

HM greetings to Ukraine President

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine on his country's Independence Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his best wishes to President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine. – ONA



P10

OMAN QUALIFY FOR CYCLING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN AUSTRALIA



P13

PYRAMID SCHEME OPERATORS TO BE FINED RO 5,000



P20

HARSHER TIMES INSPIRED THIS SELF-EDUCATED INTERIOR DESIGNER TO PURSUE HIS PASSION



MUSCAT

DEALS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Ministry of Social Development signed four agreements with private sector establishments within the framework of their social responsibility initiatives. The agreements will serve people with disabilities. The first agreement included providing maintenance services for the buildings of Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre of the Directorate-General for People with Disabilities Affairs. The second deals with implementing training programmes in the companies for people with disabilities who are enrolled with the ministry. **DETAILS ON P3**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$97.14 A BARREL

Oman oil price for October delivery on Tuesday reached \$97.14, comprising a rise by \$2.50 from the price of Monday, which was \$94.64. The average price of Oman oil for August delivery has stabilised at \$112.93 per barrel, thus \$5.71 per barrel higher than July delivery. World oil prices gained as Saudi Arabia warned that the Opec+ producer alliance could cut output. Brent was up 1.5 per cent at \$97.92, while US crude rose 1.75 per cent to \$91.96 per barrel.



Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival kicks off

TO STIMULATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LINE WITH OMAN VISION 2040 GOALS

KABEER YOUSUF
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The activities of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival kicked off on Tuesday. The festival is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in cooperation with the Office of Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, Wali's Office at Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and 'Oman Horseback Team'.

The five-day festival started off with a mountain parade on horseback, which began from Alila Jabal Akhdhar. The cavalcade passed through the Municipal Park and proceeded along mountain passages on wards till camping sites. The 50-km march was conducted in two stages by 17 horse riders from Oman and abroad.

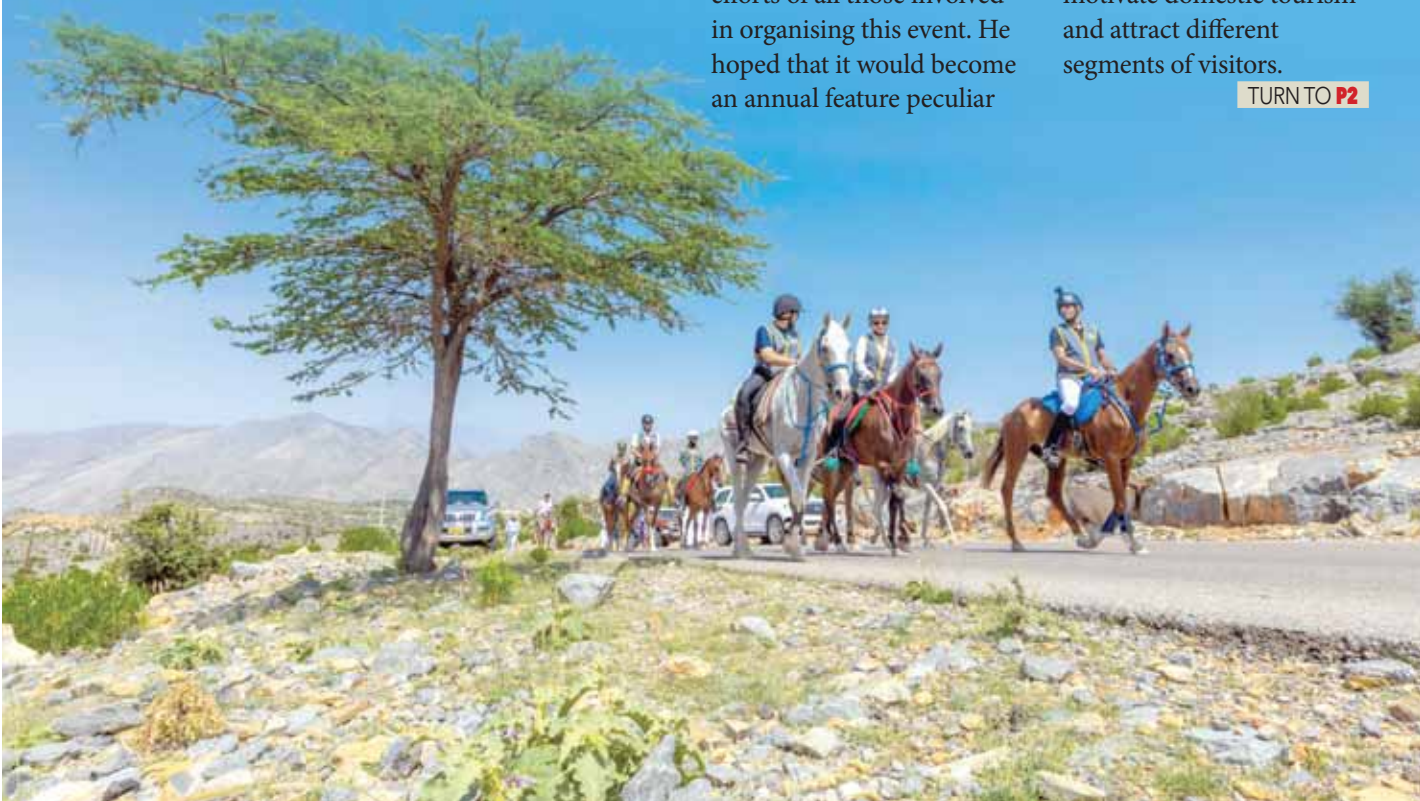
Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed al Busaidy, Acting Wali of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, who was the chief guest at the opening ceremony, said that this is the first tourism event of its kind and appreciated the efforts of all those involved in organising this event. He hoped that it would become an annual feature peculiar

to the Wilayat of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

Speaking on the occasion, Haitham bin Mohammed al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival is a link in a series of activities being implemented by the ministry this year. "These festivals aim at enriching tourist destinations and highlighting the domestic content, including key tourist landmarks in the Sultanate of Oman," said Al Ghassani.

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival comprises a diverse set of entertainment and tourism programmes and activities appealing to young people and adults. It showcases the unique tourism features of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar and the experiences that a visitor could enjoy. Al Ghassani added that the event explores promotional aspects and displays innovative initiatives to motivate domestic tourism and attract different segments of visitors.

TURN TO P2



Severe drought in Europe is 'worsening': EU experts

BRUSSELS: A severe drought hitting swathes of Europe is "worsening" and, while rain is helping some regions, accompanying thunderstorms are causing their own damage, EU researchers said in a report.

The latest monthly analysis by the European Union's Global Drought Observatory (GDO) highlighted the risk of ongoing soil dryness caused by successive heatwaves since May and a "persistent lack" of rainfall.

It maintained its warning issued with the previous report that nearly



An aerial picture shows a drought-affected forest with earlier fall-colour above the village of Roche, western Switzerland. – AFP

half of the EU's territory is at risk of drought, and noted that shrivelling rivers and shrinking water sources are impacting energy generation at power plants and reducing crops.

"The severe drought affecting many regions of Europe since the beginning of the year has been further expanding and worsening as of early August," said the report, published by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre.

Increasing "drought hazard" was predicted for big chunks of Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany,

the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg, Romania and Hungary, as well as non-EU countries Britain, Serbia, Ukraine and Moldova. In all, it calculated that 17 per cent of Europe was now in its red-alert category, higher than the 11 per cent given in July.

"Recent precipitation (mid-August) may have alleviated drought conditions in some regions of Europe. However, in some areas, associated thunderstorms caused damages, losses, and may have limited the beneficial effects of precipitation," it said. — AFP



Oman and Turkey hold energy talks



MUSCAT: Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, received here on Tuesday Fatih Donmez, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources in the Republic of Turkey, and

his accompanying delegation. Donmez is currently visiting Oman to hold talks about ways to enhance cooperation between the two countries. The two sides discussed

different aspects of cooperation in the field of energy and joint investments, notably in the fields of oil and gas, renewable energy and hydrogen, and related industries. — ONA

Over 1.5 million vehicles on roads

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUG 23

The total number of vehicles in the Sultanate of Oman has gone up to 1,575,677 at the end of July this year, from 1,252,233 at the end of 2021. According to statistics issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), private vehicles accounted for 79.5 per cent of the total number of vehicles registered, while the number of



commercially registered vehicles is 235,497, or 14.9 per cent. The number of taxi vehicles is 28,250, or 1.8 per cent, the number of rental vehicles is 26,085, or 1.7 per cent, the number of government-registered vehicles

is 12,109, and the number of motorbikes is 6,545. The number of driving education vehicles is 5,837, while the number of vehicles with temporary registration (numbers that are used for a short period for the purposes of pre-registration inspection and export and import vehicles) is 7,337. The number of agricultural tractors is 1,290 and the number of diplomatic vehicles reached 828.

Outstanding credit extended by ODCs touches RO 28.4 billion

MUSCAT: The total outstanding credit extended by Other Depository Corporations (ODCs), consisting conventional and Islamic banks in Oman, increased by 4.1 per cent to reach RO 28.4 billion at the end of June 2022. Credit to the private sector demonstrated a slight rise of 2.3 per cent (Y-o-Y) to reach RO 23.8.

Non-financial corporations received the highest shares of the total private sector credit, at approximately 46.0 per cent at the end of June 2022, followed by the household sector at 45.4 per cent. The share of financial corporations was 5 per cent while other sectors received the remaining 3.6 per cent of the total private sector credit at the end of June 2022. Total deposits held with ODCs registered a Y-o-Y growth of 5.4 per cent to reach RO 26.3 billion at the end of June 2022. Total private sector deposits increased by 1 per cent to RO 17.5 billion. In terms of sector-wise composition of private sector deposits, the biggest contribution is from household deposits at 52.1 per cent, followed by non-financial corporations at 30 per cent, financial corporations at 15.2 per cent and other sectors at 2.7 per cent. — ONA



EA launches human development initiatives

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority has inaugurated human resources initiatives to achieve various goals, including e-training and self-learning. The authority advances such initiatives to reinforce the culture of learning, provide ongoing development at low cost and furnish a training environment that is rich in educational resources, supervised by experts and specialists and uploaded on local and international e-platforms. The inaugural ceremony included a training dashboard that focuses on converting training data into information, statistics and reports. The process offers a feature of

interactive use, depending on algorithms, and utilises business intelligence to enable decision-making and determine training approaches. The ceremony also included the induction of a Professional Certificates project that lends support to holders by providing them with updates in their respective areas of specialisation. Held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Human Resources Development Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Labour, the opening ceremony touched on practices of human development in the governorates of Al Dhahirah, North Al Sharqiyah and North Al Batinah. — ONA

Dialogue on tourism opportunities for SMEs

SALALAH: Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) has organised the second edition of a business dialogue titled “Tourism Opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in Dhofar”. The opening session was held under the auspices of Halima bint Rashid al Zar’ee, Chairperson of the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED). The session discussed promising sectors available for SMEs in the Governorate of



Dhofar, challenges and incentives aimed at empowering SMEs, entrepreneurs and investors. It covered scopes for funding and the extent to which the SMEs are ready to take up ventures.

The session also touched on opportunities that may constitute projects for SMEs in sectors of foodstuff, adventure tourism, ecotourism, health tourism, housing, transport, electronic

applications in tourism, cosmetics and heritage. Emphasis was laid on the sustainability of such businesses, so that they could run throughout the year. — ONA

Huge response to call for blood donation

FROM PAGE 1
“Generally, blood banks face difficulty in providing negative blood types. If your blood type is negative, do not delay to donate, and remember that there are many who are in need of your blood donation,” the Central Blood Bank said. An official at the blood bank said: “We can collect 500 units of blood within two days, and I am sure that the community will respond. We are facing a fall in

number of blood donors and in donation campaigns, and we urge the community to help restore the stockpiles to normal. One person’s donation saves many lives.” Allaying any fears about blood donation, the Central Blood Bank said that around 450 ml of blood is collected from the donor, which represents a small proportion of the blood in a person’s body (approximately less than 10 per cent of the donor’s blood volume).

Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival kicks off

FROM PAGE 1

A display of the ‘beauty and the beast’ horse shows, and theatre for children and recreational activities for the entire family are lined up to welcome tourists from across the region and beyond. “A kaleidoscopic view of the beauty of the mountain that is famous for its labyrinth of wadis and terraced orchards are on display during the 5-day festival,” Mohammed al Araimi, Head of Tourism Promotion at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said. The activities of special significance in the festival include promotion of pomegranate season and its importance to the local community. The festival will see active participation of both public and private sectors. Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Tourism Festival is held by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism — in

cooperation with government and private establishments — to stimulate tourism development in line with Oman Vision 2040 goals. These include enhancing social welfare and bringing about balanced economic development in the country’s governorates. The festival site is located at a height of 3,000 metres above sea level. Al Jabal Akhdhar, also known as the Green Mountain, is one of the highest mountains with cool and healthy climate that gives an escape from the scorching heat around.





Govt treasury bills worth RO 10m issued

MUSCAT: A tender of government treasury bills, issue number 164, worth RO 10 million was issued this week.

Treasury bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds. The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the issue manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the issue are as follows: The total value of the allotted treasury bills amounted to RO 10 million, for a maturity period of 182 days, from August 24, 2022 until February 22, 2023. The average accepted price reached RO 98.330 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 98.305 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 3.34918 per cent and 3.40607 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 3.00 per cent while the discount rate on the treasury bills discounting facility with CBO is 3.5 per cent.

Furthermore, treasury bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Four pacts inked to serve people with disabilities

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development on Tuesday signed four agreements with private sector establishments within the framework of their social responsibility initiatives. The agreements will serve people with disabilities.

The first agreement included providing maintenance services for the buildings of Al Aman Rehabilitation Centre of the Directorate General for People with Disabilities Affairs.

The second agreement deals with implementing training programmes in the companies for people with disabilities who are enrolled in the Ministry of Social Development's Centre of Evaluation and Professional Training.

The two agreements were signed by Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-



Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, Abdulmalik bin Abdulkarim al Balushi, Chief People Officer of Asyad Group, and Eng Abdulaziz bin Said al Wahaibi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of National Construction Line Company.

The third and fourth agreements deal with implementing training programmes for people with disabilities who are enrolled in the Centre of Evaluation and

Professional Training of the Ministry of Social Development.

Those agreements were signed by Hamoud bin Mardad al Shabibi, Director-General of People with Disabilities Affairs, Ibrahim bin Ali Awlad Thani, Head of Human Resources at Al Shanfri Trading and Furniture Company, and Abdunnasser bin Ali al Kharousi from Al Ginan Al Khadra Nursery. — ONA

Oman Air launches global sale with 20% discount

MUSCAT: Oman Air has announced the launch of its new global sale campaign offering discounts of up to 20 per cent off Business and Economy Class fares on selected international destinations.

The global sale is Oman Air's latest commitment to its loyal customers offering irresistible choices to a wide selection of international destinations. Customers can enjoy savings on a wide range of selected international flights via the airline's Muscat hub.

The sale will run from August 22 to 31 and travel will be valid from September 15 to March 31, 2023 for both one-way and return flights.

To take advantage of this special offer, guests are encouraged to book early to experience the signature Omani hospitality accessible to guests on every flight. Bookings can be made through Oman Air's website (omanair.com), the Oman Air app, Oman Air sales offices and Oman Air appointed travel agents.

Oman Air is renowned for its exceptional award-winning products and services, both in the air and on the ground. The airline offers wide-body service, including Boeing 787 Dreamliner and Airbus 330 in addition to single-aisle Boeing 737.

