows that Americans are ambivalent at best about the idea that the government and businesses should rectify hundreds of years of enslavement and racism by giving special consideration to the inequities that resulted from that oppression. During the Jim Crow era, many Southern communities banned Black residents from even serving on juries and aspiring Black college students had to file suits, protest and face racist violence to gain admittance to public law schools.

Yet even today, only 23 per cent of Americans agreed that nominating a Black woman to the Supreme Court is "very important" in the same YahooNews/YouGov poll of 1,628 adults conducted in early February.

Vaughn finds it "ridiculous" that in 2022, Black Americans still have to convince some of their fellow citizens of the need for government institutions to reflect the diversity of the nation they're sworn to serve, the Supreme Court included.

Biden's pledge was born out of political

necessity. During Democratic primaries in early 2020, he rolled into Rutherford's state as an unexpected underdog. The deep bond he'd forged over decades with Black South Carolinians paid off when he received a last-minute endorsement from the elder statesman of Black Democratic politics there, US Rep James E. Clyburn.

It was Clyburn who introduced Biden, sang his praises and stood by his side during his primary victory speech in Columbia as the candidate tearfully thanked Black voters for having his back and helping him win. And it was Clyburn who coaxed a promise from Biden to nominate a Black woman to the court if he won the presidency. That sort of loyalty from a key wing of the Democratic base demands much in return, says South Carolina Circuit Court Judge Clifton Newman, another friend of Childs who was also a mentor to her in the early years of her legal career.

The impending retirement of Justice Stephen G Breyer has given Biden the opening to follow through on his promise. It's gratifying to see the president keep his word to Clyburn and by extension, all Black Americans, Newman says.

"For there to have never been an African American woman on the Supreme Court, that's abysmal," says Newman, 70, who presided over the state trial of the former white police officer who fatally shot Walter Scott, a Black man, in 2015 in a suburb of Charleston.

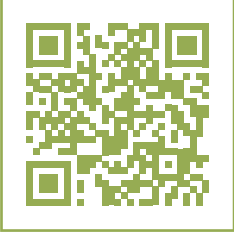
"It's important for there to be an African American woman or man on the court who represents the mainstream of the Black community," Newman says, turning his attention to conservative Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Newman counts himself among the Black Americans who believe Thomas' right-leaning political views are out of step with the majority of their community. — dpa



US President Joe Biden delivers a national update on the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border at the White House in Washington, DC, on Friday. — Reuters

sport

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SEEB, AL NASR PLAY OUT GOALLESS DRAW

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The second leg match between Seeb and Al Nasr on March 3 at Seeb Stadium will decide the qualifier to the final clash of the 2021-22 His Majesty's Cup football championship as the first-leg match ended in a goalless draw at Al Saada Stadium on Monday.

Al Nasr will have better advantage in the away game as scoring any goal will see them through if the match ends in a draw. On the other hand, Seeb will play and utilise the fans and home support and eye on ending the fixture on a triumphant note.

In the first-leg semifinal at Al Saada Stadium, the match commenced with both teams tightening their defences to avoid conceding any early goal.

After each move, the hosts

quickly returned back and closed all the gaps for any Seeb strikers movement. The visitors dominated and managed to enter Al Nasr's side as they pressed hard towards goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini.

Seeb's forward line including Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohsin al Ghassani and Arshad al Alawi faced difficulty to penetrate the strong defence line of Al Nasr.

Seeb had to wait till 40th minute to create the first real scoring attempt in the game.

Abdulaziz al Ghilani passed a ground ball to striker Abdulaziz al Maqbali who was very close to put the ball into the net but he fell down in the penalty box.

Referee Yaqoob Adbulbaqi decided to continue without taking an action of penalty. The first half ended with a goalless draw.



Seeb managed to create some chances as Amjad al Harthi's cross went in front of Eid al Farsi and Abdulaziz al Ghilani but both failed to put the ball into goal in the 73rd minute

GOLDEN CHANCE
Oman national team coach Branko Ivankovic and his coaching staff were among those in attendance at the stadium with a good turnout of Al Nasr and Seeb fans.

The hosts entered the second half strongly as they pressed hard and monitored the middle line perfectly to create more scoring opportunities.

Al Nasr's national coach Ahmed Salim instructed his players to continue exploring for the opening goal. Fahmi Dorbeen missed a golden opportunity as his header hit with the bar in the 57th minute. Seeb's coach changed ploy of attacking after aggression from Al Nasr strikers.

Later, Seeb managed to create some chances as Amjad al Harthi's cross went in front of Eid al Farsi and Abdulaziz al Ghilani but both failed to put the ball into goal in the 73rd minute.

Further attempts were made by both teams but the score remained the same without change and the match ended in a goalless draw.

The second leg matches of the semifinals will begin on March 2 as Al Rustaq will host Dhofar at Al Rustaq Sports Complex while on March 3 Seeb will take on Al Nasr at the Seeb Stadium.



AL HARTHY

SIGNS OFF WITH TOP 4 FINISH

- Oman's Ahmad al Harthy secures P4 in ALMS finale at Yas Marina
- Arab racer 'very happy' with pace and racecraft in four-race season
- Al Harthy, Eastwood and De Haan very close to first ALMS podium
- Oman Racing drivers end season fifth in GT class championship

ABU DHABI: Oman Racing's Ahmad al Harthy concluded the 2022 Asian Le Mans Series just shy of a maiden category podium at Yas Marina Circuit in Abu Dhabi on Sunday, racing to a pleasing top four result in the final race of the campaign.

Partnering Sam De Haan and Charlie Eastwood, Al Harthy and his team-mates went on to finish fifth in the GT class championship standings — with Oman Racing also the highest placed Aston Martin entry in the points table — to cap a strong and successful ALMS challenge.

"I'm really glad to end the season with the highest result so far, P4, in a very tough and respectable championship like the ALMS", said Al Harthy, "We've all driven extremely well and the team keep doing the best they can. It was great for me to be able to push as hard as I did and it was great to have been able to play with the strategy in my stint, where I went longer.

"I was very happy with my pace and the team were extremely happy with the pace. This is a great warm-up for what we hope to announce in the coming months for our main season, what we have done in the ALMS will make us stronger — I'm definitely looking forward to the rest of 2022."



Eastwood qualified the No 69 Aston Martin Vantage GT3 sixth fastest in the GT class for the fourth and final race of the ALMS season, although De Haan took the opening stint — as he did during the previous day's encounter.

Although losing ground early on during some robust action and slipping to eighth, De Haan moved back up to seventh around the half-hour mark before then being passed by the No 17 Ferrari. In eighth when a Full Course Yellow cautionary period was called just prior to the end of hour one, De Haan pitted to hand over the car to Al Harthy.

Threading back into the race in eighth position, the Oman Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Omantel, OQ and MHD-ITICS supported driver then

served another pit-stop just 15 minutes or so later when another FCY was declared — taking the opportunity to refuel.

Pushing hard and lapping very consistently when racing resumed, with the order shaken up due to a wide range of strategies playing out, the Omani set his sights on climbing through and he kept Oman Racing firmly in contention for a strong result — and a potential podium.

Around one hour 50 minutes into the race there was another FCY and Al Harthy continued to impress during a long stint, eventually handing over the Aston Martin to Eastwood with roughly 90 minutes to go.

Holding eighth place initially, Eastwood ran as high as second in GT with 50 minutes remaining, as

silverware remained tantalisingly within reach, but following the team's final pit-stop of the race he was back down to seventh.

Charging through during the closing stages, the Aston Martin works driver gained three positions before the conclusion to take the chequered flag at the end of four hours just half-a-minute shy of a maiden ALMS podium for Oman Racing. Al Harthy, Oman's number one racing driver, will officially announce his plans for the main 2022 motor racing season in due course.

Provisional 2022 Asian Le Mans Series Trophy

GT Drivers Standings:
5th Ahmad al Harthy/Charlie Eastwood/Sam De Haan, 40pts
GT Teams Standings:
5th Oman Racing, 40pts

OBA appoints Tunisia's Zuhair as head coach



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Oman Basketball Association (OBA) has appointed Tunisian coach Zuhair Sharif al Ayachi as the head coach for the national team for a one-year renewable term.

The immediate assignment for Zuhair will be the preparation for the preliminary qualifiers of the 2025 AFC Asian Cup, which will be held at the end of May and the beginning of June in Qatar.

