

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, on the occasion of being sworn in as his country's prime minister. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments to Prime Minister Albanese, wishing him good health, happiness and success in carrying out his duties to realise the Australian people's aspirations of further progress and prosperity. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth. – ONA



HM, IRAN PRESIDENT HOLD TALKS

TALKS EXPLORE ASPECTS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION AND WAYS TO ENHANCE THEM



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik hosted an official luncheon at Al Alam Palace guest house on Monday in honour of Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman. Prior to the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan presented an Omani Sword as a commemorative gift for the Iranian President.

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday held a round of official talks with President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran at Al Alam Palace.

The talks explored various aspects of bilateral cooperation and ways of enhancing the strong ties binding the people of Oman and Iran. The aim is to exchange views about issues of common concern.

The official talks session was attended from the Omani side by HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, HH Sayyid Taimour bin Asaad al Said, Chairman of the Central Bank of Oman's Board of Governors, Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It was attended from the Iranian side by Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brigadier Mohammed Reza Gharaei, Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics, Sayed Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade, Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Transport and Urban Development, Javad Oji, Minister of Oil, Ali Salehabadi, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Gholam-Hossein Esmaeili, Head of the Presidential Office, Ali Najafi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman, Abbas Moghtadaei, Deputy Chairman of the Parliament, Head of the Oman-Iran Parliamentary Friendship Committee

Oman, Iran sign 8 MoUs and 4 cooperation pacts

The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Monday signed eight memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and four cooperation programmes covering a range of fields. The pacts were inked on the sidelines of the visit of Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to Oman.

Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy and his Iranian counterpart Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian signed the first, second and third MoUs covering diplomatic studies and training, radio and television and higher education, research and innovation, respectively.

The fourth agreement, in the field of oil and gas, was signed by Dr Mohammed Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Iran's Minister of Oil, Javad Oji.

The fifth MoU, in the field of transport, was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Transport and Urban Development.

The sixth, seventh and eighth MoUs were signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Sayed Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade covered the areas of agriculture, livestock and fisheries, plant protection and agricultural quarantine and specifications, measurements and conformity assessment.

DETAILS ON P5

and several Iranian officials.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and President Raisi held a closed-door session.

This session was attended from the Omani side by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Dr Hamed bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office, Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was attended from the Iranian side by Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Jamshidi, Deputy Head of the Presidential Office for Political Affairs and Ali Najafi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA



HM hosts luncheon in honour of Iranian President



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq hosted an official luncheon at Al Alam Palace guest house on Monday in honour of Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the occasion of his visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

Prior to the luncheon, His Majesty the Sultan presented an Omani Sword as a commemorative gift

for the Iranian President.

The luncheon was attended by the Royal Family members, ministers, chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces and the Royal Oman Police, as well as ambassadors of the Arab and friendly countries.

— ONA



IRAN PRESIDENT CONCLUDES VISIT



President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran, concluded an official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The President was seen off at the Royal Airport by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan.



Iranian President meets Sayyid Fahd

MUSCAT: President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met at Al Alam Palace guest house on Monday HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers.

The meeting discussed areas of cooperation between the two countries and means of promoting them to serve the joint interests. They also exchanged views on some regional and international developments.

The meeting was attended by

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran and members of the delegation accompanying the Iranian President. — ONA



Oman, Iran underscore economic partnership, security, stability



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, have reaffirmed the positive role of the private sector in augmenting the volume of investments and commercial exchange. They also laid emphasis on the significance of exerting more efforts to establish security and stability in the region and the world at large.

This was stated in a communiqué issued on the occasion of the visit of President Raisi to the Sultanate of Oman.

The communiqué reads as follows: "In response to a fraternal invitation from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, made an official

visit to the Sultanate of Oman on Monday, 23 May 2022.

The visit stems from historically deep-rooted relations between Oman and Iran. It bolsters the already strong bilateral relations and reiterates mutual appreciation and respect between the leaderships of the two countries and their peoples, based on tenets of religion and ties of fraternity and good neighbourliness.

A session of official talks was held by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The talks explored vistas of cooperation, bilateral relations and means of developing them in various spheres, notably commercial exchange and investment. They touched on

coordination about areas of interest to the two countries. The two leaders expressed their satisfaction with the level of existing cooperation, and they decided to open up channels for new economic partnership.

JOINT COMMITTEES

The two leaders also expressed their delight over the high level of concord among the joint cooperation committees and they issued directives for the committees to convene on a regular basis.

His Majesty the Sultan and the Iranian President underscored the positive role of the private sector in both countries to enhance joint activities, hoping that these activities will augment the rate of

investment and trade exchange. The two leaders welcomed the signing of agreements and memoranda of understanding to streamline cooperation in the fields of investment, sports, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, maritime transport, ports, logistics, oil and gas.

His Majesty the Sultan and the Iranian President also discussed a number of regional and international issues of common concern. They expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of existing political consultation and coordination at various fronts.

REGIONAL STABILITY

The two leaders called for exerting more efforts to maintain regional and international

security and stability in the region and the world at large. They recommended coordination between the two sides - at regional and international events about issues of relevance to security and stability in the region and the world.

His Majesty the Sultan valued the policy of expanded, interactive and constructive interaction that stems from fundamentals of Iranian policy credited to the Iranian President and his government, as well as the policy of openness towards all countries, notably neighbouring states. He said that this approach leads to the establishment of positive relations based on mutual respect, cooperation and good neighbourliness that bring

about an exchange of economic, commercial and cultural benefits, while at the same time contributing to the consolidation of pillars of security and stability in the region.

The two sides underlined the need to curb all forms of terrorism and extremism.

At the conclusion of the visit, the Iranian President voiced his thanks to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, his government and the people of the Sultanate of Oman for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to him.

The Iranian President extended an invitation to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran. The invitation was ardently welcomed by His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA



His Majesty accords warm welcome to President of Iran



Sultanate of Oman
سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التجارة والصناعة وترويج الاستثمار
Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion

Tender 23/2022 Announcement for

The Internal Tenders Committee at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion announces the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Company rate	Tender document price in OMR (Non-refundable)	Tender Document collection Deadline	Offers Submission Deadline
23/2022	Supply, installation and commissioning Wi-Fi and firewalls and Firewall license renewal for Ministry of Commerce, Industry & Investment Promotion and its regional offices	Specialized	25/- OMR	Wednesday 1/6/2022	Thursday 16/6/2022 Before 10:00 am

Terms and conditions documents can be obtained through the ESNAD service via <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> in which they will be available until the date mentioned in the table above, provided that the document's price is paid through the website's payment gateway.

All companies shall submit their offers with a temporary insurance in the form of Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank in the Sultanate of Oman values not less than (1%) of the offer, Addressed to H.E Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee at Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and valid for (90) days from the date of offer submission. Any offer that does not meet the required temporary insurance shall not be considered. A copy of the Bank Guarantee or Certified Check must be attached with the offer submitted by the company on the website (ESNAD service) and the original Bank Guarantee or Certified Check must be kept until it is requested by MOCIIP. Offers shall be submitted through the ESNAD service on the above-mentioned website before 10 o'clock on the morning of the day mentioned for offers submission. Offers submitted after this date will not be considered, regardless of the reasons of the delay.

The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other submitted offer.

Note: Priority shall be given to companies and institutions whose bid has the highest Omanisation Rate.

Correspondences:

- Tender inquiries: All correspondence pertaining to TENDER Inquiries shall be online through E-Tendering System (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System inquiries : All correspondences pertaining to the technical support of E-Tendering System shall be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number.
Tel.: +968 24402200
E-mail: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

www.tejarah.gov.om

Tejarah_om

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MUSCAT: President Dr Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran arrived in the Sultanate of Oman on an official visit lasting one day.

The Iranian president was received with tremendous fanfare.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq led the welcoming party for the Iranian President. When the jet of President Raisi touched ground at the Royal Airport, His Majesty the Sultan met the guest at the foot of the ramp, welcoming him and wishing him and his official delegation a pleasant stay in Oman.

Along with His Majesty the Sultan, the Iranian President was received by Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (Head of the Mission of Honour), Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Muaini, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ali Najafi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman and members of the Mission of Honour.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan and the President of Iran headed to the reception hall, passing through two rows of the guard of honour of the Royal Guard of Oman (RGO).

After a short stay, the motorcade of His Majesty the Sultan and his guest President Dr Ebrahim Raisi left the Royal Airport heading to Al Alam Palace for an official reception ceremony. Before the arrival of the main vehicle of the motorcade at Al Alam Palace, a squadron of cavalry lined the two sides of the road heading to the gate of the palace.

Upon the arrival of the motorcade of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and President Dr Ebrahim Raisi at the entrance of Al Alam Palace, the RGO band played a welcoming tune, to the accompaniment of trumpets, as the motorcade entered the courtyard of Al Alam Palace.

His Majesty the Sultan accompanied the President of Iran to the Dais of Honour where the Royal Anthem of the Islamic Republic of Iran was played, while the artillery fired a 21-gun salute for the guest.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan shook hands with members of the official delegation accompanying the President of Iran, wishing them a pleasant stay.

In his turn, the guest shook hands with some members of the Royal Family, Chairmen of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura, ministers, commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP).

After that, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and President Dr Ibrahim Raisi proceeded to the hall where they took Arabian coffee and exchanged cordial talks.

President Dr Ebrahim Raisi is accompanied during his visit to the Sultanate of Oman by an official delegation comprising Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Brigadier Mohammed Reza Gharaei, Minister of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics, Sayed Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade, Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Transport and Urban Development, Javad Oji, Minister of Oil, Ali Salehabadi, Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Gholam-Hossein Esmaeili, Head of the Presidential Office, Ali Najafi, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Sultanate of Oman, Abbas Moghtadaei, Deputy Chairman of the Parliament, Head of the Oman-Iran Parliamentary Friendship Committee and several Iranian officials.

The visit is an opportunity to explore areas of interest to the two neighbouring countries, with a view to realising their aspirations. — ONA



Oman, Iran ink pacts, cooperation programmes



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Iran on Monday signed eight memoranda of understanding (MoU) and four cooperation programmes covering a range of fields. The pacts were inked on the sidelines of the current visit of Iranian President Dr Ebrahim Raisi to Oman.

Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy and his Iranian counterpart Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian signed the first, second and third MoUs covering “diplomatic studies and training”, “radio and television” and “higher education, research and innovation”, respectively.

The fourth agreement, in the field of oil and gas, was signed by Dr Mohammed bin Hamad al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and

Minerals and Iran’s Minister of Oil, Javad Oji.

The fifth MoU, in the field of transport, was signed by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Transport and Urban Development.

The sixth, seventh and eighth MoUs were signed by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and Sayed Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of Industry, Minerals and Trade covered the areas of “agriculture, livestock and fisheries”, “plant protection and agricultural quarantine” and “specifications, measurements and conformity assessment”.

The Sultanate of Oman and Iran also signed four programmes of cooperation. The first, in the fields of trade, investment and services, was signed by Al Yousef and Fatemi.

The second, third and fourth, in the fields of “labour and employment”, “environment” and “sports” were signed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry’s Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs and Iran’s Ali Riza Biman Bak, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Industries.

Sayyid Badr said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that “Omani-Iranian relations are deep-rooted in history and growing at a steady pace. The current visit of Iran’s President to the Sultanate of Oman reaffirms



these relations and brings about a new set of programmes of cooperation in different fields.”

Sayyid Badr added that a new

package of pacts will follow on the heels of the MoUs signed on Monday. They will be unveiled later as an outcome of this visit.

On his turn, Al Yousef pointed out that a joint team will put in context the agreements signed by the two sides today. — ONA



Regional issues reviewed

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, met at Al Alam Palace guest house on Monday Dr Hossein Amir Abdollaian, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

They reviewed relations

of cooperation between the two countries and touched on regional and international issues of common concern.

The meeting was attended by a number of officials from both sides. — ONA

MUSCAT: Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, received here on Monday Rostam Qasemi, Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two sides discussed activating agreements of maritime affairs, connecting ports and boosting air traffic between the two countries. They also reviewed prospects for future developments in the two-way trade between Oman and Iran.

Activating maritime agreements, boosting air traffic discussed



Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamaki, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology’s Under-Secretary for Transport, and

several officials from both sides were present at the meeting.

Separately, Eng Khamis al Shamaki explored areas of cooperation in the field of

transport and logistics with Shahriar Afandizadeh, Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran. — ONA



HM greets Eritrean president

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea on his country's Independence Anniversary. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness. His Majesty also wished the people of Eritrea further progress and prosperity. — ONA

ROP launches e-service for driving licenses transfer

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The Royal Oman Police launched an e-service for transferring vehicle-driving licenses through the ROP mobile app on smartphones. The launch of the new e-service marked the opening of Comex 2022, Sultanate of Oman's biggest Technology Exhibition, at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Brigadier Mohammed bin Awad al Rawas, Director General of Traffic, explained that the service of transferring vehicle driving licenses is to facilitate the procedures to obtain this service round the clock. He stressed that the ROP would digitalise many other traffic services. He noted that services related to driving licenses became electronic from the stage of submission of application up to the issuance of the licence.