THE LAND OF FRANKINCENSE EXHIBITION



The National Records and Archives Authority recently conducted a one-week exhibition on the land of frankincense at Salalah International Airport's Departures Hall. The exhibition, held between August 15 and 22, focused on displaying historical documents about the Sultanate of Oman, Dhofar, Omani coasts, maps of cities, and rare pictures and maps that talk about the nobility and authenticity of the Sultanate of Oman. This exhibition explained the expansion of the Omani empire and some of the landmark events associated with the country over the ages.

Jaslok Hospital opens coordination centre

MUSCAT: Jaslok Hospital, a leading hospital in the Indian financial capital, Mumbai, on Tuesday launched a Coordination Centre in Muscat.

Jaslok Hospital has partnered with Al Miri Coordination Centre and Magnus Medi to help people of from Oman to receive end-to-end services. These services will include teleconsultations, appointment booking, treatment cost discussions, hotel services,

and sim card facilities amongst others.

It has been observed that many Omanis visit Jaslok Hospital for advanced treatments, and hence the launch of this coordination centre is the need of the hour.

Jitendra Haryan, CEO of Jaslok Hospital, said, "I believe this initiative is going to be impactful in the field of healthcare, and with the success of this project, we look forward to collaborating

with many more countries."

Mihir Vora, founder, and CEO of Magnus Medi, said, "Jaslok Hospital is well-known to Omanis and we believe this coordination centre will substantially enhance the service delivery and help provide comfort to the patients." Magnus Medi is thankful to the management team of Jaslok Hospital, Abdul Nabi of Al Miri, and the Government of Oman for their support in the initiative.

JAMMA: A gem among ancient villages



TEXT & PHOTOS
BY YAHYA ALSALMANI

ON the banks of the wadi, about 25 kilometres from the centre of the Wilayat of Al Rustaq, lies a village called Jamma. This small village is a confluence of the wadis of Al Rustaq.

Once on the plateau on which the village is located, the visitor can see the panoramic view of

the "Al Mabsali" palm trees that bear fruit annually.

Farmers irrigate their farms either through the artesian wells or through the channels of the "Al Buwayrad", "Al Ghail" and the "Mansour" aflaj. In addition to the diversity of water resources, this village is calm and characterised by its archaeological landmarks. Among the most important

archaeological landmarks in this village are the old town market, which is located on the western side, and ancient houses such as Beit Al Souk and "Bani Harras Fort", and there is another fortress located in the town of "Al Mansour". It is a residential fortress that was inhabited by the ancient Al Busaidi families.

There is also "Al Khuba" which is a big pool of water that

ranks among the most important tourist attractions in the village. Village youth frequent this place for adventure.

The residents of this village are famous for their interest in agriculture and handicraft industries such as pottery, decorative products, daggers and swords.

Most of the old houses in this village are exposed to collapse

and erosion, and their doors and windows are decorated with their ancient inscriptions. Most of the villagers moved to nearby places, where they built more modern homes. But this neighbourhood remains an archaeological symbol that tells the history of this beautiful village.

"As soon as I arrive in this village on my way to my house

near it, it enlivens my childhood memories of peace and naughtiness at the same time.

I am pained by the situation of its buildings that are falling over time. It is necessary to stand on such neighbourhoods that summarise a precious historical period, and we suggest thinking about maintaining and investing in them seriously," locals proposed.



AMONG
THE MANY
LESSONS LEARNED
FROM THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC ARE HOW
DANGEROUSLY UNPREPARED THE
WORLD HAS BEEN TO DEAL WITH
SUCH PANDEMICS AND THAT
INFECTIOUS DISEASES
PHYSICIANS ARE PIVOTAL TO
REAL-TIME RESPONSE TO
PUBLIC HEALTH
EMERGENCIES



T H E

INFECTIOUS

T H R E A T

SAMUEL KUTTY
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Although the infectious disease threat is relatively modest as compared to that of non-communicable diseases in the Sultanate of Oman, the trend is up.

“Curiously, infectious diseases are still with us, and they are likely to remain eternal to our existence with their challenge and fascination,” says a report in Oman Medical Journal.

Infectious diseases are a cognitively comprehensive discipline that is almost unique in modern medicine with its capability to cure and prevent disease, identify specific disease causes (microorganisms), and deal with diverse outbreaks and pandemics.

“Contrary to the non-communicable diseases, the true burden of infectious diseases in Oman is largely underestimated, mostly overlooked, and not entirely perceived,” says the report by Dr Abdullah A Balkhair, Infectious Diseases Unit, Department of Medicine,

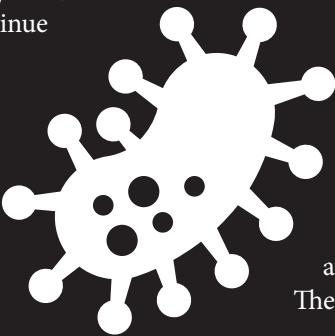


Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.

“Unlike all other medical specialties, infectious diseases are consistently changing, habitually unpredictable, frequently stimulating, and incredibly rewarding,” the report emphasises the need for more physicians in this field.

Titled “Adult Infectious Diseases Fellowship Training Program: The Time is Now”, the report at the outset pays tribute to Dr Sharon Thoms, who arrived in Muttrah in 1909 to set up the first medical mission in Oman. Nearly a hundred years ago, infectious diseases like cholera, plague, malaria, leprosy and leishmaniasis have all been recognised and reported in Oman.

“More than a century later, infectious diseases continue to pose substantial, albeit of different disease spectra and complexities, a challenge in Oman with irrefutable significant health burden and societal



impact,” Dr Abdullah points out in the report.

With the recent Covid-19 pandemic and its associated health, economic and societal impact, there is a pervasive understanding of the damaging ways in which infectious diseases affect the world today.

Among the many lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic are how dangerously unprepared the world has been to deal with such pandemics and that infectious diseases physicians are pivotal to real-time response to public health emergencies.

“One of the most valuable and often underappreciated qualities of infectious diseases physicians is their ability to direct the care of mystifying and perplexing cases,” the report that appeared in the July edition of the Journal points out.

They are also often challenging and seemingly underappreciated, at least until needed. These attributes appear to

be relatively distinctive to this field with an ever-expanding catalog of challenging pathogens and a never-deprived kinetic armamentarium.

Despite “infectious diseases physicians are the stewards of this arguably most impactful specialty of all medicine”, the report claims while expressing concerns that “adult infectious diseases physicians, albeit are insufficient over the past 10 years”.

Allowing for projected population growth for 2030 and using a conservative estimate of 0.4/100,000 population, an extra 13 trained adult infectious diseases physicians are needed to meet the 2030 national healthcare needs, the report points out.

Moreover, several key factors are likely to increase demand shortly, further augmenting



the current mismatch between supply and demand for infectious diseases physicians in Oman.

These include the potential impact of emerging infectious diseases, growing global travel, antibiotic resistance, the expansion of stewardship responsibilities, and overall population growth especially the growing number of elderly, immunocompromised, and those requiring advanced and complex medical and surgical interventions.

Given the current and projected scarcities joined with the ever-increasing complexities of infections necessitating specialist-level care, Dr Abdullah stresses founding a sustainable, locally administered fellowship training programme to ensure enough future infectious diseases physicians in Oman.

This, he says, will offset the imbalance between supply and demand as it is a strategic national health necessity and a realisation of Oman’s 2040 vision.



Sadrists launch sit-in outside top Iraq judicial body

BAGHDAD: Several hundred supporters of cleric Moqtada Sadr launched a sit-in outside Iraq's top judicial body on Tuesday, ratcheting up tensions in a showdown with a rival alliance.

Caretaker Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi cut short a visit to Egypt, where he had been due to take part in a five-nation summit, to return home to monitor developments.

Kadhemi "called on all political parties to calm down and to take advantage of the opportunity for national dialogue to get the country out of its current crisis", his office said.

The standoff between the Sadrists and their rivals in the Coordination Framework has triggered an intensifying war of words, but so far no violence.

The Sadrists, who have already been camped outside parliament for the past three weeks, pitched tents outside the gates of the judicial body's headquarters in Baghdad, AFP correspondents reported.

They carried placards demanding the dissolution of parliament and new elections, 10 months after an inconclusive poll failed to deliver a majority government.

Even though his political bloc has taken part in previous administrations, securing top jobs



Supporters of Moqtada Sadr gather outside the headquarters of the Supreme Judicial Council in Baghdad on Tuesday. – AFP

in government ministries, Sadr himself has managed to keep above the political fray.

He is lionised by his supporters as an outsider dedicated to the fight against a corrupt elite.

"We want to stamp out corruption," said Abu Karar al Alyawi, a Sadr supporter among

those demonstrating. "The judicial system is being blackmailed, or maybe it's corrupt too."

On August 10, Sadr gave the Supreme Judicial Council one week to dissolve parliament to end the political deadlock, but the council ruled it lacked the authority to do so. In the face of Tuesday's protest,

the council announced it was suspending work until further notice.

TALKS BOYCOTTED

The UN mission in Iraq said it respected the right to "peaceful protest", while urging "respect for state institutions".

Police deployed in numbers around the headquarters, which unlike parliament, lies outside Baghdad's high-security Green Zone government and diplomatic compound.

Following the start of the sit-in, the Coordination Framework said it would "refuse any call for direct

dialogue" with the Sadrists, until they put an end to "the occupation of institutions".

The Coordination Framework, which has been holding a sit-in of its own just outside the Green Zone, wants a transitional government before new polls are held.

They include former paramilitaries of the Hashed al Shaabi network, and the party of ex-prime minister Nuri al Maliki, a long time Sadr foe.

Kadhemi, the prime minister, last week convened crisis talks with party leaders, but they were boycotted by the Sadrists.

Since the aftermath of the US-led invasion of 2003, Iraq has been governed under a sectarian power-sharing system that reserves the premiership for the country's majority community.

The Sadrists insist that after emerging from 2021 elections as the largest bloc in parliament — but not an absolute majority — the constitution be amended to give it the right to nominate the prime minister, something their opponents strongly oppose.

The persistent failure of the rival factions to form a government in a country blighted by ailing infrastructure and crumbling public services has sparked mounting public frustration.

— AFP

Iran asked for 'adjustments' to proposed EU nuclear deal: Borrell

MADRID: Iran requested "some adjustments" to a draft agreement on reviving a 2015 nuclear accord with major powers proposed by the European Union, the bloc's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said on Tuesday.

During an interview with Spanish public television TVE, Borrell said "most" countries involved in nuclear talks with Iran agreed with the proposal, but that the United States had not yet responded.

The 2015 agreement between Iran and six world powers — Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States — gave the Islamic republic sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme.

The deal was designed to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon — something it has always denied wanting to do.

But in 2018, then US president Donald Trump, a strong critic of the deal, unilaterally pulled out and slapped heavier sanctions on Iran.

Earlier this month, after more than a year of talks coordinated by Borrell and his team, the EU submitted what it called a "final" proposed text — which has not been made public — to revive the accord.

"Iran responded by saying 'yes but', that is to say they want some adjustments," Borrell told TVE, without providing further details.

— AFP

Russia's Lavrov condemns Israeli missile strikes on Syria

MOSCOW/TEHRAN: Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Tuesday condemned Israeli missile attacks against Syria, in comments that underline a chill in once-warm Russian-Israel relations.

Lavrov was speaking at a joint news conference alongside his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad.

"We strongly condemned the dangerous practice of Israeli strikes on Syrian territory," Lavrov said.

"We demand that Israel respect the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council and, above all, respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria."

Israel hit Iranian targets in a series of strikes on August 14 near Syria's President Bashar al Assad's ancestral home region and also close to Russia's main Syrian bases on the Mediterranean coast, regional intelligence and Syrian military sources said.

Speaking at the same news conference in Moscow, Mekdad gave Lavrov his backing to Russia's actions in Ukraine, which Moscow calls a "special military operation" to disarm and "denazify" its smaller southern neighbour.

IRGC GENERAL KILLED

Meanwhile, a general of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has been killed while "on a mission" in Syria, Iranian state media reported on Tuesday.

"General Abolfazl Alijani, a member of the IRGC's ground forces who was on a mission in Syria as a military adviser, was martyred on



Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (R) with his Syrian counterpart Faisal Mekdad during a press conference following their talks in Moscow on Tuesday. – AFP

We strongly condemned the dangerous practice of Israeli strikes on Syrian territory

SERGEI LAVROV
Russia's Foreign Minister

Sunday," the state broadcaster said on its website.

It described Alijani as a "defender of the sanctuary", a term used for those who work on behalf of Iran in Syria or Iraq, without providing more details of the attack in which he was killed.

Iran says it has deployed its forces in Syria at the invitation of Damascus and only as advisers.

In early August, funeral processions were held in Tehran and other Iranian cities for five IRGC members killed in Syria several years ago, after their bodies were recovered and identified

through DNA testing,

TALKS WITH TURKEY

Also on Tuesday, Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, in a further softening of Ankara's stance towards Damascus after a decade of hostility, that his country does not have preconditions for dialogue with the Syrian government.

Turkey has cut diplomatic relations with Damascus early in the 11-year conflict. But the two countries' intelligence chiefs have maintained contact and recent comments from President Tayyip Erdogan's government suggest a move towards political engagement, alarming Assad's opponents in the remaining pocket of rebel-held Syria.

Cavusoglu said two weeks ago that the Syrian opposition and government must be brought together for reconciliation, and Erdogan said diplomatic relations could never be fully cut.

— Reuters, AFP



ROYAL OMAN POLICE

ANNOUNCEMENT

Royal Oman Police represented by the Directorate General of Customs announces it will hold an electronic auction to sell trucks and vehicles in addition to miscellaneous goods through Bayan System on Tuesday & Wednesday August 30th & 31st, 2022 in accordance to the requirements mentioned below. Inspection of trucks and vehicles shall be made at Al Mazoonah Customs Post whereas the other goods' inspection shall be made at the Directorate General of Customs on Sunday and Monday corresponding August 28th & 29th, 2022.

- ◆ Bidder shall register in Bayan System.
- ◆ The buyer shall pay brokerage fees amounting to 3% of the total value of the goods.
- ◆ A RO 100-guarantee shall be paid by the bidder.
- ◆ The buyer shall pay the amount of the goods electronically no later than (48) hours from the date of the auction.
- ◆ Goods are delivered to successful bidder after clearing the procedures of customs statement and providing clearance for restricted goods if any.
- ◆ The Directorate General of Customs shall not bear responsibility for damage incurred to the goods after the sale ends.
- ◆ Successful bidders shall refer to the Directorate concerned to collect the goods between 31 August 2022 & 6 September 2022. Note that a financial fine shall be imposed after the period expires.



GS Inima BARKA LLC

Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV/07/2022 for the supply Warehouse Tools

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC have been awarded with the Engineering, Procurement and Construction of Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.

Omani companies are invited to quote their most competitive price for supply Warehouse equipment and tools. To participate to bidding please send copy of CR, copy of VAT certificate and copy of MSE card if any, to e-mail: barka.v.site@inima.com, subject TND GSI BV/07/2022 within **30th Aug 2022 1:00 PM**.

- A reply with full list of items to be quoted will be reverted to candidate same day.
- Bid closing date: 7th September 2022 1:00PM.



Malaysian ex-PM Najib goes to jail for graft after losing final appeal

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia's top court ordered former prime minister Najib Razak to begin a 12-year prison sentence on Tuesday after upholding a guilty conviction on charges related to a multi-billion dollar graft scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

The Federal Court ruling caps the stunning downfall of Najib, who until four years ago governed Malaysia with an iron grip and suppressed local investigations of the 1MDB scandal that has implicated financial institutions and high-ranking officials worldwide.

Investigators have said some \$4.5 billion was stolen from 1MDB - co-founded by Najib during his first year as prime minister in 2009 - and that over \$1 billion went to accounts linked to Najib.

Najib, wearing a dark suit and tie, sat in the dock as the verdict was read out.

His wife, Rosmah Mansor, who is also facing corruption charges, and three children were seated behind him.

