

HM greets Colombia President-elect

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of congratulations to President-elect Gustavo Petro of the Republic of Colombia. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments to President-elect Petro, wishing him success in realising aspirations of the Colombian people. His Majesty also wished the relations between the two countries further development and growth. – ONA



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FITZPATRICK WINS US OPEN WITH SENSATIONAL FINISH



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OMAN SET TO INCREASE DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURE



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YOGA FESTIVAL BLAZES A TRAIL FOR UNIVERSAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY KING OF JORDAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Abdallah II of the Kingdom of Jordan in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on the occasion of his accession to the throne anniversary. In his cable, King Abdallah II expressed his utmost appreciation for His Majesty's sincere sentiments that reflect the advanced relations between the two countries, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and to grant him good health and well-being. He also wished the Omani people further progress and prosperity under the wise leadership of His Majesty. — ONA

Decree on organisational structure of Royal Court Affairs

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 49/2022 on approving the organisational structure for the Royal Court Affairs and the powers of the Secretary General.

Article (1) approves the organisational structure of the Royal Court Affairs as per the annex attached to this Decree.

Article (2) states that the Secretary General of the Royal Court Affairs shall assume the powers assigned for the minister in the Law Concerning the Financial System of the Diwan of Royal Court promulgated by Royal Decree No 128/1991, the Law on Pensions and End of Service Gratuity for Omani Employees of the Diwan of Royal Court promulgated by Royal Decree No 86/1996, the Law Concerning The Employee System of the Diwan of Royal Court promulgated by Royal Decree No 97/1997, and any other laws related to the administrative divisions of the Royal Court Affairs.

Article (3) cancels Royal Decree No 44/2004 and Royal Decree No 27/2012 and all that contradicts this Decree or contravenes its provisions.

Article (4) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No 50/2022 on conducting appointments at the Royal Court Affairs.

Article (1) appoints Shaikh Said bin Hilal bin Ali al Khalili as Head of the Human and Financial Resources and Support Affairs, along with his current grade and financial allocations.

Article (2) appoints Eng Hilal bin Mohammed bin Humaid al Wa'eli as Head of the Royal Horses, Camels, Farms and Gardens Affairs, with the special grade.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO SAUDI KING

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

Coordination to boost development

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND STATE COUNCIL HOLD JOINT MEETING

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers and members of the Council of Ministers, on Monday received Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council and members of the Council. The meeting was held within the context of joint coordination between the Council of Ministers and the Council of Oman.

The joint meeting was held between the Council of Ministers and the State Council Office in the presence of Their Highnesses and ministers who are members of the Council of Ministers. These meetings are held as stipulated in the Basic Law of the State and the State Council Law. The meetings explore means of constant coordination among all state institutions to reach joint visions which assist in upgrading the tracks of comprehensive development being witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman.

At the outset of the meeting, HH Sayyid Fahd underscored the importance of the role of the State Council in conjunction with the Council of Ministers in performing its responsibilities represented in the implementation of the state general policies and ensuring the provision of best services to citizens.

The meeting also affirmed that the government attaches importance to enhance the constructive cooperation and share views to achieve the supreme interest of the country. The Council of Ministers hopes that the State Council contributes in conducting studies and providing proposals on topics which back the efforts of the government in implementation of development plans and programmes and in elevating the march of national action, thanks to the national expertise and competencies enjoyed by the State Council. **TURN TO P2**

TO EXPLORE MEANS OF COORDINATION AMONG ALL STATE INSTITUTIONS

ASSIST IN UPGRADING TRACKS OF COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT

GOVERNMENT ATTACHES IMPORTANCE TO CONSTRUCTIVE COOPERATION



PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

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NO DEALS AS UN'S LIBYA MEDIATION EFFORT ENDS

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THE NEW URGENCY OF NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

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US eyes more security ties with Oman: Official

MUSCAT: General Michael Erik Kurilla, Commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), reaffirmed that his country is looking forward to promoting regional security cooperation with the Sultanate of Oman during the upcoming period, as well as integrating joint efforts between the two countries.

He told Oman News Agency (ONA) that during his visit to Oman, he reviewed with officials the available cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

General Kurilla also commended Oman's central role represented in hosting and



General Michael Erik Kurilla

facilitating a dialogue that led to the truce extension in Yemen under the UN supervision. In his statement, he said: "Now, we will continue to rely on Omani support as we seek to move the extended truce to a more lasting, comprehensive political process." — ONA

Summer season begins with longest day of the year today

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samuelkutyyp](#)

Even as the country has been reeling under the sweltering heat for the past few weeks, the first day of the astronomical summer season begins on Tuesday.

This is also the longest day of the year! According to the Oman Astronomical Society, the phenomenon of the summer solstice for this year begins on June 21, the first day of the astronomical summer season in the northern hemisphere.

"The phenomenon begins at 1:13



pm and thus is the longest day and the shortest night of the other days of the year", it said.

At that moment on Tuesday, astronomers say, the sun will be directly above the Tropic of Cancer. In the farthest north, the sun moves

in the sky, which is why the days close to the solstice have the most daylight of the year.

Solstice is a unique astronomical event that occurs twice a year; it happens once in the summer in June and again in winter in December. The December solstice happens around December 21, and on this day, the sun is directly above the Tropic of Capricorn.

The General Assembly of the United Nations, through a resolution adopted on November 2, 2001, acknowledged this day as the International Day of the Celebration of the Solstice. **TURN TO P2**



Coordination to boost comprehensive development



PHOTOS BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

FROM PAGE1

The Chairman of the State Council and members of the Council's Office expressed their happiness for the meeting and the topics of significance raised during the meeting for the upcoming stage.

The joint meeting also reviewed the agenda which

covers a wide spectrum of topics such as supporting integration among the state institutions to serve public interest, means of activating the State Council's role in providing studies and proposals to consolidate genuine values of the society and enhancing awareness on the current challenges with

the aim of safeguarding the achievements of sustainable development.

During the meeting emphasis was also laid on continuing to exert maximum efforts to serve more accomplishments being witnessed by the country under the enlightened leadership.

— ONA



Summer season begins with longest day of the year today

FROM PAGE 1

The solstice occurs when the Earth arrives at the point where the North Pole is at its maximum tilt in relation to the sun, which is why we have more hours of daylight during the Summer Solstice.

However, the meteorologists believe that the summer starts about three to four days before the occurrence of the June solstice. In many cultures in the northern hemisphere, the longest day of the year, is considered to be the midpoint of the summer and midsummer celebrations are common

in many European countries.

During the summer or June solstice, it is summer in the UK, India, Canada, Russia and other countries in the Northern Hemisphere and it marks the longest day here in terms of daylight.

On the same day, it is the winter solstice in Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and other countries in the southern hemisphere and marks the shortest day of the year in these countries.

Celebrations are held to mark the summer solstice worldwide with music and festivities.

Unified judicial system gives fast, fair justice in line with Vision 2040

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabnassri

Royal Decree No. (35/2022) stipulated the establishment of the 'Supreme Judicial Council' equipped with legal experts and financial as well as administrative independence.

Headquartered in the Governorate of Muscat, the Council has allocations, assets, rights, and obligations of the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, the Administrative Court, and the Public Prosecution.

The Royal Decree reflects the Sultanate of Oman's Vision 2040, as its objective is to establish a complete judicial system that achieves the highest standards of justice, integrity and transparency and transcends the unification of common visions among all judicial authorities.

The new system works to close litigations faster by merging the administrative judiciary into one judicial system. This will ensure fastness in the delivery of justice by ruling out the jurisdiction of multiple judicial bodies.

The order prevents conflict of judicial rulings, reduces pendency of cases and clear separation between litigations and conclusive rulings. It also saves efforts and costs incurred by litigants to pursue their rights and establishes oversight over the work of judges and members of the public prosecution by creating a general department for judicial inspection that reports directly to the vice president of the Supreme Judicial Council.

The system also enables a single supreme judicial body to adjudicate appeals against rulings issued in various cases so that all rulings that may be legally challenged before the Supreme Court can be appealed, instead of limiting this to some of the cases as it was previously. It is now possible for litigants in administrative cases to challenge before

It will prevent conflict of judicial rulings, reduces pendency of cases and clear separation between litigations and conclusive rulings. It also saves efforts and costs incurred by litigants to pursue their rights and establishes oversight over the work of judges and members of the public prosecution by creating a general department for judicial inspection that reports directly to the vice president of the Supreme Judicial Council

the Supreme Court the Court of Appeal's rulings, which leads to achieving justice and equality between litigants.

The Supreme Judicial Council is headed by HM the Sultan and the Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council is appointed by HM. The President of the Supreme Court, the oldest deputy President of the Supreme Court, the Head of the administrative department of the Supreme Court, the Public Prosecutor, the Head of the General Department of Judicial Inspection, and the two most senior heads of the Courts of Appeal are also appointed by HM. The Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council is responsible for the Council's work system after the Council's approval.

The Supreme Judicial Council devolves all the competencies of the Council of Administrative Affairs to the judiciary stipulated in the laws and royal decrees.

It is also responsible for drawing up the general policy of the judiciary; proper functioning of the courts and the

public prosecution; facilitating litigation procedures and bringing its sides closer to litigants; proposing projects for Royal laws and decrees related to the judiciary; expressing views on judicial cooperation drafts of agreements between the Sultanate of Oman and other countries; and promoting and developing cooperation in the jurisdictions related to the judiciary with the concerned authorities.

The Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council assumes the competencies of the Head of the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary and the Public Prosecutor of an administrative and financial nature stipulated in laws and royal decrees.

The Royal Decree also stated that a general department called "The General Administration of Judicial Inspection" shall be established within the Supreme Judicial Council and affiliated with the Vice-President of the Council. It is headed by a full-time judge and composed of experienced judges and competent public prosecutors, all of whom are delegated by the Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council. The aforementioned administration shall replace the General Administration of Judicial Inspection and the Inspection Department in their competencies stipulated in the Judicial Authority Law and the Public Prosecution Law.

The Supreme Judicial Council shall have a general secretariat called "The General Secretariat of the Supreme Judicial Council". It assists the Vice-President of the Council.

The Secretary-General of the Supreme Judicial Council shall have the functions of the Under-Secretary of the ministry stipulated in the laws and royal decrees, and his other competencies are determined by a decision of the Vice-President of the Supreme Judicial Council after the approval of the Council.



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Badr receives Japanese minister



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Taro Honda, Parliamentary Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, in Muscat on Monday. They reviewed relations of friendship and bilateral cooperation between the two countries, particularly in cultural, economic, business, renewable energy and technology fields. They also reaffirmed the joint keenness of enhancing those relations towards broader horizons coinciding with the 50th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Oman and Japan. They also exchanged views on several regional and international matters of common interest. They affirmed the continuation of consultations between the foreign ministries of the two countries to promote cooperation and contribute to achieve peace and stability in the region and the world at large. The meeting was attended by Khalid bin Hashel al Muselhi, Head of the Minister's Office Department and Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

SUDANESE ENVOY PRESENTS CREDENTIALS COPY



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a copy of credentials of Salah Al Din Al Hajj Muhammad Al Kando, Ambassador of the Republic of Sudan appointed to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Monday. Sayyid Badr wished the ambassador success in carrying out his duties. He also wished the bilateral relations between the two countries further progress and growth.

CBO Board of Governors convenes second meeting

MUSCAT: The Board of Governors of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) convened its second meeting for 2022 on Monday. The Board commenced its meeting by welcoming the International Monetary Fund's Statement in the conclusion of its Mission to Oman. This visit came within the framework of the preparations for 2022 Article IV consultations.

The Statement commended the substantial efforts exerted by the Omani government to mitigate the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and foster recovery, as well as the fiscal measures targeting social

support and helping private sector recovery in the pandemic's aftermath. It also lauded the banking system ability to overcome the recent shocks, supported by substantial capital and liquidity buffers and the CBO's continued efforts in strengthening regulatory and supervisory frameworks.

The Board of Governors underscored the importance of moving forward with the efforts to further enhance the financial and economic situation in Oman. During the meeting, the Board also reviewed CBO's financial position, the status of its reserves

and the performance of its foreign investments. The Board also examined the reports on the prospects and challenges facing financial stability, as well as the quarterly report of Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala'a). The Board was briefed on the financial safety reports of the banks.

The Board also discussed a number of requests related to Payment Service Providers (PSPs) licenses. The meeting also discussed a number of other topics on the agenda, and took the appropriate decisions on the same. — **ONA**

Majlis Ash'shura holds regular meeting

MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura held its 16th regular meeting of the third annual session (2021-2022) under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, on Monday.

During the meeting, Salim bin Saleh al Siyabi, representative of the Wilayat of Qurayat, presented an urgent statement regarding tourism projects in Qurayat. The statement emphasised the importance of prioritising the tourism sector during the upcoming period. The statement inquired about the reasons that delayed the implementation of the tourism projects in Qurayat.

Dr Tahira bint Abdulkhalik al Lawatiyah delivered an urgent statement regarding the laid-off workers and their reinstatement with lower salaries. She said that this urgent statement comes due to the continuing systematic dismissal of citizens and their re-appointment with minimum salaries which poses the threat of imprisonment due to financial obligations and the difficulty of meeting living requirements. The statement added that the inflation rate amounted to 3.6 per cent by the end of March this year and it continues to go up due to financial conditions.

According to the 2019 national survey, the minimum needs of the family amounted to RO 757 per month.

The statement said that this systematic dismissal began in the oil and gas sector and then extended to other sectors for reasons that sometimes seem logical and sometimes flimsy. The statistics indicate that 156 companies laid off national workers during 2021-2022 and the number reached 5,438 or 42.8 per cent in the oil and gas sector, 23.1 per cent in the construction sector and 17.8 per cent in the industrial sector.



The Majlis approved the vision of the Services and Social Development Committee on the draft agreement on regulating air transport services with the government of Brazil.

The meeting approved the report of the Health and Environment Committee on the expressed desire for planning and developing the handling of the environmental damages resulting from adverse weather conditions. The report emphasised the need to reconsider the issue of land distribution in low-lying areas and valley basins and the preparation of certain standards for the construction of houses in coastal areas that qualify them to mitigate in addition to draw up integrated national plans for dealing with the adverse environmental impact resulting from climatic conditions.

The meeting also approved

the report of the Health and Environment Committee on the expressed desire for establishing a body concerned with monitoring and protecting the environment.

The meeting approved the report of the Media and Culture Committee on the expressed desire for establishing an interactive digital cultural platform.

The meeting also approved the report of the Media and Culture Committee on the expressed desire for establishing public libraries for children in the governorates.

The report of the Food and Water Security Committee was also approved based on the expressed desire regarding the artificial seeding plants in the Sultanate of Oman, which aim to increase the level of groundwater and reduce water deficit in the Sultanate of Oman.



Sharp decrease in crude births; deaths increase

SAMUEL KUTTY
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On the back of enhanced and intensive health check facilities, crude births in the Sultanate of Oman witnessed a substantial fall in recent years.

According to the annual bulletin issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the crude birth rate is estimated to be 18.2 per thousand Omani population in 2021, with a total of 82,224 live births.

However, the death rate rose to 3.6 per thousand in the same year to reach 12,649 fatalities.

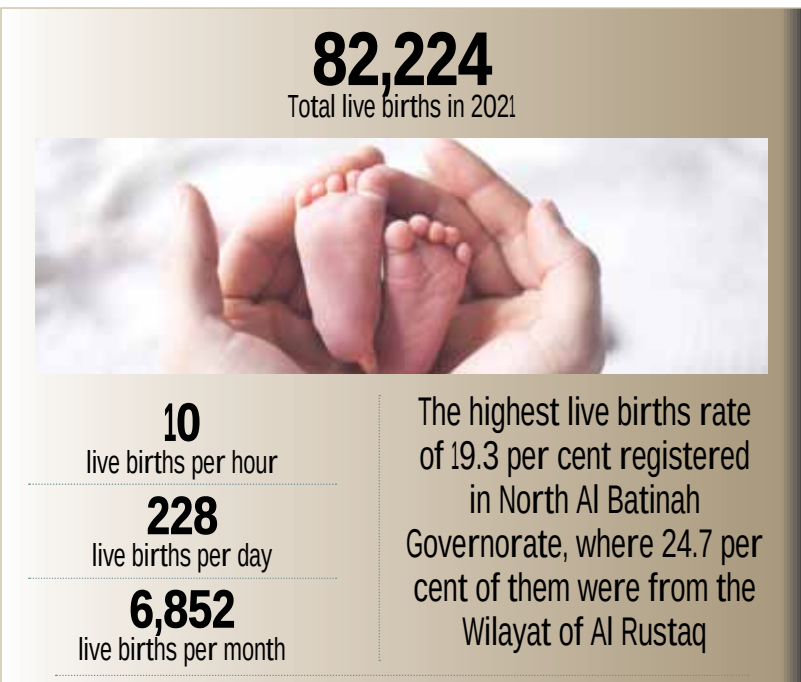
In 2020, the crude birth rate stood at 28.6 per 1,000 Omani

population, which according to the Ministry of Health, "is a drop of 29.0 per cent over the past twenty-six years".