"Work is underway to digitise all services in the licensing and the vehicle registration departments," he said.

The ROP is participating in the Comex at a dedicated pavilion to showcase police facilities and services in the Sultanate of Oman. The pavilion reviews the latest electronic services provided by the Royal Oman Police, in addition to clarifying the mechanism for benefiting from them through interactive screens.

Comex 2022: Biggest tech show opens

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Comex, the Sultanate of Oman's official technology show, was inaugurated by Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre on Monday.

Many government organisations are present at the show introducing their latest initiatives and digital services as Muscat celebrates its role as the Arab Digital Capital for the year 2022. An example is Muscat Municipality as a representative explained, "This is the latest facility for companies especially contractors and concerns who want to attain No Objection Certificate. They can do the process online."

This year more than 80 companies are taking part in Comex 2022.

"For the first time, we are having

a dedicated zone for more than 150 startups called Comex Tech Venture, where many startups from the region are having the opportunity to showcase their products and services," said Amr bin Abdullah Baabood, CEO of OITE.

Leading telecommunications companies have a prominent presence, and making an entry into the 31st edition of Comex is Banking and FinTech Zone. There is also an innovation zone that showcases the projects in Oman.

The digital transformation has reached at various levels in the Sultanate of Oman, according to the participants at Comex.

Ensuring all members join the digital transformation, Oman Information Technology Society is being the connecting point.

Muhalab bin Khalfan al Moharbi is from the Oman IT Society, "One of our roles is gathering together IT experts who are into programming and



networking. An important part is sharing skills between the experts and beginners. It is open to all nationalities."

Meanwhile, government organisations showcased the technology and innovation that is currently used in various fields while moving towards Oman Vision 2040.

There is a strong presence of SMEs along with the participation

of the SMEs Development Authority.

Abdullah al Subhi from Oman Environment Authority explained, "We use drones as part of our conservation plan in areas that have special plants and animals. We can also do surveillance on these protected and restricted areas by detecting if anyone has violated the rules. We also scan the geographical area and create

3D mappings before we visit the locations."

One of the major attractions at the technology show is Omani electric car Mays. The owner Haider al Zaabi said, "It is fully electric, and all the components are international, so we are competing with all the international brands. So far we have received 500 reservations, and it is looking promising. In the future we are going into SUVs. What is unique is that we have a futuristic design, and we are promoting this type of design but the price is good too."

Inside the vehicle, one big screen controls everything and has features that can read your stress level.

From the latest products in electronics to data services are available at the 31st edition of Comex.

"In case one cannot be present here physically, they can catch up with the technology show by participating virtually.



Operational plan of national nutrition strategy discussed

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health represented by the Directorate General of Primary Health Care's Nutrition Department in partnership with the World Health Organization Office in Oman, on Monday held a meeting to discuss operational plan of the National Nutrition Strategy and Work frame 2020-2030 at the Crown Plaza-Muscat.

The meeting was attended by Dr Jean Jabbour, WHO representative in Oman, with the presence of representatives of the concerned Ministries and international organisations.

The National Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030, which is derived from Oman Vision 2040, aim at promoting the work in the Nutrition to achieve food security and eliminate all forms of malnutrition in addition to enhancing nutrition for life by 2030. This is realised by the

cooperation of relevant public and private sectors for achieving the fundamental objectives that strengthen the health and nutrition status of community.

The meeting was commenced by an address of WHO representative in Oman where he affirmed that the importance of this meeting represents in developing a national strategy that is under process through identifying detailed activities and implementation mechanisms. It further determines the roles of sectors concerned with the implementing the strategies of the plan and developing a time frame for follow up and evaluation help improving community health status.

The Director of Nutrition Dr Salima al Maamari affirmed in her word that the Sultanate of Oman has made great progress in reducing the prevalence of various forms of undernourishment over

the past four decades against the perceived rapid social and economic development. However, the prevalence of some forms of undernourishment remains significantly high, with 11.4 per cent of children under five suffering from stunting (chronic malnutrition) and 9.3 per cent suffering from wasting (acute malnutrition), as per the National Nutrition Survey 2017.

Dr Al Maamari added that like other Eastern Mediterranean Region countries, Oman is experiencing a nutritional transition as other forms of malnutrition, including overweight, obesity and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases (N-NCDs) are becoming increasingly important.

The implementation of the multi-sectoral National Nutrition Strategy serves directly in preventing NCDs.

Lankan envoy presents ornamental plants to Royal Gardens nursery

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 23

Sri Lankan Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman Ameer Ajwad has presented different varieties of Sri Lankan ornamental plants to the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens and Farms (Royal Court Affairs) here.

Ornamental plants namely Orchids, Leather-ferns, Aspidistras, Cane Palms, Butterfly Palms and Cast Iron Plants were presented by the ambassador to Eng Saleh bin Abdullah al Jahdhami, Director, Department of Plant Nurseries of the Royal Gardens and Farms of Royal Court Affairs, at the Central Plant Nursery of Royal Gardens and Farms located at Zulfa, Maabala in Muscat.

These popular Sri Lankan ornamental plants would be planted in Royal Gardens and Farms in Salalah.

Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman arranged this donation by the Peradeniya Botanical Garden,

which is the largest and elegant botanical garden in Sri Lanka, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Tourism of Sri Lanka on the request made by the Foreign Ministry of the Sultanate of Oman.

Presenting the plants, Ambassador Ameer Ajwad stated that Sri Lanka and Oman have huge potential synergies in the field of agriculture and farming and that he was pleased to initiate cooperation in this field between the two friendly countries by donating popular Sri Lankan ornamental plants to the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens and Farms (Royal Court Affairs) of the Sultanate of Oman.

Officials of the Central Plant Nursery of the Royal Gardens and Farms (Royal Court Affairs) also were present on the occasion.

Ambassador Ameer Ajwad was taken on a tour around the Central Plant Nursery of Royal Gardens and Farms by Eng Saleh al Jahdhami.



Robotic workshop for people with special needs

KABEER YOUSUF
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The first workshop on robotics for people with special needs, especially neurodiverse students, will be organised on Saturday, May 28, in Muscat. The event is aimed at giving a boost to specially-abled children's rehabilitation.

The workshop, an international collaboration between Oman Down Syndrome Association, Edutech4Space in Dubai and Prakramika Vocational Institute from India, supported by Eshraqa Khimji Ramdas, is an approved project based on the materials and instructions developed by NASA's neurodiversity network (N3).

Speaking to the Observer, Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group, said by supporting



Ahmed al Jabri



Dr Gayatri Narasimhan



Shrisudha Viswanathan

the Oman Down Syndrome Association in this first-of-its-kind Robotics workshop, the group aims to bring a smile to the faces of those children and their families.

"At Eshraqa, we strongly believe in supporting charitable organisations, especially those related to children and education. We are honoured to be associated with Oman Down Syndrome Association's Robotics workshop. We wish them continued success

and progress in achieving their goals. We greatly appreciate the hard work and support provided by their partners at Prakramika Vocational Institute and Edutech4Space, Dubai, in organising this event," Nailesh Khimji added.

With an introduction to space science and technology, the robotics workshop is expected to make the down syndrome and other neurodiverse children

successful and help them lead a dignified life with their counterparts.

"As humans, we all have innate potential and talent that we constantly develop, which is true for the neurodiverse community. As a society, we need to give them the right opportunities to explore and excel in their innate talents," said Dr Gayatri Narasimhan, Founder and Director of Prakramika Vocational Institute, India.

The Sultanate of Oman has a total number of 1,117 people with down syndrome, out of which 638 are males and 479 females. They are covered under programmes and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development's rehabilitation centres and private civil societies.



NOTICE

This is to inform all concerned that Mr. Amru Fatooh Abdulghani holder of Egyptian Passport No. A16112973 Resident Card No. 122474585 will be no longer working with International House of Restaurant and Cafes LLC from 01.05.2022. Therefore, all the concerned are requested to stop dealing with the above named in favor of the company. If anyone is dealing with him it is at their own risk and the company will not take any responsibility hereafter. If anybody has any claim, he/she should report to the company within the next 10 working days.

International House of Restaurant and Cafes LLC



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In brief

■ MANILA



SEVEN KILLED AFTER FIRE ENGULFS PHILIPPINE FERRY

At least seven people were killed and scores plucked to safety in the Philippines after a fire ripped through a ferry and forced passengers to jump overboard, the coast guard and witnesses said. The blaze broke out on the 'Mercraft 2' at around 6:30 am as it carried 134 passengers and crew from Polillo Island to Real in Quezon province on the main island of Luzon. Seven people died and 127 were rescued, Philippine Coast Guard spokesman Commodore Armando Balilo said after the last missing were found. The fibreglass fast craft boat, which had a 186-person capacity, was about a kilometre from Real when it caught fire. — AFP

■ SYLHET



FOUR MILLION PEOPLE HIT BY BANGLADESH FLOODS, SAYS UN

At least four million people have been affected by the worst floods in Bangladesh's northeast for nearly two decades, the United Nations said. The Bangladeshi government said the floods, which began last week, had submerged 70 per cent of Sylhet district in the northeast and 60 per cent of Sunamganj district, leaving at least 10 people dead and about two million marooned. Heavy rains and a rush of water from upstream in India's northeast swelled rivers in Bangladesh, with two main border rivers, the Surma and Kushiara, breaching a major embankment and inundating hundreds of villages. — AFP

■ VIENNA



AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT CALLS TO DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen argued that his advanced age made him suitable for re-election, as part of his campaign efforts for this year's presidential election. "I'm old enough for this office," the 78-year-old incumbent said in Vienna. He pointed to experience as an important qualification for the job during restless and difficult times. Van der Bellen also referred to the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, adding that this phase of unrest could not be expected to end soon. Van der Bellen called on Austrians to defend democracy. — dpa

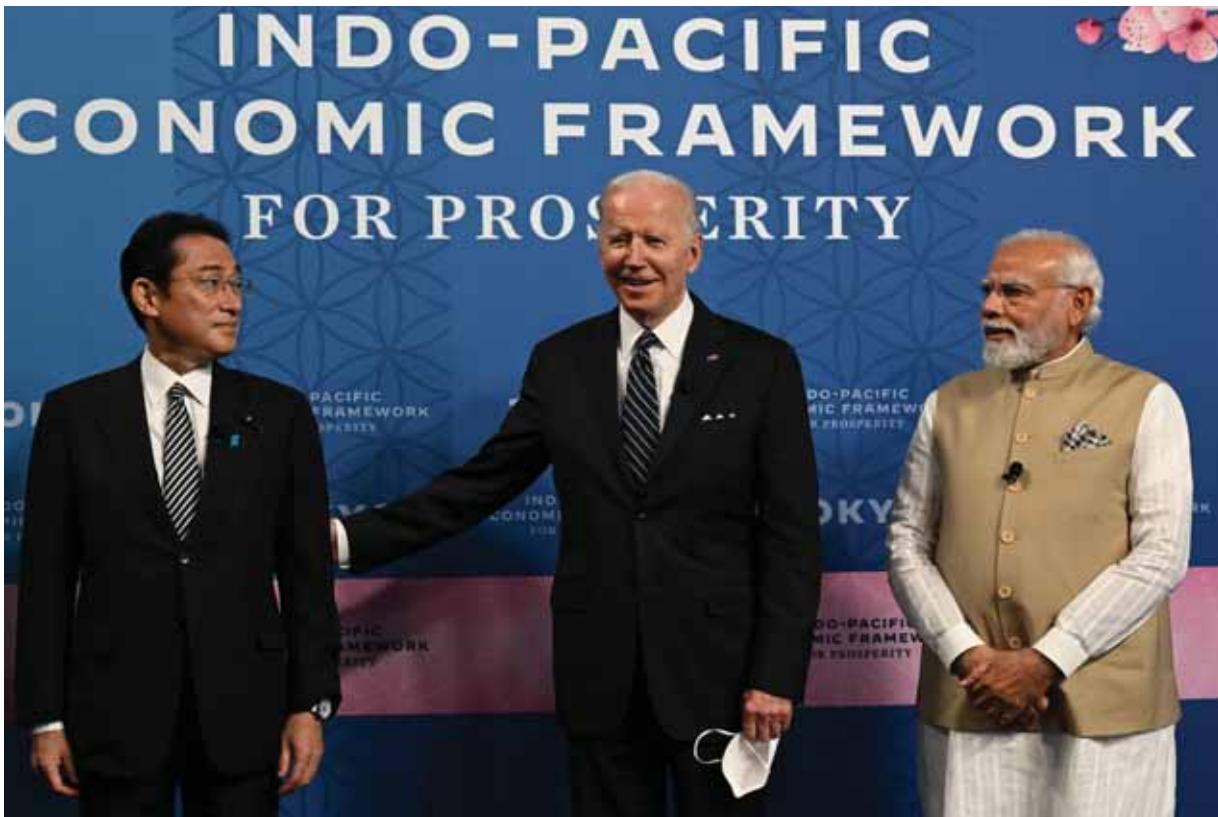
US unveils Asia-Pacific trade framework

TOKYO: US President Joe Biden launched a new Asia-Pacific trade initiative on Monday in Tokyo, with 13 countries including India and Japan signed up, although questions about the pact's effectiveness remain.

