

India reports first monkeypox death

Indian authorities reported Asia's first possible monkeypox fatality after the death of a man who recently returned from United Arab Emirates testing positive. Kerala state's health ministry said tests on the 22-year-old "showed that the man had monkeypox". The Indian man died in Kerala on July 30 around a week after returning from the UAE and being taken to hospital.



P10

EURO 2022 DELIGHT SPARKS BOOM TIME FOR ENGLISH WOMEN'S FOOTBALL



P13

BANKING SECTOR CREDIT CLIMBS 4.5 PER CENT TO RO 28.299 BILLION



P20

BRAZILIANS CAPTIVATED BY OMAN AS THEY TRAVEL THE COUNTRY IN LUXURY AND STYLE



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO PHILIPPINES PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr of the Republic of the Philippines on the death of Fidel Ramos, former President of the Philippines. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sympathies to President Ferdinand, family of the departed and the people of the Philippines.

— ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the death of Princess Mai bint Bandar bin Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al Saud. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sympathies, praying to Allah the Almighty to rest the departed's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family fortitude to bear the loss.

— ONA

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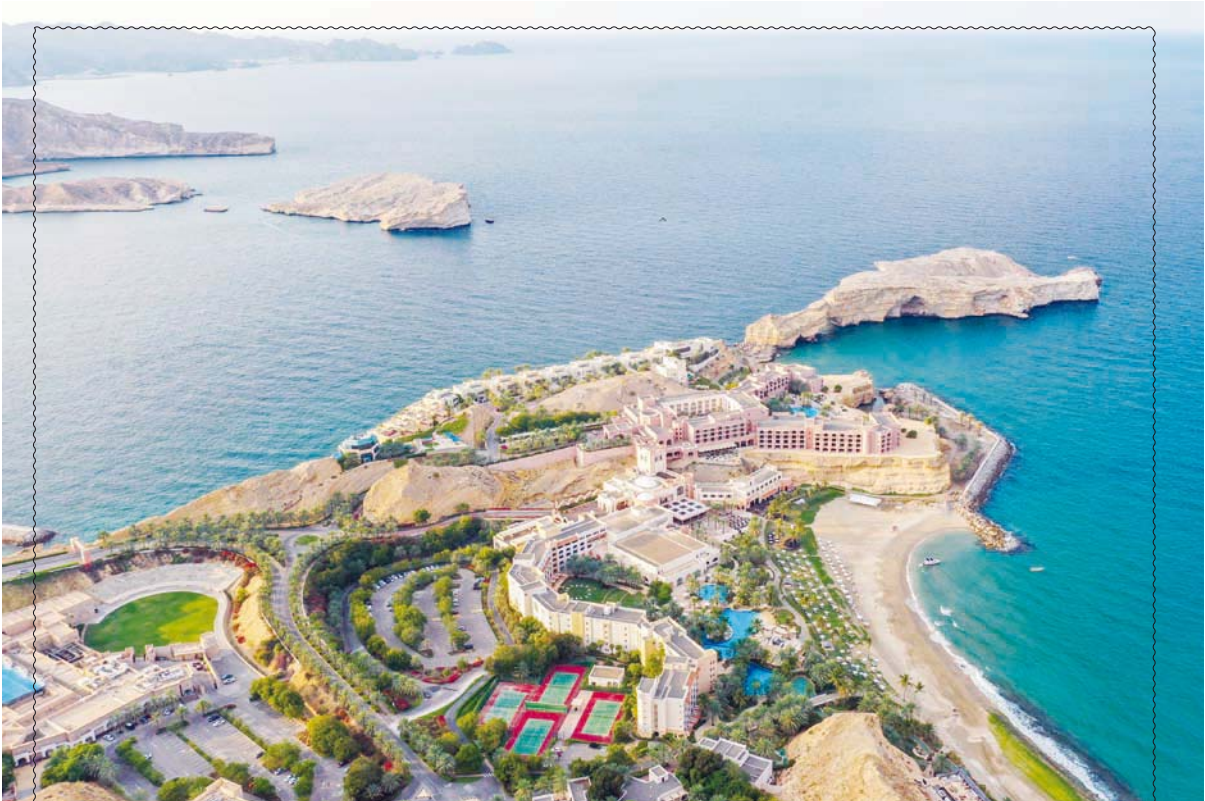
TENSIONS SOAR AS IRAQ GEARS UP FOR RIVAL PROTESTS

P6



FRINGE CANDIDATES PUT REPUBLICANS' HOPES AT RISK

P9



REGULATIONS ON HOTELS

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has updated a regulation issued in November 2021 regarding construction of hotel establishments. The regulation seeks to keep standards and empower tourism development in the governorates of Oman in accordance with the existing needs. It also aims to maintain balance between the types of hotel establishments and the needs of tenants.

DETAILS ON P13

Alert over ‘fake holograms’ scam

KABEER YOUSUF

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Authorities have warned against a new scam, which uses the forged holograms of different government authorities and siphons off money from unsuspecting customers.

“This particular message being received by many banking customers is a scam and one should not fall prey to it,” a senior official at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) told the *Observer*.

He said that con artists are coming out with new scams to dupe people.

“Banks are making awareness campaigns from time to time. However, these fraudsters are finding newer tricks to cheat people.” Though police, banks and security agencies



in the Sultanate of Oman have intensified their efforts to warn customers against disclosing their personal information to callers, many people still fall victim to fraud.

The latest in the series, which uses the holograms of the CBO, ROP and banks, contain warnings that their debit/credit cards could be blocked if they don't update

their account details by providing card number and PIN. It says accounts will be blocked due to a security reason and if one doesn't wish it to happen needs to call the number and complete the formalities immediately.

“One shouldn't panic upon receiving such messages and do not respond to it.”

TURN TO P2

‘Glimmer of hope’ as Ukraine grain ship leaves Odesa

KYIV: The first ship to carry Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea since Russian war on Ukraine five months ago left the port of Odesa for Lebanon on Monday under a safe passage deal described as a glimmer of hope in a worsening global food crisis.

The sailing was made possible after Turkey and the United Nations brokered a grain-and-fertiliser export agreement between Russia and Ukraine last month — a rare diplomatic breakthrough in a conflict that has become a drawn-out war of attrition. The Sierra Leone-

flagged ship Razoni will head to the port of Tripoli, Lebanon, after transiting the Bosphorus Strait linking the Black Sea, which is dominated by Russia's navy, to the Mediterranean. It is carrying 26,527 tonnes of corn.

Russia's war on Ukraine on February 24 has led to a worldwide food and energy crisis and the United Nations has warned of the risk of multiple famines this year.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he hoped Tuesday's departure would be the first of many such cargoes and that the UN would charter a ship



The Sierra Leone-flagged cargo ship, Razoni carrying Ukrainian grain leaves the port in Odesa, Ukraine on Tuesday. — Reuters

to replenish supplies of aid.

“People on the verge of famine

need these agreements to work, in order to survive,” Guterres told

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) has issued a regulation to monitor the quality of telecommunication services in the country.

As per the decision No. 108/2022, the chairman of the board of directors of TRA, issued a regulation to monitor the quality of telecommunication services in Oman.

The new regulation, which serves licensed parties, comprises basic requirements needed to be endorsed by a licensed party to ensure the delivery of high-level services to the beneficiaries in line with international quality standards.

The regulation covers fixed broadband services, high applicability of Internet speeds for the announced services and offers the licensed party a maximum of two years to harmonise its services. The regulation indicates the TRA's role in gauging the quality of fixed and mobile telecom services rendered to end-users, notably through field surveys. It requires the licensed party to publish sufficient information about the quality of the services it offers to the public.

The decision also states that the licensee must announce the data speed for each fixed broadband service package (wired and wireless) and publish details of the quality of communications services, packages, and offers.

The licensee must submit

“The licensee will be required to declare the data speed for each of the bandwidth packages and it is also committed to providing high-speed data for services

TRA

reports on the established performance indicators of the quality of telecommunications services within a period not exceeding 30 days from the end of the monitoring period and must publish those reports in the form and within the period specified by TRA.

The licensee will be required to declare the data speed for each of the bandwidth packages - fixed broadband (wired and wireless), and it is also committed to providing high-speed data for broadband services.

The actual speed of the fixed wired broadband service provided to the beneficiary shall not be less than 90 per cent of the maximum data speed limit announced by the licensee under the subscribed package.

The licensee must publish sufficient details about the quality of communication services and packages and the offers on its website, to ensure that the beneficiary is aware of the quality of the telecommunications services it provides.

reporters in New York. “Countries on the verge of bankruptcy need these agreements to work, in order to keep their economies alive.”

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba called it a “day of relief for the world, especially for our friends in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa.”

Ukraine and Russia are leading world grain suppliers and between them account for nearly a third of global wheat exports. The deal aims to allow safe passage for grain shipments in and out of Odesa and nearby Chornomorsk and Pivdennyi.

— Reuters



Muscat voted among 25 best cities in world

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

Muscat has been voted among the 25 best cities in the world by readers of Travel + Leisure (T + L), taking the 19th position.

The best cities in the world, as voted by T + L readers, includes a mix of culture, food, and friendliness.

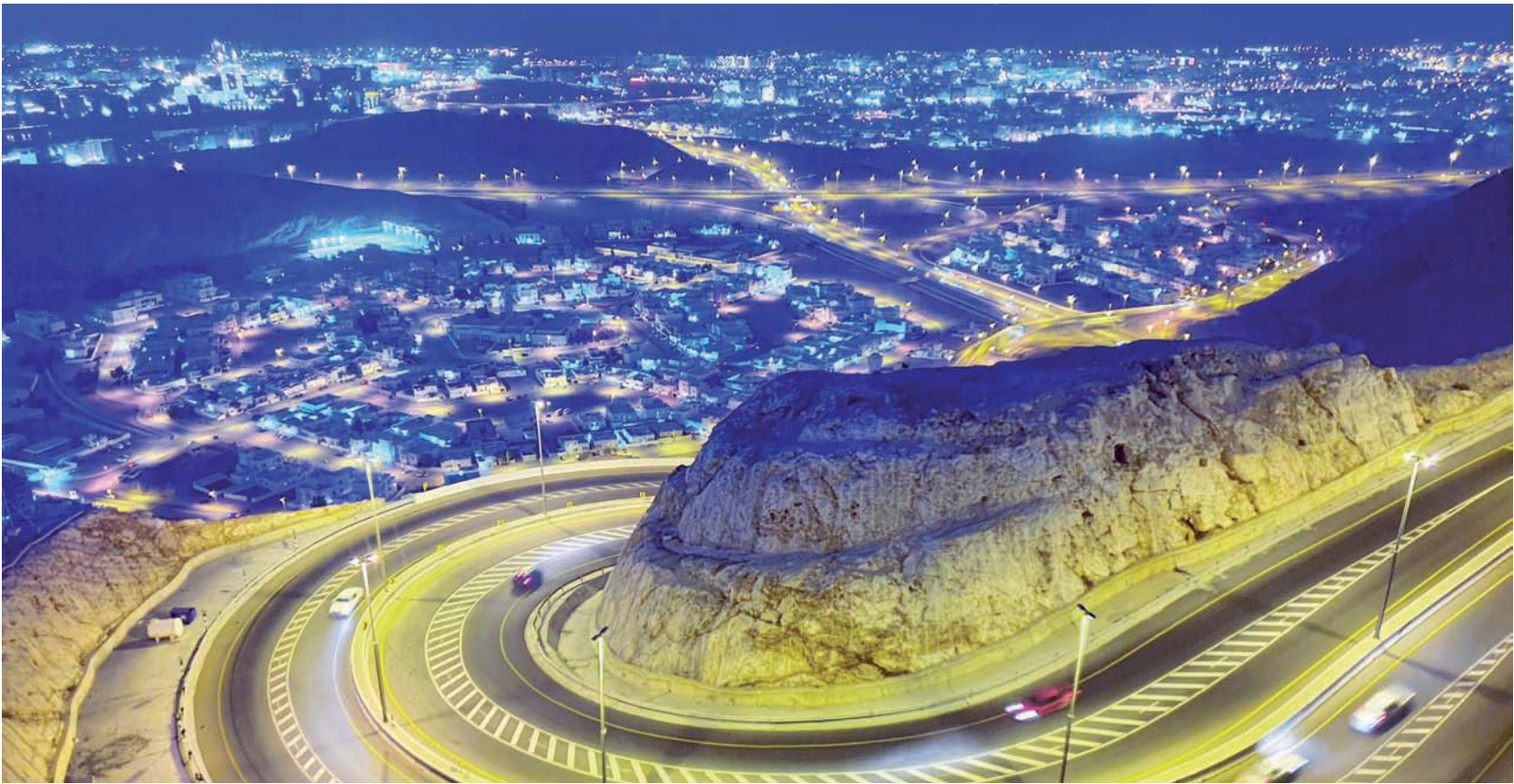
Muscat thus joins among the best cities and among other world hubs to make it to the list.

Travel + Leisure from the Dotdash Meredith Brand is a top travel media brand with a mission to inform and inspire passionate travellers.

Muscat obtained a score of 89.21 with southwestern Mexican city of Oaxaca topping at 92.96 points.

The second to tenth places went to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, Ubud, Indonesia, Florence, Istanbul, Mexico City, Chiang Mai, Jaipur, Osaka, and Udaipur in India.

Maya Kachroo-Levine, the luxury and experiences editor at Travel + Leisure digital, who wrote the story mentions that every year for World's Best Awards survey, T+L asks its readers to weigh in



Muscat obtained a score of 89.21 with southwestern Mexican city of Oaxaca topping at 92.96 points

on travel experiences around the globe to share their opinion on the top cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and others.

She further mentions that when T + L readers throw their collective weight behind an opinion, it tends

to create a ripple effect especially when it comes to the results of the World's Best Awards.

In declaring the best cities in the world, they consider hotels, Michelin-rated restaurants, rich cultural heritage, top attractions

and, in recent years, Covid-19 protocols. The votes are then counted, numbers crunched, and arrived at a score for each city and, ultimately, the ranking of the best 25 across the globe.

Once the WBA lists are revealed,

hundreds of thousands of people sift through the findings.

Travellers plan trips based on these destinations, interest in the lesser-known winner's increases, and cities around the world feel the impact, the report mentions.

Readers rated cities on their sights and landmarks, culture, cuisine, friendliness, shopping, and overall value.

Comparing the best cities of 2022 to last year's rankings yields some intriguing observations.

Last year's winning city, San Miguel de Allende, took this year's No 2 spot and garnered many superlatives, with one respondent saying, "The weather is perfect, the music scene is excellent, and the food outstanding."

Kyoto, Japan, also slid down the list, slipping from No 5 to No 14, but Istanbul (No 5) and Ubud, Indonesia (No 3), remained in the top five.

After losing the top spot to San Miguel de Allende last year, Oaxaca, once again landed at the top of readers' list of favourite cities around the world.

Maya writes that it was a dream gastronomic destination, especially for mole and mezcal enthusiasts. The dominant Indigenous Zapotec culture influences the local cuisine, which is on full display in Oaxaca City.

In fact, one survey respondent specifically touted the 'amazing local indigenous food.'

Registration open for National Scientific Research award



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation announced the opening of registration for the National Scientific Research Award.

Registration for the 9th edition of the competition lasts until September 25.

The award is given out to two segments: the first is accorded to the best published research led by a PhD holder or equivalent degrees (Senior

Specialist or higher in the medical field), and the second is awarded to the best published scholarly research made by researchers other than PhD holders.

The awards are in education, human resources, information and communication systems, health, social service, culture and social studies, energy, industry, environment and biological resources.

— ONA

New scam with fake holograms

FROM PAGE 1

"Instead, block the number immediately and alert us. We will report it to our management to take action," a senior banking official said.

"If a panicked customer responds to such a message by calling them back, he/she would be guided through various bank policies and packages in their language to win their trust and ask for their account number followed by an OTP (One Time Password). That's the end of

the game and an accomplice who's waiting at the ATM will withdraw the money immediately," he said.

Many customers have fallen prey to such unscrupulous messages and lost their money.

Usually, no executive from any bank will ever ask you for PIN, OTP, CVV, card number, account details or password over phone, SMS, WhatsApp or through a web link. If one gets a doubtful message, one should contact the customer care of banks to verify the message.

الوطنية للتمويل
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Directors' Report

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we are pleased to present to you the Directors Report of the Company for the six month period, ended June 30, 2022.

We see a positive development in the economy this year fueled by higher oil prices and progressive government policies. We are encouraged by our start to the current year and are well positioned to support our clients, colleagues and communities. Our strategy is on track, with organic growth and good momentum across all our business segments. We have further improved our efficiencies and reduced costs while maintaining high levels of technology investment and remain on track to achieve our targets for 2022. This has further strengthened our confidence in delivering a favorable return on tangible equity over the medium term.

With a well-diversified geographical presence across Oman (20 locations), coupled with a broad product profile, your company is well positioned to provide innovative and financial solutions for both Retail and SME. Your Company was awarded the Best Non-Banking Financial Corporation (NBFC) at the Oman Banking and Finance Awards. This serves as a testament of our continuous efforts and our leadership position in the industry.

National Finance continues to adopt a prudent approach to credit approvals keeping in view the overall macroeconomic scenario and perceived increase in credit risk. Within this policy, our approach has been to target customers who satisfy our credit risk appetite. We anticipate a reasonable growth to our asset base in the medium term.