The contract was signed by the OBA Chairman Engineer Khalfan bin Saleh al Naabi and the Tunisian coach in the presence of Dr Ali bin Salam al Yarubi, OBA Vice-Chairman and Rabie bin Saeed Awlad Thani, OBA Secretary-General at the headquarters of the Oman Basketball Association.

After the signing the agreement, the OBA chairman addressing a press conference, said that it was agreed to choose a coach from the Arab world.

"We had studied several CVs including some of the best coaches. Tunisian coach Zuhair al Ayachi is a well-known coach with a proven track record. Zuhair expressed his desire to work with the Oman Basketball Association to develop, improve and to build a strong team, whether at the age levels or the first team."

BUILDING THE BASE

Khalfan al Naabi said the main objective for the OBA is to build a solid base for basketball in the country.

"Like everywhere in the world, the game has suffered a lot during the past two years of pandemic situation. The league and the team's training were suspended."

"Our goal this year is to build a national team that can continue for the coming years, and there are some participations that the team will take part in this year."

"We will come up with a team that can match the Gulf and Arab

teams in the coming years."

"Everyone knows the level of basketball in Oman, and it is difficult to set a goal without knowing where we are in basketball and what level we stand at, and therefore the coach must initially stand on the technical level of the players and the general level of the league, and therefore after assessing the situation from the coach will present his plan, to define the main goal for the coming period, the OBA chief added.

The OBA is also looking to increase the number of matches. The OBA league semifinal matches were increased to five rounds, which contributed to raising the technical level of the players and increasing the intensity of competition.

Tunisian coach Zuhair said: "Joining the Oman team will be a new experience in the midst of the technical development witnessed by the Gulf basketball in general. The task requires a lot of efforts especially after the game was stopped for several seasons because of the pandemic and its impact on the technical and physical level of the players."

"We will work hard whether with the first team or with the teams of the age category. I will coordinate with the junior teams.

Zuhair said Oman have good young players who can improve to quality players.

"Observing the league matches, I could see talented young players who could be future national players. We are still in the stage of choosing the most prominent players for the national team. God willing, we will succeed in finding top players for the main team from the upcoming final matches."

"We have to work hard to achieve the goals set by the OBA by reaching an advanced and competitive level," the Oman coach added.

Al Nadi Shabab-B clinch knockout title

BARKA: Al Nadi Shabab-B won the inaugural edition of the knockout tournament at Al Shabab club in Barka on February 18. The tournament was played day/night where the grand finale was played under flood lights. Total of eight teams participated in the tournament and Al Nadi Shadab-B emerged champions by defeating Al Nadi Shabab-A with a close margin.

In an exciting final, Al Nadi Shabab-A won the toss and decided to bat first. They could only muster 30 runs in the allotted 5 overs, hence setting a target of 31 runs. Chasing the modest total, Al Nadi Shabab-B held their nerves to chase the target on the last ball of the match to win the final. Wasim was selected as the



Man of the Final.

Hafiz Rana of Al Shabab-A was declared as the best batsman of the tournament, while Pradip and Salman was adjudged best bowler and best fielder of the tournament respectively.

The final of the tournament was witnessed by Club President Ahmed al Awaisi and Majid al Balushi, the board members of

Al Shabab Club-Barka. Also they presided over as the chief guests for the evening and presented the trophies to both the captains and teams.

Organiser of this tournament Rehmat Ali also thanked the chief guests and all participating teams for their valuable support in successfully completing the tournament.

Oman juniors take part in Davis Cup, Billie Jean King Cup

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Oman under-16 boys and girls teams are taking part in the Davis Cup junior championships and Billie Jean King Cup respectively in Sri Lanka from February 19 to 27. The Oman under-16 boys team includes Issa bin Ali al Sulaimani, Ali bin Essam al Busaidy and Taha bin Talal al Wahaibi. The under-16 girls squad includes Aisha bint Essam al Busaidy, Rayan bint Mazen al Busaidy and Majda bint Kamel al Amriya.

The delegation includes under-16 boys coach Sivan Doub, under-16 girls coach Sarah bint



Abdul Majeed al Balushi and official Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi.

The Davis Cup junior tournament features 13 teams. Oman are drawn in Group D with Singapore, Maldives and Nepal. The matches are held in four groups, and two teams from each

group qualify to compete for the first rounds.

The Billie Jean King Cup championship has a participation of 12 teams. Oman are placed in Group C with Iraq and Uzbekistan.

The matches are played on clay courts.

Ireland, UAE, Oman, Nepal reach semifinals

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Ireland and UAE booked tickets to the semifinals of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup Qualifier A in contrasting fashion at the Al Amerat Grounds, here on Monday.

In the Group A clash, Ireland defeated Germany in handsome style chasing down 108 in 13.1 overs to boost their net run rate and qualify as group topper. The Germans were restricted to 107/5 after an insipid batting performance that saw only two batters reach double digits.

In the second match, UAE managed to make their way to the semis on account of a better Net Run Rate despite losing to Bahrain by two runs.

Ireland also had four points but finished with a NRR of +0.991 while UAE (+0.661) and Bahrain (+0.240) came second and third respectively.

The UAE-Bahrain match went down to the wire with the Emiratis needing 27 runs off Shahid Mahmood's last over after Bahrain set up a target of 173.. The in-form Vriitya Aravind smashed two boundaries and two sixes to bring the equation down to five runs off the last ball.

Mahmood managed to hold his nerve and conceded only two to ensure Bahrain got over the line.

UAE had a shaky start as opener Muhammad Waseem was out cheaply. Chirag Suri played a delightful 24-ball 26 but he gave away his wicket with UAE needing 138 in 14 overs.

Aravind and Rohan Mustafa gave it a good go, forging a 91-run fourth-wicket partnership to keep the UAE in the game.

Bahrain bowled well as Sarfraz Ali put in an impressive performance scalping two crucial back-to-back wickets in the 19th over to halt the UAE run chase.

While batting, Bahrain posted



172/5 in 20 overs riding on David Mathias' 46 off 35 deliveries.

"With Aravind playing so well, we still believed till the last ball that it (run chase) was possible. If the last shot too had beaten the fielder, it would have gone to a Super Over that I think would have been an ideal finish to this match. Congratulations to Bahrain though, they played amazingly well in this game and in the tournament as well," stated Ahmed Raza, UAE captain. "Definitely disappointed that we could not make the semifinals but I'm happy with the win today," Sarfraz Ali, Bahrain skipper said.

BOWLERS TURN UP FOR IRELAND
A disciplined bowling effort

ensured Ireland restricted Germany to 107/7 in 20 overs.

Thereafter, Paul Stirling and skipper Andy Balbirnie, took control of the run-chase with an authoritative performance at the

Oman Academy 1 ground. Both the batters smashed boundaries with ease as they raced to an opening stand of 67 in 7.5 overs. Balbirnie's 32 came off 21 and Stirling's 34 off 27 ensured that

the team maintained a healthy net run-rate (NRR) from the start.

Ireland eventually romped home with 41 balls to spare as they wrapped up proceedings with a superior NRR.

OMAN, NEPAL IN LAST FOUR
Oman and Nepal registered comfortable wins over Philippines and Canada respectively in Group B.

The hosts skittled out Philippines for 36 with Khawar Ali claiming 4/11 and two wickets apiece to Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt and Aamir Kaleem.

They chased down the target in 2.5 overs to pick up the requisite points and qualify for the semis. Nepal outplayed Canada as

Sandeep Lamichhane scalped 3/12 to bowl them out for 80. Nepal reached the target in 14.1 overs to win by eight wickets.

Brief scores: Group A: Germany: 107/7 in 20 overs (Faisal Mubashir 45; Josh Little 2-13) It to Ireland: 111/3 in 13.1 overs (Paul Stirling 34, Andy Balbirnie 32)
Bahrain: 172/5 in 20 overs (David Mathias 46; Basil Hameed 1/10) bt UAE: 170/6 in 20 overs (Vriitya Aravind 84, Rohan Mustafa 41; Sarfraz Ali 2/24)
Group B: Philippines: 36 all out in 15.2 overs (Khawar Ali 4-11) It to Oman: 40/1 in 2.5 overs (Khurram Nawaz 33)
Canada: 80 all out in 15 overs (Sandeep Lamichhane 3-12) It to Nepal: 81/2 in 14.1 overs (Kushal Burtel 34)

T20 WORLD CUP QUALIFIER-A POINTS TABLE							
Group A	M	W	L	T	NR	PT	NRR
Ireland	3	2	1	0	0	4	0.991
UAE	3	2	1	0	0	4	0.667
Bahrain	3	2	1	0	0	4	0.240
Germany	3	0	3	0	0	0	-2.042
Group B	M	W	L	T	NR	PT	NRR
Nepal	3	3	0	0	0	6	3.680
Oman	3	2	1	0	0	4	1.650
Canada	3	1	2	0	0	2	1.037
Philippines	3	0	3	0	0	0	-7.466

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New data protection law to underpin growth of Oman’s digital economy

STRONG LEGISLATION: Serious violations can attract penalties of up to RO 500,000

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Officials and experts have welcomed last week’s promulgation of the new Personal Data Protection Law as key to, on the one hand, strengthening the underpinnings of a future digital economy in the Sultanate of Oman, and on the other, safeguarding the personal information of individuals from misuse for commercial gains or potential abuse.