Biden formally unveiled the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, or IPEF, on his second day in Japan, where he held talks with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ahead of a regional Quad summit on Tuesday.

"I believe we'll win the competition of the 21st century together", he said at the launch, attended in person by Kishida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and virtually by representatives from the other countries.

Unlike traditional trade blocs, there is no plan for IPEF members to negotiate tariffs and ease market access — a tool that has become increasingly unpalatable to US voters fearful of seeing homegrown manufacturing undermined. Instead, the programme foresees integrating partners through agreed standards in four main areas: The digital economy, supply chains, clean energy infrastructure and



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, US President Joe Biden, and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi attend the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity in Tokyo. — AFP

anti-corruption measures.

The starting list of members in addition to the US is Australia, Brunei, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. The countries touted IPEF as a framework for what will

**The newly-launched
IPEF will act as a
framework for what
will ultimately become
a tight-knit group of
trading nations**

ultimately become a tight-knit group of trading nations.

"We share a commitment to a free, open, fair, inclusive, interconnected, resilient, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region", they said in a joint statement. "Deepening economic engagement among partners is

crucial for continued growth, peace, and prosperity." Together, the participants account for about 40 per cent of global GDP and "there are other countries that could conceivably join us", Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters.

Biden has pushed to rapidly rebuild strategic military and trade alliances weakened under his predecessor Donald Trump since taking office in 2021. IPEF is intended to offer US allies an alternative to China's growing commercial presence across the Asia-Pacific.

However, there is no political will in Washington for returning to a tariffs-based Asia trade deal following Trump's 2017 withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership — a huge trading bloc that was revived under a new name in 2018, without US membership. While the TPP reduces trade barriers for members, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo emphasised to reporters that IPEF was not designed to go down the same route.

The "framework is intentionally designed not to be a same old, same old traditional trade agreement", she said. — AFP

Russian sentenced to life in first war crimes trial

KIEV: A 21-year-old Russian soldier was sentenced to life in prison on Monday for shooting a civilian to death, in Ukraine's first war crimes trial. The court in Kiev on Monday considered his guilt proven after the soldier's confession that he shot an unarmed 62-year-old civilian on February 28, four days after Russia launched its assault on Ukraine.

The trial marks the first war crimes case to be heard in court since the start of the Russian war, following worldwide horror at Russian atrocities in Ukraine. The defendant, Vadim Sh, now has 30 days to appeal the verdict, which is not yet final.

The shooting occurred in the village of Chupakhivka in Ukraine's north-eastern Sumy region. The victim, Oleksandr Shelipov, was out with his bicycle when the defendant fired at him with a Kalashnikov assault rifle, according to the evidence gathered in court.

Shelipov's widow later found her husband dead on the road, shot in the head. "He was everything for me. He was my protector", she told the court.

Vadim Sh, a tank soldier from Irkutsk in Siberia, said he had acted on orders from his superiors. He apologised during the trial.

"I regret it. I regret it very much. I did not refuse and I am ready to accept any measures imposed", he said in his closing remarks.

He described in court how his tank column had come under fire. They stole a car to escape and the older man had been a witness. His superior ordered him to shoot, shouting at him. After initially refusing, he gave a short burst of fire.

The defendant later surrendered himself to captivity because he wanted to live and "not fight", he



Ukrainian servicemen move with an armoured vehicle towards the frontline at a checkpoint near the city of Lysychansk in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas. — AFP



Vadim Shishmarin

said, adding: "I do not deny my guilt." Another Russian soldier who was captured with him confirmed the version in court.

The commanding officer was 25 to 30 years old, the witness said. They had been told that the officer was now dead.

The prosecution had asked for life imprisonment. The defence argued for acquittal, saying the soldier was carrying out an order. The trial began last week.

Shelipov's widow joined the prosecution demand for life in prison, but said she was not opposed to him being handed to the Russians in exchange for one of the Ukrainian fighters captured in Mariupol.

According to Moscow, more than 2,400 Ukrainian fighters

have now been captured from the Azovstal steelworks in the port city. Ahead of the sentencing, Moscow said it was looking for possibilities to help the defendant.

For Ukraine, this is likely only the beginning of the country's reckoning with the countless war crimes committed since the start of Russia's invasion three months ago. Russian troops have since withdrawn from the north-eastern regions of Kiev, Chernihiv and Sumy.

Their withdrawal has revealed reports of atrocities that have triggered horror around the world. More than 400 were found dead in the Kiev suburb of Bucha alone.

The United Nations has so far registered more than 3,800 civilian deaths since the war in Ukraine began, but believes that the actual number of victims is significantly higher.

In a recently published interview on the editorially independent Russian website Meduza, the mother of Vadim Sh, said she had only learned about the war in Ukraine when she heard about her son's imprisonment on March 1. — dpa

Sandstorm in Iraq grounds flights, sends 1,000 to hospitals

BAGHDAD: Iraq closed public buildings and temporarily shut airports on Monday as another sandstorm — the ninth since mid-April — hit the country.

More than 1,000 people were hospitalised across the nation with respiratory problems, health ministry spokesman Seif al Badr said. Flights were also grounded in neighbouring Kuwait for a second time this month, as the region grapples with the increasingly frequent weather phenomenon.

The Iraqi capital Baghdad was enveloped in a giant dust cloud that left usually traffic-choked streets largely deserted and bathed in an eerie orange light, correspondents said.

Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi ordered all work to cease in state-run institutions, except for health and security services, citing "poor climatic conditions and the arrival of violent sandstorms".

Air traffic was suspended at the international airports in Baghdad, Arbil and Najaf, before flights resumed at Baghdad and Arbil.

Iraq is ranked as one of the world's five most vulnerable nations to climate change and

desertification. The environment ministry has warned that over the next two decades Iraq could endure an average of 272 days of sandstorms per year, rising to above 300 by 2050. Iraq's previous two sandstorms sent nearly 10,000 people to hospital with respiratory problems and killed one person.

The Middle East has always been battered by sandstorms, but they have become more frequent and intense in recent years.

The trend is associated with rising temperatures and water scarcity, the overuse and damming of rivers as well as overgrazing and deforestation.

Iraq is known in Arabic as the land of the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, where the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia flourished.

Iraq's environment ministry has said the increased sandstorms could be countered with more vegetation cover including trees that act as windbreaks.

Experts predict the phenomenon will worsen as climate change warps regional weather patterns, further dries out and degrades soils and speeds up desertification across much of the Middle East. —AFP



Bedouin shepherds with animals walk alongside their grazing flock in the Al Hennyiah area outside of Najaf during a sandstorm sweeping the country. — AFP

Germany, Oman share common vision of international order



Thomas Friedrich Schneider

The writer is German Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman

“In 1972, Germany and Oman established diplomatic relations, shortly after the Sultanate of Oman became a member of the United Nations in 1971. On the 50th anniversary of this wonderful occasion, I wish to extend warm greetings to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman.

The relationship between Oman and Germany has always been strong and cordial.

We share a common vision of a rules-based international order, seeking peace and understanding between nations.

Germany and Oman are reliable partners – bilaterally and in international fora. A first German Embassy in Muscat was

opened in 1976. German Federal Presidents Richard von Weizsäcker and Christian Wulff visited the Sultanate of Oman in 1993 and 2011, as well as Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2005.

In 2017, we moved to a new and larger embassy in Al Khuwair, designed by a team of Omani and German architects – a visible investment into the future of Omani-German relations.

Beyond the political, Oman and Germany have been steadfast partners for many years in the area of education.

Since 2005, over 350 Omani students have come to study in Germany, returning with a Bachelor’s degree and a perfect command of the German language.

2022 MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN GERMANY AND OMAN. BOTH THE COUNTRIES ARE CLOSELY WORKING TOGETHER ON RENEWABLE ENERGIES AND HYDROGEN, JOINTLY SHAPING THE ENERGY MARKET OF THE FUTURE

Since 2007, the German University of Technology (‘G’Utech’) in Halban, in close cooperation with RWTH Aachen University in

Germany, has become the flagship of bilateral co-operation in higher education. At the Goethe-Institut Muscat, the German Language Centre in Oman you can take German classes of all levels and sit for exams.

The German language is also taught at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman Tourism College, Nizwa University and also at several Omani public schools.

In the economic field, we are closely working together on renewable energies and hydrogen, jointly shaping the energy market of the future. The German Industry & Commerce Office Oman (AHK) promotes trade and investment.

Not only renowned German carmakers but also global players

such as Siemens, DBSchenker or DHL, as well as numerous small and medium businesses are well positioned in the Omani market, jointly with their local partners.

Did you know that most Omani banknotes are printed in Germany? And of course, every year, a shared love for spectacular nature, fascinating history, and rich cultural heritage draws German tourists to Oman and Omani tourists to Germany in great numbers.

The world has changed over the last 50 years, so have Germany and Oman.

However, German-Omani friendship has proven to be solid and lasting. May this friendship persist and grow over the next 50 years.

High schoolers design low cost filter to remove lead from water

ISSAM AHMED

When the pandemic forced schools into remote learning, Washington-area science teacher Rebecca Bushway set her students an ambitious task: design and build a low-cost lead filter that fixes to faucets and removes the toxic metal.

Using 3D printing and high-school level chemistry, the team now has a working prototype — a three-inch tall filter housing made of biodegradable plastic, which they hope to eventually bring to market for \$1 apiece.

“The science is straightforward,” Bushway said on a recent visit to the Barrie Middle and Upper School in suburban Maryland, where she demonstrated the filter in action. “I thought, ‘We have these 3D printers. What if we make something like this?’”

Bushway has presented the prototype at four conferences, including the prestigious spring meeting of the American Chemistry Society, and plans to move forward with a paper in a peer-reviewed journal.

Up to 10 million US homes still receive water through lead pipes, with exposure particularly harmful during childhood.

The metal, which evades a key defence of the body known as the blood-brain-barrier, can cause permanent loss of cognitive abilities and contribute to psychological problems that aggravate enduring cycles of poverty.

A serious contamination problem uncovered in Flint, Michigan in 2014 is perhaps the most famous recent disaster -- but lead poisoning is widespread and disproportionately impacts African Americans and other minorities, explained Barrie team member Nia Frederick.

“And I think that’s something we can help with,” she said.

The harms of lead poisoning have been known for decades, but lobbying by the lead industry prevented meaningful action until recent decades.

President Joe Biden’s administration has pledged billions of dollars from an infrastructure law to fund the removal of all the nation’s lead pipes over the coming years — but until that happens, people need solutions now.

Bushway’s idea was to use the same chemical reaction used to restore contaminated soil: the exposure of dissolved lead to calcium phosphate powder produces a solid lead phosphate that stays inside the filter, along with harmless free calcium.

The filter has a clever trick up its sleeve: under the calcium phosphate, there’s a reservoir of a chemical called potassium iodide.

— AFP

My lunch with President Biden



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

President Joe Biden invited me for lunch at the White House last Monday. But it was all off the record — so I can’t tell you anything he said.

I can, though, tell you two things — what I ate and how I felt after. I ate a tuna salad sandwich with tomato on whole wheat bread, with a bowl of mixed fruit and a chocolate milkshake for dessert that was so good it should have been against the law.

What I felt afterward was this: For all you knuckleheads on Fox who say that Biden can’t put two sentences together, here’s a news flash: He just put Nato together, Europe together and the whole Western alliance together — stretching from Canada up to Finland and all the way to Japan — to help Ukraine protect its fledgling democracy from Vladimir Putin’s assault.

In doing so, he has enabled Ukraine to inflict significant losses on Russia’s invading army, thanks to a rapid deployment of US and Nato trainers and massive transfers of precision weapons. And not a single US soldier was lost. It has been the best performance of alliance management and consolidation since another president whom I covered and admired — who also was said to be incapable of putting two sentences together: George H W Bush. Bush helped manage the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, without firing a shot or the loss of a single American life.

Alas, though, I left our lunch with a full stomach but a heavy heart. Biden didn’t say it in so many words, but he didn’t have to. I could hear it between

BIDEN HAS ENABLED UKRAINE TO INFLICT LOSSES ON RUSSIA’S ARMY, THANKS TO A RAPID DEPLOYMENT OF US AND NATO TRAINERS AND MASSIVE TRANSFERS OF PRECISION WEAPONS

the lines: He’s worried that while he has reunited the West, he may not be able to reunite America.

It’s clearly his priority, above any Build Back Better provision. And he knows that’s why he was elected — a majority of Americans worried that the country was coming apart at the seams and that this old war horse called Biden, with his bipartisan instincts, was the best person to knit us back together. It’s the reason he decided to run in the first place, because he knows that without some basic unity of purpose and willingness to compromise, nothing else is possible.

But with every passing day, every mass shooting, every racist whistle, every defund-the-police initiative, every nation-sundering Supreme Court ruling, every speaker run off a campus, every bogus claim of election fraud, I wonder if he can bring us back together. I wonder if it’s too late.