Our total regulatory capital of RO 113.25 million is the highest among Finance and Leasing Companies (FLCs) which gives us a strong base on which to build our business. Your company remains the largest finance and leasing Company in the Sultanate in terms of asset size, branch network, revenues and profit.

The operating profit (profit before provision and tax) was at RO 7.91 million (RO 6.94 million in June 2021) while Net Investment in Lease was at RO 420.28 million (RO 406.31 million in December 2021). Profit after tax was RO 5.01 million as compared to RO 3.63 million in June 2021.

The company is fully compliant with the provisioning norms prescribed by the Central Bank of Oman and the International Financial Reporting Standards. We have added to our credit reserves through additional overlay over the IFRS9 requirement in order to be prepared for future challenges, given the incremental risk in the portfolio due to COVID-19 pandemic.

The company remains committed to Omanisation and as of June 30, 2022, the number of Omani employees was 282 out of the total workforce of 313. The Omanisation percentage works out to 90.10% which is higher than the given target of 80%. Your Company continues to provide career growth and development of Omani nationals through ongoing training programs in line with their job requirement. Your Company partnered with Dar Al Atta to inaugurate the Greenhouse Project for people with special needs and earned accolades from the Ministry of Social Development for its Community initiatives. We will continue to maintain momentum on employee engagement initiatives, development of future skills, managerial and leadership capabilities for their professional development.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority, Muscat Securities Market, our bankers, depositors, vehicle and equipment dealers, customers and shareholders for the support extended towards the growth of the Company. On behalf of the Board of Directors, we also thank the management and staff for their dedication and hard work which has enabled us to establish ourselves as the most trusted company in the sector.

Taya Jandal Ali
Chairman

Note: The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any shareholder who requests the company in either Arabic or English with 7 days of receipt of the request. The full set of financials are available in the website of Muscat Stock Exchange.

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE

	Six months ended 30 June 2022 RO'000	Six months ended 30 June 2021 RO'000
Income		
Income from financing activities	21,384	20,372
Finance costs	(8,616)	(8,452)
Net finance income	12,768	11,920
Other operating income	1,456	1,171
	14,224	13,091
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(5,861)	(5,634)
Depreciation	(289)	(360)
Amortization	(162)	(155)
Net impairment loss on lease receivables	(2,267)	(2,591)
Bad debts written back	253	115
Total expenses	(8,326)	(8,625)
Profit before tax	5,898	4,466
Income tax expense	(885)	(837)
Profit after tax	5,013	3,629
Other comprehensive income		
Items that will be classified to profit or loss		
Movement in revaluation reserve – net of tax	4	5
Change in fair value of cash flow hedge	854	77
Other comprehensive income	858	82
Total comprehensive income	5,871	3,711
Basic and diluted earnings per share (RO)	0.008	0.005

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION AS AT

	30 June 2022 RO'000	30 June 2021 RO'000	31 December 2021 RO'000
ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	8,662	3,531	5,579
Net investment in finance leases	349,648	348,090	350,158
Working capital and factoring receivables	70,631	56,617	56,154
Interest rate derivatives – cash flow hedges	281	-	-
Advances, prepayments and other receivables	3,726	2,947	3,201
Assets held for sale	1,500	1,500	1,500
Goodwill	5,950	5,950	5,950
Intangible assets	766	993	904
Property and equipment	6,634	6,937	6,720
Statutory deposit	250	250	250
Total assets	448,048	426,815	430,416
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY			
LIABILITIES			
Creditors and accruals	9,814	8,529	9,327
Tax liabilities	1,623	1,405	3,476
Bank borrowings	287,908	276,993	272,919
Fixed deposits	34,324	30,591	31,269
Deferred tax liabilities	533	298	533
End of service benefits	596	602	588
Total liabilities	334,798	318,418	318,112
EQUITY			
Capital and reserves			
Share capital	54,123	54,123	54,123
Share premium	5,786	5,786	5,786
Revaluation reserve	1,027	1,035	1,031
Foreign currency reserve	4,321	4,321	4,321
Voluntary reserve	3,000	3,000	3,000
Cash flow hedge reserve	281	(221)	(573)
Legal reserve	9,363	8,501	9,363
Retained earnings	17,149	13,783	17,184
Total shareholders' equity attributable to the equity holders of the company	95,050	90,328	94,235
Perpetual bonds	18,200	18,069	18,069
Total equity	113,250	108,397	112,304
Total liabilities and equity	448,048	426,815	430,416
Net assets per share (RO)	0.176	0.167	0.174



National Museum inaugurates exhibition in Aleppo

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

The National Museum’s exhibition ‘Illuminations from Oman’ began in the Syrian city of Aleppo last week. This inauguration came within the framework of cultural and museum cooperation between the National Museum and the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, according to the memorandum of understanding, which was concluded in Damascus on November 1, 2021. The exhibition, which was held in the Damascus National Museum, will be transferred to the Aleppo National Museum. The exhibition will be open for the public for six months.

The exhibition and the accompanying events were inaugurated by Dr Lubana Mushouh, Minister of Culture of the Syrian Arab Republic, in the presence of the Governor of Aleppo, the head of the Aleppo City Council, a member of the Executive Office of the Culture and Tourism sector, the Director of the Aleppo Antiquities, the Director of the Aleppo Museum, heads of departments, a number of interested persons, researchers, experts from Aga Khan Network and engineers restoration of Umayyad Mosque and a number of local and international media outlets. The Omani side was

represented by representative from the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in the Syrian Arab Republic and their accompanying delegations.

Dr Lubana Mushouh also toured Beit Ajqbash with the Omani side to observe the progress of rehabilitation works within Ajqbash, which is one of the ancient Aleppine palaces.

She said: “The National Museum of Aleppo, which was restored in 2019, receives today the first exhibition of Omani artefacts and heritage, which were displayed in the Damascus National Museum for six consecutive months. So we thought that the people of Aleppo can have the chance to see them and get acquainted with the Omani civilisation.

The Minister of Culture indicated that the Omani artefacts date back to different eras and includes photo exhibition of some archaeological sites registered on the Unesco World Heritage List. She pointed that this valuable exhibition shows the relation between the successive civilisations of both countries, Syria and Oman, especially in light of the strong ties that unite the two peoples in terms of culture, civilisation and commerce.

On the cultural exchange between the two countries, the Minister of Culture indicated that a similar exhibition was held in



Oman. The exhibition presents artefacts from the Damascus Museum and Syrian museums in general. This significant cultural event has received clear and wide interest which indicates the convergence between the two peoples.

Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi,

Secretary-General of the National Museum, stated that the exhibition “Illuminations from Oman” in Aleppo is the first museum international exhibition to be held at the National Museum of Aleppo in recent years. The exhibition comes in the context of the National Museum initiative

entitled Exhibition and Events “Oman Day”, after the success that was achieved at the National Museum of Damascus, which was inaugurated last year on November 1, 2021.

The inauguration of the exhibition complements the process of joint cooperation in

culture and museum field between the two countries. Furthermore, it is an opportunity to introduce the Syrians to the Omani civilisation, in addition to highlighting the common factors that have brought the two countries since the Iron Age.

The exhibition includes Omani archaeological findings, which numbered about 32 artefacts. This exhibition highlighted the prominent phases of the history of Oman across the ages like the dawn of the Magan civilisation, in the third millennium BC, which was famous for copper smelting and building sea vessels to the oasis civilisation, during the Iron Age, where the ingenuity of Omani engineering was demonstrated through the construction of irrigation systems such as the aflaj, which resulted in the expansion of agriculture.

With the emergence of Oman as the land of frankincense, it became a trade hub for other civilisations of Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and Pharaonic Egypt. The Islam helped Oman to establish its unique model of good governance, away from the centralisation of both the Umayyad Caliphate and the Abbasid Caliphate. As a result, Suhar became a prominent metropolis along the Maritime Silk Road linking the East and West of the civilisations of the ancient world.

In brief

■ MUSCAT

SEMINAR ON DRAFTING DEVELOPMENT BUDGET

The Ministry of Economy on Monday organised a seminar on drafting “Development Budget 2023” and its e-system. The seminar included a demonstration on the main guidelines that government units, ministries, authorities and public establishments must follow when submitting their development budgets for 2023. The seminar’s opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Nasser bin Rashid al Maawali, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Economy. The seminar was held within the context of Royal Decree No. (36/2022) on the System of the Governorates. The Royal decree gives governorates financial and administrative autonomy in a bid to enhance decentralisation and boost the attractiveness and competitiveness of those governorates. It also aims to activate the role of governors’ offices, which includes drafting development budgets of the respective governorates.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is hosting a regional workshop in the field of strategic management. The five-day event sees the participation of 30 delegates from GCC states, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine, Iraq, Syria and Libya. The workshop lays emphasis on the aspect of ‘execution and reporting’ and the initiative of measuring performance. It seeks to enhance the capabilities of participating institutions, notably through a review of operating plans, decision-making and reporting of performance.

MoHT revises rules to improve quality of hotels

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has amended the regulations issued in November 2021 for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating the quality of hotel establishments.

Saeed bin Harib al Obaidani, Director-General of Tourism Development at the MoHT, said that the ministry aims to raise the level of quality of hotels, and efficiency of the hospitality sector, and provide various accommodation options to meet the requirements of citizens, residents and tourists. It will also help increase the number of quality establishments that may

contribute to providing more job opportunities for citizens and raise the sector’s contribution to the gross national product.

Al Obaidani said that there are 29,684 hotel rooms as of 2022 in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, which is expected to go up to 26,314 by 2025.

The new regulations for the establishment of hotel establishments will be based on compliance with classification and quality standards and the controls specified in the executive regulations of the Tourism Law.

By reviewing and updating these regulations on an ongoing basis, the request submitted to the ministry will also be studied according to the needs



of hotel establishments in each governorate, with priority given to reconciling the conditions of the

1,500 unlicensed establishments distributed over all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

It may be noted that the government is focusing on a plan for the heritage and tourism sector based on governance, management, capacity building, planning, development and investment, quality, sustainability and competitiveness, local added value, tourism products, and experiences, the labour market, support for local products, and tourism promotion. The Oman Botanical Garden is expected to be ready in 2023 while Oman Across Ages Museum will be opened shortly.

The Botanical Garden will have a large collection of plants, including Omani native plants and several facilities for tourists and visitors.

■ BRIMMING WITH BEAUTY



Al Sarooj Dam in the Wilayat of Madha in the Musandam Governorate is filled with water, following the recent heavy rains that lashed the northern governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. – ONA



Ditch phone for better *Zzzzzz*

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

If you are using a mobile phone before going to bed as a routine habit, there are chances of sleep deprivation resulting in hypertension, heart attacks and strokes, obesity, diabetes, depression and anxiety, decreased brain function, memory loss, weakened immune system, lower fertility rates and psychiatric disorders. Sleep deprivation means that you are not getting enough sleep

Scientific research makes clear that sleep is essential at any age. Sleep powers the mind, restores the body, and fortifies virtually every system in the body. But how much sleep do we really need in order to get these benefits? Healthy adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night. Babies, young children, and teens need even more sleep to enable their growth and development. People over 65 should also get 7 to 8 hours per night.

The use of the mobile phone immediately before bed stimulates the brain, which hinders the body's ability to relax and sleep. It makes the person take a longer time to sleep. In addition to causing damage to the eyes, looking at

the bright screen of the phone, especially in darkness, leads to fatigue of the eyes, and may cause long-term damage to vision.

We spend all day feeding our brain information, so when it comes time to turn it off, we should do the same thing to our phones too. Numerous studies have found that using your phone before bed is harmful to your overall health. The blue light emitted by your cell phone screen restrains the production of melatonin, the hormone that controls your sleep-wake cycle (aka circadian rhythm). This makes it even more difficult to fall asleep and wake up the next day. The circadian rhythm seems to be especially sensitive to blue light since it has a short wavelength. Studies also show that exposure to blue light can cause damage to your retinas.

Say you just received a strongly worded email or saw a Facebook post you didn't agree with. It's going to be more difficult for you to relax and go to sleep now that you're all fired up. Even if it's not upsetting content, keeping your mind engaged by scrolling through your phone can trick your brain into thinking it needs to stay awake.

Since you spent that extra time staying awake reading emails

instead of sleeping, now you're going to be more tired and less alert for the next day. And who wants to be less aware and more sluggish throughout the day? Aside from the fact that late-night scrolling can make you less efficient, it can also lead to a significant and chronic deficiency in sleep.

You should stop using electronic devices, like your cellphone, at least 30 minutes before bedtime. Instead, grab the book that's been tucked away in your nightstand and start reading before bed. Or listen to music. You'll be impressed with how much more quickly you fall asleep and how much better you'll feel the next day.

If you're worried that you may miss a call in case of an emergency, set it so that it only rings when certain people are calling, but still place it out of bed and out of reach — just in case you get tempted.

But when can we say we got enough sleep? Can it be calculated in hours? Dr Hans Gunter Weiss, head of the German Institute of Sleep Medicine (DGSM) and author of 'Sleep Works Miracles,' says that this cannot be determined by hours, but rather the determining factor is genes, which means that each of us has to monitor his body to derive the number of hours he needs to sleep.

USING ELECTRONIC
DEVICES BEFORE GOING
TO BED HAMPERS
SOUND SLEEP



Jusoor launches physiotherapy and rehab centre in Shinas

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

Jusoor Foundation, the non-profit social responsibility organisation that aims at the development of the community through sustainable social projects, celebrated the inauguration of the Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Center at Shinas Health Complex.

The opening ceremony of the Center, which was built at a cost RO 85,000, was held under the auspices of Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, in the presence of Dr Khalid bin Said al Sidi, Director-General of Health Services in North Al Batinah, and representatives of Jusoor Foundation and funding companies.

The ceremony started with a presentation on physiotherapy and rehabilitation facilities and the beneficiaries of the high-quality services provided by the centre. The guests toured the facilities of the centre, which was funded by OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale Oman.

The Chief Guest was also briefed on the treatment methods and the advanced medical equipment at the Center. The centre was established to achieve a number of goals in the health sector, the most important of which was to improve the quality and efficiency of health services in Shinas Health Complex as well as to raise the number of beneficiaries of physical therapy and rehabilitation services on a daily basis, and to improve the level of health services.

The capacity of the treatment services provided by Shinas Health Complex was



planned in such a way to prevent the need to transfer patients to referral hospitals or postpone treatment. The Center, which extends over a total area of 187.86 square metres, is equipped with the latest medical devices and equipment to ensure high-quality physiotherapy and rehabilitation services that meet the needs of locals in North Al Batinah Governorate. The Center consists of six diagnostic and rehabilitation clinics and a physiotherapy room, in addition to two waiting rooms

for men and women.

Dr Majed bin Sultan al Muqbali, acting Director-General of the General Directorate of Health Services in North Al Batinah Governorate, affirmed that the project forms a boost to the health services at Shinas Health Complex. “The Center contributes to reducing the effort and time of outpatients and those in waiting lists for physiotherapy and rehabilitation. The operation of the Center will definitely increase the number of beneficiaries at Shinas Health Complex. The Center also provides treatment for post-fractures, burns and accident patients, the elderly and people with disabilities. The Center has been provided world-class treatment equipment to meet the expectations of North Al Batinah locals”, he said. “I thank Jusoor Foundation, which comprises OQ, Sohar Aluminium and Vale Oman, for providing the required financial support for this vital project.”

ARA provides scholarships to 3 women staff for higher studies

MUSCAT: ARA Petroleum, a subsidiary of The Zubair Corporation, has offered a scholarship to three female employees to complete their university studies, with two of them set to complete their studies in the Sultanate of Oman and one in the United Kingdom. This is in line with the company’s policy to qualify and develop Omanis in various technical disciplines.

Dr Omar bin Salim al Jaaidi, General Manager, said, “Supporting employees to complete their studies abroad comes within the policy of ARA Petroleum Company. This is aimed to develop and qualify Omani employees to provide them with technical and administrative skills, aligned with the company’s ambitious plans. Moreover, it is also part of the company’s endeavour to implement the latest international standards within the oil and gas sector as well as in the field of renewable and sustainable energy. “The company is working towards reducing and eventually eliminating its carbon footprint resulting from its operations.

Commenting on this endeavour, Abir bint Ahmed al Shueiliyah, Operations Process Engineer at ARA Petroleum, who is studying in the United Kingdom said, “I started my career in ARA Petroleum in November 2017, and we have always sought to make ARA Petroleum one of the leading companies in the Sultanate of Oman in the field of sustainable energy. The engineering team and the new technologies team are working together to find appropriate solutions to this challenge. This was the reason for the company’s management to send me to the United Kingdom to complete a full-time master’s degree for one year.”

“Studying abroad will help us to develop our careers, assume responsibility and self-reliance, as well as learn how to manage



Anisa al Mahadhour

time and plan well. It also contributes to studying disciplines that are not available in the Sultanate of Oman, which allows us to excel and apply what we have learned at work, in addition to enhancing our self-confidence. We will strive to employ what we have acquired in science, knowledge and skills to develop work within the company through modern scientific and technological research, which is in line with the vision of ARA Petroleum.”