The data from the ministry showed that the crude death rate declined to 3.2 per 1,000 Omani population in 2020 from 7.3 in 1993, representing a 56.2 per cent decline in the past 27 years.

The total population in the Sultanate of Oman climbed to 4,527,446 by the end of December 2021 compared to 4,481,042 during the same period in 2020 showing an increase of 1.04 per cent.

According to the annual NCSI bulletin, the number of births decreased during the past two



years by 2.58 per cent, as the number of births among Omanis reached 76,457, forming a rate of 92.6 per cent, while the births among expatriates reached 5,767 live births or 7.4 per cent.

The overall birth in 2021 stood at 82,224 live births registering ten births per hour, 228 live births a day and 6,852 per month.

The statistics showed that the crude birth rate for Omanis amounted to 27.3 live births for each thousand of the population. The births for Omanis during August are the highest during the year at 7,194 live births.

The death rate for mothers for every thousand births amounted to 58 per cent of the total births

for mothers aged 25-34 years. The number of births for mothers aged 15-19 amounted to 894 live births, including 827 Omanis and 67 expatriates.

Births for mothers aged 50 and above amounted to 22 live births for Omanis and two for expatriates.

Nearly 70 per cent of births for Omanis were in urban areas and 30 per cent in rural areas. The births for expatriates in urban areas amounted to 96 per cent and 4 per cent in rural areas.

The highest live births rate of 19.3 per cent registered in North Al Batinah Governorate, where 24.7 per cent of them were from the Wilayat of Al Rustaq.



ONLINE SHOPPING STAYS STRONG EVEN AFTER PANDEMIC



COSMETICS AND SKINCARE PRODUCTS

27%



THE PURCHASE OF GOODS LIKE CLOTHING, FOOTWEAR, SPORTS ITEMS AND ACCESSORIES. THESE ITEMS STOOD AT

66%



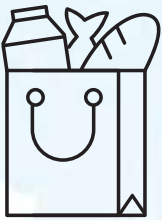
HOUSEHOLD GOODS, FURNITURE AND TOYS

40%



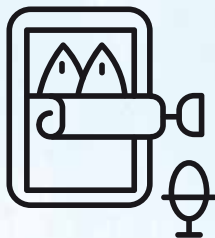
SERVICES RELATED TO TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

26%



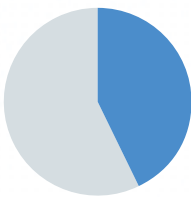
FOOD AND GROCERIES STOOD AT

57%

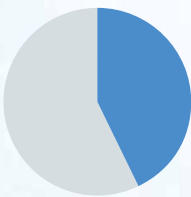


HAVE PRIVACY CONCERNS IN PROVIDING PERSONAL DETAILS

43%



43% OF SHOPPERS LACK CONFIDENCE



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

THE pandemic era was all about online shopping, which picked up during both the Eids that followed. The trend continued thereafter. With Covid-19 restrictions completely relaxed, shopping centres are back in business with the footfall of customers. For most people, however, it isn't easy to let go of the habit acquired during the peak of the Covid-19.

In 2021, people were going online for all kinds of shopping, including clothing, footwear, sporting goods, groceries, food, cosmetics and so on.

Things have changed with the change in pandemic guidelines in 2022. People have started visiting malls for shopping, but for the mode of payment, they depend more on plastic money than paper money. Those wary of using cards for payments are using the cards fearlessly. They are finding all kinds of online modes easier to explore and adapt.

The recently released digital indicators published by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology suggest a massive trend towards online platforms for the purchase of goods like clothing, footwear, sports items and accessories. These items stood at 66 per cent, while food and groceries stood at 57 per cent.

Shoppers have also been exploring

other products online such as household goods, e.g. furniture, toys etc. at 40 per cent, cosmetics and skincare products 27 per cent, services related to travel and accommodation 26 per cent and not to forget movies, short films or images at 25 per cent. Medicines, pharmaceuticals and health products also had good demand online.

Salma al Sulaimani, a young graduate with her own online business, said she thoroughly enjoys shopping, especially ordering vegetables and other groceries online. "I do online shopping also when I am travelling in neighbouring countries", she said.

Majda al Maamari feels online shopping is a good way to find Omani products from SMEs.

"There are great products to explore, but other than that, I do not shop much online. I started the online experience during the Covid era", said Majda.

However, the digital indicators show that in the Sultanate of Oman, 72 per cent prefer to shop in person, while 50 per cent are simply not interested in doing anything online. About 44 per cent have trust concerns when it comes to warranties, receiving and returning products, security concerns related to providing debit or credit card details and technical issues such as websites, payment or delivery.

About 43 per cent of shoppers lack confidence, knowledge or skills, while 43 per cent have privacy concerns in providing personal details.



Al Dakhiliyah Int'l Film Festival opens in Nizwa

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JUNE 20

The Al Dakhiliyah International Film Festival was inaugurated in the Wilayat of Nizwa on Sunday under the auspices of Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Ministry of Information Under-Secretary for Radio and Television.

Apart from the Sultanate of Oman, sixteen countries are participating in the festival including Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Algeria, Sudan, Morocco, the United Kingdom, Iran, Tunisia, Syria, Bahrain, Belgium, and France.

Bahraini director Bassam al Thawadi will participate in a symposium entitled "The Importance of the Film Industry, Centers and Festivals in the Economic Mobility," along with Algerian director Dalil Belkhour, Emirati director Nawaf al Janahi, and Omani director Haitham Suleiman.

The festival management has allocated eight awards, which are the Best Omani Narrative Film, Best Omani Documentary Film, Best International Documentary Film, Documentary Jury Award,

Award for Best International Feature Film, Award for Second Best International Feature Film, Award for Third Best International Feature Film and the Jury Prize for Feature Film.

The festival has two juries; one for feature films and animation films comprising Dr Salim al Maamari from the Sultanate of Oman; Dr Noor Al Deen Hashemi from Syria; Haitham bin Suleiman from the Sultanate of Oman; Dr Mouniah Hojeij from Tunisia; Ammar al Ibrahim from the Sultanate of Oman; and Abdulaziz al Habsi from the Sultanate of Oman.

The second jury is dedicated to documentaries, consisting of Dr Rashid al Yafei from the Sultanate of Oman; Jalal Al Deen from Iran; Mohammad al Farsi, Walid al Kharousi, and Hussein al Balushi from the Sultanate of Oman; and Hussein al Thabeti from Tunisia.

During the opening ceremony Mohammed al Kindi, Director of Nizwa film festival, said: "The film industry, in all its forms, is one of the most important pillars of the world economy, regardless of whether the country produces films or not. The industry is always on the lookout for new and exciting



locations. So when a country like Oman is blessed with a distinctive landscape of mountains, plains, valleys, deserts and architectural monuments such as castles and forts, it is not surprising that it should become a magnet for both tourism and the film industry in the Arabian Gulf Peninsula

and wider world. The Nizwa International Film Festival has established cinema as a significant form of education both locally and internationally. However, a film industry which depends on societal acceptance can only prosper if it builds partnerships of society, public and private institutions to

significantly resolve potentially controversial issues."

Al Kindi said: "Indeed, a genuine partnership between society and government or private institutions has been established to resolve many thorny issues. In this sense, there is an urgent call for the engagement of active institutions

in the visual arts industry to enable the local film industry to intensify work on the production of local films to give people a voice and feature on the film global scene. Government institutions should also give support to the film industry to generate revenue and income for writers, actors, producers, photographers, directors, visual effects workers, soundtrack technicians and other specialists in the production of such highly creative art."

"With the first cinema festival of its kind in Nizwa that celebrates creativity, aspirations and achievements, we hope to establish the foundation of film culture in Oman and launch more festivals in the future and help generate income, which in turn will be an investment in the future of cinema and the creation of film companies," Al Kindi said.

The opening ceremony also witnessed the honouring of several distinguished writers and technicians.

In addition, several workshops will be organised during the festival including one on film direction hosted by director Nawaf al Janahi from the UAE.

Students take part in debating championship in Turkey



AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JUNE 20

The Sultanate of Oman is taking part in the sixth International Universities Debating Championship being held from June 17 to 22. The event, which is organised by QatarDebate, is a global debating competition that attracts students from around the world, where students discuss and exchange ideas in Arabic on societal and global challenges and pressing contemporary issues.

Oman's delegation includes about 34 men and women, eight arbitrators, and two supervisors of the board from the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

On the participation, Nasser bin Humaid bin Abdullah al Hinai, Executive Director of Oman Debate Center, said: "Oman Debate Center is associated with the QatarDebate Center. QatarDebate Center has organised this event annually; one year for university

students and the next for school students. This time it is held outside Doha. Turkey is hosting the event this time with more than 90 teams from different countries."

The Sultanate of Oman is represented in this edition by four teams: Al Sharqiya University, Oman College of Health Sciences, Al Buraimi University College, and the International College of Engineering and Management.

This participation is supervised by the Ministry

of Culture, Sports, and Youth. The centre's role was to hold a training camp in the Sultanate of Oman for three months and establish a specialised programme for the participating teams. The centre also performed independent follow-up by appointing a separate coach for each team who monitors the preparations for the tournament. This training aims to raise the efficiency of the Omani teams participating in the sixth international championship.

Oman Air formally joins One World Alliance



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman Air formally joined the One World Alliance on Monday with the full integration likely to take place by 2024.

The agreement was signed between Abdulaziz al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air and Rob Gurney, CEO of One World.

The alliance will provide Oman Air passengers access to over 1,200 destinations provided by the One World Alliance, including the lounge access.

Oman Air operates to One World hubs such in Amman, Colombo, Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Doha and London.

Speaking to the Observer, Al Raisi said that there is a strategic partnership with Qatar Airways who pushed the file for us to join the alliance.

"We were operating to around 50 destinations before the pandemic but today it is about 40 but expected to reach the pre-pandemic levels by 2023. On new flights joining the fleet, We have a backlog of aircraft to be delivered by Boeing."

Our fleet will consist of A330s, 787-8 and 9s and 737 Max.

He said the airline will continue to focus on point to point services but will also have Strategic partnerships.

GS Inima BARKA LLC

Announcement of the tender TND GSI BV/05/2022 for the supply Storage rack system

GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC the EPC contractor for Barka V Desalination Project in Oman, for the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC.

Invites Omani companies to bid for the **supply and installation medium duty storage shelf rack system: total width 29,500 mm x high 5,000mm x depth 800mm.**

- Commercial offer will be sent to: mohamed.farid@inima.com, including data sheet.
- For technical clarification contact Eng. Soulat Abbas: e-mail soulat.abbas@inima.com
- Closing date 27th June 2022 1:00 PM, validity of offer: one month, Currency: OMR.
- GS INIMA (BARKA) LLC General Terms and Condition are applied.



No deal as UN’s latest Libya mediation effort ends

TRIPOLI: Rival sides in Libya’s long-running conflict concluded their latest round of United Nations-led talks on Monday without reaching a deal on rules for long-delayed elections, the UN said.

The presidential and parliamentary elections, originally set for December 2021, were meant to cap a UN-led peace process following the end of the last serious round of violence in the country from 2019-2020.

But the vote never took place due to the presence of contentious candidates and deep disagreements over the polls’ legal basis between rival power centres in the east and west of the country.

Representatives of the Tripoli-based High Council of State and



Jean-Claude Gakosso, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Congo, during a joint-press conference with his Libyan counterpart Najla al Manqoush in Tripoli. – AFP

of the parliament, based in eastern Libya, began meetings in Cairo more than a week ago, but without success.

“The third and final round of negotiations between the Joint House of Representatives and High Council of State Committee

on the Libyan Constitutional Track drew to a close in the early morning of 20 June,” said Stephanie Williams, the UN’s top official on Libya.

“Differences persist on the measures governing the transitional period leading to elections,” she said in a statement.

She insisted that the sides had “achieved a great deal of consensus on the contentious articles in the Libyan Draft Constitution” and thanked them for their “efforts to resolve their differences on a number of complex issues”.

She urged the two sides to meet again within 10 days “to bridge outstanding issues”.

Williams noted that some 2.8 million of Libya’s nearly 7 million people had registered to vote



Differences persist on the measures governing the transitional period leading to elections

STEPHANIE WILLIAMS

Special Adviser on Libya

amid a rare period of optimism following a landmark October 2020 ceasefire.

The political standoff has deepened since March, when parliament appointed a new administration to replace that of interim leader Abdulhamid Dbeibah, arguing that his mandate has expired.

But Dbeibah has refused to hand over power to anything other than an elected government.

After failing to enter Tripoli in an armed standoff in May, the rival administration has taken up office further east in Sirte -- hometown of ruler Muammar Gaddafi, whose fall in a 2011 Nato-backed revolt plunged the country into years of often violent chaos. — AFP

Sri Lanka opens IMF talks, begins shutdown

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka closed schools and halted non-essential government services on Monday, starting a two-week shutdown to conserve fast-depleting fuel reserves as the IMF opened talks with Colombo on a possible bailout.

The country of 22 million people is in the grip of its worst economic crisis after running out of foreign exchange to finance even the most essential imports including food, fuel and medicines.

On Monday schools were shut and state offices worked with skeleton staffing as part of government plans to reduce commuting and save precious petrol and diesel.

Sri Lanka is facing record-high inflation and lengthy power blackouts that have contributed to months of protests -- sometimes violent -- calling on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to step down.

Thousands of students marched through the streets of Colombo on Monday chanting “Gota go home” in reference to the president, who they accuse of corruption and mismanagement. “The time for Gotabaya to bow down with dignity is long gone,” student leader Wasantha Mudalige told reporters. “Now we have to chase him out.”

Police arrested 21 student activists who blocked all gates to the presidential secretariat building while declaring on Monday, Rajapaksa’s 73rd birthday, a “day of mourning” for the nation.

Officers said the students had blocked Sri Lanka’s finance ministry secretary from attending a key meeting with officials from the IMF.

But the office of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said talks with a visiting IMF delegation, the first in-person discussions since Sri Lanka asked for a bailout in April, went ahead as planned.



Autorickshaws are parked in a queue along a street to tank up petrol from a Ceylon petroleum corporation fuel station in Colombo. - AFP

Both sides said the talks would continue until the end of the month. A financial rescue plan is not expected until Colombo agrees with its creditors on restructuring its \$51 billion foreign debt, a process that could take months, according to both Sri Lankan and IMF officials.

The country defaulted on its debt in April and went cap-in-hand to the IMF which has asked Colombo to raise taxes and restructure loss-making state enterprises.

Most offices in Sri Lanka were shut on Monday and all schools were closed but hospitals and the main sea and air ports in the capital were still operating.

Hundreds of thousands of motorists waited in miles-long queues across the country for petrol and diesel despite the energy ministry announcing fresh stocks would not arrive for at least three days.

Wickremesinghe’s office said he

A financial rescue plan is not expected until Colombo agrees with its creditors on restructuring its \$51 bn foreign debt, a process that could take months

met with visiting Australian home affairs minister Clare O’Neil to “deepen cooperation and assist Sri Lanka as the country faces very difficult economic times”.

Canberra announced \$35 million in emergency assistance to meet the urgent food and healthcare needs of the impoverished island.

“Not only do we want to help the people of Sri Lanka in its time of need, there are also deeper consequences

for the region if this crisis continues,” Australian foreign minister Penny Wong said in a statement.

Australia is a member of the “Quad”, a diplomatic grouping with India, Japan and the US that has expressed concern over China’s growing influence in the region.

China owns more than 10 per cent of Sri Lanka’s external debt and has invested heavily in infrastructure across the strategically located island, which is positioned along the main east-west international shipping lane.

The United Nations last week launched an emergency response effort to feed thousands of pregnant women facing food shortages in Sri Lanka. Four out of five people in the country have started skipping meals as they cannot afford high food prices, the UN has said. It warned of a looming “dire humanitarian crisis” with millions in need of aid. — AFP

Iran says ‘train not derailed’ in N-talks

TEHRAN: Iran said on Monday the “train has still not derailed” in negotiations aiming to restore the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, despite new US sanctions on the Islamic republic.



Saeed Khatibzadeh

The US on Thursday imposed sanctions on a network of Iranian petrochemical firms, as well as alleged front companies accused of helping Tehran to circumvent sanctions.

“We are still moving on the diplomatic path -- this train has still not derailed, despite the US reneging on its commitments and in spite of all of its actions,” foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh told reporters.

The Vienna talks, which began in April last year, aim to return the US to the nuclear deal, including through the lifting of sanctions on Iran, and to ensure Tehran’s full compliance with its commitments.

But the ever-delicate dialogue has been stalled since March.

The 2015 agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA, gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme to guarantee that Tehran could not develop a nuclear weapon -- something it has always denied wanting to do.

But in 2018, the US withdrew from the accord under then-president Donald Trump and reimposed heavy economic sanctions that prompted Iran to begin rolling back on its own commitments.

“We can certainly and quickly... finalise the agreement,” Khatibzadeh said, if the US agrees to “put aside all the sanctions”.

He also called on Washington to put an end to the so-called campaign of “maximum pressure” introduced by the Trump administration.