I fear that we’re going to break something very valuable very soon. And once we break it, it will be gone — and we may never be able to get it back.



President Joe Biden departs the White House, en route to Portland, Oregon, in Washington.

I am talking about our ability to transfer power peacefully and legitimately, an ability we have demonstrated since our founding. The peaceful, legitimate transfer of power is the keystone of American democracy. Break it, and none of our institutions will work for long, and we will be thrust into political and financial chaos.

We are staring into that abyss right now. Because it is one thing to elect Donald Trump and pro-Trump candidates who want to restrict immigration, ban abortions, slash corporate taxes, pump more oil, and liberate citizens from mask mandates in a pandemic. Those are policies where there can be legitimate disagreement, which is the stuff of politics.

But the recent primaries and the investigations around the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol are revealing a movement by Trump and his supporters that is not propelled by any coherent set of policies, but rather by a gigantic lie — that Biden did not freely and fairly win a majority of Electoral College votes and therefore is an illegitimate president. Thus, their top priority is installing candidates whose primary allegiance is to Trump and his Big Lie — not to the Constitution.

And they are more than hinting that in any close election in 2024 — ‘or even ones that aren’t so close’ — they would be willing to depart from established constitutional rules and norms and award that election to Trump or other Republican candidates who didn’t actually garner the most votes. They are not whispering this platform. They are running for office on it.

In short, we are seeing a national movement that is telling us publicly and loudly: We will go there. And that terrifies me because: I have been there.

My formative experience in journalism was watching Lebanese politicians go there in the late 1970s and plunge their frail democracy into protracted civil war. So don’t tell me that it can’t happen here.

And this brings me back to my lunch with Biden. It clearly weighs on him that we have built a global alliance to support Ukraine, to reverse the Russian assault and to defend core American principles abroad — the right to freedom and self-determination of all peoples — while the GOP is abandoning our most cherished principles at home.

— New York Times

Maskless, can you?



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

Now we are free from Covid-19 restrictions, but are we free from the worry?

Can we actually walk free in crowded areas without a facial mask?

One of my friends refused to discard her mask routine. She is going to keep it, she said. I still carry one in the bag and it has become a security blanket. Another friend questioned me

on why in the past I would walk around freely and now I have an inclination to stick to wearing the mask?

That was the point - everyone else was masked or is it because some are born rebels.

But in most situations I had to unmask while interviewing or eating out.

Remember those days when we longed to breathe the fresh air at the beach?

And when we wished we could go walking without a mask?

The numerous times we went to groceries forgetting to wear a mask and ended buying a whole box or a single piece or the time we went back to fetch a mask.

We were not comfortable with them but soon held on to it when cases increased. The fear had made the mask our trustworthy friend.

It was not easy but we learnt to cope with and we got so petrified that at one point the international market ran out of surgical masks which should have been available for the health workers.

We can go maskless, but secretly many parents are hoping and wishing children will wear their masks in schools as viral flu is doing the rounds. After all, prevention is better than cure, right?

Do you remember the debates we had on vaccines and doubts - should we or shouldn't we? And as the cases increased it was concluded that vaccines are the best solution.

Do we remember the prayers for the safety of everyone who was sick? The number of people we lost. At least now we

have moved on and can let the breeze touch our face but somewhere in the back of the mind is a discomfort of letting go the mask.

The manufacturers of facial masks had become innovative while some of us were still confused about whether it should be the blue side out or white side out.

Then there were the creative individuals who made designer facial masks.

The worried ones still wondered whether it should be double layered or triple layered?

It is time to unlearn the precautions but how can one overcome the habit of cleansing hands with bottles and bottles of hand sanitisers?

Maybe now we will be classified as people with OCD. We were asked to do so and now habits are hard to give up and one will never know when and how we would be able to erase the label of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Not to forget the individuals who became possessive about their medicinal balms which used to be at arms length if they ever felt any uneasiness.

We had given up on handshakes and ceramic cups.

The ones that were considered not environment friendly were the best option.

To meet and greet like we used to before might take some time, but it is definitely a beautiful step to normalcy.



FLOWER SHOW

A visitor poses with a display of lilies during the 2022 RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London on Monday. The Chelsea flower show is held annually in the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea. – AFP

Climate consensus in the Middle East



Werner Hoyer

The writer is President of the European Investment Bank

This week, I met a teenager in Ramallah named Miriam, who shared how much she has benefited from one of the 450 solar-powered schools that the European Investment Bank has financed in the West Bank.

Speaking in perfect English, Miriam was fully aware of the challenges her region faces because of climate change. But she was also full of optimism and extraordinarily articulate in explaining why the Middle East needs to do more to harvest sunshine, one of the few clean-energy resources that it enjoys in abundance.

The following day, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett reminded me that the EIB helped finance four of Israel's six desalination plants, including one that will be the world's largest when it becomes operational in 2023.

He joked that almost two-thirds of the water in our glasses came from those EIB-backed projects.

In a region with a growing population, Israelis know that water scarcity can easily lead to new conflicts.

They want to develop greater desalination capacity so that they can potentially trade water for clean energy.

Changing rainfall patterns, water scarcity, and increasingly frequent and intense extreme weather events – including heatwaves and wildfires – affect Israelis and Palestinians equally, and the need to address the problem appears to be one of the few issues on which both parties agree.

This was confirmed to me in talks with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh.

In a context of conflict, where most policies are viewed as zero-sum, climate projects are an exception.

In a speech this past February, Israeli President Isaac Herzog pointed to the intensification of extreme weather events as a wake-up call for the region. “For

THE MIDDLE EAST WILL FACE ITS OWN UNIQUE SET OF CHALLENGES IN THE AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, FROM CHANGING RAINFALL PATTERNS AND WATER SCARCITY TO HEATWAVES AND WILDFIRES. WHILE MOST OF THE REGION RECOGNISES THE NEED FOR MORE INVESTMENT TO TACKLE THESE ISSUES, CLOSER CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION WILL ALSO BE NECESSARY

anyone who does not understand what this means, let me explain: this spells a genuine catastrophe,” he warned. “The climate crisis is a crisis for the whole world, and we in the Middle East must understand it chiefly at the regional level, because its implications will be dramatic.”

Herzog then called for a regional partnership to create a “renewable Middle East.” Yet while the Palestinian Authority has advanced some climate policies, it will take massive investment for these ideas to translate into large-scale yields of clean water from the Gaza Central Desalination Plant and solar energy in the West Bank.

These landmark mitigation and adaptation projects will be needed to manage the humanitarian, environmental, and economic issues caused by climate change. Having returned to Luxembourg from my visit to the region, it is clearer to me than ever that we need to bank on the current “climate consensus” to build momentum behind the kind of transformational climate projects envisaged in the European Green Deal.

While making Europe carbon neutral by 2050, such investments can also help

to foster stability and improve economic conditions in the Middle East.

My belief in the transformational power of smart climate investments has grown only stronger with time.

Over the past few years, the EIB has become the world's largest multilateral financier of climate projects, with commitments to support at least €1 trillion (\$1.05 trillion) of investment this decade.

However, in a region as complex as the Middle East, it will take more than just finance to make many of these projects happen.

We will need much more cooperation among countries and key external stakeholders such as the United States and the European Union.

The EIB's new Jerusalem-based Representation for the West Bank and Gaza, which opened this month, can help foster such cooperation. It will develop partnerships and stronger cooperation in the West Bank and Gaza while also supporting transformational cross-border climate projects across the region. As such, it will be instrumental for the EU's climate diplomacy in the Middle East.

We aim to complement and scale up, from a European perspective, what US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry has started with his diplomatic push for Middle Eastern countries to phase in renewable energy. That means financing the development of large-scale renewable energy and water cooperation in the region and building an even stronger climate consensus.

I am convinced that if climate diplomacy is backed by high-quality, innovative projects of regional significance, it can open up promising new avenues to pursue stability, growth, and peace in the Middle East. It's time to give climate finance a chance.

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The Middle East needs to do more to harvest sunshine.

sport

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Amanda Anisimova of the US celebrates after winning against Japan's Naomi Osaka after their French Open match at the Court Suzanne-Lenglen in Paris. – AFP



Poland's Iga Swiatek greets spectators as she celebrates after winning against Ukraine's Lesya Tsurenko in French Open at the Roland-Garros in Paris. – AFP



France's Diane Parry reacts after winning against Czech Republic's Barbora Krejcikova at the Court Philippe-Chatier in Paris. – AFP

OSAKA, KREJCIKOVA CRASH OUT

S W I A T E K E X T E N D S W I N N I N G S T R E A K

PARIS: Former world number one Naomi Osaka and defending champion Barbora Krejcikova lost in the first round of the French Open on Monday, while women's title favourite Iga Swiatek stretched her winning streak to 29 matches.

The unseeded Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion, was knocked out 7-5, 6-4 by Amanda Anisimova — the same player who ended the Japanese star's title defence at the Australian Open this year.

An error-plagued Osaka served up eight double faults and committed 29 unforced errors on her return to Roland Garros, after withdrawing in 2021 when she refused to honour mandatory media commitments before revealing she had been suffering from depression.

"I thought I tried really hard, and I just feel like it was a bit unfortunate because I wasn't able to play as many matches leading into this tournament", said Osaka.

Anisimova, the 27th seed, reached the semifinals in Paris three years ago.

"It's tough to see Naomi Osaka in the first round so I knew it wouldn't be easy", said the American.

"I knew I had to play my best tennis and the conditions were not easy."

As rain stopped on the outside courts for two hours, Krejcikova followed Osaka in making an early exit, going down 1-6, 6-2, 6-3 to 19-year-old Frenchwoman Diane Parry in her first match since February following injury.

The Czech world number two had yet to play on clay this season after being sidelined by an elbow problem.

"It's really a dream for me", said Parry, spurred on by the home support under the roof on Court Philippe Chatier.

"I'm just the happiest right now."

With Krejcikova, Osaka and Madrid champion Ons Jabeur all going out in round one, Swiatek required just 54 minutes to dispatch Ukrainian qualifier Lesia Tsurenko 6-2, 6-0.

The 20-year-old Swiatek, who took over as world number one

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS
MEN (FIRST ROUND)
Filip Krajinic (SRB) bt Reilly Opelka (USA x17) 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 6-3; Taylor Fritz (USA x13) bt Santiago Rodriguez (ARG) 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4
WOMEN (FIRST ROUND)
Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) 6-2, 6-0; Alison Riske (USA) bt Dayana Yastremska (UKR) 6-3, 6-3; Zheng Qinwen (CHN) bt Maryna Zanevska (BEL) 3-6, 7-5, 6-0; Martina Trevisan (ITA) bt Harriet Dart (GBR) 6-0, 6-2; Daria Saville (AUS) bt Valentini Grammatikopoulou (GRE) 6-1, 6-2; Petra Kvitova (CZE x32) bt Anna Bondar (HUN) 7-6 (7/0), 6-1; Bianca Andreescu (CAN) bt Ysaline Bonaventure (BEL) 3-6, 7-5, 6-0; Amanda Anisimova (USA x27) bt Naomi Osaka (JPN) 7-5, 6-4; Victoria Azarenka (x15) bt Ana Bogdan (ROM) 6-7 (7/9), 7-6 (7/1), 6-2; Andrea Petkovic (GER) bt Oceane Dodin (FRA) 6-4, 6-2; Diane Parry (FRA) bt Barbora Krejcikova (CZE x2) 1-6, 6-2, 6-3

following Ashleigh Barty's shock retirement, has won her last five tournaments and is bidding for a second French Open in three attempts.

"Today was a pretty good match", said Swiatek.

"I love playing here even though

the last couple of days it's been raining and pretty dark."

Swiatek is unbeaten since February and has the longest winning streak on the WTA tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

"I'm pretty sure that it can end,

but I just want to keep going. I'm sure someday my streak will stop."

DJOKOVIC, NADAL READY TO ROLL

Defending champion Novak Djokovic and 13-time French Open winner Rafael Nadal start their Roland Garros campaigns later on a star-studded Monday.

Djokovic plays Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan in the first of 10 night sessions — introduced at Roland Garros last year when a pandemic curfew saw most late matches played in front of empty stands.

It is the world number one's first Grand Slam match since his high-profile deportation from Australia. He won his first title of the year at the Italian Open earlier this month.

"I feel I am always in that contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy", said Djokovic, who is seeded to meet Nadal in the quarterfinals and Spanish teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz in the last four.

Djokovic's last match at a major was his loss to Daniil Medvedev in

last year's US Open final, a defeat which denied the Serb a calendar Grand Slam. Nadal has yet to win a title on his beloved clay this season, but played down concerns over the chronic foot issue that resurfaced in Rome.

"There is nothing to recover", said Nadal, who faces Australia's Jordan Thompson.

"What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices.

"I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here."

