

42 investors get residence cards

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion handed over the Investor Residency Programme cards to 42 investors of different nationalities, including 17 ten-year residency cards and 25 five-year residency cards. The number of investors who received the residency cards since the programme's launch in October 2021 reached 75. SEE P2



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NADAL TO CHASE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY



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OMANI COPPER MINING PROJECT TO GENERATE RO 200M IN CASH FLOW OVER 10 YEARS



P20

SHE LOVES OUD MORE THAN FLOWERS



MUSCAT

MINISTER HEADS TO UAE FOR ADSW

At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, left here on Sunday heading to the United Arab Emirates to attend the opening ceremony of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW). The event is scheduled to be held on Monday at Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

ONLINE ENDOWMENT SYSTEM LAUNCHED

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs on Sunday launched the electronic system of endowments. The move aims to ease and simplify procedures related to endowments and to serve the public interest. The system will provide services dealing with the management of endowments. The system will electronically connect all parties involved in the compilation process, including donors and people responsible of managing endowments, as well as public and private entities. SEE P5

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LEBANON GROUP READY TO RETURN TO MEETINGS

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UKRAINE HAS 'EVIDENCE' OF CYBERATTACK

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Sayyid Theyazin commends successful commissioning of LPG plant in Salalah

KABEER YOUSUF & ONA
SALALAH, Jan 16

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, presided over the commissioning ceremony of OQ's LPG plant in the Governorate of Dhofar on Sunday.

The ceremony was attended by members of the Royal Family, ministers, under-secretaries and other dignitaries.

Built with an investment of RO 318 million, OQ's LPG plant embodies the government's strategy to drive economic diversification, optimise value creation from the country's natural resources, promote in-country value (ICV) development and implement the Oman Vision 2040 to diversify revenue generation streams.

FIRST SHIPMENT
HH Sayyid Theyazin was given an overview of the various key components of the plant, which have been designed and built in accordance with the highest technical



and safety standards. It includes an extraction facility, fractionation unit, storage tanks, shipping facilities and a pipeline system that connects the plant with the extraction unit at the upstream end of the project, with the storage

components and the export facilities located at the Port of Salalah. The presentation to HH Sayyid Theyazin also covered the commercial operations of the plant, which has already commenced the production of LPG per in-

ternational standards and specifications. The plant exported its first LPG shipment in July 2021. The chief guest familiarised himself with the timeline for the start of production of the plant's three main commodities: ...

RUN BY YOUNG OMANI CADRES, THE PLANT REFLECTS THE EFFORTS EXERTED BY OQ TO MAKE THE OPTIMAL USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

THE PLANT WILL MEET THE ENERGY REQUIREMENTS OF INDUSTRIAL AND RETAIL CONSUMERS IN DHOFAR, AND EXPORT THE SURPLUS PRODUCTION TO GLOBAL MARKETS

Shed booster hesitancy to contain spread

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Health reported 2,087 new cases of Covid-19 and three deaths on Sunday. Of these, 755 cases were reported on Thursday, 605 on Friday and 725 on Sunday.

With hospital in-patients going up, health experts are urging all people aged 18 and above and who have completed three months of the second dose to take the third or booster dose.

The total number of cases reported in the country till date is 312,425 while the number of deaths recorded so far is 4,122.

INPATIENTS
In the past 24 hours, 25 patients were admitted to hospitals, taking the number of inpatients to 88, including 11 in ICUs. Reports suggest that omicron infections among those who are boosted and vaccinated are mild with little difference between a cold, the flu, or Covid-19.

"But those who are fully

Those who are fully vaccinated are not getting seriously ill or having breathing problems, but they still have the potential to transmit to others

MoH REPORT

vaccinated are not getting seriously ill or having breathing problems, but they still have the potential to transmit to others", a report said.

According to a consultant of paediatric infectious diseases at Sultan Qaboos University, "The studies have proved that the third dose continues to offer that protection against Omicron, is stronger with the third dose, and the ability of the virus to spread decreases with this dose. The importance of the third dose lies in reducing the risk of the virus."

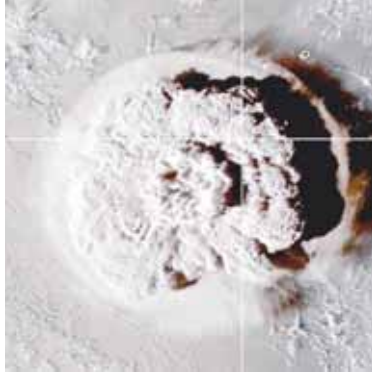
10TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROHM



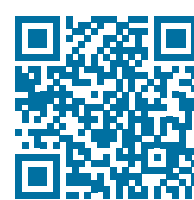
Symbolising a delightful symmetry in the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Royal Opera House Muscat, an exhibition was opened at the House on the late Franco Zeffirelli, stage director of the 2011 inaugural opera Turandot. SEE P3

Huge Tonga volcanic eruption felt around the world

NUKU'ALOFA: The massive underwater volcanic eruption in Tonga was so powerful it was recorded around the world and triggered a tsunami that flooded Pacific coastlines from Japan to the United States, scientists said on Sunday. Dramatic satellite images showed the long, rumbling eruption of the Hunga Tonga-



Hunga Haapai volcano spew smoke and ash in the air, with a thunderous roar heard 10,000 kilometres away in Alaska. The US Geological Survey recorded Saturday's eruption as equivalent to a 5.8 magnitude earthquake at zero depth. But the full extent of the damage in Tonga was unclear with communication lines down. — AFP



Sayyid Theyazin opens LPG plant in Dhofar

FROM PAGE 1

... propane, butane and condensates, as well as plans to meet the LPG requirements of local citizens and residents of Dhofar Governorate via road tanker supply. Key details about the arrangements to ship customised LPG tankers for export markets were shared as well.

HH Sayyid Theyazin said: "These national projects in the petrochemical sector carried out by Oman Investment Authority through OQ Group support the national economy and reflect the aspirations of the government of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, towards promoting the economic diversification approaches in the country in line with Oman Vision 2040."

"We would also like to commend the success in commissioning OQ's LPG plant in Dhofar and its high level of operational efficiency. The plant, which is run by young Omani cadres, reflects the efforts exerted by OQ to make the optimal use of natural resources, maximise its benefits and promote the downstream industries. This will support the various economic activities related to the energy sector, particularly the small and medium enterprises," His Highness added.

OQ LPG has a capacity to process around 8.8 million standard cubic meters per day of lean gas to produce about 304 kilotons per year of LPG comprising 155 kilotons per year of propane (C3), 111 kilotons of butane (C4) and 38 kilotons of condensates (C5+).

OQ's LPG plant will also meet the energy requirements of industrial and retail consumers in Dhofar Governorates. Surplus output will be exported to world markets through OQ Trading, the marketing arm of the Group. Furthermore, the



Group is studying the feasibility of using LPG products to develop petrochemical industries to help optimise value creation from hydrocarbons and support downstream investment.

Speaking on the occasion, Talal bin Hamed al Aufi, CEO of OQ Group, said: "The OQ LPG plant in Salalah is one of the most important projects of Oman Investment Authority. It will contribute to improving the gas value chain in general, providing liquefied petroleum gas and exporting the surplus production and some of its derivatives to global markets."

Al Aufi also indicated that the LPG plant is integrated with various other facilities of OQ Group assets in Dhofar Governorate. The project was supervised by a capable Omani management team from the beginning of its design and implementation all the way to its commercial operation. The plant has since commenced production

of LPG according to international standards and specifications, with the first LPG shipment exported in July 2021. OQ's gas network supplies the project with its needs of natural gas, while multiple products are exported through OQ Trading, the trading arm of the group, to various global markets.

The CEO of OQ Group also stated that the establishment of such projects in various governorates contributes to promoting economic and social development in the different regions of the country, while advancing the growth of the industrial sector. OQ Group aims to contribute to this objective through its various investments projects conceived in line with the sustainable development goals set out in the Oman 2040 Vision, he noted.

"The project, from inception, has sought to enhance in-country value (ICV) development in the gas sector by retaining a sizable

part of the expenditure within the country. Accordingly, it contributed to developing human capabilities and strengthening the national economy. The plant paid great attention to creating job opportunities and honing the skills of young Omanis. Total expenditure as part of ICV development reached more than RO 96 million. Around 300 small and medium enterprises took part in the implementation of the plant during the procurement and construction phase," Al Aufi explained.

The project has also contributed to the development of local communities in the governorate through the implementation of a number of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in the fields of education, health and the environment.

Furthermore, it has helped enhance the expertise of small and medium enterprises, which have benefited from technical advisory supported provided as

part of OQ's SME development initiatives.

In line with OQ's strong commitment to Omanisation and human capital development, two batches comprising more than 40 Omani staff were trained at the headquarters of an international company operating in the LPG field.

Some employees were also sent for training and internship programmes at various international methanol and LPG plants, as well as refineries. Moreover, a number of employees took part in intensive training courses to acquire the skills necessary to operate the plant efficiently. But the project did face its share of challenges, as have other such ventures around the world, during the Covid-19 pandemic, said Al Aufi.

These difficulties, encountered during the implementation phase, were nevertheless tackled thanks to the concerted efforts of the various teams working on completing this

project. As a result, OQ was able to overcome many of the logistical and technical challenges posed by the pandemic, he noted.

In his address, OQ Group's CEO also reiterated OQ's commitment to adhering to best practices in driving sustainability through the application of governance principles, continuous review of all the company's activities and operations, and the development of an action plan to raise the efficiency of operational processes. OQ prioritises performance improvement, which makes it a leader in the energy industry, he stressed.

Affirming OQ's commitment to financial stability and sustainability, he said the company has adopted a strategy that seeks to rebalance its investment portfolio with a view to attracting foreign investments, while studying options for privatising and exiting some assets.

— Pictures by ONA & Thani al Siyabi

1st semester GED exam begins



MUSCAT: As many as 54,959 students of the general education diploma (GED) began their first semester examinations in 359 examination centres across the Sultanate of Oman on Sunday.

The students took the Arabic language exam on the first day.

There are four centres for the marking of the exam papers.

Officials from the directorates general of education in the governorates inspected the examination centres to make sure that the process goes smoothly and that the students are taking the exam in a suitable environment.

Commerce Ministry hands over 42 Investor Residency Cards

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion handed over the Investor Residency Programme cards to 42 investors of different citizenship, including 17 10-year residency cards and 25 5-year residency cards.

Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, the Ministry's Under-Secretary for Investment Promotion, handed over the third batch of residency cards which entitle foreign investors and retirees a right for long stay in the Sultanate of Oman.

The number of investors who received the residency cards since the programme's launch in October 2021 reached 75. — ONA



SQUH expert team conducts rare heart surgery

MUSCAT: A special medical team from the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) has successfully treated a woman in her fifties who suffered from blockage in the coronary arteries by using the extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) technique also known as extracorporeal life support.

Dr Saif bin Hamad al Ghafri, ICU and emergency medicine consultant at the SQUH, said that ECMO is a rarely used medical technique. The aim of this technique is to provide cardiac and respiratory support to persons



whose heart and lungs are unable to provide an adequate amount of gas exchange or perfusion to sustain life. It depends on pumping and oxygenating a patient's blood outside the body.

The device implantation is complicated during sudden cardiac arrest without prior preparations which requires fast medical intervention to avoid damage caused by ischemia to various organs of the body and lack of oxygen especially to the brain, Al Ghafri said noting that the device was separated from the patient several days after

the heart muscle began to improve significantly and was able to function without external support.

He added that this case is one among the many who have been treated using the same technique.

Those cases included a pregnant woman in her thirties who suffered from severe shortage of oxygen due to lung infections as a result of H1N1 complications.

The other cases involved lung injuries as a result of accidents, pulmonary haemorrhage, obstruction of the airways, and pulmonary embolism. — ONA



Pacts on development projects in Al Dhahirah

IBRI: A number of agreements were signed in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah on Sunday to implement service, municipal and development projects at a sum of more than RO 2 million. They were signed with the companies executing the projects

by Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah. These projects will contribute to developing and boosting the governorate's economy, as well as enhancing the services rendered to cover the three wilayats of the governorate. — ONA

RNO Commander leaves for Pakistan

MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), left here on Sunday heading to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on an official visit lasting several days.

He was seen off at Al Seeb Air Base by Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, RNO Senior Staff Officer. — ONA



Exhibition opens at ROHM marking 10th anniversary

MUSCAT: Symbolising a delightful symmetry in the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM), an exhibition was opened at the House on Sunday on the late Franco Zeffirelli, stage director of the 2011 inaugural opera Turandot.

Zeffirelli is one of the most celebrated designers and directors of his era whose illustrious career spanned seven decades. Delve into Zeffirelli's imagination through this exhibition of artefacts designed especially for the Royal Opera House Muscat.

The Artistic World of Franco Zeffirelli, being held at the Exhibition Hall in the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts till March 20, comprises original sketches, costumes, films and models, as well as many others on display in public for the first time.

Among Zeffirelli's world-class opera productions explored here will be Turandot and Rigoletto, commissioned especially by ROHM, along with his production of Tosca at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, featuring Maria Callas, La Bohème at Teatro alla Scala, Milan, and Falstaff at the Metropolitan Opera, New York. — ONA



OAB Signs Agreement with Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning



Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently entered into an agreement with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning on January 13. The agreement stems from efforts to enhance partnership and collaboration between the public and private sectors and will enable the Ministry's beneficiaries to utilise the Bank's state-of-the-art e-payment gateway.

The signing took place at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning headquarters, between Nasser Khamis Al Siyabi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs, representing the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and Sulaiman Ali Al Hinai, General Manager - Treasury,

Investment & Government/FI Banking Group, representing OAB.

Commenting on the agreement, Nasser Khamis Al Siyabi, Director General of Administrative and Financial Affairs of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, said, "The Ministry strives to continue in its journey towards enhancing comprehensive digital transformation, to facilitate seamless and efficient services for its beneficiaries. We are extremely proud to be working together with OAB to enhance the experience of our beneficiaries, when utilising the Ministry's digital services, which is in turn, aligned with the Oman Vision 2040."

Highlighting the importance of the signing, General Manager - Treasury, Investment & Government/FI Banking Group at OAB, said "We are proud to have OAB's e-payment gateway chosen by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. We are committed to ensuring the provision of comprehensive and integrated services to the Ministry. We believe that this collaboration reinforces the partnership between the public and private sectors, to achieve our common objective."

The OAB e-payment gateway has been ranked as one of the best digital payment solutions in the local market. It was developed with the very latest technology and aligned with the highest standards of security and in compliance with

both local and global security control standards, including the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS). The e-payment gateway is designed to help simplify and facilitate the payment process in a smooth way and also at the lowest possible cost. Furthermore, it is the only platform as of date which offers a direct link to all categories of local and international bank cards.