Security officials then gathered around the bespectacled former premier and he was later seen leaving court in a black car with police escort.

A court official and sources close to Najib said he was taken to Kajang Prison, about 40 km away



Najib Razak greets supporters as he walks out during a break in the trial during an appeal against his corruption conviction over the 1MDB financial scandal, at the federal court in Putrajaya, on Tuesday. — AFP

from capital Kuala Lumpur. "This is unprecedented.

Najib will be remembered for his many firsts, the first prime minister to lose a general election, the first to be convicted," said Adib Zalkapli, Director at political risk consultancy BowerGroupAsia.

The British-educated son of Malay nobility held the premiership from 2009 to 2018, when public anger over the graft scandal brought election defeat, and dozens of corruption charges

were lodged in following months.

Najib, 69, was found guilty by a lower court in July 2020 of criminal breach of trust, abuse of power and money laundering for illegally receiving about \$10 million from SRC International, a former unit of 1MDB.

He had been out on bail pending appeals. The former premier, who had pleaded not guilty, was sentenced to 12 years' jail and a 210 million ringgit (\$46.84 million) fine. The

wide-ranging 1MDB scandal prompted the US Department of Justice to open what became its biggest kleptocracy investigation. Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim said the verdict proved the power of the people.

"The people made the decision in 2018 to ensure an independent judiciary and that the country is clean of bribery. That decision allowed proceedings to be brought professionally," he said.

—Reuters

Khan summoned to court as legal woes rise

KARACHI: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan was summoned on Tuesday to appear in court next week as prosecutors consider charging him with contempt following a weekend speech in which he threatened police officers and a magistrate, officials said.

The possible contempt charge comes on top of charges under an anti-terror law that police filed against Khan over the same televised speech.

Khan had complained about sedition charges an aide faces for allegedly inciting mutiny in the military.

"We will not spare you," Khan said in the speech that named the police chief and the judge involved in the case against the aide. "We will sue you."

Khan has been campaigning for new elections since being forced to step down this year but a conviction would disqualify him from standing, legal experts said.

"The court... summons him to appear before the court in person on August 31," Jahangir Khan Jadoon, Advocate General Islamabad, said.

The court also asked the Chief Justice at Islamabad High Court to constitute a full court bench to proceed with the contempt case, he added.

"It is a criminal conviction," retired judge Shaiq Usmani told television channel Geo News, adding that Khan could face six



months in jail if convicted.

The South Asian nation has seen at least one prime minister, and some lawmakers, unseated after such disqualifications.

The use of anti-terrorism laws as the grounds for cases against political leaders is not uncommon in Pakistan, where Khan's government also used them against opponents and critics.

His political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), has dismissed the accusations as being politically motivated, saying they were being used to block him from leading anti-government rallies.

Khan, prime minister from 2018 until losing a confidence vote in parliament in April, came to power with what political analysts said was the support of the military on a conservative agenda that appealed to many middle-class and religious voters.

But analysts said he fell out with the military after a dispute over the appointment of a spy chief.— Reuters

Storm forces Philippine schools to shut day after reopening

MANILA: Schools were ordered shut across the northern Philippines on Tuesday — a day after many resumed in-person learning for the first time since Covid-19 hit — as torrential rain and strong winds pounded the main island of the archipelago.

Severe tropical storm Ma-on struck the northeast coast of Luzon around mid-morning, raking the largely agricultural region with gusts of up to 185 kilometres an hour, the state weather service said.

Two people were injured by falling trees in the mountainous province of Cagayan where intense rain caused the main river and its tributaries to swell overnight, provincial disaster official Ruelie Rasping said.

"We're currently being hit by strong winds and heavy rain. The



Residents watch the overflowing Pinacanan River due to heavy rains brought about by tropical storm Ma-on in Ilagan City, Isabela province, on Tuesday. — AFP

Cagayan River is rising," Rasping said.

The provincial capital Tuguegarao was drenched with 98 millimetres of "torrential" rain over a three-hour period after the storm made landfall, an official at the state weather bureau said.

Ma-on was expected to sweep

in a northwest direction across the country and head out over the South China Sea late on Tuesday or early on Wednesday.

Some low-lying areas of the capital Manila were left in knee-deep floodwater, as the storm intensified the southwest monsoon. — AFP

China battles forest fires

SHANGHAI: The southwestern Chinese regions of Chongqing and Sichuan were battling fires on Tuesday as they awaited a long-anticipated drop in temperatures over the next week, but the country's important autumn harvest remained under serious threat.

Officials warned this month that temperatures were rising faster in China than in the rest of the world and a record-breaking heatwave has raised concern about its ability to adapt to rapid climate change and conserve already scarce water resources.

Satellite images showed Poyang Lake, which usually takes in floodwaters from the Yangtze River over the summer, at a fraction of its normal size for the time of year, reducing drinking water supplies for nearby communities, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Water from the Three Gorges



A firefighter puts out wildfire that broke out in a forest amid hot temperatures, in Luzhou, Sichuan province of China, on Monday. — Reuters

and Danjiangkou reservoirs had already been released to alleviate downstream shortages, the broadcaster said.

The drought posed a "severe threat" to China's autumn crops, the ministry of agriculture said in a notice, adding that authorities had been instructed to do everything they could to increase water supplies and protect the harvest. — Reuters

HONG KONG

Covid 'caused' decline in births, marriages

China's National Health Commission said Covid-19 has contributed to the decline in the country's marriage and birth rates that has accelerated in recent years due to the high costs of education and child-rearing.

Many women are continuing to delay their plans to marry or have children, it said, adding that rapid economic and social developments have led to "profound changes". Young people relocating to urban areas, more time spent on education



and high-pressure working environments also played their part, it added. Demographers said that "zero-Covid" policy may have caused damage on their desire to have kids.

NEW DELHI

Hearing on plea challenging convicts' release

India's Supreme Court will hold a hearing on a petition challenging the release last week of 11 men convicted of gang-raping a pregnant woman during riots in 2002 in Gujarat. Last Monday, authorities in the Panchmahals district of Gujarat released the men after considering the time they had served after their conviction in 2008 and their behaviour while jailed. However, critics contend that their discharge contradicts the government's stated policy



of uplifting women in a country with numerous instances of violence against them. The court verbally agreed to hear a Public Interest Litigation plea to reverse the state's remission order.

COLOMBO

Rajapaksa may return home by early Sept

Sri Lanka's former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa may return home in about two weeks after fleeing a popular uprising in July, two sources familiar with the matter said on Tuesday, depending in part on arrangements to secure his safety. One of the sources said his return was partly linked to the costs of his stay in Thailand.

Rajapaksa fled Sri Lanka in the early hours of July 13 after massive protests engulfed Colombo and demonstrators



angry with the country's economic devastation stormed his official residence and office. He resigned as president after reaching Singapore, from where he later flew to Thailand.



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In brief

■ KINSHASA



DR CONGO REPORTS NEW EBOLA CASE IN RESTIVE EAST

Democratic Republic of Congo says it has recorded a new case of Ebola in its violence-wracked east, less than six weeks after an epidemic in the country's northwest was declared over.

A sample from a 46-year-old woman who died on August 15 in the city of Beni in North Kivu province, "tested positive" for Ebola, the health ministry said in a statement published late on Monday.

Genetic sequencing found the case was linked to a previous strain of the virus from 2018 and was not a new variant, it said. The ministry assured the public that officials were "hard at work on the ground" to respond to the situation. — AFP

■ BRUSSELS



TWO-THIRDS OF EUROPE FACING DROUGHT OR DROUGHT RISK

Nearly two-thirds of European territory is in a state of drought alert or warning due to heatwaves and low rainfall, reducing inland shipping, electricity production and the yields of certain crops, an EU agency said.

The August report of the European Drought Observatory (EDO), overseen by the European Commission, said 47 per cent of Europe is under warning conditions, with clear deficit of soil moisture, and 17 per cent in a state of alert, in which vegetation is affected.

"The severe drought affecting many regions of Europe since the beginning of the year has been further expanding and worsening as of early August," the report said. — AFP

■ BERLIN



GERMANY RECORDS ALMOST A MILLION UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Germany has registered almost a million refugees from Ukraine since Russia attacked its neighbour in February, the interior ministry said.

A total of 967,546 people fleeing the war have entered Germany at least temporarily, 36 per cent of them children, the ministry said in a statement. Around 97 per cent are Ukrainian nationals.

Among the adults, three in four are women and around eight per cent are over the age of 64. "Many in our society have gone above and beyond to help refugees," said Interior Minister Nancy Faeser, calling the influx "the largest movement of refugees (in Europe) since World War II". — AFP

EVE OF WAR'S SIX-MONTH MILESTONE

Zelensky pledges powerful response to Russia



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky and Poland's President Andrzej Duda open the Alley of Bravery during a joint news briefing in Kyiv. — Reuters

KYIV: As Ukraine prepared to mark both its independence from Soviet-rule in 1991 and the six months since Russian troops attacked, President Volodymyr Zelensky pledged that any Russian attacks in or around the date would provoke a powerful response.

Zelensky, who has led his country's resistance since Russian troops poured over the border on February 24, also said Ukraine would restore its rule over the Crimea region — annexed by Russia in 2014 in a precursor to this year's war.

Despite his defiance, there was concern among Ukrainian and allied Western officials that Russia was preparing to attack the capital Kyiv once again. The United States urged its citizens to leave Ukraine, saying it believed Russia would target civilian and government infrastructure in the next few days. US citizens should leave Ukraine "now" by their own means if it was safe to do so, the US Embassy said.

On the battlefields away from Kyiv, Russian forces carried out artillery and air strikes in the Zaporizhzhia region in southeastern Ukraine, where fighting has taken place near

Heightened fears of attack on Kyiv around independence day

Europe's largest nuclear power plant, Ukraine's military said.

Meanwhile, leaders of dozens of countries and international organisations were taking part in the so-called Crimea Platform — most of them by video — in solidarity with Ukraine on the six-month anniversary of the war. Opening the forum, Zelensky, dressed in his customary military gear, told delegates: "To overcome terror, it is necessary to gain victory in the fight against Russian aggression."

"It is necessary to liberate Crimea. This will be the resuscitation of world law and order," he said.

Italy's acting Prime Minister Mario Draghi told the summit Rome would continue to support Ukraine. "We are with you in your fight to resist Russia's war, restore Ukraine's territorial integrity, protect your democracy and independence," he said.

Earlier, Zelensky had warned that Moscow might try "something

particularly ugly" in the run-up to Wednesday's Independence Day. Asked at a news conference with visiting Polish President Andrzej Duda about the possibility of a Russian missile strike on Kyiv, Zelensky said there was a daily threat of attacks although the number of them could increase.

Ukraine's response would be the same for any city that comes under attack from Russia.

"They will receive a response, a powerful response," Zelensky said. "I want to say that each day... this response will grow, it will get stronger and stronger."

Fears of intensified Russian attacks followed the killing of Darya Dugina, the daughter of a prominent Russian ultra-nationalist, in a car bombing near Moscow on Saturday. Moscow blamed the killing on Ukrainian agents, a charge Kyiv denies.

Kyiv has only rarely been hit by Russian missiles since Ukraine repelled a ground offensive to seize the capital in March. The mood in the city was calm on Tuesday, with many people still wandering the streets, but signs of the increased threat could be felt. — Reuters

Hundreds mourn Russian nationalist's daughter

MOSCOW: Hundreds gathered on Tuesday for the Moscow funeral of Daria Dugina, the daughter of a prominent ultranationalist intellectual, who was killed in a car bombing that Russia blames on Ukraine.

Alexander Dugin — a vocal supporter of the Kremlin's military campaign who has claimed to be close to President Vladimir Putin — may have been the intended target of the attack that killed his 29-year-old daughter.

Ukraine denies any involvement.

Mourners — many carrying flowers — paid their respects at a hall in Moscow's Ostankino TV centre where her black-and-white portrait was displayed over an open casket.

Dugin and his wife, both dressed in black, sat next to their daughter's coffin. "She died for the people, for Russia, at the front. The front — it is here," Dugin said at the ceremony.

Dugina was killed on Saturday when a bomb placed in her car went off as she drove on a highway outside Moscow. — AFP



Russian political scientist and ideologue Alexander Dugin delivers a speech during a memorial service for his daughter Darya Dugina in Moscow. — Reuters

Channel migrant crossings hit new 24-hour record

LONDON: The number of people crossing the Channel to the UK from northern France in small boats has hit a new high, the government in London said on Tuesday.

Some 1,295 people were detected on Monday, beating the previous single-day record of 1,185 on November 11, 2021, the Ministry of Defence said.

So far this year there have been some 22,670 crossings. At the same point in 2021, nearly 12,500 were intercepted making the journey.

Last year, the UK authorities brought ashore a total of 28,526 people as they tried to cross the busy shipping lane.



The issue has caused a major political headache for the UK government, which promised tighter border controls after leaving the European Union.

Tensions have risen between London and Paris, with the UK government accusing France of not doing enough to stop the crossings.

— AFP

Trial launched in Britain to find treatment for monkeypox

LONDON: British scientists have become the first in the world to launch a clinical trial to assess a treatment of monkeypox in humans.

Academics from the University of Oxford who were behind the Covid Recovery trial want to assess whether an antiviral drug can help alleviate symptoms among those infected.

The researchers are hoping to recruit 500 people from around the UK to join the trial to test whether Tecovirimat — also known as Tpoxx — can help reduce the amount of time people are sick.

The drug, which was created to treat smallpox, works by preventing the virus from leaving the infected cell, which stops the spread of the virus within the body.

Health officials in the UK licensed the drug earlier this year based on results from initial studies in animals and safety evidence from human volunteers.



A nurse vaccinates a patient against monkeypox at a Centre gratuit d'information, in Montpellier, southern France. — AFP

It is currently offered to patients with severe complications who are being treated in hospital.

But to date there have been no clinical trials to confirm whether Tpoxx can help monkeypox

patients recover from the disease so researchers who were behind the recovery trial during the Covid-19 pandemic have launched a trial to test the drug in humans.

The Platinum trial will be the

first randomised controlled trial of a treatment for monkeypox in humans in the world.

This means that half of the participants — who will have a confirmed diagnosis of

The Platinum trial will be the first randomised controlled trial of a treatment for monkeypox in humans in the world

monkeypox but not be poorly enough to need hospital care — will be given Tpoxx, while the other half will be given a placebo, or dummy drug.

Most patients with monkeypox will be eligible to enrol to the trial, which will involve them taking the medication, or the placebo, twice a day for 14 days.

They will be followed up for a month to assess whether taking the drug reduces symptoms — including the length of time people have painful skin lesions — or whether it could reduce the amount of time people stay in isolation. — dpa

Reflection is an important way of learning



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is asso professor, dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As the summer break draws to a close and children get ready to dust old school bags back into shape, it is a good time to take a step back and think of how the summer went by, what the takeaways are, and how we can use this information for the year ahead.

Reflection as a skill has been underrated in education, in the professional field, and in real life.

The process of looking back at what was achieved and how it helps in identifying our skills and gaps which need to be filled.

Reflection is a very important part of education at every level.

As far back as the 1930s, educationist John Dewey said, “We don’t learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience”.

Simply put, articulating what we learnt and how we went about it will help to work on our strengths and learn from our mistakes for the future.

Understanding the 5 Rs of reflection is useful before implementation.

They include: Reporting, Responding, Relating, Reasoning and Reconstructing.

Reflection is not a new concept at all. Coaches train athletes by viewing previous matches, scientists examine previous studies to improve on them, and event managers look to work on completed projects to improve them. In all cases, reflection is an actively conscious process, identifying core strengths and

LEARNING IS A LIFE-LONG PROCESS, REFLECTION IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS IN WHICH THAT LEARNING CAN HAPPEN

limitations.