Nadal began the year with a 20-match winning run, capturing a second Australian Open title to claim a record 21st Grand Slam and move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The 35-year-old's record at the French Open stands at a staggering 105 wins and just three losses since his 2005 title-winning debut. Djokovic has been responsible for two of those defeats. One came in the bruising semifinal 12 months ago, the most recent clash of the pair's epic 58-match rivalry. — AFP

Verstappen on top after sizzling Red Bull 1-2

MONTMELO, Spain: World champion Max Verstappen overcame a sequence of problems on Sunday to lead his Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez home and claim the lead in this year's title race on an afternoon of anguish for Charles Leclerc and Ferrari at a scorching Spanish Grand Prix.

His victory in a crushing Red Bull one-two was the 24th of his career and third in succession this season as he came home 13 seconds ahead of his Mexican partner with George Russell confirming Mercedes' revival by finishing third.

Leclerc, who had led the championship and dominated practice, set off convincingly from pole position until he was forced to retire his Ferrari with an engine failure. He fell to second in the title race with 104 points to the Dutchman's 110.

Beaten at the start, Verstappen was blown off the circuit and had technical problems, but he overcame them to produce a furious drive aided by his team-mate's generosity for his second win at the Circuit de Catalunya, where he claimed his maiden victory as a teenager in 2016.

"I went off, when I had a lot of tailwind, and lost the rear," said the 24-year-old Dutchman. "My DRS (drag reduction system) was not always working and that made it very tough, but we managed to use strategy to get ahead."

"It was a difficult beginning, but a good end! I tried to stay focused. It is not nice when stuff like that happens. I am very happy to win and happy for 'Checo' (Perez). It is a great result for the team."



FORMULA 1			F122	
6. Spanish Grand Prix			May 22	
Barcelona-Catalunya circuit				
1	Max Verstappen (NED)	1:37:20.475	Driver standings	
		25	Verstappen (NED)	110
2	Sergio Perez (MEX)	at 13.072	Leclerc (MON)	104
		19	Perez (MEX)	85
3	George Russell (GBR)	at 32.927	Russell (GBR)	74
		15	Sainz (ESP)	65
4	Carlos Sainz (ESP)	at 45.208	Teams	
		12	Red Bull	195
5	Lewis Hamilton (GBR)	at 54.534	Ferrari	169
		10	Mercedes	120
			McLaren	50
Source: formula1.com			AFP	

A not so happy Perez was nonetheless satisfied for the team. "I'm happy for my first podium in Spain," he said. "It was close and I'm happy for the team, but we need to speak later."

INSPIRED DRIVE

"It was a race of two halves," said Red Bull team boss Christian Horner. "Our pace was very strong and it was a shame for Charles (Leclerc) as I think it would have been an interesting fight."

He defended the team decision to order Perez to allow Verstappen to pass him. "It is our responsibility to bring both cars home. It was the right thing to do."

Russell said: "It was very tough today. I did all I could to hold Max off, but he did a great job. I would love to say Mercedes are back. I gave everything I could and I am proud to be standing here."

It was his sixth top five finish this year and his second podium.

Carlos Sainz came home fourth in the second Ferrari ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, who produced an inspired drive in the second Mercedes after an opening lap collision, and Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo.

Hamilton had to slow in the closing laps due to overheating problems, allowing home favourite Sainz to re-pass him to the delight of his home crowd.

"His race pace was stunning," said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff. Hamilton was voted 'driver of the day' by fans on the official Formula One website.

In front of a sell-out crowd of 121,670 spectators, the race began in hot conditions with an air temperature of 36 degrees and the track surface registering 49. — AFP

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Women's volleyball tourney on May 27



MUSCAT: Oman's female expatriates one-day volleyball tournament will be held on May 27 from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm at Muscat College in Bausher.

Organised by Khalil al Balushi who has been the driving force behind the tournament, which brings this community together year after year.

The event has been a great way to stay healthy, socialise and compete for many years, the organisers said.

During the tournament 16 female volleyball teams will

compete including Fox Hard, Blazers, Heat, Happy Team, Muscat Strikers, No Name, Slashers, Volley Diggers, Titan, Elite Fighter, PSO, Force One Team, Phil Oman, Foodtrip Warriors and Wadi Team.

The tournament is sponsored by Oriental LLC, Perfumery & Cosmetics distributor in the Sultanate of Oman. It is supported by Charm @ thecharmlifestyle blog.

The tournament medical partner is Al Hayat Hospital.

BCC, Shooters, Ashes, Sabco in semis



MUSCAT: Billah Cricket Club (BCC), Shooters, Ashes and Sabco entered the semifinals in the second edition of Barka Champions League (BCL) 2022 on May 20.

BCC will take on Sabco and Ashes meet Shooters in the semifinals to be played on May 27.

The final will be held at the Oman International Cricket Ground on May 28.

BRIEF SCORES

QF-1: Billah Cricket Club vs Sharif XI Suwaiq

Billah CC 166-7 in 16 overs (Sarath Kumar 37, Thameem Muhammed 33; Imran Majid 4-34) beat Sharif XI Suwaiq 101 all out in 15.1 overs (Bilal Ahmed 31; Shripathi 4-16) by 65 runs.

QF-2: Shooters vs Barka

Riders

Shooters 153-8 in 16 overs (Muhammad Irfan 52, Sreejin 28; Shabeeb 4-42) beat Barka Riders 107 all out in 13.1 overs (Azad 23; Biju Kumar 4-20) by 46 runs.

QF-3: Barka Super XI vs Ashes Barka Super XI 122-9 in 16 overs (Aneermon 29; Djith Mishar 22, Rahul Prakash 3-24) lost to Ashes 126-5 in 12.4 overs (Shahid Mahmood 32, Rocky Thomas 27; Aneermon 2-12) by 5 wickets.

QF-4: Sabco vs Proline Knight Riders

Sabco 153-6 in 16 overs (Akbar Gafar 67; Ruban Durai 46, Muhammad Althaf 3-35) beat Proline Knight Riders 121-8 in 16 overs (Karthik 25, Aravindh Natarajan 23; Ruban Durai 4-29) by 32 runs.

Liton, Mushfiqur slam tons to turn tide for Bangladesh

DHAKA: Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das hit centuries and shared a record stand to turn the tide for Bangladesh in the second Test against Sri Lanka in Dhaka on Monday after a disastrous start.

At stumps, Liton was unbeaten with a career-best 135 with Mushfiqur on 115, his second hundred in as many innings, as Bangladesh reached 277-5 on the first day after electing to bat at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The pair added 253 in their unbroken sixth-wicket stand after Sri Lanka's pace bowlers Kasun Rajitha and Asitha Fernando shared five wickets between them to leave Bangladesh in tatters on 24-5 in a chaotic first hour of play.

Mushfiqur played a part in Bangladesh's previous highest sixth-wicket stand when he shared 191 runs with Mohammad Ashraful, also against Sri Lanka at Galle in 2013.

"It is one of the best partnerships I have seen as a coach in Tests," said Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo.

"We were 20 (24) for five, under a lot of pressure. It was an amazing effort by those two batters. Obviously, we didn't start



Bangladesh's Liton Das (L) celebrates after scoring a century during the first day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Dhaka. — AFP

well this morning. Couple of false shots, couple of good deliveries.

"Test cricket is hard but those guys showed amazing skill and character to get us in this good position," he said.

Liton brought his third Test hundred off 149 balls owing to a misfield, which yielded

Bangladesh five runs.

Mushfiqur, who also scored 105 runs in the drawn first Test in Chittagong, then reached his ninth Test hundred off 218 balls.

The pair gave the only chance to Sri Lanka during their partnership for over two sessions when Liton lofted a catch on 47

off Fernando.

But substitute fielder Kamindu Mendis dropped the chance at backward square leg.

Kamindu came to the field after Kusal Mendis left for a hospital with pain in his chest.

Mendis was cleared later to continue playing as his physical

condition was found not to be serious, according to a Bangladesh Cricket Board spokesman.

The hosts made a nightmare start to the game as Rajitha bowled opener Mahmudul Hasan for a duck with the second ball of the morning.

Fellow opener Tamim Iqbal, who scored a century in the drawn first Test in Chittagong, also fell for a duck as he sent a leading edge off Fernando in the next over to be caught brilliantly by Jayawickrama at backward point.

Skipper Mominul Haque tried to settle the nerves with two fours, including one off the first ball he faced, but soon edged Fernando to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella when on nine.

Rajitha then found a big gap between the bat and pad of Najmul Hossain, sending his middle-stump cart-wheeling with an inswinger as the left-hander was dismissed for eight.

Rajitha delivered a body blow next ball to trap Shakib Al Hasan leg-before for a first-ball duck, leaving the Bangladesh batting line-up in disarray.

Liton hit 16 fours and a six and Mushfiqur hit 13 boundaries so

SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH FIRST INNINGS

Mahmudul b Rajitha	0
Tamim c Jayawickrama b Fernando	0
Najmul b Rajitha	8
Mominul c Dickwella b Fernando	9
Mushfiqur not out	115
Shakib lbw b Rajitha	0
Liton not out	135
Extras (b6, lb3, w1)	10
Total (five wickets; 85 overs)	277
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-6, 3-16, 4-24, 5-24	
Bowling: Rajitha 19-5-43-3, Fernando 17-2-80-2, Jayawickrama 29-9-81-0, Mendis 12-0-41-0, Dhananjaya 4-0-15-0, Karunaratne 4-1-8-0	

far. Rajitha finished the day with 3-43 while Fernando claimed 2-80.

Sri Lanka had rewarded Rajitha with a place in the eleven after he impressed in Chittagong by taking 4-60, playing the match as a concussion substitute for Vishwa Fernando.

He was one of their two changes, with Jayawickrama replacing Lasith Embuldeniya.

Bangladesh made two changes from the first Test as Mosaddek Hossain and Ebadot Hossain replaced the injured Nayem Hasan and Shoriful Islam.

— AFP



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Ethis Group hopes to capitalise on rising crowdfunding interest in Oman via EthisX

New era: Country's first licensed platform operator connects passionate investors to impactful businesses

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Ahead of the first campaign on its crowdfunding platform, leading ethical investment and social finance platform operator Ethis Group says it has begun receiving a number of fundraising applications from Omani businesses, boding well for the uptake of crowdfunding services being introduced for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman.

Ever since the Group's subsidiary, Ethis Investment Platform LLC (branded as EthisX) received a landmark licence from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to operate the country's first global crowdfunding platform, key executives have been busy setting up the requisite wherewithal to launch fund-raising campaigns mainly through equity crowdfunding (ECF) and peer-2-peer (P2P) financing.

Notwithstanding the relative novelty of crowdfunding in the Sultanate of Oman, initial interest from prospective Omani applicants — chiefly entrepreneurs and business owners — has been heartening, according to Mohamed Shehzad,



Mohamed Shehzad, CEO, EthisX

CEO, EthisX.

"In the few months since we set up our office here, we found interest to be significant and growing," said Mohamed. "We have already started receiving online applications for funding submitted via our website (www.ethisx.co), which are then evaluated against a set of criteria



Riza Ismail, COO, EthisX

as part of our due diligence process.

An investment committee will also assess the suitability of the fundraising proposals, from the amount of funding sought, usage of funds, the investment ticket size, risks and mitigation measures, valuation (in the case of ECF campaigns) and so on,

EVER SINCE THE GROUP'S SUBSIDIARY RECEIVED A LANDMARK LICENCE FROM THE CMA TO OPERATE THE COUNTRY'S FIRST GLOBAL CROWDFUNDING PLATFORM, KEY EXECUTIVES HAVE BEEN BUSY SETTING UP THE REQUISITE WHEREWITHAL TO LAUNCH FUND-RAISING CAMPAIGNS MAINLY THROUGH EQUITY CROWDFUNDING AND PEER-2-PEER FINANCING

before a decision is taken with regards to hosting a fundraising campaign on our platform."

However, in keeping with the company's tagline #CirculateGood, priority will be given to "impact projects" for fundraising, the CEO noted.

"Although we are largely sector-agnostic, impact is an area

of significant focus for us; Our preferred projects are businesses who have tangible impacts in solving world problems and address UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Goals) through technology and innovations. This also means they have a greater chance of success in years to come."

Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are expected to be the biggest beneficiaries of the platform, says Riza Ismail, Chief Operating Officer, EthisX.

"Our primary focus will be on SMEs, because of their importance as employment generators. Ethis Group started out with a mission to provide an alternative funding platform to help businesses get funding, thereby complementing the roles that banks or financial institutions play.

But at the same time, we will also be looking to fund corporates in terms of issuance of sukuk and so on."

There is praise for the CMA's "forward-looking" crowdfunding platform licensing regime that allows EthisX to facilitate both inward and outward investment — a feature that is restricted by many other regulators.

"Under the Omani CMA licensing rules, we are able to raise funding not only for Omani companies based here in the Sultanate of Oman, but also overseas.

TURN TO PAGE 15

13 countries to join new Asia-Pacific trade framework: Biden



TOKYO: President Joe Biden announced (pictured) in Tokyo that 13 countries have joined a new, US-led Asia-Pacific trade initiative touted as a counterweight to China's aggressive expansion in the region.

"The United States and Japan, together with 11 other nations will be launching" the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity, or IPEF, Biden said at a press conference alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

"This framework is a commitment to working with our close friends and partners in the region on challenges that matter most to ensuring economic competitiveness in the 21st century," he said.