“Studying abroad will give me the opportunity to apply what I have learned in many disciplines within the company, including specialised positions in the field of chemistry, among others, including process development, environmental services and manufacturing. I am currently working on a graduation project, which is to convert the gases associated with oil, which are now burned, into hydrogen that can be used to produce energy in the oil fields. Through this project, the burning of gas that produces harmful substances for the environment will be stopped and will be fully utilised”, she said.

Anisa bint Nasser al Mahadhour,



Abir al Shueili

petrophysicist at Ara Petroleum, Blocks 44 and 31, said: “I graduated from the College of Science at Sultan Qaboos University with a Bachelor’s degree in Earth Sciences (Geology) as a major and Business Administration as a minor in 2008. I worked for a short period during my university studies as assistant lecturer, I then joined a company operating in the oil fields for two months as a geophysicist specialising in earth sciences, and then joined training in several government ministries such as the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs and the Ministry of Oil and Gas at that time, when I worked in the areas of contracts and environmental permits. Then I joined the field with a Thai company (PTT) and was sent for six months at the company’s overseas headquarters in Thailand. I dealt with on-the-job training in the fields of geologist, geophysics and petrophysics. After that, I decided to complete my undergraduate studies with a master’s degree in Applied Earth Sciences, and my request was approved to complete my studies in this field.”

Give away organs, save lives: Donor pioneer

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Fr Davis Chiramel, a catholic priest who gave his kidney to a stranger and set off a movement of organ donation in the Indian state of Kerala, urged the people to Oman to save lives by donating organs.

Speaking to Observer on the sidelines of World Malayalee Council in Muscat, Fr Chiramel, popularly known as the kidney priest, said one can wipe off the tears of a family the moment one readies to donate an organ. “One is actually saving or improving the lives of up to eight people besides their families, by undertaking to donate his/her organs after death, and the goodness that such an act fetches is immeasurable,” Fr Davis, the founder of the Accident Care and Transport Service and the Kidney Federation of India, said.

“First, such a dedicated group of donors as well as awareness programmes will save patients from the consequences of trade in human organs, help correct the misconceptions of organ donation after death, and educate the various conditions for donation by relatives.”

According to statistics from the

MoH, there are nearly 2,500 patients who suffer kidney failure in the country. Muscat Governorate tops the list with more than 600 cases. At present, as many as 24 dialysis centres with a total of 373 beds operating in different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman help patients get their timely dialysis done.

Oman made great strides in organ donation by launching the Shifa app and by clarifying the same in the light of religion and Sharia, which allows organ donation based on certain conditions. This has largely stopped people depending upon foreign agents for organ transplantation. If someone wishes to donate his organs after his/her death, register on Shifa.

Dr Nevine al Kalbani, Head of Organ Donation Department at the Royal Hospital, said that the app educates the donor about the types and stages of donation and raises the awareness of patients about organ transplantation and the health care provided after the operations.

“The new application has been helping in increasing the number of organ donors to meet the increasing demand on donated organs received by health institutions in the Sultanate of Oman,” Dr Nevine said.



Fr Davis Chiramel



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	22/2022	Tender Name	Construction of new Boundary Wall & External Bus Parking Baleed Archaeological Park – Dhofar Governorate
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	30 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	21/ 08/ 2022		
Last Date for Bid Submission	14/ 09/ 2022		
Grade	First		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

- Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>, against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local bank not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.
 - Any bid that does not meet the required tender bond will not be considered
 - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids
- The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



Tensions soar as Iraq gears up for rival protests near occupied parliament

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security forces were on high alert in Baghdad on Monday as tensions soared after rivals of cleric Moqtada Sadr, whose supporters are occupying the parliament, called for counter-demonstrations.

A political standoff 10 months after Iraqis went to the polls pits Sadr — a populist with a devoted following of millions among the country’s majority population — against the powerful Coordination Framework, another alliance group.

Sadr’s supporters have been occupying parliament in the normally high-security Green Zone — also home to government buildings and embassies — since Saturday.

They started their protest in response to the rival alliance’s prime ministerial nomination.

Large numbers of security forces set up roadblocks and checkpoints, ahead of calls by supporters of the Coordination Framework.

The protests are “not directed against any particular group”, the supporters said on social media.

The protest is expected to take place on a road leading to the Green Zone, not far from where



Supporters of the Coordination Framework gather during a protest near Green Zone in Baghdad. — Reuters

thousands of Sadr supporters were still bedded down at the parliament, waving flags and pictures of Sadr.

A Sadr loyalist has also called on supporters of the cleric to protest across Iraq’s provinces, in demonstrations to take place at the same time.

The Coordination Framework includes lawmakers from the party of Sadr’s longtime foe, ex-prime minister Nuri al Maliki.

It also represents the powerful former paramilitary alliance Hashed al Shaabi, now integrated into the regular forces.

Hadi al Ameri, who heads a

faction of the Hashed al Shaabi, repeated a call on Monday for “constructive dialogue enabling solutions to be found to points of contention”.

He warned against “an atmosphere of media escalation, sparked by statements and counter-statements calling for

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, government formation has involved complex negotiations but in this case 10 month of political deadlock have left the country without a government, a new prime minister or a new president

mass mobilisations that could get out of control and lead to violence”.

In multi-confessional and multi-ethnic Iraq, government formation has involved complex negotiations since a 2003 US-led invasion toppled Saddam Hussein, but in this case 10 month of political deadlock have left the country without a government, a new prime minister or a new president.

Sadr’s massive mobilisation of supporters in recent weeks has underscored the political clout of the firebrand preacher, who once led a militia against American and Iraqi government forces. — AFP

Iran says it is ready to restart nuclear talks

TEHRAN: Iran is ready to restart talks on its contested nuclear programme, Foreign Office spokesman Nasser Kanaani said in Tehran on Monday.

“We have over recent days received important messages,” Kanaani said “There will indeed soon be the opportunity for new negotiations.”

Kanaani said Iran was aiming at a definitive end to the conflict over its nuclear programme, but did not say when or where the talks would take place.

Chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri tweeted: “We are ready to bring the negotiations to a conclusion over the short term.”

Talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the six other parties to the agreement - China, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and the United States - have been deadlocked since March.

— dpa

India’s rice growing eastern states may get below normal rains

NEW DELHI: India is likely to receive an average amount of rain in August and September, the weather office said on Monday, pointing to overall good crop yields in Asia’s third biggest economy that relies on farming to boost growth and generate jobs.

The state-run India Meteorological Department (IMD) defines average, or normal, rainfall as between 96 per cent and 104 per cent of a 50-year average of 89 cm (34 inches) for the four-month season beginning in June.

But some rice-growing states in India’s east may receive below-average monsoon rains, Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of the IMD, told a virtual news conference.

India is the world’s biggest exporter of rice, a staple for Asia, and monsoon rains determine the size of the country’s rice crop.

Good output would help



Residents wade through a flooded street following heavy rains in Hyderabad.—AFP

India maintain its pre-eminent position in the global rice market, but a prolonged spell of lower or uneven rains could hit the crop.

India’s top rice regions in the east - Bihar, Jharkhand and some

parts of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh states - have recorded a rainfall deficit as high as 48 per cent. As a result, rice planting has dropped by 13 per cent so far this season.

Traders said the forecast of lower rainfall over eastern India could hit yields of the rice crop.

India’s summer-sown rice accounts for more than 85 per cent of the country’s annual production, which jumped to a record 129.66 million tonnes in the crop year to June 2022.

Overall, monsoon rains were 8 per cent below average in June and 17 per cent above average in July, Mohapatra said.

But India’s eastern and northeastern regions have received 45 per cent below average rainfall in the first two months of the season, the lowest in 122 years, he said.

“Rainfall is gradually becoming deficient over these regions,” Mohapatra said.

The monsoon, which accounts for about 75 per cent of India’s annual rainfall, is vital as nearly half of the country’s farmland doesn’t have irrigation. — Reuters



Cars wait in a line to buy petrol from a fuel station in Colombo. — Reuters

Sri Lanka seeks urgent help to feed children

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka issued an urgent appeal on Monday to tackle rapidly spreading malnutrition among children as its economic crisis leaves nine out of 10 people dependent on state handouts.

The Ministry for Women and Child Affairs said they were seeking private donations to feed possibly several hundred thousand children wasting due to insufficient food.

The bankrupt state, grappling with Sri Lanka’s worst economic crisis since independence, was unable to sustain welfare.

“When the Covid pandemic was at its peak, the problem was

bad, but now, with the economic crisis, the situation is far worse,” secretary Neil Bandara Hapuhinne told reporters in Colombo.

Hapuhinne said they had counted 127,000 malnourished children among the 570,000 girls and boys below the age of five in mid-2021.

Since then, he estimated the numbers have increased several fold with the full impact of rampant inflation and dire shortages of food and other essentials. He said the number of people receiving direct state handouts has almost doubled in the past year. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

FUA’AMOTU

Hugs and tears as Tonga reopens borders

Families embraced and cried tears of joy on Monday as they reunited at Tonga’s airport — the inaugural arrivals to the Pacific nation after it lifted Covid restrictions for the first time since the pandemic struck.

After Tonga shut its borders in March 2020, the government had tightly controlled a select list of people who were approved to fly into the kingdom — leaving over 3,000 Tongans stuck overseas.

But with restrictions lifted, Monday’s first batch of tourists



and returning Tongans — greeted with colourful garlands and serenaded by a band at the Fua’amotu International Airport — will not have to undergo quarantine.

MANILA

Marcos Jr rules out Philippines rejoining ICC

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Monday ruled out the Philippines rejoining the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose prosecutor plans to resume an investigation into the previous government’s bloody “war on drugs”.

The Philippines withdrew from the ICC in 2019, with then President Rodrigo Duterte accusing it of prejudice by starting a preliminary examination into thousands of killings by police.



“The Philippines has no intention of rejoining the ICC,” Marcos told reporters, adding he met last week met with his legal team to discuss a resumption of the ICC investigation.

ISLAMABAD

Stating faith a must for marriage registration

Pakistan’s most populous province has made it mandatory for couples wishing to get married to submit a declaration about the finality of prophethood, a move that rights activists say will further alienate minority communities.

The decision to amend Muslim family laws was taken by the Punjab government led by the party of former Prime Minister Imran Khan. “Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) strongly opposes the



provincial government’s move making it mandatory for couples to sign a declaration of their belief in the finality of prophethood,” HRCP secretary general Harris Khaliq said.



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In brief

■ JOHANNESBURG



ONE SHOT DEAD DURING VIOLENT DEMONSTRATION

A man was killed in a police shooting during protests over the cost of electricity in a South African township on Monday, the police watchdog said. Residents angry at the high cost of basic services barricaded roads with burning tyres and set ablaze a municipal building in Thembisa township east of the financial hub Johannesburg. “We have registered a case of shooting... by a member of the police, and our investigators are on the scene,” Independent Police spokeswoman said. Protests over poor services occur regularly in South Africa, which is battling some of the highest unemployment and crime rates in the world.

■ BRUSSELS



EU COURT GIVES MIXED GUIDANCE ON MIGRANT CASE

The EU’s top court said on Monday that officials can detain migrant rescue ships, but only if they can prove there is a real risk to health in mixed guidance on a case testing Europe’s response to refugees. German campaign group Sea Watch launched a legal challenge after Sicilian port authorities detained two of its vessels that had rescued migrants in the Mediterranean and taken them to Sicily in 2020. Italian judges asked the European Court of Justice for guidance on the case that goes to the heart of disputes over how to respond to the tens of thousands of people risking the crossing from Africa every year.

■ MITROVICA



KOSOVO SERBS DISMANTLE BARRICADES AT BORDER

Serbs in North Kosovo removed barricades on Monday that blocked two crossings along the border with Serbia after authorities in Pristina postponed the implementation of new travel measures that sparked tensions. Trucks and barriers were cleared from the roads hours after a string of shootings and air raid sirens in northern Kosovo sent tensions soaring in the disputed territory home to both Serbs and ethnic Albanians. By Monday evening, the roads leading to both border crossings had been reopened. The area has long been a flashpoint between the two communities.



The record-breaking blaze sparked just days after the year’s previous largest fire raged in central California. — AFP

Thousands ordered to evacuate as California fire destroys homes

YREKA: The largest fire in California this year is forcing thousands of people to evacuate as it destroys homes and rips through the state’s dry terrain, whipped up on Sunday by strong winds and lightning storms.

The McKinney Fire was completely uncontained as it burned in Klamath National Forest in Northern California, CalFire said, spreading over more than 51,000 acres near the city of Yreka.

It is the largest wildfire so far this year in California, which has already battled several blazes this summer.

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on Saturday, saying the fire had “destroyed homes” and “threatened critical infrastructure” after breaking out on Friday.

The fire was “intensified and spread by dry fuels, extreme drought conditions, high temperatures, winds and lightning storms,” Newsom said in a statement.

More than 2,000 residents were under evacuation orders and some 200 under evacuation warnings, according to the California Office of Emergency Services, mostly in Siskiyou County.

“Surrounding areas should be ready to leave if needed.

Please don’t hesitate to evacuate,” the Siskiyou County Sheriff tweeted.

Highway 96 and McKinney Creed Road southwest of the Klamath River were closed to the public, CalFire said.

Yreka resident Larry Castle told the Sacramento Bee newspaper that he and his wife had packed up a few possessions and their three dogs to leave the area for the night, as other fires in recent years had taught them the situation could turn “very, very serious.”

Nearly 650 people were working to douse the blaze as of Sunday, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group said.

Firefighting forces were sent from nearby Oregon to help

containment efforts, the Oregon State Fire Marshal said, as the Klamath National Forest also deals with the Kelsey Creek Fire.

CalFire said the cause of the fire was still “under investigation.”

The US Forest Service said “a heavy smoke inversion” had helped to limit the growth of the fire on Sunday, but also meant that firefighters’ aircraft were also “mostly grounded.”

Fire crews were working above Fort Jones and west of Yreka “to cut off the fire’s progress,” the USFS said.

The record-breaking blaze was sparked just days after the year’s previous largest fire raged in central California.

The Oak Fire near Yosemite National Park broke out in mid-July and spread rapidly, destroying 41 buildings and forcing thousands to evacuate.

California, which is facing a punishing drought, still has months of fire season ahead of it.

In recent years, California and

other parts of the western United States have been ravaged by huge and fast-moving wildfires, driven by a warming climate.

Other parts of the world have also faced intense wildfires this year.

On Sunday, both Portugal and France were battling major forest fires, as temperatures rose sharply in Europe over the weekend.

In Portugal, a blaze broke out in the Mafra area, north of Lisbon, while in France at least four firefighters were seriously injured and motorways were closed.

Around 400 firefighters were drafted in to fight the blaze around 40 kilometres (25 miles) north of Lisbon. Also over the weekend, hundreds of firefighters in Germany battled a blaze in the east of the country, with four people injured, authorities said.

Scientists say climate change is making heatwaves around the world more frequent and more intense, increasing the risk of fires.

— AFP/Reuters

Biden calls on Russia, China to enter nuclear arms control talks

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden called on Monday on Russia and China to enter nuclear arms control talks, saying that Moscow in particular has a duty to show responsibility after its invasion of Ukraine.

In a statement, the US leader reiterated that his administration is ready to “expeditiously negotiate” a replacement to NewSTART, the treaty capping intercontinental nuclear forces in the United States and Russia, which is set to expire in 2026.

“Russia should demonstrate that it is ready to resume work on nuclear arms control,” Biden said. “But negotiation requires a willing partner operating in good faith. And Russia’s brutal and unprovoked aggression in Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and constitutes an attack on fundamental tenets of international order.”

Turning to China, which has been bolstering its much smaller nuclear arsenal, Biden said the China has a duty as a permanent member of the UN Security Council “to engage in talks that will reduce the risk of miscalculation and address destabilising military dynamics.”

“There is no benefit to any of our nations, or for the world, to resist substantive engagement on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation,” Biden said.

Biden said nuclear superpowers Russia and the United States in particular have a responsibility to set the tone, ensuring the viability of the landmark nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT.

“The world can be confident that my administration will continue to support the NPT and seek to strengthen the nonproliferation architecture that protects people everywhere,” Biden said.

— AFP

Truss wins UK cabinet backing as voting begins

LONDON: British Conservative frontrunner Liz Truss won another heavyweight endorsement on Monday as Tory members began a month of voting to decide the next occupant of 10 Downing Street.

Truss’s lagging rival Rishi Sunak vied to make up lost ground with a plan for future tax cuts -- and potentially to fund a future women’s football World Cup in Britain after England’s “Lionesses” won the European championship.

Truss attended Sunday’s final against Germany, and the first victory by any England football team in a major tournament since 1966 wiped Sunak’s long-term tax slashing plan off all the front pages except The Daily Telegraph.

The Conservative party contenders were going head to head in a members’ hustings, in the southwestern city of Exeter -- the second of 12 such events before the winner is announced on September 5.

Sunak, a polished debater, needs to recapture momentum after Truss steamed into a strong polling lead on a platform of immediate



British Foreign Secretary and Conservative leadership candidate Liz Truss speaks at the Conservative Party leadership campaign event at Biggin Hill Airport. — Reuters

tax cuts to address Britain’s worst cost-of-living crisis in generations.

Chancellor of the Exchequer Nadhim Zahawi joined other luminaries of Boris Johnson’s

cabinet in backing the foreign secretary against Sunak, his predecessor in the Treasury.

