

HIS MAJESTY CONFERS OMAN MILITARY ORDER



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred Oman Military Order (Third Class) on Brigadier Said bin Abdullah bin Humaid al Hatmi. The conferment took place at Bait Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday. The order reflects His Majesty's recognition for the efforts exerted by Brigadier Hatmi during his tour of duty at the Royal Guard of Oman (ONA)

جهاز الضرائب
TAX AUTHORITY

Announcement

Tax Authority calls the attention of taxpayers to adhere to the registration procedures, update the required details, submit the tax returns and pay the tax on the specified date to avoid further fees and administrative penalties in accordance with the tax laws.

For more information about tax compliance kindly contact: 24426996 or via E-mail: info@taxoman.gov.om

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24746996

45 brands bag Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards 2021



Muscat - The winners of the 2021 edition of Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards were felicitated at a special ceremony held at Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, on Tuesday evening.

The ceremony was held under the auspices of H E Dr Mohammed al Rumhy, Minister of Energy and Minerals. The event was also attended

by their highnesses, excellencies, chairmen, managing directors, CEOs and senior officials from 45 winning companies.

Senior representatives of the 45 winning companies received Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards from H E Rumhy and Saleh Zakwani, executive chairman of Apex Media.

Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards is a val-

A month-long survey this year attracted more than 700,000 votes for the 45 categories

idation of the public trust in a brand and every year this prestigious award is presented to the most trusted brands in the country by Apex Media.

The Awards were designed in 2016 with one goal in mind: To allow general public and consumers to vote for their favourite brands that they trust the most.

The Awards are based on the results of a month-long extensive survey which was open to general public for voting. With each passing year, Oman's Most Trusted Brand Awards is growing in terms of both attracting votes and number of categories. This year, the survey attracted more than 700,000 votes for the 45 categories.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

Below the signature, the sabre has the phrase 'property of Sheikh Saif', and 'Shah Abbas year 5' engraved.

The Omani navy reached a great degree of development during Imam Saif's reign. The Imam's foreign policy was based on renewing the struggle against the Portuguese on the Persian, western Indian and East

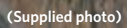
At home, Imam Saif bin Sultan invested in agrarian reform, building new aflaj water management systems and maintaining old systems, expanding the plantation of crops such as wheat, barley and sugar cane, planting date palm and fruit trees, introducing new varieties of plants such as turmeric, saffron and coffee, and establishing beekeeping.



Our Correspondent

Muscat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources stated the number of factories established for the production and bottling of pure water in the sultanate until the end of 2021 reached 35 factories.



MAFWR said it deals with these projects in accordance with the technical requirements and gives conditional approvals

According to MAFWR, Oman

Meanwhile, the volume of surface water running off the land in the sultanate during the year 2020 was estimated at 913mn cubic metres compared to 303mn cubic metres estimated in 2019.

Our Correspondent

Muscat

In another incident, ROP seized two boats and arrested five infiltrators from them. 'The boats carried over 2000 bundles of qat,' ROP stated.



Our Correspondent

Muscat

'Flight WY166 (January 25)

Meanwhile, The Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Istanbul confirmed that Istanbul Airport has announced the postponement of all flights until 1pm on Tuesday. 'So we advise all citizens travelling to and from Istanbul airports to contact airlines to confirm the new date/time for their flights,' the embassy said in a statement.

Fajr	5.31am
Sunrise	6.50am
Duhr	12.24pm
Asr	3.32pm
Maghrib	5.54pm
Isha	7.07pm

Oman to produce camel milk under Watani brand in Feb

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Al Morojoj Dairy Company will produce camel milk under the 'Watani' brand name, starting from February, according to an official at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MAFWR).

The official added that Al Morojoj Dairy Company started receiving cow's milk at its three centres, Zeyk centre in December 2021, followed by the milk collection centre in Ghado beginning January, and finally in Sahel Hajeeef centre on Monday.

"Al Morojoj Dairy Company in the Governorate of Dhofar is currently collecting approximately 6,000 litres of cow's milk per day, as a minimum, from all centres, and it will receive camel milk and manufacture it under the 'Watani' brand, starting from February, equivalent to 12,000 litres per day, said the official.

The company registered con-



(Supplied photo)

Al Morojoj Dairy Company is currently collecting approximately 6,000 litres of cow's milk per day, as a minimum, from all centres, and it will receive camel milk and manufacture it under the 'Watani' brand, starting from February, equivalent to 12,000 litres per day

MAFWR OFFICIAL

tracts with the breeders, and explained the reception mechanism, the required milk quality, the times of receipt, and the payment mechanism through the breeder's personal account, in addition to training the employees on fieldwork directly to achieve work efficiency with high technology.

According to the MAFWR official, the project aims to increase income of camel breeders, by purchasing milk directly from them, and create job opportunities. "It will support small and medium-sized companies engaged in this sector, besides enhancing food security and achieving self-sufficiency in the dairy sector."

Al Morojoj Dairy Company is affiliated with the Oman Investment Authority and the Oman Food Investment Holding Co, and it's under the supervision of the MAFWR in order to develop the livestock sector, enhance family income and contribute to the food security of Oman.

12-year-old girl to publish 7th book on Amazon in Feb

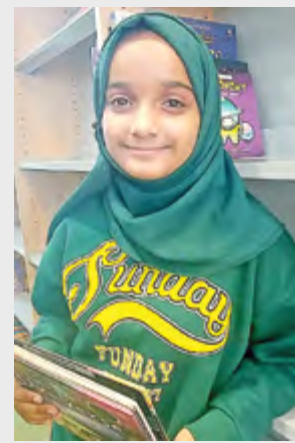
Our Correspondent
Muscat

Oman based young writer Aysal Waheed, a 12-year-old student from The International School of Choueifat, will publish her seventh book on the Amazon platform on February 22. Her unnamed book (as of now) will be available in both paperback and Kindle.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, Aysal, a Pakistani national, said, "I want to help the United Nations Organization (UNO) in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - Women Empowerment through my motivational writing. The message behind my story is that women and men have the same capabilities and skills. I also highlighted that if girls are given opportunities, they can contribute in making this world a better place to live. I want to grow up to be an author because I really enjoy creative writing. In the future, I also want to help make a positive change in this world by helping UNO in achieving SDGs."

The new book is around 35 pages and its target audience is children. It took her around four months to finish the book followed by editing and publishing.

"I got inspiration from my elder sister Zunaira Waheed. She is an excellent writer and I have noticed a maturity of writing in her first novel *That Night*. I am also inspired to read and follow the style of Enid Blyton. From the way she explains the scenes, the readers feel



I am inspired to read and follow the style of Enid Blyton

AYSAL WAHEED

themselves physically part of the scene," said Aysal.

An ardent writer of short stories and motivational articles, many of Aysal's articles have been published in several countries around the world including Oman, Pakistan, India and Malaysia. Until now she has published five solo books and has written for an anthology, containing motivational writing of more than 100 other writers including Aysal's sister.

Her first book published on Amazon was *Through the Portal* and it is about a girl named Savannah. She said, "Savannah has always been interested in chemistry, she decided to make a potion so powerful that it could take her to a different universe. With her brother by her side, she embarks on a once in a lifetime journey."

MTCIT to train jobseekers in 3D printing, design

Our Correspondent
Muscat

As part of its efforts to empower and train job seekers, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT) will launch a new programme from February 13.

An official at the ministry said, "The programme aims to train and empower job seekers in the field of engineering design and 3D printing. The five-day programme will be held from February 13 to 17, from 9am to 1pm at the Knowledge Oasis Muscat."

Meanwhile, the sultanate has witnessed a phenomenal jump in



(Supplied photo)

annual employment of citizens. Over 35,000 Omanis were employed in 2021.

From creating 5,000-6,000 jobs annually earlier, the Ministry of Labour (MoL) was successful in creating 35,344 positions in public and private sectors till Sep-

tember 2021.

In the recent past, the MoL negotiated with several establishments to prevent layoffs. As a result, around 45,000 Omani workers employed in different establishments were able to keep their jobs.

COVID-19 UPDATE

Daily count crosses 2,000



Muscat - The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday announced 2,079 new infections registered within the past 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 cases registered in Oman now goes to 326,164.

One new death was also reported in the past 24 hours. The total number of COVID-19 related deaths reported in the country now stands at 4,130, an MoH statement said. The ministry added that 599 new cases have recovered, bringing the total number of recoveries to 307,003.

F2V, Occidental Oman sign agreement for Flare Gas recovery at Mukhaizna Field



Flare2Value (F2V), an energy solutions company in flare abatement; and Occidental Oman (Oxy Oman), the Sultanate's largest independent oil producer, are pleased to announce the signing of an agreement, where F2V will construct and operate flare gas recovery facilities. The project will reduce emissions and create economic value from captured associated gas.

With the project, F2V demonstrates a novel business model that delivers flare gas utilization solutions and focuses on standardization, modular solutions, and the creation of In-Country Value. The project will capture associated gas that otherwise would have been emitted and achieves this in an efficient manner, utilizing the available energy in high pressure gas.

F2V would like to thank Oxy, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM) in the Sultanate of Oman, our investors and our partners for



their trust and unwavering support through a challenging journey. F2V's mission is to complete the project and deliver rapid growth in Oman and elsewhere.

Ministry of Energy and Minerals: "We are very pleased that Oman can provide a platform for innovation in the area of collecting and utilizing flared gas. What is even more pleasing is the alignment of this project and F2V business with our national aspirations, to reduce flaring of low pressure

gases, reduce emission of greenhouse gases, build in country value, facilitate technology and know-how transfer and build a platform for further FDI into Oman. We are looking forward to rapid scale up: delivery of the follow up projects, first in Oman, and the expansion of flare out delivery capabilities," said H E Salim bin Nasser Al Afi, Undersecretary, Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

"As Oxy was the first US Oil and Gas company to endorse the World Bank's

"Zero Routine Flaring by 2030" initiative, we are proud to sign this agreement with F2V, in continuation of the company's efforts to reduce routine flaring and maximize the use of natural gas as a valuable energy resource.

Taking advantage of innovative solutions will allow Oxy to achieve net-zero in our operational and energy-use emission before 2040 and our total emissions inventory before 2050," said Stephen Kelly, President and GM at Oxy Oman.

Advertiser



(Supplied photo)

Early Bronze Age settlement found in South Batinah

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A team of archaeologists has excavated a 4,000 year old settlement in Rustaq, South Batinah, according to an official of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT).

A joint archaeological mission comprising the Department of Archeology at Sultan Qaboos University and University of Pisa, Italy, under the supervision of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, discovered the settlement in the Al Tekha area at the base of the Hajar Mountains. The settlement includes a large number of man-made structures and burial sites.

Speaking to *Muscat Daily*, a ministry official said, "Studies in-

dicate that the site was inhabited for the first time in the 3rd millennium BC corresponding to the Early Bronze Age. It is one of the settlements of Umm al Nar - a Bronze Age culture, which witnessed great and wide prosperity in the sultanate."

According to the MHT official, the team started excavations at the site spreading over 70 hectares in early January.

"The ministry has placed signboards around the site to protect it. The archeology team has unearthed remains of copper furnaces, clay utensils that were made locally and outside Oman, soapstone vessels, residential quarters of varying sizes and burial sites," the official said.

More significantly, circular towers, some more than 40m in

diameter, were also found. "Built with mud bricks on huge stone foundations, these were found in different parts of the settlement. The presence of public buildings and huge towers in the settlement indicate the important cultural role the settlement played during the Early Bronze Age."

He noted that the findings further establish proof of Oman being a vital copper trading hub during the Bronze Age between the sultanate and the land of Sindh and Mesopotamia. The site is one of the largest settlements of Umm al Nar culture discovered in Oman.

The MHT official informed that considering the site is spread over a large area, it will require work over several years.

MARKET WATCH

MSX30	4,178.98
BSE Sensex	57,858.15

FOREX RATES

(RO1 equals)

Indian Rs	194.53
Pakistani Rs	458.74
Bangladeshi Taka	223.58
Philippine Peso	133.47
Sri Lankan Rs	527.93

*Rates as on January 25
Source: xe.com

BRIEFS

Lebanon, IMF begin talks on financial rescue package

Lebanese officials have begun much-delayed talks with the International Monetary Fund on support measures aimed at lifting the country out of its worst-ever economic crisis.

"We hope the negotiations will be concluded as soon as possible, but given the complexity of the issues it is possible that other rounds will be held," Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami, who heads the Lebanese delegation, said in a statement.

The talks are taking place online due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Lebanon is hoping to obtain a financial rescue package to rekindle an economy that has been in free fall for two years.

The previous government held several rounds of talks with the multilateral lender, but was unable to secure a bailout, amid a failure by the two sides to agree on the scale of financial losses stemming from the meltdown.

SOHAR's Indian webinar series forges new metal partnerships

Our Correspondent
Muscat

Sohar Port and Freezone (SOHAR) hosted the third webinar in its series with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) with a focus on the growing metals industry. The webinars have increased Sohar Port and Freezone's visibility in the Indian market and highlighted the potential avenues for further trade between SOHAR and Indian businesses.

The events have highlighted Sohar Port and Freezone's strategic advantages, the opportunities in downstream metal operations and sharing success stories from Indian companies based in and already trading with SOHAR.

The latest webinar featured presentations from Robert Bartstra, commercial manager at Sohar Freezone, Mohammed al Kindi, commercial officer at Sohar Freezone and representatives from leading worldwide freight and logistics operator C. Steinweg Oman LLC, located within Sohar Port.

There was also a panel discussion on the topic of 'Metals in SOHAR - Industrial Solutions' with speakers from Al Tamman Indsil Ferrochrome LLC, Jindal Shaded Iron and Steel LLC, and Sohar Aluminium, all based at SOHAR.

In a press statement, Omar al Mahrizi, CEO of Sohar Freezone, said, "SOHAR has access to an



abundance of raw materials and reliable, affordable energy to facilitate primary, secondary and downstream metals projects. Over 50 per cent of the industrial tenants within SOHAR are involved in the metals industry, including iron and copper among others, and the production of pellets, billets and liquid metal, and we are always looking to expand the possibilities to grow the cluster."

He noted that companies basing themselves at SOHAR can take advantage of the sultanate's free trade agreement with the United States. "Our series of webinars have already been successful in generating leads between clients and potential new tenants for the freezone, and we look forward to following

up on the new ways SOHAR can benefit businesses in India's metals sector by providing a thriving gateway to new markets," he said.