Oman Arab Bank has a rich and proud history as one of the first financial institutions to be established in the Sultanate. Today, the Oman Arab Bank Group operates a nationwide network of 51 conventional branches, 15 Islamic branches, 150 conventional ATMs and 15 Islamic ATMs in high footfall locations across the Sultanate. OAB provides a complete range of financial products and services through its OAB Online App. Customers can now digitally benefit from several other services, directly from the convenience of their mobile phones.





FOR A COMFY, SMOOTH



VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Sultanate of Oman is a vast country with linear geography spread across the Dhofar Governorate in the south and the Musandam Peninsula in the north. While travelling from Salalah in the south to Muscat in the north takes around 1,200 km, travel from the capital to the other parts of the country also requires a minimum of three to four hours. Not to forget that some of these motor rides are through the rugged mountains, barren lands, and aggressive sands that could virtually blow up in one's face.

Such travels often require well-equipped and hygienic toilets, restaurants and even waiting rooms that offer protection from rain, wind and sun. "The Sultanate of Oman has very natural tourist spots that require long hours of drive. But some of these routes do not offer adequate facilities such as waiting rooms, clean toilets, or even quality restaurants. I won't say they are totally absent but are just not enough or efficiently maintained", said Salim al Balushi, a junior engineer who often travels to places such as Duqm, Sur and Adam among others. "The government has been

saying that all new fuel station complexes will offer essential services to motorists, which include international tourists. We see some of them on expressways leading to South and North Al Batinah, but we really need fully functional ones at all strategic places, if they have to enjoy this country to the fullest", said Gavin, a road travel enthusiast. The competent authorities that include the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), Omran, and even the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning have been working on several initiatives

for years to address such issues. Accordingly, the MoCIIP has issued some regulations and guidelines to ensure that the level of services provided to both domestic and international tourists and regular road motorists at fuel stations are of the highest levels. The ministry indicated that this came to ensure compliance with the controls, the level of service provision, the provision of basic service requirements, the provision of the best services that reflect the economic and tourism status of the Sultanate of Oman, the commitment to the regulations and regulations issued for the establishment of fuel filling

stations and attention to basic public utilities. Fuel stations developed on highways and expressways should ensure that they have provisions for prayer halls (both men and women), toilets, a restaurant or café, shops, pharmacy, automated teller machines (ATMs), car wash, information desk, primary mechanical services, parking for cars and trucks, parking spaces for the disabled and establishment of rest houses and hotels. Earlier speaking to the *Observer*, a senior executive of one of the leading fuel marketing companies told the *Observer* that in the coming years, the country would

have mega fuel station complexes spread over a vast of land over the next couple of years. "The plan is not just to provide more than just fuel to the customers, but a chain of service facilities such as shopping, food, entertainment for children, postal services and even gyms. Some stations will be spread over 10,000 sqm of the plot." During a recent campaign that covered 334 fuel filling stations in various governorates, MoCIIP reported violations of 49 fuel stations for not providing basic services such as air filling machines for vehicles, unclean toilets, inadequate shopping stores and poor appearance."



Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs launches electronic app



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs launched on Sunday the electronic system of endowments.

The move aims to ease and simplify procedures related to endowments and to serve the public interest.

The system will provide services dealing with the management of endowments.

Moreover, the electronic system is a comprehensive scheme that organises the process of compiling and registering endowments and the ones managing

them in the Sultanate of Oman.

Ultimately, the system will electronically connect all parties involved in the compilation process, including donors and people responsible for managing endowments, as well as public and private entities.

— ONA

Minister heads to UAE for ADSW

MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, left here on Sunday heading to the United Arab Emirates to attend the opening ceremony of Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW). The event is scheduled to be held on Monday at Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The ADSW, which comes within the events of the Expo 2020 Dubai, contributes to the international efforts exerted to address the climate change by focusing on three areas, namely international cooperation and leadership, economic development, technology and innovation. — ONA



Dam projects in North Al Batinah make progress

LIWA: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources is overseeing the implementation of new dams in North Al Batinah Governorate and is following up maintenance works on the existing dams. The ministry issues licences for the removal of sediments from dam's catchment areas and conducts periodic follow-up of the condition of dams to make them ready to receive water from overflowing wadis during heavy rainfall, according to Engineer Mohammed bin Ali al Issaei, head of the dams and aflaj department at the Directorate-General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Al Batinah Governorate.

The Governorate of North Al Batinah thrives on various water resources from valleys,



aflaj, groundwater and surface water. The 10 dams supervised by the Directorate-General

of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in North Al Batinah Governorate have a great

importance as they contribute to groundwater recharge and boost water quantities of water entering

the aquifer.

The dams in the Governorate of North Al Batinah are considered as important water facilities for their contribution to groundwater recharge and increasing the quantities of water entering the aquifer. Besides, the dams protect populated areas from flood hazards which was clearly visible during Cyclone Shaheen, the official said.

The Governorate of North Al Batinah boasts 10 dams distributed in the wilayats of Saham, Suhar and Al Khabourah. There are four dams in the Wilayat of Suhar namely Wadi Al Jizi dam, a groundwater recharge dam with a length of 1,234 metres and a storage capacity of 5.4 million cubic metres. Al Salahi is a protection and groundwater recharge dam measuring 9,062

metres in length with a storage capacity of 0.55 million cubic metres. In addition, the Wilayat of Suhar has two more small-sized recharge dams: Saih Al Berir dam with a storage capacity of 15,000 cubic metres and the Al Malha underground dam which has a storage capacity of 12,500 cubic metres, the official said.

The Wilayat of Saham has four dams including groundwater recharge and protection dams. The Wadi Ahin dam is one of the largest dams in the governorate with a storage capacity of 6.8 million cubic metres and a length of 6,540 metres.

The Wilayat of Al Khabourah has two dams: Wadi Al Hawasna dam which has a storage capacity of 3.7 million cubic metres and the Maiha Bani Kiyum dam, Al Issaei concluded. — ONA

Over 43,000 tourists visit sites in Dhofar

SALALAH: The number of visitors to the Land of Frankincense sites in the Governorate of Dhofar last year stood at 43,174, according to data released by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar.

The number of visitors to Al Baleed Archaeological Park and the Museum of the Frankincense Land reached 27,962, while the visitors of Samahram Archeological Site stood at



12,916. Moreover, the number of visitors to the Wbar Archaeological Site reached 2,296.

The Al Baleed Archaeological Park, Samahram, Wbar and the Wadi Dokka archaeological

cal sites are registered on the World Heritage List under the name "Land of Frankincense" sites.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, represented by the Directorate General of Heritage and Tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar, develops the sites and provides them with service and aesthetic facilities to serve the goals of cultural and archaeological tourism in the governorate.

— ONA

5 expatriates held on drug charges

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances arrested five expats including an infiltrator who entered the country illegally via the sea with drugs in his possession.

The police monitored a smuggling boat and followed the infiltrator who was finally arrested along with other gang members from Muscat Governorate.

The police seized more than 35 kg of crystal meth and marijuana.

Legal procedures against the defendants have yet to be completed.



ROBBERY: The Dhofar Governorate Police Command arrested a citizen on charges of robbery and impersonating a police officer.

The defendant stopped his victim, forced him to withdraw



money from an ATM and fled. The police managed to identify the culprit and arrested him.

Legal procedures against the defendant have yet to be completed.

BOAT SEIZED: The Coast Guard Police in North Al Batinah Governorate seized a boat carrying 49 infiltrators of Asian nationalities while attempting to enter the country illegally.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (3/2022)

Specialized Companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/003	2022/MM/HQ-3	Cleaning Work at Muscat Municipality Buildings (E- Tender)	Rial 40	07/02/2022	27/02/2022	Specialized
PRE/19/002	2022/MM/QS-1	Maintenance Works of MEP Services for Muttrah Fish Market (E- Tender)	Rial 25	07/02/2022	27/02/2022	Specialized

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



Sudan doctors rally against attacks

KHARTOUM: Dozens of Sudanese doctors demonstrated on Sunday in Khartoum to denounce attacks by security forces against medical personnel and doctors during pro-democracy rallies opposed to the October military coup.

Carrying pictures of colleagues they say have been killed in the turmoil that has gripped Sudan over the past months, the doctors rallied dressed in their white uniforms, an AFP correspondent said.

“During every protest they (security forces) fire tear gas inside the hospital where I work,” Houda Ahmad, a doctor who took part in the rally, said. “They even attack us inside the intensive care unit,” she said.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there have been 11 confirmed attacks on health workers and health facilities in Sudan since November.

“Most of these attacks were committed against health-care workers in the form of physical assault, obstruction, violent searches, and related psychological threats and intimidation,” a statement on Tuesday said.

The WHO “is also aware of the interception of ambulances, medical personnel and patients during their attempts to seek safety,” it added.

It called for the attacks to “stop now”, saying they violate international humanitarian law and restrict patients’ access to healthcare, particularly during the Covid pandemic.

According to the WHO, Covid-19 is a “grave threat” for Sudan, where 94 per cent



Dozens of Sudanese doctors demonstrate in Khartoum to denounce attacks by security forces against medical personnel and doctors during pro-democracy rallies opposed to the October military coup. — AFP

of the population has not been vaccinated.

One of the world’s poorest countries, Sudan has confirmed 93,973 coronavirus infections and about 4,000 deaths.

By September 21 of last year, 64 per cent of 1,041 health workers had tested positive, the WHO said, warning that the actual number of cases was “much higher”.

The October 25 coup led by military leader General Abdel Fattah al Burhan derailed the country’s transition to civilian rule, sparked international condemnation including aid cuts, and triggered mass protests.

The demonstrations have been met by a deadly crackdown that has seen 64 protesters killed,

COVID-19 IS A ‘GRAVE THREAT’ FOR SUDAN, WHERE 94 PER CENT OF THE POPULATION HAS NOT BEEN VACCINATED, ACCORDING TO WHO

according to pro-democracy medics who say security forces have used live bullets, a charge the police have denied. A police general has also been killed.

Anti-coup demonstrators have called for new rallies to be held on Monday to denounce the military and demand civilian rule.

It comes as the United Nations seeks to organise talks involving political, military and social actors in Sudan to resolve the crisis.

UN special representative Volker Perthes announced the bid on Monday saying it was “time to end the violence and enter into a comprehensive consultative process”.

While most anti-coup players have rejected the UN push, one group said it was willing to consider it. The mainstream faction of the Forces for Freedom and Change, the leading civilian pro-democracy group, said on Sunday it would accept the offer of a dialogue if it were to lead to the end of the coup and restoration of transition to civilian rule. — AFP

Lebanon’s group says ready to return to cabinet meetings

BEIRUT: Lebanese group Hizbullah and its ally the Amal movement said they were ready to return to government meetings after three months of political deadlock that has exacerbated the country’s economic crisis.

“We announce our agreement to participate in cabinet meetings to approve the national budget and discuss the economic rescue plan and all that concerns improving the living conditions of the Lebanese,” the two Shiite movements said in a joint statement.

Lebanon’s government was formed in September after a 13-month political impasse.

But it has not met since October 12 due to a boycott by Hizbullah and Amal amid tensions over an investigation into a catastrophic explosion at Beirut’s port in 2020.

Hizbullah and Amal said Saturday’s decision was a “response to the needs of the citizens”, citing “the collapse of the Lebanese pound’s exchange rate, the decline of the public sector” and crumbling incomes and purchasing power.

The country is in the throes of an economic meltdown that the World Bank has said is likely among the world’s worst since the mid-19th century.

About 80 per cent of the population now lives in poverty and the local currency has shed more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market.

Reacting to the parties’



Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati

announcement, Prime Minister Najib Mikati said he would convene a cabinet meeting as soon as the finance ministry had sent through a draft budget.

The two groups had been boycotting cabinet sessions in objection to the judge tasked with investigating the August 2020 port blast, Tarek Bitar, demanding he be replaced.

The explosion of a shipment of ammonium nitrate fertiliser stored haphazardly in a port warehouse for years killed at least 215 people and disfigured the capital.

Efforts by Bitar to interrogate ex-ministers have been challenged with lawsuits, while Hizbullah and Amal have accused him of politicising the probe.

Families of the victims and survivors of the blast have grown increasingly angry and have accused politicians of seeking to hamper the investigation to escape accountability.

— AFP

Putin to host Iranian president for talks

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin will host his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi for talks in Moscow next week as Russia tries to help salvage a nuclear deal between world powers and Tehran, state television channel Rossiya-1 reported on Sunday.

Rossiya-1 did not disclose when precisely the meeting between the two leaders would take place, nor the issues they would discuss.

Russia is taking part in talks to revive a 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers — the United States, Russia, China, France, Britain, Germany and the European Union — that lifted some sanctions against Tehran in

exchange for restrictions on its nuclear programme.

Donald Trump pulled Washington out of the deal in 2018, a year after he became US president. Iran later breached many of the deal’s nuclear restrictions and kept pushing beyond them. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Friday that progress had been made in the talks to revive the deal. Meanwhile, French-Iranian academic Fariba Adelhah was jailed anew for breaking house arrest restrictions, an official from the Islamic republic’s judiciary authority said on Sunday.

— AFP

REFUGEE CAMP IN DISTRESS



Palestinian firefighters evacuate a resident from an inundated house, following torrential rains that hit the Jabalia refugee camp in the northern Gaza strip. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Libya oil, gas exports hit 5-year high of \$21.5 bn

Libya’s lifeline oil and gas exports raised revenues of more than \$21.5 billion in 2021, the highest level in five years, the National Oil Corporation announced. Total net revenues for oil and gas exports last year amounted to \$21.5 billion as well as 30 million euros in non-dollar sales, the state-run NOC said in a statement.

It said record levels were achieved in November and December. “The end of the year 2021 recorded a recovery, and oil prices achieved their largest an-



nual gains since 2016, driven by the recovery of the global economy from the state of stagnation” due to the coronavirus epidemic, NOC chief Mustafa Sanalla said.

— AFP

ISTANBUL

Turkey lifts negative PCR requirement

People in Turkey, including the unvaccinated, are no longer required to take a PCR test before using public transportation or going to concerts, cinemas or theatres, state news agency Anadolu reported.

Public and private sector employees and school personnel are also not required to provide proof of negative tests in order to report to work, Anadolu said, citing an order from the Interior Ministry. The exemption covers individuals who are not fully



vaccinated as well as those who haven’t contracted the coronavirus in the preceding 180 days. Travellers no longer have to provide negative PCR results before taking domestic flights. — dpa

KHARTOUM

Sudan revokes licence of Al Jazeera live TV unit

Sudan has revoked the licence of Al Jazeera Mubasher, part of the Qatar-based network, accusing it of ‘unprofessional’ TV coverage of anti-coup protests, the channel said. “The Sudanese authorities announce they revoked the accreditation of Al Jazeera Mubasher and barred its team from working in Sudan,” tweeted the news channel.