For all professionals, reflection means to identity the big picture for the long term, but also the smaller steps in getting to it.

Typically, it requires answers to questions like what your strengths are and how you could leverage them, what your weaknesses are and how you can overcome them.

They also include what interests you most, and even what bores you most. Writing all this down will help to structure one’s path, whether as a student or a professional.

Not all reflective lessons are for immediate use. Ideally, reflections should be life long and habitual, with implementation also being progressive.

When done for the long terms, ‘strategic reflection’ means that key areas have been identified which can then be broken into smaller bits for review from time to time.

Reflection does not have to be a tedious process at all. Making it fun, like keeping a journal with pictures and drawings, or having a scrapbook with collected objects are ways to make us go back to a

previous experience, whether in school or in a job.

Vlogs, short videos, a short film or even a shared podcast are also ways to reflect for those who like to use technology. There are various online applications which allow adding visuals, audio, still pictures and text which can be shared virtually with peers or teachers and team leaders.

It is said that the best way to teach is by doing. Teachers and team leaders can set an example by engaging in reflective practices to encourage others to be involved in the process.

If learning is a life-long process, reflection is one of the most effective ways in which that learning can happen.

Children in Yemen skip class to survive ‘misery’

TAHA SALEH AND SHATHA YAISH

Yemen’s new school year is underway, but Midian Aoud skips class and washes cars to support his family in its struggle to survive the “misery” of poverty exacerbated by war.

The 12-year-old lives in Taez, a besieged city in the grinding conflict between Ansar Allah fighters and government forces supported by a military coalition. “My friends are studying and I am not. They are in seventh grade. I dropped out of school to help my parents and support my family,” Midian, dressed in a torn T-shirt, said.

After washing cars, Midian goes to help his father, Adnan Aoud, a shoemaker who says his decision not to send his son to school was difficult but unavoidable as the extra income was needed just to feed the family.

“To study, you need books, notebooks and pens. I wanted to provide for my children and send them to school, but I couldn’t,” Adnan said. “We are in total misery.”

The father said he himself was also unable to attend school in a country that was already one of the poorest in the Middle East even before the war that has ravaged it for eight years.

“My children and I are illiterate. I wanted my son to do better than me, but he’ll become a shoemaker too,” said Adnan. “This isn’t a life!”

Yemen’s economy was already in crisis before the conflict started in 2014, when the Ansar Allah seized the capital Sanaa.

Since 2015, when the coalition intervened, the war has killed hundreds of thousands directly or indirectly, the UN says.

The conflict has fuelled displacement, the spread of disease and collapse of infrastructure, and pushed Yemen to the brink of famine.

A UN-brokered truce that came into effect on April 2 and has twice been renewed provided respite from violence for much of the country and alleviated some of the suffering.

The UN children’s agency Unicef said the Arabian Peninsula country is facing a “severe education crisis”.

“The conflict and frequent interruptions to schooling... have a profound impact on learning as well as intellectual and emotional development,” the agency said.

The war and the education crisis were damaging the mental health of 10.6 million children, Unicef said.

The UN agency estimates that more than two million children have dropped out of Yemen’s schools, an increase of nearly half-a-million since 2015. — AFP

Devouring oysters by battlefield, Ukrainians ‘switch off for a bit’



Michael Schwartz

The writer is an investigative reporter with NYT

Senior Lt Kirill Vikhrov stripped off his uniform and waded into the shallow estuary, the long rays of afternoon sunlight glinting in his blond hair.

Slowly, the 25-year-old soldier lowered his whole body into the briny water, closed his eyes and, for an instant, seemed to let himself go.

It had been nearly six months since Vikhrov last had a moment for himself, free of the shelling, the guns and the death that had only intensified in recent weeks along the front lines in southern Ukraine. The stresses of war have become difficult to endure.

“People are getting tired,” he said. “For some their nerves are failing. It’s constant shelling, constant tension. You can’t sleep normally. So some people are breaking.”

For a brief Sunday afternoon, though, Vikhrov retreated from the bloody conflict that he and his fellow troops have been locked in for months with Russian forces entrenched in the nearby Kherson region.

He and his girlfriend have escaped to a small, peaceful oasis about 50 miles from the front lines. The spot, along the banks of the Tylihul Estuary, has become a popular respite, where the war weary swim and sunbathe and pretend that life is normal, if only for a short while. The estuary is one of the few bodies of water along Ukraine’s Black Sea coast that is not mined or used for some military purpose.

It also has an attraction that might seem exotic even in quieter corners of Ukraine: oysters. A few years ago,

THE SPOT ALONG THE BANKS OF THE TYLIHUL ESTUARY, HAS BECOME A POPULAR RESPITE, WHERE THE WAR WEARY SWIM AND SUNBATHE AND PRETEND THAT LIFE IS NORMAL, IF ONLY FOR A SHORT WHILE

a Ukrainian entrepreneur with a flair for the unconventional started an experimental oyster farm in these waters. Despite the war, the little creatures, along with the business, have thrived.

On a recent Sunday, the small outdoor cafe run by the farm was packed, many of the wooden picnic tables occupied by those seeking a break from the fighting.

There was a table of front-line medics, and a firefighter from the nearby city of Mykolaiv, where rockets rain down nearly every night. Vikhrov was there as well, with his girlfriend, Yulia Vasilyeva, who said the idea of eating oysters and sipping wine by the water was “like something European,” that made her feel far from the war.

“Now is not the time for tourism; now is the time for survival,” Vasilyeva said. “But something like this helps

you switch off for a bit.”

Andre Pigulevsky, the owner of the farm, named The Oysters of Scythia, reopened it shortly after Vikhrov and his comrades repelled a Russian advance along the Black Sea coast early in the war that had threatened to swallow his business, along with a large chunk of southern Ukraine. In appreciation, he has decreed that soldiers and their families can eat all the oysters their stomachs can hold for free.

“The purpose of this place is to have a few hours rest to feel like it is peacetime,” said Pigulevsky, 40.

Since the war began, Ukrainians have surprised the world not only by their fighting prowess but also with the way they have carried on living. In cities that have been enduring withering artillery attacks, municipal workers continue to prune trees and maintain flower beds.

The young throw raves at the sites of bombed-out buildings to encourage cleanup efforts. The internally displaced open florist shops in their adopted cities.

Even in the idyllic setting of the oyster farm, however, the signs of war are not completely absent.

Russian cruise missiles occasionally fly overhead, startling beachgoers with their horrifying whooshing noise. Drones, shot out of the sky by Ukrainian air defences, have crashed nearby, Pigulevsky said.

The Ukrainian military at first resisted Pigulevsky’s desire to reopen, citing safety concerns about large gatherings of people so close to the war zone, but officials convinced them that local residents needed some place to unwind.

To put more of a buffer between his oyster farm and the fighting, Pigulevsky is moving it across the estuary to the Odesa region side, where he has also built a small cafe and beach resort called Oysterville.

He sells one kind of oyster, a Japanese variety called Crassostrea gigas, which he buys as small spuds from suppliers in France and grows in netted sacks out in the estuary. Recently he has branched out to growing snails and bought five goats from a local family for making cheese.

— The New York Times



Visitors swim near Oysterville, a small cafe and beach resort on the Odesa side of the Tylihul Estuary, Ukraine.

Parents should not let their underage children drive



Samuel Kutty @samkuttyvp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

A recent incident in which a juvenile was arrested while he was driving in the South Al Batinah Governorate in Oman shows the appalling state of parental ignorance and complicity which can lead to fatal consequences. This episode of getting children behind the wheel gives me the reminiscences of a father in the Indian State of Kerala, who was caught repeatedly posting pictures of his child driving high-speed cars like Ferraris. When admonished he was adamant that he would continue with the practice. The law blocking him from doing so was the other side of the incident.

Sadly, such a tendency has become a growing concern worldwide that, each year, underage driving offenders are getting younger and parents more apathetic.

The parents even blissfully overlook the fact that they are placing their children in grave danger!

Most of the time, they encourage underage driving. I have seen many parents prodding their young children to drive when they run errands!

Adding to the gravity of such action is the huge threat that the vehicle in the charge of a child poses to both him and others.

ADDING TO THE GRAVITY OF SUCH ACTION IS THE HUGE THREAT THAT THE VEHICLE IN THE CHARGE OF A CHILD POSES TO BOTH HIM AND OTHERS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE ABILITY OF THEIR CHILDREN TO DRIVE IS SEEN AS AN ACHIEVEMENT BY MANY PARENTS AND THEIR INDULGENCE HAS ON MANY OCCASIONS LED TO NEEDLESS DEATHS OF INNOCENT PEOPLE!

On the other hand, the ability of their children to drive is seen as an achievement by many parents and their indulgence has on many occasions led to needless deaths of innocent people!

Ironically, this is nothing but comes out of zeal to show how their minor child can drive a vehicle and feel proud and pleased without caring for the future consequences! Sometimes, overzealous minors resort to such adventures without the knowledge of their parents!

The consequences of the accident caused by underage driving are psychologically and physically traumatic and

also, legally exhausting.

More importantly, parents agonise over what has happened to their children and feel guilty about allowing their children to drive.

Also they feel troubled by the various procedures involved — medical treatment and hospitalisation, not to mention, the distressing legal procedures involved in it.

In Oman, Article 39 of the Traffic Law issued by Royal Decree No 93/28 and Royal Decree No 38/2016 stipulate that “the owner of the vehicle, or the licensee in his name, possessor or responsible for it, shall be fully responsible for any violation of the provisions of the law or the regulations and decisions implementing it unless it is proven that someone else was driving the vehicle at the time of the violation, provided that he is committed to providing sufficient information for guidance about him”.

Regarding other legalities and penalties, the law says, “without prejudice to the measures stipulated in this law, a fine of no more than RO 200 shall be imposed on anyone who violates any of the provisions contained in this law or its regulations and decisions unless the law provides for a special penalty for it”.

In my opinion, laws should, if need be, be further amended to punish parents, who allow their underage children to drive. It's parents' fault as they pamper their kids to drive cars and other vehicles.

We should realise that one needs to be mature enough to drive vehicles. If we love our children, we should give priority to their safety over their tantrums and wishes. As parents, we need to understand that although our children feel thrilled by driving a vehicle, their brain isn't mature enough to handle that 'thrill'.

Children always look towards parents as their role models. Therefore, parents should be careful not to set a bad example for their children.



A BOMB SHELTER

Members of the public stand beside a newly constructed bomb shelter, built to protect civilians from shelling, near a bus stop in Kharkiv, amid Russian war on Ukraine. – AFP

Anthony Fauci, face of US Covid fight, to step down in December

SARAH TITTERTON

Anthony Fauci, the top infectious disease expert who became the face of America's fight against Covid-19, announced on Monday he will leave government service after more than 50 years in December, stepping down as advisor to President Joe Biden.

In the chaotic early days of the pandemic, Fauci became the nation's most trusted expert on Covid — but his clashes with former president Donald Trump over the virus response drew anger from the right, and he now lives with security protection following death threats against his family.

The 81-year-old, who has served under seven presidents beginning with Ronald Reagan, said in a statement he would be leaving both his position as director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), and that of chief medical adviser to Biden.

But he added: “I am not retiring.” Instead Fauci, who had said he would leave by the end of Biden's current term, said he now intended to “pursue the next chapter of my career.”

Biden extended his “deepest thanks” to Fauci in a White House statement, adding that the country is “stronger, more resilient, and healthier because of him.”

Fauci has helmed the United States' response to infectious disease outbreaks since the 1980s, from HIV/Aids to Covid.

When the coronavirus first spread globally from China in 2020, he became a credible source of reliable information, reassuring the public with his calm and professorial demeanour during frequent media appearances.

His straight-talking approach won him legions of fans, who bought T-shirts and bobbleheads in his likeness and made cocktails named after him.

“I will always be grateful that we had a once-in-a-century public health leader to guide us through a once-in-a-century pandemic,” tweeted former president Barack Obama upon news Fauci was stepping down.

But his honest takes on America's early failures to get to grips with the virus soon brought Fauci into conflict with Trump.

The White House at one point barred him from doing TV interviews and launched a media blitz against him.

The clash helped turn him into a hate figure for many on the right — already incensed by the pandemic protections Fauci was advocating, from masks and vaccines to lockdown measures.

“Dr Fauci lost the trust of the American people when his guidance unnecessarily kept schools shut and businesses shut,” Republican House Minority Leader

THE 81-YEAR-OLD, WHO HAS SERVED UNDER SEVEN PRESIDENTS BEGINNING WITH RONALD REAGAN, SAID HE WOULD BE LEAVING BOTH HIS POSITION AS DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ALLERGY AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES, AND THAT OF CHIEF MEDICAL ADVISER TO BIDEN. BIDEN EXTENDED HIS “DEEPEST THANKS” TO FAUCI IN A WHITE HOUSE STATEMENT, ADDING THAT THE COUNTRY IS “STRONGER, MORE RESILIENT, AND HEALTHIER BECAUSE OF HIM”

Kevin McCarthy tweeted on Monday.

In emotional testimony earlier this year, Fauci slammed another prominent Republican, the vaccine skeptic Senator Rand Paul, for unleashing “crazies” against him, recounting “threats upon my life, harassment of my family, and my children with obscene phone calls.”

This month a West Virginia man was sentenced to three years in prison for threatening to drag Fauci and his family into the street and beat them to death.

But despite the threats, Fauci has been conciliatory towards Trump, telling Politico that they developed “an interesting relationship.”

It was not the first time Fauci faced criticism and clashes. In the 1980s he

became a lightning rod for accusations the government was not doing enough to stem the rise of HIV/Aids — but he later forged a close collaboration with activists.

His accomplishments include implementing a fast-track system that widened access to antiretroviral medicines, and working with former president George H W Bush to plow in more resources.

Later, under president George W Bush, Fauci was the architect of a relief plan credited with saving millions of lives in sub-Saharan Africa.

As a scientist, he is credited with developing effective treatments for formerly fatal inflammatory diseases, as well as for contributions into understanding how HIV destroys the body's defences.

Despite his many duties, he had continued to treat patients at the NIH's Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. It was not clear if that was part of his plans going forward.

Biden said that after winning the 2020 election, as he built a team to lead the Covid-19 response, Fauci was “one of my first calls.”

“I've been able to call him at any hour of the day for his advice,” the president stated.

Fauci said it had been the “honour of a lifetime” to lead the NIAID, which he has done since 1984.

He did not spell out what he will do next, but said he wants to inspire and mentor the next generation, citing the “energy and passion” he still has for the field despite his decades of service.

“I am proud to have been part of this important work,” he said. — AFP



Dr Anthony Fauci speaks during a press briefing at the White House in Washington. – Reuters

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Oman qualify for cycling world championship in Australia



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

Oman national cycling team, youth and under-23 category has qualified to participate in the World Road Cycling Championships, which will be held in Australia at Wollongong city from September 18 to 25.

The Oman team qualified for the World Championships after the issuance of the list of candidates for the championship by the International Cycling Union.

Oman made it to the list based on the good results achieved by the team in 2021 by achieving second place in the Asian classification.

The Sultanate of Oman team also participated in the Nations Cup last March.

Omani riders also impressed during the current season.

Saeed al Rahbi, Mohammed al Wahaibi and Munther al Hasani were the top riders in the under-23 category, while Abdulaziz al Habsi excelled in the youth category.

The World Road Cycling



Championships is an annual competition organised by the International

Federation of Cycling, since 1927 for men and since 1958 for women. The championship in Australia features a track of 135 km for the youth category and 170 km for the under-23 category.

In each category, the competition gives a colourful shirt to the winner who carries

it throughout the season. The cyclists who have mostly won a round in the world championships include Italy's Alfredo Penda, Belgium riders Eddie Merckx and Rick Steinbergen and Spanish rider Oscar Freire.