The issuance of the new law, promulgated by Royal Decree 6/2022 on February 9, 2022, caps a series of far-reaching efforts by the Omani government collectively aimed at fuelling the digital transformation of the Sultanate of Oman.

In a post, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, which has been mandated to enforce the provisions of the new law, said: “The issuance of the Personal Data Protection Law contributes to creating a legislative environment that protects personal data and enables a thriving digital economy.”



Dr Ali al Shidhani, Communications and Information Technology Under-Secretary at the Ministry, added: “Issuance of the Personal Data Protection decree is an important step to complete the system of personal laws for the digital economy and give the user greater powers to control personal data.”

Significantly, the decree is set to come into force one year after its issuance, which corresponds to the second week of February 2023. The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has been tasked with drafting and rolling out the underlying executive regulations during the intervening period.

According to legal experts, the law enshrines a set of safeguards around personal data, which is defined as any information that “identifies a natural person that makes (them) identifiable, directly or indirectly, by reference to one or more identifiers”.

Examples of personal data include the person’s name, civil number and address particulars, as well as their social, health and economic information.

In essence, users of personal data will have to obtain the prior written consent of the data subjects before processing that information.

In any event, certain types of sensitive personal data cannot be processed without the express approval of the ministry.

They encompass information related to, among other types, genetic, biometric, ethnic, political, ideological, religious and criminal background of individuals. The personal data of children cannot be processed as well without the approval of the parents or guardians.

Additionally, the new law places a significant onus on the Controller (parties holding personal data) and Processor (parties processing the data on the Controller’s behalf) in ensuring that all prescribed safeguards and prohibitions are adhered to.

The Controller, for example, is tasked with ensuring that personal data in its possession is suitably protected from

Issuance of the Personal Data Protection decree is an important step to complete the system of personal laws for the digital economy and give the user greater powers to control personal data

DR ALI AL SHIDHANI
Under-Secretary, Ministry of Transport, Communications & Information Technology

breaches or hacks. Any transfers of personal data outside of the Sultanate of Oman must also comply with the provisions of the Executive Regulations.

Underscoring the importance that the Omani government accords to personal data protection, the law prescribes significant civil and criminal penalties for violations. Aggrieved data subjects, for example, can approach the ministry if they feel their personal information has been misused. Severe violations can attract fines of up to RO 500,000.

Euro zone economic growth jumps as virus restrictions ease



People wearing masks walk in front of the euro sign at the former European Central Bank (ECB) headquarters in Frankfurt am Main, western Germany. — AFP

BRUSSELS: Economic growth in the euro zone jumped sharply in February as coronavirus restrictions were eased, a key survey showed on Monday.

Growth accelerated to a five-month high, IHS Markit said in its closely watched monthly survey — but it also noted that persistent supply constraints and soaring energy prices also pushed inflation to a record level.

Its purchase managers’ index (PMI) surged 3.5 points to 55.8, higher than the 52.3 recorded in January. A figure above 50 indicates growth.

The rise was attributed to the euro zone exiting two months of tough restrictions designed to slow the spread of the Omicron variant.

Omicron is now the dominant strain in Europe, but governments regard it as less grave than previous variants because widespread vaccinations and booster jabs have muted its impact.

After two months of curbs that hit the euro zone economy, “February saw these restrictions ease to the lowest since November,” IHS Markit said.

Spanish firm wins OQ gas pipeline contract

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Spanish infrastructure and energy group Elecnor has announced that it has been awarded a contract valued at around RO 32 million (72.5 million euros) for the construction of a 210-km gas pipeline for OQ Group in the southern part of the Sultanate of Oman.

Madrid-based Elecnor said the contract represents the group’s maiden foray into the energy transportation sector in the Sultanate of Oman, which is looking to expand its gas transportation network in the southern region of the country in order to meet the expected increase in demand during the period 2022 to 2030.

The project is being carried out in the area surrounding the town of Salalah, it said in a press statement. “As well as the gas pipeline



construction, work will be carried out on the connections to the existing parallel pipelines, as well as work related to teleprocessing and detection of leaks. The design of this strategic infrastructure will mean that the gas pipeline can automatically function without

interruption, under constant supervision by the OQ control centre,” it stated.

The project will be carried out in a consortium with GPS, a local company, and will directly involve 850 employees, said Elecnor, pointing out that the project is due

for completion in mid-2023.

“The construction of this gas pipeline in Oman will consolidate the course that Elecnor has been taking in the Sultanate of Oman since 2015, when it entered the market with the Qurayat Tie-in EPC project for water transmission.

Later on, in 2016, the construction of a photovoltaic solar power plant was awarded, the 9 MW plant called PSP Mina Al Fahal. In this country in 2020, Elecnor was awarded one of the greatest developments for conveying and supplying water that Oman has implemented to date, valued at EUR 192 million,” the Spanish firm added.

Elecnor specialises in infrastructure, renewable energy, services and new technologies industries. With a presence in 55 countries, Elecnor Group focuses on different industries spanning electricity, gas, industrial plants, railways, telecommunications, water, control systems, construction, the environment and installation maintenance to aerospace engineering. In 2020, the company reported revenues of 2,456 million euros and a consolidated net profit of 78.3 million euros.

The service sector led the newfound optimism, as increased travel and tourism pushed it to its highest level since last November. Manufacturing increased “also accelerated slightly, attaining the fastest expansion since last September, thanks in part to improved supply availability” and a rise in demand.

However, supply constraints remained, causing backlogs, and average prices for goods and services spiked to the highest level recorded in the PMI surveys.

“Soaring energy costs and rising wages have added to inflationary pressures, resulting in the largest rise in selling prices yet recorded in a quarter of a century of survey data history,” said IHS Markit’s chief economist, Chris Williamson. — AFP

Ooredoo wins
Award for
Best Telecoms
Company 2022



MUSCAT: Acknowledging its pioneering role in the Sultanate’s telecommunications industry, Ooredoo has been awarded winner for “Best Telecommunications Company Oman 2022” in the Middle East by the annual Global Business Magazine Awards 2022.

Evaluated alongside over 10,000 companies, it’s the latest in a string of awards Ooredoo has been given for digital innovation and transformation, which is demonstrated through an ever-evolving portfolio of fantastic digital products and services as well as an awesome digital-first customer experience.

Guided by its vision to enrich people’s lives, Ooredoo has made it its mission to leverage the power of communications to stimulate economic and social development.

As such, it continues to provide an enhanced experience for both the Ooredoo family and its customers across the Sultanate, positioning itself as one of Oman’s most recognised and admired companies and a cornerstone of the community.

Meanwhile, it continues to stay ahead of the curve by introducing new ways to hone and improve communications and cater to the needs of an ever-evolving market.

Bank Muscat extends special offer on
personal, auto and home finance

MUSCAT: In line with its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, is steadfastly working towards financial inclusion of various segments of society in the Sultanate of Oman.

Having expanded its range of products and services over the years, the bank currently offers a number of financing facilities including Personal Finance, Sayyarti Auto Finance, Baituna Home Finance, Education Finance, Green Finance and the Woqar banking package for pensioners.

The bank recently announced an extension of its highly competitive offers on Personal, Auto and Baituna home financing

options for Omani nationals working in the government sector, government-related entities and select corporates as part of its commitment to improving the quality of life of people in the Sultanate. The extension, which is effective till 28 February 2022, also includes takeover options on personal and home loans. Customers will be particularly enthused by the fact that the bank is at present offering highly competitive rates, starting at just 3.5 per cent for Auto Finance, 3.75 per cent for Personal Finance and 4.95 per cent for Baituna Home Financing.