Arnab Hazra, deputy secretary general of Indian Steel Association who represented FICCI, said, "The success of the webinars so far has had a profound impact on the way companies in India view doing business with SOHAR. The vast market reach has the power to transform the metals industries by providing world-leading logistics, warehousing, raw materials and downstream opportunities in a single location and bring Oman and India even closer together as trade partners."

He said, "The chance to expand the fast-growing metals in-

dustries using SOHAR as a regional transit point to connect Indian businesses to 550 ports around the world, which makes it a base for companies looking to expand into the growing markets across the GCC, East Africa and into Europe and North America. The webinar series offers valuable insight into the possibilities for companies to invest in SOHAR and the mutual benefits available to metals producers and suppliers from those who have already found success in the market."

Sohar Port and Freezone has continued to invest in the import and export of raw materials and goods produced in Sohar. Indian metal companies account for 45 per cent of the total investment in SOHAR and the growth of new

and expanding industries offers access to world-class functional connectivity and entry into global markets for growing industries.

Recent expansion into the automotive industry through a new cluster at Sohar Freezone offers more opportunity to reach new customers within the region, as does further exploration into packaging for the growing food cluster.

Sohar Freezone is equipped with warehousing and leading logistics service providers and is a growing transport hub for receiving goods for distribution within Oman, the Gulf region and around the world.

SOHAR offers access to abundant raw materials as well as attractive incentives for tenants in all industries.



CBO issues RO125mn treasury bills

Our Correspondent
Muscat

A tender of the government treasury bills (issue number 159) was issued this week by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

Total value of allotted treasury bills amounted to RO125mn, for a maturity period of 182 days, from January 26 until July 27. Average accepted price reached RO99.611 for every RO100 bill, while minimum accepted price arrived at RO99.580.

Average discount rate and average yield reached 0.78094 per cent and 0.78399 per cent, respectively. Interest rate on the repo operations with the CBO is 0.5 per cent, while the discount rate on treasury bills discounting facility with the central bank is 0.75 per cent.

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

Bank Nizwa named best Islamic bank in Oman by IFN survey

Muscat - Bank Nizwa has been voted the 'Best Islamic Bank in Oman' for the third year in a row, according to Islamic Finance News' (IFN) recognised survey and poll.

In a press release, Bank Nizwa said it was given the title after a public vote. With 27,500 votes, the bank took first place, demonstrating its high levels of customer and stakeholder trust, as well as its role as a change leader with new Islamic finance products and digital banking services.

The IFN Best Banks Poll 2021 honours the best in the Islamic financial industry around the world, awarding institutions in a variety of categories from a variety of nations.

On receiving the award, Khaled al Kayed, CEO of Bank Nizwa said, "This award honours Bank Nizwa's dedication to creating new strategies, implementing cutting-edge technology and prioritising digitalisation. We are thrilled to announce that we have been named the best Islamic bank in Oman for the third time by Islamic Finance News. We



will continue to strengthen our Sharia'a-compliant product and service range, as well as meet client expectations with new banking solutions. Without a question, we want to continue to be in the forefront of raising awareness and innovation, defining a qualitative leap in the Islamic finance sector."

Bank Nizwa's strategy has been drawn keeping in mind the next phase of growth and expansion, aligned to the overall objectives of Oman's Vision 2040. Not only did the bank show great resiliency during the pandemic, but it also exhibited it with a con-

sistent financial performance that outperformed market expectations.

With Islamic banking becoming more popular, Bank Nizwa is devoted to providing a wide range of Sharia'a-compliant financing solutions to meet the diverse needs of its clientele. The bank has established itself as a robust, innovative, and customer-centric Islamic banking institution, infusing innovation into all of its operations and creating a digital ecosystem to make Sharia'a-compliant solutions available throughout the sultanate.

Bank Nizwa has received a slew of local, regional, and worldwide awards since its inception as the country's leading and fastest-growing Islamic bank.

IFN is a leading worldwide online industry journal that covers the global Islamic financial markets exclusively and comprehensively. The annual IFN awards honour the best suppliers of Islamic financial services in a variety of areas and sectors, as determined by public voting.

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Expo 2020 sees nearly 11 million visits



Expo 2020 Dubai has recorded 10,836,389 visits as of 24 January, catalysed by a magical new musical from Indian stars Shekhar Kapur and A R Rahman, plus a series of high-profile events as part of the first Global Goals Week to be held outside of the United Nations in New York.

Across the Expo 2020 Dubai site, which is four times the size of Dubai Mall and spans the area of 613 football pitches, visitors have safely enjoyed the nearly 200 events being staged every day, thanks to stringent precautionary measures against COVID-19, a press release said.

The Musical – a mesmerising show by renowned filmmaker Kapur and Grammy Award winner Rahman – opened at Al Wasl Plaza on January 20 featuring more than 100 performers, including Indian

actor, dancer and comedian Jaaved Jaaferi. It will continue to wow audiences until 27 February, with performances in English, from Thursday-Sunday (except February 4 and 5).

Global Goals Week, which ran from January 15-22, in association with the United Nations, proved similarly popular, with the site coming alive with post-it pledges and inspiring ‘to-do list’ activations, adding to the range of compelling forums and panel discussions.

The Theme Week advanced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a blueprint to achieving a better, more sustainable future for all, tackling global challenges such as poverty, inequality, health and education, and climate change. Expo 2020 Dubai continues to be committed to promoting the SDGs, pro-



viding a platform to create a positive impact for the future.

The headline attractions in the coming week are equally impres-

sive, including a concert by pop-rap megastars Black Eyed Peas at Al Wasl Plaza on 25 January – the fourth show in Expo 2020



Dubai's six-month Infinite Nights series. With Expo 2020 Dubai set to close its gates on March 31, visitors have only a few short

weeks left to enjoy the site's vast array of attractions. As part of the 'It's Now or Never, Only Until March 31' marketing campaign,

the Season Pass Finale ticket is available now for a price of AED 195, with a huge variety of entertainment and dining options.

EAD launches Baadr app to protect environment

The Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi (EAD) has launched Baadr, a unique smartphone application, in partnership with Bourouge, that will reward Abu Dhabi residents and citizens for completing different environmental actions that will help protect the environment across Abu Dhabi.

Available to download for free on the Apple Play Store and to be released on Android at a later date, Baadr is the first app in the UAE to offer incentives for environmental actions with more than 20 tasks to choose from. It will aim to reduce carbon emissions, reduce food waste and the consumption of single-use items, conserve energy, and encourage people to reuse and recycle their products, a press release said.

Baadr, which means ‘initiate’



in Arabic, is the latest programme launched by Sustainable Campus Initiative and strengthens EAD's and Bourouge's long-standing partnership as part of their vision towards building a sustainable environment for a sustainable future.

As well as promoting sustainability and increasing environmental awareness, Baadr will

also help change people's behaviour in their everyday lives and inspire the youth, placing them at the forefront of supporting the government's drive to create a greener city that will benefit residents and citizens.

It will enable people to live a healthier lifestyle, explore new ways of saving money, such as double-sided printing and growing your own vegetables and fruits, as well as helping support the economy by buying locally.

Through the simple-to-use app, users can earn points by completing a wide range of tasks that are based on Baadr's seven environmental themes: Reuse, Switch, Grow, Initiate, Conserve, Join and Move.

The tasks users can engage in include switching to organic

foods or eating vegetarian meals for one day and finding different ways of reducing the amount of water and electricity that they consume.

People can also attend workshops or events to improve their environmental knowledge while Baadr will help encourage people to live a healthier and sustainable lifestyle by walking or cycling to their destinations. Besides using their own mugs, cups and containers when ordering at cafés or restaurants, people can also get involved and organise clean-ups in Abu Dhabi emirate.

Points, which will vary accordingly to each task, will be awarded to users who upload a picture of their completed action on the app using their smartphones.

Alizz Islamic Bank announces restructured Bushra account

Adding a new set of monthly profits on customer deposits, Alizz Islamic Bank recently announced the restructuring of its Bushra Savings Account.

This move comes in compliance with Central Bank of Oman's decision to withdraw the 'prize scheme linked saving deposit schemes' with effect from January 2022 in all banks operating in the sultanate, a press release said.

Currently, Alizz Islamic Bank offers Bushra Savings Account based on the Shari'a principle of unrestricted 'Mudarabah', where the customer is the owner of the money, and the bank manages the 'Mudarabah' by investing the pool of customer funds in joint 'Mudarabah' transactions. All profits are divided between the customer and the bank, based on a profit-sharing ratio determined by the bank.

Profit rates based on each category will be applied to the deposit balances kept in the Bushra Account.

Based on each customer's account balance, the bank will deposit their profit shares on a monthly basis. Customers can get more details on profit rates by visiting the bank's official website at (<https://alizzislamic.com>) or walking into their nearest bank branch across Oman.

For 2022, Bushra has been



restructured to keep up with the changes in customer lifestyles, making the account bigger to secure the best possible profits for the customer. Alizz Islamic Bank continues to tailor-make products and services to suit the expectations and requirements of customers.

Bushra customers, whether Omanis or expats, will enjoy many advantages and benefits including monthly profit payment, same-day debit card issuance and collection, and free online and mobile banking, and SMS alerts, to name a few.

Mohammed al Ghassani, acting chief consumer banking officer at Alizz Islamic Bank

said, "The benefits and incentives offered by the restructured 'Bushra' account comes in line with our plans to provide customers with tailor-made products and services to meet all their needs and requirements in today's ever-changing world."

"The new Bushra account gives customers the opportunity to grow their funds as we help them to save and invest and eventually get to their desired financial goals. We are always keen to offer the products and services needed by our valued customers, and it is always our priority to offer banking with transparency," Ghassani added.

NBO offers 20% discount for credit card purchases at Sharaf DG

National Bank of Oman (NBO) is offering 20 per cent off at Sharaf DG in Mall of Oman for those paying using their NBO credit card.

Valid between January 27 and 28, cardholders can choose from a range of branded electronics and household appliances. Besides receiving Nuqati points for every purchase, they also have the option of converting to the Easy Payment Plan which offers 6 – 12 month instalments at 0% interest.

Maha Saud al Raisi, AGM Re-



tail Products at NBO, said, "NBO continues to make everyday banking more rewarding, while keeping our customers' needs and lifestyles in mind. Our collaboration with Sharaf DG is one of a growing number of exclusive partnerships on our portfolio, ensuring our cards offer greater value, convenience and flexibility."

Offering cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of its customers, NBO's

suite of credit cards have no annual fee as long as the spending threshold is reached. Providing a smarter, safer alternative to cash, cardholders are rewarded with Nuqati points for every transaction they make in addition to other benefits like movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, and airport lounge access. It's a great way for customers to increase their savings while enjoying the freedom of the lifestyle they choose.

Occidental Oman gets Green Branch Award

Occidental Oman (Oxy Oman) was recently honoured with the Green Branch Award, in recognition for the company's work in service of environmental preservation and long-term investments in Oman's environment.

The award was given as part of the Oman Environment Forum, which coincided with Oman Environment Day.

The event was held at the Grand Millennium Muscat under the patronage of H E Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. Alya Saleh al Maimani, vice president of Block 9/27 Operations at Oxy Oman, accepted the award on behalf of the company, a press release said.

Oxy Oman has contributed to a variety of environment-focused projects, including the construction of two public parks, including a public park in Hamra Al Doroa, Al Dhahirah Governorate, and a first-of-its-kind linear park in Al Mabela, Muscat governorate.

The company has also sponsored the printing of the 'Nature



Reserves' book in collaboration with the Environmental Authority, in order to raise awareness of Oman's natural sights.

Oxy Oman is also sponsoring the installation of mooring buoys at the Damaniyat Islands Nature Reserves, in order to support marine life and coral reefs at the island.

"We are proud to receive the inaugural Green Award in recog-

nition of our collaborations to support environmental awareness and conservation," said Stephen Kelly, president and general manager at Oxy Oman. "Oxy Oman is committed to the preservation and sustainability of habitats and biodiversity through efficient use of energy, land, water, and other natural resources where the company operates," he added.

This programme falls under Oxy Oman's umbrella of strategic partnerships and continuous collaboration with key stakeholders. It is part of Oxy Oman's endeavour and long-term commitment to support programmes that enhance economic growth and sustainable development, and yield a positive impact in the neighbouring communities.



Minister of Higher Education receives AOU officials

Her Excellency Dr Rahma Ibrahim al Mahrouqi, Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation, received Dr Muhammad Ibrahim al Zakari, president of the Arab Open University (AOU), Dr Abdul Aziz bin Mohammad al Hinai, member of the university's Board of Trustees, and Prof Mohammad bin Hamdan al Badi, director of the Arab Open University in the

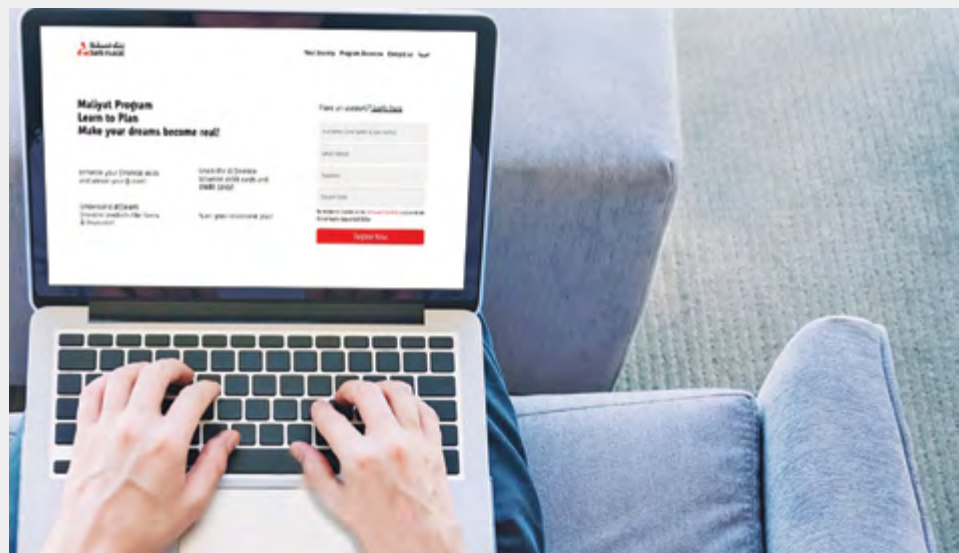
Sultanate of Oman, to discuss many issues concerning higher education. The meeting focussed on issues that serve higher education, in general, as well as matters related to the role of Arab Open University in providing a qualified environment to serve the country and researchers, in general, a press release said.