Behind the main race there are some competitions, which is the road against the clock for men and women for a distance of 34

km, the road against the clock race for under 23 years for a distance of 29

km, and the road against the clock for young people for a distance of 29 km as well.

The championship also includes a road race against the clock relay, mixed teams for 28 km, men's 270 km road race, 170 km under-23 category road race, 164 km women's road race and 135 km youth road race.

Casemiro sees United showing some steel at last

MANCHESTER: The memes had been doing the rounds on social media after Casemiro agreed to sign for Manchester United with the gist of the jokes suggesting that the former Real Madrid midfielder was effectively ending his career by joining a club in crisis.

But after sitting in the stands at Old Trafford to witness Monday's 2-1 victory over arch-rivals Liverpool, the Brazil international probably wondered what all the fuss was about.

For 90 minutes United looked like a top football team again — roared on by a passionate capacity crowd, they outran,

outfought and at times outplayed a Liverpool side considered to be genuine title contenders.

The protests against the club's owners, the Glazer family, before and during the game, were a reminder that there remain many deep-seated problems at United which a one-off victory, certainly doesn't mask.

But for Dutch manager Erik ten Hag, the win was a massively needed boost after the embarrassing start to the season which had seen a home defeat to Brighton and Hove Albion and a crushing 4-0 surrender at Brentford.

Casemiro, a tank-like



Manchester United's Anthony Martial in action with Liverpool's Kostas Tsimikas. — Reuters

destroyer at the base of Real Madrid's midfield in five Champions League winning campaigns, was signed to bring some badly needed aggression, nous and resilience to the centre of the field.

But what was most impressive about United's display against a badly below-par Liverpool was the addition of steel provided by Ten Hag's first two signings.

Central defender Lisandro Martinez has already faced doubts and criticism after his performances in the opening two games but right from the outset, when the Argentine left his mark on Mohamed Salah, he

was a determined presence.

Playing alongside French international Raphael Varane, who replaced the out of form Harry Maguire, Martinez contributed to a solid display that showed none of the hesitancy and uncertainty of so many United performances at the back in the past year.

In attack, with Cristiano Ronaldo benched, there were encouraging displays from Marcus Rashford and Jaden Sancho — both scored to inject some confidence into two players who have looked short of self-belief.

— Reuters



In brief

■ DHAKA



BANGLADESH RECALL NAIM FOR ASIA CUP, NURUL OUT

Bangladesh have recalled batsman Mohammad Naim for the Asia Cup starting this week after wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and pace bowler Hasan Mahmud were ruled out with injury.

Naim, who has featured 34 times in Twenty20 internationals, will join the squad in the UAE from the West Indies where he was playing for Bangladesh 'A'.

Nurul was kept in the squad despite undergoing finger surgery in Singapore last week, in the hope that he would be ready for the tournament when it starts on Saturday.

But Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) said that Nurul needs more time to recover.

■ NEW DELHI



INDIA COACH DRAVID HAS COVID AHEAD OF ASIA CUP

India coach Rahul Dravid tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the team's departure for the Asia Cup in the United Arab Emirates, the country's cricket board said on Tuesday.

The Twenty20 tournament begins on Saturday, with India's first match a blockbuster clash against Pakistan on Sunday in Dubai.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India said Dravid returned a positive result after a routine test.

"Mr Dravid is under the supervision of the BCCI medical team and has mild symptoms," said a statement. "He will join the team once he returns with a negative Covid-19 report."

■ LONDON



STOKES REVEALS HE TAKES ANXIETY MEDICATION

England Test captain Ben Stokes has revealed he takes anxiety medication everyday to help his battle with mental health issues.

Stokes stepped away from cricket last year to focus on his mental health after enduring a series of panic attacks.

The 31-year-old's father, Ged, died of brain cancer two years ago and Stokes opted out of his sport for six months as he struggled to come to terms with the loss.

"I never thought I would be on medication to help me for that kind of stuff. I am not embarrassed or ashamed to say it because I needed the help at the time," Stokes said in an Amazon documentary, which will be released on Friday.

KUWAIT, HONG KONG POST WINS IN ASIA CUP QUALIFIER

UAE keep hopes alive with win over Singapore

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH

MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

United Arab Emirates kept their hopes alive for Asia Cup 2022 qualification after posting a comfortable 47-run win against Singapore at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds in Al Amerat on Monday night.

The UAE were stunned by Kuwait in their opening match on Sunday.

The battle to join Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan in the Asia Cup 2022 is currently underway, through a qualifying tournament, the Asia Cup Qualifier 2022. The four teams in the contest are Hong Kong, Singapore, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.

After losing the toss UAE were asked to bat, scoring a total of 160-8 in their 20 overs, Muhammad Waseem the top scorer with 56 runs.

Singapore failed to chase down the target and were bowled out for 113 in 18.3 overs.

Spinner Karthik Meiyappan took three wickets giving away 13 runs for the UAE.

UAE captain CP Rizwan said: "I am happy for the boys and the team, this was a much-needed win. On paper, we are one of the stronger teams and we needed to show that on the field as well. That is what we did today. The boys were hungry and keen to perform. When they got the opportunity, they grabbed it with both hands."

Singapore captain Amjad Mahboob said: "This was a must win game for us and by restricting UAE to 160, our bowlers did a very good job. I think the batting let us down again, but I believe our coaches are watching closely and they will help us work on this."

"We have a young team, for more than half the team, this is the first time playing a tournament of this nature. It is great exposure for them and when we go back, we will work hard on the areas in which we are lacking."

Player of the Match Karthik Meiyappan said: "It is good to be on the winning side and bounce back after yesterday, and this means we are still in with a chance to go through to the Asia Cup, which is what is most important for us. It was good to contribute to the team's win."

KUWAIT PULL OFF THRILLER

On day two of the Asia Cup Qualifier, Kuwait rode on man of the match Edson Silva's 14-ball



UAE's Karthik Meiyappan



UAE's Muhammad Waseem in action.



Ehsan Khan of Hong Kong

25 to post their first ever win against the UAE.

After winning the toss, Kuwait chose to field first, and were set a target of 174. Kuwait sealed the win by a wicket, with one ball to spare.

"We have been attempting to win against UAE since 2020. We played against them previously on two occasions but were unable to win. This time we had planned our approach, and prepared by analysing all their players, and as a team we did well today," Kuwait captain Mohammed Aslam said after the win.

In the opening match of the tournament, Hong Kong beat Singapore by 8 runs.

Hong Kong fought back from a shaky start to set Singapore a target of 149 to win.

Singapore tried hard but ended eight runs



Kuwait's man of the match Edson Silva

short of Honk Kong total.

The spinners made crucial contribution to Hong Kong's victory with Ehsan Khan taking 3-20 to grab the player of the match award.

BRIEF SCORES

Match 3: UAE vs Singapore
UAE 160-8 in 20 overs beat Singapore 113 all out in 18.3 overs

Player of the Match: Karthik Meiyappan (3-13)

Match 2: UAE vs Kuwait

UAE 173-5 (20 overs) lost to Kuwait 177-9 (19.5 overs)

Player of the Match: Edson Silva (25 off 14)

Match 1: Singapore vs Hong Kong

Hong Kong 148-9 (20 overs) beat Singapore 140-7 (20 overs)

Player of the Match: Ehsan Khan, Hong Kong (3-20)

Gill's 130 sets up Zimbabwe whitewash

HARARE: Shubman Gill made his first international hundred as India beat Zimbabwe by 13 runs after a tense finish in Harare on Monday to complete a 3-0 ODI whitewash.

Gill not only wreaked havoc with the bat, he also caught Zimbabwe centurion Sikandar Raza, who was threatening to give the home side a shock victory.

Gill won the player of the match and player of the series awards, having contributed 245 runs in the three matches. "I was just trying to minimise my dot-ball percentage. I just tried to time the ball and not hit it hard," he said.

"The bat was pretty good and that is why I changed it after my fifty as I wanted to save it. Always special to get a hundred. I had made three nineties but wanted to get a century."

"I have being playing with a great bunch of players for sometime. This one is for my dad as he has been my primary coach."

"I got a bit of a schooling the day before yesterday when I was out on 33. So this century is for him."

After India captain KL Rahul won the toss and batted, the



India's Shubman Gill watches the ball after playing a shot during the third ODI against Zimbabwe in Harare. — AFP

tourists posted 289-8 in 50 overs. Zimbabwe were all out for 276 in reply with three balls remaining.

The tourists looked set for victory when they reduced the home side to 122-5 with all the regular scorers bar Raza back in the pavilion.

GALLANT RUN CHASE FAILS

But Pakistan-born Raza shrugged off poor form in the first two matches to smash 115 and leave Zimbabwe needing 17 runs off 12 balls for victory.

The tail could not deliver, and a gallant run chase by Zimbabwe

came up short.

Gill smacked 130 off 97 balls, hitting 15 fours and a six. Ishan Kishan (50), Shikhar Dhawan (40) and Rahul (30) also contributed with the bat. The breakthrough century for 22-year-old Gill came less than a month after he

Oman Cricket season 2022-23 registrations closing soon



MUSCAT: Oman Cricket will start its annual multilayered season with its division leagues starting from October 2022. The team registrations for the season 2022-23 commenced from August 9 onwards.

Teams can be registered by browsing on www.omancricket.org > registrations.

Oman Cricket can also be reached out on +968 92204745 (Zeeshan Siddique) for any queries to registrations.

Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket on the commencement of the season registrations said, "We are delighted to begin the preparations for the array of marquee domestic tournaments for all commencing on October 2022. On behalf of the Board of Directors of Oman Cricket, We gracefully invite all teams willing to play quality cricket to register for the season 2022-23. We extend our sincere regards to all corporates, institutions and sponsors who form the backbone of all teams participating in the domestic season."

Registrations are open for the Premier Division and Senior Division Leagues until August 28. The registrations for Junior Leagues and Women's League is set to open in September 2022.

The final groupings for the Divisional Leagues will be confirmed once the registrations have been closed. The last date for player registrations is September 4 upon team confirmation.

came agonisingly close, scoring an unbeaten 98 against the West Indies in Port of Spain.

He shared a 140-run third-wicket partnership with Kishan, who reached his half-century before being run out by Tony Munyonga. From the first ball of the final over Gill sought a boundary, but achieved height rather than length off a Brad Evans delivery and was caught at long-off by Innocent Kaia.

Luck was twice on Gill's side as he survived a close leg-before appeal on 97 and was dropped by Victor Nyauchi on 110.

Evans, the son of a former Zimbabwe international, was the only bowler to impress, taking a career-best 5-54 in 10 overs.

Raza, regaining the form that brought him unbeaten centuries in two ODIs against Bangladesh, faced 95 balls and struck three sixes and nine fours. — **AFP**

Brief scores: India 289-8, 50 overs (Shubman Gill 130, Ishan Kishan 50, Shikhar Dhawan 40; B Evans 5-54) v Zimbabwe 276 all out, 49.3 overs (S Raza 115, S Williams 45; Avesh Khan 3-66, Axar Patel 2-30, Kuldeep Yadav 2-38, Deepak Chahar 2-75)



Caroline Garcia (FRA) kisses the trophy after winning the final against Petra Kvitova (CZE) at the Cincinnati Open. — USA Today Sports

Assertive Garcia extends strong run to re-enter top-20 ranking

CINCINNATI: With clarity of thought and renewed trust in an attacking style of play, France's Caroline Garcia clinched her third title of the season on Sunday at the Cincinnati Open and climbed back to the top-20 of the women's world rankings.

Garcia, 28, was ranked at a career-high fourth in 2018 but slipped down the ladder due to confusion over her approach of play and injury problems.

Since coming back from a foot injury in May, when she was 79th in the rankings, Garcia has won a WTA 1,000 title on hardcourt, won a grasscourt event in Bad Homburg and the Warsaw tournament on clay.

"We made it clear which way I have to play, which direction I have to go," Garcia, who climbed up to world number 17th on Monday, said, referring to her new coach Bertrand Perret and her team.

"So when I step on court, I know what game style I have to play, and I know what I have to do, and always try to do it the best I can."

In Cincinnati, the last big tune-up event before the US Open, Garcia came through the qualifiers before taking down Maria Sakkari, Aryna Sabalenka and Jessica Pegula — all three ranked in the top-10 of the women's world rankings.

She defeated two-time former Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova 6-2, 6-4 in the final to

underline her title aspirations for the hardcourt major in New York from August 29.

"When I arrived on tour, I was definitely playing like that," Garcia told reporters about her offensive game, confirming it was the only way forward for her. "That's the way it was working for me. That's the way I learned to play tennis."

"Sometimes I did doubt it, because it was not always working... And then I did it kind of half and half, and it was not working anymore."

"I have to accept that it may not work every time."

Iga Swiatek retained her commanding lead as world number one despite losing to

Madison Keys in the Cincinnati last 16. — Reuters

- WTA TOP 20:**
1. Iga Swiatek (POL) 8,605 pts
 2. Anett Kontaveit (EST) 4,580
 3. Maria Sakkari (GRE) 4,190
 4. Paula Badosa (ESP) 3,980
 5. Ons Jabeur (TUN) 3,920
 6. Aryna Sabalenka 3,470 (+1)
 7. Simona Halep (ROM) 3,255 (-1)
 8. Jessica Pegula (USA) 3,201
 9. Garbine Muguruza (ESP) 2,886
 10. Daria Kasatkina 2,795
 11. Emma Raducanu (GBR) 2,756 (+2)
 12. Coco Gauff (USA) 2,687
 13. Belinda Bencic (SUI) 2,635 (-2)
 14. Leylah Fernandez (CAN) 2,540
 15. Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA) 2,317 (+1)
 16. Jelena Ostapenko (LAT) 2,316 (-1)
 17. Caroline Garcia (FRA) 2,220 (+18)
 18. Veronika Kudermetova 2,206 (+2)
 19. Danielle Collins (USA) 2,167 (-1)
 20. Madison Keys (USA) 2,128 (+4)

Chile urges Fifa to speed up Ecuador World Cup player decision

MANCHESTER, England: Fifa has been urged to speed up its response to an appeal in the case of an Ecuador player that Chile claim played while ineligible during World Cup qualifying.

The Chilean Football Association has appealed Fifa's June 10th decision to dismiss their complaint that Ecuador's Byron Castillo was born in Tumaco, Colombia in 1995 and not in the Ecuadorean city of General Villamil Playas in 1998 as stated on his official documents.

Castillo played in eight of Ecuador's 18 qualifying games for the Qatar World Cup.

Fifa said that "after analysing the submissions of all parties concerned and considering all elements brought before it" it was not taking action.

The Chilean FA (ANPF) appealed the decision on July 1 but says it has yet to hear from Fifa. "We are deeply concerned about the delays in the procedure. This is a case where the resolution impacts the World Cup tournament, due to commence on November 20, and we would

therefore expect quick answers and rulings, as has happened in other cases," ANPF general secretary Jorge Yunge said in an email.

"We formally appealed to Fifa on July 1 and requested the production of certain evidence from the Ecuadorian Federation that would have a great impact on the resolution of the case, but, to date, there has been no further feedback. "We also sent new and unpublished documents in the appeal, which clearly show the irregularities regarding Byron Castillo's eligibility, and we requested once again that he be called to clarify the situation. Apparently, nobody wants to speak to him, which we find surprising," he added.

Yunge said that there was a risk that any opportunity to take the issue to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland would be denied by a lack of time.

"We understand the challenges associated with making a ruling in our favour at this stage, but justice needs to be served at all costs," added Yunge. — Reuters



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INSURANCE 1 YEAR Or Cash Gift in Lieu of Insurance From RO 250 up to RO 275

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Pyramid scheme operators to be fined RO 5,000

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) has reiterated warnings surrounding multi-level marketing schemes – also known as pyramid schemes – while also urging the general public to beware the risks associated with such scams.