He did not say what countries had already signed up to IPEF, which the White House is billing as a framework for what will ultimately become a tight-knit group of trading nations.

Unlike traditional trade blocs, there is no plan for IPEF members to negotiate tariffs and ease market access — a tool that has become increasingly unpalatable to US voters fearful of undermining homegrown manufacturing.

— AFP

Riyada reaffirms funding support for Omani SMEs

Empowering entrepreneurs:
Financing ranges from
RO 15,000 to RO 250,000

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, MAY 23

The Public Authority for SME Development (Riyada) has reaffirmed its pledge to ensure that Omani small and medium enterprises (SMEs) get funding support ranging from RO 15,000 to RO 250,000 against flexible repayment terms.

It said in posts on its social media platforms that repayment periods can range up to 10 years, while administration fees are limited to a modest 2 per cent.

The financing programmes of Riyada fall in five categories based on the nature of the SME

business: In-Country Value creation; Financing of industrial and service projects; Financing of working capital against fixed assets; Financing of incubated enterprises and business accelerators; and Financing of craft products, household functions, productivity, street vendors and mobile business activities.

In Country Value creation: This programme is dedicated to the financing of various business opportunities as partnerships between private sector institutions and companies that contribute to the empowerment of SMEs, localisation of industries or services by creating business opportunities for small entrepreneurs to provide services and goods related to the former's production inputs.

Funding to the tune of RO



250,000 can be provided under this programme, subject to the decision of the competent committee.

The committee may require a percentage of the applicant's contribution to the project of no more than about 10 per cent of investment cost.

Financing of industrial and

service projects: This programme covers financing of industrial and manufacturing projects, as well as service ventures, spanning commercial concessions, mining, logistics industries and tourism projects, agricultural and fish ventures, as well as those who want to expand existing projects.

Target segments include

tourism, mining, commercial concession projects, and agricultural and fish projects. Financing reaches RO 250,000 or as decided by the competent committee.

Financing working capital and fixed assets: This programme assists SMEs in covering their daily operating costs towards, for example, the purchase of raw materials, semi-manufactured commodities or goods, stores and spare parts, salaries and wages, transportation expenses and other costs, in order to maintain the continuity of operations. Funding reaches RO 100,000 (or as decided by the competent panel).

Financing of incubated enterprises and business accelerators: This programme is dedicated to financing projects in the incubation phase and institutions related to the

establishment and operation of business incubators and accelerators in order to facilitate their establishment on the ground.

Target institutions include operators of incubators and business accelerators operating in the field of technology, innovation and the 4th Industrial Revolution, IT security, food, services, logistics, creative industries and consulting.

Funding reaches RO 70,000. Financing of craft products, household chores, productivity, street vendors and mobile business activities: This cover funding for craft projects, domestic work and productivity entrepreneurship, street vendors and mobile businesses, creative industries, entrepreneurship and individual professions and food trucks. Funding reaches RO 15,000.

Oman Shell helps raise road safety awareness



MUSCAT: In line with their commitment to excellence in health, safety and environment systems and practices in the Sultanate of Oman, Oman Shell took part in the Global HSE Conference and Exhibition, held on May 17-19 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), as a diamond sponsor.

As part of this event, Shell showcased several Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE) related initiatives in road safety, worker welfare and environment sustainability.

In addition, the conference programme featured five of Oman Shell's talents who spoke and participated in panel discussions covering initiatives

and topics like road safety, achieving net zero and Women in HSSE.

Speaking about Shell's participation at the Global HSE Conference and Exhibition 2022, Walid Hadi, Oman Shell's VP and Country Chairman said, "Safety is at the forefront of everything we do in our operations, our offices and our daily lives. Over the years, Oman Shell have been fortunate to lead and work with the industry partners in Oman in various safety initiatives. We look forward to taking an even more active role to ensure that we deliver on our commitments safely, while ensuring the safety and well-being of our colleagues and partners."

Vodafone showcases state-of-the-art experience hub at Comex 2022

MUSCAT: In line with its participation in Comex 2022, Vodafone Oman set up an interactive booth for all visitors, to take them on a journey into the future of people and technology. The 31st edition of the Comex Technology show, powered by Vodafone, brings together key entities across various sectors and sheds light on new advancements in technology and innovative solutions.

Highlighting the importance of the showcase, Sayyid Fahad al Busaidy, Chief Support Services Officer at Vodafone said, "Vodafone has always strived to be the pioneer of many firsts and this has been reinforced through our various partnerships with local companies to enhance our products and services.

Through our participation at Comex 2022, which sees the presence of trending and the latest digital technology across the globe, we too are keen on showcasing what Vodafone has to offer customers in the future. We would like to encourage people to visit our experience booth, which catered towards unlocking their



perception of technology and advancement and taking them on a 'Journey into the future.'

Vodafone's experience hub comprises six different rooms, designed to highlight the Vodafone brand, its offering as a completely digital company as well as allowing the customer to experience changes brought upon by technology.

The first room introduces the brand and provides an overview of the experience. This is followed by

the second room that displays two different eras and the progression of technology that is utilised on a day-to-day basis, with the help of Augmented Reality (AR) elements.

The third room poses the key question of how does one quantify the weight of the internet to date, with an accompanying visual and touch screen experience.

Rooms four and five are more engagement-oriented, encouraging visitors to realise

that technology is not only a means of collaboration but can be used for entertainment, as well as unlocking the imagination of visitors through an immersive infinity-themed experience, respectively.

The last room puts into perspective the appreciation of the rapid advancements of technology, highlighting the moon landing achievement and how all the data of that time now resides in one's pocket.

Make drives memorable in the popular and stylish Kia Telluride

MUSCAT: The popular and stylish Kia Telluride SUV is powerful, capable, spacious and comfortable. It is an ideal choice for families looking to make the most of fun time together. Built rugged to go beyond on every journey the full-size Kia Telluride SUV is a perfect companion to navigate your way across terrains.

The Telluride with its advanced technology and features helps you stay in control wherever your desires take you. The Telluride is equipped with a 3.8L GDI engine that produces 291 hp and 36.2 kg.m. torque.

Complementing this powerful SUV is the 8-speed automatic transmission. The powerful Kia Telluride SUV loads up your desires to go places with all that you have planned and packed for. Equipped with thrilling performance capability and



space enough to comfortably carry your loved ones and your adventure equipment along, the Telluride is engineered to offer exceptional experiences.

The Telluride's stylish exterior highlights its every arrival, encouraging more than just second stares. Contributing to this are the Bi-Function Projection Headlamps, LED Daytime Running Lights, 20" Alloy Wheels, LED Rear Combination Lamps and more.

Arming you with the advantage of having great start

to your days is the Remote Engine Start. During the summers when the heat could be discomforting, the Remote window control feature, can be a much needed advantage. Faster cooling, happier journeys.

Reliable International Automotive, the distributor for Kia in Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers. Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way.

BankDhofar showcases cutting-edge banking solutions at Comex 2022

MUSCAT: BankDhofar takes part in the 31st edition of the largest Technology, Communications, Innovation and Digital Transformation show in the Sultanate of Oman, Comex 2022. The exhibition is held during the period May 23-25, 2022.

BankDhofar's participation comes in line with its ongoing commitment to design state-of-the-art products, services and financial solutions that adopt the latest technology, to ensure providing a convenient banking experience to its customers.

Comex 2022, which is held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), brings together leading technology companies that display their digital solution.

Visitors of BankDhofar's booth, at the Fintech corner, will get the chance to see and experience the innovative digital banking solutions designed by the bank for the customers. The visitors will also get the chance to win valuable prizes presented by the



bank during the exhibition period. BankDhofar puts technology and innovation at the core of its strategy to improve the experience of its customers.

The bank is constantly keeping pace with the technological developments while designing new products and services to ensure convenient banking experience for customers. Customers may conduct their transactions at ease and around

the clock through the highly-secured and user-friendly digital banking channels.

BankDhofar's, award-winning, Mobile Banking App offers a wide range of exclusive services. The services include; instant transfer to any bank in the Sultanate of Oman, cardless cash, mobile top-up for all telecom providers in the Sultanate of Oman, increasing daily withdrawal limit to RO 5,000, among other services.

OOMCO signs partnership pact with OITE and ARB

MUSCAT: Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) has signed a partnership agreement with Oman International Trade & Exhibitions (OITE) and sister company Arabian Research Bureau (ARB) to support Oman's most influential events.

The agreement ensures that OOMCO remains at the forefront of Oman's exhibition and convention sector and a prominent ambassador for the nation's key industries. As Diamond sponsors of COMEX 2022, under the theme 'Embracing Future Technologies', the leading company will be exhibiting throughout the event,

highlighting the technological opportunities of the Smart Ahlain, OOMCO World App, Ahlain Smart Screens and more.

"Oman Oil Marketing Company prides itself on innovation, utilising the latest technology and the power of digital to make people's lives easier. Our partnership with OITE and ARB will allow us to reach more customers and new markets, as well as provide a high-profile platform to demonstrate our commitment to technology and convenience.

We look forward to working with both companies to



demonstrate further advances in the customer experience and accelerating the digital

transformation across the region", said Tarik bin Mohammed al Junaidi, CEO at Oman

Oil Marketing Company. Amr Baabood, Group CEO at OITE and ARB, said, "We are thrilled to have entered into this partnership with OOMCO, which will help us propel our company to the next level.

Securing a prominent exhibitor from the nation's most important industry will share Oman's capabilities with a world of visitors to the country while also showcasing the very latest technology.

Combining our amenities with OOMCO's cutting-edge technology and advanced solutions will allow us to provide

better services to a much wider customer-base, especially as OITE, ARB and OOMCO all prioritise quality and customer-centricity."

With over 100,000 registered users, the OOMCO World App continues to be the pinnacle of the company's digital transformation and its aim to position itself as the most customer-centric marketer in the GCC.

Fully integrated with its network of service stations and stores, it enables a number of tasks such as online top-up, viewing and redeeming loyalty points, unlocking badges, locating service stations and more.



Tariq to speak at ICAI Muscat Chapter



MUSCAT: As part of its annual general meeting for the year 2021-2022, the Institute of Chartered Accounts of India (ICAI) Muscat Chapter is organising a full day seminar for its members on May 27, 2022 at the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat. Well-known IT enthusiast Tariq al Barwani (**pictured**) has been invited as a motivational speaker to share 8 practical habits that transform lives positively.

ICAI Muscat Chapter was established in the year 2008 under the sponsorship of College of Banking and Financial Studies (CBFS) by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by two bodies for the development of accounting profession in Oman and sharing knowledge and skills.

The Chapter operates is a non-profit group of Indian Chartered Accountants who are employed in Oman and organises professional learning events which is open to attendance by the professionals of all nationalities residing in Oman.

"I am honoured to be invited to speak at ICAI Muscat Chapter Seminar and I look forward to share the 8 practical habits that I personally use to continuously transform my and all the people I associate with positively," said Tariq.

Shura panel visits Al Mazunah Free Zone

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MAY 23

A delegation representing the Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash'shura visited Al Mazunah Free Zone to get familiarised with the ongoing and future projects that are planned by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) in Al Mazunah.

Eng Ali al Maashani, Director General of Al Mazunah Free Zone, briefed the committee on the free zone and its projects and elaborated on the incentives that are offered to the investors in the free zone.

These incentives include customs' exemptions, 100 per cent foreign ownership, no minimum capital requirements, and the Omanisation rate stands at 10 per cent.

More incentives include easy access of individuals and investors



to the free zone without entry visas being required for Yemenis, facilitation of employing Yemeni workforce without work visa being required, in addition to other incentives.

A number of service projects are currently being implemented in Al Mazunah Free Zone including new road network, water tanks and network, fibre optic network, and electricity and

drainage networks.

The facility building project, which is valued at more than RO 3 million, is also expected to be completed by end of this year.

The committee was also

introduced to the tasks undertaken by the customs area in the free zone including the handling operations that are managed by Al Madina Logistics Services Company.

Ethis Group hopes to capitalise on rising crowdfunding interest in Oman via EthisX

FROM PAGE 13

This can be indeed beneficial to Omani businesses operating abroad. Take, for example, an Omani company operating a franchise. If the franchisor sells a franchise, say, to a GCC company, then the Omani business can, with the help of our platform, raise funds for the GCC franchisee. People familiar with the Omani brand in the Gulf country can invest and be part-owners of this brand," Mohamed Shehzad explained.



EthisX is being rolled out globally in stages, starting with Oman. The platform serves to digitally connect startups, funds

and growth companies with HNWI's, the mass and emerging affluent retail segments, and corporate investors seeking to provide shariah-compliant funding, said the CEO. He noted however that the platform, while shariah-compliant, is open to businesses and investors alike of other faiths.

Significantly, investor interest in the Oman platform is anticipated to be strong and widespread, says Riza Ismail who also oversees the EthisX Oman office.

Ethis Group, as a whole, has an investor base from over 80 countries, notably Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, Australia, Brunei and UK, among others.