Sudan has been gripped by political turmoil since top military leader General Abdel Fattah al Burhan launched a coup on



October 25. The military power grab triggered mass protests by pro-democracy movements demanding civilian rule that has met with a deadly crackdown. — AFP



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In brief

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO BUY 32 NEW BLACK HAWK HELICOPTERS

The Philippines will buy 32 new Black Hawk helicopters for more than \$620 million, the defence secretary said, in the nation's latest big-ticket purchase to upgrade its ageing military capability. For the past decade, Manila has been trying to modernise its run-down military equipment featuring Vietnam War-era helicopters and World War II naval vessels used by the US.

The first of the 32 S-70i Black Hawks from a Polish firm owned by US defence manufacturer Lockheed Martin will begin to arrive next year, Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said on Facebook.

■ VIENNA



AUSTRIA TO MAKE COVID JOBS COMPULSORY FROM FEB

Austria will become the first European country to make Covid-19 vaccination compulsory for adults in February, Chancellor Karl Nehammer said, acknowledging that it was a "sensitive topic". Nehammer, a conservative who took office in December, said those who didn't comply would face a hefty fine. "We will decide on compulsory vaccination as planned. It will come into force at the beginning of February" for adults, he told a news conference.

Since plans for compulsory jabs were first announced last year, Austria has seen impassioned debate both in parliament and beyond on the issue.

■ LONDON



TONY BLAIR DEFENDS KNIGHTHOOD AFTER IRAQ CRITICISM

British former prime minister Tony Blair said his leadership should be remembered for more than the Iraq war as he rejected fierce criticism over his receipt of a knighthood. The Labour party's most successful leader, who won three successive general elections, was made Sir Tony in Queen Elizabeth II's New Year's Honours list.

The announcement was defended by the Conservative government, but several online petitions want it rescinded. One on change.org, accusing Blair of "war crimes", has drawn more than one million signatories.

Ukraine says has 'evidence' for cyberattack

KYIV: Ukraine said on Sunday it had "evidence" that Russia was behind a massive cyberattack that knocked out key government websites this past week, while Microsoft warned the hack could be far worse than first thought.

Tensions are at an all-time high between Ukraine and Russia, which Kyiv accuses of having massed troops on its border ahead of a possible invasion. Some analysts fear the cyberattack could be the prelude to a military attack.

On Friday, Washington also accused Russia of sending saboteurs trained in explosives to stage an incident that could be the pretext to invade its pro-Western neighbour.

"All the evidence points to Russia being behind the cyberattack", the Ukrainian digital transformation ministry said in a statement. "Moscow is continuing to wage a hybrid war."

The ministry urged Ukrainians not to panic, saying their personal information was protected.

The purpose of the attack, it added, "is not only to intimidate society. But to also destabilise the situation in Ukraine, halting the work of the public sector and crushing Ukrainians' trust in the authorities".

The Kremlin earlier rejected the claims and said there was no evidence Russia was behind the attack. "We have nothing to do with it. Russia has nothing to do with these cyberattacks", President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, told CNN.

"Ukrainians are blaming everything on Russia, even their bad weather in their country", he



Ukrainian former President Petro Poroshenko meets with his supporters and journalists ahead of a news conference in Warsaw. — Reuters

said in English.

Kyiv said late on Friday it had uncovered preliminary clues that Russian security services could have been behind the cyberattack.

Ukraine's SBU security service said the attacks in the early hours of Friday had targeted a total of 70 government websites.

The website of the foreign ministry for a time displayed a message in Ukrainian, Russian and Polish that said "be afraid and expect the worst".

Within hours of the breach, the security service said access to most affected sites had been restored and that the fallout was minimal.

Senior government official said that the hack was one of the 'biggest' cyberattacks of the past few years

But Microsoft warned on Sunday that the cyberattack could prove destructive and affect more organisations than initially feared.

The US software giant said it continued to analyse the malware and warned it could render government digital infrastructure

inoperable.

"The malware, which is designed to look like ransomware but lacking a ransom recovery mechanism, is intended to be destructive and designed to render targeted devices inoperable rather than to obtain a ransom", Microsoft said in a blog post.

Microsoft said it had not so far identified a culprit but warned that the number of affected organisations could prove larger than initially thought.

"Our investigation teams have identified the malware on dozens of impacted systems and that number could grow as our investigation continues", it said.

"These systems span multiple government, non-profit, and information technology organisations, all based in Ukraine. We do not know the current stage of this attacker's operational cycle or how many other victim organisations may exist in Ukraine or other geographic locations."

Senior government official Viktor Zhora said on Friday that the hack was one of the "biggest" cyberattacks of the past few years.

Russia has amassed tanks, artillery and tens of thousands of troops near the border of Ukraine and demanded guarantees that its neighbour will never join Nato.

Senior Russian and Western officials held three rounds of talks in Geneva, Brussels and Vienna over the past week but there was no breakthrough.

By the end of the week, Washington warned that Moscow could stage a false flag operation within weeks to precipitate an invasion.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Kyiv and its Western partners were working on a broad "package to contain Russia" that would include "painful" new sanctions and moves to ramp up defence cooperation with the West.

Speaking to Germany's *Bild* newspaper, Kuleba said Putin "only understands the language of force".

"If Putin wants to know why neighbours are seeking to join Nato he only needs to look in the mirror", he said in remarks released by the foreign ministry on Sunday. — AFP

UK PM 'broke the law', says Labour leader

LONDON: Britain's main opposition leader on Sunday accused Prime Minister Boris Johnson of breaking the law, but the government vowed changes after an explosive series of revelations about lockdown-breaching parties.

In the latest, Johnson's wife Carrie was photographed on the front page of the *Sunday Telegraph* embracing a friend at a September 2020 party, in violation of the then rules on social distancing.

Carrie Johnson "regrets the momentary lapse", a spokesperson told the newspaper, after she was also pictured with the prime minister and others enjoying drinks in the Downing Street garden.

At least six lawmakers in Johnson's Conservative party have now called publicly for him to quit, while others say they are awaiting the findings of an internal inquiry by senior civil servant Sue Gray.

"I have regretfully come to the conclusion that Boris Johnson's position is now untenable, that his resignation is the only way to bring this whole unfortunate episode to an end and I am working with colleagues to impress that view on Number 10", former minister Tim Loughton tweeted.

Labour leader Keir Starmer, who is enjoying an opinion poll surge on the back of the Downing Street "partygate" allegations, said the facts were already clear.

"I think he broke the law. I



British Labour Party leader Keir Starmer appears on BBC's Sunday Morning show in London. — Reuters

'I think he broke the law. I think he's as good as admitted that he broke the law', Starmer told BBC television

think he's as good as admitted that he broke the law", Starmer told BBC television, accusing Johnson also of lying to parliament.

Gray only has the remit to establish the facts, he added, calling for the police to look into a possible criminal inquiry once her report is out. "The prime minister has degraded the office of prime minister and he has lost

full authority not only in his own party, but in the country", Starmer said.

Three polls this week have each given Labour a 10-point lead over the Conservatives, and some in the ruling party want Johnson out in good time before Britain holds local elections in May.

The latest poll in *Sunday's Observer* newspaper said Johnson's personal approval rating had fallen below the worst figure recorded by his hapless predecessor, Theresa May. Government Minister Oliver Dowden, the Conservatives' co-chairman, said Johnson was "very contrite and deeply apologetic".

— AFP

Gunmen kill over 50 in Nigeria's northwest

KEBBI, Nigeria: Dozens of gunmen on motorbikes ransacked a village and killed more than 50 people in the latest violence in northwest Nigeria, residents said on Sunday.

Gangs have been terrorising areas of the northwest in recent years, forcing thousands to flee and gaining global notoriety through mass kidnappings at schools for ransom.

Local elder Abdullahi Karman Unashi said that the men entered Dankade village in Kebbi state on Friday night and exchanged gunfire with soldiers and policemen.

Security forces were forced to retreat, leaving the attackers to burn shops and grain silos and take cattle into the early hours of Saturday, he said. "They killed two soldiers and one police officer and 50 villagers. (They) kidnapped the community leader of Dankade and many villagers, mostly women and children",

Karman said.

It came a week after armed men killed 200 people in the nearby state of Zamfara.

Didzi Umar Bunu, son of the abducted community leader, said the gunmen had returned early on Sunday and torched more houses.

"They have not called or made any ransom demand. Dankade village is littered with dead bodies", he said on the phone.

Nafiu Abubakar, police spokesperson for Kebbi, did not respond to calls and messages to his phone.

Kebbi shares a border with Zamfara, where the government in September started a military offensive and imposed a telecoms blackout to rid the state of gangs it calls terrorists.

Violent crime has compounded the challenges in northern states, which are typically poorer than in the south. — AFP



Members of Nigeria's security forces in Zamfara last year. — Reuters File

How to make New Year’s resolutions stick



Hyesha Barrett
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It’s the start of 2022 and the majority of humans around the world have made New Year’s resolutions with the desire to change their bad habits and start afresh.

New Year’s resolutions are “promises” we make to ourselves about a future vision we wish to achieve, but much more often than not, we lack the strategy, commitment, focus and accountability to make them a reality.

This is why most resolutions are broken around the first month of making them. Here are a few more reasons why they don’t stick:

1. Your goals aren’t specific enough. When you have achievable and measurable targets with exact dates, you have something more tangible to work towards. There has to be clarity, desire and determination

- with precise action steps otherwise the target is too vague and our human brains dismiss vagueness.
2. You don’t have someone to hold you accountable. Without accountability you can easily get sidetracked. When we have to tell someone reliable of our progress, we tend to not want to let them nor ourselves down.
3. You lose focus. It’s so easy to get distracted in today’s world. Remove all distractions and ask yourself where do I want to be a year from now? What do I want more of? What do I want less of?
4. Your environment is not conducive to your goals. Decluttering will free up space to allow in the new.
5. You don’t really want it or you don’t know why it’s

NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS ARE “PROMISES” WE MAKE TO OURSELVES ABOUT A FUTURE VISION WE WISH TO ACHIEVE, BUT MUCH MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WE LACK THE STRATEGY, COMMITMENT, FOCUS AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO MAKE THEM A REALITY

important. Often we do things to make someone else happy. Now is a time for deep reflection to discover what YOU really want.

Attempting to follow through on promises to yourself without clear intention and clear action steps are good thoughts, yet without implementation, will remain just thoughts.

The key is to make the process

gradual, not aim for your success to be achieved overnight.

Let’s take the example of losing weight, this ranks as one of the most popular resolutions. So instead of imposing a restrictive meal plan, add one positive habit per week. Start with drinking more water during your first week. Set a regular alarm and have a big bottle close by for easy access. Keep at it.

The following week, move on to eating more veggies every day. The next week, aim to eat a variety of proteins and fish. Thereafter cut down on carbs, processed foods and eventually all sugars.

This gradual process is more manageable and achievable which will lead you to long term success. Setting achievable goals with exact dates and deadlines creates a sense of certainty and urgency, which we are much more likely to carry out.

A habit is a lifestyle not a crash course. You have to repeatedly take action and do it over and over in order for it to become second nature — like driving a car, you’re on automatic pilot.

Work at it daily to make it subconscious. Strategically place pictures around your house of your ideal self. Take the time to project yourself there and think of your vision often.

What’s so amazing about the brain is that it doesn’t differentiate whether your thoughts are real or made up. It will do its utmost to go towards whatever you are thinking about constantly, as the brain deducts this is what you desire.

In the end, resolutions can be empty, unfulfilled promises filled with regret. Or they can be enlivening, motivating targets that push you towards being the best version of yourself. It’s up to you which path you’ll take.

Questions over Kazakh version of deadly unrest

BY CHRISTOPHER RICKLETON

As the dust settles on lethal clashes in Kazakhstan that prompted authorities to call in Russian-led troops, questions are mounting over the authoritarian government’s handling of the unprecedented crisis.

While President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has pinned the blame on bandits and foreign militants, many ordinary people question the official storyline.

Following days of Internet shutdown, prosecutors announced late on Saturday the unrest that began with peaceful protests over energy price hikes had left 225 people dead, including 19 law enforcement and military personnel.

But many stress that a number of issues remain unexplained.

It is unclear why so many civilians died, and who the “foreign terrorists” the government blames for the violence are.

And where is Tokayev’s mentor and predecessor, 81-year-old Nursultan Nazarbayev, who has not been heard from since last year?

Dauren Bitkembayev, 30, who lost his elderly parents in the unrest, said he needs answers.

He and others want to know why gun attacks on civilian cars in the country’s largest city occurred even after the military had appeared to restore order.

A video shared on social media shows a car engulfed in flames close to barriers put up by the military. Inside the vehicle were a retired postal service worker and a former teacher, Bitkembayev’s late parents.

“It looks like military shot (the car) up... and we thought (violence) was over,” the eyewitness, who filmed the burning car, can be heard saying.

“Everyone is saying it was the army (who fired). I don’t understand,” said Bitkembayev, who works in a pawn shop ransacked by looters during the upheaval.

“Were they blind? They could see it was a grandfather and a grandmother — what kind of looters or terrorists could they be?” Bitkembayev asked.

Some doubt the authorities will ever tell the whole truth. Daniyar Moldabekov, a commentator and political reporter, said society was polarised.

“With Internet shut down, some turned out to be too susceptible to propaganda ready to believe that everyone who has been out on the streets is a terrorist and villain,” he said. — AFP

OVER 12,000 PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DETAINED SINCE THE UNREST ERUPTED IN EARLY JANUARY, INCLUDING JOURNALISTS AND RIGHTS ACTIVISTS



Paul Krugman

The writer is an American economist and public intellectual, who is Distinguished Professor of Economics at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Wonking out: France is doing well

I have written about America’s surprising success in limiting the economic damage from Covid-19. Compared with expectations and compared with our handling of the 2008 financial crisis, we’ve done remarkably well.

But other countries have also done well, in some cases and by some measures better. In fact, among major advanced economies, the star performer of the pandemic era, arguably, is ... France.

France? For as long as I can remember, US media coverage of the French economy has been relentlessly negative.

Back in 1997, The New York Times’ Roger Cohen described France as “America’s favourite European basket case” (although he had the good grace to make fun of his own premature pessimism 16 years later). Indeed, in the 90s we were told that France was too culturally stagnant to keep up with modern technology; another 1997 article was titled “Why the French Hate the Internet.” (France currently has higher broadband penetration than we do.) During the 2010-13 euro crisis, I constantly read assertions that France was next in line to join the afflicted economies of Southern Europe — “France is in Free Fall,” asserted an editor at Fortune.