All interested customers may use the loan calculator at <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx> to view



details of the financing options available to them.

For general information on financing options available, customers may go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/loans/Pages/default.aspx> or call 24795555. Speaking on the occasion, Abdullah bin Tamman al-

Mashani, General Manager — Products, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat endeavours to provide the best banking and financing products and services in Oman in line with the needs of different customer segments.

We are delighted to extend our highly competitive offers on various financing options in keeping with the needs of our valued customers and aligned to the bank’s aim of facilitating a high standard of living for people in Oman.

We would like to thank our customers for their strong confidence in the bank’s products and services as well their constant feedback, which helps Bank Muscat to continue innovating and offering new products and

services in line with the bank’s customer-centric vision.”

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in the Sultanate of Oman with 174 branches and over 800 ATMs, CDMs, FFM’s and statement printers. Its vast array of digital banking channels including Internet Banking and Mobile Banking are helping customers meet the vast majority of financial requirements and needs 24x7.

The bank’s technology-driven products and services are in tune with Oman’s move towards an e-payments-based society and are playing an important role in realising the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Bahwan Engineering wins GCC Best Employer Brand Award

MUSCAT: Bahwan Engineering Company (BEC) has been awarded as the Best Employer Brand 2021 at the 08th Edition of the GCC Best Employer Brand Awards, which is part of the World Human Resources Development Congress.

The GCC Best Employer Brand Award 2021 recognises organisations and companies that have used effective practices in attracting, developing and retaining talents.

The event also celebrated some of the finest leaders that believes in producing leaders, leaders of change, leaders who are iconic and talent management strategy alliance with the vision and the mission of the organisation.

The award winners were judged based on research and recommendation of organisations by the World Federation of



HR professionals.

The awards ceremony was attended by over 100 participants including high profile industry leaders within GCC.

BEC Group, a leading conglomerate in engineering, products sales and support services, believes that their people are their most valuable assets and they are committed to cultivating a culture that exhibits this value.

BEC Group employees have the opportunity to work on a wide range of diversified projects, which give them a chance to learn and grow. Every employee works together in a culture of open collaboration, where dedicated people pursue the common goal of creating greater success.

The Group strives to provide a healthy work-life balance for its employees and is proud to retain its employees for many years. It is not surprising that many of the BEC Group’s employees have been with the company for decades.

NBO celebrates opening
of new Bukha branch



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) recently celebrated the opening of its new branch in Bukha in the Governorate of Musandam. Having relocated its existing branch to a bigger premises, the new facility is fully modernised and equipped with a Full Function Machine (FFM), enabling customers to access a comprehensive range of services including account management, card issuance and inquiries.

Opened under the auspices of Shaikh Abdullah bin Ahmed bin Al Malik al Shihi, Majlis Ash-Shura Member for the Wilayat of Bukha, the branch marks the latest in NBO’s efforts to make the banking experience as convenient and as enjoyable as possible for its growing customer base.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO said, “In our quest to make

banking accessible to people across the Sultanate of Oman, we continue to place our branches in strategic and convenient locations. Our new branch in Bukha is an extension of our efforts to meet the needs of our customers in Musandam, while offering them excellence through a tailored range of innovative products and services.”

As Oman’s local bank, NBO provides a full suite of innovative and high-quality banking solutions through 60 branches across the country, including two in the Governorate of Musandam, as well as a wide network more than 189 ATM and deposit machines.

Having built a rich history of innovative banking services that keep pace with the needs of its customers, it continues to modernise and evolve, in readiness for the future.

Bank Nizwa offers lowest profit rate
on home, auto and personal finance

MUSCAT: Amplifying its brand equity as Oman’s most trusted Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has announced a comprehensive ‘Lowest Profit Rate Campaign’, with a 4.85 per cent profit rate, to cater to customers seeking affordable home, auto and personal finance.

With its benchmark services that go beyond fulfilling financing needs of individuals, Bank Nizwa partners with its customers to enable their choices and help them meet their aspirations.

The Bank’s advisory services are a testament to the role it plays in the life of individuals, providing them with evolved Shari’a compliant banking.

The period of this campaign to be effective between February 16, 2022 and June 30, 2022, has been structured to provide attractive and feasible options for customers striving to enhance their living standards.

The promotion aims to stimulate customers to explore easier and convenient Islamic financing options without restraining their dreams and aspirations.

Upholding high values of customer service embedded in



its sharia-compliant products and services, Bank Nizwa is going the extra mile to fulfil its customers’ aspirations of securing comfortable lifestyles for themselves and their loved ones.

The offer of lowest profit rate of 4.85 per cent, to procure a dream house or a cherished vehicle or even to meet and manage personal financial responsibilities, is a major boost for customers requiring easy finances for big purchases.

Commenting on the campaign and highlighting the Bank’s intent to meet specific requirements of its growing client base, Arif al Zaabi — AGM Retail banking of Bank Nizwa, said, “As Oman’s premier Islamic bank, we are

committed to grow and achieve significant milestones together with our customers. As has been proven earlier, sharia-compliant financial options are perfect to indulge and inspire our customers to enhance their lifestyles.

The assurance of safety and security integrated into our portfolio of products and services has helped us grow our footprint in the country. Today, people are aware and mindful of the need to opt for Islamic banking facilities to acquire new assets or purchase everyday commodities.”

“I would like to encourage all our customers to avail this limited period offer of lowest profit rate and enjoy a carefree banking experience. We are

ready and waiting to help our customers, who are our patrons, with their specific finance requirements. Whether they are seeking financial support to buy/construct a house or purchase a new car, we have the solution and it comes with specialised advisory services,” he added.

This lowest profit rate campaign is expected to act as a bridge between clients and their dreams. Armed with enhanced purchasing power and a refined taste for modern and contemporary products and assets, Bank Nizwa customers are promised with hassle-free banking and an enabling partner that helps them realise all their set goals. The option of easy finance will not only help the Bank to meet its customers’ socio-economic needs, it will also enable it to uphold its gold standard for customer service. As Oman’s first dedicated Islamic bank, Bank Nizwa has been innovating to cater customer needs through segmented products, enhanced digital platforms and lucrative propositions, that not only promise great benefits, but also make the customer’s life convenient and hassle-free.



Aviation embarks on decade of growth: Report

PENT-UP DEMAND: Middle East fleet will expand by 4.5 per cent a year over the next decade as demand expected to climb back to pre-pandemic levels in 2023

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

After struggling with Covid-19 for more than two years, the aviation industry is set to rebound — with the fleet growing 4.5 per cent in the Middle East region over the next 10 years, according to Oliver Wyman's Global Fleet & MRO Forecast 2022-2032. But as pent-up global demand pushes air travel to pre-pandemic levels by 2023, the industry will once again have to confront rising carbon dioxide emissions and its lack of immediate solutions to reduce them.

The widely anticipated report, now in its third decade, digs deep into commercial aircraft deliveries and inventories — as well as aerospace production — to provide a comprehensive view of the size and composition of the commercial fleet over the next decade. The outlook delineates growth both globally and from a regional perspective.

Additionally, it analyses the maintenance, repair, and overhaul services (MRO) that the fleet will require. Key findings for the 2022-2032 report include:

- Long-term growth for the Middle East is forecast at 4.5 per cent annually, in part because of a strong narrow-body outlook.
- Globally, the fleet growth rate is set to grow to 38,100 aircraft by 2032 — a compound growth rate of 4.1 per cent over the decade.
- Narrow-body aircraft will make up a larger share of the fleet — 64 per cent in

January 2032 versus 58 per cent in January 2020 — as the slow recovery of international traffic after Covid-19 is depressing the number of widebodies in service.

- With an influx of narrow-body aircraft expected, the widebody share of the fleet in the Middle East is expected to drop below 50 per cent, and by the end of the decade narrow-bodies will overtake widebodies as the largest class.

- In total, the Middle East region has almost 700 narrow-bodies on order through the end of the decade spread out among more than 15 operators

- The global fleet won't reach its pre-pandemic peak of almost 28,000 until the first half of 2023

- The dedicated global cargo fleet grew 3 per cent and conversions of passenger aircraft to freight carriers broke records, thanks to a double-digit expansion in demand with the Covid-19-related explosion in online shopping and the loss of cargo belly capacity.

- The MRO sector is being redefined by a fleet in transition, as airlines begin to take delivery of new, highly fuel efficient narrow-bodies and attempt to weed out older aircrafts that will need intensive maintenance sessions.