“Liz understands that the status quo isn’t an option in times

of crisis,” Zahawi wrote in the Telegraph, attacking Sunak’s plan to prioritise fighting inflation now, before cutting taxes later.

“We need a ‘booster’ attitude to the economy, not a ‘doomster’ one, in order to address cost-of-living woes and the challenges on the world stage,” the new chancellor said.

Sunak’s resignation from the scandal-tainted Johnson’s cabinet helped spark a ministerial exodus that forced the prime minister out last month.

As they began receiving postal and online ballot forms, a large chunk of the roughly 200,000 Tory members are said by pollsters to nurse a grievance against Sunak -- one shared by Johnson.

The prime minister is not formally taking sides, but has told aides that he intends to give his successor some words of advice, “whoever she may be,” the Sunday Times reported.

Despite her endorsements from the likes of Zahawi, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, Northern Ireland Secretary Brandon Lewis

and Tory centrist Tom Tugendhat, Truss has warned against complacency.

Heading into the Exeter hustings, the foreign secretary has markedly improved in her sometimes robotic public delivery — seen most notoriously in a 2014 speech when she was environment secretary. Returning to her former field, the Remainer-turned-Brexit zealot promised over the weekend to “unleash” farmers from European Union regulations to improve the UK’s food security.

Truss also promised to tackle labour shortages in agriculture, partly caused by post-Brexit restrictions on immigration which have forced UK farmers to leave fruit rotting in fields and to slaughter healthy pigs.

And Truss unveiled a plan on education, vowing that all school students with top grades would automatically get an invitation to apply for Oxford, Cambridge or other prestigious universities.

Both the contenders have stressed the need for unity once the election is out of the way. —AFP

Let’s talk about bullying



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Few weeks ago I received a text message through Instagram from an anonymous person saying that I have upset his mother who came to the clinic and I said she had a mental illness ‘just like the previous three psychiatrist’ he described the four of us as ‘heartless monsters’.

He then went on to wish that I too have mental illness and ‘die in a painful and terrible death’.

I told him that I do not share patient’s information and if he has any particular questions he can book an appointment and am happy to answer him. Instead he replied with more insults so I decided to block him but I still felt upset with his words.

According to Cambridge dictionary the term bullying is used to describe an act intended to hurt or frighten someone, often forcing

that person to do something they do not want to do.

The act of bullying often occurs over a period of time but its impact can be permanent.

Although bullying is often associated with teenagers it can occur in any age group. From a psychological point of view, bullying is often associated with aggressive behaviour repetition and an imbalance of power.

The bully uses his or her physical strength, access to embarrassing information, or popularity to control or harm the victim.

Although most people associate bullying with physical aggression it can include other behaviours such as making threats, spreading rumours, attacking someone verbally, and excluding them from a group on purpose.

‘ALTHOUGH BULLYING IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH TEENAGERS IT CAN OCCUR IN ANY AGE GROUP’

There are several theories that tried to identify why someone becomes a bully.

Most theories focus on what makes the victims different such as their physical appearance like being short or overweight, or their skin colour or religious backgrounds.

Some of these focus on the fact that bullies are looking to gain a feeling of power, purpose and control over their victims.

A few scientific studies showed that bullies often experienced a

stressful or traumatic situation such as their parents’ divorce or the death of a close family member or even being subjected to bullying themselves.

Some bullies have low self-esteem so to mask how they actually feel about themselves they focus attention on someone else, others are jealous of the success of their victims such as when smart students are bullied and called nerds.

While some bullies have insecurities in their relationship and become bullies to be accepted among the group of bullies.

Cyber bullying can be different because bullies are able to hide behind fake names and the fact that they do not see their victim makes it easy to be aggressive.

Bullying has several negative

impacts on the victims, some people who experience bullying start to internalise it and become self-critical and blame themselves for being bullied. While others develop mental health problems such as anxiety, depressions, eating disorders or even addiction.

In severe cases bullying can lead to self-harm or suicide. Some people try to change their looks or behaviour due to their bullying so an overweight person may seek gastric bypass surgery or cosmetic surgeries that he or she does not need.

Whatever the form or cause of bullying, organisations and individuals should work together to create a safe working environment where people feel respected and appreciated so they can do their jobs with dignity and respect.

Desperate Ukrainians risk Russian shelling in food queues

FRANKIE TAGGART

On a morning hot enough to curdle milk in Ukraine’s second city, a few dozen hopefuls bat away wasps as they queue to get their hands on food aid. They are taking a risk congregating outdoors in Kharkiv, where they can be targeted by Russian artillery fire, but it is the hours-long wait that is troubling them, not the danger.

“People don’t think about what could happen because they just want their food,” says government volunteer Maxim Gridasov, 45, as he distributes parcels in the Nemyshlyansky neighbourhood.

“Even when there is shelling nearby, nobody leaves. They wait for their food.” The military’s notices in local media on locations for aid distribution always include the warning: “Please do not create queues, it can be dangerous.”

Russia has pounded Ukraine relentlessly since the start of its February attack, killing thousands of civilians going about their business.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has put the civilian toll at 5,237 in its latest update last week.

Shortly after visit, Nemyshlyansky was bombarded by what authorities said were likely to have been Soviet S-300 missiles.

Ominously, the targets have included at least one food queue: 14 people were killed in March by Russian forces while waiting to collect bread in the northern city of Chernigiv.

Moscow says it only selects targets with military value, accusing Kyiv of being behind the incidents or staging them, and sometimes alleging that Ukraine uses locals as “human shields”.

Despite the dangers, around 40 people waited for food packages from the charity Hub Vokzal in Merefa — a one-horse town that would have been in Kharkiv’s commuter belt when jobs were plentiful.

Train driver Vitaliy Znaichenko, 38, clutches a plastic bag of rice, bread, ravioli, onions and cereals as he leaves the distribution point.

“It was difficult at the start, when the shops were shut or there was nothing in them because of the war. But now, somehow, we’ve gotten used to it,” he says.

It’s his first visit here in two months, and he would rather not linger in a large crowd and risk being targeted from above — but he feels he has no choice.

“I have to live somehow. I have to go to work at a railway station, which is also risky,” he says.

—AFP

For India’s effort to ban disposable plastic, one state offers a playbook



Sameer Yasir

The writer is a reporter for the NYT

Amul Vasudevan, a vegetable hawker in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, thought she was going to go out of business.

The state had forbidden retailers to use disposable plastic bags, which were critical for her livelihood because they were so cheap. She could not afford to switch to selling her wares in reusable cloth bags.

Tamil Nadu was not the first state in India to try to curtail plastic pollution, but unlike others, it was relentless in enforcing its law.

Vasudevan was fined repeatedly for using throwaway bags.

Now, three years after the ban took effect, Vasudevan’s use of plastic bags has decreased by more than two-thirds; most of her customers bring cloth bags.

Many streets in this state of more than 80 million people are largely free of plastic waste.

Yet Tamil Nadu’s ban is far from an absolute success. Many people still defy it, finding the alternatives to plastic either too expensive or too inconvenient.

The state’s experience offers lessons for the rest of India, where an ambitious countrywide ban on making, importing, selling and using some single-use plastic took effect this month.

“Plastic bags can only be eliminated if the customer decides it, not the seller,” Vasudevan said from her stall on Muthu Street in Chennai, the state capital.

“Getting rid of it is a slow process; it can’t happen overnight.”

Across India’s metropolises and villages, daily life is intertwined with disposable plastic, considered one of the worst environmental hazards. Shopping of all sorts is carried home in throwaway bags, and food is served on single-use dishes and trays. The country is the world’s third-biggest producer of disposable plastic waste, after China and the United States.

But now Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government has banned some of those ubiquitous items, including disposable cups, plates, cutlery, straws

ACROSS INDIA’S METROPOLISES AND VILLAGES, DAILY LIFE IS INTERTWINED WITH DISPOSABLE PLASTIC, CONSIDERED ONE OF THE WORST ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

and ear swabs. Single-use bags are forbidden, but thicker, reusable ones are allowed. The ban does not include soda bottles and plastic packaging for chips and other snacks.

India follows places such as Bangladesh, the EU and China in a large-scale effort to reduce plastic waste.

But its plan is among the most ambitious, experts said, as it targets the entire supply chain, from the making to the use of disposable plastics.

What remains to be seen is how committed authorities will be to enforcing the new law.

“A blanket ban is very difficult to implement unless local governments take strict actions against the violators

and build partnership with people,” said Ravi Agarwal, who heads Toxics Link, an advocacy group that focuses on waste management. “Otherwise we will end up with some sporadic fines here and there, and some newspaper reports.”

Last year, the federal government banned very thin plastic bags, but enforcement, left to local authorities, was not stringent.

Enforcing the new law is also up to local authorities, but now the government says it will involve the public, who will be able to report violators and their locations with an app.

Public pressure on politicians — to fix drain and sewage blockages caused by plastic, for example — is another key reason for the relative success in Tamil Nadu.

On a recent Friday morning, plainclothes police officers milled about Muthu Street, hunting for perpetrators. Near a section of hawkers selling vegetables and jasmine flowers, they found a street vendor bagging up produce for customers in disposable bags.

Police fined that vendor and proceeded to seize dozens of pounds of the contraband from others, fining them and threatening them with prison.— *New York Times*



A ragpicker hunts for useful plastic items at a garbage dump in Chennai, India.

Finding your true value in life!



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

To what degree do you value yourself?

That's the question that began our conversation on GreenMent, Oman Observer's podcast on mental health with Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Psychiatrist.

The session was looking at teenagers and how they develop self-esteem. And that could

be from trying to find appreciation to being accepted within the peer group.

Of course a major part of it is to do with parents, he said, adding that sometimes parents give them too much attention so much that they bask in self-importance only to be deflated when they step out into the world.

We often talk about generation gap and it can get wider as the digital world takes over.

It is not just about being accepted by our personal world of family, teachers and parents, but in the virtual world too.

Sometimes parents try to be tough to bring out the best in their children, but most often it also could be to meet the parents' expectations.

Whatever the case, teenagers tend to have a hard time finding their footing often clashing with elders in the family or being left out from the peer group because not being able to fit in.

It is low self-esteem when we search in others on ways to be accepted.

As they say it is not others who makes us happy but we must find the reasons within ourselves. Quite often we feel we need so many other elements to fulfil our life.

Instead we hardly look within ourselves. What is that we really want? Are we brave enough to follow our heart?

It is not just teenagers who go through low self-esteem. We go through self-esteem issues during various stages in our life such as during the middle age and retirement age.

It hits badly when one thinks of career change. But the support and guidance we get at young age can go a long way.

The fact is we are continuously evolving and that means we are changing. We cannot remain stagnant. As we move on to new situations how do we cope?

Are we ready to adapt or are we going to be a hindrance to development just because we do not want to face changes?

A whole new world could be awaiting us! If people did not believe in changes there would have been no scientific discoveries and innovation. They thought differently and proved themselves, so what stops us?

What is that we need to break free from the normal thinking process? After all the future is for the ones who can think out of the box.

So should we not be encouraging the youngsters to think for themselves and open them to the real and ever changing world providing them assurance and safety.

After all one aspect teenagers might never understand is the anxiety the parents go through regarding their children's safety.

It is dilemma each parent must go through while ushering the young ones to spread their wings. But what they must send with them is the understanding of their own value, self-respect and dignity.



FISHING SEASON BEGINS

The aerial photo taken on Monday shows fishing boats preparing to head out to sea on the first day of the fishing season in the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea, in Nantong, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP

Fringe candidates putting Republicans' US Senate hopes at risk

JAMES OLIPHANT

Republican voters' embrace of fringe and divisive candidates is jeopardising the party's goal of taking control of the US Senate in November's midterm elections, as well as winning key governors' races.

Far-right candidates who have echoed former President Donald Trump's spurious stolen-election claims could win primaries in Arizona and Michigan on Tuesday, likely boosting the odds of Democratic victories in those battleground states this fall.

In Arizona, polls show Trump-backed candidates Blake Masters and Kari Lake leading the Republican fields for Senate and governor, respectively.

A far-right candidate, Tudor Dixon, could capture the party's nomination for governor in Michigan. She was endorsed by Trump late last Friday.

With Democratic President Joe Biden deeply unpopular among voters and an inflation-ravaged economy, political analysts and strategists say Republicans appear poised to assume control of the US House of Representatives and have a strong chance of reversing Democrats' narrow Senate majority.

Taking either would allow them to kneecap Biden's legislative agenda.

The battle for the Senate has become more complicated, however. Republican nominees in competitive races in Georgia, Ohio and Pennsylvania are first-time candidates who have raised far less than their Democratic opponents and have struggled to broaden their appeal beyond Trump's fervent, but narrow, base of support.

Democrats, meantime, have become more energised in recent months by the Supreme Court decision overturning the Roe vs Wade ruling that recognised women's constitutional right.

With the Senate divided 50-50, Republicans need to pick up a net total of just one seat to gain control.

Jacob Rubashkin, an analyst with

Inside Elections in Washington, said Republicans remain favoured to take the Senate, but it is no longer the slam-dunk it once appeared to be.

"Republicans are certainly creating opportunities for Democrats in Senate races," he said, "but I think it's too early to declare that they're snatching defeat from the jaws of victory."

FiveThirtyEight, an influential political analysis website, this week declared the race for the Senate to be a "toss-up" and gave Democrats the edge.

Republicans may have headed off a potential tough fight to keep a seat in Missouri, which also has a primary on Tuesday. Senate candidate Eric Greitens, a former governor who has been accused of domestic abuse by his ex-wife, appears to be falling back in the Republican field after a party-funded super PAC blanketed the airwaves with the allegations in the hope of derailing his campaign.

James Harris, a Republican political strategist in Missouri, said Greitens' candidacy should serve as a warning to his party that it cannot take winning Congress for granted given the more galvanised Democratic electorate.

"A lot has changed in the last two months," Harris said. "So if Republicans go into Senate races with weak candidates like Eric Greitens, they're going to be expensive races that we might lose."

One of those Senate races may well be in Arizona, where Democratic Senator Mark Kelly has amassed a large war chest while Republicans have engaged in a bitter primary. Kelly would go into a race against Masters as the favourite, according to early polls.

Masters, a venture capitalist making his first political bid, has echoed Trump's election-fraud claims and earlier this month cast doubt on the legitimacy of this year's midterm elections.

At a rally led by Trump in Arizona last week, Masters pledged to work to impeach Biden and prosecute Dr

Anthony Fauci, the US government's top Covid-19 expert.

If elected, Masters said he "would finish the work that President Trump got started"

A Reuters/Ipsos survey taken last week found 60 per cent of the US public views Trump unfavourably, with 34 per cent viewing him favourably.

Talk of election fraud is unlikely to resonate with the crucial voters who swing between both major parties in elections.

That same poll found that 45 per cent of independent voters view the 2020 election as legitimate, while 24 per cent believe fraud was involved and 31 per cent didn't have an opinion.

More than 70 per cent of voters said Trump is at least partly responsible for the January 6 attack on the Capitol.

Republicans could also lose the governor's mansion in Arizona, particularly if Lake emerges as the nominee.

Lake, a former TV news anchor, has been a leading proponent of Trump's election-fraud claims in a diversifying state that has been shifting towards Democrats and went for Biden in 2020.

"I know for a fact we will no longer accept rigged elections," she said at the rally with Trump, whom she referred to as "Superman."

Former Vice President Mike Pence recently stumped for Lake's more mainstream opponent, Karrin Taylor Robson, in defiance of Trump.

Alex Conant, a Republican strategist and former top aide to Senator Marco Rubio, said Republicans want the election to be a referendum on Biden and his handling of the economy.

"Candidates that don't come off as qualified or say things that turn off independent voters have a tough time getting across the finish line even in a very favourable environment," Conant said.

In Michigan, all the leading Republican candidates for governor have said the 2020 election was riddled with fraud.

After a tumultuous race to take on Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer, once considered among the nation's most vulnerable governors, the Republican primary has come down to a slate of little-known conservatives. One of them, Ryan Kelley, was arrested last month for participating in the January 6 Capitol siege. Last week, a group backed by the Democratic Governors Association began running TV ads in the state attacking Dixon, a conservative media personality and self-styled "working mom of four" who has emerged as the putative favourite. — Reuters



Arizona Republican Senate candidate Blake Masters speaks during former Donald Trump's rally ahead of Arizona primary elections, in Prescott Valley, Arizona, US. — Reuters file photo



EURO 2022 DELIGHT SPARKS BOOM TIME FOR ENGLISH WOMEN’S FOOTBALL

LONDON: Euro 2022 began with organisers defending the choice of small venues, but 25 days later a record European Championship attendance of 87,192 at Wembley for the final witnessed England at last win a major international tournament.

The Lionesses’ legacy could change the face of the women’s game in England for future generations.

A record television audience for a women’s football match in the UK of 17.4 million tuned in to watch Sunday’s tense 2-1 victory in extra time over Germany, as Chloe Kelly scored the winner.

Sarina Wiegman’s squad

changed perceptions on top of winning the hearts of the host nation.

An Ipsos poll published on Monday found that 44 per cent of the British public — and 64 per cent of football fans — said they are more interested in watching women’s football following Euro 2022.