It is worth noting that Prof Zakari's visit comes to confirm the

university's leading role in higher education in the Arab world, supporting the university in the sultanate, to meet with the director of the university and the academic and administrative bodies, to overcome all challenges, and see the progress of work in the university building.

The university building project is expected to be complete by December 2022.

Bank Muscat's 'Maliyat' offers financial coaching



Financial literacy is the ability to understand and apply financial skills effectively and includes personal financial management, budgeting, and saving. Financial literacy is important because it equips us with the knowledge and skills we need to manage our money effectively.

Global economic research has shown that financial literacy and awareness greatly help in reducing income inequality and facilitating equitable growth and development. Hence, in line with its commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, Bank Muscat launched its free 'Maliyat' financial literacy programme in 2019 to enable people in Oman improve their financial literacy, knowledge, manage their income, and also save and invest wisely, a press release said.

The programme has seen a steady growth in the number of participants, and in 2021, the bank launched an upgraded website (<https://maliyat-bankmuscat.com>). With well-structured programme content that caters to different age-groups, the key aspects of the programme include defining personal financial goals and financial planning to achieve one's goals.

Speaking about the importance of improving financial literacy and awareness in the sultanate, Talib Saif al Makhmari, manager, Community and Media Relations, Bank

Muscat, said, "Financial awareness helps individuals manage income, save, and invest wisely. Today, it is ever more important to be financially aware as financial products and services get increasingly diverse and complex.

"Since its launch in 2019, Bank Muscat's groundbreaking Maliyat financial-literacy programme is helping equip participants with the skills needed to better manage their finances and take fiscally prudent decisions, thereby helping everyone, particularly the youth become financially independent.

By empowering people in Oman, the Maliyat programme will contribute majorly to the socio-economic development and progress of the sultanate in the future."

When people are financially literate, they are better able to understand financial concepts like budgets, interest payments and plan for their future so as to be able to respond effectively to life-changing events such as economic downturns or a job loss.

They are also able to choose various products like insurance and loans, based on their actual needs and financial abilities rather than be influenced solely by an advertisement or someone else who may not necessarily have their best interests in mind.

The Maliyat curriculum comprises three main parts -

Oman's economy, financial awareness, and successful financial planning. To encourage completion of the course and to help participants apply the learnings in their personal lives, certification is provided upon successful completion of each module. The programme is also available in both Arabic and English to encourage maximum participation by everyone.

In addition to Maliyat, Bank Muscat also provides the Irshad financial coaching programme for the benefit of both, individuals and entrepreneurs. The Irshad programme leverages the rich knowledge base of the bank's executives for the benefit of those who seek mentoring.

Coaching in a number of areas such as budgeting, managing financial debt, the importance of saving regularly, challenges for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), and how to raise capital are available from experienced mentors and the programme is aimed at empowering participants with the relevant information they need for financial planning or running a sustainable business.

The one-to-one Irshad sessions are conducted online and can be availed by Omanis and expatriates. Information about the Irshad coaches is available at the bank's website and queries related to the programme can be sent to irshad@bankmuscat.com.

OSN commissions feature film 'Yellow Bus'

OSN continues to demonstrate its commitment to investing in local talent and stories that resonates to the region with its announcement of the upcoming OSN Original Film *Yellow Bus*.

The production has finished shooting, and is set to premiere on the platform later this year after its theatrical release. The original film, further cements OSN's promise in creating and showcasing a unique blend of modern-day Arabia seen through untold stories derived from the region, a press release said.

Yellow Bus is a compelling story of a schoolgirl who falls asleep on the school bus, is left behind, and ultimately dies from heat exhaustion. The story begins with the mother, Ananda, waking up to a day full of promises and hope. Little did she know that the next time she would see her youngest daughter, after sending her to school, would be at the morgue.

Her life shattered, Ananda defies everyone and everything in search of the truth about what really happened to her daughter, Anju, on that fateful day.



Amit Sial



Kinda Alloush



Tannishtha Chatterjee

The film is written and directed by Wendy Bednarz and is produced by Nadia Eliewat. The film stars Tannishtha Chatterjee in the lead role as the mother, Ananda, with Amit Sial as the father, Gagan, and Kinda Alloush as the school proprietor, Mira.

The film explores universal themes of motherhood, grief and dealing with loss - set against the backdrop of the culture in the Gulf.

Darine Elkhatib, Senior Vice President - Arabic Services & Original Production at OSN said, "We were drawn to the story as it works on many levels - it takes you on a heartbreaking roller-coaster of the mother's desper-

ation, while covering controversial themes and concepts that are rarely addressed in this region. Paired with the incredible writing, passionate producers, and wonderful cast, we can't wait to share *Yellow Bus* with OSN customers later in 2022."

Tannishtha Chatterjee said, "I play the character Ananda in this film, a mother coming to terms with losing her child, coping with grief, and searching for the truth. I can't imagine a mother going through the loss of her child. It was a very emotional role for me to immerse myself in the character."

The production of the film and the atmosphere on set were a

truthful reflection of the real life with its diversity of languages and accents. What unites us is more than what divides us and the theme of the film is truly universal in this regard"

Kinda Alloush added, "When I read the script's first 10 pages, I knew I wanted to be a part of this film. It's a relatable story that can take place anywhere. However, 'Mira' is a character I've never played before, and she has lots of layers that I got to understand as I delved deeper into the role. The character 'Mira' intertwines with 'Ananda' in a sense that they both explore different themes of Motherhood and loss throughout the film."



Samiksh XI bags Ruwi Cup 2022

Samiksh XI defeated Desert XI in the final of the first Ruwi Cup 2022 cricket tournament held at the Amerat cricket ground on January 14.

The tournament was organised by the Ruwi unit of Kairali Arts Club Oman - a premier organisation involved in socio-cultural activities for past several

years. Unit secretary of the club Riyaz Kottappurath welcomed the teams and its players while club president Sugathan presided over the function inaugurated by Indian Social Club Oman Kerala Wing convener Santhosh Kumar.

Sixteen teams from different parts of Oman competed in the

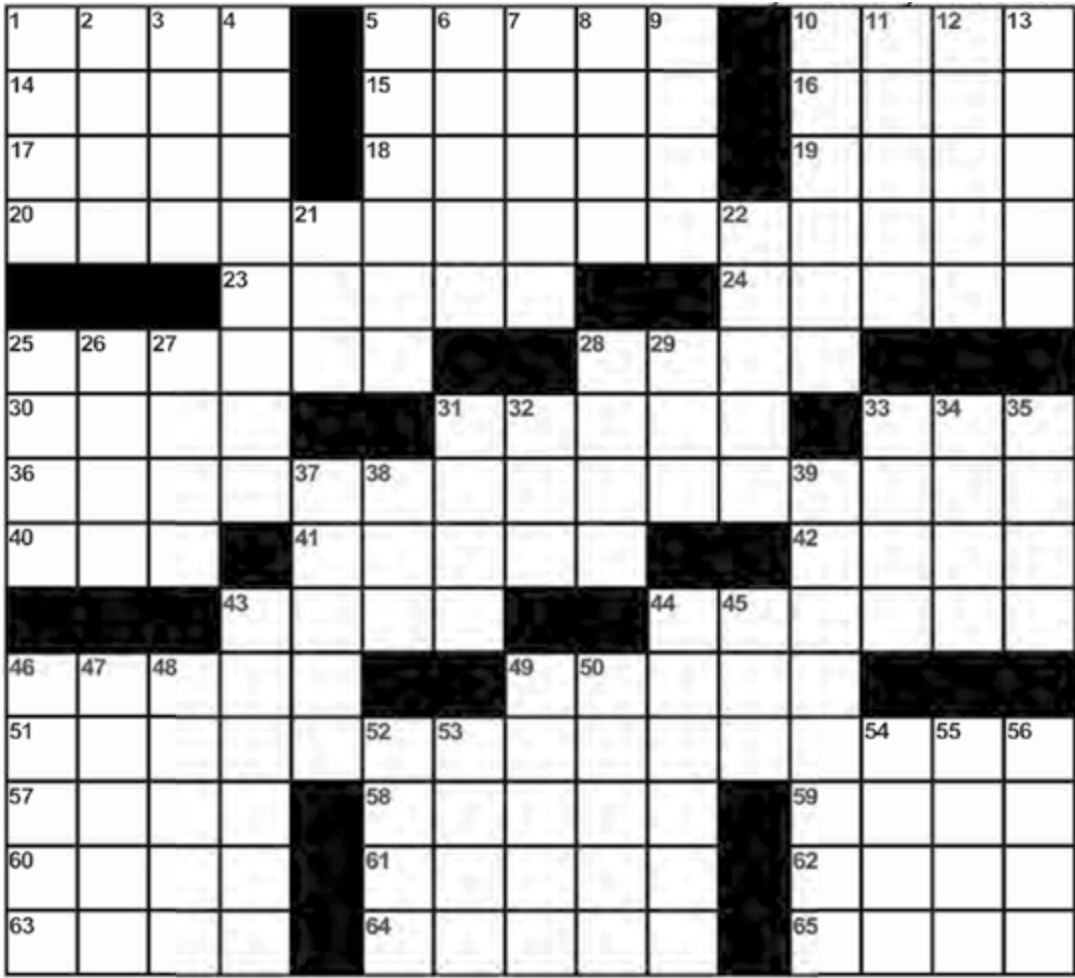
tournament. while Samiksh XI lifted the Ruwi Cup, Ashok, of Samiksh XI, was named Man of the Series, Man of the Match, and Best Batsman while Desert XI's Rahul was adjudged the best bowler.

The event was sponsored by Purshottam Kanji Money Exchange.

The organising committee said that the Ruwi Cup will be better organised in the years to come.

Balakrishnan, general secretary, Kairali Arts Club Oman and Supin James, general manager, Purshottam Kanji Exchange, presented the trophies to the winners and runners-up.

DAILY CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1) Result of an ink mishap
- 5) Behave poorly
- 10) It may be manicured
- 14) Not prerecorded
- 15) Witchlike woman
- 16) Sort of sword
- 17) Warning sign
- 18) Piglike creature
- 19) Nibble like a beaver
- 20) Loyal party voter
- 23) Like swamp water
- 24) Gather, as details
- 25) Steady guys and girls
- 28) “_” words cannot express
- 30) Level
- 31) Big bangs
- 33) Wall Street exec’s deg., perhaps
- 36) It’s not taken by extremists
- 40) Dinner remnant
- 41) Nautical stop
- 42) Annul
- 43) Bums or Sexton, e.g.
- 44) Late-night host
- Conan

- 46) French farewell
- 49) Aircraft parking spot
- 51) Certain empty-nester
- 57) Weighted cattle catcher
- 58) Field of endeavor
- 59) Shop class gripper
- 60) Early garden spot
- 61) Leonardo’s home
- 62) Zatopek of Olympic fame
- 63) Relax
- 64) Moth-_(ratty)
- 65) Authentic
- DOWN
- 1) Common-interest group
- 2) CEO’s transportation, briefly
- 3) “the Rainbow”
- 4) Overcrowded digs
- 5) They may make a scene
- 6) Jack-in-the-box feature
- 7) “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” character
- 8) Single piece
- 9) “Scope” starter

- 10) Lentil or pea, e.g.
- 11) Snorer’s problem
- 12) No longer nurses
- 13) Some salamanders
- 21) Dogcatcher’s prey
- 22) Ankle bones
- 25) Art_(retro style)
- 26) State point-blank
- 27) Collapsible shelter
- 28) No longer worth debating
- 29) Momma’s triplets?
- 31) Cote cry
- 32) Photo_(publicity events)
- 33) Short, short skirt
- 34) Foreshadow
- 35) Bartlett abbr.
- 37) “Eating_” (1982 movie)
- 38) Abbr. on a Monopoly board
- 39) Apple pastry
- 43) Educated show-off
- 44) Install as a minister
- 45) Archer’s need
- 46) Traffic-light color
- 47) The “D” in LED
- 48) Waits in traffic

- 49) Insurance offeror
- 50) 11100th of a pound
- 52) Roofer’s hangover?
- 53) Soprano’s big number
- 54) Perform silently
- 55) Home to billions
- 56) Dudley Do-Right’s lady

NOTE PAD



YOUR DAILY HOROSCOPE



ARIES MARCH 21-APRIL 19

Step in and become part of a discussion today. Don't wait for an engraved invitation. Interacting with others is the best way to try out new ideas or philosophies. Learn how others think about controversial issues and it will help you fine-tune your opinions. The group you're mixing with is a very welcoming crew despite initial appearances. So don't be shy. Hop right into the flow and mix it up! You might get a new friendship out of the experience.



LEO JULY 23-AUGUST 22

You can and should shut out pressures from the outside world right now. Too many people are demanding too many unreasonable things of you. So today, enjoy being by yourself for a while. Lower the volume on your life and some helpful introspection is bound to come your way. You could be feeling more introverted than usual, which is a sure sign you aren't getting as much out of being in a group as is typical.



SAGITTARIUS NOVEMBER 22-DECEMBER 21

At work or school, you need to be honest and understand your limitations. The people who have authority over you will appreciate and respect it. It can be tough on your ego to admit that you can't do something, but it's the only way to start learning a skill or piece of information that you lack. Get a better perspective on your place in this organisation and understand that you are more valuable the more you actually know.



TAURUS APRIL 20-MAY 20

Take yourself out! Show yourself off to the world and you're sure to have a good time. If you're looking for more romance in your life, you certainly aren't going to find it alone at home. And if you're happy to be single, remember that as a solo act you can do whatever you want to do and go wherever you want to go. Your freedom is priceless, and it's something you should consciously enjoy more often.



VIRGO AUGUST 23-SEPTEMBER 22

If a friend or family member asks you to sacrifice some of your free time, try to do what you can for them. They wouldn't ask this of you unless they really needed your help, and chances are you will get a lot out of being there for them. You should take it as a compliment that they came to you first. In your work life, things are about to get busy, so you might want to tidy up your work area so that you can be ready for the onslaught.



CAPRICORN DECEMBER 22-JANUARY 19

No matter what you're debating doing right now, you aren't going to come to any conclusions today, so don't push yourself too hard. Instead, use this day to do some more research on your options. Go online and find out what other people who have been in your situation chose to do. Ask for advice from your friends. Making a decision about your life doesn't always have to be something you do alone.



GEMINI MAY 21-JUNE 21

You and another person need to come to an understanding, so make talking to them one of your top priorities. The two of you need to work things out. There isn't going to be a lot of conflict in your meeting, but it might take a lot of time to agree on things. One of the first things you should agree on is to disagree. Otherwise, you two will continue to butt heads. To ensure they stick to their end of the bargain, get things in writing.