The data never actually supported this negativism. What was really going on, I believe, was that business and economic discourse in the United States is strongly shaped by conservative ideology — and given that ideology, France, with its huge social expenditure, high taxes and extensive economic regulation, ‘should have been’ a basket case. So reporting

about France seized on every negative development as a sign that the long-awaited disaster was finally arriving.

But it never did show up. Instead, the French economy just kept on plugging along. True, gross domestic product per capita is about a quarter lower in France than it is here. But that mainly reflects a combination of earlier retirement and, above all, shorter working hours — because the French, unlike Americans, actually take vacations. That is, somewhat lower GDP mainly reflects a choice rather than a problem.

And while the French work less than we do, they’re more likely than Americans to be employed during their prime working years. That’s probably not the story you’ve heard; my sense is that many Americans still imagine that France suffers from mass unemployment, a vision that had some truth to it 25 years ago but has long been out of date.

And prime-age employment is where France has done astonishingly well during the pandemic. Many economists use the employed percentage of adults ages 25-54 as a gauge of labour market conditions. This ratio plunged in the United States during the worst of the Covid-19 slump; it has since recovered strongly but is still below pre-pandemic levels, even though other indicators suggest a very tight labour market — one of the divergences that have economists talking about a Great Resignation of workers unwilling or unable to return to the labour force. France, however, not only managed to avoid a huge plunge in employment but has also surpassed its pre-pandemic level.

How did it do that? When the

pandemic forced economies into a temporary lockdown, Europe, France included, and the United States took divergent routes toward supporting workers’ incomes. We offered enhanced unemployment benefits; France offered subsidies to employers to keep furloughed workers on the payroll. At this point it seems clear that the European solution was better, because it kept workers connected to their employers and made it easier to bring them back once vaccines were available.

Oh, and while the French have their anti-vaxxers, they don’t have as much political clout as their US counterparts, so the country has done better at getting shots in arms.

France also has universal child care, which reopened relatively early in the pandemic, as did schools — freeing parents, largely mothers, to return to work.

I don’t want to romanticise the French economy or French society, both of which have plenty of problems. And liberals who like to imagine that we could neutralise the anger of the white working class by raising wages and strengthening the social safety net should know that France, whose policies are to the left of US progressives’ wildest dreams, has its own ugly white nationalist movement, albeit not as powerful as ours.

Still, at a time when Republicans denounce as destructive “socialism” any effort to make America less unequal, it’s worth knowing that the economy of France — which isn’t socialist but comes far closer to socialism than anything Democrats might propose — is doing pretty well.

— The New York Times Service



The Federal Reserve building in Washington.

Once upon a dream...



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

A year ago, I remember that I had been tirelessly chasing a dream, day and night. The chasing journey is not over yet; rather I'm sparing no effort to make that dream come true someday soon! The case is undoubtedly alike with many others who are having the same struggle of making their

dream possible. It seems many are leaving no stone unturned striving to succeed in their annual mission impossible of pursuing a dream.

Though the dream-chasing mission is extremely tiring and disappointing, it is a very rewarding learning experience. Along the way, one comes across various challenges and obstacles while heading to achieve his dream. The hard experiences that one goes through to mark a milestone are challenging and stimulating a person to bring the best out of him. Hence, the mission is exhausting, but insightful too. As Walt Disney, once upon a time, advised, "If you can dream it, you can do it". The equation is as simple as that!

Do you really think that it is possible to get all our dreams come true? Realistically yes, but if we only believe in them deep down in our hearts! Yet that is likely possible if we sincerely work on them so they turn out to be a reality one day. It has been said that you are what you think and you achieve what you believe in. Therefore, if you have faith in your dreams, then definitely you will hold on them and strive to get them the breath of life. Just remember that success comes only to those who believe in their dreams!

Accordingly, the more people believe in their dreams, the easier they become possible and achievable. Hellen Keller said, "Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties." Perhaps, some people would assume that what they have is only thoughts or most likely beliefs, which will eventually be shaped as dreams. True it is not all what we think of can be a dream, but dreams always start with just a simple thought.

On the other hand, there are people who do not believe in dreams; they only live their moment and bearing no attention to the so-called "future". It is good to keep your life simple and smooth, but not to the extent that you do not even bother to plan for what you will do the next day! It is really a shame, but actually, there are people who have no obvious goal in their life. What concerns them more is the way of making a good living and enjoying life. However, one's life is meaningless without having a goal or a dream that you believe in and fight for.

As Albert Einstein said, "Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than the one with all the facts".

Always the little of persistence results in getting more achievements; whatever looks a failure and disappointment might suddenly turn into a commendable victory. If you have ever thought that you failed in achieving your dreams, change your techniques of doing things, but not your principles.

Trees change their leaves, but not their roots. Likewise, a pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, but an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty. Let us look at the lives of all those who achieved outstanding successes by being committed to their goals and plans.

They challenged themselves and brought guidance and enlightenment to humanity overall. Thomas Edison, the inventor of light bulb and other countless inventions, was very committed to succeed even though he failed at least in 700 different projects.



YEAR OF THE TIGER

People walk past festive lanterns installations at Yamashitacho Park in Yokohama on Sunday, ahead of the Chinese Lunar New Year of Tiger. — AFP

Covid goes to court



Antara Haldar

The writer is a lecturer in empirical legal studies at the University of Cambridge

The coronavirus is everywhere: in the air, on surfaces, in our respiratory tracts, and, over the past week, at the US Supreme Court. On January 10, key elements of US President Joe Biden's controversial "vaccine-or-test" mandate provisionally went into force, requiring that all workers at companies with more than 100 employees be vaccinated or tested regularly for Covid-19. With roughly 84 million Americans affected by the mandate, all eyes were on the Supreme Court, which on January 13 struck down the measure.

With the support of a massive body of scientific evidence, the US Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) argued in favour of the mandate, emphasising that workers "face a grave danger... in the workplace." But the National Federation of Independent Businesses and 27 states (all Republican-controlled) contended that the vaccine is an "invasive, irrevocable, forced medical procedure" that should not be imposed en masse.

Although the technical question before the court was whether OSHA has legitimate authority to enforce the mandate, the justices also considered whether Covid-19 does indeed pose a threat distinctive to the workplace. Yet, with only 62% of Americans vaccinated, the stakes were — and are — much bigger than these questions imply. At issue is whether the 38% of Americans who refuse to get the vaccine should be permitted to imperil the majority's ability to earn a livelihood without facing unnecessary risks to their safety. And even this broader framing still doesn't address the risks imposed by the unvaccinated on healthcare workers, parents, separated families, patients in need of non-Covid-related treatments, and all the children whose development has been disrupted or derailed.

Despite the unprecedentedly rapid development of effective vaccines, the pandemic has entered its third year and is still raging, owing to mask hesitancy, global vaccine apartheid, and, crucially, vaccine refusal. Its persistence is due not to a failure of science but to a failure of our other institutions, starting with the rule of law.

Specifically, a dubious legal theory is to blame. Many legal scholars continue to take pride in a highly formal interpretation of the rule of law as something that is resolutely neutral and amoral, even as it fails spectacularly in helping us confront the most urgent challenges of the day. The pandemic is a paradigmatic case: We are stuck with a dithering legal system that stands by and watches as the toll of preventable deaths continues to rise, and whose moral authority and relevance are increasingly at risk as a result.

The problem lies in a conception of law that is rooted largely in legal positivism, the leading school of jurisprudential thought, whose most stringent interpretation argues that law derives its authority from "pedigree" (where it comes from) irrespective of morality (whether the law is "good" or "bad"). In reality, however, this amounts to an excuse not to commit to an account of collective welfare and instead defer to individual choice.

Even if this perspective was acceptable in the midst of a surging pandemic, it would be deeply flawed. The rule of law is an intricately intertwined, mutually

THE STAKES IN THE CASE OF NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESSES VS OSHA WERE EXTRAORDINARILY HIGH. AT ISSUE WHEN THE US SUPREME COURT RULED ON THE LEGALITY OF THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S WORKPLACE VACCINE MANDATE WAS NOT JUST THE FUTURE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC BUT ALSO THE JUDICIARY'S OWN RELEVANCE AND CREDIBILITY

reinforcing combination of formal rules and social norms. It lives in, and functions through, its participants' collective moral consciousness. The role of courts, then, is not merely to apply formal rules but also to shape social norms and, when necessary, act as a society's conscience. A close analogy would be a parent exercising her judgment by intervening in a sibling squabble.

This is not to suggest that "the law is what the judge ate for breakfast." Rather, scholarly research in law and psychology, and breakthroughs in the cognitive

sciences, show that law is a fundamentally social institution, and that individuals respond powerfully to cues provided by institutions of authority (what psychologists call "evoking"), particularly when the cues embody a strong moral position.

The positivist position fundamentally misses this point. It ignores the fact that the historically warring nations of Europe have been stitched together within a largely integrated bloc through the jurisprudence of the EU Court of Justice. Similarly, the Indian Supreme Court's 2018 landmark judgment decriminalising homosexuality has played a significant role in changing norms in that country.

The US Supreme Court had a chance both to do the right thing and to make history, by helping to end this protracted — and increasingly preventable — pandemic and enriching the rule of law in the process. The United States — and indeed the world — needed a decision with the moral force of Brown vs Board of Education, not more of the grubby cynicism that we saw in Trump vs Hawaii case.

The court could, and should, have taken a stand on vaccines, especially considering that it has already been doing so with respect to the "right to life" in other contexts. Foetuses are, for example, far more ambiguous instances of "life" than the workers affected by the mandate, who are clearly moral agents. And the court has ruled against the choice to end even one's own life in the context of euthanasia.

Legal judgments are about trade-offs, and in this case there was a clear choice between collective safety or a misguided notion of personal freedom (as the philosopher Peter Singer has argued). While large employers like Citigroup and United Airlines have gone so far as to impose a "no jab, no job" policy, the OSHA mandate took a much more moderate approach to creating a secure work environment.

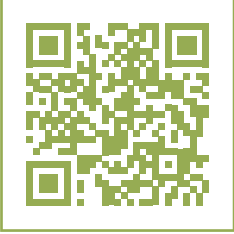
Moreover, even if the case before the Court had not been open and shut, the common good ought to have been the tie breaker. But instead, the court's vote was for individual liberty at all costs: the core, if hidden, value of legal positivism. The circus surrounding Novak Djokovic, the anti-vaccine tennis star who was recently detained by Australian border agents, is just a microcosm of the confusion that will now be unleashed by the decision striking down Biden's workplace mandate. With hospitalisation rates breaking records and the US death toll approaching one million, the court has missed a major opportunity to exercise guardianship over a divided polity, and to assert its relevance and moral authority.

— Project Syndicate Services



sport

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NADAL TO CHASE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

MELBOURNE: A Grand Slam accustomed to the iron rule of Novak Djokovic will emerge blinking into a brave new world on Monday as rivals jostle to fill the power vacuum left by the departed Serbian superstar at the Australian Open.

The winner of a record nine titles at Melbourne Park, including the last three in succession, Djokovic's hopes of continuing his dynasty and claiming a record 21st Grand Slam title lay in ruins on Sunday after he lost a court case to stay in the country.

Many Australians will be glad to be rid of an athlete who had become a hero of the anti-vaxxer movement, while players will be relieved the spotlight can shift back to tennis.

But the loss of the world number one is a blow for a men's tournament which was already lacking star power after the withdrawals of Roger Federer and Dominic Thiem.

Djokovic's exit from Australia may have major repercussions for his tennis career, particularly if he continues to snub Covid-19 vaccination.

But for the players left in Melbourne, it is a golden opportunity.

None may be more pleased than sixth seed Rafael Nadal, who

2022 Australian Open: men to watch

Novak Djokovic	Rafael Nadal	Daniil Medvedev	Alexander Zverev	Stefanos Tsitsipas
Age: 34	35	25	24	23
Serbia	Spain	Russia	Germany	Greece
Ranking: 1	6	2	3	4



VISA CANCELLED after COVID-19 vaccine controversy









Grand Slam titles:	20	1	0	0
Australian	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
French	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
Wimbledon	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
US	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●

2022 Australian Open: women to watch

First Grand Slam of the season, in Melbourne, January 17 - 30

Ashleigh Barty	Naomi Osaka	Garbine Muguruza	Simona Halep	Emma Raducanu
25 years old	24	28	30	19
Australia	Japan	Spain	Romania	Britain
Ranking: 1	14	3	15	18











Grand Slam titles:	4	2	2	1
Australian	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
French	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
Wimbledon	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●
US	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●	●●●●●●●●●●

Sources: WTA/AFP photos

remains level with the Serbian and Federer on 20 Grand Slam titles.

The 2009 winner and four-time finalist, Nadal is the only Australian Open champion left in the draw. Before Sunday's court decision, Nadal could well have met the Serb in the semifinals, a player the Spanish great has not

beaten on a hard court since 2013.

Should Nadal survive a possible quarterfinal against third seed Alexander Zverev, the highest seed Nadal could meet in the semis is seventh-ranked Italian Matteo Berrettini.

Nadal will still have his work cut out, though.

The leading lights of the next generation have gradually worn the Spaniard down on hard courts in recent years, and a number of them will feel their time has come in Melbourne.

Second seed Daniil Medvedev could prove a major obstacle for the Spaniard's hopes of stealing a march in the Grand Slam title race.

Medvedev was thrashed by Djokovic in last year's final but the gangly Russian dynamo turned the tables on the Serb at the US Open to win his first major title.

He would become the first player outside the 'Big Three' of Djokovic, Nadal and Federer to win consecutive Grand Slam championships since Andre Agassi in 1999-2000.

Long marked for Grand Slam success, Zverev will feel he is due for a breakthrough, having fallen agonisingly short in his first major final at the 2020 US Open against Thiem.

Fourth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas will be another desperate to make hay while Djokovic is away.

Tsitsipas knocked Nadal out in the quarterfinals last year to reach his second semifinal at Melbourne Park before being stopped in his tracks by Medvedev. Months later, Djokovic ruined Tsitsipas's hopes of a maiden Slam title in the final at Roland Garros. — Reuters

'DISAPPOINTED' DJOKOVIC DEPORTED FROM AUSTRALIA



Novak Djokovic walks in Melbourne Airport before boarding a flight in Melbourne. — Reuters

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia on Sunday having lost a sensational legal battle over his coronavirus vaccination status and with his dream of clinching a record 21st Grand Slam in tatters.

An "extremely disappointed" Djokovic said he would comply with a unanimous Federal Court decision to uphold his visa cancellation over fears he could stoke anti-vaccine sentiment.

"I cannot stay in Australia and participate in the Australian Open," he said on the eve of a tournament that he has dominated for a decade.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love."

A reporter captured images of Djokovic at Melbourne's Tullamarine airport late on Sunday, as the humbled star boarded a flight for Dubai. EK409 took off at 10:51 pm local time (11:51 GMT).