England’s women now have a platform their predecessors could only dream of and they used it to push the message of equality off the pitch.

“In most workplaces across the world, women still have a few more battles to face,” said captain Leah Williamson.

“For every change of judgement or perception or opening the eyes of somebody who views women as somebody with the potential to be equal to her male counterpart, I think that makes change in society.

“That’s a powerful message that we have the power to send, in a typically male-dominated environment.”

There remains a huge income gap for women’s football to close on the men’s game.

Prize money of 16 million euros (\$17 million) for the 16 competing teams at Euro 2022 pales in comparison with the 331 million euros handed out to the 24 nations at the men’s Euro 2020 last year.

UEFA defended that gulf by saying they would make a “significant loss” in running the tournament due to a five-fold increase in spending on infrastructure and facilities.

But a tournament of record crowds — with total attendance more than doubled from Euro 2017 in the Netherlands — and TV audiences will ripple around the rest of the continent.

“We expected a lot but to be honest we didn’t expect so much,” UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said at a women’s football forum on Sunday.

“The numbers are amazing, but it’s not only the numbers that are

important. The matches are great and the technical skills have been unbelievable.

“Maybe some people — sponsors, broadcasters and everyone else — should start thinking that it’s worth investing in women’s football.”

World Cup to come

With less than a year to the start of the 2023 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, the Euro has revived some of the momentum for the women’s game lost during the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2019 World Cup in France was also seen as a launching pad for the popularity of the women’s game. However, just a year

later, it was often treated as an afterthought as associations, clubs and leagues scrambled to get the men’s game back up and running during lockdowns.

Euro 2022 itself was supposed to take place in 2021, but was moved back to accommodate a 12-month delay to the men’s Euro 2020.

England’s women did not play a match for nearly a year between March 2020 and February 2021.

Such a scenario is now unthinkable with a new generation of girls idolising the likes of Beth Mead, Alessia Russo and Ella Toone just as much as Harry Kane or Raheem Sterling. — AFP

Saudi Arabia among nations interested in Women’s Asian Cup



KUALA LUMPUR: Australia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan have expressed interest in hosting the 2026 Women’s Asian Cup, the Asian Football Confederation said on Monday.

The AFC “will now work with all bidding member

associations on the delivery of the necessary bidding documentation in accordance with the bidding process”.

The winning bid will be announced next year and the AFC hailed the growing popularity of the tournament.

India hosted the 2022

Women’s Asian Cup, which was won by China and was expanded from eight to 12 teams.

The 2026 edition “is expected to build on the solid foundations of the tournament’s celebrated legacy”, the AFC said. — AFP

Neymar, Messi secure Champions Trophy for PSG on Galtier debut

TEL AVIV: Neymar scored twice with Lionel Messi also on target as Paris Saint-Germain thrashed Nantes 4-0 in the Champions Trophy in Tel Aviv on Sunday in new coach Christophe Galtier’s first match in charge.

After an underwhelming first season in French football, Messi struck 22 minutes into the traditional curtain-raiser, being played in Israel for the second year in a row.

Neymar, whose future at the club has been the source of much speculation this summer, doubled the lead just before the break with a magnificent free-kick.

Sergio Ramos added a third and Neymar bagged his second late on from the penalty spot as PSG, the reigning Ligue 1 champions, eased to victory over last season’s French Cup winners.

“It was a good match. There was a trophy on the line so we wanted to win it,” Neymar told Prime Video, drowning out rumours of



his potential departure.

“If Kylian (Mbappe), Leo and myself are happy, PSG will do well,” he added. “I hope this season all three of us will stay and it will go well.”

It is the ninth time in 10 seasons PSG have lifted the Champions Trophy. They lost 1-0 to Lille at the same venue a year ago.

PSG begin their quest for a record 11th French league title away to Clermont on August 6.

Galtier became PSG’s seventh different manager since the Qatari takeover of 2011 when he was appointed on a two-year deal in early July as the replacement for Mauricio Pochettino.

MBAPPE SUSPENDED

The club won a protracted battle with Real Madrid in May to convince Kylian Mbappe to stay, but Galtier was without the France star for his first official match due to suspension. — AFP

VAN VLEUTEN

WINS TOUR DE FRANCE FEMMES WITH FINAL STAGE TRIUMPH

LONDON: Dutch rider Annemiek van Vleuten won the Tour de France Femmes after she tamed the brutal ascent to La Super Planche des Belles Filles in Sunday's final stage to grab the overall victory.

Van Vleuten came under pressure midway through the stage as she underwent mechanical issues that forced her to change her bike on three occasions.

The Movistar rider also faced several attacks by rival teams but she proved why she is the best climber as she accelerated away on the final ascent, sealing the overall title after crossing the finish line 30 seconds ahead of second-placed Demi Vollering.

"It's a dream come true, winning in yellow on the top. Wow," Van Vleuten said.

"It was not an easy stage and not an easy week. It's been a super big rollercoaster for me."

It was Olympic time trial champion Van Vleuten's second stage win following her

climbing masterclass in the penultimate stage.

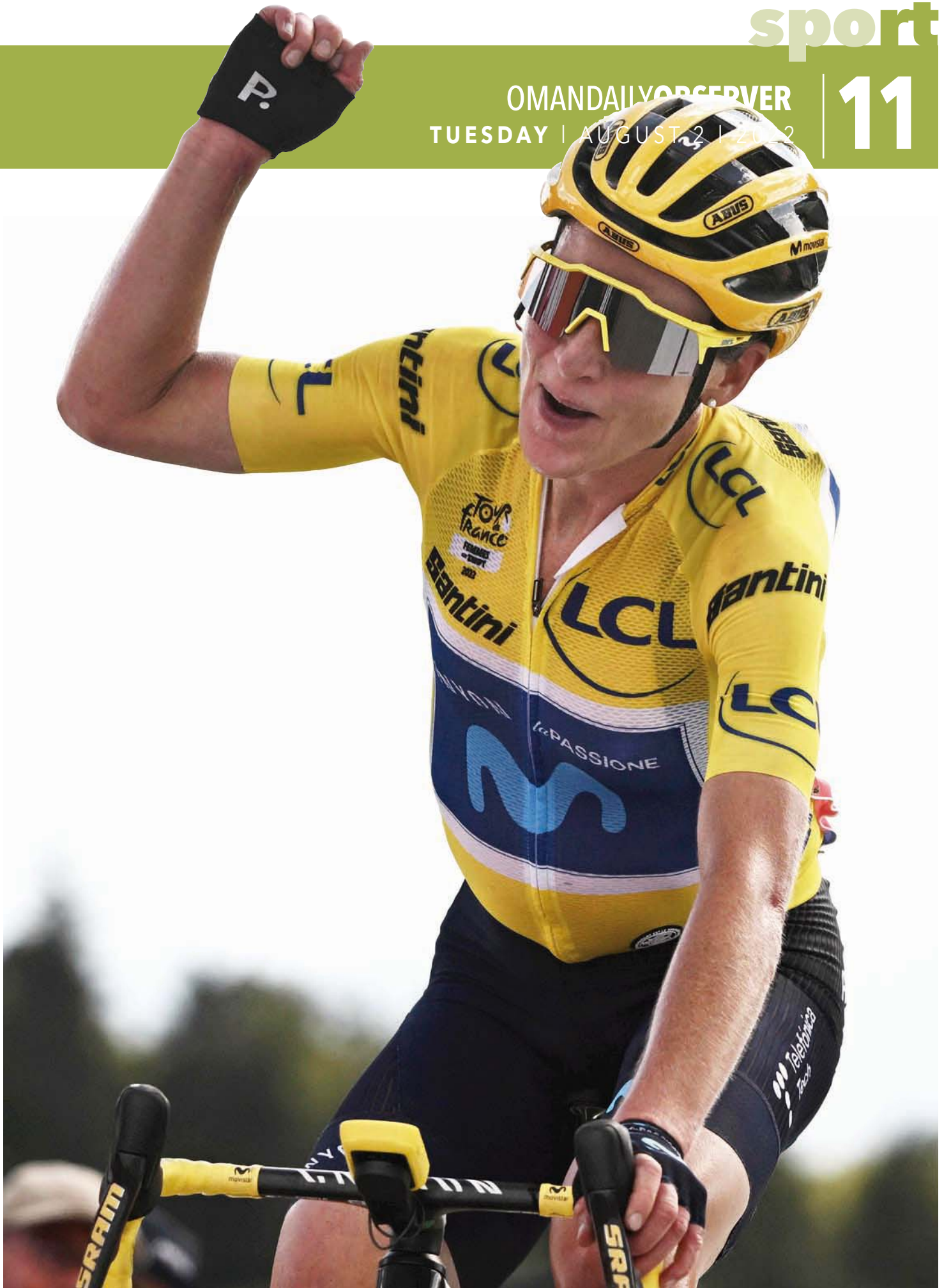
Vollering of SD Worx came second in the overall standings, nearly four minutes adrift of Van Vleuten, while Katarzyna Niewiadoma of Canyon-SRAM completed the general classification podium after eight days of intense racing since the start in Paris.

The Tour de France Femmes is the first time in 33 years that the best female racers have been given the chance to compete in a multi-stage version of the world's greatest cycle race.

"I'm super proud to be the first winner of the Tour de France for women — of this new version," Van Vleuten added.

"I hope it's a big start for more, and we can build this event into an even bigger event. It's a milestone to win the first one of hopefully many more."

— Reuters



Movistar Team's Dutch rider Annemiek Van Vleuten wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey celebrates as she cycles to the finish line to win the 8th and final stage of the new edition of the Women's Tour de France cycling race, 123.3 km between Lure and La Super Planche des Belles Filles. — AFP

Mosaddek to lead Bangladesh in Zimbabwe decider



Mosaddek Hossain

DHAKA: Bangladesh have named all-rounder Mosaddek Hossain to lead the side in the series-deciding third Twenty20 against Zimbabwe in Harare on Tuesday.

Mosaddek replaces Nurul Hasan as captain after the wicketkeeper-batsman was ruled out of the rest of the tour with a finger injury he sustained in Sunday's seven-wicket win in the second match.

The three-match series in Harare is locked at 1-1 after

Zimbabwe won the first by 17 runs.

Mosaddek led Bangladesh's comeback with a career-best 5-20 in the second match.

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) statement on Monday also said that the experienced Mahmudullah Riyad will replace Nurul in the squad.

Mahmudullah, who led Bangladesh's T20 side for 43 matches until this series, is already in Zimbabwe as part of the one-

day international squad.

He was rested for the T20 series because Bangladesh were trying to rebuild following 11 defeats in 13 matches since October 2021.

Bangladesh will play three ODIs against Zimbabwe on August 5, 7 and 10, all of them at the Harare Sports Club.

The injured Nurul will leave Harare on Monday to return home and continue his treatment and rehab on his fractured left index finger, said the BCB. — AFP

‘Ambitious’ Alonso to replace Vettel at Aston Martin

LONDON: Veteran Spanish Formula One driver Fernando Alonso said he “intends to win again” after Aston Martin announced on Monday that he would be joining the team on a multi-year contract from 2023.

The double world champion, who turned 41 on Friday and was coming to the end of his contract with French team Alpine, will replace German driver Sebastian Vettel, a four-time champion, who last week announced his retirement from Formula One at the end of the current season.

Alonso, who won his world titles with Renault in 2005 and 2006, said the Aston Martin team — which is owned by Canadian billionaire Lawrence Stroll whose son Lance drives the other car — “is clearly applying the energy and commitment to win” and is “one of the most exciting teams in Formula One today”.

“I have known Lawrence and Lance for many years and it is very obvious that they have the ambition and passion to succeed in Formula One,” said Alonso who came eighth in Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix and is currently 10th in the world championship standings.

The Spaniard made his F1 debut in 2001. After winning his world titles with Renault — the precursor to Alpine — he failed to add any more in two spells with McLaren and during a five-year stint with Ferrari.

In 2018, he left the sport to try his hand at other forms of racing, winning the Le Mans 24



Alpine's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso attends a press conference. — AFP

Hours twice and taking part in the Indianapolis 500 and the Dakar Rally.

Alonso returned to Formula One with Alpine in 2021, clinching his 98th and most recent podium at that year's Qatar GP. His last victory came at his home Grand Prix in Barcelona in 2013, but he is eager to add to his 32 race wins.

“I still have the hunger and ambition to fight to be at the front, and I want to be part of an organisation that is committed to learn, develop and succeed,” Alonso said. “I intend to win again in this sport and therefore I have to take the opportunities that feel right to me.”

Vettel, who scored 53 GP wins and won four successive championships with Red Bull

from 2010 to 2013, had tipped his friend and protege Mick Schumacher, son of the legendary Michael Schumacher, to be his successor.

However, the British-based team which is still developing since Stroll took it over in 2020, have turned instead to the wealth of experience that Alonso can offer.

“The whole company is very excited to bring Fernando's incredible experience and brilliant pace and racecraft to the team,” Aston Martin said in a statement.

“The recruitment of a special talent such as Fernando is a clear statement of intent from an organisation that has committed to developing a winning Formula One team.”

Oman Sail hosts the Arab Sailing Championship 2022

MUSCAT: Oman Sail has been named host of the Arab Sailing Championship 2022, due to take place from 11-15 October 2022 at Barceló Mussanah Resort. Returning for the first time since 2019 in Egypt, expected sailors from 14 countries across the region will compete over five days, which are Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia and the UAE.

The Championship is open to Optimist, ILCA 4, ILCA 6, ILCA 7, RS:X and iQFOiL windsurfing and RS Venture para sailing. Alongside prizes for the top three sailors and countries, the best-performing countries overall will also receive prizes.

Sheikh Khalifa Abdullah Al Khalifa of Bahrain, President of the Arab Sailing Federation, said, "We are very pleased to be able to announce the return of the Arab Sailing Championship and to host the event in Oman. This is a great opportunity to showcase the sailing skills of young sailors from across the MENA region and mark a return to action for all members of the Arab Sailing Federation as well as a debut for para sailing in the RS Venture class. The Barceló

Mussanah Resort is a wonderful venue, capable as we have seen of hosting the very best sailors in the world and we are looking forward to taking to the beautiful clear waters in October."

Dr Khamis al Jabri, Oman Sail CEO, said, "This is a great opportunity for our young sailors to test themselves against their peers within the Arab Sailing Federation across several disciplines.

Oman Sail has a history of good performances in this championship, and to be able to perform on home water will be a huge honour for our sailors. We are also very proud to be able to include para sailing this year as sailing in Oman and across the region continues to take great strides towards inclusivity and equality while proving sailing is a sport for all."

Barceló Mussanah Resort has gained significant notoriety as a world-class host venue for international sailing events. Most recently the destination welcomed over 800 international guests, including 357 sailors, for the 50th edition of the Youth Sailing World Championships — the largest ever edition of one of the most prestigious events in the World Sailing calendar.



Holiday Cricket Club clinch BCL knockout cricket tournament title

BARKA: Holiday Cricket Club (HCC) won the inaugural edition of Bcl Knockout Cricket Tournament in Barka on Friday. The matches of the tournament was played across 3 grounds where the grand finale of the tournament was played at UGB Ground . Total of sixteen teams participated in the tournament & HCC proved to be a Champions by defeating FC Goa Cricket Club with a close margin.

In an exciting last ball finish final, FC Goa Cricket Club won the toss & decided to bat first. They could manage to muster 43 runs in allotted 3 overs, hence setting a target of 44 runs. Chasing the tricky & competitive total, HCC hold their nerves to chase



the target on the last ball of the match to win the Finals. Rakshith was selected as Man of the Final.

Ali Hamza of FC Goa Cricket Club was declared as the best batsmen of the tournament, while Mohammad Asif of Dessert Warriors was adjudged best bowler. Siddhu from HCC was awarded with Man of Series for his all-round performance throughout.

The Champions & Runner-ups of the tournament were crowned with cash prizes & attractive trophies.

BCL committee thanked all the participating teams & support staffs for their valuable support in successfully completing the tournament.

Tent pegging tournament begins in Salalah today



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

A horse riding training course for youths will kick off the Equestrian Week in Salalah on Tuesday. The event is part of the khareef season activities organised by the Oman Equestrian Federation in cooperation with Dhofar Equestrian Committee, Dhofar Governor's Office, Dhofar Municipality, and the General Directorate of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The tent pegging tournament will be held for two days and will conclude on Wednesday. It will feature 10 teams from government cavalry units and private stables with a total of 40 riders competing for the championship title. The teams included The Royal Cavalry, ROP cavalry, the Cavalry of the Royal Guard of Oman, Al Nameer School, the S3 Stable team, Al Mudhaibi Equestrian Committee team, Sohar Equestrian Stud and the Dhofar Equestrian Committee team. The event is part of the Oman Equestrian Federation's efforts to popularise equestrian sports and encourage young people to practice horse riding.

Responding to the great enthusiasm to learn equestrian sports, the federation launched a training course for young people, teaching them the

basics of equestrianism, in cooperation with the Al Saada Equestrian School, from Monday to Thursday. As part of the Equestrian Week activities, an endurance race was held on Saturday at Khor Al Daharis Beach, over a distance of 100km. Around 47 riders from the various governorates of Oman took part in the event which was held under the auspices of Sayyid Munther bin Saif bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Equestrian Federation (OEF).