- By 2030, MRO demand is expected to reach \$118 billion, 13 per cent below the pre Covid-19 forecast of \$135 billion, showing the lost growth from Covid-19.

“There is optimism that the industry has turned the corner and is now on an upward trajectory — but the next 10 years will be filled with a multitude of challenges that will test the industry's resilience unlike ever before”, said Andre Martins, Head of IMEA Transportation & Services, Oliver Wyman.

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The formal inauguration of the Port of Duqm will help strongly position as a regional logistics gateway and spur the country's economic growth, according to a key representative of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI).

Mohammed Hassan al Ansi, Chairman of OCCI's Labour Market Regulation Committee, and a well-established player in the logistics industry, described the Port of Duqm as a landmark economic project from the standpoint of its geographical location at the crossroads of international shipping lanes serving both East-West and regional maritime trade. Furthermore, its proximity to the most important markets in the African continent as well as Indian sub-continent, qualifies Duqm to be a global logistics centre, he stated.

“Port of Duqm is considered one of the most important ports in the world, given its remarkable capabilities in serving shipping, industrial and economic investments and logistics as well. It has areas dedicated for industrial zones, manufacturing industries, warehousing, logistics and re-export.

This enhances the role of Duqm port as a competitor with international ports, while giving confidence to the major shipping lines to make Omani ports the first port of call in the region”, Al Ansi stated. Speaking exclusively to the



Port of Duqm is considered one of the most important ports in the world, given its remarkable capabilities in serving shipping, industrial and economic investments and logistics as well
MOHAMMED HASSAN AL ANSI
Chairman, OCCI's Labour Market Regulation Committee

Observer, the official noted that Duqm Port's formal launch will contribute to further integration with Omani ports.

“It will contribute to activating and strengthening the role of the local investors as well as the foreign investor by connecting with the target markets and bringing in foreign investments to enhance the performance of the national economy. In turn, this will enable the Omani government to achieve its desired goals of activating the role of the local private sector and increasing its contribution to economic development and enabling it to compete globally.”

The logistics sector, Al Ansi said, is poised to play an important role, together with industry, tourism, fish farming and agriculture, in sustaining the growth of the local economy. Rising output from these sectors

will help boost exports through Omani ports, while also reducing the country's dependence on imports, he noted.

Al Ansi acknowledged that the global economic downturn and coronavirus pandemic did have a disruptive effect on local supply chains, but he applauded the measures adopted by the Omani authorities to alleviate these impacts on the flow of essential commodities and other goods. As a result, investors felt encouraged to continue their activities in the Sultanate of Oman, he added.

The OCCI official also underlined the importance of continued government support for the industrial sector to help it compete regionally and internationally. A stronger manufacturing segment will also help create jobs for Omanis and sustain growth in the governorates of the country, he added.

Oil prices slip on Ukraine crisis summit plan

MELBOURNE: Oil prices fell on Monday on a plan for US President Joe Biden and Russia's Vladimir Putin to hold a summit on the Ukraine crisis and on prospects of a nuclear deal between Iran and world powers in the next week or two.

The office of French President

Emmanuel Macron said in a statement on Monday he had pitched to both leaders a summit over “security and strategic stability in Europe.”

The White House said Biden had accepted the meeting “in principle” but only “if an invasion hasn't happened.”



A flare burns excess natural gas in the Permian Basin in Loving County, Texas, US. — Reuters

Brent crude futures fell 73 cents or 0.8% to \$92.81 after having jumped more \$1 than to \$95.00 in early trade, its highest level since Wednesday. US West Texas Intermediate crude futures similarly fell 52 cents to \$90.55 a barrel after having hit a high of \$92.93. — Reuters

MENA energy investments supported by elevated oil prices

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

An uptick in regional energy investments will continue over the mid-term, according to the annual “Top Picks 2022 Outlook”, according to The Arab Petroleum Investments Corporation (APICORP), a multilateral development financial institution.

Among the trends the report examines is the impact of oil and gas prices on energy investments in the region and the main factors weighing down on broader economic recovery.

“Despite the volatility in commodity prices which is expected to persist throughout 2022, the good news in the short-term is that oil and gas prices will likely remain elevated throughout the year, providing support for energy investments including

renewable energy and ESG-related projects. Power sector investments in MENA are also expected to continue to thrive, with an accelerating shift towards renewables.

Collectively, the region is expected to add nearly 20 GW of solar power over the next five years”, noted Dr Ahmed Ali Attiga, CEO of APICORP.

The MENA region will take centre stage in the ongoing global energy transition as all eyes shift to Egypt, which will host COP27 in November — and the UAE for COP28 in 2023.

Yet while the transition continues to steadily gain momentum, the report notes that it may be marred by mixed policy signals from governments as they attempt to balance imperatives which are oftentimes very difficult to align: Emissions reduction,



energy affordability and energy security.

Thus, a sustainable and comprehensive policy is needed in order to avoid tilting the policy scale too far towards in favor of one of these factors, as this may lead to unintended consequences such as market distortions, heightened volatility and energy shortfalls.

The already substantial pressure on policymakers is expected to be further exacerbated by continued

volatility in commodity markets in 2022 due to the pandemic, uncertainty over macroeconomic policy and supply chain disruptions.

Despite the modest — albeit uneven — recovery in 2021, it will take time for this improvement to migrate downstream and ease cost pressures this year. As for the energy markets, the report forecasts that they will remain comparatively stable during 2022 due to higher oil

production by Opec+ and non-Opec countries and increased gas production and LNG supply.

Brent is expected to average between \$65/bbl and \$75/bbl. As for gas, the JKM and TTF/NBP hub prices in Asia and Europe are expected to cool down considerably from their all-time highs of 2021, especially after the winter season.

The report's analysis of energy investment trends suggests that the expected robust oil and gas prices in 2022 have triggered an opportunity to return to pre-pandemic activity.

As a result, energy investments in MENA are forecast to grow in 2022 from the \$805 billion in APICORP's MENA Energy Investment Outlook 2021-2025 and continue in the upcoming 5 years, namely on the strength of sustained higher oil and gas prices

and planned unconventional gas and upstream investments.

For petrochemicals, the drive for further integration and rationalisation will continue with reconfigurable petrochemical plants shifting to high-margin products such as plastic packaging films and healthcare and hygiene products.

“The strong pipeline of investments we are seeing in the downstream projects reflects the region's push to direct more funds to this sector, especially in brownfield petrochemical projects versus greenfield ones.

This makes sense in light of the current market conditions which favour improving cost and operating efficiencies in existing projects rather than sheer expansion”, said Nicolas Thevenot, Managing Director of Corporate Banking at APICORP.

Pandemic's economic impact is easing, but aftershocks may linger

The pandemic's grip on the economy appears to be loosening. Job growth and retail spending were strong in January, even as coronavirus cases hit a record. New York, Massachusetts and other states have begun to lift indoor mask mandates. California on Thursday unveiled a public health approach that will treat the coronavirus as a manageable long-term risk.

Yet the economy remains far from normal. Patterns of work, socialising and spending, disrupted by the pandemic, have been slow to readjust. Prices are rising at their fastest pace in four decades and there are signs that inflation is creeping into a broader range of products and services. In surveys, Americans report feeling gloomier about the economy now than at the height of the lockdowns and job losses in the first weeks of the crisis.

In other words, it may no longer be that "the virus is the boss" — as Austan Goolsbee, a University of Chicago economist, has put it. But the changes that it set in motion have proved both more persistent and more pervasive than economists once expected.