LIBRA SEPTEMBER 23-OCTOBER 22

Lots of vibrant energy is coursing through you right now, but it's more the start-up kind than the finish-up kind. But this isn't necessarily a bad thing. By initiating a lot of new things at once, you can make your life a lot more interesting without getting too overwhelmed. And it's okay if you don't actually get a lot done right now. You have more time than you think, and it's fun to play around with a few different sets of plans.



AQUARIUS JANUARY 20-FEBRUARY 18

Don't be shy about protecting your secrets today, even if you have to plead the fifth with inquisitive friends and family. Your business is your business, and other people can't help but meddle if they get the impression that you are looking for their input. No matter how well intentioned they may be, they still have a different agenda than you do. It's time to remind people that you're capable of running your own life!



CANCER JUNE 22-JULY 22

You're going to get along really well with people today. Like-minded folks will be everywhere you look! This is a good day to make plans to get to know one or two of these people better. Making plans will be easy, especially when a big chunk of your calendar suddenly gets cleared up. You've got a lot of playtime coming up in the next few days, so make the most of it. Don't fritter it away by sleeping and watching television.



SCORPIO OCTOBER 23-NOVEMBER 21

Today is a very good day to initiate a new thing, from a new book to a new job to a new relationship. Possibility is a profound thing right now, and nothing will excite you more than a blank canvas upon which you can draw anything you like. Your creativity is leading you to act in unexpected ways, but the people you meet now could find your unpredictability charming. You are out to impress and you're likely to succeed quickly.



PISCES FEBRUARY 19-MARCH 20

Even if you have a dozen different projects going on right now, you should make personal relationships your first priority today. Someone needs your advice or your time, and you should juggle your schedule to give them what they need. Helping others is also a way to help yourself see things from a new perspective. You will realise the immense value that you have in other people's lives.



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

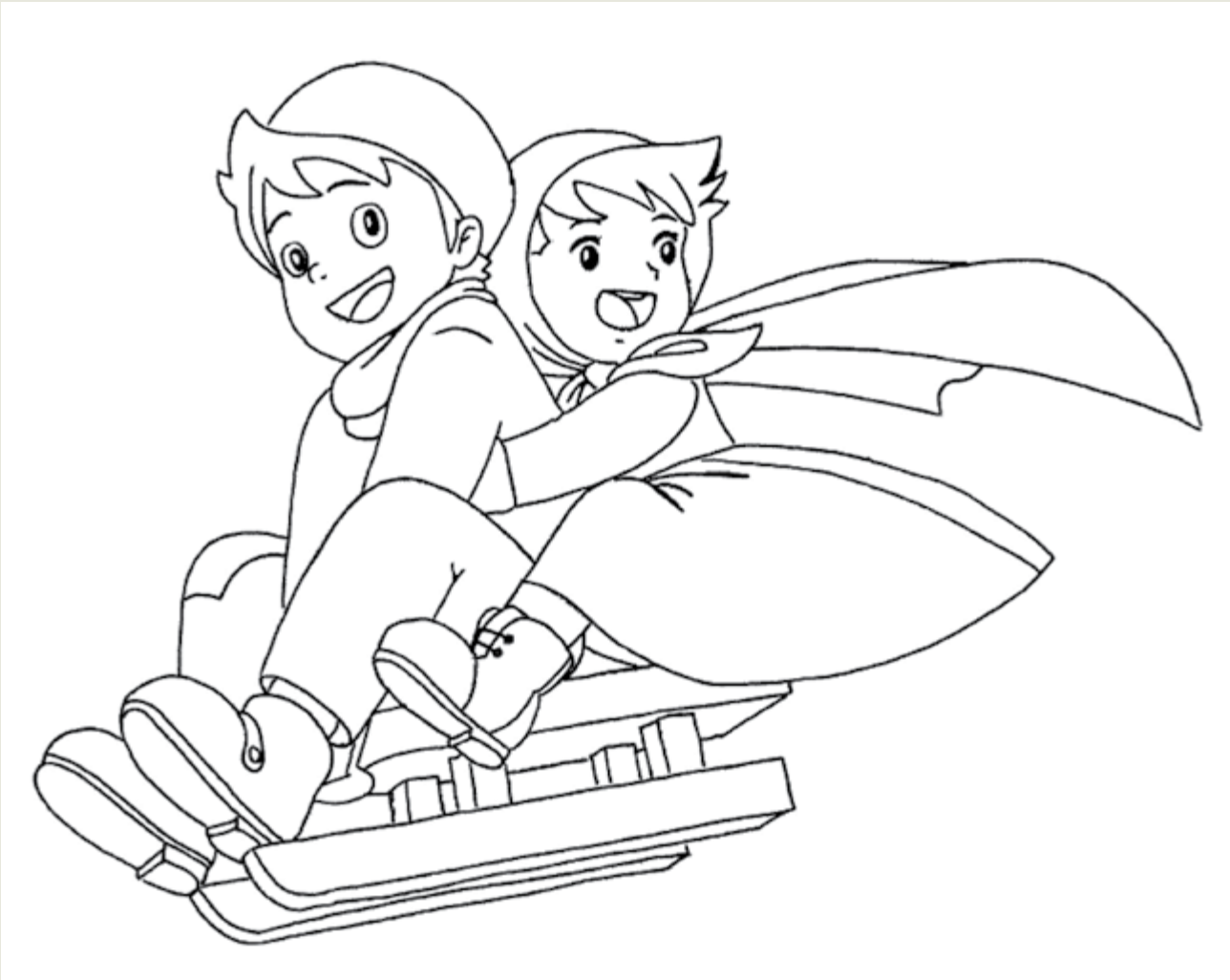
1. Which of the following agencies related to the United Nations is concerned with promoting the growth of international trade and equilibrium in balance of payments?
- A. United Nations Industrial Development Organisation
 - B. International Development Association
 - C. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development Organisation
 - D. United Nation Development Programme

2. Which of the following are the members of CARICOM?
- A. Anguilla, Antigua, Trinidad, Tobago
 - B. Barbados, Belize, St. Lucia, St. Vincent
 - C. Dominica, Grenade, Guyana, Jamaica
 - D. All of the above

3. When was the International Monetary Fund established?
- A. 1945
 - B. 1946
 - C. 1947
 - D. 1950

Answers: 1. C 2. D 3. A

KIDS COLOURING



BOGGLER

L	L	O	E
E	C	A	S
R	L	T	A
A	R	E	C

Each game will present you with a matrix filled with letters. The objective is to form words by linking adjacent letters - to the left, right, on top, bottom, or diagonal to each other. The Boggles Classic game uses a 4 x 4 matrix. Words are valued at one point for each letter in excess of two letters. A three letter word is worth one point, a four letter word is worth two points, and so on. Valid words must be at least three letters long.

Solution 20-25 words: Excellent, 15-20 words: Very good, 10-15 words: Good, 5-10 words: Average

DO YOU SUDOKU?

LEVEL EASY: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9 and only one instance of each number

	1	9	6				2	
5				2		1		4
	2	8				6		9
			8	7	6			3
	9		2		1		6	
6			4	9	5			
9		5				7	4	
8		2		4				1
	4				2	8	3	

WORD BUILDER



You have three minutes to find all the words contained in this word.

Rules: Words should be at least four letters long, proper nouns and duplicates don't count

SUDOKU EASY ANSWER

9	8	2	6	7	4	1	9	8
1	5	6	3	4	7	2	9	8
2	4	7	8	9	1	5	3	6
7	1	2	5	6	4	3	8	9
8	9	5	1	3	2	4	6	7
3	6	4	9	7	8	1	5	2
6	7	4	1	8	3	2	9	5
4	7	1	8	2	3	9	7	5
3	2	3	7	8	9	6	1	4

Istanbul permits first flight after blizzard pummels Mediterranean

Istanbul, Turkey - Europe's busiest airport in Istanbul welcomed its first flight in 24 hours on Tuesday and Greece declared a public holiday as the eastern Mediterranean neighbours began digging themselves out of a rare snowstorm that ground their capitals to a halt.

Turkish officials ordered all private vehicles off the snow-clogged streets of Istanbul while the Greek military joined rescuers in trying to evacuate hundreds of stranded drivers in Athens.

Major highways were closed across both countries and basic services such as food delivery shut down.

But much of the international attention focused on the fate of Istanbul's main airport - a gleaming glass-and-steel structure that offers connecting flights spanning much of the world.

A blizzard on Monday closed Istanbul Airport for the first time since it took over from the old Ataturk Airport as the new hub for Turkish Airlines in 2019.



A man stranded on the highway walks after heavy snowfall at the Basaksehir district in Istanbul on Tuesday (AFP)

Its press service pushed back its planned reopening hours a handful of times before admitting defeat and shutting it down for the night.

It tweeted an image on Tuesday of the first flight since Monday afternoon landing from the Venezuelan capital Caracas after one of the runways was cleared to accept a few airborne flights.

But Turkish Airlines decided to suspend operations at its main international hub until midnight.

All the main scheduled international departures were either cancelled or delayed for the second day running.

Istanbul Airport serviced more than 37mn passengers last year despite disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Yet President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's critics had long questioned his decision to place the airport on a remote patch along the Black Sea coast that is often covered with fog in winter.

Istanbul's second airport on its Asian side near the Sea of Marmara stayed open throughout the storm.

'We need a hotel'

Numerous passengers stuck aboard stranded flights took to Twitter to air their grievances with the airport's customer service and lack of updates.

"Not even a bottle of water offered. Zero concern for women with children," user Chris Wiggett wrote in a typical tweet.

"Not even blankets for stranded passengers at night."

Images tweeted from inside the packed airport on Tuesday showed a frustrated crowd chanting 'we need a hotel'.

A burst of sunshine over the city of 16mn people on Tuesday raised hopes that the storm had finally passed and normal life could slowly start to resume.

But forecasts warned of more possible snow on Tuesday evening and officials ordered all cars off the streets.

The mayor's office some parts

of Istanbul had recorded 85cm of snow. The Istanbul governor's office closed the region's universities until Monday and announced a temporary suspension of non-emergency traffic into city from its Asian and European sides.

The situation appeared just as chaotic in Greece.

The Athens public prosecutor's office opened an investigation as officials traded blame over who was responsible for the closure of the city's main road leading to the Greek capital's international airport.

Greek civil protection minister Christos Stylianides issued a formal apology on Monday.

But he also blamed the private Attiki Odos motorway management company for 'failing to keep open a busy road'.

The management company issued its own apology. But it also said the problems were due to 'vehicle breakdowns or to the lack of experience of motorists, some of whom were afraid'.

AFP

Seoul says N Korea fired 2 'suspected' cruise missiles



People watching a news broadcast of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul on Tuesday (AFP)

Seoul, South Korea - North Korea fired two suspected cruise missiles on Tuesday, Seoul said, its fifth weapons test this year as Pyongyang flexes its military muscles while ignoring US offers of talks.

The last time North Korea tested this many weapons in a month was in 2019, after high-profile negotiations collapsed between leader Kim Jong Un and then-US president Donald Trump.

This year Pyongyang has embarked on a fresh flurry of sanctions-busting tests, including hypersonic missiles, after Kim reavowed his commitment to military modernisation at a key party speech in December.

Washington imposed new sanctions in response, prompting Pyongyang to double down on weapons testing and hint last week that it could abandon a years-long self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and long-range tests.

"North Korea fired two suspected cruise missiles," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement on Tuesday, without giving further details.

Cruise missiles are not banned under current UN sanctions on North Korea, and Seoul does not always report such

launches in real time, as it does for ballistic missile tests.

The last time North Korea is known to have tested a cruise missile was in September 2021.

A South Korean military official told the Yonhap news agency that 'should such a missile be launched southward, our detection and interception systems have no problem countering it'.

"North Korea appears to be wanting to test Washington's reaction, while showing off its presence on the global stage," Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies, told AFP.

By firing a cruise missile, Pyongyang does not violate UN sanctions but can still try 'to attract the world's attention while thumbing its nose at the US'.

The string of launches in 2022 comes at a delicate time in the region, with Kim's sole major ally China set to host the Winter Olympics next month and South Korea gearing up for a presiden-

tial election in March.

Domestically, North Korea is preparing to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the birth of late leader Kim Jong Il in February, as well as the 110th birthday of founder Kim Il Sung in April.

Pyongyang has not tested inter-continental ballistic missiles or nukes since 2017, putting launches on hold as Kim embarked on a blitz of high-level diplomacy through three meetings with Trump.

But last week Pyongyang said it could examine restarting all temporarily-suspended activities. The impoverished North, reeling economically from a self-imposed coronavirus blockade, has recently restarted cross-border trade with China.

And ally Beijing, along with Russia, last week blocked the UN Security Council from imposing fresh sanctions in response to the recent tests.

Defector-turned-researcher Ahn Chan-il told AFP the tests could also be an attempt by Pyongyang to pressure China.

"The Beijing Olympics cannot be a festival of peace without peace on the Korean Peninsula," he said.

"And peace on the Korean Peninsula depends on North Korea."

AFP

Eight dead in stadium crush in Cameroon

Yaoundé, Cameroon - Eight people were killed and dozens more injured in a crush outside a Cameroonian football stadium ahead of an Africa Cup of Nations match, officials said on Tuesday.

Cameroonian President Paul Biya ordered an investigation into the tragedy that occurred on Monday as crowds attempted to enter the Olembe Stadium in the capital Yaounde to watch the host nation play the Comoros.

Although crowds at the 60,000-seat stadium had been limited to 60 per cent of capacity for the tournament because of the coronavirus pandemic, the cap is raised to 80 per cent when Cameroon's Indomitable Lions play.

"Eight deaths were recorded, two women in their 30s, four men in their 30s, one child, one body taken away by the family," said a preliminary health ministry report obtained by AFP.

The ministry said victims were 'immediately transported' in ambulances, but 'heavy road traffic slowed down the transport'. Communications Minister Rene Emmanuel Sadi said 38 people were injured, including seven seriously, according to a statement.

The health ministry reported



A purse is seen lying on the ground at the scene of the stampede at the entrance of Olembe stadium in Yaounde, on Tuesday (AFP)

earlier that around 50 were hurt, including two people with multiple injuries and two more with serious head wounds.

A baby was also reportedly trampled by the crowd, the ministry added. The infant was 'immediately extracted and taken to Yaounde General Hospital' and is in a 'medically stable' condition, it added.