The endurance race consisted of three stages; the first stage was for 38 km, second was for 38 km, and third stage was for 24 km. OEA presented cars to the winner and runner-up, and cash prizes to 10 other top riders. The rider Saeed bin Jabr al Busaidy won the championship title with his horse "GIS", owned by Omar bin Salim al Kharousi. The second place went to Mohammed bin Yarub Tabuk with the horse Wadah, owned by Musallam bin Salim al Busaidy. The third place went to Khalid bin Saeed al Balushi on "Al Mustafez", owned by Munther bin Talib al Rabadni.

On Wednesday, the tent pegging championship will conclude along with traditional horse sports, horse riding, under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohsin al Ghassani , Chairman of Dhofar Municipality.

AL ZUBAIR, SCHILLER, JEFFRIES AND MORAD FORCED TO RETIRE AFTER LEADING SILVER CUP AT TOTALENERGIES 24 HOURS OF SPA



SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM): Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair and team mates Fabian Schiller, Axcil Jeffries and Daniel Morad were forced to withdraw from the 74 th edition of the TotalEnergies 24 Hours of Spa after 58 laps and under three hours of racing.

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SMEs to enjoy 50 pc reduction in service fees: OPAZ

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) approved a decision to extend the 50 per cent reduction of the fees for the services provided in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) to SMEs.

The reduced fee will apply for the next five years until March 20, 2027, according to the decision published in the Official Gazette on Monday, August 1, 2022.

The decision explained that the 50 per cent reduction of the fees for the services provided by OPAZ targets small and medium enterprises operating in special economic zones and free zones, affiliated with the authority, provided that they are wholly owned by Omanis, and that they are registered with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority.

Dr Said bin Khalifa al Tuirshi (pictured), In-Charge of Managing the Business Development Sector at the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ), confirmed that this decision comes within the framework of the authority's effort to create a stimulating investment environment for entrepreneurs and present their various business opportunities due to the growth

witnessed in the special economic and free zones.

The decision will benefit businesspersons and owners of commercial buildings located within SEZAD as this package of facilities will boost the business and demand for these buildings.

Further, it will meet the needs of residents, workers and visitors to the zone for various services, he added.

Al Tuirshi said that OPAZ last month issued a decision reducing the registration fees for registration services in the commercial registry and licenses to practice some economic activities, including over 130 activities in SEZAD.

He added that the fees for



Dr Said bin Khalifa al Tuirshi

operating the activities have been reduced from RO 550 to RO 5, while the registration and renewal fees for registering a local company or individual establishment in the commercial registry or registering its branch has become RO 30.

As for the registration and renewal fees for a joint Omani

company or registering its branch the fees has been reduced to RO 40 instead of RO1,000 , with the aim of facilitating and enabling the business and investment environment and supporting small and medium enterprises or service providers operating within the borders of the zones of different services.

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) seeks to provide the best advantages, incentives, and facilities, to create a stimulating business environment that enables SMEs to benefit from, and to facilitate OPAZ one-stop shop procedures to ensure efficiency and speed of its systems to serve all zones.



Banking sector credit climbs 4.5 per cent to RO 28.299 billion

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

Total credit extended by commercial banks in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 4.5 per cent to reach RO 28.299 billion during the first five months of this year, up from RO 27.085 billion a year earlier. The Interest rate on loans declined by 0.1 per cent over the year.

Statistics issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicated that the effective exchange rate index for the Omani riyal witnessed an increase of 8.3 per cent, recording 111 points, compared to 102.5 points in the same period in 2021.

The volume of foreign assets in the Central Bank of

Oman decreased by 3.5 per cent at the end of last May to reach RO 6.705 billion, down from RO 6.945 billion during the same period in 2021.

The total volume of domestic liquidity (M2) increased by 0.5 per cent to reach RO 20.379 billion, compared to RO 20.279 billion a year earlier.

The narrow money supply (M1) decreased by 0.4 per cent to reach RO 5.783 billion, compared to RO 5.803 billion in 2021.

Total private sector deposits with commercial banks and Islamic windows in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 1 per cent to reach RO 17.155 billion during the January – May 2022 period, down from RO 17.336 billion a year earlier, the Centre added.

Agreements signed to implement digital transformation projects in Musandam

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, AUGUST 1

In the context of seeking to implement the approved plans for digital transformation initiatives for the year 2022, the Musandam Governor's Office signed three agreements in the field of digital transformation with a number of companies in response to the requirements of establishing the e-government approach in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first agreement with Omantel provides for the implementation of a project to provide telecommunications and Internet services. Under this agreement, Omantel will work to achieve compatibility between network communication systems and Internet lines and integrate them, which will enable the office to manage them in one entity and facilitate its technical management, in addition to raising the level of readiness of

the office's communications and information technology solutions from the organisational and operational aspects.

This cooperation will contribute to raising the quality of government services provided, reducing communication costs, enhancing the efficiency of government spending, as well as enhancing IP-based communications.

The agreement was signed by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, with Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel.

Sayyid Ibrahim al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, commented: "Musandam Governorate is an emerging institution in the field of digital technology, because previously it used the digital services of the Ministry of Interior, and today we are establishing a new sustainable phase for the governorate to partner with the Omantel to



provide communications and Internet services, the aim of which is to enhance all interactive services with the local community and facilitate communication with local investors or foreigners."

An agreement was also

signed for the implementation of a project to rehabilitate and upgrade network infrastructure and electronic information security systems with Mohsin Haider Darwish Information Technology Company, with the

The cooperation will contribute to raising the quality of government services, reducing communication costs, enhancing the efficiency of government spending, as well as enhancing IP-based communications

aim of enabling the governorate to manage its electronic services and networking lines, and to enable it also to implement the initiatives approved in the governorate's digital transformation plan, in addition to contributing to establishing a computer network to link employees to various work sectors in the governorate and to establish a secure environment that preserves employee accounts and protects their electronic data.

This is in line with directives to

open channels of communication with the local community to serve the public interest within the governorate.

An agreement was also signed to provide electronic services portal and management systems for internal services and non-municipal external services with the integration company for solutions and software.

This agreement aims to strengthen the internal work system and the development, investment and promotion of the governorate's resources, and work to strengthen the economic and social aspects and attract investments and projects that ensure the development and development of the governorate.

The project also comes in response to one of the priority initiatives for the development of governorates and sustainable cities with the aim of developing public services provided through the governorate's electronic portal.

Bank Muscat provides external PG scholarships to 13 employees

MUSCAT: In line with its pioneering role in the development of Omani human resources, Bank Muscat, has announced external postgraduate scholarships to 13 talented employees in 2022.

This year's external scholarships are in addition to the 68 internal scholarships to pursue higher studies within Oman. In 2021, the Bank gave 7 external scholarships and 95 internal ones to its employees.

Bank Muscat makes opportunities available for staff to pursue part-time diplomas or Bachelors programmes at local colleges and universities as well as postgraduate programmes at leading international business schools as part of a strategic plan to create a pipeline of leaders not just for itself, but also for the overall growth and development of the nation.

Bank Muscat, which has an Omaniisation ratio of over 94 per cent, recognises that employees are its core strength and constantly invests resources to further develop their skills and help them reach their peak potential. From the moment of joining the bank, suitable training and development opportunities are provided to make employees skilled in work-related processes and procedures so that they can deliver to the best of their abilities.

The bank is responsive to employee feedback and strives to ensure a professional work environment that is based on fair and equal opportunities to all employees, cutting-edge technology and global financial best practices.

Speaking about the many



successes and achievements by the bank over the last four decades, Said bin Salim al Aufi, General Manager, Human Resources and Administration said: "Bank Muscat's HR practices focus on nurturing and supporting our talented employees to meet the ambitious growth plans of the bank. Recognising that highly motivated employees are the foundation of the bank's success, it makes all efforts to ensure that employees are well trained and motivated to perform to the best of their abilities through excellent training and well rewarded opportunities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate and wish all the best to the 13 external scholarship holders who will be off to some of the best international business schools for their higher studies. Bank Muscat looks forward to their return and good progress in their careers after successfully completing

their respective courses, thereby helping both the bank and our nation achieve excellence."

Bank Muscat also provides numerous opportunities for employees to pursue undergraduate, postgraduate and professional certifications through scholarships locally, online and overseas.

Besides the 13 scholarships, the bank provided as well educational assistance for 68 employees were provided to pursue higher studies within Oman (Diploma/Bachelors/Masters).

As of 2022, 582 employees have completed their studies in Oman while 158 employees are currently enrolled in different higher education programmes. As of date, 72 overseas scholarships have been granted by the bank while 818 employees have completed their professional certifications with another 496 employees currently enrolled.

Earlier in 2022, the bank successfully participated

in the Career and Training Opportunities Fair organised by Sultan Qaboos University (SQU). This year the bank has already recruited 150 Omanis till date, while in 2021, 265 Omanis were recruited to support the Sultanate of Oman's job creation initiatives.

The bank's Jadara Academy, which is accredited by the Global Association of Corporate Universities and Academics, provides a comprehensive platform and framework for all staff learning and development programmes. In 2021, the Jadara Academy was able to deliver over 15,000 learning opportunities to over 3,800 employees across various functional and knowledge areas.

The bank has been greatly encouraged by the results of this continuous investment in Omani human resources. It is a matter of pride for Bank Muscat that most of its senior and middle management have been promoted from within the bank's ranks.

Gazoo racing excels at 6 hours of Monza

MUSCAT: Gazoo Racing earned a dramatic double podium finish in the 6 Hours of Monza recently during the exciting fourth round of the 2022 FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC).

The team's Toyota GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar were strong contenders for victory during an incident-packed race at Monza Circuit, which is known as the "Temple of Speed", before going on to achieve second and third place.

Sébastien Buemi, Brendon Hartley, and Ryo Hirakawa finished just 2.762 seconds behind the eventual winners in the No 8 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar to claim second place. Mike Conway, Kamui Kobayashi, and José María López clinched a podium finish of third in the No 7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar. The valuable points gained by Gazoo Racing mean Toyota leads the manufacturers' championship by 15 points going into the final two races.

The two GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercars were part of a close race from the very beginning. Two full course yellows during the opening 30 minutes saw all Hypercars make fuel stops, before a new strategy elevated Buemi into second and López into third.

The complexion of the race changed after two-and-a-half hours when an accident from a GT

competitor necessitated a safety car and closed up the field. All Hypercars pitted, and Mike Conway was able to take the lead in the No 7 GR010 Hybrid Electric Hypercar thanks to a shorter pit stop.

The top three Hypercars were separated by only a few seconds going into the final two hours, with their positions alternating at each pit stop as a result of the teams changing tires at different intervals.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race. Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established GR to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand.

Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars,' GR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars.

Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of motorsports events, GR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.



Alizz Islamic Bank adopts innovative social schemes

MUSCATG: The staff of Alizz Islamic Bank have begun pursuing various voluntary efforts aiming at extending personal initiatives and giving back to the communities around them. The Sharia Audit and Compliance Department launched a voluntary initiative for cleaning mosques in Wakan tourist village located 2,000m above sea level in Al Batinah South Governorate, with the participation of all staff of the department.

The bank has recently approved a prudent strategy that is applicable to its staff in all departments and branches across the Sultanate of Oman whereby each department and branch is required to propose a voluntary project that reflects the bank's commitment to its CSR initiatives through its staff, and this

initiative was rolled out under the direct supervision of the CEO.

The bank is also encouraging competitiveness among the staff in giving back to the community by awarding the most innovative and beneficial initiatives.

Commenting on the cleaning campaign implemented by staff of the Shari'a Audit and Compliance Department, Issa bin Salim al Riyami, Head of the Department, said: "These voluntary initiatives reflect each individuals' commitment to the communities, as giving back to the community, regardless of the form or type of voluntary initiatives, has a significant impact not only on the individual but on society as well.

This spirit shouldn't be limited to the employee's role within

the organisation, but rather should go beyond that. The bank's aim behind launching such initiatives was that each department implements its own initiatives, and this vision was already deliberated and approved after taking all perspectives into consideration and aligning them with the desired objectives."

Al Riyami added, "The bank invests in social responsibility in line with its mission to achieve exceptional and sustainable results for our shareholders. Since its inception, the bank launched several projects with the aim of providing a better life for the people we serve across the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to fulfilling the bank's commitment to the prosperity of the society.

To that end, the bank offered the necessary support to charity organisations and proactive national organisations that aim to build strong and flexible communities.

It has also contributed directly to the growth of non-profit social organisations".

Alizz Islamic Bank has launched various social responsibility programmes, including supporting victims of the Shaheen Cyclone as well as offering accommodation and aid to our customers who were directly affected by the Cyclone.

The bank also recently launched the Iftar Sayim Campaign, for the eighth consecutive year, by distributing food packages among low-income families in the areas where it operates.

Genesis GV70, G80 earn top marks in JD Power 2022 US study

MUSCAT: The Genesis GV70 SUV and G80 executive sedan were named as top-ranked models in their respective segments in the J D Power 2022 US Automotive Performance, Execution and Layout (APEAL) Study. Genesis was also ranked second overall among premium brands.

"At Genesis, we create our products with bold designs, the latest technological innovations, refined performance, and class-leading safety & driver assistance

features," said Claudia Marquez, chief operating officer of Genesis Motor North America.

GV70 is the award-winning second SUV from Genesis and receives this accolade in its first year of eligibility. It comes to market with the brand's latest Athletic Elegance design language: a bold and distinct look for Genesis with its signature two-lined Quad Lamps. GV70 provides a dynamic driving experience and exceptional comfort, all while incorporating the



latest technologies and advanced safety features.

G80 is at the core of the Genesis sedan lineup and offers a perfect balance of comfort and refined performance. For the 2022 model year, the brand introduced the G80 Sport, adding bold new styling, available new suspension tuning, and other features to the executive sedan.

The JD Power US APEAL Study examines new-vehicle owners' assessments of their experiences

with their new vehicle after 90 days of ownership. The study data provides insight on experiences with design, performance, safety, usability, comfort, and other factors.

OTE Group is the exclusive dealer for Genesis in Oman offering excellent sales and after-sales service support, underpinned by a nationwide service network, that's on par with global standards. For more information contact 800-50003.

World stocks kick off Aug at 7-week high, US futures on back foot

CAROLYN COHN

World stocks hit seven-week highs on Monday, buoyed by recent strong corporate earnings and declining expectations for hefty interest rate rises, though US index futures were indicating a lower start to August at the Wall Street open.

Over the past month, global shares have gained 7 per cent, the S&P 500 jumped 9 per cent and bond markets rallied as investors started to look for a peak in official interest rates, given slowing economic growth. Markets have gathered steam after comments on the economy from Federal Reserve chair Jerome Powell last week following a 75-basis-point hike in interest rates by the Fed.

“There’s a sense of relief that the Fed have at least got an eye on slowing growth. They are not going to be pig-headed and keep hiking interest rates as the economy falls into deep dark recession,” said Giles Coghlan, chief currency analyst at HYCM.

In addition, upbeat forecasts from Apple and Amazon on Friday pushed the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq index to their biggest monthly percentage gains since 2020.

MSCI’s world equity index rose 0.3 per cent. S&P futures dipped 0.15 per cent, however, indicating a lower open on Wall Street, after the index rose 1.42 per cent on Friday, also to seven-week highs.

The US ISM manufacturing survey for July is due at 14:00 GMT, forecast to give an expansionary reading of 52, according to a Reuters poll. Key US employment data is due on Friday.

“The US is not in a ‘proper recession’ — yet,” Gilles Moec, Group Chief Economist at AXA Investment Managers, said in a note.

“The labour market is key there, and the Fed will want to see clear signs of deceleration in wages before lowering its guard.”

Manufacturing activity across the euro zone contracted last month with factories forced to stockpile unsold goods due to weak demand, a survey showed on Monday. Central banks in Britain, Australia and India are all expected to hike again this week. European stocks gained 0.32 per cent and Britain’s FTSE was up 0.56 per cent, boosted by strong results from HSBC. — Reuters

The US is not in a ‘proper recession’ yet. The labour market is key there, and the Fed will want to see clear signs of deceleration in wages before lowering its guard

GILLES MOEC
Group Chief Economist
AXA Investment Managers



CREATIVE INNOVATION

Small sachets of five grams of toothpaste and other basic necessities are displayed in a retail shop at Ibafo market, Ogun State in southwest Nigeria. Five grams of toothpaste or ten milliliters of cooking oil: Struggling with the soaring cost of living, many Nigerians now buy their basic necessities in small quantities packed in tiny plastic bags to be consumed on the same day. — AFP

How to beat market debt crises



HIPPOLYTE FOFACK

The writer is Chief Economist and Director of Research at the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank)

Since the Latin American debt crisis of the 1980s, sovereign-debt crises have become a regular occurrence for emerging and developing economies. Today, Sri Lanka needs a bailout from the International Monetary Fund after defaulting on its foreign debt in May, and a growing number of low-income countries are facing similar challenges.

The World Bank estimates that around 60 per cent of all emerging and developing economies have become high-risk debtors. As many as a dozen might default over the next 12 months.

Unlike the advanced economies, where sharp increases in government debt following the emergence of Covid-19 encouraged a speedy return to trend growth, developing economies have been constrained by a shortage of vaccines and a lack of monetary and fiscal space. Unable to deficit-finance their way out of the synchronised global downturn, these countries now must contend with the economic fallout from the Ukraine crisis, which all but eliminates a near-term return to pre-pandemic growth rates.