The United States has previously argued that Tehran’s demand that Washington remove the powerful Revolutionary Guards from a terrorism blacklist is peripheral to discussions, although it can discuss the issue later. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

GUWAHATI

26 more dead in India monsoon fury

At least 26 more people have died in monsoon flooding and lightning strikes in India, as millions remained marooned in the country and neighbouring Bangladesh, authorities said. Floods are a regular menace in India and Bangladesh, but experts say climate change is increasing their frequency, ferocity and unpredictability for the two countries’ 1.6 billion people.

In India’s northeastern state of Assam, three people were killed in landslides while six others died in flood waters, disaster manage-



ment authorities said.

In the eastern state of Bihar, lightning triggered by storms killed at least 17 people, according to local disaster management minister Renu Devi. — AFP

BEIRUT

IS Syria ambush kills 15 pro-govt fighters

An ambush on a bus in remote eastern Syria left at least 15 pro-government fighters dead, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. The war monitoring group said it was not immediately clear if those killed were from the regular army or allied militia.

The attack took place on the road linking the city of Raqa, which used to be a major IS hub and is under Kurdish control, to the government-controlled city of Homs. The Observatory said several other fighters were criti-



cally wounded.

The official state-run agency SANA confirmed 13 casualties and quoted a military source saying that the ambush took place at around 6:30 am. — AFP

BEIRUT

Lebanon threatens to expel Syrian refugees

Prime Minister Najib Mikati said Lebanon was ready to expel Syrian refugees living in the country if the international community does not work to repatriate them.

Lebanon, grappling with its worst ever economic crisis, has the world’s highest proportion of refugees in its population, with the government estimating that Syrians account for almost a quarter of its more than six million residents.

“Eleven years after the start



of the Syrian crisis, Lebanon no longer has the capacity to bear this burden, especially under the current circumstances,” Mikati said.

— AFP



In brief

■ LONDON



AUSTRALIA SHOWS NO SIGNS OF INTERVENING IN ASSANGE CASE

Australia's prime minister gave faint hope that he will publicly demand the US drops its prosecution of Julian Assange, despite pleas by the WikiLeaks co-founder's wife that Canberra intervene in the Australian native's case. Anthony Albanese refused to say whether he had discussed the case with US President Joe Biden after Britain ordered Assange's extradition on spying charges last week.

"There are some people who think that if you put things in capital letters on Twitter and put an exclamation mark, that somehow makes it more important. It doesn't", Albanese told reporters. — dpa

■ MADRID



EVACUATIONS AS FOREST FIRES RAGE IN NORTHERN SPAIN

Around 1,000 residents from 12 villages in Navarre province in Northern Spain have been forced from their homes as firefighters battled forest fires in the region on Monday.

The villagers have been housed in emergency accommodation, the 'Noticias de Navarra' newspaper reported on the basis of information from the local authorities.

The situation is reported to be worst amid changing wind directions in the Sierra del Perdón mountain range and in Gallipienzo, some 20 kilometres south of the provincial capital of Pamplona. — dpa

■ BERLIN



BERLIN TO HOST FOOD SECURITY CONFERENCE

Germany will host a meeting on the looming global food crisis caused by the war in Ukraine with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken among those attending, a government spokesman said. The gathering on Friday under the title "Uniting for Global Food Security" will address looming shortages caused by the war, the spokesman told a press conference in Berlin.

"The government is particularly committed in its presidency of the G7 to finding joint answers to the looming global hunger crisis triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine", he said. — AFP

Macron scrambles to salvage majority

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron and his allies were scrambling on Monday for a way to avert political deadlock after losing their majority in parliament, a stunning blow for the president and his reform agenda.

Macron's Ensemble (Together) coalition emerged as the largest party in Sunday's National Assembly vote, but was dozens of seats short of keeping the absolute majority it has enjoyed for the last five years.

A surge by the far-right and wins by a united left-wing destroyed the dominant position of Macron's deputies, who for five years had backed the president's policies without fail.

The left-leaning 'Liberation' daily called the result a "slap in the face" for Macron, while the conservative Figaro said he was now "faced with an ungovernable France".

Macron's Together alliance won 244 seats, far short of the 289 needed for an overall majority, in a low-turnout vote that resulted in an abstention rate of 53.77 per cent.



France's Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne gives a speech after the first results of the parliamentary elections at Matignon in Paris. — AFP

Macron, who has not yet commented on the results, met Monday with his embattled Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne and two top allies, former premier Edouard Philippe and centrist leader Francois Bayrou.

The election saw the new left-wing alliance NUPES become the main opposition force along with its allies on 137 seats, according to the Interior Ministry. But it appears unlikely the coalition of Socialists, Communists, Greens and the hard-left France Unbowed will be able to retain common cause

in the legislature.

Jean-Luc Melancon, the France Unbowed chief who orchestrated the alliance, called its results "fairly disappointing" and proposed Monday to make NUPES a permanent left-wing bloc.

He said it would not be a full-on merger but simply an effective "alternative" force in parliament, though the offer was immediately rejected by the three other NUPES parties.

Meanwhile, the far-right under Marine Le Pen posted the best legislative performance in its history, becoming the strongest single opposition party with 89 seats, up from eight in the outgoing chamber.

A confident Le Pen said her party would demand to chair the National Assembly's powerful finance commission, as is tradition for the biggest opposition party.

"The country is not ungovernable, but it's not going to be governed the way Emmanuel Macron wanted", Le Pen told reporters Monday.

— AFP



Commuters wait on a platform to catch a train towards central London at Clapham Junction station after strike action caused travel disruption in the British capital. — AFP

Britain set for biggest rail strike in decades

LONDON: Britain's railway network this week faces its biggest strike action in more than three decades in a row over pay, as soaring inflation erodes earnings, triggering fears of wider industrial action.

Last-ditch talks to avert a strike broke down on Monday afternoon, meaning more than 50,000 members of rail union the RMT will walk out for three days. RMT General-Secretary Mick Lynch told reporters proposals from train operating companies and London Underground were "unacceptable".

The strikes —on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday — risk causing significant disruption to major events including the Glastonbury music festival. Schools are warning that thousands of teenagers taking national exams will also be affected.

But the RMT argues the strikes are necessary as wages have failed to keep pace with inflation, which has hit a 40-year high.

Jobs are also at risk, with passenger traffic yet to fully recover after the lifting of coronavirus pandemic lockdowns.

Countries around the world are being hit by decades-high

The strikes —on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday — risk causing significant disruption to major events

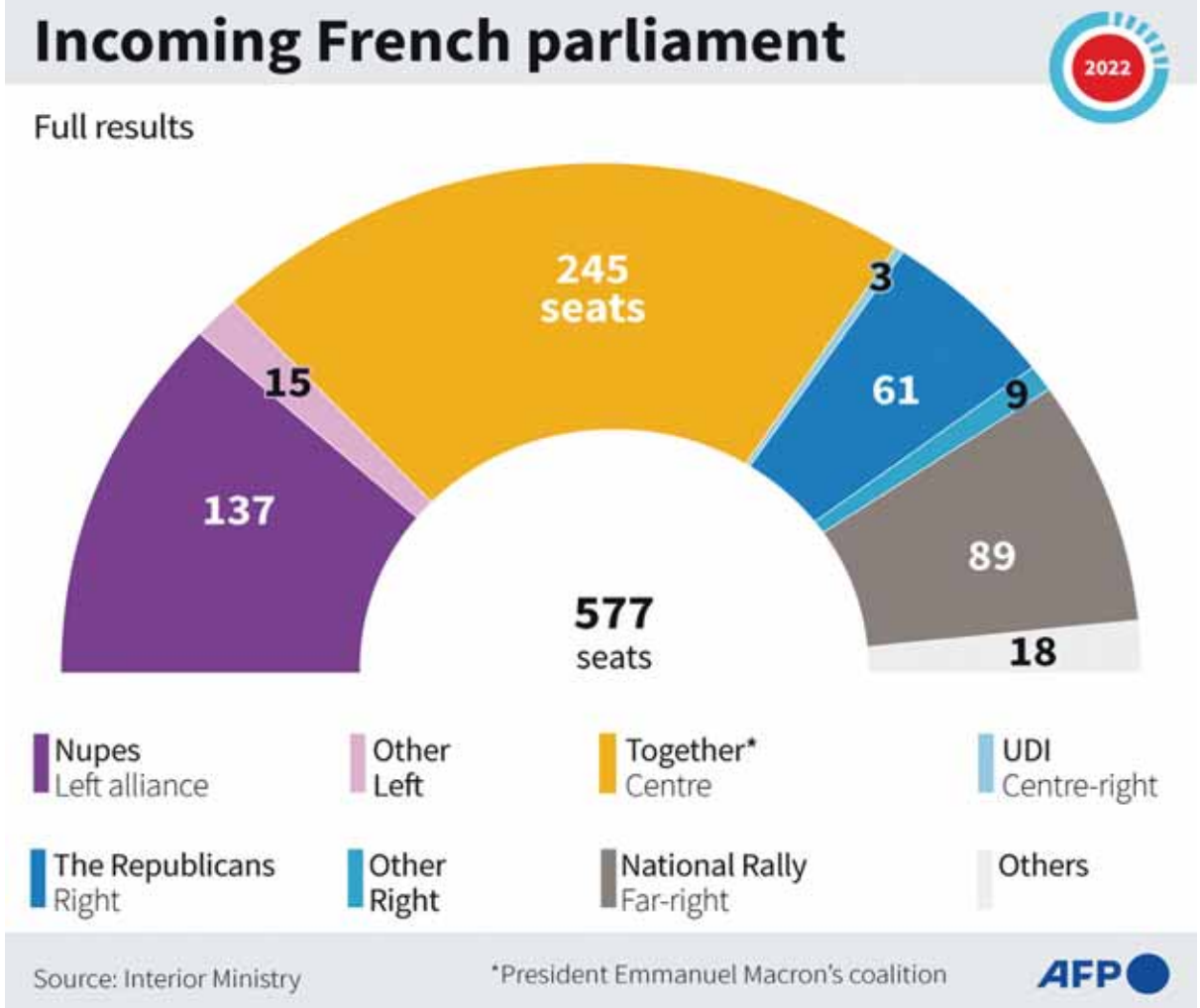
inflation as the Ukraine war and the easing of Covid restrictions fuel energy and food price hikes.

The strikes are the biggest dispute on Britain's railway network since 1989, according to the RMT. RMT members on the London Underground will stage a 24-hour stoppage on Tuesday.

Rail operators, however, warn of disruption throughout the week, with lines not affected by strike action still having to reduce services.

Andrew Haines, Chief Executive of Network Rail, which looks after the country's rail tracks, called the strikes "needless" and said they would have a "damaging impact".

"We, and our train operating colleagues, are gearing up to run the best service we can for passengers and freight users next week, despite the actions of the RMT", he added. — AFP



Belgium returns Lumumba tooth to family

BRUSSELS: Belgium on Monday handed over the last remains of slain Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba — a tooth — to his family, turning a page on a grim chapter in its colonial past.

Chief prosecutor Frederic Van Leeuw gave the relatives a small, bright blue box containing the tooth in a televised ceremony, and said legal action they had taken to receive the relic had delivered "justice".

The tooth was placed in a casket that was then draped in the flag of the Democratic Republic of Congo, which celebrates Lumumba, who was murdered by separatists and Belgian mercenaries in 1961, as an anti-colonial hero.

Lumumba's assassination — and the brutal history of Belgian control of the Congo — have been

enduring sources of pain between the two countries.

Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo reiterated that his country's authorities bore a "moral responsibility" over the killing.

"I would like, in the presence of his family, to present in my turn the apologies of the Belgian government", he said.

"A man was murdered for his political convictions, his words, his ideals."

Lumumba's son Francois told Belgium's RTBF broadcaster that his relatives had been waiting "more than 60 years" for this event.

"I think it will provide solace for the family and the Congolese people", he said.

"We are opening a new page in history."



Juliana Lumumba, daughter of Patrice Lumumba, during a ceremony to hand over a tooth of DRC's first prime minister Patrice Lumumba at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. — AFP

A fiery critic of Belgium's rapacious rule, Lumumba became his country's first prime minister after it gained independence in

1960.

But he fell out with the former colonial power and the United States and was ousted in a coup a

few months after taking office.

He was executed on January 17 1961, aged just 35, in the southern region of Katanga, with the support of Belgian mercenaries. His body was dissolved in acid and never found. But the tooth was kept as a trophy by one of those involved, a Belgian police officer.

The tooth was seized by Belgian authorities in 2016 from the daughter of the policeman, Gerard Soete, after Lumumba's family filed a complaint.

The casket containing the tooth is set to be flown back to the DRC where it will be officially laid to rest at a memorial site.

The country is set to hold three days of "national mourning" from 27 to 30 June — its 62nd anniversary of independence — to mark the burial ceremony. — AFP

Turning anxiety from a foe to a friend



Hyesha Barrett
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The writer is a master life coach, NLP practitioner

Anxiety is generally construed as negative. However, feeling anxious is part and parcel of everyday life. We have all experienced feelings of nervousness and uncertainty, trouble concentrating or an increased heart rate and rapid breathing from worrying.

At the core, anxiety is what keeps us alive. It's our body's automatic fight or flight response that gets activated when we feel threatened, under pressure or are faced with challenges or dangers.

When kept in check, anxiety is not a bad thing. It floods the body with a lot of energy and can help us stay alert, focused, "switched on" and motivated to solve problems.

However, if these feelings overpower you, whereby you

experience frequent and excessive worrying or terror and panic in everyday situations, you have probably crossed into the territory of an anxiety disorder.

These feelings are unhealthy if they affect your quality of life and prevent you from functioning normally. Please seek professional help if so.

When we shift our mindset to think more from the perspective that anxiety protects us and saturates us with extra energy, as long as we channel it into a positive thing, overtime our constructive outlook will turn anxiety from a foe to a friend.

Here are 15 tips for coping with anxiety:

- 1.Keep physically active. Exercise

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION, YOGA AND DEEP BREATHING ARE PROVEN WAYS TO REDUCE ANXIETY

is a powerful stress reducer and anxiety reliever.

- 2.Quit smoking, avoid caffeinated beverages, sugary drinks and alcohol. Limit intake of all stimulants.

- 3.Use stress reduction, relaxation and visualisation techniques. Mindfulness meditation, yoga and deep breathing are proven ways to reduce anxiety.

- 4.Breathe the 6-3-6-3 method. Breathe in for 6 seconds, out for 3, in for 6 and out for 3.

- 5.Uplevel your daily requirements with healthy non-fried, low sugar foods, adequate water intake and a proper amount of restful sleep.

- 6.Take supplements to give you vitamins that might be excluded from your diet.

- 7.Learn about your disorder. You are not alone. Join a community.

- 8.Keep a journal. Reflective writing will allow you to make sense of your emotions.

- 9.Socialise and connect with others. Interact with only those who make you feel good.

- 10.Ground yourself with the 5 senses exercise: name 5 things you see, touch 4 things, name 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell and 1 thing you taste.

- 11.Smell lavender, chamomile

or sandalwood. Aromatherapy is effective in calming the stress hormones.

- 12.Listen to uplifting music.

- 13.Focus on what you can change.

- 14.Put a stop to chronic worrying. Challenge anxious thoughts and learn to accept uncertainty.

- 15.Be kind to yourself.

Over the past years especially, so many of us have understood the meaning of being better connected, with others and ourselves. If not taken care of, anxiety can leave us feeling crippled, beaten down and confused.

However with introspection, desire and elevated consciousness, we can be in a better position to move through the worries of uncertainty to the security of predictability.

Hopes fade for swift Nato accession for Finland, Sweden

ALMA COHEN

Finland and Sweden are to discuss their stalled Nato bids with Turkey in Brussels, but hopes are fading they will be able resolve their dispute before an alliance summit next week, experts say. Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was to meet with representatives from the three countries to try to make progress on the Nordic nations' membership applications, which have been blocked by Ankara.

"I think it is possible but it would be very difficult," Paul Levin, director of the Institute for Turkey Studies at Stockholm University, said, adding it would require both parties to compromise.

Nato and the two Nordic countries had expected the application process to be quick. But Ankara's objections caught them all off-guard, at a time when Nato is keen to display a unified front against Russia.

Ankara has accused Finland and Sweden of providing a safe haven for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), listed as a "fighter" group by Turkey and its Western allies. Ankara has also demanded they lift their weapons freezes on Turkey.

Any Nato membership deal must be unanimously approved by all 30 members of the alliance, and fears are now mounting that Turkey could delay the Nordic countries' bids indefinitely.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin recently expressed fears that unless the issues are resolved "before Madrid, there is a risk that the situation will freeze". Germany on Monday dampened hopes of a deal being reached that quickly.

"I think this is about expectations management and to place this in its historical context," said a high-ranking German government source, while stressing a solution was still in sight.

"It would not be a catastrophe if we need a few more weeks," the source said. "What is crucial is that in our view there are no insurmountable difficulties" between Sweden, Finland and Turkey.

Ankara's anger has primarily been directed at Sweden.

"Sweden does view the PKK as a fighter organisation and has done so since 1984", Levin said, adding that it was "arguably the first country apart from Turkey" to do so. "So in that sense Sweden does not really stand out" from other European countries. In a bid to ease Ankara's concerns, Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson has stressed that Sweden has been beefing up its anti-terror laws in recent years, with new stricter legislation coming into force on July 1.