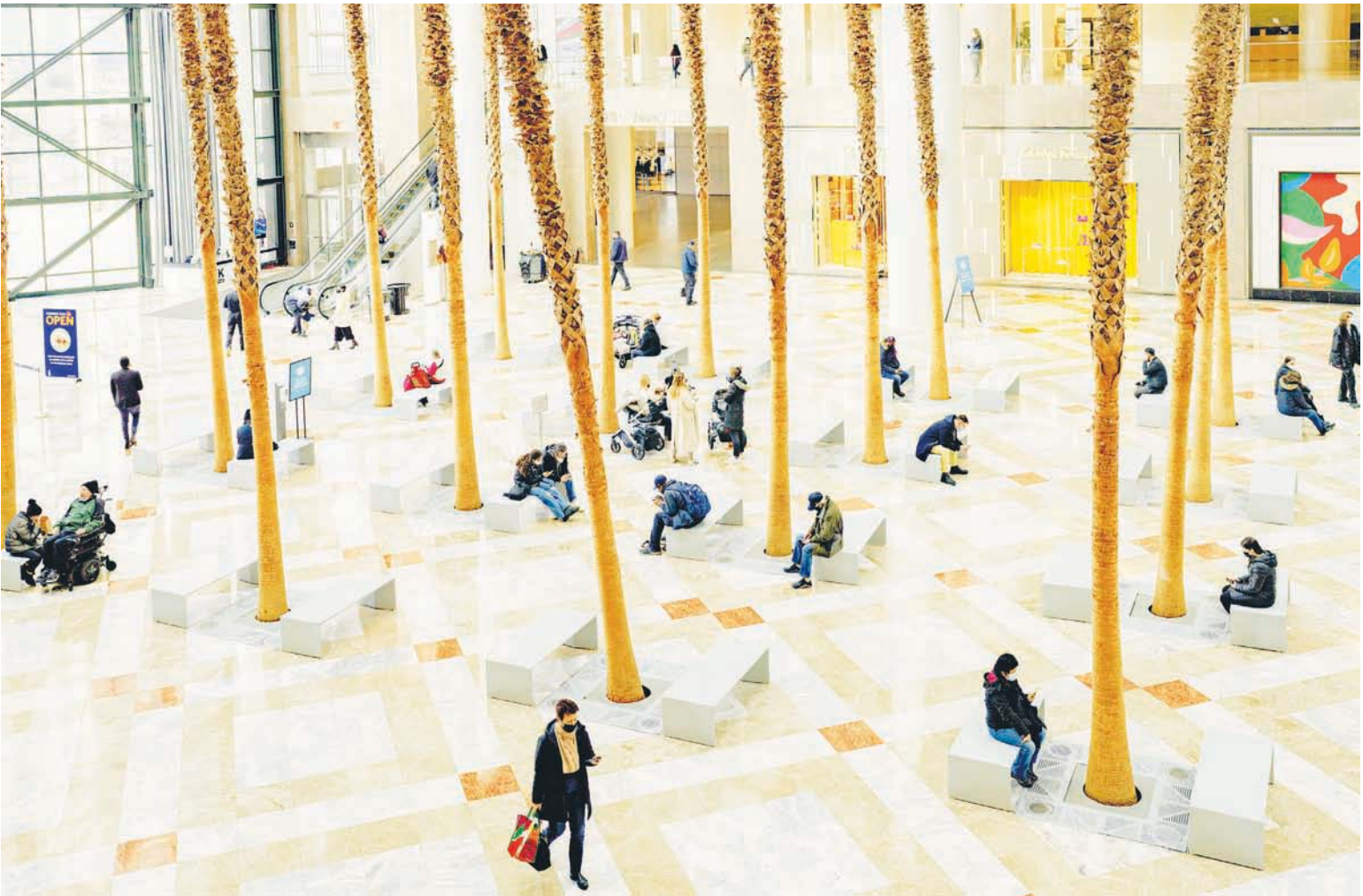
"I — totally naively — thought that once a vaccine was available that we were six months away from a complete reevaluation of the economy and instead we're just grinding it out," said Wendy Edelberg, director of the Hamilton Project, an economic policy arm of the Brookings Institution. "A switch didn't get flipped and I thought it was going to."

The resulting limbo is a challenge for the Biden administration, which has so far failed to convince a sceptical public that its economic policies are working, despite falling unemployment and a recovery that has surpassed the most optimistic projections by most measures.

And it is a challenge for policymakers at the Federal Reserve, who have struggled to assess how long the pandemic's disruptions will last or the best way to mitigate their effects.

Some economists remain optimistic that the economy will normalise as the pandemic recedes, even if the process takes longer than initially expected.

Goolsbee, who was chief economic adviser under former President Barack Obama, was among those who argued early in the pandemic that the best way to revive the economy was to get the pandemic itself under control. Until that happened, he said, the recovery would be steered by the



Brookfield Place, a shopping centre and office building complex, in New York.

ebb and flow of case counts and hospital capacity, variants and countermeasures.

He recently pointed to the relatively mild economic impact of the omicron wave as evidence that consumers were becoming more comfortable.

"The reason the virus was the boss is that people were afraid; they changed their behaviour," he said. "If this is a sign that the fear is easing, the virus will no longer be the boss and the economic pandemic will be ending."

But others warn that the pandemic's effects could outlive the pandemic itself, potentially resulting in a smaller workforce and faster inflation. "It is appropriate to start asking, are some of these shifts going to stick to at least some degree?" said Michael Strain, an economist at the American Enterprise Institute. "Things that happen over a two-year period, the chances of them sticking are larger than things that happen over a one-year period."

Fear of the virus can still affect consumer demand. Spending at restaurants fell in December and January, as the most recent spike in coronavirus cases kept diners at home. Air travel, hotel bookings and other in-person services also suffered.

But demand for services did not fall as far during the latest coronavirus wave as it did earlier in the pandemic and preliminary data suggests that it has recovered more quickly. More comprehensive data through December shows that the crisis-induced shift in consumer spending away from goods and toward services is reversing, albeit slowly.

Supply disruptions have been harder to resolve. Shortages of computer chips, lumber and even garage doors have held up production of items from cars to houses, while a lack of shipping containers has led to delays in almost anything transported from overseas.

Some bottlenecks have let up in recent months, but logistics experts expect it to take months if not years for supply chains to run smoothly again.

Then there is the labour shortage. The pandemic pushed millions of people out of the workforce and while many have returned, others — a disproportionate share of them women — have not.

Whether and how people return to work will be crucial to the economy's path in coming months. If workers flood back to the job market as school and child care

becomes more dependable and health risks recede, it will be easier for manufacturers and shipping companies to ramp up production and deliveries, giving supply a chance to catch up to demand. That in turn could allow inflation to cool without losing the economy's progress over the past year.

"If you got the public health situation improved, you would see economic improvements in terms of increased work, increased output, increased functioning of the economy," said Aaron Sojourner, a University of Minnesota economist who has studied the pandemic economy. "I do think that's a real constraint."

But people who retired early or left jobs to care for children may not go back to work right away, or may choose to work part time.

And other changes may be similarly slow to reverse: Companies that were burned by shortages may maintain larger inventories or rely on shorter supply chains, driving up costs. Workers who enjoyed flexibility from employers during the pandemic may demand it in the future. Rates of entrepreneurship, automation and of course, remote work all increased during the pandemic, perhaps permanently.

The resulting limbo is a challenge for the Biden administration, which has so far failed to convince a sceptical public that its economic policies are working, despite falling unemployment and a recovery that has surpassed the most optimistic projections by most measures

Biden administration: China failed trade commitments

The Biden administration criticised China in a report released on Wednesday morning for failing to uphold a wide range of trade commitments, including promises it had made when it joined the World Trade Organization in 2001 and others in a trade deal signed with the Trump administration in 2020.

In its annual assessment of China's compliance with its obligations to the WTO, the Office of the US Trade Representative excoriated the Chinese government for flouting the global trade body's rules and its transparent, market-oriented approach.

Instead, China expanded its state-led approach to its economy and trade, causing serious harm to workers and businesses around the world, particularly in industries targeted by its industrial plans, Katherine Tai, the US trade representative, said in a statement. "China has not moved to embrace the market-oriented principles on which the WTO and its rules are based, despite the representations that it made when it joined 20 years ago," Tai said.

The report also criticised the trade deal signed by the Trump administration, in one of the first written assessments the Biden administration has provided of China's progress toward the terms set out in that deal.

The Biden administration has said it intends to hold China to the terms of that agreement, while also calling for a different approach to trade. But it has not clarified just

China has not moved to embrace the market-oriented principles on which the WTO and its rules are based, despite the representations that it made when it joined 20 years ago

KATHERINE TAI
US TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

how assertively it would enforce a deal it has described as fundamentally flawed.

The report said that the deal had failed to address the most fundamental concerns the United States has with China's approach to trade, and that the United States had serious concerns with China's implementation of several of its commitments.

Those included pledges to purchase US goods and services, as well as promised reforms related to agriculture, particularly biotechnology, and an assessment that China promised to conduct on the use in swine and cattle of ractopamine, a feed additive widely used in the United States that Beijing has banned.

The United States has raised concerns about China's progress during regular meetings between officials at various levels of government, the report said.

Data released this month showed that China fell far short of satisfying commitments it had made in the trade deal signed with the Trump administration to purchase an additional \$200 billion of goods and services by the end of last year.