With few exceptions – Sri Lanka and Zambia, for example – most developing economies are not heavily indebted.

Collectively, their average debt-to-GDP

EVEN THOUGH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES’ DEBT BURDENS HAVE INCREASED ONLY MODERATELY OVERALL, THE FLOW OF FUNDS THEY RECEIVE FROM CAPITAL MARKETS HAS REMAINED DISMALLY LOW

ratio has increased by just seven percentage points (to 65 percent) since the start of the pandemic, much lower than the 20 percentage points increase in advanced economies where the combined sovereign debt now averages 122 per cent of GDP.

The flow of funds that developing economies receive from global bond markets and banks has remained dismally low. According to the most recent estimates from the Institute of International Finance, their combined sovereign liabilities represent less than 30 per cent of global public debt.

Worse, following post-pandemic credit downgrades, many low-income countries cannot access international capital markets and now face acute liquidity constraints that could morph into solvency crises. And because these countries’ sub-investment-grade credit ratings have raised their

borrowing costs, the fiscal impact of their sovereign liabilities has increased, and their governments’ reduced ability to roll them over as they fall due has raised the spectre of a developing-country debt crisis.

Ghana, for example, planned to issue a bond to refinance its foreign currency-denominated debt earlier this year.

But with a wave of ratings downgrades driving up international bond yields, Ghana has effectively been shut out of international financial markets, and its ten-year sovereign bond yield has risen above 22 per cent.

After resorting to painful internal adjustments (tax increases and cuts to discretionary spending) during the pandemic, Ghana is now contending with soaring food prices, and its government is seeking IMF assistance.

Two other factors are combining to increase the risk of a liquidity crisis in developing markets: the currency of lending and the shift toward variable interest rates in a context of increasingly complex lending structures and growing reliance on international capital markets. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of low-income countries with variable-rate external debt rose sharply from 13 to 31.

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Fuel crisis cuts electricity in Bangladesh, sparking energy debate



MD TAHMID ZAMI

The writer is a Bangladesh correspondent for Thomson Reuters Foundation

Robiul Islam, 29, sits in the dark at his home in the Kalurghat neighbourhood of Chattogram city, suffering through yet another power cut, as Bangladesh struggles with costly and inadequate natural gas imports amid a global hike in energy prices.

“Over the last two months, we are seeing power outages that we have not seen in quite a few years,” Islam told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone.

The South Asian nation boasts an electrification rate of 97 per cent — meaning nearly all of its population has access to electric power — and has increased its total power generation capacity to 25,700 megawatts (MW), against peak demand of about 15,000 MW.

But since June, the country has seen a return of frequent power outages, or ‘load-shedding’, as the government tries to keep down rising fuel costs.

Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy and mineral

resources, wrote in a Facebook post that with energy prices soaring on the world market due to the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Bangladesh is experiencing a shortage in its gas supply that is hampering electricity generation.

But observers say the roots of the crisis go back way before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine led to an oil and gas squeeze.

Bangladesh’s power sector has increasingly relied on imports of fossil fuels, including Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) which is a “very volatile commodity” that risks becoming too expensive for poorer importing countries, said Simon Nicholas, a researcher at the US-based Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA).

The share of Bangladesh’s power generated from natural gas stands at about 60 per cent, with a quarter of that gas imported.

Experts have called for more

GLOBAL ENERGY PRICE HIKES PUSH BANGLADESH TO CURB POWER SUPPLY AS OBSERVERS BLAME DEPENDENCE ON HIGH LEVEL OF IMPORTED NATURAL GAS

exploration and expansion of gas production at home to reduce reliance on imported fuels.

The Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) has also faced financial pressure because of the over-capacity it created through costly support for independent power producers (IPP) in the private sector.

They receive capacity payments from the government — a set fee based on the amount of power that plants can generate — even when they remain idle.

Nicholas said that in the fiscal

year 2020-21, the cost of electricity purchased from IPPs represented over half the PDB’s total operating expenses for the first time.

In that year, the government also made capacity payments of 132 billion taka (\$1.40 billion) to the IPPs and paid out an equivalent amount of subsidies to state-owned power utilities.

The government launched austerity measures two weeks ago, including scheduled load-shedding, controls on air-conditioning use and reduced working hours to ease pressure on fuel imports.

But power outages and energy price hikes will nonetheless drive up business costs, said Rizwan Rahman, president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Electricity and other energy, including diesel and gas, accounts for 15-20 per cent of production costs across the main energy-intensive industries, especially

textiles, cement, steel, leather and plastic products, he added.

Electricity prices went up both in 2019 and 2020, he noted, while gas tariffs recently rose by nearly 23 per cent — which will in turn drive up power costs further.

“The frequent and unpredictable tariff hikes undermine industrial efficiency and production,” he said, adding that this deters foreign and local investment.

In addition, production processes are delayed by power cuts, making it harder to meet manufacturing deadlines for exports, hampering shipments and reducing competitiveness, he said.

So far, however, the power crisis has yet to result in any significant corporate shutdowns or unemployment, he added.

But on the ground, small business owners like Shishir Karim, who runs a restaurant in a shopping mall in downtown Dhaka, are already feeling the effects.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation



Brazilians captivated by Oman as they travel in luxury and style

Wealthy Brazilians landed in Oman on a private chartered jet and toured tourist spots in Muscat before using a private helicopter service to the famed mountains of Jabal Al Akhdhar. Their heli experience was heightened by visits to date plantation, souqs, fort and wadis before they departed to their home country with promises to come back again... **P20**

Spielberg heads starry Toronto festival line-up

STEVEN SPIELBERG, Jennifer Lawrence and Harry Styles will bring their world premieres to Toronto, as North America's largest film festival signalled a return to full strength with the unveiling of a star-studded lineup on Thursday.

The Toronto International Film Festival, which bills itself as "the world's biggest public film festival" and has launched countless Oscar winners, will welcome back A-listers to glamorous red carpets and exclusive after-parties after two heavily scaled-back editions during the pandemic.

Spielberg's eagerly awaited and deeply personal "The Fabelmans" will be among the hottest tickets during the festival, which begins on

September 8.

Based on the revered director's childhood in Arizona, exploring the family secrets of a young man with an early passion for film-making, the coming-of-age drama stars Michelle Williams, Paul Dano and Seth Rogen.

Director Rian Johnson launches "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery," a whodunit sequel from Netflix in which Daniel Craig's gentleman sleuth meets a new star-studded cast including Edward Norton, Ethan Hawke and Jada Pinkett Smith.

Peter Farrelly, whose 2018 race drama "Green Book" began its path to Oscars glory at Toronto, will bring "The Greatest Beer Run Ever," another world premiere. Zac Efron plays a



merchant seaman who travels to Vietnam in the 1960s to deliver a case of beer to his army buddies, alongside co-stars Bill Murray and Russell Crowe.

TIFF is a key part of the fall festival lineup, along with Venice and Telluride, at which movies hoping to build early Oscars momentum typically hold lavish premieres.

Toronto's annual People's Choice Award has become an increasingly

accurate Oscars bellwether, predicting eventual best picture winners such as "Nomadland," which took home the Academy Award in 2021, and "Green Book."

Last year, organisers held a reduced in-person event over Covid-19 fears, while a year earlier the festival took place almost entirely online.

Stars expected to return to the Toronto red carpets this year include Oscar winners Jessica Chastain and

Eddie Redmayne — in "The Good Nurse" — and pop mega-star Harry Styles, who plays a closeted 1950s cop in "My Policeman."

Jennifer Lawrence stars in "Causeway," a drama about a soldier suffering from a traumatic brain injury, while Viola Davis plays "The Woman King," and Nicolas Cage appears in "Butcher's Crossing."

Ewan McGregor and Hawke will feature in the world premiere of "Raymond & Ray," produced by Alfonso Cuarón for Apple which — fresh from its historic best picture win with "CODA" — is also bringing a Sidney Poitier documentary produced by Oprah Winfrey.

"Sidney" will feature Halle Berry, Morgan Freeman, Denzel Washington and Quincy Jones.

Billy Eichner's "Bros" — billed as the first gay rom-com from a major studio — will have a splashy first showing, as will movie mogul Tyler Perry's "A Jazzman's Blues."

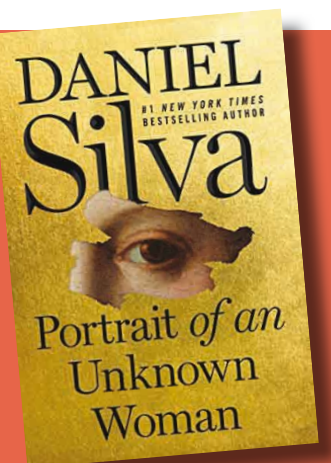
Additionally the festival will play host to several major movies expected to premiere weeks earlier at other festivals, including Sam Mendes' "Empire of Light," Darren Aronofsky's "The Whale," and "Women Talking" starring Frances McDormand. TIFF runs from September 8-18. — **AFP**

READ

PORTRAIT OF AN UNKNOWN WOMAN

BY DANIEL SILVA

The 22nd book in the Gabriel Allon series. Allon becomes an art forger to uncover a multibillion-dollar fraud.



WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE

Nichelle Nichols, whose portrayal of starship communications officer Lieutenant Uhura in the 1960s sci-fi TV series "Star Trek" and subsequent movies broke colour barriers and helped redefine roles for Black actors, has died at age 89, her family said. Nichols, whose fans included Martin Luther King Jr. and a young Barack Obama, "succumbed to natural causes and passed away" on Saturday night, her son, Kyle Johnson, wrote on Facebook. — **Reuters**



THE MOST DANGEROUS THRONE

"Game of Thrones" is back in the form of prequel "House of the Dragon" with an all-new cast who turned out on Wednesday to launch the show at a premiere in Los Angeles. The new showrunners, who took over from David Benioff and D.B. Weiss, are Ryan Condal and Miguel Sapochnik. "There's more wealth, there's been a half century of peace and really the big thing about this is it's a story about a house divided. It's about a single house tearing itself apart from within," said Condal. — **Reuters**





Syria's last traditional boat-makers keep ancient craft afloat

KHALED BAHLOWAN hammers nails into a traditional wooden boat he built by hand, toiling under the scorching sun on Syria's Mediterranean coast to preserve a disappearing ancient skill.

"We are the last family that makes wooden ships and boats in Syria," said the 39-year-old on the shores of Arwad island, near the city of Tartus.

"This is the legacy of our ancestors... We are fighting to preserve it every day".

Located about three kilometres (less than two miles) off the coast, Arwad is Syria's only inhabited island and a haven of peace in a country torn by 11 years of war.

Hundreds of workers, residents and visitors commute to and from there every day in wooden boats, mostly built by the Bahlawan family.

But demand for a craft that dates back to ancient Phoenician times has dropped to all but a trickle.

The eight members of the Bahlawan family now share the work, making boats for fishermen, resorts and passenger transport.

The tradition of building and repairing wooden boats has been in their family for hundreds of years.

Long power cuts due to years of conflict mean that Bahlawan cannot use his electrical equipment.

Instead he works with his grandfather's manual tools, smoothing the wood by hand rather than with an electric plane.

"It's a hard task," he said, standing inside the hull of a boat and tapping each nail carefully.

He heads to his narrow, open-air workshop near the beach every day, despite the low demand and modest means.

"We are doing our best to overcome difficulties," said Bahlawan, his face covered in sweat and sporadic wood shavings.

HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY

Boat-building has been a village tradition since Phoenician times, said

Noureddine Suleiman, who heads the Arwad municipality.

In the past, the majority of Arwad's residents were boat-makers, he said. "Today, only the Bahlawan family remains," he said.

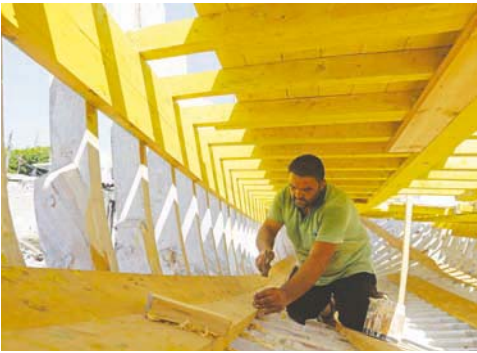
Thousands of years ago the Phoenicians, renowned for their

Suleiman warned, as young people emigrate or search for easier, more profitable work.

Farouk Bahlawan, Khaled's uncle, said his family had preserved the original shape and structure of ancient Phoenician boats, with a few

Close by, more than 40 wooden boats were moored at the Arwad port.

"We used to manufacture four big ships and several boats every year that we would export to Cyprus, Turkey and Lebanon," Farouk Bahlawan said.



ship and boat-making, laid the foundations of marine navigation.

The skilled sailors and traders roamed the seas, bringing their knowledge, craftsmanship and their alphabet to other parts of the Mediterranean.

But traditional boat-making now risks disappearing altogether,

modifications.

"We mainly make ships from eucalyptus and mulberry wood from the Tartus forests," said the 54-year-old, a skilled carpenter.

Young children played hide-and-seek in the boats' hulls at the workshop, while an elderly man smoked in the shade of a large ship.

"This year, we only worked on one ship, and it still needs a lot of work before it is done."

He gazed at the beach, where the children ran in the sand.

"We must continue this journey," he said, his voice welling up with emotion. "We bear a historic responsibility on our shoulders." — AFP

A LOOK INTO THE ACADEME



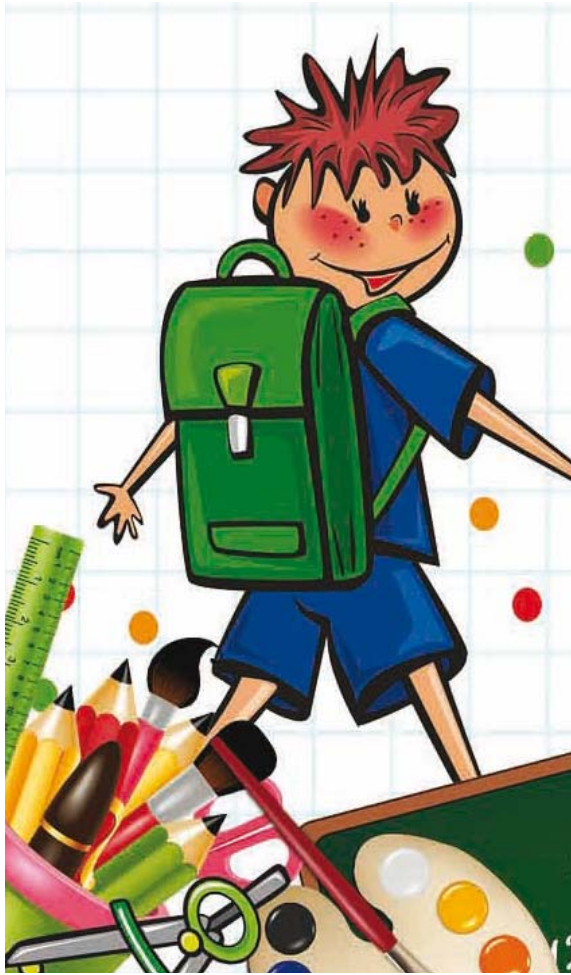
Dr Zainab Al-Ajmi
zeinbf@moe.om

Enhancing pupils' problem-solving Skills

AS PUPILS FACE COMPLEX problems occurring within different contexts, such as educational, and social-psychological, they'll require a range of skills to solve, manage and engage with them from the early stage of their life and education. Overall, the learning process aims to prepare independent and motivated students to be able to compete in a world of complicated problems. As viewed by (Mulhayatiah et al., 2019), one of the competencies of the 21st -century is problem-solving skills.

These competencies mean the "ability of a person to find a solution through a search that involves the acquisition and organisation of information to achieve a goal. The problem-solving ability owned by the students can be identified through the ability to organise and use the knowledge, as well as connecting one concept with another when solving the problems".

Moreover, research results point out that



"there is no general way for solving different problems. Problem varies in their conditions and difficulty and demand to use different methods" (Szabo et al., 2020). Teachers in the classroom create critical and creative activities to develop students' abilities and skills, either way in school or their social relationships, consequently being ready to solve problems in different contexts. Simultaneously, teachers in the classroom could prepare their pupils and equip them with a set of tools they will need to seek solutions, and gain knowledge with skills to solve problems. For instance, educating "pupils how complex choices can be, formulating and sharing relevant arguments, judging others' arguments and opinions, helping pupils to build up a diagram, a scheme, or a map in creating a possibility for dynamic, collaborative, and in develop pupils' life skills such as flexibility, leadership, initiative, and social skills" (Szabo et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the theoretical literature agrees on a method involving sets of steps that facilitate and support pupils in acquiring problem-solving skills, as below: define and understand the problem, make a plan, list all the possible solutions, evaluate the options, select the best solution, execute the plan and feedback. These steps are a general strategy that could be a great way to get pupils ready to solve real problems in their daily life. That is, classroom problem-solving activities make a great role to educate pupils on how to manage problems rather than become disappointed in each rough situation.