Sweden has also said that its independent weapons export agency would be prepared to review its policy once the country was a Nato member. — AFP

For the first time, Colombia will have a leftist president



JULIE TURKEWITZ

The writer is the Andes bureau chief for NYT

Gustavo Petro wins the election, becoming Colombia's first Leftist leader. Petro, a former rebel and a longtime legislator, won Colombia's presidential election on Sunday, galvanising voters frustrated by decades of poverty and inequality under conservative leaders, with promises to expand social programmes, tax the wealthy and move away from an economy he has called overly reliant on fossil fuels.

His victory sets the third-largest nation in Latin America on a sharply uncertain path, just as it faces rising poverty and violence that have sent record numbers of Colombians to the United States border; high levels of deforestation in the Colombian Amazon, a key buffer against climate change; and a growing distrust of key democratic institutions, which has become a trend in the region.

Petro, 62, received more than 50 per cent of the vote, with more than 99 per cent counted. His opponent, Rodolfo Hernández, a construction magnate who had energised the country with a scorched-earth anti-corruption platform, won just over 47 per cent.

Shortly after the vote, Hernández conceded to Petro. "Colombians, today the majority of citizens have chosen the other candidate," Hernández said. "As I said during the campaign, I accept the results of this election." Petro took the stage flanked by his vice-presidential pick, Francia Márquez, and three of Petro's children. The packed stadium went wild, with people standing on chairs and holding phones aloft.

"This story that we are writing today is a new story for Colombia, for Latin America, for the world," Petro said. "We are not going to betray this electorate."

He pledged to govern with what he has called "the politics of love," based on hope, dialogue and understanding.

Just over 58 per cent of Colombia's 39 million voters turned out to cast a ballot, according to official figures.

The victory means that Márquez, an environmental activist who rose from poverty to become a prominent advocate for social justice, will become the country's first Black vice president.

Petro and Márquez's victory reflects an anti-establishment fervour that has spread across Latin America,



Economist

- * Former member of radical leftist urban guerrilla group M-19
- * Founder of political movement Colombia Humana
- * Senator (2006-2009 and 2018-2022)
- * Mayor of Bogota (2012-2015)
- * Candidate for left coalition "Historic Pact" in 3rd run for presidency after failing in 2010 and 2018

- * May 29: comes top in 1st round of Colombian presidential elections with over 40% of the votes
- * June 19: Elected president of Colombia with 50.5% of the votes* in 2nd round

*Over 99% of votes counted: election authority
AFP Photo: Yuri Cortez

PETRO PLEDGED TO GOVERN WITH WHAT HE HAS CALLED 'THE POLITICS OF LOVE,' BASED ON HOPE, DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING

exacerbated by the pandemic and other long-standing issues, including a lack of opportunity. "The entire country is begging for change," said Fernando Posada, a Colombian political scientist, "and that is absolutely clear."

In April, Costa Ricans elected to the presidency of Rodrigo Chaves, a former World Bank official and political outsider, who took advantage of widespread discontent with the incumbent party. Last year, Chile, Peru and Honduras voted for leftist leaders running against candidates on the right, extending a significant, multiyear shift across Latin America.

As a candidate, Petro had energised a generation that is the most educated in Colombian history, but is also dealing with 10 per cent annual inflation, a 20 per cent youth unemployment rate and a 40 per cent poverty rate. His rallies were often full of young people, many of whom said they feel betrayed by decades of leaders who had made grand promises but delivered little.

"We're not satisfied with the mediocrity of past generations," said Larry Rico, 23, a Petro voter at a polling station in Ciudad Bolívar, a poor neighborhood in Bogotá, the capital.

Petro's win is all the more significant because of the country's history. For decades, the government fought a brutal leftist insurgency known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, with the stigma from the conflict making it difficult for a legitimate left to flourish.

— New York Times



Gustavo Petro celebrates after winning the presidential election in Bogota.

The changes and challenges in our lives



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

If there is anything that is constant then it is a whole lot of changes we come across in life.

Butterflies go through it and wonder if they know how beautiful they are going to reach at the final stage. Don't know if they also know when they are at caterpillar stage and crawling on trees that one day would be flying around exploring flowers of all kind. Space and movement are at different level at each stage.

As caterpillar its movement is rectilinear locomotion and is probably because there is no bone in it. They feed on leaves and move on to the pupation site to develop into the next stage. During that period they make leaves their homes by rolling into it. Is it not

WHATEVER THE AGE, THE CHANGES AND CHALLENGES WE GO THROUGH WOULD ONLY HELP US EVOLVE TO BE BETTER AND CAPABLE PEOPLE. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE AND THE OTHERS IS JUST ON THE WAY INDIVIDUALS RESPOND TO SITUATIONS

amazing that after going through pupa stage they come out with wings flapping to get the air moving and they instantly beautify the world.

Who teaches them what to do at each stage?

In fact in the scientific explanations that the caterpillar's old body dies and a new body forms inside the protection of cocoon makes us wonder - so what is that gives

continuity to this being while transforming from a caterpillar to butterfly?

While pupating does it even think about the end result?

In fact if we look at the animal kingdom they do not waste time and worry thinking about future. However it seems in the

deserts the butterflies have a different trend if need be.

Most of the time they could take five to 21 days to come out of the cocoon, but apparently if the conditions are harsh they can wait up to three years as explained by morgridge.org.

Leaves are very important for butterflies and this is where they lay eggs most of the time or the plants because the larvae would have food immediately as they emerge. So who tells them what to do? Is it an intuition backed by experience?

We go through many metamorphoses too in one's life. Now would it not be easier if we accepted the challenges as part of the processes? Because even the butterfly struggles to break out of the cocoon and spread its wings. It is that controlled environment that keeps it perfect but to enter the world it must wrestle it out. But it is this very struggle that prepares the butterfly to explore the world. No one is supposed to assist the butterfly in this process.

It is the same process parents have to let children go through.

Whatever the age, the changes and challenges we go through would only help us evolve to be better and capable people. The only difference is successful people and the others is just on the way individuals respond to situations. There is an opportunity in every crisis. The key to the secret is simply how we respond to each circumstance we face in life.



PEEPING OUT

Boys peek out of a torn mat at the Al Shati camp for Palestinian refugees in Gaza City on Monday. - AFP

The new urgency of nuclear disarmament



ALEXANDER SCHALLENBERG

The writer is Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of the Republic of Austria



PHIL TWYFORD

The writer is Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control of New Zealand

Austria and New Zealand may be far apart geographically, but we are connected by shared values and principles. Particularly relevant today is our longstanding opposition to nuclear weapons and our shared concern about the lack of progress on nuclear disarmament.

While the threat of nuclear weapons never went away after the end of the Cold War, steep cuts to nuclear stockpiles in the early 1990s represented progress. But the trend towards disarmament stalled. Three decades on, nine nuclear-armed states possess some 13,000 nuclear warheads, and, far from phasing out their arsenals, these states are modernising and expanding them. The risks of nuclear escalation, miscalculation, and accident are mounting, even though we have a better understanding than ever of the catastrophic consequences that would follow from the use of nuclear weapons.

We recently received a fresh wake-up call. In early January, the five nuclear powers on the United Nations Security Council reaffirmed the 1985 statement by US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” Yet, the following month, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s government threatened to unleash those same vastly destructive and indiscriminate weapons in the context of Russia’s war against Ukraine.

This threat – which we unequivocally condemn – has sparked a new global debate on the value of nuclear deterrence, highlighting a bleak dissonance between the avowed collective goal of achieving a world without nuclear weapons, and nuclear-armed states’ ongoing reliance on them. This dissonance is also evident in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which entered into force more than 50 years ago following a “grand bargain” between nuclear-armed China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and non-nuclear-armed states, including Austria and New Zealand.

The NPT’s signatories acknowledged that nuclear disarmament is ultimately the most effective way to discourage proliferation. But while proliferation risks have increased in recent decades, concrete progress has stalled. Sixty years after the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of catastrophe, we find ourselves again faced with the threat of nuclear escalation.

Countries the size of New Zealand and Austria cannot coerce others to heed our wishes. But we are far from powerless when it comes to encouraging

constructive change, especially when we work together with like-minded partners. In July 2017, we were among more than 120 states to adopt the new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

The TPNW crystallises our total opposition to nuclear weapons. Consistent with the NPT, it is a practical manifestation of our commitment to nuclear disarmament. And it is based on evidence, both of the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, and of the risks associated with nuclear deterrence.

AFTER MAKING SOME PROGRESS TOWARDS NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT IN THE 1990S, THE WORLD HAS BEEN SUBJECT TO HEIGHTENED NUCLEAR RISKS, REFLECTED IN RUSSIA’S DANGEROUS SABER-RATTLING. FORTUNATELY, STATES THAT SUPPORT A BAN ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS REPRESENT A GLOBAL MAJORITY, AND THUS ARE NOT POWERLESS TO EFFECT CHANGE

The new treaty asks tough questions of those with nuclear decision-making authority. It is they who must consider the sustainability of an approach to national security that imposes existential risks on their populations, as well as all other states and, indeed, the rest of humanity. The treaty also gives voice to the majority of states that do not accept nuclear deterrence as a valid basis for security. We are convinced that it is a fundamental error to believe that these weapons provide security. In reality, they pose a profound threat to us all, as well as to future generations.

The TPNW is also a means of focusing public debate and channelling resources towards those affected by the use of nuclear weapons, not least the Pacific communities that have been exposed to nuclear testing. The TPNW’s evidence-based focus on the humanitarian consequences and existential risks of nuclear weapons gives it immense transformational potential.

From June 21-23 in Vienna, Austria will host the First Meeting of States Parties to the TPNW. Even as we acknowledge that there is much work to be done, we should understand that this meeting is a major achievement in itself. It shows what can be accomplished by a strong alliance between like-minded states and civil society. Similar alliances were instrumental in banning anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions.

Moreover, several nuclear-allied states and other non-state parties have indicated that they will attend the meeting as observers. We welcome them. Even if our views differ on the validity of nuclear weapons for security, we value the perspectives they will bring to an international conversation about the consequences, risks, and challenges of nuclear weapons. This conversation is essential, especially now that nuclear risks are higher than they have been in decades.

The TPNW is not a quick fix. But it can build international pressure and help to put the world back on track towards nuclear disarmament. Given the fundamental threat to humanity, we cannot be content with the status quo on nuclear disarmament. Austria and New Zealand will continue to spearhead these efforts. In the interests of humanity, we will continue to work with all willing state and civil-society partners to remove the nuclear sword of Damocles that is hanging over all our heads.

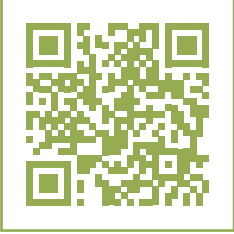
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The threat of nuclear weapons never went away.

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Fitzpatrick wins US Open with sensational finish

BROOKLINE, US: England's Matt Fitzpatrick captured his first major title on Sunday by winning the US Open in dramatic fashion, making spectacular shots as rivals crumbled under final-round pressure.

After a thrilling three-man fight down the back nine at The Country Club, Fitzpatrick fired a two-under-par 68 to finish on six-under-par 274 and defeat Americans Scottie Scheffler and Will Zalatoris by one stroke.

"I'm going to say it because I won but I hit some unbelievable shots coming down the stretch and that's what I work for", Fitzpatrick said.

With perseverance, Fitzpatrick delivered his first professional US victory for a long-sought major trophy.

"It's what you grow up dreaming of", Fitzpatrick said. "It's something I've worked so hard for for such a long time. There was a big monkey on my back trying to win over here and everyone, all they ever talked about was that. To do it as a major for my first win — there's nothing better."

World number 18 Fitzpatrick, who won the 2013 US Amateur at The Country Club, matched Jack Nicklaus as the only US Open and US Amateur winners on the same course, the US legend doing the double at Pebble Beach.

"It means the world", Fitzpatrick said of the achievement.

The 27-year-old from Sheffield, who shared fifth last month at the PGA Championship for his best prior major result, sank a stunning 48-foot birdie putt at the 13th hole to grab a share of the lead.

"I'm going to say it because I won but I hit some unbelievable shots coming down the stretch and that's what I work for"

MATT FITZPATRICK
US Open Champion

At the 15th, Fitzpatrick blasted out of the right rough to just inside 19 feet and rolled in a tension-packed putt to reach 6-under and lead by two thanks to a Zalatoris bogey.

"Got a couple of nice breaks on 15 and took advantage of it and that's what it took in the end", Fitzpatrick said.

After birdies by top-ranked Masters champion Scheffler at 17 and Zalatoris on 16, Fitzpatrick clung to a one-stroke lead at the 18th tee.

The Englishman sent his tee shot into a left fairway bunker, but blasted a magnificent approach to 18 feet and two putted for par.

"I hit a 3-wood into the bunker and if there was one shot I've struggled with this year that I do not want it's a fairway bunker shot", said Fitzpatrick.

"I guess ability just took over. It's one of the best shots I've hit of all time. When I saw it leave the sand and felt the strike I couldn't have been happier"

Zalatoris had a 14-foot birdie putt to force a playoff but when he missed, the record \$3.15 million



top prize went to Fitzpatrick.

"Matt's shot on 18 is going to be shown probably for the rest of US Open history", Zalatoris said.

"I walked by it and thought that going for it was going to be ballsy, but the fact that he pulled it off and even had a birdie look was just incredible. So hats off to him."

Fitzpatrick has had a workout programme to boost his driving

distance for the past two years, boosting his shotmaking courage.

"I absolutely backed myself 110%", he said. "I feel like I can compete against anyone out here, particularly over the last two years as I've got longer. Hopefully this is the first step in getting even better."

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama, the 2021 Masters champion, fired the

best round of the week, a bogey-free 65, to finish fourth on three-under 277.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy and two-time major champion Collin Morikawa shared fifth on 278 while second-ranked Spaniard Jon Rahm, the defending champion, shared 12th on 281 after a closing 74.

Scheffler fired a final-round 67

while Zalatoris, now a three-time runner-up in nine major starts, and third-ranked McIlroy each closed on 69 and seventh-ranked Morikawa, the reigning British Open champion, shot 66.

"Tip of the hat to Fitzy", Scheffler said. "He's hitting the ball really well and has been knocking on the door for a long time. He definitely deserves this win." — AFP

Oman Athletics Association unveils new logo

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

Oman Athletics Association (OAA) launched their new visual brand identity on Monday through different social media platforms of the association.

The new branding of OAA described the simplicity and modernity. The new logo represent the basic elements of the athletics sport in a modern way as it shows three competitions including: Running, jumping and throwing.

After unveiling the new logo, OAA wrote in their social media pages: We lead with youth determination. With a new identity and an ambitious vision. We work towards breaking records.

Salim al Amri, the Chairman



of OAA, thanked the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for their blessings on the new branding of the association.

"The board of directors worked with great effort to showcase the brand in this way as it reflects modernity. After the election of the association, the sporting fans demanded a change of identity as well as from fans of athletics including

the runners who will be the most prominent ambassadors of this identity in several international, continental and regional events", the chief of OAA added.

The OAA aims from the new visual branding to reflect the modern image of the association and contribute in a positive manner to the effective activities, competition and programmes of the association.

Berrettini says in running to win Wimbledon after Queen's double

MILAN: Matteo Berrettini is quietly confident he can win Wimbledon after retaining his Queen's Club title over the weekend to join an elite group of players and continue an impressive return from injury.

World number 11 Berrettini defeated Serbia's Filip Krajinovic 7-5, 6-4 in Sunday's final of the warm-up event for the grass court Grand Slam to claim his second straight title in London, a week after beating Andy Murray to the honours in Stuttgart.

The 26-year-old Italian lost to Novak Djokovic in last year's Wimbledon final and is keen to go one better this year after bouncing back from a near three-month injury lay-off to win two tournaments in a row.

"I don't know if I'm the favourite as Novak and Rafa (Nadal) are always there; Rafa



has already won two Slams and no-one expected him to win in Australia," said Berrettini in an interview with Sky Sport Italia broadcast on Monday.

"I don't feel like I'm the favourite but I know I can do it, I can't pull the wool over people's eyes. My aim is to have a big tournament at

Wimbledon and I hope it will be two intense weeks."

Sunday's victory meant Berrettini joined John McEnroe, Jimmy Connors, Boris Becker, Ivan Lendl, Lleyton Hewitt, Andy Roddick and Murray as the only players in the Open era to win back-to-back Queen's titles.

Before his two recent wins Berrettini had gone through a difficult few months, dropping out in Acapulco with abdominal problems in February and then missing the entire European clay court swing following hand surgery. "After a really good week in Stuttgart it would have been easy to not exactly take my foot off the gas but let my problems overwhelm me," he said.

"Instead I found the right energy levels and to win such a prestigious tournament is really very special." — AFP

DRAVID BACKS UNDER-FIRE PANT



Rishabh Pant

NEW DELHI: Coach Rahul Dravid said Rishabh Pant remained “integral” to India’s plans despite concerns about his batting and leadership after the Twenty20 series against South Africa ended on Sunday in a 2-2 draw.

The 24-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman was making his debut as India captain, prompting speculation that he could one day replace the resting Rohit Sharma, 35, as permanent skipper.