Just hours earlier, in a few dry words, the chief justice of Australia's Federal Court, James Allsop, dispensed with the unvaccinated tennis superstar's attempt to reinstate his cancelled visa and to make tennis history. "The orders of the court are that the amended application be dismissed with costs," Allsop said in understated remarks that ended a week of legal high drama. Three Federal Court justices had listened to half a day of feisty legal back-and-forth about Djokovic's alleged risk to public order in Australia. — AFP

Barrow snatches draw for Gambia

MALI AND GAMBIA THROUGH TO SECOND ROUND



Mali's Moussa Doumbia (C) fights for the ball with Gambia's Yusupha Bobb (L) during the Group F Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2021 match in Limbe. – AFP

LIMBE, Cameroon: Musa Barrow converted a 90th-minute penalty for Gambia to snatch a 1-1 draw against Mali with the matchday 2 result set to take both teams through to the second round of the Africa Cup of Nations.

Mali went ahead after 79 minutes in Limbe when Ibrahima Kone scored from another penalty, both of which were awarded after the Moroccan referee watched replays on a VAR monitor.

The draw keeps Gambia and Mali level at the top of Group F with four points each. Pointless sides Tunisia and Mauritania meet later on Sunday and a win for either country will bring them into contention.

Group winners and runners-up after three matchdays qualify for the round of 16 along with the best four third-placed sides.

"I am thrilled with our

results so far. We have beaten Mauritania and drawn with Mali, a team 97 places above us in the world rankings", said Belgium-born Gambia coach Tom Saintfiet.

"This Gambian team is packed with talented players and one of them, Musa Barrow, showed great calmness to score from the penalty."

Debutants Gambia are the lowest ranked of the 24 teams in Cameroon and needed a penalty shootout victory over Djibouti to book a place in the group phase of qualifying.

Brighton midfielder Yves Bissouma, who came off the bench in a matchday 1 win over Tunisia, was promoted to the starting line-up by Mali coach Mohamed Magassouba.

The other Premier League player in the Mali team, Southampton winger Moussa Djenepo, retained his place as

the west African nation sought a ninth win in 19 matches in all competitions against Gambia.

SLOW PACE

In 32 degrees Celsius (90° Fahrenheit) early afternoon heat and 75 per cent humidity at the 20,000-seat Stade Omnisport it was no surprise that the match began at a slow pace.

Mali were more impressive in the early exchanges with Bissouma firing a free-kick wide and Djenepo having a header saved by Modou Jobe, who plays in the South African second division.

After being on the back foot for 20 minutes, Gambia were awarded a 35-metre free-kick and Musa Barrow unleashed a thunderbolt that rattled the crossbar. After two cooling breaks within eight minutes to enable the players to drink water, the woodwork came to the rescue of Mali again.

This time Ablie Jallow was the unlucky Gambian as his angled shot rebounded off a post to the relief of Mali goalkeeper Ibrahim Mounkoro.

Djenepo was harshly yellow-carded by the Moroccan referee as half-time approached, ruling him out of the final group match against Mauritania on Thursday as he was also cautioned against Tunisia.

After a slow start to the second half, the match burst into life with Mali having three scoring opportunities in quick succession and Gambia one.

Bissouma fired just over, Adama 'Malouda' Traore narrowly lost a chase for the ball with Jobe, who then blocked with his chest a close-range attempt by Traore. Then came the two penalties with Kone and Barrow holding their nerve to send the goalkeepers the wrong way. — AFP



Oman University Sports Committee unveils 2022 plan

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The Oman University Sports Committee (OUSC) has unveiled the sporting events for 2022. Athletics, cross country, swimming and volleyball are the top domestic championships which will take place in the existing year. OUSC Chairman Dr Salim al Orami, recently met the representatives of sports sections in the national universities and colleges in presence of OUSC board members.

The OUSC officials requested all the university and college students to take part in the domestic sporting events. The top winners in each sport will represent the Sultanate of Oman University team in the Summer World University Game which will take place in China from June 26 to July 7, 2022 and the Arabian Universad Games in Abu Dhabi.

During the meeting at the National University of Science and Technology, Al Orami highlighted on the championships and tournaments which took place in 2021. Despite the challenges posed by Covid-19, the OUSC managed to organise different sporting events under implementation of strict medical protocol to ensure the safety of the athletes and participants.

Table Tennis tournament, badminton, athletics, women's futsal and other remote training courses were the top events held in the previous year.

The year 2022 will begin with the athletics championship and then the cross country tournament. The swimming championship will be followed while Volleyball open championship will take place later this year for both genders. Beach volleyball is another planned event for this year besides basketball 3X3 and chess tournaments.

"We would like to see the participation of many students in all the 2022 sporting events. Attendance of good number of students will give better options for the coaching staff to select the top faces to form the national team. The last two years registered less activities and events due to the pandemic impact. Despite Covid-19 challenges, many events and courses were organised under tight medical protocol. We hope all the students will take part in the 2022 sporting activities", the chief of OUSC said.

The Sultanate of Oman represented by OUSC will host the FISU World University Cross Country Championships in 2024 in coordination with the International University Sports Federation (FISU).

Aussie pacers rip through England to seal Ashes 4-0

HOBART, Australia: Australia's fast bowlers ran through the English batting line-up to claim a comprehensive 146-run win in the fifth and final Ashes Test at Hobart on Sunday, sealing a one-sided series 4-0.

After a bright 68-run opening stand chasing 271 for victory, England collapsed once again to hand the Test to the rampant Australian outfit, losing 10 wickets for 56 runs in 137 balls.

The hosts could easily have won the series 5-0, but for some bad weather and heroics from England's lower order in Sydney, when the outclassed visitors held on for a tense draw.

"To be at the end of a five-Test series with so many positives -- winning 4-0 -- it's huge so I'm really pumped," Australian captain Pat Cummins said.

"It really feels like we are building to something big.

"I can't wait to show our wares overseas so we can really judge ourselves in all conditions."

England had no answers once more in Hobart to the pace barrage of Cummins, Cameron Green, Scott Boland and Mitchell Starc, who shared the wickets between them and took nine English wickets in the night session.

So dominant were the fast bowlers, off-spinner Nathan Lyon did not bowl a ball in the entire match.

England captain Joe Root admitted his side were simply not good enough throughout the series.

"It's been a really tough tour," he said. "We've played good cricket in parts, we've just not been able to structure a whole game together."

"It's something we have to learn from and not go away and keep



making the same mistakes.

"We've been outplayed in all areas and credit to Australia."

The tourists had bowled Australia out for 155 during the middle session, leaving

SCOREBOARD	
Australia 1st innings	303
England 1st innings	188
Australia 2nd innings	155
England 2nd innings	
R Burns b Green	26
Z Crawley c Carey b Green	36
D Malan b Green	10
J Root b Boland	11
B Stokes c Lyon b Starc	5
O Pope b Cummins	5
S Billings c Cummins b Boland	1
C Woakes c Carey b Boland	5
M Wood b Cummins	11
O Robinson b Cummins	0
S Broad not out	1
Extras: (lb 13)	13
Total: (38.5 overs)	124
Fall of wickets:	1-68, 2-82, 3-83, 4-92, 5-101, 6-107, 7-107, 8-115, 9-123
Bowling:	Starc 8-0-30-1, Cummins 12.5-3-42-3, Boland 12-5-18-3, Green 6-1-23-3

ball from Green, only to chop it on, falling for 26 with the score on 68.

Dawid Malan, whose wife gave birth to their first child overnight, started well with a couple of

slashing boundaries, but he fell the same way, chopping on to Green for 10 to end a disappointing Test.

Green struck again when Crawley edged the ball through to wicketkeeper Alex Carey, before Ben Stokes on five threw his wicket away when he pulled a Starc short ball to Lyon at deep square leg.

Root has endured a difficult series after some bright starts, but there was nothing he could do when a Boland delivery barely bounced, shooting through and crashing into the bottom of off-stump.

All Root could do was stand there and shake his head with a wry smile before trudging off, bringing debutant Sam Billings to the crease.

But he didn't last long before he meekly chipped Boland to mid-off where Cummins took a simple catch. — AFP



LEAVING WITH A LEGACY

FOUR OVERSEAS TEST VICTORIES IN A CALENDAR YEAR

Kohli is the only Indian captain to achieve the feat twice. Incidentally, it was under Kohli's captaincy when India achieved the feat for the first time as well. India won Tests in Brisbane, Lord's, Oval, and Centurion in one year, equalling the feat in 2018 when India began their away win campaign in Johannesburg, Nottingham, Adelaide, and Melbourne.

MOST TEST WINS BY ASIAN CAPTAIN IN SENA COUNTRIES

Centurion win was the seventh under Kohli in 23 Tests (Lost 13 and drawn 3) the most by an Asian Captain in SENA countries. In overseas Tests, Kohli has won 16 out of 36 Tests

FIRST ASIAN CAPTAIN TO WIN AT CENTURION

Kohli has become the third captain and the first Asian to register a Test win at Centurion, the first two being England's Nasser Hussain in 2000 and Australia's Michael Clarke in 2014.

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, JAN 16

When Virat Kohli tweeted his resignation from the captaincy of the Indian Test cricket team on Saturday, it shook the cricketing world with its suddenness. For a period of seven years, the 33-year-old from Delhi had revolutionised, yes he did resoundingly, India's cricketing fortunes in the longest form of the game. As former India batsman Wasim Jaffer aptly put it. "When Virat took over as Test captain, India winning a Test overseas was an achievement. Now, if India lose an overseas Test series it is an upset. And that's how far he has taken Indian cricket forward and that will be his legacy. Congratulations on a successful reign." It truly summed up what Kohli has contributed to Indian cricket since taking up the

biggest job in 2014. Kohli's stupendous record as captain in Test cricket with 40 wins in 68 Tests is the most successful by an Indian captain leaving MS Dhoni and Sourav Ganguly behind. Overall, he is fourth in terms of Test victories behind Graeme Smith (53), Ricky Ponting (48) and Steve Waugh (41) and that speaks volumes about the magnitude of the batting great's achievements as captain. When India began their renaissance as a touring Test team in 2018 with that famous win at the Wanderers in Johannesburg, it was the start of something truly special.

5-BOWLER THEORY, SUPREME FITNESS
The legacy of Virat Kohli will not be completed without the mention of his great emphasis of playing with five specialist bowlers and six specialist batters. The concept truly revolutionised the way India



When Virat took over as Test captain, India winning a Test overseas was an achievement. Now, if India lose an overseas Test series it is an upset. And that's how far he has taken Indian cricket forward and that will be his legacy. Congratulations on a successful reign

WASIM JAFFER
Former India batsman

approached Test cricket at home and especially overseas. With such tactical changes, there was a great deal of stress on high levels of fitness as well to take the team to the pinnacle of world cricket. With these two aspects covered, Indian cricket started to climb new heights and conquer all new peaks en route greatness. A historic Test series win in Australia in 2018 can be counted as Kohli's highest point as skipper and a Test series win in England in 2021 being the icing on the cake. Test series victories in Sri Lanka and West Indies also added to his aura with the only blemishes coming in the World Test Championship Final against New Zealand and the now concluded South Africa series, which India were expected to win. **BCCI RUN-INS** Kohli's recent exchanges with the BCCI with regard to his relinquishing of the T20I captaincy

prior to the T20 World Cup may have put some added pressure, but the decision ultimately would have purely been a cricketing one. For a player who set such high benchmarks as batsman and captain and whose best batting performances have come post captaincy, Kohli was probably falling short of the targets he set for himself. The pressures of the pandemic and the natural evolution that fatherhood brings may have played a part as well. However, one can safely assume that the upcoming years will only see Kohli the batting beast raise the bar the way only he can. And that is an added bonanza as far as Indian cricket and its fans are concerned. For everything you did for Indian cricket in the last seven years as the main man, a big thank you and your best years as batsman is still ahead, perhaps. Go well, skip!



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Omani copper mining project to generate RO 200 million in cash flow over 10 years

MINING SECTOR GROWTH:
Sohar International signs agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources LLC to finance major mining project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

Sohar International has signed an agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, an Omani-Australian JV, to provide financing to the tune of RO 19 million for its Wash-hi Majazah copper mining project in Al Mudhaibi in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

Signing the agreement on behalf of the bank was Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer of Sohar International, whereas Sayyid Khalid bin Hamed al Busaidy, Chairman of Al Naba Holding, Devaki Gulabsi Khimji, Managing Director of Al Tasnim Group and Atmaviresvar Sthapak, Managing Director of Alara Resources Ltd represented the shareholders of Al Hadeetha Resources.

Ahmed al Musalmi of Sohar International said, “Regarded as one of the major mining projects in the Sultanate of



Oman, the scale of its operations will contribute significantly to the overall economy, creating in-country value, job opportunities and much more. At Sohar International, we remain invested in supporting ventures that provide sustainable socio-economic benefits to the community enabling people to prosper and grow.”

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, a joint venture between Alara Resources, Al Hadeetha and Al Tasnim, is the first international joint venture company that has been awarded a copper mining license in the Sultanate of Oman for the Wash-hi Majazah project. Located in the Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah, the Wash-hi Majazah copper deposit has

been evaluated under JORC standards with over 16 million tonnes of copper resources and 10 million tonnes of mineable reserves.

With an increase in global demand for copper, the Wash-hi Majazah project provides various channels of growth and prosperity in the economy as well as socioeconomic benefits for the country and local communities such as providing employment for approximately 200 Omanis, local skill developments, opportunities for local suppliers and vendors, infrastructure development and much more.

The plant will be inaugurated in November of this year. “A project of this scale requires

the right kind of support, and we are grateful to Sohar International for extending their project financing services to ensure that our operations are carried out without any hindrance,” said Sayyid Khalid al Busaidy, Chairman of Al Naba Holding. With equity contribution of RO 8 million bringing up the total valuation of the project at approximately RO 27 million, Wash-hi Majazah project will generate cash flows of RO 200 million for a period of 10 years. The project will empower the local community in the governorate of North Al Sharqiyah and create significant in-country value that will have an impact on the neighbouring governorates and regions

The project will empower the local community in the governorate of North Al Sharqiyah and create significant in-country value that will have an impact on the neighbouring governorates and regions

harnessing local capabilities and creating a strong value chain impacting everything from skills to infrastructure development such as upgradation of local STP plants, power, road and water.

A V Sthapak, Managing Director of Alara Resources said: “Alara wishes to thank Sohar International, our fellow JV partners for their valuable support and for their disciplined approach towards realising our mission of becoming a mid-tier mineral producer with a focus on mineral deposits and projects in the Sultanate of Oman. These are exciting times for global copper mining industry and Al Wash-hi Majazah Project is destined to write a new chapter for Oman copper.”