To sum up, enhancing pupils' ability to analyse problems and innovate a practical, and flexible solution to solve them is one of the most beneficial skills they can acquire in their own and social life. What's more, pupils' finding a solution to deal with the different problems is a primary important skill of education in the 21st -century to address challenging situations by including learning process a specific strategy of problem-solving such as critical thinking activities and solving problems in a broader context in Pupils' life.



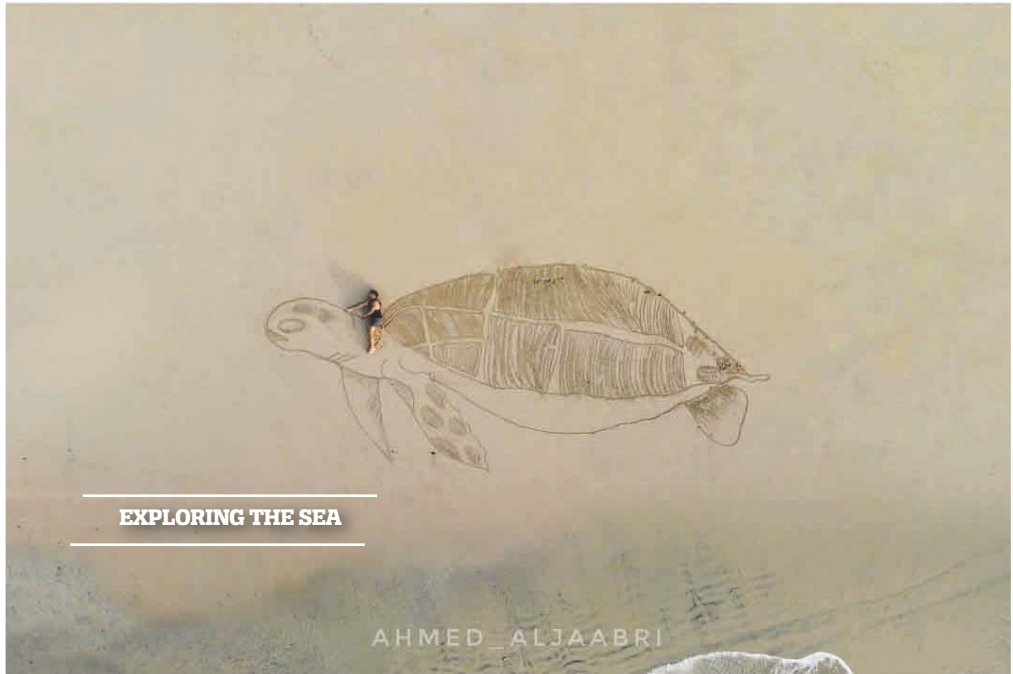
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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Elvis Presley's jewellery on auction with Priscilla Presley's support



A COLLECTION OF JEWELLERY that Elvis Presley gave to his manager Colonel Tom Parker is going up for auction on August 27.

Two hundred items, including gold rings encrusted with jewels, cufflinks, watches and chains, have been brought together by GWS Auctions. Also included is the guitar played by Presley during his famous "comeback" TV special of 1968.



Many of the pieces were provided by Presley's former wife, Priscilla Presley.

"Well, it brings back memories for sure," Priscilla Presley told Reuters.

She added that it was a running joke with her former husband that he constantly bought or commissioned jewellery for Parker because the manager already had everything he needed and the Presleys did not know what else to buy him.



Priscilla Presley said she felt protective of the items because she designed some of them, including artifacts with the logo for TCB Band, the musicians who formed the core rhythm section of Presley's backing band in his later years. "TCB" stood for "taking care of business," a favourite expression of Presley's.

Priscilla Presley supported the auction in part because she was weary of seeing so many fake Elvis artifacts for sale. "There is so much product out there that is not authentic at all and that worries me," she said. "I want to know for sure that that is going to go to someone who is going to care for it, love it." — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Saudi women DJs go from hobbyists to headliners



STANDING BEHIND HER control tower with headphones around her neck, Saudi DJ Leen Naif segues smoothly between pop hits and club tracks for a crowd of business school graduates noshing on sushi.

The subdued scene is a far cry from the high-profile stages — a Formula 1 Grand Prix in Jeddah, Expo 2020 in Dubai — that have helped the 26-year-old, known as DJ Leen, make a name for herself on the Saudi music circuit.

Yet it captures an important milestone: Women DJs, an unthinkable phenomenon just a few years ago in the kingdom, are becoming a relatively common sight in its main cities. These days they turn few heads as, gig after gig, they go about making a living from what once was merely a pastime.

"A lot of female DJs have been coming up," Naif said, adding that this has, over time, made audiences "more comfortable" seeing them on stage.

"It's easier now than it has been."

Naif and her peers embody two major reforms championed by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

The possibility that DJs would be welcomed at public events, let alone that many would be women, is something "we didn't expect" until recently, said Mohammed Nassar, a Saudi DJ known as Vinyl Mode.

"You are seeing now more female artists coming out," Nassar said.

Before "it was just a hobby to express themselves in their bedrooms".

"Now we have platforms, and you know they could even have careers. So it's really amazing."

WINNING OVER SCEPTICS

Naif was first introduced to electronic music as a teenager by one of her uncles, and she almost instantly started wondering whether DJ'ing was a viable job.

While her friends dreamed of careers as doctors and teachers, she knew she didn't have the patience for the schooling those

paths required.

"I'm a work person, not a studying person," she said.

Unlike other women DJs, she had the immediate support of her parents and siblings.

Other Saudis, however, required some winning over.

Several years ago, a man came up to her mid-performance, declaring she was "not allowed" and demanding "Why are you doing this?"

His complaints got Naif's set shut down, but she doubts the scene would play out the same way today.

"Now I bet that same guy, if he sees me, he's going to stand first in line just to watch."

Naif has benefited from official attempts to trumpet Saudi Arabia's new entertainment-friendly image.

Her nomination to play at the Saudi pavilion of Expo Dubai 2020 gave her an international audience for the first time.

But it's the work at home that supports her day-to-day, earning her 1,000 Saudi riyals (around \$260) per hour.

HERE TO STAY

Other women DJs have encountered more resistance.

Lujain Albishi, who performs under the name "Biirdperson", started experimenting on DJ decks during the pandemic.

Her family disapproved when she started talking about DJ'ing professionally, preferring she



to become a doctor.

She stuck with it anyway, developing her skills at private parties. Her big break came last year when she was invited to perform at MDLBeast Soundstorm, a festival in the Saudi capital Riyadh that drew more than 700,000 revellers for performances including a set by superstar French DJ David Guetta.

The experience left her "really proud". "My family came to Soundstorm, saw me on stage. They were dancing, they were happy," she said.

Both Naif and Albishi say they believe women DJs will remain fixtures in the kingdom, though their reasoning varies.

For Naif, women DJs succeed because they are better than men at "reading people" and playing what they want to hear.

Albishi, for her part, thinks there is no difference between men and women once they put their headphones on, and that's why women DJs belong.

"My music is not for females or for males," she said. "It's for music-lovers." — AFP

OF BOOKS, LIFE, AND POP CULTURE



Rasha al Raisi

The Book of Misers

8) A MISER SHARED a story with his other miser friends: "I suffered from a bad cough for days. People I know recommended eating Persian sweets called Faneeth and Khazeera (made from starch, sugar, and almond oil). I found both sweets costly in making so instead I started praying for wellness, till someone suggested drinking boiled bran. When I did, I found it delicious and kept me full till dinner time. Henceforth, I ordered my wife to boil bran for our children to keep them full and healthy. The boiled bran could then be strained from water, dried, and resold again. My wife loved the idea that she exclaimed: "The cough had obviously benefited you physically and economically!" And I think she's right!" His friends agreed that such an experience could only be caused by a divine encounter.

9) Mu'atha Al-Anbaria was gifted a goat by her cousin to slaughter. Being a widow with no one taking care of her, Mu'atha was worried that she won't be able to benefit from the whole goat. She was sure that every part could be used somehow: the horns to be nailed on the house's columns to hang clothes, baskets, cauldrons, and anything that needs keeping away from the reach of mice, snakes, and cockroaches. The intestines would be dried and strung on a piece of wood to fluff cotton mattresses. The skull bones would be broken and boiled to extract fat that is used for cooking and lamps. The bones used as fire fuel that is much cleaner and faster to cook with. The skin in making bags and flasks. As for the wool it has numerous benefits. She then thought for a while about the blood, how could it be used given the fact that it's prohibited to consume in anyway? This caused her great anxiety till she remembered that she has some Levantine

pots that could be strengthened by spraying them with boiled blood. Mu'atha was relieved after knowing that she could use everything in the goat! Funny enough, six months passed and Mu'atha hasn't yet eaten the dried meat as she was still eating other parts including bones. But she wasn't in a rush as there is a time and place for everything.

10) Zubaida Al-Sayrafi borrowed from a grocer 2 Dirhams and 4 grains of barley. After six months he paid back 2 dirhams and 3 grains. The grocer was annoyed: "You own 100,000 Dinar and I'm a broke grocer who hardly owns 100 Fils and live on left goods! Besides, a cameleer and a porter came to your door and your aid wasn't there to pay them, so I paid instead. And now you pay me a grain less!" Zubaida answered: "You fool! You lent me in summer and I paid you back in winter. 3 grains of moist winter barley are heavier than 4 dry summer ones!"

11) A miser invited a group of friends to his house. Before their arrival he agreed with his cook to perform an act: the cook would put the meat in the oven the minute they sit to eat. The host would then ask him to bring it out. Being raw, his friends won't eat it (and the miser would be blameless). The cook would then take the meat, cook it, and bring it cold the next day to the same group of people who will think it's today's fresh meat. However, the cook forgot the deal, brought the meat cooked from the first time and the guests finished it. He received 80 lashes from the miser.

(To be continued...)

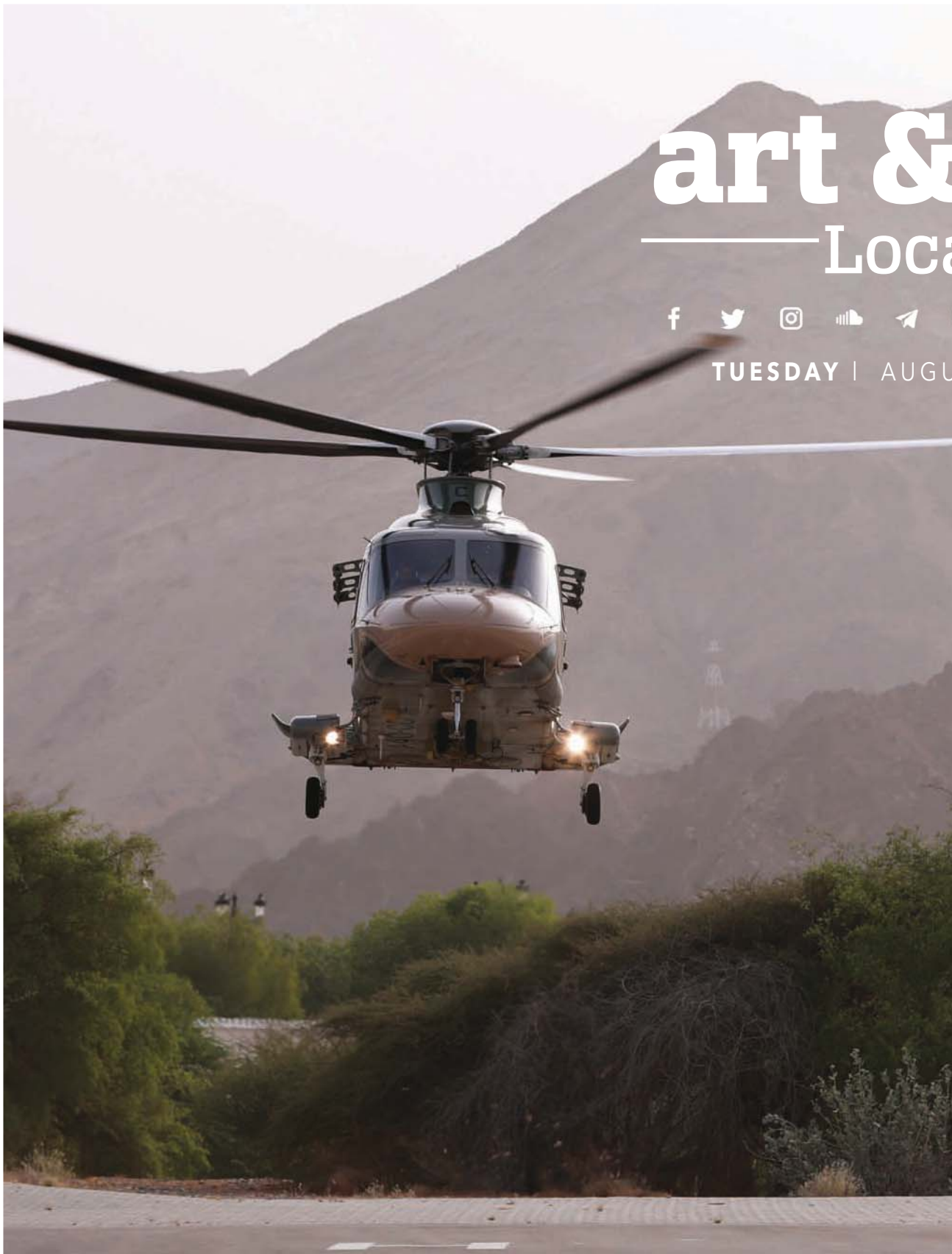
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art & life

Local Scene

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Brazilians captivated by Oman as they travel the country in luxury and style

By Liju Cherian
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Visiting Oman on a private chartered jet as part of a luxury group tour must be a dream for many. But for a group of elite Brazilian tourists, it was easy as they came visiting and went back mesmerised at the beauty of the country.

The visit was part of the maiden Private Jet Expedition from Brazil which earlier visited Asian countries including Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Mongolia, Nepal, Vietnam, and Oman was the final destination before they flew back to São Paulo via London.

Oman was the last destination for the 40 tourists on their 23-day expedition around Asia and Middle East countries outside the tourist mainstream. Infinite Tours, a Muscat-based destination management company, successfully operated the programme for Brazilians.

Alexandre Cymbalista, Founder and CEO of Latitudes, Journeys and Knowledge, a Brazilian travel boutique, specialised in thematic and cultural journeys around the world, says "there was a feeling that it was worth going back to know more about Oman which enchanted everyone."

For Alexandre, it was, without doubt, the pleasant surprise of their brief stay and travel between Muscat and the mountains of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar in a chopper, where they slept in the excellent Alila Hotel for two nights.

Saud al Junaidy, General Manager, Infinite Tours, says that the services and experiences provided to the group were unique and complex. "We worked tirelessly with many industry partners for almost three

months to make this operation a success including the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism."

Saud mentions that it was the largest number of transfers by six helicopters from the Al Bustan Palace Hotel to Anantara Jabal Al Akhdar Resort in collaboration with Al Sharqiya Aviation and Royal Oman Police Aviation. The well-travelled Brazilians were lodged at luxury villas at the Anantara with special arrangements for lunch, dinner and gatherings. Arrival and immigration formalities at Muscat Airport VIP Terminal were done in coordination with JETEX.

Timam Alsinaidi, a Spanish tour guide, explained to the tourists during their visit to various site locations. He says he was privileged to spend time with such wonderful tourists as he accompanied them to The National Museum, Anantara Hotel, Nizwa souq, Birkat Al Mouz till they were dropped off by the helicopter from the Al Bustan Hotel at the airport.

Isabel Graça, one of the few official tour guides in Portuguese and Spanish says, "I always put my best efforts to popularise Oman as a tourist destination and highlight the traditional and cultural aspects."

With her wide experience in diplomacy, she works as a tour guide, with a preference to guide VIP guests, in small groups, preferably ladies having worked earlier with visitors from Spain, Portugal, Mexico and Brazil.

Isabel explained about date farming to the guests and made the Brazilians aware that Oman is geographically diverse and beautiful, with its deserts, mountains, wadis, and amazing heritage villages, retaining charm with its original wooden crafted doors and windows. The tour had an orientation to culture, history and geopolitics

and did my best to make their trip memorable," she explains.

Notable personalities who were part of the group included CNN journalist Lourival Santana, National Geographic photographer Erico Hiller, and famous historian Saul Mota and other professionals.

The tourist's excursion to Nizwa with a tour around the old town was carried out using eight electric buggies and a special refreshment set-up at the Nizwa Fort. They later visited a date plantation at Birkat Al Mouz with a demonstration of the date harvesting process by the local farmers.

José Guilherme Nunes Lapa, Private Jets, MICE & Incoming Manager for Latitudes, who was part of the visit, praised the excellent role of Infinite Tours in working with the local authorities, government and suppliers to find the best and the most comfortable solutions.

"The guests left the country with a very positive image regarding tourist destinations and high standard of service. Oman is a very new destination for Brazilians and definitely, Latitudes is committed to keeping planning groups to the country and Infinite Tours will be responsible for our guests in future," he adds.

He highlighted the heli experience which surprised the guests in a very positive way. "Anantara was the best choice ever for the group and everybody was happy with their villas, food and service. The care with cold towels, cold water and having cars available for everybody were very helpful," he reminisced.

The tourists were impressed by the level of service and hospitality and mentioned how Oman provided a perfect setting to end their month-long expedition and was keen to plan future trips soon.