India lost the first two games and Pant managed scores of just 29, 5, 6 and 17 in the series with Sunday’s fifth and final game washed out.

“When you are in the middle overs and you are asking people to play a slightly more attacking brand of cricket, sometimes it’s hard to judge on two or three games,” Dravid said.

“He remains an integral part of our batting line-up. The fact that he is a left-hander is very important to us in the middle overs.

“He would liked to have scored more runs but it’s not that concerning. Certainly he is very big part of our plans going forward in the next few months.”



“When you are in the middle overs and you are asking people to play a slightly more attacking brand of cricket, sometimes it’s hard to judge on two or three games

RAHUL DRAVID
India coach

Pant was out the same way in each of his four innings — attempting to fetch the ball from wide outside off stump and being caught — prompting batting great Sunil Gavaskar to say on TV that Pant “hasn’t learned” from earlier dismissals and “he keeps going for it”.

“He can’t throw enough muscle on that. He has got to stop looking to go aerial that far outside the off-stump.”

Dinesh Karthik, another wicketkeeper-batsman, scored 92 runs in the series including a

match-winning 55 with former India opener Wasim Jaffer saying Pant may find it hard to retain his place as a result.

“I think DK has overlapped Rishabh Pant at least at the moment. I can’t say about the future, but at the moment you would pick DK any time in front of Rishabh Pant,” Jaffer told ESPNcricinfo.

India lost the opening two matches only to bounce back in the next two with convincing victories and Dravid said the young captain would learn from his mistakes.

“I think he is a young captain,

he is learning all the time, he is growing as a leader, he is getting more and more opportunities. It’s again too early to judge him,” said Dravid.

Pant led Indian Premier League side Delhi Capitals in two editions of the popular Twenty20 tournament and took the team to the playoffs last year.

Pant, who made his India Twenty20 debut in 2017, will now fly to England to join the Rohit-led team for a rescheduled Test starting July 1 in Birmingham.

— AFP

England power past Netherlands

AMSTELVEEN, Netherlands: England beat off a plucky attack by the Netherlands on Sunday to defeat the hosts by six wickets in a shortened second one-day international at VRA cricket ground outside Amsterdam.

The win by the world champions give them an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series, with the final match to be played at the same venue on Wednesday.

The Netherlands won the toss and opted to bat, setting Eoin Morgan’s men a target of 236-7 in 41 overs.

Heavy rain overnight delayed the start of the match with officials waiting for wet patches to dry next to the batting-friendly pitch and on the outfield.

England opener Phil Salt slapped 77 off 54 balls before falling to Dutch youngster Arjan Dutt, who also claimed the scalp of fellow opener Jason Roy.

Roy, who scored a single run in England’s record total of 498 on Friday, redeemed himself by hitting 73 off 60 balls.

Unlike Friday’s run-fest which was peppered with sixes, Sunday’s match was a more demure affair, with England’s first six only



coming in the 15th over when Roy smacked Dutt over midwicket to clear the boundary.

Salt survived an early scare when an attempted off-side cut sent the ball into the air, only to fall between two Dutch fielders — none of whom decisively nominated for the catch.

The Welsh-born Salt never really seemed troubled after that, celebrating his half-century with a stylish four off the bowling of Bas de Leede.

Dutt however had the last laugh when Salt attempted to play around the ball and was beaten, seeing the bails flying off the stumps behind him.

England however scored freely, smacking 29 fours despite the fall of Morgan and Liam Livingstone’s wickets in quick succession.

The Netherlands earlier posted a solid 235-7 against a blistering England attack led by David Willey and Carse on a deck that mainly stayed low.

Newly-minted captain Scott Edwards’ move paid far better dividends than Friday’s first ODI, when England were sent in to bat and proceeded to set a new one-day world record of 498.

Top-scoring Dutch batsman Edwards, with 78, played a skipper’s innings which included three sixes and four fours. — AFP

Lyon ready for spin onslaught in Sri Lanka Tests

COLOMBO: Australia’s premier spinner Nathan Lyon on Monday said their two upcoming Tests in Sri Lanka will be a “massive challenge” with pitches expected to turn from day one.

The tourists come into the five-day games from June 29 at the back of a recent 1-0 Test triumph in Pakistan where the Pat Cummins-led side played two draws before winning the final match.

“It is a massive challenge (in Sri Lanka). It can be pretty different... especially if you are coming at the back of Pakistan where those wickets, they didn’t break up,” Lyon told reporters.

“But here we are going to be a lot in the game as spinners from day one. In my past history here playing from my debut to another Test series number of years ago to now, the conditions are going to be pretty similar.”

He believes he could team up with leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson for the red-ball series with Australia likely to go in with two specialist slow bowlers.

Australia, who won the Twenty20 series 2-1 but trail the five one-day internationals 1-2, will begin the opening Test on June 29 in Galle, where Lyon made his debut in 2011.

Lyon, who joined the team for the five-day series, said their win over Pakistan in March has given them confidence that they can win in the subcontinent.

“It’s purely the belief that our process and what we are doing is starting to work. We all know how hard it is to win games of Test cricket away from home,” said Lyon who has claimed 427 wickets in 108 Tests.

“I think just the pure belief that we are able to hang in there for 15 days of really hard Test cricket in the subcontinent in Pakistan and end up with the right result was probably the biggest thing.”

Lyon was part of the Steve Smith-led Australian team which suffered a 3-0 whitewash in Sri



In this file photo taken on March 25, 2022, Australia’s Nathan Lyon celebrates after taking the wicket of Pakistan’s Imam-ul-Haq (not pictured) during the third and final Test against Australia in Lahore. — AFP

Lanka in 2016 and the off-spinner said the result made them learn and grow.

“It was a really good learning curve. We were able to learn and grow as cricketers and people,” said Lyon.

He said that boosted by their two recent one-day international victories over Australia, he

expected Sri Lanka to be “full of confidence and playing some really good cricket”.

Lyon said his chats with New South Wales assistant coach Chandika Hathurusingha — former Sri Lankan all-rounder — have helped him with a better understanding of the conditions in the island nation. — AFP

■ BSC U-16 TEAM TO PLAY EVENT IN DUBAI/SHARJAH



MUSCAT: Bausher Sports Centre Cricket Training Academy is all set to take its U-16 Cricket Team to Dubai/Sharjah (UAE) from Oman to play a six-night cricket tournament against top cricket academies from UAE. Trained students of BSC will be participating on a 10 days tour which will gain great turf cricket exposure amongst the teams from the Dubai region from June 23 to July 21, 2022. Such tours give great exposure in nurturing young talents to develop the game, build up international touring on different playing conditions and set their moral to high standard when they come back to play domestic cricket in Oman. Travelling along with high profile coaches from Oman who will monitor their performances and make their tour to become successful in terms of boosting up cricket.

Nissanka stars as Sri Lanka cruise past Australia

COLOMBO: Pathum Nissanka scored a brilliant maiden ODI century on Sunday as Sri Lanka stunned Australia to go 2-1 up in the third one-day international.

Set a tricky 292 to win after a Travis Head 70, the hosts won comfortably with nine balls to spare in Colombo, in their second straight victory in the five-match series.

Glenn Maxwell bowled Niroshan Dickwella for 25 but helped by the dew, Nissanka and Kusal Mendis ground down the injury-depleted Australian attack of Josh Hazlewood, Jhye Richardson and Matthew Kuhnemann.

Mendis retired hurt unbeaten on 87 off 85 balls and was replaced by Dhananjaya de Silva who made 25, but Nissanka clung on until almost the end, caught off Richardson for 137 off 147.

Richardson then skittled captain Dasun Shanaka for a duck, but Charith Asalanka -- with an ice-cold six in the penultimate over off Hazlewood -- and Chamika Karunaratne saw Sri Lanka home.

“In the dressing room we talked about tempo and awareness and they delivered,” Shanaka said. “It is a great chance for this team to pull out a series win.”

“The heat and humidity was a challenge for both teams. But we handled it to our advantage,” said 24-year-old Nissanka.

“The wicket seemed to get a little bit better, it wasn’t stopping as much in the surface. But all credit to Sri Lanka, that was a great run chase,” Australian captain Aaron Finch said.

“It was quite clinical, particularly Nissanka. That was a very classy innings. And Kusal (Mendis), we know the quality of player he is,” Finch said.

Earlier Australia braved a spin onslaught to reach 291-6 in their 50 overs after winning the toss and opting to bat first.

Opener David Warner went for nine in the third over and Mitchell Marsh, back from injury, struggled to get going and departed for 10 off 23 deliveries.

Marnus Labuschagne and Finch added 69 before Labuschagne was stumped off Jeffrey Vandersay

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA	
D Warner c Theekshana b Chameera	9
A Finch c de Silva b Vandersay	62
M Marsh c Mendis b Wellalage	10
M Labuschagne st Dickwella b Vandersay	29
A Carey lbw de Silva	49
T Head (not out)	70
G Maxwell c Wellalage b Vandersay	33
C Green (not out)	15
Extras (B-5, LB-4, NB-3, W-2)	14
Total (For 6 wkts, 50 overs)	291
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-47, 3-116, 4-121, 5-193, 6-233	
Bowling: Chameera 8-0-49-1, Theekshana 10-0-37-0, Karunaratne 5-0-46-0, Wellalage 10-0-56-1, Vandersay 10-0-49-3, de Silva 6-0-35-1, Shanaka 1-0-10-0	

SRI LANKA	
N Dickwella b Maxwell	25
P Nissanka c Warner b Richardson	137
K Mendis (retired hurt)	87
D de Silva c and b Hazlewood	25
C Asalanka (not out)	13
D Shanaka b Richardson	0
C Karunaratne (not out)	0
Extras (B-2, LB-1, W-2)	5
Total (For 4 wkts, 48.3 overs)	292
Fall of wickets: 1-42, 2-212, 3-255, 4-284, 5-285	
Bowling: Hazlewood 9-3-0-57-1, Richardson 9-0-39-2, Maxwell 7-0-44-1, Kuhnemann 10-0-61-0, Green 5-0-30-0, Labuschagne 7-0-49-0, Head 1-0-9-0	

for 29 and Finch edged the same bowler to slip two overs later having made 62 off 85.

Head and Alex Carey added 72 before de Silva trapped Carey leg-before. Maxwell hit 33 off 18 but became Vandersay’s third scalp, miscuing the spinner to Dunith Wellalage scurrying back from midwicket.

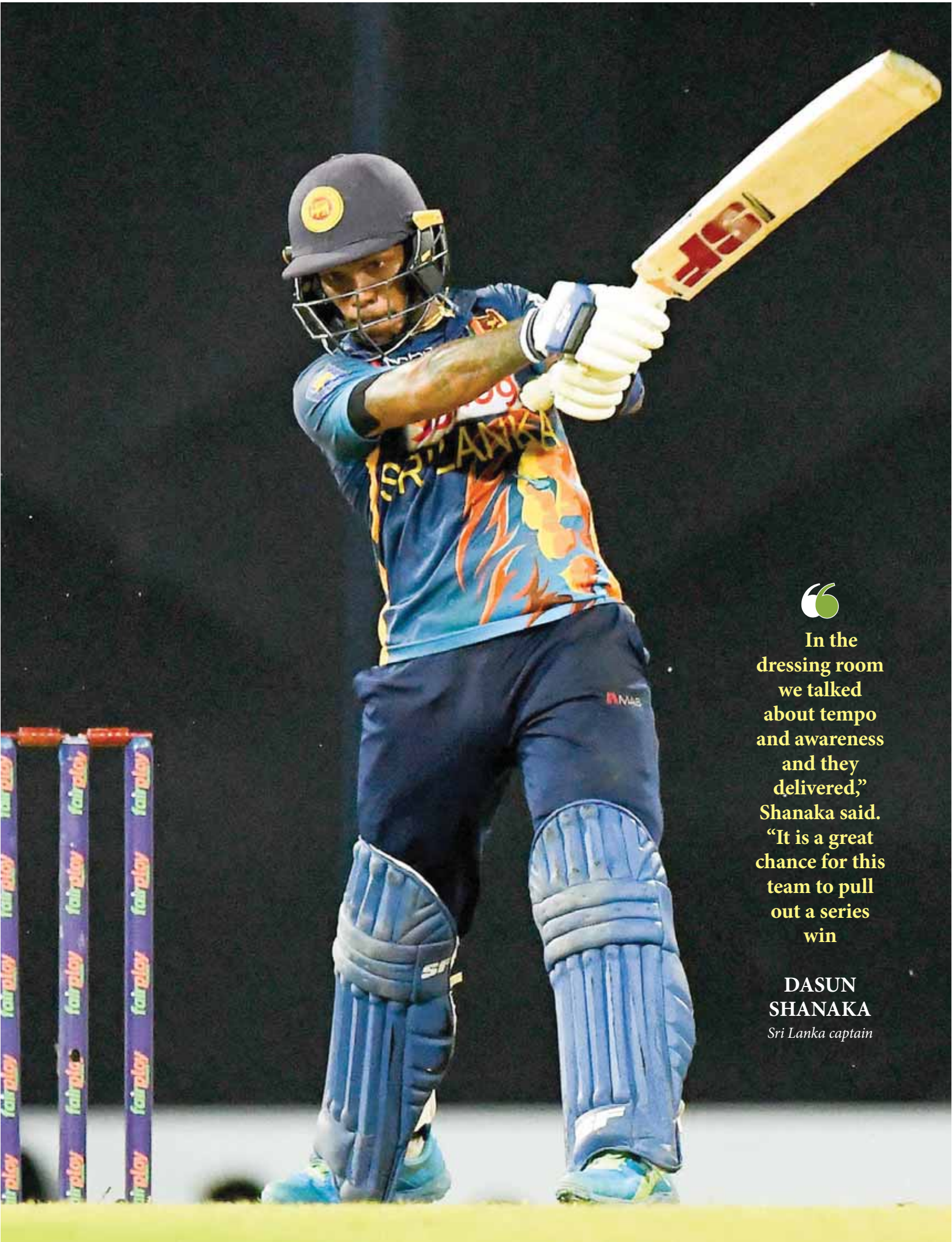
But Head stayed firm, reaching his half-century and punishing Wellalage with three sixes in the penultimate over and ending 70 not out off 65 deliveries.

Vandersay ended with figures of 3 for 49.

Already missing Marcus Stoinis, Kane Richardson and Mitchell Starc, Australia left out Steve Smith after the batsman injured his left quad batting in Thursday’s 26-run defeat inallekele.

Cameron Green and Richardson returned from injury, while Test skipper Pat Cummins and Mitchell Swepson were left out. Spinner Kuhnemann was again in for the injured Ashton Agar. The hosts were once again without key all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga, who injured his groin in the first match while Dickwella replaced Danushka Gunathilaka.

— AFP



Sri Lanka’s Pathum Nissanka plays a shot during the third ODI against Australia at R Premadasa International Cricket Stadium in Colombo. – AFP

“In the dressing room we talked about tempo and awareness and they delivered,” Shanaka said. “It is a great chance for this team to pull out a series win

DASUN SHANAKA
Sri Lanka captain

Positives for India as T20I series ends 2-2 after washout

BANGALORE: Skipper Rishabh Pant on Sunday said India’s different approach to win matches has paid off after their Twenty20 series against South Africa ended 2-2 with the final game being washed out.

The hosts bounced back from 2-0 down to level the series with convincing victories in the absence of top stars including regular captain Rohit Sharma and batting stalwart Virat Kohli.

Rain played spoilsport in the series decider in Bangalore when persistent showers forced umpires to call off the match with just 3.3 overs bowled and India on 28-3 after being put into bat first.

“It might get a little bit frustrating (with the no result), but there are a lot of positives, especially the way the whole team showed character after the series was 2-0 (in favour of South Africa),” said Pant.

“We are just finding different ways to win the matches, we are trying to play different kind of

cricket which we never used to play. There will be mistakes but as along we learn from our mistakes and keep improving it will be fine.”

India won the third match by 48 runs and then hammered the hosts by 82 runs for their second successive win on Friday.

Pace bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar was named player of the series for his six wickets. Indian opener Ishan Kishan topped the batting chart with 206 runs.

Pant, who was made national captain for the first time ahead of the series when KL Rahul pulled out injured, had an ordinary outing with scores of 29, 5, 6 and 17.

“It is for you guys to decide on how I am doing as a player and captain,” the wicketkeeper-batsman said on his first series as Indian leader.

“I can only focus on giving my 100 per cent every time I go on the field and keep improving.”

India now head to Ireland

for two T20 matches while a few players including Pant head straight to England for a rescheduled fifth Test starting July 1 in Birmingham.

In the final T20, play started 50 minutes late, when rain forced the teams to head off the field just before the first ball was bowled.

South African quick Lungi Ngidi bowled the left-handed Kishan for 15, and then got his opening partner Ruturaj Gaikwad caught at mid-on for 10.

Shreyas Iyer, on nought, and skipper Rishabh Pant, on one, were batting when play stopped for second the final time.

Earlier, South Africa skipper Temba Bavuma was ruled out of the line-up due to an elbow injury he suffered in the team’s previous loss. Keshav Maharaj stood in as captain.