Their investor number is projected to grow substantially as Ethis Group expands across the Middle East and EthisX ventures into other markets as well as adding more institutions to its investment base.

"We have always felt that our call is global," Shehzad added.

"We are among the pioneers in Islamic fintech in the world, recognised by various bodies. But what we are trying to do should be done on a more global basis. Indeed, aside from Oman, we are also looking at expansion not only geographically, but also across product types.

Our ambition is not limited to crowdfunding, but encompasses the full spectrum of what fintechs can offer. Our ambition is huge, but we need to deliver and execute well, taking measured steps in the process."

Comeback week for industrial and precious metals



OLE S HANSEN

The commodity sector continued to find support this past week, despite the hurricane sweeping across global stock markets. US stocks posted their biggest daily drop in almost two years on Wednesday, driven by surging inflation, weak earnings and the prospect of aggressive monetary policy tightening hurting economic growth.

Nevertheless, the Bloomberg Commodity Spot index managed to climb by 1.6 per cent and, while we are seeing the fourth biggest drawdown in the S&P 500 since 2010, the commodity sector continues to highlight the need for both supply and demand to keep prices stable.

With the supply of many key commodities – from grains and coffee to fuel products and some industrial metals – being challenged, the sector is likely to remain supported despite softer growth; especially considering the prospect for a government-

supported stimulus boost to a post-lockdown China.

Growth in the country has been increasingly challenged by its stubborn adherence to the dynamic zero-Covid policy despite mounting economic and social costs. Gains this past week were concentrated in industrial and precious metals – sectors that have suffered setbacks during the past two months.

In addition, the risk of a global food crisis continues to rise, with Russia's aggression in Ukraine and poor weather conditions being the main culprits for the disruption to a lower supply of key food commodities.

The grains sector hit a fresh record high with the Bloomberg Grains Spot Index sprinting to a +30 per cent gain on the year.

Soybeans led the rally, followed by wheat with corn registering a small loss in the week.

Global worries about a food crisis persist with disruptions in shipments from the Ukraine, one of the world's most important supplier of high-quality wheat and sunflower oil causing ripples around the world.

Ukrainian farmers have almost completed the sowing of spring wheat for the 2022 harvest and the overall rate of this year's spring crop sowing is 25 per cent lower



than at the same date in 2021, the agriculture ministry said on Friday.

A couple of positive supply news, however, helped ease but by no means remove worries about a global food crisis. Palm oil slumped after Indonesia ended its short-lived export ban.

Wheat which earlier in the week surge to fresh highs in Europe and the US on worries about supplies from India saw prices ease on forecast for a bumper crop year in Russia.

However, comments from agriculture analysis firm Gro

Intelligence that the world only has 10 weeks' worth of wheat consumption in reserve will keep prices supported.

At least until we get some more clarity over production levels in Europe and North America, both areas that have seen a challenging weather-related start to the growing season.

Crude oil spent most of the week challenging the upper end of the trading range that has prevailed for the past six weeks.

However, relative calm market action during this time has been hiding a market in continued

turmoil where major opposing forces have managed to keep it rangebound.

During this time, the US government has injected millions of barrels in a failed attempt to suppress the price while Chinese demand has suffered due to its zero-Covid strategy.

The fact the market has not fallen below \$100 highlights the underlying strength with tight supply of key fuels, self-sanctioning of Russian crude oil, Opec struggling to increase production and unrest in Libya all supporting the market.

With China potentially starting to ease lockdowns and with unrest in Libya still growing, the short-term price risk remains firmly skewed to higher prices.

During the past few weeks, the focus has turned from a rangebound crude oil market to the product market where the cost of gasoline, diesel and jet fuel have surged to levels not seen in years (if ever).

The combination of refinery maintenance, a post pandemic reduction in capacity as well as self-sanctioning of Russian products have all led to incredible tight markets. Especially in North American refineries, where they are running flat out to produce what they can and, in turn, benefitting from mouthwatering margins.

So, despite the prospect for slower global economic growth, the price of crude oil remains supported. If we stick to our wide \$90 to \$120 range call for Brent during the current quarter, while still considering structural issues (most importantly the continued level of underinvestment and OPEC's struggle to increase production), this will continue to support prices over the coming quarters. (*The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank*)

Economic headwinds mount as leaders weigh costs of confronting Russia

ALAN RAPPEPORT AND PATRICIA COHEN

The world economy is heading into a potentially grim period as rising costs, shortages of food and other commodities and Russia’s continuing war of Ukraine threaten to slow economic growth and bring about a painful global slump.

Two years after the coronavirus pandemic emerged and left much of the globe in a state of paralysis, policymakers are grappling with ongoing challenges, including clogged supply chains, lockdowns in China and the prospect of an energy crisis as nations wean themselves off Russian oil and gas. Those colliding forces have some economists starting to worry about a global recession as different corners of the world find their economies battered by events.

Finding ways to avoid a slowdown while continuing to exert pressure on Russia for its war in Ukraine will be the primary focus of finance ministers from the Group of 7 nations who are convening in Bonn, Germany, this week.

At a news conference, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that elevated food and energy prices were depressing both spending and economic output, creating what she called “stagflationary effects” all around the world.

“This is an environment that is filled with risks, both with respect to inflation, and also potential slowdowns,” Yellen said.

The economic challenges that governments around the globe are facing could begin to chip away at the united front that Western nations have maintained in confronting Russia’s aggression, including sweeping sanctions aimed at crippling its economy and efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy.

Policymakers are balancing delicate trade-offs as they consider how to isolate Russia, support Ukraine and keep their own economies afloat at a moment when prices are rising rapidly and growth is slowing.

Central banks around the world are beginning to raise interest rates to help tame rapid inflation, moves that will temper economic growth by raising borrowing costs and could lead to higher unemployment. Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, last week signaled a possible increase in interest rates in July, which would be the ECB’s first such move in more than a decade.

Global growth is expected to slow to 3.6% this year, the International Monetary Fund projected in April, down from the 4.4% it forecast before both Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s “zero-Covid” lockdowns.

On Monday, the European Commission



A woman works inside a bakery in Al Hasakah, Syria. The interruption of wheat exports from Ukraine and Russia is causing food prices to spiral and increasing global hunger, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. — The New York Times

released its own revised economic forecast, showing a slowdown in growth to 2.7% this year from the 4% estimated in its winter report.

At the same time, inflation is hitting record levels and is expected to average 6.8% for the year. Britain’s annual inflation rate jumped to 9% last month, the highest in 40 years, the Office for National Statistics said. And some Eastern European countries face even steeper increases, with Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Lithuania all facing inflation rates in excess of 11%.

Pressures on global supply chains also worsened in April as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and pandemic lockdowns in China made it more difficult for companies to source parts and products globally, a supply chain index published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York showed. That could further exacerbate shortages and price increases.

Eswar Prasad, the former head of the IMF’s China division, summed up the challenges facing the G-7 nations, saying that its “policymakers are caught in the bind that any tightening of screws on Russia by limiting energy purchases worsens inflation and hurts growth in their economies.”

“Such sanctions, for all the moral justification underpinning them, are exacting an increasingly heavy economic toll that in turn could have domestic political consequences for G-7 leaders,” he added.

Still, the United States is expected to press its allies to continue isolating Russia and to deliver more economic aid

to Ukraine despite their own economic troubles. Officials are also expected to discuss the merits of imposing tariffs on Russian energy exports before a proposed European oil embargo that the United States fears could send prices skyrocketing by limiting supplies. Policymakers will also discuss whether to press countries such as India to roll back export restrictions on crucial food products that are worsening already high prices.

Against this backdrop is the growing urgency to help sustain Ukraine’s economy, which the IMF has said needs an estimated \$5 billion a month in aid to keep government operations running. The US Congress is close to passing a \$40 billion aid package for Ukraine that will cover some of these costs, but Yellen has called on her European counterparts to provide more financial help.

A downturn may be unavoidable in some countries, and economists are weighing multiple factors as they gauge the likelihood of a recession, including a severe slowdown in China related to continuing Covid-19 lockdowns.

The European Commission, in its economic report, said the EU “is first in line among advanced economies to take a hit”, because of its proximity to Ukraine and its dependence on Russian energy. At the same time, it has absorbed more than 5 million refugees in less than three months.

Deutsche Bank analysts said this week that they thought a recession in Europe was unlikely. By contrast, Carl B. Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics, warned in a note Monday that with consumer demand and

output falling, “Germany’s economy is headed for recession.” Analysts at Capital Economics predicted that Germany, Italy and Britain are likely to face recessions, meaning there is a “reasonable chance” that the broader eurozone will also face one, defined as two consecutive quarters of falling output.

The major culprit is energy prices. In Germany, which has been most dependent on Russian fuel among the major economies in Europe, the squeeze is being acutely felt by its industrial-heavy business sector as well as consumers.

Rising food prices are another matter causing anxiety among finance ministers. The Treasury Department released a report laying out plans by the World Bank and other international financial institutions to combat food shortages.

The interruption of wheat exports from Ukraine and Russia, which together account for 28% of global exports, along with supply chain disruptions, a severe drought in India that has caused it to ban shipments of grain and Covid-19-related lockdowns in China, are also causing food prices to spiral and increasing global hunger, particularly in Africa and the Middle East.

The question for both American and European policymakers is how to corral leaping prices without sending their economies into recession. The Federal Reserve has begun raising interest rates to tame inflation in the United States, and Fed Chair Jerome Powell has acknowledged that bringing prices down without seriously hurting the overall economy will be a challenge.

“Elevated food and energy prices were depressing both spending and economic output, creating stagflationary effects all around the world. This is an environment that is filled with risks, both with respect to inflation, and also potential slowdowns.”

JANET YELLEN
US TREASURY SECRETARY

Crypto crash renews push for more investor protections

EPHRAT LIVNI

For some experienced cryptocurrency investors, last week’s crash was par for the course. “Markets are seasonal; crypto is no exception,” venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz wrote philosophically in a new “state of crypto” report out. “Summers give way to the chill of winter, and winter thaws in the heat of summer.”

But for officials in Washington contemplating new rules for a slew of novel financial products, taking the nosedive in stride is tough. Many are calling for quick action, though that may end up being the only thing they agree upon easily.

The Securities and Exchange Commission chair, Gary Gensler, for instance, speaking at a conference of Wall Street regulators in Washington on Monday, said crypto was “a highly speculative asset class” that left investors exposed to losses and fraud.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission chair, Rostin Behnam, told CNBC that crypto is “causing some confusion and some chaos”, and said that his agency should take on more regulatory responsibility over digital assets.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau chair, Rohit Chopra, told Bloomberg that he thought there were many dangers for investors lurking in stablecoins — cryptocurrencies linked to assets like the dollar that are meant to hold a steady value but which last week proved problematic.

There is agreement on this much, at least. “The existing oversight is clearly inadequate”, said Salman Banaei, policy chief at the crypto company Uniswap Labs, who was formerly at the CFTC.

The SEC has proposed bringing exchanges and other firms that facilitate crypto trading under the same regulations that now govern stock markets. Gensler argues that most tokens should be registered as securities, which would mean disclosures for investors.

As for stablecoins – the cryptocurrencies meant to be tied to a stable value asset like the dollar, some of which last week proved wobbly – a range of regulations may be needed.

Some lawmakers have also favoured more reporting for crypto brokers for tax compliance.

As for stablecoins — the cryptocurrencies meant to be tied to a stable value asset like the dollar, some of which last week proved wobbly — a range of regulations may be needed.

Stablecoins backed by traditional assets like cash and US Treasury could be regulated like banks, some say, with oversight possibly given to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp, but that would still leave others out of the picture.

Algorithmic stablecoins — like TerraUSD, which plunged last week and relies on an algorithm and trader interest in a linked cryptocurrency, Luna, to maintain its value — would not be included. Some lawmakers say that’s the right approach because algorithmic stablecoins are not tied to the traditional financial system, and therefore present less of a risk of causing a meltdown.

But with crypto markets and investors increasingly connected to the older system, others argue that such distinctions are moot.

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The dark exhibition hall of “Syria: The Cradle of Civilisations” shines with antiques

Last Saturday, the National Museum inaugurated the exhibition “Syria: The Cradle of Civilisations” showcasing some of the antiques and remains found in Syria from the Palaeolithic era...**P20**

‘Squid Game’ star Lee Jung-jae steps behind the camera for ‘Hunt’

“**SQUID GAME**” star Lee Jung-jae flexes his film-making muscles with “Hunt”, a spy thriller he wrote, directed, produced and also acts in.

Lee’s directorial and screen-writing debut received its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival, where it is screening out of competition.

The fast-paced, action-packed movie centres around two South

Korean spies who are tasked with uncovering a North Korean mole, and wind up investigating each other in the process.

Lee, 49, stars as one of the spies opposite his long-time friend and business partner Jung Woo-sung.

He said his nearly three-decade long career was a big help when stepping behind the lens.

“I have acted in many different genres and I could remember



scenes I’d shot as an actor that were difficult to film or that didn’t come out as I expected,” he told

Reuters in Cannes.

“I tried to remember those scenes when I was writing the

script to ensure I could be as effective as possible when directing.”