OWWSC to support mining project’s treated water needs



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company (OWWSC) signed an agreement with Al Hadeetha Resources Company to supply the latter’s copper mining project in the Wilayat of Mudhaibi with treated water over the next 10 years. As part of the pact, Al Hadeetha Resources will invest in upgrading the capacity of Al Mudhaibi Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) to 1,800 cubic metre per day. The agreement was signed by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, CEO of the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company and Eng Avigyan Bera, CEO, on behalf of Al Hadeetha Resources, in the presence of Asila bint Salim al Samsamiyah, Investment Promotion Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Dedicated business desk to build on robust Oman-UK ties

ENDURING FRIENDSHIP:
Proposed UK-GCC free trade agreement to unlock major benefits for Sultanate of Oman

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

The Omani Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion will shortly set up a special section to focus solely on trade and investment proposals or queries emanating from the United Kingdom – currently the largest foreign direct investor in the Sultanate of Oman.

Announcing plans for the establishment of a UK-centric section within the Ministry, Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), said the move is in recognition of Britain’s long-standing bilateral relations with the Sultanate of Oman.

“(…) In order to support UK enterprises on their Omani investment journey, my ministry



Indeed, our trade and investment partnership has also flourished — expanding into a range of sectors, most notably oil and gas, technology, infrastructure, defence and education

QAIS BIN MOHAMMED AL YOUSUF
Minister, MoCIIP

will shortly launch a dedicated UK-Oman business,” said Al



Yousuf, while exhorting British businesses to take advantage of investment opportunities, as well as the newly liberalised business and economic environment offered by the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Yousuf made the announcement while delivering the keynote address at a roundtable meeting of the Arab-British Chamber Commerce, held in London week.

Also present from the Omani side were Nasser al Jashmi, Secretary General — Ministry of Finance, Abdulsalam al Murshidi,

President — Oman Investment Authority, Mahad bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour and Abdulaziz al Hinai, the Omani Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

Centuries of mutually beneficial ties between the two countries, Al Yousuf said, were further reinforced in February 2019 with the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Enduring Friendship.

“Indeed, our trade and investment partnership has also flourished — expanding into a range of sectors, most notably oil and

gas, technology, infrastructure, defence and education,” Al Yousuf said.

“As our nation has evolved UK investors have benefited from the skills of our multi-lingual skilled talent, the connectivity and seamless access to regional markets provided by our world-class infrastructure – our award-winning roads, international airports and deep sea ports and the possibilities of our growing and diversifying industrial base. And as a result, the UK is Oman’s largest foreign direct investor,” he noted.

In his address, the Omani minister also welcomed the UK government’s plans to explore new free trade agreements with global economic blocs, notably the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). He referenced in this regard the 12-year-old Oman-US FTA – a trade deal that has made the Sultanate of Oman a “more competitive, dynamic and future-focused economy”, he said.

With UK-Gulf trade presently worth over £30 billion (approx \$41 billion) a year, a UK-GCC

free trade agreement has the potential to not only deepen the strong business ties with the Sultanate of Oman, but also open up opportunities in renewable energy, digital and financial services, technology, education, health and agriculture, he said.

Al Yousuf also urged British investors and professionals to take advantage of the recently launched Investor Residency Programme (IRP) which he described as an “initiative designed to attract high-impact foreign investment and enhance Oman’s economic growth”. The programme enables foreigners meeting specific criteria to acquire renewable five and 10-year residency visas through real estate and commercial investment.

“We understand that successful places of the future will be those that offer an environment where creative and innovative people can make a home, raise a family and pursue a rewarding career. And we are confident the IRP will make the Sultanate of Oman even more attractive to UK business, investors as well as talent,” he added.

OCEC signs partnership agreement with Mubashir

MUSCAT: Aligned with their busy event schedule for 2022, and a growing market demand in the country for premium-position advertising space, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) recently announced a new partnership agreement with Omani out of home advertising firm Mubashir.

The exciting new collaboration will enable OCEC to offer local and international brands a premium opportunity to expand their visibility via indoor/outdoor advertising solutions within the OCEC Precinct.

The project will be delivered in three phases in which each phase will have a combination of static and digital solutions. Furthermore, it will give advertisers the opportunity to deliver targeted messages to



high-profile audiences in an interactive manner, and to gain maximum brand exposure and increasing return on investment.

Oman's premium events and conferencing venue says the planning and site inspections have already begun, and the project's Phase 1 installation is

expected to be completed by Q3 2022.

This first phase will provide a combination of indoor/outdoor advertising solutions incorporating both static and digital spaces. Advertising brands will be able to book their space in advance as soon as the networks

are finalised and announced.

The OCEC Precinct provides the world-class infrastructure and luxurious setting to host all kinds of international, regional and local events. It includes the 5-star JW Marriott Hotel linked to the Convention Centre, the 4-star Crowne Plaza Hotel and

a business park surrounded by a nature reserve, parklands and wadi valley.

According to the OCEC, Mubashir was selected to manage the project's operations due to their long-standing reputation in the local market for offering premium Out of Home (OOH) advertising solutions.

Currently, Mubashir's network consists of over 120 digital screens and billboards across 60 strategic locations throughout Oman.

These collectively generate millions of measured impressions per month for advertisers.

Speaking about the partnership, Said al Shanfari — CEO, OCEC, stated, "This exciting new partnership comes in line with the growing market demand in Oman for premium-

position advertising space. With OCEC's high-profile visitor demographic, and a long list of events scheduled into our calendar for the coming months, the OCEC Precinct will cater perfectly to advertisers seeking maximum high-quality exposure for their brands."

Ali al Raisi CEO of Mubashir had stated, "As the largest digital Out of Home advertising network in Oman, Mubashir brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this collaborative partnership.

We are very proud of this venture with OCEC and we look forward to give our ad partners a new exciting network that will enable brands to promote themselves in one of the most prestigious and strategic national projects of OCEC."

Al Mouj Muscat empowers future Omani women entrepreneurs



MUSCAT: A joint initiative between Al Mouj Muscat and the Omani Women's Association in Seeb is giving women a helping hand through workshops and training to develop their own sustainable small businesses and inspire others.

Since September of last year, 20 women from the Wilayat Seeb community, have attended Ghinsha Workshops which was sponsored by Oman's premier lifestyle destination. The workshop guided them through resin-based jewellery manufacturing skills followed by guidance on how to market their products.

The Omani Women's Association in Seeb is a social and cultural organisation aimed at advancing Omani women across all social and cultural fronts. By joining forces with Al Mouj Muscat, this project has given participating women both the practical skills and a sense of empowerment to shape their own futures by selling beautifully made products to local markets.

This week, the course culminated in a wrapping up ceremony, which was an opportunity to celebrate the programme and reflect on what had been achieved.

Nasser al Sheibani, CEO of Al

Mouj said: "It has been a privilege to support the Omani Women's Association in Seeb with this inspirational initiative which epitomises Omani culture both from a sense of togetherness and by creating opportunities where individuals feel motivated to find, develop and channel their artistic and entrepreneurial skills.

"It's clear that by helping these talented ladies to make the most of their abilities, they have grown in confidence and certainly continue to be an inspiration to their children, community and helping to spread positivity and prosperity throughout our nation."

Jawahir Oman rebrands as 'Majliya'

MUSCAT: Passionately dedicated to uncompromising quality for more than 40 years, Jawahir Oman recently revealed its new brand identity, "Majliya", in a bid to make the brand experience more accessible to customers in the Middle East and beyond. During a special event, attended by Majliya customers, the new Majliya store was unveiled in the commercial district of Al Qurum.

Commenting on this exciting rebrand, Marco Belgrado, General Manager of Majliya, said, "Jawahir Oman was established in 1977 to continue the legacy of the Sultanate of Oman famed jewellery makers through the craftsmanship of refined jewels and exclusive gifts that are the very essence of Oman.

In the last four decades, the brand has become a leader in the luxury jewellery and gift segment, synonymous with uncompromising quality and passion. Today, we proudly



take our brand experience to the next level by making our high-end keepsakes available to anyone in the region, even the world. Through Majliya, we build on four decades of master craftsmanship in the hope to inspire our customers to be true to themselves and discover a unique Middle Eastern luxury brand with global reach."

Majliya is the story of an extraordinary Omani icon with big aspirations: Creating timeless masterpieces that honour the wishes of its clientele and are as individual in spirit as they are. With great respect for

local traditions and customs, each brand element is a story in itself. Colour, design lines, harmony between heritage and modernity, all contribute to the success of this eternal luxury brand that celebrates bridging history and time with a glorious future.

"Majliya continues on a legacy that makes us stand out. As patrons of high-end luxury keepsakes that present a lifetime of stories and memories, our success is the unquestionable proof of the attraction Oman's heritage has on customers around the world", Marco adds.

Bank Muscat holds special year-end draw for Al Mazyona customers

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, recently conducted its Al Mazyona End of Year draw with over RO 1.5 million in high value prizes being given away to 92 lucky winners, in line with the bank's commitment to promoting a strong savings culture in the Sultanate of Oman.

The winners were chosen from amongst customers across the different governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, Asalah Priority Banking and Al Jawhar Privilege Banking during the special prize draws, which were conducted in the presence of Abdulnasir al Raisi, General Manager — Personal Banking, Abdullah bin Tamman al Mashani, General Manager — Products, Amjad Iqbal al Lawati, Deputy General Manager —



Customer Segments and Taya Eid Bait Sabeea, Deputy General Manager — Interior Regions.

As many as 70 winners were chosen from across all governorates in the Sultanate of Oman, from among customers having a minimum balance of RO 1,000 with each winner getting

RO 5,000 in the prize draw.

High-savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 were entered into special draws wherein 10 lucky customers won RO 50,000 each.

Al Jawhar customers maintaining a minimum balance

of RO 10,000 were entered into special prize draws to choose the 10 lucky winners of RO 20,000 each.

Two mega prizes of RO 250,000 each were also given away after conducting a prize draw from among all the customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts. In total, more than RO 1.5 million were given away during the special End of Year draw.

In 2021, a record 7,470 prizes amounting to a total of over RO 11 million were given away to the winners of the Al Mazyona Savings Scheme. The draws were held in line with the bank's strategy of promoting a good savings habit in the country, which improves the financial stability of society and economy as a whole.

Lead in the Ford Edge with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: The stylish and exciting Ford Edge, is now available with and exclusive offer — service 3 years / 60,000 kms, petrol card worth RO 100 and registration 1 year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

The offer is valid until March 9, 2022.

The Ford Edge showcases an exterior that's edgy, refined and elegant. The muscular exterior creates a sleeker, more unique look. Stepping inside the cabin of the Ford Edge you will be greeted with the classic Ford design language. You will also notice impressive buttons, the large touch screen, elegant ambient lighting and the overall high fine fit and finish. The Edge is also equipped with the rotary dial shift knob, which replaces the stick shifter.

The Edge has class leading space for 5 adults and luggage, along with many storage spaces to provide convenience for daily travel. Dual Zone Climate Control, Premium Audio System with 9 speakers, Active-X seats adds to a welcoming interior feel.

The Edge's dashboard gives a modern feel to the interior, while still being intuitive to control. The distinct shapes of the air vents with chrome trim help to accent the dash and center console with a modern look and feel.





Oman International Hospital receives EFQM certification



MUSCAT: Oman International Hospital, the multi-super specialty hospital in Oman, made history by becoming the first recipient of the prestigious European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) certification in the region.

EFQM certification is awarded to distinguish organisations that follow an assessment framework based on “Excellence Model” and have met their established objectives. Organisations that are EFQM certified, perform better by creating data-driven insights backed up by organisational experts to fit priorities, purposes and people.

Dr José Alexandre Cunha, Board Member of Oman International Hospital and Chairman of IGHS Group that manages the hospital said, “We have been in operation for just little over a year in Oman and to be accredited with this certification as the first hospital in the region truly speaks volumes of our commitment and dedication to make this hospital an impeccable landmark in Oman’s healthcare sector. I am truly proud of this recognition for Oman International Hospital.”

He added, “This certification not only reassures the people of Oman the highest standards of treatment when they visit us but also motivates us to better ourselves to earn more such international recognitions. My sincere thanks goes to Oman’s Ministry of Health and other government sectors that have been supporting us.”

Marcelo Pereira, CEO of OIH said, “We are thrilled to have achieved the EFQM certification. What better recognition there can be than getting this accreditation just as the young hospital completes its first year? The certification reiterates our commitment to delivering the highest quality of treatment, services and facilities to the people of Oman and the region.”

OIH was officially inaugurated on January 6, 2022 by HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health in the presence of HE Abdul Salam bin Mohammed al Murshidi, Executive President of Oman Investment Authority, HH Basmal al Said, Shaikha Amal bint Suhail Bahwan, Chairperson of Al Afia Healthcare Development and Investment company and Vice Chairperson of Suhail Bahwan Group Holding, several ambassadors and distinguished guests.

Oman International Hospital is a joint venture by Suhail Bahwan Group Holding, Oman Brunei Investment Company and IdealMed GHS, Portugal.

The high-profile event started off with a ceremonial ribbon cutting by the chief guest HE Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health declaring the hospital fully open with all its services and treatments available to the people of Oman.

OIH is the home to five Excellence Centers, a hybrid operation theatre and several other cutting-edge features and facilities.

Barka Desalination IPO to be based on price-discovery process

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 16

Barka Desalination Company SAOG (under transformation) BDC, owner of the Sultanate of Oman’s largest operating water desalination plant (Barka IWP), says it plans to shortly offer part of its share capital to the public via an Initial Public Offering (IPO) based on the book-building process — a price discovery mechanism adopted by the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) to ensure fair pricing of a scrip floated for the first time.

BDC has announced that it will offer 30,208,800 shares, representing 40 per cent of its share capital, to the public through listing on the MSX.

As anchor investors in the IPO, National Power & Water Co LLC (an investment arm of Bahwan Engineering Group), and Bank Muscat SAOG have committed to invest up to 10 per cent of the IPO at Bzs 145 per share i.e. the highest end of the IPO price range.

“The IPO of BDC is going to be the first IPO in the Sultanate of Oman under the Rules for Pricing Mechanism in Public Offering of Shares introduced by the Capital Market Authority (CMA) last year. The IPO of BDC will adopt several recent mechanisms in the Sultanate of Oman, including a two-phased approach.

Phase I will be an offer to large and institutional investors through a book-building method which is aimed at finding a fair value for the offer shares. This will be followed by a Phase II offer to the retail investors which is based on a fixed price and E-IPO for



“
The IPO is a unique opportunity to invest in a strategic asset that will continue to be held and managed by the marquee founders. We look forward to welcoming new partners in our future journey

PATRICK THIENPONT

CEO, Barka Desalination Co

investor convenience.

The CMA has designed the new rules with the aim of providing clear legal framework for determining fair offer price

objectively and transparently,” the company said in a press statement.