In a post on Tuesday, the Ministry referred to the proliferation of examples of multi-level marketing schemes being promoted on social media in recent times. Some of these fraudulent scams are even promoted from overseas, it said.

Citing Article 2 Ministerial Decision 105/2021, the Ministry stated: “It is prohibited to sell, buy, trade, advertise or promote any commodity, product or service through network marketing or multi-level marketing fraud by any electronic or non-electronic means.”

Offenders can attract a fine of



RO 5,000, which is doubled if the violation is repeated, the Ministry said. Such activities are regarded as fraudulent commercial

transactions subject to criminal penalties under the Omani Commercial Law issued by Royal Decree 55/90 and the Omani

Penal Law promulgated by Royal Decree 7/74. Experts have described pyramid marketing or pyramid

CITING ARTICLE 2 MINISTERIAL DECISION 105/2021, THE MINISTRY STATED: “IT IS PROHIBITED TO SELL, BUY, TRADE, ADVERTISE OR PROMOTE ANY COMMODITY, PRODUCT OR SERVICE THROUGH NETWORK MARKETING OR MULTI-LEVEL MARKETING FRAUD BY ANY ELECTRONIC OR NON-ELECTRONIC MEANS.”

scheme fraud as an unsustainable business model whose goal is to collect money from the largest number of participants, while the largest beneficiary is the person at the top of the pyramid. It begins with a person or company at the top of the pyramid whose work is summarised in persuading the person to

participate or contribute a sum of money with a promise to give him services or a symbolic profit if he can convince others to participate after him.

With the aim that the higher the levels of subscribers, the more the first gets more commissions and each participant persuaded after him to participate.

In return for the promise of large commissions, he must include new subscribers to the scheme. The scam focuses on the process of engaging and linking it to sales, regardless of the quality of the product itself.

Additionally, pyramid schemes have harmful implications for the economy, as they are based on deception and fraud by amplifying the benefits associated with the product or service at the heart of the scheme, notably by attracting new customers on the false claim that they will earn huge profits.

Often, new members are baited into joining the scheme by paying them an attractive amount upfront to get them to stay hooked.

Oman holds the highest fish consumption rate per capita in the world

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

The Sultanate of Oman holds the highest fish consumption per capita in the world with 27 kilogrammes annually, according to the Fisheries Development Oman — a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority. Meanwhile, the average fish consumption per capita worldwide is only 17 kilogrammes.

Earlier this year, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations reported that UAE, Qatar, Egypt and the Sultanate of Oman are among the highest fish consumers in the region. “All countries of the Near East and North Africa have access to marine areas, and thus fish and marine products constitute a major source of livelihood and nutrition in the region”, the report added.

Aquatic food has always been an important commodity in the Sultanate of Oman. The country has a long coastline, the vast majority faces the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea. The main economic activity in the coastal areas is fishing which provides and important supply of fish to local communities, urban cities and for the export markets.

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the largest fish producers in the region and a net exporter of



fish and fish products.

The National Centre for Statistics and Information reported that in 2020, the total quantity of fish landed in the Sultanate of Oman reached 840, 378 tonnes, an increase of 44.8% compared to 2019. Fish exports rose to more than 300,000 tonnes, a growth rate of 47.3%, with a total value estimated at RO 114.25 million in 2020.

As for fish exports, 22.2% of Oman’s fish are exported to GCC countries, 0.5% to European countries, 10.2% to the US, and 67.1% to other countries. The UAE is the top importer of Oman’s fish in the region with 37,952 tonnes or 56.8%. Saudi Arabia followed as second top importer of Oman fish with 19,969 tonnes or 29.9% in 2020.

Fisheries Development of Oman (FDO) was established as a joint commitment between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Oman Investment Authority (OIA) to develop a sustainable commercial aquaculture and fishing sector in the Sultanate of Oman.

Oman puts MEDC privatisation on hold pending review of new options

Restructuring: Move to reorganise electricity distribution and supply activities into a Distribution Company and a Supply Company in all governorates, except Dhofar

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

The planned partial privatisation of Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), one of the largest power utilities in the Sultanate of Oman, is currently on hold pending a review of options envisaging the broader restructuring of the country’s distribution companies.

According to a top official of Nama Group, the umbrella organisation of Omani state-owned power and water procurement, generation, transmission, distribution and supply entities, the decision to pause the keenly-anticipated privatisation exercise came at the behest of the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

“Based on a recommendation from APSR, the project was placed on hold to study and explore options including a possible restructuring and merger of sector companies,” said Hamdan al Shaqsi, Chairman of the Board



of Directors of Nama Group.

Following the landmark partial privatisation in 2020 of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC), the owner and operator of the country’s vast grid network, MEDC – also part of Nama Group – was prepped for partial disinvestment. Under Nama Group’s privatisation strategy, up to 70 % of its equity in MEDC was offered for investment, effectively granting administrative and operational control to the strategic investor.

The balance 30 % was proposed to be eventually offered for public investment via an Initial Public Offering (IPO) to be floated

on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

Last August, the results of the evaluation of binding offers received from eligible international bidders were submitted to Oman Investment Authority (OIA), which represents the government’s interests in Nama Group.

However, following proposals for the restructuring and possible mergers of all of Nama Group’s electricity distribution and supply entities – an exercise designed to unlock further value from the electricity sector – APSR called for a timeout on MEDC’s privatisation.

“In December 2021, APSR issued a letter to Oman Investment Authority requesting the implementation of the electricity sector restructuring initiatives, as directed by the Ministry of Finance, with an aim to reduce operational cost of the electricity sector and optimise subsidies.

The recommendations included reorganisation of the electricity distribution and supply activities into a Distribution Company and a Supply Company in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, except the Governorate of Dhofar,” Al Shaqsi added in the newly published 2021 Annual Report of Nama Group.

Yokohama Tyres unveils exciting promotion



MUSCAT: Yokohama Tyres Oman recently unveiled an exciting campaign for customers.

On cash purchase of 4 passenger car tyres, customers will get a free Lulu shopping voucher worth RO 5, instantly. And on purchase of 4 ultra high performance tyres or four wheel drive tyres, customers will get a free Lulu shopping voucher worth RO 10, instantly.

The offer is valid until September 29, 2022.

(Offer only for DOT 2022 from Saud Bahwan Group tyre retail outlets and authorised dealers.)

Yokohama tyres are engineered to meet the demanding operating conditions in Oman. Yokohama's state-of-the-art technology ensures top-notch safety and reliable performance.

Yokohama tyres have always stood out when it comes to safety and reliability. Every Yokohama tyre is engineered to offer excellent road grip and comfortable smooth drive, in addition to extended tyre life.

The Yokohama Rubber Co Ltd is one of the world's leading manufacturers of rubber products, offering an extensive range of tire, rubber and adhesive products.

Established in 1917, Yokohama Rubber in its 100th centennial, has expanded its worldwide business scope with a line-up of high-technology products meeting customer needs in the fields of automobiles, civil engineering, construction, marine engineering, aerospace and sporting goods.

In Oman, Saud Bahwan Automotive markets Yokohama Tyres with a nationwide network of 40 branches and over 300 dealers.

GCC agri-nutrients industry to address food security and net zero issues

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 23

Regional policymakers and the agri-nutrient industry will come together at the 12th annual edition of the Gulf Petrochemicals and Chemicals Association (GPCA) Agri-Nutrients Conference to address the twin goals of food security and net-zero from September 28-29, 2022 in Dubai.

The conference will be held under the theme 'Resolving Global Food Challenges with Agri-Nutrients' and attract hundreds of industry leaders from across the agri-nutrients value chain.

The prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity has been increasing slowly since 2014, with



the estimated increase in 2020 alone being equal to that of the previous five years combined.

Approximately 2.37 billion people across the world – nearly one in three – did not have access to adequate food in 2020. This puts the often-overlooked agri-nutrients sector at the forefront to play a quintessential role in tackling global food challenges. Approximately half of global food production is made possible today by agri-nutrients.

Given the steady growth of the

global population combined with factors, such as land expansion and urbanisation, the role of agri-nutrients in feeding the world will be essential for years to come.

Building on the success of its 2021 edition, the 12th GPCA Agri-Nutrients Conference will return to Dubai to facilitate dialogue and collaboration across the agri-nutrients value chain and address future looking topics, including how the industry can enable climate-smart agriculture, the way forward to mitigate

fertiliser-related emissions, what investments will be needed to achieve food security in the region, and how key global trends are impacting agri-nutrient markets.

With agriculture estimated to contribute up to 24 per cent of total GHG emissions worldwide, a key focus at the conference this year will be the role of sustainable agri-nutrients in lowering the climate impact of the agriculture sector and enabling the transition to net zero.

The two-day event will discuss the technologies, innovations, partnerships, and funding needed to decarbonise the industry, while ensuring farmers anywhere in the world are not required to pay more to acquire the necessary nutrients

for their food production.

Dr Abdulwahab al Sadoun, Secretary-General, GPCA, commented: "Ongoing supply chain disruptions as a result of the pandemic, rising food prices and now the Russia-Ukraine conflict mean that the threat of food insecurity for millions of people globally is growing rapidly.

"I look forward to welcoming global and regional stakeholders from across the agri-nutrients value chain for two days of networking, collaboration and thought-provoking discussions on how we can all work together to address food security challenges within the region and globally, while enabling the transition to net zero."

Enjoy the perfect weekend 'daycation' at Jumeirah Muscat Bay

MUSCAT: Nestled within the secluded cove of Bandar Jissah between the dramatic Al Hajar Mountains and the sparkling Arabian Sea, just 15 minutes from Muscat, Jumeirah Muscat Bay combines sublime restaurants, stunning views, magnificent pools and Oman's finest beaches to deliver the ultimate daycation this summer.

Valid every Friday until September 30, guests at Jumeirah Muscat Bay can enjoy an exquisite brunch paired with pool and beach day access, providing the definitive day experience for couples, friends and families to kick back and relax at Muscat's newest luxury address.

Set against a backdrop of azure ocean views and overseen by Culinary Director Claudio Dieli, Peridot brunch features interactive live cooking stations showcasing fresh and healthy favourites from all over the world, an exquisite seafood tower and sushi selection, plus refreshing gelato selection, alongside a mouth-watering crepes station.

Live music and a kids' entertainment area with a variety of board and card games, drawing activities, a cookie baking station and a specially curated kids menu



provide the perfect ambiance and ensure little ones are kept amused at this must-visit spot for Friday brunch.

Guests can also take advantage of Day Pool & Beach access, with a special rate of RO 10 per person. Boasting three alluring, temperature-controlled swimming pools, including adults only, kids and family pools, plus wide expanse of pristine beach and plush sunbeds, visitors can enjoy a blissful day soaking in the magnificent surroundings and outstanding service.

Exclusively available till end of September, every Friday from 1 – 4 pm, RO 29 per person with soft

drinks or RO 39 per person with house beverages, RO 14 for kids aged 6-12 exclusive of taxes.

Children below 6 years go free. Outside of the Friday daycation offer, residents and visitors can enjoy Day Pass access for RO 20 per adult and RO 10 per child, inclusive of taxes and subject to availability.

For more information and reservations, please contact us on: e-mail - jmuinfo@jumeirah.com, call - +968 2493 1000 or WhatsApp - +968 7199 7749. In the meantime, stay connected via our social media channels and don't forget to tag us in your posts #TimeExceptionallyWellSpent.

Grow your money with ahlibank's 'Wafra Plus'

MUSCAT: Continuing the momentum of its product innovation and expansion process, ahlibank has affirmed the success of its recently launched 'Daily Multiplier Account' - Wafra Plus, with enhanced interest rates and the additional benefit of debit cards for Wafra account holders.

The bank had introduced Wafra Plus earlier this year, allowing its new and existing customers an unparalleled opportunity to grow their money — on a daily basis — as part of its aim to create unrivaled channels that suit its customer's demands.

The 'Wafra Plus' Daily Growth Account is a savings account that pays up to 1.75 per cent interest per year on the daily balance in the account. At the end of each day, the benefit is compounded and credited to the clients' accounts.

Key benefits for Wafra Plus account holders include up to 1.75 per cent interest per annum in competitive benefits, compounded advantages on a daily basis, unlimited transactions on the account, and benefits being credited to the account every day.



As per the scheme, ahlibank will offer interest rates ranging from 1.00 per cent (for deposits up to RO 9,999) to 1.75 per cent (for deposits of RO 100,000 and more), depending on the deposit amounts.

"The new account was created as a platform for our customers to secure and grow their savings balances. This is a significant step forward in our continuous progress, and it reflects our dedication to creating and executing products and services that are truly valuable to our customers.

We believe in communicating with our customers across several platforms in order to assess their shifting demands and, as a result, tailor our solutions to their lifestyles and financial behaviour," said Muneer al Balushi, AGM – Head of Retail Distribution.

London continues to be world's top fintech city



ANDY JALIL
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The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK

London was confirmed last month as the world's top hub for fintech venture capital funding. This year so far, it has raised \$6.3 billion

which is well ahead of New York, at \$4.5 billion and Silicon Valley, at \$5.5 billion. It comes on the back of record-breaking VC investment into London in 2021 of \$25.5 billion as well.

London is home to more start-ups and scale-ups than anywhere else. There is nowhere else in the world that one can meet venture capitalists, regulators, clients and partners, all within a short ride on the underground, an ecosystem that is now even better served with the newly-opened Elizabeth line.

The success of London's fintech sector is a testament to traditional industries such as fashion, financial services, healthcare and education innovating with technology to create bold new ideas.

The capital's position as a global financial centre, combined with its status as a global tech hub, has cemented the UK as a leader in fintech. London is a tested for innovation and a place where new ideas thrive, and is home to 3,018 fintech HQs, more than New York's 2,531 and San Francisco's 1,515.

Thanks to unicorns such as Wise, Starling Bank, Onfido, Monzo and Revolt, the UK represents more than 10 per cent of the global market share in fintech. The sector is thriving and has proved incredibly resilient over the past two years.

In fact, it has performed remarkably. It wants to ensure this continues to be the case, as it is critical to the goal of building a better capital city for everyone

— a city that is fairer, greener, safer and more prosperous place for all.

Research from Hays has revealed that recruitment in London's tech sector has now risen above pre-pandemic levels, with the sector in the UK now worth \$1 trillion. The only other countries to hit this figure are the US and China, and tech investment and innovation is set to play a key role in driving the UK's economic recovery.

The creativity and diversity of London creates a wonderful playground for innovation to thrive. Whether you want to set up, expand or scale your business, it offers a wealth of resource.

Furthermore, former chancellor Philip Hammond is set to join an all-star line-up at

a new fund that will try to boost the chances for UK fintechs, according to reports. A new vehicle provisionally called the Fintech Growth Fund will raise \$1 billion to back promising start-ups, Sky News reported, and Hammond is set to join its advisory board.

The fund will look to institutional investors for capital, the news website reports, and will not be affiliated with Westminster politics. A flagship report by ex-WorldPay boss Sir Ron Kalifa into the UK's fintech landscape in 2021 highlighted a gap for funding for companies that want to go beyond their Series B stage and raise money to scale up.

Lord Hammond's potential foray into the fund wouldn't

be his first involvement in the investment world since leaving office. In October, he took on the role of an adviser at Crypto start-up Copper, after joining start-up lender Oak-North's advisory board in 2020. His contract with senior government officials on behalf of Oak-North was branded "unwise" and "not acceptable" by the chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments last year. Barclays, London Stock Exchange Group and Mastercard are among City stalwarts asked to provide seed funding to the Fintech Group Fund. Former government fintech ambassador Alastair Lukies and FintechTech Alliance boss Phil Vidler are expected to play a role in the fund.