“We’re a work in progress, and we’re trying different combinations to see how we shape up ahead of the (T20) World Cup,” said Maharaj. — AFP



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OQ Upstream hydrocarbon output climbs to 218k boepd

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

OQ Group, the integrated global energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, showcased the achievements of its Upstream Business at an event held under the auspices of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals.

In a statement to ONA, Al Aufi said: “OQ Group plays an important role in many oil, gas, petrochemical and renewable energy investments, as part of its strategy to diversify its investments, operate to the highest international standards and export its products to more than 60 countries.”

Through investments in various oil and gas concessions, both directly and through partnerships, OQ’s Upstream Business has contributed to increasing hydrocarbon production, which has reached an average of 218,000 barrels of equivalent per day (boepd), accounting for a 12.6 per cent of Oman’s total oil and gas production during a relatively short period, he noted



The Group has also reduced the operational cost per barrel of oil, enhanced local value creation, and employed national cadres in technical and engineering fields. Talal bin Hamed al Oufi, CEO of OQ Group, said: “The Group invests in various oil, gas, petrochemical and energy businesses to maximise its

contribution to the national economy, and contributes to the success of the government’s policies in economic diversification in accordance with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, as well as supporting various private sector business activities and many local value-added

initiatives.”

Notable achievements in the Upstream Business include oil and gas discoveries in Block 60, which currently averages 50,000 boepd.

The group is also seeking to increase its output to around 60,000 barrels of equivalent per day by the end of this year, he said.

Talal al Oufi confirmed that Okio was able to deliver gas from production fields to power plants and industries in various regions of the Sultanate Oman through 4,100 kilometre-long gas network carrying more than 100 million cubic metre per day of gas.

According to Ahmed bin Saeed al Azkawi, CEO of OQ Upstream Business, the group’s achievements are the result of

continued cooperation with Ministry of Energy and Minerals, strengthening government efforts to attract international partners, intensive exploration and production activities, which reflect His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik’s directives to diversify sources of income and contributing to raising the energy sector’s GDP share.

“The group has worked to reduce the cost of oil production through the use of modern technologies despite increased production, pointing out that the group contributed to reducing costs in many joint ventures, which benefits the government and investors and has employed its human potential and technical capabilities in managing asset safety.

Oman set to increase development expenditure

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JUNE 20

The latest Economic Insight report for the Sultanate of Oman, commissioned by ICAEW and compiled by Oxford Economics, reveals Oman’s oil production has risen above 1 million barrels per day, from an average of 970,000 barrels per day in 2021, as elevated oil prices drive economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the report for Q2, increasing commodity and food prices driven higher by the Russia-Ukraine conflict are weighing moderately on Oman’s outlook.

However, gains made in the hydrocarbon sector will offset higher costs, with oil production set to increase over 5 per cent this year and gas output expected to rebound, following a pullback in January and February.

Continued investment in the gas sector should further boost production capacity by 0.5 million cubic feet within the next two years, supporting GDP growth. Expansion is also expected from the non-oil industries, including tourism, having been hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Oman’s recovery has been



OMAN’S ECONOMY IS BEGINNING TO BENEFIT FROM THE REFORMS INTRODUCED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, LEADING TO ITS FIRST CREDIT RATING UPGRADE FROM S&P GLOBAL RATINGS SINCE 2007. OIL WINDFALLS AND HIGHER NON-OIL REVENUES, INCLUDING FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF VAT LAST YEAR, HAVE SUPPORTED IMPROVED ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE.

underpinned by the government’s strong response to control the outbreak. Although new restrictions came into force in

April, these have since been relaxed, enabling tourism to rebound and the economy to continue its recovery.

Oman’s economy is beginning to benefit from the reforms introduced over the past two years, leading to its first credit rating upgrade from S&P Global Ratings since 2007. Oil windfalls and higher non-oil revenues, including from the introduction of VAT last year, have supported improved economic performance.

As a result, Oman is expected to post an annual budget surplus, forecast at 5 per cent of GDP, for the first time since 2008, following a recorded surplus of RO 357 million at the end of March.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Success of The BGP Technical Workshop



The BGP Oman Technical Workshop was held by BGP Oil & Gas Services L.L.C in Muscat, the capital of Oman, on June 15th, 2022. It was held simultaneously through online and offline methods.

The representatives invited from different oil companies participated this BGP Technical Workshop in Oman, nearly 20 experts of BGP also participated in this workshop. They came from BGP International, BGP Oman, Non-seismic, Abu Dhabi Processing Center and other integrated unities, some members who could not reach this workshop in person participated by video conference.

This technical workshop introduced BGP’s best practices covering onshore acquisition as well as advances in the related data processing. Including technical development



on Advances in Seismic Land Acquisition Methods, Advances in Seismic Processing and Interpretation, Intelligent Seismic Crew, Ultra-sensitivity Distributed Acoustic Sensing

(uDAS) system/VSP, and Non-Seismic Acquisition.

The representatives expressed their insights and the vision of the future direction of the industry. And all parties discussed the challenges faced and the way move forward in the future.

At the end of the workshop, participants appreciated the communication platform provided by BGP in this Technical Workshop. BGP also hoped to continue to work together with various oil companies and strive to create more collaboration and cooperation opportunities.

The workshop made an expectable achievement. Not only did it promote communication between the companies, but also it facilitated the building of BGP’s corporate in Oman even further regions.

Lexus RX: Luxury, style & sophistication



MUSCAT: Lexus has made quite a mark with the RX, making it an iconic vehicle that has pioneered advanced technology like a unique combination of petrol engine and hybrid electric motor.

Besides offering impressive luxury, comfort and a host of features, the RX offers some of the finest driving and ownership experiences. The Lexus RX is available in 5 & 7-seater configurations. The Lexus RX embraces Lexus' reputation for engaging performance.

The engineering team has scrutinised every part of the vehicle and has made significant enhancements to the rigidity of the body and suspension system, as well as shock absorber and brake-control system. The result is a vehicle with outstanding handling, which enables drivers to trace their desired driving line with incredible precision.

The RX is powered by a choice of two powertrains. The RX 350 is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine, which produces 296 HP and 37.7 Kg.M of torque and is paired to an eight-speed automatic transmission.

And the RX 450h hybrid variant is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine

and two electric motors and produces a combined system output of 308 hp.

The RX Hybrid is available with a hybrid battery warranty of 8 years or 160,000 kms, whichever is earlier. To get the best out of every drive, the Lexus RX 450h can be switched to EV drive mode to reduce noise while driving in residential areas and to reduce exhaust gas in indoor parking lots and garages or through a combination of its petrol engine and two electric motors.

This depends on the vehicle's speed and customer's driving behaviour.

The batteries in the hybrid electric drivetrain are automatically charged by either the petrol engine or when braking and decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

A host of advanced technologies ensure the RX 450h drives like any other conventional vehicle, while not requiring special fuel. Inside the RX a 12.3-inch high-resolution, split-screen Lexus Multimedia System touchscreen positioned closer to the driver, offers control of both audio and climate systems. The touchscreen also includes a rear-view camera to assist the driver in reversing.

Bank Muscat, National Finance launch online direct debit solution

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has signed an agreement with National Finance for its cutting-edge online Direct Debit solution. National Finance is a diversified non-banking finance company, which provides a wide array of financial products to a robust base of retail and corporate customers.

Through this agreement, Bank Muscat continues to leverage its technology prowess to provide customers with the most innovative digital banking solutions that deliver fast and seamless payment and collection solutions, thereby, enhancing their banking experience.

National Finance, which already uses Online Banking, will now also use the bank's Collection Solution of Online Direct Debit for managing the payments from their customers. The agreement was signed by Wafa bint Ibrahim al Ajmiyah, Assistant General Manager - Transaction & Government Banking, Bank Muscat and Juma al Khamisi, General Manager - Finance & Operations, National Finance.

The Sultanate of Oman is building the strategy, infrastructure and capabilities to be at the forefront of digital societies. In line with the Oman Vision 2040, Central Bank of Oman is spearheading the overall digital transformation strategy of the financial services sector in the country.

In an endeavour to provide affordable and accessible payment services to achieve an inclusive financial system in the country, CBO has introduced 'Direct Debit' service which is an alternate secure payment option replacing Cheque payment options.

The increase in usage of 'Direct Debit' will have a positive effect on the banking system with reduction of cash in the payment process and digitalising the entire collection process. CBO



has already included the Direct Debit facility in National Payment System Law for the purpose of providing legal framework to the facility. This gives proper governance structure, dispute resolution mechanism to the direct debit returns and management of direct debit facility.

Wafa bint Ibrahim al Ajmiyah, Assistant General Manager - Transaction & Government Banking, Bank Muscat said, "Our corporate clients are increasingly focused on improving the end-user experience of their customers, with integrated solutions that offer more choice and convenience with flexible payment options and simplified user experiences. We are delighted to bring National Finance onboard, a leading non-banking finance company in the Sultanate of Oman to our sophisticated Collections Solution of Online Direct Debit.

Our Online Direct Debit Solution will enable National Finance to collect payments directly from accounts of their customers, thus, automating the entire collection process while minimising credit risk and reducing collection cost.

The new digital service is based on the bank's belief in the importance of achieving the highest level of services provided

to its customers in a manner that meets their needs and keeps pace with the latest banking trends while providing the highest level of security."

Juma al Khamisi, General Manager - Finance & Operations, National Finance, said, "We are launching Online Direct Debit for our collections in collaboration with Bank Muscat, which aligns with our strategy of digital transformation of all aspects of our operations.

We are proud to partner with Bank Muscat to use the bank's state-of-the-art digital collection solution, which is a smart, innovative and completely digital service helping us to vastly improve our operational efficiencies.

This service will greatly enhance our customers' experiences and provide them with a convenient method for making payments of their loan obligations on time. It will also facilitate efficient financial settlement with automated reconciliation processes."

Bank Muscat's Online Direct Debit is a digital collection solution, which provides corporates with a convenient mechanism to manage their recurring payments from their customers. This solution provides

improved working capital management and predictability in liquidity management with automation in the collection of funds.

The solution eliminates the need for paper-based payment instructions for recurring payments and manual tracking of payment deadlines. The solution provides the flexibility of submitting debit mandates online and the initiation of direct debit collection by the corporates themselves through a transaction banking platform.

The solution also offers Secured 'Host to Host' connectivity for automatic Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) integration. The Online Direct Debit solution facilitates the collection of utility bills, repayment of loans and mortgages, credit card bills, systematic investments, insurance premiums and more. This solution is available to Corporates, Government Institutions and SME customers.

As the trusted banking partner in Oman, Bank Muscat is committed to supporting corporates to make a mark in digitalisation to create a successful business environment. Bank Muscat provides a complete range of products, services and technology-driven digital offerings catering to government entities, corporates, SMEs and the retail industry in the area of Payments, Account services, Collections and Receivables, Liquidity solutions, Point of Sales (PoS) terminals, QR Code Payments, Payment Gateway etc.

Earlier this year, Bank Muscat had announced the launch of its 'Integrated Transaction Banking Platform', as part of the bank's digital transformation plan, which offers a wide range of online capabilities including payments, a consolidated dashboard of bank accounts across all banks, Direct Debit solution, Virtual accounts and Liquidity solutions.

Hyundai turns to hybrid and EV to build hydrogen-fuelled future

MUSCAT: The rapid shift toward sustainable solutions has inspired more efficient and rewarding ways of solving major environmental crises. As a result, the automotive industry, including Hyundai, has turned to hybrid and electric vehicles to help usher in a more sustainable lineup of vehicles.

However, in an effort to achieve a more sustainable future for humanity, Hyundai are investing in one of the simplest yet the brightest solutions: Hydrogen, the most lightweight and abundant element in the universe.

On Hyundai's hydrogen strategic direction, Hyoungh Jung Im, Head of Hyundai Motor Company Middle East and Africa HQ said: "Twenty years ago, Hyundai Motor Company established a dedicated research team to develop its Fuel Cell Electric Vehicle (FCEV)



technology. The vision was simple - FCEVs that use fuel cells and electric vehicles (EVs) can make a huge impact in the market, by shifting from conventional engines to more eco-friendly technologies, today we are proud of the progress made by our team's achievement which placed Hyundai Motor Company at the forefront of Hydrogen Fuel cell technologies".

In 2013, Hyundai introduced the first FCEV, the fuel cell-

powered Santa Fe, which marks the first mass-produced FCEV in the world. A new era has started for the company's production of fuel cell technologies, which were included in many models later such as NEXO, which was based on the FE Fuel Cell concept.

Hyundai Motor Company aims to deliver the next-generation fuel cell system that enhances performance and durability, in a lighter

architecture with enhanced energy density by offering a highly efficient and diversified lineup of hydrogen-powered vehicles.

In December 2018, Hyundai Motor Company introduced 'Fuel Cell Vision 2030', a long-term roadmap that reflects its ongoing commitment to accelerate the development of a hydrogen society. That aims to secure 700,000 units a year of production capacity of fuel cell systems for automobiles, as well as for non-automotive sectors, such as vessels, rail cars, drones, and power generators, by 2030.

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

ahli islamic extends cash reward offers on salary transfer

MUSCAT: Continuing to offer added benefits to its customers and assessing their various needs, ahli islamic has announced the extension of the salary transfer offer until the end of July, through which it offers a 10 per cent cash reward of the total salary, up to a maximum of RO 500. All current and new ahli islamic customers from Oman and expatriates, whose monthly salary is at least RO 1,000, are eligible to receive a one-time offer.

This initiative is part of the Bank's strategic efforts to enhance its services and products, maximising benefits for its customers, within a framework that conforms to the Islamic-sharia'h principles.

Through its new salary transfer campaign, which runs until the end of July 2022, ahli islamic aims to provide its customers with Islamic banking products and services that suit the ever-evolving choices of



today's customer.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, Deputy General Manager and Head of ahli islamic said, "Islamic banking has recently become increasingly popular among Oman's new workforce, which is characterised by being more aware, and decisive of their choices. Clearly, the trend is attributed to customer's awareness of the benefits offered by Islamic banks. By extending our promotion period, we hope to expand the benefits of this offer to an increased number of our customers."



Calls for setting up national reinsurance JV revive

National spotlight: Sultanate of Oman prepares to host 34th GAIF Conference

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

With the Sultanate of Oman set to host the next edition of the General Arab Insurance Federation's (GAIF) biennial conference in 2024, there are renewed calls for the Omani government to play its part as a partner with the private sector in positioning the sector for stronger and sustainable growth for the future.

According to insurance sector experts, the need for a central reinsurance institution formed by the government in partnership with the private sector will be among a host of issues that will take centre stage in the intervening period leading up to the prestigious conference.

"The local insurance industry, with the support and assistance of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), hopes to work closely with the Omani authorities in facilitating the establishment of a centralised national reinsurance company as an initiative of the government with the support of private sector players — local and international", said Murtadha M J Ibrahim al Jamalani (pictured), Chairman of OCCI's Finance



& Insurance Committee.

"This is imperative to the goal of suitably preparing the insurance industry, as well as the national economy, for catastrophes — both natural and man-made."

Al Jamalani was in Oran, Algeria recently as part of Oman's delegation at the 2022 edition of GAIF. The delegation, comprising officials from the Capital Market Authority (CMA), OCCI and Oman Insurance Association, has successfully lobbied the Federation to support Oman's bid to host the 2024 edition.

"By the grace of the Almighty, we succeeded in persuading the majority of

PRIVATE INSURERS NEED TO SUITABLY AMP UP THEIR RISK MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES GOING FORWARD. WHEN THEY INSURE BUSINESSES AND THEIR OPERATIONS, THEY NEED TO HAVE THE REQUISITE KNOWLEDGE AND CAPABILITIES TO IDENTIFY AND ASSESS THE RISKS THEIR CLIENTS FACE AND ACCORDINGLY PROVIDE THEM WITH INSURANCE COVERAGE

GAIF members to accept our offer to host the 34th conference in Muscat in 2024", Al Jamalani said.

"In fact, we first made the offer in 2018, but when the pandemic broke out, the 33rd edition scheduled in 2020 in Algeria was pushed back to 2022. We took the opportunity to remind the Federation of our standing offer and, despite some competition from rival venues, the final decision went in Oman's favour."

Referring to the need for a state-backed reinsurance entity in the Sultanate of Oman, the official cited examples of government-led reinsurance institutions operating in countries, such as, India, Iran and Algeria.

"There are a number of successful examples of state-led reinsurance corporations that provide a useful model for the Omani government to choose from.

On the one hand, state-backing will attract international players as partners, bringing with them foreign investment into the country. On the other hand, the outflow of insurance premium is limited when the reinsurer is partly government-owned.

So I hope the Omani government will consider taking the lead in setting up a majority state-owned national reinsurance company, together with private partners."

Another key matter that will attract a lot of attention in the lead-up to the 2024 GAIF Conference in Muscat is Risk Management, according to Al Jamalani.

He explained: "Private insurers need to suitably amp up their risk management capabilities going forward. When they insure businesses and their operations, they need to have the requisite knowledge and capabilities to identify and assess the risks their clients face and accordingly provide them with insurance coverage.

Risk management is a discipline that insurance firms must be conversant with."