The tragedy happened at gates where final ticket checks are supposed to take place.

One man in his 30s who was caught up in the crush told AFP that it was 'complete chaos' at the entrance to the stadium as supporters without tickets tried to force their way in.

"I arrived a quarter of an hour before kick-off. I had my ticket, but all of a sudden a group of people without tickets arrived

and tried to force their way through and we found ourselves pushed up against the fences," said the supporter, who gave his name as Stephane.

"I was crushed up against a woman who said she couldn't breathe. Eventually the gate gave in and I was able to get through, but it was complete chaos."

'Crisis meeting'

President Biya has 'ordered the opening of an investigation so that all light is shed on this tragic incident', the communications minister said.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF), which runs the continent's flagship competition, said it was 'investigating the situation and trying to get more details on what transpired'.

It added it was in 'constant

communication with Cameroon government and the Local Organising Committee'.

Cameroon's health minister Manaouda Malachie tweeted images showing him visiting a hospital treating those injured in the incident. "Everything is done to give them free care and the best support," he tweeted.

CAF was due to hold a 'crisis meeting' with the organising committee on Tuesday, dedicated exclusively to security issues in the stadiums, a source close to African football's governing body told AFP.

Deadly crowding

The government, Sadi said, is 'once more appealing to Cameroonian's sense of responsibility, discipline and civic duty for the total success of this great sporting event'.

Cameroon was initially meant to host the Cup of Nations in 2019, but the event was moved to Egypt over concerns the country's stadiums were not ready.

CAF cited delays in the construction of stadiums and infrastructure projects, as well as question marks over security.

Overcrowding at football matches around the world has resulted in scores of deaths.

AFP

London police to probe PM's lockdown parties

London, UK - London's police chief on Tuesday said her officers are investigating several parties that took place at Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office and government departments during COVID lockdowns.

"The Met is now investigating a number of events that took place at Downing Street and Whitehall in the last two years in relation to potential breaches of COVID-19 regulations," Metropolitan Police Commissioner Cressida Dick told the London Assembly local authority.

Allegations that a string of parties were held at Downing Street while the rest of the country was in lockdown have shaken Johnson's government in recent weeks, prompting the worst crisis of his premiership and calls for him to quit.

The latest revelations came on Monday night and saw claims



A police officer walks past the door to 10 Downing Street, the official residence of Britain's Prime Minister, in London on Tuesday (AFP)

that Johnson broke lockdown rules by having a birthday party at Downing Street on June 19, 2020.

Up to 30 people were present, ITV News alleged. At the time, social gatherings were only permitted between six people outside.

"I should stress that the fact that we are now investigating does not of course mean that fixed penalty notices (fines) will necessarily be issued in every instance and to every person involved," Dick told the Assembly's Police and Crime Committee.

"We will not be giving a running commentary on our current investigations. But I can assure you that we will give updates at significant points as we would generally do."

A senior civil servant, Sue Gray, is also conducting an investigation into the string of allegations and is expected to publish her investigation soon.

Speculation has swirled that she would have to pause her fact-finding probe if the police become involved.

But a Cabinet Office spokesperson said: "The investigation being carried out by Sue Gray is continuing. There is ongoing contact with the Metropolitan Police Service."

Gray's investigation is understood to include the claims about the June 19, 2020 birthday party for Johnson.

AFP

Russia: US troop ‘escalating tensions’

Moscow, Russia - Moscow on Tuesday accused the United States of ratcheting up tensions over Ukraine after Washington put several thousand troops on alert for possible deployment to boost NATO.

The West is accusing Russia, which has massed 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border, of preparing a potential invasion of its pro-Western neighbour.

The troop build-up has sparked the biggest crisis in East-West ties since the Cold War, with US President Joe Biden holding a long call with European leaders on Monday.

Biden said there was 'total unanimity' on how to deal with Russia, as the Pentagon said 8,500 US troops were being put on standby and NATO said it was sending ships and jets to bolster eastern Europe's defences.

In Moscow, President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said these actions were only adding to an already tense atmosphere.

"The United States is escalating tensions," he told reporters. "We are watching these US actions with great concern."

Russia denies it has any plans to invade Ukraine, where Russia already seized the peninsula of Crimea in 2014 and backs separatist forces in two breakaway regions. Moscow has instead accused the West of increasing tensions with deployments and support for Ukraine, a former So-



Airmen from the 60th Aerial Port Squadron loading cargo on to a 757 at Travis Air Force Base, California on Saturday (AFP)

viet republic.

It has put forward a list of security demands including for a guarantee that Ukraine never be allowed to join NATO and that alliance forces pull back in Eastern European countries that joined after the Cold War.

The United States and NATO have rejected the demands and told Russia to withdraw from Ukraine's borders, warning that an attack will trigger damaging economic sanctions, as well as a beefed-up NATO presence in eastern Europe. A series of talks in various European cities this

month have failed to ease tensions, though US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed at a meeting in Geneva on Friday to keep talking.

Divisions in the West

The United States has promised to provide written answers to Moscow's demands this week, but has rejected calls for a ban on possible NATO expansion as a non-starter. The crisis has laid bare divisions in the West, with some European Union members appearing less willing to take se-

vere action against Russia, which supplies about 40 per cent of the bloc's natural gas supplies.

The new government in EU economic powerhouse Germany in particular has faced criticism from Kyiv over its refusal to send defensive weapons to Ukraine, as well as hesitating over one of the harshest economic sanctions under discussion - cutting Moscow from the global SWIFT payments system.

Biden held a one-hour-and-20-minute video conference with allied leaders from Europe and NATO on Monday, telling

reporters afterwards: "I had a very, very, very good meeting - total unanimity with all the European leaders."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's office also said there was unity 'in the face of growing Russian hostility', while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called for Russia 'to undertake visible de-escalation'.

There were hopes for some easing tensions after the French government announced that Russian and Ukrainian officials would meet, along with French and German counterparts, in

Paris on Wednesday to try to find a way out of the impasse.

President Emmanuel Macron 'thinks there is a space for diplomacy, a path to de-escalation', an aide said.

Both the aide and Kremlin spokesman Peskov said Macron would speak to Putin soon.

In Kyiv, the families of US, British and Australian diplomats had been ordered to leave, though the EU and Ukrainian government said any withdrawal of foreign embassy personnel was premature. The Kremlin has accused NATO countries of 'hysteria' over the crisis. It also claimed this week that Ukrainian troops fighting Russian-backed separatists in the east of the country could launch an offensive, prompting President Volodymyr Zelensky's office to say that Ukraine will not 'succumb to provocations'.

The United States has warned that Moscow could manufacture a 'false flag' incident in Ukraine to be able to then frame an invasion as a justified response.

The US has stepped up security assistance to Ukraine, with Blinken on a visit to Kyiv last week confirming another US\$200mn in aid.

A shipment arrived on Saturday and another batch was due later on Tuesday which the US embassy in Kyiv said would include 'equipment and munitions to bolster the defensive capacity of the Ukrainian Armed forces'.

AFP

7 migrants die crossing to Italy in icy weather

Rome, Italy - Seven migrants have died while attempting the perilous Mediterranean crossing from Libya in a boat carrying 280 people in cold weather, the mayor of Italy's Lampedusa island told AFP on Tuesday.

Hundreds of people have made the often-deadly journey this year, despite winter weather that once deterred migrants from attempting the crossing. "Three people died during the crossing, another four suffering severe hypothermia died after they were intercepted by the coast guard and were being transferred to the island," mayor Toto Martello said.

The Mediterranean Hope migration project said on Twitter that the 280 migrants hailed originally from Bangladesh, Egypt, Mali and Sudan, and 'almost all of them were in a severe state of hypothermia'. The seven dead were Bangladeshi, according to Italian media reports.

"The shocking thing is there continues to be a deafening silence from the Italian government and Europe," Martello said.

After undergoing coronavirus tests, the survivors were split between the health centre and the heavily overcrowded reception centre on the tiny island, which lies closer to Africa than Italy.

AFP



People drive on a street in Ataq city, the capital of the province of Shabwa, from where UAE-trained troops drove the rebels out (AFP)

Yemen rebels lose key district after missile attack on UAE

Aden, Yemen - Yemen's Huthi rebels were driven out of a key district by the United Arab Emirates-trained Giants Brigade, the militia said on Tuesday, a day after the insurgents' latest missile attack on Abu Dhabi.

The Iran-backed Huthis lost Harib district south of Marib, the strategically vital northern city they have been fighting to topple for months.

The Giants Brigade said 'hundreds were killed and wounded on both sides' in battles that lasted for more than two weeks and also secured the neighbouring governorate of Shabwa. There was no immediate comment from the Huthis.

"We thank the Arab coalition for their support for our operations in Shabwa, which were crowned with complete success," a Giants Brigade statement said.

The clashes are part of a major escalation in the seven-year war after the Huthis, launched a deadly

drone-and-missile attack on the UAE last week.

The Saudi-led pro-government coalition that includes the UAE hit back with a volley of air strikes, one of which killed at least three children and plunged Yemen into a four-day internet outage.

Internet services were restored early on Tuesday, a web monitor and AFP correspondents said.

On Monday, the rebels renewed their attack on Abu Dhabi as two ballistic missiles were intercepted over the city, scattering debris.

US forces based at the capital's Al Dhafra air base fired Patriot missiles to help repel the attack, while some of them also scrambled to bunkers, US officials said.

The UAE, which pulled most of its troops out of Yemen in 2019 but maintains support for pro-government forces, warned of a 'thorough and comprehensive response' to the latest barrage.

AFP

Ghebreyesus guaranteed second term as WHO chief

Geneva, Switzerland - World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is all but guaranteed a second term after a procedural vote on Tuesday made him the sole nominee ahead of the election in May.

The first African leader of the UN health agency said he was 'very grateful for the renewed support', after the WHO's executive board held a secret-ballot vote approving his nomination as the only candidate for the post.

Tedros, one of the most recognisable figures of the global battle against COVID-19, acknowledged that his first five-year term had been 'challenging and difficult', and said it was a 'great honour' to be given the opportunity to continue the battle.

The former Ethiopian minister



Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

of health and foreign affairs is thus expected to be a shoo-in for re-poll when all 194 WHO member states cast their ballots for the next director-general in May.

Since COVID-19 burst onto the global stage more than two years ago, the 56-year-old malaria specialist has received

much praise for the way he has steered the WHO through the crisis. African countries in particular have been pleased at the attention paid to the continent and at his relentless campaign for poorer nations to get their fair share of COVID vaccines.

Ethiopia criticism

The main source of opposition meanwhile has come from Tedros's own country.

Ethiopia's government has slammed his comments about the humanitarian situation in his home region of Tigray, in the grip of a 14-month conflict.

After Tedros earlier this month described the conditions there as 'hell' and accused the government of preventing medicines and other life-saving aid

from reaching desperate locals, Addis Ababa demanded he be investigated for 'misconduct and violation of his professional and legal responsibility'.

Ethiopia does not, however, appear to have much support in its criticism.

"He has indeed expressed himself forcefully, but what he is saying corresponds to facts observed by the heads of all the humanitarian agencies," a Western diplomatic source told AFP on the condition of anonymity.

"There was no misconduct."

Addis Ababa blocked the African Union from unanimously backing Tedros's nomination, but several African countries, including Kenya and Rwanda, figure among the 28 mainly European nations that officially put his

name forward.

'Zero tolerance' for abuse

The United States is also now largely supportive of the WHO chief. That marks a major about-face from the start of the pandemic, when former president Donald Trump's administration began pulling the United States out of the WHO, accusing it of being Beijing's puppet and helping cover up the initial outbreak.

Trump's successor Joe Biden halted the withdrawal, and Washington has voiced stronger support for Tedros as he has taken a sterner tone with China, demanding greater transparency around the origins of the outbreak.

AFP

Pro-junta rally in Burkina Faso as UN condemns coup

Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso - Supporters of Burkina Faso's new ruling junta were set to rally on Tuesday as France and the UN condemned the West African country's latest coup.

Officers detained President Roch Marc Christian Kabore in the volatile state on Monday amid deepening anger at his handling of an insurgency.

The country now lies in the hands of the Patriotic Movement for Preservation and Restoration (MPSR), the name of a junta led by Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba.

Dozens of people gathered at Nation Square in the heart of the capital Ouagadougou on Tuesday ahead of a rally aimed at showcasing support for the junta.

"Our tears are now going to stop. We ask the military, in whom we have trust, to work together to restore peace in Burkina Faso," said one man, Amado Zoungrana.

On Monday night, a state-



Demonstrators hold a picture of Lieutenant Colonel Damiba to show support to the military the leader in Ouagadougou on Tuesday (AFP)

ment signed by Damiba announced the suspension of the constitution, the dissolution of the government and parliament and the closure of the country's borders from midnight.

The MPSR would re-establish 'constitutional order' within a 'reasonable time', the statement said, adding that a nationwide 9:00 pm to 5:00 am curfew would be enforced.

Despite the latest turmoil, life in Ouagadougou seemed to continue as normal on Tuesday.

The city's main market, shops and petrol stations were open, and there was no particular military presence in the centre, an AFP journalist saw.

Condemnation

West Africa has been rattled by three military coups in less than

18 months, beginning with Mali in August 2020 and Guinea in September 2021.

It is the latest bout of political turmoil to strike Burkina Faso, which has had little stability since gaining independence from France in 1960.

French President Emmanuel Macron condemned a 'military coup' on Tuesday, while the UN's human rights office said it 'deeply deplores the military takeover of power'.

"We call on the military to immediately release President Roch Marc Christian Kabore and other high-level officials who have been detained," the office's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani, told reporters in Geneva. "We urge a swift return to constitutional order."

France has committed thousands of troops to shoring up its former colonies Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali - three of the world's most impoverished countries - in the face of a brutal offensive.

On Monday, West African states in the ECOWAS bloc described the volatility as a 'coup attempt' and held 'soldiers responsible for (Kabore's) physical well-being'.

The national TV channel RTB late on Monday published on social media a handwritten letter that it said was written by Kabore, purportedly saying that he was stepping down 'in the higher interests of the nation'.

The letter could not be independently verified.

The whereabouts of Prime Minister Lassina Zerbo and other senior officials are also unknown.

The junta said 'the operations (to overthrow Kabore) unfolded without bloodshed and without any physical violence towards the persons arrested, who are being held in a secure place with respect for their dignity'.

Kabore's downfall came amid deepening anger at the government's failure to stem Burkina Faso's security crisis.