Eurozone economy shrinks again, hit by inflation

BRUSSELS: European economic activity fell for a second straight month in August, a keenly-watched survey revealed on Tuesday, as high inflation fuelled by Russia's war in Ukraine darkens the outlook.

The S&P Global Flash Eurozone PMI index dropped to its lowest level in 18 months as rising prices hurt demand for services and supplies to manufacturing. The PMI fell from 49.9 in July to 49.2 in August. A reading below 50 represents a contraction in business activity.

The index dropped under 50 in July after 16 months of growth, as inflation driven by soaring energy prices and supply chain crises batters the world economy. Manufacturing was already down last month but the downturn has now spread to services, including tourism, which had helped some EU economies hobble through the summer.

"Cost of living pressures mean that the recovery in the service sector following the lifting of pandemic restrictions has ebbed away," said Andrew Harker of S&P



A man works at Volkswagen assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany. — Reuters

Global Market Intelligence.

"Declining output is now being seen across a range of sectors, from basic materials and auto firms through to tourism and real estate companies as economic weakness becomes more broad based in nature."

Harker said the survey showed that European manufacturers had built up record inventories of unsold finished goods, suggesting that production would not pick up "any time soon". Employers are also rehiring staff shed during the Covid pandemic at a slower rate, he warned.

While high oil and gas prices linked to the war in Ukraine and sanctions imposed on Russia in response to its invasion remain high, within businesses inflationary pressures may have passed their peak.

However, "it appears that any alleviation to the inflation situation is coming too late to provide any real support to demand," Harker said. "The remainder of 2022 is therefore looking to be one of struggle for firms across the euro zone." — AFP

Elon Musk subpoenas Twitter's ex-CEO for buyout deal documents



WASHINGTON: Tesla owner and billionaire Elon Musk (pictured), who is fighting a legal battle regarding his shelved efforts to buy the social network Twitter, has subpoenaed Twitter co-founder and former boss Jack Dorsey.

Dorsey, who stepped down from the CEO role last year and left the board in May this year, had announced his support for Musk's \$44 billion acquisition of Twitter in April.

According to a filing with the US Securities and Exchange Commission, the subpoena seeks documents and communications from Dorsey about the Twitter buyout agreement, reports said.

Dorsey was also asked about spam and fake accounts and its impact on the platform as well as Twitter's use of monetisable daily active usage (mDAU) as a key metric.

The subpoena was filed as Musk is preparing to face a five-day trial in a lawsuit from Twitter on October 17 in the Delaware Court of Chancery over his intended termination of the planned acquisition of the social media.

Judge Kathleen McCormick earlier had ordered Twitter to collect, review and produce documents from Kayvon Beykpour, who was the general manager of its consumer product division. — dpa

Oil climbs as tight supply moves back into focus

LONDON: Oil rose \$1 a barrel on Tuesday as tight supply moved back into focus as a result of Saudi Arabia floating the idea of Opec+ output cuts to support prices and the prospect of a drop in US crude inventories.

The Saudi energy minister said Opec+ had the means to deal with challenges including cutting production, state news agency SPA said on Monday, citing comments Abdulaziz bin Salman made to Bloomberg in an interview.

Global benchmark Brent crude gained \$1.32, or 1.4 per cent, to \$97.92 a barrel by 11:10 GMT. US West Texas Intermediate crude rose \$1.65, or 1.8 per cent, to \$91.95. "Whether cutting Opec or Opec+ output after September is justified is debatable," said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM.

"Despite the recent inflation-induced weakness, the oil market seemed to have found a bottom lately," Oil has soared in 2022, coming close in March to an all-time high of \$147 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine exacerbated supply concerns. Concern



about a global recession, rising inflation and weaker demand has since weighed on prices.

Also in focus is the prospect of a nuclear deal between Iran and world powers that would allow Iran to boost oil exports. A senior US official said on Monday that Iran had dropped some of its main demands on resurrecting a deal.

While the price of Brent futures has fallen sharply from this year's high, the market structure and price differentials in the physical oil market still point to supply tightness.

In the comments reported on Monday, the Saudi minister said the paper and physical oil markets had become "disconnected". Underlining tight supply, the latest weekly reports of US inventories are expected to show a decline of 1.5 million barrels in crude stocks. — Reuters

Indonesia raises key interest rates

JAKARTA: Indonesia's central bank hiked its key interest rate on Tuesday for the first time in nearly four years to combat rising inflation stoked by the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine.

Bank Indonesia raised the policy rate to 3.75 from 3.5 per cent, a move that went against the majority of analysts' predictions. Its two other main rates were also raised by 25 basis points.

Rates were hiked for the first time since 2018 to defend against accelerating inflation, Bank Indonesia governor Perry Warjiyo said, with Russia's invasion driving up global energy and food prices and pushing millions into poverty around the world.

"The decision to raise the rates was taken as a pre-emptive and forward-looking step to mitigate risks from the hikes in core inflation and expectations of inflation because of the increase in non-subsidised fuel prices and volatile food inflation," Warjiyo told reporters in an online press briefing.

The move came as Jakarta considers raising subsidised fuel



An employee wearing a synthetic gloves counts Indonesia's rupiah banknotes at a currency exchange office in Jakarta. — Reuters

prices, a policy that was expected to further stoke inflation already at a seven-year high of 4.94 per cent in July and sitting above the central bank's target range of between 2 and 4 per cent.

With rising energy and food commodity prices, Warjiyo said the central bank expected inflation would go above its target range in 2022 and 2023.

President Joko Widodo came to power in 2014 on a pledge to boost annual growth to seven per cent, but the commodities-driven economy has remained

stuck in the 5.0 per cent range and has fallen below that after the onset of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020.

Looking ahead, the outlook for monetary policy is likely more tightening due to the continuing uncertainty in world markets, economists said.

"The hawkish commentary from the (Bank Indonesia) press conference increases the risk that the bank will tighten policy further this year," said Gareth Leather, Asia economist from Capital Economics. — AFP

France to push for private jets regulation

PARIS: France will consult its partners in the European Union on ways to regulate private jet emissions after the comings and goings of French billionaires on the fuel-guzzling planes caused a political controversy over the summer.

While an outright ban is not on the agenda, government spokesman Olivier Veran said on Tuesday that at a time the government promotes more "sober" energy consumption habits, regulating private jets would send a message that the same rules apply to all.

Several Twitter accounts tracking French billionaires'



An Air France airplane lands at the Charles-de-Gaulle Airport in Roissy. — AFP

private jet flights have emerged recently, causing a public outcry

over private jet emissions from the wealthy while regular folks

are asked to save on energy.

The leading "I Fly Bernard" account tracks the every move of a jet belonging to Bernard Arnault, the CEO of luxury giant LVMH and one of the world's richest men. "Private jets have a symbolic value," Veran told Inter radio.

"One can understand that French people who cut their energy consumption can be hurt when some of his fellow citizens use a private jet to hop around from place to place even though in most cases private jets are used for business," he said.

This is why Transport Minister Clement Beaune proposed that

EU ministers look at "ways to compensate Co2 emissions" of private jet flights, Veran said.

Beaune over the weekend told Le Parisien newspaper that it will be more efficient to act on the matter at a European level "to have the same rules and the most impact".

EU Transport Ministers are due to meet next month. The head of the French Green party, Julien Bayou, who favours an outright ban, told RMC radio: "One cannot tolerate that some people burn with a few flights 50 years in the (energy) consumption of an average French person". — Reuters

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#Living_with_COVID19



Harsher times inspired this self-educated interior designer to pursue his passion

Awadh al Abri is an entrepreneur who got heartbroken when the pandemic threatened the business he fostered and built. But rather than well in the challenges, he decided to take the downtime during the pandemic to pursue his passion — interior designing... **P20**

'It's wonderful,' say riverside booksellers as tourists return to Paris

At the very heart of Paris, former sailor Rachid Bouanou opens a large green wooden crate mounted on a wall overlooking the Seine, and carefully sets out the old second-hand books he keeps in there to sell to visitors strolling by.

Tourists are back in the French

capital, and for the riverside booksellers — known as "bouquinistes" in France — it's the end of fears that the Covid-19 pandemic might spell the end of a business that dates back to the 16th century.

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There are even 18 new riverside booksellers along the roughly 3-kilometre (1.8-mile) stretch of river embankment, and Bouanou, long a mechanic on a fishing boat, is one of them.

"I used to be a sailor ... but I always loved books, beautiful books, and I thought why not share this passion and share the books and authors I love with other people," he said, smiling broadly. "We're helping people dis-

cover books, new authors."

Nearby, Jan and Maria-Aida Vandemoortele, from Bruges, Belgium, have happily been browsing through the old books and newspapers on sale from the bouquinistes.

New Parisian bouquiniste, traditional street bookseller, Rachid Bouanou places books on shelves along the banks of the River Seine in Paris, France, August 18, 2022. REUTERS/Sarah Meyssonnier

"It's only in Paris you get these stalls with wonderful books," 68-year-old Jan said. "We just saw *Time* magazine from when we were born, so someone kept this for 60 years, my goodness, it's wonderful."

The coveted bookseller spots are allocated for five-year periods by the city council. The booksellers pay no rent but must open at least four days a week and, in normal times, bountiful summers make up for slower sales in the winter.

Bouanou and the 17 other new sellers were approved recently, bringing the total to around 230, the first new riverside booksellers appointed since 2019, before the pandemic kept local and foreign tourists away.

"Life is finally back (to normal)," said Jerome Callais, who heads the booksellers' association. "We have just had two years of pandemic with confinements which put our activity to a halt ... now tourists are returning and new booksellers are settling in."

And the riverside bookstalls are not just for the tourists.

"It's very encouraging (that new sellers have arrived), it's sign that it's not going to disappear," said 27-year-old Parisian Kubilai Iksel. "It's one of the most wonderful things about Paris." — Reuters

READ

DRAGONS LOVE TACOS

BY ADAM RUBIN
ILLUSTRATED BY DANIEL SALMIERI

What to serve your dragon-guests.



THE HOUSE OF DRAGON

The premiere of "House of the Dragon" drew nearly 10 million viewers on Sunday on television and the HBO Max streaming service, the largest audience for any new original series in the history of network, HBO reported. — Reuters



HISTORY IN CARPETS

A woman takes a picture at the 29th Handmade Carpet Exhibition in Iran's capital Tehran. Iran has some of the most beautiful carpets in the world and it's a thriving industry that gain loyalty from within the region. — AFP





George R R Martin Is Finally Getting the Show He Wanted

IN THE FIVE YEARS that HBO programming executives have been carefully considering a worthy successor to “Game of Thrones,” there was one idea that George R R Martin kept pushing: his rise-and-fall tale of the dragon-riding Targaryen family, set nearly 200 years before the events of “Game of Thrones.”

There was some reluctance within HBO’s ranks about creating a series that, like the original, was about a battle for the Iron Throne. A pair of writers assigned to work on the Targaryen concept came and went, but Martin would not give it up. Then, after HBO shot — and cancelled — a separate “Thrones” prequel pilot, Martin’s persistence prevailed. “House of the Dragon” was ordered straight to series in late 2019. Martin is the creator of the show along with Ryan Condal.

“House of the Dragon,” the first “Thrones” spinoff series, premieres on Sunday night, and the stakes are high for HBO. A hit could prove the viability of the Thrones Cinematic Universe. A middling performance (or worse) will prompt broader questions about whether millions of viewers are craving more “Thrones” series.

In a conversation late last month, Martin, the man who over the past three decades meticulously constructed the “Thrones” universe in his various books, discussed why he felt strongly about this idea; his ambitions for future spin-offs; and how his work-in-progress books will diverge from the controversial ending of “Game of Thrones,” the TV series.

These are edited excerpts from our conversation.

Q: TWO WRITERS WORKED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR TARGARYEN STORY AND IT DIDN'T GO ANYWHERE. WHAT MADE YOU KEEP PUSHING FOR IT?

A: I did not want to drop it. There was a lot of material already written on it, and it had everything that I thought we needed for a successful successor show. It had all of the intrigue around the Iron Throne. It had the great houses contending. It had dragons — a lot of dragons — and battles and betrayals.

Q: “HOUSE OF THE DRAGON” HAS THEMATIC OVERLAPS WITH “GAME OF THRONES” — FAMILY RIVALRY, THE BATTLE FOR THE THRONE. IN WHAT WAYS IS IT DIFFERENT?

A: “Game of Thrones” and my book

version of it, “A Song of Ice and Fire,” is, in some ways, a classic high fantasy in the mode of Tolkien and many, many writers who followed. Now, yes, it is true that in a sense, I’m deconstructing those tropes, those myths, the things that were hallmarks. But I’m also following them to some extent. “House of the Dragon” is more like historical fiction with some dragons thrown in. It’s like a Shakespearean tragedy.

Q: IT’S BEEN JUST OVER THREE YEARS SINCE “GAME OF THRONES” ENDED IN A WAY THAT DISAPPOINTED MANY FANS. WHAT DID YOU MAKE OF THE ENDING?

A: One of the things in the later seasons of the show was: How many seasons was it going to be? And [“Game of Thrones” creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss] for years were saying they wanted to wrap it up in seven seasons. Well, seven became eight because the eighth season is really the second half of the seventh season — it’s kind of one long season.

But I never felt that seven or eight seasons was enough. I campaigned for 10 seasons, and we could have gone to 12. There’s enough material — and there certainly will be enough material once I finish these last two books — to sustain 12 seasons.

Q: LET’S SAY “HOUSE OF THE DRAGON” IS A HIT. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR IDEAL AMBITION HERE? AN ENTIRE FLEET



OF “THRONES” TV SERIES?

A: Well, we are developing a number of other spinoffs. There’s the Jon Snow sequel show, and the rest are all prequels. There’s “Ten Thousand Ships” about Nymeria — that’s like a thousand years before and about how the Rhoynar came to Dorne. That’s an “Odyssey”-like epic. There’s the nine voyages of Corlys Velaryon, the Sea Snake. That would take us to places in the world that we’ve never seen.

We have some animated shows going, one of which was set in Yi Ti, which is basically the fantasy version of Imperial China or the Far East. We got a terrific script on that. Obviously, not all these shows we’re developing are going to make it to air, but I hope

that several of them do.

Q: TELL ME ABOUT YOUR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT IN “HOUSE OF THE DRAGON” VERSUS YOUR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT WITH “GAME OF THRONES,” THE ORIGINAL SERIES.

A: I am a lot more involved in “House of the Dragon” than I was in the later seasons of “Game of Thrones.” Now, mind you, I was very involved in the early seasons of “Game of Thrones.” Seasons 1 through 4, I mean, not only did I write a script, but especially like Seasons 1 or 2, I was giving a verdict on all the castings. I was reading the scripts. I was talking to Dan and David. I visited the set. But as the years went by, that involvement became less and less.

Q: WILL YOUR UPCOMING BOOKS DIVERGE FROM “THRONES,” THE TV SERIES?

A: A lot of this story comes to me as I write it. I always knew once the show got beyond my books — which honestly I did not anticipate — they would start going in directions that the books are not going to go in. Now, as I’m writing the books and I’m making more and more progress and it’s getting longer, ideas are coming to me and characters are taking me in directions that are even further from where the show went.

So I think what you’re going to find is, when “Winds of Winter” and then, hopefully, “Dream of Spring” come out, that my ending will be very different. And there will be some similarities, some big moments that I told David and Dan about many years ago, when they visited me in Santa Fe. But we only had like two, three days there, so I didn’t tell them everything. And even some of the things I told them are changing as I do the writing. So they will be different. And then it’ll be up to the readers and the viewers to decide which one they like better, and argue about it.

Q: WHEN WILL THE BOOKS BE DONE?