The Biden administration said its patience with China was wearing thin, but it has not yet clarified what action, if any, it would take in response.

The report echoed many of the criticisms of China issued under the prior administration, including spelling out the World Trade Organization's shortcomings in

disciplining China's trade violations and calling for measures to take on China outside the organisation.

But the report also appeared to take issue with the Trump administration's attempt to decouple from China, arguing that the United States needed to invest in American workers and infrastructure to compete with China in an integrated global economy.

"We cannot build a wall between the United States and China and assume that it will address the problems posed by China," the report said.

Beyond efforts at the WTO, the United States was pursuing several strategies to hold China to account, the report said.

They included bilateral dialogues with China, including over its progress toward the commitments of the 2020 trade deal; cooperation with allies like Japan and Europe; and efforts to repurpose and expand domestic trade tools, like using tariffs to encourage companies to reduce their carbon emissions.

"It is also apparent that existing trade tools need to be strengthened, and new trade tools need to be forged," the report said.

"China pursues unfair policies and practices that were not contemplated when many of the US trade statutes were drafted decades ago, and we are therefore exploring ways in which to update our trade tools to counter them."

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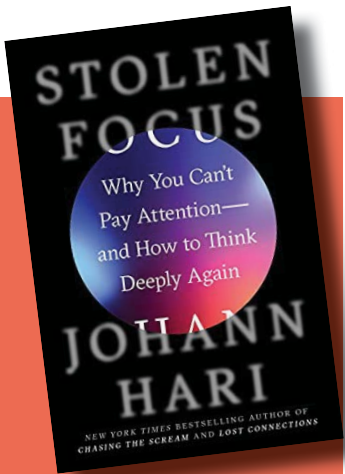


Mi Carmen Flamenca at ROHM deserved the three-minute standing ovation

The flamenco version of Carmen was stripped of the pompousness and grandiosity of its opera version but the Friday show at the Royal Opera House Muscat was like watching the “bull run” in Spain — exhilarating, action-packed, and there were only a few pauses in between that you barely have time to breathe to process what was happening. It was powerful, gritty and raw that at the end of the night, it deserved the standing ovation...**P20**

GASTRONOMY

READ



STOLEN FOCUS BY JOHANN HARI

Potential causes for diminishing attention spans and how corporations might raid our attention for profit.

Two Michelin star chefs to visit Salalah in March

NAMED THE “Most influential Parisien Chef” by *The New York Times* in 2019, Michelin star Chef Sota Atsumi is coming to the beautiful shores of Salalah from his renowned Maison in Paris restaurant to bring his talent and demonstrate what makes him one of the world’s best, giving people of Oman the rare opportunity to sample some of the world’s finest dishes.

Hosted by Al Baleed Resort Salalah, Chef Sota will regale the country with the finest French dishes infused with Asian touches and incorporate local ingredients to the

menu as he prepares a signature 6-course meal at the Mekong from March 2 to March 4, 2022.

Budding chefs or those who love to entertain will also enjoy an exclusive Live Workshop event at Sakalan. With limited seats available, Chef Atsumi will present a step-by-step demonstration of one of his signature dishes from preparation to plate.

Diners can enjoy a carefully prepared menu by the esteemed Chef at Al Mina Beach. The gentle Salalah breeze will ripple across the water as guests savour each



exquisite morsel from amuse-bouche to dessert.

At the later part of the month, Michelin star Chef Rik Jansma follows with his culinary showcase.

Chef Rik Jansma heads up his kitchen at Basiliek in the Netherlands. The chef who honed his craft under luminaries such as



Gerry Brokken and Jan de Wit, is celebrated for his creativity and attention to detail.

From March 23 to 25, Chef Rik will prepare a signature 6-course menu at Al Mina promising dishes that burst with freshness and flair. He will showcase the culinary masterpieces that have put his

Dutch restaurant on the global culinary map.

On March 24, he will also conduct a Live Workshop where Those looking to know the secrets behind Chef Jansma’s success can watch as he prepares one dish from beginning to serving. Only 15 people can witness the Michelin-starred Chef at work, mesmerised by his finesse and dexterity.

The chef will end his visit with a 4-course menu at Al Mina Beach where he will create a special menu for guests to enjoy by the Arabian Sea focusing on fresh ingredients and his craft, a medley of deliciousness will delight each diner.

After the successful Salalah Food Festival in 2021, Oman Air, Amouage and Royal Razat Farm and CHEFS’ by Lise Timmer will partner to support these culinary events.

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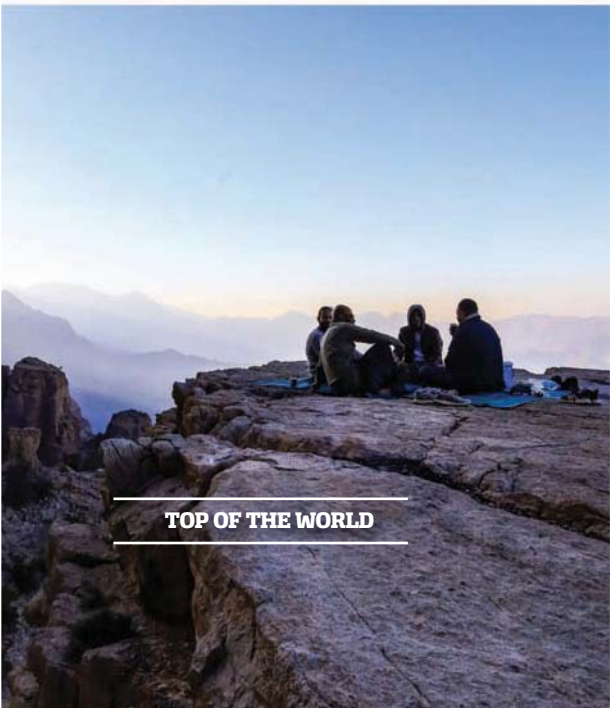
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AROUND THE WORLD

FASHION

Renaissance meets grunge, ski inspires as London Fashion Week kicks off

TURKISH DESIGNER Bora Aksu mixed Renaissance and grunge for his latest womenswear collections on Friday while Poster Girl loomed to the ski slopes, as Fashion Week kicked off in London.

Aksu was among the first to present his latest autumn / winter 2022 creations, looking to 14th century poet Christine de Pizan for inspiration for his dreamy feminine dresses and sharp tailored jackets.

Models wore an array of floaty frocks in dusty pinks, cream and different shades of blue. The dresses in taffeta and tulle were frilled, ruffled, layered, decorated with contrasting black ribbons or with puffy sleeves. They were paired with pink grunge — style boots and sometimes berets.

"This feels like different centuries meet together", Aksu told Reuters. "There's those references from early Renaissance and then there's lots of the '90s vibe with the make-up and grunge moment and the boots and everything."

Poster Girl, whose clothes have been worn by Kylie Jenner and Dua Lipa, held its debut London Fashion Week runway show. Models wore ski — inspired hooded bodysuits in hot pink, furry and puffy jackets and shiny dresses.

Designer Francesco Capper and Natasha Somerville presented their take on snow boots, slit trousers at the ankles, and added their brand's signature from cuts to tops. Their colour palette include green, orange and purple.

London Fashion Week, which runs until February 22, began as an Atlantic storm battered Britain, with the city and other parts of the country suffering significant disruption.

Like its predecessor in New York, the London event, known for showcasing emerging talent, is a mix of physical shows, presentation and get-togethers, as well as digital releases.

"We'll continue to see that hybrid mix because the designers have really leaned into the digital film as a mode of not only creativity but showcasing their collections", British Fashion Council Chief Executive Rush told Reuters.

"It has changed the shape of fashion weeks going forward".

Demand for luxury goods has soared after lockdowns as customers splurge on high-end goods, although inflation is casting a shadow. In Britain, consumer prices rose at the fastest annual pace in nearly 30 years last month.

"(There's) a little bit of caution... now we're looking at the rising cost of living but there is a demand for fashion", Rush said.

"As we're back out, we go to the theatre, we're going to dinners again. People are refreshing their wardrobes and I think there's a real appetite for the fashion industry". — **Reuters**

CONSERVATION

Mysteries and music: Listening in to underwater life



WHEN MARINE researchers started recording sounds in the seagrass meadows of the Mediterranean Sea they picked up a mysterious sound, like the croak of a frog, that resounded within the dense foliage — and nowhere else.