BDC has been promoted by global leaders with vast experience in water industry: ITOCHU Corporation from Japan, ENGIE and SUEZ from France along with WJ Towell Group from the Sultanate of Oman. BDC caters to around 23 per cent of water demand in the country.

BDC generates its revenues pursuant to a twenty year contracted water purchase agreement (WPA) until 2038 with the Omani government-owned Oman Power & Water Procurement Company (OPWP), ensuring stable and predictable cash flows.

Backed by this contracted WPA, BDC plans to offer the shares in the IPO on book-building basis in a price range of Bzs 115 to Bzs 145 which translates into an attractive dividend yield of 8.4 to 10.6 per cent per annum to IPO investors.

Commenting on the proposed IPO, Patrick Thienpont, CEO of BDC said: “Barka Desalination Company officially commenced commercial operations in June 2018 after the remarkable construction of the Barka IWP plant, which was completed in less than 30 months. The IPO is a unique opportunity to invest in a strategic asset that will continue to be held and managed by the marquee founders. We look forward to welcoming new partners in our future journey.”

Bank Muscat Investment Banking, Oman’s largest and most experienced investment banking team, is the financial adviser and sole issue manager for the IPO transaction. BDC has also appointed a large collection syndicate for the IPO, consisting of five banks and two prominent brokerage firms who would be accepting application forms from potential investors in the IPO.

OWWSC to support mining project’s treated water needs

FROM PAGE 13

Qais bin Saud al Zakwani of OWWSC said: “In the first phase, the Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company will supply the

mining project with 300 cubic metres per day of treated water from Al Mudhaibi STP.

After increasing the plant capacity, the volume of treated water supply will increase to

1,200 cubic metres per day.”

Al Zakwani added that the mining company will benefit from this agreement to control the dust resulting from the daily

operational works. In addition, treated effluent (TE) will be used in mining operational works for copper production, as well as using it to make the project area greener.

8th Global HSE Conference to take place next month

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 16

The 8th edition of the Global Health, Safety and Environment Conference and Exhibition will be held from February 13 -16, 2022 at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre under the theme, ‘HSE Excellence — Leadership, Sustainability and Technology’.

The event will be hosted by the Omani Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Saudi Aramco, OQ Group and OPAL. It will take place under the auspices of Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

The four-day forum has been organised by iCONEX, an international events organiser, in coordination with major government entities and many local, regional and international companies. It will be attended by

a number of executives and senior officials from across industries as well as interested professionals in this field to discuss many valuable and exciting topics related to Health, Safety and Environment.

Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, praised the initiative of PDO for hosting this global HSE conference series in the Sultanate of Oman, noting that it reflects the country’s good reputation in organising various international events, and the continuous support of the Omani government towards achieving the desired goals and objectives of global HSE concerns and best practices implementation.

Guided by the Oman Vision 2040, the conference will stress the importance of health, safety, and environment for the development of human capital and its impact on the economic and social development aligned



with the industrial modernisation and production efficiency in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Al Rumhy pointed out that companies in the Sultanate of Oman always strive to develop training plans and work to update all employees on the latest programmes related to country’s industrial modernisation and production efficiency to occupational health and safety, which aims to create a safe working environment free from risks that may cause damage and

loss to facilities and human capital

“The Minister of Energy and Minerals highly values to encourage participation of various companies, technicians, specialists and academics in this conference, which represents a good opportunity to exchange knowledge experiences and best practices.

Wishing all success to the conference participants in achieving the desired goals and benefit from the specialised papers and exhibitors in HSE

development across industries,” PDO said in a press statement.

The conference will include a high profile opening ceremony, 3 High Level Keynote Address sessions, 4 panel discussions, 16 technical sessions and 7 workshops that will address several important topics, such as Process Safety Management, International HSE Management Standards, Pandemic Risk & Response Management for Major Industries, Energy Efficiency & Climate Change, and successful practical experiences in the areas of health, safety, and environment, and many other specialised topics.

The conference will also witness the participation of 100+ expert speakers in this field and is expected to welcome more than 1,500 participants from 25 countries.

In addition to the conference, an accompanying exhibition

will be held with the expected participation of more than 50 companies from various local, regional and international organisation to showcase the latest technology and expertise related to safety, health and environment, which includes devices, equipment and modern system applications.

The participants will have the opportunity to network and meet a large number of global companies participating in this event, including Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Saudi Aramco, OQ, Sadara, MAADEN, Asyad, Occidental Oman (OXY), Bahrain National Gas Company (BANAGAS) Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO), Shell, NAMA Holding Company, Oman LNG, BP, Petrofac, CCED, Daleel Petroleum, ALBA, Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (GPIC) and other international companies.

Everyone wins in India’s telecoms debt reset

There’s plenty of reason to cheer the Indian government becoming the top shareholder in Vodafone Idea, the country’s third largest operator with 253 million subscribers.

A debt-for-equity swap relating to \$2.2 billion of interest payments on deferred mobile phone spectrum and other charges over four years is set to hand New Delhi 35.8 per cent of the financially stretched company.

Britain’s Vodafone ends up with 28.5 per cent, and its local partner, Kumar Mangalam Birla’s Aditya Birla Group, with 17.8 per cent. That’s not too bad for the two big backers, who had been reluctant to put in more capital given the ailing telecoms firm’s \$26.2 billion of net debt, a crippling 11 times its EBITDA.

The surprise acceptance of the deal, part of a wider rescue package proposed by New Delhi in October, creates winners all round.

It significantly increases the chances of Vodafone Idea’s survival, sparing its lenders the threat of bad loans. That, in turn, cuts the chances of a duopoly of private sector operators dominating the giant emerging market. It also reduces the risk of a repeat of the bruising price war that Mukesh Ambani’s \$220 billion Reliance Industries unleashed on the industry in 2016. Operators are only now raising tariffs back towards more sustainable levels. The tycoon is less likely to revert to such aggressive tactics if they directly hurt the government.

Finally, the swap should make it easier for Vodafone Idea to secure outside investment. The company has held talks with international investors for months in an attempt to cut its debt pile. Would-be buyers can now take comfort in the government’s firm commitment to a three-player market.

That’s where Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s newly earned reform credentials matter. The government has no desire to run the operator and is not even seeking a board seat, Vodafone Idea’s management said.

Time will tell, but such assurances sound more reassuring now that New Delhi has committed to selling key state assets like Air India and is planning an initial public offering of the \$200 billion Life Insurance Corp of India.

Having the government on side, even if passively, might also help address other industry headaches ranging from high licence fees and taxes to exorbitant spectrum pricing and endless litigation. For now, Vodafone Idea’s debt reset ticks all the boxes. — Reuters

The surprise acceptance of the deal, part of a wider rescue package proposed by New Delhi in October, creates winners all round



PRODUCTION FALLS

Workers merge the chassis with the body of a jeep frame on the assembly line at the Detroit Assembly Complex – Mack Plant in Detroit, Michigan. Production at US factories unexpectedly fell in December, pulled down by a decline in output at motor vehicle plants amid an ongoing global semiconductor shortage. Manufacturing output dropped 0.3% last month after increasing 0.6% in November, the Federal Reserve said. — Reuters

Regime change in the global economy



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author, a Nobel laureate in economics, is an emeritus professor at Stanford University and a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution

AS INCOMES AND PURCHASING POWER RISE, DOMESTIC SECTORS EXPAND ALONG WITH THE TRADABLE SECTORS

In 1979, W Arthur Lewis received the Nobel Prize in economics for his analysis of growth dynamics in developing countries. Deservedly so: His conceptual framework has proved invaluable in understanding and guiding structural change across a range of emerging economies.

The basic idea that Lewis emphasised is that developing countries initially grow by expanding their export sectors, which absorb the surplus labour in traditional sectors like agriculture.

As incomes and purchasing power rise, domestic sectors expand along with the tradable sectors.

Productivity and incomes in the largely urban, labour-intensive manufacturing sectors tend to be 3-4 times higher than in the traditional sectors, so average incomes rise as more people go to work in the expanding export sector.

But, as Lewis noted, this also means that wage growth in the export sector will remain depressed as long as there is surplus labour elsewhere.

Because labour availability is not a constraint, the key factor with respect to growth is the level of capital investment, which is needed even in labour-intensive sectors. The returns on such investment depend on competitive conditions in the global economy.

These dynamics can produce startlingly high growth rates that sometimes continue for years, even decades. But there is a limit: When the supply of surplus labour is exhausted, the economy reaches the so-called Lewis turning point.

Typically, this will happen before a country has climbed out of the lower-middle-income range. China, for example, reached its Lewis turning point 10-15 years ago, which brought about a major shift in the country’s growth dynamics.

At the Lewis turning point, the opportunity cost of shifting more labour from traditional to modernising sectors is no longer negligible.

Wages start to increase across the whole economy, which means that if growth is to continue, it must be driven not by shifting labour from low- to higher-productivity sectors, but by productivity increases within sectors. Because this transition often fails, the Lewis turning point is when many developing economies fall into the middle-income trap.

Lewis’s growth model is worth revisiting because something similar is happening today. When the global economy started to open and become more integrated several decades ago, massive amounts of previously disconnected and inaccessible labour and productive capacity in emerging economies shifted to the manufacturing and export

sectors, producing dramatic results.

Manufacturing activity relocated from developed countries, and emerging economies’ exports grew faster than the global economy.

Owing to the sheer scale of relatively low-cost labour in emerging economies (especially China), wage growth in advanced economies’ tradable sectors was subdued, even when the activity did not shift to emerging economies.

Labour’s bargaining power was reduced in developed economies, and the negative pressure on middle- and low-income wages spilled over to non-tradable sectors as displaced labour in manufacturing shifted to non-tradable sectors.

But that process is largely over. Many emerging economies have become middle-income countries, and the global economy no longer has any more large reservoirs of accessible low-cost labour to fuel the earlier dynamic.

Of course, there remain pools of underutilised labour and potential productive capacity, for example in Africa.

But it is unlikely that these workers will enter productive export sectors fast enough and at sufficient scale to prolong the pre-turning point dynamics.

The Lewis turning point will have profound consequences for the global economy. © Project Syndicate 2022

Tunisia’s crisis-stricken economy needs ‘deep reforms’

FRANÇOISE KADRI

Tunisia’s crisis-stricken economy needs “deep reforms” such as slashing its vast public wage bill, the International Monetary Fund’s outgoing country chief has said as the government seeks a new bailout.

Jerome Vacher, speaking in an interview at the end of his three-year term as the global lender’s envoy to the North African country, said the coronavirus pandemic had helped create Tunisia’s “worst recession since independence” in 1956.

“The country had pre-existing problems, in particular budget deficits and public debt, which have worsened,” he said. Tunisia’s debts have soared to nearly 100 per cent of Gross Domestic Product.

Its GDP plunged by almost nine per cent in 2020, the worst rate in North Africa, only modestly offset by a three per cent bounceback last year.

That is “quite weak and far from enough” to create jobs to counteract an unemployment rate of 18 per cent, Vacher said. He said young graduates face particular challenges in finding work, despite the country being able to offer “a qualified workforce and a favourable geographic location.”

Since Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was toppled by mass protests in 2011, Tunisia’s troubled democratic transition has failed to revive the economy.

President Kais Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament on July 25 last year, and the government has since asked the IMF for a bailout package — the fourth since the revolution.

Tunisian authorities say they are optimistic about reaching a deal by the end of this quarter.

Vacher said discussions are still at an early stage and that the IMF first wants “to understand what they’re planning in terms of economic reforms.” “It’s an economy that needs very deep, structural reforms, especially to improve the business environment,” the French economist said.

But Vacher added that the government “understands the main challenges and problems, which is already a good basis”, urging Tunisia to come up with a “solid and credible” reform plan. To do that, it must tackle its huge spending on public sector salaries. “The public wage bill is one of the highest in the world,” Vacher said.

In a country of 12 million people, more than half of public spending goes to paying the salaries of around

650,000 public servants — a figure that does not include local authority wages.

Nor does the figure include Tunisia’s hefty public companies, which often hold monopolistic positions across sectors from telecoms to air transport and employ at least 150,000 people at the public expense.

All this drains resources that the state could be investing in education, health and infrastructure, Vacher said.

“There needs to be a big efficiency drive in the public sector (to meet) public expectations in terms of services,” he said.

The IMF has long called for a restructuring of Tunisia’s system of subsidies on basic goods such as petrol and staple foods, which essentially see more state funds doled out to the biggest consumers — a

system Vacher said was unfair.

The lender recommends scrapping subsidies and instead creating a system of targeted cash payments to needy groups.

The IMF’s recommendations are important as not only could it lend billions more to Tunisia, but other bodies including the European Union have said they will condition future aid on the global lender’s green light.

For Vacher, the biggest responsibility lies in the hands of Tunisia’s decision-makers. “It’s up to them to act to find solutions, put forward reforms, a vision and an ambition,” he said.

While many observers have predicted doom for Tunisia’s public finances, Vacher said the situation is “not optimal, but manageable”. But “there is an urgent need to make the public finances more sustainable.” — AFP

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Observer



Loving Oud more than flowers

Fatima al Balushi's journey to becoming a musician wasn't an easy one but it is a journey she is proud she took. Specialising in the beautiful instrument of Oud, her dedication is finally paying off as she plays in some of the biggest events and stages not only in the Sultanate of Oman but also abroad... **P20**



READ



CROSSROADS AND THE HIMALAYAN CRYSTALS

BY C. TONI GRAHAM

An ordinary school day in Middlefield turns into a mystical tale filled with endless adventures of magic, fairies, flying horses and danger.

CONSERVATION

ESO project combats light pollution in Masirah to save sea turtles

BUILDING ON THEIR long-term efforts to conserve the population of nesting Loggerhead sea turtles on Masirah Island, the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), in collaboration with the Environment Authority (EA) and Future Seas Global SPC (FS), have launched a new initiative to combat light pollution.

Sponsored by the US Fish and

Wildlife Service and Sprint for Oman, the latest project aims to help local coastal communities switch to low glare lighting, while raising awareness on the effects of artificial bright lights, which remain one of the main threats to nesting and hatching turtles.

"Nesting turtles need a quiet, dark beach to lay their eggs, but as Masirah develops, lights from the

nearby properties discourage females from nesting. If a female attempting to nest is repeatedly disturbed by recreational activities on the beach, such as movement or artificial light, she will eventually resort to deposit her eggs in the ocean and thus losing all her eggs. The survival outlook for hatchlings is naturally slim and it is our responsibility to secure them a safe nesting and hatching environment" said Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director, ESO.

"In this case, the solution is as simple as changing a lightbulb. We're grateful to all of our supporters on the project, but especially the local community, who have been key custodians in our conservation efforts since the beginning of our sea turtle programme. By working together, we are ensuring that our precious wildlife is still around for future generations to enjoy."