Lee makes his debut riding on the high of the success of his Netflix series, which became the streaming giant’s most popular show globally, and the triumphs of other Korean TV shows, films and music around the world.

“I am so thankful that I am making my directorial debut during this renaissance of Korean culture,” Lee said.

“I hope to get to meet international audiences and fans more often with other movies and content as well.”

Asked which of the many hats he wore on the project he enjoyed the most, Lee did not hesitate.

“Of course acting. I’m an actor. It’s my identity. So, I just loved acting the most.” — **Reuters**

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ART SCENE

Paris street art legend Miss.Tic dies aged 66

MISS.TIC, whose provocative illustrations began cropping up in the Montmartre neighbourhood of Paris in the mid-80s and made her a pioneer of French street art, died on Sunday aged 66, her family said.

Radhia Novat grew up in the narrow streets in the shadow of Sacre-Coeur basilica, the daughter of a Tunisian father and a mother from Normandy in western France, where she began

stencilling sly and emancipatory slogans.

Her family said she died of an unspecified illness.

Miss.Tic’s work often included sly wordplays — almost always lost in translation — and a heroine with flowing black hair, who resembled the artist herself, and the images became fixtures on walls across the capital.

“I had a background in street theatre, and I liked this idea of street art,” Miss.Tic said in a 2011 interview. — **AFP**



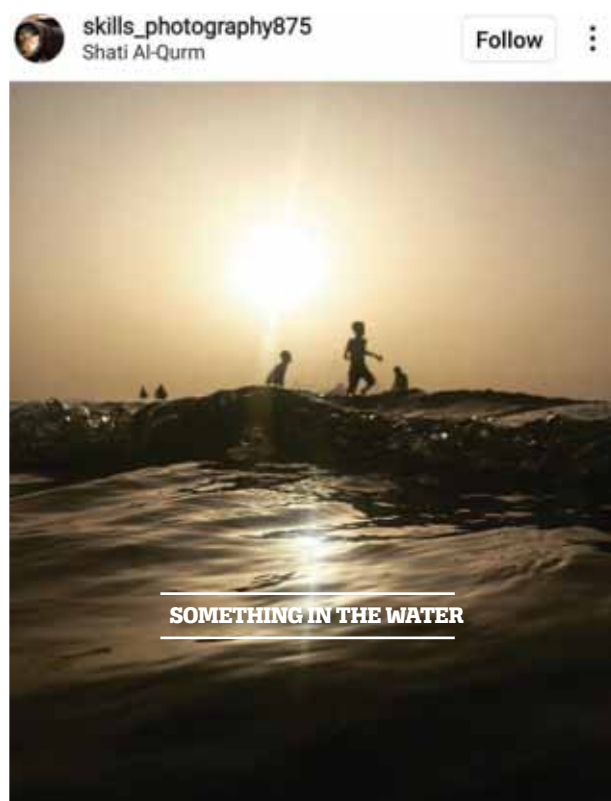


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AROUND THE WORLD

ART SCENE

Dark times inspire Dakar artist at long-awaited African art biennale



AS THE INTERNATIONAL art world flocks to Dakar for the African art biennale, Senegalese artist Fally Sene Sow only has to look out the window to find inspiration in the chaotic street market outside his studio in the capital.

Normally colourful and bustling, the area in Dakar's Colobane district became much more sombre during the pandemic, prompting Sow to create an apocalyptic vision of what his neighbourhood could become.

The result is an installation that fills an entire room of about 30 sq. metres (323 sq. ft), where model buildings are in a state of collapse, skeletons hang next to hybrid animals, thunder rumbles overhead and decaying waste generates heat, all of which combined create a foreboding atmosphere.

"It is mind-blowing," said Ifeoma Dile, an art enthusiast who came from London to see the Dakar Biennale, which kicked off on Thursday. "I have goosebumps just looking at all this and how long must it have taken him to create that in this space? It is amazing."

Sow is one of 59 artists or collectives officially selected for the exhibition - one of the continent's oldest, large-scale celebrations of contemporary African art - which runs until June 21.

Expectations are heightened because this biennale, Dakar's 14th, is being held two years late after the coronavirus pandemic forced a postponement in 2020.

Sow, 34, has spent the last three years preparing for the show. His main creative tool is the rubbish he collects when he wanders around his street, including discarded building materials, plastic sheets and disposable cups.

When not focusing on his big creation for the biennale, he uses scraps for his miniature street tableaux, delicately painting ramshackle market scenes onto glass for his updated take on traditional Senegalese 'sous-verre', or painting under glass, art.

"I live at the heart of the market and so I have this theatre before me," he said from his cluttered atelier on Wednesday, giving the final touches to his mixed-media pieces before they went on show.

Sow's intended audience is not the critics, but people in his neighbourhood, particularly his miniature tableaux of street life. Painting recognisable scenes is a way to make art more accessible - "it's a chance for me to guide them," he said.

The biennale's curators have a similar wish. Over the next month, some 250,000 art lovers and movers and shakers of the art world are expected to visit shows at the capital's many galleries and its grand Museum of Black Civilisations.

But to draw the wider public into the festivities, a series of art installations, including a giant yellow dog statue, have cropped up along Dakar's main coastal road, where many locals gather at sunset to exercise and catch up by the ocean.

"In Senegal few people consume art," Sow noted. Seeing everyday market scenes on canvas catches their attention and makes them laugh, he said, giving the artist a chance to convey the artwork's deeper meaning. — Reuters

MUSIC

Ed Sheeran could be first British billionaire musician



ED SHEERAN could become the first British billionaire musician after another "golden year" saw his wealth reportedly increase by £40 million, according to the Sunday Times Music Rich List.

The Suffolk singer-songwriter, 31, places 10th on the annual list of UK and Irish artists with an estimated total wealth of £260 million.

Sir Paul McCartney, 79, claims number one in the rankings with a fortune of £865 million, which he shares with his American wife Nancy Shevell, but the list's compiler believes Sheeran may beat him to £1billion if he continues his current trajectory.

Composer and impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber, 74, has seen his wealth drop by £30 million to £495 million amid the impact of Covid-19 on the theatre world, but is still at number three.

He recently announced the closure of his new West End musical, Cinderella, after it was

repeatedly delayed due to the pandemic.

As he releases his third solo album, former One Direction star Harry Styles, 28, adds £25 million to his fortune, making him the wealthiest musician under the age of 30 with £100 million.

The last few years have seen the singer embark on a North American tour and release his second album *Fine Line* to positive reviews.

After boosting her fortune by £24 million to a total of £60 million, singer Dua Lipa rises to second place on the young musician list, drawing equal with girl group Little Mix.

Sting, former front man of The Police, has boosted his personal fortune by £100 million to some £320 million after selling his music rights to Universal Music earlier this year.

He was the latest high-profile artist to sell the rights to their back catalogue.

In December 2020,

Universal acquired Bob Dylan's entire song collection for a reported 300 million US dollars.

Dublin stadium rockers U2 are the top Irish entry in the list, jointly worth £625 million, while former One Direction member Niall Horan, 28, is the country's wealthiest young musician, worth £52million.

Robert Watts, compiler of the Sunday Times Rich List, said: "Selling their music rights has proved extremely lucrative for many of the older acts on the Music Rich List - especially those who had quiet pandemics."

"We expect the post-Covid return to touring will see many of these singers and bands earn well this year and next. It seems old musicians never retire, they just get richer."

"Another golden year for Ed Sheeran leads us to believe he may in time pip Paul McCartney to become the first British billionaire musician." — dpa

A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Roof Like a Sieve in the 1960s

THE FOLLOWING is my English translation of an excerpt from "A Soldier from Oman: Memory's Nectar" by (ret.) Inspector-General Said bin Rashid al Kalbani

WHEN IT RAINED IN MISKIN

It used to rain heavier in the 1960 and 70s than it does today. You wouldn't be able to stay indoors during the winter, as water leaked from the roof, which would be something of a sieve when there were heavy downpours. Added to that there were no protective covers, which made parts of the house like an open sky whose drops could fall on household belongings. We men would take shelter in caves and mosques, leaving the unaffected parts of the house for our women and children.

Our elderly were well versed in astrology, and my father was surely one of them. They would know the rainfall times. They would specify their share of falaj* water through star constellations and galaxies, and through the sun's movement at midday. They determined the sun's movement through human shadow, as measured by feet.

I learnt some such skills through my father. We would know that the appearance of a certain star would indicate a certain season. People would accordingly prepare themselves for work on their farmland. They would ready themselves for planting wheat (locally known as albur) through a process of al tareeq. Two weeks after the season, it would start to rain. I still remember the then well-known Omani singer Hamdan al Watani hailing the rain throughout the whole night:

"Hark hark
Water's melody
In the rainy night".
With Osefar.

We used to buy our food from the centre of Ibri and Al Khabourah. My father had a camel, known as Osefar, which carried our food from the two towns. I would sometimes go with Uncle Saif Al Kalbani, and at other times my father would go alone. I remember dealing with two people, Haider al Lawati and Khamis al Lawati. Nowadays it takes us less than one hour to get to Al Khabourah from our town in a comfortable air-conditioned car. With Osefar in a convoy, the journey would take, up and down, five days, and may as well extend to seven. How striking the comparison is!

We would go to Al Khabourah to sell our products, onion, garlic, dry lemon and honey, especially if the harvest was rich; and would come back carrying what we bought of rice, coffee, dry fish and clothes. The transactions would be carried out either by cash or by exchanging goods. We used to plant what was called alneel and sell it in other governorates.

* The local name for human made water tunnels in Oman. Aflaj have a complex structure of distribution. For details see John C Wilkinson's seminal book, *Water and Tribal Settlement in South-East Arabia. A Study of the Aflaj of Oman* (Oxford, 1977) (the translator).

The dark exhibition hall of “Syria: The Cradle of Civilisations” shines with antiques



By Mai al Abri

As part of its target to introduce different civilisations and cultures, the National Museum inaugurated last Saturday the exhibition “Syria: The Cradle of Civilisations” to strengthen bilateral relations between the two sides in a manner that contributes to achieving museum leadership and also to showcase some of the antiques and remains found in Syria from the Palaeolithic era.

The oldest archaeological remains found in Syria date from the Palaeolithic era (c.800,000 BCE) and since approximately 10,000 BCE, Syria was one of the centres of Neolithic culture (known as Pre-Pottery Neolithic A) where agriculture and cattle breeding appeared for the first time in

the world.

The ancient city-state of Ugarit, northern Syria, gave the world its first known alphabet (15th century BCE) as well as the Hurrian Hymn, which is the oldest surviving melody and is over 3,400 years old.

The Phoenicians came to dominate the coasts of Syria from the 13th century BCE, founding city-states and eventually spreading their influence throughout the Mediterranean, and founding the major city-state of Carthage (in modern Tunisia) in the 9th century BCE.

In 539 BCE, Cyrus the Great, King of Achaemenid Persians, took Syria as part of his vast empire. Persian dominion ended with the conquests of Alexander the Great in 333-332 BCE, subsequently, Syria was incorporated into the Seleucid Empire. In 64 BCE, Roman Syria was formed, with the city of Antioch as its

capital, which had become the third-largest city in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. The cities of Palmyra and neighbouring Emesa (modern-day Homs) rose to wealth and prominence. Some Syrian nobles administered Rome and even rose to the imperial title, such as Empress Julia Domna (193 – 222 CE), Emperor Elagabalus or Antonios (reigned 218 to 222 CE) and Emperor Philip the Arab (reigned from 244 to 249 CE).

Syria became part of the Byzantine Empire in 395 CE, and played a significant role in Christianity; Paul the Apostle had converted on the Road to Damascus and emerged as a significant figure in the Church of Antioch.

In the modern era, Syria emerged as an independent state on 24 October 1945 CE, when it had signed the Charter

of the United Nations, which ended France's mandate by the League of Nations.

Damascus, the capital of the Syrian Arab Republic, is one of the oldest cities in the world with an uninterrupted history of nearly eleven thousand years, and the oldest capital in the world.

The exhibition also sheds light on the old spoken languages and dialects in Syria. Dating back to the 1st century BCE, Palmyrene was a special dialect of Aramaic that was spoken by the inhabitants of Palmyra. The inscriptions of Palmyrene Aramaic were found on fragmented documents, but the majority of clearer inscriptions were found carved on stone. Across the exhibition hall, the Palmyrene funerary statues contain Palmyrene inscriptions, with some statues containing inscriptions from other languages, such

as Greek. The inscriptions were found in the archaeological sites found across ancient trade routes. This attests to the cultural and social diversity of Palmyra, and the economic context in which such languages thrived together.

The exhibition highlights the first results of the humanitarian initiative adopted by the National Museum – Sultanate of Oman, focusing on the preservation of Syrian cultural heritage through the conservation and restoration of Syrian artefacts that were damaged during the years of crisis. This initiative is a necessity that should not be postponed under the current circumstances, given the important role that the cultural factor plays in social reconstruction, enhancing the sense of identity and belonging. This, in turn, contributes to promoting the notions of tolerance and reconciliation.