AFP

UK FOODBANKS



A volunteer uses a trolley to take food products to a car before heading out on a delivery from the Trussell Trust's Norwood and Brixton Foodbank located in St Margaret's the Queen Church in Brixton south London - AFP

FOOD CRUNCH

Britons struggling with rising costs now need to choose between 'heating or eating'

Nestled amid superstores at a retail park, the Colchester Foodbank in eastern England last year gave out a total of 165 tonnes of food -- enough to feed 17,000 people. But that could be surpassed this year, as British annual inflation hits a 30-year high of 5.4 percent in December, as real wages fall, and food and energy costs rise.

"We think we're likely to feed 20,000 people in 2022," said foodbank manager Mike Beckett. "If there is a slowdown, and things get worse, it might be as many as 25,000 people. That is certainly a bit of a nightmare. Our worst case scenario is maybe 30,000 people."

About 95 percent of the produce at the foodbank, run by the Trussell Trust charity, comes from members of the public donating at collection points at local supermarkets. But the current economic climate has forced many who wouldn't normally need food parcels to seek assistance.

"I normally put something in the foodbank trolley but now it's my turn to have some help," said Heidi, 45, who said she was struggling with price rises on just everything.

"I'm struggling big time, basically. Bills have got really high, that's why I'm here," she said. Like many in Britain, this winter she will have to make the tough choice between 'heating or eating'.

"My electricity is going up. I'm putting in probably about £80 (US\$110) a month now, as opposed to 40 or 50 last year," she said.

Fundamentally flawed

The Trust says the number of people receiving three days worth of emergency food from its centres across Britain has risen from some 26,000 in 2009 to over 2.5 million in 2021.

British food writer and anti-poverty campaigner Jack Monroe noted after the latest inflation rise this week that the actual cost of many food sta-



About 95 per cent of the produce at the Colchester Foodbank comes from members of the public donating at collection points at local supermarkets - AFP

Everyone should put something in (at collection points). Because you never know when you're going to be in this situation

HEIDI

ples has gone up by much more.

The cheapest pasta at her local supermarket a year ago cost £0.29 for 500g while today it is £0.70 - a hike of 141 percent. The cheapest rice was £0.45 for 1kg but now it costs £1.00 for 500g.

"That's a 344 percent price increase as it hits the poorest and most vulnerable households," she wrote in a viral Twitter thread read by millions. "The system by which we measure the impact of inflation is fundamentally flawed - it completely ignores the reality and the real price rises for people on minimum wages, zero hour contracts, food bank clients, and millions more."

Manager Beckett asserts, "However you measure, inflation doesn't really account for the cheap food going up, and it's going up by hundreds of per cent."

Low-income families are under extra pressure after the government returned welfare benefit payments to pre-pandemic levels, having increased them temporarily during lockdowns.

Beckett says that in

2020 - a bumper year - 42 per cent of the food bank's clients were children.

"People come and report that it's taken them 20 minutes or an hour in their car to get the courage to come in," he said. "They didn't think they'd ever need to, and they don't want to use the foodbank, but they don't have a choice because they love their kids. The question is, when things are cold, people have to choose between eating or heating."

Chronic health problems

In a report published this month, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation noted, 'for children, severe food insecurity has been linked to chronic health conditions like asthma and depression'. A poor diet will impede a child's physical, cognitive and emotional development. And adults in food-insecure households have higher rate of developing chronic diseases such as arthritis, asthma, diabetes, and mental health issues, said the report on UK poverty in 2022.

The anti-poverty charity noted, 'key design features of the social security system that directly lead to higher food insecurity and have contributed to the rise in food bank use'.

The cost of living in Britain is forecast to soar even higher in April owing to a tax hike and further planned increases of around 50 per cent to domestic energy bills. More painful tax increases are expected to foot the vast bill for COVID-19. As a result, even more households across Britain will face fuel poverty, spending more than 10 per cent of their total income on fuel.

"There's a lot of people in this situation who have never been in it before," says foodbank client Heidi. "Everyone should put something in (at collection points). Because you never know when you're going to be in this situation. I certainly didn't think I'd be in it."

AFP

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Nadal 'destroyed physically' by epic Shapovalov win to reach semis

Melbourne, Australia - An ailing Rafael Nadal said he was 'destroyed physically' by his gritty five-set quarter-final win over Denis Shapovalov at the Australian Open on Tuesday.

But the Spanish great still managed to move to within two matches of a record 21st Grand Slam title with an incredible display of guts and resilience against the talented 22-year-old.

The sixth seed edged the Canadian 14th seed 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 3-6, 6-3 in 4hr 8min of thrilling action on Rod Laver Arena.

"I was honestly destroyed physically. But my serve worked well, and for me, every game that I was winning with my serve was

top.

Nadal said he was not consumed by going after the record.

"For me, the fact that we are equal at 20, it's just the only thing that says we share an amazing part of the history of our sport, and for me it's a real honour to be part of it," he said.

"Let's enjoy the situation that we did, every one of us, we did very special things in our sport.

"Let's enjoy that. Doesn't matter the other thing."

Nadal, the 2009 Australian Open champion, had his 2021 season wrecked by a chronic foot injury followed by a bout of Covid-19 in December.

He raced into a two-set lead

I was honestly destroyed physically. But my serve worked well, and for me, every game that I was winning with my serve was a victory

RAFAEL NADAL

a victory," said Nadal, who will have two days to recuperate before Friday's semi-finals.

"Being in semi-finals means a lot to me and to have a victory against a great player after all the things that I went through, so it's an amazing news. I'm super happy."

It will be Nadal's seventh semi-final in Melbourne where he will meet Italian seventh seed Matteo Berrettini who survived a rollercoaster five-setter of his own to overcome Gael Monfils of France 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-2.

Nadal is tied with great rivals Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer on 20 Grand Slams, but with Djokovic deported and Federer injured, the opportunity is there for him to go clear at the

but was visibly hampered by stomach issues before eventually coming through after a spirited fightback from Shapovalov peppered with winners to all parts of the court.

"I started to feel not well in my stomach. They checked everything was all right with my body," said Nadal, who received medical attention in the fourth set. "I took some tablets to try and improve my stomach."

Nadal looked on course for a routine straight sets win before Shapovalov hit back to take the quarter-final into a thrilling deciding-set climax.

The Spaniard broke in Shapovalov's opening service game and held on to take the victory.

AFP



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning the men's singles quarter-final match against Canada's Denis Shapovalov on day nine of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 25, 2022 (AFP)



Australia's Ashleigh Barty celebrates after beating Jessica Pegula of the US during their women's singles quarter-final match (AFP)

Barty on road to another Slam title

Melbourne, Australia - Ashleigh Barty said Tuesday she was having fun 'problem-solving' on court after accelerating her march towards a maiden Australian Open title on Tuesday with a straight-sets masterclass against Jessica Pegula.

The single-minded world number one dismantled the 21st-seeded American 6-2, 6-0 in 63 minutes on Rod Laver Arena to power into the last four at Melbourne Park for only the second time.

She will face the unseeded Madison Keys for a place in Saturday's final after the American, ranked 51, upset French Open champion and fourth seed Barbora Krejickova 6-3, 6-2.

Keys is into her fifth Grand Slam semi-final and her first in Melbourne since 2015.

But she faces a huge task against the top seed who is edging closer to becoming the first Australian woman to win her home Grand Slam since Chris O'Neill in 1978. Barty is renowned as one of the best tacticians in the game and figuring out what to do in tough moments is a key part of her game.

"To be honest I'm having fun trying to problem solve out on the court, and each and every opponent has been different, each and every opponent has presented me with a different challenge and forced me to use another tool in my toolbox," she said.

AFP



Berrettini creates history, becomes first Italian man to reach semi-finals of Australian Open

Melbourne, Australia - Matteo Berrettini created tennis history by reaching the semi-finals of the Australian Open with a rollercoaster five-set victory over Gael Monfils on Tuesday.

The seventh seed overcame the French 17th seed in their quarter-final 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 3-6, 6-2 to become the first Italian man to reach the last four of the Australian Open.

Berrettini, a Wimbledon finalist last year, will now face 20-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal on Friday for a place in Sunday's final.

"It feels unbelievable (to be the first Italian), hopefully there will be a second one tomorrow with Jannik Sinner," Berrettini said of his compatriot, who faces Stefanos Tsitsipas in a quarter-final on Wednesday.

"I was really happy with myself, it was a great fight with Gael, a great match, a lot of emotions.

"I thought I had him in the third set but then I found myself in the fifth. I really fought hard



Matteo Berrettini hits a shot against France's Gael Monfils during their men's singles quarter-final match (AFP)

I was really happy with myself, it was a great fight with Gael, a great match, a lot of emotions.

MATTEO BERRETTINI

Adelaide tournament and had not dropped a set in his previous four matches, came up just short again in his first quarter-final appearance in Melbourne since 2016 when he lost in four sets to Canada's Milos Raonic.

Monfils credits his recent resurgence to the stabilising influence of his new wife, women's world number 17 Elina Svitolina. The tennis "power couple" tied the knot in Geneva in July just before the Tokyo Olympics.

AFP

and I put everything into the court."

In a grinding 3hr 49min night match on Rod Laver Arena, 25-year-old Berrettini grabbed a double break to surge clear in the fifth set after Monfils had roared back from two sets down.

It was Berrettini's sixth win in seven career five-set battles.

There were many drawn-out, attritional games, including a

monumental 20-minute Berrettini service hold game of 10 deuces to give him the edge in the 62-minute second set.

It means the 35-year-old Monfils, who won the warm-up



SHARED POSITIVE OUTLOOK TO POWER INDIA-OMAN RELATIONSHIP

Ambassador's message on the occasion of Republic Day of India

On the proud occasion of the 73rd Republic Day of India, I extend my warm greetings and heartiest felicitations to all members of the distinguished Indian community living in the Sultanate of Oman. I also take this opportunity to extend, on behalf of the Government and people of India, best wishes for peace, progress and prosperity to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik and the friendly people of Oman.

Since my arrival in Oman in October 2021, I have experienced extraordinary warmth and goodwill towards India in all my interactions. I had the honour to present my credentials to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik quite early after my arrival and convey greetings on behalf of Hon'ble President and Hon'ble Prime Minister of India. In all my subsequent interactions with ministers and senior government officials, not to mention the ever smiling and gentle people of Oman, I have sensed a genuine desire to further enhance the strong edifice of India-Oman relations.

India and Oman are natural partners, joined by the blue waters of the Arabian sea, sharing millennia old contacts and unique people-to-

His Majesty the Sultan greets President of India

Muscat- His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to President Ram Nath Kovind of the Republic of India on his country's Republic Day. In the cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Kovind. His Majesty also wished the people of India further progress and prosperity.

ONA

India and Oman are natural partners, joined by the blue waters of the Arabian sea, sharing millennia old contacts and unique people-to-people bonds of trust and friendship

H E AMIT NARANG

people bonds of trust and friendship. The relationship has evolved into a multifaceted strategic partnership under the wise leadership of both the countries. Robust defence and security cooperation and growing economic ties have added new pillars to the relationship. Given the triple advantages of proximity, connectivity and familiarity, there exists great potential for further enhancing bilateral trade and deepening investment co-

operation for mutual benefit.

Even as the world continues to suffer the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the strong momentum of cooperation between both the countries remains buoyant. India remained a reliable supplier of essential commodities to Oman during the past year, while Oman became the first country in the region to approve made-in-India COVID-19 vaccine - COVAXIN, in a sign of close cooper-

ation between both the countries during COVID-19.

India accords high priority to its strategic partnership with Oman and remains committed to further increasing cooperation in existing as well as new areas. Government of Oman's push towards economic diversification under its 'Vision 2040' provides an excellent platform for deepening India-Oman ties and taking them to the next level. As Oman seeks to realise its 'Vision 2040' and India marches ahead on the path towards all-round growth and development, the opportunities for enhanced cooperation are abundant.

I firmly believe that India will be a reliable and trusted partner of Sultanate of Oman to realise the objectives of Oman 'Vision 2040'. New ideas, new technology, youthful energy and a shared positive outlook towards future will power the India-Oman relationship into the future. The Embassy of India looks forward to working closely with the Government and people of Oman as well as the vibrant Indian diaspora towards this objective.

H E AMIT NARANG
Ambassador of India to
the Sultanate of Oman



HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY

Greetings to the government & people of India
on the occasion of the 73rd Republic Day



muscatpharmacy.om



as India's commitment to maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean region through SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) bode well in terms of exploring more collaborative endeavors in the coming times.

Dr. Jaishankar said that the Indian Ocean community needs to work together to address pressing challenges emanating from post-COVID economic recovery. He said, "A world of more decentralized globalization obviously offers greater opportunities to many more nations. These would be accentuated by a stronger desire to foster localization and promote regionalism. It is important that we do not perpetuate or even repeat some of the mistakes of the pre-Covid era. Assuming unsustainable levels of debt in pursuit of apparently attractive projects was one concern. The economic downturn that accompanied the pandemic has heightened this significantly. The ongoing debate on responsible and viable connectivity is another. When plans and projects lack transparency, market viability, consultation or local participation, their consequences are unlikely to be beneficial."

In the end Dr. Jaishankar requested all the regional countries to work together and emphasized, "as we seek to recover from the Covid pandemic, as we assess the implications of the Afghanistan situation and as we come to terms with rebalancing, multipolarity and major power competition, it is only natural that we will look more amongst ourselves for solutions."

(Excerpts from Keynote address by External Affairs Minister at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference 2021, December 04, 2021)

A world of greater plurilateralism

External Affairs Minister of India, Dr. S. Jaishankar gave a key note address at the 5th Indian Ocean Conference which was held in UAE on December 4-5 2021. The conference was organised by India Foundation, and was also attended by H E Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood al Busaidi, Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman.

In his address, Dr. Jaishankar highlighted the challenges and cooperation opportunities in the Indian Ocean region in the wake of global re-balancing and COVID pandemic. Dr. Jaishankar said, "Whether it is the Indo-Pacific, Afghanistan or the Gulf, we are seeing more players, greater localization and arrangements of pragmatism. In fact, we are now entering a world of greater plurilateralism, one that recognizes

the shortcomings of multilateralism, the limits of bilateralism and the untenability of unilateralism from whichever quarter."

He said, the centrality of Indian Ocean to the global economy will ensure responsiveness to the ongoing changes, which may manifest as more activities and stronger cooperation among resident players. On the impact of COVID pandemic on the re-

gion, Dr. Jaishankar stated that, "it has also thoroughly exposed all its fault-lines and shortcomings. In economic terms, the dangers of over-centralized globalization are starkly apparent. The answer lies in both more reliable and resilient supply-chains as well as in greater trust and transparency. In political terms, the absence of vaccine equity and the reluctance to co-

operatively address a challenge of such magnitude spoke for itself. International organizations failed the world, whether in terms of establishing the origins of the problem or in leading the response to it."