Significantly, major reinsurance companies are averse to offering competitive business terms and

conditions to the markets due to two key factors: Adverse claims experience and low retention of risk, says the veteran insurance industry representative.

The nature of the topography and landscape of our country, with a lengthy seafont that is exposed to extreme weather events, contributes to an unbalance insurance portfolio that does not easily appeal to international reinsurance players.

Consequently, the centralisation of reinsurancelocallybecomeskey,h stressed. Furthermore, with the government playing the role of both producer and consumer — across multiple sectors, notably Oil & Gas, Mining, Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Health, Tourism, Aviation & Maritime Transport, Logistics, Housing & Infrastructure, and so — its large portfolio of high-value assets and infrastructure must be suitably safeguarded against disasters.

A centralised reinsurance entity can play a part in mitigating the cost burden on the government if these assets are damaged in any calamity. In the event, the proposed centralised reinsurance entity becomes the captive reinsurer for the nation — one buyer for reinsurance protection or retrocession protection, a feasibility study report shall be prepared accordingly, he added.

Oman crude slides to \$108.51 per barrel

MUSCAT: The price of Oman crude slumped to \$108.51 a barrel in trading on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) after losing \$7.72 a barrel from Friday's price of \$116.33 per barrel. International benchmarks began to stabilise on Monday after losing about 6 per cent of their value over the weekend — blamed on a delayed reaction to concerns about a looming recession.

Brent crude futures were down 38 cents, or 0.3 per cent, at \$112.74 a barrel. Front-month prices tumbled 7.3 per cent last week, their first weekly fall in five. US West Texas Intermediate crude was at \$109.38 a barrel, down 18 cents or 0.2 per cent. Front-

month prices dropped 9.2 per cent last week, the first decline in eight weeks.

Analysts and investors said they believe a recession is more likely after the US Federal Reserve approved on Wednesday the largest interest rate increase in more than a quarter of a century to stem a surge in inflation.

Libya's oil production has remained volatile following blockades by groups in the country's east, with its output most recently pegged at 700,000 per day.

Meanwhile, prospects are dwindling for Iranian sanctions relief that could result in a meaningful increase in the country's crude exports.

Oman set to increase development expenditure

FROM PAGE 13

Against this positive backdrop, the authorities announced they would boost development expenditure to RO 1.1 billion in 2022, an increase of RO 0.2 billion from the original budget, with additional allocations planned in subsequent years.

The recently introduced economic reforms, including in the labour market, will support job creation and stimulate growth in the expat workforce.

This has led to a bounceback in private-sector jobs, following a steady decline since 2017, including a steep 15 per cent year-on-year drop in 2020 as businesses reacted to the pandemic. However, a full recovery in the labour market is expected to take several years.

Vanessa Heywood, ICAEW Head of Middle East, said: "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin



Vanessa Heywood

Tarik has made great strides in improving the domestic landscape since he assumed power two years ago, with the diversification objectives enshrined in Oman Vision 2040 a key undertaking. The Leadership has also given impetus to its reform agenda to attract foreign investment, including allowing full foreign ownership of local companies and more flexible property purchase rules."

Scott Livermore, ICAEW Economic Adviser, and Chief Economist and Managing



Scott Livermore

Director, Oxford Economics Middle East, said: "Oman has rebounded strongly from 2020 where there was a sizeable budget gap and decline in private-sector employment.

While oil has been the primary driver of the current economic upturn across the region, it is Oman's reform policy that has been instrumental in transforming the economy beyond hydrocarbons. This will enable the country to utilise its short-term gains for long-term prosperity, as set out in Oman

Vision 2040."

In the near-term, ICAEW expects Oman to face headwinds from the lockdown-induced economic slowdown in China, the largest buyer of Oman's oil. Beyond the near-term, oil dependency remains an underlying risk, with the potential for a downturn in oil prices to renew financing pressures.

Alongside the region and most of the world, households and businesses are facing rising costs, with the war in Ukraine exacerbating price pressures stemming from disrupted supply chains and food and energy inflation.

Inflation rates have slowed to 2.6 per cent in April, from 4 per cent in Q1, due to the base effect of VAT being introduced last year. Overall, ICAEW forecasts inflation to average 2.8 per cent this year, before falling back below 2 per cent in 2023.

Demand for air travel is back but challenges remain

VINOD NAIR

DOHA, JUNE 20

While the demand for air travel has increased and airlines adding the capacity, airports are taking time to meet the resurge in demand. This was revealed at the Annual General meeting of The International Air Transport Association (IATA) in Doha on Tuesday.

The demand for air travel is expected to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2023 as countries ease all restrictions. It was also impact of the current oil prices will be temporary and ticket rates have been impacted as airports tried to make up for losses from travel bans.

IATA also said that the Industry losses are expected to reduce to -\$9.7 billion (improved from the October 2021 forecast for \$1.6 billion loss) for a net loss margin of -1.2 per cent. Efficiency gains



and improving yields are helping airlines to reduce losses even with rising labour and fuel costs (the latter driven by a +40 per cent increase in the world oil price and a widening crack spread this year).

Industry optimism and commitment to emissions reductions are evident in the expected net delivery of over 1,200 aircraft in 2022.

Strong pent-up demand, the lifting of travel restrictions in most markets, low unemployment in most countries, and expanded personal savings are fuelling a resurgence in demand that will see passenger numbers reach 83 per cent of pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

"Airlines are resilient. People are flying in ever greater numbers.

And cargo is performing well against a backdrop of growing economic uncertainty. Losses will be cut to \$9.7 billion this year and profitability is on the horizon for 2023. It is a time for optimism, even if there are still challenges on costs, particularly fuel, and some lingering restrictions in a few key markets", said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

Revenues are rising as Covid-19 restrictions ease and people return to travel. The challenge for 2022 is to keep costs under control. "The reduction in losses is the result of hard work to keep costs under control as the industry ramps up.

The improvement in the financial outlook comes from holding costs to a 44 per cent increase while revenues increased 55 per cent. As the industry returns to more normal levels of production and with high fuel costs likely to stay for a while, profitability will depend on continued cost control. And that encompasses the value chain.

Our suppliers, including airports and air navigation service providers, need to be as focused on controlling costs as their customers to support the industry's recovery", Walsh said.

Passenger revenues are expected to account for \$498

billion of industry revenues, more than double the \$239 billion generated in 2021.

Scheduled passenger numbers are expected to reach 3.8 billion, with revenue passenger kilometres (RPKs) growing 97.6 per cent compared with 2021, reaching 82.4 per cent of 2019 traffic. As pent-up demand is released with the easing of travel restrictions, yields are expected to rise 5.6 per cent.

That follows a yield evolution of -9.1 per cent in 2020 and +3.8 per cent in 2021. At \$192 billion, fuel is the industry's largest cost item in 2022 (24 per cent of overall costs, up from 19 per cent in 2021). This is based on an expected average price for Brent crude of \$101.2/ barrel and \$125.5 for jet kerosene.

Airlines are expected to consume 321 billion litres of fuel in 2022 compared with the 359 billion litres consumed in 2019.

China's once-sizzling property market has started to cool

DAISUKE WAKABAYASHI AND JOY DONG

A year ago, business was humming for Liang Jiawei, a property salesperson in Zhanjiang, a coastal city in southern China. He could sell three apartments in a day without much arm-twisting. The apartments were fairly generic, Liang said, but the new building complex — in an up-and-coming neighborhood not far from a high-speed rail station — was enough to entice buyers.

Then came a sudden reversal of fortune. China's property sector started to crumble under the weight of its huge debts. What was already shaping up to be the country's worst housing market in years suffered another blow when a new variant of the coronavirus triggered widespread lockdowns and brought the economy to a standstill.

The turmoil has touched off a plunge in new-home sales and depressed real estate prices for the first time in years, jeopardizing the prospects of an already fragile economy that had come to depend on housing for job growth and business spending, and putting at risk an important investment for millions of Chinese families.

So far, China's efforts to revive the housing market with lower mortgage rates, easier credit, subsidies and relaxed regulations have not worked. In April and May, new-home prices fell in more than half of China's 70 biggest cities for the first time since 2016, and sales of such properties tumbled nearly 60%.

Zhanjiang, a port city of 7 million people, had some of the steepest price declines among major cities. Liang said he sold only five apartments in April. May was even worse.

"Prices have come down, but enthusiasm for buying houses still hasn't returned," Liang said. "The economy is not good, and the continuous impact of the pandemic has completely changed the situation."

As China slowly emerges from restrictive lockdowns, the country is focused on preventing an economic slowdown. Last month, its premier, Li Keqiang, called an emergency meeting and issued a grave warning to more than 100,000 officials that businesses and local governments needed to act with "clear urgency."

The real estate sector is a large and important lever. Ever since China started to roll out reforms in 1988 for commercial housing, property has become a pillar of an ascendant economy. By some estimates, it accounts for about 30% of



An idle construction site for an Evergrande residential project in Taiyuan, China. – The New York Times

China's gross domestic product after factoring in related industries such as construction and property management.

Property also carries a deep significance in Chinese society. For young people who want to marry, owning a home is considered a must before starting a family. Instead of investing in stocks and bonds, Chinese households allocate most of their savings to real estate — at more than twice the rate of Americans.

Also, a hit to real estate prices could ripple through the economy by eroding how much Chinese shoppers are willing to spend on appliances, clothes, jewellery and cars.

With the economy in limbo, Beijing is trying to get people buying property again.

The government suspended a trial program to implement property taxes in March. Last month, Chinese banks cut mortgage costs by the largest amount since a new interest rate system was put in place in 2019.

In addition, various local governments have rolled out dozens of new policies to promote homebuying. Meishan, a city in Sichuan province, said it would offer subsidies for new-home purchases before the end of the year. The government of Wenzhou, a city in Zhejiang province, said it would now permit interest-only repayments for the first three years on mortgages for first-time homebuyers.

Huainan, a city in Anhui province,

ordered banks to extend more money and shorten loan-approval times, as well as lower the mortgage rates and down-payment requirements for first-time buyers.

A year ago, the concern with China's real estate market wasn't reluctant buyers but frenzied speculators. When a property in Shenzhen became available in March 2020, the building's 288 units sold out online in 7 minutes, according to state media.

Chinese officials, worried about a housing bubble and its impact on the financial system, enacted the so-called three red lines policy to curb the reckless borrowing habits of the country's biggest property developers.

The new rules, which required companies to pay down debt before borrowing more money, started to expose cracks in the property market. Late last year, China Evergrande Group, a highly indebted property developer, defaulted on bond payments to creditors. Since Evergrande, more than a dozen firms have defaulted.

People across the country are protesting about quality problems and unfulfilled promises.

Louis Lee, a 38-year-old administrator at a real estate firm, bought an apartment in 2019 at the "Moon on the Sea" complex by Vanke, one of the country's largest property developers. She was told that the complex in Guangzhou would eventually

include a shopping mall with grocery stores and an international school — a major selling point for Lee, who has two young children.

But more than a year after she moved in, the school building and mall remain empty. Residents said Vanke told them there was not enough interest from businesses to fill the mall, and an application for the school was tied up in government bureaucracy.

The local district challenged this version of events. It told residents that Vanke hadn't paid the rent for the land in recent years because of a financial dispute with the village, which owned the land. After the matter was taken to court, Vanke eventually paid, but there are currently no plans for an international school.

In April, enraged homeowners hung a banner covering the high-rise's top 10 floors that read "Vanke false advertising," based on residents' photos. Other banners warned people that buying a Vanke home would "ruin their lives." When police arrived to tell the homeowners to remove the banners, protesters refused and clashed with officers. Vanke did not respond to emails asking for comment.

Lee regrets buying the property. She says the financial problems facing developers are leading to quality issues.

"I personally don't recommend buying apartments now," Lee said. "People should really think twice."

"Prices have come down, but enthusiasm for buying houses still hasn't returned. The economy is not good, and the continuous impact of the pandemic has completely changed the situation."

LIANG JIAWEI
PROPERTY SALESPERSON

Germany fires up coal plants in effort to save natural gas

MELISSA EDDY

Germany will restart coal-fired power plants in order to conserve natural gas, the country's economy minister announced on Sunday, amid concerns about a looming supply shortage after Russia cut gas deliveries to Europe last week.

The move was part of a series of measures, including new incentives for companies to burn less natural gas, announced by Germany as Europe takes steps to deal with reduced energy supplies from Russia.

Since European countries imposed sanctions to punish Moscow after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February, Russia has responded by cutting off gas supplies to several European countries. Last week, Russian energy giant Gazprom also reduced flows through the Nord Stream pipeline, an important undersea link that carries gas directly to Germany.

Gazprom blamed maintenance issues for the reductions, but European leaders have called the move a political tactic by President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

"The situation is serious," Robert Habeck, the economy minister who is also Germany's vice chancellor, said in a statement Sunday, laying out the steps that would be taken to ensure that more gas is available to divert into storage so the country has enough to get through the winter. They include bringing back online coal-fired power plants that had been drawn down to reduce carbon emissions, although the statement did not specify how many plants would be affected.

"That's bitter, but it's simply necessary in this situation to lower gas usage," said Habeck, a member of the environmentalist Greens party.

"The gas storage tanks must be full by winter. That is our top priority." Germany has relied heavily on energy imports from Russia for decades. Last year, Russian imports accounted for 55% of the country's natural gas supply. But after Moscow's February 24 invasion of Ukraine, Berlin began purchasing gas from Norway, the United States and the United Arab Emirates, reducing its purchases from Russia by about 20%.

The government has nevertheless insisted that Russian gas will be needed to ensure storage tanks are at

By the end of the summer, a model should be in place that would allow companies to auction gas, as part of efforts to encourage Germany's industrial sector to reduce its reliance on the fuel.

least 90% full by November — in keeping with a law passed earlier this year to ensure a sufficient supply of natural gas, which is used largely for heating and manufacturing. One-third of Germany's homes are heated with natural gas, while it is used for only about 15% of all electricity generation.

A law allowing a return to the use of coal in power generation is expected to pass next month. By the end of the summer, a model should be in place that would allow companies to auction gas, as part of efforts to encourage Germany's industrial sector to reduce its reliance on the fuel.

Last week, Germany's powerful industrial lobby, the Federation of German Industry, said companies were already switching to coal, as part of efforts to make more natural gas available for storage. Many have also been seeking alternative, more sustainable sources of energy, it said, while emphasizing that such transitions take time.

The German government recently called on citizens to cut back their energy use in light of the strained supply situation.

"It's obviously Putin's strategy to make us insecure, to drive up prices and divide us," Habeck said. "We will not allow that to happen. We will defend ourselves resolutely, precisely and thoughtfully."

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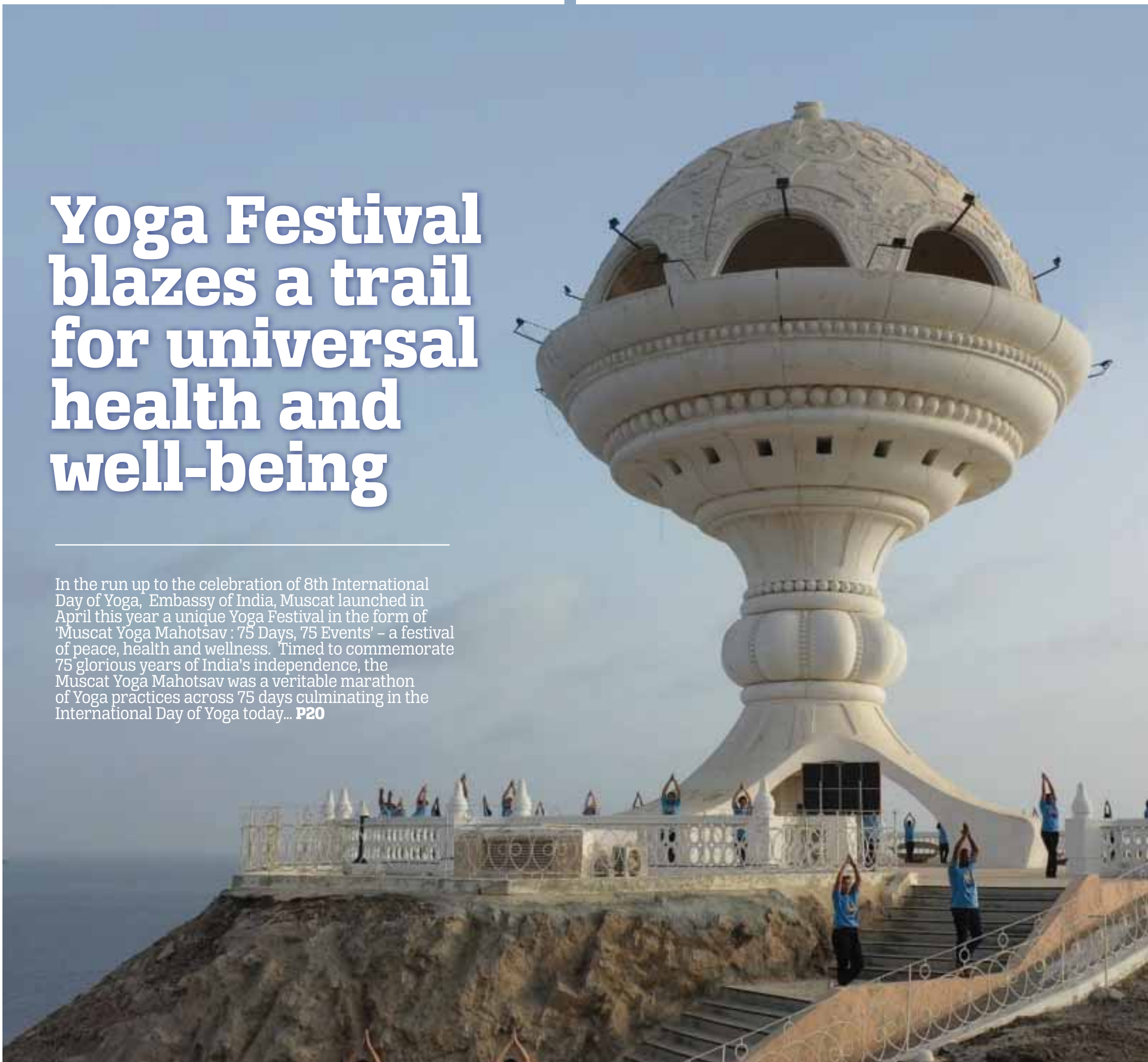
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NEW RO 50 BANKNOTES FROM THIS MONTH

Yoga Festival blazes a trail for universal health and well-being

In the run up to the celebration of 8th International Day of Yoga, Embassy of India, Muscat launched in April this year a unique Yoga Festival in the form of 'Muscat Yoga Mahotsav : 75 Days, 75 Events' – a festival of peace, health and wellness. Timed to commemorate 75 glorious years of India's independence, the Muscat Yoga Mahotsav was a veritable marathon of Yoga practices across 75 days culminating in the International Day of Yoga today... **P20**



Moon sculptures, NFTs at futuristic Art Basel fair

THE WORLD'S LEADING contemporary art fair has taken a futuristic turn this year, offering buyers the chance to see their sculptures placed on the moon.