Dr Andrew Willson, Founding Director of Future Seas Global SPC added, "In addition to causing dis-

ruption to the nesting process, artificial lights can disorient the females after nesting, as well as the hatchlings emerging from the nests. We have witnessed, on various occasions, an adult female and hatchlings disorientated by lights, wandering in-land instead of heading towards the ocean. We also found them crawling on the main coastal road which doesn't usually have a happy ending. With the current declining status of the population, it is imperative that we make sure that every hatchling makes it back to sea to support the population recovery. ESO's efforts to conserve the declining loggerhead population on Masirah are essential and we are proud to be a part of the project."

Supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the Omani Women's Association, surveyors took to the field to determine the

lighting sources posing the highest threat to the sea turtles and the modifications required. To further encourage the project, Shaikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al Maajali, member of the Majlis Ash'shura, has offered his house to be the first on which lighting modifications can be made.

Being the Sultanate's of Oman only non-profit organisation focusing on environmental conservation, ESO has been combatting such issues since 2008 as part of the organisation's long-standing Sea Turtle Research and Conservation project, based on Masirah Island. ESO continues to promote a sustainable approach in delivering conservation action, while ensuring the involvement of local communities.

For more information on how to support, make a donation, or to find out other ways to get involved, visit eso.org.om.



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Older date for Ethiopian fossils sheds light on rise of Homo sapiens



VOLCANIC ASH LEFT over from a huge ancient eruption has helped scientists determine that important early Homo sapiens fossils found in Ethiopia in 1967 are older than previously believed, providing fresh insight into the dawn of our species.

Researchers said on Wednesday they used the geochemical fingerprints of a thick layer of ash found above the sediments containing the fossils to ascertain that it resulted from an eruption that spewed volcanic fallout over a wide swathe of Ethiopia roughly 233,000 years ago.

Because the fossils were located beneath this ash, they predated the eruption, the researchers said, although by how many years remains unclear. It previously was believed the fossils were no more than about 200,000 years old.

The fossils, called Omo I, were discovered in southwestern Ethiopia in a region called the Omo Kibish geological formation during an expedition led by the late paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey. They include a rather complete cranial vault and lower jaw, some vertebrae and parts of the arms and legs.

Scientists have sought greater clarity about the timing of our species' origins in Africa.

The new findings conform with the most recent scientific models of human evolution placing the emergence of Homo sapiens sometime between 350,000 to 200,000 years ago, said University of Cambridge volcanologist Celine Vidal, lead author of the study published in the journal *Nature*. Research published in 2017 showed that bones and teeth discovered at a site called Jebel Irhoud in Morocco were more than 300,000 years old, representing the earliest fossils attributed to Homo sapiens. Some scientists have questioned whether those fossils genuinely belong to our species.

The researchers determined the ash's geochemical composition and compared that with other volcanic remnants in the region. They found it matched a light and porous volcanic rock called pumice created during the eruption of Shala volcano about 230 miles (370 km) away. They then were able to date the pumice to determine when the eruption happened.

"I think what is important is to bear in mind is that the study of human evolution is always in motion: boundaries and timelines change as our understanding improves," Vidal said. "But these fossils show just how resilient humans are: that we survived, thrived and migrated in an area that was so prone to natural disasters."

While the study resolved the minimum age of the fossils, their maximum age remains a mystery. There also is an ash layer below the sediment containing the fossils that has not yet been dated. This date would set the maximum age of the fossils. — Reuters

ART



A brush with imagination at a tender age

BY TOBI SALINS

FOR FIVE-YEAR-OLD Ishan, recreating what he sees around him is a passion. He depicts the objects that attract him most with pencil, crayons, oil pastel and water colour.

Be it a pencil drawing or painting, it has a story to tell; perhaps an episode of experience he had while visiting a mall or a wadi or a hilly area.

But these scenes are not recreated in a realistic style, but revisited with an artistic perspective.

For instance, a helicopter flying in the sky is so close a sight for him that he captures it just above his father's car parked on the roadside. His other works such as the night birds, a rabbit on the river bank, a wooden bridge across the river, Santa Claus with a lantern etc too are beautiful artistic expressions in elegant lines and pleasant colours.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when children were forced to stay indoors most of the time as schools remained closed, many of them got ample time to develop their latent talent, and Ishan was no exception.

A KG2 student at Middle East Nursery in Muscat, Ishan has been making maximum use of his leisure time by giving

shape to his thoughts and emotions. In other words, he has been lending colour to his imagination.

The parents of Ishan, who hail from the Indian state of Kerala, spotted their ward's artistic inclinations at an early stage and they have since been encouraging him to develop his skills.

Speaking about his son's initiation into the art, Rajiv Mahadevan, an engineer, recalled that the boy showed his interest in drawing pictures at the tender age of two. The vague images that he tried to draw weren't much different from those his peers would do. However, his mother Devi, who is a doctor by profession, identified the budding artist in him and motivated him to do more works.

"He is yet to be given any professional training. But he learns by himself watching YouTube videos and acquires new techniques step by step and improves day by day", says Rajiv.

The little artist has a long way to go, but he holds much promise.



GREEN MENT - PODCAST



Lakshmi Kothaneth

Keeping up with your new year's resolution

Join us at Green Ment with Dr Hamed al Sinawi on Sunday, 6 pm.

We are in the middle of January 2022. Are you keeping up with your new year resolutions? Or have you given up so soon?

Wondering how you can stay true to your resolutions throughout the year?

People tend to wish for a better version of themselves each year. Most of the time the resolutions aim for better health.

Gym memberships, new bikes, new exercise equipment, new pair of running shoes teamed with sportswear are invested in first but after a while, they are not catchy enough to keep the interest going.

So where do we go wrong?
Dr Hamed al Sinawi says, "It is interesting to note that we all want to make a positive change and seek a healthy lifestyle provided you keep a time frame so that you stick to it. So the idea is to ask, what is my objective for this year? Most importantly, how do I achieve this objective?"

So why don't we stay true to our resolutions?

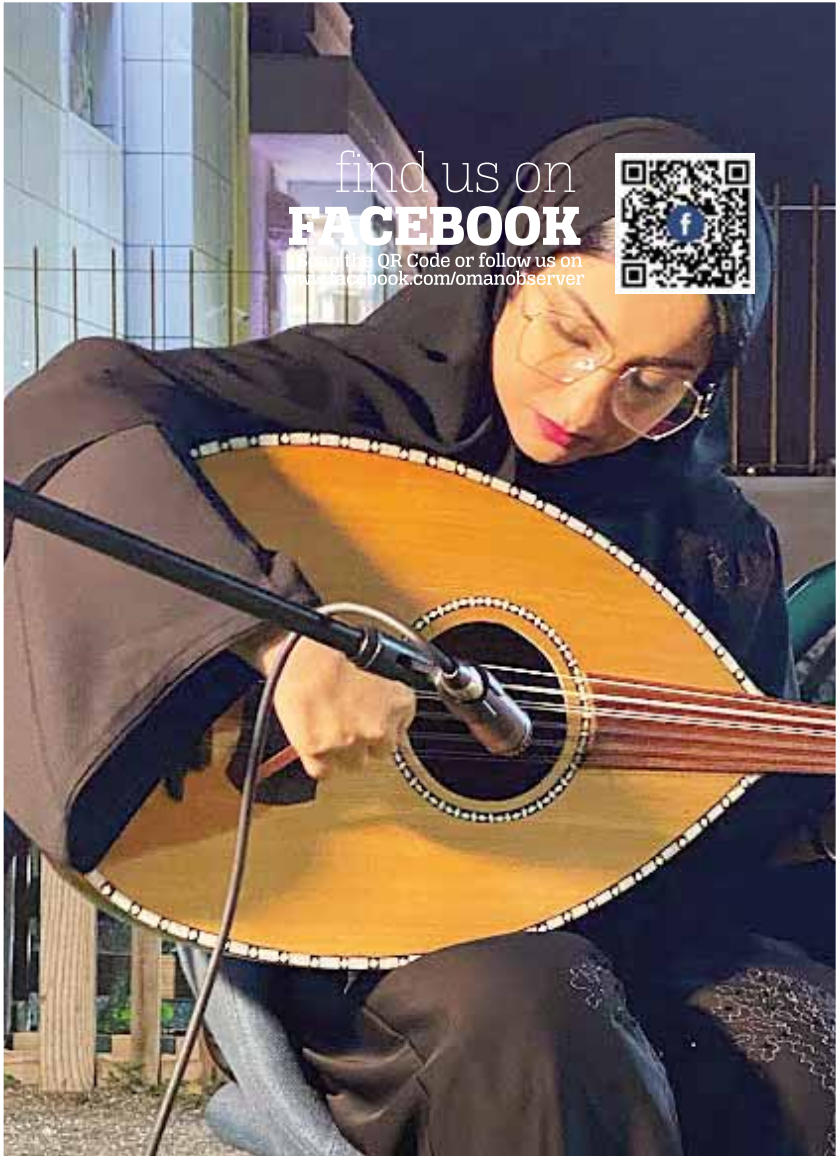
"I think it is a combination of factors. For example, most people identify with losing weight and that is probably difficult as it is not very helpful because we have to be more specific to help ourselves in achieving the objective. First of all, it would help if you would say, 'I want to lose five kilograms in the first two months.' At the same time one has to be realistic by asking, is it achievable?" pointed out Dr Hamed.

The questions to ask are: Do I have to change my schedule to incorporate gym timing? Can I monitor my meal or should I move on to a healthy meal or any specific diet? Does my physical health allow me to try a strict fitness regime? Would willpower help to hold onto resolutions?

Find out more by listening to our podcast, Green Ment on www.omanobserver.om or @omanposcast on Twitter and Oman Observer on Anchor.



Loving Oud more than flowers



BY MAI AL ABRI

For Oud musicians, the physical form of the instrument is so much more than just a source of music, it is an extension of the body and soul by which artists can express themselves. This is how Fatima al Balushi, an Omani Oud player, expressed her love for this instrument.

To be a master oud player, just like other musicians, a person must not only rely on raw talents but rather enhance them by doing meticulous practice, dedicating long hours to knowing the instrument in and out and the music it produces as well as understanding what makes a good musician.

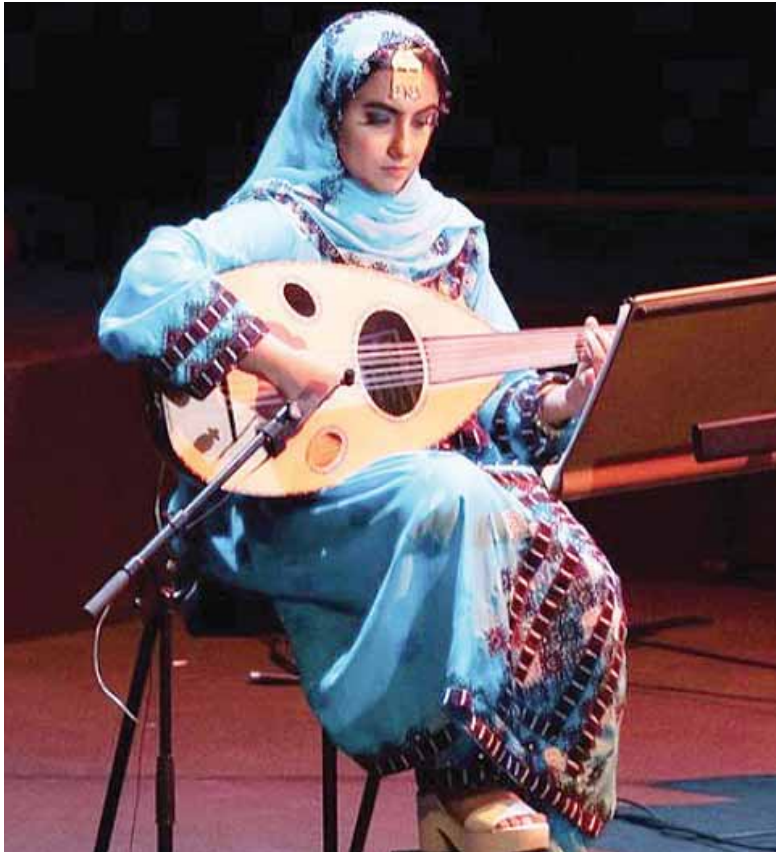
Growing up, Fatima used to go to sleep listening to oud music.

not a field for women to join.

"Even now, I still meet people who can't accept the idea of a woman, me in particular, being a musician. It is difficult to convince them to change their minds and it requires a lot of patience and understanding", she said.

"Thankfully though, after countless hours dedicated to refining my skills, what kept me going are those people who were very kind and supportive. I was fortunate to find a great support system, people who believed that a woman can add beauty to everything in life, people who don't look at gender but rather the talent of the person and a person's ability to master the instrument well", she said.

Other than delivering something different in the world of music, Oud has managed to win the hearts and the minds of western audiences as well.



Even in her dreams, she is lulled and bewildered by the music each string makes.

"It is the only instrument that I could feel gathering all emotions together, moving smoothly to the ears", she said.

From this fascination with the sound it produces and while she was finishing her higher diploma, the Oud performance and solos were her constant companions.

"The credit goes to oud players who have superbly and succinctly presented their music to the audience by incorporating their individual inputs and by presenting it pleasantly", she shared.

"Like other ancient musical instruments, Oud managed to resonate to a lot of people inspiring these people to become admirers and followers. The versatility of the instrument and its uniqueness and ability to affect people from different walks of life is what keeps its legacy alive even in modern times", she said.

"But of course, an instrument is just an instrument. Had it not been for some great musical maestros, the legacy of oud would have not been possible today. We could have easily lost it to oblivion. These maestros definitely include Naseer Shamma and Marcel Khalife", she said.

When she finally decided to take oud playing seriously, Fatima has to contend with the community's perception. When she was starting out, some people believed that oud playing is

"I have participated in the ceremony of the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in the Brazilian capital "Brasilia" to represent the Sultanate of Oman on the National Day in 2014. It was a huge event and it was extremely touching to see them enjoy an oud performance by a woman", she said.

Fatima's dedication to her craft would bring her to different places. Other than performing in different big venues within the Sultanate of Oman, some of Fatima's biggest breaks include being asked to participate in the Sultanate of Oman's National Day celebration in Abu Dhabi in 2014 as well as regaling listeners and guests during the Sultanate of Oman Embassy celebration in Riyadh.

"I am very proud for being part of the celebration of the rural woman products expo that was presided over by The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty Sultan. This invitation to the female musicians highlights the importance given by the royal family to music and female musician in particular", Fatima shared.

"One of the realisations I had which I wanted to share with other female musicians is this: When a woman embarks on a path, whether pursuing a dream or a career, there will be many conflicts and obstacles along the way. To be successful, it would have to take a lot of hard work and patience but above all, it is to keep your eyes on the prize — on the thing that you wanted to achieve", she said.