Dr. Jaishankar added that specific countries stepped forward in different ways to mitigate the crisis including India. India did its fair share through the "supply of

medicines, vaccines, and oxygen. Or in a willingness to take care of expatriate population in times of difficulty." He also emphasized that the world needs to "expeditiously normalize travel through certification recognition so that livelihoods are restored". Dr. Jaishankar mentioned that India has started to approach the Gulf, ASEAN and Central Asia as extended neighbourhoods as well



Indian Social Club Oman

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Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav: India@75



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the Padyatra (Freedom March) from Sabarmati Ashram, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, on March 12, 2021 and inaugurated the curtain-raiser activities of the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (India@75).



A dance performance from the inaugural event

An initiative of the Government of India to commemorate the 75th year of the country's Independence, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav is an embodiment of all that is progressive about the nation's socio-cultural, political and economic identity.

A country is not merely a geography or group of people. It is a civilisational heritage. Modern India, drawing from the civilisational ethos of ancient Bharat-varsh, stands out among the comity of nations by virtue of its intellectual achievements, philosophical discourses and universalism in thought and action.

The past can be a good guide for an innovative future. Coming out of the colonial yoke, India enabled a large number of countries across Asia, Africa and elsewhere to follow suit and in turn, acquired the leadership through non-alignment to become the voice of the developing world. India's involvement in the United Nations (UN), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/ World Trade Organization (WTO) and a plethora of international organisations engineered its adherence to multilateralism which is also implicit in the psyche of Indians at a fundamental level.

It was at a time when India was struggling to survive hunger, poverty and under development. Yet it became a beacon of hope and trust for the world. India is an example of unity in diversity and has emerged as an indispensable strategic actor which needs to be factored into all global calculations.

India@75 is a force to reckon with. With 1.3 billion voices, it can easily overcome the challenges that stare at her and the world. India's development model, which has evolved with time, has been of great assistance to more than 160 countries across the world through various capacity-building programmes and efforts in the spirit of "Share and Care".

It has helped India to create a tremendous constituency of goodwill across continents. Even during the ensuring Covid-19 pandemic, India was one country which went way beyond her call of duty to help more than 150 countries with medicines and other assistance, and has provided millions of doses of vaccines to over 90 countries. 'Vaccine Maitri' and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' became the mantra during this crisis. It was no wonder that when India faced the second wave off COVID-19, many friends extended their assistance. Global solidarity for confronting global challenges is what India practices and prescribes. India, with its continental size, is a kaleidoscope of culture, tradition, languages, art, music,

films, food and festivities. These would be an integral part of the Mahotsav (mega event) until August 2023 and beyond.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiative to seek global support for the International Day of Yoga on June 21 at the UN in 2014 was an astounding and unprecedented success. It is gaining greater acceptability across the world. It was also a stellar achievement of Indian diplomacy. Other major initiatives like International Solar Alliance and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) have earned India the right to be at the forefront of fight climate change.

As India aims to be the third-largest economy, led by talented youth into the Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven Industrial Revolution 4.0, it has embarked on a journey to become 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) and an integral part of the global value and supply chains with 'Vocal for Local' facilitating a paradigm shift in the post-Covid era. PM Modi has enthused the nation, saying that, "when an Indian takes one step forward, the nation sprints by 1.3 bn [billion] steps". In the international domain, India is taking the lead as it chairs the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in 2021 and G20 in 2023, and aspires for its rightful place at the high table of UNSC (United Nations Security Council) as it promotes peace and development across the world through the dynamic five 'S' vision for foreign policy, namely Samman (respect), Samvaad (dialogue), Sahyog (cooperation), Shanti (peace) and Samridhi (global prosperity).

PM Modi, while speaking at the UN, said, "India is a nation that has given Buddha [in a reference to Lord Gautama Buddha] and not yuddh [war]. That is why we have an abiding commitment against terrorism. Terrorism goes against the founding principle of the United Nations, and for the sake of humanity, it is crucial that the world unites against it. A divided world is in nobody's interest." We can rightly be proud of our achievements in the last 75 years, although a lot many challenges remain. But to rise to the dreams of our freedom fighters for a resurgent, resilient robust and reliant India, we have to be innovative across the spectrum, while dedicating ourselves to the service of the nation.

By Ambassador Anil Trigunayat

He is India's former ambassador to Jordan, Libya and Malta. He takes keen interest in the middle East and Africa, and Russia. He is a Distinguished Fellow of Vivekananda International Foundation and the president of Millennial India International Chamber of Commerce Industry & Agriculture

GREETINGS

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Pandemic & Beyond: India’s soaring ties with Gulf

Ties between India and the Gulf countries have strengthened during the pandemic period and set to scale new frontiers as the two sides proactively collaborate in the post-pandemic global economic recovery process

True friendship, as an Arab proverb says, is tested in times of adversity. The deepening of India’s mulch-faceted partnership with Gulf countries during the Covid-19 period exemplifies this spirit of solidarity in times of crisis. Right from the time the Coronavirus pandemic struck the region and the world, over a year ago, India emerged as the first provider of humanitarian assistance to friendly Gulf countries and promptly provided emergency medical supplies to several countries in the region. India sent medical teams to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and the UAE to help them address the challenges of Covid-19. India and the Gulf countries also forged cooperation in Covid research and testing.

Vaccine Maitri: Caring & Sharing

The same spirit of caring and sharing was evident in the supply of vaccines from India to Gulf countries under the “Vaccine Maitri” programme. Three million doses of Made-in-India vaccines were provided to Saudi Arabia and 2,00,000 doses were sent to Kuwait and the UAE each. India gifted 1,00,000 doses of the anti-Covid vaccine each to Oman and Bahrain.

The supply of vaccines to Gulf countries on this scale reflects India’s deep sense of universal humanitarian desire to fight the pandemic together. In a statement at the Rajya Sabha on the “Vaccine Maitri” Initiative” on March 17, 2021, External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar said, “Quite appropriately, Vaccine Maitri began in the immediate neighbourhood, starting with the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, as also Mauritius and Seychelles. The extended neighbourhood followed thereafter, especially the Gulf... To date, we have supplied ‘Made in India’ vaccines to 72 nations across geographies.”

Diplomatic Outreach

The pandemic period saw sustained diplomatic outreach between India and the energy-rich Gulf countries. Defying constraints imposed by the pandemic, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar held telephonic conversations with their counterparts from nearly all Gulf countries.

When the pandemic situation eased slightly, Dr. Jaishankar visited the UAE, Bahrain and Qatar, and Minister of State for External Affairs, V Muralleedharan traveled to the UAE and Oman. Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan visited Kuwait in October 2020 to offer condolences to the Kuwaiti leadership on the sad demise of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the former Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Caring for Diaspora

What stood out during this difficult period was the exceptional compassion and care shown to the Indian community by the Gulf countries. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, comprising Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman, collectively host around 8.5 million Indians, forming the largest expatriate community in the region. Indians are highly valued and appreciated in the Gulf countries. Leaders and ministers of the GCC countries have often



showed praise for Indians and highlighted their contributions to their respective countries’ economic growth and development. Most Indian professionals, who returned to India last year due to Covid-related difficulties have gone back to their adopted home in the Gulf countries. The demand for Indian migrants in the region is expected to revive significantly as the pandemic eases. Qatar is looking to employ 15,000 workers/managers in construction and hospitality connected to the FIFA World Cup, which it will be hosting in 2022. The Indian government is also in the process of aligning its e-migrate platform with GCC countries to spur the return of Indian workers to these countries. In this regard, pilot projects have already been launched with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The government is already negotiating for “prior recognition of skills” with CC countries that will enable quicker employment and deployment of Indians.

Energy Matrix

Energy security remains a key driver of India’s Look and Act West Policy that is designed to strategically engage and expand the collaborative matrix with the Middle East, especially the CC countries. Increasingly, energy partnership between India and the Gulf countries is acquiring a strategic orientation with Saudi Arabia and the UAE planning to partner with India in the next phase of the Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) programme. During Prime Minister Modi’s historic visit to the UAE, a consortium of Indian oil companies was awarded a 10 per cent interest in Abu Dhabi’s offshore Lower Zakum concession. Moving beyond hydrocarbons, India is also looking to deepen a new partnership with the Gulf region

in renewables. Many countries in the region have backed the India-led International Solar Alliance. In October 2020, Indian engineering conglomerate Larsen & Toubro unveiled its portfolio of power and water projects in the GCC region, which also included its first large-scale renewable energy project. Besides economic and energy ties, India and the Gulf countries are poised to transform their defence and strategic relations.

New Horizons

While energy security remains at the heart of the blossoming India-GCC partnership, the relationship is diversifying into new areas, including cutting-edge technology. In the backdrop of global economic churning, the two sides are aiming to forge an “ahead of the curve” partnership with the energy-rich West Asia region focused on Industrial Revolution 4.0, technology collaboration, R&D and high capital-intensive projects. This new transformed partnership between India and the Gulf will focus on new emerging technologies, especially ICT, consultancy, fin-tech, logistics, edu-tech and health-tech.

The Road Ahead

India’s multi-dimensional ties with the Gulf region, supported by centuries-old historical and cultural connections, found a new energy and resilience during the pandemic period. Sustained diplomatic outreach, accompanied by growing trade and investment, continued apace, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading India’s diplomatic outreach from the front.

Prime Minister Modi’s visit to nearly all Gulf countries over the last seven years have decisively transformed this mutually-empowering partnership and im-



bued it with a strategic vision. Looking ahead, India-Gulf ties are set to scale new frontiers as India seeks to collaborate across

the spectrum with all countries in the region for the post-pandemic global economic recovery process, and to stimulate the

resurgence of each others economy.

As India pursues its plans of becoming a USD five-trillion

economy, Aatmanirbhar Bharat, with its emphasis on promoting Make in India-Make for World mission, offers exciting opportunities of joint ventures in infrastructure and manufacturing sectors. Partnering in future-looking innovation and start-ups is set to keep India-Gulf ties humming with new ideas and entrepreneurial energy. And at this rate, India-Gulf ties can only move to a higher trajectory.

By Manish Chand
(Manish Chand is Editor-in-Chief of India and the World magazine and India Writes Network, a portal focused on global affairs.)

Together for environmentally conscious lifestyle

National Statement by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at COP26 Summit in Glasgow

Friends,

When I first came to Paris for the Climate Summit, it was not my intention to add one promise to the many promises being made in the world. I came with a concern, for the whole of humanity. I came as a representative of a culture that gave the message of 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' means that everyone should be happy.

And so, for me the event in Paris was not a summit, it was a sentiment, a commitment. And India was not making those promises to the world, but those promises, 125 crore Indians, were making to themselves.

And I am happy that a developing country like India, which is working to lift crores of people out of poverty, which is working day and night on the Ease of Living for crores of people, despite having 17 per cent of the world's population today, whose responsibility in emissions has been only 5 per cent, still India has left no stone unturned to show that it has fulfilled its obligation.

Today the whole world believes that India is the only big economy, which has delivered in letter and spirit on the Paris Commitment. We are making every effort with determination, working hard, and showing results.

Friends,

Today, when I have come among you, I have also brought India's track record. My words are not just words, they are cheers of bright future for the future generations.



Today India is at number four in the world in installed renewable energy capacity. India's non-fossil fuel energy has increased by more than 25 per cent in the last seven years. And now it has reached 40 per cent of our energy mix.

Passengers numbering more than the entire population of the world, travel by Indian Railways every year. This huge railway system has set itself a target of making itself 'Net Zero' by 2030. This initiative alone will lead to a reduction of 60 million tonnes of emissions annually. Similarly, our massive LED bulb campaign is reducing emissions by 40 million tonnes annually. Today, India is working fast on

Today India is moving forward on the subject of climate with great courage and great ambition. India also understands the suffering of all other developing countries

PM NARENDRA MODI

many such initiatives with a strong will.

Along with this, India has also given institutional solutions to cooperate with the world at the international level. As a revolutionary step in solar power, we initiated the International Solar Alliance.

We have created a coalition for disaster resilient infrastructure for climate adaptation. This

is a sensitive and vital initiative to save crores of lives.

I would like to draw your attention to one more important topic. Today the world is recognizing that lifestyle has a big role in climate change. I propose to you today a One-Word Movement.

This One-Word, in the context of climate, can become the basic foundation of One World.

and Energy.

These are topics where each of us has to make. Conscious choices everyday. These daily choices of billions of people around the world will take the fight against climate change, billions of steps forward every day.

And I consider it as a movement on every ground whether on economic grounds, on scientific grounds, on the basis of the experiences of the past century, it meets every criterion. This is the path of self-realization. This is the only way to benefit.

Friends,

In the midst of this global brainstorming on climate change, on behalf of India, I would like to present five nectar elements, Panchamrit, to deal with this challenge.

First- India will reach its non-fossil energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030. Second- India will meet 50 percent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030. Third- India will reduce the total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now onwards till 2030. Fourth- By 2030, India will reduce the carbon intensity of its economy by less than 45 per cent. And fifth- by the year 2070, India will achieve the target of Net Zero. These panchamrits will be an unprecedented contribution of India to climate action.

We all know this truth that the promises made till date regarding climate finance have proved to be hollow. While we all are raising our ambitions on climate

action, the world ambitions on climate finance cannot remain the same as they were at the time of the Paris Agreement.

Today, when India has resolved to move forward with a new commitment and a new energy, So in such times, the transfer of climate finance and low cost climate technologies becomes more important. India expects developed countries to provide climate finance of \$1 trillion at the earliest. Today it is necessary that as we track the progress made in climate mitigation, we should also track climate finance.

The proper justice would be that the countries which do not live up to their promises made on climate finance, must be pressured too.

Friends,

Today India is moving forward on the subject of climate with great courage and great ambition. India also understands the suffering of all other developing countries, shares them, and will continue to express their expectations.

For many developing countries, climate change is looming large over their existence. We have to take big steps today to save the world.

This is the need of the hour and this will also prove the relevance of this forum. I am confident that the decisions taken in Glasgow will save the future of our future generations, giving them the gift of a secure and prosperous life.