Non-fungible tokens, or NFTs, are all the rage at the Art Basel fair in Switzerland, where the world of digital assets is taking off.

Artist Jeff Koons plans to send 125 miniature sculptures to the moon with multi-billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX company.

The sculptures -- set to be installed 384,400 kilometres (238,855 miles) apart from their owners -- will be sold as NFTs, which work like certificates of

ownership.

The "Moon Phases" statues come with a photo of their lunar location, and buyers will also be able to take home a sculpture with a gemstone marking their extra-terrestrial counterpart's place on the moon.

"We're also seeing it for the first time," said Pace gallery director Marc Glimcher as he unveiled a moon-shaped statue about the size of a beach ball at his stand in Basel.

Elsewhere at Art Basel, Turkish artist Ozgur Kar's LCD display of a man surrounded by skeletons is being sold by the French gallery Edouard Montassut.



The Vive Arts platform, meanwhile, offers a dive into digital art with the help of augmented reality glasses, presenting an avatar of the German artist Albert Oehlen in a 3D universe.

The fair, which runs from June 16-19, also features a host of non-digital works -- from an installation by Franco-Chinese artist Huang Yong Ping depicting a kitchen strewn with giant cock-

roaches, to a series of portraits carved in wood by Franco-Cameroonian artist Barthelemy Toguo.

A spider sculpture by the French-American sculptor Louise Bourgeois fetched \$40 million.

Along with sales of yachts, luxury cars, watches and jewellery, the art market recovered strongly in 2021 after the shock of the pandemic in 2020.

The stock market rebounded sharply last year, swelling the coffers of the ultra-rich -- and inflation is giving wealthy collectors yet another reason to splash out on a multi-million-dollar painting.

Pace is one of the few major galleries to have ventured into the field of NFTs. According to Clare McAndrew, author of an art market report for Art Basel, only six per cent of galleries sold NFTs in 2021.

Since peaking in August 2021, NFTs have plummeted. While art-related NFT sales volumes soared to \$945 million in August, they fell to \$366 million in January and then to \$101 million in May, according to McAndrew's records.

These ups and downs don't faze the owner of the Pace gallery though, who believes that NFTs represent a "new methodology for distributing digital art". — **AFP**

READ

SPARRING PARTNERS

BY JOHN GRISHAM

Three novellas: "Homecoming," "Strawberry Moon" and "Sparring Partners."



A WONDERFUL TALENT

Jean-Louis Trintignant, one of France's greatest actors, who died on Friday aged 91, was hailed by French President Emmanuel Macron as "a wonderful artistic talent and voice". He died surrounded by his family in the Gard region of southern France, his wife said. — **AFP**



FASHION TRENDS

Models present creations for Moschino's Men's Spring-Summer 2023 fashion collection in Milan. — **AFP**





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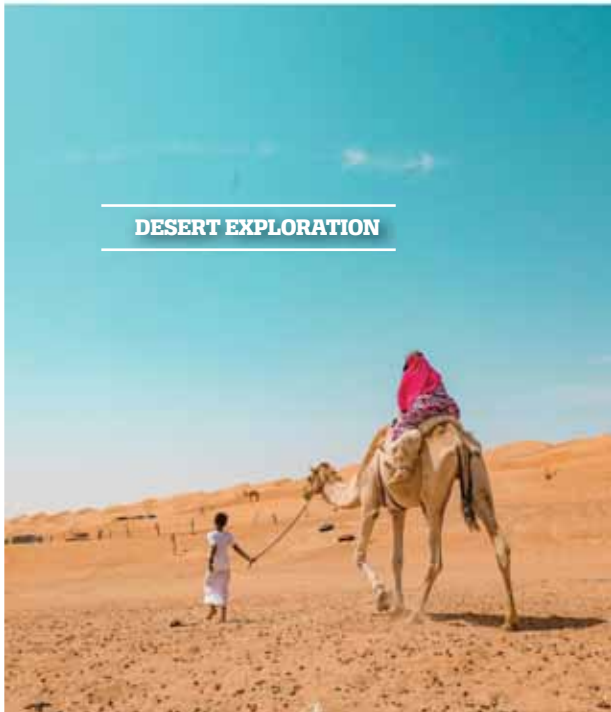
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AROUND THE WORLD

CULTURE

Yours sincerely: Singles charmed by Japan letter-writing scheme



SICK OF SWIPING and tired of dating apps? Old-fashioned love letters may be the answer, says one Japanese city whose unusual matchmaking scheme has been a surprising success.

Singles in southern Japan's Miyazaki are being encouraged to put pen to paper in a low-tech search for their soulmate, part of municipal efforts to boost the low birth rate.

The charm of handwritten correspondence has attracted so many young residents that organisers have decided to expand the programme to people living farther afield.

Compared to online dating, "it takes longer, and inspires you to imagine the person you're in communication with", said Rie Miyata, head of a local consulting firm commissioned to run the scheme.

"It's less about how good your penmanship is", she told AFP, "and more the fact that you write every single character sincerely and with care, thinking deeply about the person you're writing to."

"That's what makes letters so powerful", she said. Since 2020, when the project began, 450 people have signed up — more than double authorities' initial estimates — with around 70 per cent in their 20s and 30s.

Applicants are screened by Miyata's team and paired with potential suitors based on information they submit about themselves like their favourite films, books and sports.

But unlike dating apps, the only thing revealed about each new pen pal is their age, with identifying details like their full name, job and address withheld — and of course, no profile pics on display.

"Looks are often a decisive factor" when searching for a partner, "but in letters, you are judged by your personality", Miyata said.

Letters are posted to the organisers, who give them a quick read to make sure the note contains no obscenities or insults before sending it on to the eager recipient.

So far, 32 pairs have set up face-to-face meetings, with romance blossoming for 17 couples who have started a relationship.

One participant, a 25-year-old Miyazaki resident, said the idea had brought back fond memories.

"As a kid, I used to write letters to the girl I had a crush on", the man, who wished to remain anonymous, told AFP.

"I like how old-fashioned letters are. That made me want to join the programme."

Despite the city's original approach, it's not unusual for local governments to fund matchmaking programmes in Japan, which has the world's oldest population and one of the lowest fertility rates.

In 2021, the number of babies born hit a new record low of 811,604, and women are now expected to have an average of 1.3 children in their lifetime, far below the rate needed to maintain a population. — **AFP**

CHANGING WORLD

War-stricken pets await new life



UKRAINIAN VET Nataliya Mazur cradles Murzik, a big green-eyed tabby, in her arms at a makeshift animal rescue shelter in Kyiv.

The three-year-old cat comes from Bucha, a suburb of the Ukrainian capital now synonymous with alleged Russian war crimes since Moscow launched its invasion of Ukraine nearly four months ago.

"His owner in Bucha survived shelling and the occupation," Mazur explains. "But eventually she died. She couldn't endure the situation."

Murzik's fate is shared by animals across the country, who have suffered alongside humans since Russia invaded on February 24 despite great lengths to save them.

Footage of Ukrainian civilians evacuating their devastated homes with their beloved dogs and cats in their arms went viral at the start of the conflict.

But like people who stayed behind, animals have been killed or wounded by Russian shelling. Many have lost their homes or owners.

Other pets have been lucky. Rescued by civilians or soldiers and brought to shelters like Mazur's to be fed and cared for, they have a chance of a new life and potentially new owners.

NEW HOMES

Since Mazur set up her temporary shelter at the end of March in southern Kyiv, 132 animals from the region around the capital and the east — the current

epicentre of the fighting — have lived here.

Ninety-seven of them have already found new owners, a sign perhaps of the human need for positivity and kindness to offset the bleakness of war.

There are currently 19 dogs and nine cats in the sanctuary, some jumping about and barking, others curled up in their enclosures.

A dark dog lies peacefully on a rug.

The paper card attached to his wooden door says his name is Kai.

He is seven and he arrived on April 19 from Borodianka — a northwest suburb of Kyiv where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused the Russians of atrocities "much more horrific" even than Bucha.

Kai has been de-fleaded and has a good appetite.

NEED FOR CARE

"When the war began, the number of homeless pets shot up," says Mazur, who also heads Kyiv's animal hospital.

"We set up this shelter with the help of the Kyiv authorities and volunteers, to look after pets and help find them new families."

It is housed in one of the pavilions of an open-air exhibition centre.

Volunteers come and go, inspecting the animals, feeding them and taking them for walks around the grassy grounds.

"If the pet has lost its owner and remained in a place where there's fighting

and explosions, then first of all it needs socialisation," Mazur explains.

"They're used to being with humans, so they need tenderness and care. They need someone to sit and talk to them."

Animals have also helped the war effort, some famous in Ukraine for their unusual abilities.

LOVE ANIMALS

A Jack Russell called Patron rose to nationwide renown for helping sappers demine areas recaptured from Russian forces.

Patron, who has more than 290,000 followers on Instagram, received a medal for Dedicated Service from Zelensky in May and was awarded a special prize at the Cannes Film Festival the same month.

In the Kyiv shelter, volunteers shower the animals with affection.

"My wife and I love animals very much," Dmytro Popov tells AFP, after walking a small dog with a fluffy tail across the park.

"We want a dog, but we're not allowed to have one in our rented apartment. So, we decided to come here and help as much as we can," the 28-year-old botanist smiles.

Earlier in the day, another two dogs were picked up by their new owners.

"I've been friends with dogs since I was a child," 31-year-old volunteer Yuriy Manko says.

"I don't know what will happen tomorrow, but I want to keep coming here." — **AFP**



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Iron Talks!

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

AL HADHRA

One of the noteworthy customs of that period [the 60s and 70s] was hadhra. If someone had something stolen or his property damaged, people would be called for a general gathering, hadhra. All the attendants and their children would be asked to take an oath of innocence. Whoever didn't attend would be singled out. People would go to him and ask him why he missed the hadhra. If the reason given was fully convincing, it would be accepted, and the person would accordingly be judged innocent. This custom saved people resorting to court to resolve such issue

IRON TALKS!

Around 1955 we received a short message informing us of the arrival of Uncle Ali al Kalbani from Africa. Upon his arrival we saw a big device we didn't recognise. With its wooden structure, it was called "radio". People back then didn't know what a radio was and what it would present; they didn't have a clue what culture change it would bring.

It operated by being connected to an antenna and was hanged onto a palm tree. People crowded in with astonishment, whispering, "Where the iron speaks there skulks the danger". Some left saying that the Domsday would soon come, while others, spell-bound, kept listening.

THE "WOOD" FLIES!

There were a number of Bani Kalban living in Kalbaa in Khor Fakhaan*. One day one of them visited Miskan. As was the custom, he was warmly welcomed and asked about his "news". He said in response, "Nothing, except we saw a wood fly" (Ships in those days were called "wood"). He meant to say that he saw a ship flying. The coastal people of Khor Fakhan would normally see ships sailing to the sea not an aircraft flying in the air. Thinking that he was either lying or laughing at them, people asked him to leave.

OUR DONKEY DESERVES WARMTH

We had a white coloured, quiet and obedient donkey. We appreciated him for the innumerable services he rendered us. In winter we kept him warm with burlap. He was so close to us that he would bray if we were late in feeding him.

Donkeys were an important means of transportation in those days. They carried manure to the farms, food to the neighbouring towns and whatever we could not carry ourselves, such as soil and clay-made bricks for building houses.

On mentioning building, we, the children, would bring soil, knead it in water and then take it to the builders. We also carried clay-bricks to them, singing as we did, "O builder take; take and give me". We repeatedly sang this in order to motivate and energise ourselves.

*In the United Arab Emirates (the translator).

**It is the tradition in Oman that you greet a person by asking him about his "news", a social gesture meant to show closeness and solidarity (the translator).

art & life

Local Scene

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TUESDAY | JUNE 21 | 2022



Yoga Festival blazes a trail for universal health and well-being

By Amit Narang

Diabetes, back & joint pain, blood pressure, heart disease – all too common ailments that do not differentiate between nationality, ethnicity, region or religion. Rich, poor or middle class, all of us are equally vulnerable. The World Health Organisation estimates that non-communicable or chronic diseases kill around 41 million people every year, equivalent to 71 per cent of all deaths globally.

Prevention from such diseases, as also from disorders linked to modern lifestyles such as stress, anxiety and depression, is possible by following a holistic approach to wellness, by bringing about a balance between the mind and body and by enhancing our body's natural tendency toward health and self-healing.

Yoga, the ancient tradition from India, shows the path to holistic health and well-being, offering physical and mental health benefits for people of all ages, everywhere.

Requiring a little more than a mat and comfortable clothes, Yoga is the path to everyday health. Its daily practice is simple, affordable and accessible. It promises innumerable benefits, recognised and endorsed by health professionals around the world.

In 2014, the overwhelming response to the United Nations General Assembly call to recognise June 21 as the International Day of Yoga underlined the universal appeal of this ancient discipline for physical and mental health. Since then, the International Day of Yoga has been marked globally with great fervour.

Covid pandemic reinforced to the world the imperatives of natural immunity and good health practices and brought the benefits of Yoga to the centre of global

imagination once again.

As the world marks the 8th International Day of Yoga today, Yoga has already transformed into a mass movement, transcending all barriers and bringing people from all over the world on to a common platform for attaining better health, re-invigorating an inner consciousness and promoting harmony and peace.

The theme for this year's International Day of Yoga is 'Yoga for Humanity', showcasing the important role Yoga has played in helping humanity cope with the devastating effects of the Covid pandemic.

As a combination of careful body postures, breathing and meditation, Yoga can help achieve harmony of the body, mind and soul. It helps boost immunity and resistance to common illnesses, stress and anxiety – just what is required these days. The holistic practice of Yoga not only benefits the mind and body, it also inculcates love, generosity and compassion towards others, promoting a humanity of the heart so needed in today's world.

People of the Sultanate of Oman have taken to Yoga as an elixir for better health with great enthusiasm. Yoga as a health regimen is increasingly popular among all sections of the Omani population.

In the run up to the celebration of 8th International Day of Yoga, Embassy of India, Muscat launched in April this year a unique Yoga Festival in the form of 'Muscat Yoga Mahotsava : 75 Days, 75 Events' – a festival of peace, health and wellness. Timed to commemorate 75 glorious years of India's independence, the Muscat Yoga Mahotsava was a veritable marathon of Yoga practices across 75 days culminating in the International Day of Yoga today.

Over the past 75 days, this unique festival of health featured not just 75, but well over 100 events

in online and offline mode all across the Sultanate of Oman. Indian community and Omani people came out in large numbers for numerous yoga sessions held since then on diverse themes including Yoga for general fitness; strengthening nervous system; relieving mental stress; controlling diabetes, thyroid, insomnia and high blood pressure; improving flexibility, immunity, concentration and memory; boosting child and adolescent health etc at different locations all across the country.

This iconic Yoga marathon and the enthusiastic participation of people of all age groups signifies not only the growing popularity of Yoga in the Sultanate of Oman, but also the time-tested bonds of fraternity between Indian and Omani people.

We are grateful to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the Government of the Sultanate of Oman for their constant support and to the kind people of Oman for their wholehearted embrace of Yoga for health.

Yoga is a bridge of friendship, bringing the people of India and the Sultanate of Oman together in a common quest for personal good health, community well-being and peace and harmony all over.

(The writer is Ambassador of India to the Sultanate of Oman)