A: No comment. No comment. No comment. I get in trouble every time I do that. I mean, going back like 10 years, I said, “Oh, I should be done next year.” And then it’s not done next year. And then: “George lied to us.” I’m no good at predicting these things. And some of it depends on how many other interruptions there are and all that. I’m in a pretty good place now, so I’m optimistic. But I’m not going to make any predictions. — **NYT**

TRAVEL TALES

Ivory Coast's 'Pearl of Lagoons' loses its lustre



IT WAS ONCE a jewel of West Africa — the “Pearl of Lagoons,” people liked to call it.

Today, the vast Ebrie lagoon which abuts Ivory Coast’s economic capital Abidjan is a sick and sorry sight, choked by plastic pollution and ravaged by sand extraction and unbridled development.

Named after an ethnic group that lives on its banks, the lagoon covers 120,000 hectares (297,000 acres), mostly separated from the Atlantic Ocean by a strip of land.

Old-timers wax nostalgic about the days when its waters were a pristine aquamarine and mangroves teemed with fish and wildlife.

Today, the shoreside village of Beago exemplifies a nightmarish problem with plastic.

Discarded bottles, wrappers and other plastic rubbish smother the banks for at least a kilometre (more than half a mile).

“The situation is alarming. There are no more fish because of the pollution — fishing has been abandoned,” said the village chief Paul Abe Blessoue, 73.

Urban and industrial waste from Yopougon, Abidjan’s biggest district, has transformed his village of 3,000 inhabitants into an open dump, he said.

“If we are not careful, Beago could disappear in a few years, abandoned by its inhabitants,” he said.

MINIMAL RECYCLING

Discarded plastic typically enters the marine environment from rivers or drains or by the wind. Once there, it becomes a notorious problem.

Larger pieces can choke seabirds and mammals, and after biodegradation that can take years, tiny fragments may enter the food chain at the smallest level.

Many rich economies are trying to crack down through such measures as banning single-use plastic bags, launching awareness programmes and sorting rubbish to encourage recycling.

But in Ivory Coast, as in many developing countries, little such headway has been made.

The country of 26 million produces 460,000 tonnes of plastic waste each year, said Yaya Kone, CEO of recycling company Coliba Africa.

Of this, 290,000 tonnes come from Abidjan, where some six million people live.

“Only three per cent is recycled and used again,” he said.

The rest “ends up in nature, especially the lagoon and the sea.”

DEAD BAY

One of the biggest expanses of brackish water in Africa, the lagoon stretches far through countryside west of Abidjan to the Azagny National Park.

Its eastern point lies at Grand Bassam — Ivory Coast’s first French colonial capital, renowned today for its ocean beach.

“Plastic is the (lagoon’s) biggest pollution source,” said Ayenon Seka, from the Institute of Tropical Geography at the University of Cocody in Abidjan.

But plastic is not the only ill.

Around Bietry Bay, pollution has been compounded by industrial extraction of sand and anarchic development.

“Bietry Bay is a dead bay — it is extremely polluted, a real environmental disaster,” said businessman Bernard Derrien, 76, who has lived in the area since 1998. He said 1.6 million square metres (17.2 million square feet) of the bay had been filled in to build factories there.

POTO-POTO

Gerard Frere, a Frenchman who has lived in Abidjan for 67 years and owns a hotel in the bay, remembered the old days with nostalgia.

“Bietry used to be a corner of paradise — now it is poto-poto,” said Frere, using a term for muddy terrain infested with mosquitoes and exposed to flooding.

A specialist in sports fishing, Frere said pollution had halved his turnover.

“The floor of the lagoon is carpeted with plastic waste 30 centimetres (a foot) thick,” he said.

Voices are being raised to reverse the lagoon’s catastrophic decline, with some, like Derrien, demanding a massive sewerage network to ensure that water entering the lagoon from Abidjan is clean.

Residents in Bietry district have launched an association, Abidjan Ma Lagune, and Kone’s company is launching a training programme for as many as 6,000 plastic rubbish collectors.

But public awareness is still far behind, said Kouadio Affian, an oceanographer at the University of Abidjan.

“People don’t realise that when they throw away a plastic bottle in the street, it could end up in the lagoon,” he said. — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

Kim Kardashian among celebrities flouting US drought rules: Report



KIM KARDASHIAN and celebrity neighbours including Sylvester Stallone have been handed warnings for repeatedly flouting water restrictions at their homes in drought-hit California, the Los Angeles Times reported on Monday.

Strict water limits — imposed as the western United States endures its 23rd successive year of drought, worsened by human-caused climate change — are in place across swathes of southern California, including the affluent neighbourhoods of Calabasas and Hidden Hills.

But more than 2,000 residents of the two glitzy enclaves north of Los Angeles, known for their sprawling green lawns and giant swimming pools, are continuing to breach the limits, often by eye-watering amounts.

Celebrity reality stars Kim and Kourtney Kardashian were among repeat offenders in June, the newspaper reported, citing notices obtained via a Public Records Act request.

A Hidden Hills home and adjacent lot owned by a trust linked to Kim Kardashian exceeded their water allowance by a combined 232,000 gallons (878,000 litres) for the month, while her sister Kourtney's property in nearby Calabasas was around 100,000 gallons in excess.

"Rocky" star Stallone's \$18-million Hidden Hills property exceeded its June limits by 230,000 gallons, or 533 per cent, having been 195,000 gallons over the limit the previous month, it said.

Repeat offenders are initially fined hundreds of dollars, but deep-pocketed homeowners who are still not dissuaded can eventually have their supplies physically reduced to a trickle.

Water authorities in Las Virgenes Municipal Water District, covering Calabasas and Hidden Hills, have already installed metal flow restrictor devices at around 20 properties' main shutoff valves, the newspaper reported.

A representative for the Kardashians did not immediately respond to AFP request for comment.

Stallone's lawyer told the Times that its report "could mischaracterize and misrepresent the situation" at a property sustaining around 500 mature trees, saying his clients had "proactively" installed a drip irrigation system and let certain lawns die.

Others named in the newspaper's investigation included comedian Kevin Hart and former NBA basketball star Dwyane Wade.

Famous for its rows of palm trees, Los Angeles has also traditionally been known for its lush, green lawns, often maintained with automatic sprinklers.

Residents are increasingly replacing their thirsty lawns with plants native to this desert region, and Las Virgenes spokesman Mike McNutt said he hoped celebrities could set a positive example.

"People listen to you, people look at you, people value what you do," he said.

"We need you to step up to the plate, to be examples and to be leaders so that other people will follow." — **AFP**

CULTURE

The Deep Roots of Weleda's Skin Food



CALENDULAS LOOK LIKE daisies, smell like marigolds and possess powerful phytochemicals that can mend skin. At a garden in Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany, Astrid Sprenger's blond bob and turquoise pendant swung in the sun as she picked the fiery orange flowers by hand.

"It's one of the only plants you can put on open wounds," she said.

Sprenger, 56, who has a doctorate in agricultural science from the University of Hohenheim in Stuttgart, Germany, is a head gardener at Weleda, a Swiss company perhaps best known for its ultrarich Skin Food cream. Sold in parrot green tubes, the moisturiser costs \$12.49 an ounce on the company's site.

Though Skin Food has gone by that name only since around 2010, its formula dates to 1926. In addition to extracts of calendula, it contains concentrated forms of chamomile and wild pansy, sunflower seed and sweet almond oils, and beeswax.

The Skin Food line has expanded to include Skin Food Light, a less dense version of the original cream, along with a lotion and body and lip butters. According to Swati Gupta, Weleda's head of e-commerce in North America, the company in 2020 sold a Skin Food product every five seconds. Weleda is developing other Skin Food cosmetics, including some for the face, which it plans to debut next year.

FARM TO TUBE

The plants used to make Skin Food and Weleda's other products are grown worldwide. In Schwäbisch Gmünd, the 50-acre plot that Sprenger oversees runs wild-ish with about 260 species that include stonecrop and mistletoe. It is one of eight gardens owned by the company, which is based in Arlesheim, Switzerland, in

addition to sourcing from 50 partner growers.

Occupying about 60,000 total acres, the web of gardens, which spans five continents, is roughly 70 times the size of New York City's Central Park.

Last year, Weleda achieved B Corp certification, meaning its operations meet certain social and environmental criteria. It is also certified by the

Union for Ethical BioTrade, which sets best practices for sourcing ingredients.

The gardens it owns are certified by Demeter, an organisation that maintains the standards for the agricultural practice known as biodynamic farming, which Sprenger compared to regenerative farming — an organic method that focuses on soil health and forgoes elements of industrialised agriculture such as synthetic chemicals — but "on a higher level."

The practice demands strict standards for biodiversity and soil fertility, at Weleda's gardens, topsoil is not tilled and crops are rotated and intercropped, or grown together in the same plot, with three to 10 other species. Another tenet of biodynamic farming is composting. "It's not like poo,"

Sprenger said as she plunged a trowel into a dark mound that disgorged bugs and a heady herbal odour. "It's nice!"

The compost she was sifting through contained homeopathic additives, or preparations, made from fermented plants including yarrow and valerian. Preparations are also a requirement of biodynamic farming, and others are

sprayed directly onto soil or crops. One, called horn manure, does include excrement. It is made by packing cow dung into cow horns that are buried underground for the winter and dug up in the spring; the dung is then extracted, swirled into rainwater at body temperature and flicked at the soil with a brush, not unlike how a priest sprinkles holy water.

Some growers see preparations as magic potions of sorts, claiming they sensitise soil to cosmic rhythms. Followers of what is known as the biodynamic calendar sow, plant and reap crops based on the positions of the sun, moon, planets and stars. (While not necessary for Demeter certification, some of Weleda's gardens operate this way, but not the one in Schwäbisch Gmünd.) — **NYT**

CHANGING WORLD

Gaza women seek outdoors escape on summer nights



FROM CARD GAMES to horse riding, women in Gaza are spending their summer nights outdoors to seek solace from daily hardships in the Palestinian enclave.

"We wait for the sun to be gone to escape to the sea," said Yusra Hmedat, 43, while playing cards at a beachfront cafe in Gaza City.

"Women leave their houses, from the pressures of life, and try to stay out as long as possible," said the civil servant, as she put her cards in order.

Fifteen years into an Israeli-led blockade on Gaza, residents of the densely populated territory endure regular power cuts amid stifling summer heat.

One of Hmedat's competitors, Nawal Yassin, said she often returns home at 2:00 am or 3:00 am. "Women try to adapt and overcome the circumstances more than men," said the 66-year-old.

In another cafe northwest of the city, housewife Umm Saeed described her nightly rendezvous as a way of coping with the impact of repeated wars between Palestinian militants and Israel.

"We try to overcome the stresses by going out, sharing our concerns and sympathising with one another," she said.

"You see people laughing, but from within everyone is devastated, psychologically."

Umm Saeed said she spends all of her disposable income at the cafe, amounting to around 15 shekels (\$4.50) a day. But with Gaza's unemployment rate hitting 47 per cent last year, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, such outings are an unaffordable luxury for many.

At Al Shati refugee camp, which overlooks the sea, Faten Abdul Rahman instead sits outside with her daughters and neighbours.

"The majority of women in the camp gather together at the door of their homes because of the poor economic situation," said Rahman, who relies on social welfare to support her seven children.

"The heat is unbearable at home. We spread out a sheet and sit with guests on the beach, which is the only free entertainment," she added.

Switching on fans or air conditioning is often out of the question in Gaza, where resi-

dents received an average of 11 hours of electricity a day last month.

This plummeted to just five hours on August 7, during the latest bout of fighting between Palestinian militants and Israel, data from the UN humanitarian agency (OCHA) shows.

- FEELING HUMAN -

Women like Umm Jaber Abu Assi minimise their spending by heading to the park, bringing homemade pastries and renting a chair for a shekel.

"If we went out to the sea I would need to pay more," she said, as crowds of women and children gathered at the park to the west of Gaza City.

"There's a lack of options in Gaza; leaving the house (makes us) feel that we're human," said the 43-year-old, who sometimes faces criticism for getting home after midnight. "I don't care about the criticism. I walk home with my daughter without being scared (because) the streets are crowded," she said.

For some women, sports such as horse riding are on offer each evening.

At a club southwest of Gaza City, 22-year-old Menna Kahil is feeding her horse Ripple.

"I spend most of my time here in the evenings. I'm afraid to go out in the evening in public places alone, for fear of shelling or rocket fire," she said. Such weapons killed at least 49 Gazans in three days of cross-border fighting this month, according to a health ministry toll.

Despite riding for a decade, Kahil said she still comes under pressure over her chosen hobby.

"I face a lot of criticism because I'm not veiled when I ride my horse at the sea," she said. "Although it's only natural — even the horses need a change of atmosphere."

Outside the sports club, Mervat al Ghalayini is playing pickleball, which incorporates elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis.

"I love joining anything new," the 41-year-old said enthusiastically.

"I work in the morning and practice sports in the evening. I leave the house to go to a place where there's light and people." — **AFP**



Harsher times inspired this self-educated interior designer to pursue his passion

By Mai Al Abri

As a small business owner in an era of constant trend changes, it is important to have a clear perception and understanding of what your customer wants. A small business's success depends a lot on the capacity of its owner to have a vision and understand these constantly evolving needs.

But just imagine being a businessman in the time of Covid-19 and face the harsh reality that you have to shut your doors for months because the business is not doing well.

This was what Awadh al Abri has to contend with. A self-educated interior designer, he was heartbroken when the business he fostered and built was threatened due to the pandemic.

"The peak of the pandemic was really harsh time for my business," He said.

The extra time at home during the Covid-19 pandemic made it clear to Awadh that it was time to pursue his true passion for Interior Design. Having the spare time at home to work on projects and explore design elements set a fire within him that he could no longer ignore. He knew that he would be living a life of happiness by pursuing this new career path, and he would finally be given a chance to unleash his creativity.

"When I was 18 years old, I got really sick. Doctors couldn't tell what was my problem. I just felt that something forcing me to disconnect from the real world. That was a turning point in my life

and where I got a lot of my drive. I built up grit and mental strength while I was in the hospital and seeing patients that were sicker than I was," he shared when asked how he got started in interior design.

"I remember the doctor saying, 'He's so tough.' I think over time that became my mindset. Whatever I get involved in, I just use that mentality; I think there is always a way to keep going," he said.

"Luckily, I could complete my general education diploma but never was lucky enough to join any higher education institutions. I decided then not to look at the problem, rather look at the solution", he shared.

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM WHAT HE SEES

Awadh said that he learns from watching experts on how to do interior design.

"On Instagram, all I do is follow design accounts. I look at furniture pictures, houses, art, as well as every single design magazine. I just love beautiful places and the history behind houses and furniture. I always wanted to do something within that field and I kept thinking, 'How do I get into that space?,' he shared.

Interior design can create and change someone's space in a way that makes them feel like they deserve that space. It's important to make that space feel like home. I believe that designing with people who have a passion for community has the power to change our society.

WHAT DO YOU PREFER? MODERN OR TRADITIONAL DESIGNS?

This really depends on the customer's wish and view of their homes. Some prefer the modern designs while others ask us to add some modern touches to the traditional designs. I love how to become so in tune with my client. "You have to be able to connect with them to communicate the vision that's in their head, and then translate it into their homes. When you walk into someone's house and every room is put together, it's powerful. It shows how much they care about their space.

For me, the thing I like about Heritage is the ability to have freedom and form within my learning. Heritage is a lived experience. It introduces real-life education. It makes you want to keep learning. There is a constant ability to keep growing in this space.

WHERE DO YOU DRAW INSPIRATION FROM?

I draw my inspiration, truthfully, from getting to know my client well before jumping into creating his or her space. It is so important that space reflects the individual who lives there. I am a "design guide" for that client. I am learning that the biggest compliment from a client is when they say "how did you know what I wanted? It's amazing how you get me."

What is the best advice you've ever received?

The best advice I ever received was to believe in myself and chase my dreams. Since beginning this journey, I am the happiest I have ever been.