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HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY



Heal in India: Emergence of India as a hub of medical tourism

With its rich cultural heritage, myriad attractions, and picturesque landscapes, India is emerging as the most preferred destination for tourists from across the world. Expected to contribute a staggering \$512bn to India's GDP by 2029, the travel and tourism industry is an integral pillar of the Make in India programme and is emerging as one of the key drivers of growth among the services sectors.

Interestingly, India is visited not only for its tradition, enthralling beauty, and delightful diversity but also for its high-end healthcare ecosystem and world-class medical treatment. Over the years, India has become a premier and attractive destination for travellers from across the globe to attain best-in-class clinical treatment, recharge, and rejuvenate.

Medical Tourism (also known as Medical Value Travel, Health Tourism, or Wellness Tourism) is defined as the accelerating practice of travelling across international locales and territories to seek healthcare services. Healthcare services and offerings in India are primarily classified into three broad categories:

Medical Treatment: Treatment for curative purposes that include cardiac care, organ transplantation, orthopedics, neurosciences, oncology, and bariatrics.

Wellness and Rejuvenation: Offerings focused on rejuvenation or for aesthetic reasons such as cosmetic surgery, stress relief, spa treatments, etc.

Alternative Medicine: Treatment to seek AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) services

Across these categories, India is largely visited by medical visitors from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nigeria, Kenya and Iraq. Key medical tourism destinations within India include hospitals and diagnostic centres in Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities such as Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Chandigarh, Jaipur, etc. Naturally, several underlying factors are making India a popular medical tourism destination. These are as follows:

Infrastructure and Digital Enablement: Ranging from the problems of the eye, heart, and kidney to organ transplantation, orthopedics, and cancer, the Indian healthcare ecosystem is delivering world-class care and treatment at lower costs (almost 20% less for major surgical treatments as compared to those of developed countries equipped with internationally recognized facilities). Currently, India has around 37 Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited hospitals and 513 National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) accredited hospitals that provide care at par or above global quality standards and benchmarks. India is also home to some of the most renowned super-specialty hospitals and services that provide patients with the latest and most advanced treatment options using the latest technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Virtual Reality (VR), and Robotics for greater accuracy and holistic well-being.

Trained Manpower: India is not only the center of world-class amenities but is also home to



some of the most renowned and revered doctors in the world that are pioneers in their respective

areas of specialization and clinical expertise. With over 1.2 million Allopathic doctors, 0.17

million dental surgeons, 2 million nurses, and 0.8 million formally trained Ayurvedic doctors, the

country has the largest pool of doctors and paramedical staff in South Asia. Most of the doctors in the nation have trained and worked at some of the most prestigious medical institutions in the US, UK, and other developed nations, thus making them highly competent and capable in providing care to patients coming from the far corners of the globe.

Alternative Medicine and Therapeutic Treatments: India has positioned itself as the focal point of AYUSH, naturopathy, Vedanta, and meditation techniques, curated and restored from the most ancient of sciences and arts. From yoga ashrams to spas and wellness centers offering holistic therapies, India offers a multitude of sites and locations to retreat, recharge, and rejuvenate. The strong branding of AYUSH by the Government is drawing patients to India from across the world. Several players like Apollo and the Manipal Group

are setting up wellness centers equipped with traditional healthcare remedies.

Quality of Care: Besides being the most affordable and accessible destination to seek clinical care and wellness treatment, India has emerged as the forerunner in providing care, which is inclusive, personal, and compassionate, truly living by "Athithi Devo Bhava" (Guest is akin to God). Medical personnel in India strive to maintain the highest standards by putting the patients' needs and interests ahead of everything and by listening to them empathetically and compassionately.

To poise and establish India as the hub of medical tourism, the Government of India has been taking crucial steps and interventions to reduce the time of waiting and to ensure hassle-free travel, stay, and treatment for the medical patient and attendant.

Some of the key initiatives include: e-Medical and Medical

Attendant Visa: The e-tourist visa launched in 2014 has expanded to include medical visits and medical attendant visas to streamline, ease, and expedite the travel procedures and protocols for allowing multiple entries and long-term stay of Medical Tourists. Additionally, separate immigration counters and facilitation desks have also been set up at major Indian airports to provide end-to-end support and facilitation. Owing to these facilities and logistical support systems, the number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India on the medical visa have grown to an astounding 697,000 in 2019 from 495,056 in 2017.

The National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board: The National Medical and Wellness Tourism Board has been constituted under the Chairmanship of the Minister for Tourism to provide a dedicated and comprehensive institutional framework to promote and enhance Medical Tourism including the Indian system of medicine covered by AYUSH. The Board acts as the umbrella organization that governs and promotes Medical Tourism, with representations from the Ministry of AYUSH, Quality Council of India (QCI), and the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH).

Digital Enablement: The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC) have developed a healthcare portal for seekers and potential medical tourists from across the globe which functions as a comprehensive, one-point information site that covers hospital-related and travel-related information on India. The digital portal covers 124 accredited medical facilities across 93 medical centers, 30 Ayurveda and wellness centers, and 1 special category center.

Fiscal Support and Non-Fiscal Initiatives: To encourage Medical Tourism in the country, the Ministry of Tourism aims to provide financial support to approved Wellness Tourism Service Providers (WSTPs) and Medical Tourism Service Providers (MTSPs) under the Marketing Development Assistance Scheme (MDA). The Government has also been taking dedicated initiatives to promote indigenous medicine and related therapeutic procedures. The Ministry of AYUSH has recently been allocated INR 2,970 Crore in the Union Budget for FY 2021-22, as compared to INR 2,122 Crore in the Union Budget for FY 2020-21, tapping centuries of the wisdom of spiritual philosophy that is unique and unparalleled to the nation. Furthermore, the Ministry of Tourism has constituted a Wellness and Medical Tourism Promotion Committee (WMTPC) and chalked out detailed guidelines to promote Wellness and Medical Tourism as niche tourism products among international tourists and to make India a holistic tourism destination for 365 days offering varied medical services and techniques

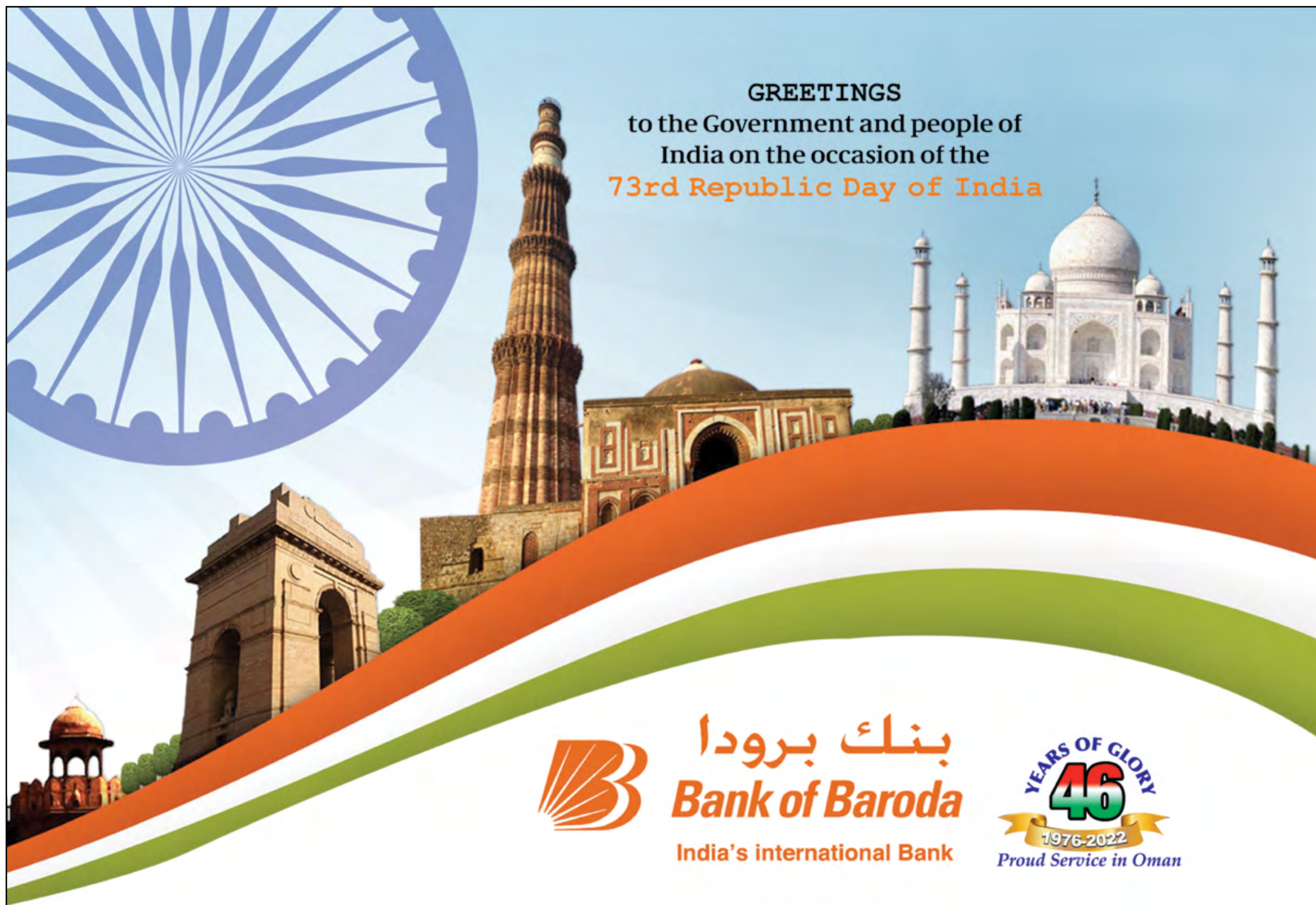
The growth drivers and interventions undertaken by the Government stand as testimony to India's positioning as the healthcare destination of the world and truly invite the world to 'Heal in India'.

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Sun shines bright on Indian tech start-ups



Backed by rapid digitisation, tech adoption and liberal government policies, India's technology start-up ecosystem is witnessing a significant growth trajectory. The next step will be global expansion, says author and public policy expert Aashish Chandorkar.

A key tenet of Indian entrepreneurship growth in the last few years has been to support and catalyze job-givers in the economy. Given India's fast workforce, it is critical that new employment opportunities are created by risk-taking first generation entrepreneurs, who dream of building strong global firms out of India.

Technology start-ups have been at the forefront of this thinking. There are 500 unicorns around the world. These are technology start-ups with more than USD one billion in valuation. Fortyfour of them are now in India - about nine per cent of the total. Twelve of these unicorns got to the coveted valuation benchmark in 2020 - a year otherwise throttled by the global pandemic. This shows that the Indian start-up ecosystem is not just innovative but also robust. The ability to scale up and demonstrate viable business models has set Indian start-ups apart. The 44 technology unicorns have been valued at more than USD 106 billion. To put this in perspective, the market capitalization of the National Stock Exchange is USD2.7 trillion. The top 44 technology firms are already valued worth four per cent of the old economy, some of them being global leaders in their own right.

These 44 firms have also created about 1.5 million jobs in direct or indirect employment. Many of these jobs have been in the Gig economy sector (a free market system in which temporary positions are common and independent workers are hired for short-term commitments), which directly benefits job seekers who may not have the best educational qualifications, but who are willing to work hard towards improving their and their family's standard of living. That the Indian start-up ecosystem has come this far should hardly be a surprise. India has always had the brainpower behind some of the biggest technology firms globally. This brainpower used to make a beeline for foreign shores a few years ago. Now, many individuals are searching for opportunities locally and finding them.

The access to capital for Indian start-ups is also rapidly improving. With the world awash with liquidity owing to loose monetary policies of global central banks, India has attracted large investments. This is reflected year after year in the burgeoning Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) figures, where India is one of the hottest destinations. The next stop for Indian technology start-ups is to expand globally, conquering new markets. Given India's market, which is not just large but also diverse in terms of consumer behaviour characteristics - the global leap of faith may be a matter of when and not if. To facilitate Indian start-ups getting a platform alongside similar firms elsewhere, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), which works under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, had organized Prarambh: Startup India International Summit in January 2021.

This two-day summit was attended by several participants from BIMSTEC countries. BIMSTEC or Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIM-

The ability to scale up and demonstrate viable business models has set Indian start-ups apart

AASHISH CHANDORKAR

STEC) is an economic platform that India has been actively participating in. This event attracted investors, scholars, policy makers and start-up professionals from various member nations in a first-of-its-kind exchange of ideas. Such global platforms are significant in the region, as many countries share a similar economic trajectory as well as consumer traits.

The experience obtained in a large country like India can be transferred relatively easily to other markets, where it may be possible to apply the Indian success. In fact, several Indian productivity applications are already being used in other countries in the region. Especially in the areas of merchant automation, new-age mobility, and social commerce and networking, there are already enough proofs of concept that the mantra for commercial success in India and in the other countries in the region may not be too different. Such platforms thus provide the exploratory opportunities for Indian start-ups to expand geographically. In the recently-presented Union Budget, the government has allowed Indian firms to list themselves overseas without listing in India first. The Indian securities market regulator is also working to create a facilitative environment to ensure such firms that opt to raise capital outside won't be subject to dual jurisdictions and regulations. These steps are critical in ensuring that growing and promising Indian firms are not starved for resources.

In the recent past, the technology start-ups have also diversified. While the initial wave of unicorns came from FinTech (finance and technology) and consumer apps in food and mobility aggregation businesses, the recent success stories go much beyond. Technology innovators are now making a dent in varied areas like commercial logistics, merchant automation, construction management and healthcare.

This change is critical for Indian economy as a whole, too. As new players enter the market and start challenging long-time incumbents, yesteryear leaders are forced to respond in kind. This leads to new investments in research and development, and employee upskilling, which, in turn, leads to greater economic productivity and, eventually, higher wages. In this sense, start-ups also play a critical role in uplifting and modernizing old economy players they compete with, creating a virtuous economic cycle. With an educated workforce, well-integrated in the global ways of working, and a young nation comfortable with using mobile-first technology, Indian start-ups are on a fast growth trajectory. Some of these players will eventually become national and global business leaders in their own right.

By Aashish Chandorkar
(Aashish Chandorkar writes on public policy, politics and current affairs. He takes interest in business, sports and technology, and has authored a book on Devendra Fadnavis, the former chief minister of Maharashtra. He holds an MBA from IIM Calcutta and a Bachelor of Engineering degree from Indore University.)



Happy Indian Republic Day

As we celebrate the historic Republic Day of India, our utmost respect and admiration go out to the visionary leaders of India and this great nation, Oman for their shared thoughts of progress and innovation that has brought lasting peace, prosperity and happiness for all of us.

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