"We recorded over 30 seagrasses and it was always there and no-one knew the species that was producing this kwa! kwa! kwa!" said Lucia Di Iorio, a researcher in ecoacoustics at France's CEFREM.

"It took us three years to find out the species that was producing that sound."

The melodious songs of whales might be familiar music of the world's underwater habitats but few people will have heard the hoarse growl of a streaked gurnard or the rhythmic drumbeat of a red piranha.

Scientists are now calling for those sounds and many thousands more to become more widely accessible.

They say a global database of the booms, whistles and chatter of the sea will help to monitor diversity in aquatic life — and help put a name to mystery sounds like the one Di Iorio and her colleagues investigated.

Experts from nine countries are working to create what they have dubbed the Global Library of Underwater Biological Sounds — or "GLUBS".

This would gather together

recordings held all over the world and open them up to artificial intelligence learning and mobile phone apps used by citizen scientists.

While experts have been listening to life underwater for decades, the team behind GLUBS say that audio collections tend to be narrowly focused on a specific species or geographical area.

Their initiative is part of burgeoning work on marine "soundscapes" — collecting all the sounds in a particular area to discern information about species types, behaviour and overall biological diversity.

Scientists say these soundscapes are a non-invasive way to "spy on" life underwater.

In a paper published recently in the journal 'Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution', the GLUBS team said many fish and aquatic invertebrates are mainly nocturnal or hard to find, so acoustic monitoring could help conservation efforts.

"With biodiversity in decline worldwide and humans relentlessly altering underwater soundscapes, there is a need to document, quantify and understand the sources of underwater animal sounds before they potentially disappear", said lead author Miles Parsons of the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

Mystery music

After many months inves-

tigating the strange seagrass croaker, Di Iorio and her colleagues were able to point the finger of suspicion at the scorpionfish.

But they struggled to explain how it was making such an unusual noise — and it refused to perform for them.

They tried catching the fish and recording it in a carrier. They sunk sound equipment onto the seabed next to the fish. They even listened in to aquariums that contained scorpionfish.

"Nothing", she said. Eventually colleagues from Belgium took a camera that could record at low light and staked out some seagrass in Corsica.

They were able to capture the kwa! kwa! sound as well as video of the fish making a shimmering motion.

Back in the lab, they dissected a scorpionfish and found that they have tendons strung along their bodies.

Their hypothesis is that the fish contracts these muscles to produce the sound.

"It's a guitar, an underwater guitar", said Di Iorio.

But there are many more mysteries where that came from.

Di Iorio said in the Mediterranean, up to 90 per cent of noises in a given recording might be unknown.

"Every time we put a hydrophone in the water we're discovering new sounds", she added. — **AFP**



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Safe Journey, Old Boy!

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

(1)	reproof... How can I find you like a cloud I will ride? Did I dream or reveal? Good evening my homeland ... is there such a cup On which I splinter into letters One after another?
Ibn Khaldun*	
Ibn Khaldun lied When he claimed that man Is "civilised by nature."	
Never have I found a way To tame this beast That Flows in my blood!	
(2)	(3) Keeping What's to Be Kept You'll succumb. What you gathered is escape You'll be folded and those you saw will be wrecked. Great difference is there between horrors you ride And between what they cohabited and what they drank. You came to them while the era was accused Of what you go through, and in you it fights. You loathed them, while there's no destination Nothing but chests in turmoil, Nothing but retreating, if there's ever an advance, Nothing but illusions when they went down.
From the Gulf to the Ocean	Safe journey, old boy! Where to? To yourself where there's no design, No impostors or swindlers No callous youth sees himself as stranger Where freaks aren't judges Whose foes are Arabs and rebels Where for a freeman exile is Warmer than pure death.
My homeland... the rhymed old man I greet you with reproof. For you I'll sacrifice an exile and land. I greet you with reproof... How can I see you like a palm That in treason has touched no other? I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like a heart Not scared by the terror of religion or ritual? I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like a face Not soaked in mud? I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like a child Not aged by dreams of poverty and hunger? I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like wine or a pure poem? To hell with pretenders! I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like a fine steed Sent just to conquer? I greet you with reproof... How can I find you like Arab blood Like the palm in roots and bounty? I greet you with	*Abul Rahman bin Mohammed bin Khaldun (1332-1406) is a Tunisian born famous Arab historian and sociologist (the translator).



Spiced up with Arabic elements, Mi Carmen Flamenca at ROHM deserved the three-minute standing ovation



By Yeru Ebuen
Photos by Khalid al Busaidi

Watching Mi Carmen Flamenca this weekend at the Royal Opera House Muscat was like watching the 'bull run' in Spain. It was exhilarating, action-packed and there were only a few pauses in between that you barely have time to breathe to process what was happening.

If you've missed it, it would have been utterly a disservice to your weekend experience. It's not everyday that the Compania Antonio Andrade is in town much more principal dancers Ursula Morena (Carmen), Jose Galvan (Don Jose), and Jose Jurado (Escamillo) who were stunning and magical in their performance it was a nearly two-hour show where every minute counted.

The flamenco version of Carmen

is stripped of the pompousness and grandiosity of its opera version which I was fortunate to see in the past performed in ROHM as well but it doesn't mean that it was eclipsed in the overall effect. If there's one thing about the performance last Friday, you'd realise that there is so much power in a darkened stage and only well-played lights to set the mood and the location. While other shows are dead without a good set design, Mi Carmen Flamenca's lack of it brought all the attention to the performance that often, I forget there was nothing there behind the actors but a black background. That is power — to be able to convey a story with minimal need for other visuals.

Mi Carmen Flamenca is 100 per cent Andalusian flamenco and has been performed across the world in some of the best theatres including Shanghai's Oriental Art Centre, Peking's Mei Langfan Grand Opera and Malaga in Spain's Echegaray Theatre and already were booked in different cities across Spain and even Europe.

The show in Muscat was a blessing for us to have a deep dive into why this show is a force to be reckoned with and while played at the smaller venue of the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts, the intimacy of the space heightened the experience even more than at the end of Friday's performance, it received a three-minute standing ovation from the spectators.

As a little back-grounder, two Frenchmen had given life to this

Spanish legend — the tragic novel was written by Prosper Merimee with Georges Bizet giving it life as an opera. Set in the 1830s Seville, the story revolves around the love and jealousy of soldier Don Jose and his beloved Micaela. As the story goes, Don Jose was smitten by the gypsy factory-girl Carmen and the back-and-forth drama will eventually lead to a haunting death scene with Carmen ending knifed and dead.

What Antonio Andrade and his flamenco company did to this version is bring it back to its root and so effectively with the power and gusto of a Spanish telenovela that you will be hooked from the first scene alone.

What was even more enjoyable is that aside from playing classic themes of Carmen, they also spiced it up with some Arabic elements, jazz and salsa with every scene performed with that inexhaustible flamenco spirit you hold on to your seat as the taps and the chants transport you within inside the world of Carmen itself.

And this is perhaps the reason why the audience laughed, rejoiced and grooved with the actors — some of the music was familiar, like listening to an Arab radio show but at the same time foreign that it's intriguing and titillating at the same time.

There was numerous stand out moments in the whole performance. Carmen dancing with her red poncho imitating a phoenix reborn to life was a top favourite. The scene where both girls fighting over the affection of Don Jose imitating the aggressiveness of a bullfight was the standout number on Scene 1. The tap dances, the clapping, they all made the whole scene so vibrant making it hard to rank the performances for every scene. But of all the drama, it was the death scene that wrapped the whole experience altogether. The stage bled in red light, the music eerie, a dead body on the floor and it goes on for a full minute the audience just left with their spirit crushed on the floor. It was an experience that I cannot give justice to with words but so vivid I will think of it moving forward whenever I watch another Carmen performance.

Due credits have to be given to singers Rocío Maroyal and Pablo Oliva — without those voices, it would have been a different experience altogether. The masterful playing of guitarist Antonio Andrade and Javier Leal with Vicente Dominguez had wonderfully made the show what it is. The music arrangement was so well thought out and positioned — strong when needed, menacing when the scene calls for it — that had made me fall in love with this performance just like the rest of the attendees.

I usually don't agree with PRs sent when building up shows like Carmen. But when ROHM said that Mi Carmen Flamenca "takes the opera Carmen from exile of a classical opera to the flamenco of its roots in both aspects of music and dance... direct, pure and without pomposity," they were talking of the truth and nothing but the whole truth. And there was nothing I wished more but for a lot of people to hopefully have seen it.



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